

Tribhuvan University

Stigmatization of AIDS Victims: A Study of Tony Kushner's
Angels in America

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The world has gradually accepted that individual human beings have different sexes, racial or ethnic origins, and religions and that these differences must be respected. But most countries still do not accept two other aspects of human diversity; that people have different sexual orientations and different gender identities and that a person's identity as a female or male or neither, is not always determined by the type of body into which they were born.

The refusal to accept and respect these differences means that oppression of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, transsexuals, transitioned, inter-sexual persons (LGBT) people is still a daily reality in most parts of the world. In some countries, discrimination and violence against LGBT people are getting worse. But more and more, brave individuals and groups are standing up for LGBT human rights in every region of the world. In particular, LGBT individuals and groups in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe no longer accept prejudices and discriminations and are becoming increasingly impatient to achieve freedom and equality.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) deals with the major social problems of contemporary America of 1980s, encountered in the domains of Gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. The American society never accepted the possibility of different sexuality and gender identity of a person. The new found disease was taken as a infection of the homosexuals acquired as a result of their sinful sexual activities.

The purpose of this study is to study Tony Kushner's fight against the social stigma and discrimination against LGBT, and other social minorities by focusing on his play *Angels in America*.

Born to Jewish parents on July 16, 1956 in Manhattan, New York, Tony Kushner grew up to be one of America's best known playwrights, a cultural icon of his generation. While he was still young, his musician parents moved the family to

Louisiana, where they played with the New Orleans Philharmonic. Kushner's views on religion, politics and sex – that were the hallmarks of his later works as a playwright, began to take shape during his early childhood. He attended Hebrew school, where he felt further isolated as a Jew in the American South. When he left Lake Charles to attend Columbia University in New York, he was by his own estimation, liberal, ardently Zionist and extremely closeted.

Theater and life are the major subjects of Tony Kushner. He had little interest in the specific Christian contents of the cycle. Unlike Aristotle, he deliberately tries to evoke the long history of western dramatic literature and positions himself in the same tradition as Shakespeare, Brecht and others.

While Kushner's use of multiple location is obviously consistent with medieval practice, his arrangement of incidents in *Angels in America* closely imitated the structural outline of mystery cycles. As the cycles trace the events ranging from Genesis to Dooms Day, so too, does Kushner's play.

Kushner tries to follow the blueprint laid down by great playwrights like Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, G. B. Shaw, T. Williams and Miller. Like them, he is trying to show the social issues in theater and provide an open space for the audience to judge what is right and what is wrong. Like G. B. Shaw, Kushner has used the stage as a forum for social debate. Individual position in the society is the prime issue of Kushner's play. A search for identity is underway, beginning with the opening monologue of *Angels in America*, and each of the characters become involved in this search whether they intend it or not.

It is worth noting the influence of Kushner towards his contemporary writers. Tony Kushner seems highly influenced by the German playwrights Bertolt Brecht and Carly Churchill and their concept of Epic Theater and Theater of Absurd.

Brecht believed that there was a danger in the audience's becoming too deeply engrossed or lost in the story of the play. He wanted to find a way to make the audience step back from the drama in order to encourage analysis rather than empathy or identification. From Brecht comes the idea, the idea of interruption, of breaking the narrative to snap the audience out of what he saw as a hypnotic state. He also did not want the experience of the play to be completed within time and space. Instead, he saw the theater as a call to action where the performance would be a starting point or part of a process in which the audience and actors would become engaged in social action. Borrowing the concept of the Epic Theater, Kushner has visualized the problems the minorities faced in *Reignites America*. Unlike realistic theater, he gives open space to audience to judge the facts and problems they faced.

In early times, epic was referred to a kind of tale Homer told in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*: stories that cover long periods of time, perhaps months or even years; involved many locations, ranging from small rooms to forests and battle fields; followed many characters through multiple plotlines; and alternate short and long scenes, with a series of crisis points, rather than a single strong climax near the end. Shakespeare and Brecht followed this pattern and which is continued by Kushner.

Kushner follows the tradition of large, important, political dramas, influenced mainly, he claims, by Bertolt Brecht. Brecht attempted to "alienate" his audiences by exposing theatrical devices (lighting, scene changes). Following Brecht, Kushner strives for a very theatrical presentation that does not attempt complete illusion.

Kushner is also extremely political, and he, too, wants his audiences to learn something, though he allows more subtlety of expression than Brecht. In Kushner's play, the strong political ideas are woven into the fabric of the sub-plot, plot and the audience is left with an impression rather than an obvious message. Controversial

ideas are usually presented from both sides, leaving the audience free to draw their own conclusions. Kushner lets his characters and their philosophies speak for themselves.

Apart from *Angels in America*, the other notable works of Tony Kushner are *A Bright Room Called Day*, *Homebody/Kabul*, *Caroline, Or Change*, *Hydrotaphia*, *Slavs!; Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness*.

Kushner's *Caroline, Or Change* is composed for a Broadway musical. The musical is set in Lake Charles, Louisiana during the American civil rights movement, just before, after and during the Kennedy Assassination. The title character, Caroline Thibodeaux, is a black maid for a Southern Jewish family, the Gellmans. The Gellmans' young son, Noah, is enamored of Caroline, a woman resistant to the sweep of change she sees around her. When Noah's stepmother, Rose, enlists Caroline's help in a plan to teach Noah a lesson about leaving change in his pants pocket, the tide of change begins to affect Caroline's life firsthand, and she must come to terms with the necessity and inevitability of the end of segregation. Much of Caroline's work day passes in the Gellmans' laundry room, which adds some surprising singing characters to the cast.

Linda Armstrong comments after watching the play as:

When one first saw *Caroline, or Change* at the Public Theatre during the end of last year, one was not appreciative *or* accepting of what one saw before me: a character named Caroline, a maid, who spends part of her day talking to appliances — dryer, washing machine and radio — while she works in the basement of the Gellmans, a white family in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1963. One found it unusual and annoying that Caroline not only talked to these appliances, but the actors

performing as these appliances answered her back. They helped her reflect over her life and advised her on what decisions to make. (20)

A Bright Room Called Day (1985) was Kushner's first foray into professional theater. The play, which initially received only a brief run at London's Bush Theatre, concerns a group of friends in pre-World War II Germany. Kushner presents this period of time as an unstoppable wave of political upheavals and sets them against the life of a lone woman unable to cope with a social madness she can barely comprehend. The play is set in Germany in 1932 and 1933, and concerns a group of friends caught up in the events of the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and Nazi party. The plot is centered around a woman named Agnes Egging, a middle-aged actress, and all of the action takes place in her apartment. The action is occasionally interrupted by scenes featuring Zillah, a young woman in 1990 who has moved from Long Island to Berlin. Zillah has fled to Germany out of frustration and anger at the growing power of the Republican Party in America during the 1980s.

Contrasting *Angels in America* with *A Bright Room Called Day* Oppenheim, Irene writes:

Tony Kushner's 1987 drama *A Bright Room Called Day* is a small play, very different from his monumental *Angels in America*, which appeared four years later. Nevertheless, in Theatre of Note's perceptive recent Los Angeles premiere of *Bright Room*, it was clear that the intricate moral conundrums and layered theatricality soon to blossom in *Angels* were already very much in evidence in the earlier play. (7)

Critics were not kind to the work, especially in the United States where it was dubbed the most infuriating play of 1991. Kushner himself called the production a

“catastrophe.” The writer’s next efforts were adaptations: *The Illusion* (1988) taken from Pierre Corneille’s play *L’illusion Comique*: and *Widows* adapted from a book by fellow playwright Ariel Dorfman (*Death and the Maiden*) and produced in Los Angeles in 1991. Employing an epic structure and expanded by Kushner’s abundant theatricality, lyricism, and, as Harold Bloom writes “authentic gift for fantasy” (109), Kushner’s play leads us into the darkest of the dark nights. He also made references to the Ronald Reagan presidency in many of his dramas as in *A Bright Room Called Day* and *Angels in America*.

Angels in America is an “epic” drama. The plot of the play unfolds over great distances of time and place, involving many characters and more than one story line. Two complete plays form the entire plot in the drama. The first part is *Millennium Approaches* and its second installment is called *Perestroika*. Together, they present more than thirty characters in eight acts, fifty nine scenes and an epilogue. It is the story of two couples whose relationships are disintegrating. The drama is set in America of the 1980’s against the backdrop of greed, conservatism, sexual politics and discovery of an awful new infection- HIV. It is this backdrop that provides *Angels in America* its magnitudes and sets it apart from other love stories. The plot is largely driven by its themes, which are viewed from different characters’ perspectives as through a kaleidoscope as the story unfolds.

The literature of a period is embedded in the social reality of the time. During the 1980s a new virus called HIV appeared among gay people that was diagnosed as AIDS. People took it for granted that the emergence of the AIDS disease caused by HIV positive virus was the result of homosexuality. The church added that AIDS was a sin God gave to homosexuals for going against the law of nature. This fatal infection drew the attention of the majority, media and mainstream community who stigmatized

the minority subjects. A study of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* will enable us to understand the changes taking place in American society of the last decade of the past millennium and how AIDS was stigmatized.

Scenes in *Angels in America* are both long and short and often overlap, occurring on the stage simultaneously. This provides two qualities that are important to epic plots: juxtaposition and contrast. In climatic plots, the story moves forward in cause-and-effect fashion, with the action in one scene influencing the action in the next. The effect of two seemingly unrelated scenes placed next to each other is a juxtaposition of action, characters and ideas which often produces a contrast that makes the play more meaningful.

This study will try to find or prove that Prior Walter is treated as social pariah because of being stigmatized as an AIDS victim. The society around him and others like him is not able to come to terms with them being infected with AIDS. They are treated as social outcasts by society due to the norms it formulates and then uses its power to define stigma through the discourse it controls.

Prior is caught up in the play's biggest struggle over change. On a personal level Prior is having change after change thrust upon him. First, his disease attacks him and then Louis abandons him, leaving him all alone in the hospital to cope with his new disease. Finally an Angel calls upon him and asks him to become a Prophet on behalf of the continental principalities. Prior's character has been able to dramatize the struggle between American conservatives and liberals, more specifically of the conflict over moral and social dilemmas, such as the conflict between religious beliefs and social realities of AIDS and the fear of stigmatization. In fact, the play deals with a number of issues in current American society, many of which are of grave significance. The religious beliefs were in conflict with social

reality and the polarity of American politics. The drama attempts to find a moral footing in multi-cultural environment and diverse democratic society in which values seem to be constantly changing.

His other major character Joe seeks a different kind of identity. All his Mormon life he has tried to deny the nature of his sexuality: he is attracted to men. In an attempt to change his true identity, he went as far as marrying Harper. Contrary to his beliefs, he helps write decisions in court cases that deny the rights of homosexuals.

In keeping with his character traits, Louis's search for identity is more abstract. Though he thinks he has come to terms with the world, and has developed opinions and answers for any situation, his philosophies are constantly being tested, and he, like Joe, lives a life of contradictions. He criticizes Joe for hiding his sexuality, an overtly masculine, heterosexual façade that he assumes around his family. He is a tortured agnostic who was raised Jewish but can't find a religion that accepts him for what he is.

It is worth noting that such a prize-winning creation; *Angels in America* began as a work made for hire. After writing only a handful of plays, and experiencing only one major production, Kushner was approached by Oskar Eustis, a resident director at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, who had been impressed by the playwright's first drama, *A Bright Room Called Day*. In 1987, Eustis asked Kushner to write a play about the impact of AIDS on the gay community in San Francisco for the Eureka Theater. The two applied for grants, conducted workshops, and developed the work, which became *Angels in America*, at the Mark Taper Forum. The play then went on to the Eureka and later to the National Theater of Great Britain, where it began to attract its global following. Thus scope and fame of the play reached wide in the field of literature and society.

Theater is a gathering place for the public presentation of ideas. As ideas are exposed through the characters caught in a difficult or dangerous situation, the theater creates an intensely emotional experience for the audience. It is particularly the collective and public nature of the theater that makes it such a potent social force. On the one hand, theaters can evoke a collective sigh of relief and emotional release. On the other hand, theater can focus on collective anger or outrage which can then take form as a revolutionary force. It is one of the most powerful weapons that can change social belief, norms, and values more easily than others. Because of its unique power as a collective public form, theater has always been of great interest to philosophers and social activists. Realizing this fact, Tony Kushner also chooses theater as a medium of social transformation. He brought the issue of HIV/AIDS and the issue of stigma that sexual minorities faced and showed vividly that their attitude towards sexual minorities and their misconception towards HIV victims changed.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* has been a center of much attention by many critics since its publication and stage debut. Ela Nutu, who comments on *Angels in America* and says, "The presence of angels in Kushner's creation signifies the absence rather than the presence of God. Confusion and abandonment rather than clarity and love" (181).

On the other hand, Harold Bloom blends politics with AIDS in *Angels in America* as:

A play about life in Ronald Reagan's America and the pandemic of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Much of *Angels in America* – and of Kushner's other works – focuses on political thought, especially the connections between world history and contemporary politics. (1)

Similarly, John M. Clum comments on the theme of homosexuality and AIDS in *Angels in America* as , “an Angel as a turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture” (4).

Further examining the epic drama *Angels in America*, Catherine Stevenson adds,” *Angels in America*, invests personal and familial issues with powerful political balances. On the level of the individual character, the new emerges from the painful, gut – wrenching process of resisting the stasis that is death” (763).

Thus, it is evident from the review of the criticisms available that there is no coherent voice emerging from the above cited critics dealing with the issue of AIDS as stigma. This research will explore the stigmatization of AIDS victims in *Angels in America*.

2. The Origin of Stigma

The phrase to stigmatize originally referred to the branding or marking of certain people (e.g., criminals, prostitutes) in order to make them appear different and separate from others. The act of marking people in this way resulted in exile or avoidance. In most cultures, physical marking or branding has declined, but a more cognitive manifestation of stigmatization –social marking has increased and has become the basis for most stigmas.

“Stigmatized” and “nonstigmatized” people are tied together in a perpetual inferior/superior relationship. This relationship is key to understanding the meaning of stigma. To conceptualize stigma as a social relationship raises some vital questions about stigma. These questions include:

- (a) When and under what conditions does an attribute become a stigmatized one?
- (b) Can a person experience stigmatization without knowing that a trait is devalued in a specific social context?
- (c) Does a person feel stigmatized even though in a particular social context the attribute is not stigmatized or the stigma is not physically or behaviorally apparent?
- (d) Can a person refuse to be stigmatized or destigmatize an attribute by ignoring the prevailing norms that define it as a stigma?

These questions lead to another one: Would stigma persist if stigmatized people did not feel stigmatized or inferior? Certainly, a national pride did not lessen the persecution of the Jews, nor does it provide freedom for blacks in South Africa. These two examples illustrate how pervasive and powerful the social control aspects of stigma, empowering the stigmatizer and stripping the stigmatized of power. Yet a

personal awakening, a discovery that the responsibility for being stigmatized does not lie with oneself, is important. Understanding that the rationale for discrimination and segregation based on stigma lies in the mind of the stigmatizer has led people like Mahatma Gandhi and civil rights activist Rosa Parks to rise above the feeling of stigmatization, to ignore the norms, and to disobey the existing laws based on stigma.

Many stigmatized people also begin to understand that the stigmatizer, having established a position of false superiority and consequently the need to maintain it, is enslaved to the concept that stigmatized people are fundamentally inferior. In fact, some stigmatized individuals question the norms about stigma and attempt to change the social environments for their peers.

It is clear, especially from accounts of those who move from a nonstigmatized to a stigmatized role, that stigmatization is difficult to resist if everyone begins to reinforce the inferior status with their behavior. Two of the most common ways in which nonstigmatized people convey a sense of fundamental inferiority to stigmatized people are social rejection or social isolation and lowered expectations.

Social rejection or avoidance affects not only the stigmatized individual but everyone who is socially involved, such as family, friends, and relatives. This permanent form of social quarantine forces people to limit their relationships to other stigmatized people and to those for whom the social bond outweighs the stigma, such as family members. Social rejection is perhaps most difficult for younger children who are banned from most social activities of their peers.

Many stigmatized people are not encouraged to develop or grow, to have aspirations or to be successful.

Social exclusion as well as overprotection can lead to decreased performance. Lowered expectations also lead to decreased self-esteem. The negative identity that

ensues becomes a pervasive personality trait and inhibits the stigmatized person from developing other parts of the self. Another detrimental aspect of stigmatization is the practice of treating people, such as the ex-con and ex-mental patient who are attempting to reintegrate themselves into society, as if they still had the stigma.

The most pernicious consequence of bearing a stigma is that stigmatized people may develop the same perceptual problems that nonstigmatized people have.

Stigmatized individuals sometimes blame their difficulties on the stigmatized trait, rather than confronting the root of their personal difficulties. Stigma uniquely alters perceptions in other ways, especially with respect to the notion of “normality”, and raises other questions about the dilemma of difference. Most people do not want to be perceived as different or “abnormal.”

Normality becomes the supreme goal for many stigmatized individuals until they realize that there is no precise definition of normality except what they would be without their stigma. Given the dilemma of difference that stigma reflects, it is not clear whether anyone can ever feel “normal.”

Stigma is clearly a very complex multidisciplinary issue, with each additional perspective containing another piece of this enigma. Lerita Coleman in *The Disability Studies Reader* mentions about the forms of stigma as:

Three important aspects of stigma emerge from this multidisciplinary examination and may forecast its future. They are fear, stigma's primary affective component; stereotyping, its primary cognitive component; and social control, its primary behavioral component. The study of the relationship of stigma to fear, stereotyping, and social control may elucidate our understanding of the paradoxes that a multidisciplinary perspective reveals. It may also bring us closer to

understanding what stigma really is—not primarily a property of individuals as many have conceptualized it to be but a humanly constructed perception, constantly in flux and legitimizing our negative responses to human differences. (227)

Stigma is a statement about personal and social responsibility. People irrationally feel that, by separating themselves from stigmatized individuals, they may reduce their own risk of acquiring the stigma. By isolating individuals, people feel they can also isolate the problem. If stigma is ignored, the responsibility for its existence and perpetuation can be shifted elsewhere. Making stigmatized people feel responsible for their own stigma allows nonstigmatized people to relinquish the onus for creating or perpetuating the conditions that surround it.

Changing political and economic climates are also important to the stigmatization and destigmatization process. What is economically feasible or politically enhancing for a group in power will partially determine what attributes are stigmatized, or at least how they are stigmatized. Stigma persists as a social problem because it continues to have some of its original social utility as a means of controlling certain segments of the population and ensuring that power is not easily exchanged. Stigma helps to maintain the existing social hierarchy.

The multidisciplinary approach could be used in a variety of creative ways to study stigma and other social problems. Different models of how stigma has evolved and is perpetuated could be subject to test by a number of social scientists. They could combine their efforts to examine whether stigma evolves in a similar manner in different cultures, or among children of different cultural and social backgrounds, or during different historical periods. The study of stigma encompasses as many factors and dimensions as are represented in a multidisciplinary approach.

The effective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions are subject to the current cultural, historical, political, and economic climates, which are in turn linked to the norms and laws.

Stigma

The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. Later, in Christian times, two layers of metaphor were added to the term: the first referred to bodily signs of holy grace that took the form of eruptive blossoms on the skin; the second, a medical allusion to this religious allusion, referred to bodily signs of physical disorder. Today the term is widely used in something like the original literal sense, but is applied more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it.

Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories. The term stigma will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself.

A stigma is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype. The term stigma and its synonyms conceal a double perspective: does the stigmatized individual assume his differentness is known about already or is evident on the spot, or does he assume it is neither known about by those present nor immediately perceivable by them?

Erving Goffman in *The Disability Studies Reader* writes about three grossly different types of stigma as:

First there are abominations of the body – the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior. Finally, there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion. These being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family. (205)

In all of these various instances of stigma, however, including those the Greeks had in mind, the same sociological features are found: an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired different ness from what we had anticipated. We and those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue, are called the normal.

By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily

discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning.

What is stigma and why does stigma remain? Because stigmas mirror culture and society, they are in constant flux, and therefore the answers to these two questions continue to elude social scientists.

Stigma represents a view of life; a set of personal and social constructs; a set of social relations and social relationships; a form of social reality. Stigma has been a difficult concept to conceptualize because it reflects a property, a process, a form of social categorization, and an affective state. In specific cultures or within particular social groups, some human differences are valued and desired, and other human differences are devalued, feared, or stigmatized.

No two human beings are exactly alike: there are countless ways to differ. Shape, size, skin color, gender, age, cultural background, personality, and years of formal education are just a few of the infinite number of ways in which people can vary. Perceptually, and in actuality, there is greater variation on some of these dimensions than on others. Age and gender, for example, are dimensions with limited and quantifiable ranges; yet they interact exponentially with other physical or social characteristics that have larger continua to create a vast number of human differences. The infinite variety of human attributes suggests that what is undesired or stigmatized is heavily dependent on the social context and to some extent arbitrarily defined.

As we move out of one social context where a difference is desired into another context where the difference is undesired, we begin to feel the effects of stigma. This conceptualization of stigma also indicates that those possessing power, the dominant group, can determine which human differences are desired and undesired, in part, stigmas reflect the value judgment of a dominant group.

Many people, however, especially those who have some role in determining the desired and undesired differences of the zeitgeist, often think of stigma only as a property of individuals. They operate under the illusion that stigma exists only for certain segments of the population. But the truth is that any “nonstigmatized” person can easily become “stigmatized.” Nearly everyone at some point in life will experience stigma either temporarily or permanently. Given that human differences serve as the basis for stigmas, being or feeling stigmatized is virtually an inescapable fate. Because stigmas differ depending upon the culture and the historical period. It becomes evident that it is mere chance whether a person is born into a nonstigmatized or severely stigmatized group.

Because stigmatization often occurs within the confines of a psychologically constructed or actual social relationship, the experience itself reflects relative comparisons, the contrasting of desired and undesired differences. Assuming that flawless people do not exist, relative comparisons give rise to a feeling of superiority in some contexts (where one possesses a desired trait that another person is lacking) but perhaps a feeling of inferiorities in other contexts (where one lacks a desired trait that another person possesses). It is also important to note that it is only when we make comparisons that we can feel different. Stigmatization or feeling stigmatized is a consequence of social comparison.

Although some stigmatized conditions appear escapable or may be temporary, some undesired traits have graver social consequences than others. Being 7 feet tall, having cancer, being black, or being physically disfigured or mentally retarded can all lead to feelings of stigmatization, but obviously these are not equally stigmatizing conditions. The degree of stigmatization might depend on how undesired the difference is in a particular social group.

Physical abnormalities, for example, may be the most severely stigmatized differences because they are physically salient, represent some deficiency or distortion in the bodily form, and in most cases are unalterable. Other physically salient differences, such as skin color or nationality, are considered very stigmatizing because they also are permanent conditions and cannot be changed. Coming to conclusion Lerita Coleman says the stigmatization that one feels as a result of being black or Jewish or Japanese depends on the social context, specifically social contexts in which one's skin color or nationality is not a desired one. A white American could feel temporarily stigmatized when visiting Japan due to a difference in height. A black student could feel stigmatized in a predominantly white university because the majority of the students are white and white skin is a desired trait. But a black student in a predominantly black university is not likely to feel the effects of stigma. Thus, the sense of being stigmatized or having a stigmatized is inextricably tied to social context. Of equal importance are the norms in that context that determine which are desirable and undesirable attributes. Moving from one social or cultural context to another can change both the definitions and the consequences of stigma.

Stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility. Part of the power of stigmatization lies in the realization that people who are stigmatized or acquire a stigma lose their place in the social hierarchy. Consequently, most people want to ensure that they are counted in the nonstigmatized "majority." Thus, of course, leads to more stigmatization.

Stigma, then, is also a term that connotes a relationship. It seems that this relationship is vital to understanding the stigmatizing process. Stigma allows some individuals to feel superior to others. Superiority and inferiority, however, are two sides of the same coin. In order for one person to feel superior, there must be another

person who is perceived to be or who actually feels inferior. Stigmatized people are needed in order for the many nonstigmatized people to feel good about themselves.

On the other hand, there are many stigmatized people who feel inferior and concede that other persons are superior because they possess certain attributes. In order for the process to occur (for one person to stigmatize another and have the stigmatized person feel the effects of stigma), there must be some agreement that the different ness is inherently undesirable. Moreover, even among stigmatized people, relative comparisons are made, and people are reassured by the fact that there is someone else who is worse off. The dilemma of difference, therefore, affects both stigmatized and nonstigmatized people.

Stigma is a social construct, constructed by cultures, by social groups, and by individuals to designate some human differences as discrediting, then the stigmatization process is indeed a powerful and pernicious social tool.

Some stigmas are more physically salient than others, and some people are more capable of concealing their stigmas or escaping from the negative social consequences of being stigmatized.

Often, attributes or behaviors that might otherwise be considered “abnormal” or stigmatized are labeled as “eccentric” among persons of power or influence. The fact that what is perceived as the “ideal” person varies from one social context to another. Some categories of stigmatized people cannot alter their stigmas nor easily disguise them. People, then, feel permanently stigmatized in contexts where their different ness is undesired and in social environments that they cannot easily escape. Hence, power, social influence, and social control play a major role in the stigmatization process.

Stigma stems from differences. By focusing on differences we actively create stigmas because any attribute or difference is potentially stigmatizable.

By reexamining the historical origins of stigma and the way children develop the propensity to stigmatize, we can see how some differences evolve into stigmas and how the process is linked to the behavioral (social control), affective (fear, dislike), and cognitive (perception of differences, social categorization) components of stigma.

Norm or Normalcy

We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what the average person does, thinks, earns, or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above average. We consume a minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume. Our children are ranked in school and tested to determine where they fit into a normal curve of learning, of intelligence. Doctors measure and weigh them to see if they are above or below average on the height and weight curves. There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated.

A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. Lennard J Davis in *The Disability Studies Reader* says:

The constellation of words describing this concept “normal”

“normalcy”, “normality”, “norm”, “average”, “abnormal” – all entered

the European languages rather late in human history. The word “normal” as “constituting, conforming to not deviating or different from the common type or standard, regular, usual” only enters the English language around 1840. The word “norm” in the modern sense, has only been in use since around 1855 and “normality” and “normalcy” appeared in 1849 and 1857, respectively. (10)

If the lexicographical information is relevant, it is possible to date the coming into consciousness in English of an idea of “the norm” over the period 1840-1860. If we rethink our assumptions about the universality of the concept of the norm, what we might arrive at is the concept that preceded it; that of the “ideal” a word we find dating from the seventeenth century. Without making too simplistic a division in the historical chronotope, one can nevertheless try to imagine a world in which the hegemony of normalcy does not exist. Rather, what we have is the ideal body, as exemplified in the tradition of nude Venuses, for example. This idea presents a mytho-poetic body that is linked to that of the gods (in traditions in which the god’s body is visualized). This divine body, then this ideal body, is not attainable by a human. The notion of an ideal implies that in this case, the human body as visualized in art or imagination must be composed from the ideal parts of living models. These models individually can never embody the idea since an ideal by definition can never be found in this world.

Greek artist, lined up all the beautiful women of Crotona in order to select in each her ideal feature or body part and combine these into the ideal figure of Aphrodite, herself an ideal of beauty.

If the concept of the norm or average enters European culture, or at least the European languages only in the nineteenth century, one has to ask what is the cause of

this conceptualization? One of the logical place to turn in trying to understand concepts like “norm” and “average” is that branch of knowledge known as statistics. The word statistics was first used in 1749 by Gottfried Achenwall, in the context of compiling information about the state. The concept migrated somewhat from the state to the body when Bisset Hawkins defined medical statistics in 1829 as “the application of numbers to illustrate the natural history of health and disease. In France, statistics were mainly used in the area of public health in the early nineteenth century.

This concept of the average, as applied to the concept of the human, was used not only by statisticians but even by the likes of Marx. Marx actually cites Quetelets notion of the average man in a discussion of the labor theory of value. We can see in retrospect that one of the most powerful ideas of Marx, the notion of labor value or average wages, in many ways is based on the idea of the worker constructed as an average worker.

The concept of a norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down that majority of the population that falls under the arch of the standard bell-shaped curve.

An important consequence of the idea of the norm is that it divides the total population into standard and nonstandard subpopulations. The next step in conceiving of the population as norm and non-norm is for the state to attempt to norm the nonstandard.

What these revisions signify is an attempt to redefine the concept of the “ideal” in relation to the general population. First, the application of the idea of a norm to the human body creates the idea of deviance or a “deviant” body. Second, the idea of a norm pushes the normal variation of the body through a stricter template

guiding the way the body “should” be. Third, the revision of the “normal curve of distribution” into quartiles, ranked in order, and so on, creates a new kind of “ideal”. This statistical idea is unlike the classical ideal which contains no imperative to be the ideal. The new ideal of ranked order is powered by the imperative of the norm, and then is supplemented by the notion of progress, human perfectibility, and the elimination of deviance, to create a dominating, hegemonic vision of what the human body should be.

3. Textual Analysis

Prior as an AIDS Victim

Louis: When did you find this?

Prior: I couldn't tell you.

Louis: Why?

Prior: I was scared, Lou.

Louis: OF WHAT?

Prior: That you'll leave me. (28)

In the beginning of the play Louis and Prior experience a major terrible shock. It is more of a double shock for Louis. His grandmother had passed away and Prior adds another shocking news. Prior reveals that he has been infected with AIDS– and that awful moment signals the inevitable destruction of their relationship. As the play begins we are made to know that Louis Ironson and Prior Walter are in a homosexual relationship. Homosexuality was considered a deviant form of sexuality and therefore a form of stigma was attached with it. Prior Walter is caught up in the play's biggest struggle over change. He is infected with AIDS and therefore is stigmatized by the society around him. His partner Louis abandons him after hearing about Prior having been infected with AIDS. Prior's character has been able to dramatize the struggle between American conservatives and liberals. It is their conflict that will confront them for the rest of the play. From the queasy beginning we can predict the downward arc of their relationship which cannot be accepted in their society.

Paralleling the homosexual relationship of Louis and Prior is the heterosexual relationship of Joe Pitt and his wife Harper. It is the story of these two couples whose relationships are disintegrating. The two couples' fates quickly become intertwined. Joe stumbles upon Louis crying in the bathroom of the courthouse where he works

and they strike up an unlikely friendship based in part on Louis's suspicion that Joe is gay. Harper and Prior also meet, in a fantastical mutual dream sequence in which Prior, operating on the "threshold of revolution", reveals to Harper that her husband is a closeted homosexual. American society did not consider homosexuals as normal or average. At that time it was felt that AIDS was the result of homosexuality, a sin from God for going against nature. On Prior being affected with AIDS, Elu Nutu writes:

Kushner's work is complex, and it addresses issues like the human condition, homosexuality, AIDS, race, religion and politics, while emphasizing elements of choice and identity. For Kushner, it seems, '*angels*' signify an absence rather than a presence of the divine, puzzles rather than answers many of which refer to sex and gender identities, and turn-of-the-millennium angst. Kushner's 'Prior' character is declared a prophet by the messenger angel while dying of AIDS. (181)

Ironically and precisely, Prior is the play's chief victim. He begins the play at the mercy of everyone and everything around him. He is abandoned by Louis for no fault of his. The fear of being stigmatized forces Louis to abandon Prior.

Louis: I have to go bury grandma.

Prior: Lou?

Then you'll come home?

Louis: Then I'll come home. (28)

Prior tells Louis he is afraid he will leave him, but rather than comforting him or telling him he loves him, Louis just says "oh," than says he has to go. Only with prompting does Louis say he will come home. Louis reneges on his own responsibilities and his actions are clearly condemned. His abandonment of Prior is weak, selfish and insensitive. Caring for Prior is complicated and excruciating and

Louis's guilt is genuine. He walks out on Prior with his eyes open, aware of the callousness of his action yet brave enough to do what he feels he must. Louis doesn't have the moral strength to stick with Prior and therefore abandons him. The fear of being treated as an outcast by the society forces Louis to leave Prior so that the latter bears the brunt of society. As a result, Prior is terribly unhappy and thinks he is beginning to lose his mind when he starts hearing voices and having visions.

Louis might seem like one of the play's villains, abandoning his lover at the time of his greatest need. But although Louis has human failings and commits an immoral act of leaving Prior, he is no villain, as Act II, Scene i helps us to understand. The depiction of Prior's illness is truly awful. The screams in the night are frightening, and Louis' panic is entirely justified; Prior refuses to go to the hospital, but there is no way Louis can help him. He cannot even perform the simple task of cleaning his body, since Priors' blood is infectious. In addition to this physical and medical helplessness, the scene conveys the emotional difficulties Louis must suffer. The gentle, witty Prior of years past is replaced by a person who screams and cries, shouts at Louis for touching him and faints without warning. He is entirely self-centered which is understandable but difficult for his lover. Faced with such a constant nightmare, Louis' actions become more comprehensible. At this moment Prior is clubbed with the nonstandard population which was not following the norm and hence considered abnormal.

Prior: I think something horrible is wrong with me.

I can't breathe. . . .

Louis: (starting to exit) I'm calling the ambulance.

Prior: No, wait, I. . . .

Louis: Wait? Are you fucking crazy? Oh God you're on fire, your head is on fire.

Prior: It hurts, it hurts. . . .

Louis: I'm calling the ambulance.

Prior: I don't want to go to the hospital, I don't want to go to the hospital please let me lie here, just. . . . (53)

AIDS and Homosexuality as Stigma

Individual human beings have different sexual orientations and gender identities. We must respect their choice of sexuality and try to accommodate them in our society and not stigmatize them. Tony Kushner has given a different analysis on so called social norms and values regarding gender identities, human sexuality and the newly found infection HIV/AIDS in his play *Angels in America*. In America, from 1980 onwards a social and religious debate on gender and sexuality emerged that threatened to disintegrate society. At the same time a deadly disease known as HIV emerged among the homosexuals in America. It drew the attention of social commentators, religious preachers, the mainstream community and the media. This dominant and majority group was unanimous in denigrating AIDS and homosexuality and stereotyping it as a form of stigma.

The word "homosexuality" has acquired multiple meanings over time. In the original sense, it describes a sexual orientation characterized by lasting aesthetic attraction, romantic love, or sexual desire exclusively for others of the same sex or gender. Homosexuality is usually contrasted with heterosexuality and bisexuality. Individual human beings have different racial and ethnic origins. People have different sexual orientations and gender identities. But all must be respected. The society, always stigmatizes the minority subjects. Monica Pearl establishes a

metonymy between AIDS and America, suggesting that the story of AIDS in the 1980s in America also tells the epic story of America in the late 20th century as:

It might seem that gay men have become the nation's prophets in cultural representation if not in real life, this is at the cost of rendering homosexuality asexual and paradoxically safe. *Angels in America*, the makes AIDS and homosexuality American, so woven into its national themes have these once ostensibly more marginal themes. (761)

The social order had always been constructed and ordered by heterosexuals. Sexual minorities especially those who have different sexuality and gender identities than biologically assigned role were slowly asserting their presence. They gradually started to express their feelings, sexual emotions differently that made no problems with heterosexual society.

After 1980's, sexual minorities started to raise their voices and started to demand for their right like other ethnic and religious groups. Sexual minorities were tired of being isolated by the mainstream heterosexual society. For a very long time the dominant construction of AIDS and homosexuality like that of alcoholism was a moral one. This problem was owned by the church. The church ruled that the act of homosexuality was against the wishes of God and nature and homosexuals were committing an unpardonable sinful act. Later Gay and Lesbians were presented as a minority group who were considered social pariahs as they did not confirm to the majority social "norm"..

To challenge the social belief that a man can fall in love with man, a woman can fall in love with woman, and a person can have different sexuality apart from his biological sex, Kushner has used the characters with different sexual, gender identities. People took it for granted that the emergence of the AIDS disease caused

by HIV positive virus was the result of homosexuality. The mainstream society which had been composed of heterosexuals said and believed that because of homosexual contact between two men, AIDS was the resultant disease. To add to their argument, the church said that AIDS was a sin God gave to homosexuals because of going against nature. AIDS was and is still a fatal disease. Due to hopelessness and social stigma, people used to die after being infected. The medical community had no clue about AIDS in the 1980's when it first emerged. Family members and friends hesitated to go near an infected person.

AIDS and homosexuality was stigmatized and a social construct. Mostly gay men are at risk of contracting AIDS. Condoms and safe sex products are out of the gay man's reach. This is a consequence of the result of the high stigma and sexual discrimination toward sexual minorities. In the mainstream society gay men and homosexuals have no right to practice their sexual desire openly. The society has restricted them and constructed a discourse about them against making love openly. To hide from the mainstream society's gaze, homosexuals are forced to make love in far, isolated and dark places often away from the city or market place. During such a time, the homosexual minorities cannot practice safe sex and the resultant disease is AIDS. After Prior was admitted to the hospital, Louis unable to control his sexual urge, went to a Public Park and had sex with a stranger. During the intercourse, their condom ruptures. But both of them are not bothered and continue their sexual act without the fear of being transmitted by HIV virus.

Louis: What?

Man: I think it broke. The rubber. You want me to keep going?
(Little pause) Pull out? Should I. . .

Louis: Keep going

Infect me.

I don't care. I don't care. (63)

AIDS is made to be the product of homosexuality and stigmatized in *Angels in America*. The best example is of Roy Cohn, a corrupt lawyer and political operator. Roy Cohn is the closeted homosexual and red-baiting attorney for Joe McCarthy. The play asserts that his perspective on AIDS reflected a general intolerance of difference. *Angels in America* further represents the disavowal of AIDS in Cohn's relationship to his own homosexuality. When told by his doctor that he has contracted the disease, Cohn feels that it would threaten and ruin his career if this news gets out. Roy asserts that he is dying from liver cancer. Identified by his power and political clout (rather than by his sexuality as a gay man) Roy feels he cannot identify himself to be a homosexual and so he cannot have AIDS. The fear of being dubbed abnormal and therefore stigmatized is the constant fear Roy undergoes. Roy considers himself as a heterosexual man who sometimes fools around with other men. Cohn's twisted logic represents the entrenched homophobia of the 1980's in America and his refusal to admit that he was gay and infected with AIDS. Though a Gay Rights Bill was introduced in the New York City Council in 1971, the first in the country, gay activists could not get it passed until 1986. The social stigma attached to being a gay was immense at that time. Roy felt that if he declared himself to be a homosexual with AIDS then he would lose everything he had. Roy believed and hid behind the veil of his money, power and status. He was afraid of being marginalized and felt that his status and his money would protect him from oppression and could even buy him immunity from AIDS in the form of AZT. Roy not only feels no solidarity with other oppressed groups, like women or racial minorities, he even rejects other gays and lesbians. Since his personal bonds with others are based not on affection or shared

ideology but on power, this is not surprising. Roy might desire another man, but desire is irrelevant: he only identifies with other powerful people, like Nancy Regan, who belonged to the powerful ruling political elite rather than powerless gays like Joe Pitt. But the later events in the play demonstrated how wrong he was and AIDS could not and cannot be held at bay no matter how many AZT drugs Roy took.

Roy: This disease. . . .

Henry: Syndrome. . . .

Roy: Whatever. It afflicts mostly homosexuals and drug addicts.

Henry: Mostly. Hemophiliacs are also at risk.

Roy: Homosexuals and drug addicts.

So why are you implying that I . . .

(Pause)

What are you implying, Henry?

Henry: I don't

Roy: I'm not a drug addict. (49)

Another example of AIDS and homosexuality as a stigma can be seen in the character of Mormon lawyer Joe Pitt. Social history reveals that, there are two sexes—male and female. But society has completely ignored other possibilities that a man can fall in love with another man. A person can have different sexuality from his biological sex, and he may have different gender identity besides his social gender role. Our society is so much rooted on social rules and regulations that have been constructed by the discourse of power by the mainstream society that everybody is mechanically obeying those rules as a part of their body. The fact is that a person can have different sexuality and gender identity beside the biological sex. The society Joe resides in has totally ignored this fact and an individual like Joe has to struggle

against it. Even as Joe tries to reveal his sexual preference and gender difference to his mother, she refuses to accept it. The social stigma against homosexuality affects Joe, one of the major characters of the play. Joe is a married gay man and lives a double life. He tried his level best to confess about his sexuality and his real desire for men to his mother and wife but failed. Ultimately he reveals about his homosexuality to his Mormon mother.

Joe: Mom. Momma. I'm a homosexual. Momma.

Boy, did that come out awkward.

(Pause)

Hello? Hello?

I'm a homosexual.

(Pause)

Please, Momma say something.

Hannah: You're ridiculous. You are being ridiculous. (82)

Joe tells Harper that he still loves her and that he will not abandon her. Even when they were first married he knew inside that he was different from other men. He was inclined towards homosexuality. Due to the fear of the mainstream society, he kept quiet and repressed and internalized his desires.

Joe: Forget about that. Just Listen. You want the truth. This is the truth.

I knew this when I married you. I've known this I guess for as long as

I've known anything, but...I don't know, I thought maybe that with

enough effort and will I could change myself...but I can't...(83)

People like Joe who have different gender identities besides their biological sex, are not accepted by their near and dear ones. In such a situation they have to

abide by the family diktat or leave the family and society and live an alienated life which Joe doesn't want.

Social rules, norms, values and spectrums of morality are made by the powerful church and the majority mainstream society. They make all the rules according to the values and perceptions through the discourse they control. The minorities like homosexuals are always ignored. They are stigmatized as abnormal and their voices are repressed, suppressed and oppressed. God has created everybody equal and the mainstream society does not have the authority to impose their *fatwa* on the minority homosexuals. Since norms are the production of majority or power, they exert harsh impacts on the minorities. In addition, people who are treated as members of the minority, often start 'acting normal' in order to avoid being the objects of stigma. That is, they do their best not to be perceived as different from the majority. At times such kind of acting, done in order to be perceived normal inflicts fatal consequences upon others. Roy, the closeted homosexual, for example does the same in *Angels in America*. Further, the relation of both couples-Prior and Louis and Joe and Harper- disintegrate mainly due to their inability to resist the so called norms of the society. On the one hand, Joe cannot profess his homosexuality as he is a Mormon, and marries Harper in spite of himself. On the other, Louis cannot cope with Prior's AIDS and flees away not knowing how to proceed.

Rabbi: The Holy Scriptures have nothing to say about such a person.

Louis: Rabbi, I'm afraid of the crimes I may commit. (31)

Louis feels that homosexuality is a crime and therefore asks repentance from the Rabbi. It was believed that homosexuals cannot be involved in any religious activities. Homosexuality was an illegal, immoral and sinful act not acceptable to the Christian church and gay men were kept away from it.

Prior: I'm a homosexual.

Harper: Oh! In my church we don't believe in homosexuals. (38)

We are at a shock to learn that Louis abandons Prior who is infected and dying of AIDS. Louis's eventual abandonment of Prior is extreme and selfish but it is perfectly human. Both of them were in a homosexual relationship. Louis did not want to continue with the relationship and be contracted with AIDS because it would be very difficult to lead that type of life in the America of the 1980's. The millennium was approaching and all the people were confused and speaking prophetically about where their country, their soul, their politics and their values were heading. The AIDS epidemic had just erupted and being in love in the age of AIDS was extremely difficult. As AIDS was related with homosexuals, Louis didn't have the moral strength to stick with Prior.

Belize: How long have you been here?

Prior: (Getting suddenly upset) I don't remember, I don't give a fuck. I want Louis. I want my fucking boyfriend, where the fuck is he? I'm dying, I'm dying, where's Louis? (66)

Louis is a stereotypical example of a white, Jewish liberal, who is appalled by the conservative views of someone like Joe, but is flat-footed and insensitive. Louis who loves Prior but whose love is not powerful enough to overcome the tremendous divisive power of AIDS and stigma. Prior's body makes AIDS an "inerasable biological stigma"—he can no more act as "normal." AIDS which is the product of their homosexual relationship keeps Louis and Prior apart. It subjects Prior to prejudice and disenfranchisement within the gay community. While solidarity may be an ideal, it cannot be achieved solely by the power of an idealized gay brotherhood. Prior's AIDS infection is too great a barrier for Louis to overcome. Louis does not

have the moral strength to stick with Prior, leaving Prior to turn to his former lover Belize.

Prior's family was the epitome of stability, so much so that all the sons bear the same name. Prior lived off an inherited trust fund. But this unbroken line would come to an end as Prior was a gay man. He would not bear any children and a person with AIDS he was likely to have a short future left. Since he rarely worked, he could never add to the family's store of capital. Because of his homosexuality and AIDS Prior is blamed for breaking the thread. His family would be in shame in the society and they would not be able to accept their offspring. He would always remain a family and social outcast. Prior would be the one to bring instability to his family because of being gay. Amy Schindler talks about life in the age of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome as:

The AIDS plague is the central defining metaphor for a national spiritual decline during the 1980s and as a starting point of a social order for the next century. Heavily intertwined with this message is the theme of judgment. Prior Walter, a main character with AIDS, feels dirty, as though his heart is pumping polluted blood. He literally wrestles with angels to try to figure out why such a disastrous illness has come to plague the earth. (54)

Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt are the other closeted homosexuals who fear the mainstream society. The binaries that haunt *Angels* are mirrored structurally by sets of symbolically paired characters and their treatment of AIDS and homosexuality. Roy and Prior are both HIV positive. Roy refuses to claim his HIV status or any kind of homosexual identity. He fears the mainstream society of which he is a part. His revelation will lead to his downfall. Prior is not only out of the closet but

performatively discloses his diagnosis. Roy is the victim of internalized homophobia. Roy uses Ethel as a scapegoat to save himself from accusations of homosexuality by championing regressive right-wing family values and attacking homosexuals in the public sphere. It is crucial to note that a person like Roy Cohn who is a famous advocate and a wealthy established person rejects the term AIDS. His unreasoning fear and aversion to homosexuals has led to his disapproval of AIDS. Instead of accepting his infection, he avoids it, gives it another name.

Roy: And what is my diagnosis, Henry?

Henry: You have AIDS, Roy.

Roy: No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer.

(52)

Roy is the heartless, greedy man who cares only for money and self-promotion. He is so consumed by his power over other people that he neglects his AIDS disease. Accepting the disease AIDS like Prior would mean becoming powerless and dubbed as a social outcast. Due to his fear of losing power that he holds, he pays for it with his death. Because of his influential power he is able to get the AZT medicine. While common people and minorities would have to wait up to two years to get AZT, Roy was able to get it delivered to him in no time. But AZT did not prove to be the life saving drug he took refuge in. Roy died because of his closeted behavior and not being able to accept the truth and reality, his own ill-concealed anti-Semitism and homophobia. Roy's isolation from his natural identity contributed to his twisted villainy and his unprofessed but profound loneliness.

Joe is another closeted homosexual in the play who goes through the fear of stigma. Joe is a gay man married to Harper. He fails to perform his masculine role of a husband and his sex life with his wife is in disarray. Joe dreams for handsome,

masculine men, whereas Harper is longing for his penis and a baby. Harper believes that Joe must have sex with her as it is her right to have sex with her husband. But due to his different sexual preference, Joe is looking for a man partner. He marries Harper because the society would continuously question him as to why he remained unmarried. To quiet the society, Joe married Harper. Joe's commitment to justice keeps him from accepting Roy's offer, and his love for Harper traps him in an unhappy marriage. Freedom is frightening to him because it means abandoning his value system, the mainstream society. Joe and Harper were just as unhappy in Utah as they are in New York. The only difference is that, there, a conformist society prevented them from finding a better way, requiring them to seem cheerful, uncomplicated and strong.

Thus, we see how Roy and Joe because of their internalized homophobia and abnormality led a life of a closeted homosexual. The fear of the mainstream society and their reluctance to leave the society they did not belong to resulted in their respective losses later in life. Roy paid for it with his life. Joe was unable to discuss about his sexuality with his Mormon mother and his wife. Therefore he faced a number of problems that were psychological and emotional. Due to Joe's silence two lives were destroyed- his and Harper's, his wife. When he later confesses about his own sexuality, both of them become liberated. Harper leaves Joe and sets off on an optimistic voyage to San Francisco to begin her own life. Joe feels light at heart after having accepted his sexuality.

Joe: My whole life has conspired to bring me to this place, and I
 can't despise my whole life. I think I believed when I met you
 I could save you, you at least if not myself, but. . .
 I don't have any sexual feelings for you, Harper.

And I don't think I ever did.

Harper: I think you should go. (84)

Homosexuals like Roy Cohn, Joe, Louis and Prior are the victimized lot as they are forced to spend their lives in isolation and seclusion because of the fear of social stigma. After realizing their preferred sexuality, homosexuals like them spend their entire life in the cocoon because of social rejection.

Roy Cohn is a prime example of a closed homosexual who falsely believed he did not have AIDS but liver cancer. He had the capacity to change laws that would benefit the likes of him and not remain closeted. He rejected and neglected his own infection for fear of social discrimination. While trying to hide his homosexuality, Joe goes through a period of mental pain and suffering. Prior is abandoned by his lover Louis because the latter fears he may also be contracted with AIDS and be discarded by society.

4. Conclusion

As different from his predecessors, Tony Kushner does not hesitate to produce works that are openly gay. Kushner rather felt proud that *Angels in America* was identified as a gay play. Critics on both sides of the Atlantic have waxed lyrical over his talent, declaring him to be a new gay icon. In scale and ambition, *Angels in America* stands alone on the contemporary stage that appeals to a wide audience.

In conspicuous contrast to dramatic evidences of the lovelessness of the heterosexual relationships, there are references and remarks in the play to homosexual relationship. This exposes the corruption inherent in heterosexual love in the then American society and the favorable action of homosexual love.

Tony Kushner moulds Prior, the protagonist of the play- who is gay and infected with AIDS, as a mouthpiece to highlight the social stigma that he as a homosexual faces. Through Prior, Kushner has expressed his hope and optimism about the future, even though at present there is a great social misunderstanding regarding AIDS, homosexuality and gender construction. The society was guided by their canonical and religious beliefs constructed by the powerful and majority of the people. Due to misconception, social beliefs, norms, values, religion, and so on, the mainstream society could never accept AIDS and homosexuality. Gradually times are changing and circumstances are different from what they were.

Society is gradually changing and advancing. The mainstream people are willing to reform their beliefs, the process is continuing. People are willing to provide space to the minorities by altering their traditional beliefs towards gender and sexuality. It is not an overnight process that will happen instantly. The thought process has begun and Kushner is optimistic that it will change one day. On that day all concepts, beliefs and constructed norms will melt like ice. That day, society

comprising the binaries of mainstream and minorities will stand on the same platform and a new era will begin. For that new dawn, great patience and tolerance is required on both sides of the binaries.

The AIDS epidemic has caused the death of heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. Homosexuals are the victimized lot as they are forced to spend their lives in a cocoon. They are unable to come out of it. After realizing their preferred sexuality, homosexuals spend their entire life in the cocoon because of social stigma and discrimination. As a result people like Prior is abandoned by his lover Louis because the latter fears he may also be contracted with AIDS and be discarded by society. Roy Cohn is a prime example of a closeted homosexual who falsely believed he did not have AIDS but liver cancer. He had great influence upon government and legislation. He had the capacity to change laws that would benefit the likes of him and not remain closeted. Instead of showing solidarity to other homosexuals, he develops a kind of homophobic attitude towards them and discards them totally. He rejects and neglects his own infection. As a result, he meets an untimely death. But all are not like Roy Cohn and have not given up on life. Those who are still living will fight for their rights, and for the sake of the coming generation. Joe Pitt is another closeted homosexual. While trying to hide his homosexuality, Joe goes through a period of mental pain and suffering. Later, he acknowledges his gayness to his mother and his wife. At that moment he feels liberated. Prior is not bothered about his sexuality nor about AIDS and stigma. He has come to accept it. Prior and Joe are the ray of hope for the present and future generations to fight for their rights.

Each and every human being is a citizen of the country and has equal rights to enjoy the privileges of the right to life, liberty and all pursuits of happiness. One

should not hide their real sexuality and the other should not mock and try to marginalize or stigmatize them. All of us are God's creation. God has given us the beauty of life and nature has bestowed us our sexuality. So if we are gay or lesbian, it should not be a problem to the other person. In God's world and in His creation, all is fair and nothing is wrong. It is we humans and our society that constructs right, wrong, norms, values, morality, etc. and forces the minorities to accept what the majority decides. Whatever God makes, He makes perfect. If there is any problem, the problem is with the human society which uses its power to construct discourses like normality and stigma.

It can be surmised that AIDS and homosexuality are a social construct and that homosexuals like Prior Walter are treated as social outcasts. The life of Prior showcases the journey traveled by the AIDS infected homosexual community in America. Prior is a homosexual who is abandoned by the society because he has contracted AIDS. Though the concept of homosexuality was more open and discussed at the time of Prior, the social stigma attached to it was more or less the same. There was a very miniscule difference regarding their acceptance by the mainstream society. Prior was subjected to treatment as a social outcast in the era he lived in. Tony Kushner tried to give homosexuality a grand entry in *Angels in America* in the world of America where homosexuality was celebrated.

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