

# The Cultural Silencing of LGBT Voices in India with Reference to do the Needful: A Radio Play

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## Abstract

*Culture deliberates the arts and philosophy, which are considered to be important for the development of civilization and mentality of the people. In a multicultural and multilingual country like India marginalisation of certain communities, including homosexual, is a significant problem that threads the fabric of our society. In modern society, gender and sexuality-based discrimination are witnessed all over the world. The term homosexuality has never gained social acceptance and has been treated down the ages as taboo subjects. Although sexual desires are a matter of instinctive behaviour, yet are controlled by social norms and morals. Therefore, heterosexuality is the only acceptable mode of relationship and is considered as a centre to our culture. The homosexual relationships are still stigmatized as unnatural and unacceptable in Indian social context and therefore often hidden under the shroud of privacy. Mahesh Dattani, an Indian writer, has chosen such taboo subjects and treated them with great confidence and sublimity to bring them from the boundary to the main stream. This paper focuses on the pathetic conditions of those who struggle between instinct and social culture concerning queer theory in the play DO THE NEEDFUL: A RADIO PLAY by Mahesh Dattani.*

**Keywords: Culture, LGBT, Gender, Queer.**

Culture is a contested phenomenon which is understood to mean different things by different groups. It is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs and behaviour. Culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, techniques, tools and works of arts, and so on. That is to say; culture is a broad concept that embraces all the aspects of human life. Culture embraces everything, and it shapes our thoughts and actions. Cultural differences will affect the receptivity of individual education and willingness to accept information and incorporate it into his or her lifestyles. Culture, therefore influences the custom we learn, live and behave in this modern society.

Culture plays a significant role and in fact, causes development in several different fields of our daily life. Just as literature heavily draws on existent norms and values, which are translated into the fictional sphere to be further investigated, expanded, or altered to probe their boundaries, society does not only rely on literature for the dissemination of its values but also uses it for the affirmation of its moral concepts and social norms. Literature, society and the media, therefore engage in a dynamic negotiation and altercation of norms and values which are constructed, maintained and revived in a constant dialogue between them. Literature comes into view as a medium of the representation of extra-literary norms and values and as a medium that is capable of constructing or generating new or alternative hierarchies of norms and values.

Literature serves as an important medium to portray the role of culture in present-day society. The relationship between literature, society and culture is vital to the field of culture studies. There are many cultures that includes professional, corporate, educational, national, religious/spiritual, sexual orientation, generational, family and gender. All of these cultures influence us; we see the world through our cultural lens. Several cultural aspects influence the way we interact with other people, including national culture, gender culture, corporate culture, and so on. We always have a tendency to judge other's behaviour based on our cultural norms, the "lens" we see through. It can be said that the world is made of cultured fabric. In the contemporary society, cultural studies became a global movement and attracted the attention of human community both within and beyond borders for a variety of reasons.

All the literary works like novels, plays, poems, etc., are a reflection of culture. The writers reflect their culture through their literary works. Literature helps to explore the values and ideals held by a particular community. Literature typically takes place within the cultural vacuum of one's social setting. For it to reflect the community, there are values and ideas that are explored through the work, and this helps to bring a sense of understanding to a particular social order represented in work. Among the various medium literature pays more attention to the LGBT communities and incalculable torments faced by them in the culture bounded contemporary society. Young adolescents are also exploring self and social boundaries. For gay and lesbian humans, suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the culturally marginalized society. An issue relatively unique to LGBT people is the feeling of isolation. Many LGBT youths are fearful of being isolated and rejected and often must keep their feelings, questions, and fears bottled up inside. For those isolated, books mirroring their real-life struggles and dares are of paramount importance. People in the LGBT community are struggling for equal rights and acceptance. Transgender people face a lot of difficulty in finding acceptance, and they are looked down upon all the time. This is a major issue because discrimination against the LGBT community is highly prevalent. People's prejudices lead them to

think that LGBT people are odd and very different that has been made as an age-old tradition.

Today, homosexuality and queer identities may be acceptable to more Indian youths than ever before, but within the boundaries of families, homes and schools, acceptance is remaining as a constant struggle for LGBT people. There are some who disclosed their identity and were accepted by people; there are others living dual lives and waiting for the right moment to talk about the issue. Even in this modern society, a huge number of LGBT people face huge issues related to violence, unemployment, discrimination, poverty and lack of healthcare. Among the many Indian writers Mahesh Dattani is well known for exploring the inner feelings of the marginally victimized humans and in his *Do the Needful: A Radio Play* he portrays culture silencing the voice, sufferings and feelings of LGBT community effectively. *Do the Needful* is the earliest radio play of Dattani. The play depicts the theme of homosexuality but in a quite different way. The play was first broadcast on 14th August 1997 by BBC Radio 4. The hero of the play is a homosexual and has a strong relationship with Trilok and which is not even known to his parents. Although they belong to the Patel community, they are ready to marry their son to Lata who belongs to Gowda community just because he is a divorcee and can't get a girl in their community very easily. Alpesh did not openly reveal the prominent reason for the rejection of his second marriage and tries to tell his situation in some or other manner. This shows the confused mind of a gay who is unable to decide openly the life which he wants. Instead of understanding her son's problem behind the rejection of marriage, they simply do the same mistake that they did earlier. Through this Dattani stress the point that it is the parents who must come forward and make them understand that it's not their mistake and hug their children with their unique character as the writer won't call it as a defect. If the homosexuals get the support from inside, it will boost them to move outside freely with the believe that someone is there behind them to rise even though if they fall. Mostly Alpesh talks and fights with himself as there is no one for them to share his feeling. He even confides this to his parents as they will be afraid and become unsupportive for his decision of

continuing his gay life. He feels helpless to stop his parents from running his life for the second time and by throwing him into the cage of marriage. Even the audience understand his exasperation both sexually and emotionally as he tries to express his condition mother. Alpesh by his parent's pressure, accepts for second marriage. While going to the bride's home, Alpesh thinks this marriage as "another mad window shopping spare". Alpesh one day before the marriage moves out at night to smoke and at that time he meets his bride Lata on the way. Both go for a walk and try to tell their situation to each other, but both seem to be feeling remorse in revealing their identity. Even at that time, he imagines Trilok standing in front of him and tries to make love with him. Alpesh ignores Lata, and she remains quite as she too doesn't show any interest in him. Homosexuals always have a conflict between an individual self and the collective (society) self. The individual self has a lot of inclination and tries to come out from the vicious circle of the collective self to fulfil it. All humans are blessed with free will, but the society stands as a barrier to make this possible. This sort of feeling is felt by the character Alpesh also in this play. Initially, Alpesh tries a lot to stop the marriage and even suggest Lata run away, but many of their tricks and plans become a failure. At last, they decide to marry and make their parents and themselves happy. Both stay under the same roof and sleep in the same bed by giving full space to individual desire and freedom. Even when both take the seven circles around the fire during the marriage, Alpesh thinks of Trilok and Lata thinks of Salim. This depicts their extreme love for their lovers and their sacrifice to make them feel proud and to get respect from the outer world. Alpesh takes the divine system like marriage as a curtain to hide his homosexuality. For the world, they are in wedlock, but they make an agreement and fulfil they desire which can't be done by them when they are single. Alpesh will continue to sleep with Salim without any sort of fear. Both of them use the path of marriage for their personal convinces. Queer theory issues out of the study of gay, lesbian and bisexual experiences. It takes gay and lesbian criticism to its premises and has an interdisciplinary approach to the issue of sexuality. Queer theorists believe that sexuality is not natural

and unchanging. It is rather a construct and subject to change. In Queer Studies, one finds the expansion of Foucault and Sedgwick's constructionist view of sexuality to include the role of social construction in any kind of sexual identity formation, which challenges and subverts heteronormativity. It deals with the idea of non-straightness, which virulently challenges heterosexuality as a natural and universal norm. The greatest problem of the homosexuals in India is the fear of marginalization in Do the Needful. Lata agrees to marry Alpesh, the homosexual, only to continue with her heterosexual relationships with Salim, a terrorist, under the sexual safety and social security that she would enjoy being somebody's wife. Likewise, Alpesh, under the social recognition of a 'normal' heterosexual, would continue with his homosexual activities. This deconstruction of homosexuality and heterosexuality as the binary opposites certainly proves that sexuality, like gender, is also a social construct. While primarily this play visible and give some sort of voice and space to the silenced and closeted gay, some of the gay characters, instead of coming out, make a hide-out in the enemy den, i.e., heterosexuality. Thus the plays do not only explored the closeted and silenced gay, but they also suggest a self-silencing on the part of the gay characters the way the worldwide LGBT movements are gaining regular attentions throughout India suggests that India, in general, is beginning to sympathize with people belonging to alternate sexualities. But still, this LGBT is not paid equal importance in every nook and corner of India. And here I would like to mention an article titled "The World Did not let us live" by Simantini Dey which speaks about the suicide committed by two women along with a child in Gujarat on June 11 2018. In the later found suicide note by the women, they revealed their homosexual relationship and also said how it's been unaccepted in the society in which they live. One of the suicide notes read, "We had distanced ourselves from the world so that we could unite, but the world did not let us live." This shows how rural areas in India are still ruled by a culture, which is why issues related to LGBT is marginalized. This shows that the culture of silence and culture silencing LGBT voices still exist in India. Even there are places still where transgender is not accepted as

the part of this society, the tortures and torments faced by them are limitless in this cultural bounded patriarchal society. Often in the name of religion or vaguely defined morality and culture, society is silencing the LGBT voices in India, which is needed to be rewritten completely.

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