

Critical study of Sandhya Gokhale's Drama "Quest"

Priti Nikam

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Research Scholar, Department of
English, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce
College, Amravati
Email: pritinikam31@gmail.com

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Address for correspondence:

Priti Nikam
Research Scholar, Department of
English, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce
College, Amravati
Email: pritinikam31@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper has presented critical study of Sandhya Gokhale's drama "Quest" that explore themes of matrimony, identity, sexuality, and emotional self-discovery. In the period of two decades, there has been dramatic emergency of public and scientific awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives and issues. This awareness can be trace to large sociocultural shifts in understanding sexual and gender identities, including the emergence of the gay. Sandhya Gokhale is an Assistant Director, screenplay writer and actor. By profession she is an Advocate. She done her post graduation specializing in Civil Rights Law. After that she shifted in America and started her career as litigator. Here she countered modern issues sexual harassment at work place, racism, discrimination, child abuse, homosexuality rights, HIV – related biasness. By facing these parameters of her point of view and understanding was broadened. She also practiced in the USA as litigator for about 10 years. Sandhya Gokhale shifted to India and started her profession as a lawyer in Mumbai High Court also want to follow her keen interest in writing and performing arts. Whatever newer experiences she had in America she pens down in her writing in well mannered. She touched those sensitive issues which are social taboos in Indian scenario yet to unspoken. Her films created awareness and open different layers of issues before the audience. She explored path breaking female protagonist as strong, liberal, they questing on patriarchal dominance, exploring sexuality, free from societal boundaries. Her works Daayara (1996), Anahat (2003), Paheli (2005), Quest (in Marathi "Thang") (2006), Samantar (2009), We Are On! Houn Jau Dya (2013) etc. It's a first English language Indian drama also adopted in movie which won the National Film Award. for Best Feature Film at the 54th National Film Awards, directed by famous actor Amol Palekar. It was released at Brisbane International Film Festival on 5th August, 2006. It made in Marathi and English version simultaneously.

Keywords: homosexuality, acceptance, guilt, love, betrayal, identity.

Introduction

Literature deals with daily life experiences of human beings, simplicity, innocence, love for nature, respect for elders, societal issues (gender, racism, discrimination, etc.). Indian English literature somewhat reflects modern concept, ideas, contemporary living lifestyle, political prejudices, and patriotism to some extent. Its primary object is to increase the readers' awareness and attentiveness. Indian literature has begun exploring LGBTQ, and other similar gender themes more openly. In India it's a big taboo to speak on such sensitive subject. Homosexuality is often not openly discussed in traditional households. Particularly in Marathi families it's not a subject of communication or the free speak; rather it's a sin. *Quest* by Sandhya Gokhale examine sexuality, identity, and social conflict specially in Marathi background.

Indian literature authors, writer use their text, thesis, findings as tool for social awareness, reflection towards the LGBTQ communities for people in society. They have the power to alter how gender and sexuality are portrayed positively in literature, bringing about cultural change and subverting stereotypes and conventions. In India we have some writers who wrote on such sensitive subject like R. Raj Rao; writer who wrote first gay novel in India (The Boyfriend, Six Inches, Underground), Mahesh Dattani (Night Queen), Hoshang Merchant ("Yarana" India's first gay anthology), Vikram Seth (The Golden Gate – talk about homosexuality), Vijay Tendulkar (Mitrachi Goshta – modern Indian play dealing with lesbian theme), Shakuntala Devi (The World of Homosexuals, which included interviews with homosexuals from around the world; considered as one of the first educational books on the LGBTQ+ people) Arundhati Roy (The Ministry of Utmost Happiness) etc. they are going to start new way of light. These narratives give an objection towards the stereotypes and give visibility to lived experiences. Society does not accept certain group of people, they remain neglected, marginalized. it is happened those are lesbian, transgender, gay, bisexual or LGBTQ people. It is pathetic reality of our society all around the world. Gokhale explores untouched topic of gender, identity, and sexuality with her powerful narrative style with a socio – cultural context and give another way of understanding which is beyond the rigid thinking to her readers.

Another side of the coin - acceptance of homosexual person in Quest

On the upper side Quest is actually about the female protagonist's plight and issue of homosexuality. Quest was published in 2006 and it's an urban story of a highly educated working woman Sai; a successful and reputed lawyer in Mumbai High Court who discovers that her husband Aditya a professional chef in five-star hotel is a homosexual; this revelation shakes her and after that family go through different crisis- pain, suppression, weak bonding between relations. They have a son Nilay (7-8yrs) and live moral valuable middle class family life.

Issues faced by Homosexual-

People in the LGBT community are looked down upon all the time. This is a major widespread issue because discrimination against the LGBTQ community is highly prevalent fighting for their equal rights and being accepted by common people. They deal, faces multiple problems, crisis, discrimination etc. like lack of legal protection; suffer from mental health issues, opposed by religion, face discrimination, bullying, violence and other issues like marriage, acceptance, and lack of equality.

Uday – *“we are not criminals, merely a ‘minority’, then why is it so hard to offer us basic decency, simply respect and perhaps equal rights?? Or you think, that is asking for too much? Why are you treating him like a piece of garbage. Maybe, there are still some signs of life remaining in him”.* 1

This dialogue has been spoken by Uday having conversation with Sai. This dialogue is highly criticised against Indian prejudice thinking society. It speculated emotional fervour of the instant and at the same time hidden themes like struggle for identity, dignity and feeling of excluded personality not only in family but also in society. From the dialogue He refers homosexuality as a natural divergent not an aberration within society. He raised the question for marginalized homosexual's Fundamental Rights; why society abolished such a community. Actually, here he raised his voice against the misbehaviour which happened with his homopartner.

Speaking from the pained heart Uday exposed that though homosexual person who emotionally and socially being suppress and abused by continuous rejection from society; yet they are alive and still they are human being. Uday shows his wrath against hypocritic society. He said homosexual persons just expecting from so called society is empathy and treat them as a normal human being. Due to maltreatment of society, they suffer from psychological trauma and loss self-confidence. On the other hand, these lines revealed dark side of society; society claim that society uphold high moral values and all human being are equal and shows humanism but society failed to accept homosexual community as human being and they are one of us.

Quest for Identity -

The title itself is apt. The idea of a “Quest” suggests that sexual identity is not simply revealed—it is searched for, struggled and negotiated. Endmost drama divulged the quest for identity is not an individual's journey but also shows broader transformation of a family (represent as society) in contemporary Indian era where homosexuality is not just a social issue but also homophiles' deepest personal struggle which has been shaped by fear of rejection, societal expectations and guilt as being homophile.

Thus, Gokhale's portrayal highlights how the path to self-acceptance is frequently rife with emotional upheaval, making identity a site of ongoing struggle. Internal conflict reflects that identity is not innate but performed under social constraints. The protagonist's inability to articulate his identity within a heteronormative framework. Aditya is hesitating in expressing his new identity to his wife and father because fear of rejection and dishonour creates emotional fragmentation.

Adity – *“Even for me, it was hard to digest his attraction for me. At first, it seems strange. I started blaming myself..... then slowly I realized that I was reciprocating.”* 2

The protagonist experienced that he became caught between internal desire and external pressure. This reflects the broader Indian condition where acceptance begins internally long before it is recognized socially or legally.

Aditya when reveals his homosexuality to his father Nana, it becomes a moment of tension that exposes the fragility of familial acceptance.

Aditya- *It is one thing to react, but just living charges....?. I didn't intend to cheat on her. I wanted to tell you also ... but...I lack the courage. Moreover, I've been dealing with my own issues. Uday is gay, right since his childhood. Ever at a young age he was aware of his difference. I was not like that.* 3

Gokhale's portrayal thus emphasizes that the journey toward self-acceptance is often fraught with emotional turmoil. It reflects mental health struggles faced by homosexual. He has neither dare to acknowledge oneself totally and nor having daring to deal with all mess.

The homosexual men live 'double' life. they keep their identities hidden from their wives and family members throughout their lives, and thus end up leading 'double' lives. Because they don't want to lose their marriage life and the male partner even. They equally love to family members and partners. This is exactly seen in Quest where Aditya was unwilling to abandon both his wife Sai as well as homosexual partner Uday.

Family and social context –

In countries like India, where family structures are close-knit and influenced by cultural norms, social number of customs, religious traditions of society, LGBTQ people are not even come out with family. If some LGBTQ people reveals their sexual orientation; the life of the person challenging due to the number of customs and religious traditions of our society and thinking and behavior of the family, friends and society towards them. It can give on both optimistic and pessimistic transformation. If the families that responds with open acceptance, it can bring relief, increased self-esteem, and a stronger sense of identity, deeper emotional bond develop. On the contrary,

pessimistic responses open to denial, anger, depression, isolation, guilt, shame, anxiety, emotional and verbal abuse, hate rate, violence, forced to separate from home. Families have more conservative and traditional households, principally in context with homosexuality creates rift, conflict and sometime violation. Families often fear social stigma and loss of honour, which shapes their response more than empathy for the individual.

We can understand by the dialogs of Uday when he talked to Sai, what happen with him when he 'come out' with his family.

Uday- "This was a punishment sanctioned in the honorable presence of my parents and executed by my own two brothers. You know why? so that our family's reputation and standing would not be tainted. And this would not be forgotten by me till the grave." 4

Most of LGBTQ community person will experience non acceptance from their dear ones especially from their parents due to their sexual proclivity. Infact, gigantic motive is parents have fright about their position and honour in the society will mingle and it's strenuous to live. In this drama Uday's parents and his brothers rejected him and toucher violently and humiliated him. The height of cruelty was when his family his own parents and two brothers punished him by burning him from hips to knees when he was come out at the age of eighteen. This situation is so pathetic and heart touching. From this ruthless moment Gokhale wants to show the mentality of society towards homosexual people; rather supporting and understanding their own child they do demonic behavior just for the preservation of honour and reputation in society. Sandhya Gokhale very smartly picturizes this condition to her readers. Such type of experiences can have long-term psychological consequences and affect future relationships and trust.

In the eyes of family-

Human kinship is not just light and dark. Family plays pivotal role in shaping the individual's well-being and identity. The drama urge that transformation is possible but when families pass beyond the horizon of rigid norms and involved in individual's reality. Embracing and psychological bear shapes the lived happening of homosexual individuals. Upper side of drama we find out Sai is the main protagonist who struggles with questions of identity, betrayal from life partner, love and societal norms. Conflict came when she knew that her husband is homosexual. Instead of reacting with straightaway anger and hate rate, Sai begins a journey of introspection and understanding. Though Sai represents modern and highly educated working woman as lawyer believes in rationality but in the case of her husband, Aditya's homosexuality disturbed her and unable to understand all this chaos. Despite the conflict, Quest also gestures toward possibility of positive changes. Particularly educated families gradually shift their attitude. Instead of doing melodrama at home, she took some time to understand and introspect all this mess. She discussed with her mother, father-in-law and colleagues fortunately she got positive response that is acceptance. On the other hand, Aditya's father accepts him and his new identity also in normal way and shows his support and stand with him in his crucial period. He spoke,

Nana – Look Adi, once you accept that homosexuality is a genetic fact.... 5

Complete acceptance and inner transformation can be happened by communication, empathy and understanding but for smoothing it takes time.

Being an advocate Sai handle such types of cases for her clients but such things are happened in her life; she num. shock and can't understand what she does now? How does she deal with this? She heisted to sharing this with her near ones. Sandhya Gokhale shows good bonding and understanding between father-in-law and daughter-in-law. When Aditya's father talked with Sai on his son's behavior and his situation and he became guilty about his son's behavior; he thinks that he wasn't a good father, not nurture him properly.

Sai- "Being homosexual is no fault of Adi's. Rather, it is a new identity for him."

"Homosexuality is neither inherited nor it is dependent on nurturing." 6

Sai's inner transformation helps her to understand Aditya's sexual orientation. And her point of view changes when she accepts Aditya as a human being not marginalize. When she went to meet Uday she reveals that she also accepts her and Aditya needs his company. Her last dialog was -

Sai - "He needs you, Uday. (Uday pause) Please" 7

Another plot is interwoven – AIDS issue

Sandhya Gokhale has her fingers in many pies implying from homosexuality to HIV. She skillfully weaves another wider theme of discrimination against AIDS sucker. Its wonder how the society is so hypocritic! AIDS sucker's son has been expelled from the reputed school just because of his father. Learning institutes are such places where everyone is well educated and developed radical and scientific thinking in students and such place where students, their parents along with teaching faculties who spanked Yatin; also forced him to sit alone in the classroom and tortured to a small kid by asking embarrassing questions. How could be they do it. It shows the horrible side of hypocritic society. Though it is shocking but reality of a society is as. By interweaving this subplot, she really numbs us and give a ray to broaden readers understanding and thinking. When Mrs. Barve came to meet Sai and show a letter of school. Sai become incense immediately take an action against school. Gokhale turned a page of her drama and make it as a turning point of Sai's life. Also, we may say that it helps Sai's subtle transformation. Though Mrs. Barve and her son Yatin was suffering from trauma, they both support to Mr. Barve. Here Gokhale want to imply – if you give support and love to victims, they also want to live a life.

Sai's quest for searching a clarification for her mess up life; she gets crystal clear clarification. She totally introspects and accepts his new identity - 'Homosexuality' with open minded. She broadened her perspective and

understand it by Aditya's point of view. From this incident we concluded that gradually we accept our love ones in any condition because love is the only thing which make a bonding strong and stand firm in any difficult situation. Lakdawala who lost his young son has taken responsibility of Yatin's education up to higher education level by sponsoring scholarship on his son's name 'Faroukh Trust'. Once again Gokhale reflects positive change happened in the society if only you understand victim's situation.

Film Adaptation

To reach mass audience and want to elucidate a message more immediate, effective, accessible and give a new way of thinking, film adaptation is one of the most important forms of interlinkage between literature and film. Original message represents on screen and it convey through character's dialogue delivery, facial expression, body language, pause, background music and so on to give proper impact on audience. Even though by content it's a bold and sensitive topic drama in Indian scenario, Brisbane International Film Festival gave permission for this film and film won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in English at the 54th National Film Awards. Quest is Indian play movie directed by Amol Palekar in both languages English and Marathi (in marathi its Thang) released in 2006. In lead role Mukta Barve as assistant of Sai, Rishi Deshpande as Adity, Mrinal Kulkarni as Sai and Shishir Sharma as Uday.

Conclusion

Literature and cinema help us to understand the concept of tricky subjects in better way one of theme is sexual orientation. People with homosexual orientation face many hurdles including the conflicts in acknowledging their homosexual feelings, the meaning of disclosure and the problems faced in coming out. Human sexuality is complex and diverse. We need to focus on people's humanity rather than on their sexual orientation community. *Quest* is not just about a marital crisis but about understanding human complexity. Quest is also about finding answers in black hole. It encourages viewers or readers to put aside prejudice thinking and embrace them with love and empathy by presenting a daring and layered picture of sexuality and relationship, particularly in the Indian context. Gokhale represents the possibility of problems if happen in someone's life; how we handle such problems Or are we able to handle such problems?

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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