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Gendered Spaces and the Quest for Selfhood in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*

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Abstract

Gendered space is constructed by those in positions of power and control, attributing specific duties and responsibilities to men and women, respectively. Generally, the public sphere is dominated by men, leaving zones of leisure and recreation primarily to them. In her novel All the Lives We Never Lived, Anuradha Roy uses the character of Gayatri to narrate the struggle of domestic women who are confined to the kitchen, sacrificing their potential for their children and husbands. Gayatri takes a poignant step by leaving her family to pursue her artistic passion, an act that mirrors the stifled dreams of many Indian women who suppress their own identities to nurture their families. Situating that rebellion within the sociology of gendered space, this paper reads her flight not merely as a private transgression but as a critique of the spatial logic that allots the outdoor world to men while immuring women within the home. It examines the urgent need for a shift in male attitudes and argues that traditional masculinity must be redefined to accommodate female autonomy.

Keywords: female autonomy, selfhood, identity, masculinity, gendered space, spatial disparity, the private sphere

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Introduction: Theorising Gendered Space

Gendered spaces refer to the way societies divide physical and social environments according to gender roles. “The gender-specific spatial distinctions and restrictions fully reflected the stereotypes of gender roles” (Park 110). The concept, developed by sociologists and feminist geographers such as Daphne Spain and Doreen Massey, holds that space is never neutral; it is at once a product of social relations and a force that reproduces them, so that the way a society arranges its rooms, streets, and institutions both expresses and entrenches its assumptions about who belongs where. Such space is structured by societal norms to reflect gendered roles and constructed by persons in power. “The counterhegemonic stance primarily aims to challenge the dominant hegemonic masculinity in the pre-existing gendered space. They also exhibit the contractedness of gender norms, with due emphasis on the discontinuous and fluid nature of identity” (Sharma and Niharika 345). Some spaces are meant for men and some for women. Man’s space has every freedom, opportunity, and authority. Since time immemorial, men have been cast as the hunters, gatherers, and providers of the family, while women’s space is only her home. She is imprisoned between four walls, her whole responsibility being to take care of her husband, her children, and the household chores, and rarely does she secure any leisure activity in which to relax herself. The spaces are divided into outdoors, considered the domain of men, and indoors, associated with women.

This division is not a quaint relic but a living structure, and it announces itself in the most ordinary exchanges. In a campaign named “Break the Silence,” which invited women to submit anonymous stories, one response ran: “I was telling someone about how I play the electric guitar. He responded: ‘Leave that to the guys, you have to ultimately sit at home and make chapatis’” (Thakore). The anecdote is trivial in scale and enormous in implication, for in a single sentence the public world of performance and the private world of the kitchen are assigned, respectively, to the man and the woman, and an entire ideology is transmitted in the guise of casual advice. The domestic space, the indoor, thus, represents power and control. These stereotypes are very much real and prevalent; choices and decisions are routinely based on gendered assumptions. This spatial division has historically limited women’s freedom, opportunities, and ability to express their individuality. Women are not naturally tethered to domestic space; it is the limitation placed upon them by society that restricts them. These outdoor and indoor spaces, in turn, shape the very behaviour of the people who inhabit them.

It is worth pausing on that last claim, because it inverts the common-sense understanding of the relationship between people and the places they occupy. We are inclined to think that spaces are arranged to suit the natures of those who use them that the kitchen is feminine because women cook when in truth the arrangement frequently precedes and produces the nature it claims merely to accommodate. A girl who is told from infancy that the home is her proper sphere, who watches her mother confined to it and her father move freely beyond it, learns

to want what she is permitted and to fear what she is denied. The gendered division of space is therefore not only a constraint upon behaviour but a manufacturer of it, and any analysis of women's subordination that ignores the silent pedagogy of walls and thresholds will remain incomplete.

The public and the private: A cartography of erasure

If women have been confined within domestic space, they have been correspondingly erased from the public record, and the two exclusions reinforce one another. Caroline Criado Pérez opens her study of data bias with an observation that doubles as an indictment of the historical archive:

> Most of recorded human history is one big data gap. Starting with the theory of Man the Hunter, the chroniclers of the past have left little space for women's role in the evolution of humanity, whether cultural or biological. Instead, the lives of men have been taken to represent those of humans overall. When it comes to the lives of the other half of humanity, there is often nothing but silence. (Criado Pérez, Preface)

The silence Pérez names is the temporal counterpart of the spatial confinement described above. Just as the public square was reserved for men, so too was the page on which public life was recorded, and the woman who was kept from one was almost inevitably kept from the other. The very phrase "Man the Hunter" performs the erasure it describes, folding the whole of humanity into the figure of the male and consigning women to a residual, unrecorded background. To recover women's history, then, is not merely to add forgotten names to an existing story but to question the spatial and narrative architecture that decided in advance whose actions would count as history at all. It is against precisely this architecture that a novel like Roy's sets itself, restoring to visibility a woman whose ambitions the official chronicle of nationalist struggle would otherwise have dissolved into silence.

Spatial disparity in institutional life

In the 1990s, Nancy Hopkins, a molecular biology professor at MIT, gained prominence for her documentation of gender inequality within the institution. Her investigation famously began when she used a measuring tape to check the square footage of her laboratory, discovering that her research space was significantly smaller than that of her male colleagues, despite her superior academic performance. This evidence of spatial disparity became a powerful symbol for the broader systemic inequities facing women at MIT, eventually leading to a landmark report on the status of women faculty.

What makes the Hopkins episode so resonant is its literalism. Where discrimination usually hides in attitudes and intentions that are difficult to measure, here it could be laid out in feet and inches, recorded by a tape measure, and tabulated on a page. The shrunken laboratory is the institutional descendant of the four walls of the home: in both cases a woman of evident capacity is allotted less room than her work requires, and the constriction of her physical space operates as

a quiet statement about the perceived smallness of her claims. That a scientist of Hopkins's standing had to resort to a tape measure to make her marginalisation legible is itself instructive, for it shows how readily spatial inequity passes unnoticed until it is rendered in numbers. The continuity between the cramped laboratory and the confining household reveals that gendered space is not a problem of the domestic sphere alone; it follows women into the academy, the office, and the boardroom, shrinking their domain wherever they go (Zernike 3).

The Myth of female frailty

The reason behind this kind of spatial disparity, in institutional settings as in the home, is rooted in the perception of women as the weaker sex. Such misogynistic attitudes are reflected in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the protagonist exclaims, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (Shakespeare 1.2.146). This misogynistic remark, and the centuries of assumption it distils, influences the subconscious biases of those within administrative hierarchies, manifesting as systemic inequality; the spaces are built according to a presumed hierarchy of strengths. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir offers the formulation that has anchored modern feminist thought: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society" (Beauvoir 273). Society labels a woman the weaker one, fearing that her inner strength and passion may one day dominate the male world. She is caged inside her home like a bird, because men fear that, given freedom, she will fly away from the cage.

Beauvoir's sentence is the philosophical hinge on which this whole argument turns. If womanhood, in the socially weighted sense, is not a destiny written into the body but a role one is trained to perform, then the frailty attributed to women is not a fact to be accommodated but a fiction to be enforced—and the gendered division of space is one of the principal instruments of its enforcement. The confined woman is made to seem weak because she has been kept from the activity, mobility, and exposure that would demonstrate her strength, and her resulting timidity is then offered as the justification for her confinement. The caged-bird image, which recurs throughout discussions of women's lives, captures the circularity exactly: the bird is judged unfit to fly because it has never been allowed out of the cage, and its presumed unfitness becomes the reason the cage is never opened. Shakespeare's Hamlet supplies the slander and Beauvoir the diagnosis; between them they map the ideological terrain that Roy's Gayatri will be forced to traverse.

Confinement, control, and the manufacture of weakness

Restrictions on women's mobility, education, and expression function as mechanisms of control that prevent women from realising their full potential. Women are made to believe they are weak and soft by their families and societies. They are encouraged to prioritise family responsibilities and to suppress personal ambitions. This article of belief has scarcely changed, except in the lives of a fortunate few. The idea that women are physically and emotionally weaker has historically functioned as a tool of control, used by patriarchal societies to confine

women within limited spaces. Women confined by these spaces are urged by feminist thinkers to come out of the space society has built for them and to build a space of their own.

The injunction to "build a space of one's own" is more than a metaphor, and it anticipates the most famous feminist demand of the twentieth century. When Virginia Woolf argued that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write, she was insisting that creative and intellectual freedom is inseparable from the material possession of space that one cannot think freely in a room one does not control, at a table one must clear for someone else's dinner. The mechanisms of confinement that this section describes limited mobility, curtailed education, discouraged ambition are so many ways of denying women that room, and of ensuring that whatever talents they possess will wither for want of a place in which to grow. The remainder of this paper turns to a novel that dramatises, with unusual honesty and at considerable moral cost, one woman's refusal to let her gifts so wither.

Review of Literature

A survey of existing criticism reveals a body of work attentive to Roy's ecological and feminist concerns, yet largely silent on the spatial question this paper foregrounds. Shailendra Singh, in "An Eco-Critical Reading of Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*," examines ecocritical themes by focusing on the protagonist's mother and her intrinsic desire for a profound connection with the natural world. A. Khan's "Interweaving Personal and Ecological Histories" utilises an eco-feminist lens to explore the intersection of individual narratives with environmental and political upheavals, emphasising the interdependent well-being of humans and their environment. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Misra and Surabhi Shishodia, in "Character of a Progressive Woman in Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*," portray Gayatri as a progressive figure who challenges patriarchal norms and seeks personal fulfilment by revolting against her domineering husband. In "Impure Subjects within Power Structures," Ziwei Yan and Jing Yin argue that female agency in Roy's novel is a product of complex negotiations with power and discipline rather than a mere series of resistant acts. A. S. V. Kumar's "Deep Ecology and Environmental Sustainability" promotes ecological consciousness and harmonious coexistence, advocating reduced human interference and population control to preserve non-human life.

The Research Gap: Toward a Sociology of Gendered Space

While existing scholars extensively cover the eco-feminist and ecological dimensions of Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*, there remains a distinct research gap regarding the sociology of gendered space. Scholars have noted Gayatri's rebellion, but they have yet to examine it through the lens of spatial disparity. Spatial disparity is a direct consequence of the systemic marginalisation of women, for it reinforces the perception of women as weak. By restricting a woman's access to physical and professional space, both institutional and domestic

hierarchies sustain the myth of female frailty.

This article seeks to occupy that gap. Reading the novel through the framework of gendered space established above, it treats Gayatri's confinement and her eventual flight as spatial events as much as emotional ones, and it argues that her departure is most fully understood not as the abandonment of a family but as the seizure of a space geographic, creative, and existential that society had refused to grant her. To make this case, the discussion turns first to the figure of Gayatri herself and the cage of domesticity in which the novel discovers her.

Gayatri as the embodiment of female autonomy

In Anuradha Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived*, the protagonist Gayatri serves as an embodiment of female autonomy in 1930s pre-independence India. Narrated through the retrospective lens of her son, Myshkin, the novel chronicles Gayatri's struggle against societal constraints, set against the backdrop of India's independence movement and the gathering shadow of the Second World War. Her journey transcends the personal to become a feminist statement, illustrating the conflict between rigid cultural expectations and the existential necessity of self-actualisation.

The choice of Myshkin as narrator deserves emphasis, for it shapes everything the reader is permitted to know. Gayatri's story reaches us only as it has been reconstructed, decades later, by the son she left behind, pieced together from memory, letters, and the testimony of others. The novel is thus not simply about a woman who departs but about the long afterlife of that departure in the consciousness of the child, and the retrospective form quietly insists that the cost of a woman's freedom is borne, and remembered, by those she leaves. That Roy entrusts the narration to the wounded party rather than to Gayatri herself lends the book its peculiar moral tension: we are asked to understand a choice whose price is being paid, before our eyes, by its narrator.

In an interview regarding *All the Lives We Never Lived*, Anuradha Roy describes the protagonist as follows:

> She is not modelled on anyone, she came to me as a complete, sparkling, gifted, sometimes abrasive, sometimes contradictory woman who believes she has something that sets her apart. Many of the characters are fighting for freedom of different kinds, including freedom from colonial rule, and Gayatri defies the accepted modes of defiance; what she is fighting for is not personal freedom to paint or picnic (as her husband thinks); she is struggling for the idea that you cannot be caged into giving your life to a version of freedom that belongs to someone else, however worthy that may be. But she knows her kind of freedom comes at a price, including being condemned by society, and that is probably as true today. (The Telegraph)

Roy's own gloss is illuminating, because it refuses the easy reading that would reduce Gayatri's revolt to a private appetite for art or amusement. The freedom

Gayatri seeks is not the freedom to paint or picnic, as her husband condescendingly imagines, but the freedom not to be conscripted into someone else's definition of liberation, however noble that definition, and the nationalist cause was noble, may be. "Domestic violence (DV) is a serious and preventable human rights issue that disproportionately affects certain groups of people, including Indian women. Feminist theory suggests that patriarchal ideologies produce an entitlement in male perpetrators of DV; however, this has not been examined in the context of women from the Indian subcontinent. This study examined Indian women's experiences of abuse (physical, sexual, and psychological) and controlling behaviour across 31 countries by examining the relationship between the patriarchal beliefs held by the women's partners and the women's experience of DV" (Satyen et al. 103). This is the novel's most radical insight: that a struggle for collective freedom can itself become a cage if it requires a woman to surrender her individual selfhood to it. Gayatri's defiance is therefore aimed not only at her domineering husband but at the very logic of sacrifice that the freedom movement, like the family, demanded of its women.

The invisible cage of domesticity

Gayatri's life is torn between social obligations and personal desires. Married young to Nek Chand, an older nationalist teacher, she is expected to dedicate herself to her family and to support the independence movement. Society views her strictly through the lens of her roles as wife and mother, consistently overlooking her inner life and her artistic talents. Consequently, she feels stifled, trapped within an invisible cage of domesticity. Her escape to Bali in 1937 with the German painter Walter Spies marks the pivotal moment in which she prioritises her own fulfilment over family responsibility. Though haunted by guilt, she views her departure as an act of survival. This choice highlights a double standard: a society that glorifies male freedom fighters while simultaneously using the concept of duty to confine women to the home.

The adjective "invisible" is precisely chosen, for Gayatri's cage has no obvious bars. She is not beaten, not starved, not locked in; her imprisonment is woven from expectation, role, and the steady erosion of her sense that her own desires are legitimate. This is what makes her predicament so representative and so insidious. A visible tyranny can be named and resisted, but the cage of domesticity disguises itself as love, as duty, as the natural order of things, so that the woman who chafes against it is made to feel not oppressed but ungrateful. The double standard the novel exposes is sharpened by its historical setting: in the very years when the nation celebrated its men for refusing the bondage of empire, it expected its women to embrace the bondage of home, and to call that embrace patriotism.

Gayatri writes to her husband:

> I am not coming back. I am telling you this only so you don't worry about me. Please do not try to find me or stop me. I am twenty-six, and life is running away from me. I wanted more! There are things in us that we cannot fight,

however hard we try. I have failed you and failed my child. Forgive me if you can. (Roy 142)

The letter is a small masterpiece of divided feeling, and it rewards close attention. Its sentences swing between defiance and contrition, between the urgency of “I wanted more!” and the abjection of “Forgive me if you can,” enacting in their very rhythm the war between selfhood and socialisation that the whole novel dramatizes. The phrase “life is running away from me” locates the crisis in time as well as space: at twenty-six, Gayatri feels her one existence draining away unlived, and the cage she flees is finally the cage of a future already foreclosed. That she frames her flight as a failure even as she commits to it tells us that she has internalised society’s verdict upon her, and that her freedom will be shadowed, permanently, by guilt.

“Adventure, not Abandonment”: The ethics and cost of freedom

Gayatri was well aware that society would condemn her for abandoning her husband and son. She was even free from domestic chores; her husband was neither abusive nor unfaithful; and she enjoyed privileges that most Indian women of that era could only dream of. Yet she chose to leave. This is the central question that haunts everyone who learns her story. Though a part of her was devastated to leave her son and constantly longed for home, she believed her departure an essential sacrifice. For Gayatri, staying meant the death of her spirit; she had to leave in order to pursue her artistic passion and explore the world, proving that material comfort is no substitute for personal fulfilment. Gayatri states, “I refuse to be miserable, I won’t be sick again or have headaches, this is adventure, not abandonment. I want to eat life, grab everything new and taste it” (Roy 224).

It is the comfort of Gayatri’s circumstances that makes her case so morally demanding, and so valuable to the novel’s argument. Had her husband been a brute, her flight would be easy to applaud and easy to dismiss as a special case; the cruelty would explain everything, and the larger indictment of gendered space would dissolve into a single bad marriage. By making Nek Chand decent and Gayatri privileged, Roy strips away every external justification and forces the reader to confront the bare question of a woman’s right to her own life. The defiant declaration that this is “adventure, not abandonment” is Gayatri’s attempt to rewrite the script society has handed her, to reclassify her departure from sin to self-realisation, ergo, the very need to insist upon the distinction betrays how heavily the charge of abandonment weighs. The novel does not resolve this tension into a comfortable verdict. It holds the cost and the necessity of her freedom in unflinching simultaneity, asking the reader to feel both the son’s desolation and the woman’s right, and refusing to let either cancel the other.

She rebels against the traditional spaces allotted to women, proving she is ready to sacrifice her domestic life for artistic passion and personal liberty. Through the character of Gayatri, Roy explores woman’s fundamental need for autonomy. Gayatri seeks to escape her husband’s domineering nature; her ultimate departure

from the family serves as a physical manifestation of her internal transformation. By breaking away from the gendered restrictions imposed upon her, she courageously chooses a path defined by independence and individuality.

Art as Emancipation: The quest for creative freedom

A large part of Gayatri's fight is her strong desire for creative freedom. Before marriage she loved dance, music, and painting, but her husband would not let her follow her passions. After marriage she secretly attends an art school, and with the help of friends such as Spies and Beryl de Zoete she grows more determined to follow her dreams. She believes that creativity is not merely a hobby but a means by which women may gain knowledge and independence.

Gayatri's art is best understood, in the terms of this paper, as the building of a space of her own in the most intimate sense. Denied a public sphere and confined to a home that belongs, in every meaningful way, to her husband and child, she discovers in painting a territory that no one can allot or withhold an interior room into which she can withdraw and within which she is sovereign. That she must first attend her art school in secret tells us how thoroughly even this inward space had been forbidden her, and how subversive the simple act of making a picture becomes when performed by a woman who has been assigned only the making of meals. Her friendships with Spies and de Zoete matter because they offer her, for the first time, a community that recognises her as an artist rather than as a wife, and in their recognition, she glimpses the self that domesticity had rendered invisible. Creativity, for Gayatri, is thus not an escape from reality but the instrument of her self-knowledge, the practice through which she discovers what, beneath all her assigned roles, she actually is.

From Silent Wife to Self: Reclaiming Identity

Gayatri's journey from a silent wife to a confident artist shows the importance of women's talents being recognised and valued. By rejecting marriage as a form of imprisonment and seeking freedom for herself, she takes control of her identity beyond being merely a mother or a part of the Indian national struggle. While Indian women of the time were encouraged to sacrifice for the country's freedom, Gayatri shows that personal freedom is no less important. Her time in Bali symbolises a liberated womanhood in which art helps her find independence. Yet her freedom comes with loneliness and separation from her son, showing that reclaiming oneself is difficult but necessary.

The trajectory from silence to speech, from wife to artist, follows the deep grammar of the female Künstlerroman the narrative of the woman who becomes an artist in which the heroine's aesthetic awakening is inseparable from her struggle against the roles prescribed for her sex. What distinguishes Roy's handling of the form is its refusal of triumphalism. Bali is a place of liberation, but it is also a place of exile; the same distance that frees Gayatri from the cage severs her from her child, and the novel will not let us forget that the two are aspects of a single act. This

is the hard truth at the centre of the book: that for a woman of Gayatri's time and place, selfhood and belonging had been made mutually exclusive, so that to claim the one was necessarily to forfeit the other. Her loneliness is not a flaw in her liberation but the measure of how high the walls had been built.

In the end, Gayatri's search for identity in *All the Lives We Never Lived* is a powerful message about the importance of women's inner lives. By choosing her desires and her creativity over social expectation, she fashions a story of feminist courage, reminding us that freedom must be fought for.

Feminist Genealogies: Fuller, Woolf, and the Room of One's Own

There are several feminist writers who argue in their works that woman must rebel for her selfhood, freedom, and space. Feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich, Margaret Fuller, and Elaine Showalter are well known for promoting a cultural change that opposes the prevailing patriarchal ideologies that denied women their identity in the twentieth century. They help women create a solid and positive individual identity by critically analysing the ideas of female personal, social, and rational identity. Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* profoundly opposes the patriarchal rejection of women's identity by portraying women not as secondary to men but as independent individuals capable of complete self-realisation. In a patriarchal society the home often confines women, limiting their creativity and independence. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century,* she writes:

> What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. If fewer talents were given her, yet if allowed the free and full employment of these, so that she will not complain. (Fuller 27)

Fuller's plea, written in 1845, and Beauvoir's formulation, written more than a century later, frame Gayatri's story from either side of history, and they reveal how little the fundamental demand had changed in the intervening decades. Fuller asks not for dominion but for growth for the woman to be permitted, like any other nature, the "free and full employment" of whatever powers she possesses. This is exactly what Gayatri is denied and exactly what she leaves to claim. The genealogy extends, too, to Virginia Woolf, whose argument that a woman needs a room of her own and an independent income in order to create gives the spatial vocabulary of this paper its most celebrated expression. Read alongside Fuller and Woolf, Gayatri ceases to be an isolated transgressor and becomes the fictional embodiment of a long tradition of feminist thought that has insisted, across two centuries, that selfhood requires space literal, economic, and imaginative and that to deny a woman space is to deny her a self.

Redefining Masculinity: Dismantling the Gendered Cage

Although Gayatri's decision to abandon her son for her artistic passion is questionable from an ethical and moral standpoint, the longing for inner freedom

she represents resonates with all Indian women. “By framing the female body as a critical site of political resistance, both texts challenge traditional definitions of freedom and expose the pervasive nature of violence in social control” (Kim 359). Like Gayatri, many women possess dreams and talents that deserve recognition and appreciation, and these aspirations should not be stifled by the limitations of gendered spaces. Margaret Fuller admits as much when she observes that women’s creativity is confined within the four walls of the home, and Virginia Woolf likewise insists that women need intellectual space in which to explore and prove themselves. Men must take the initiative to dismantle these gendered spaces by sharing equally in domestic labour; only then will the home cease to be a cage for women. Furthermore, men should actively respect and support women’s individual talents and identities. Masculinity must be redefined so that traditional gendered spaces are remade to give equal importance to a woman’s autonomy and self-expression. “Psychological pressures caused by treatment side-effects such as erectile dysfunction require reinterpretation of the meanings and impacts of these side-effects on masculinity” (Talvitie et al. 763).

It is on this constructive note that the argument must end, for the analysis of confinement is finally valuable only insofar as it points toward release, and release cannot be the work of women alone. If gendered space is constructed by those in positions of power, as this paper began by asserting, then its dismantling requires the participation of those who have most benefited from it. The redefinition of masculinity that Roy’s novel implicitly calls for is not a diminishment of men but an enlargement of the human, an invitation to surrender a hoarded freedom in exchange for a shared one. So long as the home remains a space a woman cannot leave and a man need never tend, the tragic arithmetic of Gayatri’s life in which selfhood could be purchased only at the price of belonging will continue to govern the lives of women who possess neither her courage nor her means. The task the novel sets its readers, then, is to imagine and to build a world in which no future Gayatri is compelled to choose between her child and herself, because the spaces of home and world have at last been made equally hers.

Conclusion

Anuradha Roy’s *All the Lives We Never Lived* transforms the abstract sociology of gendered space into the lived drama of a single, unforgettable woman, and in doing so it makes visible the bars of a cage that most of its inhabitants have been taught not to see. Through Gayatri, the novel demonstrates that the division of the world into masculine outdoors and feminine indoors is neither natural nor neutral but a structure of power, sustained by the myth of female frailty and enforced by the silent pedagogy of walls. Gayatri’s flight is costly, and the novel honours that cost; but it is also a refusal, and in her refusal the book locates a form of courage that the official histories of her age, preoccupied with the freedom of nations, entirely overlooked. Read through the lens of spatial disparity, her story becomes more than a portrait of one woman’s rebellion. It becomes an argument that the

quest for selfhood is inseparable from the quest for space, and that a society which would call itself free must extend that freedom to the half of humanity it has so long confined indoors.

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