

A LITTLE LESS THAN QUEER: POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND DESIRE IN DATTANI'S *MANGO SOUFFLÉ*

Dr. Sachin Labade

Associate Professor
Department of English
University of Mumbai

Dr. Santosh Rathod

Professor,
IDOL
University of Mumbai

Abstract

The economic liberalisation era in India witnessed a rise in the creative voices on the invisibilized and/or marginalised gender and sexual subjectivities. Among others, Mahesh Dattani's literary, theatrical and cinematic work, though bounded by the cosmopolitan and English speaking spaces in India, experiments with a reasonable range of themes and presents characters striving against the conservative heteropatriarchal politics. Dattani's film Mango Soufflé brings to the front the gay subculture and the politics of sexual identity by employing different strategies and images. This paper attempts to investigate imaging and imagining of sexual identity and sexual desire through a close analysis of the dialogues along with frames, shots and scenes where the camera is put to use effectively. The study reveals that the film comes across as a 'progressive' project of explicit sexual identities in that it pigeonholes the characters in mutually exclusive sexual identities. While the narrative celebrates coming out as a liberating and empowering act, it also appears to establish moral superiority of 'out' characters whose act of outing others is validated. These become the instruments of moral valuation of the characters.

Keywords: *gay subculture, queer, politics of identity, outing, coming out*

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- Dr. Sachin Labade
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Introduction

The 1990s witnessed a major paradigm shift in the Indian Economy with the Indian State adopting a market oriented model with the focus on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. This had an impact on various social and cultural practices such as literature and cinema. Western discourses became more accessible with the advent of international TV channels like Zee and Star. Secondly, international mobility of Indians and a growing presence of Indian Diaspora brought home a new language and consciousness to talk about human bodies as citizens. Many writers like Arundhati Roy, Upamanyu Chatterji, and R. Raj Ro in Indian Literature in English started giving rise to the marginalised and/or invisibilised voices. Mahesh Dattani is one of those writers who disrupted the normativized narrative by drawing 'uncomfortable' issues of sexual and gender discrimination out of the dark closet. Dattani, created a niche for himself with a series of plays in Indian theatre in English and went on to become the 28th Indian writer and the first playwright in English to receive the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. Dattani is a strategic playwright in that he is quite conscious of the choice he made in selecting themes and characters. Elsewhere, Dattani candidly confessed, 'I write for my milieu, for my time and place, middle-class and urban Indian...my dramatic tensions arise from people who aspire to freedom from society' (De). His work projects issues like homosexuality, transsexuality, child sexual abuse, and social apathy towards the marginalized.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate Dattani's craftsmanship and experimentation with the form of theatre (for instance, Chaudhary 2005; Das 2008). Many scholars uphold Dattani's artistic efforts to give voice to the invisibilised issues of sexuality and gender politics (See Mee 1997; De 2001; Ramanujan 2016). While Dattani's plays drew much attention from the scholars, his cinematic work

remained understudied, especially his film *Mango Soufflé*, which was based on his play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*. It becomes important to explore how Dattani establishes a discourse of sexual identity and desire through his characters. This paper takes up to investigate the imaging and imagining of sexual identity and sexual desire in *Mango Soufflé* through a close reading of the film.

The narrative of *Mango Soufflé* is mostly dominated by the theatre techniques, for instance, the use of tableaux and dramatic entries and exits of the characters. The dialogues in this film carry the narrative weight in a significant way. The film offers only a few instances where Dattani deploys the cinematic apparatus effectively to tell the story. This is probably because Dattani is primarily a stage craftsman rather than a filmmaker. Hence, it becomes imperative that dialogues be scrutinised along with frames, shots and scenes where the camera is put to use effectively.

Dattani began his stint in film making with *Mango Soufflé*. Chaudhari (2005) briefly discusses the difference between the film and the play on which it is based. The discussion limits itself to the shifting of the location from Mumbai to Bangalore and from a flat to a farmhouse. The film won the Mostra Lambda Award for best film at the Barcelona Film Festival in 2002. The film had two different tag lines, 'a metrosexual love story' and 'a not so straight movie', thus revealing its portrayal of sexual politics. Dattani stressed that "pictorial aspects of a film besides the visual perspectives are particularly important" (Christopher). This implied that the film version would have certain additions with cinematic signification. The film, like his plays, was made in English, thus territorializing its spectatorship. Dattani, in his pre-production interview, declared that the film was being made for a special market and he planned to screen it at various international film festivals.

Etching Sexual Identity in the Language of Dominant Episteme

John and Nair in *A Question of Silence* argue that the understanding of sexuality in India is largely informed and influenced by discourses of sexuality made in the West as 'we cannot but draw upon Western theories, since they determine at an unconscious level, the reading practices we bring to bear on our work'(07). However, they also insist on the importance of understanding the realities of lived experiences and on the articulation of that in discourses. *Mango Soufflé* is arguably the first Indian film to offer a landscape of queer characters with a range, identical to that of the globalised Western discourse. The film seemingly attempts to show gay men who take a hard and long look at their sexual lives. In many ways the film

alludes to William Friedkin's 1970 Hollywood blockbuster *Boys in the Band* that celebrates the queer comradery and shows a sense of belonging. However, the film lacks in vigour as the characters created turn out to be very stereotypical and flat. What distinguishes the film is its positioning of the sexual desire and identity wrapped within the discourse of sibling kinship. The narrative ostensibly foregrounds Kamlesh's love and concerns for his sister, Kiran. By way of doing this the film offers a different dynamic of the queer subjects and subjectivities in the non-Western cinematic spaces.

The narrative of the film is defined by the rhetoric of the queer identity more than queer desire and pleasure. The characters are cut out to fit the westernised discursive markers of queer identity such as 'gay', 'lesbian', 'queen', and 'bisexual'. The only category it leaves out is transgender / *Hijra*. This is probably due to the disparate socio-economic paradigms. Sexual identity in *Mango Soufflé* becomes a privilege of class. Almost all the characters are cosmopolitan in the sense that they live in the city of Bangalore, a city known for its liberal outlook due to the presence of multinational companies. Secondly, all the characters are English-speaking 'intellectuals' as Bunny calls them. This enables them to access the Western discourse of sexual identity with relative cultural neutrality.

In its iconographic signification the narrative delineates on the corporeal spaces of Indian characters, marks that are easily associated with the Western discursive practices of sexual identity formation. The 'flaming queen' is a characterization that bonds flamboyance and effeminacy. This is a gay male stock character in Hollywood mostly termed as sissy. A limp wrist is also a mannerism associated with gay men (Zimmerman 491). Brian Palmer (2012) in deconstructing this notion states that in ancient Rome, the rhetoric teachers discouraged limp-wristedness during public speaking as it was thought to betray a more general lack of masculine control over the body and its various urges. It was not associated with homosexual practice as 'gay' sex was not considered 'unmanly'. However, "in the 18th century... Europeans came to think of homosexuality as a character trait rather than an occasional behavior and gay sex became the antithesis of manliness". Ranjit and Sharad in the film don these manners along with their heavy English accent and campy style thus allowing them to be labelled as 'Western'. This corporeal markedness not only results in homophobic delight of the 'straight' world but also brings out the internalised homophobia of the queer world as Bunny Singh calls Ranjit a 'coconut' and asks Sharad to 'behave himself' in public. This seems to set the standards of

community that the members have to live up to. However, Ranjit and Sharad do not internalise this judgement and do not suffer from poor self-esteem. The film, in fact, subverts the heterosexual understanding of a limp twisted, effeminate gay man as a weak and passive person when Sharad consciously chooses to greet Ed with a limp hand. For him, it becomes a token of strategic essentialism. Thus, the behaviour that is made fun of or is loathed is transferred into a marker of self-esteem. The language these characters speak is not that of a self-hating gloomy faced gay man but that of the one celebrating sexual identity.

In contrast to Sharad and Ranjit is Kamlesh, a well-muscled, youthful, 'straight' acting gay man, thus offering a gay male ideal at least in its corporeal sense. However, his being a fashion designer pushes him into another stereotype of gay men being arty. The interior of his farm house and his fashion conscious outlook only reinforce this stereotype. Moreover, Kamlesh is seen depressed not because of his perception of his sexual identity but due to his closeted relationship with Prakash. Prakash, on the other hand, consciously avoids any marking of being queer on his body. When Prakash appears on the screen he is seen wearing a helmet and riding a bike that resembles the Royal Enfield Bullet. It is a bike that has been associated with rugged masculinity. For Prakash his bullet becomes a spectacle of his 'manly' status. However, as the narrative reaches its climax, Prakash is seen ripped off his sham masculinity as he falls off the bike.

The TV actor Bunny Singh, with his Hinglish register, mirrors the Indian Urban middle class ethos. He tries to fit himself in the elite class of these upper middle class English educated metropolitan men. Overtly 'liberal minded' Bunny likes to play it straight and does not tolerate 'sissy' behaviour. Bunny is shown mentioning his public/media face as his career demands. The narrative does not develop Bunny's character any further than this. Similarly, Deepali, the only lesbian character in the film, seemingly, is put into the narrative out of mere representation logic.

Deepali's unconventional exterior, which is also probably the reason why Heeba Shah was selected to essay this role, becomes the marker of her being lesbian. Other than the mention of her being lesbian, the narrative does not invest in her sexuality in any subtle or explicit way. She turns out to be the flattest character in the film. Her otherness is established in the framing of her looks through the gaze of the

bride. The non-diegetic score reinforces her 'strangeness' from 'heterosexual' women's vantage point.

The narrative, in a way, becomes a 'progressive' project of explicit queer identities in that it pigeonholes the characters in mutually exclusive sexual identities. Sharad, Ranjit, Kamlesh and Deepali enjoy moral superiority as they have come out of their closets and have embraced their sexual identities. What one may easily observe is that the Western epistemology of the closet is at work. The act of coming out of the closet is in keeping with the politics of representation. It is this epistemological understanding that gives the 'out' characters a sense of self identity. However, the same understanding becomes responsible for treating Bunny Singh and Prakash / Ed as closeted gay, making them morally weak or inferior to the others. This moral valuation is a result of the new epistemology of the closet.

Heterosexual Festivity versus Homosexual Bereavement

The diegesis provides the audience with a sense of two worlds. The technique is used to signal 'that in India, as elsewhere in the world, multiple realities co-exist, resolutely and cheek-by-jowl, but that often only one reality - the heteronormative and patriarchal - is visible' (Chatterjee). The narrative deploys juxtaposition to highlight differences between the two worlds. The heterosexual is the outer world while the homosexual is the inner/closeted world.

Families become indexical of the patriarchal heteronormative order present in the outer world. In one of the scenes, after all the friends gather at the farmhouse we hear a marriage ritual being performed in the neighbourhood. The heterosexual union in marriage ritual is juxtaposed with the homosexual ritual of separation and exorcism where Kamlesh has to tear off the last photograph of Prakash with him. The camera constantly moves between the interior and the exterior spaces, thus establishing the binary opposition. It underscores the fact that heterosexual couple formation enjoys social privileges which a homosexual couple is denied. The film beautifully deploys the semi-diegetic sound of *shehnai* with ambivalence. The festive mood reflected by the *shehnai* music acquires a different solemn tone in case of Kamlesh.

The film, however, does disrupt the notion of the hetero-patriarchal family as the 'other' in that Kamlesh's sister Kiran, gains the representative voice of such a family. Her concern and love for her brother also implies the concern of his family.

Moreover, it is the liberation of the brother and sister and not the reunion of homosexual lovers that the narrative closes with. Thus Dattani troubles his viewers' understanding of the presumed binary through contradictory vantage points that are internal to narrative structure of the film.

Queer Desires and the Liminal Spaces

Continuing with the binary logic, the narrative positions desires and pleasures of the queer characters within the diegetic space like farmhouse, backroom of the office, swimming pool and cruising park, thus othering them; the rest is the world of heteronormative order. What one cannot ignore at the same time is that spaces like the farmhouse mark the privilege of belonging to a certain 'class' and the cruising park, the privilege of being a cosmopolitan.

The cruising park, even though it represents urban privilege, is an open space where the intersections of class, caste and community collapse. It is the space right in the centre of the heterosexual order of the world where many men of disparate age, class, caste and community come together to seek sexual partners. So the lives of men sexually interested in men are organised around the site of cruising parks. In one of the nostalgic moments, Kamlesh recounts his first encounter with Prakash in one such cruising park. The camera captures those moments between Prakash and Kamlesh bringing to surface the nuances of the class barriers and psychological turmoil of the characters.

The scene opens with a mid-shot and from the audience vantage point with Prakash in frame, Kamlesh walking across the frame. It is the evening time; the half lit faces of the characters are seen in soft focus. From the costumes of the characters one understands that Prakash comes from a financially humble background, whereas Kamlesh is financially well off. When Kamlesh sits next to Prakash, the upright image of Kamlesh and the lowered image of Prakash are seen. The frame captures the characters' social as well as psychological standing. One side of the faces is seen at a time. The second half remains dark, revealing only the partial truth about the characters. The dialogue between the two reveals that Prakash is in a state of depression and wanted to commit suicide as a result of his financial crisis. Both of them resort to euphemism when they are asked about the reason why they are in the park. As Kamlesh realises that Prakash needs emotional support he tries to heal him with his words and touches. What is interesting to note is that Prakash does not move from his position while Kamlesh lowers his own to come to the level of

Prakash. The closedness of Prakash and openness of Kamlesh become evident which continues throughout the narrative. This seems to suggest that sexual desire may collapse the class distinction. The narrative also seems to suggest that the differences melt not only in bed but beyond it.

As mentioned earlier, *Mango Soufflé* engages less in the politics of pleasure. The only moment of homoerotic pleasure that the narrative consciously offers is the swimming pool scene. The rhythmic movements of the rolling over nude bodies of Kamlesh and Prakash offer some of the lyrical moments in the film.

The liminality of homoerotic nudity and passionate kiss between the two is marked by the space of the swimming pool. As Prakash rises out of the water the audience catches just a glance or two of his butt and the shot cuts into the next scene. It becomes clear from the design of this scene that despite the centrality of queer positioning, the film does not explicitly show the moments of physical intimacy. This could be to avoid the surveillance of the state through the Film Censor Board. Dattani subverts the controlling gaze of the state by turning the constraint to his advantage by aestheticising the intimate moments underwater.

Deconstructing the 'real man'

With the love affair in the backdrop, *Mango Soufflé* unravels many layers that construct the sense of identity of a queer individual. The narrative develops around the dyadic notion of sexuality. It divides the diegetic world into the mutually exclusive category of heterosexual and homosexual. It does not problematize the unmarkedness of the heterosexual subject formation; instead, it aims at outing the 'closeted' men who camouflage to be heterosexual men. One such scene is where in a dramatic turn of events to coax Prakash into rethinking his marriage with Kiran, Deepali declares that Sharad wants to become straight. Puzzled at first, Sharad gathers his senses and understands the game. What follows is a dramatic construction of the 'real man'. Prakash says, 'there are real men and women out there! ... You don't want to look at the world outside this- this den of yours' (MS). Prakash does not understand the game, and adds, 'maybe he (Sharad) is bisexual', the possibility of which Sharad immediately rejects as he says, 'I am as gay as a goose.' What follows then is a long speech by Sharad who performs a 'real' man:

Weeell, let me see how I can put it. You see, being a heterosexual man- a real man as Ed put it- I get everything. I get to be accepted- accepted by whom? ... Well that

marriage lot down there for instance. I can have a wife; I can have children, who will all adore me simply because I am a hetero... a real man. Now why would I want to give it all up? So what if I have to change a little? If I can be a real man I can be king. Look at all the kings around you, look at all the male power they enjoy, thrusting themselves on to the world, all that penis power! Power with sex, power with muscle, power with size. Firing rockets, exploding nuclear bombs, if you can do it five times, I can do it six times and all that stuff. (Thrusting his pelvis in an obscene macho fashion.) Power, man! Power! (*Mango Soufflé*)

Sharad's parody of the 'real' man connects us to Foucault as well as Butler's idea of gender and sex as discursive practices. Sharad points out that one enjoys the position of privilege by performing the 'heterosexual' man. He associates the power of being heterosexual with the power of penis, sex, muscle, size and phallic weapons of mass destruction. Sharad further demonstrates how by practising certain traits one 'becomes' straight.

Don't sit with your legs crossed. Keep them wide apart. And make sure you occupy lots of room. It's all about occupying space, baby. (Bunny Singh in close up frame, with introspective look) The walk. Walk as if you have a cricket bat between your legs (he grabs his crotch). And thrust your hand forward when you meet people. (Speaking in a base voice, an imitation of Prakash.) Hi! Call me Sharad! Everyone calls me Sharad! (Prakash in a close up frame, growing restless). And the speech. Watch the speech. No fluttery vowels. Not 'it's soooo hot in here!' - but - It's HOT! It's fucking HOT! (*Mango Soufflé*)

Sharad's demonstration is not aimed at mocking the heterosexual men but rather those who are gay and are in self-denial. By deconstructing the heterosexual behaviour as performance and matter of practice Sharad only aims at making Prakash/Ed conscious of his mask of a 'real' man. As an effect of Sharad's speech, Bunny Singh grows aware and guilty of his double face. He comes out to everyone while Prakash grows uncomfortable not only because of Sharad's demonstration, but Kamlesh's declaration that he loves Sharad. The narrative rhetoric pushes Prakash to the verge of confessions.

From this scene Sharad emerges as an 'out and proud', balanced and morally superior individual. It is this positioning of Sharad as queer subject that renders his perspective visible and audible to the others. At the same time, the narrative cuts

Prakash to his 'real size' and projects him as 'hypocrite' and hence morally inferior. Bunny too grows aware of his 'double' face.

Bunny Singh gets his coming-out-of-closet moment after Sharad's speech. After introspection he says:

I have denied a lot of things...you all hate me for being such a hypocrite. The people who know me are the people who hate me. That is not such a nice feeling. I have tried to survive. In both the worlds. And it seems I do not exist in either. Everyone believes me to be the model middle-class Indian man. I was chosen for the part (pauses abruptly)...I believed in it myself. I lied to myself first. And I continue to lie to millions of people every weekday on prime time. (*Mango Soufflé*)

Bunny Singh's confession becomes the ritual of purging himself of the guilt of living a life of denial and hypocrisy. The discourse of visibility acquires the position of queer episteme of moral being. The initial ambiguity that the character of Bunny Singh enjoys dies out as the narrative progresses. The viewers become sure that Bunny Singh is a closeted middle class gay Indian man.

Panoptic Surveillance and Queer Visibility

Surveillance in Foucault's panopticon does not stem from a singular source. Power is to be found, not so much in the individual...but more in the distribution of bodies, knowledge and gazes within which the subject is caught up (Mason 21). The world of queer desires and pleasures within the diegetic spaces of the narrative in *Mango Soufflé* is constantly under panoptic surveillance in this Foucauldian sense. This panoptic surveillance not only poses a major threat to the vulnerably fortified and closeted world of these gay men but it also shapes their experiences. Mason is apt in his remark that the 'disciplinary power does not just make subjects visible, it fundamentally determines if and how we are to see such subjects' (21). The source of visibility of queer desire in the film and the ensuing scandal is the only photograph of Kamlesh and Prakash/Ed in each other's embrace, 'cheek to cheek, pelvis to pelvis. Naked' (*Mango Soufflé*).

The narrative assigns this agency to the individuals and chorus. The in house servant, Mansooq, who is a mute witness to his master's sexual secrets, does acquire a superior tone when the photograph is seen by the people in the neighbourhood. He says: *Ab aap logon ka kya hoga? Aap yeh sab khullam khulla kyo karte hain?*

(*Mango Soufflé*) (What will become of you all? Why do you do these things so openly?) Mansooq achieves a power position as his gaze is guided by his knowledge of queer sexuality as just a matter of fun/*masti* to be had secretly. His episteme of queer sexuality reduced to the level of fun/*masti* represents the dominant perception. Ironically, Mansooq too secretly has an affair with a maid and he reads porn magazines. For him the queer world is no different than what he does in the farmhouse.

The second agent of the surveillance is the boy and the girl. The stage play has only boys whereas the film uses a boy and a girl dressed as bride and the bridegroom. The two then assume the position of a heterosexual couple. They find Sharad funny due to his 'strange' behaviour. The very intrusion of the boy and the girl into the mango groves implies vulnerability of closeted world and penetrative power of the outer world. The girl while picking a mango chances upon the photograph and falls off the tree out of shock. The children are very much informed by their internalised homophobia.

The last agent of the patriarchal heteronormative order is the neighbourhood which functions more like a chorus in a Greek tragedy representing the social psyche. When Prakash/Ed encounters them, the chorus turns to hysterical laughter thus, bringing in the discourse of shame. The camera tilts up and looks at the imposing images of men and women. Assuming Prakash's vantage point the camera provides a position of superiority and power to look down upon the 'outed' Prakash.

By showing the queer characters and desires constantly under the panoptic surveillance of the patriarchal heteronormative order of the world the narrative brings out the vulnerability of the closeted world of the queer characters.

The Rhetoric of Visibility and Queer Case of Prakash/Ed

In his discussion on the discourse of sexual identity Mason remarks, 'the subject may be formulated through discursively constituted identities but he or she can never be contained by, or reduced to, the discursive terms of those identities' (24). Despite a decidedly politicised depiction of queer subjects and subjectivities, the conflicting viewpoints that are internal to the narrative of *Mango Soufflé*, make a case for queer understanding of the character of Prakash/Ed. It is already argued that the rhetoric of the narrative does not allow Bunny Singh in his subject formation, the liberty not to be contained or reduced to the discursive term of

sexual identity. His programmed 'coming out' puts an end to the ambivalence of his sexual desire. Bunny ends up declaring that he was using the mask of a 'liberal minded' man, but was a closeted gay man (who can and does love only men). However, within the diegetic spaces of the film Prakash is allowed to display the ambivalence of his sexual desires and preferences. Especially in the backroom montage scene where Kamlesh and Prakash develop an intimate bond, Prakash is shown hugging the female mannequin.

This ambivalence, instead of getting disrupted, gets reinforced in the scene where Prakash first meets Kiran. Right from his first encounter with Kiran, Prakash is shown drawing closer to Kiran. However, as mentioned earlier the rhetoric of the coming out which the film champions outs Prakash as a closeted gay rather than a person with sexual ambivalence. The ritual of coming out in the film becomes a sign of moral superiority of the characters. Sharad, Deepali, Ranjit and Kamlesh have come out as gay and lesbian. Hence, they occupy a morally superior position; whereas, Prakash and Bunny Singh who do not 'come out' become morally inferior and weak individuals. This epistemology of the closet is very much an influence and continuation of the Western discourse of sexual identity. Mason remarks that

the significance of disciplinarity for the historical construction of sexuality lies in the way in which categories such as heterosexual and homosexual are not just labels imposed upon the subject, but, rather, are processes of normalisation that insinuate themselves into the very fabric of the modern corporeal and psychic subject...it is through the production of these visible subject positions that we come to see, and thereby know, ourselves as specific types of sexual subjects (23).

This logic of production of visible subject positions, applies to the subject formation in *Mango Soufflé*.

The ambivalence with which Prakash/Ed makes his presence on the screen gradually fades as his internalised homophobia and self-hatred surface. The narrative positions him in the liminal spaces of the 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' world. He wishes to keep his gay life a private secret of perverse pleasures and live the life of a 'real man' in the outer world. It is this nature of Prakash that makes him a hypocrite in the eyes of others. His rejection by both Kamlesh and Kiran, shows that he is a real misfit in both worlds. In fact, the narrative brings out the predicament of a bisexual man to the fore. The queer world establishes its own moral order where confession of one's sexual identity and honesty to oneself are

valued. Since Prakash does not fit the bill, he is reduced to a morally inferior position. What he does can only be perceived as hypocrisy.

The only way he can be purged of the vice/sin is facing the people from the neighbourhood who have seen his photograph with Kamlesh, and look them in the eye. This finally pushes Prakash/Ed into the confessional mode. He accepts his wrong doing and seeks forgiveness from Kamlesh. He then goes out on his bike and turns to face the crowd. The camera assumes the position of the 'heterosexual' world that bursts into laughter on seeing him. This confrontation makes Prakash/Ed lose his balance and he falls off the bike. The narrative has the masculine mask off Prakash's face. However, the moment of gaining self-respect comes immediately after Prakash recovers and looks people in the eye. It is one of the rarest moments where the camera lens acquires the position of Prakash's eyes. The triumphant moment for Prakash comes when instead of laughing or giving him insulting looks, the women and men look down. In a Dutch angle, signifying uncertainty, the camera then tilts up giving superior position and magnitude to Prakash suggesting he is purged of his sin and now is elevated to a moral position. Finally, Prakash goes back to Kamlesh and declares, 'I love you, Kamlesh'; then he turns to Kiran and says 'I love you too, Kiran'. Thus ends the ritual of purgation. Prakash turns to the gate. The camera does not follow him. Instead, Kamlesh is seen throwing the bits of the photograph into the pool and hugging Sharad, followed by Kiran throwing the bits of her photograph with Prakash and running inside.

Since the camera does not follow Prakash/Ed, uncertainty around his character continues. The close up of the torn bits of photograph and the refreshing music score as the credits appear, make a very strong statement about bisexuality. Prakash/Ed stands rejected by both the worlds, as the floating bits of photographs indicate. The rhetoric that this narrative develops then seems to suggest that one should choose where one wishes to belong; the in-between-ness will only result in being rejected by both worlds. Thus the episteme of sexual identity shows that there is no place for the queer in the queer world.

Conclusion

The close reading of the film, enables us to see 'effeminacy' as imaged and imagined in *Mango Soufflé*, as a new sign in that the signifier remains the same but the signified changes. As a marker of non-heteronormative male sexuality, effeminacy comes to signify self-assertiveness. Moreover, visibility and 'coming out' become

strategies of asserting and celebrating self-identity. It needs to be noted that the resistance and contestation too plays a vital role in the emergence of these identities which implies that the construct of sexual identity is inevitably reconfigured by the ways people live everyday lives. In the narrative outing is presented as an act of unmasking. However, we observe that it becomes a choice only for some. A person like Ed undergoes a forceful removal of the 'forced' mask. One identity is replaced only by another 'forced' mask of another sexual identity. Instead of acknowledging fluidity of desire, the narrative pushes the characters into the binaries. The unmasking of 'forced' masks is very much based on the assumption that one simply cannot have the ambivalence of desire. It is the politics of identity that takes over the politics of desire.

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