



# Religious and Superstitious Outlook: A Pseudo-Scientific Approach to Queer in Raj Rao's Novel *Hostel Room 131*

Bincy Skaria<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. R. AJITH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar (Full-Time) PG & Research Department of English V. O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi - 628008. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli.62701, Tamil Nadu, India bincy.shibu35@gmail.com, 9605408961

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor PG & Research Department of English V. O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi - 628008. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli.62701, Tamil Nadu, India. ajithranchal@gmail.com, 9446796994

**Citation:** Bincy Skaria, et al. (2024), Religious and Superstitious Outlook : A Pseudo-Scientific Approach to Queer in Raj Rao's Novel *Hostel Room 131*, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(9), 924-926

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i9.9829

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>Raj Rao in his work <i>Hostel Room 131</i> brings about the concept of Superstition and religion as a Pseudo-scientific approach. Various perspectives of the societal conceptions are discussed in the works of Raj Rao. As a queer writer he has tried to bring out the nature of Homophobic society that is drowned with Patriarchal and religious beliefs, societal conventions, prejudices and practises. Though several notions of homosexuality is discussed in the society, acceptance in this regard seems inapparent. It is noted that sexuality and gender is discussed as biologically and socially constructed and there is no alteration found in the beliefs of the same. The paper tries to bring out the societal outlook of homosexuality as a superstition.</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Superstition, pseudo-scientific, Homophobic, religious beliefs, societal conventions.</p>

Every individual possesses the right to exist within society. Individuals in society are classified according to conventions such as sex, gender, caste, class, religion, and education.

The distinctions among these attributes are influenced by biological factors and social constructs. R. Raj Rao, a prominent Indian LGBT rights activist, is an Indian Marathi writer, poet, and literature educator. He is openly homosexual and focuses on the subject of homosexuality. He has consistently been very outspoken with his experience as a homosexual Indian. Rao is the inaugural laureate of the newly instituted Quebec Indian Awards.

Raj Rao seeks to normalize homosexuality as an inherent trait established before birth, asserting that homosexual behaviour is typical rather than anomalous. Rao, as a gay activist and writer, believed that critical attention should be directed toward a community that has historically been marginalized and deprived of authentic identity and representation within the social and cultural framework of society. They strive to secure a position in society where gender nonconformity is not seen as deviant, yet they are perpetually depicted as unacceptable members of society. The LGBTQ community in India has numerous challenges in daily life, including societal non-acceptance and discrimination. The behaviour is therapeutic, and homosexuality is perceived as aberrant or pathological. Emotional complexity may arise from social exclusion, alienation from loved ones, despair, isolation, or a sense of inferiority.

The paper titled "Religious and Superstitious Outlook: A Pseudo-Scientific Approach to Queer in Raj Rao's Novel *Hostel Room 131*" provides a comprehensive examination of the brutality perpetrated under the guise of religious beliefs. People frequently perceive behavioural changes or individual attitudinal variances as odd and superstitious, typically interpreting them as manifestations of possession or challenging them as pseudo-scientific. Superstitious beliefs have been present since the inception of human history and are deeply embedded in culture and religion.

In "Mohanjodaro and Indus Civilization," Marshal presents various seals and plates indicating that the inhabitants of Mohanjodaro shared common superstitions and beliefs.

Their religion was rudimentary, characterized by strong superstition and the use of magical activities. The Vedic age was characterized by a rudimentary religion. Both the Rigveda and Atharvaveda provide ample evidence of superstitious beliefs and magical practices. The Atharvaveda elucidates the demonology that was widespread among the superstitious tribes of India. However, its magic has Aryan influence as well. Certain superstitions evolved from religious rituals that persist among those who no longer follow the faith from which they derived. The practices frequently lost their initial significance during this process.

Superstition has been the main opponent of the scientific legacy all through human history. According to

Russell, "superstitions have sidetracked the growth of scientific knowledge and efforts to solve our problems". Bertrand Russell frequently discussed the detrimental impact of superstition on human progress. In his essay "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish" (1943), he "Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom."

Pseudo-sciences include witchcraft, numerology, astrology, psychism, mythology, evil-eye, mediumship, and many more portents and practices that have universal appeal and are expanding rather quickly. Humans have a tendency to turn to supernatural beliefs, rituals, and similar behaviours for solace during stressful and uncertain situations. Reason fails and emotions take over when faced with disasters, especially when one has used up all of his resources to deal with them.

The discourse on contemporary man in society implicitly pertains to the current notions, attitudes, and actions under consideration. We can all agree that humans face endless challenges throughout their lives. They often find it challenging to overcome their circumstances. He seeks solutions in all facets to navigate the tumult of his life. He ventures off to seek the external influence that will determine his destiny.

A variety of factors cause changes in human behaviour. Education is indicative of economic growth. Advancements in science and technology stem from education-driven growth. Although knowledge has led to more personal change, Indians still place a higher value on ancient practices and traditions because they think these will elevate them above their current situation.

*Hostel Room 131* centres on a homosexual topic, emphasizing the friendship between Siddharth, who is from an educated background, and Sudhir, a lad from a rural area. Both seek and envision a shared life that Indian society does not recognize. Siddharth's family members, although sceptical of their son, are not particularly concerned about his sexual orientation. Simultaneously, Sudhir's family, originating from a rural village, could not reconcile with the reality of their son's identification with the queer community; instead, they believe Sudhir is possessed and seek treatment from Swamiji. Although their faith may appear religious, the reality is that, aside from religion, the patriarchal and cultural traditions within their culture fail to embrace the established concepts of gender and sexuality.

In addition, seeking assistance from science, they often find comfort in superstitious beliefs. We can comprehend from several texts. We can deduce from several texts that the intersection of culture and identity can create a complex landscape for individuals like Sudhir.

The struggle between personal authenticity and societal expectations often leads to intense internal conflict, highlighting the need for broader acceptance and understanding within traditional frameworks. In this context, it becomes essential to foster dialogues that challenge normative perceptions and celebrate diverse expressions of identity. By doing so, we not only support individuals like Sudhir but also contribute to a more inclusive society that honors the rich tapestry of human experience.

The belief in superstitions started from primitive age, beside the fact of enlightenment through education, it continues even today. It is obvious that many prevalent superstitions exist inside every community and culture. Certain individuals adhere to superstitious notions, while others do not. Individual variations exist in the adherence to superstitious ideas.

Foreign notions are inclined to categorise religious activities as 'superstitious' when they encompass beliefs about remarkable occurrences (miracles), an afterlife, supernatural interventions, apparitions, the effectiveness of prayer, charms, incantations, the significance of omens, and predictions. Social, Psychological, Economic, and Environmental elements each play a significant role in the formation and perpetuation of superstitious beliefs.

In *Hostel Room 131*, the family's perspective on the concept of homosexuality is evident. They perceive this as malicious. The lines in the novel "Beyond shadow of doubt, they felt, Siddharth had occult powers by means of which he'd mesmerised their son" (144). The family members seek refuge in Sri Pitambar Maharaj Baba, not only for religious remedies to liberate Sudhir from homosexuality but also because Baba specializes in exorcism. *The Monotheists* by F. E. Peters: "Religion, it is said, is about the relationship between God and humanity" nonetheless, in the novel, humanity is prominently excluded from the religious environment, as exemplified by the religious teacher depicted therein.

We recognise that Sudhir was oblivious, as he believed that his family's devout nature indicated that their meeting with Baba at the ashram was for the forthcoming Poojas.

Religious teachings from the saints have a discernible impact on individuals. This is especially true for those who are impoverished, reside in rural areas, and lack formal education. Baba administers therapies that integrate ancient and contemporary procedures. This appeals to both the educated and urban populations. This episode from *Hostel Room 131* illustrates how individuals are misled under the guise of religion and emphasises the naïve faith people place in religious leaders. Rational thought and superstitious ideas are significantly influenced by the environmental conditions of the home or familial setting.

It is been understood superstitious views among the impoverished arise from resource shortages, whereas people in more favourable socio-economic conditions develop such ideas due to factors like business uncertainty and existential uneasiness. Particularly in poor countries, one can observe a significant differentiation. Villages or rural locations are remote from contemporary conveniences, facilities, and essential resources required to fulfil the basic needs of individuals. India is home to a multitude of religions and sub religions, referred to as cults or sects.

In *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (1939), Karen Horney critiques traditional psychoanalytic perspectives, emphasizing the influence of cultural and social factors on human psychology. She acknowledges the challenge of transcending contemporary biases: "No one can entirely step out of his time; despite his keenness for vision, his thinking is in many ways bound to be influenced by the mentality of his time." The author here tries to emphasize the importance of the fact that inspite of the awakening from the customs and practices, certain theories are still enrooted in the cultural and social practices.

Apart from all this backdrop that leads to superstitions. *Hostel Room 131*, has a different story, it is their religious belief that lead them to baba. Religion can be considered as a structured framework for human spirituality that typically includes narratives, symbols, beliefs, and practices, often including a supernatural or transcendent aspect, which provides meaning to the practitioner's life experiences through the reference to a higher power or truth. Folks of Sudhir seeks baba to make Sudhir free from Homosexuality when they felt only he can help them out from their present situation. It focuses on making supernatural, metaphysical, and moral claims about reality (like the universe and people), which could lead to a set of religious rules, ethics, and a unique way of life. Religion includes ancestral or cultural traditions, texts, history, mythology, and individual beliefs and religious experiences.

The violence evident in the context of religion can be comprehended through allusions from *Hostel Room 131*, which reveal that the individual in question is not only a religious guru but also an exorcist. He administers shock therapy to Sudhir, exacerbating his condition. His family members felt that the suffering endured by Sudhir would lead him to renounce homosexuality. In this context, shock therapy is regarded as a treatment for homosexuality, which can be classified as a pseudoscientific method that erroneously suggests that such therapies are legitimate scientific interventions.

The cruelty perpetrated in the name of religion is evident, manifesting as a pseudo- scientific method or a reflection of superstitions exhibited by Sudhir's relatives. These lines clearly bring out the pain suffered by Sudhir in the Ashram, A metal plate was placed on his chest. Fixed to the plate was a cream-coloured cord, at the other end of which was a 15 watt three-pin plug. The cold metal went a shiver down Sudhir's spine. Without warning, the baba put the plug into a socket and switched on the button. An 440-volt current passed through Sudhir's body. At first he was silent, too was dazed to react but, as the baba repeated the operation, shifting the metal plate from one end of his torso to another, the sheer agony of it brought tears to his eyes and made him howl. The pain was so excruciating that, even though he was barely conscious, Sudhir vowed to take revenge on the whole world. (146)

The perverse sexual behaviours occurring under the guise of blind religious faith, perpetuated by spiritual gurus such as Swamiji in *Hostel Room 131*, are also revealed.

Following the shock treatments administered to Sudhir, Swamiji attempts to amuse himself with deviant sexual activities, while Sudhir, undergoing all the shock therapies, remains unresponsive.

Today, humanity has a major illness. Political turmoil, economic instability, and moral disorientation are simply symptoms of this spiritual illness. The only way to combat aggressive evil, which is eroding society, is aggressive good. We must shift our mindset drastically. Human nature must change. Despite its positive aspects, religion has faced criticism. Humanity requires the world's great faiths to respond. Understanding the dangers of superstitions and using science and technology properly will eliminate pseudo-scientific approaches that harmonize religion and the universe.

### Works Cited

1. Hodgson, Marshall G. S. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. University of Chicago Press, 1974.
2. Horney, Karen. *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*. W. W. Norton, 1939.
3. Peters, F. E. *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition*.
4. Princeton University Press, 2003.
5. Rao, R. Raj. *Hostel Room 131*. Penguin Books Limited, 2010
6. Russell, Bertrand. *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish*. 1943. *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, edited by Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn, Routledge, 2009, pp. 58–78.