

Mahesh Dattani's *Ek Alag Mausam*: A Call for Love and Humanity

ABSTRACT

Mahesh Dattani's *Ek Alag Mausam* emphatically articulate the inarticulate to express the 'silence' of those who are the victims par excellence of the social apathy, indifference of fate and disgrace born out of human attitude. In the play, Dattani exhibits his protest against the irrational control of social conventions which do not permit an individual to make an innate response to the call of humanity. The play *Ek Alag Mausam* is the story of the emotional sensibility of two HIV positives. However, *Ek Alag Mausam* is a play with a message. It is not a question of the love of two people but it is a question of love with life. Dattani tries to proclaim that the misfortune of being marginalized as HIV positive can't crush the desire to live. Society can't leave an individual to die in shame and isolation for those reasons which are beyond the conscious control of man.

To live, to survive and to belong are the basic thrusts of human existence. The protagonists in *Ek Alag Mausam* are HIV positives and in spite of being aware of it, they are equally sensitive towards the warmth of human relationship. There are legal restrictions of matrimonial alliances for HIV positives. Yet Dattani takes his pen against this socially and legally challenged issue with a motif that human life takes its own course beyond the domain of legislature and its pace can be felt and estimated only in the court of humanity.

Ek Alag Mausam is Dattani's celebrated screen play which deals with the pain and suffering of HIV positives of our society. The play seems to be a thematic innovation

in the field of Indian drama in English. The film *Ek Alag Mausam* was released on 4th Feb., 2005 in India. Dattani in *Ek Alag Mausam* takes the pen against the forces that suppress the call of humanity. The play looks like an attempt to respond the call of humanity beyond the socio-medico territories. The plot of the play deals with emotional and existential crisis in the lives of two HIV positives namely Aparna and George. As Asha Kuthari observes:

Ek Alag Mausam is a love story of two HIV positive people. The objective was to infuse a sense of belonging, care and hope in the HIV afflicted. This was hardly an easy task in the Indian context where myths constantly shape and colour the present, not merely evoking the past (Asha Kuthari Chaudhari 125).

However according to Beena Agrawal the play is not simply a love story but it is a play with a message:

Ek Alag Mausam is a play with a message, it is not a question of the love of the two people, but it is a question of love with life (Beena Agrawal 140).

The play *Ek Alag Mausam* focuses on fundamental desires of human beings such as to survive, to belong and to live life in an honourable way. The play exhibits attitude and apathy of society towards the ill-fated HIV positives who lead life with pity and disgust and dies in shame. *Ek Alag Mausam* depicts incidents of past and present in the lives of Aparna and George. The story is told in time present and time past. When the play opens, Aparna decides to put Paro in Panchgini boarding school. After Paro's mother's death due to HIV virus, she was brought up like a daughter by Aparna. Aparna did her level best for well-being of Paro but now she feels that she can't continue her support. Disappointed by Aparna's decision, Paro pleads her, "Why? Why are you sending me away?" (CP II 473).

Aparna is moved by Paro's allegation and sinks into the past. The whole past emerges from the flux of her conscience. She shifts into the past and recalls the past telephone call of Rosalynd Cooper who was a volunteer nurse. Aparna is expecting a baby and at the hospital, the nurse Cooper advises her to give up her baby. She tries to argue without understanding thing properly. Later on she realizes what is being indicated. She is utterly traumatized to know that she is HIV positive. Dr. Sanyal

declares that she got the virus infection from her husband Suresh. Her conscience receives a great jolt at the disclosure of her husband being HIV positive. She is frightened at the idea of loss of the unborn baby along with the feeling that she is losing on either side. She feels an acute mental agony and her soul falls to pieces. When she comes out, she realizes that some people were looking at her with a mixed feeling of pity and disgust.

Aparna has no ray of hope to rescue her child. She accuses her husband for ruining her life. She needs help from him but he is unable to help her. His helplessness is revealed in the way he replies, "How can I help you? I am dying too" (CP II 482). He tries to escape from the shame and leaves the city with guilt ridden soul. He, in fact, has neither capacity nor courtesy to help her. Aparna feels a sense of uprootedness and lets go her child. She is weakened both physically and mentally. She is deserted by all and supported by none in the hours of crisis. Forced by the fate and family, Aparna takes refuge at Jeevan Jyoti Hospital managed by Dr. Machado. After taking refuge at the hospital, she feels that it is her new and true home. Beena Agrawal observes:

It was a new dawn in her life with message of the shadows of death, can't be overpowered, can at least be lingered with the positive thrust of life. If HIV is the preface to death and social shame, Jeevan Jyoti is certainly the light of life (Beena Agrawal 143-144).

Dr. Machado tries his best to lift the spirit and shake off the fear of death of all HIV patients. Aparna is moved by Dr. Machado's slogan "Keep fighting. Seize the moment!" (CP II 487). He tries to infuse positive attitude in the minds of the people infected with virus. In the play, Dattani ridicules the society where even a doctor, a man of science, is carried away with the tides of social myths and irrational notions. The social humiliation and spiritual pain is killing Aparna bit by bit. She tries to get solace by helping other HIV victims. Dr. Machado approves that death is an inevitable phenomenon in human life and none can avoid it. However, cheerful atmosphere makes one's journey a little easier. At Jeevan Jyoti Hospital, Aparna's encounter with George is very significant in her life. Initially, she mistakes George as the doctor but later comes to know that he is an owner and driver of the truck transporting the cops at Jeevan Jyoti. It is George who understands Aparna in a proper way. Gradually she develops emotional bondage with the children of the hospital and George. Initially, both Aparna and George

are quite ignorant of each other's HIV positive. Later on George comes to know about Aparna's being HIV positive through Dr. Machado.

In the play, Dattani tries to exhibit that social apathy doubles the pain and suffering of the diseased people. Dattani examines and demonstrates that the virus infected people have two kinds of suffering – one physical and second mental – resulting from the social apathy. The play *Ek Alag Mausam* celebrates the joy of life rather than mourning on the death. It encourages how to fight against suffering. Here everybody is in love with life. The play depicts love for life. The sign at Jeevan Jyoti Hospital '*Leave Your Prejudice Outside*' is very significant and suggestive. Dattani believes that social myths, convention, prejudice, apathy etc. have made the lives of many people worst than the hell. If society shakes off apathy and deep rooted prejudices, the life will become easier journey. Thus the play shows love for life.

The story of Rita and her brothel is also a very bold dramatic attempt of Mahesh Dattani. Through Rita's character, Dattani throws light on the illicit sex business going on in our society. He asserts that such unlicensed sex business is managed by the men and women are the victim of it. It is understood that corrupt sex is the cause and carrier of the AIDS disease. In the play, Dattani is concerned about the problems and suffering of the marginalized people. He tries to justify them by putting their voices on the page, stage and also in the cinematic version like *Mango Souffle*. He tries to articulate the voices of those whose voices have remained inarticulated so far. The longing for human love and relationship is the main theme of the play. George and Aparna, being HIV positives are destined to end up like many other HIV positive very soon. Nevertheless, they want to make every moment of life meaningful. George wants to enjoy the life on the devouring face of the death. Joy and happiness is the gist of his existence. He can't defeat death, but he can remove pain by being cheerful and happy. George also wants Aparna to be like him.

Actually, George wants Aparna to forget that they are HIV positives. He thinks only of their lives together. He teaches her to live life heroically. He believes that one can survive and also enjoy against the backdrop of perpetual pain if he is possessed with strong will power. George's character reminds us of Earnest Hemingway's heroic character Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea*, who says, "Man can't be destroyed. No one can destroy my will to complete my journey!" George seems to be the most innocent character, but he is punished beyond endurance. He is infected, rejected and insulted for no fault of his own. Yet, he survives and sustains against all the odd forces that consume

his self-esteem and existence. He could bear all these because he has got inward strength and courage.

Jeevan Jyoti is a new life for all the HIV positives. Both Aparna and George feel that it is not a place but something more than that for them. It is the makeshift home for the people with HIV positive. It is not only healing clinic for virus infected, but it is real home for them. It is the only place where they feel associated and needed by others. The play *Ek Alag Mausam* may be seen as a tool to evolve social protest against the social myths and misbeliefs about the dreaded disease. It is unfortunate that Jeevan Jyoti is going to cease due to the shortage of fund. Aparna organizes a charity show on 2nd December, the World AIDS Day to generate resources to save the place from the economical crisis. She encourages the children to make posters for the World AIDS Day concert. It seems that the dramatist, through the character of George, strives to create understanding and love for HIV positive. It is ironical that Aparna herself is infected with the virus and yet unable to appreciate the condition of George. She too thinks that he is infected due to his involvement in unlicensed sex.

Aparna's visit to Dr. Machado's house proves to be turning point in her life. Dr. Machado brings up the issue between George and Aparna. He blames her for running away and breaking his heart. Aparna confesses that she did so because he was HIV positive like her husband. Dr. Machado shocks her saying that George got virus through his son Joseph. He explains in detail to Aparna how George got infected by blood transfusion from Joseph who was virus infected. Dr. Machado has started Jeevan Jyoti hospital in memory of his son Joseph. Aparna is shocked after this revelation. Dr. Machado suggests that it is not too late to reciprocate her feelings. Soon after, Aparna and Paro arrive at Panchgini School. In a very dramatic manner, Dr. Machado comes there bringing George with him. The area is surrounded by hills and mountains. Paro and George go to climb the mountain nearby. Dr. Machado encourages Aparna to reciprocate her feeling for George. Encouraged by Dr. Machado, Aparna runs in the direction pointed by him. The play ends at the exterior level on a hill showing Aparna and George in each other's arm and Paro blowing bubbles on them. With immense mental strength and exceptional power, George's character triumph over the man made and nature made maladies.

Through the play Dattani tries to circulate ideas like 'live and let others live', 'understand and love', 'giving up myths and prejudice' etc. In the play George's character does his best to inculcate the idea of understand and love in other. Dattani's *Ek Alag Mausam* may be seen as a response to call of humanity. It is a sincere and genuine

attempt of creating awareness against the social myth and apathy which are more dreaded than the dreaded disease AIDS itself. At the end, Dattani gives a disguised message through Dr. Machado's speech. Dr. Machado addresses the school children as follows:

On World Aids Day. Let us remember the lives of those who died of the virus and respect the dignity of those who are living with HIV. Today's enemy is not other human beings from another country or people of another religion or race. The real enemy today is a tiny invisible creature – a virus. The Aids virus knows no barriers of caste, creed, religion, age, gender, race. It is not prejudice, fear or ignorance that will win the battle against Aids. But understanding, precaution and above all love. Today the world over doctors and scientists are trying to find a cure for Aids. In the interest of mankind we hope they succeed. While waiting for that cure to be invented or discovered, let us not forget – that miracles are known to happen (CP II 556).

Dr. Machado's speech can be seen as the epilogue of the play. In the play, Dattani seems to be working for the cause of the deprived and marginalized. He dramatizes the emotional crisis resulting from the lack of understanding about the dreaded disease AIDS very skillfully and artistically.

The cinematization of the play Ek Alag Mausam opens up new avenues for disseminating message of understand and love for the AIDS infected community. After the theatre script got transcribed into film script, the play got a wide spread popularity, a kind of consolation for the community of AIDS victims. The Chief Executive of Action AIDS Indian Society, Terry Almeidee rightly admitted:

It is a film that will make people sit up and start thinking about the issue seriously so far. We have only seen marginalization of such

people. Through *Ek Alag Mausam*, we hope to put the problem in a different perspective and help audience to understand the issue better. We used the film medium to reach out to not only HIV positive people out there who are feeling isolated, but also a large cross-section of people (Vishwanathan Subrahmanya 2003).

The play seems to champion the idea of inculcation of courage and strength in the virus affected people. To live bravely is one of the messages of the play. Dattani tries to depict socio-medico issue with philosophical twist in the play. The play *Ek Alag Mausam*, being a screen play, is spared from the theatrical restraints and constrains. It also helps the issue in a new ways and angles. Aparna's love and care for Paro, George's affection for the kids, all the HIV positives and feelings for Aparna, and Dr, Machado's undying paternal care and consideration are the way to redress the gaps carved in their lives by social apathy and fate. Aparna is separated from her husband and has to let go her unborn baby. There is a strong desire for filial love. George has to leave his parents due to the virus infection. The lack of parental love enhances him for the love of Aparna and others. Dr. Machado lost his son Joseph due to the virus infection. This deficiency keeps on flowing the paternal care inside him. All these things have got universal significance and therefore the play got wide popularity.

The idea of 'understanding' and 'love' promoted through the play imparts an enduring popularity to the play. The recognition of *Ek Alag Mausam* as voice of humanity is beyond all debates.

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