

DRAMA

Untouchable

Mahesh Dattani

Characters:

RAKESH: EARLY THIRTIES, MALE. WEALTHY AND ISOLATED

SAGAR: LATE TWENTIES TO EARLY THIRTIES, MALE. A VISITOR

The year is June 2033.

It is a summer afternoon. The monsoon is delayed. The air is thick with moisture and indolence.

On Madh Island, in a gated community of Mumbai, life is deathly peaceful as is elsewhere in the world.

The poor live on clusters just outside the commune of the isolated wealthy. Their bodies - the living ones - have made peace with the enemy of mankind that ravaged the earth in 2020. And later in 2022 and yet again in 2028. They live together huddled, sharing the air. The air that may carry a new enemy in the near future, killing once again thousands of their old and sick people, leaving the healthy ones to keep the lineage of the poor going.

From Rakesh's apartment window he can see the fishing boats at sea. And also the shanties where the fisherfolk live.

RAKESH enters the room. He wears casual clothes and is eager in intent. Gelled back hair suggests he is out to impress.

He stands in a specific spot and slowly begins to pull his T-shirt over, as if doing it to please somebody.

The doorbell rings.

Rakesh adjusts his T-shirt. He takes a bottle of essential oil and drops some around where he is standing.

He picks up a remote and points it at the front door, pressing a button on it.

The door opens with a buzz. The door swings wide open on its own with some force.

SAGAR stands at the door, with a remote button in hand that probably rang the doorbell.

SAGAR is handsome and young like Rakesh. They are both in their early thirties or so.

Sagar walks into the room. The door shuts behind him.

SAGAR

(sniffs. He speaks the word as if for the first time, affirming it)

Lavender.

RAKESH

I know you wanted something exotic. This is all I have. You said lavender is fine.

SAGAR

I have never smelt lavender before.

RAKESH

They grew them on the hills - Himachal, UP... Made many of them rich. Europeans couldn't get enough of it. This is from my mother's stock, left over...Surely it must evoke some memory.

SAGAR

No. I would never forget a smell like this.

RAKESH

How old were you when it all stopped?

SAGAR

I like it. (inhaling deep, enjoying the fragrance)

RAKESH

I am glad.

RAKESH

(sniffs) You've got something on, too!

SAGAR

Surprise.

RAKESH

Sandalwood! I love it.

SAGAR

I slapped some powder. A lot of it... On my hands, my underarms, my crotch. So you will get more of it as we progress.

RAKESH

Thank you. I gave you hills, you brought in a jungle. I can hardly wait.

They stand there looking at each other, about ten feet apart.

(They smile.)

RAKESH

So we do exactly what we did on Jhoom?

SAGAR

Yes.

RAKESH

Okay... We do it together.

They get ready, motionless.

They lift their T-shirts over their heads, slow, in unison. They drop their T-shirts on the floor, also in unison.

(They inhale, taking in the heady fragrance that they enjoy, almost as if the scent is touching them.)

Sagar takes off his shoes.

RAKESH

Stand there by the window.

Sagar goes to the window.

Rakesh circles around him as Sagar moves to the window, as if there is a sphere between them keeping them apart with a diameter of ten feet.

The afternoon light streaming through the large window gives Sagar's skin a golden glow.

Sagar looks out of the window.

(He takes a deep breath in and holds it, in awe of what he sees.)

Pause.

SAGAR

You can see the boats!

RAKESH

They are beautiful.

(Pause.)

SAGAR

From here.

They get back to looking at each other.

Sagar glances once again at the boats before focusing on the sexually charged game.

They both reach for their trouser and unbutton, unzip in unison and let their loose trousers drop to their ankles. They step out of their trouser legs still looking at each other.

Rakesh adjusts his position to maintain the distance.

They hold the edge of their underwear, ready to pull them down.

Rakesh begins to pull down his underwear. He pauses when he notices Sagar isn't mirroring him.

(Pause.)

Rakesh pulls up his underwear.

RAKESH

We did this on Jhoom.

Sagar looks out of the window. (Pause.)

RAKESH

You look beautiful standing there.

(Pause.)

RAKESH

I want to see you, please.

SAGAR

Do you know they went out to sea when it happened?

RAKESH

Yes.

SAGAR

Not the first time. The second time. They blamed it on the people living in the slums. They call them clusters now. They locked down the entire basti. All the shanties were sprayed everyday with chemicals. Then...they sprayed the people with chemicals. Smoked them out of their hovels, and... sprayed. Bleach. A few went blind. The fishermen escaped in their boats with their families. They went out to sea. They stayed there for a month, one boat coming ashore every five days to get supplies for all the people on the other boats. Many died, and passed on the sickness to the rest of the people on the boats. The vultures came for their flesh... I was the only one on my father's boat that survived.

(Rakesh is frozen, hanging on to every word.)

SAGAR

The sandalwood my father stashed in the boat, under the troughs with fish...I helped smuggle the last batch out just before... it happened the second time. All that money, and only I survived. I started a delivery service, and became rich - like you. Joined the online university. But I live in the cluster, not in a bubble like you. In my ancestral home.

(pointing out a spot from the window)

Right there, in that shanty with the blue plastic sheet on top. The monsoons are late but we still put it up. My cousins, my uncles and aunts, and I. All twelve of us in that space, half the size of this room. You see it every day I suppose

RAKESH

I—I didn't know.

SAGAR

You said you wanted to see me. So, here I am.

RAKESH

(frightened to tears)

That is not the profile you have on your page.

SAGAR

I am a cluster, not a bubble. Sometimes we lie. Don't worry, I won't come any closer to you.

RAKESH

Thank you.

SAGAR

I like you. I want to touch you. But I won't.

RAKESH

I want to touch you too. But I can't...

Sagar picks up his trousers.

SAGAR

Thank you. For your hills. And...

(one last look at the sea)

And the ocean from up here. It does look beautiful. I would never have told you if it wasn't for the view from up here... Hell turns to paradise... all it takes is a nice place to see it from.

(Rakesh is almost in tears.)

RAKESH

(soft)

I am sorry...

Sagar goes cautiously towards his T-shirt.

He stops when Rakesh doesn't move to retain the
accepted distance.

SAGAR

I don't want to make you sick. That was never my intention. I just wanted to smell you. Every
time I saw your face on my screen, I imagined how you must smell. Now I know.

(Pause)

SAGAR

Open the door.

(Pause. Rakesh doesn't move.)

SAGAR

You've seen my dick on Jhoom, so there's nothing new there. Let me go.

Rakesh doesn't move.

SAGAR

(wearing his trousers)

Open the—

RAKESH

I want to touch you.

Sagar stops fumbling with the trouser. He looks at
Rakesh.

SAGAR

But you've never done that, right? Touched someone from a cluster?

(Rakesh shakes his head.)

SAGAR

Rakesh walks towards him.

SAGAR

Don't. Don't tempt me.

RAKESH

You want to.

SAGAR

Yes.

RAKESH

As badly as me... It's about time... All it takes is one little prick. One little rupture.

SAGAR

Your body doesn't know what's in my body. You may die.

Rakesh stops.

Sagar wears his trousers. Then his T-shirt. He puts on his shoes. Rakesh watches him.

RAKESH

Remember the castes? They got it all wrong. The Brahmins were the original bubbles. They were the untouchables, not the clusters. If you say, "Don't touch me. I am a Brahmin." What does that make you? An untouchable, right?

Sagar steps back.

Rakesh runs to him. Sagar holds his breath.

RAKESH

It's okay. Breathe! Breathe on me. Touch me with your breath. You have to let go. I am asking you to touch me.

Rakesh is really close.

Sagar looks away, still holding his breath.

Rakesh pulls at Sagar's T-shirt.

He stops.

RAKESH

(sniffs)

You smell of... fish...

(Rakesh laughs.)

RAKESH

For the first time in my life, I smell stinking fish. It's real...

(Sagar cannot hold his breath any longer. He is breathing hard now.)

Rakesh moves his face close to his to catch a whiff of his breath.

At first Sagar keeps jerking his head away to avoid breathing directly on Rakesh.

Sagar gives up as Rakesh persists.

Sagar is now breathing rapidly on Rakesh's face.

The stand close together for a while, Sagar's heavy breathing on Rakesh quieting down.

(Rakesh blows on Sagar's face.)

RAKESH

(playful)

You stink!

(Sagar blows on Rakesh's face.) Rakesh pulls down Sagar's trousers.

They pull each other's underwear down, laughing, breathing on each other.