

Sexuality to Sainthood:
Review of *Secret Writings of Hoshang Merchant*

*Ananya Parida**

*Hoshang Merchant's recent book *Secret Writings of Hoshang Merchant* (2016), edited by Akshaya K. Rath, is a 'strange' book: 'strange' because it is 'queer' and 'queer' because of its 'difference.' The front cover holds no title but presents the portrait of an elegant yet sad Merchant aspiring to present his thoughts in a Chinese jacket, which states: "[T]his is no fiction. I have scars on my body and soul to prove this." The unaccommodated gay son of India, publishing as late as his 40s, goes to a main-stream publisher! Is it a change in time in academic and publishing world? Is it the effect of the Apex Court's ruling in favour of the transgender culture? There are several such questions on gender, sexuality and culture the book addresses. It is important to mention that Merchant's highly acclaimed *Yaraana* (1999) came out during Vajpayee's era; the present one, *Secret Writings*, during Modi's. Is it time for the secrecy to break the orthodox tradition? Merchant's *Secret Writings* presents this dilemma in four different sections of the book: "Literature: A Different Muse," "Autobiography: The Gay Gaze," "Sexuality: Othering the Nation" and "Matriarchy: Mothering the Nation." All the four sections are interlinked, are preceded by an introductory note by the editor along with an artwork by Koeli Mukherjee Ghose. The concluding section presents Merchant's 'Secret Writing Life' and houses a tiny dictionary of sexual vocabulary.*

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