

Metabolic Urbanity and the Public Bathroom in the BomGay of R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*

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<https://doi.org/10.71106/DXHO8532>

Abstract | This paper considers the ways in which the urban novel is narratively structured by the metabolic life of its characters and the availability of public infrastructures to satisfy their bodily needs. I examine R. Raj Rao's 2003 novel *The Boyfriend* and its depiction of how urban metabolic life intersects with the material contingencies of Mumbai's gay subculture. While descriptions of setting in the novel are often moments of narrative stasis, urban infrastructural description, I argue, proliferates with narrative. I contend that metabolic descriptions of characters' digestive acts, which make explicit the usually unspoken acts of daily life in the novel, draw our attention to various urban contingencies and the interpellation of characters by the infrastructures that sustain their physical bodies, elaborating human subjectivities through infrastructural description. As I will show, these urban infrastructural subjectivities in Rao's novel are formed alongside overlapping and interlocking geographies of caste, gender, and sexuality in Mumbai.

Keywords | LGBTQ+, Infrastructure, Sexuality, Mumbai Gay Culture, Public Bathrooms, Metabolic Activity, Novel Studies, Indian Literature, R. Raj Rao, *The Boyfriend*

Ramachandrapurapu Raj Rao's 2003 *The Boyfriend* is one of the first gay novels to come out of India. The book follows the life of freelance journalist Yudi after he meets his lover, the Dalit-caste Milind, while cruising in the station toilets for sex. Comprising an almost A–Z knowledge of Mumbai's queer outposts, including Churchgate train station loos, the sports field Azad Maidan, and gay nightclubs, *The Boyfriend* is a highly instructive text. It is a map of the city organized around points of queer encounter, an essential manual in Rao's wider cultural production of "BomGay."¹

My paper focuses on Rao's realist descriptions of homosexual cruising, food-eating, and scatology in *The Boyfriend*, seeing how his queer characters move and act according to their metabolic cycles and their navigation of the city's availability of public infrastructure for their more illicit metabolic acts. These vivid descriptions of consumption, defecation, urination, and sex are significant to Rao's rendering of the city's infrastructure as spaces that can provide both protective cover and desirable exposure for gay men meeting in public. Train station bathrooms and other peripheral urban spaces do not merely confine the gay community to the spatial and social margins of the city, but accommodate and even adapt to the diverse material contingencies of queer urban communities. The train station bathrooms at Churchgate, for example, may be an objectionable locale in Mumbai, but an important one in Rao's BomGay. In *The Boyfriend*, these often-overlooked spaces are also physically organized around caste, religion, marital status, gender, occupation, and diet, which allow for highly complex and variable negotiations of and for queer identity in Mumbai. Sucheta Mallick Choudhuri has written about the representation of Bombay's trains functioning as a means for class and sexual mobility in *The Boyfriend*: "The railway system is a pivot on which Rao's narrative turns: for Yudi, it helps bridge the gap between the Nalla Sopara, the suburban ghetto that he is forced to inhabit and the nodes of urban anonymity that offer uncomplicated erotic contact" (87). The railway system and its bathrooms enforce Yudi's class mobility as an upper-caste white collar commuter at the same time that it provides a space for his sexuality as a gay man. My argument builds upon Choudhuri's ideas and the work of scholars of postcolonial space like AbdouMaliq Simone and Jennifer Wenzel who attend to the material, ecological, and spatial legacy of colonialism in contemporary cities. Their work establishes that infrastructure is more than its common understanding as physical systems of highways or pipes that provision a city (Simone 407). For example, there are intangible infrastructures such as colonial zoning laws which continue to dictate districting and resource access. There are also infrastructural inequities where

¹"BomGay" is Rao's portmanteau of the colonial name for the city of Mumbai and its well-known known hotspots for homosexual activity. In 1995, the city officially changed the name from Bombay to Mumbai, a name which local communities have been using from before the colonial period. Most of Rao's writings—which also include short stories, poems, and plays—are set in the fictionalized city of BomGay.

the underclass must rely on publicly maintained infrastructure, while the economic elite can afford privatized alternatives. The ubiquity of infrastructural description in the contemporary world novel has often been tied to the mounting failures of state governments to adequately address systemic infrastructural crises gripping their populations.² In contemporary novels set in postcolonial nations or the so-called Global South, descriptions of infrastructure reaching its limits of useability abound: cars overwhelm the commuter roads, vendors descend on the idling traffic, and informal towns are erected from scavenged parts.

Struggling and obsolescing infrastructure is consequential for literature set in the city as it structures narrative development by limiting physical movement, initiating forms of social contact, and forcing people to take on the functions of infrastructure in their laboring bodies. When urban infrastructures become overwhelmed by high concentrations of people using them, the resulting infrastructural experience becomes not only physical space, but all human presence and activity within that space. AbdouMaliq Simone has written about the economic collaboration of urban dwellers as a type of living infrastructure formed out of the complex engagement between households, objects, spaces, persons, and practices that is common to urban life (Simone 407). This idea of people-as-infrastructure is vital to my analysis of Rao's characters, who are not only subject to limitations and grievances caused by Mumbai's infrastructures, but whose own bodily urges and excretions add and even enhance the utility of these public infrastructures for the gay community. In *The Boyfriend*, humans co-constitute Mumbai's infrastructural environment: public toilets are represented with users, filth, cleaning chemicals, and maintenance staff. These descriptions foreground the indispensable human networks and that sustain Mumbai's urban infrastructures. The narrative of *The Boyfriend* foregrounds its characters' metabolic lives. As such, the focus of analysis will be on scenes in which characters use public utilities to relieve their metabolic urges of eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, and fornicating. Molly MacVeagh has written about "metabolic description" in the contemporary novel as conveying vital processes such as eating, drinking, and metabolizing (1). Metabolic descriptions are not only passages that control the tempo of narrative development through moments of still observation. Rather, metabolic descriptions ensure that the vitality of the novels' characters is maintained so that narrative growth can continue.

While purely metabolic processes like urination and defecation are uncommonly portrayed in the novel, the public bathroom as a space has long held symbolic and cultural power in the history of gay life in the city. The association of the public bathroom with gay cruising culture began in the late 19th century with the installation of urban public toilets, often in parks, where men would meet for sex. The association developed over time with the popularity of glory holes in the 1950s and continued into the decades following the AIDS crisis, when public mainstream exposure and scrutiny of gay community practices was fueled by mass phobia and stigmatization of casual sex. At the heart of scholarship and cultural production around the public bathroom is its potential as a space through which one's sexuality and class position gains heightened public

²See, Boehmer, Elleke, and Dominic Davies, eds. *Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructure, Literature and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Wenzel, Jennifer. *The Disposition of Nature: Environmental Crisis and World Literature*. Fordham UP, 2019.

visibility, leading to either illicit pleasure or unwanted scrutiny (Edelman 150–156; McCann 105–124; Swati and Biswas 2). Public bathrooms are complex sites with competing uses: they can be a critical ‘good’ for the general public, private meeting places for the queer community, vital infrastructure for the unhoused, and sites of surveillance and control for the state. This is why the public bathroom has been frequently used as a site of activism and resistance for problems endemic to rapid urbanization such as housing, sanitation, mass state surveillance, and the class struggle.

Many cultural historians have explored the public bathroom as the rendezvous point of queer subculture, economic struggle of the urban class, and the state regulation of sex. In Marcus McCann’s 2023 *Park Cruising*, the public bathroom was a haven for pleasure-seeking cruisers in cities where rapid increases in rent and living costs made securing private space for sex more and more difficult. Comic artist and illustrator Michael DeForge’s “The Right to Pee Everywhere,” written in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, argued that mass public bathroom closures instituted by the state in the name of public sanitation and safety created new infrastructural crises for unhoused communities. As public toilets increasingly became places of state surveillance for the control of economic, sexual, and even racial minorities, they also served as the location for creative and powerful efforts of resistance. A 1964 ‘shit-in’ was planned to overwhelm public toilets at O’Hare International Airport in Chicago, where activists would occupy 2,500 stalls indefinitely in order to force Mayor Richard Daley to fund infrastructural projects in Chicago’s south side where most of the city’s Black residents lived. The threat alone achieved the movement’s calls for change (DeForge 7). A more recent and executed shit-in was “successfully carried to completion on March 18, 2015, in India, when tribal activists from Jharkhand’s Latehar district protested a land acquisition bill, which sought to weaken protections rural communities had against state and industry incursions on their land, by lining up and defecating on copies of the legislation” (DeForge 7). These cases show how activist demonstrations staged around public toilets and the body’s metabolic cycles are acutely tied to broader movements of economic and class struggle and state policies of urban development. The centering of public bathrooms in global cultural production and activism calls for renewed critical attention to them as infrastructural and ideological spaces that articulate the struggle for bodily, sexual, and economic autonomy under increasingly authoritative modern nation-states.

Hiding their romance under the guise of close male friendship, Yudi and the titular boyfriend Milind of R. Raj Rao’s *The Boyfriend* go out every Friday after work to Café Volga, a semi-fictionalized version of the famous Parsi-run Leopold Café, which in real-life stands across the street from Hotel Volga in central Mumbai. At Volga’s, Yudi and Milind conduct their romance through conversation and indiscreet lewd acts, which no one catches because of the scant wait-service and Yudi’s knowledge of the Café’s space as a regular patron. Yudi’s flouting of eating conventions in *The Boyfriend* transgresses not only the heteronormative sexual boundaries of contact between men but also that of any contact between men from vastly different castes. As the contact zone where pure and impure are determined, food provides what R.S. Khare has called a “gastro-semantics,” through which ideas of caste and caste exclusion are communicated (29). Khare’s study of India’s vast repository of religion-based food symbols found that

food was a comprehensive cultural language that conveyed moral principles, concepts of impurity and purity, and the actual bearing of historical forces on present experiences and sensations. Rao uses food and its highly contextual semantics in India to symbolize nuanced and layered transgressions of caste, religion, and social law in Yudi and Milind's dates, which invariably include scenes of food eating.

Milind, who is part of the Dalit or 'untouchable' caste, contravenes social law by merely sharing food with Yudi. In one of their dates at the Café Volga, Milind tests Yudi for casteism by giving him one of his half-bitten wafers:

The pitcher arrived, accompanied by wafers. Milind enjoyed pouring the frothy liquid into tumblers and clinking the glasses. Then he picked up each wafer on the plate, bit into it, and threw it back on the plate.

'May I ask what you are doing?' Yudi said.

'Testing if my caste really doesn't bother you. Eat my jootha if it doesn't.'

'Oh no, not again,' Yudi replied, infuriated. He took a half eaten wafer and popped it into his mouth. 'There you are. Are you convinced now?'

'No! Eat the whole lot!'

'Stop it!' Yudi howled, causing the Xavierites to look in their direction.

'Cool down,' Milind said. 'I was only joking.'

'Homos are no different from Bhangis. Both are Untouchables. So why should I have a problem 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.

The Xavierites abruptly got up and left. Yudi lost no time. First he brought his mouth to Milind's and kissed him till the boy pulled away; then he ducked under the table, unzipped Milind and blew him to finish. A new set of customers arrived just as Milind fastened his trousers and Yudi went to the sink at the far end. (Rao 81–82)

In this scene, Yudi responds to Milind's inquest by eating Milind's *jootha*, a Hindi nomenclature used for things that have been soiled by saliva. Jootha is untouchability by another name, as even the implied presence of saliva can cause something to be rendered jootha, for example when a hand that has been used for eating touches another's food. Jootha is contradictory as a practice since it names saliva as the chief impurity even if it resides in the same oral cavity that must only receive pure and unsoiled food. As such, jootha is a construct of the mind, not of physical reality, and it is practiced solely out of fear of caste miscegenation. Yudi disarticulates the terms of Brahmanical jootha when responding cheekily that he is "Gay by caste," and revealing the complex matrix of social values that render the scene impure, even though Milind is only testing him on the basis

of saliva untouchability. The scene takes place in a Parsi café, which is already outside of the bounds of strict religious law for someone of Yudi's caste, and the two gay men are sitting next to students from St. Xavier's college, an institution that designates most of its seats to minority Catholics and students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India. The observance of caste-based strictures of food purity could not happen in such an establishment, let alone between gay men. Yudi takes the idea of jootha to its metaphysical limits by taking Milind himself into his mouth while in public and while doing so, shows the tensions between religious food decorum and queer male eroticism, the concurring purity and impurity of the mouth. Even the imperative Milind utters: "Eat my jootha," has taken on connotations of a different forbidden act than mixed caste food-sharing by that point in the encounter.

Shakuntala Ray has written about *The Boyfriend's* place in a nationalist political climate in India, where "a politics of enforced vegetarianism-based-purity as a mark of authenticity and ideal national identity intersects with the liberalization of the economy and the globalization of tastes to produce complex hierarchies of taste and ideas of culinary belonging" (17). The extent to which globally-circulated ideas about how Indian people eat are shaped by upper-caste Hindu definitions of (im)purity informs us that the very act of eating in India can mark one's proximity to, or likely, distance from upper-caste identities and habits. As we have seen already in the scene of eating, caste transgression can occur in multiple aspects of the act: what you eat, who you eat with, where you eat, and who touched the food before you did can constitute unclean practices. Rao's scene of eating conveys the distance between Yudi and Milind's embodied positions in a Hindu-nationalist society and Yudi's quick subversion of those positions with a simple act of ingestion.

The perpetual theme of purity vs. impurity pervades the text's many scenes of eating. Yudi's appetite alternates between the sexual and gastronomic, and the book humorously mixes its food and sexual entendres, especially in scenes where Yudi seeks casual sex. In one scene of cruising in a train station bathroom, Yudi exchanges his sexual preferences with a stranger using the language of food:

'What's your choice?' the man asked him.

'Everything. How about you?'

'Biryani khayega?'

Yudi knew all the slang of working-class homos. 'Dhakka start' was gay.

'Biryani Khayega' was rimming.

[...] Back at the flat, they did everything. Yudi ate and relished his biriyani, as Asha Bhosle provided the background score. (31)

Rao breaks down the clandestine language of the pick-up, decoding terms for food (biryani is a slow-cooked savory rice) into the terms of sex. Yudi's enjoyment of forbidden sexual acts in public flouts the common idiom of not eating in the same place as where one excretes. Later, Yudi balks at someone "who ate live pigs as a child to quell his hunger, only a few feet from the spot where women shat," but this sense of scandalizing impurity does not apply to his enjoyment of this food-inflected sexual encounter (Rao 106). Yudi's "eating" and "relishing" hilariously portray the 'impure' act of oral sex without directly naming it. The inclusion of Asha Bhosle's singing adds

another layer to the joke, as the famed singer's cooking talents were well known, especially for making biriyani.³

Yudi's sexual habits are the focus of the narrative in *The Boyfriend*, and his urges are cycled daily with metabolic regularity:

As soon as it became dark, he cruised. He had an A to Z of all the loos in South Bombay where men had sex with men. He bought it from the office of *Bombay Dost*, for which he occasionally wrote [...]. A full bladder always provided him the excuse to visit them even during the day, as he walked from one newspaper office to another. This was why he loved walking. By 8:30 P.M., Yudi was in a Virar fast on his way home. By 10:30 P.M., he was in his flat, munching the dinner that the dabbawalla had left at his door. A little bit of radio and/or TV after dinner, and he was in bed, snoring. This was an average day in the life of Yudi. (Rao 28–29)

Yudi's movement through the city is motivated by bodily urges. He makes excuses to visit public bathrooms known for gay cruising, where he relieves himself of his sexual thirst while simultaneously relieving his bladder. After taking care of matters of fluid elimination, Yudi eats. In another passage, Yudi describes his routine when bringing lovers home, where he tosses the dabbawalla's food out in favor of Chinese take-away, and Yudi and his lover take their time supping before indulging their sexual appetites (29). This back and forth between eating and fornicating, ingesting, and excreting, is not a narratological given in *The Boyfriend*, and it is not assumed that characters habitually take care of their physical bodies. Rather, the metabolic processes of life are foregrounded in the novel and actively propel Yudi's narrative development.

Yudi's metabolic cycles are portrayed most vividly during his visits to the public bathroom at Churchgate train station to quench his sexual thirst. In one of the first mentions of the bathroom, Rao describes the layout of the bathroom as having "two sections" where "one of them is the gay wing and the other straight" (6). The knowledge of these distinctive wings was consequential to safely navigate the station and avoid attendants "on the payroll of cops" and "people who hung around in the loo with a great deal of suspicion" (6). While inside the correct wing, the filthiness of Yudi's surroundings heightens the erotic sensations of the activity, enhancing its pleasure for him:

The stinking places were always humming with erotic activity. Orgies in the dark, amidst piss and shit. The foul smell, somehow, made the sex more enjoyable. Having spent so much of his life in these loos Yudi had come to the conclusion that there was indeed something sensual about filth. If the toilets were clean,

³Asha Bhosle (1933–2026) was a legendary singer in Hindi cinema and known cook. In 2002, she began a restaurant chain, Asha's, with biriyani as one of the signature dishes on the menu. See, Shounak, Sanyal. "Not Just Songs, Asha Bhosle's Cooking Won Hearts Too; Founded Restaurant Chain." *India Today*. 12 Apr. 2026, www.indiatoday.in/entertainment/music/story/asha-bhosle-dies-delighted-bollywood-maa-ki-daal-biriyani-kebab-lata-mangeshkar-restaurant-chain-uk-dubai-2895050-2026-04-12.

scrubbed with phenyl, patrons wouldn't achieve orgasm. Of course, it wasn't only after dark that Yudi went to the loos on his map. (28)

Yudi chooses to visit in the evening hours after dark, keeps to the “gay wing,” sidesteps attendants who would surveil his activity, and indulges in the accumulated filth of the day. Yudi's visits to the loos are not only arranged temporally around his own metabolic patterns, but around the cleaning schedule of the bathrooms themselves. The bathrooms' accumulation of filth throughout the day parallels Yudi's enlargement of his sexual and visceral organs over time, climaxing at the end of the day (28). Yudi's preference for dirty bathrooms over sterile, clean ones conveys Rao's realist representation of the variable physical states in which public bathroom infrastructure exists. These metabolic descriptions reveal a city astir and not a static setting, a city full of people, all of whom have bodily needs. Rao's metabolic descriptions generate a kind of thrumming texture of aliveness to BomGay, from the microbiome of the public bathroom at the end of the day to the cleaning products of public facility maintenance. They invoke not only the contingencies of working urban life—of the universal need to relieve oneself hygienically while in the city—but also sensory conditions (“amidst piss and shit”) of some illicit and ephemeral queer lifestyles. The description's focus on sensuality, for example, reveals how the soiling of infrastructure might frustrate its intended function while enhancing the sensory component for gay men who “wouldn't achieve orgasm” in a sterile public train station bathroom (28). In his multi-layered examination of Johannesburg's urban dwellers, AbdouMaliq Simone accounts for exactly this “multiplicity of connotations” by which people live in and interact with highly-codified and controlled city space: “It is always possible to do something different in and with the city than is specified by these domains of power while, at the same time, acting as if one remains operative inevitably only within them (409). Rao's description of the station bathroom along with its multiplicity of reticulated users, servicers, and subcultures exemplifies Simone's ideas of people as not only encountering infrastructure but becoming a part of it in the process of navigating its spatial and social conventions.

Rao's focus on metabolic filth and the descriptions of the dirty train station bathroom disturbs the idea that public bathrooms exist for a single or ideal kind of person, activity, or use, particularly in a time when public bathrooms are increasingly sites of violent policing and surveillance. In their 2026 study, “No Place to Go: Trans-inclusive Public Sanitation and Urban Health Equity in India,” Swati Sharma and Rathin Biswas describe the differential exposure to surveillance, harassment, and physical violence that queer and transgender people face when using public bathrooms in India (2). Highly circulated social narratives about transgender people inculcate the public to view them with suspicion: “In male-designated toilets, they are perceived as threats to conventional constructions of masculinity and male sexuality, while in female-designated toilets, they are often viewed with suspicion and treated as predators intruding into women's privacy and safety” (2). These encounters can escalate to physical assault and abuse, and hostile encounters may in turn perpetuate medically harmful behaviors like minimizing bathroom usage and open defecation which worsen the transgender community's health risks. Furthermore, with the passing of the 2026 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, which forces people who do not identify under the binary terms of male and female to obtain medical certification for legal identity recognition,

transgender people's hypervisibility and stigmatization in and around public bathrooms will be heightened, putting them at greater risk for harm. In 2025, the Sabar Institute and Azad Foundation co-published a report on "Status of Public Toilets for Women and Trans/ Queer People in Kolkata" which revealed the vast discrepancy in number of toilets to footfall at major train stations. Some 900,000 persons using the station would have access to only 33 toilets for men and 19 for women (2). The scarcity of public bathrooms to the overwhelmingly high numbers of public commuters has fundamentally shaped the way people experience the train station bathroom. These accounts show too, the scale of material change happening to the bathroom over the course of a single work day.

Metabolic filth is the measure of time in BomGay's Churchgate train station bathroom as it indexes how many people have used the bathroom and at what times of day, interrelating the time of the workday with the time of peak sexual cruising. Yudi is able to convert the filthiness of the bathrooms into sensual surroundings for an enhanced sexual experience, turning literal human waste into a pleasure den "humming with erotic activity" for him and other time-wasting humans (28). Like in the first scene of eating, Yudi does more than fulfill his metabolic urges: he asserts his and others' queer presences in the public infrastructures of Mumbai while transforming their association to impurity or filthiness into desirable sensuality. He transforms the temporality of his workday breaks, the timing of commute peak times, and the accumulated metabolic filth into something like queer temporality—as existing between these other measurements of capitalist time.

The public bathroom in Rao's text illuminates its opposing uses for the productive time of urban train commuters and the unproductive time of queer sensuality. Yudi's metabolic cycles intersect significantly with his productive work as a journalist, the urban workplace food delivery systems of Mumbai, and his own domestic schedule for household maintenance. These overlapping timescapes portray the rhizomatic feeling of urban time in Rao's BomGay, but also reveal how much time, no matter who you are, is dictated by the demands of productivity in a capitalist world. The simultaneous existence of time for queer cruising however, interrupts the dominance of productive capitalist time and subverts what Jennifer Wenzel describes as the "ontological transformation of the human under capital into surplus life or wasted life" particularly through infrastructures of urban waste management (Wenzel 141). Wenzel's argument follows the historical trajectory of spatial occupation in postcolonial India from colonialism to late-stage capitalism, seeing a spatial correlation between how trash, poor sanitation infrastructure, and unproductive persons are managed together in modern governance. In Wenzel's analysis, poor districts are distinguished by lack of or scarce sanitation services and are kept ecologically, economically, and sanitation-poor by the placement of waste landfills on or near their land, which is a legacy of colonial zoning (148–152). Under these unequal and brutal conditions of continued ecological and economic degradation, residents are also rendered as waste, as a byproduct of city re-development necessitating containment and removal. Rao subverts these spatialized processes of laying waste to human life with his lively and life-filled description of the Churchgate bathroom and Yudi's unassailable pleasure from the space's accumulated fecal waste. But how could a pleasurable feeling emerge from conditions resulting from structural and spatialized legacies of colonial-enforced inequality? Writing about the "affective tendencies through which

infrastructure is lived as a promise of development in spite of its materialities of ruination,” Gediminas Lesutis has analyzed male gender and desire in the face of mega-infrastructure development in Kenya. In spaces structured by capitalist re-entrenchment of colonial and metropolitan inequalities, “queer life is experienced both through the intricacies of relationships with others and through the impersonal systems that determine who, and under what temporal and spatial circumstances, can meaningfully count as human” (Lesutis 400). There is a feeling, an affective tendency towards urban infrastructural space because infrastructure shapes social relations within that space, even as it might bring about precarity. Lesutis found that Kenyans entangled themselves further with infrastructure like ill-maintained fishing ports even in the face of developmental uncertainty and the threat of spatial displacement. By doing so, they created “affective economies of anticipation,” “secured access to new lands and resources,” and consolidated expressions of their own desire for independent governance and belonging (404). These responses to the violence of broken, precarious infrastructure brought about a queer, anticipatory, counter-temporality to capitalist time and development.

Metabolic acts structure not only the temporality of Yudi’s work schedule, but his domestic one as a single man. Yudi’s offscreen dabbawalla, a Mumbai-specific type of male food service provider who makes home cooked meals for workers and delivers them hot in tin boxes called dabbas, is a key part of the intricate choreography that constitutes Yudi’s queer existence. His bachelor and office-worker identities intersect neatly with his queerness in his decision to forgo marriage. In the place of a traditional wife, Yudi’s dabbawalla labors to maintain his metabolic cycle by logistical lunchtime delivery and as a result renders Yudi’s bachelor lifestyle possible. Another domestic worker, the cleaning lady, structures the hours during which Yudi receives lovers and when he kicks them out in the morning. In the text, Rao elaborates on Yudi’s scheduling around his cleaning woman:

Yudi had spent part of his night worrying where to hide Milind when Saraswati came. Not in the bathroom, for that was where she washed clothes ... Now, minutes before Saraswati was expected to arrive, he had no definitive answer yet. He woke Milind up in alarm, tickling him all over when he refused to get out of bed.

‘Take a long walk,’ he ordered him, ‘and come back after an hour. There’ll be hell to pay if Saraswati sees you here.’

‘What a moosibat,’ grumbled Milind, as he wore his trousers and searched for his toothbrush.

Not being the walking type, the boy whiled away his time at a nearby bus stop, while the Goddess of Learning did Yudi’s dishes, scolding him for leaving things so dirty. Cleaning women, Yudi reminded himself again, are the mothers-in-law of unmarried men. (101)

Yudi’s cleaning woman contributes to an ‘other woman’ comedic situation where Yudi’s gay lovers must avoid a confrontation with Yudi’s ad-hoc ‘mother-in-law’ lest his sexual orientation becomes known. The way Yudi briefly considers hiding Milind in his bathroom parallels the circumstances of their first meeting in the Churchgate bathroom. This scene stages a comedic inversion of expectations between Yudi’s public sex life and

domestic bachelorhood, and the home becomes the place where Yudi must hide. As a single man in Mumbai, Yudi's metabolic life must be sustained by this fleet of domestic workers who also get in the way of his intimate home life, perpetuating the cycle of Yudi's bachelorhood and his preference for sex in the city. Milind, the titular 'boyfriend' must not only contend with the stealth and discretion necessary for sustaining a homosexual relationship but also the shuffling he must do to circumlocute Yudi's domestic corps, who must remain as long as Yudi remains unmarried. While the train station public loos facilitate a queer temporality existing between the cycles and motions of the capitalist workday, Yudi's ability to create time and space for a boyfriend in his own home is complicated by interlocking schedules of the domestic laborers who tend to Yudi's other metabolic needs as a bachelor worker. These descriptions of Yudi's food servicers further develop Simone's ideas of people-as-infrastructure within the representation of urban homosexual lifestyle. The lunchtime delivery worker and cleaning lady who enable Mumbai's unmarried workers sustain some of Yudi's metabolic urges, while making others difficult.

As a journalist and contributor to *The Bombay Dost*, an LGBTQ-centered magazine, Yudi's gay lifestyle is profoundly connected to his work. The gay cruising sections of train station bathrooms are spaces intertextually codified in magazine *Bombay Dost*,⁴ which was a real and historically significant publication for the queer community of Mumbai (Lalwani 1). Rao's inclusion of this seminal queer intertext in his novel revives some of the queer epistemology and cultural practices kept by the *Dost* and its readership. As such, both Yudi's textual work and sexual activity can be understood in a metabolic relation. His work as a journalist demands that he spend most of his days in press offices in the center of town, where he must use the public can, and his reporting of queer subculture in Mumbai is enriched by his firsthand knowledge of the spaces he writes about: "He was expecting an article he had recently written to be published in *The Statesman*, and he knew that Churchgate was the only place in Bombay where he could lay his hand on it [...]. And then, of course, there was the loo. He would be lying if he did not admit that this was the most urgent of factors that drove him to Churchgate. The gent's toilet at Churchgate provided a twenty-four-hour supply of men" (2). At the same time that Yudi's journalistic work records Mumbai's queer spaces into textual history, his commute to his workplace facilitates his physical participation in the ongoing, living culture. His articles influence others in the community to known hotspots while conveying Yudi's own body to them, re-starting the metabolic cycles of fornicating and writing on which the narrative momentum of *The Boyfriend* is based.

Metabolic descriptions, as such, might be seen as infrastructures of the novel that sustain its characters, its plot, and even its own author. While characters' metabolic acts can reveal much to us about the cultures and norms of public infrastructure use, these descriptions can also simply enable life in the actual world of BomGay. Rao's text foregrounds the daily metabolic cycles of his queer characters to show that their very lives and visceral existences are what shape the temporalities, spaces, and sensory experiences of the city. The representation of queer life can reveal both limitations and

⁴*The Bombay Dost*, India's first registered LGBTQ magazine was founded in 1990 by journalist Ashok Row Kavi. The magazine suspended its serialization after 12 years in 2002, only a year before the publication of *The Boyfriend*, and was later revived in 2009.

excesses of urban space, subvert norms of untouchability and create the sensuality of filth, appropriate and adapt structures of capitalist productivity for queer purpose, and most importantly, archive and substantiate cultural knowledge and queer epistemologies.



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