



Editorial

The Geography of Gender: Place, Space and Contexts

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Guest Editor, *postScriptum* Special Issue on 'The Geography of Gender: Place, Space and Contexts'

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) claims that Gender is not something fixed but fragile and provisional and posits gender in an exterior space where its identity is constructed through the repetition of some stylized acts. Butler, here, clearly connects gender and the formation of gender identity to space, where the body performs certain individual acts against a specific physical and cultural environment. Therefore, space becomes the site where culture and environment are inscribed upon the body and consequently participate in the formation of gender identity. Moreover, an intensive look into the relationship between gender and space underlines the fact that gender practices, roles and imaginaries are “situated,” and the context, and location of the situatedness have deep impact on them. Therefore, place and/or space are intricately involved in the activities related to gender formation and practices. Precisely, geography has a role to play in the formation and analysis of the epistemological as well as ontological formation of gender. With the change of geographical locations, gender politics and activities change with the change in cultural practices, socio-political and religious imperatives.

A specific space and/or place are gendered through the demarcation of the public and the private space that shape human actions. A common belief prevalent in our society regarding this demarcation is informed and endorsed by a larger patriarchal discourse that the public space is for the men and the private space for the women. This binarization of space is intricately linked to gender identity. So, a baby, who, according to Butler, is announced a girl is allotted the private space, which demarcates her future movements and activities. A woman has only access to certain spaces where her presence is

admissible and her labour is required. But unlike the women, who have minimalistic access, men enjoy free access to places of his choice. This politics of division and discrimination is further problematised when we find that certain feminine spaces deny access to men also. If we look at the private spaces like *Zenana*, as opposed to *Mardana*, the public space allocated to Men, we experience that men are generally not allowed to enter. The *Zenana* is generally considered a female space where the women are safe and secured and free to act and articulate. But, interestingly enough, this feminine space is a veritable ghetto constructed, regulated, and controlled by patriarchy. Therefore, it is quite natural that a man cannot enter the *Zenana* like a woman because patriarchy considers it as its sacral duty to establish and validate the masculinity of a man. He has access only when the social and cultural codes allow him to perform certain masculine roles. Feminist movements fight for challenging this spatial demarcation based on gender differences. Their activities not only include the fight against these general demarcations, but also underline how geographical factors affect the nature of oppression that patriarchy hurls upon women. Geographical features, prevalent beliefs, and practicing cultural codes are duly connected to the nature and pattern of patriarchal control. We find that the oppression of women in honour-based societies is quite different from other patriarchal societies because of the existence of certain social norms and beliefs which consider women as the emblem of their society and in turn the source of their collective honour. Therefore, the oppression that is prevalent in certain honour based societies is different from other communities which are also controlled by patriarchal ethos. Here, we can refer to Bapsi Sidhwa's Pakistani *Bride* (1983). The novel revolves round the struggle of Zaitoon, who was forcibly married to a person from the Kohistani tribe at the behest of her foster father. Unable to cope up with the inhuman torture by her husband and in-laws, she undertakes a dangerous journey across the river to escape from Kohistan and arrive at the plains of Lahore. Zaitoon had the idea that the plains of Lahore are not like the hilly regions of Kohistan, where a woman crossing the domestic line is considered a heinous crime and an incident of shame upon the family and the community as well. Zaitoon in the course of the novel manages to arrive at the other side of the river. The bridge that takes her to the other side is not just a conciliatory agent that connects the two worlds, but it also underscores the difference between them. If the hilly tribal area is an oppressive space for women, the plains of Lahore on the other side is space of Freedom. At the end of the novel the Kohistani search party fails to take hold of Zaitoon. But the novel gives us no hint of what happened to her finally. She is discursively silenced from the text.

Actually, Sidhwa who is well aware of the lived experience of the Third World women knows that the place where Zaitoon finally arrives is actually not very different from where she escaped. Only, the nature and pattern of patriarchal control and oppression differ with the change in place. A deeper study discerns that both the spaces on either side of the river are social products, which according to Henry Lefebvre, are based on social values affecting “spatial practices and perceptions” (59). Lefebvre further comments that “the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action...in addition to being a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (26). This observation of Lefebvre offers us a new angle to look at the connection between space and gender politics. According to Lefebvre, every society builds its own space that is governed by rules and beliefs of the group that is in power. Now, if we consider patriarchy as the overarching, omnipresent structure that controls the majority of societies and communities either directly or discursively, then all constructed social spaces are gendered spaces with different manifestations of domination and control.

This difference in the manifestation and expression of patriarchal oppression is the primary reason behind the emergence of various feminist movements. Precisely, the intricate relationship between gender and space underline the relevance of Womanism, Third World feminism, Chicana Feminist Movements, or South Asian Feminism. A quick look at the genealogy of variety of feminist movements not only points to their reaction against the control and the representational politics of White Western Feminism but also to the role of geographical factors. The socio-cultural and religio-political shifts that become prominent with the change in social as well as cultural spaces are connected to geography that necessitates a separate agency for the non-West, non-White feminist issues.

Gender questions and its relation with space and spatiality also engage the queer issues. Of late the LGBTQIA+ movement intends to celebrate the non-normative sexual preferences that challenge the primacy of heterosexuality as the standard norm. Queer denies any kind of categorization and calls for a fluidity in gender positions and roles. Queer movements are associated with Pride walks and parades that offer an open space for exercising and celebrating non-normative sexual roles and preferences. In is interesting to note that the space that these Pride Walks construct is a dynamic social space that challenges the homophobic space regulated by Heteronormativity. Therefore, the question of gender and gender dynamics uses the social space as a contesting site between the powerful and the disempowered, who questions the authority of the former.

In this context, we can also refer to the Hijra quarters or *kholes* where a different type of power dynamics can be seen. The Hijras live in communities that are divided in small quarters or groups controlled by the *Guru* or the Master. Generally, these communities are closed communities where stringent rules are followed in every ritual they perform. Starting from indoctrination of a new hijra to a specific clan to sex change or the *Nirvana*, the *Guru* and the disciples perform strict rules within a constricted space. This apparent contradiction in their celebration of fluidity and openness and their strict ritualistic private life is only to maintain the purity of the space where they live. The wide world outside offers them no space where they can demand their dignity as human beings. Hence, this construction of the pristine forts. But, recently, the hijras are also coming out of their closets. They are writing about their lives, and sharing space with other non-hijra people in the society. Recently, books like *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) by A. Revathi or Laxmi's *Red Lipstick* (2016) mark how these transgender writers are merging their confined space with the larger world.

The present issue has tried to deal with all these observations on the relation and connection between gender, space and place and critically explore all the probable issues that come under the aegis of the geography of gender. The present theme has been spread into two issues because of the huge response that we have received. This only underlines the relevance and the importance of the theme that we have taken up for critical enquiry. For many obvious reasons we had to exclude a good number of articles, otherwise it would have been impossible to put it even in two issues

The July 2022 issue of *postScriptum* focuses on the various aspects of the role of place, space and geography in the understanding and formation for gender roles, practices and imaginaries. The special article in this issue by Prof. Aparajita Hazra focuses on gender in the context of Third Space. Prof. Hazra in her paper attempts to locate the position of women in the scale of equality and equity. While Bhaba observes the Third Space as a site of liminality, Soja considers it as a networked space which is inhabited by multiple remote users simultaneously and asynchronously. Prof. Hazra's work shows that home is the First space and the professional field is the second space. Patriarchy, as I have already mentioned at the beginning, had assigned the first to women and the second to men. However, women are steadily braving to foray into the second space, and while doing so they negotiate with the Third Space. Thus, the pathways, the transports which the working women use to commute to their workplace become the Third Space. Diana

Turken's work shows how the women writers of colour reconstruct the West into a Third space, where borders blur and West emerges as a site for assimilation and convergence. Ayan Mondal's article reads Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in the light of Toni Morrison's takes on blackness and intends to reveal the gendered space that lies submerged in the text. Kaushani Mondal's article gives an almost new dimension to the understanding of geography and gender. Starting with theorizing gendered geography, the article moves on to deal with feminist geography on a scalar transformation on a psychosomatic level. The article reads Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* to critically study violence, gendered topography and consequent cartographies of emotions. Raemia Antionette Escott's article takes us back to the world of Early Modern Dramas where men used to play the roles of women and subsequently disconnect themselves from the social definitions of gender through performance. Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta in her article looks at the borders and migration in the context of women immigrants of Indo-Bangladesh and US-Mexico Border. Sonia Ben Soltane's article is the result of empirical research that deals with the experience of the North African immigrant women within the urban space of Montreal and Marseille. The next two articles focus on films. Mousumi Hazra takes up Meghna Gulzar's *Chapaak* to study how acid attack survivors fight against the violence and social subjugation in terms of legal and social discourses with their 'deformed corporeality.' Sharmila Paul's article purports to study Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire* and Aparna Sen's *Ghare Baire Aaj* and offers a comparative study of how woman challenges the dichotomy of the public and private space. If Ray's work presents Bimala as the metaphor of nation and how she crosses the borderline between private and public space to question the dichotomy of 'ghar' and 'bahir,' Sen's movie underlines the secular and liberal discourses of gender. Moreover, she further problematises both Tagore's work and Ray's adaptation by making the central female character a dalit, thereby engaging multilayered 'sites' on the formation of gender identity. Suparna Bag studies two short stories of Shobha Rao to show how 'other spaces' along with a different social context play a role in the transformation of the gender performances and roles. Subham Mondal's article is more of a sociological study that underscores the problems faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in positing their sexual preference and identity within the mainstream social space that is homophobic in nature and heteronormative in structure. The issue also has a book review of Naisargi N. Dave's *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics Through a Philosophical Anthropological Perspective* by Meghjit Sengupta.

This issue within its limited scope has tried to deal with all the probable aspects of the relation between place, space and gender. The following issue will bring out another set of articles on this topic with more new critical dimensions and angles in January 2023. At the end, I would humbly submit that the articles in this issue raises important critical questions on the focus area but never intends to draw the conclusive line, thereby offering new research insights to the future scholars. At the end, I express my sincere gratitude to all the contributors, reviewers and the editor of the journal for bringing this issue to fruition.

As for now, over to the readers.

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