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An Indian Tale on Homosexuality

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Abstract: This is a review of one of the earliest literatures from Independent India written on homosexuality. Mitrachi Goshta, a Marathi (a local language from the state of Maharashtra,

India) play, is one of the few Indian literatures that does not portray homosexuality as a disease or as an object of comedy. The author, Vijay Tendulkar, has exhibited sensitivity while dealing with the subject, which is laudable, considering the time period when he wrote it. Even now, homosexuality is considered a taboo and something to be ashamed of in the Indian society. Although, things are changing for the better, there is a lot left to be desired, even in the present 21st century. The researcher, while reviewing the play, has also connected it with the present-day society, and checking if the situation today is any different from the one portrayed in the play.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Vijay Tendulkar, homosexuality literature, Vijay Tendulkar's view on homosexuality, Indian literature, homosexuality in Indian literature, homosexuality and society, Vijay Tendulkar playwright.

Introduction and Summary

Vijay Tendulkar was a leading playwright, movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social commentator. He has more than fifty publications to his name. Many of his plays have become Marathi theatre classics and have been translated and portrayed on stage in numerous Indian languages. He has been bestowed with a string of prestigious awards such as Padma Bhushan, Vishnudas Bhave

Memorial Award etc. for successfully raising social issues through his plays.¹

Tendulkar claims that he is a writer first and a playwright later. He says that he has survived by writing, and not just economically. Even when writing as a ghost writer, i.e., writing in someone else's name, he claims to have enjoyed it, despite knowing the fact that he will never receive credit for that work. He claims to write by completely assuming the role in which he had to write, and thus molding his language accordingly.² "The one Characteristic of my play that I can legitimately boast of, is characterization. My characters are not cardboard characters; they do not speak my language; rather I do not speak my language through them; they are not my mouthpieces; but each of them has his or her own experiences and expression. This is felt more in the original version of my plays because of the nuances and variations of speech I attribute to my characters. In a translation some of it is lost- at times, a lot of it."³

Mitrachi Goshta remains one of the least performed plays of Vijay Tendulkar.⁴ Set in the pre-independence era, the play tells a complex yet engaging tale of heterosexual and homosexual love. The story begins with Bapu finding a picture of Mitra. They soon start talking and Mitra gradually opens up to him. She tells him about her childhood and how she always

¹ Tendulkar, Vijay, *Collected Plays in Translation*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

² Id.

³ Taken from Sri Ram Memorial Lecture, 'The Play is The Thing', Lecture 1, 1997.

⁴ Mitter, Suprita 'Play it Like Vijay Tendulkar', Mid-Day, 1 July 2016, [Play it like Vijay Tendulkar \(mid-day.com\)](https://www.mid-day.com/story/entertainment-nation/play-it-like-vijay-tendulkar-20160701)

played with boys. Then one day, Mitra attempts to commit suicide. Bapu asks her about the reason for her suicide attempt. Mitra at that point opens up about her issues. She reveals to him how the elderly folks in her family established a dread of men in her mind when she couldn't even comprehend why men were risky. She was the sort of girl who loved to play with boys. She didn't care either way if the young men played harsh with her, in fact she enjoyed it. Quite soon her family chose to set up her marriage with a decent young man. She had to keep up cordial binds with him and she complied. However, she had no affection for him, or any other man. She felt no actual rush, no energy when she was in the company of men. She started to believe that she was insufficient in a way since she didn't feel the same way about men as the other girls of her age did. There was a servant in her home who had shown interest in her multiple times, so, she decided to sleep with him. But unsurprisingly, she was unable to go through with it. She realized, that she will never have any intimate feelings for a man and that it is unimaginable for her to be a man's life partner. This realization pushed her over the edge and she decided to end her life.

Mitra stars as a male character in the college play alongside Nama who acts as her love interest. After the play, Mitra reveals to Bapu that she feels for Nama what other girls feel for a man; she has fallen head over heels for Nama. She pleads with Bapu to let her and Nama use his room, hesitantly Bapu concurs. However, Nama never shows up. Mitra later uncovers that it is Manya Dalvi who doesn't allow Nama to see her. She is fixated on Nama and builds up a poisonous mentality. She

asserts that regardless of Nama not having any desire to see her, she won't rest; she won't let Nama off until she gets her. Mitra even requests that Bapu uncover some dirt on Dalvi, which Bapu refuses to do. Meanwhile Mitra writes various anonymous letters to Nama and Nama's father in order to blacken Dalvi's name, she even forges Bapu's handwriting and posts the letter in his area. Dalvi gets a hand on those letters and beats up Bapu believing that it was he who wrote the letters. Later, Dalvi walks in on Nama and Mitra in Bapu's room. He is filled with rage and threatens to kill Mitra if she ever brings Nama to the room again. On a different note, Pande, Bapu's roommate, who had fallen in love with Mitra leaves the college for a war in either Africa or Europe, after he gets to know that Mitra is a homosexual and he has no chance with her.

Nama and Mitra start meeting again without Dalvi's knowledge, despite Bapu's protests to Mitra. Later Dalvi comes to Bapu's room and apologizes to him for beating him up. He asks if he would sub let his room to him and Nama for some time. Bapu manages to make some excuses and lay Dalvi off. He later tells Mitra about this. Horrified, Mitra pleads with Bapu to not lend his room to Nama and Dalvi, she proposes that Bapu empty his room and give it to her. Bapu denies and says that he'll empty the room but then she will have to purchase it from the landlord. This angers Mitra and she abuses and insults Bapu, while he moves to a new room with two roommates.

Nama opens up to Bapu and tells him that she is afraid of Mitra. She tells him that she feels suffocated and dominated by her. Bapu indirectly tells all of this to Mitra. Agitated, Mitra

claims that she can make Nama eat dirt if she wants to. She threatens to make their relationship public in order to break Nama's marriage if she refuses to continue meeting with her. After this incident, Babu builds up an aversion towards Mitra, a strong rage. He decides to help Nama and do all that could be within his reach to liberate her from Mitra's hold. Babu visits his hometown for a few days and when he returns, he comes to realize that Nama and Mitra's affair was distributed in a magazine story and had become a serious public scandal. He meets with Mitra who discloses to him that when stood up to by the college authorities, Nama initially excused their relationship as obviously false and later said that she was deceived and coerced into it. While Mitra may be confronting rustication, Nama moved away without any penalty and only had to tender an apology. And with this revelation, Babu's indignation died down, he was still revolted by the manner in which Mitra had treated Nama; yet now she was in isolation and he was unable to abandon her during such a period.

Babu later meets with Nama, she tells him that she is moving to Calcutta for her marriage. She makes swear not to tell any of this to Mitra. However, unable to hold it in, he reveals all of this to Mitra. He tries to reason with her and make her forget Nama. He asks her to let Nama move on and not visit Calcutta as he had made an oath to never share this information with her. Unmoved by Babu's reasoning, Mitra pretends to agree with him but later ditches him and goes to Calcutta. When she comes back, she has a huge fight with Babu and they break up. Meanwhile, Babu's roommate Pande returns from war. The two of them along with Dalvi go for a couple of drinks at The Army Club. As they are drinking, Pande reveals that Mitra is

now a regular at their club. She gets intoxicated and passes out as the army officers have their way with her. Unable to believe this, Bapu gets up to leave. However, Sumitra enters the club, wearing an extremely outrageous costume with lipstick on. She tosses drink after drink, all the while abusing Bapu. She passes out from all the alcohol and two army officers carry her out. As he witnesses the incident, he wonders if he is to blame for Mitra's current condition. He forces himself to accept that he has not done anything wrong and drowns himself in work. Later, Dalvi tells him that Mitra is no more. She committed suicide. The play ends with Bapu slumping to the ground, with his head between his knees as he is engulfed by a deadly silence.

Tendulkar claims that he was in his teens when the woman who became Mitra in *Mitrachi Goshta* came into his life.⁵ This was during the 1940s. Many years after that, one of his friends mentioned Mitra. It was via this friend that he came to know about Mitra's homosexual nature. Homosexuality and lesbianism were a concept alien to Tendulkar and the society in general during those times. It was something unheard of. It was during the mid-50s that Tendulkar wrote a short story featuring Mitra, titled '*Mitra*', however, it had no reference to her homosexuality. It was simple story about the relationship between a boy in his early twenties and a slightly older young lady who enchants and terrifies him simultaneously. Writing a play featuring same-sex relations, during those times, was out

⁵ Extract from Preface of *A Friend's Story*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

of the question. Yet, numerous years later the play in its present form materialized.⁶

The play was staged for the first time in 1980, starring Rohini Hattangady as Mitra.⁷ The play was not well received by the audience. It was despised by women and sneered at by men. Rohini claims that although the play was not a commercial success, those who did watch it remembered it as an 'unforgettable' experience.⁸ "This play may have been ahead of its time, but it was received quite well by the audience. It ran for a long time and we staged it 25 times," recalls Hattangadi.⁹ Homosexuality was and still remains a taboo in the society.

Characters

Mitra / Sumitra

Mitra is the protagonist of the play. The character is based on a real woman. Tendulkar first saw this woman in her elder sister's college play, and just like in the play, the woman was playing the character of a man. She played the character so well, that when she entered on the stage, there was a respectable silence in the audience. Usually, a woman playing a male character was met with catcalls and sneering by young boys, but not that night. It was through a mutual friend that

⁶ Supra note 1 at Preface xvii.

⁷ Supra note 1.

⁸ Supra note 5.

⁹ Avachat, Vishakaha, *DNA*, 5 August 2008, [But homosexuality is not taboo \(dnaindia.com\)](http://dnaindia.com)

Tendulkar came to know about the woman's lesbian nature, something he had never heard of before.¹⁰

Bapu in the very beginning of the play says that "This is the love story of Mitra". By her very nature Mitra was a rebel, going against the values of the society and her family. A 'masculine girl', is how she's been described in the play. Being a lesbian, she had to face unprecedented troubles in the society as she was never able to fit in. As a kid she loved to play with boys as opposed to girls. She would play gilli danda and even Kabaddi with them. Her family members, mostly the males in the family, imposed absurd rules on her. She was not allowed to play with boys as she entered adolescence. Her whole adolescence she wasn't allowed to interact with boys but was suddenly expected to marry one. However, she felt nothing when she was with him, no romantic feelings at all, while the boy felt it all. She even tried to get intimate with a male servant of her house but was unable to go through with it. She felt that she was insufficient and incomplete since she did not feel anything for the opposite sex. Being in a constant battle with the society and with herself, took a toll on her. She had nobody in her life, nobody to rely on, until she met Bapu.

She was able to be herself around Bapu and felt at ease, However, she did not treat him the way he deserved to be treated. She would constantly insult him, walk all over him and would ask for favors. Mitra was not perfect. She was many a times indifferent to Bapu's sufferings and apathetic to his plight. She forged his handwriting on letters she wrote to Nama and Nama's father, which ended up with Bapu getting

¹⁰ Supra note 5.

badly thrashed, she never apologized for this and in fact laughed at his face and called him incompetent and a coward. She was also blackmailing Nama, threatening to break her marriage if she refused to continue with their affair. She treated Nama, not as a person but as a thing, something which she had to have in her possession. Mitra would also be too aggressive and dominating with Nama, at one point, even trying to strangle her when she joked about getting married.

Mitra would constantly hurt those around her, the ones who cared about her (Bapu and Nama). A behaviour which was rooted in her troubled childhood. She was constantly disappointed by people around her, so she eventually stopped trying to impress others and gradually began projecting this trauma onto the people who actually did care about her. She never got the love and affection a child should get from his or her primary caretaker and so, she started seeking a motherly figure in Bapu; someone who would always be there for her, someone who would always provide for her, someone who would forgive all her mistakes and above all, someone who would never abandon her. This association of Bapu with a motherly figure is what ultimately led to her tragic end. She was not able to cope with Bapu abandoning her, just before she passes out from intoxication she exclaims "Bapu - mother, GONE!".

Regardless of these flaws, Mitra was an icon, someone who was able to be herself in a society that shunned her and constantly mocked her. A lesbian, or as others would call her "A frigid dame". She was reckless and brave, not afraid of standing up for herself, which is a lot more than what could be said for the other girls of her time. In fact, what angered her

the most when Dalvi walked in on her and Nama was not that he abused her and threatened to kill her but that Nama quietly walked behind Dalvi, without any protest, she followed his orders as if she had no voice of her own. Towards the end of the play, after her breakup with Bapu, she tried to be like the other girls, putting on makeup and wearing an outrageous costume, trying to 'lure in' men so as to feel something, anything for them. She struggles between being "Mitra" and a "normal woman" and ultimately kills herself. Despite being a strong woman, she ultimately lost the battle against society.

Bapu

Shrikant Marathe, also known as Bapu, is the narrator of the play. The introduction of the play reveals that he is anywhere between 18 years to 30 years of age. He constantly steps in and out of his role as a narrator, on one hand he is also a narrator and on the other hand he is also a fellow actor. Bapu is not a conventional male. He is not a very outgoing person; he is not a sportsman and is not athletic, as opposed to Mitra. He feels as if he is a nobody; someone who is there in college just to fill the benches. He even says that his only special trait is his 'inferiority complex'. He seems to be in love with Mitra, although he never reveals these feelings to her. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why he continues to help Mitra and be a part of the one-sided friendship that they have.

He is the only person in the entire play who is understanding of Mitra's plight and accepts her homosexual nature (except Nama). He seems to have some compassion for Mitra, however, even he advises Mitra to try and become 'normal'. He helps Mitra and is by her side for almost until the end of

the play. He remains by her side despite her insulting him and calling him names like “worm”, “milksop”, “chicken-hearted” etc. However, he is not a man of his word. Throughout the play, he breaks his promises; he breaks his promise to Mitra by revealing her lesbian nature to his roommate Pandey; he breaks his promise to Nama by telling Mitra about her marriage prospects in Calcutta. He constantly does favors for Mitra even when he knows he shouldn't. He is also somewhat of a pushover as he gives in to almost every demand of Mitra.

Nama

Nama is a bisexual female, who is in a relationship with both Mitra and Manya Dalvi. She is the one character in the play for whom the readers feel sympathy throughout. She is constantly wounded in her affair with both Dalvi and Mitra. Both of them try to exert their dominance on her in the name of love. She is the collateral damage of the battle between Dalvi and Mitra; in their bid to ‘have’ her and put the other one down, the two of them forget that she is also a human being with her own individual identity.

She is also a rather spineless person as she does not speak up for herself, neither in front of Dalvi nor in front of Mitra. She lets herself be dragged into the mess and refuses to take a stand for herself. Although, in her defense, she stood to lose everything if either of them, out of spite, decided to reveal her bisexual nature. She is also a hesitant and indecisive person. When Bapu asks her about who's side she is on, she is unable to give a definite response and instead says that she does not know and should probably leave. This indecisiveness is ultimately what leads to her ordeal. She lets herself be used by

Dalvi as a way to inflate his ego; and as a way to validate her own sense of hurt and loneliness in case of Mitra.

Pandey

Pandey is Bapu's roommate. He is an alcoholic who is obsessed with Mitra. He falls in love with her after seeing her perform in the college play and is unable to get her out of his head. He calls out to her, even when he is being intimate with other girls. He is shattered when Bapu tells him that Mitra is a homosexual and so he has no chance with her. He feels so heart-broken that he leaves to take part in the war. He would constantly plead and beg Bapu to introduce him to Mitra. Although, he seems to be disgusted by Mitra's homosexual nature. When he returns from war, he constantly abuses Mitra and calls her names for no apparent reason other than his inherent homosexual bias and bigotry. He compares lesbians to eunuchs and says that lesbians are frigid dames.

Manya Dalvi

Manya Dalvi is Nama's boyfriend. Much like Pandey, he exhibits a hatred for homosexuals. He is not very different from Mitra in the sense that he threatens to destroy Mitra's life by revealing her homosexual nature, no matter which city she moves to. He derives pleasure from the fact that he can destroy Mitra's life. He even thrashes Bapu when he gets to know that Bapu wrote the letters maligning his image, although, it is later revealed that it was Mitra who wrote the letters. Even after thrashing Bapu, he has no problem in asking for his help and he barely shows any remorse or regret for his actions towards him. Much like Mitra, even he is apathetic to Nama's plight. He dictates her and bosses her around as if she

is not capable of making her own decisions. He purportedly abuses Mitra in front of Bapu despite knowing very well that Bapu and Mitra share a rather special bond. To sum up, he is the sort of person who only cares about himself and is apathetic to the feelings of others.

Setting

The play is set in pre-independence Pune. Although, Tendulkar has not explicitly mentioned the period in which the play takes place. It can be inferred that the events of the play take place in the early 1940s. This is because in the play, Bapu mentions that Pandey has been posted somewhere in Europe or Africa for the war. Here war refers to the Second World War, which started in 1939 and ended in 1945. Moreover, it was in 1940, when Tendulkar saw the woman on whom the character of Mitra is based, hence, it is likely that the play is set in that time period.

The play is divided into three acts. The first act ends with Mitra confessing her feelings for Nama to Bapu; the second act ends with her breaking up with Bapu for vacating his room, because of which she is not left with any place where she can meet with Nama; and the final act ends with Mitra's suicide and Bapu not being able to come to terms with it. The final act of the play is the hardest to read. Until the third act, one had to read between the lines to see Mitra's vulnerability, until then, her character was like a cocoon, strong on the outside but vulnerable on the inside. This changes in the third act. Mitra directly reveals her weakness and vulnerability as Bapu walks away from her.

Symbols

Male Characters

The male characters of the play symbolize the society as a whole. Their attitude towards homosexuality is in consonance with that of the society. They are unable to accept the normality of homosexual relations and look at it with pure disdain. Pandey refers to lesbian women as “frigid dames”, comparing them with eunuchs. Initially he was in love with Mitra, however, after he gets to know about her homosexual nature, he develops a strong disdain for her. After he returns from the war, he constantly calls Mitra a ‘bitch’. Displaying a complete lack of empathy, he asks Bapu to “keep drinking, you’ll enjoy it more”, as Mitra reveals her desperation in front of Bapu and is then taken away by two officers in an intoxicated state.

Dalvi also has a strong disdain for homosexuality, although it is not clear how he treated Nama after he gets to know about the nature of her relationship with Mitra; he treats Mitra with utter disregard of respectability and a completely snobbish attitude. Much like the society as a whole, he is hell-bent on pulling Mitra down, even when she is at her worst, he displays a complete lack of empathy and humanity. All he wants is to show Mitra her ‘place’ and ensure that she is unable to move on in life and succeed. He wants to see her fail and crumble, and he wants to be the one who causes it.

Dalvi’s attitude towards Mitra is also in consonance with that of our society towards a strong woman. Much like our society, Dalvi is agitated by a woman who is capable of speaking her

mind, a woman who is challenging him. He is unable to cope with the fact that a woman has the guts to rise up against him and give him competition. Although, he walked in on both Nama and Mitra, he only exhibits a strong dislike for Mitra and not Nama. Perhaps, this is because unlike Mitra, Nama does not speak up against him, she silently follows his orders without any protest.

Bapu, unlike Pandey and Dalvi, shows some compassion for Mitra and Nama. Although, he does not have an abhorrent view of homosexuality, he fails to understand that it is incorrigible. Like many in the society, present and past, he views homosexuality as a choice, failing to understand that often individuals may be born with homosexual tendencies. He asks Mitra to change just this one thing in her personality. Nevertheless, he is still an ally for Mitra, a symbol of the positive elements in the society that are standing up for the empowerment of the LGBTQ+ community.

Mitra

Mitra symbolizes the struggle of an individual's identity in an immensely exclusive society. The constant battle between being true to oneself and being accepted in the society. Mitra had to carry the burden of being a lesbian in an inherently heterosexual society; a strong woman in a patriarchal society that expects a woman to live in the shadow of a man. On top of all of this, she had the stigma of suicide associated with her following a failed suicide attempt. All these factors were weighing her down and acting as an albatross around her neck, with no fault of hers.

She was expected to behave like a “normal” woman, her family members first shunned boys out of her life and then later on expected her to get married to one. Even Bapu asked her to try and be “normal”. She was left alone and isolated, with no one left to hear her struggles and plight. Ultimately, it was the society that won the battle. Towards the end, Mitra shrugged of her own identity, sweeping it under the carpet. She tried to embrace the society’s notion of a true woman and in the process, lost the will to live.

Motifs

Alcohol

Alcohol and drunkenness prevail in the play and it is in this state, the characters reveal their vulnerabilities. Pandey routinely shows up drunk and begs Bapu to fix his meeting with Mitra. It is in the state of intoxication he reveals that he has feelings for her. Similarly, Mitra also exposes her desperation and isolation after getting intoxicated. It is only when she is drunk, she accepts that what she did to Bapu was wrong, only then she reveals how lonely and abandoned she feels. To sum up, alcohol brings out the true nature of the characters to light.

Violence

The characters use violence to ascertain their strength and domination. Dalvi thrashes Bapu for the letters received by Nama and her father, maligning his image. He also threatens to kill Mitra for having an affair with Nama. Mitra nearly strangles Nama for talking about getting married to someone

else. This constant use of violence and threats displays the insecure nature of the characters and their obsession with putting others down and assume power over them.

Two Names

Tendulkar has used two names – Mitra and Sumitra, for the protagonist, who is a lesbian. Throughout the play, she is sometimes referred to as Mitra, sometimes Sumitra. These two names are reflective of her two identities. One that she truly is, and the other one, she is forced to assume owing to societal prejudices. These two identities are not in consonance with each other and eventually lead to her destruction. All her life, she is forced to balance between the two, while enduring insufferable mental torture.

Themes

Unrequited Love

The entire play is based on unrequited love and relationships. Mitra's love for Nama; Pandey's love for Mitra; Bapu's love for Mitra; all are unrequited. Mitra expects Nama to fight for their love, she wants her to embrace her bisexuality as she has embraced her homosexuality. Similarly, Bapu wants Mitra to try and be heterosexual, although, he still helps her, no questions asked, even if his love for her is one-sided. Pandey's love is also one-sided as Mitra is a lesbian.

Love triangle

There exists a love-triangle between Mitra, Nama and Dalvi (and also between Mitra, Bapu and Nama). The existence of

this love triangle complicates the lives of the three characters to a large extent. Further, the inability of Nama to make a decision leads to more complications and ultimately a tragic end for Mitra.

Love and Entitlement

The love the characters in the play display for each other, particularly in the case of Nama, Dalvi and Mitra comes with a sense of entitlement. Both Dalvi and Mitra see Nama as a trophy, a prized possession they must have in their name. Both of them end up crossing the line of a loving relationship to enter into a toxic one. Nama is treated as a possession and she feels suffocated by the both of them. Dalvi and Mitra, while competing for Nama's love and affection, end up forgetting that they are not entitled to it. They both try to exert their power and influence over her, and in the end both of them end up losing her.

Gender Stereotypes

Mitra and Nama both are not heterosexuals, however, Mitra is the one who ends up suffering more. This can be traced back to their very personalities. Nama is inherently docile and timid, unable to speak for herself, in line with society's notion of a woman. Mitra on the other hand is very outgoing and courageous, she headbutts society's expectations and notions of a woman, and hence, bears the brunt of it. The society punishes her for going against it, not just by being a homosexual, but also by being a strong and courageous woman who openly speaks her mind. Her masculine lesbian nature is unacceptable to the society and she is punished for it.

Exposition

A Friend's Story (Mitrachi Goshta) is a distinct discourse on the idea of heartfelt love-both heterosexual and homosexual. In the realm of Mitra, love has no saving graces; it is a round of power that diminishes players to brutish levels. The play adroitly provides insights into lesbianism and the challenges associated with it and how even a constructive and nurturing platonic heterosexual friendship is unable to avert the ultimate disaster caused by the prejudiced social fabric. The protagonist, Mitra, behaves in bestial ways, in her bid to have Nama. Yet, the question arises, "Is it really her fault?". Throughout her life, Mitra is deprived of love, she is constantly surrounded by people who do not understand her, and if they do, they expect her to change, which is something she cannot do. Even Bapu expects her to find a way around her sexuality. One cannot help but wonder, if Mitra's own notion of love is flawed. Is Mitra behaving the way she does because she actually believes that this is what love is? Is she just projecting her own sense of abandonment on her relationship with Nama and confusing it with love? Ultimately, is it the society that is to blame? A society that stifled Mitra so much that she found it easier to be dead than continue living. A society that refused to provide her the love and support she needed. Mitra is in a constant battle with herself, on one hand she tries to live up to societal expectations and on the other hand she cannot deny her sexual orientation. She feels insufficient as she is unable to be a man's partner. Unable to bear the mental torture inhibited on her by the society, Mitra ultimately engages in

self-destructive acts- attempting suicide and hurting the ones around her.

Set in pre-independence Pune, the play remains reflective of the plight of homosexuals and the society's attitude towards them, then and now. One cannot find much difference in the treatment meted out to homosexuals and the prejudice towards homoeroticism in the present age and the age before independence. It is a shame that even after seven decades of independence, the Indian society has failed to liberate its homosexual inhabitants from the clutches of discrimination. Lesbian women, sometimes have to go through 'corrective rape', often carried out by their own family members, the very people she grew up with. ¹¹The victims may be reluctant to report it as rape in order to save the family name, and often just want to erase the memory from their mind. The fact that our society views rape, the most despicable thing a person (read psychopath) can do to someone, as a 'disciplining tool' to 'cure' something which is not even a disease and is completely normal, is despicable.

The discrimination and stigmatization homosexuals face in the society begins right from their homes. Their families often reject them when they come out of the closet. This is one of the many reasons why members of the LGBTQ+ community keep their sexuality hidden for long periods in their life, even for lifetime. Even if their families do not disown them, it is conditional upon them keeping their sexuality hidden. How can an individual be expected to hide such an integral part of

¹¹ Jain Rupam, "Parents use 'corrective rape' to 'straight'en gays", *Times of India*, 1 June 2005, [Parents use 'corrective rape' to 'straight'en gays - Times of India \(indiatimes.com\)](https://www.indiatimes.com/Parents-use-corrective-rape-to-straight-en-gays-Times-of-India)

herself? “Log kya kahenge?”¹², is often the highest concern of Indian parents when dealing with homosexual children. The opinion of the society takes precedence over the wellbeing of their child. The society creates a brouhaha over homosexual relations, in the name of preserving the “Indian culture” or the “Indian way of life”. Various Hindu, Christian and Muslim organizations came together to appeal the decision of Delhi High Court to decriminalize homosexuality. It is loathsome how something as vile as homophobia was able to bring together the otherwise warring religious factions.

However, in the recent years the situation has improved, even if not to a large extent, it is still progress. The apex court of the country in 2018 decriminalised homosexuality. A few days after the verdict, Patna threw its first gay party.¹³ With the decriminalization of homosexuality, the debates and discussions around it are happening more openly. At least now, families cannot make use of the law to ‘punish’ homosexual tendencies in their children and their lovers. In fact, homosexual couples can now seek help from the legal machinery. There have been instances of homosexual couples getting police protection after being threatened by their families.¹⁴ Justice N Anand Venkatesh from the Madras High

¹² What will people say?

¹³ Saafi Michael, Singh Aarti, “‘There are few gay people in India’: stigma lingers despite legal victory”, *The Guardian*, 13 March 2019, [‘There are few gay people in India’: stigma lingers despite legal victory | Human rights | The Guardian](#)

¹⁴ See Press Trust of India, “Delhi high court orders police protection for same sex couple”, 1 October, 2018, *Hindustan Times*, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/delhi-high-court-orders-police-protection-for-same-sex-couple/story-FOU7VYCWzEXlqTtvubZ4PL.html> ; Giri Sagrika, “Allahabad High Court Orders Police Protection To Same-sex Couple”, 4

Court, while hearing a petition of a lesbian couple seeking police protection from their birth families, said that he would like to undergo counseling, in order to better understand the challenges faced by members of the LGBTQ+. He admitted that he was not 'woke' on the issue and would hence like to learn.¹⁵ Although, this progress needs laudation, there is still a long road to cover. Homosexual marriages are still not recognized by the law. An even arduous challenge is convincing the society to view homosexuals as equal.

Critical Appraisal

"He didn't take the easy way out. He chose not to represent homosexuality through men. He deliberately chose women. So, if you see, it was a multifold commentary that extended beyond homosexuality and even spoke about the liberation of women in that era" says Deepa Gahlot, head of theatre and film at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) on the subject of Mitrachi Goshta.

Mitrachi Goshta was way ahead of its time. Tendulkar wrote about homosexuality at a time when the term was missing from the vocabulary of the Indian Society. Even now homosexuality is looked down upon, but at least now, the discussions on homosexuality are held more openly. There is

November 2020, <https://www.shethepeople.tv/news/allahabad-high-court-orders-police-protection-same-sex-couple/>

¹⁵ Chandrababu Divya, "Madras HC judge seeks session with psychologist to understand same-sex relationships", *Hindustan Times*, 29 April 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/madras-hc-judge-seeks-session-with-psychologist-to-understand-same-sex-relationships-101619685222088.html>

also an active part of the society that is actively fighting for equal status of the community. Owing to its bold subject, the play remains underperformed.

Tendulkar brings forth the plight of homosexuals via his protagonist Mitra. Mitra's struggles and her ultimate demise attempts to make the audience sympathetic. By weaving a complicated plot consisting of love triangles and unrequited feelings, Tendulkar creates a prototype of the then society (although, still relevant in the present time) by incorporating society's apprehensions and prejudice towards homosexuality via his male characters. He also successfully brings to light the inherent gender bias of the society which is unable to deal with a courageous woman and constantly tries to show her her place.

Not much can be said about the language of the play since it was originally written in Marathi and there are various translations available, which translation is the most accurate, remains unknown. The play, although very bold in its choice of subject, seems a bit rushed. Tendulkar never really focused much on Nama, the only bisexual character in the play. Mitra's intention behind visiting Kolkata and what she did there, also remain unknown.

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1. Vijay Tendulkar, *Collected Plays in Translation*, Oxford University Press, 2003.
2. Sri Ram Memorial Lecture, *'The Play is The Thing'*, Lecture 1, 1997.



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