

# Women, Domestic Space, and the Architecture of Control: Feminist Geographies in Indian Fiction

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## Abstract

This paper will investigate the domestic space in Indian women's fiction as a gendered space of control and not a non-gendered arena. The argument presented in this essay will be that the domestic space is a political space through which women's agency in terms of mobility, utterance, desire, and identity is controlled. In this regard, this essay will challenge the conventional view of the domestic space in Indian women's fiction as a space from which women find belonging. Rather, this essay will argue for a feminist geography of domesticity in Indian women's fiction through the thresholds and confinement experienced in domestic space. This essay will use feminist spatial theory to examine how the subjectivity of women is mediated through spatial confinement. The article also argues that the domestic space in Indian women's fiction is a location that marks both physical confinement and the interiorization of psychology through surveillance. The essay argues that this psychology is mediated through women's surveillance of themselves.

In speculating on home as an apparatus of discipline, this paper extends the ongoing discourse of feminist literary studies in India to exceed beyond the frameworks of empowerment and resistance, suggesting that feminist struggle is not merely one of resistance but also one of spatial contestation. This, at last, proves that politics of space is intertwined with the politics of gender, and it is through geographics of homes within Indian literary texts that patriarchy sustains itself unspoken.

**Keywords:** Domestic space, Feminist geography, Patriarchy, Surveillance, Respectability, Indian women's fiction.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural discourses have often conceived "home" in terms of protection and security. Within the Indian social framework, home has often been perceived as the moral core of tradition itself. However, in contrast to the above perceptions of home as a source of solace and protection, feminist critical discourse has contended against the idealization of home as a protected site that often gets conceived in terms of patriarchal domination. The body of Indian women's fiction provides an extensive archive to engage with the implications of home as a source of shelter as well as gendered architecture.

In this thesis, I will contend that domestic space in Indian fiction can and should be understood as a site of politics that regulates the mobility, voice, desire, and subjecthood of women. The home, in such a reading, is a disciplinary space, which maintains control over women in mundane ways, from the allocation of domestic space to the regulation of mobility, moral surveillance, and emotional labor. Such regulation is enabled not only through visible violence but through subtle practices.

Thus, a feminist approach to geographical issues in Indian fiction encompasses not merely where women reside, but also what manner of space they inhabit, whether they enjoy a right to privacy, what mechanisms of boundary negotiation and exit exist. Resistance by women appears less through acts of escape and more through silence, withdrawal, appropriation of interior spaces, or a traversal of thresholds never intended to be crossed.

Through the theoretical formulation of home as an architecture of control, this research can thus extend feminist literary discourse from the parameters of empowerment studies and relocate the concept of resistance into the spatial negotiation of patriarchy.

## 2. Review of Literature

The domestic realm has been an area of intense study by feminist literary critics as an important site of patriarchal imposition. Research on Indian women's writing indicates that marriage, domestic work, and womanly Duty provide frameworks of women's lives as choice-less alternatives. Researchers have viewed domesticity as cultural reproduction wherein women are caretakers of tradition, respectability, and morality. Here, the domestic space transcends from being merely private to an important political institution, as patriarchy is made more sustainable and domestic.

In spatial theory, as well as feminist geography, the fact that space never remains neutral or simply a passive area that can be occupied has been discussed. Domestic space, therefore, needs to be decoded as a structured environment. This increasing recognition, according to feminist readings, acknowledges that the organization of space, who owns a particular space like a room, who holds keys, who can move unnoticed, remains closely tied with gendered authority. In Indian circumstances, this might get further conditioned by class and caste hegemonies, determining how women occupy both domestic as well as public spaces.

Nevertheless, there is still a preponderance of research on resistance, liberation, and other related issues of female feminism as the basic results of domestic oppression. There is little work done on micro-resistant action combined with space negotiation, such as retreating to silence, occupying one's body in confined spaces, private interiors, or disrupting domestic discipline. This paper fills this gap by highlighting an emphasis on a feminist geography of domesticity within Indian fiction. It also explores the ways in which the home is made into a system of surveillance, how women learn to discipline themselves within this spatiality, and how feminist interventions occur at the threshold within domestic spaces.

### 3. *Theoretical Framework*

This study draws upon feminist spatial theory, narrative ethics, and intersectional critiques, this research informs the concept of the domestic as disciplinary space. According to feminist spatial theory, space is not natural but socially constructed and politically mediated. Domestic space is articulated according to the power relations of gender, which frame movement, privacy, authority, and access. In the specifically patriarchal society, the home can be seen as an institution of containment, of regulating, and of making woman accountable to cultural narratives of female virtue.

The practice of feminist narrative ethics not only underlies this interpretation but also stresses the importance of complexity with regard to ethics as well as agency that is restricted. In other words, while the domestic lives of women might be interpreted from dual parameters of resistance and surrender, the ethics of survival under limitation becomes more important from the stand point of feminist ethics.

It is important to critically apply the tool of intersectionality to the domestic space, as the space is never experienced in an homogeneous way. Caste, class, community, and regional cultures demarcate the domestic geographies in a different way, marking an unbalanced provision of privacy and freedom. Respectability politics is also intersectional to the space, as the movement and visibility in space get defined by the markers of morality, in the sense that the woman's movement and visibility in space provide. These frameworks together enable the domestic space to be interpreted not simply as a location but an actor in feminist discourse. The domestic space becomes a location that intersects the domestic and the architectural to inscribe patriarchy into space itself, in the form of doors, kitchens, bedrooms, and borders. Resistance becomes feminist space, which is therefore the negotiation of the location of feminism in domestic space, homes that are not shelters but territories.

### 4. *Home as a Disciplinary Architecture: Surveillance and Self-Regulation*

The domestic space is where women are controlled not only through confinement but also through surveillance. In most Indian households, a woman's presence is constantly obligated to answer: in which place? What activity? At what time? How does one speak? How does one move? This surveillance does not have to be overt; most of the time, it happens through observance, moralizing, and community chatter. The domestic space becomes a place where women are educated in the projected risks of visibility and the conditional nature of privacy.

The house itself is also an apparatus of discipline. Kitchens, bedrooms, and courtyards are FIXED as gendered spaces, spaces for women, for labor, for caring, not for leisure or freedom. Women's space movements are frequently meaningful and disciplined: to serve, to clean, to fulfill duty. Leisure is doubtful, solitude is unknowable. Women come to regulate their selves; they learn to discipline themselves, lest they be judged. Respectability is Now Spatial. "A good woman" remains inside. She must be available for all domestic needs and cannot occupy too much space. Patriarchalism therefore, functions on the basis of a moral topography of domesticity. Women are supposed to be in "proper" places. The Home becomes a Moral Machine.

The female writer's stories in India often reveal the psychological toll of this domestic discipline: tiredness, erasure, repressed rage, and fragmentation. The domestic space therefore stops being merely background and becomes constitutive of subjectivity. The control of space therefore becomes the control of women's lives in ways that are subtle, constant, and seemingly non-violent.

### 5. *Threshold Politics: Doors, Boundaries, and Negotiated Exits*

Control appears most clearly at the threshold—the door, corridor, balcony, gate, or window between inside and outside. The threshold is the symbol of the boundaries of women's freedom. This marks the point where the freedom of movement becomes the object of moral judgment and where the freedom of women's movement becomes the subject of social interpretation. The feminist geography reads these boundaries as political boundaries. They decide not only the areas women can access, but also the women they can become.

In Indian fiction, women are often involved in negotiations for exits and not in struggles for freedom. Going out necessitates a reason, a sense of duty, necessity, or permission. Even the act of walking out of one's house becomes an ethical event. Women encounter mobility as negotiation rather than as a right. Education and employment become only restricted forms of mobility—within the boundaries of respectability.

Threshold politics also influences desire. The outside world is constructed as risk; friendship, love, or autonomy are moralised. The women's movement is encoded as the threat of sex, and the world outside becomes the site where honour might be lost. Patriarchy arms the threshold by correlating freedom of movement with shame.

However, the thresholds also open a possibility for resistance. A doorway is crossable. A line is testable. Agency in the feminine, and therefore in the feminist, involves the micro-transgression: the short solo walk, the conversation, the failure to quickly return, the moment of unauthorised presence outside. These are acts small in appearance, yet they disrupt the domestic rationality of the Good and its association with enclosure. The threshold is the most politicised line within the realm of feminist fiction.

### 6. *The Gendered Rooms of the Home: Kitchen, Bedroom, and the Politics of Labour*

The power-delivery in domestic architecture is based on the room. For example, the kitchen is ideal and has been idealized in fiction. It is seen to represent the realm of sustenance, but in terms of labor extraction, it is the main place where gender roles are extracted. The role involves women's bodies being organized in terms of preparation, serving, and cleaning. It is a place where one is made to work, and the work is presented in the form of righteousness in the Indian fiction setting.

The bedroom is also a politicized space. The bedroom is more than a private domain, it is an area in which marriages are enforced, desire is negotiated, and consent can, in fact, be jeopardized. The privacy of women, in relation to the bedroom, can get constructed in terms of emotional mandates, reproductive burdens, or surveillance. Sleeping can also become conditional. "Other spaces, the courtyard, living room, and so on, the prayer room, are imbued with ethical connotations." In other spaces, such as the courtyard, living room, or prayer room, there are ethical implications of women's access to these spaces as regulated by elder members or hierarchical roles along gender lines in the family. Thus, space becomes Domestic as "a map of permission." "Women do not merely live in a house; they live in a structure that judges their legitimacy," fairly observes

"Indian women's fiction often achieves this sense of women reclaiming space—wishing to be alone, writing alone, sitting alone, locking up their space, and demarcating their own space. This shows how women's agency also manifests as a form of space-claiming and not merely as space-sharing. Space-claiming means reclaiming their subjectivity. Thus, the domestic space and its politics become the focus of women's discourse."

### **7. Domestic Space and the Production of Silence**

Silence is not only psychological but is spatially constructed. The domestic space typically teaches women to speak softly, to speak only select words, or to speak not at all. Speaking is censored, contradiction is punished, and speaking out is equated with disobedience. Silence, on the other hand, sustains belonging. Thus, the home can appropriately be described as a factory of silence, a space in which women learn to spatially inscribe silence into their survival.

"The domestic silence is also bound up with respectability. "The respectable woman is one who does not argue, complain, or manifest injustice outside." Silence secures domestic reputation, concealing the conflict from public view."Here, the woman is positioned as the keeper of domestic secrets, silently bearing pain to preserve the facade of domestic bliss.

The silence of Indian women's fiction consistently demonstrates how this silence amass. It is anger unexpressed, sorrow unrecognized, desire unsaid. Silence is no emptiness but storage. It is the cause of interior fragmentation whereby the woman socially exists but not emotionally.

Silence, however, may also become a strategy for feminism. In hostile homes, silence may mean the refusal to justify the pain in morally justifiable terms, a refusal to serve emotionally, a refusal to provide patriarchal sustenance. The role of the feminist geographer is to show how silence is produced in relation to the space, the room in which women are prevented from talking, the house in which the possibility of hearing is lacking, and the thresholds in which the possibility of talking is dangerous.

### **8. Resistance as Spatial Negotiation: Micro-Transgressions and Feminist Survival**

In Indian women's stories, resistance is frequently experienced as a function of space, rather than resistance. This is because this power is personal, it does not have a clear moment of confrontation. In other words, it does not have any definitive sequelae. Here, one finds the practice of micro-transgressions: taking solitary moments, stalling on tasks, finding personal recesses, going for a brief walk, or not being constantly at their beck and call.

Spatial negotiation is a complicated site for ethics. This is a place where there is no triumph, only the maintenance of self. Feminist action manifests as resilience, the ability to survive without absolute erasure. Sometimes, feminist action will come across as withdrawal, the refusal of emotional labour and the refusal of the demand for unconditional nurturing. Sometimes, it will appear as the strategy of mobile presence, the decision when to appear within public space, when to return, and when to disobey domestic timing.

This resistance urges a rethinking of empowerment discourses that assume a correlation between empowerment and freedom. In many places, women do not possess the ability to escape, but they must find ways to maneuver within. In this sense, a feminist geographical perspective legitimates these limited forms of empowerment, insisting that they be seen as meaningful acts, and refusing to judge women for them. In fact, spatial resistance further changes the definition of feminism from its result to its practice. The act of resistance becomes the 'what' of women in relation to 'less space': 'the way in which women breathe in the hemmed in room, the way in which they enter the space, the way in which they occupy boundaries.' Thus, Indian feminist fiction shows patriarchy not only as an ideology, it shows patriarchy as architecture. Also, it begins to show how women can resist architecture.

### **9. Discussion: Domestic Geographies, Middle-Class Respectability, and Feminist Discourse**

Domestic space becomes particularly disciplinary within the Middle Class respectability regimes. The Middle Class quite often translates cultural legitimacy into moral performance, with women's domestic behavior at the core of that performance. Educated, yet controlled; modern, yet modest; visible, yet disciplined: such is the contradictory nature that situates the home both as enabling and yet restrictive since it provides security while commanding compliance.

It is this tension that seems to surface well in domestic geographies. While women are allowed mobility into education or work, their speech, sexuality, and independence are still highly policed. The home becomes a moral checkpoint that women must get through, over and over again, by proving their virtue. Even autonomy gets to be performed only conditionally-through ways that do not threaten patriarchal order.

Indian women's fiction critiques this system by laying bare the exhaustion of such performance in the home. Respectability requires endless emotional work: keeping the peace, keeping relations, and avoiding scandal. This requires women to be burdened with keeping intact the moral identity of the family. Thus, home becomes a space where patriarchy gets reproduced not merely through violence but through moral narratives.

"Feminist literary studies must therefore consider domestic space to be political. Home is not merely personal—home is institutional. Home is the site of the construction of gender roles, of silence and of the circumscription of agency." In finding the domestic geographies in literary texts, it becomes possible for feminist literary studies to find elements of resistance in the daily acts of negotiation rather than in the realm of ideal freedom. This enables the enlargement of the borders of discourse in feminism in realizing that the fight is not merely for freedom but also for autonomy.

### **10. Conclusion**

This paper has suggested that the domestic space in Indian women's fiction is a gendered space of control rather than a space for safety and belonging. This is because the domestic space is a disciplinary space that controls the talk, desire, movement, and identity of the woman. Patriarchy is not only an ideology but is incorporated in space, in terms of space and rhythm, and is translated into the woman's confinement as virtue and silence as propriety.

In construing domesticity through the lens of feminist geography, this paper has modestly contributed to the delineation of the parameters of feminist literary practice in India from the typology of discourses that emphasize empowerment through escape/voice as the equation of resistance. Agency on the part of women often asserts itself through geographical negotiation: micro-transgression, privacy assertions, withdrawal, and the drawing of boundaries.

Finally, feminist geographies show how the struggle of women is not merely for presence but also for resistance to moral surveillance within spaces. Domestic architecture helps to maintain this patriarchy subtly, constantly, and cunningly. Domestic spaces, which could be shared by all people, become private by virtue of domestic architecture. Reclaiming this domestic space, which represents a politicized arena rather than a private domain, would enable feminist critical discourse to comprehend ways of resistance.

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