

A Study of Queer Identity and Human Rights Discourse: Re-examining LGBTQ+ Rights in *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* through the Lens of International Human Rights Law.

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Introduction

The discourse on LGBTQ+ rights has gained increasing prominence within international human rights frameworks. In India, literature and theatre have played a crucial role in articulating marginalized voices. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* is one of the earliest Indian plays to explicitly portray homosexual relationships and their socio-psychological implications (Dattani 2013).

This paper examines how the play engages with queer identity while situating it within international human rights law, arguing that the play functions as both a cultural narrative and a political critique.

2. Queer Identity and Theoretical Framework

Queer theory challenges heteronormative assumptions and destabilizes binary constructions of gender and sexuality (Ghosal and Mondal 2018). It foregrounds fluidity and resistance against normative structures.

In Dattani's play, queer identity is socially constructed and shaped by repression, secrecy, and stigma (Paul 2017). The characters' struggles reflect the tension between personal identity and societal expectations.

3. Representation of Queer Identity in the Play

The play portrays individuals grappling with identity, love, and acceptance. Characters such as Kamlesh and Ed embody the psychological consequences of internalized homophobia and social rejection (Bhushan 2024).

Dattani exposes societal hypocrisy by presenting a world where queer individuals are forced to conceal their identities, leading to emotional fragmentation (Bite 2021).

4. Marginalization and Social Exclusion

The LGBTQ+ community in the play is depicted as marginalized and silenced within mainstream society (Roy 2017). The heteronormative framework renders queer identities invisible and stigmatized.

This marginalization operates at both social and psychological levels, reinforcing exclusion and alienation (Sunalini 2019).

5. Human Rights Perspective: International Framework

International human rights law emphasizes equality, dignity, and freedom. Foundational documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) assert the universality of these rights.

The experiences of the characters in the play reflect violations of these principles, particularly the denial of dignity and privacy (United Nations 1948).

6. Intersection of Law and Literature

When Dattani wrote the play, homosexuality was criminalized under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The narrative serves as a critique of legal and social oppression.

Literature often anticipates social change; the play contributes to the discourse that eventually led to the decriminalization of homosexuality in India in 2018 (Dharsini 2019).

7. Themes of Identity, Secrecy, and Resistance

The play explores closeted identities, internal conflict, and resistance. These themes highlight the importance of recognition and equality within human rights discourse (Rajput 2025).

8. Critique of Heteronormativity

Dattani critiques heteronormativity by portraying queer relationships as emotionally valid and socially significant. This challenges dominant ideologies that privilege heterosexuality (Sankar 2017).

9. Conclusion

On a Muggy Night in Mumbai is an important piece of Indian English literature in which Mahesh Dattani's novel is one of the earliest to highlight the queer experience in a socio-cultural context that is steeped in heteronormative values. The play sensitively explores LGBTQ+ themes and not only raises awareness of the emotional and psychological impact of discrimination, but also the significant structural inequalities that limit the rights and freedoms of sexual minorities. The protagonists' struggle for identity, the need to keep certain things hidden, self-acceptance, social alienation reflect the deep impact that social prejudice can have on individual life, making it an important commentary on the lived reality of queer communities in India.

The play becomes more relevant when considered in the context of international human rights law, and seen as the violation of basic human rights such as equality, dignity, privacy, freedom of expression and protection from discrimination. The events of the characters' lives seem to reflect those values that are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee that people have the right to be treated with equality and respect, in all aspects, without regard for their sexual orientation or gender identity. As such, Dattani's dramatic portrayal goes beyond the fiction world of literature into the arena of human rights and raises social and institutional issues concerning LGBTQ+ people.

The study also shows that literature is a potent medium of dissent from the dominant ideas and the proliferation of social change. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* boldly challenged legal and cultural norms which were hostile to queer identity, an identity that was criminalised in India under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The characters were portrayed as people, and their emotional situations were rendered in a believable and empathetic manner, allowing the audience to reflect on their own biases and stereotypes and to reimagine their ideas about sexual identity and sexuality. In this respect, Dattani's work resonated with many changes in the law and in society generally, such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in India in 2018.

Besides, the play highlights the need for visibility, recognition and acceptance in the quest for social justice. It disrupts the culture of silence that perpetuates stereotype and homophobia around queer identity and calls for a society that recognizes and celebrates diversity. This research on the intersection of literature and human rights demonstrates how a text can serve as literature in the public sphere, as a catalyst for empathy, and as a social factor that can shape attitudes toward marginalized communities.

In conclusion, *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* remains a powerful literary intervention that not only documents the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals but also calls for a more inclusive and equitable society. Its engagement with themes of identity, discrimination, and human dignity aligns closely with contemporary human rights principles, making it an enduring and relevant text for understanding the relationship between queer identity, social justice, and human rights. The play ultimately reinforces the idea that the recognition and protection of LGBTQ+ rights are not merely matters of social acceptance but fundamental issues of human dignity and universal human rights.

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