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Overlapping Territories: The Cartography of Home in Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games*

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Abstract— *Place studies form an important part of modern cultural studies and literary discourse. Place is a physical location bounded with territories. Places at all scales are constructed by means of physical and cultural elements. Borrowing theoretical ideas from modern geographic models, literary studies project home as a geographical unit. Vikram Chandra's Sacred Games published in 2006, abounds with spatial imaginaries ranging from nation to home. Homespace in Sacred Games is not a linear place; it is multiply situated. There are different dimensions for any place at any scale. Home has physical, geographical territories and abstract, cultural boundaries. Homespaces are made unique with their boundaries of sight, sound, taste, and tactile experiences. The possibilities of an individualized time sequence and historical existence may highlight any homespace as a new geographic model itself. Its spatial and temporal territories are subject to overlapping. Home is an imagined community wrought with the utopian concepts of companionship and belonging as it is portrayed in Sacred Games. The making of homespace is intertwined with the underlying gendered practices, institutional ideologies and economic structures. Home, as a power ridden place, produces disciplined bodies and acts as a site of conflict. Institution of marriage, religion, nationality, and legal systems are always active in the homescapes. Homespace in Sacred Games is simultaneously a contested place, open to struggle and conflict and an alternative place with subversive power.*

Keywords— ***place, homespace, territories, emotional territories, cultural boundaries, imagined community, contested place.***

Introduction

Place studies assume a significant space in contemporary cultural studies and literary discourses. A spatial orientation is evident in the writings of Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Said, Edward Soja, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Place may be identified as a unique location, bounded by territories and defined by the lived experiences of people. They have physical, social, historical, cultural and emotional dimensions. Places at all levels are cultural constructs. They are combinations of material physical locations and abstract cultural elements.

> Places ... are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either. A church, for instance, is a place. *It is neither just a particular material artefact, nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both*. Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the 'merely ideological;' rather, they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them. (Cresswell 13)

The Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre sees space as 'made up' through a three-way dialectic between the

perceived, the conceived and the lived space. In his view point, cultural practices, representations and imaginations together constitute space. Space in this sense develops from perceptions, practices, and representations (38-39). Places are made of a series of different types of locations: physical, mythological, symbolic, imagined, linguistic, cartographic, perceptual, and representational. Places at different scales are made of the strange combination of all the different spatial locations. As Edward Soja argues in his books *Postmodern Geographies* and *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, a close reading of different places at different spatial scales exposes them as having different layers of meanings- 'third spaces'- in addition to their existence as first space and second space. This is same with places at any scale ranging from global places to local places.

In a broader sense, any place or area (location) at any scale can be treated as a spatial context. Alongside physical and political spaces, there exist a variety of spatial contexts and socially planned spaces. For example, in a macro scale, planet Earth can be taken as a spatial unit; in a micro scale; a home, a room, a street or even a body can be treated as a spatial context (Anderson J. 1-5).

Present studies project home as a geographic unit, highlighting relations among place, space, scale, identity, and power. It is a physical landscape wrought with cultural, institutional, social and economic factors. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling defines, "Home is ... a spatial imaginary" (2). The feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy and the feelings of fear, violence and alienation turn home as an emotional landscape (2). Home is hence a complex and multi-layered geographical concept: "Put most simply, home is a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two" (2-3).

Home is a spatial context that involves multiple factors like physical locale, selected identities and expected practices. It may have its own spatial representations and historical connections; it is a place overladen with boundaries and spatial rules. The material and cultural boundaries of the homespace are shifting and changing. In short, it is a pure spatial construction.

Home as a Multisensory and Non-Linear Space

Vikram Chandra sets out to map the varied faces of Bombay in *Sacred Games.* Published in 2006, S*acred Games* abounds with spatial imaginaries working at diverse dimensions. The spatial locations that Chandra draws ranges from national places to local places; religious places to linguistic places; from workplaces to homespaces.

As Chandra delineates the linguistic, technological, economic and cultural forces play a significant role in the spatial production of places ranging from street to home. To describe one's home is to carve it out of a vast spatiality. Its material and cultural borders must be drawn clearly by differentiating it against the outer spaces and possible enemies. The materiality/cultural aspect of home are hinted by Chandra in describing Shalini's views regarding her home: "So now she and her sons had a roof, two rooms, a kitchen, that was their own. That is what he had wanted, to own, to have a patch of earth that was not government property or a landlord's estate, he had wanted the safety of home" (330). The place of home involves the possession of it against the interest of outside forces.

Homespace is not formed in a linear manner. Its territories are overlapping. There are physical, geographical territories and abstract, cultural boundaries. The geographic location of a house, its place in the class-defined locations in a city, the constructed walls, labelling of the house, its size, shape and style contribute to its nature and existence. The connections that a house makes to other houses, along the physical route and through the daily interactions too are deciding factors. Connection that a house establishes along communal factors and community line is also significant. So, there are separate residential areas in Navnagar for Bengali Muslims and Indian Muslims; for Tamil families and Maratha families. The placing of home is decided across class, caste and religious lines.

The style of home making varies from home to home. Thus, a body-trader Jojo's house with varied types of shampoos and soaps, make-up articles and various kinds of threads and sewing needles, shelves full of shoes of different fashions, is contrasted with Sartraj's memories of his house with entire walls of photographs, histories of the family and the branches of it (Chandra 132). The constitution of homespace with selected objects and their careful display convey culturally significant meanings of religious attitudes, professional aspirations, nationalist ideologies and family lineage.

The homeplace and neighborhood sometimes make the city space blurred and confused. The Bengali Bura (a slum) in Navnagar is such a place with a confused history, as its residents are migrated from Bangladesh. They create survival stories about their roots and make false a claim that they are all from Bengal. Yet their Urdu sprangled Bengali reveal other possibilities about their origin. In addition, all these houses share the common history of migration, poverty, crime and estrangement in the city (Chandra 18-21). Thus, even when remaining in the national space of India, people of Bengali bura are treated as outsiders.

Homespaces are made unique with their boundaries of sight, sound, taste, and their tactile

experiences. The part narrating Prabhjot Kaur's perception of her own house in terms of its multiple sensory experiences signal that homespaces are ever shifting and multiple. The homescape are also carved in memory in terms of tactile experiences and body movements: "In the kitchen, Mata-ji slapped the parаunthas back and forth between her hands with a sprightliness that made a quick music, tossed them down on the hot tava, each with a final wristy flick" (163). The emotional territories of the house are marked in terms of varied sounds and sights too: "Prabhjot Kaur had heard the laughter of her mother from the roof. There was a comfortable freedom in the sound" (163). Home thus becomes a site of memory. The individualized experiences of house make it a heterogeneous space.

The uniqueness of homespace is perceived in terms of their unique culinary practices too: Majid's wife' khima is a distinguishing mark of their home; Katekar's and Shalini's home has a special culinary history of Sunday Mutton; Sartraj's home has a Sunday special Rajma-chawal, rice with plenty of fried onion (Chandra 159). Like a national flag serves as a symbol of a nation, cooking styles and eating preferences differentiate each homespace.

The odours of persons and products too draw emotional landcape of homes. For instance, Prabhjot Kaur' memories of her parental home are coded by the smell of their servant woman Ram Pari: "It wasn't exactly a bad smell, but strong, it was like damp earth, or the back of a halwai's shop, where you got a little dizzy from all the old milky odours" (164-165). This memory of the smell of an outsider in her house is contrasted immediately with the presence of her sister Navneet Kaur's "the sweet tinge of soap and warm skin. It was a flavour that Prabhjot Kaur had known all her life" (165). The contours of homespace thus become a fluid ever shifting assemblage of multiple fragments.

Chandra presents the auditory markers of homespace in detailing the sensory experiences of Prabhjot Kaur: "Prabhjot Kaur could hear Sartaj sleeping. It was a long way, across and down the hall, but at this time she could hear many things: the slow settling of the ancient dining table, the steady plit-tap, plit-tap of drops from the tap behind her neighbor's house, the shivery movement of small animals under the hedge at the front of the house, the hum of the night itself, that low and living vibration that made all other sounds larger. She heard all this, and loud in it, her son's breathing" (158- 159). Chandra's art of capturing even the minute details thus brings to the reader the very unique soundscape of a homespace. Even in perceiving temporality, each home may follow its own time marker: "she listened for the tapping of the watchman's lathi at the very last turn of the road, it was time" (160). Prabhjot Kaur' mental mapping of her home is drawn along with a personally appropriated time sense. The possibilities of an individualized time sequence for any homespace may set it as a new geographic model itself.

Gendered Boundaries and Power in the Domestic Sphere

The making of homespace is intertwined with the underlying gendered practices, institutional ideologies and economic structures. Prabhjot Kaur' memories around the armchair in her house at Pune as "the first piece of their small household that had not come in dowry" indicate how the economic relations and social practices like dowry involve in the setting of a homespace (159). The materiality of the homespace is in turn revealed as a product of its cultural relations.

Home is an imagined community wrought with the utopian concepts of companionship and belonging. However, they often remain as a dream only. A place like home is 'a place in imagination' as indicated in K.D.Yadav's ideas about home, "a beautiful, prosperous land that doesn't exist yet" (314). In a similar fashion, Prabhjot Kaur's cherishing of the granted loneliness of her home challenges accepted discourses about homespaces "But she felt it, late at night, hidden under the contours of her face, which she touched and felt as if it were a mask, as she savoured, slowly, the unspeakable pleasure of being alone" (159). Against the grand narratives of home as a happy place of community life, the suppressed reality is just the opposite. Homescape with all its capturing images, often remain as an imagined place and imagined community lacking a real counterpart.

Home is also a place carved with emotional territories. These emotional territories may be fluctuating between a love- hate relationship too. Prabhjot Kaur's memories of her house where she lived with her husband and son is fraught with the feeling of struggle and resistance: "And listening, she heard the tiniest creak of resentment rising from her bones, a very small rub of resistance, barely heard amidst the larger music of happiness, of a life not without pain but lived well: home, husband, son, and her the wife. It was unseemly, after all these years and years, this unvanquished and sullen spark rising from clothes on the floor, this small spurt of anger at having to always do things for men, always" (160-161). The sense of dislike of her house at Pune is contrasted with her love of her childhood home. The widely celebrated images of a nuclear family with a husband, wife and a son are exposed as a myth, the truth of which is the narrative of suppressed resentment and anger.

Homespace experiences are not linear. They very much connected to varied mental mapping processes. One's perception of home is not often linked to its physical reality and material surroundings. Prabhjot Kaur differentiates the territories of her present house in Pune and its past memories and present perceptions with her no-more existing parental home in a distant city: "she was seeing instead a house in a city very far away, immeasurably farther now that it lay on the other side of a new border and a long wire fence that flashed with murderous electricity..." (161). Physical/ psychological experience of one's home, is clustered in mind along with some other homescape in distant past. It lies in tie with some other homes, remote and distant.

The gender-driven nature of homespace is signalled in the word of Navneet Kaur as she makes a reference to the future home of a girlchild: "A girl is born into a house, but her home is somewhere else. This house doesn't belong to you. Your home is elsewhere" (172). The repeatedly made claim of home as one's birth right is challenged. Homespaces are projected as well decided by cultural dictums and gender discourses.

Institutional Intrusions: State, Religion, and Law

Homecapes are institutional places too. Home is a site for the situated practices of various institutions. Various events starting from birth to death are constantly monitored by the state institutions. Thus, there is an instance in the novel when a 'No Objection Certificate endorsed by the police' becomes a mandatory condition to release a dead body to the relatives (Chandra 5-6). Biopolitical mechanism of the State observe and regulate the behaviour of homescapes. There is another occasion when the abortion cases in the town are noted by police as is indicated in the conversation between Sartaj and Mary: "every year, for one month or two or three after Navratri, all the clinics in town report a rise in abortions" (Chandra 500). There are also references to the Family Welfare Group in Mumbai that instruct women about the lessons of cleanliness (Chandra 500). The homecapes are placed within the over brooding clutches of large frameworks of law, religion, communal forces and national discourse.

Spatial and cultural configuration of each home is different. Both the material geographical arrangements and unique cultural selections constitute homespaces. The spatial positioning of the house, its possession of modern technological advancements in the form of a fridge, phone or television, its cultural selections in the form of religious characters, sports stars, fashion icons, film stars, etc. together decide the nature of homespaces (Chandra 24).

The historical boundaries that decide a house too is multiple. The mutli-located history of any homespace is derived from the unique configurations of the personal histories, family histories, social / communal history. The shifting economic structures and national happenings too affect the homespaces in an entangled relation. For example, the event of communal riot in Punjab makes an everlasting impact on Prabhjot Kaur's family history as they lose their sister Navneet Kaur in the religious riots (188).

The multiply located historical layer of a house is composed of the immediate present, distant past and the future aspirations. Prabhjot Kaur's perception of her own house unravels this truth: "the small dissatisfactions of every day and the huge murderous tragedies of long ago .... Prabhjot Kaur took a deep breath and tried to think of the tasks for tomorrow" (161). The temporality of the house thus become a to and fro movement along the timelines of past, present, and future.

Home as Contested Territory: Conflict and Belonging

House is a contested place, open to struggle and conflict. There are conflicts involving internal forces and external factors. There are violent physical conflicts and intense emotional or cultural conflict. For instance, Mr. Mahesh Pandey of Mirage Textiles and his wife Mrs Kamala Pandey involve in physical aggression, which even necessitates police presence in their house to settle it at least temporarily (Chandra 3-4). There are also occasions when a house turns to be a disciplining force as seen in the episode dealing with a boy named Saileh. Here the parents solicit police assistance to discipline their son Saileh and take him to the police station to regulate his misbehavior (Chandra 11-13).

The divisions within the homespaces are presented in the family conflicts of Prabhjot Kaur's family. Even when remaining as a member of the same Sikh family, Alok and his sister Mani has daily quarrels owing to the differing degree of their religious beliefs (196). Navneet Kaur and her mother has daily quarrels over a girl's freedom of education and marriage (165, 172). The daughter is even thrilled at her feeling of leaving her parental home because of her resentment towards her mother (172). Ironically, it is what comforts the girl Navneet Kaur is the thought that at least after marriage she can go to another house.

There are also instances when even as a child, Prabhjot Kaur wanted to go away from her own house: "She wanted to go away. She wanted a place to go to, somewhere very far away, hundreds of miles from her family, thousands of miles from everyone" (191). Difference in lifestyle and attitude place Mary and her sister Jojo at opposite poles. Against the widely spread images of a happy community, it is the loneliness that her home offers, that make Prabhjot Kaur to stick on to her house at Pune. She embraces her home tightly for the solitude and the freedom it guarantees.

It is not the presence others, but it is their absence that bound her to it. In a similar fashion, it is when returning from his mother's house at Pune, to his workplace at Mumbai, that Sartraj experiences the feeling of being at home (198).

There are imbalances of power in the domestic place. The unequal power relations in a house are hinted at in the incident dealing with the quarrel between the character named Rampari and her husband: "He's not been home in a year and a half. She was sure he had another wife somewhere. Then yesterday he came back. Like a laat-saab he spread his legs and shouted for his dinner. It's my house, he said" (169). The husband's claim over the house indicates the cultural systems that uphold patriarchal power relations. Amritrao Pawar and his wife Arpana who fight continuously, over Amritrao Pawar's violation of family boundaries in establishing an extra- marital relationship with another woman "refused to part, refused to come closer or divide, they fought and fought" (92). The violation of cultural dictums regarding the institution of marriage drive partners to never ending conflicts. The emotional stiffness is often followed by the fight over economic rights, which make homespaces as intensely contentious sites.

House is a power ridden place and site of conflict: Sartraj remembers his maternal house as a site of "fights, shouted quarrels" (196). Home is no longer a 'haven of contentment. Same is with the character of Mary who once had colorful ideas about a dream home (353). Mary is later reluctant to go back to their parental house: "To my mother? To that house I grew up in, with Jojo? No, I couldn't live there. I couldn't go back.' So even a slum was better, better than that home left far behind" (274). She comes across a similar realization about her new home in the city where she used to live with her husband: "Your own home becames a hostile borderland. And then one day you knew that this raw wasteland, this garish alien light, was your home. You just had to have patience and will enough to survive the first terrors." Throughout the novel, the happy image of homespace is laid against painful realities of being at home. Homespaces seem to struggle to manage the conflicts that have roots within it. This is not a place people want to cling to, but a place that people want to free themselves from.

Institution of marriage, religion, nationality, and legal systems are ever active in the homespaces. They have a signifying role in the constitution of homespaces. They are not passive factors, but vigilant and ever-active discipling forces. Home is bound with various rules, implicit and explicit. It is evident even in the seemingly simple individual behaviors like that of Major Shahid Khan who insisted on keeping his house "clean, quiet and peaceful" (884). This disciplining power of the homespace is also indicated in speaking about the policeman Majid's expectations: "Majid thought that a mother who kept an orderly house, who maintained cleanliness and had clear rules about what was right and what was wrong, actually ended up training her sons to be good policemen" (411). House is thus a place with formative powers. There are instances when the members of family may come to follow certain behavioral patterns despite their unwillingness to do the same at first. Thus, Katekar's son Rohit, who was resistant to his father's routine cleaning instructions to wash his hands and feet after play, start to do it voluntarily after his father's death: "Now that his father was really gone, Rohit performed the evening ablutions with a ritualistic seriousness, and led his brother through it with an unrelenting, police-like discipline" (331-332).

Homespace is now revealed as a place that produces disciplined bodies. The normalization and regulation of body behaviors are transferred from generation to generation in a linear fashion. In contrast, there are similar power operations in everyday culture that regulate the individual identities and their domestic existence. Shalini, a widow, faces criticism from her relative Vishnu Ghodke for her engagements and social activities outside her house: "That home will suffer. We have a saying: *gharalapaya rashtrala baya*" (409). This saying that means 'so if the stability and prosperity of a house depended on its foundations, and that of a country on its women,' unravels both the gender discourse that exist through widely spread cultural dictums and the policing action of the agents of power who observe and regulate the bodily behaviors according to these cultural discourse. Homespaces are thus turned as constraining territories for the bodies labelled women.

Subversive Possibilities: Home as Heterotopia

There are also instances in the novel when the homespace is presented as an alternate place with subversive power. The territories of the homespace are porous. In detailing the occasion, where a Sikh family gives shelter to a Hindu woman and her children, Chandra points out the heterotopic possibilities of everyday practices. The common cultural interaction between members of different religious groups, as seen in the Sikh policeman Sartraj's visit to various colleagues' houses, also indicate the resistant possibilities of domestic places.

Conclusion

Homespace in S*acred Games* is simultaneously a contested place, open to struggle and conflict, and is an alternative place with subversive power. As Chandra charts out, home, as an intimate geography, has physical, geographical territories and abstract, cultural boundaries.

Its intertwining boundaries make homespace a dynamic place of cultural formation. The possibilities of an individualized time sequence and historical existence may highlight any homespace as a new geographic model itself.

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