

ex-boyfriend Z and so we have connections across several levels. Ormus has obviously read the questionnaire I sent to him in advance of our online meeting in detail—his answers are eloquent and well-framed. He is being honest and sharing intimate details of his life. I feel privileged to have this trust, but I also feel strangely exploitative. Is Ormus being so honest and open because he wants to make a good impression on me? Would he be so forthcoming even if we had not established our bond earlier? Am I attracted to him? I am enjoying the conversation immensely...we really have an excellent rapport and my previous conversations with him have meant that I have enough background information as well as a level of comfort established to ask him probing questions without wondering if I have gone too far. The formal interview goes off excellently.

Informally, we exchange pictures and decide to meet in Bombay for a date when I visit the city. During the course of this date, it is clear that there is a possibility of romance. Although this does not eventually materialize (we develop a platonic friendship instead), it results in my not conducting an offline interview with him and only retaining the online component as my data for research.

DEPARTURE SCENE: KABHI ALVIDA NA KEHNA (NEVER SAY GOODBYE)

India, I have swum in your warm waters and run laughing in your high mountain meadows. Oh, why must everything I say end up sounding like a filmi gana, a goddamn cheap Bollywood song? Very well then—I have walked your filthy streets, India, I have ached in my bones from the illnesses engendered by your germs. I have eaten your independent salt and drunk your nauseatingly sugary roadside tea...farewell my country. Don't worry, I won't come knocking at your door. I won't phone you in the middle of the night and hang up when you reply...India, my terra infirma, my maelstrom, my cornucopia, my crowd. India, my too-muchness, my everything at once, my hug-me, my fable, my mother, my father and my first great truth...India, fount of my imagination, source of my savagery, breaker of my heart. Goodbye. (Salman Rushdie, 1999)⁹¹

I attend a Gay Bombay Sunday meet two days before I leave Bombay at the end of my summer break in 2004, to return to my graduate studies

in Boston. It is the group's sixth anniversary—and it is being celebrated in style, with several events spread over a fortnight. The meeting I attend coincides with the festival of *Raksha Bandhan*—the Hindu festival commemorating brother-sister love. Appropriately, it is titled 'The Siblings Meet'. For old times sake, the meeting point is the Bandra McDonalds, just like it was at the first meet, six years ago. I climb upstairs to the second level of the restaurant and am met by Isaac, dressed in a splendid cream embroidered *churidar kurta* and the black GB cap identifier, greeting all the gay guests that arrive with a traditional hand folded *namaste*. As always, there are the old regulars and a bunch of (eight) newbies—a motivational trainer just relocated from Dubai, two guys from South Africa and Kenya, a group of shy college students, some software engineers.... There is also Upal, a brooding 20-something assistant film director from Delhi, who I am instantly attracted to—he looks like a young Matt Dillon, with his underfed, starving poet look, and blazing eyes. He had been introduced to me at the last dance party by my date for that evening; now I have the chance to chat him up as the group shifts to Sargam's aunt's place—again, a repeat of what took place six years ago.

The apartment is on the third floor of a building in a quiet by lane, off the crowded Pali Naka in Bandra. It has been recently renovated in the Palladian style common to upper middle class Bombay homes. Plaster of Paris false ceiling, lots of arches, sculpting, molding, cornices and scalloped curtains. Egyptian looking vases abound and there is abstract art on the walls. There are sofas arranged all around the apartment. By the time we arrive, it is already a full house with old timers who have come there directly. I make sure I squeeze myself right next to Upal. Sargam's two widowed aunts preside maternally over the proceedings—passing around sweets and drinks and urging everyone to speak up.

I hear several stories that evening. Robin talks about his brother's rejection upon learning about his sexuality, something that he did not expect at all, since his brother was a doctor who lived in America. Karim speaks about his sister's queasiness regarding his sexuality when it comes to telling her fiancé about it. He also feels strange that although she knows that he is in a long-term relationship, she avoids making any inquiries about his partner whenever they speak. Sargam feels

that although his sister has accepted him for whom he is, she is still uncomfortable if he holds hands with his partner in her presence. He makes fun of her by threatening to attend her wedding in full bejeweled drag. Sankalp narrates his story of playing *doctor-doctor* with his cousin all through his childhood, which progressed into sexual action in their teens. Now, his cousin, married to a woman, constantly ignores him at family gatherings. Bhisam confides that he was blackmailed into having sex with his cousin and brother since the age of 12. There is a debate over the action of Isaac's brother—on coming out to him; he advised Isaac to leave the house and stay by himself, away from the family. Isaac chooses to interpret this as concern, the others feel it is selfishness and callousness on the part of the brother; instead of standing up for him, he is in fact shunning him, but Isaac is not convinced.

Shoeb, a software engineer who lives in California with his partner, has a happy tale. He came out to his family six years ago and now his parents and his partner's parents treat each other like in-laws. He advises that everyone should make their parents feel comfortable, answer their questions honestly and help them get over their fears. Likewise Senthil discloses that although his then 12-year old sister initially 'freaked out' when he came out to her at age 16, she was very supportive afterwards and even highlighted his sexuality in an admissions essay for a university in the US. (It worked, she was accepted!) He is not yet out to his parents though—he says that they are very conservative and might not be able to understand or accept. Joseph's story is unique—when he came out to his brother, his brother in turn revealed his own homosexuality to him—and now they are close confidantes.

The aunts interject with a list of concerns that parents might have on learning about their child's homosexuality. Who will look after him when he falls ill? What will happen when he grows old? They feel that gay men should be ready to answer these questions before coming out to their families. There is a general consensus that one should only come out after achieving financial independence. The meeting ends with a warm round of applause for the two aunts and their hospitality—and then its time for the great telephone number exchange to begin. The new guys mingle with the others, happy to be a part of this exciting community and old friends renew contacts. I am busy hugging everyone I know—saying goodbye!