

## CONTESTING SOCIAL OSTRACISM: A READING OF MAHESH DATTANI'S *EK ALAG MAUSAM*

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### **Abstract:**

The paper entitled "Contesting Social Ostracism: A Reading of Mahesh Dattani's 'Ek Alag Mausam' is an attempt to analyse the portrayal of a subaltern group in Mahesh Dattani's screenplay 'Ek Alag Mausam' (2005). Mahesh Dattani is one of the paths defining playwright in the Indian theatre. He writes plays in English. He has written fourteen plays and four scripts. As a versatile theatre personality, he directs and acts in the plays. Dattani writes plays that can be enacted on stage and he writes plays that can be read in radios. Dattani's social concerns reflected in his choice of plots for his plays. He often stages the issues that are considered taboo by other playwrights. 'Ek Alag Mausam' is one such play. The Hindi expression of 'Ek Alag Mausam' means 'a beautiful season'. This play revolves around the life of victims of AIDS. This paper attempts to analyse how Dattani problematizes the treatment of victims of AIDS and how he questions the myth and connotations around AIDS that results in social ostracism of AIDS victims.

**Keywords:** AIDS, HIV, Ostracism, Social Myths, Subaltern, Ek Alag Mausam, Mahesh Dattani.

Mahesh Dattani (1958) is one of the leading literary figures representing Indian drama in English. He wrote several controversial plays in a short period of time. He has won a numerous award including the prestigious Sahitya Academy for his collection of plays *Final Solution and Other Plays*. He touches the themes that most of his contemporaries are afraid to touch. His plays deal with the dark social issues like gender discrimination, child sexual abuse, homosexuality, transgender issues and communal violence.

Dattani's works focus on the relationship in urban middle-class families. He influences audience by allowing them to relate themselves with the character on the stage. Though he does not claim himself to be a moralist, his plays have moral undertone. He preaches moral values in the screen play *Ek Alag Mausam* (2005). In *Ek Alag Mausam*, Dattani questions the hypocritical nature of the modern society. He pictures the indifference shown by the modern society to the innocent and weaker community. Dattani uses his screenplay as a platform to fight against social ostracism. He spreads awareness and gives voice to the people those who are considered misfit to the society.

*Ek Alag Mausam* is a story about the innocent HIV-positive children and the victims of HIV. The screen play registers the sufferings of the victims and also antipathy of the society. Society stereotypes them as immoral people. It builds a wall of hatred and aversion towards the HIV positives. This attitude pushes the victims into more miserable condition.

Dattani feels that the lack of awareness is the root cause for this ostracism. Irrespective of the age groups, all HIV positives are affected by social ostracism. They are isolated by their relatives. They face exclusion by the society. Their only hope is Jeevan Jothi, a home for HIV-positive children run by Dr. Machado. He runs the home for the memory of his son who died of AIDS. Aparna and George are the only

volunteers in the home. Aparna was infected by her husband. George, a lorry driver, got the virus because of blood transfusion from his close friend Joseph, son of Dr Machado.

Other People are afraid to enter the campus. If a normal person with service mentality visits Jeevan Jhothi often, society brands him as an Aids victim. While Aparna enquires about the other volunteers a young lad name Manoj replies,

APARNA Aren't there enough volunteers?

MANOJ Are you joking? Only George has remained here. Other are too scared that people will think they have Aids... (II 500)

Dr Machado travels to various countries to collect fund and lifesaving medicine for the Jeevan Jothi. But most of the time they run out of medicine. So Dr Machado prepares some Ayurvedic medicine to sooth the agony of the children. Dr Machado faces difficulties as the landowner asks him to vacate the place. At the same time, Government does not release the fund given by a Dutch organisation.

Unfortunately educated people do not have an awareness of AIDS. Dattani reveals the inhuman and unethical attitude of a dentist. Young Manoj consults a dentist for a gum surgery. Manoj shares his experience in the group as follows:

I went to the dentist the other day... he said I needed gum surgery to save my teeth. I thought I should tell him the truth. So I told him that I am a HIV positive, so that he will be more careful during the surgery. The dentist looked at me strangely... he ordered me to wait outside. I waited for an hour before his assistant came out to say the doctor was not free to do the surgery and I should go somewhere else. She did not even take money for the consultation. Okay, I said. I went to another dentist across the street. I didn't tell him anything. I just let him to do the surgery. (*Showing off his teeth.*) And now I have perfect gums (II 487).

Sukhiya, one of the George's village friends is also a truck driver. He often goes to prostitutes having no precautionary measures. George warns him, but he refuses to lend his ears. Sukhiya knows George has often visited Jeevan Jhothi.

SUKHIYA. I hear they are all very sick.

GEORGE. Yes, some of them have AIDS.

SUKHIYA. George bhaiyya! If you don't mind me saying this... why don't you sit there? (II 512)

Sukhiya's lack of awareness not only causes misery to his life but also it makes others more miserable. Sukhiya spreads news that George often visits Jeevan Jothi as he has AIDS, to the entire village. The village elders refuse to allow George to stay among them. They prohibit him from entering the village.

VILLAGER 2. (*Moving back*) Don't come near us!

VILLAGER 1. (*Picking up a stone*). I said stay away from us. (*To the rest of the crowd.*) We all heard what Sukhiya had to say! He swore on his mother it is the truth.

VILLAGER ELDER. You will have to leave town George. We cannot tolerate you living with us! (II 536)

Dattani takes serious measures to condemn the ostracism faced by the HIV victims. He gives hope to them to live. Jeevan Jhothi itself brings hope to the HIV-positive children because they are not afraid of death. In Jeevan Jhothi "Death is not a news over here. Life is" (II 504). George, Aparna and Dr Machado try their best to make the children happy until their last breath. George encourages the children to fight hard against their fate. He asks the children to fight hard to live. Children of Jeevan Jothi are immune to the fear of death and they are very busy in living their moments. They have no time to grieve for their fate.

On the other hand, Aparna grieves over her misfortunes. She aborts her child due to Aids. Her thoughts dwell around death. She wants to show love and affection to the children of the home but she is afraid to do so. George helps her to get out of the grief and agony. George loves Aparna, he wants to marry her. He helps Aparna by unmasking her persecution complex,

You have branded yourself Aids,[sic] Aids,[sic] Aids![sic] You have put a big red stamp on yourself. I thought only an uncaring, unfeeling society would do that to us. But no. We don't have worry about society. We are doing it to ourselves! I refuse to band myself (II 533).

George wants Aparna to see the world like he sees it. As a conservative woman, she wants a normal life. So he encourages Aparna to adopt little Paro. Paro is a daughter of an AIDS victim. Aparna take care of Paro. Aparna even devices to keep Paro financially sound even after Aparna's death. George organizes a series of campaigns to spread awareness among prostitutes and the public about AIDS and its victims. He distributes free medicines to the prostitutes and advises them to ask their customers to use condoms. He does a public awareness campaign about AIDS. He encourages the victims among prostitutes to reveal their health condition. In this way Dattani tries to build a strong wall against ostracism.

Literary studies speak about several subaltern group and marginalised group. The classification of subalternity/marginalisation is made based on caste, race, gender, sexuality, etc. Most of the authors deal with such issues. But one invisible criterion is the disease like AIDS that have an amoral connotation. Mahesh Dattani exposes the marginalisation in those grounds and urges the viewers to do away with it.

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