



An Analysis Of Queer Futurity In Raj Rao's *Madam, Give Me My Sex*

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Abstract:

This paper examines Raj Rao's *Madam, Give Me My Sex* through the theoretical lens of queer futurity, drawing primarily on José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, while also engaging with Louis Althusser's concept of ideology and ideological state apparatuses. Queer futurity, as articulated by Muñoz, emerges from a sense of dissatisfaction with the heteronormative present and an affective longing for a more just and livable future. The study argues that Rao's novel stages this tension between an oppressive "here and now" and the promise of a "then and there" through its satirical portrayal of the Indian higher education system. Focusing on the character of Dr. Viraf Marzaban, the paper explores how queer desire, pedagogy, and creative expression function as sites of resistance within institutional spaces governed by dominant ideologies. Marzaban's poetry and his efforts to institutionalize LGBTQI studies exemplify Muñoz's notion of concrete utopia, wherein hope is grounded in historically situated struggles rather than abstract idealism. Simultaneously, the paper demonstrates how heteronormativity, caste hierarchies, and patriarchy are reproduced through educational and social institutions, aligning with Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation. The courtroom narrative, pedagogical interventions, and interpersonal encounters in the novel collectively foreground moments where the future is glimpsed within the present. Ultimately, the paper contends that *Madam, Give Me My Sex* imagines queer futurity not as an escape from politics, but as an active, utopian praxis that challenges ideological domination and gestures toward a more inclusive social order.

Keywords: Queer Futurity, Heteronormativity, Concrete Utopia, LGBTQ

The concept of queer futurity features the sensing of longing, the inadequacy inherent in the state of affairs in the present; the constant observance, knowing and the subsequent wait to fill the inexplicable void of how the present heteronormative society functions. It also constitutes the ability to look beyond the present. JE Muñoz explains queerness with respect to queer futurity as "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (1). The present, according to Muñoz, is a prison that ought to be endured to reach a favourable future. "We must strive, in the face of the *here and now*'s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*" (1).

Raj Rao's *Madam, Give Me My Sex* is a social satire attempting to jibe at the Indian higher education system and the extent of vile hypocrisy of its stakeholders. The novel predominantly follows the life (both personal and professional) of characters associated with the department of English in a fictional 'Oxford of the East' university. The author exposes the readers to queer characters, openly gay and closeted, in the

story who navigate the homophobia prevalent in their work environment and how the prejudices affect their potential for growth in their jobs and hinders their social lives.

Dr Marzaban who is interim reader of the department of English in Oxford of the East is described to be a poet, the crux of his writings being his journey of self-exploration and his gay experience. Marzaban's sexual orientation is not withheld from the readers; however, the other characters of the novel have had to constantly take a guess at it, exposing their prejudices. When Professor Tiwari, who functions as the head of the department for the major part of the novel, first sees Dr Marzaban and the readers get to witness him through Tiwari's perspective. Professor Tiwari notes that when Marzaban walks he walks "like a woman".

Dr. Marzaban stood out among the other academics who had gathered at the British Council to deliberate on modern British poetry. He was in his late thirties and was fair skinned with a jet-black beard that provided an effective foil to his fair skin. However, Dr Marzaban spoke with a feminine lilt...His hips swayed from side to side as he walked so that while one buttock was up, the other was down. Still, Professor Tiwari approached Dr Marzaban during lunch break with a job offer. (18)

Marzaban's poem "Hotel Begumpet" starts with the line, "I went to a hotel in Begumpet and fell in love with the waiter". His colleagues. Ankit Jadhav (of whose place Marzaban was recruited in formerly) and Dr Saxena disproved his poem being any good. Ankit Jadhav even remarks, "Dr Marzaban isn't a poet who is gay. He is a poet *because* he's gay. It is his sexuality that newspapers are interested in, not his doggerel" (119). These heteronormative characters however, fail to notice the queer aesthete which is forward-dawning. Muñoz quotes Bloch's theorisation where he detects 'wish-landscapes' in painting and poetry and claims that they extend into the territory of futurity (5). Marzaban in his poetry looks forward to a future where he can marry a man, face no discrimination or shoulder perilous life-threatening consequences for being openly gay. In his poetry, the quotidian act of going to a hotel becomes a secret rendezvous. Muñoz writes in explaining one such poem by O'Hara's poem "Having a Coke with You" that the events of the poem deal with a specified present which has now considerably become the past and in its "queer relationality promises a future"

Muñoz elaborates Bloch's idea of abstract and concrete utopia in his *Cruising Utopia* to discuss queer futurity. Unlike abstract utopia, concrete utopia exists in relation to the historically situated struggles and does not contribute to evasion of politics. Concrete utopias generate a hope for change where "a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many" (3).

Here, Dr. Marzaban proposes to incorporate queer studies in the syllabus of the learners of years to come. He successfully manages to culminate LGBTQI studies as an elective paper and has it done despite having the idea being rejected by the board the first time around. His persistent efforts to craft the course and be indulged in it as its facilitator makes the course "run like a compulsory course" based the class' strength being akin to that of a core paper, forty-four out of sixty. Rao writes,

Though the LGBTQI studies course was optional and had begun with just five students, it had grown so popular that three-fourths of the students now opted for it. In the light of the decriminalisation of Section 377 by the Delhi High Court, students grew curious about the subject. They wanted to know why such a hullabaloo was made about it. And they loved the way Dr. Marzaban taught the subject, providing them with entertaining anecdotes from his own life. (277)

Elisavet Pakis explains that Muñoz wants to disrupt a deeply confining, deadening, lethal here and now, 'a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity' and that suggests that there is nothing outside of this current moment. (2). Dr Marzaban receiving a phone call from an anonymous 'well-wisher' saying "get yourself a dummy girlfriend" (105) in order to save himself from allegations of him being gay and in extension save his job as Professor Tiwari is looking for ways to fire him from the job to safeguard department's reputation. When Debashish Goswami, Marzaban's colleague, tells Kamalkant and Marzaban that he identifies himself as gay too, he tells the audience in attendance to not out him, because unlike Dr Marzaban he is still closeted. He says that when the office clerk misconstrued his phrase "Madam, give me my cheques" as "Madam, give me my sex", he was called a pervert and this mondegreen escalated things. This comical encounter however resulted in serious repercussions. Marzaban replies to Debashish Goswami that "these chicks think every man is after their pussy" (147) and questions the heteronormative mindset prevailing in the society.

Baban Bodre, who is a part of the English department as well, files a case against Marzaban under Section 377, as a part of his schemes to take him down. The court proceedings of the case reinstate the necessity of unlearning of all the presupposed social constructions revolving around queerness. It is essential to be aware of the repression, fragmentation and alienation happening as a result of centuries of oppression.

Muñoz writes further in this accord that,

It is also important to practice a criticism that enables us to cut through the institutional and legislative barriers that outlaw contact relations and obscure glimpses of the whole. These glimpses and moments of contact have a decidedly utopian function that permits us to imagine and potentially make a queer world. Such a criticism would work by allowing us to see "the future in the present" (55)

In the court hearings, Marzaban's and Baban Bodre's lawyers present their points in defense of their parties. Bodre's lawyer poses the question of what is "natural" and he continues saying that sexual intercourse resulting in and done with the primary goal of reproduction is considered natural and not against the law. Whereas Mr. Billimoria, Marzaban's lawyer presents the judge with historical facts and researches undertaken on queerness and homosexuality as evidence to reinstate his standpoint that what is natural is largely socially constructed and the idea of natural varies indefinitely. Mr. Billimoria digs out history to justify how homosexuality was not a crime in pre-British India, how animals exhibited homosexual behaviour at some point of their lives and how even men can bear babies. T

he outcome of the case turns out to be favourable to Dr Marzaban. Rao constructs the courtroom drama in such a way that the accused and the plaintiff, those with completely contrasting perceptions of homosexuality. The juxtaposition offered by the author allows the reader to place themselves or associate oneself with either of those parties and take a stand, or remain objective- and assume a middle ground as the judge, providing room for contemplation and self-introspection. The justice is restored when Marzaban is absolved of his supposed crime, a possibility for birth of utopia where being queer is good is reassured.

Louis Althusser in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" elucidates how individuals by being born, or even before their birth automatically become subjects of ideology, this submission need not necessarily be consensual. Upon calling, the individual understands that the call is made for them "nine out of ten times".

I shall then suggest that ideology "acts" or functions" in such a way that it "recruits"" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing,

and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace every day police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" (699)

Rao's depiction of a brief interaction between professor Tiwari and Dr Marzaban in the washroom, where the vocabulary used in the conversation is believed to have deeper implications than the very obvious meaning of the words used. When Tiwari asks Marzaban "Viraf, don't you have your periods?" (29), the latter replies that "Sir, I am not a woman", stressing on the *woman*. Viraf, startled by the directness of the question- Tiwari asking him if he had 'periods', as in classes, he thinks it is his boss' expression of mockery, a remark on his sexual orientation, a result of prejudice and misconceptions prevailing within normative ideology. Marzaban shares the details of this encounter with his coworker Dr Saxena who then ensures that Tiwari could have used any other word such as "lectures" or "classes" but he deliberately used "periods". Although the truth of the intended meaning of why Tiwari used "periods" in his question remains contested, Viraf immediately assumed that it was an attack directed towards him. He was hailed at, and presumed without second guessing that it was a place where he ought to get defensive and react to it.

Althusser writes, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (693). The world outlooks, predominantly religious, ethical, political, legal ideologies and so on, do not conform to the actuality of lives but are merely imaginary. Ankit Jadhav, who occupies the job reserved for people belonging to scheduled castes, constantly tries to escape his identity as he believes in a political ideology that tells him to renounce anything and everything that is associated with his caste, to fit in his definition of being progressive. But as the story moves on, the character's efforts to escape the pangs of caste system- be it his inter-caste marriage, him wanting to convene a conference on literary theory instead of Dalit literature, him not wanting to mobilise with the campus SC and ST activist groups; gets co opted into what the prevalent ideology of the oppressors dictate.

Marzaban sporting a mock girlfriend to save his job and face from Tiwari, Ankit Jadhav and Baban Bodre organising conferences and delivering speeches on Dalit literature and the reflexive experiences of his tribal life, respectively, as an obligation for having received a job under reserved category by their employers, Veronica D'costa's inability to refuse Tiwari's indulgence and his attempts of advancements upon her, her abiding with her husband's interests even when her's does not align with his- all these characters suffer and have come to terms with or in denial of the fact that the men in positions of power, and their ideology influence their way of lives. In Althusser's words,

There is therefore a cause for the imaginary transposition of the real conditions of existence: that cause is the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the "people" on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations. (694)

The novel *Madam, Give Me My Sex* touches on aspects of how ideology does not identify itself as ideology but is, in turn, propagated in the society through various channels and other instrumental ways. Althusser remarks educational institutions and filial institutions as state apparatuses that help imbue ideology onto the subjects. He also mentions that "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" (695). The Oxford of the East is a representative portrayal of how educational institutions function and play a significant role in keeping the subjects (students and the staff) comfortably in their status quo. The conversations that the characters have amongst themselves, the lectures they deliver their students, even the occasional exposition of any character's conscience does not lead up to or hint at the unlearning that should have happened as a result of their actions and extended exposure. Every uncomfortable conversation that attempts to go against the norm is either met with a challenge or is forgotten halfway.

Although the characters are a part of an place, a university, where constant learning and evolving from one's former self to a better person is prone to happen, the characters refuse to defy the generalised way in which a society functions. The characters, who are subjects, as Althusser says, they constantly remind themselves of the customary discriminatory practices they have always indulged themselves in, not willing to shed their skins off. Tiwari does not outgrow his casteist and homophobic mindstate. "The subject's ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (697).

Kamalkant narrates the stories that his pastor told him regarding how God punishes sodomy and homosexuality as a sin to Marzaban. The pastor's stories are exaggerated lies, cock and bull stories cooked up to scare young people away from embracing their sexual identity and orientation, if they ever dared to stray away from heteronormativity. The movies preached the same as well. Marzaban associates himself with the female protagonist from *Raja Hindustani* when his lover Altaf assumes himself to be the male counterpart and considers it as an act of subversion.

Pierre Bourdieu says, Because the social capital accruing from a relationship is that much greater to the extent that the person who is the object of it is richly endowed with capital (mainly social, but also cultural and even economic capital), the possessors of an inherited social capital, symbolised by a great name, are able to transform all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections. (9) The social capital of the characters, their ability to make and sustain profitable connections is notable in *Madam, Give Me My Sex*. Tiwari's connections and his prestigious job position, Ankit Jadhav's wife Ujwala Deshpande's job and Gargee Spark's (a scholar) lectures were possible thanks to Ankit Jadhav's social connections. Meanwhile, Baban Bodre's speech explains the stark reality and privilege his peers received while he was deprived of the same.

according to him, except for the unfortunate people of his community and his hamlet were privileged. And his colleagues in the English department of the Oxford of the East represented a microcosm of the world. They were born in big cities, their parents had bank balances and they were admitted to the best schools and colleges without any glitches. For their higher education, all of them went abroad, to England, America and Canada, none of them had to worry, for even a second, about where the next meal would come from. (177)

The ideological state apparatuses aid ideology to prevail and subsume queerness upon its existence. Queer futurity is a ray of hope in a stifling present that is largely heteronormative. The ideology of the state is kept under control using the state apparatuses that police the subjects and upholds the ideas fit for the ruling class.

This study has demonstrated that *Madam, Give Me My Sex* operates as a compelling literary articulation of queer futurity within the constrictive framework of a heteronormative and ideologically regulated present. By situating Raj Rao's novel within José Esteban Muñoz's theorization of queer futurity and Louis Althusser's concept of ideology, the paper has shown how the text exposes the mechanisms through which educational institutions, legal systems, and everyday social practices function as ideological state apparatuses that discipline, marginalize, and police queer subjects. The "Oxford of the East" emerges as a microcosm of Indian society, where learning paradoxically coexists with prejudice, and where intellectual spaces reproduce rather than dismantle dominant norms.

Dr. Viraf Marzaban's trajectory foregrounds the affective and political dimensions of queer existence in such spaces. His poetry, pedagogy, and personal negotiations with visibility exemplify Muñoz's notion of concrete utopia—hope that is neither abstract nor escapist but rooted in collective

struggle and lived experience. Through acts as ordinary as teaching an elective course or writing a poem about desire, Marzaban envisions and enacts a future in which queerness is not criminalized, pathologized, or ridiculed. These moments reveal how the future is not deferred entirely but intermittently glimpsed within the present, offering possibilities for resistance and transformation.

At the same time, the novel underscores the pervasive grip of ideology on all subjects, queer and non-queer alike. Characters such as Tiwari, Ankit Jadhav, and Baban Bodre illustrate how caste, gender, and sexuality are regulated through internalized beliefs and institutional rituals, often compelling individuals to comply with or reproduce the very systems that oppress them. Rao's satire thus lays bare the contradictions of liberal posturing and progressive rhetoric that fail to translate into genuine unlearning or structural change.

Ultimately, *Madam, Give Me My Sex* affirms queer futurity as both a critical lens and a political imperative. By exposing the inadequacy of the present and insisting on the possibility of a more equitable future, the novel aligns with Muñoz's call to imagine and work toward a "then and there" beyond the totalizing logic of heteronormativity. Queer futurity, as envisioned in Rao's text, becomes an act of endurance, imagination, and resistance—one that challenges ideological domination while keeping alive the hope of a world where queerness is not merely tolerated but affirmed as a vital mode of being.

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