

Coming out of the Closet: *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*

Introduction:

I see hatred

I am bathed in it, drowning in it

since almost the beginning of my life

it has been the air I breathe

the food I eat, the content of my perceptions;

the single most constant fact of my existence

is their hatred...

-- Judy Dothard Simmons (quoted in Yep, 16).

“Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our ‘truth’ as human subjects are decided” (Michel Foucault, quoted in Yep, 11).

In spite of the preeminent role of sexuality in the formation and constitution of human subjectivity and experience, it has been, in post-ancient India until recently, largely a neglected area of inquiry and conscious cultivation in mainstream discourse.

The forces are rather at work to keep it left out, silenced and suppressed. Naturally, the body of literature centered on and obsessed with romance and erotica uncritically accepted heterosexuality as default identity and thus, mandated and institutionalized what Elizabeth Grosz calls 'heterocentricity' (quoted in Tamsin Wilton 513). It is really reprehensible that authors of human sexuality and interpersonal communication texts have not thought of challenging the pervasive heterosexism and almost always tended to treat gender and sexual identities as fixed, stable, and contained. Through such fixed conceptions of identities and a minoritizing view, these studies normalize and perpetuate the current homo/heterosexual binary and promote hetero-normativity as superior. Their strict adherence to the discursive parameters of hetero-normativity makes the texts misrepresent or apologetically present the non-normative sexuality or absent it altogether and even downplay the heterogeneity of heterosexuality itself. Dattani emerged as one of the very few voices in India breaking the silence, and his voice was heard rather clear and bold. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is a confident exploration of the uncharted region.

An important reason behind the erasure or silencing of homosexuality and other sorts of non-normative sexuality may be traced to the fact that heterosexuality is not only sexual but social. In fact, "It is simultaneously marked as a natural and given category and unmarked as a ubiquitous and invisible force permeating all aspects of social life" (Yep, 12). The pervasive presence of heterosexuality is felt as an institution, as identity, as practice and as experience. Naturally any discontinuity in the regime of sexuality poses serious threat to the centrality and naturalness of all sorts of hetero-normativity. Sedgwick proposes a radical distinction between sexuality and gender, arguing that "whereas gender illustrates the normative and Oedipal structures of power in

our society, sexuality figures a more radical and fluid performativity, through which historically silenced and abjected identities can speak” (quoted in Campbell, 158).

“The elaborating of erotic preferences into a character—into a kind of erotically determined essence—is,” as Foucault forcefully argues, “inherently a disciplinary project”(quoted in Bersani, 39). Following the process of de-naturalizing and de-familiarizing the identity-disturbing phenomenon of homosexuality, the centre accelerates the mechanism of marginalizing the Other and tries to remove any threat by particularizing and peculiarizing the identity into mere sexual preference which in turn designates heterosexuality as natural and essential. “The authority, position, and power of such a center are attained through normalization [which] ... is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values” (Yep, 17). The process of hetero-normalizing functions through symbolic annihilation of gay and lesbian. The promotion of the unfavourable specificities of homosexuality helps to project it as dangerous, both culturally and politically. Homophobia and the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian/not-woman become the central organizing principle and the cultural policing of manhood and womanhood.

As Steven Seidman rightly observes, “...science's claim to truth carried a social authority that made it productive of forms of personal and social life”. He farther adds, “Science had not only helped to create a polluted homosexual identity but also had helped to bring into existence an elaborate apparatus of homosexual oppression...I knew that

many brave souls had campaigned under the banner of science for social respect and rights for ‘homosexuals’” (Seidman, 199). The policing of science ranges from pathologising the homosexual orientation as a “disease”, suggesting cure, inventing therapies, promoting medical surveillance and control, detecting and identifying it with source of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases -- by implication -- criminalizing it. Psycho-analysis remained particularly effective in promoting homophobia in spite of its many conscious contrary moves. Freud was particularly definite in his denial to diagnose or treat homosexuality as a disease. Yet the fact remains, some of its basic assumptions like “unconscious” discourage any non-normative or out-lawed psychic or sexual orientation on the ground that it may lead the individual to the alone-ness of his/her narcissistic self. We may draw support for the view from Jan Campbell who, in his introduction to his book *Arguing with the Phallus* noted, “The unconscious desire that underpins or, more accurately, deconstructs our postmodern identities is a psychic negativity revealing the narcissistic, divided and alienated roots of contemporary being. It seems then, for psychoanalysis, that the only positive alternative to our unconscious negativity is the law. Return from abject narcissism and borderline psychosis means the upholding of oedipal law and the ethical and religious principles that accompany this kind of patriarchal and colonial society” (Campbell, 1). The socializing and mainstreaming of science encouraged pseudo psychiatry enormously to disseminate homophobia and aversion as well as therapeutic possibility.

Perhaps the deepest anxiety of hetero-normativity lies in the arena of heteropatriarchy which perpetuates itself through gender categorization and reproductive normativity. In fact, “Heteropatriarchy is an overarching system of male dominance

through the institution of compulsory heterosexuality” (Yep, 30). It relies heavily on and seeks to maintain the gender division of labor, distribution of resources, and the patriarchal relations of production. The hyperbolic version of “man” and “woman” is critiqued aptly throughout the play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. Since the rootedness of heterosexuality in gender hierarchy gets manifested through its central mechanism, marriage, the present play naturally addresses the gender issue and the desirability of its realization through the institution of marriage -- often reduced into nightmarish domestic violence, into hushed up betrayal as one homosexual (not bisexual) partner lives a double life without the knowledge of the other and makes both suffer.

Thus heterosexism banishes the non-heterosexuals from the outer limit of the charmed circle to prevent them from entering the ambit of civil rights like marriage, adopting children, inheriting parents’ property, and protest against discrimination and so on. If at all recognized, it is quarantined within the subsections of social issues. The hegemonic form of erotic is produced “the ways in which particular discourses of the erotic have been produced by and in the interests of the class-group which has oppressed them” (Wilton, 508).

However, an interesting observation by Katz reveals “heterosexuality” to be “painstakingly dependent on homosexuality to maintain and reproduce its master status” (quoted in Yep, 11). The homosexual identity as an emerging socio historical event has been able to expose the heterosexuality as an unstable, contestable institutional and discursive production. The construct of homo/hetero binary challenged the autonomous existence of heterosexuality itself defining its contour, rightly detected by R. Johnson,

“...from homosexual invasion and infringement, heterosexuality erects heavily policed borders. Such borders are closely watched and carefully defended because they are points of danger for one or the other or both identities involved” (Quoted in Yep, 27). Apart from the definitional anxiety, the fixity to a particular brand of sexual behaviour appears limited and narrow, suppressing a wide range of pleasure, possibility and freedom of choice. As Wilton puts it with positive jubilation, “Set against anxious mainstream heteronormativity, the hedonistic pluralism of queer counterculture is, truly, power play” (Quoted in Yep 15).

Unfortunately, though ancient Indian culture was inclusive enough to embrace multiple variations of the heterogeneous heterosexuality and various kinds of alternate sexualities, in modern India, homosexuality did not enjoy any official disciplinary existence before the introduction of the antisodomy act in 1861 by the colonizers (non-recognition does not imply non-existence). The disciplinary production of sexual subject continued to confine within the patrolled border knowledge and desire as well. Even after independence, various post and neo-colonial forces went on to define a colonial code as “Indian tradition” and posit the civil rights of homosexuals as elitist mimicry of the west and the neo religious dogmas closeted the practice. “...the right-wing Hindu Sangh Parivar celebrates a past that stabilizes homogeneity and externalizes difference, as opposed to staging it as constitutive of Indian history” (*Anjali Arondekar*, 121). Suparna Bhaskaran argues in her paper “Politics of Penetration”, “heteropatriarchal ideology of shame and duty coupled with cultural and structural violence continued to be powerfully articulated by the post and neo-colonial forces of homophobia” (Bhaskaran , 27). The colonial act was included in IPC as article 377. Thus in India legal bias went on

legitimizing the exploitation of the myrmidons of law, psychiatry designating it as gender identity disorder, medical science diagnosing the homosexuals as carrier of HIV -- leading the Ego alien individuals to marry and live a double life or commit suicide.

The petition filed by NAZ foundation in 2002 to abolish section 377 of IPC was initially rejected on technical grounds. But when it was again taken up in 2009, the judiciary prohibited any legal steps against the accused under this article; but again the verdict was withdrawn by the Supreme Court in 2013. However, Indian intelligentsia and the youth upheld significant protests. Amartya Sen remarked, the “criminalization of gay behavior goes not only against fundamental human rights, but it also works against the enhancement of human freedoms in terms of which the progress of human civilization can be judged” (quoted in Arondekar, 120). However, the contestation of the allegation of westernization brought into play the concept of trans-nationalism, breaking the boundaries of different temporality and spatiality. As Anjali Arondekar puts it, “‘transnational turn’ instantiates a powerful political metaphoric, a vigorous corrective to the hegemony of national and temporal boundaries, particularly in an era of increased surveillance and U.S. ‘imperialism’” (Arondekar, 114).

In the present scenario, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* “is not simply the first play in Indian theatre to handle openly gay themes of love, partnership, trust and betrayal. It is a play about how society creates patterns of behaviour and how easy it is for individuals to fall victim to the expectations society creates” (McRae, a Note, 45). Dattani takes up a daring project to offer a glimpse, not into but, from a world of different reality, into that of “normality”, of “those heterosexuals” (*On a Muggy...*, 53), which , in

reference to the former, appears equally constructed, contestable and complicated, and seeks to assert an equal status of “normal”.

Policing

“...Sexuality has become a point of entry to the psyches and lives of individuals and to the life and welfare of the population as a whole” (Weeks, quoted in Yep, 37).

The rubric of the power structure gets shaken in any possibility of discontinuity in the realm of sexuality and naturally, it mobilizes every possible hetero-normalizing measure both at micro (homophobia) and macro (heterosexism) level. The normalization almost inevitably becomes the site of violence: “Normalization is a symbolically, discursively, psychically, psychologically, and materially violent form of social regulation and control” (Yep, 17).

In India, policing takes the form of the de-westernization/purification of Indianness, which is in fact a reproduction of the colonial legacy of hetero-normativity. It seeks to obliterate both the richly pluralistic and inclusive Indian past (both ancient and medieval Islamic India) and the emergent transnational sociocultural reality. The “normalization” takes various forms of institutionalized affiliation and sanction. The institutional vigilance of the legal system is perpetrated and perpetuated by Section 377, the antisodomy statute of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which is in fact, an uncritical appropriation of a colonial statute formed in 1861. The section reads:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section. The offence made punishable under this section requires that penetration, however little, should be proved strictly. Thus an attempt to commit this offence should be an attempt to thrust the male organ into the anus of the passive agent. Some activity on the part of the accused in that particular direction ought to be proved strictly. A mere preparation for the operation should not necessarily be construed as an attempt. Emission is not necessary.

<http://indiankanoon.org/search/?formInput=section%20377>)

In 2001, NAZ Foundation, a Delhi-based HIV/AIDS prevention nongovernmental organization, with the assistance of the Lawyers Collective filed a petition against the Union Government seeking to declare the section as violative of the right to equality (Article 14), the right to freedom (Article 19), and the right to life and liberty (Article 21) of the Indian Constitution. The petition strategically referred to the global discourse of gay civil rights, relationality between sexual acts and civil rights, defense of a citizen-subject's privacy, removal of a major obstacle to HIV/AIDS prevention programme for the underground sexual practice outside the reach of safe-sex interventions etc. In order to break the stranglehold that homoeroticism is produced by the western temporality and spatiality, the petitioners made presentation of the indigeneity of the discourse defying the colonial figurations of ontological perversity

(Arondekar, 113-128). The logic of historicity was based on the assumption that “to criminalize sodomy is to embrace a judicial Westernization” (Arondekar, 117). The dismissal of this petition in 2004 on the ground that a PIL loses its validity without a victim came as an enormous blow to the Foundation and members of the Lawyers’ Collective. Indian intelligentsia from multiple fronts actively protested against the judicial move. “Amartya Sen remarked that the Civil War in the United States began the same year as the establishment of 377 (1861) and that while the United States had managed to abolish slavery as a result of the war, the Indian state had, as yet, not stepped up to its promise as a modern democracy by refusing to abolish Section 377” (quoted in Arondekar, 120).

In 2009 Delhi High Court declared its verdict de-criminalizing homosexuality. It was a moment of jubilation for the petitioners, the closeted minority, and persons of sensibility, taste and open mind. However, sharp reaction came from the conservative circle both at individual and group level. But the revocation of the verdict by Supreme Court in 2013 was a backward move to an oppressive legal domination and violence. The overt emphasis on penetration -- which constitutes the heterosexist centre of sexual activity -- in the section, also tends to overlook the other kind of sexual harassment which is not hetero-sexual.

The neo colonial forces also operate through surveillance in the regime of religion. The deeply patriarchal bias of Islamic religion maintains highly policed border to repress any potential rupture in the narrative of heteropatriarchy and the status quo of gender categorization. Neo-Hinduism, in the guise of reclaiming identity, distorts its past

of rich and productive variety and tries to reduce it into a monolith. "...the right-wing Hindu Sangh Parivar celebrates a past that stabilizes homogeneity and externalizes difference, as opposed to staging it as constitutive of Indian history" (Arondekar, 121). Christianity continues to uphold the Judeo-Christian frame of temporality and morality that condemned not only "unnatural acts" but also a range of other native sexual and social behaviors to promote a heterosexual, marital and reproductive relation as "blessed". If neo-Hinduism imposes itself by validating and exaggerating heterosexual marriage, Christianity complements its workings by exorcising homosexual desire. The play shows how an educated man such as Ed develops the habit of going to church every week to be exorcised and gets impressed that his relation with Kamlesh was the "work of the devil" (*On a Muggy Night...*, 85).

Even science, with all its claim to being founded on impartial "truth", perpetuates the discursive parameter of heteronormativity and fortifies the hegemony. "Its power lay not only in its capacity to rationalize the denial of moral legitimacy for same-sex desire or to justify the denial of civil rights or claims to social inclusion. Through its cultural and institutional authority, science could inscribe in our bodies and minds a sexual/social regime - one that made desire into an identity, one that made gender preference into a master category of sexual and social identity, one that made hetero/homosexual identities mutually exclusive, and one that purified a heterosexual life while polluting a homosexual life" (Seidman, 199). It is science that is used to justify incarceration, medical surveillance and control, curative therapies that aimed at great psychic alteration.

In the play reference is made to the psycho therapists who suggest aversion therapy and make a gay man feel ashamed of “what” he is. In a primitive manner he wants to reorient Kamlesh’s sexuality – by implication – making him afraid and ashamed of himself instead of redeeming his incompatibility with the circumstance of being ditched: “‘It is impossible to change society’, he said, ‘but it may be possible for you to reorient yourself’” (*On a Muggy night...*, 69). Kamlesh stops seeing the doctor, but such yellow-page psychiatrist succeeds in developing an ego-alien anxiety in persons such as Ed. The aversion therapy averts them against themselves. The play finally institutes a superb lampoon on such pseudo sciences by Sharad’s brilliant mock-demonstration of the methodologies followed by the “behavioural model”. He performs/parodies the various stages like how to sit without your legs crossed, keep two legs wide apart, walk “as if a cricket bat between the legs”, talk in a base voice -- at all cost occupy space in a macho fashion.

Ed is a fair case study in victimization by cultural, social, religious and scientific policing and self-abnegation leading to self-negation and self-annihilation. Born in an orthodox Tamil family he fails to co-relate his sexual preference with that of the “world”, pervaded with sense of guilt and isolation, surrenders to suicidal provocations. The victim becomes victimizer exploiting Kamlesh emotionally to leave him with an acute depression disabling him to develop any farther relationship and tries to deceive Kiran into a marriage that will cover up his relation with her brother beyond social surveillance. Frustrated in his plan to live a double life like Bunny Singh -- the media face of happy middleclass heterosexual family man and a private gay man --, he falls a

pathetic victim to the devastating pervasiveness of hatred and violence in daily life based on being seen, perceived, labeled, and treated as an “Other.”

Alien

“...we are everywhere impelled to confess the truth of our sex, which we have been taught to see as the truth of ourselves” (Foucault, quoted in Wilton 516).

Our confessional consists chiefly in our adherence to the discursive parameters of hetero-normativity. Caught in the web of multiple identities, we try to discard, hide or suppress the identity at variance with the “panoptic vision [which] depends on a successful immobilizing of the objects it surveys; [because] only then can behavior be transformed into manipulatable characterological types” (Bersani, 39). If the flight becomes painfully unavoidable, the individual suffers from a terrible sense of alienation and tries different strategies to address the situation. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* offers interesting variations of the ways some minorities and closeted individuals find to cope with their status as the Other.

Kristin Ross once observed, “The moments when everyday life becomes most vivid or tangible are the moments when most people find themselves living more than one life” (Quoted in Yep, 170). This is the face Bunny Singh tries to “become” and the fate he is compelled to carve for himself in order to belong to the “characterological type” of the mainstream. He is a well known media face, mobbed in any gathering, famous as a character in a family drama playing the role of the middle class, middle aged,

head of an ideal family constructed by the heterosexual marriage and based on reproductive principle. In his real life he is happily married to a woman and has children and having a clandestine gay sexual life avoiding only the gay life style. He thus finds a way of resolving the paradox of being a homosexual and a middleclass Indian man by the strategy of “camouflage” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 70). Bunny Singh operates in an in-between-ness which reinforces Butler’s challenge to the obviousness of “fiction/truth” and “fantasy/reality” as symmetrical binaries (Butler, 6).

Yep farther observes, “heterosexuality must anxiously, repeatedly, and persistently set about trying to affirm itself, assure itself, defend itself, and insist on itself” (Yep, 14). The anxiety of keeping up a confirmed heterosexual image and the gender structure it maintains, make Bunny Singh wish the children “Mard ke puttara bano! Be brave! Be like your father!” (*On A Muggy Night...*, 66). It is the same anxiety which makes him act as some one not really belonging to the minority group even at the cost of offering himself as typically Indian unaccustomed with “witty remarks in foreign context” and warning Sharad not to behave “camp” before his invitees. He even goes so far as suggest Kamlesh should marry a “nice woman” and “have sex on the side” that will help him to get rid of the sense of insecurity and loneliness. He adopts every gesture proving himself to belong to the majority, to be straight only by not screaming from the roof top that he is gay, which, seen from a different view point, may appear, as Ranjit puts it, “But you scream from the roof top that you are straight”. Bunny however defends himself by claiming his right to the basic instinct of self-defense by adopting another instinctive mechanism camouflage (“be matched with your surrounding and no one can find you”).

A dreadful reality stares at our face -- how the fear of being marginalized breeds hypocrisy, betrayal and self-alienation. Pathetically, he clings to the disguised identity in front of Kiran and takes pains to stress his condescension in giving a “liberal-minded” indulgence to the minoritized group of homosexual friends and himself being “not like them”. Yet with all his parading of being on the side of the majority and maintaining a successful life, the loneliness and discontentment could not escape the audience both in his insistence on being certified a “happy” man and stressing the obvious repeatedly: “I am very happy” (*On a Muggy night...*, 84). The alienation gets evident also in the chance remark: “You cannot make me an outcast both inside and out” (*On a Muggy night...*, 89). Apart from the deep-seated sense of guilt and loneliness produced by hetero-normativity, a material fear of losing his job as a media face also acts as a constant threat.

Thus, the disguised/camouflaged identity of Bunny Singh exposes the constructed and performatic nature of heterosexuality itself. He may be a fine illustration of Yep’s proclamation – “We all have heard of individuals who are heterosexually married, with children, and fully participating in heterosexual practices, institutions, and rituals, who confess that they have been ‘living a lie’ all along and proclaim that they have always really’ been lesbian or gay all their lives. Precisely because it can be “faked” (Yep, 12).

The widespread reluctance to accept homosexuality as part of Indian identity and promotion of its Western origin -- encouraged by the on-going movements in various European and American countries -- make the individuals alien to the national identity. From the very beginning, Wagner’s music on the stereo exudes a slightly Europeanized

cosmopolitan atmosphere. The reference to the “What Makes a Man a Man?” as gay anthem refuting *Jana Gana Mana* gives a sense of not belonging—a sense of being Otherised.

Men like Ranjit find themselves lurking in a zone of liminality, carrying hyphenated identity and without ever inhabiting any one place. An inability to identify with so-called “Indian” sensibility makes him feel foreigner in his own country. The incompatibility of Ranjit with the hot and humid Mumbai weather and the turns of phrases he uses point to a deeper sense of alienation he feels from his surrounding. He finds a ready solution to resolve the paradox of adopting mutually exclusive identities like Indian and gay by denying his former self. Beneath the humorous effrontery of Sharad about Ranjit’s being “brown from outside and white from inside”, like a “coconut”, lies a deeper sense of being repulsed by a part of his own identity. Ranjit fails to connect with his own sexual orientation to the monolithic reduction by neo-colonial forces of a multicultural multiethnic country like India: “Well, this is the price one pays for living in India”(*On a Muggy night...*, 70).

Ranjit is also faced with his incapacity to come to terms with the co-existence of suppressed facets of identities as Bunny Singh points out: “You can leave the country, but you can never run away from being brown...” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 88). But his admission of the fact -- “I can’t seem to be both Indian and gay” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 88)-- heightens only the workings of the post and neo colonial forces acting as complementary to each other. In the same manner, his impatience with the hot air pouring from outside as well as his irritation with the whole business of marriage itself since it

tampers with the electricity supply of the air conditioner, may appear slightly funny and the exaggeration leading to imagining to have a heart attack gives him a comical dimension, but it makes us see the other side of all our performances which are generally lost sight of in the normalizing process of heteronormativity.

The internal injuries like what Yep calls “Soul Murder” and “Internalized Homophobia” (Yep, 20) that individuals inflict upon themselves tell heavily upon Edwin Prakash Mehta who, from his very childhood, was taught to interpret his orientation as “anxiety-ridden, guilt-producing, fear-inducing, shame-invoking, hate-deserving, psychologically blemishing, and physically threatening” (Yep, 20). In order to liberate himself from the anxiety of losing himself in shameful anonymity, he takes recourse to “the process of coping by repressing the pain and identifying with the perpetrator [which] is ... a powerful mechanism for heteronormativity to perpetuate itself in current forms of social organization” (Yep, 18). An interesting dramatic design comes into play as Dattani introduces him with a double identity – Prakash for Kamlesh and Ed for Kiran –the enigma resolved only by the end of the play. We first meet him in the imaginary/psychic space called “shunya” (empty space), a place signifying the decontextuality of his position in an orthodox Tamil Christian Indian family/society as a gay man. Prakash meets Kamlesh in a park haunted by his loneliness and the devastating pervasiveness of hatred and violence in daily life based on being seen, perceived, labeled, and treated as an “Other.” The meeting with someone who “listen[s]” to story, sympathizes with him and takes a similar kind of liking for him saves his life in the “blessed” evening that might otherwise end by concretizing his plan of jumping from the balcony giving the impression of a case of death by being a bit intoxicated to the world. Kamlesh makes him

see, “how beautiful we are together” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 81), and redeems him momentarily from the bottomless pit of self-abnegation.

But the discursively permeated subjectivity/identity fails to cope with the marginalized position, and the workings of heteronormativity prove so powerful that “its regulation and enforcement are carried out by ... through socially endorsed and culturally accepted forms of soul murder” (Yep, 21). The self-surveillance of the penetrated subject only accelerates self-hatred and self-destructive behavioral pattern. Finally the victim gives way to the rigorous process of normalization, which Foucault terms as a “process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values” (quoted in Yep, 17). Prakash visits psychiatrist, practices therapeutic and “behavioral” model and tries every measure to become straight. He develops the habit of church-going every week and is almost convinced that his relation with Kamlesh is the “devil’s work”. The more religious he feels, the more his sexual expression is tied to what is sexually permissible within the context of his religion. With a firm faith that heterosexual, marital, and reproductively bound couples are the most blessed, he attempts to reorient his sexual preference by developing a relation with Kamlesh’s sister Kiran, a “real woman”.

A master stroke of dramaturgy comes into play in the presentation of the procedure of the breaking up of the relation of Prakash and Kamlesh and building up of a parallel one between Ed and Kiran, both presented in a manner of point counterpoint. Ed’s coming out as a macho man -- protective, daring, assertive -- helping Kiran

overcome her depression and shame of the stigma of divorce is punctuated by Kamlesh's attempt to convince Prakash of the possibility, practicability and pride in a partnership between them. The cacophony gathers to a crescendo as Ed comes with a pack of lies (that he met Kamlesh at Sushma's party not in park, the latter thought him a gay, he is sympathetic to Kamlesh's cause, he is helping him to come to terms to the world etc), puts on the mask hiding the face, fleeing from the truth of his own preference and commitment (his homosexual relation) and exhibiting his daring of the remarks of others (being seen with Kiran), declares his decision to be like the "rest" not himself and finally blurts out that though he once needed Kamlesh but now he thinks it to be "filth", "not working out" and he does not want to come out. Kiran's embarrassed but happy plea "Ed no please" at being pushed forward by him to go onto the stage to receive the award of "best couple" on the dancing floor -- by implication -- the "normal couple" is cruelly and pathetically punctuated by Kamlesh's helpless appeal being pushed aside by him, "Prakash! don't leave me now! I need you!!!" (*On a Muggy Night...*, 93). Finally being exposed as well as both his plan of leading a heterosexual partnership as a cover for maintaining a parallel homosexual relation with Kamlesh being frustrated, the suicidal instinct returns and he attempts to jump from the window. He leaves the play dilapidated, degenerated, staggering to a void losing both the worlds.

If Ed is a victim of internalized homophobia, Kamlesh is victimized by its externalized form and the hetero-normative violence instituted by institutionalized heterosexism. Though unashamed and assured about his own orientation, he is bound to maintain a closeted privacy to encounter the institutionalized oppression.

The short encounter between Kamlesh and the guard in his bedroom in the opening scene of the play has multiple significance and potential for suggesting many emotional tenets. The bedroom itself, hidden by the partition wall as hinted at in the stage direction, breathes an air of secrecy rather than privacy. Kamlesh, in his dressing gown and enjoying his cigar in relaxed observation of the guard putting on his Khaki uniform, sufficiently suggests a foregone sexual intimacy and prepares us for a story of non-normative relationship. The offer and acceptance of money brings in a host of possibilities of meaning: The guard's involvement (in his uniform,) in an act of legal transgression is a minor rupture in the wholesomeness of authority; it also points to a class hierarchy in a capitalist society. However, both the clichés of homosexuality being an Europeanized upper-class practice and a person belonging to the lower stratum of society being exploited by an upper-class get complicated both by the gesture of sincere concern shown by Kamlesh's tying of the guard's shoe lace as well as the Guard's off-guarded answer "nehin" (no) (*On a Muggy Night...*, 51) to Kamlesh's question whether it is only a way of earning money on his part. This hiring of some one for sexual satisfaction for money is at once a replication and subversion of the practice rampant in the heterosexual world. The use of a "man" as a gigolo undermines the patriarchal privilege of using "woman" as a sex object. Yet at the same time, while in a heterosexual world love is professed to be an excuse to hide the motivating pecuniary consideration, here the guard reverses the priorities to confirm his cohabitation with the mainstream and thus problematizes his "exploiters'" position.

Like every interesting opening scene, it also holds the suspense as Kamlesh refers to “him”, some one whose memory hunts him and who also pretended not to belong to Kamlesh’s world. The very act of referring to him by pronoun instead of by his proper name even in a moment of joy shows the wound still bleeds. Rules were made not to mention his name in the house, his photos were destroyed but Kamlesh found a way to hide one photograph in spite of himself, as he confesses: “I tried but I couldn’t”. He gets irritated with Sharad’s obsession with the relation (“You know what your problem really is? You just don’t want to let go!”), *On a Muggy Night...*, 61) since it replicates his own inability to overcome after all his efforts. Kamlesh performs the role of Sharad’s lover to “forget” Prakash, but finds him no better than “a brother I never had”. All the attempts made by the latter seems to interfere with the private space to keep up the memory of Prakash, and found at last that he could not but feel stifled: “I wish you would stop rubbing it in people’s faces that you were once my lover who controlled and stifled me till I had to scream for some space” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 62). Kamlesh even consults the psychiatrists to get over the depression, but the “straight, homophobic man” tries to cure him of his own sensibility by reorienting his sexual choice instead of helping him to cope with it and thus increasing his sense of loneliness. The tranquilizing medications stopped, the fear of isolation comes back with double force and he dwindles into a recluse trying strong physical sensations only as a drug to have temporary relief: “It is a terrible thing you are doing -- to yourself”, says Deepali. (*On a Muggy Night...*, 63).

The break up proved even more humiliating telling upon his self-esteem since Prakash left him not for any other man, but because he was “ashamed” of the relationship. The self-abnegation in one breeds self-denial in another: “For the first time in my life, I wished I wasn’t gay” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 69). A fear of being alienated even from himself, yields almost a fear psychosis in him. Unable to fight the fear back of self-extermination (“I-I feel I cannot live without him. I am capable of doing anything”, (*On a Muggy Night...*, 70) he enters a dangerous game of finding strangers and trying to “connect” with them if they are “lonely”, “tired of pretence” or “need[s] more money”.

The gloom darkens farther with the shattering blow that comes with the news of Prakash seeing his innocent sister whom he loved so much and who had been happy in his company years after her broken “troubled marriage” and started to gather herself again. Instead of his friends’ persistent request to tell the truth to Kiran, Kamlesh tries to deceive himself with the comfort his sister derives and supposed to continue to derive from the relation. In an unprepared moment he even confesses his own disbelief of the idea of any possibility of Ed’s being able to change his sexual orientation, yet pathetically he finds his hope of the latter’s homophobia and zeal to undergo hetero-normalizing successfully and goes on dismissing any idea of making Kiran suffer for a second time: “And I would pray that she would not fall apart again” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 86). He pretends to continue the relation with Sharad in front of Kiran and, maddened with the suspicion that Sharad would reveal the truth, almost drives him out from his house. His conviction is farther strengthened by innocent Kiran’s own confession: “I feel like a complete woman with him” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 104). But actually, Kiran is only entering into a social drama going on in Indian maritocratic arena well substantiated by

Hossang's remark, "...most homosexuals get married due to social pressure.... Most adjust to a double life. So do their wives..." (Merchant, XVI). However, Kamlesh's final blow comes from Prakash's proposal to continue his relation under the guise of heteronormative relation of brother-in-law which also acts as magnificent therapy for his depression and cure for fantastic idea of Kiran's happiness.

"The language and law that [regulate] the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defense and protection...." (Yep, 12). Those who are subsumed within its rhetoric willingly or unwillingly are thrown away from the fold of protection and security. The play in fact brings out a host of individuals trying to readjust their position in their various ways of combating the symbolic, psychological, discursive and material violence of heteronormativity. As Deepali properly points out: "It's not shame, is it? ... It'S FEAR... Of the corners we will be pushed into where we don't want to be" (*On a muggy Night...*, 89).

Positive Resistance

In a 1982 interview for the American magazine *Salmaqundi*, Foucault said: "I think that what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay life- style, not sex acts themselves. . . . It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate" (Quoted in Bersani, 38).

The play is not merely the story of injury, but rather it also is an enactment of the drama of resistance, resilience and healing. This is an assertion of an identity which is different but not different from or subservient to the hetero-normative world of mainstream. The prime task Dattani takes up in the play is perhaps to provide a subjunctive autonomy to an alternative discourse of relationship, a complex fabric of love, hate, betrayal, jealousy and thousands emotions woven out of the texture of the life of a handful of individuals building and rebuilding “unforeseen kinds of relationship”.

Since biologistics of reproduction is the keystone of the heterocentric world, “...it is precisely the non-reproductive nature of homosex which, within the terms of a reproductive heteropolarity discursively produced in religious, scientific and juridical terms, requires its extermination” (*Wilton*, 518). We meet a group of individuals who, rejected and repressed by their kith and kin or voluntarily walking away from their family to spare them the knowledge or the humiliation, develop a different kind of family. The “family of origin” is replaced by the “family of choice”. The new variation produces a potential for restructuring the institution of family which is synonymous not just with heterosexuality, but with a very specific brand of heterosexuality, which ideally involves marriage, baby making, monogamy, ownership of property, espousing middle class values, gender discrimination etc. Deepali and her absent “significant other” Tina provide an alternate family structure which undermines the typically heteropatriarchal one by appropriating it the other way round. The parenting of Deepali’s niece itself challenges the concept of reproductive normativity as the chief justification of a family. Like family members, the friend circle is sensitive to detect a disturbance in Kamlesh, concerned to try to help him out and not to bring up the subject that might hurt him and

precise in trying to divert him. Deepali's assurance of her identity and desire ("If we were heterosexual, we would be married", *On a Muggy Night...*, 65), and confidence in her womanliness, "Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman", (*On a Muggy Night...*, 66) expose the heterosexuality to be a performance and desire constructed.

Leo Bersani rightly observed, "A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) privileged male society" (Bersani, 42). Echoing the lesbian feminists, in the play Deepali challenges not only the practice of reducing lesbianism into a sexual identity, but also the reproduction of gender preference as master category and a male domination as well. Her sharp reaction to Sharad's jocular reference to a bitch defies the assumption that homosexuality is a primary sexual and social identity and other differences are submerged as secondary: "You can call yourself a dog, call yourself a pig, but never never insult a female" (*On a muggy Night...*, 59).

An interesting piece of subversion is proposed by Sharad with diverse potentials of the institution of marriage which is the foundation of the rubric of the heterosexist society. He proposes a disjunctive ritual to be performed as a mirror image of the heterosexual ritual performance of marriage -- the very site of power from which this minoritized group is excluded in our country. It is a powerful appropriation: if marriage is a "union pact" acknowledged as legitimate by the world, compelling the two participants to "stick" to it, the present ritual, in presence of the Society of Friends, will dissolve the bonding between Kamlesh and Prakash and ignore the existence of any such relationship

henceforth and the parties must abide by the law. The fire god is substituted by warm sea breeze and the “mantras” (holy chanting) by loud music. Sharad, like a religious agent, prompts the solemn vow: “As my friends, this city and God sre witness to my vow, I break all ties with Prakash” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 73). While Kamlesh hesitates about going on with the most troubled part of Tearing up the photograph, the chance arrival of Kiran spares him the task and he throws down the snap by the window undestroyed.

Dattani’s comic genius works wonder in the scene of exposition where the devices of subversion, mimicry and other resisting instruments come into play creating at once deeply emotional and superbly ludicrous effect. Deepali sets the motion by dropping the clue -- “...Sharad wants to be straight” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99) -- which is readily taken up by Sharad and Ed finds himself caught unawares. Ed’s defense of Sharad turns out to be self-defense: “It’s too bad for Kamlesh. I think it is better he comes to terms with it now that Sharad wants to be a man” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99). He gains a momentary upper hand as he preaches, as if from the pulpit: “Look around you. Look outside. ...There are real men and women out there! ...You don’t want to look at the world outside this... this den of yours. All of you want to live in your little bubble” (*On a muggy Night...*, 99). The audience, aware of the reality, could appreciate the ironic implication of every word he says -- the reference to “bubble” by which he alleges the so-called “unreal” existence of the gathering, best describes his own position of a convert to heterosexuality.

The pseudo-scientific method of yellow-page psychiatry is debunked with a hyperbolic demonstration of its favourite methodologies, refuting the claim of scientific sanction of a repressive mechanism. As Deepali mockingly points out, one should not go to the reputed psychiatrists who will either “they will make him come to terms with who he is, or worse -- tell him that he isn’t suffering from a disease that needs to be cured” (*On a muggy Night...*, 100), but should visit the lesser practitioners who may help to cure the “ego distonic homosexuality” in exchange of a huge sum. In a similar fashion, the discourse of “real man [hood]”, as upheld by Ed, is shown to be the perpetuation of the macho power in a patriarchal structure. The jocular implication of the simile “as straight as a rod” apart, the hypothesis denotes an authoritative regulation. The exaggerated exhibition of the desire becomes a positive resistance to the hierarchical structure of heteropatriarchy. The practice of heterosexuality turns out to be only a story of “occupying” space, “take room”, and thus to assert itself by pushing others to the periphery. As Sharad, the camp, puts it in his own way, to be a hero amounts to be the “marriage lord of the town”, to have a wife and children who would love him “only” because he is a “hetero”, to have “penis power” –at any costs to be the “king”. The margin thus levels back the centre reducing its identity to sheer sexual orientation.

The hilarious effect produced by the theatrical presentation of the privilege of heterosexuality by “wonderful” Sharad proves therapeutic to Kamlesh. The mimicry of an illusion accelerates the process of disillusionment; truth being obviated falsehood gets exposed: “The man I loved does not exist. You exist, Sharad and I love you” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 102). For the first time he really gets over the self-evasive illusion of

being in love with a victim of illusory world and self-deluding comfort of giving happiness to his dear sister. He recognizes his love for Sharad suddenly and surely.

The disillusionment also affects Bunny Singh with all the conviction of the impossibility of continuing an illusory non-existent world and sense of guilt of leading some one to live in it. The advocate of camouflage declares: “The people who know me are the people who hate me... I have tried to survive. In both worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either” (*On a muggy Night...*,102-3). He recognizes the treachery done to his wife only to cover up (“...the man whom my wife loves does not exist”, *On a Muggy Night...*, 102) and resolves to ask her pardon. He of course could not face the world with the truth about himself and cannot gather enough courage to leave the flat alone after the photo scandal, since he may be “appearing for nine hundredth time” on the serial, but at least he begins to face himself and admits: “I lied – to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every week on Thursday nights” (*On a muggy Night...*,103).

However, the greatest resistance in the play instituted through the dangerously potential design of comedy shapes itself in the character of Sharad. His self-location as a camp queers the whole business of identity and defies self-naming as man, woman, heterosexual, lesbian, gay and like names of pre-queer rubric of identity politics. “This potential for a kind of transubstantiation of desires” which “endows queer theory with real intellectual and social potency”, also inculcates in him “the robust playfulness that is queer performativity” (Wilton, 507).

Sharad is the first to arrive at the party thrown by Kamlesh for his friends, and he strikes us with a positive open and confident candor until now absent in both the encounters: between Kamlesh and the guard, and Ed and Kiran. We first meet him imitating mad cap for Kishor Kumar's "Ina Mina Dika", then spying upon the diamond merchant couple with a binocular, and then trying to probe into the real cause of the arrangement. With putting the finger on the name Prakash, he opens up a deep wound inflicted upon Kamlesh by the break up and his inability to come out of the hang over as *On a Muggy Night...*, 64) yet. It affected his relation with Sharad and broke the one year of living together. The latter tried heart and soul to help him to overcome the obsession, but failed. For moments, the pain Sharad had to suffer and the concern he still feels for Kamlesh ("You Know I still love you", *On a Muggy Night...*, 56), surfaces from beneath the venire of jovial extrovert, the drama queen he loves to play.

Sharad's keenness of observation and caring watchfulness over Kamlesh is evident in pointing out the real cause of Kamlesh's anxiety as well as discovering his relationship with the guard ("love bite",) and latter the hidden photograph. He is sensitive enough to react sharply at using some one for his poverty, but a sting of pain is not absent: "How dare you use" While Kamlesh uses the mechanism of suppression to cope with his sense of being betrayed, Sharad adopts that of exaggeration. He goes on stressing the obvious such as, reminding time and again that he was once a lover to Kamlesh, he knows perfectly well where things are kept in the house since it was he who designed the kitchen cabinet and also that Deepali is Kamlesh's guest, not "our[s]". He mimics the roles of the neglected house wife, dumped lover and other likes to apparently nullify their implications through parody, but sufficient hints are dropped how it bleeds:

“Spare me the humiliation of sitting through this... And I don’t need any farther humiliation by having you defend me!” (*On a muggy Night...*, 68). It is Sharad who points out the horror of the imminent wedding between Kiran and Ed putting it naked before Kamlesh’s face: “you want to rid yourself of his memories, but you sre ruining her life!” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 83). Latter’s feeble protest loses ground.

However, a serious purpose of challenging the very rendering of gender preference as a master category defining sexuality and social identity is served by the switching over from role to role. The camp, theatricalizes, demystifies and thus finally exposes the constructed nature of not only the identity but of desire itself by assuming the performative qualities of different gender roles ranging from Mina Kumari (the suffering or “dukhi” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 55) woman), Madhubala (the alluring femme), drama queen, the housewife who got a kick, the widow, (traditional feminine roles) to a bitch. In a post-feminist strain, he even declares his obvious right to choose gender role, though in a tone of mockery: “it is with great pleasure and pride that I equate myself to a bitch!” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 59). He has a ready answer to Deepali’s “Every time I menstruate, I thank God I am a woman” by “I thank God I am not pregnant” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 66) undermining the fixity of the role itself. He renames the characters in order to provide an alternate way of looking at them. He calls Kamlesh Kamla Bai with an appalling suggestion of prostitution (implied to both the parties), attaches “didi” (elder sister) to Deepali heightening her monitoring over the behaviour, and his reference to Ranjit as “coconut friend” alludes to the dual identity the latter carries on.

Thus, the resistance ranges from Ranjit's conscious jocularity in referring to Kiran as "he" supposing her to be Kamlesh's mistress to the exposition of a dangerous truth silently poisoning both brother and sister leading to their finding out themselves as independent individuals. It is the indeterminacy, the out of box/border nature and the refusal to follow the prescriptive norms of any fixed identity, which gives Sharad the charm, endows him with a *recueillement* (Yep, 48) and offers the most powerful resistance to the hetero-normativity the play aspires to combat.

From a different Perspective

"...the ontologically valorized [heterosexuality] actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of [homosexuality]; hence... the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that [homosexuality] is constituted as at once internal and external to [heterosexuality]" (Yep, 11-12).

The master stroke of dramatic language in the play is constituted by Dattani with providing an inverted/subverted vision of the hetero-normative world that we accept and neutralize as "normal". A different perspective which endows the Other with a viewership and situates the self/center in the position of an object to be seen, challenges, changes, reinterprets and resignifies the socio cultural rubric. As a patriarchal institution, heterosexuality is exposed to privilege and elevate the dominant social and material status

of men at the expense of women and sexual others, but the anxiety of proving one's manhood and womanhood require concealment or banishment of unsanctioned sexuality, gender performance and pleasure. Butler calls this programme of re-elaboration and reproduction of itself ritualistically and continuously "heterosexual comedy". Being situated at the top of the erotic pyramid, it shapes, influences and constrains how women and men should operate and function in the social arena and transforms the performance into being. It is only through the "heterosexual contract", as Wittig puts it, that women are constituted as 'real' women and men as 'real' men" (Quoted in Yep, 31).

The presentation of a non-normative liaison – both in its sexual orientation and the authorized pattern of social relationship – in the opening scene is followed by a delineation of a short meeting of a "normal" couple. Interestingly Dattani situates the scene in a non-realistic area where the confrontation between the "real" "man" and a "real woman" appears inverted, unnatural and different. Like the previous scene, the male, the performer ("I can take care of you", *On a Muggy Night...*, 52), is assertive and very protective about the comfort of the counterpart. Kamlesh's gesture of putting the foot of the guard on his own thigh to buckle his shoe lace is replicated by Ed's "fussy" readiness to change the window seat with an isle one for Kiran who is scared of height, as is the guard's shock replicated by Kiran's embarrassment. But while the former recoils from accepting his spontaneous response of satisfaction by the convenient camouflage of prostitution, Kiran visibly enjoys being at the centre of Ed's caring attention.

“A certain type of heterosexual relationship style is often promoted as the best, most respectable and cherished sexual lifestyle that provides social currency and status (Note, Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, 59). This particular brand is promoted to the anchor or exemplar position by which sexual others are judged. Hence, the discursive centrality enjoyed by the institution of heterosexuality, authenticated by marriage providing legal, socio cultural and religious validity is zoomed in and put under scanner.

In the following scene, as Sharad enjoys the view of the merchant couple from Kamlesh’s window, the object status of the so-called “normal” world of heterosexuals is confirmed by the voyeuristic gaze concentrated upon “those heterosexuals”. The use of the binocular suggesting distance and reference to the blue films exposes the essentially performative nature of the practice and its perverse potential. It also subverts the mechanism of reducing non-normative sexuality into public spectacle packaged to titillate, captivate or debate.

The forced intrusion implied by the autonomous existence of the hetero-normative lifestyle which narrows the space of any alternative existence is suggested by the light strokes like the shrill noise of the band swelling through the window into the room where the party met as well as the traffic jamming the entrance of the apartment. The tampering with the electric supply causing load shedding and other discomforts exhibits our indifference to the way so-called “normal” activities usurp the legitimate space of others so casually.

“Implicit in the marriage contract is men’s appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies (e.g., sexual, reproductive) and labor (e.g., domestic, emotional)” (Yep, 29). The rupture within the professed sanctity of the institution is shown through the predicament of the diamond merchant’s wife entrapped by a forced union with her husband (“She is gritting her teeth. She might throw up any moment”, (*On a Muggy Night...*, 53) by a capitalist heteropatriarchal society. Her situation well complies with the concept of “proper sex” which is “widely defined as a specific version of heterosexual intercourse in which the man’s penis penetrates the woman’s vagina; it starts with his arousal and finishes with his climax” (Yep, 30) and other sexual activities are presented as ancillary to the “real thing” effecting reproduction. As a relief, she of course enjoys a clandestine relation with a “doodhwala” (milk man) during her husband’s absence. But while with him, she has to suffer his company in whichever way her husband decides and he leaves her alone only to have the cathartic weeping to remove all the displeasures of the moments.

Once Kitzinger & Wilkinson remarked, “Compulsory heterosexuality creates the conditions by which ‘it never occurs to many women to be anything else’ but heterosexual” (Quoted in Yep, 18). Having no alternative, the women accept the gender-based violence and domination, psychic, emotional and economic suffering, diminished physical and mental health as the recipe of their daily existence and ignore them as normal. The cultural conceptions of a “good wife” or “good mother” create expectations and experiences and regulate women’s behavioral choices. Even when the sexual pleasure is concerned, Holland et al (1994) found that, in terms of sexual practice, sex is

still defined as “penetration for men’s pleasure in which women find fulfillment primarily in the relationship, in giving pleasure” (Quoted in Yep, 30).

The oppressive mechanism of the much coveted institution of marriage is laid bare with another story, that of Kiran. This is a story of “fight at nights”, of “nightmares”: the wife is brutally tortured day after day, beaten up black and blue, burnt with cigars. It is the same anxiety to belong to the category “normal”, woman, the internalization of the patriarchal values that made her cover up. Black eye is explained as heating the head, broken ribs as due to a fall. The institution of law fails to protect the victim and punish the grave offender as he is bailed out the next day; the institution of family could not offer her shelter in fear of being cornered and advises her to “adjust” to the dire situation.

Another horrible face of happy concept of marriage is unmasked when a gay man like Bunny Singh or Ed, in order to be a “real” man and accepted by the society, gets married. The women are duped by the hyperbolic enactment of manhood into a marriage where she remains actually unloved – sometimes suffering from unsuspected betrayal, sometimes from duplicity of relationship maintained (as Ed proposes to do), sometimes remained “contented” like Bunny’s wife: “She is contented and thinks Bunny a considerate husband” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 84). Kiran, so much dependent upon and infatuated with Ed, sounds really ironic when she tries to dissuade Sharad to marry a woman for a “cover-up for your shame” (*On a Muggy Night...*, 102).

Heteropatriarchy does not only subjugate women by confining them in specific gender role, but oppresses men by categorizing. To be a “real” man is an exhausting and unending performance, or as Michael Kimmel (2001) puts it, “that nightmare from which we never seem to awaken” (Quoted in Yep, 19). Given a different perspective, the heteropatriarchal image of masculinity appears as “obscene”, a way of “thrusting with power” – muscular, sexual, occupying power.

The play presents an occasion for re-evaluating the definitional correctness of typical man and woman defining their own identities in reference to other. Kiran loved to play the woman as much as Ed the man. First she accepted the tortures of her former husband as sign of love unless it ruined her life and then she enjoyed the male protectiveness and care ensuring the centrality as a woman unless it gets exposed to be sham. In the same manner, the projection of an ideal family man on Bunny Singh is exposed as much an illusion as the absurdity of society’s incapacity to come out of the fixed monolithic structural pattern valorizing sexual orientation over every other aspect of our identity. Thus, the play altogether presents a fair illustration of Butler’s assumption that the “...hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome, that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is consistently haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself” (Butler, 125).

Conclusion

The experience of reading the play in the pages or watching it being performed on the stage, makes us view that the social meanings attached to our desires, emotions, impulses and behaviours are derived from the same organizing principle which orders sexuality, gender and even pleasure in the interest of “a historically specific cultural invention called heterosexuality” (Yep, 20). The sexist society creates a category of knowledge, a normative language which frames our knowledge of bodies, desires, sexualities, identities and also creates moral boundaries and political hierarchies. Patriarchy uses heterosexism as its prime tool to create and perpetuate the fixed gender structure. It strictly confines penetration within the boundary of a monolithic meaning because “[w]renching penetration out of a heterosexual matrix of meanings deprives it of its symbolic power” (Yep, 32). A penetrable body is a vulnerable body; to be penetrated is to relinquish power. Hence, here is a need to “challenge the regime of sexuality itself, that is, the knowledges that construct the self as sexual and that assume heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories marking the truth of sexual selves” (Yep, 37). Complying with the necessity, the play seeks to expand sexual choice and diversity, and to de-police desire and pleasures that are private and consensual. Given a different perspective to what is granted as “normal”, it achieves its meaning and significance by promoting the conviction, so beautifully worded by Leo Bersani, that “...the only way we can love the other or the external world is to find ourselves somehow in it. Only then

might there be a nonviolent relation to the world that doesn't seek to exterminate difference" (Bersani, 43).