

Quest For Love And Self- Fulfilment In Vikram Seth's The Golden Gate

Dr. Rama Mishra

E-mail Id : mishra.1630@rediffmail.com

Dr. Mohd Shamim, Associate Professor, Halim Muslim PG College, Chamanganj, Kanpur, UP, India. Email id: shamimmohd2009@gmail.com. Mobile no:8188865653

Gay relation or Homosexuality is a romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same sex or gender. It also denotes to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related manners, behaviours and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. During the period of 1980s and afterwards most of the people accepted the extensive concept of homosexuality or gay relation. The theme of homosexuality was frequently merged into otherwise traditional speculative fiction stories works apparent that went beyond simple representation of homosexuality to systematic consideration of significant issues relevant to LGBT community. This development was helped by growing number of openly gay or lesbian authors. Specialist gay publishing presses and a number of awards recognizing LGBT achievements in the genre emerged, and by the twenty first century obvious homophobia was no longer considered acceptable by most readers of speculative fiction. At the same time, there was an increase in representation of homosexuality within non-literary forms of speculative fiction. From the twentieth century till now, Film makers, and writers continues several times in highlighting the LGBT themes. This effort helps them to gain media attention and controversy while the perceived lack of sufficient representation, along with unrealistic depictions, arouses criticism from LGBT sources.

By the twentieth century, the discourse on the subject of homosexuality became more open and society's understanding of it involved. A number of novels with frankly gay themes and characters began to appear in the area of mainstream or art literature. An English Critic Mark Lilly wrote a book *Gay Men' Literature in the Twentieth Century*. This book is based on the theme of gay relationship. In this book, there is an essay "The Love Poetry of the First World War". The essay begins by commenting on the strong feelings between men evident in war conditions and the general reluctance to accept the presence of homoerotic undertones, in such relationship. Mark Lilly has written the following lines:

A man of mine
Lies on the wire
And he will rot

And first his lips
The worms will eat.
It is not thus I would hev him kissed
But with the warm passionate lips
of his Comrade here.

(Lilly 78-79).

In these lines poets wants to express these homosexual feelings. The poet is very certain that there is no possibility of a real physical expression of these feelings. This is because the recipient is dead. There are many writers who present LGBT themes in their fiction like Andre Gride, Bayad Taylors, Edward Prime Stevenson, Thomas Maan, Khushwant Singh, Taslima Nasrin and Vikram Seth. They had played a vital role in revealing LGBT themes in their writings.

Vikram Seth is one of the most prolific writers of English in Indian Literature. He has received several awards like Sahitya Academy Award, Pravasi Bhartiya Samman, W.H. Smith Literary Award and Crossword Book Award. He also got a Padma Shri Award in 2007. His writing has received world wide acclaim and in 2001 he has conferred the OBE (Orders of the British Empire) for his services to Literature but with true artistic stoicism Vikram Seth's upbringing in an intellectual inclined family, together with a life spent in the United Kingdom, helped shape his liberal views on Hindu Society and English people. He has written many novels like- *The Golden Gate*, *A suitable Boy*, *An Equal Music*, *A suitable Girl*. In all the four novels, Seth also unveils the socio-political and economic conditions of the newly Independent India and other countries.

The objective of this paper is the presentation of a Gay relationship in Vikram Seth's novel *The Golden Gate*.

Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* was his first novel. It was published in 1986. This is a novel in verse composed of 590 onegin stanzas (Sonnets written in iambic tetrameter with the rhyme scheme following the unusual ababccdeffegg pattern of Eugene Onegin). It is set in a metropolis, Loss Angeles of United States of America, a symbolic location of twentieth Century American culture. This city has it's own more, values and life styles. In the so-called modern life, an individual has shrugged off his familial and regional associations in order to attain success. Hence, San Francisco can also symbolize Urban Indian Society. The protagonist of the novel, John Brown is a young, employed, healthy, ambitions, self-possessed, but depressed person. John desires for a family that will help him to overcome with solitude, but he constantly changes partners which do not allow him to settle down. Through the matrimonial advertisements, he comes in contact with Liz, a young urban professional working in a law firm, who finally deserts him and marries Phil. Phil Weiss is an

another character in the novel. He is a Jew, a computer expert. He has opted out of Lungless Lab, a nuclear power plant, a nuclear weapons, are harmful for mankind and civilization. Later, he works for the promotion of peace and harmony. Though Phil is bisexual, yet he is able to establish a family. After having been left by Claire, Phil marries Liz who gives birth to him a baby. He proves to be a caring father and lavishes all his attention on Paul, his son by the ex-wife.

Homosexuality is one of the significant themes of modern literature and has given rise to Gay literature. Seth's *The Golden Gate* may also be considered Gay literature as a large part of it is concerned with the Phil-Ed affair. Ed Dorati is another character in the novel. He is a brother of Liz Dorati. His age is twenty-three. He is passionate and has a silent nature. He is a firm believer in spiritual aridity. He is always caught in a dilemma between his religious beliefs and his natural homosexual preference. In the fourth chapter of the novel, Seth shows a party scene. The party scene ends with heavy drink of resulting in the homosexual behaviour of Ed and Phil. The act is repeated many times subsequently while Phil has neither any sense of guilt and repentance. Ed feels guilt, quotes the *Bible* and confesses, but does not want to break his relation with Phil rather he feels "unaccustomed Pain" at their separation. Ed shares a soft corner in his heart for Phil, but he is unable to come to terms with his feeling of guilt as a result of Catholic upbringing. Ultimately, he breaks away from the relationship. Ed is a shy man and hesitates to talk to anyone. It is Ed, who asks to be introduced to Phil at Liz and John's housewarming party but once the introduction is over he is "reduced to numbness" (Seth 81). But as long as it lasts it becomes visible to the reader that the Phil-Ed relationship has all the love, warmth and sharing that truly characterizes the best man-woman relationship. Besides of light hearted reference and romance the immoral part of a story, the reader can feel the purity and almost exalted quality of their relationship. It appears in these lines:

As Phil talks on, his eyes grow radiant.
Ed thinks of the first time they met.
The weeks have warped the
placid gradient
On which his even wheels were set.
Neither the sense, at every meeting,
Of his heart's full and rapid beating,
Nor the abrupt and scolding rush
Of redness to his face, the flush
When he feels Phil's eyes resting on him,
But something infinite and slow
And tide-like holds his life in town.
The salt of human love upon him,
To it his leached will yields control,
Whether it stings or heals his soul.

(Seth 174)

It is seen that Ed is unable to handle either his homosexual preference and reconcile them to his faith and as such there is a struggle between to extremes of his life. Phil finds it strange that a God would object to sex between two men but it is this inability of Ed to see other persons or simply human beings that form the harshest crime of his character. Ed has neither the loyalty to hold his religious faith nor he will to give up his homosexual desires. In fact, time and again Ed returns to Phil to have sex only to burn in self - punishment and hate afterwards. Finally, his religious conviction emerges victorious over an offence against his principles. The complete personality and temperament of Ed Dorati can be understood in the words of Seemita Mohanty :

Ed Dorati is twenty-three, “
intense,athletic, / silent “
(4.24),and caught in a
dilemma between his
religious beiefs and his
natural homosexual prefrences.
He shares a tender relationship
with Phil, but is unable
to come to terms with his feelings of guilt, a consequence
of his Catholic upbringing.
He ultimately breaks away
from the relationship. But
as long as it lasts it is
clear to the reader that
the Phil-Ed relationship has
all the love, warmth and
sharing that truly characterizes
the best man - woman relationship.
Inspite of the rather light hearted reference
to censors, the reader can
feel the purity and almost elevated
quality of their relationship.
(Mohanty 131).

In the Eighth Chapter, Seth exposes the strong feeling of sexual love between Phil and Ed. Phil loves Ed's physical stature but Ed believes in keeping their relation as a friendly and he does not want to involve in sexual relation. There was an argument between them. In the next chapter, Phil and Ed manhandle each other when Phil wants to sleep but Ed wants to talk. A mark occurred on Phil's face but soon both of them accept their situation thinking that

they involved in intense love. While Ed quotes the Bible in his support Phil persuade him to avoid all religious faith but fails to change him. Their passionate love is clearly visible in these lines:

No more to say. They change Unsleeping,
On the same bed they lie apart
(What terrifying miles), each keeping,
Unshared, his bitterness of heart,
The longing each feels for the other,
Their unburnt love.

(Seth 189)

The character of Ed, Liz's brother, represents the strong disapproval of homosexuality and the character of the Phil praises it. There are two groups of people one group is represented by John, who fails even in the pursuit of female love, and another group represented by Phil who succeeds in both homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. After having been deserted by Claire, Phil falls in love with effeminate Ed. John is a firm advocate of the anti – homosexuality campaign. John believes that gay and family life are to opposite poles and it is impossible for one to sustain the life of gay and the life of family simultaneously. Furthermore, he opines that men and women are designed to mate with the opposite sex so as to reproduce but Phil does not agree with John's opinion and says that homosexuality and family life are not uncompromising. Phil's attempts are not only to justify but also to glorify homosexuality. He is not oppose to the established assumptions and takes refuse in the realm of science and rationalization to escape sexual repression and religious belief. Seth clearly describes their physical encounter. These passionate scenes make fun of heterosexual love. Seth projects the Phil-Ed affair as romantically as the John-Liz affair. It is clearly visible in these lines:

.... Trembling

He moves his hand across the space
-- What terrifying miles – assembling
His courage, touches Philp's face
s And feels him tense up and fo rigid.
“I'm sorry,” Ed says, in frigid,
Half-choking voice, “I thought you might—
I didn't mean—good night.”
Taut with a cataleptic tension
They lie, unspeaking. Phil thinks, “ Why
Be so uptight? He's a great guy.
I've never bothered with convention.

God! It's a year that I've been chasto
And puts his arm around Ed's waist.
(Seth 86)

In the novel *The Golden Gate*, Seth unveils the life of young and prosperous professionals as well as the life of depressed and lonely persons. Bisexual Phil is attracted towards gay Ed, but Ed, a devout catholic is tormented by sexual guilt. Phil accepted his spiritual ideas, and attracted toward Liz. Finally Phil marries her.

In the article "Chapter 2: Social Acceptance", it has been said that many countries now have given the value of social acceptance to Gay, Lesbian, homosexual, Transgender inspite of the religious negations except for such activities of fear that such relations would create a confusion in the family institution. (www.pewsocialtrends.org). Seth seems to focus at this point to maintain the sensitive relationship of male-female and heterosexual relations pious by nature and by religious scruple. This is the way to feel the pulse of American Society.

In Modern American Society, sexual relationship between man and man as well as woman and woman has become an idea that has become very popular. It is a social reality and even the marriage between man and man is legalised by law. Seth portrays a range of loves in this novel which are possible and acceptable in a modern metropolis evincing a unique culture and lifestyle and the characters' attitudes to love reveal their attitudes to life, to issues though they ate beyond the reach of romantic or sexual love.

The novel is a gentle satire on the moral ideas and attitudes of American society. Through this novel, Seth gives a message that sexual self-acceptance, meaningful commitment, sincere love and stability in friendship are the basic tenets of an authentic life.

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