

Homosexuality In R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend and Hostel Room 131*.

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Introduction:

R. Raj Rao (B. 1955) is a writer, poet and professor of literature. He is known for 'India's leading Gay – rights activists. His literary works generally deal with the homosexual relationships amongst characters. He has co-edited images of India in the Indian novels in English (1960-1980). He worked as a professor and head of the English department at the University of Pune. He is openly gay. On the recurring themes of homosexuality in his works. Rao says, "I am myself a poet, novelist, playwright and a writer of non- fiction. Similarly, my teaching and research interests in queer theory and queer literature are direct and natural outcome of my being gay and imaginatively tackling the subject in my fiction, poetry and plays." His literary works include *One Day I Locked My Flat in Soul City* (2001) *The Wisest Fool on Earth and Other Plays*, his novel *The Boyfriend* (2003) is one of the finest example of queer literature. His interviews include *Whistling in the Dark; Twenty-One Queer Interviews* (2009). In 2010 he wrote one more novel to contribute in LGBT i.e. *Hostel Room 131*.

Queer identities have always been seen as the subaltern and have been relegated to the margins. Since the past few decades these identities also known as alternative identities have started voicing out. They have come out in the open and in the process through subtle and sometimes strategic ways have questioned the normative standards, heteronormativity or ideologies the ideologies that the orthodox sexual identities represent. Gay and lesbian activists call for a decriminalization of homosexuality and negotiate an aesthetic framework beyond the conventional male/female binaries. Masculinity studies, an extension of Gender Studies, too has attempted to reread the concept of masculinity, thereby questioning hegemonic masculinity orthodox gender constructions in cultural discourses. The hegemonic type of masculinity has been dominant and oppressive in nature. Its overall dominance in patriarchal set up has never really given alternative masculinities an opportunity to exist. Contemporary queer writers are spokespersons of the queer community and of masculinities that have been silenced, banishes or effeminized so far in literature. The novels *The Boyfriend* and *Hostel Room 131* by R.Raj.Rao are such works of fiction which are known as gay novels in India has lent voice to such oppressed groups in the society.

Elements Of Homosexuality In The Novels:

R. Raj Rao's novel *The Boyfriend* has two main characters. Yudi, the well educated and affluent Brahmin protagonist. The other character is Milind, Dalit lover of the protagonist. Yudi welcomes back his lover after a long separation. The relationship between Yudi and Milya is beyond the caste, class and age. The speechless reaction of Yudi is reason of thinking for the readers. In addition of highlighting the Brahmin/ Dalit divide, the author tries to depict identity politics. In practice, however gay identity is exposed to the deleterious effect of other identity makers like class, caste and religion. Author presents this social determinism in appraising tone. Rao's writing makes clear that he includes all these terms in it. In the introduction of his non-fiction work *Whistling in the Dark* (2009) he explains the term gay and its development in the

queer politics. He suggests that queerness is substantive and cannot have equivalence with other denotation of identity. He says,

“What does gay identity mean? It means, for one, that though we possess multiple identities and are fragmented subjects, identity based on sexual orientation is not subsumed by previous categories of race, class and gender. If these identities intrude, so that a white gay man foregrounds skin color in his dealings with, say, a gay servant in his father’s palace, then perhaps it is time for queerness to secede from the union of identity makers, and establish itself as an autonomous category.(p. XIII-XIX).

The Boyfriend can be studied as an extended problematic of queerness and the union of identity makers. The novel describes the life of Yudi, a forty- something self proclaimed gay man who is emphatically middle- class and atheist, qualities which are seen to complete his work as a journalist. The story of the novel revolves around the opportunities presented by the male homo-social spaces in 1960s Bombay. He (protagonist) enjoys a lifestyle which frequently has sex in public locations. He meets and falls in love with a much younger Dalit man Milind, with whom he mutually creates relationship. Milind’s family marries him to a woman of his own caste; and he serves all the contact with Yudi to continue their affair. Thus the novel emerges the power struggles engendered by the gay or homosexual identity and other identifications in India.

When Yudi is searching for Milind after the riots, he concludes that “it was unlikely that Kishore would be alive” (p.41), and it latterly emerges in Milind’s account that he, although neither Hindu nor Muslim, is embroiled in the brutality of communalism. As he is walking along the railway tracks, he becomes part of a group of Muslims who are fleeing Hindu persecution, and it is only his decision to hide under an empty train which prevents him from being “slaughtered...as goats are slaughtered at Deonar” (p.79). Milind becomes a target simply because he seems to be part of the group, revealing the ultimate indiscriminacy of what began as persecution based on conflicting religious ideology. Yet these experiences do not transform his perceptions: “Of course I am unhappy. The Muslims are our friends, even though they are dirty and I wouldn’t really spend time with them. I hate the Brahmans and the Marathas.

While the novelist plays classical music for the English speaking men and western pop music for Marathai or Gujarati college boys, the likes of Milind received a background of Bollywood music. Receptive anal sex is stigmatized by many of the characters in *The Boyfriend* and *Hostel Room 131*, and it is significant that the term gandu, ‘one who has his anus taken’, is still a prevalent insult in Northern India. Proffering a cogent explication for such phenomena, Indrani Chatterjee (2002) traces a genealogy of the active/passive binary along the axis of slavery, arguing that historically in South Asia a ruler or social superior could penetrate an inferior, but the inversion of this unwritten law invited derision and punishment. In this description of Yudi’s first anal sex with Milind, while portraying identitarian preconceptions as deterministic; Rao simultaneously refuses to replicate the historical connection between wealth- and class-based privilege and sexual roles. Rao toys with two idealistic positions here. Firstly, the inversion of Yudi and Milind’s social status suggests that penetrative anal sex can level class differences; secondly, this sex act seems to be outside the usual economies of gifts and bribery. But even as this idealistic stance is insinuated, Yudi and Milind’s positioning could be subject to a radically different interpretation: this new inverted order is based on the avoidance of blackmail and violence, and a refusal of the working-class man to accede to Rao’s idealized notion of homosexuality. Such men, he suggests elsewhere, are merely MSM, whose “implicit sense of

denial" requires "counseling" (2009, p. xx). In *The Boyfriend* he ultimately repudiates the possibility that male-male penetrative sex can democratize power relations in the outside world, merely reinvesting these hierarchies with alternative models of exploitation and pathology. In this novel the protagonist Siddharth, Twenty-Three years old boy, Meets Sudhir, Twenty, in a friend's room in Pune's Engineering College Hostel. He falls instantly in love.

The middle-class protagonist of *Hostel Room 131*, also lives in constant isolation as a result of his obsession with a younger man from the lower classes, but his apartness is fleshed out more coherently than Yudi's, especially in contradistinction to the collectives of kothis and hijras whom he periodically encounters. As he bitterly remarks: "Here are deviants who see the sense of hanging around together, although devoid of education. We, of the middle classes, on the other hand, learned and all, myopically remain islands unto ourselves" (Rao, 2010, p.159). Dialogising with that of the close-knit group he is observing, Siddhartha's gay identity loses its connotations of separatist communities and activism and is instilled with the isolationism of individuals. This is not Rao's utopia where homosexuality can form collectives based on social ostracism, because "education" has created multiple allegiances which superannuate a singular identity of sexual or gender non-normatively.

The characters from both of the novel show how the people in society are bonded mutually for each other. In spite of the family members the characters are close for their friends (lovers). It is always easy to speak theoretically but in practice such kind of people faces many difficulties. These days the society avoids such kind of people and they are ashamed to behave as a normal people. In the age of globalization the gay and lesbian literature and queer theory need to be studied deeply. Through his work of fiction Rao has questioned a number of realities in the society he mirrors the society as a mere farce. He advocates that no one can be really stigmatized, no matter what they do. Seeking social approval from certain dominant forces of the society is irrelevant because society is inherently repressive. It is impossible to advocate a system in which everything is okay. Homosexuality is a well kept secret most of the times and one can never be sure as to who is a homosexual. Rao endorses the views of queer thinkers that the whole notion of gender is wrong, there is no such thing as responsibility, and any attempt to go by the rules is oppressive. He advocates and regards homosexuality as just another viable lifestyle, absolutely harmless and therefore no more to be shunned or censured.

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