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Exploring Masculinity And Gender Equality In The Novels Of R. Raj Rao

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Abstract

The "sex" and "gender" debates always flare up whenever the topic of gender is broached. Gender is a cultural construction, in contrast to the biological category of sex. Based on these myths, society places men and women in different positions. The female is often the focal point of any discussion on gender. Culture and society both have biases against women. Gender is a feminist concept, but sexism against males has been under-analysed, making this an exclusively female concern. Discourse analysis of gender as an interdisciplinary field of research. Sociology, linguistics, communication, anthropology, psychology, and literature are all part of this umbrella term. Discourse really serves as a lens through which gender inequality may be examined. Social scientists investigate society and social behaviour using a variety of conceptual words as analytical categories. Concepts help social scientists create useful categories for studying social behaviour scientifically. Several such principles serve as a basis for the study of gender dynamics and behaviour. For instance, Ill Matthews, in her 1984 exploration of how femininity is constructed, pioneered the idea of gender. Mathews argues that the idea of gender accounts for the universal practice of classifying people into gendered categories. Therefore, the term/concept of gender is a methodical means of studying the social patterns between men and women. The study of male domination in society is aided by the idea of patriarchy. Gender is a useful lens through which to examine the ways in which men and women differ, whether those differences have their roots in biology or were imposed on them by culture. Some species of trout are more stereotypically male or female due to the conceptions of masculinity and femininity. We will be covering some groundwork here. Sex, gender, patriarchy, and the definitions of male and female are all part of these ideas.

Keywords: - Masculinity, homophobia, Gender & Discourse

INTRODUCTION

In The History of Sexuality, as Foucault contends, homosexual bodies are deemed ‘unnatural’. As a consequence, the body will always be subject to sexual politics and dominance. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault explains how the “body is also directly involved in a political field.” As a result, the body becomes inextricably linked to disciplinary procedures. The novel argues that the homosexual body is perpetually affected by discourses centred on a binary concept of sexuality. Foucault emphasised sexuality as positioned within power structures and discourses. He contended that certain

forms of sexuality were portrayed as unnatural and evil and that their adherents were subjected to surveillance. He relied on the sexualised and sexual body as a site of power play. Various forces, such as law or medicine, mapped and labelled the body in a particular manner before 'acting' on it. Foucault shifted sexuality from the realm of the pure body to discourses and culture. According to him, society constructs itself as normal and safe by denouncing some people as 'deviant' and criminal. The labelled category is a form of 'social control' emphasizing that some people are naturally deviant.

Masculinity

2010 novel Hostel Room 131, wherein he mocks social institutions that propagate authoritarian ideologies under the garb of a polished demeanour. Hostel Room 131 is a love story of two young men, Siddharth and Sudhir, in an engineering college. The narrative is a way to understand the compulsory heterosexuality issues facing young gay men in present-day India. Rao has Sudhir undergoes a sex change operation, a physical transformation. She thus becomes Sumati to live together as a same-sex couple in India. Sudhir tells Siddharth that "I will become a woman . . . so that we can get married . . . two men cannot get married, but a man and a woman can."5 Rich perceived heterosexuality as a globally prevalent structure that organizes male and female relationships, rather than an individual matter of being attracted to and engaging in sexual conduct with the opposite sex. This heterosexual institution is dreamed up of unstructured but explicitly stated and obligatory norms through which males and females embark on romantic relationships. For Siddharth and Sudhir, heterosexuality is not really a choice; instead, it is something they must follow due to enormous normative pressures to classify as heterosexual. Raewyn Connell proposed the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' in his work Masculinities, Power, and Alliance Politics. He exhibits hegemonic masculinity as a distinctly gendered construct. This hegemonic masculine identification promotes the notion of a distinct sort of masculinity that heterosexuality must recognize. Rao highlights how these ideologies operate against society's ability to createan alternative masculine identity. As Sudhir bemoans: If I'm a man and am caught having sex with another man, people will call me chhakka or a homo-both words of abuse. Why should I allow people to abuse me? But if I'm a woman, they'll accept my relationship with man. Because it's a relationship that society understands. So, in a way, I'm doing it not just for myself but also for society.6

Homophobia

Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai discuss how homonormative constraints have turned sexuality to a 'life and death' matter in Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History. The myth that same-sex love is a disease imported into India contributes to an atmosphere of ignorance that proves dangerous for many Indians. In such an atmosphere, homoerotically inclinedpeople often hate themselves, live in shamed secrecy, try to "cure" themselves by resorting to quacks or forcing themselves into marriage, and even attempt suicide, individually or jointly.

In The Boyfriend, Milind is portrayed as a victim of internalized homophobia by Rao. Milind is unsure of his sexual preferences from the start of the novel. He is not as radical in his thinking and attitude as Yudi is. He is perpetually hesitant to identify as gay. In The Boyfriend Rao hints at the possibility of an ideal homosexual community, only to disavow it and therefore reinforce the inescapability of other identity formations.

This is evident in his description of Yudi and Milind's first penetrative sex: Whenever Yudi picked up strangers and took them home, he gladly offered them the active role in bed. He had a theory based on years of experience. As long as men were allowed to penetrate, there was no fear of their returning afterwards to demand money or to beat you up. Some even thought it beneath their dignity to accept cash from someone they had buggered. For such a person, according to them, was

at best a hijra. And their heroism and sense of valour did not permit them to assault a eunuch. It was only when these men were penetrated that they became wounded tigers. They felt emasculated. They could then even murder.

Currency notes, wristwatches, walkmans, sneakers, were not compensation enough; these couldn't restore their lost masculinity. They accepted the presents with one hand and put a knife in your back with the other. (p.11) Rao suggests that male-male sex acts can produce their own nexus of identity markers which may be empowering or disabling.Gayatri Reddy (2005) aptly identifies that the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay', although historically constructed in different ways, do not in themselves specify receptive/penetrative sexual roles, unlike longer-standing identities in India such as those of the panthi,kothi and hijra. For the working-class men whom Yudi seduces, the binary opposition of penetrator/penetration is inseparable from that of man/hijra, implying that they cannot conceive of a 'versatile' and 'egalitarian' homosexuality uninflected by Indian accounts of gender normativity.Yudi's gay identity, despite its apparent aloofness from such low-class and -caste conceptualisations, is not impervious to them, and the novel depicts the slippage between knowingly playing the role of the 'feminine' hijra in sexual intercourse and adopting 'womanly' characteristics, as refracted by masculinist paradigms, in a male-male relationship.Rao does not allow Yudi's idealistic vision to go unchecked, instead revealing it as illogical and contradictory. To ascertain whether or not Yudi is really troubled by his caste, Milind exhorts him to eat several wafers which he has half consumed, and Yudi reacts furiously:

"Homos are no different from Bhangis. Both are Untouchables. So why should I have a problem with eating your jootha?" "But you are a Brahman, aren't you?" "No, I am a homosexual. Gay by caste. Gay by religion." "I don't understand what you are saying." "What I am saying is that homosexuals have no caste or religion. They have only their homosexuality." "How can that be?" "That's how it is. Straight people are Brahmans, gays Shudras. So you see, both you and I are Shudras. That's why we are best friends." At some intuitive level, Milind suspected that Yudi was talking sense. He was in no position, however, to understand the intricacies of the argument. (p.81-82)

Throughout the novel, his sexual identity remains heteronormative; he always takes the 'active' role in bed and believes that this does not qualify him as a member of the homosexual community. He is adamant about not being referred to as a "Chhakka", a homosexual.33 He blames Yudi for his sexual promiscuity upon his return from the A. K. Modeling Agency: You are the one who has ruined my life. It's because of you that I became a homo. Had it not been for you and your perverse ways, I would never have landed up at a place like A. K Modeling Agency and become a prostitute. Shame on you! I wonder whether I'll now be able to lead a normal married life.the words of Ruth Vanita: All laws originate in custom, that is, in the social practice of local communities. Customs change gradually so the change is not startling to people. But when laws are written down, the written law freezes while customs continue to change. It takes time for the written law to catch up with custom. When the written law changes, people panic because they think written law changes practice, whereas in fact, changes in practice precede changes in written law, for example, incompatible spouses used to separate and remarry long before divorce and remarriage became legal. Similarly, same-sex marriages occurred long before laws began to recognize them. "Shut up!" Milind snapped. "Have some respect for a sacred place. You're so educated, yet you talk such rubbish!" "Let me put it this way," said Yudi, not accustomed to being snubbed. "I talk rubbish because I'm educated. At least I have something to say. You illiterates are slaves. You only say what people allow you to!" (p.126) Confounding Milind's lack of education with his menial status, Yudi reveals his earlier affirmation of their shared untouchability to be hollow. Rao is suggesting that gay idealism as espoused by a Yudi is at best contradictory, at worst hypocritical, because homosexuality is continually obfuscated by his greater attachment to the other markers of identity which constitute his inevitably socialised subjectivity. The Boyfriend painstakingly demonstrates that Yudi and Milind are separated by class, caste, age, language,

education and religion, and, in a society where such formulations constantly militate against fulfilling relationships, even gay idealism cannot emerge untainted by social conditioning. Rao's position recalls that of Dennis Altman (2001), who claims of the 'developing world':

The romantic myth of homosexual identity cutting across class, race, and so on doesn't work in practice any more than it does in the West. The experience of sexuality in everyday life is shaped by such variables as the gap between city and country; ethnic and religious differences; and hierarchies of health, education, and age. The idea of a gay or lesbian/gay community assumes that such differences can be subordinated to an overarching sense of sexual identity, a myth that is barely sustainable in comparatively rich and affluent societies. (p.34)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, the VHP and the RSS..."(p.79). Rao satirises the contradictoriness of Milind's opinions, but he also implies the disjunction between tolerance and acceptance: national aspirations of mutual tolerance, rooted in Nehru's ideal of the democratic secular nation state, do nothing to neutralise communal tensions; in fact, they are barely capable of concealing them. Rao's purpose in evoking such moments of communalism is to adumbrate the failure of the egalitarian ideals enshrined in the national constitution and the principles of democracy, partly to parallel the vitiation of the democratising potential of homosexuality by more pressing identifications. As Milind subsequently remarks: "When I was thirteen, I was in the RSS...The gandus enrolled me in their party, even though they knew I was a Dalit" (p.79). To reiterate, the pejorative label gandu suggests both a general insult and a specific reference to the passive partner in male-male sexual intercourse, nuances which the Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal (1999) captures in his famous Marathi poem, "Gandu Bagicha" ("Arsefuckers' Park"), first published in 1989. The ending is relevant here:

The widow gladdens her heart The cripples play kabaddi The lame sleep under rags The leper cracks what's left of his knuckles Homosexuals screw each other to the strains of the nation's anthem (p.75) The analogy with Yudi is striking: surrounded by multiple identifications, some of which he internalises, he cannot perform Rao's ideal homosexuality, and in The Boyfriend it never manages to"establish itself as an autonomous category." If the novel hints at the dissolution of hierarchies by means of the shared abjection of homosexuals, Rao maps the inevitable failure of this gesture in order to underscore the ineluctability of other constituents of identity in contemporary India. He implies that the gay man's efforts to evade the incursions of identity markers like class, caste and religion do not result in new collectives but merely a dangerous solipsism and alienation from the world around him.

Hence Yudi's simultaneous attraction and aversion to subalternmen is entirely motivated by an irreducible sense of class difference. Even long-term relationships do not promise solidarity because these men do not see male-male love and sex as constitutive of an essential orientation or identitarian core. Rao's idealistic vision is still far from fruition, but it hauntsThe Boyfriend as an unrealised counternarrative,a muted exhortation for social and political change.

GENDER@ DISCOURSE

The conversation on "sex" and "gender" is sparked by any topic relating to gender. Gender, in contrast to sex, is seen as cultural rather than biological. Based on these myths, society constructs gender-based roles for men and women. Whenever gender is discussed, women are often the focal point. Cultural biases in society tend to be sexist. Gender equality should be the norm, but sexist attitudes toward males have prevented that from happening. The fact that we need laws to protect women from so many different types of unfairness is glaring evidence that women experience the most severe forms of bias. To provide for their families, male members of society were required to leave their homes and work outside, while women were supposed to stay at home and take care of the children and the household. However, as time went on, this seemingly neutral division of work morphed into explicit bias in the media's portrayal of the two groups. The disparity between the sexes is deeply ingrained in Indian culture.

CONCLUSION

A city is a place where the hegemonic class or the class in power exerts their power through different mechanisms. Ideological state apparatuses are diverse ways to propagate the discourse of heteronormativity. In The Boyfriend Bombay is shown as a space where sexual norms are transgressed. Yudi‟s apartment, the gay bar, the modeling agency, the loo, etc., are avenues of escape. These queer spaces are liminal spaces that offer a kind of alternative to the disciplines and routines of modern city life. The city epitomizes rationality and heteronormativity, whereas the liminal spaces valorize the play of human sexuality. The city becomes a metaphor for closeted gay men. Most of the people are unaware of queer spaces. Though the city offers anonymity, Milind and Yudi are always under surveillance. The novel depicts the dynamics of male homophobia, the irrational fear or intolerance of gay men, that serves the function of keeping men within the boundaries of traditionally defined role. Bombay becomes a site of contradictions- it produces queer spaces, and it is also a place where sexuality is politicized.

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