

**Voicing the Voice of the Gay: An Analysis of Select Works of Fiction and Non-Fiction in**

*Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia*

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**Dr.Sumneet Kaur**, Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Guru Nanak Dev University.

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**Abstract:**

The literature emanating from and centred upon the experiences of individuals identifying as Gay or Lesbian has garnered substantial prominence and invoked significant scholarly scrutiny across the world since the 1960s. Whether manifest through the mediums of fiction, drama, poetry, or autobiography, homosexual literature conventionally probes the matters concerning gender dynamics and individual identity, while also investigating the relationship between ethnicity and social class upon these individuals' sense of self. The explicit assertion of unconventional sexual orientations, particularly in historically conservative societies like India, remains a contentious topic, liable to incur the disapproval of the 'heteronormative' majority or the conventional societal mainstream, thereby giving rise to personal, economic, and social biases. Consequently, numerous authors in the homosexual literary sphere have resorted to the extensive utilization of metaphors and allegorical expressions in their creative endeavours, opting to obliquely address themes related to gender identity and sexual inclination. The present paper undertakes an examination of several prevailing patterns in Gay literature at large, focusing specifically on Gay prose encompassing non-fiction, fiction and drama in the Indian context. This exploration has been conducted with particular emphasis on a seminal anthology edited by a preeminent Indian gay writer, Hoshang Merchant. The initial segment of this paper endeavours to provide a panorama of gay and homosexual literary expressions briefly, subsequently drifting into an evaluation of selected non-fiction, short fiction, and dramatic compositions like "The Contract of Silence" by Ashok Row Kavi, "The Slaves" by Hoshang Merchant, "Night Queen" by Mahesh Dattani, "Rites of Passage" by Manoj Nair, "Moonlight Tandoori" and "Six Inches" by R. Raja Rao, "Shivraj" by Kamleshwar and "Never Take A Candy from A Stranger" by Gyansingh Shatir. The paper investigates how the chosen works deconstruct the notion of rigidly compartmentalized sexuality or sexual identity.

**Keywords:**Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Homosexuality, Heterosexuality, Queer, Sexual Identity, Subjectivity, Gender Criticism, Marginalisation, The Other, Coming-out-literature.

**Introduction and Aim:**

Indian English fiction has shown a notable void in adequately addressing the Gay and Lesbian experiences alongside other sociological currents characterizing Indian society. The present paper undertakes an examination of several prevailing patterns in Gay literature at large, focusing specifically on gay prose encompassing non-fiction, fiction and drama in the Indian context. This exploration has been conducted with particular emphasis on a seminal anthology edited by a preeminent Indian gay writer, Hoshang Merchant. The anthology, *Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia* published in 1999, collates a collection of male queer narratives. The compilation deliberately challenges the conventional contours by integrating a diverse array of genres, including short stories, autobiographical fragments, non-fictional essays, poems, and theatrical works. The underlying intention, as expounded by Hoshang Merchant in the editorial preface, is to deconstruct the notion of rigidly compartmentalized sexuality or sexual identity. This deconstruction, when pursued to its textual representation reflects a plurality of subjectivities. The initial segment of this paper endeavours to provide a panorama of Gay and homosexual literary expressions briefly, subsequently drifting into an evaluation of selected short fiction, non-fiction and dramatic compositions like “The Contract of Silence” by Ashok Row Kavi, “The Slaves” by Hoshang Merchant, “Night Queen” by Mahesh Dattani, “Rites of Passage” by Manoj Nair, “Moonlight Tandoori” and “Six Inches” by R. Raja Rao, “Shivraj” by Kamleshwar and “Never Take A Candy form A Stranger” by Gyansingh Shatir.

**Theoretical Background:**

The literature emanating from and centred upon the experiences of individuals identifying as gay or lesbian has garnered substantial prominence and invoked significant scholarly scrutiny across the world since the 1960s. Whether manifest through the mediums of fiction, drama, poetry, or autobiography, homosexual literature conventionally probes the matters concerning gender dynamics and individual identity, while also investigating the relationship between ethnicity and social class upon the individual’s sense of self. The explicit assertion of unconventional sexual orientations, particularly in historically conservative societies like India, remains a contentious topic, liable to incur the disapproval of the ‘heteronormative’ majority or the conventional societal mainstream, thereby giving rise to personal, economic, and social biases. Consequently, numerous authors in the homosexual literary sphere have resorted to the extensive utilization of metaphors and allegorical expressions in their creative endeavours, opting to obliquely address themes related to gender identity and sexual inclination. In its foundational premise, the genre of gay and lesbian literature finds its roots in gender criticism, a theoretical framework that challenges the notion of sexuality as an innate or predetermined biological trait. Instead, proponents of this perspective view sexuality as a product of social conditioning, a learned behaviour moulded by cultural norms and institutional influences. In a deliberate departure from conformist paradigms, advocates of gender criticism vehemently contest the rigid categorization of sexual orientations into homo- and hetero- sexuality, actively opposing the notion of fixed identity and gender traits, while championing the concept of gender constructionism.

In his influential work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault delineates the conceptualization of sexuality as a mechanism for social construction of meaning, aimed at establishing coherent signification for individuals in societal contexts (123). The categories of

identity such as 'gay' and 'straight' manifest as tools in governing assemblies, serving either as normative designations within oppressive structures or as rallying points in liberatory struggles against the very oppression they signify (14-15). Butler further contends that the notion of homosexuality itself finds its origins in a discourse steeped in homophobia (anti-gay sentiment), with historical precedence tracing back to its initial usage in Germany, predating the emergence of the term 'heterosexual'. Paradoxically, the term homosexuality attains recognition as a consequence of the crystallization of the underlying concepts it denotes. Evidently, the domain of gay and lesbian literature thrives upon the post-structuralist ethos. It is a paradigm that dismantles binary oppositions. It challenges the absolutism attributed to the distinctions between paired contraries, and positing the potentiality for inverting the hierarchical order of these pairings, favouring the latter term over the former. Within the purview of gay and lesbian studies, the deconstruction of homosexual and heterosexual follows a similar journey. Nonetheless, as posited by Foucault, this power structure simultaneously functions as an instrument of social governance, exerting considerable authority to define and dictate social behaviours as either morally acceptable or immoral. Such a power dynamic notably tilts in favour of heterosexuality, relegating its 'other' to a position of malevolence and reprehensibility.

Exploring the same foundational principle of 'fluidity of identity' that pertains to sexual orientation, specifically in gay studies, Eve Sedgwick, in her work *Epistemology of the Closet*, examines the dynamics surrounding the process of coming out or disclosing one's homosexual orientation. She contends that this revelation is not an isolated and an absolute act. The act of revealing one's homosexuality carries with it the necessity for nuanced demeanour. The distinctions of being 'in' or 'out' do not constitute a mere binary or an irreversible occurrence. Rather, varying degrees of concealment and transparency coexist within the same individuals' lives (Sedgwick, 1985: 23). Rather than an inherent and incontrovertible essence homosexuality is influenced by deliberate affiliations, societal positioning, and vocational responsibilities. It's almost as though the repercussions of determination of the course they wish to pursue and the cultural customs they wish to embrace is vested in the discretion of gay individuals themselves. This latitude is intended to offer this distinct subset of the cultural sphere the flexibility to look for their societal and cultural stances and to function within the prevailing normative discourse of society, assuming the subjectivities perceived as ordinary or heterosexual.

However, as Foucault postulates, it also serves as a tool of social regulation, wielding comprehensive authority where its decrees dictate and appropriate social conduct, dictating what is deemed moral or immoral. This power dynamic, historically and contextually, reveals a distinct bias in favour of heterosexuality, particularly conspicuous in regions such as India. In this context, the cultural paradigms of machismo and chivalry, which exclusively position masculinity within the ambit of assertive conquest over women have consistently hindered the displacement of heterosexuality by homosexuality as the normative cultural norm. Despite the etymological precedence of the homosexual identity, its manifestation as a normative deviation is sometimes burdened with heterodox implications. Frequently, it occupies the role of the marginalized 'Other' within the dichotomy between the normative 'self' of heterosexuality and the socially constructed homosexuality, even though the former inherently exists within the latter's domain. In Barry's words, "The 'Other', in these formulations is as much something within us as beyond us, and 'self' and 'other' are always implicate in each other, in the root sense of the word, which means to

be intertwined or folded into each other” (145).

The systematic configuration of human behaviour in fixed social frameworks consistently places the ‘Other’ in a discredited position, an outcome compounded by the divergence from established norms and the potential ramifications stemming from prevailing power structures. On occasion, gay behaviour or identity also finds itself subject to differentiation and marginalization, with its attributes sometimes labelled as ‘heterodoxy,’ a term that appears to allude to the homo/hetero opposition, or even regarded as an abnormality. Authors who explore gay themes or individuals in their literary works highlight a range of socio-political responses directed at this ‘queer’ generation. These responses often occupy a middle ground, neither overtly condemning nor fully embracing these non-normative inclinations. Contemporary cinematic and television portrayals like *Will and Grace*, films such as *Brokeback Mountain* in Hollywood, and *Page 3* in Bollywood, draw attention to the presence of homosexuality in the mainstream culture. However, a counter-narrative emerges within these successful representations, as they tend to hinge upon either a farcical or a distressing discourse of gay existence, often intertwined with violence and repulsion. The subtleties of normalcy and the blurring boundaries between mainstream and the periphery warrant rigorous discourse. In light of this, the role of the gay critic assumes significance in discerning this distinctiveness and forging a literary tradition of ‘classic’ gay writers. Moreover, latent homosexual themes in the works of canonical authors such as Shakespeare, Eliot, and Auden are also excavated to confront and counteract the ‘homophobia’ embedded within mainstream literature, thereby shedding light on and rectifying the marginalization and disregard of homosexual realities.

Discussions surrounding gay literature frequently amalgamate literature and personal experiences. For instance, autobiographical creations like *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982) by Richard Rodriguez, and *How Town* (1990) by Michael Nava, have garnered attention due to their intimate portrayals of how gays have to face a dual marginalization one as members of ethnic minorities and second as gay individuals. Scholars have also engaged in dialogue concerning the role of stylistic elements in homosexual literature, contending that lexical choices and narrative structures often serve as mirrors of the authors’ or characters’ emotional mood. Mark Lilly, for instance, has discerned a pervasive sense of fatigue in Andrew Holleran’s works specially in *Dancer from the Dance* (1978) and *Nights in Aruba* (1983). Lilly interprets this exhaustion as a reflection of the vexations experienced by Holleran’s gay protagonists as they grapple with the pursuit of love and acceptance. In Severo Sarduy’s works recurring imagery of imminent peril serves as a reflection of the at times distressing, even violent encounters faced by gay individuals in the contemporary world. Central themes in homosexual literature encompass matters of concealment and disgrace. ‘Coming-out literature’ constitutes a well-established and enduring subgenre that explores the process of openly acknowledging one’s homosexuality. However, the present study confines its scope to an exploration of Hoshang Merchant’s anthology, *Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia*, focusing intently on prose concerning gay writings. The paper examines diverse facets of Indian gay prose and the intricate socio-cultural contexts shaping the lives of gay individuals in the chosen texts.

**Analysis:**

The anthology, *Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia*, explores the complex fabric of social perceptions surrounding gay individuals in India’s predominant structures of education,

politics, religion, and familial dynamics. The collection unveils the depiction of gays as the 'Other' within heterosexual society or as individuals laden with guilt and ignominy. Through its assortment of short stories, plays, and excerpts, the compilation voices the substantial risks involved in the act of 'coming out of the closet' for a gay in the Indian context. Distinct from eunuchs, with whom they are occasionally conflated, gays lack a distinct locus and an acknowledged identity, often navigating dual existences and adopting bisexual roles. The resort to heterosexual marriages as a means to evade societal shame is a common recourse, yet it ushers in further turmoil due to the latent 'other' proclivities, increasing the predicament. The literary compositions in the book confront the humiliation imposed upon gay men and has been conveyed by both gay and heterosexual writers, thus, providing a platform for the contentious presence of this diverse human spectrum. These works endeavour to normalize the gay experience, giving expression to their emotions and quests for fulfilment in love and intimacy akin to the practices upheld by normative heterosexual cultures. The ambiance of romance and affection created by these writers in their individual narratives strives to draw a parallel between heterosexual and homosexual experiences, highlighting an intrinsic similarity that diverges only in sexual orientation. The narratives abound in themes like unrequited love, unbalanced affections, pain of separation, treacheries in love, reunions, and even the archetypal 'and-they-lived-happily-ever-after'. These narratives include the dialectical 'otherness' associated with the gay identity, endeavouring to carve out a discourse that advocates for equivalence in society, politics, and culture. Hoshang Merchant mentions:

It should be obvious ---- that 'gay' in India is not an ethic, not a religion, not a sub-culture, not a profession, not a sub caste. Yet it is all present, all pervasive, ever practiced and ever secret. .... It is shame, guilt, subversion, for some new fangled ones even their honour and pride. Homosexuals are largely unrecognized and blend with the crowd. Hence homosexuality is unspoken about, unaccepted, a danger to the homosexual and the non-homosexual alike. (xxi)

Ashok Row Kavi's "The Contract of Silence," is a work of non-fiction that serves as both a historical account and a contextualization of the acknowledgment of homosexuality in India. This piece unveils the politics of silence that has been imposed upon the gay community, stifling their capacity to articulate their concerns and assert their demand for a discourse-based comprehension. The essay traces his personal journey as a gay, surmounting the overarching narratives to craft an account that is distinctly his own. [Hetero]sexuality is the central metanarrative that sustains his account in form of a discourse he engages in with his father, referred to as Anna because "the decision that evening was watershed in my life. I had decided that I had to get to the bottom of this" (Merchant 3). Kavi disrupts the conventional logic of "men as plugs" and "women as sockets," resulting in "electric charges" (Merchant 3). In this context, the author presents his homosexuality not as an aberrant predisposition, as the world often perceives it, but rather as an inherent aspect that is distinct from heterosexuality and much akin to the physiological binary distinctions between male and female as he feels "if people really loved you, they wouldn't care about your sexuality" (Merchant 8). The writer tries to deconstruct the essentialism of gender—comprising of either male or female—in order to construct his own narrative framework centred around the gay man, whose distinct sexual orientation constitutes an irregularity among human relationships. This literary journey charts the writer's transition from

silence to assertion, tracing his life from early childhood to maturity. Concurrently, the work elucidates the spectrum of socio-political reactions directed at gay community over different historical epochs during post-independence era. It delineates the author's interactions and affiliations with women are profoundly influenced by his status as the 'other,' underscoring the challenges he faces due to his divergence from established societal patterns.

The narrative effectively underscores a salient facet of gay existence in India. It hints at the prevailing culture of shame and guilt, which entrusts the gay identity to the margins. As elucidated earlier through Eve Sedgwick's insights on the divulgence of one's homosexual inclinations, a certain measure of concealment and tolerance invariably permeates such discourse, stemming from apprehensions of the potential repercussions inherent in underdeveloped or conservative societies. The essay also posits that such apprehensions compel gay individuals to navigate a dualistic existence, cloaking their authentic proclivities and aspirations beneath a facade that ostensibly adheres to heteronormative conventions. In this intricate web, bisexuality emerges as a crucial facet, characterized by fluctuating identities devoid of fixed categorizations. In contrast, the rigid demarcations of homosexuality and heterosexuality prove inadequate in encapsulating a definitive essence. This form of gay existence, marked by perpetual shifts in accordance with social norms, aligns with the postmodern conception of identity as a series of masks, roles, and latent potentials forming a complex amalgamation of elements pigeonholed by their provisional, contingent, and improvisational nature (Barry 2002: 146). Thus, one could surmise that Kavi's narrative not only enumerates the multifaceted struggles faced by the community of the gay but also progressively evolves into a proactive stance, transitioning into an advocacy campaign against the marginalization and seclusion experienced by this segment of society.

In Hoshang Merchant's story "The Slaves," the depiction of gay sexual activity is rendered with a frank and unreserved explicitness, a characteristic that has been deemed unsettling by certain critics. Such portrayal has led to perceptions of deviancy and unbridled ardour commonly associated with perversion and uncontrolled passion of freaks. Yet, it becomes evident that the underlying intention is to emancipate the gay experience from the constraining clutches of conventional mainstream norms. The story unfolds as Mazhar crosses paths with the narrator, evoking a romantic encounter. However, this seemingly familiar narrative converts into an outlet for an array of audacious gay sexual exploits. These encounters, involving not only the central figures but also extending to other individuals with similar inclinations within the broader social context, are narrated with frankness. Amidst the depiction of these interactions and the light-hearted dialogues shared between these intimate partners, the boundaries separating sexual orientations are effectively blurred. This deliberate erasure serves to normalize the gay experience, nullifying the artificial distinctions often ascribed to diverse sexualities.

However, Mazhar's vacillation illustrates yet another facet of gay discourse. Contrary to the narrator's initial impression of Mazhar's audacity, it becomes evident that Mazhar does not embody the anticipated boldness. He presents a façade of heterosexuality by engaging in liaisons with female sex workers, a calculated move aimed at concealing his authentic sexual orientation. One day he brings a Christian girl to assert his masculinity, "The girl dressed. A cross glistened on her impossibly lean frame. She probably needed food. Mazhar paid her fifty rupees. He felt like a man. She looked like a poor girl. I felt bad for her" (53). Mazhar was a fatherless and was

used and exploited by his maternal uncle and all male boarders started using Mazhar. “When he grew up, he started using servant girls, he felt like a master. They were his sex slaves” (53).

This strategic manoeuvre serves the dual purpose of projecting an outwardly normative heterosexual existence and tactically avoiding potential discord in Mazhar’s social sphere. His oscillation between homosexuality and heterosexuality introduces a fresh dimension in the discourse, leading into the realm of “homosociality” (Sedgwick 124). This concept encapsulates the intricate bonds that subsist among men, crucial for upholding social structures particularly those linked to the transfer of status and property through marriage, sex, and birth. Although this may appear to stand in contrast to the conventional tenets of gay culture, Sedgwick’s observations reveal their intermingling in both practice and literature, as these two domains often converge with the genesis and expression of homoeroticism originating from within homoerotic practices themselves. Mazhar’s romantic entanglements with the narrator and fellow gay individuals, juxtaposed with his connections with women, epitomize this notion of ‘homosociality’. He harbours a genuine fondness for homosexual relationships, yet simultaneously seeks societal validation through his association with women. This nuanced portrayal underscores his simultaneous yearning for homosexual affection and his need for social endorsement, achieved by maintaining ties with women.

Mahesh Dattani’s play, *Night Queen*, highlights the process of concealing gay inclinations, engendering a convoluted coexistence among individuals in India that often assumes the guise of bisexuality. In the play, Raghu, an openly gay individual yet weighed down by self-consciousness, extends an invitation to Ash, whom he meets at a “gay park,” to become his companion. Ash adopts the role of a stern enforcer in the social boundaries of heterosexuality, chastising Raghu for his perceived “deviation.” Paradoxically, it soon unfolds that Ash is himself struggling with his gay identity as he is going to marry Raghu’s sister. The undercurrents of his seemingly misguided aggression are rooted in a complex amalgamation of frustration and envy directed at Raghu. Raghu, in stark contrast, has boldly disclosed his sexual orientation to his seemingly apathetic family, while Ash still aspires to attain such a liberated state. The play effectively confronts the audience with the unvarnished realities of being gay in the character of Ash’s brother who serves as a representation of the quintessential heteronormative patriarchal archetype. This character resorts to physical violence as a manifestation of his neutrality, positioned within the framework of a heterosexist ideology.

Ash: My brother beat me up. I slept with him the next day. I wanted it. I wanted it for real. He hit me hard. He showed me those guys, looking around, waiting for a sexual partner. A stranger. He told me how unhappy and miserable they were. They looked unhappy and miserable to me. And ugly. And I didn’t want to be a part of it. I didn’t want to be ugly and repulsive! In my brother’s eyes, they were worse than lepers. And I was my brother’s favourite. In his eyes I didn’t want to be ugly. I hate myself (73).

The distressing prospect of an inconspicuous and detestable life serves as the impetus driving Ash to assume a counterfeit heterosexual persona and subscribe to the notion of heterosexist committed matrimony. Paradoxically, this endeavour fails to diminish the essence of his gay identity. Ash recounts a vivid dream to Raghu, wherein he envisions a snake winding around his body, emerging from a cluster of “night queen” flowers which is symbolic of his inner apprehensions concerning the social and psychological turbulences targeted at him. In this

context, he confides in Raghu about the anguished state of his psyche, where his perplexing actions emerge as mutable indicators of his oscillating hetero/homo identity.

Walking alone at night in a park eyeing strange men. Following a man into the bushes. Unloading my burden as quickly as possible. Pulling up my pants and walking away before I could feel the shame. Going home as if nothing had happened. Till the next evening (Merchant 74).

Ash endeavours to resolve the conundrum by seeking refuge in matrimony or bisexuality, a strategy that can be construed as a postmodern attempt to cling to illusions as a means of evading the complexities of his identity crisis, albeit with limited success. But Raghu dispels the haze enveloping Ash's facades, thereby offering clarity:

Pretending that she turns you on. That you are in love with her. That everything will be alright after marriage. Such a pretence! And when you sleep with her, you will be groaning extra loud with pleasure, shutting your eyes thinking of your snake god or whatever, and penetrating her with those images in your mind. Pretending, pretending all the fucking way! (74)

These reactions once again bring to the fore the dynamics of constructed identity of the gay individuals. The establishment of a distinct homosexual identity serves as a means to segregate and eliminate those aspects of desire that deviate from the prevailing productive and reproductive imperatives associated with capitalism. Hence, sexuality emerges not as an inherent or 'natural' phenomenon, but rather as a manifestation shaped by the economic underpinnings inherent within a particular cultural context. The discerning observer can readily discern that Raghu's earnest endeavours to engender a sense of normalcy and authenticity in Ash are essentially reflective of the author's own intent driven by a desire to advocate for a compassionate outlook directed at gay individuals who are often relegated to the status of subalterns in the societal framework.

The complexities arising from the endeavour to uphold an appearance of normalcy while preserving latent 'other' tendencies, resulting in spiritual distress and perilous outcomes, find exemplification in the story "Rite of Passage" by Manoj Nair. The central figure, Prem, emerges as a poignant illustration of this phenomenon. Raised in a modest background by a single mother following his father's demise, he contends with the weight of social expectations along with the constraints of a middle-class milieu. This situation contributes to his emergence as an introvert and reticent individual. During his college years, an acquaintance with a clerk Ramettan, sparks a blossoming friendship between them. Neither Prem nor Ramettan are initially depicted as possessing overt queer inclinations; however, a singular occurrence gives rise to a peculiar situation that alters their relationship. The subsequent absence of Prem in Ramettan's life leads to an inner turmoil that culminates in Ramettan's tragic suicide. Nevertheless, Prem's deliberate silence and self-imposed seclusion harbour varied implications. Predominantly, it appears rooted in his deep sense of guilt and shame stemming from his participation in a homosexual encounter. His guilt is amplified by his choice to conceal this episode from his mother, an action taken to spare her any anguish. This course of action is underpinned by his awareness of the hardships she endured while raising him, prompting him to shield her from the repercussions of his actions.

The guilt of keeping something from his mother haunted him. It sealed his lips. There were moments when he wished to be alone. Then he sought refuge in the toilet. But that

night the closed interiors of the four walls could not provide him solace. ....it was unbearable, but he thought hard. Through the sounds. Throughout the night. What was he? Why did he not, like other boys of his age, look at girls, talk about them, think about them? (186)

Amidst the myriad forms of social condemnations directed towards individuals identifying as gay, perhaps none is as deeply unsettling as the disapproval from the members of the family. The characters in the stories and the play in the present anthology attribute a distinct significance to parental reactions upon the disclosure of their homosexuality. These narratives skilfully subvert conventional familial discourses, thereby accentuating the existing sense of unease and culpability. Correspondingly, Merchant contends that the persistent queries and expectations come from the family, particularly the mother, whose preoccupation with her son's moral integrity in matters of sexuality inadvertently drives the young male towards homosexual inclinations. He aptly notes: "This prohibition/obedience syndrome breeds an ambivalent attitude in the young boy towards mother in particular and to women in general. Either you worship the Madonna or the Mother Goddess as in Latin (or Hindu) cultures or you denigrate women as in the Anglo-Saxon (or Muslim) cultures" (xiii). This provocative generalization by Merchant inadvertently taps into another disquieting facet of the gay experience, one that distinctly mirrors Prem's predicament. Nonetheless, the poignant tragedy and eventual descent into madness experienced by Ramettan, prompted by separation and emotional ambiguity vis-à-vis Prem, seemingly aligns with the conventions of a familiar narrative of unrequited love and dashed romantic aspirations. This narrative strives to transcend marginalization, positioning gay love and emotions within the sphere of conventional heterosexual sensibilities.

Conversely, "Moonlight Tandoori" by R. Raja Rao endeavours to establish a sense of normalcy within the gay experience, trying to align it with the broader spectrum of everyday heterosexual encounters. The narrative revolves around an Indian expatriate residing above the 'Moonlight Tandoori' hotel in UK. Here, his interactions with Khalid, the nephew of the establishment's owner hailing from Bangladesh, conclude in camaraderie. The narrator's sentiment towards Khalid evolves into affection, yet Khalid's reception is less than favourable, leading to the author's inner turmoil and a pervasive sense of guilt. Khalid "did not resist but spoke of my need to have a girlfriend" (87). His unresponsive stance toward the "gay love" inflicts deep emotional distress upon the narrator, ultimately ending in his departure from England, nursing a shattered heart and dashed hopes. The story becomes intricate when it is observed that Khalid pays heed to narrator's advances on account of his lure for good T-shirts, and other materialistic benefits. He has himself been exploited sexually by his uncle because of his economically inferior position, "Then confiding in me he'd tell me how Ahmed his uncle and employer, owner of Moonlight Tandoori, exploited him and I would feel helplessly sorry and my feelings would show (83).

The narrative adopts a straightforward prose style, devoid of explicit descriptions of gay intimacy; instead leading to the narrator's muted affection and emotional resonance for Khalid. This approach mirrors the tender and uncomplicated romantic narratives often found in mainstream literature, portraying the hidden sentiments of one gender towards another. Notably, the author consciously evades any connotations of perversion frequently associated with gay individuals. Instead, the aim is to foster a discourse that encapsulates the inherent complexity of

gay dialogue. The story portrays the silent anguish resulting from unrequited love as a universally human response, transcending the boundaries of gender and sexuality. In this light, the anticipated objective of exploring sexual orientation remains consistent with the preservation of instinctive reactions to fundamental emotions.

The play *Six Inches*, penned by the same author, intricately presents the urban gay experience by exploring the relationship shared between Rashid, a businessman, and Ashok, a fashion photographer. Their lives are depicted as mirroring those of any regular urban couple; navigating the intricacies of their relationship amidst the backdrop of demanding professional commitments. Rashid and Ashok are portrayed as awaiting each other's return at the airport, and sharing intimate dinners. They engage in occasional arguments akin to a married heterosexual couple and subsequently reconcile encapsulating the mundane yet profound essence of an urban partnership. Ashok enjoys living in Rashid's wellfurnished home and this fact creeps up time and again in their conversation:

Ashok: You think I'm your slave.

Rashid: No

Ashok: You keep me in your flat, allow me to drive your car, so you can control my will.

Rashid: No. No. (141)

Rashid on his part accuses Ashok of being straight and faking as a gay, so that he can enjoy benefits provided by him. He calls Ashok a liar and states: "Liar. Voyeur. I know what you were up to in my flat when I was away in U.S. You're not even queer. You pose as one because its trendy" (144). Yet, the narrative takes an abrupt turn, concluding with both characters continuing their individual journeys and unexpectedly encountering two policemen. Remarkably, these law enforcement officials are themselves gay, ultimately culminating in a warm interaction that lacks any undertones of peculiarity or mystery. This denouement underscores the narrative's intent to normalize the gay experience, aligning it with the familiar and commonplace aspects of Indian life. The revelation of the policemen's own homosexual inclinations further accentuates the ubiquity of such orientations among strangers and ordinary individuals, devoid of any vestiges of enigma or grotesquery. The narrative diligently strives to elucidate that gay individuals are not confined to the peculiar realms, but rather, they coexist harmoniously in the social fabric, intertwining seamlessly with the quotidian.

Along with political aim for recognition of the gay sensibility as natural in the Indian society, Hoshang Merchant's anthology contains stories which present another aspect of homosexuality which is child abuse. Since the heterosexual child exploitation is one of the most petrifying truths of the societies, the writer has incorporated the stories of homosexual child abuse too. The story "Shivraj" by Kamleshwar presents the journey of Shivraj, a fourteen-year-old boy who grows up among hermits, taken as a wonder boy and is finally left to corrode in the streets once his charm is lost. There he is maltreated by Sarnam, a deprived creature who provides him shelter. In the another similar story, "Never Take a Candy from a Stranger" by Gyansingh Shatir, the young narrator is molested by his fellow villager Lashkar Singh leaving deep scars of torture on his psyche. Such incidents create a homophobia, or hatred or fear against the gays and homosexuals in general driving them away from the mainstream. The narrator exclaims:

Readers! Childhood is such a mirror of inexperience and simplicity of feelings that it doesn't recognize any blemish of the lover. I felt a piercing pain in my buttocks and felt as

if I was tearing at the seam. I let-out a full-throated cry which rent the air....I stood up weeping and made towards the gate. As he came close to me, drew back in fear, as if he were a monster...By the time I reached home, I was feeling ill...That delicate age! That repulsive incident! That self-restraint! That unnatural sexual experience stuck to me like a shield which defended me from homosexuals in later life (165).

The dreadful aspect of child abuse in gay discourse, comes out comprehensively through these stories. With the help of such narratives the agenda of equivalence for the gays has been entwined in the mainstream discourse.

**Conclusion:**

To sum up, it may be observed that in the works collected by Hoshang Merchant in *Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia*, one hears the language of campaigners. The compositions continually raise inquiries pertaining to the safety of individuals identifying as homosexuals, whether in terms of their sexual security or in broader contexts. In this regard Merchant asks: “Why do those who protest rape never talk of gay rape? Why this conspiracy of silence? The passive gay is subjected to the same humiliation while walking down a street as a woman is in India” (xv). Amidst the inclination toward duplicitous oversimplification, metaphysical generalization, and the endeavour to universalize the specific struggles faced by marginalized segments of society, often stemming from apprehensions of addressing what societal norms deem impermissible, it remains imperative not to disregard the underlying socio-political impetus that pervades the present work in the domain of gay literature. To substantiate the argument Merchant quotes Octavio Paz: “Gay liberation and women liberation are political movements and have nothing to do with human liberation” (xii).

Consequently, Hoshang Merchant, through his unreserved frankness and determined political commitment, unveils the authentic portrayal of the gay community in the Indian society. His purpose is to secure recognition, even if not necessarily immediate respect for his community. In this collection, Merchant adeptly disassociates male bonding from its sexual connotations, effectively transforming it into a resolute political gesture rather than a mere sexual orientation. This transformation serves to purify and reshape the essence of these relationships. The literary works contained in the compilation depict the on-going conflict between intense male-male sexual desires and the prevailing silence enveloping same-sex affection in contemporary India. By comprehensively addressing the diverse dimensions of homosexuality in India from experiences of disgrace, guilt, imposed bisexuality, alienation, to suffering, Hoshang Merchant’s anthology inaugurates a new chapter in the arena of gender studies in India. This contribution stands in contrast to the conventional focus limited to feminism as the solitary discourse in the domain of gender exploration. The anthology effectively disentangles gender and sexual disparities, delving into their interplay both individually and collectively. The intricate interaction of these disparities, as manifested in the compositions contained in this compilation, provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying the production of such texts in the culture. Unlike the predominant approach among many queer activists advocating for equal rights by contesting the patriarchal heteronormative structure, the works here conspicuously sidestep an overtly vehement tone. Instead, they adopt an attitude of embracing queerness as the new norm.

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