



*Experiencing Home*

Domestic Architecture in Urban Writing

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**Book of Abstracts**

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**22 February 2024**

**Plenary**

*Of Heterotopian, Thirdspace, and Precarious Home Spaces*

Cecile Sandten

This paper delves into the multifaceted relationship between heterotopias, thirdspace, precarity, and domestic architecture as depicted in urban writing. Through an interdisciplinary lens drawing from the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault, Edward Soja, and Judith Butler, it explores how literary texts illuminate the intersections of spatiality, social conditions, and lived experiences. Heterotopias, conceptualised by Foucault as spaces of difference and otherness, provide fertile ground for literary exploration, serving as sites of resistance, refuge, and transformation. The notion of thirdspace, as articulated by Soja, expands our understanding of spatiality beyond binary oppositions, highlighting the fluid, hybrid, and contested nature of contemporary urban spaces. Precarity, influenced by Butler's theories of vulnerability and interdependency, foregrounds the precarious conditions of existence experienced by marginalised individuals within contested spatial contexts (e.g., the refugee camp), disrupting conventional narratives of stability and security. The home, as a locus of intimacy, memory, and power dynamics but also of precarity and difference, serves as a focal point for literary representations of social inequality, gender roles, and cultural identity. Through brief close readings of a selection of literary works spanning various genres and historical periods, this paper examines how heterotopic spaces, thirdspace dynamics, and precarity explore themes of resistance, belonging, and displacement. Additionally, the paper considers how narratives of home domestic architecture intersect with broader issues such as gentrification, displacement, and home, shedding light on the complex dynamics of urban space and power.

**Cecile Sandten** is Professor of English Literatures at Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany. She has previously worked at the Universities of Bremen and Hanover as well as Aalborg, Denmark. In her research, she focuses on literary representations of the urban in postcolonial metropolises across textual genres, concentrating on the figure of the flâneur, the concepts of interstices, heterotopia, or underworlds. She has been spokeswoman of the research network initiative "Palimpsesträume" ("Palimpsestic Spaces") at TU Chemnitz, comprising a

group of colleagues that are working on exploring the potential of this concept in an inter- and transdisciplinary research network. She is co-editor of *Die Stadt: Eine gebaute Lebensform zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft* (WVT, 2022), *Re-Inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis* (Brill, 2016), *Palimpsestraum Stadt* (WVT, 2015), *Stadt der Moderne* (WVT, 2013), and “Tracing the Urban Imaginary in the Postcolonial Metropolis and the ‘New’ Metropolis”, a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47.5 (Dec. 2011), apart from being author of numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals. She was president for four years and vice president for two years of the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies (GAPS).

## Panel: Domesticities and Gendered Spaces

*The Home with a View: Hijab Imtiaz Ali and her Uncanny Fiction*

Shweta Sachdeva Jha

Forgotten for many years, the fiction of Hijab Imtiaz Ali (1908–1999) is now witnessing renewed interest. A prolific and famous author of Urdu fiction from the 1930s, Hijab was born in colonial India but moved to Lahore in the 1930s after her marriage to the famous Imtiaz Ali Taj. Focusing on a few early short stories, I will show how she explores the domestic world of *ashraf* modernity through her reconfiguration of the home as an eerie and haunted space. Combining literary conventions from late nineteenth century Anglo American gothic fiction with Urdu romanticism in the use of the garden, Hijab reflects upon the fears, desires, and anxieties of young women in search of freedom and adventure. The home is central to her uncanny fiction with its Freudian use of alter-egos, doppelgängers, corpses revealed within hidden cupboards, dark rooms, and corners in the familial household. Young Ruhi/Zulfi (the protagonist) features in most of these stories ensconced in the comfortable and wealthy world of palatial bungalows with views of apple trees, jasmine blossoms, rose bushes or the sea.

Combined with tropes familiar to readers of Urdu poetry and *dastan*, Hijab's stories simultaneously depict the dangers of forbidden love. The subconscious world of the *ashraf* woman living in a wealthy home amidst fine upholstery, luxurious clothes, delicious food, and cozy fireplaces is also an expression of 'bourgeois fear's (Anthony Vidler 1992). Inspired by Gaston Bachelard (1964)'s reading of the home as a 'the topography of our intimate being', Vidler's (1992) formulation of the architectural uncanny, and Diana Wallace's (2013) work on the gothic and women's place, the *ashraf* home will emerge as a site of fractured modernity in this paper. *Ashraf* women writers explore freedom, love, sexual desire, and adventure within the home yet the struggle to conform to patriarchal boundaries of honour and respectability make the home an oppressive and uncanny space of crisis, class conflict and alienation.

**Shweta Sachdeva Jha** teaches English at Miranda House, University of Delhi. She did her PhD as a Felix Scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her research interests range from women's history, Urdu popular literature to digital archives on college women. Her recent publications include chapters in *The Bollywood Islamicate: Idioms, Histories and Imaginaries* (Orient Blackswan, 2022), *South Asian Gothic: Haunted*

*Cultures, Histories and Media* (University of Wales Press, 2021) and *Sultana's Sisters: Gender, Genres, and Genealogy in South Asian Muslim Women's Fiction* (Routledge, 2021). Her awards include the Avabai Wadia Fellowship by SNDT University of Women, Mumbai (2019–2020) and the Tata Trusts-Partition Archive Research Grant (2021).

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*Experiencing Domesticity and Placeless-ness in Mohan Rakesh's "Miss Pal"*

Parul

The Nayi Kahani Movement registered changing gender relationships and domestic roles in 1960's India. Mohan Rakesh's writing contends itself with this changing urban fabric of traditional familial domesticity based on the institutionalized heterosexual marriage and coping with the fissures considering the economic avenues available to both the partners. However, in his short story "Miss Pal", he attends to the radical self that falls outside the purview of the traditional narrative and its encumbered struggles. The story trails Miss Pal, a single, conventionally unattractive woman who has decided to leave her well-paying job in Delhi in favour of moving to Raison, a small village near Kullu, Himachal. Her reasons for wanting to escape to a quieter creative retreat in the countryside are clearly stated: social alienation in the city, objectifying male gaze, and harassment at the workplace. Miss Pal finds herself isolated and lonely despite her attempts to change the social and geographical context of her life. Her sexuality also becomes a topic of sensationalized gossip and rumours—thereby marking her placeless-ness in urban as well as urbanizing spaces. As the narrative unravels, her life is in more disarray than before. She has no means of income and is surviving on her limited savings of Rs. 3000. She has no social life except a handful of conversations with a postmaster, a neighbouring family, and a security guard—none of whom seem very keen to indulge her. She actively rebuffs any other interactions attributing it to the dogma and small mindedness of the villagers.

Despite her self-imposed isolation, the creative freedom she had hoped to find in the village, away from the stifling environment of the city, also seems to elude her. In absence of any familial relationships and/or social obligations, Miss Pal's domestic architecture also mirrors a similar neglect and lack of structure. Accordingly, the paper argues that Mohan Rakesh in "Miss Pal" challenges codified gendered spaces and their duality. The paper also argues that

her spatial disorganization marks her as an outsider in the traditional modes of domesticity and gender, further exacerbating her alienation upon migration. The phenomena of reverse migration—from urban to rural—as a search for a sense of belonging and home away from the sites of consumption will also be examined during the analysis of the short story “Miss Pal”.

**Parul** is currently pursuing her doctorate in Literature at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, KK Birla BITS Pilani, Goa campus. Her research focusses on the urban literary culture of 1960–70’s India with respect to Mohan Rakesh and the Nayi Kahi Movement. An alumna of Miranda House, she has formerly worked as an Assistant Professor (ad-hoc) at the University of Delhi.

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*Santhal Homes and Shifting Gender Roles:*

*Analysing Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s Short Stories*

Mrinalini Raj and Sarbani Banerjee

This paper investigates the shifting idea of home for the Santhal tribe through an analysis of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s select short stories from his collection *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015). The understanding of home for this community gives an insight into their social and gender relations, parallely capturing the shifting cultural paradigm. Home is a site that reflects the dilution of traditional cultural values through its position in the community. Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling explain that interpreting the meaning of home requires an analysis of its creation and reproduction through the processes of commerce, imperialism, and the politics surrounding it. The Santhal tribe—like many indigenous communities of Eastern India—has undergone a shift in their relations with space through time, thus re-establishing Doreen Massey’s argument of co-dependency in the space-time configuration. The replacement of *Jaherthan* (a sacred grove for praying) by Hindu temples and lighting *dhoop-batti* (incense) inside their homes is one of the integral changes the tribe makes, which challenge the Santhal belief system in *bongas* (spirits). The paper also elaborates how the blurred boundaries of public and private have been concretized into two separate spheres through colonial influence on the tribe, thus restricting gender roles in the community. The position of the tribal woman lies at the intersection of ethnic and gender oppression, and the

paper delves deeper into their position through an analysis of their relation with the shifting idea of home.

**Mrinalini Raj** is a research scholar in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee. Her research work is on the women of the Santhal tribe in India. Her areas of interest are Indigenous studies, Women's studies, Intersectionality, and Spatiality. She has published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies*.

**Sarbani Banerjee** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee. She has completed her PhD from the University of Western Ontario, Canada. She has published in journals like *South Asian Review*, *Interventions*, and *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.

## **Panel: Paradigms of Design and Lived Experience**

*Framed Balconies of Chandigarh's Marla Houses:*

*Evolution from Tokenism to a Spectacle*

Priya Gupta

This paper explores how the balconies of Chandigarh's row houses evolved and altered the dialogue between domesticity and urbanity. Chandigarh has been one of the most canonical representations of modernism in India post-independence. However, the discourse on its domesticity and everyday architecture, accounting for almost 70 percent of private housing, has been overshadowed by Corbusier's iconic public buildings. Row houses, commonly called Marla houses, account for 50% of the private housing, once uniquely similar due to the regulated urban form and controlled aesthetics of the façade. The control on the urban form and façade affected the interstitial spaces, and one such prominent space was the balcony that signified strong modernist characteristics. This regulated balcony and the overall Marla house have seen a vast shift in the last 70 years, owing to relaxations in regulations that accommodated the changing needs of the city.

Balconies can facilitate selective engagement and reserved sociability and act as a place of refuge both from domesticity and the overwhelm of the everyday, depending on their configuration. In this paper, I have analysed the configuration through its spatiality and materiality while conducting an architectural survey of houses and prescribed controls through an archival study. This was triangulated by inquiring about the use and affective nature of balconies on the residents through semi-structured interviews with 25 residents. I have collated the change in spatiality and material with the change in space's affectivity in use on a timeline and anatomy of a Marla house. Balconies today are products of extensions, transparency, and display. From an inappropriate translation of modernity to the Indian context as a controlled point of contact and influence to urbanity, the study shows that balconies have come a long way from the imposed modernist ideas, making twenty-first century domesticity a spectacle.

**Priya Gupta** is a PhD scholar at CEPT, Ahmedabad. Her PhD research analyses the impact of regulations on private houses. She has eight years of experience in academics and four years in architecture firms. Her research interests encompass modernism in India, South Asian Urbanism, and the everyday urban in Chandigarh.



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*Gender, Space, and the Contemporary Bathroom*

Aayushi Gupta

The contemporary bathroom within the Indian household has had to travel a long way to find its comfort in the privacy of the modern bedroom. The subject of bodily excretion and the mobility of waste gave rise to the modern science of plumbing. The inability to incorporate civic lines into pre-colonial urban settlements further encouraged the state—colonial and post-colonial—to begin with a clean slate and design cities in the pursuit of sanitation and safety. In lieu of the lack of resources cited by various state institutions, where these infrastructures were directed raises questions of who the modernist city was built for and how the transformation of spatial identities allowed for constant reconfiguration of subjugation in terms of caste, class, and gender. Engaging with the modernist history of the bathroom, this paper examines the reimagined body and its cultural and moral prescriptions with the emergence of modernism. Questions of who designed this space, who had access to these spaces and how, who were denied access to this space, and where it was located within the home look into the equality that modernist aspirations promised and the reproduction of the inequality that it enabled. A space that interacts more closely with the human body than any other, the bathroom redefined the idea of gender, sexuality, and beauty for modern India.

**Aayushi Gupta** is a fourth-year student from the Jindal School of Art and Architecture, majoring in architecture and with a minor in law. She is interested in questions of spatial identity, informality and the intersection of power, and bodies and spaces. She has previously worked as a communications intern, research intern and archivist, and is currently freelancing as a designer.

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*Home as Assemblage: Architectures of Circular Migration*

Pranjal Sancheti

What are the spatialities of home for circular migrants in Mumbai? This question is framed against the backdrop of the pervasive practices of circular migrants whose rhythmic movement

between near and far regions call into question a limited housing imagination that casts home through the building of permanent, standardized, and efficient dwelling units—usually apartment type—for heterosexual, nuclear family households. I advance three arguments in this paper by drawing my engagement with twelve low-income circular migrant households in Mumbai’s diverse neighbourhood settings through in depth semi-structured interviews and spatial documentation. I firstly argue there are rhythms of circulation of circular migrants and these rhythms are highly influenced by the temporality, precarity of life, place of origin, and destination. Second, home is produced through a dense network of relations closely held by friendships and solidarities with actors involved. Overlap of social, political, and economic networks brings out diverse scales of infrastructural encounters where multiple forms the spaces intersect. Third, in this networked idea of space home becomes a fluid assemblage of spaces, objects and materials coming together.

**Pranjal Sancheti** is a fifth-year architecture student studying at the School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai. She sees architecture as a way of thinking about space and life. She is writing a thesis on migrants and their practices of homemaking in the city of Mumbai.

## Panel: Home and Urban (Un)Belonging

*Home, Fear, and Belonging: (In)Security in Contemporary Bhopal*

Anshu Saluja

Rooted in contemporary urban India, this paper maps the production of exclusivist spatial imaginaries and cornered social communities. It examines the everyday processes of othering and exclusion of communities in expanding urban landscapes, and what these processes mean for people's everyday existence. Specifically, it addresses how exclusion of Muslim residents is constructed and maintained in spatial and social terms. Resting the spotlight on Bhopal, a burgeoning city in central India and a bastion of Hindu nationalist politics, it discusses how fraught socio-spatial boundaries are produced and sharpened, and how urban geographies of fear come to be crafted. It further explores how this sharpening of boundaries inflects the immediate realities of Muslim residents, shaping their living patterns, housing preferences, feelings of security/insecurity, placement within the urban habitat, and the (un)ease with which they access the built environment. It underscores the wider implications of these tensions by retrieving residents' narratives of home and belonging. The paper strikes up a conversation between the written and the oral, the documentary and the experiential. It juxtaposes available chronicled records with residents' narratives, culled through a chain of in-person field interviews. Through this two-pronged approach, it seeks to discern the multiple ways in which Muslim residents perceive and speak of their home, the neighbourhood, and the wider city. Thus, it focusses attention on different modes of imagining, experiencing, navigating, and inhabiting a fragmented cityscape.

**Anshu Saluja** is an Assistant Professor of History at Azim Premji University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. Her research maps competing trajectories of intercommunity engagement in South Asia. Her areas of interest include contemporary history and politics, memory and memorialisation, space and spatiality, transition from the colonial to the postcolonial, urban studies, and women's involvement in social and political movements.

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*Spatialization of Gender, Home, and Violence in Ashapura Devi's Mittirbari*

Debjani Sengupta

An exception to the common accusation that Bangla writers of the 1940s were silent about the impending independence is Ashapura Devi's 1947 novel *Mittirbari*. Set in the backdrop of the Calcutta Riots of 1946, Devi explores the ongoing clash of old and new values through the lives of the many inhabitants of Mittirbari, especially the women who search for new ways in which freedom can be understood in the context of the larger questions of the impending independence of the country. Exploring the tumultuous months leading up to the Partition, the narrative revolves around how the joint family structure receives an onslaught from historical forces that are sometimes incomprehensible to its members. In *Mittirbari* there is a palpable absence: the riot is not present in its horrifying immediacy; rather it is an absence that provokes one to ask questions about the violent world we live in, both inside and outside the home. The novel records the stormiest phases in Bengal's postcolonial history by investigating the notion that the family is a site of ideology formation and identity construction that enables it to be a metaphor for the community and nation. The need to redefine power constructions within and outside it becomes the most important aesthetic impulse of the novel in a free India that will also construct a secular space of freedom for all citizens.

**Debjani Sengupta** is the author of *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities* (CUP, 2015) and has co-edited *Looking Back: The 1947 Partition of India 70 Years On* (Orient Black Swan, 2017) with Rakhshanda Jalil and Tarun Saint. She is an Associate Professor at the Department of English, Indraprastha College, University of Delhi.

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*'Heliotropic': Navigating India's Lockdown Through Poetry-led Research*

Kathryn Hummel

With its foundation in arts-based research methodology (Chilton and Leavy 2014; Leavy 2022; McNiff 2008), this paper presents a series of poems-as-research on the domestic, social, and political ramifications of Phase 1 of India's national COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 (Kumar and Choudhury 2021; Grover 2020). Originally formulated as a counter-discourse to the disinformation and fake news of the Indian lockdown 'infodemic' (Kanozia, Kaur and Arya 2021), the poems also acknowledge my role as an emotional actor in the narratives they recount: their often-confessional nature mapping my identities as a woman, foreigner, and

writer setting down details of life practiced, observed, and consumed under lockdown conditions in the confines of (temporary) home in Hyderabad. Analysing a number of the author's own works and those produced in India concurrently, the genre of poetry is therefore harnessed not only as a tool of ethnographic inquiry but also to facilitate the communication of emotional and physical nuances of domestic places in urban spaces. Moreover, the paper deconstructs the poems' depictions of class, caste, race, gender, and governance in the context of the Indian lockdown, exploring them as examples of culturally and place responsive research (Berryman, SooHoo and Nevin 2013) and illuminating the interplay between socio-political dynamics, research, and emotional domestic life.

**Kathryn Hummel** is a Visiting Associate Professor with the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Goa, and an Adjunct Professor with Woxsen University, Telangana. Widely published across media and disciplines, Kathryn researches at the intersection of ethnography, gender, sexuality, cultural studies, and the creative arts.

**23 February 2024**

**Panel: Affect and Home in contemporary Delhi**

*Reading the Concrete and Abstract Modalities of House in Delhi*

Shivangi Chaturvedi

A house transcends mere visual perception. Its true essence lies beyond its structures in its dynamism that instils in it the property of being alive. Imagining, constructing, and experiencing a house requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between corporeal and incorporeal elements, human and non-human entities, need and potentiality, and dreams and fears. The essence of a house defies reduction to absolutes, revealing itself as a dynamic interplay of interconnected forces. The architecture of a house not only occupies physical space but also extends into the mental realm of its inhabitants. In urban environment, beyond notions of shelter, security, and stability, a house wields significant influence in sculpting an individual's identity in relation to the city, acting as a mediator of their sense of belonging. This paper will use three literary works set in different socio-political settings in Delhi to substantiate this argument, *The Householder* (1960), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). Houses in these texts act as both the setting and character, at one level exhibiting a poetical conception of space and, at another level, encapsulating the politics of the city's everyday life. Looking beyond its functionalist approach, houses serve as microcosms reflecting the socio-economic and political conditions of the city. Within the framework of two seminal works in the field of spatial studies, *The Poetics of Space* (1958) by Gaston Bachelard and *The Production of Space* (1974) by Henri Lefebvre, this paper will provide a phenomenological conception of the house, exploring the politics, complexities, and nuances of houses within urban spaces.

**Shivangi Chaturvedi** is a PhD Research Scholar at the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University. She is studying the representative spaces of Delhi in Indian English Writing using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. Apart from spatial studies her research interests lie in memory studies, Asian literature, and digital humanities.



In an interview in Johannesburg, the author and activist Arundhati Roy suggested that her expertise with architecture has an effect on the way she writes and represents space in her work. By referring to her most recent novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), she makes the case for how architecture uses space to substantively represent the processes of inclusion and exclusion in a given space, particularly in urban settings where we can observe the very process of exclusion taking the form of the ghettoization of certain communities. Along with vivid descriptions of Delhi's landscapes, this book also provides readers with engrossing descriptions of domestic architecture and space, which act as powerful lenses through which to view characters' inner lives, social structures, political conflicts, and overarching themes. From the communal warmth of the Khwabgah to the isolated rebellion of the Tilo's hideout, from the sterile detachment of the architect's house to Anjum's residence at the graveyard, these domestic spaces and their architectural descriptions offer profound insights into the intrinsic interplay between people and the build environment. This paper will seek to interpret the domestic space and its architecture in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by placing theories of the Situationist International, the 1950s avant-garde group, to reveal how the architectures in domestic space reflect and influence the emotional, social, and political aspects of characters' lives. Using the Situationist techniques of *dérive* and *détournement*, this paper will also delve into the psychogeography of domestic architecture in the novel and demonstrate how architectural interventions are used to create new modes of inhabitation that modify behaviour and habitual living within the domestic.

**Subham Patar** completed his MA in English Literature from the University of Burdwan, West Bengal. At present he is pursuing his PhD in the Department of English and Culture Studies in The University of Burdwan on Indian City Narratives as a Junior Research Fellow.

## Panel: Trajectories of Home in the Global South

*The Casualties of Urbanism:*

*A Reading of Tranquility at Dawn (“Kapayapaansa Madaling Araw”) by Rogelio L. Ordoñez*

Carlota B. Francisco

The paper analyses the story “Tranquility at Dawn” (“Kapayapaan sa Madaling Araw”) by Rogelio L. Ordoñez, a distinguished Filipino writer, as an inquiry into the dark side of urbanism. The paper focuses on character analysis as an interrogation into the self’s understanding of personal circumstances, and how it makes sense of and interacts with outside forces. Probing into the main character’s psyche, it exposes the other side of urbanism where the former, Andong, a single father who lost his wife to a bus driver when tuberculosis robbed him of the capacity to earn a living, succumbs to begging, thereby stripping himself of a sense of dignity and, eventually, of self as well as of hope even for his son. Home in the story is no longer a source of refuge, but of distress, and while located in a slum, outside the city centre where Andong begs for alms, it is depicted as both cold and dark. When a home breaks down, and the body loses its function, an individual’s resilience and social capital can no longer kindle one’s will. As the narrative unfolds and the individual’s resilience and social support systems cease to be effective, we are presented with a compelling opportunity to scrutinize the representations of Manila’s urban poor within the broader context of a city that falls short of its aspirations of industrialization. The story serves as a poignant critique of the harsh realities faced by marginalized members of society, shedding light on the pervasive patterns of abuse that stem from the contradictions of urban life. This poignant conclusion beckons us to reexamine the complexities of decolonization processes, urging us to consider how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape and distort the lives of the urban poor, even in the face of modernization.

**Carlota B. Francisco** obtained her MPhil in Sociology and Social Policy from the University of Bangor in the United Kingdom through a Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program. Her Bachelor in Sociology was from the University of the Philippines. She is currently teaching Literature and Filipino Language and Culture at the Ateneo de Manila University under the School of Humanities.

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*Mapping the Evolution of Home in Indian Literature  
During the Rise of Nationalism and Industrialization*

Shivender Rahul

The concept of home evolved distinctively as a site of identity negotiation amidst India's socio-political transformations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper will analyse the evolution of depictions of home in Indian literature during the late colonial period, coinciding with the rise of industrialisation and nationalism in the country. Through close readings of literary works in Hindi and English by seminal authors like Premchand and Tagore from 1880–1940, the paper will map changing constructions of domestic space, family dynamics, and gender roles within middle class households. Qualitative narrative analysis will elucidate how home emerged as a contested site between tradition and modernity against the backdrop of anti-colonial nationalism and rapid urbanization. The paper will chronologically trace how notions of domesticity, privacy, and family relationships were redefined as swelling Indian cities confronted the flux between colonial architecture and planning versus vernacular living customs. It will analyse how joint family structures were reorganized into nuclear units as nationalism reified the home as a symbol of cultural identity. Gender roles were recast through changed delineations between public and private spheres. This historical literary analysis will shed light on how socio-political forces shaped domestic space, architecture, and family in resonant ways during a transformational period in India.

**Shivender Rahul** is an Assistant Professor of English, Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur.

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*Interpretations of Home and Belongingness Among Diasporic Writers in India*

Veena Roshan Jose

With large-scale emigration from India since the colonial period, the diaspora experience of displacement has emerged as a major theme in Indian writing. This paper proposes to examine how diasporic writers from India interpret notions of home and belonging in their literary works. It will focus on diasporic authors from India grappling with identity and cultural roots

in their depictions of the city. Through qualitative narrative analysis of memoirs, novels, and short stories by writers like Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and so on, the paper will assess recurring metaphors, imagery, and themes related to home and identity across diasporic narratives. It will elucidate how concepts of home become plural, hybrid, and contested due to the rupture of emigration and assimilation of new cultural elements. The paper will trace commonalities in language, tone, and motifs writers deploy to capture the nostalgia, dislocation, and fragmentation wrought by separation from the homeland. In doing so, the paper will generate insights into the creative ways diasporic authors subvert conventional constructions of home and identity to reflect cosmopolitan, transnational realities. It will also elucidate the role of memory, family, and sensory imagery in expressing the emotive force of home for scattered communities.

**Veena Roshan Jose** is an Assistant Professor at Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur. She also heads the Centre for Environmental Law. Her areas of interest include human rights, refugee studies, diaspora studies, climate migrants, and climate refugees.

## Plenary

### *Literature, Infrastructure, and Built Form*

Alex Tickell

My presentation takes account of recent pronouncements by writers such as Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie on continuities between fictional and built form to ask how we might read literature in relation to city architecture, infrastructure, and design. Drawing on a range of contemporary Indian-English fictions, I explore the architecture of these works and assess how the advent of the so-called New India has challenged the politics of form in these writings. I will also suggest that, with the global climate crisis and mounting resourcing issues facing cities globally, a concentration on how formal aspects of infrastructure, such as water provision, transport systems, communications and waste management, are narrativized affords important insights into the development of sustainable equitable cities. My presentation looks at recent graphic fiction, literary journalism, fiction, and TV serials in order to trace their respective engagements with built form. I draw theoretically on a cross-disciplinary range of commentaries on urban space and infrastructure but take particular account of Caroline Levine's recent work on *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis* (2023), in which Levine suggests that '*the most important difference between [the politics of] left and right in our time lies not in our relationship to norms and constraints but in the ways we understand enabling conditions—the infrastructures of collective life*' (p. 14. Italics in original).

**Alex Tickell** is Professor of Global Literatures in English at the Open University, UK, and Director of the OU's Postcolonial and Global Literatures Research Group. He specialises in the Anglophone literary histories of South Asia and Southeast Asia and conjunctions of literature and politics. He was sole editor of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (Vol 10): *The Novel in South and South East Asia since 1945* (OUP 2019), the editor of *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations* (Palgrave 2016), and author of a readers' guide to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (Routledge 2007). Alex also researches contemporary urban South Asian fiction and has co-published a special journal issue of *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* on urban writing of Delhi. His new monograph *City Fictions of the New India: Literature, Infrastructure, Citizenship* will be published by OUP in 2024.

## Panel: Informality and Alterities of Home

*Servant at Home (?): Imagining Alternative Notions of Belonging in Urban Domestic Spaces*

Samiksha

Some of the formative notions of belonging for an individual develop in relation to the category of home. Much emphasis has been laid on the unit of family as the primary locus in relation to which experiences of home are associated and analysed, but scant critical attention has been given to alternative experiences of home by those who occupy that space but lie outside close-knit kinship structures. This paper intends to study how domestic servants experience the urban middle-class homes of their employers in order to explore different possibilities of belonging and attachment with the spaces and material objects that constitute the idea, both in material and affective terms, of home. The paper will closely analyse two novels, *The Diary of a Maidservant* (2007) by Krishan Baldev Vaid, and *The Space Between Us* (2006) by Thrity Umrigar, to understand how the servant characters in these literary works negotiate with the complexity of urban domesticities. The particular nature of domestic work warrants close contact and familiarity with the space of home and the people who inhabit it. One of the concerns of this paper would be to explore the co-relations between the liminal position that a servant occupies as an insider-outsider at the employer's house and the liminality of certain spaces at home like balconies and courtyards, to study how engagement with these spaces work to reinforce the marginalised identities of the servant characters. By investigating the servant's experience of the urban middle-class domesticity, the paper will attempt to understand how the necessity and the nature of paid domestic work opens up possibilities of imagining alternative notions of belonging in relation to spaces and objects that constitute the category of home, as engendered by the co-existence of social differences and intimacies between employers and servants.

**Samiksha** is a doctoral research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her PhD looks at narratives of cross-class engagements in the domestic sphere, particularly focusing on representations of master-servant relationships in literary narratives. Her research attempts to understand the inter-relations between labour involved in earning livelihoods and labour expended in creative and aesthetic processes.



This paper will explore the tectonics of spatial production of and on Chandigarh's streets by inquiring into the informal solidarities of its homeless population, contextualising their lived experience against the immense scale and grandiosity of the city's utopian (albeit mis-transplanted) postcoloniality. Invoking the street as master infrastructure (Bandyopadhyay 2022), the lived experience of those occupying the streets becomes both evidence and product of the precarious turn taken by a city originally envisioned by Jawaharlal Nehru as a microcosm of a newly independent India's democratic socialism. Such solidarities of the home-less, produced by the transposition of the affective functions of home—community, domesticity, solidarity—on to the uncertainty of the hearth—simply centred around the domestic fire—are heightened due to the enforced invisibility of their domestic materiality. The evidence of their existence (pots, pans, mattresses) tucked securely away come daylight, creating a curious experience of home (and the street) in perpetual motion which this paper intends to investigate.

It is these journeys between the lack of a house, the impossibility of accessing home, and their intersections with the hearth which belie degrees of affective belonging amongst the homeless in Chandigarh. In reading the literary representations of said journeys, such as in Madhur Kapila's slum-chronicles in *Saamne ka Asman* (2010), Sanamacha's Sharma outsider-insider poetical perspectives in *Chandigarh Seasons* (2015), or Aarish Chhabra's witty sketches *The Big Small Town* (2020) along with the various laws, measures and policies, which question the right of the homeless to occupy public space, these differentials of mobile domesticity evoked by the 'hearth' add to the chronicles of lived experience that make up Chandigarh. Thus, the paper will theorize the street as a political apparatus of city-making, represented in the everyday struggles of those who dwell on its wide tree-lined streets. Such occupancy is even more interesting in a city hailed for the absence of the usual paraphernalia of urban congestion like bastis or slums, marking the lives of those struggling for their share of urban utopia in Chandigarh as distinctive and worthy of inquiry.

**Ishita Sareen** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, DAV College, Chandigarh. Her doctoral research reads Chandigarh as a modern spatial experiment through

its literary perceptions and lived experience. She has done her BA (Hons) from Lady Shri Ram and MA from the Department of English, University of Delhi.

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*Homes and Sleep: Towards collective spaces of sleep in Howrah Railway Station*

Ayatree Saha

This paper examines the idea of sleep and space by understanding the association of sleep and home. We often consider specific spaces to be our homes, which are either formed materially or through social relations. The changing notion of home as something that is not fixed but, as Sara Ahmed (1999) argues, is a state of being that is often derived from people's experience offers a significant framework to understanding how spaces for sleeping are associated or disassociated to imagining homes. This paper looks at the space of Howrah railway station, West Bengal, that observes a multitude of people from diverse places, using this space as either transient or permanent. From migrant labourers, vagrants, to daily passengers and long-distance travellers, the heterotopic space of the railway station is home for some and fleeting for others. Through everyday forms of negotiations and interactions with space and the social network within this space, this paper addresses how economic and political processes seep into the architecture of sleep. It also attempts to uncover the question of spatialization of gender, which brings vulnerable bodies into the forefront. The paper taps into the experience of precarity that leads to the formation of sleeping community and experiences of home.

**Ayatree Saha** is a PhD scholar at Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. She graduated from St. Xaviers College, Kolkata and completed her masters from TISS. She is currently working on sociality of sleep, with research interest in body, gender, culture, labour.

## Panel: Spatial Anxieties in Domestic Writing

*Children and the Politics of Home in late twentieth century Kerala*

Glinicy Piyus

The paper attempts to understand the changing contours of the politics of the middle-class home with respect to children and childhood in the last decades of twentieth century Kerala. As a period of intense changes, fuelled by modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation, the idea of home became increasingly complex in intricate negotiation with personal aspirations and the commitment to the newly formed nation. Home, in this paper, would then be seen through the interpersonal relationships that existed between adults and children. The paper attempts to expand the idea of home using the generational structures that existed in these newly emerging nuclear middle-class families. Accordingly, the paper attempts to address three crucial questions: firstly, what was the new idea of home in Kerala, in the newly emergent middle-class? How does the use of childhood as a lens enable us to understand the underlying power structures that were reintroduced during the modernisation of private spaces? Finally, did this new image of home, in turn, become hegemonic when understood through various intersections of caste and class? The paper attempts to shed light on these questions by looking into the politics of the representation of homes in literary texts.

**Glinicy Piyus** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Humanities and Social Science at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhopal, India. Her research focus is on the field of childhood studies in relation to postcolonial theories, caste, and gender studies. She is currently working on the politics of representation of children and childhood in Kerala at various intersections.

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*Woes of Dwelling and Incommensurable Extremes of Representation  
in the Domestic Architectural Discourses of Twentieth Century Kerala*

Aparna Ros P.

This paper is part of a larger study that addresses the topology of houses as revealed through textual representations and figures in the domestic architectural discourses of twentieth century

print Malayalam. It attempts a cross-reading of several architectural texts on building houses—or grihanirmmanam as it is called in Malayalam—with a literary short story to make visible disjunctive operations and practices lurking behind the symbolic unity of the social imaginary of an ideal house. These texts were produced and circulated in a socio-cultural milieu where referential regimes of experience imparted by a stable past and tradition were slowly being replaced by simulative modes of experience characterised by the consumption regimes propagated by print and visual media. The paper emerges on the premise of how historically specific conceptions of a domestic subject may inform the understanding of the homogenised spatiality of houses as well as the production of dominant meanings of dwelling in Kerala. Firstly, the paper argues that the cultural meanings of houses and regimes of practices surrounding their construction have placed the subject within an economy of desire, forms, and objects that stabilised modern ideas of the domestic and the conjugal. Secondly, it demonstrates that the anthropocentric representations of houses bolster the domestic and the conjugal through the figure of the male householder so that the undifferentiated wholes of subject-object units of the modern house may thrive. The paper employs the short-story as a methodological conduit to map the topographic changes in the house-plans of Kerala and to read the figural deflection of the male subject's spatial experience inside his own house even as the constructivist discursivity surrounding domestic architecture are stabilized around the figure of the male householder. The paper further posits that this representational rupture could possibly account for illustrations of incommensurable attunement between perception and sensation of the male householder, especially in the light of the rapt, enigmatic, thing-ly mobilisations in his domestic space. The archive that the paper brings forth points towards the prevalence of a distinct male melancholia encapsulating an affective experience of space where culture, reconstituted as signs of consumption, confabulates the experience of dwelling for the male house-holder.

**Aparna Ros P.** is a PhD Scholar in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, India. This paper is a work-in-progress chapter from her dissertation on the domestic architectural discourses in Kerala. She studies texts on house-building practices in print Malayalam.





Aishani Roy

What, exactly is space? It would be easy to read space as an assemblage, or aggregation of objects and functions, or to (mis)read it as a function of all other functions by ascribing to it an overarching purpose which determines the reality of the objects it encompasses. Domestic space presents its own set of difficulties, by being at the same time privy to both subjective and objective imperatives of space—and therefore raises questions about the philosophical basis of space in its generality. Among different ways of reading space lies the idea of reading the house as a container of both lived experience and imaginaries, which ascribes to it the peculiar quality of being able to critically examine the onto-epistemological reality of space itself. More so, when the space in question is marked out as a private space, or a space of intimacy, which calls into question far more than the perceived sociality of empirical space. Interrogating the poetics of space, therefore, requires a new set of vocabulary which is no longer limited to experiential space, which takes into account the poetic excesses of an imaginary space—and which marks out the space of intimacy, of privacy, and the home. Rabindranath Tagore's *Malancha* (1934) adopts an almost cartographic approach to the space of the home by mapping it onto the physical, psychical, and imaginary space of the garden, which serves as a representation of the characters' private, inner lives. The garden in the novella is at once a public space and a private one: it serves, first and foremost, as a horticulture farm for Neeraja and Aditya; and secondly, as an extension of their home and their private lives. The events in the narrative unfold in and around the garden, foregrounding it as a space of intimacy and conflict, of domesticity and alienation, and the imaginary of Neeraja's subjectivity. For Neeraja, the garden exists as a psychical entity which, at times, overlaps with the physical contours of her body: the inscription of the body in the garden, or the garden in the body, has interesting ramifications for readings of space. Where, then, does the body end and space begin? And how do we then read the interiority of space and the interiority of the body in it?

**Aishani Roy** is currently pursuing PhD at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta on "The Erotic Object: Self and Thingness in Literature." She completed her BA, MA, and MPhil from the Department of English, Jadavpur University. She is concerned with theories of eroticism, subjectivity, a philosophical engagement with literature as a mode of knowledge production, postcoloniality, multiculturalism and the role of aesthetics and affect in literature.