

Representation of Intimate Partner Violence in Humboldt's Gift

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Humboldt's Gift (1975) by Saul Bellow is one of the most significant work of Jewish American novelist Saul Bellow. It won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1976 and contributed to Bellow winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in the same year. What's striking about Humboldt's Gift is that is a fictional story about real events and the character of Humboldt is modelled upon Bellow's friend Delmore Schwartz. "Humboldt's infamous life of brilliant success and crashing failure closely parallels that of Schwartz."(Encyclopedia.com) Humboldt's Gift is considered most American of Bellow's novels and it discusses various strands of American life. From American academia to American underworld it weaves around a grand tale of two great writers of their times. What it also demarcates is the shallowness of the authors and the ambivalence in their inter-personal relationships. The most heart-wrenching of them all is Humboldt's ill-treatment of his wife which can be read as a case study of intimate partner violence.

To understand it, we need to understand various aspects of Intimate Partner Violence. Domestic violence (also referred to as Intimate Partner Violence or battering) can be defined as:

a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes every year.

The most frequently asked question concerning a battering situation is why does the victim stay with an abusive partner? While there exists a variety of reasons like misogyny and patriarchy, yet it is also very possible the victim may be locked into a cycle of violence. The paper aims at studying the causes and behavioural patterns in victim, batterer and society in a case of intimate partner battering with special reference to the situation of Kathleen in the novel "Humboldt's Gift"

Keywords: battering, batterer, intimate partner violence, misogyny, social behaviour

Analysing the cycle of The Los Angeles Police Department has pointed out all the reasons why a victim chooses to stay with a violent partner. One of the foremost reasons is, "The victim loves the batterer... the batterer is not always violent." That is one of the reasons why Kathleen initially stays with Humboldt.

"On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. For one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men." But women are targeted more often than men."(National Statistics). Women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner." says the National Statistics of America. The situation is much worse than it appears because many incidents of intimate partner violence and abuse go unreported.

Humboldt's Gift highlights the treatment of women through the character of Humboldt and Kathleen. Though being a scholar Humboldt was a misogynist and masochist. He says of his wife Kathleen, " She's very pliant. You see what a dove she is. One hundred percent obedient to the vile old man. He said, 'Go,' and she went. Maybe that was her real pleasure, which her pimp father only authorized..."(*Humboldt's Gift*, 26) "Pliant" according to Humboldt is a virtue for women. Women ought to be soft, meek and docile according to patriarchal standards. This is what Caroline Clark points out in behaviour of women. They have problem in being assertive. She writes:

Another trend I've noticed in myself and other women around me is discomfort associated with being assertive. Women in my life are quick to feel they are overstepping boundaries when asking for something: be it a date, a raise, or at times, even a request for information. The discomfort associated with trespassing these perceived social boundaries results from the ways in which women are silenced for straying from social norms of timidity and acquiescence. Women may be labeled overbearing, desperate, bossy, or unladylike in circumstances that men are considered driven and self-assured. Hesitation women feel in being assertive is a result of societal restrictions placed on what women are entitled to and how we are expected to behave. (Caroline Clark)

Despite the fact that advocacy groups like National Organization for Women or NOW which has worked for over three decades to halt the epidemic of gender-based violence and sexual assault and even with their constant efforts the numbers of cases of violence against women are still shocking. There was an increase in number of domestic violence case across the globe during the coronavirus pandemic. With the alarming numbers of domestic violence, the NOW official page takes it very seriously and states that:

It is time to renew our national pledge, from the President and Congress on down to City Councils all across the nation to END violence against women and men, girls and boys. This effort must also be carried on in workplaces, schools, churches, locker rooms, the military, and in courtrooms, law enforcement, entertainment and the media.

Impact of gender-related violence can also be seen in health and social services. The Center for Disease Control in America estimates that the cost of domestic violence in 2003 was more than over \$8.3 billion. This cost includes medical care, mental health services, and lost productivity. 14

Cases of domestic violence are reported from all corners of the world especially India and Indian sub-continent where rates of crime against women are very high. Though it has been seen that gender-related violence are more in poor and illiterate class, but the so-called educated society also shows traces of misogyny and domestic violence. The same can also be seen in the character of Humboldt. There is an inherent contradiction in what he says and does. He is well-read and well-informed. He is a poet and a scholar and yet he gets brutally violent in his personal relationship. Aida Edemariam in her article, "Who's Afraid of The Campus Novel" quotes David Lodge,

The high ideals of the University as an institution-the pursuit of knowledge and truth are set against the actual behaviour and motivations of the people who work in them, who are only human and subject to the same ignoble desires and selfish ambitions as anybody else. The contrast is perhaps more ironic, more marked, than it would be in any other professional milieu.

That ironic contrast can well be observed in the character of Humboldt who "...lay on his sofa reading Proust, pondering the motives of Albertine. He seldom allowed Kathleen to drive to the supermarket without him. He hid the ignition key from her and kept her in purdah." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 26) So though he is reading great writers and discussing about high ideals of truth and beauty, yet he is unable to give his wife Kathleen the required freedom.

Cases of domestic violence get more aggravated when the victim silently suffers. The same happens in the case of Kathleen. Knowing full well that she is in an abusive relationship, Kathleen cannot speak for herself. She doesn't revolt against Humboldt when he initially tried to control her: Sometimes the batterer is otherwise well respected or mild mannered, (as was the case with Humboldt, he was respected in society and moved in elite social circles) so the victim's concerns are not taken seriously. Kathleen doesn't leave Humboldt early because she initially loved him and continued to adore him. As the narrator, Citrine points out, "He was a handsome man still, Kathleen adored him. He, however, suffered keen Jewish terrors in the country..." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 27) Kathleen's case should be taken as precedent by young women who keep the love of their spouse over their self-love.

In certain cases, the perpetrator of domestic violence may also be suffering from neurotic disorder. Humboldt had symptoms of paranoia which was overlooked by his family and friends

He (Humboldt) was an Oriental, she a Christian maiden, and he was afraid. He expected the KKK to burn the cross in his yard or shoot at him through the window as he lay on the Castro sofa reading Proust or inventing scandal. Kathleen told me that he looked under the hood of the Buick for booby traps. More than once Humboldt tried to get me confess that I had similar terrors about Demmie Vonghel...." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 27)

Citrine too confirms to the misogynistic views of Humboldt and instead of contradicting him, he finds himself in a similar situation. Though Citrine never physically abuses Demmie (his mistress) or Denise (his wife), yet he is always critical of them and hates them in his private thoughts.

The lack of trust in conjugal relationships leads to violent outbreaks. Kathleen's own identity was lost in Humboldt's presence and her only solace was sleep. Citrine points out: "Kathleen was a somnambulist. Humboldt had surrounded her with the whole crisis of Western culture. She went to sleep. What else could she do?" Her personality was diminished in the presence of Humboldt.

There is another angle to violence against women and that is pervading misogyny where women accept their discordant relationship as their predicament. In India the social custom and traditions also enforces the laws of patriarchy upon women. Like the dowry system and accepting the husband as a God. Misogyny is not only directed by men towards women but also by women against women. Caroline Clark explains this behaviour of women by writing

Patriarchal values and expectations pervade all aspects of our society-from our laws to our culture. But while these values are rooted in patriarchy, women too play an integral role in the preservation of misogynistic cultural norms and social practices. Women are educated from infancy both explicitly and implicitly on "appropriate" ways to act, think, and feel. These cultural conceptions of womanhood are so deeply ingrained that they dictate performances of femininity, even behind closed doors." (Clark, Caroline)

Denise a woman herself describes Renata as " a tramp with the fat figure who wears no bra and shows her big nipples to the world. " (*Humboldt's Gift*, 43) Women also use abusive words for other women "That whore with fat tits" was what Denise regularly called her." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 56)

Women have to face misogyny at various levels, but Kathleen's life was at risk when Humboldt attacks her and what appears more appalling is that nobody among the onlookers tries to save her. Citrine describes the incident,

"Well, Humboldt tried to run down Kathleen in his car. They were driving home from a party in Princeton, and he was punching her, steering with the left hand. At a blinking light, near a package store, she opened the door and made a run for it in her stocking feet- she had lost her shoes in Princeton". (*Humboldt's Gift*, 143)

Humboldt would take out all his frustration and personal failures on Kathleen. When he met professional failure, he would turn abusive towards Kathleen. He would also abuse her verbally and then go on to hit her. When Humboldt felt that he was being surpassed by a bureaucrat then he wrote a letter of resignation and vented out his frustration on Kathleen.

...But that evening, on the road as they were driving in to attend a party at Littlewoods' he went to work on Kathleen. Why did she let her father sell her to Rockefeller? Yes the old guy was supposed to be a pleasant character, (a bohemian antique from Paris, one of the gangs from Closerie des Lilas, but he was an international criminal, a Dr. Moriarty, a Lucifer, a pimp and didn't he try to have sexual relations with his own daughter. Well how was it with Rockefeller? (*Humboldt's Gift*, 144)

Humboldt could go to any extent in trying to demean Kathleen. He told her, "Did Rockefeller's penis thrill her more? Did the billions enter in? Did Rockefeller have to take a woman away from a poet in order to get it up? "*(Humboldt's Gift*, 144) When Kathleen wouldn't react and would try to remain calm Humboldt would abuse her further

So they drove in the Buick skidding on the gravel and booming through clouds of dust. He began to shout that her great calm-and-lovely act didn't take him in at all. He knew all about these things. From a bookish viewpoint he really did know a lot. He knew the jealousy of King Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Mario Praz he knew... "I know all that lust garbage," he said. "And I know the game has to be played with a calm face like yours. I know all about this female masochistic business. I understand your thrills, and you are just using me!" (*Humboldt's Gift*, 144)

It was not just in private, but Humboldt would also abuse Kathleen in public. Citrine and his wife Demmie had been witness to it at Littlewoods' party.

So they got to Littlewoods' and Demmie and I (Citrine) were there. Kathleen was white. Her face looked heavily powdered. Humboldt walked in silent. He wasn't talking. This was infact his last night as the Belisha Professor of Poetry at London." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 144)

Citrine tried to cheer them (Humboldt and Kathleen) up but he didn't intervene or do anything to protect Kathleen. "To cheer up Humboldt and Kathleen I got him to sing "I'm Just a Vagabond Lover"."(*Humboldt's Gift*, 144) Humboldt that night went on to physically abuse her and hit her hard for a simple gesture which Humboldt termed as obscene. Even that simple act of borrowing a match from a man was termed a mistake by Citrine and a serious offense by Humboldt. Citrine narrated the incident as "I was present in the kitchen when Kathleen made a serious mistake." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 145) This line of Humboldt makes it clear that he also believed in the patriarchal norms and judged Kathleen for a casual gesture of reaching into a man's pocket for a match while Humboldt knew Kathleen's side as the man wasn't a stranger and his wife was standing near him when the incident happen. So though the action may appear inappropriate yet these facts make it clear that it wasn't really a mistake in a party but Humboldt ignores these details and brutally hits Kathleen. Citrine describes the incident as:

Kathleen was beginning to recover her spirits and was slightly drunk herself. But just as she was getting the matches out of Eubank's pocket Humboldt came in. I saw him coming. First, he stopped breathing. Then he clutched Kathleen with sensational violence. He twisted her arm behind her back and ran her out of the kitchen into the yard. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 145)

What was more disheartening than Humboldt's abuse was people's reaction. The guests at the party took such violence as normal.

A thing of this sort was not unusual at a Littlewood party, and others decided not to notice, but Demmie and I hurried to the window. Humboldt punched Kathleen in the belly, doubling her up. Then he pulled her by the hair into the Buick. As there was a car behind him, he couldn't back out. He wheeled over the lawn and off the sidewalk, hacking off the muffler on the curb. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 145)

Kathleen didn't take or receive any medical treatment following the incident nor did she report it to police and it was not an individual event according to American National Statistics, "Less than 20 percent of battered women sought medical treatment following an injury." There are several cases of domestic violence that go unreported. Even Citrine didn't do anything and just became an observer of the incident. Though he knew the victim and the batterer personally. It was only in the morning that Citrine found the extent of the violence that was vented against Kathleen. He observes:

I saw it (the car) there next morning like a case of a super-insect, flaky with rust, and a pipe coming out of it. Also I found Kathleen's shoes stuck by the heels in the snow. There was fog, ice, dirty cold, the bushes glassy, the elm twigs livid, the March snow brocaded with soot." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 145)

The question arises why Kathleen's case in particular and several such cases get unreported. One of the reasons for it is the patriarchal values imbibed by the society. Not only men but women also become spokesperson of patriarchy. Misogyny is so inherent in Demmie that she remarked of the incident, "Kathleen shouldn't have reached for Eubanks's matches. I hope Humboldt didn't hurt her, but she shouldn't have done it." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 146) Her thought process is seeped into patriarchal conventions

Patriarchal values and expectations pervade all aspects of our society – from our laws to our culture. But while these values are rooted in patriarchy, women too play an integral role in the preservation of misogynistic cultural norms and social practices. Women are educated from infancy both explicitly and implicitly on “appropriate” ways to act, think, and feel. These cultural conceptions of womanhood are so deeply ingrained that they dictate performances of femininity, even behind closed doors. (Caroline, Clark) Citrine tries to defend Kathleen, "But Eubanks is an old friend." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 146) But it's not easy to convince Demmie who has imbibed the patriarchal conventions, "Humboldt's old friend? He's known him a long time--there's a difference. It means something if a woman goes into a man's pocket. And we saw her do it....I don't completely blame Humboldt." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 146) Instead of being sympathetic for Kathleen, Demmie is critical of her because her views are governed by the patriarchal mind-set.

Abuse in such cases doesn't end on a day and they continue in a series of events. LAPD states that, "Some batterers are life endangering. It is possible to evaluate whether a batterer is likely to kill his partner, other family members, and/or others attempting intervention. "

the more aggravated situation of intimate partner violence is murdering them. In 2005, 1,181 women were murdered by an intimate partner.¹ That's an average of three women every day. Of all the women murdered in the U.S., about one-third were killed by an intimate partner.

Kathleen's life is also under threat with Humboldt. Knowing full well the intensity of Humboldt's violence, even after a series of abuses Kathleen doesn't rebel. She doesn't say a word to Humboldt and calmly suffers all the pain inflicted on her. Citrine observes Kathleen's predicament when later Humboldt and Kathleen visit his house. He recounts, "Humboldt and Kathleen descended on me in the repaired Buick. I was in a cottage on the Connecticut shore, down the road from Lampton, the director, making revisions under his guidance--writing the play he wanted....We sat in a small stone kitchen drinking coffee and gin, having a reunion." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 148). During that visit Humboldt wore a facade of being gentle. Citrine observes him and writes:

Humboldt was being "good," serious, high-minded. He had been reading *De Anima* and was full of ideas about the origins of thought. I noticed, however, that he didn't let Kathleen out of his sight. She had to tell him where she was going. "I'm just getting my cardigan." Even to go to the bathroom, she needed permission. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 148)

Humboldt wasn't being good, but he was pretending to be 'good' and he still was very controlling over Kathleen. Like Kathleen, women, in an unhappy marriage undergo mental torture along with physical abuse. Kathleen is also suffocated in the relationship with Humboldt where she is treated like a caged bird. Even when she was not physically hurt, she lived in the constant fear of being further abused by her husband.

Also he seemed to have punched her in the eye. She sat quietly and low in her chair, arms folded and long legs crossed, but she had a shiner. Humboldt finally spoke of it himself. "It wasn't me this time," he said. "You won't believe it, Charlie, but she fell against the dashboard when I made a fast stop. Some clunk in a truck came barreling out of a side road and I had to jump the brakes. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 148)

Though he had not hurt her physically this time, but he had taken over Kathleen's nerves. Citrine observes the situation as:

Perhaps he hadn't hit her, but he did watch her; he watched like a bailiff escorting a prisoner from one jail to another. He moved his chair all the while he was lecturing about *De Anima*, to make sure we didn't exchange eye-signals. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 148)

More appalling than Humboldt's physical abuse is the silence of other characters around Kathleen. Nobody comes out in support of Kathleen. There is a silence over the whole event. Although Citrine knows Humboldt's attitude towards Kathleen, he doesn't say anything to him directly. He doesn't even try to stop him or talk him out of his violent behaviour towards Kathleen. In fact, he also behaves as if he is afraid of Humboldt. He narrates, "He (Humboldt) laid it on so thick that we were bound to try to outwit him. And we did. We managed at last to have a few words at the clothesline in the garden. She had rinsed her stockings and came out in the sunshine to hang them. Humboldt was probably satisfying a natural need." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) In a private conversation Citrine asks Kathleen, "Did he sock you or not?" (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) Kathleen agrees that she wasn't hit by Humboldt but the mental harassment that Kathleen is going through is more unbearable for Kathleen than the physical abuse she has gone through "No, I fell on the dashboard. But it's hell, Charlie. Worse than ever." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149). She opens her heart to Citrine.

He says I'm carrying on with a critic, young, unimportant, completely innocent fellow named Magnasco. Very nice, but my God! And I'm tired of being treated like a nymphomaniac and told how I'm doing it on fire escapes or standing up, in clothes closets, every chance I get. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149)

It is difficult for her to cope up with his eccentric behaviour, she narrates one such incident, "And at Yale he made me sit on the platform during his reading. Then he blamed me for showing my legs. At every service station he forces his way into the ladies' room with me. I can't go back to New Jersey with him." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149)

Instead of suggesting her a way out and telling her to report about the abuse Citrine asks her. "What will you do?" said eager, heart-melting, concerned Citrine. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) Citrine's concern for her is meaningless as he fails to do anything for her. A friend's role in such a situation should be more than that of Citrine and he ought to take an action to bring her out of the abusive relationship or to stop Humboldt from hurting her. Kathleen couldn't bear the abuse anymore and decides to run away from Humboldt.

Tomorrow when you get back to New York I'm going to get lost. I love him but I can't take any more. I'm telling you to prepare you, because you guys love each other, and you'll have to help him. He has some money. Hilderband fired him. But he did get a Guggenheim, you know. (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149)

She even in the worst phase doesn't even for once think to take legal action against Humboldt. Humboldt's behaviour shows a lot of obsessiveness and paranoia. In such cases along with legal action counselling is required. The way Humboldt behaves is neither good for his own mental health nor for Kathleen's. Counsellors and psychiatrist can help in cases where a partner gets obsessive and tries to possess another partner. A violent and

unacceptable behaviour needs to be checked and reprimanded but nobody questions Humboldt's action and intimate partner violence is normalized.

In Humboldt's case, he treats Kathleen like a prisoner and dominates her by keeping a vigil on her, he is also keeping a watch on her while she is talking to Citrine. Kathleen finds him keeping a watch on her, "...Now he is watching us from the kitchen." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) Humboldt behaved like a paranoid and instead of countering Humboldt, Kathleen and Citrine act as if they are at fault, "... The clothesline surrendered the pith of its soul, and Kathleen's stockings, hung at the wide end, now suggested lust. Such was Humboldt's effect." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) Humboldt tries to isolate Kathleen from everyone. "He came straight to me at the clothesline and ordered me to tell him what he had been talking about." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) It's just once that Citrine tells Humboldt not to over-react. He says, "Oh lay off, will you Humboldt? Don't force me into this neurotic superdrama." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) but even while countering Humboldt, Citrine was expecting a counter-reaction. He narrates: "I (Citrine) was appalled by what I foresaw. I wished they would go-pile into their Buick..."(*Humboldt's Gift*, 149) This scene depicts the magnitude of violence against Kathleen and it makes one question laws and legal system. There are laws and legislation to curb the violence but there ought to be more awareness against domestic violence and no kind of violence should be normalized. This message is made loud and clear in the movie *Thappad* (translated *Slap*) in which the Taapsse Pannu decides to take divorce from her husband when he hits her at a party. We should be ready for a change in our mind-set and if we don't change our standpoint as a society the situation is never going to get better. The organizations for protecting women have massive funding but now women have to stand up for themselves.

In 1994, the National Organization for Women, the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now called Legal Momentum), the Feminist Majority and other organizations finally secured passage of the Violence Against Women Act, which provided a record-breaking \$1.6 billion to address issues of violence against women.¹⁵ However it took nearly an additional year to force the Newt Gingrich-led Congress to release the funding. An analysis estimated that in the first six years after VAWA was passed, nearly \$14.8 billion was saved in net averted social costs. VAWA was reauthorized in 2005, with nearly \$4 billion in funding over five years.

Yet the victims don't take legal action in most cases of domestic violence. The community and people around the victim should counsel them to approach the police and not just escape from trouble. Kathleen just runs away without confronting Humboldt or taking any legal action, she disappeared from Rocco's Restaurant on Thompson Street according to her plan and after that Humboldt went wild. Humboldt maligned her without any proof and said that she was with Magnasco, that Magnasco kept her hidden in his room at the Hotel Earle. Her escape would have turned fatal because later Humboldt had found a pistol and went to attack Magnasco.

(Humboldt) hammered on Magnasco's door with the butt until he shredded the wood. Magnasco called the desk, and the desk sent for cops, and Humboldt took off. But next day he jumped Magnasco on Sixth Avenue in front of Howard Johnson's. A group of lesbians gotten up as longshoremen rescued the young man. They had been having ice-cream sodas, and they came out and broke up the fight, pinning Humboldt's arms behind him." (*Humboldt's Gift*, 149)

Humboldt twice attacked Magnasco and it was averted both times, but it was a death-threat to both Kathleen and Magnasco as he believed that Kathleen had eloped with Magnasco. So, had Kathleen taken legal action against Humboldt then the two attacks on Magnasco could be averted. Los Angeles Police Department has listed various cases of domestic violence and has tried to probe its cause too. There are economic causes when a victim is dependent on the batterer. Then there are social causes like in Indian society where marriage is thought to be sacred and divorce is still a stigma for women, sometimes custody of child also becomes the reason of continuing in an abusive relationship. But whatever be the reason a person should stand up for their own safety and security and report the incident well in time. According to LAPD in more complicated cases,

The victim fears the batterer, believing the batterer to be almost "godlike." Often threats are made against the victim, for example, the batterer will kill the victim if the beatings are reported to anyone. Police, in the victim's eyes, offer no long-term protection from the batterer. Even if it is a neighbor who reports, the batterer may take it out on the victim. Often when the police come, the victim will not admit the battering.

In such cases victim's life is at constant threat and so the victim should try to overcome their fear of the batterer and should take all measures to protect themselves and not tolerate violence against them even for once. The Bollywood movie *Thappad* (2020) translated *Slap* gives the message loud and clear that any kind of abuse and violence in a relationship should not be tolerated. It is not just about one slap but it is about the dignity and safety of the women and any victim and this paper proposes for a society which raises its voice against any kind of violence and abuse so that any abuse can be prevented in time.

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READING RAMAYANA IN INDIAN LANDSCAPE: THE GRAND EPIC PRESERVED IN MONUMENTS AND PLACES

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Abstract

India is a land where history doesn't die. It is not a matter of past but it seeps into present and the legendary history infuses in oral tradition of folk theatre and songs. (Sanyal, 2015) Many episodes depicted in Valmiki Ramayana corroborate with the stories preserved in the temples, monuments, landscapes and places. Through this paper, we will explore how the story of Ramayana is kept alive in the 'geographical imagination' or 'sthala-purana'¹ of India. Indian mythologies especially the Ramayana and Mahabharata are etched in the shrines and temples of India. This paper portrays Ramayana not only through textual analysis but also as a landscape-narrative. It would retrace the story of Ramayana through the temples and shrines and places that are associated with Lord Rama and his life as described in Valmiki Ramayana. Through historical, geographical, mythological and literary study, this paper tries to bring out the beauty of Indian epic Ramayana preserved in historical monuments, places and ancient cities.

Keywords: Geographical Imagination, Reading Ramayana, sthala-purana

Indian mythologies remain alive in its ruins, forts, cities, palaces and landscapes. The geography of a place is not restricted to its landscape, but its identity is entwined with history and mythology. It gets its distinctiveness not only by its natural topography but also derives its unique identity from landmarks, monuments and buildings. Every landscape has its own story to tell as it presents its own unique identity, background, history and myths which J.K. Wright (1947) refers to as "Geographical Imagination"¹. He describes it in terms of the "excitement, the myths and mysteries engendered by unexplored places, including those in our own minds." Similarly eminent geographer, Hugh Prince claimed that the relationship between geography and imagination is a mutual one; "geography stirs the imagination", yet it needs to be informed by imagination for "we can't know a place until we discover its literature, art or science."

Indian landscape adds to the geographical imagination of the two grand Indian epic narratives; Ramayana and Mahabharata. This phenomenon of Indian storytelling and keeping the epics alive through monuments was well-observed by Raja Rao who refers to it as 'sthala-purana'. Even the remotest villages in India are associated with Gods or Goddesses who might have walked through that village; explaining this very Indian cultural phenomenon, Raja Rao writes;

There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthala-puran, or legendary history, of its own, some God or godlike hero has passed by the village. Rama might have rested here under the peepal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath.... In this way the past mingles with present, and gods mingle with men to make the repertory of our grandmother always bright. (Kanthapura, 5)

The story of Rama and Sita in the form of sthala-purana extends across Indian subcontinent. Along with Valmiki Ramayana and Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, Ramayana is also alive in

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performances of Ram Leela and recital of songs in folk and oral tradition. Ramayana permeates Indian landscape as every character in Ramayana can be traced to his/her real geographical locations, and their own indigenous identity. Although there are many versions of Ramayana yet the geographical imagination of the story doesn't alter much in any of these versions.

One can sense the majestic presence of Rama by visiting those places. The rivers, mountains and streams are described with a great geographical accuracy in Ramayana. The most important place in the Ramayana epic is Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. It has plethora of temples which host thousands of devotees during the festival of Ramanavami, thus keeping the spirit of Rama alive in the place. Ramayana's geographical accuracy gives credibility to the fact that the story of Ramayana is not just an imaginary epic but a real historical event. Ramayana has left imprints of its story everywhere in rocks, caves and waterfalls; in building, monuments and fine art, and in the names of streets, houses and businesses.

There are various texts and textual references that repeat the story of Rama, it appears in prominent Hindu scriptures like *Vishnu Purana*, *Padma Purana*, *Garuda Purana* and *Agni Purana*. Moreover, the story of Rama is included in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. Another text *Yogavasistha* is a conversation between young Prince Rama and Sage Vasistha who is also referred to as the first saint of the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy by Adi Shankaracharya. The complete text contains over 29,000 verses. The short version of the text is called *Laghu Yogavasistha* and contains 6,000 verses and is a comprehensive treatise of yoga. Along with it we also gather information about works created by Ravana.

Ravana was an erudite scholar too and there are three books of Ayurveda attributed to him which includes Arka Prakasha, Nadi Prakashaa and Kumarathanthraya. Moreover, Shiva Tandav Stotra is also attributed to Ravana. According to scriptures, Ravana once tried to lift Mount Kailash, but Shiva pushed the mountain into place and trapped Ravana beneath it. For a thousand years, the restrained Ravana sang chants (Shiva Tandava Stotra) in praise of Shiva, who finally blessed him and granted him an invincible sword and a powerful linga (Shiva's iconic symbol, Atmalinga) to worship. As he is considered one of the most revered devotees of Shiva, Ravana is worshiped in several places. There are some Shiva temples too where Ravana is worshiped.

Reflecting on the antiquity and permeability of Rama's narrative; his life is remembered and celebrated in the form of folk theatre and songs and enacted every year in Ramlila, they are usually staged during the festival of Navratri in India. Depicting the stories from Ramayana and Ramacharitmanas, the Ramlila celebrations were declared by UNESCO as one of the "Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity" in 2008. The enactment of the legendary war between Rama and Ravana, the Ramlila performance concludes on Dussehra night. At various places giant ten headed effigies of demon Ravana are burnt with fireworks. Ramlila is particularly notable in historically important North Hindu cities of Ayodhya, Varanasi, Vrindavan, Almoraa, Satna and Madhubani –in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. It's a community event where everyone participates spontaneously, acting or taking part in related activities, such as mask- and costume preparation, and putting make-up, effigies and lights. The epic and its performance migrated to southeast Asia and *Ramayana* based *Ramlila* is a part of performance arts culture of Indonesia, particularly the Hindu society of Bali, Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand.

Another festival linked to Rama is Diwali. Rama's return to Ayodhya and his coronation is the main reason for celebrating Diwali which is described as *Festival of Lights*. In Guyana, Diwali is marked as a special occasion and celebrated with a lot of fanfare. It is observed as a

national holiday in this part of the world and some ministers of the Government also take part in the celebrations publicly.

The beauty of Ramayana is the expanse of its geographical journey from North to South; which takes its onward journey through Janakpuri, Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Kishkindha and then to Rameswaram followed by Lanka. All these places fit precisely in to the map of Indian sub-continent and the monuments commemorating these places bear witness to a story whose history is engraved in the stones and sculptures still preserved by the followers of Hinduism. The journey of Rama also marks the territorial boundary of India and has also been seen by various scholars of Ramayana as a journey to consolidate the Indian empire by making allies on the way and defeating the enemies.

Dasharatha was the king of Kosala⁴ and father of Rama and his mother's name was Kaushalya which implies that she belonged to Kosala. According to the geographer, Sanjeev Sanyal the basic story (of Ramayana) that is often repeated is of:

Rama, the young and popular crown prince of Ayodhya (now a small town in the state of Uttar Pradesh), is forced to give up his claim to the throne. He is exiled for fourteen years. Along with his wife Sita, and younger brother Lakshmana, Rama heads south, crosses the Ganga near modern day Allahabad and goes to live in the forest of central India. (Sanyal, 54)

Dasaratha had four sons from his three wives and his youngest wife Kaikeyi got jealous of Rama and wanted her son Bharata to ascend the throne of Kosala. On her behest Rama was exiled from Kosala for fourteen years. The geographical location of Ayodhya is well marked in Valmiki Ramayana. Situated on the banks of River Sarayu, it was the capital city of the great and prosperous empire named Kosala. Ayodhya has monuments like Dasaratha Mahal (the palace of King Dasaratha and Kanak Mahal (the palace gifted to Rama and Sita by Queen Kaikeyi as a marriage gift) commemorating the reign of King Dasaratha. On his exile, the citizens and Dasaratha followed Rama for a great distance but on reaching Guha at Shrungiberapura Rama sent back his charioteer Sumantra and crossed River Ganga from there.

Dasaratha passed away grieving his son's exile. After his death, great Bharata (Rama's step-brother) did not desire to rule the kingdom and followed Rama and requested him to return but Rama was unwavering in his vow. The following shloka from Ramayana describes Bharata's disappointment in his mission to take Rama back. Bharata worshipped the sandals of Rama and ruled the kingdom from Nandigram in his name, awaiting his return.

गते तु भरते श्रीमान् सत्यसन्धो जितेन्द्रियः ॥1.1.39॥

रामस्तु पुनरालक्ष्य नागरस्य जनस्य च ।

तत्रागमनमेकाग्रो दण्डकान्प्रविवेश ह ॥1.1.40॥

When Bharata left, Sri Rama perceiving that the citizens from Ayodhya would arrive there following him, he entered the Dandaka Forest accompanied by Laxman and Sita with firm determination to uphold his promise to his father and step-mother Kaikeyi.

Sita, like her husband Rama, belonged to a royal family. She was the adopted daughter of the King of Janakpur (Janakpur is situated in present day Nepal). According to the legend, King

⁴ Ayodhya was the capital of Kosala during the reign of King Ikshvaku and his descendants. The kingdom of Kosala is also mentioned in Buddhist and Jain texts, as one of the sixteen *Mahajanpads*

of Janakpur⁵ ploughed the land to get rid of devastating drought that had inflicted his land. While he was ploughing the land, he stumbled upon an earthen pot out of which Sita emerged. This place is named after Sita and is known as Sitamarhi in Bihar. A temple dedicated to Sita is located at Punaura Dham, Sitamarhi and thousands of pilgrims visit the shrine at the time of Vivah Panchami, marriage day of Sita and Rama and on Rama Navami, the birthday of Lord Rama.

Geographically Dandakaranya is a vast forest land which includes parts of Chattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh states. In Dandakaranya (Dandaka Forest) Rama slayed the demon Viradha and met the sages Sarabhanga, Sutikshna; and Agastya and his brothers. While his stay in the hermitage, the ascetics requested Rama to destroy the asuras and he assassinated fourteen thousand asuras at their request. Thus, eradicating evil on his way and further consolidating his empire.

The epic of Ramayana from here continues in the form of a travelogue of nomads who don't have a particular destination in mind and they go on travelling encountering picturesque landscape, beautiful rivers and wisdom of the sages in their onward journey. During his exile Rama journeys across India. He heads South crosses River Ganga near modern day Prayagraj and goes to live in the forest land of central India. The trio (Rama, Laxman and Sita) spent sometime in the Ashram of sage Bhardwaj; the hermitage is still there in Allahabad (now Prayagraj). The Ashram was a centre of teaching and learning and Lord Rama and Sita gained a lot from the scholarly environment. Valmiki Ramayana documents the stay of Rama at Bharadawaj Ashram in Chitrakoot.:

ते वनेन वनं गत्वा नदीस्तीर्त्वा बहूदकाः ॥1.1.30॥

चित्रकूटमनुप्राप्य भरद्वाजस्य शासनात् ।

There are references to several other places in the Ramayana which have temples built there to mark the presence of the Lord. From Chitrakoot in present day Madhya Pradesh, the plot moves to Panchavati situated in modern day Nasik. The Kala Rama Mandir and the Sita Gufa (the Cave of Sita) bear witness to the geographical imagination of Ramayana and to the geographical knowledge of Sage Valmiki who penned down the story of Rama. Moving from one forest to another and crossing deep and wide rivers abundant with waters, they reached the Chitrakoot mountain as commanded by sage Bharadwaj. They raised a hut made of leaves in the forest located in Chitrakoot mountain range and dwelt there for a short while.

वने तस्मिन्निवसता जनस्थाननिवासिनाम् ॥1.1.48॥

रक्षसां निहतान्यासन्सहस्राणि चतुर्दश

The three travellers meet Sati Anusuya at Chitrakoot who gifted an enchanted saree to Sita, the saree which does not get old and does not get dirty. Though this story may appear implausible but the location of Bhardwaj Ashram on its way from Ayodhya to Chitrakoot makes the journey plausible. From Bhardwaj Ashram, the trio went to Chitrakoot. It is also a landmark in the journey of Rama and Sita as this scenic place on the bank of River Mandakini includes the sites of Bharat Milap, Hanuman Dhara and Ram Shaiya (where Rama, Sita and Laxman used to rest) there are numerous locations in Chitrakoot that bear testimony to the stay of Rama in the place. The visit to the place makes one aware of how the

⁵ Janakpur is a city in Dhanusha District, Madhesh Province, Nepal. Which is thought to be the capital of King Janak the ruler of Videha

beautiful landscape is interwoven with the story of Ramayana. It is here that Rama, Laxman and Sita finally decide to stay and build a home.

स काममनवाप्यैव रामपादावुपस्पृशन् ॥1.1.38॥

नन्दिग्रामेऽकरोद्राज्यं रामागमनकाङ्क्षया

Rama's journey was a journey of inclusion and on his onward journey he made friends, allies and sympathizers. It is during this journey that Rama meets Shabari, a Shudra and shares berry with her. Thus, establishing the values of equality and fraternity which he planned to represent in his administration.

सोऽभ्यगच्छन्महातेजाशशबरीं शत्रुसूदनः ॥1.1.57॥

शबर्या पूजितस्सम्यग्रामो दशरथात्मजः

The above Shloka of Valmiki Ramayana describes how Rama, son of King Dasaratha, destroyer of opponents and possessing great splendour approached Sabari who duly worshipped him. He also made allies with the Vanaras, headed by Hanuman who were his valuable associates in the battle with Ravana. His befriending Hanuman at Kishkindha Mountain range is represented in the following Shloka of Valmiki Ramayana.

ततः प्रीतमनास्तेन विश्वस्तस्स महाकपिः ।

किष्किन्धां रामसहितो जगाम च गुहां तदा ॥1.1.67॥

Pleased with Rama's action and convinced of his prowess, Hanuman left thereafter with Rama for Kishkindha which was a cave structure. Kishkindha was the abode of Vanaras (which is variously interpreted as apes or Van+Nar, which means men of the forests or forest dwellers). It is here that Rama defeats Bali and makes Sugriva his ally. (1.1.68). This land of Rama's allies is situated around modern-day Tungabhadra River near Hampi in Karnataka. There is also the mention of Rishyamukh Mountain in Ramayana where Hanuman met Lord Rama and Laxman where Sugriva and Hanuman were hiding from Bali, elder brother of Sugriva. Rama helped Sugriva to defeat Bali and thus Sugriva became an important supporter of Rama in his battle against Ravana. It is on the Anjaneya Hill near the Rishyamukh mountain where Lord Hanuman was born. Situated on the banks of river Pampa this picturesque landscape brings alive various episodes of Rama's life.

ततो गृध्रस्य वचनात्सम्पातेर्हनुमान्बली ।

शतयोजनविस्तीर्णं पुप्लुवे लवणार्णवम् ॥1.1.72॥

This place documents the crisis of Ramayana's story. It is an important site as it is the place where Surpanakha, Ravana's sister met Lord Rama and fell in love with him and Laxman chopped off Surpanakha's nose when she tried to kill Sita. This is the place where Ravana sent the demon Mareecha disguised as a golden deer to tempt Sita and when Rama goes hunting for Mareecha, Ravana abducts Sita. This place also bears witness to Surpanakha's and her brothers Khar's and Dushan's battle with Rama and their death in the resultant battle.

From Nepal to Northern India and then crossing central India the story of Ramayana travels to southern India and reaches Rameswaram. Along with numerous temples Rameswaram is a major attraction for Hindu Pilgrimage. Also known as Ramanathaswamy temple it is decorated by ornate pillars and large corridors. Situated in the Gulf of Mannar at the tip of Indian peninsula; the Pamban island also known as Rameswaram island and is connected to mainland India by the Pamban bridge. The Panchamukhi Hanuman temple in Rameshwaram

showcases the ‘floating stones’; thus, establishing the fact that the floating stones of Rama Setuⁱⁱⁱ (Rama’s bridge) were not just figment of imagination.

The story of Rama is not confined to the mainland of Indian subcontinent but crosses the sea to reach Lanka, identified with present day Sri Lanka. The following shloka notes how Hanuman crossed the ocean with his magical powers. At the suggestion of the vulture, Sampathi mighty Hanuman leapt over the salt ocean which was extending over a hundred yojanas.

तत्र लङ्कां समासाद्य पुरीं रावणपालिताम् ।

ददर्श सीतां ध्यायन्तीमशोकवनिकां गताम् ॥1.1.73॥

Hanuman arrived at the city of Lanka ruled by Ravana and found Sita in the Ashoka Garden meditating on Rama. Later, the entire army of Rama crossed the ocean from the newly constructed engineering marvel, Rama Setu, the bridge made on ocean made with the help of floating stones. Earlier Samudra, lord of rivers was unwilling to give the path for the bridge but later afraid of Rama's anger he gave way for the construction of bridge. He appeared in his own form and also helped in the construction and on his advice a bridge was built with the help of the great engineer Nala.

दर्शयामास चात्मानं समुद्रस्सरितां पतिः ।

समुद्रवचनाच्चैव नलं सेतुमकारयत् ॥1.1.80॥

By the building of the bridge between India and Lanka, present day Sri Lanka, the epic of Ramayana crosses the Indian ocean to reach Lanka where Sita was kept captive at Ashoka Vatika by the Rakshasa King Ravana. It is presently marked as Hakgala Botanical Garden which is also known as Seetha Eliya and has commemorative sites like Sita Amman Temple and Sita Jharna where Sita lived and took bath.

पुनराख्यायिकां जल्पन्सुग्रीवसहितश्च सः ।

पुष्पकं तत्समारुह्य नन्दिग्रामं ययौ तदा ॥1.1.88॥

The place where Ravana died is also honored in Lankan history. Dunuwila is a place from which Lord Rama fired the Brahmastra at King Ravana who was directing the war from Laggala where he was killed. The word Laggala is derived from the Sinhalese term ‘Ēlakke Gala’ which means target rock. After Ravana’s death his body was kept at Yahangala Divan or bedrock. On his return journey Rama again paid visit to the hermitage of Bharadwaja (as promised) and despatched Hanuman to Bharata as his messenger.

There are sites in Jharkhand that also bear testimony to Ravana’s existence. When Ravana, the King of Lanka, felt that his kingdom would be under constant threat of enemies unless Lord Shiva decided to stay there forever; he offered continuous prayers to please the Lord. Contented, Shiva blessed Ravana with his 'Atmalinga' to carry with him to Lanka on the condition that there neither should be a pause on the journey to Lanka nor should the lingam be handed to any other person. If this were to happen, the lingam would remain fixed at that place forever where it was placed. The other gods deliberated to hinder Ravana’s journey as they knew that if Shiva went to Lanka with Ravana would become indefatigable and the evil deeds of Ravana would wreak havoc in the whole world. They thus requested Varuna, the God of Water, to enter Ravana's stomach on his way back. When the Lord did so, Ravana felt a strong urge to release water, and he handed over the lingam to a passer-by. The passer-by was Lord Ganesha in

disguise. The place where Ravana released the water is known as Shivganga Kund or Ravana Kund and is considered as auspicious as River Ganges.

The Brahmin placed the lingam at this location, which is now a popular pilgrim site known as Baidyanath Dham in Deoghar, Jharkhand. Ravana tried hard to remove the lingam from the spot where it had been placed. His frustration at being unable to do so made him resort to violence, and he damaged the lingam in the process. His guilt then made him visit the spot daily, and this continued forever. The place where Lord Shiva descended the Earth is known as Harilajori, which is located about four miles from Baidyanath Temple. Located just 10 km from Deoghar, this place has a temple of Shiva called Taponath Mahadeva and a number of caves are also present there. In one of the caves, there is a Shiva lingam installed and it is said that Sage Valmiki came here for penance.

There are also family trees that bear evidence to the presence of Rama and Ravana. Many Suryavanshi Kings trace their lineage to Lord Rama which includes erstwhile royal Family of Mewar and Jaipur. Similarly, the Kanyakubja Brahmins of the Vidisha district worship Ravana; they idealize him as a symbol of prosperity and regard him as a saviour, claiming that Ravana was also a Kanyakubja Brahmin. Thousands of Kanyakubja Brahmins of the village Ravangram of Netaran, in the Vidisha District of Madhya Pradesh, perform daily puja (worship) in the Ravana temple and offer naivedyam / bhog (a ritual offering to the Gods). Centuries ago King Shiv Shankar built a Ravana temple at Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. The Ravana temple is opened once a year, on Dussehra Day, to perform rituals for the welfare of people. Ravana is also worshiped by Hindus of Bisrakh, who claim that Ravana was born here. While the Sachora Brahmins of Gujarat also claim to be descendants of Ravana, and sometimes have "Ravan" as their surnames. Some Saraswat Brahmins from Mathura claim Ravana as their ancestor too. The Gond tribe of central India claim to be descendants of Ravana, and they have temples erected for him, his wife Mandodari, and their son Meghnad. They also state that Ravana was an ancient Gond king, the tenth *dharmaguru* of their tribe, and the eighteenth lingo (divine teacher). Every year on Dussehra day, the Gondis of the village of Paraswadi carry an image of Ravana riding on an elephant in a procession.

The expanse of Ramayana even gives a lot of space to the antagonist Ravana and various places and landscapes ascertain the presence of Ravana. He comes to the house of Mayasura and falls in love with his daughter Mandodari.

Mandodari and Ravana are soon married with Vedic rites. Mandodari bears three sons of Ravana: Meghanada (Indrajit), Atikaya and Akshayakumara. Mandore, a town located nine km north of Jodhpur, Rajasthan is believed to be the native place of Mandodari. Ravana is treated as a son-in-law among some local Brahmins and has a temple devoted to him here.

Aranya-Kāṇḍa of *Ramayana* mentions Sita's abduction. Ravana, using a golden deer as a trap, visited Sita when she was alone in her hut. He carried her in his famous Pushpak Vimana. Jatayu, the "King of Vultures" (*gidharāja*) tried to save her. He fought heroically with Ravana, but as he was very old, he was soon defeated and fell to earth when Ravana chopped off his wings. Rama and Laxman while searching for Sita, chanced upon dying Jatayu, who informed them of the battle with Ravana and told them that Ravana had headed in southerly direction. Jatayu then died of his injuries and Rama performed his funeral rites. According to Kerala's folklore, Jatayu fell on the rocks in Chadayamangalam in the Kollam district of Kerala after his wings were clipped off by Ravana. The name "Chadayamangalam" is said to be derived from the word "Jatayu-mangalam". Jatayu Earth's Center Nature Park in

Chadayamangalam features a 61 metres (200 ft) wide statue of Jatayu, which is credited as the world's largest bird sculpture.

Along with places associated with Rama there are also places, temples and shrines associated with Sita, Hanuman, Ravana and Vibhishan and there are various sites in Sri Lanka that memorializes the story of Rama and Ravana as it is in Lanka that the great war between Rama and Ravana ensued.

Ravana abducted Sita and brought her to Weragantota in Lanka in his plane, the famed Pushpaka Vimana. Weragantota means the "place of aircraft landing" in Sinhala. This is the first place Sita Devi was brought to Lanka. It is believed Ravana had an aircraft repair center at Gurulupotha close to Sita Kotuwa. Devi Sita resided in queen Mandodari's palace until she was moved to Sita Kotuwa (which means Sita's Fort in Sinhalese) and then on to Ashoka Vatika. Ravana moved Sita from Sita Kotuwa to Ashok Vatika, the lush garden in the mountains. The route too was said to be spectacular, as Ravana wanted to show Sita the splendour of his kingdom. Sita's tear pond is found in the chariot route, and is believed to have been formed by the tears of Devi Sita. It has not dried up since and doesn't dry even during severe famines when the adjoining rivers dry up. The indigenous exquisite Sita Flower is also found here. The peculiarity of this red bloom is the arrangement of the petals, stamen and pistils, which resembles a human figure carrying a bow, and is said to embody Lord Rama. These flowers are endemic only to this area in the whole of Sri Lanka. There are also places that document Devi Sita's woes, Kondagala, known as Kondakalai in Tamil is the place where Sita is said to have her hair deranged while passing the place due to the speed of the chariot. "Konda kalai" in Tamil means "spoiling of hair." Till date the villagers of this place live with the legacy of this event dated to Ramayana.

Situated in Weldimara area, Istripura is another ingenious network of paths interconnected with all major areas of king Ravana's city. Istripura means "Area of Women" in Sinhala. Sita devi took bath in this very stream and had dried her hair sitting on a rock and put clips to her hair, hence this rock is known as Konda Kattu Gala.

Hanuman was the first messenger of Rama to set his foot on mainland Lanka. The mountain on which he landed is known as Pawala Malai. These hills stand tall between King Ravana's capital city and Ashoka Vatika. Hanuman was brought in the presence of Ravana and as a punishment, his tail was set on fire. Hanuman in turn set fire to the houses in the city. The soil in the area which caught fire is burnt black and Ussangoda is one such area where burnt soil is found.

The summit where Hanuman is believed to have rested after meeting Devi Sita is known as Mani Kattuthar. This is a rock in the Labookelle estate. Hanuman met Devi Sita and, on his way, to announce this happy encounter to Lord Rama, rested on this hilltop. Today an open temple with statues of Lord Rama, Sita, Laxman, and Hanuman is erected on top of it. Locals offer prayers at this temple.

Dunuvila is a word derived from "Dhunu" means "arrow" and "Vila" lake, it is a place from which Lord Rama fired the Brahmastra arrow at king Ravana who was directing the war from Laggala. It is here that King Ravana was slain by Lord Rama's brahmastra (the most powerful weapon). The top of Laggala is flat and is believed to have been created by the power of the brahmastra.

Sita met Rama after the war at Divurumpola where she undertook the "Agni Pariksha", test of fire where she proved her blamelessness and chastity to Rama. Divurumpola means the

"Place of Oath" in Sinhalese language. She came out unscathed and proved her virtue and purity.

The Kelani River is mentioned in the Valmiki Ramayana and Vibishana's palace was said to be situated on the banks of this river. The reason Laxman crowned Vibishana was because their aim in the battle with Ravana was not to annex his territory but to save Devi Sita and to abolish evil and to establish a virtuous emperor in his place. Lord Rama had to return to India to continue his self-exile of 14 years to honour the commitment. He also destroyed the Rama Setu after his return as there wouldn't be any further battles between mainland India and the island Lanka (present day Sri Lanka).

The strategic location of all the sites mentioned in Ramayana weaves the Indian landscape of ancient Bharatvarsha together, clearly specifying the boundary of Rama's empire and also of Ravana's kingdom. The landscapes bear testimony to the chronicles of Rama's life and his epic journey through length and breadth of India giving a clear picture of the expanse of ancient Bharat Varsha and the study of each and every landscape will lead to further insight into the narrative of Rama and its geographical imagination. There are places that are not mentioned in the Valmiki Ramayana and yet they are marked by the local people as the places where Rama visited, lived or a memorable incident related to Rama occurred. These are the shrines and places of Hindu pilgrimage which have kept alive the Indian grand narrative of Ramayana. Most of the places in local lore and Valmiki Ramayana overlap. A close study of any of these landscapes would open the debate of Rama's story to be history or fiction and further debate but the beauty of it is that how Indian tradition is kept alive in its cultural landscape. All the places mentioned in the paper opens a door of new studies in the area of Ramayana studies which is endless as the popular Indian saying goes "Hari Anant Hari Katha Ananta"

ⁱ A term coined by Raja Rao to describe the landscape mythology of a place

ⁱⁱ The geographical imagination is a way of thinking about the world and considering the relative importance of places. The term encompasses a variety of meanings, including individual mental images and socially produced discourses about cultures, spaces, and differences. How people see the world is influenced by many factors, including social class, education, and personal and political philosophies. The particular moments in history in which people live also play a major role in how they view the world around them.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is said that with the help of these floating stones bridge over the sea connecting mainland India and Lanka (present time Lanka) was built.

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Conflict of Interest

1. I, Dr. Purnima on behalf of all corresponding author confirm that there is no conflict of interest.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA AND LEGAL AIDS AND PROVISIONS FOR PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

In a country like India, where the feminine form of Goddess Durga (Adishakti) is worshiped with huge devotion, hypocrisy prevails as violence against women in the form of verbal, physical, mental, and sexual abuse remains one of the most prevalent human rights violations. Besides having several legal aids and provisions, many women are unaware or unwilling to report against domestic abuse that they undergo during their lifetime. Violence against women is defined by United Nations as: “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” This paper aims to highlight domestic violence cases by intimate partner using case studies and statistical analysis. The objective of the paper is to understand the existing laws and provisions available against domestic violence against women in India. Focusing on the national laws and measures and provisions for intimate partner violence, it also demonstrates the failure of government organizations, civic bodies, and NGOs through instances to take proper action against the perpetrator and for protection and rehabilitation of the victim.

Keywords: COVID-19 Lockdown, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Legal Aids, And Legal Provisions.

Understanding Domestic Violence

Violence against women is serious and pressing issue around the world. Despite various laws, policies and international protocols to protect women, violence and other forms of abuse exist in various forms. To comprehend how the victims are exposed to violence by their partners, a wheel called the Power and Control Wheel was created by the Domestic Abuse Intervention

Program as a part of The Duluth Model (see fig.1). It focuses on eight different ways that are commonly used by the abuser to suppress a victim.



Fig. 1. Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, The Duluth Model-Power and Control Wheel, 2017. This model serves as a tool to explain the behavioral patterns and tactics of the abuser that are universal and commonly observed in abusers who try gaining control over the victims. The wheel consists of two parts: outer and inner. The outer ring symbolizes abusive actions used by the perpetrators, and the inner ring consists of other subtle behavior to explain different aspects of abuse utilized by the men to exercise power and control over their partners.

Barriers of Reporting

According to the World Health Organization, 38% of females were murdered because of intimate partner violence. The irony about the recorded data is that, still there is a large number, whose voices remain unheard and who could not find a favorable source that can help them come out of vulnerable situations. Majority of the women choose to agonize over their situation who accept violence as their fate rather than reporting against the atrocities. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* points out that, "It is interesting that many women do not recognize themselves as discriminated against; no better proof could be found of the totality of their conditioning" (Millet, 55). The victim's reasons for staying and not to be able

to escape an abusive relationship are notably complex. The barriers include the threats from the abuser to hurt the victim or anyone related to her, fear of losing custody of her children, lack of financial support, cultural beliefs to maintain the guise of an ideal marriage or obsolete gender roles that may not support and keep the victim enslaved in a relationship, the victim's belief that domestic violence may not be taken seriously by judicial authorities or fear of police and legal hassles, and in many cases, the denial and rationalizing the violence against them are few reasons responsible for staying with the batterers. Rachel Louise Snyder in her book *No Visible Bruises* highlights the situation of leaving a domestic abuser as a whole process rather than an event. She points out the fact that a victim of domestic abuse stay with their partners because, they think that any sudden move will provoke the abuser and that they have no other viable choice (Snyder). A sufferer of domestic abuse is unable to reach her family members or friends due to failed communication and isolation by the perpetrators. Furthermore, the main entities that could be useful in this aggrieved situation are police and legislation. In a conventional Indian household, a woman is taught to abide the set norms of marriage which shuns the victim of domestic violence to report the abuses against her and to file a divorce. The police, in many cases neglect the severity of the situation, which would result in minimal reporting of violence against women.

Domestic Violence: Facts and Figures

To begin with 2019, in India, NCW received a total of 19,730 complaints of crimes against women. This number was expanded to 23,722 in 2020. The official data of the NCW made shocking revelations, which showed a rise of violence and harassment within the four walls of their homes

in 2021. In the same year, a total of 30,865 complaints in which 21.6% asked for protection against domestic violence were registered (PTI). In a latest report, 6900 cases are registered by National Commission for Women under the category of domestic violence in 2022 (Pandit). All the data recorded is quite alarming and provokes every individual to think intensely over the causes behind the spike in violence against women.

As Beauvoir states, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 301), performative gender roles, misogyny and internalized patriarchy have always been the predominant cause of domestic violence in India and worldwide. To attain complete dominance over their female partner, whom the perpetrators consider as weak and fragile, is one of the evil reasons that contribute to domestic violence. Besides, alcoholism, mental issues, suspecting infidelity, and financial circumstances are some other factors.

Research conducted by two healthcare facilities in Nagpur found that 32% of the women who visited obstetrics-gynaecology outpatient department during COVID-19 faced domestic violence in the form of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. The abuser committing violence was a women's husband and her parents, including his sister. The most heart-wrenching part was that only 7.4% of women reached out to ask for help or file complaints. (Bavadam, 2021) While the recorded data represent one side of the issue, the other side, which is apparently invisible, comprises unreported cases of domestic violence. The reasons behind unreported cases are the lack of awareness on the availability of legal aids, legal provisions and helplines (National Commission for Women, Central Social Welfare Board, JAGORI, Saheli etc.), fear

of livelihood or economic instability, and silence on the part of victims. A report by the National Family Health Survey-5 revealed that only 14% of the women who suffered any type of physical or sexual violence reported against it. A large percentage, that is, 77% of women did not seek anyone's help or spoke against violence (Pandit).

Legal Provisions and Rehabilitation

In India, the Indian Penal Code addressed the issue of domestic violence under sections namely, Section 304B and Section 498A, and on 13th September, 2005, a historical act, "Protection of Women from the Domestic Violence Act" was passed. Section 304B, also known as dowry death, was applicable to every part of the country except Jammu and Kashmir due to article 370 of the Indian constitution, which granted special status to have a separate constitution, a state flag, and liberty of internal administration. (Khan, 2020)

In our culture, gifts were given to daughters in marriage as a token of love but they later became a source of increasing wealth and boasting status in society. Due to outdated gender roles, gender inequality, and the patriarchal structure of society, the family of the bride is compelled to meet dowry demand at any cost, which leads to harassment or even death of the victim in many cases. Section 304B makes it clear, if the death of a woman is caused because of injury or burns other than normal conditions and if soon after her death, it is established that she suffered from harassment by her husband or his relatives, in association with the dowry, then it shall be called 'dowry death' and they shall be held accountable. The punishment for committing dowry death shall not be less than seven years and can extend to life imprisonment.

Section 498A addresses 'cruelty', where cruelty refers to any act that forces a woman to die by suicide or results in severe injuries and harassing her or people related to her to meet any illicit demand shall be imprisoned for a term that could extend to three years and liable to fine. It was under this section that domestic abuse was recognized as a criminal offense for the first time.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, can be called an umbrella act that prohibits a broad range of violence such as sexual, physical, economical, verbal, or emotional against women. It also provides support to the victims of violence in the form of residence orders, custody orders, protection orders, and defendant's orders. Section 3 of the act gives a definition of the domestic violence as "A domestic abuse in case of any act, omission or action or actions of the respondent in case: harms or damage or put at risk the health, life, limb or well-being of the victim of domestic violence or has an intention to do so, which also includes abusing physically, sexually, verbally, emotionally and economically; harass, harm or injure or threaten the victim purposely to force her or any person related to her to meet any vicious demand for dowry or other property or valuable assurance; has the outcome of intimidating the victim of domestic violence or any person related to her by any conduct mentioned in clause (a) or clause (b); causing damage or injure the person being abused physically or mentally. (PMDVA, 2005)

Domestic violence is a serious social evil and is still widely seen as a private matter. Apart from family members, neighbors and friends are mostly aware of the wrongdoings of

perpetrators. We as a society need to intervene to prevent domestic violence. In this regard, Section 4 of IPC declares that it is the moral responsibility of a person who believes that an act of domestic violence has been taken place or aware of the possibility of occurring domestic violence in future, may give information to the officer appointed for this purpose. He or She shall not be held accountable to any civil or criminal liability for this purpose.

Section 5 prescribes the duties of a police officer, protection officer, and service provider who are present at a place where the incident of domestic violence occurred. They shall instruct the victim about her legal rights to obtain relief by way of protection order, an order for monetary relief, a custody order, a residence order, a compensation order, or more than one such order under the Protection of Women from the Domestic Violence Act. They shall also assist the victim about free legal services under the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 and access to the services provided by protection officers and service providers.

Sections 6 and 7 deal with shelter assistance and medical facilities. Section 6 asserts that a shelter home shall provide a haven to the affected person to support the victim of domestic violence when requested by her or protection officer. Under Section 7, it is expected that a victim will be provided any medical care by the medical facility available.

Due to lack of literacy and education in rural areas as well as inadequate legal education in both urban and rural areas, many women are unable to report crime against them. Section 11 ensures that the central and state governments take all the steps to publicize the provisions under the act through television, radio, and print media. It also provides training to the police and judicial officers to raise awareness against domestic violence and look after that the departments of law and order, health, and human resources work in harmony with each other and the guidelines are well established. Section 12(1) postulates that the victim or the protection officer or any person on behalf of the victim of the domestic violence can present an application before the magistrate for perusal of relief under the act.

Section 18 to Section 22 safeguard victims of domestic violence and provide various relief in the form of protection orders, residence orders, monetary relief, custody orders, and compensation orders.

In a dreadful incident reported in 2021 in Budh Vihar, Delhi, a woman was butchered and stabbed by her husband 47 times in broad daylight. This frightening episode had many silent onlookers, which is alarming and questions humanity (Sridevi et al). Under Section 18, the act assures that the person who committed domestic violence is prohibited from invading the work place of the victim or school in case the sufferer is a child, communicating with the victim by any means, depriving the abused person from accessing a bank account shared by both the partners and causing harm to any person related to the victim. The protection orders assure that the victim is guarded from any distress, suffering, or harm by the abuser. It prevents the abuser from the isolating victim from her financial rights to access a joint account or any other property once shared by both the parties. The protection also extends to the relatives, friends, or anyone who provides their support against domestic violence.

Under Section 19, the orders by the magistrate restrains the accused person to remove the victim from the shared household, detain him and his relatives to enter the shared household section, and further directing him to provide accommodation or pay rent if needed and to return eligible holdings and goods of the victim. Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929 (Woolf, 29), addressed the importance of personal space and status of women by saying that, “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”. She used the metaphor of the room to assert the significance of political, cultural, private, and public spaces for women and declared the encroachment of the spaces that were earlier considered the domain owned by men.

Legal battles require lot of money and financial independence of a woman, while a woman who do not have finances and property can not fight a sustained battle. Section 20 states that the victim of domestic violence will be given monetary relief for the expenses caused by the damage of property, medical expense, and maintenance of the victim and her children. In several cases, children are snatched from their mother or they are also abused by the perpetrator. Section 21 and Section 22, provides the victim temporary custody of the child or children of the victim and restricts

the accused to visit if it causes any threat to the life of the child and directs the accused person to pay compensation for the damages and emotional and mental torture because of domestic violence. The majority of the women do not break their silence fearing loss of possession of their children and financial support. Sections 20, 21 and 22 assures that the victim seeking help against domestic violence should be granted with adequate and fair compensation to maintain her children and herself under custody and compensation orders.

In Section 23, the magistrate has the power to grant interim and ex parte orders, under Section 26, the victim is entitled to relief in any legal proceedings before a civil or criminal court available under Sections 18,19,20,21, and 22.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act is a civil law enacted to alleviate the miseries of women in a domestic relationship. Under Section 2(f) of the act, “domestic relationship” means a relationship between two persons who live or have, at any point of time, lived together in a shared household, when they are related by consanguinity, marriage, or through a relationship in marriage, adoption, or are family members living together as a joint family. (PWDVA, 2005)

A Case Study of Domestic Violence

Among the numerous domestic violence cases in India, the landmark case of *V.D. Bhanot v. Savita Bhanot* (2012), highlighted the issue involving whether the victim of domestic violence before the enactment of the act would still be entitled to take proceedings under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005? The case comprises a special leave petition by the Delhi High Court against the order passed by learned Additional Sessions Judge on 18th September, 2009, rejecting the appeal filed by Mrs. Savita Bhanot against the order of the metropolitan magistrate. The viewpoint of the metropolitan magistrate on rejecting appeal was that the domestic violence act came into implementation on 26th October, 2006, and the respondent left her matrimonial home before that on 4th July, 2005;

thus, the claim of a woman living in a domestic relationship is not maintainable and the court could not mediate upon the merits of the respondent's case, which meant that the victim of domestic violence was not eligible to fight a legal battle because she left her husband's home before the act of Protection of Women from Domestic

Violence came into existence. The Delhi High Court directed the Additional Sessions Judge to contemplate the appeal filed by the respondent. After considering Article 21 of the constitution and inquiring the statement of objects and reasons for the enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the learned judge held that the purpose of the act was to provide protection to women against any form of violence and therefore the learned judge adhered to the fact that the petition under the provisions of the act is maintainable irrespective of the times it came into force. (Tiwari, 2022)

Global approach to mitigate domestic violence

Domestic Violence is a universal social malaise that requires a global plan of action to prevent and respond to violence against women. In 2019, WHO and UN women along with the approbation of twelve other UN and bilateral agencies issued a framework called RESPECT women to prevent violence against women. The seven-letter word stands for seven strategies: Relationship skills strengthening; Empowerment of women; Services ensured; Poverty reduced; Enabling environments (schools, work places, public spaces) created; Preventing Child and adolescent abuse; and Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms. The framework emphasizes various interventions and demonstrates its effectiveness in both low and high-resource environments. It prioritizes the safety of women and challenges gender stereotypes and inequalities and addresses numerous risk factors at an early stage of life. It underlines the importance of organizing various programs at the school level to enhance safety by eliminating child abuse and incorporating curricula that promote equality and challenges gender stereotypes. The framework creates an environment that gives equal status to men and women so that they develop a critical viewpoint about unequal gender power relationships. It focuses on working with couples to improve communication and relationship skills and empowerment at the social and economic levels.

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development was opted by the United Nations in 2015 to improve health and education, promote gender equality, and for addressing environmental issues. It included 17 major goals with 169 targets. Sustainable development goal number 5 concerns with ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, equal opportunities to

women, equal rights to women to various resources, gender equality, and empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. This goal is integral for sustainable development, and all the sustainable development goals depend on the accomplishment of Goal. (UN Women, 2022) Since 2008, a campaign is being observed as the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women, headed by the UN Secretary General and UN women on 25th November. The objective is to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls around the world, increase awareness, promote advocacy, and to create possibilities for discussions on challenges and solutions. In 2022, an initiative of 16 days of activism beginning from 25th November and concluding on International Human Rights Day on 10th



November was being launched. The theme of the day was UNITE, activism to end violence against women and girls that intended to mobilize all society to become activists for preventing of violence against women, to stand in solidarity with women's rights activists and to support feminist movements around the world to resist the rollback on women's rights and calling for a world free from violence against women. The color orange associated with the campaign signifies a brighter future, free from violence against women.

Interventions at ground level

Accompanied by the legal provisions, the helplines available across the country offer expansive services to protect and empower women against violence. The National Commission for Women launched a 24×7 helpline in collaboration with Digital India Corporation to address women undergoing any distress and provide counselling services by connecting them to pertinent authorities for instance, police, hospitals, legal services, and counsellors for psychological support (PIT, 2021).

Numerous interventions at the individual and community level can help in mitigating intimate partner violence. To begin with, the norm of accepting violence as a part of a conjugal relationship needs to be addressed. At an individual and community level, support from the martial family (if not involved in violence), women's natal family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors could help report violence. The silence from the part of the victim and other community members will result in condoning violence, and hence, women will continue to experience abuse frequently.

It is strange that in our society, people have prodigious interest in making and consuming films, documentaries and web series that are based on comedy, thriller, action and serial killers and that bring no rational change. The media houses are engrossed in flashing breaking news regarding politics, religious conflicts, economy, and entertainment, but the incidences of domestic violence that occur periodically in our country are less talked about. Only recently, the murder of Shraddha Walker by her live-in partner Aftab Poonawalla brought back a focus on gendered violence or domestic violence. It is ironic and heart breaking that attention toward gender-based violence had been possible only after a gruesome murder. Since, every person nowadays has access to social or mass media so, it is the moral obligation of media to spread awareness regarding the nuances of domestic violence. There should be engaging and informative programs, documentaries, and web series for disseminating knowledge about abuse and characteristics of abusers so that it could be prevented at an early stage.

Along with the government, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a powerful role in combating domestic violence. NGOs have been consistently working to provide services to the victims of domestic abuse in the form of counseling, shelter, medical assistance, financial support, and making victims aware of their rights and hence increasing legal literacy. The grassroots activists and the women's rights defenders play a vital role in decreasing domestic abuse by working on social welfare activities and organizing programs to uplift and empower women. NGOs such as Guria India, provide protection and legal intervention for domestic violence and help victims with financial assistance. Another NGO, Action Aid India, is affiliated to Action Aid International whose one stop center Gauravi

works 24×7 and provides counselling, legal, medical, and shelter assistance for the victims of domestic and sexual violence, which also extends to minor boys. However, in a startling audit report released by Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS), Mumbai, in 2018, many minor girls at a government children home called Seva Sankalp ewan Vikash Samiti located in Muzaffarpur, were subjugated to physical and sexual abuse. The report was immediately followed by an FIR against the NGO (TOI). Therefore, a constant vigilance of such Non-Governmental Organisations who claim to work for social welfare is required tinely. The police are an important law enforcement agency for protecting life and property, prevention of crime, and maintenance of law and order. In several cases, police hesitate to interfere in cases of domestic violence because they feel it is a private concern. However, it is the social and legal responsibility of the police to protect women against any form of violence. For this purpose, the law enforcement officers should be trained to address all incidents of domestic and intimate partner violence so that they could intervene properly to stop violence. The proper implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act is necessary for protecting the rights of women and save them from the barbarities of abusive men.

Hope for survivors

Though the situation appears bleak yet there's still hope. A survivor of domestic abuse, Chiara Lisowski talked about her story of survival at the TED conference. She spoke up about her abusive husband who isolated her from friends and family. She shared that she was strangled several times and subjected to physical abuse regularly. While seeking help to understand relationship problems, she came across the UK National Charity of Domestic Abuse for women's aid, that made her identify the danger she was in. She left her abusive partner after several efforts by her family and friends who helped her financially and emotionally to get out of a manipulative, controlled, and abusive relationship. She began a new life after going through numerous medications and therapies. She reconnected with old friends, found a new job, rediscovered herself and met the love of her life (Lisowski 12:49).

Another story of a warrior, Uma, who did not only battle domestic violence but also defeated life-threatening disease like cancer. An Indian student, who was abused physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially, had never thought that the person she loved would turn into a monster. From mental torture at the time of her pregnancy for not being able to do household chores to giving threats to kill her and hitting, choking, and slapping in the presence of their children, Uma had endured it all. She did not get any help from her family and friends. She decided to learn self-defense by taking classes. The day, she was diagnosed with cancer, she lost all her fears, as mortality is the only real fear in human life. She called the police for help and-, filed for divorce. In her words, "Divorce is a taboo subject in my Indian community and a huge stigma. The women, especially, are ostracized along with being blamed for breaking up the family". She could conquer her disease and domestic violence. (Garg, 2022)

Conclusion

The universality of intimate partner violence regardless of geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers ensures that this issue is a most urgent matter of public health, rather than being a private problem. It is the duty of law enforcement bodies to treat domestic violence as a criminal act, so that necessary actions should be taken. Having a genuine understanding that

it could happen anywhere, to anyone is crucial. Along with better enforcement of laws, police and emergency personnel should be trained to interact with the victims of domestic abuse to prevent the consequences of undiagnosed and untreated injuries. Though the situation appears bleak due to gender inequities in marriage and domestic work, however the stories of women coming out of abusive relationship gives us hope. There's an urgent need to transform existing normative expectations surrounding wives and domestic work and spreading awareness about various legal provisions among women will empower them in cases of domestic violence.

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Genderspaces: Gender Division of Spaces in Literature and Culture with Special Reference to Manju Kapur's Works

Aabha Sharma, Purnima and Satyam Kumar

Abstract

The gendering of space corresponds to the division of public and private spaces. Edward T. Hall defines space as the “silent language” and “hidden dimension.”¹ Space is a word related to gender, and its literal meaning has altered over time due to its complexities and socially constructed characteristics. The predominant division of spaces into feminine and masculine spaces reveals the rigidity of the society. The spaces have been further classified as unbounded and bounded spaces, ‘rightful space’, safe and unsafe spaces, and so on. Apart from women, there is a small and highly marginalized community known as the transgendered or intersexed population. They have been largely disregarded in terms everyday spaces and interactions. This article will study the gender disparity discussed in the novels of Manju Kapur. Her works are centred on strong women embarking on their journey, confronting and mitigating their home spaces, while establishing their place in society. We will also analyze the formation of identities in Manju Kapur’s works and analogous situations in society based on spatial segregation by the classical patriarchy.

Keywords: feminine space, gendered space, genderspace, masculine space, rightful space, transgender

Introduction

The French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) states in his revolutionary book, *The Production of Space* (1991 [French 1974]), that “the word space has a strictly geometrical meaning; the idea evoked was simply that of an empty space.”² He describes in detail how space is produced socially and through a succession of human relations. The concept of ‘gendered spaces’ is associated with power relations, dominant opportunity structure, and the way public and private spaces are gendered, obstructing one gender while permitting the other. There have been attempts in the last two decades to revive interest in the notion of spaces and gender in literary studies and to map how they affect human life and culture. To understand the existence of gender stratification, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists formulated a variety of theories. To examine radical geography’s challenge and transform spatial boundaries in

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¹ Daphne Spain, “Gendered Spaces and Women’s Status,” *Sociological Theory*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1993), p. 139.

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 1.

society, “feminist geography emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, building on the second-wave movement of the 1960s.³ Feminist geographers emphasized the interconnections between patriarchy, identity and geographical subjectivities, and highlighted how gendered divides alter through time, place, and across cultures.

This article will examine context of space, which has long been a focus for feminist geographers and social scientists. Risa Whitson assigned her readers to consider the public and semi-public spaces in which one lives, works and plays, in order to ask, Who has the right to occupy these areas? The different social identities affect how people respond and behave in households, communities, and societies.⁴ Doreen B. Massey explains that social space is the product of relations and connections with each other, and these relations are filled with power. She draws attention toward the unequal distribution of power; the power of some groups and the power of some places over others.⁵ This article considers ways in which spaces become a hindrance to the development of women’s identities. It also examines how spaces offer a site to break patriarchal constraints and attain power by discussing the portrayal of women in the novels of Manju Kapur, namely *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), and *Home* (2006). The protagonists of Manju Kapur’s works are new women who struggle with intermingled issues of space and power. They are forging their own ‘identity’ and ‘space’ in a male-dominated world.

The Struggle for Space of One’s Own

In India, the home is viewed as a woman’s domain, with female members expected to be necessarily obedient and ardently involved in domestic chores and with their children. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and a silent sufferer with no place to create her own identity. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir investigates the existence of women as a relational concept. She presents her argument by saying that “one is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman.”⁶ This asserts that a woman’s position is a result of social conditioning. These social conditions led to the segregation of spaces, which reduced women’s mobility in spheres of education, economic growth, and religious places, resulting in the ‘Gendering of Spaces.’

Through the portrayal of Viramati, Astha, and Nisha in *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, and *Home*, Kapur reveals the struggles that a daughter, a wife, and a mother experience to accomplish various roles in society. Petra Doan argues that spaces are largely gendered based on a binary system of gender, and thus spatial segregation fails to acknowledge a highly marginalized, intersexed, and transgendered community.⁷ Interestingly, Kapur also evaluates the norm of compulsory heterosexuality, which is the root of male supremacy. She explores sexuality

³ “Research Guides: Human Geography: Feminist Geography,” *Dartmouth Libraries*, 23 February (2024). At: http://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/human_geography/feminist. Accessed 07/09/2023.

⁴ Ann M. Oberhauser, Jennifer L. Fluri, Risa Whitson, and Sharlene Mollett (eds), *Feminist Spaces: Gender and Geography in a Global Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁵ Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 295.

⁷ Petra Doan, “The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces: Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy,” *Gender Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography Place and Culture*, vol. 5 (2010), pp. 635-654.

through her characters Astha and Pipeelika in *A Married Woman*. This allows deconstruction of gendered binaries and raises concerns about the status and spaces filled by a third gender in society.

The Uneven Playing Ground: Forbidden Terrain for Female Children

Gender theorists maintain that the conformity of men and women as masculine and feminine is due to cultural conditioning that begins in childhood. Manju Kapur, in *Difficult Daughters*, narrates the story of women from three generations, namely, Kasturi, Viramati, and Ida. Kasturi is the mother of Viramati, and Viramati is Ida's mother. Viramati was the eldest daughter of the eleven children of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. She was born in a generation when women's roles were limited to childbearing and household chores. Being the firstborn, she could only remember looking after children and was the second mother to her younger siblings. As a child of ten years, Viramati never received affection or desired love from her mother. Kasturi would often lash out at Viramati to take on all the responsibilities and rebuke her, "Have you seen to their food-milk-clothes-studies?"⁸ Viramati has been constantly entrapped in family duties and was devoid of motherly love. Her quest for a space and a place of own is captivating throughout the novel.

The second novel, *A Married Woman*, is the story of Astha, the only child of her parents. Raised in a conventional middle-class household, her father was a bureaucrat, and her mother was a schoolteacher in Delhi. Her mother often tells her, "When you are married, our responsibilities will be over."⁹ To them, her education, character, health, and marriage were burdens. Kapur emphasizes the social norms imposed on a girl child that restricts their role to limited spheres. Astha's upbringing prepared her to serve and please the men in her life. Astha had no personal space to follow her passion for painting and drawing, as her parents believed there was no future in art. In her book, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf put forward her concern for economic liberation and individual space for survival of woman. David Daiches decodes this theme along these lines: "All those who have talent should be given the opportunity to develop and use it...and allowed to have an income and a room of their own."¹⁰ Astha was constantly pushed to follow the predestined traditional gender roles by her father and later by her husband.

Kapur's third novel, *Home*, is about Nisha, the daughter of Yaspal and Sona. Through Nisha, Kapur highlights the differences between the upbringing of a girl and a boy. The difference revealed when Nisha asks her mother, Sona, if she can play with her brothers outside the home. Sona scolds her, "You can't... It is better for girls to remain inside."¹¹ From childhood, the girl's access to spaces is within the boundaries of home, while a boy is generally allowed to play outside the home. This defines the gender roles set up by the social structure of patriarchy. Beauvoir underlines the different nurturing of male and female children by explaining that "boys are spoken

⁸ Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), p. 5.

⁹ Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 1.

¹⁰ Leona Watson, "The View Towards Feminism and A Room of One's Own," *Just Great Database* (n.d.). At: <https://jgdb.com/essays/the-view-towards-feminism-and-a-room-of-one-s-own>. Accessed 11/04/2024.

¹¹ Manju Kapur, *Home* (Open Road Integrated Media, 2014), p. 40.

to with great seriousness and esteem; they are granted more rights; they themselves treat girls scornfully; they play by themselves, not admitting girls to their group; they offer insults.”¹²

Is Home Safe?: The Myth of Safe Spaces

Kapur highlights Nisha’s sexual exploitation by Vicky, her late aunt’s son, who resides with them after his mother’s death. She unveils the fact that a child is suffering silently. On one hand, Nisha’s mother confines her at home, as it is not appropriate for a girl to go outside the so-called ‘safe’ boundaries of home. On the other hand, they could not understand Nisha’s distress. Kapur mentions that “Vicky was always on the lookout for opportunities to get Nisha alone. Then bliss would follow. She was too young to understand what was happening, and then he really wasn’t doing anything bad to her. Certainly, she showed no signs of remembering anything.”¹³ No one at home comprehended Nisha’s agony as she couldn’t eat and got scolded by her mother. She hid her face in her grandmother’s lap and broke down as Kapur brought her up, “Once in that safe, filtered world she wept and wept.”¹⁴ Her parents rebuffed the advice of Nisha’s aunt to see a doctor; her mother coldly said, “There’s nothing wrong with Nisha. All children have bad dreams from time to time.” Her family consoles her when she wakes in the night, assuring her, “It was nothing, just a dream - you are in your own home, safe and sound .”¹⁵ Conservative gender practices label women as submissive, passive, fragile, and secondary. The question arises: which space is safe for a girl or woman if not home?

The Kitchen as Woman’s Space

The arrangement of spaces is under the subjugation of traditional patriarchal society. The kitchen space and women have always been synonymous. Lefebvre states that the kitchen is a space field that reflects social forces and is a life theatre in which every woman performs daily. The traditional women are the participants and act as representatives of patriarchy, which causes their daughters or daughters-in-law to lose their self-identity and to act as labourers in the kitchen space. Kapur observes in her novels how women are conditioned to believe that their real education is in the kitchen. In *Home*, Kapur notes that Nisha was compelled to accept the roles of an ideal wife and housewife. Nisha’s mother, Sona, thinks that her daughter is useless and a substandard female. She rebuked her sister Rupa for not teaching culinary skills to her daughter while she stayed with her for eleven years. She blames her sister: “This is the life of a woman: to look after her home, her husband, and her children and give them food she had cooked with her own hand.”¹⁶

In a conventional society, the kitchen is considered a woman’s natural home, a space they devote all their time to. They expect women to acquire a docile position of an unpaid employee in

¹² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 313.

¹³ Kapur, *Home*, p. 47.

¹⁴ Kapur, *Home*, p. 50.

¹⁵ Kapur, *Home*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ Kapur, *Home*, p. 101.

their house and exclusively in the kitchen. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur describes how Kasturi was trained in a family where girls were taught housekeeping from the time they started walking. Hema Sundaram contends that “it is not enough if a woman is accomplished and intelligent; she should be a good cook, a good housekeeper, and a good entertainer.”¹⁷ Thus, kitchen space marks a site for gendered division, an alienated and undervalued space where women are constrained to derive their identity from, reflecting a form of masculine repression.

Gendered Spaces in the Field of Education

The role of education is equally important in the lives of men and women for the welfare of society. However, in a society governed by men, women are given less preference to pursue higher education. According to Kate Millett:

The education of women was not thought of as a course of study beyond the threshold level of learning; a genteel polish its major achievement. And in most cases, it was deliberately cynical in its emphasis upon virtue - a sugared word that meant obedience, servility and a sexual inhibition perilously near to frigidity.¹⁸

Manju Kapur, in her novels, depicted the segregated societal norms for women in the sphere of education. In *Difficult Daughters*, she delineates the struggles of Viramati for her emancipation through education. She was influenced by her cousin Shakuntala, who was a postgraduate in chemistry. According to the 2021 census, in India, the literacy rate for males is recorded at 82.14%, and for females, it is 65.46%. The gender gap has reduced to 16.68% in 2011 as compared to 21.59% in 2001; nonetheless, there are still many factors that inhibit female literacy.¹⁹

Viramati’s education was neglected during her childhood. She had been sent to a school that was situated within a ten-minute walking distance. After failing FA exams, Viramati complained to her mother about overburdening domestic duties and having no space to study. Regardless of passing the FA exam, her parents believed that she was qualified enough to be the wife of a canal engineer. Viramati was criticized by her mother when she pleaded to postpone her marriage to study further in Lahore. She once attempted to flee her home and when questioned about the cause for her departure, she said: “I want to study.”²⁰ Her mother tried to convince her, “When I was your age, girls only left their house when they married.”²¹ Viramati, eventually found her way to education and achieved her desired goal of going to Lahore for studies. The novel exposes how women are constricted within the spaces of the home to adjust to domestic roles. They are prohibited from being independent and building an identity and space of their own.

¹⁷ Leela Gulati and Jasodhara Bagchi, *A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 93.

¹⁸ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 74.

¹⁹ “Literacy Rate in India,” *Indiaonlinepages.com* (2021). At: www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/literacy-rate-in-india.html. Accessed 30/05/2023.

²⁰ Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, p. 77

²¹ Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, p. 101.

In *A Married Woman*, education was contemplated as one of the burdens for Astha's parents. Being the parents of their only daughter, they regarded education as the only key to finding a good husband. Astha's mother would pray every day for a good match for her daughter. Her father had the notion that, "If she did well in her exams, she could perhaps sit for the IAS and find a good husband there."²² A well-known Ghanaian scholar, Dr James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey, famously said, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family."²³ The ideology that women are primarily the caretakers while men are the breadwinners restricts new opportunities for women and compresses their social spaces. Irrespective of being an educated woman, Astha could not stand up for herself and was unable to realize her identity in the incompatible gender roles and spaces. She accepted her parents' decision to marry an MBA, the foreign-returned son of a rich bureaucratic family.

Kapur, in *Home*, illustrates various ways in which hegemonic rules restrain women from education and the independence that comes from it. Besides, the novel portrays the discriminatory patterns of education offered to a girl and a boy. The gendered perceptions of education are revealed when Sona, the mother of Nisha, gets a marriage proposal from a high school graduate shopkeeper. Sona was enrolled in her first year of college at that time. When her parents speculated if she would be happy in a family of shopkeepers, she declared, "She does not want to study anymore; she wants to remain on the same level as her husband,"²⁴ while Rupa, her younger sister, completed her graduation due to a lack of marriage proposals. The nurturing of girls persuades them to accept marriage as their destiny.

Catherine Macaulay, an English historian, in *Letters on Education* (1790) condemned the narrow limits of female education. She advised parents, "Confine not the education of your daughters to what is regarded as ornamental parts of it."²⁵ By ornamental parts, she meant drawing, music or smattering of French and Italian to attract a husband. The novel expresses the gender disparity in society. Nisha performed well in exams while she stayed with her aunt. However, after her return to her home, she never found a space to study. Her parents didn't want her to go to college, as her mother believed, "People are suspicious of brides that are very educated."²⁶ In conventional society, the gender space in education persists since the education of a daughter is not regarded to bring any profit to their parents as that of a son. The education of a boy is preferred because of the perception that it is a man's role to provide for his family. In addition to that, Kapur depicts how the life of a woman is spent on domestic duties and childcare which produce gender gaps in education.

²² Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p. 2.

²³ Satvinderpal Kaur, "Women, Education and Discursive Space for Empowerment," *Counter Currents*, 21 April (2019). At: countercurrents.org/2019/04/women-education-and-discursive-space-for-empowerment/. Accessed 01/06/2023.

²⁴ Kapur, *Home*, p. 229.

²⁵ Kathryn Sutherland, "Female Education, Reading and Jane Austen," *British Library* (2014). At: www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/female-education-reading-and-jane-austen. Accessed 30/05/2023.

²⁶ Kapur, *Home*, p. 111.

Constricted Economic Spaces for Women

Fay Weldon once wrote about her experience, “What drove me to feminism fifty years ago was the myth that men were the breadwinners and women kept house and looked pretty. That myth finally exploded, and I helped to explode it.”²⁷ Economic independence for women has always been a major aspect of achieving gender equality. It is about recognizing the works of a woman and giving equal spaces in all spheres of life. The protagonists in the novels of Manju Kapur sought economic emancipation and gained access to spaces that were predominantly occupied by men. Viramati, in *Difficult Daughters*, deemed higher education as the first step towards independence. She is known to be a ‘difficult daughter’ who, being entrapped in domestic duties, longed for a space of her own by defying stereotypical traditions. She was intimidated by her highly educated cousin, Shakuntala, who lived independently in Lahore. Viramati was also attracted by Professor Harish Chandra, who motivated her to further education. She introspects and reminds herself that, she had seen women growing in power and strength, claiming responsibilities for their lives, and declaring that society would be better off if its females were effective and capable... She was worthy of independence.²⁸ Viramati was offered the position of headmistress after completing a BT degree in Lahore. She performed her responsibilities as a professional and established herself as competent, equivalent to a man. At the same time, she was immensely criticized by her mother, who blamed her for the destruction of the family due to her education. Her mother firmly opposed Viramati’s decision to pursue higher education and economic independence. The novel depicts how women are vehemently denied equal spaces in private and public and are relegated to a secondary role within a male-controlled society.

A *Married Woman* revolves around the life story of Astha, who gets married to Hemant after agreeing to her parents’ decision. After a few months of marriage, her life became monotonous, and her father suggested she try journalism. Hemant expressed his refusal and remarked, “Journalists have to stay out late; they have very odd hours.”²⁹ He decided on a teaching job for Astha, so that she could stay home for the rest of the day. The choice of a woman in opting for a career is undervalued leading to neglect of the multiple spaces that a woman could occupy. Doreen Massey coined the term, “power geometry,” which describes how space and mobility are determined by power relations. She states, regarding the mobility of different groups:

It is not simply a question of unequal distribution; some people move more than others, and some have more control than others. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the

²⁷ “Fay Weldon Obituary: Shrewd, Mischievous and Outspoken,” *BBC News*, 4 January (2023). At: www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-32300956. Accessed 02/06/2023.

²⁸ Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, p. 146.

²⁹ Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p. 38.

already weak. The time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others.³⁰

Astha soon realises that Hemant does not respect her job and mocks her, “What is there in teaching? Hardly a serious job; you just go, talk to some children about poems and stories, organize a few clubs, and come back.”³¹ Hemant seems to be an embodiment of patriarchy who restricts his wife’s participation in the public domain. Kapur also demonstrates how men are considered assertive, qualified, and capable of taking charge of financial duties. In the novel, after the death of Astha’s father, her mother, Sita, gives the property of her husband to Hemant without consulting Astha. When Astha expressed disagreement with her decision, Sita replied, “Why not? He is a man; he knows about money.”³² She questioned her mother about whether women cannot be responsible for their investments. Sita calls Hemant a clever person who does business very well. The instance shows that women are ineligible for the succession of their family’s property.

Kapur delineates how women had no authority over their money through an instance in the novel. Hemant planned a family trip to Goa, and Astha asked him if he had won a lottery to manage expenses for the trip. He replied, “I have to go to Bombay to see a dealer; the children’s tickets will cost half; yours is the only ticket we have to pay for. We will spend the money you earned for your painting.”³³ Astha was stunned to discover that her husband did not seek any advice from her to plan for a trip. Moreover, he did not allow any space for her to have control over the money she earned from painting. Doreen Massey in *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) expresses her concern for the spaces of employed women:

The fact that women are employed in the context of an extended family is important not only in the organization of the industry but also for the lives of the women themselves. They may have a wage, but they do not get the other forms of independence that can come with a job. They do not get out of the sphere of the family; they do not make independent circles of friends and contacts; nor do they establish a spatially separate sphere of existence. Within the family itself, the double subordination of women is fixed through the mixing in one person of the role of husband or father with that of boss and employer.³⁴

Nisha in the novel *Home*, lived in a joint family arrangement in which her father, grandfather, and uncle never had any discussion regarding business with the women at her home. To the contrary, Rupa, Nisha’s aunt, was encouraged by her husband and father-in-law to start a pickle business, while Nisha pleaded with her father to do a business and requested for a year to establish a name of her own: “Give me a chance to show you what I can do.”³⁵ Her father granted her permission; however, her mother was not pleased and commented, “She is going to get married; why waste

³⁰ Sophie Raine, “Doreen Massey’s Politics of Space & Place: Definition, Summary and Analysis”, *Perlogo Knowledge Base*, 7 March (2023). At: www.perlogo.com/knowledge/study-guides/understanding-doreen-masseys-concept-of-space/. Accessed 06/06/2023.

³¹ Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p. 56.

³² Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p. 89.

³³ Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p.145.

³⁴ Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 209.

³⁵ Kapur, *Home*, p. 229.

time and money in all this?”³⁶ The notion of women working outside the home, seeking opportunities for economic well-being, has always threatened the patriarchal order, of which conventional women acquire a large part. Nisha proved her potential and started her business with the name ‘Nisha Creations’. The evolution of Nisha as a new woman in a family where women are subjugated in the name of familial values and virtues reveals that a woman can be autonomous and create her own identity instead of negotiating with masculine spaces.

Spaces of Third Gender

Manju Kapur introduces the lesbian relationship between Astha and Pipeelika in *A Married Woman* and attempts to deconstruct gendered binaries. The relationship presents an escape from the void that had filled their lives and is a medium to defy the norms of compulsory heterosexuality, by which men use their authority over women. While Hemant uses Astha to impose his masculine powers and humiliates her, she gets the desired love, respect, and understanding from Pipeelika. Kapur portrays the quest of Astha for self-expression and empowerment, who desolately asks her husband, “I need more space.”³⁷ Pipeelika and Astha’s imaginative space was only temporary since it did not fall inside the confines of private or public domains imposed by male hegemonic norms. Eventually, Astha settled down as a subordinate wife of Hemant and a mother who had moral responsibilities for her children. Kapur paved the way for the idea of ‘space’, which is not a static term, and expanded its horizons to illustrate flexibility and the construction of identities. Kapur highlights the possibility of space open for lesbians, gays, and, transgendered people, also known as the ‘third gender’, through the explicit portrayal of lesbian relationships, and opposes the heterosexual power structures that invalidate them.

The LGBTQ+ community is outcast, invisibilized, and ostracized from the spaces and places constructed by dominant groups. The exclusionary practices have resulted in harassment and discrimination against this highly marginalized group. In India, the ‘Hijra’ or transgender community are referred to using a myriad terms, like homosexual, bisexual, intersexed, impotent, or sexually disabled. A recent anthropological study placed hijras under an institutionalized ‘third gender.’³⁸ The existence of this group can be traced to one of the anecdotes of the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*. On the command of his father, Rama, accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana, prepared to go into exile for fourteen years. He was followed by the natives of Ayodhya to the banks of the river. According to Hijras, he requested his people by saying, “Men and women, please go back and perform your duties.”³⁹ After his return to Ayodhya fourteen years later, he was surprised to see a mass of people who remained at the same spot, as they were neither men nor women. They felt excluded from Rama’s directives. For this, they received a boon for being auspicious and possessing the power to confer blessings. Despite the religious beliefs associated with hijras or

³⁶ Kapur, *Home*, p. 227.

³⁷ Kapur, *A Married Woman*, p. 140.

³⁸ Vinay Lal, “Not This, Not That: The Hijras of India and the Cultural Politics of Sexuality,” *Social Text*, no. 61 (1999), p. 119.

³⁹ Lal, “Not This, Not That,” p. 120.

transgendered people, they do not find tolerance and space in society. The range of issues prevailing for the transgender community is broader, but a very basic facility from which they are often barred is the accessibility of restrooms. Along with the concern access to education, health, employment, and violence against them, as well as liberty to use restroom spaces, is one of the many matters to grapple with trans people.

The creation of inclusive spaces and friendly spaces in the form of physical, political, social, economic, and digital spaces could only end the prejudices and inequalities against the LGBTQ+ community. However, giving less access and resources will only lead to homophobia, transphobia, and a reduction in making or retaining spaces. Social media platforms seem to be becoming more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community. The Queer Spaces Inc. app, launched by Hornet Networks in March 2022, is the world's largest queer tech platform, with over 35 million users. It has been a crucial platform for digital inclusion since 2011. The CEO of Queer Spaces Inc. Christof Wittig, stated that the app provides safe digital spaces that could be accessed by all segments of the LGBTQ+ community and where they can their authentic selves.⁴⁰ Social media have become a distinguished site for the construction of identities and a medium for socializing virtually. Stephen Thomas Russell explains the importance of accommodation and multiplication of the minority LGBTQ+ community on digital platforms:

The Internet has provided sexual minority youth with a safe place in which to explore identities, come out to one another, and tell their stories... Such free spaces characterize the 'virtual communities' of sexual minority youth that have recently emerged, creating opportunities for the development of relationships and identities that are not supported in other contexts of their lives.⁴¹

Conclusion

Everyday space is disregarded by the process of negotiation, domination, challenges, and their continuous division based on binary categorization of gender. Manju Kapur, through her novels *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, and *Home*, portrayed segregated masculine and feminine spaces, and a quest for 'self' by subverting the dominant patriarchal structure. She described how women are subjugated and seldom take part in the public realm. This article observed that the lives of women and the marginalized LGBTQ+ community are steadily changing. They are pushing away the boundaries drawn by their family and society to restrain them.

A woman belongs in every place. Her place is in her home, workplace, community, streets, politics, and public transport, and she has the right to feel safe and welcome. In *Home*, Kapur reflects on the unsafe home space and shows how important it becomes to establish child-friendly

⁴⁰ Ashlee Marie Preston, "Finally, A Social Media Platform," *Forbes*, 24 August (2022). At: www.forbes.com/sites/ashleemariepreston/2022/08/24/finally-a-social-media-platform-that-cares-about-lgbtq-safety-the-spaces-app-is-worth-following. Accessed 05/06/2023.

⁴¹ Leanna Lucero, "Safe Spaces in Online Places: Social Media and LGBTQ Youth," *Multicultural Education Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2017), p. 118.

spaces, particularly girls' safe spaces. Nisha would not have been subjected to continuous molestation if her family understood her distress. The other two novels, *A Married Woman* and *Difficult Daughters*, reveal the dual role women play, as homemakers and also making their space in the public sphere, being financially independent. It is necessary to make improvements in making public spaces more inclusive rather than intimidating for the marginalized section of society, who make themselves invisible in claustrophobic spaces, to alleviate gender disparities.