

**Indian Poetry in English**  
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**Lecture - 37**  
**Hoshang Merchant**

Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. My dear friends, we have come a long way, but then when something begins, it is also to come to an end. And now we are in the last phase of our lecture and the last phase, we have titled it as Marginalized Voices.

In this we shall be studying some poets, who because of some reason or the other either because of taking up some unusual themes as the topics of their poems and then the delineation of something which we can call unusual.



They actually became or they were rather relegated, but then, we always say that when something is on the margin, it actually speaks more. And among such voices, today we are going to discuss, one very important name and that is the name of the poet, who is Hoshang Merchant.

The moment we talk about Hoshang Merchant, we are actually reminded of what Merchant wrote and how he became a representative of the voice of the voiceless. Because as we have already seen, that while we were discussing Indian Poetry in English, we have heard all sorts of voices. But this voice is unique, because of many reasons.

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**Voices from the Margin**

- ❖ Indian Writing in English assimilates all kinds of writing.
- ❖ It is not confined to dominant discourse alone.
- ❖ Meta-narrative has been challenged by 'little narratives'.
- ❖ Different voices from different discourses have come out.
- ❖ Queer Writing, Dalit Discourse, Tribal Literature, etc. have been much in talk.
- ❖ These voices need our special attention because they are still marginalized in some way or other.

 Swayam 

Indian writing in English, which assimilates all kinds of writing cannot be confined only to the dominant discourses alone. We have already seen, that in the contemporary times with several changes, outside and even in our own country. Meta-narrative has been challenged by little narratives. There have been different voices and different discourses have been resulted namely Queer Writing, Dalit Discourse, Tribal literature we discussed in the previous week. All these actually have been much in talk much in discussion.

These voices also need our special attention, because they are still marginalized in some way or the other. Now, when we talk of the word Queer, naturally many of us actually start thinking whether there has something been wrong. But then my dear friend, while something was in a different state and when there are certain things which could not be talked of in public, now these issues have also attracted the attention of poets and writers.

When we talk about Queer writing especially in Indian writing in English, it started during the 1990s, and in such the themes which can be considered to be a bit unusual are for many of us who are traditionalists.

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## Queer Writing in Indian English Writing

- ❖ Queer Writings started in India during 1990.
- ❖ The theme of homosexuality is not taboo now. People from diverse background are writing about this frankly.
- ❖ Even though homophobia is prevalent in our society, the normative approach to sexuality is challenged in this discourse of homosexuality.
- ❖ Some prominent names in the field of queer writings in Indian English Writing are Hoshang Merchant, Suniti Namjoshi, Ruth Vanita, Eunice de Souza, Salim Kidwai, Vikram Seth, R. Raj Rao, Firdaus Kanga, etc.
- ❖ *The Lion and the Antler*- First Collection of Queer Poems by Shaleen Rakesh



The theme of homosexuality is not taboo now. Earlier, it was actually quite restricted, and people were not in a position to talk about it publically. Even though homophobia is prevalent in our society, but then people do not want to talk about it. And it was actually Hoshang Merchant for the first time, who actually challenged this normative approach to sexuality through his poems.

Some prominent names in the field of Queer Writings, especially in Indian writing in English are-- Hoshang Merchant, then Suniti Namjoshi, Ruth Vanita, Eunice de Souza, Salim Kidwai, Vikram Seth, R. Raj Rao, Firdaus Kanga etcetera. And the first collection of Queer Poems entitled *The Lion and the Antler* was by Shaleen Rakesh.

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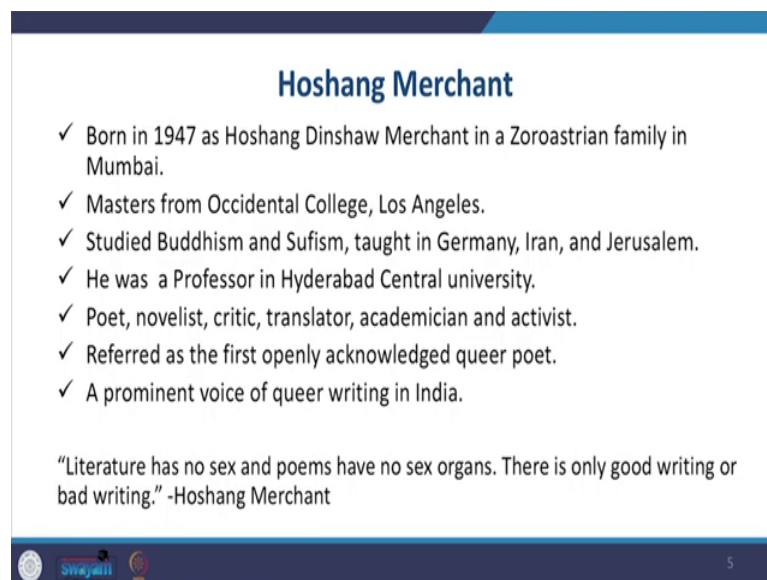
"Of the writings that lay the foundations of Queer Literary genre in India, Yaraana: Gay Writings from South Asia (1999) edited by Hoshang Merchant, Facing the Mirror: Lesbian Writings from India (1999) edited by Ashwini Sukthankar, Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History (2008) edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, Ruth Vanita's Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West, and Hoshang Merchant's Forbidden Sex/Texts: New India's Gay Poets (2009) deserve to be mentioned specifically since these writers have ventured out to break the silences, to point out to the self-willed neutrality and secrecy about homosexual people and their lives that a race has so tactfully managed to maintain over the years. These seminal works are indeed works of literature that attempt to speak about issues that concern homosexual people to reclaim an equal space into the mainstream."

-Chhutan Dey

So, while talking about Queer Writings, it is quite significant to mention one of the observations by Chhutan Dey, who says, “Of the writings that lay the foundations of queer literary genre in India. Yaraana, Gay writings from South Asia...” which actually was the first and foremost and which was actually an eye opener and this was edited by Hoshang Merchant.

Then “*Facing the Mirror, Lesbian Writings* from India and again, *Same-Sex Love* in India, *a literary history* which was edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, very famous names. And Ruth Vanitas Love’s Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West and Merchant’s Forbidden Sex or Texts: New India’s Gay Poets deserve to be mentioned specifically since these writers have ventured out to break these silences,’ I am underlining this word. To break these silences; meaning thereby such things already prevailed in the society, but no one ever dared speak it out in public. So, and this ‘the self-willed neutrality and secrecy about homosexual people and their lives, that a race had so tactfully managed to maintain over the years. These seminal works are indeed works of literature, to say that they are not the works of literature,’ will be perhaps an early conclusion. And these works of literature ‘which attempt to speak about issues that concern homosexual people to reclaim an equal space into the mainstream.’”

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### Hoshang Merchant

- ✓ Born in 1947 as Hoshang Dinshaw Merchant in a Zoroastrian family in Mumbai.
- ✓ Masters from Occidental College, Los Angeles.
- ✓ Studied Buddhism and Sufism, taught in Germany, Iran, and Jerusalem.
- ✓ He was a Professor in Hyderabad Central university.
- ✓ Poet, novelist, critic, translator, academician and activist.
- ✓ Referred as the first openly acknowledged queer poet.
- ✓ A prominent voice of queer writing in India.

“Literature has no sex and poems have no sex organs. There is only good writing or bad writing.” -Hoshang Merchant

Now, when we talk about Hoshang Merchant, Hoshang Merchant was the first person who actually openly acknowledged himself as a Queer Poet. As a Queer Poet, Queer

Indian Poet writing in English. But now who this, Hoshang Merchant was, and why he became so popular and why his works need to be discussed.

And why his works need to be explored that actually remains a point of discussion. Hoshang Merchant was born in the year in which India got independence, and perhaps Merchant also might have realized, that after years and years of secrets, this was actually a time that these secrets ought to be divulged.

It was not a question simply of sex, but it was actually a question of the feelings, it was the question of love, it was the question not only of sexuality as he himself says, it was the question of sainthood. So, he was born as Hoshang Dinshaw Merchant, his full name was Hoshang Dinsaw Merchant.

And he was born in a Zoroastrian family in Mumbai. He did his early education and then he shifted to Los Angeles, where from Occidental College, he did a masters and Merchant had also you know, the advantage of having studied Buddhism and Sufism. He had also the opportunity of teaching in Germany, Iran and Jerusalem. And, he is an academic poet in the sense, that he was a Professor at Hyderabad Central University.

Merchant is not only a poet, but also a novelist, a critic, a translator, academician and activist. He is referred as the first openly acknowledged--- a queer poet. He is supposed to be the first queer voice of India. What Merchant himself says because many of the poets and critics and even scholars have denigrated the writings of Hoshang Merchant.

But then, what Merchant says is—“Literature has no sex and poems have no sex organs. There is only good writing or bad writing.” Now, we would also like to have a look at what Hoshang writes and why we are giving it a different color.

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**General Themes of His Poetry**

- Voice of the 'voiceless'
- Autobiographical details and search for identity
- Challenge to sexual binaries
- Quest for love
- Amalgamation of love and spirituality
- Challenge to social dogmas
- Quest for freedom

He calls himself "a male homosexual Parsi by religion, Christian by education, Hindu by culture and Sufi by persuasion."

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If we have a look at the themes of his poetry of course, Hoshang Merchant is a representative of the voice of the voiceless. Of course, there are certain autobiographical details and search for identity in his poems in a way a Merchant challenges, he actually interrogates the traditional views about love and sex. One can find a quest for love in the poetic world of Merchant.

And this love not only talks about body, but this love talks about the spirit. We will find ample number of poems where Merchant actually tries to find out, how love can not only be sex, rather love can be a sort of spirituality. And that is why, Hoshang is supposedly challenging the social dogmas, his poems actually cry for freedom.

He calls himself "a male homosexual Parsi by religion, Christian by education, Hindu by culture and Sufi by persuasion." Now, what sort of a poetry does Hoshang Merchant write? Hoshang Merchant has got quite a good number of poetry collections to his credit.

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## His Literary Corpus



**Poetry Collections**

- ❑ *Flower to Flame* (1989)
- ❑ *Stone to Fruit* (1989)
- ❑ *Yusuf in Memphis* (1991)
- ❑ *Hotel Golkonda: Poems 1991* (1992)
- ❑ *The Home, the Friend and the World* (1995)
- ❑ *Jonah and the Whale* (1995)
- ❑ *Love's Permission* (1996)
- ❑ *The Heart in Hiding* (1996)
- ❑ *The Birdless Cage* (1997)
- ❑ *Talking to the Djinns* (1997)
- ❑ *Selected Poems* (1999)
- ❑ *Bellagio Blues* (2004)
- ❑ *Homage to Jibanananda Das* (2005)
- ❑ *Sufiana: Poems* (2013)- Collection of 54 poems.




He started his poetic journey from *Flower to Flame*, which came out in the year 1989, then *Stone to Fruit*, *Yusuf in Memphis*, *Hotel Golkonda: Poems* 1991 and 1992, *The Home, The Friend and the World*, then *Jonah and the Whale*, *Love's Permission*, I mean there are end number of collections to his credit.


But one of his collections which actually drew attention worldwide was *Sufiana: Poems* which came out in the year 2013. *His Bellagio Blues*, then *Pelected poems*, then *Hyderabad Quartets* all these are very famous. And they have got a lot of food for thought.

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- ❑ Novel
  - *The Man Who Would Be Queen* (2012)- an autobiographical fiction
- Collected Works
  - *Forbidden Sex/Texts* (2009)
  - *Indian Homosexuality* (2010)
  - *Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia* (1999)- a seminal anthology in the area of gay writing in India.



"As everyone knows by now, I'm a homo-sexual. To write this sentence and to speak publicly, which is a great liberation, is why I write."

Merchant also wrote a novel which is entitled, *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, it is actually an autobiographical fiction, and then there are other critical writings entitled *Forbidden Sex Texts*, *Indian Homosexuality*, *Yaraana* which was the first gay writing from South Asia, it is a seminal anthology in the area of gay writing in India.

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**His Views on Poetry**

“.....poets have no axes to grind. Their objective is the poem itself. However, we poets have to ‘abstract’ our experience to fit it to the reader's experience. We all share the same space/time. Some great poets make their own space and their times. It comes as a surprise to know Whitman, Melville and Dickinson were gay. We do not know them as gay poets but as Transcendentalists even after 150 years. This transcendence is a poem.”

(In an Interview with Meena Kandasamy)

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Now, what are actually Hoshsang’s personal views on poetry? Let us have a look at it what he said in one of the interviews given to another poet Meena Kandasamy. “....Poets have no axes to grind. Their objective is the poem itself. I mean he has already said that there is good writing, there is bad writing, you cannot nominate a writing as consisting of sex or whatsoever; however, we poets have to abstract our experience to fit it to the reader’s experience. We all share the same space and time. Some great poets make their own space and their times. It comes as a surprise to know, he actually refers to some very major and significant names like Whitman, Melville and then Dickinson, they were gay, but do we really consider them as gay poets. No, we consider them as Transcendentalists, even after 150 years this transcendence is a poem.”

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Contd...

A whole race with its hand in pockets  
A something an eye can't see but a whole race knows  
And keeps to itself... ( Alif Alpha )

Each on has his own dream over coffee  
The chef dreams about America  
The waiter dreams custom  
I dream about the waiter.

Poetry is a way to use language without  
colonizing words  
Poetry is away to liberate words  
I cease being a colonizer, I became a free  
man.  
( ' My Lover' for Ashfaque)

My hatred of my father led me to this Love  
Of boys and men, saints and sinners.  
("Couplets written with blessings of Feisal  
Chisti, Nampally Dargah" L 2-3)

So, what Merchant believes is, a poem has to move, a poem has actually to record. It is also said that Hoshang Merchant who himself has acknowledged that he had this problem of homosexuality and all. So, he has in many of his writings mentioned, how he developed a friendship with some even males and with them he enjoyed their company.

And he also had said, in one of the poems entitled *Alif Alpha* what he says,

“ A whole race with its hand in pockets/ A something an eye cannot see, but a whole race knows and keeps to itself....”

I mean he is referring to the secrets and says, that all of us, I mean an entire race, having their hands in the pockets meaning, thereby they hide, they actually want to say, but they do not say it.

And then in another poem entitled *My Lover for Ashfaque* where he says,

“Poetry is a way to use language, without colonizing words without colonizing words.” Now, when he talks about language, you know his views are at times very different and he says, that I have all through, I have loved strangeness and difference. One of his famous collections entitled *Hyderabad Quartets* where he says, that it is not man who writes language; rather it is language which writes man.

And then in another poem entitled *Couplets Written with Blessings of Feisal Chisti, Nampally Dargah* where he says, that why he developed such a sort of fascination towards his own compatriots was,

“My hatred of my father led me to this Love of boys and men, saints and sinners”. And he believes, that all of us have in us not only the males, but also the females. And he says, “Each on his own dream over coffee/ The chef dreams about America/ The waiter dreams about custom/ I dream about the waiter.”

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*Sufiana Poems*

- ✓ Fifty-four poems
- ✓ Language of sexuality
- ✓ Religious yet sexual imagery
- ✓ Bhagsu Nag, Krishna and Radha
- ✓ A self-purifying journey
- ✓ Images of Rumi, Ghalib and Derek Walcott

My lovers say I'm looking for a poem  
 My students say I'm looking for god  
 But I'm neither looking for lover nor poem nor god  
 But for Death which is all of these. (p.49)

Today the boys  
 are at their Sunday bath  
 I watch them strip to the waist  
 And plunge heedless, headfirst  
 into the pond, newly born  
 Their wet limbs ripple  
 in the morning sun  
 As their loincloths fall  
 in coils to the floor  
 Beads of water fall like rainbows on  
 stone And the snake in paradise  
 is aroused once more: Jai Shankar!  
 Jai Jai Bhole Nath!  
 ("Bathers at River Bhagsu Nag,  
 Dharamsala," pp. 80-81)

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So, if one goes on and if one reads the poems of Hoshang Merchant, one will find that not only there is a sort of a spontaneity, there is a sort of genuineness. I mean there is no such a thing as a poet, he hides rather he actually tries to reveal what usually many poets and many individuals per se they try to conceal.

So, his Sufiana poems, which became very popular, fine. We actually should know a little bit about it, because not only was he influenced very much by Sufism and Buddhism; rather he says, in this collection there are of course, 54 poems and majority of the poems are soaked in the language of sexuality.

There are at times, there is a sort of religiosity, but then the imagery that Merchant uses are full of sexuality. But, then that does not mean Hoshang is completely unaware of our scriptures. He also talks of our scriptures; he also gives references from our scriptures. And then he mentions Bhagsu Nag, then Krishna and Radha.

He believes that writing poetry and writing for these categories of people is a sort of self-purifying journey. There are images of Rumi, Ghalib and Derek Walcott. What he says, in one of the poems is:

My lovers say I am looking for a poem  
My students say I am looking for God  
But I am neither looking for lover nor poem nor God  
But for death which is all of these.

So, the ultimate question is, that all of us have to die. So long as we are living, we must not live a life which is borrowed. And then, in one poem after another, we can find references to the companionship of people of the same sex. One poem entitled *Bathers at River Bhagsu Nag* where he gives a very beautiful description of how right from the beginning, we have been instructed to have a homo socio-group, and there that he mentions: "Today the boys are at their Sunday bath."

He actually picturizes how some of the boys who are taking a dip in the water and the poet says,

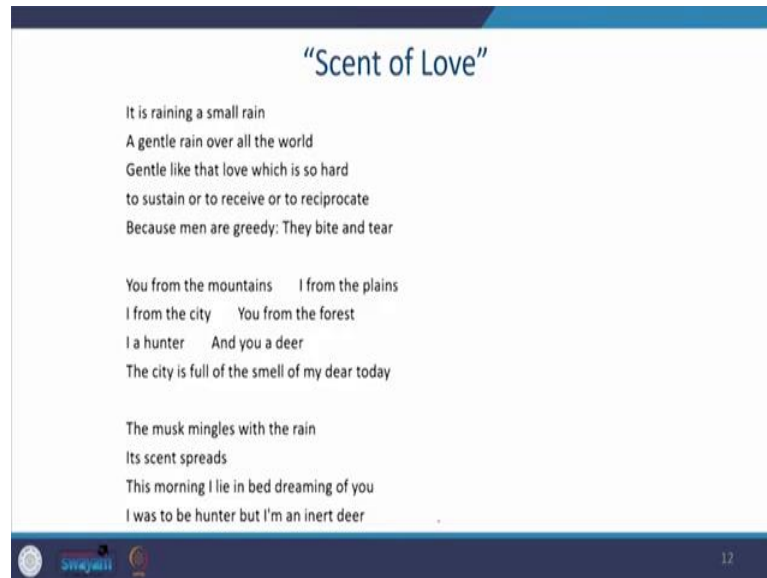
Today the boys  
are at their Sunday bath  
I watch them strip to the waist  
And I plunge heedless, headfirst  
into the pond, newly born  
Their wet limbs ripple  
in the morning sun  
As their loincloths fall  
in coils to the floor  
Beads of water fall like rainbows on  
stone And the snake in paradise  
is aroused once more: Jai Shankar!  
Jai Jai Bhole Nath!

So, not only does the poet refer to our scriptural slogans and all, but then he says that we have been instructed to formulate groups right from the beginning. So, but then if that group develops, a different sort of association, a different sort of relationship, one should always try to find, one should always try to discover a scent of love in that, and then one poem which we can take here, just for the references entitled *Scent of Love*.

Because Hoshang Merchant can be considered thoroughly a poet of love. Of course, we are free to make meanings, interpret things, because he himself has acknowledged. But

then, what he believes is, it is not the question of body, but it is actually a question of soul.

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And he says,

It is raining a small rain  
A gentle rain over all the world  
Gentle like that love which is so hard  
To sustain or to receive or to reciprocate  
Because men are greedy: They bite and tear.

There are at times we will also find, that there is a sort of scathing attack, on this heterosexual identity of people. And that is why he says—‘They bite and tear’.

You from the mountains I from the plains  
I from the city You from the forest  
I a hunter And you a deer  
The city is full of the smell of my dear today  
The musk mingles with the rain  
Its scent spreads  
This morning I lie in bed dreaming of you  
I was to be hunter but I am an inert deer.

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Contd...

Sensing danger you wait  
And I sense danger with you  
Why is the world so crazed for venison?  
I wonder at a living creature  
Who must so eat a living creature!

And suddenly the wounded doe dies for you  
She has dragged herself to you to die before you  
Her stag  
Did she not stay one night inert  
When you slew her in bed  
Just as tonight I wish to slay you?

Why? because I am not able to express myself and that is why he says, “Sensing danger you wait /And I sense danger with you.”

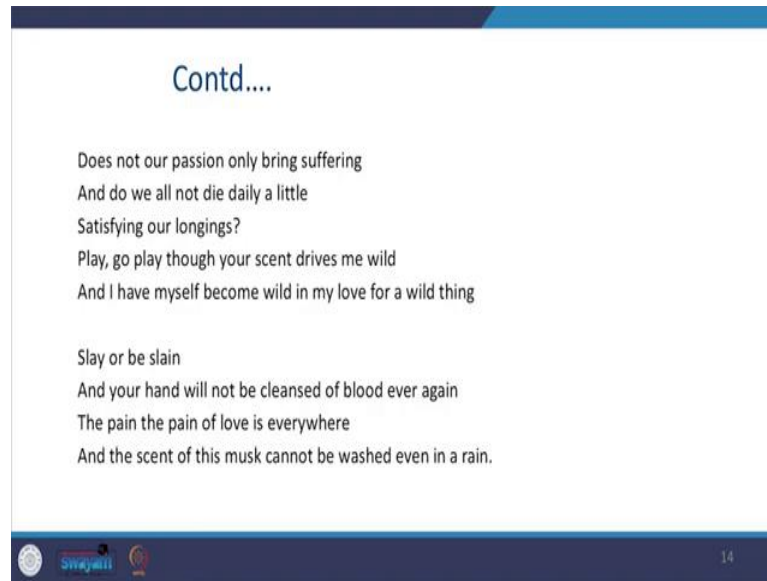
Two people having emotions for each other are not able to meet that is, Why the world so crazed for venison? He raises a very significant question that why is the world after a meat of a game animal?

So, why? When the world is after a meat of a game animal and he says, “I wonder at a living creature/ Who must so eat a living creature!”

So, when we are ready to eat another living creature, fine, I often feel I often wonder, why it is So? why the world is crazy?

And suddenly the wounded doe dies for you  
She has dragged herself to you to die before you  
Her stag  
Did she not stay one night inert  
When you slew her in bed  
Just as tonight I wish to slay you?

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So, poem after poem you can find that the poet actually tries to bring out or to reveal the feeling of love. And then he says,

Does not our passion only bring suffering  
And do we all not die daily a little  
Satisfying our longings?  
Play, go play though your scent drives me wild fine  
And I have myself become wild in my love for a wild thing.  
See the use, become wild a wild thing.  
Slay or be slain  
And your hand will not be cleansed of blood ever again  
The pain the pain of love is everywhere  
And the scent of this musk cannot be washed even in a rain.

So, the poet is actually obsessed with the feeling of love for his partner, whosoever it be, because we find the poet had many such associations.

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From "My Sunset Marriage"

The world is the stuff of dreams  
of martyrs and madmen  
Palestine  
Ahvaz  
Iran burned  
Go to the burning ghettos  
With kerosene and water  
Pour alternately over the fires  
to lengthen the funeral drama to the pyre  
I, poor H.M.  
burning, burning  
Burnt to cinder  
Come back with a begging bowl! (The Ballad of Poor H.M. p 58)

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Now, we can also take one poem, *From My Sunset Marriage*, where the poet once again talks about the burning desire, the burning bodily desire and the poet says,

The world is the stuff of dreams  
of martyrs and madmen  
Palestine  
Ahvaz  
Iran burned  
Go to the burning ghettos.

And he says, everywhere around you, everywhere besides you will find that there is a sort of burning, there is a sort of desire. Go to the burning ghettos

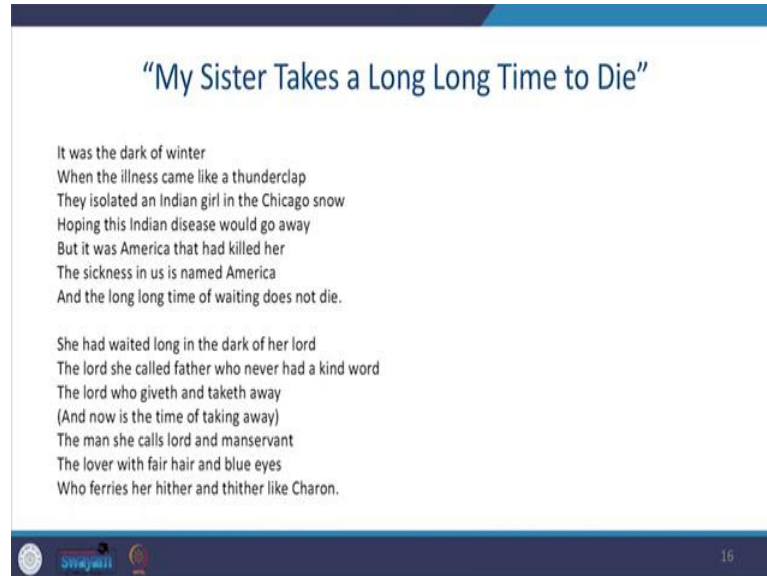
With kerosene and water  
Pour alternately over the fires  
to lengthen the funeral drama to the pyre  
I, poor H. M.

So, H. M. stands for Hoshang Merchant.

I, poor Hoshang Merchant  
burning, burning  
Burnt to the cinder  
Come back with a begging bowl.

So, I am yearning for love, I am asking for love, I am a beggar in the course of love, fine.

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And then again we can take another poem which is entitled *My Sister Takes a Long Time to Die*. Here you can find, how the poet makes use of water imagery and the poet actually talks about the plight of his own sister, and then we can also find that there is a sort of chiaroscuro, fine.

This is actually the treatment of light and shade that you can find in this poem throughout.

She had waited long in the dark of her lord  
The lord she called father who never had a kind word  
The lord who giveth and taketh away  
The man she calls lord and manservant  
The lover with fair hair and blue eyes  
Who ferries her hither and thither like Charon.

So, ultimately our soul, fine, our soul will be ferried by somebody, our dead, you know our dead body will be ferried.

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## Contd...

My sister, she hangs by our slender thread that cannot snap  
Because the long long time of waiting is never dead.

And she called Death, as her brother  
Brilliant, charismatic death  
Death who loves and beguiles and kills  
but does not beget  
Death the brother who no sister in life can wed  
That unfulfilled love, that great longing that does not die  
That long long time of waiting never dies.



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And that is why the poet says,

My sister, she hangs by our slender thread that cannot snap  
Because the long time of waiting is never dead.

And towards the end what the poet says,  
Death the brother who no sister in life can wed  
That unfulfilled love, that great longing that does not die  
That long long time of waiting never dies.  
Love is also a form of waiting.

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## Contd....

And now in the brilliance of summer  
of melting light and butterflies  
She floats between dark and light  
As on a river a swan doubly glides  
One half flesh; one half shadow  
Sister and brother  
Reality and reflection on one river.

She has crossed life's flood on a reed  
She awaits a boat now to ferry her to the other side  
The long long wait she waits for all of us will never die...



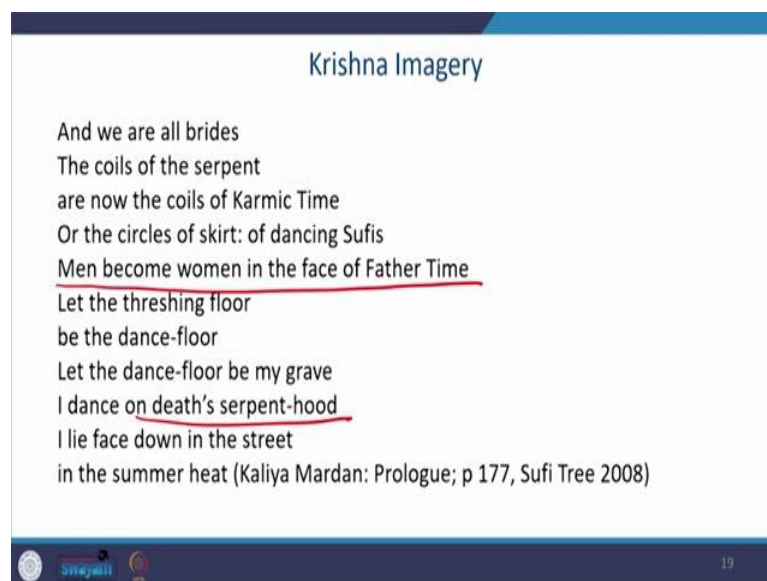
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And again, the poet as he beautifully tries to balance the surreal image of light and shade,  
And now in the brilliance of summer  
of melting light and butterflies  
She floats between dark and light  
As on a river a swan doubly glides.  
One half flesh; one half shadow  
Sister and brother  
Reality and reflection on one river.

But then, to say that this poet only talked about love and that love also which the civilized society can consider as a sort of unusual love. But the poet also takes us back and then he also refers to the Krishna imagery. And then he says, how Krishna also had a sort of love, and it was actually Krishna's love where when the Kaliya Mardan, Kaliya Mardan was actually a venomous snake. And this Kaliya Mardan because of the fear of Garur had come to take a shelter in Brindavan.

And in Brindavan near the Yamuna river, this Kaliya Mardan snake was there. And while Radha was trying to cross the river, this Kaliya Mardan threatened and Radha informed Krishna. And Krishna also tried, but Krishna was also threatened, but finally, it so happens, that Krishna plays over the head of this Kaliya Mardan and Kaliya Mardan finally, is subdued. Now there, you find that how Kaliya Mardan has to submit to the love.

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Krishna Imagery

And we are all brides  
The coils of the serpent  
are now the coils of Karmic Time  
Or the circles of skirt: of dancing Sufis  
Men become women in the face of Father Time  
Let the threshing floor  
be the dance-floor  
Let the dance-floor be my grave  
I dance on death's serpent-hood  
I lie face down in the street  
in the summer heat (Kaliya Mardan: Prologue; p 177, Sufi Tree 2008)

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And then. So, the poet says very beautifully here,

And we are all brides  
The coils of the serpent  
are now the coils of Karmic Time  
Or the circles of skirt: of dancing Sufis  
Men become women in the face of Father Time  
Let the threshing floor  
be the dance-floor  
Let the dance-floor be my grave  
I dance on death's serpent hood.

Towards the end it so happened that, Krishna had danced over Kaliya Mardan's head. Kaliya Mardan- the snake, and you know because of Krishna's weight on Kaliya Mardan's body, Kaliya Mardan had to release all its poison.

"I lie face down in the street/in the summer heat."

So, this is from Kaliya Mardan: Prologue a Sufi Tree.

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*From Hyderabad Quartet*

Walking down the street of banglesellers  
Pleases the woman in me  
Everyone is Radha, everyone Krishna  
Some bhang-drunk are Narsimha in choler...  
There is no man or woman.  
Only the god of love-  
Sweet death! (HQ 41)

Sudama's eyes filled with tears  
And his hovel a mansion appeared  
He'd never left home  
Only invited a friend into his heart.  
(HQ,254)

Swajathi 20

From Hyderabad Quartet also we can take some lines, where the poet mentions and rather admits in a very poetic manner, how he feels himself a woman. And he says, "Walking down the street of banglesellers/Pleases the woman in me."

So, in every man he says in every man there is a woman and in every woman there is a man.

Everyone is Radha, everyone Krishna  
Some bhang- drunk are Narsimha in choler

There is no man or woman  
Only the God of love  
Sweet death.

All of us have to die. And that is why, it is very important that we must understand this reality, and in one of the Hyderabad Quartets, the poet also refers to, how even in our scriptures we find mention of the love between Sudama and Krishna. They were also men. But then, their friendship was also a sort of love and then he mentions how Sudama and Krishna who were classmates, Krishna became the king and Sudama remained what he was.

So, once when Sudama went to visit Krishna, Krishna wanted to eat the rice, you know which Sudama had with him. And finally we find, it was actually the result of their friendship and Krishna's benevolence that by the time Krishna returns, Krishnas hovel is actually turned into a sort of mansion.

And then what the poet says is beautifully described,

Sudama's eyes filled with tears.  
And his hovel a mansion appeared  
He had never left home  
Only invited a friend into his heart.

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**As an Indian English Poet**

- ❑ He has played a crucial role in establishing courses on Indian Gay Literature in Indian universities.
- ❑ He always writes against the hetro-sexual normative discourse of our society.
- ❑ Use of Indian myths and mythological characters like Shiva, Krishna, Gopi, Radha, Sudama.

"My task as a writer was to give tongue to the dumb ones. The beautiful boys I have loved were always too silent to tell Their story. I spoke for those who couldn't speak. I was reprimanded, always, for talking too much."  
(Hyderabad Quartet)

My lovers say I'm looking  
for a poem  
My students say I'm  
looking for god  
But I'm neither looking  
for lover nor poem nor  
god  
But for Death which is all  
of these  
(Sufiana, p. 49).

swajati 21

So, when our scriptures also talk of such love, such associations, why we also cannot talk of why we always say that such a thing is taboo. And that is why, when we have to evaluate Hoshang Merchant as an Indian English poet we can say, that not only has Hoshang Merchant played a very crucial role in establishing courses on Indian Gay Literature in Indian universities.

But as he has himself said, that I am actually trying to create a new world for my boys, who do not understand, he always writes against as I have been saying against the heterosexual normative discourse of our society. And then one can find plethora of details about many celebrated Indian characters like Shiva, Krishna, Gopi, Radha and Sudama.

In *Hyderabad Quartets* what he says,

“My task as a writer was to give tongue to the dumb ones.” He said that this is there within us and we are not able to speak it out. “The beautiful boys, I have loved were really too silent to tell/ their story. I spoke for those who could not speak./ I was reprimanded, always, for talking too much.”

“I was always reprimanded,” but his criticism can be seen in a different light, because as the poet we find that Hoshang Merchant wanted to celebrate love, even though through same sex marriages, same sex loves. And these of late, I think the government has also taken cognizance to that and in several circles this is being talked of getting approved or whatsoever. But then one can always find a sense of alienation, because of the social strictures and structures around Merchant.

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Contd....

- ❑ Celebration of love including same-sex love.
- ❑ Sense of alienation because of the social structure around him.
- ❑ Also tried to understand the psychology of women.
- ❑ Explored sex as a way to liberate oneself, and spiritual longing is there in his poetry.

"...I had already left my body behind  
In an attempt to become angelic." (Alif/Alpha: Poems for Ashfaque)

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Merchant also tries to understand the psychology of women, while he talks about homosexuality and homoeroticism. This does not mean he does not have respect for women, he already had respect for women and he simply explored sex as a way to liberate oneself, sex as a way to scent hood and sex as a way to spiritual longing, we can find it in his poetry.

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Conclusion

- Merchant celebrates spiritual love along with physical love, a journey from imagination to reality.
- Union with soul is more important for him.
- Use of myth by him gives extra sense of cultural touch to his poetry.
- Searches for an identity which has been marginalized in the dominant discourse of our society.

"The body dies  
The soul lives  
What then am I tied to?  
Holding hands?" (Johah and the Whale 16)

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So, before we come to assess a Hoshang Merchant as a poet we can find, that as Merchant believes that, "The body dies/ The soul lives ./What then am I tied to?/ So, this

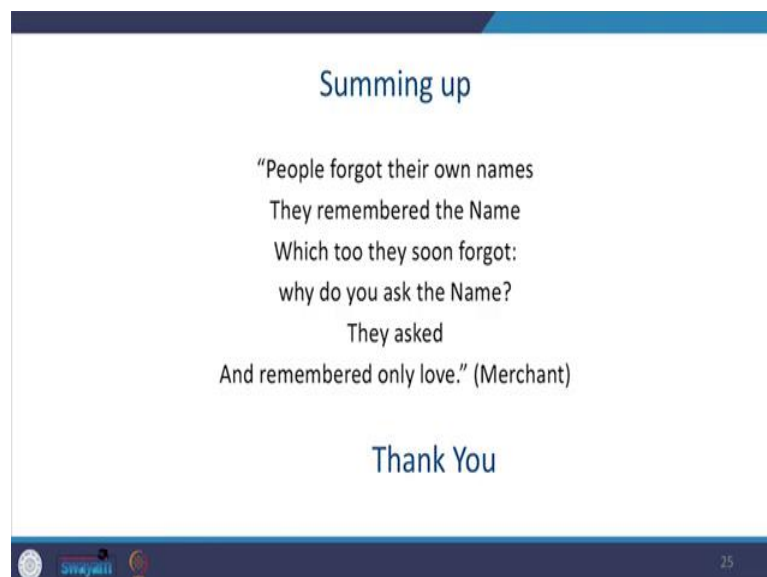
body which is ephemeral, this body which is transitory, fine. "Holding hands," fine. I mean one can always find that, when two males hold each other's hands, then many of us may not approve of it.

But then, as Merchant says, that it should not be seen merely as a meeting of two bodies, or a union of two bodies, rather it is actually a union with soul which is more important. He often uses myth by giving extra sense of cultural touch to his poetry. And one can find a search for identity, which has been marginalized in the dominant discourse of our society.

My dear friends, we can find that Hoshang Merchants poems are in a way a sort of reformation. It is actually a sort of reformation, for a better unity, for actually a better meeting, and then what he himself had said as everyone knows by now, I am homosexual, to write this sentence and to speak it publicly which is great liberation, is why I write.

We can always find that Merchant challenges heterosexist ideology of the patriarchal society and he seems to have erased the presence of the same sex, love. Scathing which is often a quality in the poems of Hoshang Merchant also can be understood as a sort of reclaiming for an equal space. One can always find, a journey from imagination to reality, in a poetic world of Hoshang Merchant. And that is why, he very beautifully says, poetry is a way to use language.

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Summing up

"People forgot their own names  
They remembered the Name  
Which too they soon forgot:  
why do you ask the Name?  
They asked  
And remembered only love." (Merchant)

Thank You

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So, before we sum up this discussion, let us take some major lines from Merchant when he says,

People forgot their own names  
They remembered the Name  
Which too they soon forgot:  
why do you ask the Name?  
They asked  
And remembered only love.

What he says, it is not the name that is important, but when he talks about name he also thinks of sex, it is not the name that matters, what matters is love. It can always not only bridge the gap it can always bridge the boundaries, but it can act as a sort of unifying and a sort of purifying force. With this we come to the end of today's talk.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a good day.