

Institutionalized Power and Pederasty in the Ancient and Medieval South Asia—A Study of Literary Evidences of Love, Lust, and Violence Against Men

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Even if the act of pederasty is considered as a heinous crime, if we look into the ancient South Asian history, we will find evidences where pederasty has been widely a common practice. The folk-tales, literature, music, and other cultural evidences of ancient South Asia provide us numerous references of institutionalized pederasty. This research will investigate on the causes and effects of pederasty of ancient South Asia and will probe into the matter how this necessitated the minors to learn about sexuality.

Keywords: institutionalized pederasty, South Asia, power, gender, dominance, culture

Introduction

The word *pederasty* derives from Greek (*paiderastia*) “love of boys”, a compound derived from *παῖς* (*pais*) “child, boy” and *ἐραστής* (*erastēs*) “lover”. To be precise, an adult male falling in love with a young boy, who mostly hasn’t reached to his adulthood and the love is often associated with sex, is considered the act of pederasty. In *Understanding and Addressing Adult Sexual Attraction to Children*, Sarah D. Goode states pedophilia as “child sexual abuse, child pornography, sexology, sexual disorders and sexual deviance, children’s sexuality and sexual politics” (2010, p. 2). Again, in her *Paedophiles in Society*, she elucidates that those who practice such behaviors are “adults” who are sexually attracted to minors below the legal age of sexual consent (2011, p. 11). The issue is rather tabooed and often criminalized, hence very little research has been done on this issue.

Historical Evidences and the Indian Subcontinent

Historically, pederasty has existed as a variety of customs and practices within different cultures. Pederastic practices have been utilized for the purpose of coming-of-age rituals, the acquisition of virility and manly virtue, education, and development of military skill and ethics. These were often paralleled by the commercial use of boys for sexual gratification, going as far as enslavement and castration. The evanescent beauty of adolescent boys has been a topos in poetry and art, from Classical times to the Middle East, the Near East and Central Asia, imperial China, pre-modern Japan, the European Renaissance, and into modern times.

However, as far as the Indian subcontinent is concern, the history of pederastic practice has been un-investigated and unrecognized, unlike the Roman or Greek evidences. The reason can be mainly due to the numerous colonial invasion that this particular continent has gone through, where each invader left extreme religious precincts and psychological effects and changes to this land added with societal stigma. Yet, the (almost extinct) ancient literary evidences say something else.

Model of Geoffrey Gorer

Anthropologist Theo Sadford in his *Queering Anthropology* proposes three subdivisions of homosexuality as:

- (i) Age-structured,
- (ii) Egalitarian and,
- (iii) Gender-structured. (2000, p. 63)

Pederasty is the archetypal example of male age-structured homosexuality. Geoffrey Gorer and others distinguish pederasty from pedophilia, which he defined as a separate, fourth type that he described as “grossly pathological in all societies of which we have record”. According to Gorer, the main characteristic of homosexual pederasty is the age difference (either of generation or age-group) between the partners. In his study of native cultures, pederasty appears typically as a passing stage in which the adolescent is the beloved of an older male, remains as such until he reaches a certain developmental threshold, after which he in turn takes on an adolescent beloved of his own. This model is judged by Gorer as socially viable, i.e., not likely to give rise to psychological discomfort or neuroses for all or most males. He adds that in many societies, pederasty has been the main subject of the arts and the main source of tender and elevated emotions (*The Danger of Equality and Other Essays*, 1968, pp. 186-187). However, it cannot be denied that not all circumstances were driven with pedagogy and tenderness.

The Practice

The practice of pederasty in the South Asia seems to have begun, according to surviving records, sometime during the 800s and ended, at least as an open practice, in the mid-19th century. Throughout this era, pederastic relationships, poetry, art, and spirituality were found throughout Moorish Spain to South Asian subcontinent. The forms of this pederasty ranged from the chaste and spiritual adoration of youths at one extreme, to the violent and forcible use of unwilling boys at other.

While homosexuality was considered as a major sin, the aspect of pederasty was interestingly institutionalized and was a legal practice, though it was problematized to various degrees at various times and places.

The Ancient Bengal

Charyapada is considered as the first literary evidence of Bengali scripture. It is a collection of mystical poems, song of realization in the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism from the tantric tradition in Bengal. Even though many poems provide a realistic picture of early medieval society in eastern India by describing different occupations of people such as hunters, boatmen, and potters, the geographical locations, namely Banga and Kamarupa, are referred to in the poems. Names of the two rivers that occur are the Ganga and Yamuna. River

Padma has been referred to as a canal. No reference to agriculture is available. References to female prostitution occur as well.

Charyapada was written in Proto-Bengali between the 8th and 12th centuries and it is said to be the oldest collection of verses written in those languages. A palm-leaf manuscript of the *Charyapada* was rediscovered in the early 20th century by Haraprasad Shastri. In *Charyapada*, we also can locate direct/indirect references of pedophilia:

The bald Brahmin passes sneaking close by.
 Oh, my young boy, I would make you my companion.
 Kanha is a kapali, a yogi.
 He is naked and has no disgust. (Kanhupa's Poetry, Kidvai & Vanita, 2008, p. 103)

This extract clarifies that the practice was not uncommon at that time.

The Medieval Bengal: The Fairytales

The history of Bengali folk tradition takes us back to the 3C when the Mouryas, the Guptas, the Palas, the Senas, and the Mughals came one after another to rule the land. The folk tradition was basically oral that has been preserved over the ages via various medias like music, jatra, pala, and pictures. It was not before the early 20th Century that some of the major tales were compiled and one of the most well known compilation was done by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen under the title *Moimonsingho Githika (The Ballads of Moimonsingho)*. However, during this long history of oral tradition, many of the stories were already distorted and re-interpreted as per the cultural changes. Most of these immensely popular folktales describe pictures of the tragedy of love, where the female characters have been in the main focus. No much emphasis has been given to the male characters, except for being the tool of betrayal or unfaithfulness. Hence, the male characters have under-developed that raise questions regarding their authenticity in the portrayal.

The Tale of “Chandrabati”

The tale of “Chandrabati” is considered as one of the most classical oral folktales of Bengal that depicts the sad story of a maiden named Chandrabati, who fell in love with Joyanonda. The story continues how Joyanonda betrays Chandrabati and marries a Muslim girl and the latter devotes her life in translating religious scriptures. Later Joyanonda understands his mistake and begs Chandrabati to take him back, but she denies. The story ends with both of the characters committing suicide. This version of the story, compiled by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen in 1923, has been immensely popular as in the folk culture of Bangladesh. However, research shows that the time when the legend of Chandrabati is said to be taking place, the Muslims were not even introduced to that part of the land (Syed Azizul Haque). Interesting discovery by Johann Stavorinus tells another version of the story where Joyanonda actually did not marry any Muslim girl, rather felt attracted towards a young boy, whom he saw swimming naked in the river Fuleshwari (Greenberg, 1988, p. 180). The oral history may have altered the story into a more typical tragic love story, when pedophilia started becoming controversial as an issue to deal with in the society. This alteration or modern censorship of literature is something I will be addressing in the later part of my discussion.

The Tale of “Dewana Madina”

Another immensely popular story of our oral folktale is the story of “Dewana Madina” which tells a story of long lost brothers—Alal and Dulal, who find each other dramatically. In the story, it has been said that when their stepmother asks a man to kill the brothers, the man instead sells them to a rice merchant, who starts using the young the brothers as slaves. It was this point of the story when one of the brothers runs away. Even though the story does not develop this episode of the slavery of the young brothers, a version says that the rice merchant used the young boys to please his pedophilic lust, for which the elder brother runs away (Greenberg, 1988, p. 200).

The Mughal Period

The Mughal period saw strong pederastic influences in the arts and literature. Poetry in ghazal form was a favorite means of such expression, produced by poets such as Mir Taqi Mir. In such poetry, we find clear reference of the poet falling for young boys:

When I had some wealth, even then I spent it on boys—
And now that I wander as a mendicant, Mir, it is thanks to *them*. (n.d., p. 130)

Andalib Shadani argues that no less than 32 epithets used by Mir to identify boys of different castes and classes: Sons of Sayyid, gardener, soldier, Brahman, perfumer, judge, washerman, etc., are all admired in specific couplets (S. 170-175). He thus demonstrates the quantity (if not quality) and explicitness of Mir’s pederastic verse (n.d., p. 136).

The manifestations of pederastic attraction vary. At one extreme, they are indeed of a chaste nature, incorporated into Sufism as a meditation known in Arabic as *Nazar ill’al-murd* (contemplation of the beardless), or *Shahed-bazi* (witness play) in Persian. This is seen as an act of worship intended to help one ascend to the absolute beauty that is God through the relative beauty that is a boy. Modern Sufi thought asserts that this contemplation uses imaginable yoga to transmute erotic desire into spiritual consciousness.

Richard Francis Burton, in his “Terminal Essay” (Part D) to the *Arabian Nights* claims that Easterners value the love of boys above the love of women, using Persian terminology in which the moth and the bulbul (nightingale) represent the lover, and the taper and the rose represent the boy and the girl, respectively: “Devotion of the moth to the taper is purer and more fervent than the Bulbul’s love for the Rose” (1885, p. 66).

In an illuminated manuscript (Figure 1) of Sufi poet Abdul-Rahman Jami’s (1414-1492) *Haft Awrang*, an anthology of seven allegorical poems on wisdom and love, there is a calligraphed verse in the section titled *A Father Advises his Son About Love* in which a father instructs his son, when choosing a worthy male lover, to chose that man who sees beyond the mere physical and expresses a love for his inner qualities. The verse exemplifies one Sufi way of turning love into wisdom:

I have written on the wall and door of every house.
About the grief of my love for you.
That you might pass by one day.
And read the state of my condition.
In my heart I had his face before me.
With this face before me, I saw what I had in my heart. (1997, p. 103)

Nazar was a principal expression of a male love that, according to the teachings, was not to be consummated physically. Rather it was a form of unifying oneself with God, who is as innocent and beautiful as a young boy. From Jami's verses, we find such evidences of Nazar (Welch, 1987).

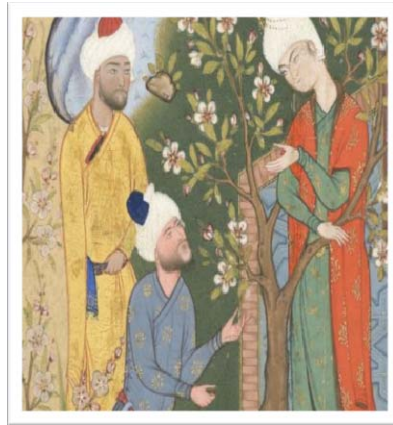


Figure 1. Illustration from the Haft Awrang of Jami (Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC).

However, not all followed such teachings. There are evidences where the Sufism went beyond the Platonic adoration (Figure 2). Young child slaves were adored just as much as the adoration of God, and this practice involved physical interaction. On being challenged by Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (c. 717-801) of Basrah (Sufi woman saint who first set forth the doctrine of mystical love), upon noticing him kissing a boy, for appreciating the beauty of boys above that of God, the ascetic Sufi Rabah al-Qaysi retorted that, "On the contrary, this is a mercy that God Most High has put into the hearts of his slaves" (Sulami, 1999, pp. 78-79).



Figure 2. Men and their young lovers by a stream (Ceramic panel from Chehel Sotoun; Louvre, Paris).

Some Muslim theologians condemned the custom of contemplating the beauty of young boys. Their suspicions may have been justified, as some dervishes boasted of enjoying far more than "glances", or even kisses. Nazar was denounced as rank heresy by such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), who complained, "They kiss a slave boy and claim to have seen God!" (1995, p. 13). The real danger to conventional religion, as Peter

Lamborn Wilson asserts, was not so much the mixing of sodomy with worship, but “the claim that human beings can realize themselves in love more perfectly than in religious practices” (1995, p. 13). Despite opposition from the clerics, the practice was institutionalized and survived from Middle East to the South Asian continent until only recent years, according to Murray and Roscoe (1997).



Figure 3. Naked Indian Prince and his naked male attendant at harem (Mughal painting; cropped picture).

Even in the Mughal Emperor’s harem (Figure 3), where the emperor would drink his wine with his wife and mistresses, there was a place for a young boy, who often was more trustworthy and close to the emperor than that of his wives (Sharma, “Inside the Harem of the Mughals”, 2010).

The Ghazal Tradition

In Islamic societies, symbolic poetry has always been a safe medium for expressing controversial ideas: What was not said in prose was licit in poetry. The ghazal tradition’s aesthetics are derived from Perso-Arabic Islamic literature and the genre was developed mostly by Muslim poets under the patronage of Muslim royalty in North India. Although the ghazal deals with the whole spectrum of human experience, its central concern is love. According to Carla Petievich, this form of poetry is composed in two line verses, *shers*; its main subject is an idealised love (*ishq*), and its (anti) hero-narrator; a lover or *aashiq* (masculine voice) speaks to or about the younger beloved *mashooq* or *mahbub* (also in the masculine voice) who plays the role of the *aashiq*’s antagonist, and who is generally elusive, aloof, and even cruel (2007, p. 84).

There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the gender and imagery of the beloved in the ghazal tradition. This ambivalence is explored in CM Naim’s famous article, “The theme of homosexual love in pre-modern Urdu poetry”, where the apologists’ justification regarding the uncertainty surrounding the gender debate of the ghazal tradition is chalked out in order to defend it against homosexuality. The apologists state that the reference of the ghazal’s romantic hero to the beloved in masculine terms is a grammatical necessity for purposes of universality (Kidwal & Vanita, 2008, p. 112).

Naim also states that many verses not only exclusively refer to male accouterments like swords and turbans but unambiguously refer to young boys persistently: *launda*, *larka*, *bacca*, *pisa*. The apologists enunciate that masculine imagery could either refer to an earthly male or to the Divine beloved. This claim borrows heavily from the Sufi tradition where it is believed that the beauty of God is reflected in every earthly entity and *ishq-e-haqiqi* (love for the Divine) is reached only after the seeker had learned to love his *murshid* (a

manifestation of *ishq-e-majazi*, that is mortal or earthly love) and both these objects of love were referred to in the masculine voice. Naim adds,

In any case, such verses, whether true testaments or false, would not have shocked their audiences in the 18th century. Indian society has never looked upon homosexuality with the horror and anxiety that have characterised western responses to it since the early modern period. (2008, p. 114)

Therefore, it is safe to say the attitude of the society through multiple layers and cultural lenses concludes that pederastic expression was a symptom of the re-imagination of poetry as a social institution with a role to play in the life of its linguistic community.

Performances

Performance or staging a literary piece is also part of the literary tradition. From the early stages of cultural practices, presence of women participation along with men is found in evidential history in all forms of art. Especially in dance and music, women as characters and performers are notably seen within ancient tales, stories, and plays. However, in the late middle ages, female performances were gradually bigoted and turned into a social stigma till early modern era. It was such stringent that women involved into performing arts were seen as disrepute in community. Thus, it came the need of performing men or young boys in continuing the long practiced cultural activities.

Young boys used to portray female characters in dance, plays, and acts to perform a story socially and professionally. In Bangladesh, similar consequences have prevailed since cultural performances flourished and have been carried traditionally. Bengal being a thriving land for major primitive religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and posterior Islam, has always been eloquence towards cultural practice. Major cultural customs are from folklore, which is either about the emotional experience of people's livelihood or religious philosophy. From both perspectives, various female centric stories, legends, and anecdotes have been the elements of performing arts in this region. Young male dancers and actors customarily enacted most of these remarkable female characters of folklore for hundreds of years from now. Therefore, the concept of performing young boys has been embodied with fundamental characteristics of innumerable folk performances that it became a primary signifier of a huge part of the cultural dance heritage.

Traditional folk rituals like Gajir Jatra, Manasa Mangal, Kushan Jatra, Madan Pirer Gan, Pala Gan, Ghetu Nach etc., were widely performed by young boys dressed as women, who were called as "Princesses" within local communities. These are either unique ceremonials or part of a profound traditional ceremony in Bengal with huge community participation as viewers or performers. Generally, these male performers were young boys from the local neighborhood with family and village profession. They belonged to the community as a typical man like others. But the interesting point is, that they learnt to play female characters for beholding the tradition as the principal identity of these performances.

In the past, the audience was not only the common people, but also rich and powerful zamindars or landlords were also patrons of such literary performances. And in many of the cases, the young boys, performing the female characters, were the centre of attractions of all performances, who mastered to act like female characters. Rich and powerful male patronisers in the audience invited the young boys in their house for personal desires.

Social Factor

It is clear that in the ancient and medieval South Asia, pederasty was a common practice, and as far as the social class distinction is concerned, it was rather institutionalized, that is publicly recognized. In medieval South Asian civilization, pederastic relations “were so readily accepted in upper-class circles that there was often little or no effort to conceal their existence” (Hodgson, 1987, p. 146).

If we investigate the literary evidences parallel, we can see that there is a lineage between them, even though they are written in different time frames. Many of the stories show us how a powerful, or comparatively rich man attains or lusts for a young boy. Similar to keeping a mistress, many rich people may have considered keeping young boys as partners (interns). Social class is seemingly playing an interesting role here.

The investigation of pederasty in ancient South Asia can be read utilizing the Marxist theory to examine the political and economic factors that resulted in the classing of the institution, with “classing” here used as a term denoting the transformation of a practice into an entity restricted by class. The ideology behind the institution of pederasty can be understood analyzing in what ways the practice was used as a means of furthering the perception of itself as elitist. In its inception, pederasty was not a political or classist practice, though it is difficult to determine which element of the practice came first, sexual or pedagogical.

Pederasty had most likely connections with elitism where the rich people in the society had the luxury to woo a young boy. Seemingly men with young male partners were considered as rich portions of the society, who “afforded” to be in a pederastic relation that was also symbol of wealth (Greenberg, 1988, p. 180). Thus, the idea of pederasty was undoubtedly institutionalized.

Effects

Lust and Violence

No matter whether the elites or the aristocrats were involved with the practice, it was mostly lustfulness that carried the act. For which child abuse was an unavoidable consequence. Many of the literary evidences show (if not directly) how young boys were molested and misused. Non-sublimated pederastic relationships were widespread, and widely documented in the poetry and art of the cultures involved, including in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. Libertine poets such as the poet Abu Nuwas (750?–813?) flaunted their sexual conquests, often Christian wine boys, some of whom they plied with wine in order to subdue. While some of these poems appear to describe affectionate relationships, others are clear depictions of rape, as is this quatrain by Mamayah al-Rumi:

The art of liwat is the way of masculinity and might.
So leave Laylah to Majnun, and Azzah with Kuthayyir,
And go up to every beardless boy, strip him, and even if he cries,
Present him with your prick and fuck him by force. (El-Rouayheb, 2005, p. 21)

Effects on Women

While women were considered sacred and prohibited to move beyond the domestic circles, young boys were used for manifold purposes. In many cases, they worked as interns to rich men.

Women, on the other hand, also seemingly had terminal effects on pederasty, when their husbands were involved with young lads. Stories that are told from the female perspective say that women or the wives suffered

from extreme depression, jealousy, and other mental illness. Many female characters in the ancient and medieval stories are shown as suicidal or depressed. We also can find evidences from *The Gāhā Sattasaī* which is a collection of poems written by women about relationships and sadness of women regarding their husbands' relations with boys. The collection is basically attributed to the king Hala as are about forty of the poems in it. It is estimated to date from between 200 BCE and 200 CE. It consists of 700 single-verse poems, divided into seven chapters of 100 verses each. It names 278 poets; about half the poems are anonymous. For example:

Hey! you angry girl,
 Don't you see.
 That when he calls you by the wrong name.
 It's only because he wants to see your eyes.
 Rolling with jealousy? (Verse: 908; Khoroché & Tieken, 2009, p. 103)

Heartbreaks

Pedophilic relations mostly ended in heartbreaks, which is mostly evidential in the poetry written in the Mughal periods. Older men fall deeply in love with young boys—boys who later grow up to be adults, and lose interest in the older male partner. On the other hand, it has also been seen while the older partner dies of old age and the younger partner is left alone—who mostly spent his entire life with this man and starts suffering from sadness and heartbreak as well. As we can see in the verses of the famous 13th Century mystic poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi, who has legends of being in deep love with a younger man Shams and was later heartbroken for the loss of his male beloved, who suddenly disappeared. Rumi wrote the following verses:

Why should I seek? I am the same as he.
 His essence speaks through me.
 I have been looking for myself. (1999, p. 228)

Making Minors Aware of Sexuality Even When They Were Not Ready

Using young children as sexual object caused manifold effects on the minors. When it was the time for them to play and have fun, some of the boys were hand-picked to be the lovers of older men, which undoubtedly ceased their childhood and made them aware of sexuality far before they were ready. Many of the boys kept the practice and once being old themselves selected other young boys for company.

Creation of Literature

No matter what implication the institutionalized practice of pederasty had on the society, it certainly has been the reason for the creation of some of the most memorable literary evidences in the South Asian subcontinent. In many cases the references have been subtle or gender-fluid, or later been censored, deeper investigation has shown us evidences that the practice was certainly there and well-institutionalized.

Modern Censorship

Historical evidences of pederasty is reported to be systematically distorted. Famous Bangladeshi poet Jasimuddin raised question on the authenticity of the folktales compiled by Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen. In an interview, Jasimuddin said that not only the compilation distorted the main elements of the ballads, at the same time, they are written in a language that was not even practiced during the time they were orally transmitted. According to him, many of the male characters have been replaced by female characters to make the female

centric stories look more tragic, and otherwise popular among the locals—who enjoyed women to be sacrificing characters.

The pederastic topos in medieval South Asian verse is so widely allusive that it has been an obstacle for translations of these works into western languages. As Dick Davis comments, “A further cultural barrier, and one that can prove particularly difficult to negotiate, is the prevalence of the cult of pederasty in much medieval Persian verse”. He notes that many translators have taken advantage of the fact that pronouns are not gender specific but notes that the translator “in availing himself of this help he is, as he knows, often fudging the issue, quietly bowdlerizing the texts” (Southgate, 1992, p. 289). This is held to be true even of major works, such as the *Gulistan (Rose Garden)* of Sa’adi. English translators even in the tamer episodes of the “Gulistan” turn boys into girls and change anecdotes about pederasty into tales of heterosexual love (Southgate, 1992, p. 289).

In his monograph on pederastic relation in the ancient South Asia and Middle East, Khaled El-Rouayheb demonstrates how Mughal love poetry and other literary material is routinely heterosexualized or devalued in critical studies authored by postcolonial scholars and critics.

It was only in 2012 when famous Bangladeshi novelist Humayun Ahmed addressed the issue in his story *Ghetu Putra Kamala (Pleasure Boy Kamala)*—a story that he says has true evidences of the past. The story deals with a landlord’s lust for a young boy, who used to dance being dressed as a girl in with a group of entertainers (or “Ghetu” in Bengali). The group is later invited to the household of the landlord where he uses the boy to fulfill his physical lust every night. In the end of the story, the boy was murdered by an assassin employed by the wife of the landlord, who was suffering from terminal jealousy.

Considering the social stigma of Bangladesh, this was indeed a brave initiative and first of its kind to bring forth the true picture of the medieval past related with controversial theme like pedophilia of the country. Before the death of Humayun Ahmed in 2012, this happens to be his last work and in an interview before his death Ahmed said that the story was based on historical accuracy.

Older Women’s Attraction Towards Young Boys?

Young boys have been the centre of attention in our cultural and folklore ancestry. In many of our commonly known folk stories, the young boy factor has been numerously established. In popular stories like “Rupban” or “Yusuf Julekha”, we can see that male minors are put into the position to get married to adult females. Undoubtedly these stories are immensely popular as far as Bengali folklore is concerned. But the question that has been often overlooked is why putting male infants into such predicaments of getting married or being in a relationship with a woman who is almost 20 years older than the young boy. Whatever the reason might be, this also establishes the fact that young boys have always been in the centre of attention—whether it has been for male or for female pedophilic reasons.

Conclusion

In exploring the relationship between various facets of society and pederastic expression, the practice can be seen as an intricate social institution. Pederasty played a crucial role in the aristocracy of South Asia, underscored by the assimilation of the practice into the majority of areas pertinent to the elite. By investigating the ways in which pederasty was incorporated into aristocratic activities, it is possible to gain a deeper

understanding of the purpose and motivation of homosexuality in ancient South Asia. Certainly it becomes clear that perception was a critical issue in the minds of the wealthy, as pederasty was designed to reflect a carefully constructed image regarding the ideal qualities of both men and youths. Evident in the ancient texts, which discuss pederasty as well as the imagery, which depict the practice, pederasty represented a model for the aristocracy and a manifesto, which outlined the persona aristocrats wanted to confer to the lower classes. Regardless of the intricacies of the actual practice, scholars will never be able to discern definitively precisely how pederasty was practiced in reality—the fact that literary and visual evidence both work in conjunction to construct a similar impression of pederasty's function in society implies a unified ideal regarding pederastic relationships.

The various facets of society with which pederasty connected itself emphasize a masculine society. Pederasty within the aristocracy concerned both the soul and the mind, and this focus excluded the lower classes. That pederasty was exclusionary is evident from the areas in which it was practiced—pederasty never extended into those areas of society in which the elite were not dominant, even the artists who depicted pederastic practice were excluded from the institution. While this association with elitist areas within society could be attributed to the bias of ancient authors.

The dignity and significance of the practice resulted from the practitioners, making the institution very much an active construct of the ancient mind, allowing scholars to use pederasty as a conduit for conceptualizing homosexuality in ancient South Asia. Pederasty created an intricate mapping of social pairs that in turn bolstered the unity. In a society in which fathers and sons interacted only rarely, and even then predominantly during formal occasions such as religious festivals and holidays, pederasty allowed for the creation of masculine bonds which would augment the father/son relationship and create a bond of men with social and emotional connections. Pederasty, long defined by the aspect of the practice most at odds with the modern conception of morality, was far too complex a process to be discussed in terms of sexuality.

If pederasty were merely concerned with satiating a sexual need, there would be no need to woo young men as male prostitutes were readily available. Just as the honour of the hunt lie within the chase, so, too, did the honour of pederasty lie within courtship. Boys were meant to respond to offers with modesty, and men were meant to make those offers with a purity of intention. Although there are evidences where the notion of purity was crossed. However, it becomes clear through the inclusion of pursuit and the idea of wooing and gifting that the relationships within pederasty were far from simple couplings of men and boys.

Pederasty was another means of establishing the honour of an upper-class individual, another means by which the elite could distinguish themselves from the lower class. Those from the lower classes would not have had the opportunity to prove themselves, their divine spirit, in daily life. By transforming the act of wooing into a noble act, pederasty provided yet another arena within society in which the elite could prove themselves better—even in loving the aristocrat gains honour. Given the rhetoric of ancient writers, which stressed the capability and inherent right of the elite, regardless of any bias on the part of those writers given that perception is being examined, it seems natural that the elite would seek to construct pederasty as an expression of higher love, as a spiritual pursuit, which bettered all those involved. However, as mentioned earlier, this notion of the evidences love may have gradually distorted and heterosexualized by replacing and reforming characters, as the notion of pederasty started becoming too complex and controversial to handle.

Modern perceptions and stigmas have long been the bane of historical scholarship, and ancient South Asian pederasty is no exception. Pederasty was a multifaceted practice, which reflected the ideals and self-perception of the elites, while simultaneously propagating the hegemony of that class. It is difficult for the modern mind to conceptualize a relationship between a young man and an older man without falling prey to the stringent morals of modern society. This natural but nihilistic predisposition has resulted in an unfair assessment of pederasty for a large portion of historical scholarship. Examining the individual societal areas of pederasty through the lens of class allows for a discussion of pederasty as a homosocial practice, one which had motivations which lay in the complexities of South Asian social structure and not simply in eroticism. The practice of pederasty was an elitist activity that created a strong union among those most powerful in the city, which, in turn, strengthened that most critical of entities. Pederasty was the ultimate, tangible expression of a union between male citizens and the profound desire for interpersonal connection, a connection, which was inextricably woven into the ancient literary evidences, folklore, music, poetry, and imagery of South Asian civilization.

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