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*Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics in Contemporary Indian
English Writings*

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Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics in Contemporary Indian English Writings¹

Abstract

*This Paper examines the relatively unexplored spatial aspects of the queer literary texts which can provide effective tools to unearth the still uncharted areas of queer and literary studies when perceived through the lens of queer geography, especially in the Indian context. It is in this light that Kuhu Sharma Chanana tries to investigate certain specific spaces like train compartments, railway stations, public parks, gay-bars, streets and public toilets. For this purpose, the author has critiqued Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*, *Six Inches*, *Lady Lolita's Lover* and Michael Malik's "Dreams and Desires in Srinagar". She has used Foucault's concept of heterotopias, Michel de Certeau, Amy Ritcher and Wolfgang Schivelbusch's theorization of railway navigation, Baudelaire's and Benjamin's notion of flaneur and Dianne Chisholm's idea of cruising flaneur.*

Keywords: *Flaneur*, travelling imaginations, gay spaces, queer gaze, heterotopias

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The queer space as focus of inquiry gained momentum in the last decade when scholars had started concentrating on specific spaces vis-à-vis non- normative sexual and gender identity. For instance works on the issues regarding work, gender and space (McDowell 1997), queer identity and citizenship (Bell and Binnie 2000), bisexuality and space (Hemmings 2002), domestic spaces and lesbian identity (Valentine 1989) have fired the imagination of the academics and deconstructed the hegemonic structures to such a degree that Hubbard has gone to the extent of stating that “straight geographies have gone queer too”(Hubbard 2007, p.11).The reciprocal negotiation between space and identity constantly contests, challenges and reorients the everyday practices of normative spaces.

The symbiotic relationship between space and gay identity has also been the subject of many scholarly works and out of which George Chauncey’s *Gay New York: Gender, Urban, Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (1994) holds an important position. As Chauncey succinctly charts out that prior to the Stonewall movement², there was a strategic fine balancing of hide and seek in terms of visibility and camouflage by the gay individuals to combat the oppressive forces and their community formation relied on shared codes of communication. To quote his words:

Gay men developed a highly sophisticated system of subcultural codes---codes of dress, speech and style---that enabled them to recognize one another on streets, at work, and at parties and bars, and to carry on intricate conversations whose coded meaning was unintelligible to potentially hostile people around them. (Chauncey 1994, p. 4)

This is specially true in the Indian context as due to the pre-colonial draconian law, implemented according to Sec. 377 (that has been repealed only recently) which criminalized penetrative sex between two same-sex individuals, gay men have been at the higher risk of ostracization as compared to lesbians. And precisely for this reason, the public exposition of their sexuality is fraught with greater dangers and warrants a fine balancing of visibility (to enable them to communicate in subtle ways and find partners)

² Stonewall movement refers to a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by the members of the queer community against a police raid that took place in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City. This rebellion is considered a watershed moment in the queer liberation movement.

and secrecy. On account of attendant patriarchal privileges, gays have more access to public spaces, greater financial autonomy and mobility as compared to the other queer entities such as lesbians and transgenders, but the issue of sodomy makes them more vulnerable in the eyes of the law till recently. In a seminar conducted by IIAS (Indian Institute of Advanced Studies) in 2012 on Gay Subcultures, Akhil Katyal (a member of the faculty at Ambedkar University) presented a paper tentatively “Agha Shahid Ali and the Black Shoe” in which he discussed as how Shahid had talked about evading the police scrutiny inside the public transportation like buses by looking at the black shoes of police men who were in plain clothes to catch the offenders. During an informal discussion after the seminar with Raj Rao (the author of India’s first gay novel in English, *The Boyfriend*), Rao told me that it is a common gay code to look out for police presence in public spaces. Thus the gay subcultures have their specific codes to belie the social opprobrium and yet finding potential partners and suitable cruising spaces.

It is in this light that I try to investigate certain specific spaces like train-compartments, railway stations, streets and festival sites. The exploration of the gay sexuality at these spaces reveals unique camouflage techniques and gay codes of conduct prevalent in the gay subculture. These codes and techniques synchronise the ambivalent threads of secrecy and perspicuity. For this purpose, I have critiqued Raj Rao’s *The Boyfriend*, *Six Inches*, *Lady Lolita’s Lover* and Nikhil Yadav’s “Upstairs Downstairs”. I have used Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, Michel de Certeau, Amy Ritcher and Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s theorization of railway navigation, Baudelaire and Benjamin’s notion of flaneur and Dianne Chisholm’s idea of cruising flaneur.

Gay Flanerie and the Travelling Imagination

First of all I am going to excavate the heterotopic site of train space and other modes of travelling imaginations that create liminal fluid spaces, where the flourishing of non-normative desires takes place. It appears that the train is not only an interesting site of intersection of private and public spheres but also a fine example of Foucauldian heterotopias.

According to Foucault (as expressed in “Of Other Spaces”):

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience. (foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en.html)

Foucault further asserts that there are certain identities like adolescents, menstruating and pregnant women, who are in crisis with their environment. He argues that boarding schools in its nineteenth century form or military services for young man, the train and honeymoon hotels are all examples of ‘heterotopias of crisis’ because the “first manifestations of sexual virility were in fact supposed to take place ‘elsewhere’ than at home. For girls, there was, until the middle of the twentieth century, a tradition called the ‘honeymoon trip’ which was an ancestral theme. The young woman’s deflowering could take place ‘nowhere’ and at the moment of its occurrence the train or honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of this nowhere, this heterotopia without geographical markers.” (http://www.foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en.html).

Little wonder the train has been the center space for sexual-encounters of queer people in Raj Rao’s *The Boyfriend, Six Inches*, Sarojini Sahoo’s “Behind the Scene” and Abdul Khalid Rashid’s “Incomplete Human”. Apropos of this Giti Thadani in *Sakhiyani* by quoting Sonia Singh’s article, “A lesbian to lean on (*Chastity*, July 1994) affirms that there is a considerable amount of anxiety pertaining to the flourishing of lesbian relationships on account of easily available homosocial spaces in the ladies compartments of local trains. Thadani states that there is a nagging demand to create heterosocial spaces as compared to homosocial ones in order to mitigate lesbianism. Patently the politics of annihilating the homoerotic social places by creating more heterosexual spaces has a larger sinister agenda.

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

To quote Sukthankar:

The above constructs lesbian experiences as arising from the fact that homosociality is more easily accepted, leading to lesbian experimentation. The moment that heterosociality is accepted this 'problem' supposedly will be eradicated. (Sukthankar 1999, p. 7)

This indicates the raffish potential of train as a site that promotes eschewing of essentialist notion of sexuality. Similarly in Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra's story, "Chocolate Charcha" or "Discussing Chocolate" published in 1924, a self reflexive discussion on Ugra's gay writings takes place in the train itself. The entire story starts with a moving train and ends within a train. The whole story is a discussion about whether writing about gay-sex gives impetus to homosexuality or it is just an act of lay baring this hidden aspect of sexuality. In fact as early as 1924, the use of moving train for homoerotic articulation became conspicuous.

Now to investigate further Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*, let me first briefly sketch the outline of this first gay novel (by an Indian in English) published in 2003. The protagonist Yudi is a middle aged, upper middle class, English-speaking, sophisticated man who moves around in local trains and in the process meets the love of his life Miland, a working class, *dalit* and homophobic gay man who later tries to use his sexuality to extract money. Miland later marries a woman leaving Yudi heart broken. The story presents an interesting backdrop of trains, railway stations, cruising parks, public toilets and through the queer gaze of Yudi these places appear to present an alternative cartography of Mumbai. Both the anonymity and the connectedness of the city life have been documented through the metonymic signifier of these public and semi-public spheres. Apropos of the specific ethos of Mumbai city, it is significant to quote the following lines from Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*:

Bombay is a...city of migrant men without women; a city in heat. The womanless rickshaw wallahs, the bollywood wannabes, the fashion models, and sailors from many countries---all in search of some heat, a hurried furtive fuck in whatever hidden corner the world will permit them. They do it in trains, railway stations, the back of taxis, parks, urinals. The rocks by the sea are a favorite. Along Carter Road in Bandra, at Scandal Point in Malabar Hill, rows of couples are wrapped in each other on the rocks, all facing the sea. It is no matter that the thousands of people walking by can see them, because

they can see only their backs, not their faces, and the lovers to the left and the right of them are all busy with each other, kissing, feeling. Anonymity is erotic. That woman hanging out clothes on her balcony, with the hair long and wet around her shoulders from her bath. The crowds of girls in short skirts outside the Catholic colleges. 'The whole city is a bedroom', says my maid. She knows about the memsahibs who come to meet their drivers at Haji Ali. (Mehta 2005, p. 176-177).

These spaces have been reinvested with heterosexual liaisons, but Yudi's Mumbai has been reclaimed by rewriting and bending the rules of desire by the queer identity of Yudi. It creates radical ruptures in the heterosexual cartography of the city, and the train as a heterotopic site with no geographical markers plays a significant part in this connection. The Mumbai locals are overcrowded unlike the tube trains of the western world and hence there cannot be any concept of the personal space in these local trains and unintentionally one is bound to touch and to be touched in the cramped compartments of these locals and Yudi deliciously relishes these daily ephemeral erotic encounters at these spheres. The densely crowded space of a train compartment unwittingly challenges the received notion of straight spatiality in a convoluted manner. In fact by using his gaydar, he is able to locate his potential partner from a distance and suddenly the entire complexion of the compartment changes for him dramatically:

The train had to be quite full of people to have a go at each other...By the time they reached Bombay Central, all the seats were taken and the people were beginning to press on each other in aisles. In the Virar trains that Yudi caught, this happened all the time, and he was thankful for it. Rubbing his body against someone's was the best way to handle the tedium of the journey—it was much better than reading or singing bhajans or playing cards. (Rao 2003, p. 19)

Yudi is even aware as which station brings what kind of queer commuters. While describing Dadar and Bandra stations he states:

The former was famous for its mobs of working men who switched from Central to Western Railway, and vice versa, on their way to office and home. The latter, the queen of the suburbs as it was appropriately called, was the hot spot in town for queens". (ibid. p. 21)

Another interesting aspect of his satiation of queer desires through train space is that despite the 'immobility' and static 'rest' that are associated with train-travel, Yudi's erotic journey through static train compartment cannot be termed as 'dead time'(a term given by

Wolfgang Schivelbusch while cogitating about conceptions of space and time vis-à-vis a railway journey). According to him, only the points of departure and destination hold importance and because of which the experience of the journey is valueless and can be realized only as “dead time” (Schivelbusch 1986, pp. 37, 55). As Michel de Certeau has also postulated that in a train journey, “As always, one has to get out”, and in this “there are only lost paradises. (Certeau 1984, p. 114). As Certeau asks, “Is the terminal the end of an illusion. (ibid., p.114). He documents a passenger’s re-entry into the hustle and bustle of the station:

In the mobile world of the train station, the immobile machine suddenly seems monumental and incongruous in its mute idol-like inertia, a sort of god-undone. Everyone goes back to work at the place he has been given...the incarceration vacation is over. (ibid., p. 114)

But as opposed to this argument, Yudi’s renegotiation of sexual identity is not limited to only train space and time and is not coterminous with the idea of ‘dead time’ but rather it turns the ‘dead time’ into ‘transformative time’ because Yudi’s sexual escapades with Miland though start at a train compartment but exceed to other places like home, streets, restaurants, bars and even market spaces. Thus the time spent at a railway compartment acts as a catalyst to reorient the time and space outside the train compartment as well. The lessons of the train compartment indeed get translated into wider world as well and there is no lost utopia in this sense.

In fact in his erotic quest, Yudi seems to be loitering in and out of these trains and a picture of his being a cruising *flaneur* emerges. Let me briefly sketch the concept of *flaneur* before delving into deeper discussion on this topic in the context of the unusual queer *flaneur*. The idea of *flaneur* first made its appearance in the writings of Baudelaire. *Flaneur* is a casual wanderer, idle stroller, an aesthetic and dandy who has a detached observation of modern city life. In the twentieth century the figure of *flaneur* returns through Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (an unfinished project on the city life of Paris in the 19th century which was later published by Harvard University Press in 1999). In fact in 1929 he wrote an essay entitled “The Return of the *Flaneur*” but it was through the *Arcades Project* that the idea of a *flaneur* got fully conceptualized in his writings. The Arcades of Paris were long past but he revisited them through the eyes of a casual stroller who was an urban walker and presented a kaleidoscopic vision of Arcades that were

imbued with the delicate aspect of the city life including a certain kind of consumerism. It is in this respect that the shops, café and bars become the part of the street of which this idle stroller makes a mental note. The sheer joy of *flaneur's* gaze has been described in these words by Benjamin as quoted by Rignall:

The street becomes the dwelling of the *flaneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of the house as a citizen in his four walls. (Rignall 2004, p. 18)

The city becomes both familiar and fantastic at the same time through his specific gaze. Bobby Seal in “Baudelaire, Benjamin and the Birth of the *Flaneur*” by quoting Martina Lauster postulates this idea in these words that a *flaneur* is, the viewer who takes pleasure in abandoning himself to the artificial world of high capitalist civilization. One could describe this figure as the viewing device through which Benjamin formulates his own theoretical assumptions concerning modernity, converging in a Marxist critique of commodity fetishism. (<http://psychogeographicreview.com/ baudelaire-benjamin-and-the-birth-of-the-flaneur>)

Thus this urban *flaneur* has largely been a male, privileged figure and in the process of *flanerie* a certain sort of barter and commodity exchange takes place as he dwells through streets and market places. In fact in this sense the consumption of the city is shown through identities that have certain privileges of class and gender. No wonder the concept of female *flaneur* has largely been alien till recent times. Scholars like Wolf and Pollock have talked emphatically about the impossibility of a female *flaneur*. Janet Wolff in her essay, “The Invisible *Flaneuse*: Women and the Literature Invisibility” gives the example of George Sand who has to disguise herself as a boy to experience Paris life in 1831:

The disguise made the life of the *flaneur* available to her, as she knew very well, she could not adopt the non-existent role of a *flaneuse*. Women could not stroll alone in the city. (Wolff 2004, p. 16)

In fact Phadke in *Why Loiter* talks about the nagging problems regarding women's accessibility to public spaces in specific Indian context and why there is a need of aimless loitering for women in order to reclaim the public spaces. Thus there is a greater need to turn to the public places like streets, bus stops, railway stations, metro stations, markets,

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

and parks to analyse the embodied experience there. I would further like to elaborate on the concept of cruising *flaneur*. This term has been effectively employed by Dianne Chisholm in *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City*. Charting out not only the similarities but also the dissimilarities, Chisholm affirms:

Unlike the classical *flaneur*, who has no object, the cruising *flaneur* is on the lookout for love, where the gay gaze is misrecognized for the look of the commodity. A city lover, as much a lover of his or her own sex, the cruising *flaneur* gravitates to the city's hot spots in search for a companion. (Chisholm 2005, p. 47)

Thus the idea of traditional flaneur has gone through a sea change and becomes quite fluid and dynamic over a period of time. The transience of gay cruising is coterminous with the ephemerality of train space and the act of flanerie. The whole experience of a cruising flaneur is fraught with a certain kind of 'emplacement' and constant movement which mitigate overt visibility and consequent violence. Thus strategically this mutable kind of erotic experience in a moving space is quite suitable for gay encounters and in this sense the constant emplacement of a traditional flaneur corresponds with the gay flaneur. Also I beg to differ from Dianne Chisholm on the idea that cruising flaneur is not aimless because he is looking for love. The cruising flaneur (specially in the texts under discussion) is not looking for stable partnership and love but mainly aspires for just ephemeral erotic exchange (no purposeful quest for love is indicated here). The yet another intersecting zone between cruising flaneur and traditional flaneur is their subversive potentiality to critique normativity. The traditional flaneur's aimless loitering is a critique of modern life as it presents a stark contrast to the meaningless sick hurry of modern life by highlighting the purposefulness of the so-called aimless loitering as in the process he develops a profound observation regarding the life that surrounds him. Similarly the cruising flaneur's subversive potential is inherent in the fact that the so-called straight places are reconfigured as queer spaces through not only his queer gaze but also by his relentless cruising. Lastly as the traditional flaneur is incognito to fellow-walkers, similarly the gay identity and cruising of a queer flaneur are invisible to straight passengers and fellow-travelers.

In this light the queer identity of Yudi and his loitering through trains and cruising in public toilets of railway stations and ephemeral erotic exchange in trains as compared to the materialistic barter offered by the traditional male *flaneur* dismantle the spatial privileges accorded to a consumerist male figure of a *flaneur*. In this respect this gay cruising figure through his aimless loitering in trains and the associated spaces like public toilets and railway stations with *dalit* and working class men not only changes the heteronormative complexion of these spaces but also disrupts the hierarchy of gender, class and caste. And as Richter describes the train space as a “a socially diverse and fluid space capable of blurring the lines of class and caste” (Richter 2005, p. 5). Similarly Wolfgang Schivelbush depicts railway compartment as “the chariots of equality [and] freedom”, for travelers in a train find themselves equalized by their shared situation of technological equality (Schivelbush 1986, pp.71-72). Thus the flaner through the train space is conducive for re-making and revising the social identity. The traditional *flaneur* is a consumer and a certain kind of exchange of commodity takes place there, but here Yudi’s currency of exchange is erotic pleasure (which brings a paradigmatic shift in the concept of the conventional *flaneur*), no matter how so ever mutable it is. In this aspect the fluid and always in a movement kind of liminal and heterotopic space of train compartment, combined with the queer identity of cruising *flanerie* of Yudi, presents a counter site that the city of Mumbai offers. Yudi proudly introspects that despite being forty and having grey hair, he has never paid for sex although later Miland does extract some money out of him but by and large the exchange of commodity has always been mutual sexual pleasure.

In fact not only the mobile space of a train compartment with no geographical markers corresponds with Yudi’s liminal queer identity but also the associative spaces like railway stations provide a different kind of solace and acceptance to his non-normativity. No wonder the very first paragraph of the novel is saturated with Yudi’s experience of comfort and solace that he feels at these places. The novel opens with these lines:

Churchgate station is a tranquil place on a Sunday morning. It doesn’t choke with humanity as it does Monday to Saturday. The station is an asylum for Bombay’s down and out, but on a Sunday morning one is unlikely to find many bootblacks. Even they like to forget their Cherry Blossom tins and loll about in bed till mid day, like the youngsters in high rises on Cuffe Parade and Malabar Hill. On a

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

Sunday morning, one doesn't see urchins greedily finishing the remnants of a discarded bottle of Energee, or a Styrofoam cup of coffee, nor one does bump into skinny pimps and fleshy prostitutes. (Rao 1999, p. 1)

Thus the station becomes, as he has emphasized in the above mentioned paragraph, an asylum for all kinds of marginalized entities where everyone can have his or her own share of meat. Thus the constant visibility of various kinds of marginalized entities discriminated on the basis of class, caste and gender creates a unique place of implicit solidarity that further produces a space for coalition politics and it is in this manner that train and its associative spaces open an entry for gay Yudi in a way that no other space offers to him. Little wonder the entire novel is soaked with his queer experiences either inside a train or associative spaces around it. It reminds me of a scene described in yet another gay novel by Raj Rao entitled *Lady Lolita's Lover* that depicts a train as a honeymoon site where the deflowering takes place as mentioned by Foucault in his concept of heterotopias. Interestingly here the associative space around a train is a tunnel which is known as 'kissing tunnel'. To quote from the text:

The cream-and-blue mini train, hauled by a steam engine that huffed and puffed, came to be known as the toy train and matchbox train, and was a great hit with children and adults alike. It went through a tunnel known as One Kiss Tunnel, long enough for lovers to have just one kiss. (Rao 1999, p. 42)

It clearly reflects the radical potential of the varied variety of associative spaces around a train that can puncture the idea of normalcy potently. These spheres are by and large public spaces but in certain situations act like semi-public spaces on account of a certain kind of privacy that these domains offer.

Now when we compare the exposition of the gay identity with the lesbian and transgender entities in the train spaces, the privileges accorded to gay identity within queer circles become conspicuous. Despite radicalizing the train space through Sapphic desire, nowhere the lesbian lovers in the story, "Behind the Scene" by Sarojini Sahoo and in the novel of Anita Nair (*Ladies Coupe*) come close to the unabashed, frequent queer *flanerie* of Rao's Yudi who appropriates the train space through constant and spontaneous loitering while searching for potent partners. Yudi not only reinvests the train space with gay desire

and changes its heteropatriarchal complexion, but also vehemently appropriates the associative places like railway station, platform and public toilets. Nowhere in the literary texts we find the exposition of lesbian longing in such unabashed manner as by Yudi in Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend*. Similarly the lovers in "Behind the Scene" are able to explore their sexual identities and the protagonist in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is able to narrate her sexual escapades, but the hijra in "Incomplete Human" is unable to even expose her/ his identity spontaneously, let alone exploring her/his sexual identity in a train space. Thus by documenting these queer entities within a single space of train, one is able to decipher the hierarchal organization of gays, lesbians and transgenders within lgbtq circles.

While discussing train as a fertile and suitable ground to unearth the queer identities because of the heterotopic nature of this space, it is equally important to once again bring Michel de Certeau's theorization of railway navigation into discussion. At one level it corresponds with the Foucauldian idea of train as heterotopia in more than many ways. To quote from the text:

A travelling incarceration. Immobile inside the train, seeing immobile things slip by. What is happening? Nothing is moving inside or outside the train. The unchanging traveller is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car, which is a perfect actualization of the rational utopia. Control and food move from pigeonhole to pigeonhole: 'Tickets, please . . .' 'Sandwiches? Beer? Coffee? ...' Only the restrooms offer an escape from the closed system...Except for this lapse given over to excesses, everything has its place in a grid work. Only a rationalized cell travels. A bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible the production of an order, a closed and autonomous insularity—that is what can traverse space and make itself independent of local roots. (Certeau 1984, p. 111)

Certeau's railway compartment internalizes order in such a way that it subverts surveillance. According to Certeau, the immobility within mobility transcends and refashions the time-space compression. In this way a peculiar way of disordering of order takes place. The explicit order hides curious and implicit subversion.

Between the immobility of the inside and that of the outside a certain quid pro quo is introduced, a slender blade that inverts their stability. The chasm is produced by the windowpane and the rail...the iron rail whose straight line cuts through space and transforms the serene identities of the soil into the speed with which they slip away into the distance. The windowpane is what allows us to see, and the rail, what allows us to move through. These are two complementary modes of separation. The first

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

creates the spectator's distance: You shall not touch; the more you see, the less you hold—a dispossession of the hand in favor of a greater trajectory for the eye. The second inscribes, indefinitely, the injunction to pass on; it is its order written in a single but endless line: go, leave, this is not your country, and neither is that—an imperative of separation which obliges one to pay for an abstract ocular domination of space by leaving behind any proper place, by losing one's footing. (ibid., p. 112)

Hence the pleasure of seeing objects from which one is separated from evokes a sense of uncharted liberty and freedom that colours the identity and the space alike. Thus in a unique sense, the flouting of surveillance takes place despite a certain sort of order being organized within the immobile space of compartment that intersects through and contrasted with mobility of train and a distant fantasmic viewing of scenery takes place through window panes whose iron grid and glass provide a sense of safety. Certeau's argument seems to be about distance (which fits in well with the idea of the flaneur) that both collapses and extends the difference between inside and outside. The outside is barred by the rod across the window, even as the outside exists in symmetrical relation to the inside. What is interesting about such an argument is that it takes us back to the idea of heterotopias: the "outside" can seem like a separate space but it exists only in relation to the "inside." In other words, there is no such thing as privacy. The public world always impinges on the private, and vice versa. No wonder Certeau's railway compartment is a place where "dreams and desires resign supreme" (ibid. p.111). He compares railway journey with the fantasy laden voyages described in Jules Verne's works.

There is something at once incarcerational and navigational about railroad travel; like Jules Verne's ships and submarines, it combines dreams with technology. The 'speculative' returns, located in the very heart of the mechanical order. Contraries coincide for the duration of a journey. A strange moment in which a society fabricates spectators and transgressors of spaces. (ibid., p. 113)

In this manner one can see a similarity between Certeau and Foucault who has also catalogued train, boat or ship in the same bracket and called them liminal spaces of heterotopias where non-normative desires that cannot find expression anywhere find concrete and fruitful manifestations. Taking a clue from this I have tried to investigate the short story, "Dreams and Desires in Srinagar" from this perspective. This story centers around the sex escapades of a Kashmiri youth with a Delhi based professional on a boat.

Their sexual rendezvous corresponds with the vivid depiction of a floating boat which serves the specific purpose of providing a fluid heterotopia for the sexual negotiations of the two extremely different men---one a Kashmiri youth with a traditional upbringing and the other a middle-aged educated professional from Delhi. The extreme disparity in terms of gay encounter, class and ethnicity gets mitigated in the fluid no-where space of boat as boat is always in a state of motion with no fixities and definitives and cannot be slated as belonging to one space and identity only. To quote from the text:

We moved back to the rear deck and onto the threadbare sofa that faced the water. We sat side by side, with legs touching. What had played out between us moments before didn't now mean that we had to keep space between skin For me the musk of crystallized sweat on a man is pure sex. (Malik 2012, pp. 22-23)

This entire scene in a boat is followed by a dream like sequence that runs into the mind of the narrator where he envisages copulation with this young Kashmiri boy. Right in the middle of the lake inside the boat he imagines and refashions the boat space in his mind as an ideal sphere where he gets resuscitated by the young Kashmiri boy. In this manner the real and imagined spaces come together to form that third space which is described by Soja in these words:

Thirdspace too can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the 'real' material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality. (Soja 1996, p. 6)

Interestingly just after this scene, the narrator thinks about another of his gay encounter that has taken place in yet another heterotopic site---the metro train at Delhi. In a cramped railway compartment the compulsive touching of each other's body leads to an actual gay encounter amidst smarm of people. So the amalgam of both train and boat as fluid heterotopic sites which seem to be most suitable for non-normative sexual transactions becomes conspicuous here. Also it in a specific way combines the imagined space of boat as a site of gay copulation with the actual site of train through the play of memory at a given time; and this brings into discussion Lefebvre's concept of trialectics of spatiality as opposed to the binary organization of spaces only as real and imagined. According to Soja, Lefebvre is successfully able to weave three different kinds of spaces namely the 'perceived spaces of

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

materialized spatial practice’; the conceived spaces he depicts as ‘representation of spaces’ and the ‘representational spaces’. Now the mental space created by the narrator, through combining the lived space of train with the imagined space of heterotopic site and by bringing a reconciliation of the two spaces through the play of memory, forms that unique third space which encapsulates transference of huge magnitude. And in this fashion at one level, it is more potent than the lived spaces to explore the deviant desires. The memory of the train compartment becomes the palimpsest of the boat spaces. No wonder Soja compares these ‘spaces of representation’ with heterotopias. However by juxtaposing the imagined space of boat with the lived space of train, the narrator is able to transcend these spaces to ‘representational spaces’ (to quote Lefebvre) or ‘third space’ (to quote Soja) where the optimization of these radical spaces can be realized both by the protagonist and the readers. Talking about the explosive potential of the ‘third space’ Soja contends:

thirdspace is knowable and unknowable, real and imagined life, world of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in *spatial praxis*, the transformation of the (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed power. (Soja 1996, p. 31)

Thus the affirmation of the boat site as a transgressive heterotopic site goes a notch further as in this story through the power of imagination and play of memory it opens rabid fissures that are far more powerful than the Foucauldian idea of considering boat as a heterotopic site.

However as opposed to this gay fictional narrative, in the lesbian story, “The Edge of the World” by Anisha Sridhar, the radicalization of space as presented by the fluidity and liminality of boat space has not been realized by the characters fully. It is a story of two lesbian lovers, Rosa and Kaavya. Since society disapproves their relationship, they decide to elope. However one of them develops cold feet due to the compulsions of the home and the society while the other one runs away. The entire story is an intriguing interplay between the constraining traditional heterosexual spaces of home and their escape from these spaces through boat which incidentally belongs to Rosa’s father.

One Sunday afternoon they had stolen the boat of Rosa's father, while he was sleeping. In the heady rush of the theft, Rosa had pushed the little wooden boat into the creek as Kaavya swung the oars haphazardly. 'Where are we going?' Rosa asked. 'Somewhere far, far away where we can be together forever and ever'. Kaavya dips the oars in the water and pulled. The boat spun slowly. Ripples broke up the reflection of the coconut trees, and when Rosa looked in the water it was as if the world shimmered at her in thousand new ways. "Faster! Faster!" she egged Kaavya on. But Kaavya's little arms were getting tired, and the boat, instead of moving forward, simply continued to spin lazily in the same spot. They were going nowhere. (Sridhar 2012, pp. 72-73)

Interestingly enough, the boat belongs to the patriarchal father who after his retirement has allowed Rosa to use the boat for daily errands. Thus using the means provided by her father for the articulation of their non-normative sexuality symbolically represents reversing the hetero-patriarchal paradigm.

In fact while in the boat their imagination runs amok and the boat becomes a means to transport them to an island far away and it is not a coincidence that the earliest of the lesbian literary signatures by Sappho had vivid descriptions of Lesbos, an island that was supposed to be a home for lesbians. So an imaginary island where no patriarchal scrutiny is there has been persistent in the imagination of lot of lesbian writers. Suniti Namjoshi's *Mothers of Maya Dip* also depicts an island, Maya Dip which again is a women only homosocial domain. Thus the boat becomes a means to transport them to a utopian space where the interrogation of heteronormative configuration of space is a possibility. To quote from the text:

The next time they took Rosa's father's boat, they didn't bother with the oars. They sat, rocking gently in the water, and pretended they were on an island far far away...Movement rocked the boat gently, and Rosa felt Kaavya's arms around her. She felt soft kisses on her neck, her chin, when their lips finally met. (ibid., p. 74)

Like the protagonist of the gay story, "Dreams and Desires in Srinagar", the lovers in this story too are able to create an imaginary utopian space ideal for the articulation of their lesbian longings. But when finally the time for realizing it comes by using another fluid means of transportation (by a bus) they fail. In fact unlike the promise of future meeting that the gay couple exudes in "Dreams and Desires in Srinagar", the 'lesbian panic' grips one of

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

the lesbian lovers towards the end of the story and while one of them remains in the bus cajoling her partner to come, the other remains stranded on the road:

Kaavya was two steps ahead of Rosa, already on the bus, when it rumbled to life, throwing exhaust fumes in the air. ‘Come on!’ Kaavya said, her voice shrill with irritation and panic as the driver shifted gears. She tugged at Rosa’s hand---but Rosa was like stone. Thus bus started to move, and Kaavya’s nails dragged across Rosa’s palm until finally all contact broke. In Kaavya’s eyes, the first shock of tears was beginning. But in Rosa’s there was nothing, neither comprehension nor love. She stared at Kaavya as if she were looking at stranger, as if she was watching a film. Then the bus turned the corner and pulled away from her forever. (ibid., p. 83)

At the very beginning of the story, there is a paragraph that depicts their escapades through boat and at the end of this paragraph there is a line that the boat takes them nowhere. This ‘unableness’ to take them anywhere becomes the leitmotif of the entire story.

Throughout the story despite showing a promise, this heterotopic space of boat and bus is unable to transcend the coercive environment of heteronormative surroundings and ultimately their travelling imagination and the fulfillment of their lesbian longings get aborted in these spaces itself. Thus unlike the gay story as mentioned above, these spaces do not act as ‘exit scapes’ to quote Wibke Strube’s term. In this sense one can gaze the effect of ‘lesbian panic’² on these spatial identities that despite having conducive environment and space, the lesbian protagonists of this story are unable to transgress the rigidity of the hegemonic heteronormativity, where as the gay protagonist reinvests the similar space of boat in a much more assimilative fashion and is able to reterritorialize it as a queer space. However the additional ontologies that include placelessness and movement, help in creating a queer friendly environment, and these stories excavate this aspect quite effectively. In this regard Larry Knopp’s observation in “From Lesbian and Gay Prospects to Queer Geographies: Pasts, Prospects and Possibilities” is quite pertinent. He observes:

The visibility that placement brings can make us vulnerable to violence as well as facilitate our marginalization and exclusion from the security and pleasures that placement typically brings members of dominant social groups. It is no surprise then that queers are frequently suspicious, fearful and unable to relate easily to the fixity and certainty inhering in most dominant ontology of ‘place’.

Indeed, many queers find a certain amount of solace, safety and pleasures being in motion or nowhere at all. Social and sexual encounters with other queers can feel safer in such contexts---on the move, passing through, inhabiting a space for a short amount of time---and a certain erotic (or just social) solidarity can, ironically emerge from the transient and semi-anonymous nature of such experiences. (Knopp 2007, p.23)

'lesbian panic' is a term used by Patricia Juliana Smith who defines lesbian panic thus: "In terms of narrative, lesbian panic is, quite simply, the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character--or conceivably an author--- is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism or lesbian desire. Caught in this state, the female character indulges in an action which causes 'emotional or physical harm to her and others....In an instance, the character is led by her sense of panic to commit irrational or illogical acts that inevitably work to the disadvantage or harm of her and others.(p. 567)

In fact Whatmore (1999) and Thirft (1996) employ actor-network and non-representational theories in a manner that is helpful in refashioning place when viewed from this sort of queer perspective. They invest both non-human and also human 'actants' with powers and there is an associative cartographical imagination in which interconnectedness is conceived as 'flows' as opposed to any kind of fixities and definitives. Thus the incompleteness, movement and transitoriness of these moving spaces work as a fertile ground for the negotiations of the alternative sexualities. By describing boat as a 'heterotopia par excellence', Foucault has given a special place to this space as mentioned by Soja in the chapter entitled "Heterotologies: Foucault and the Geohistory of Otherness" in *Third Space* where he is describing the sinuous path through which the overlap between heterotopias and third space takes a tangible form. In fact Foucault ends the chapter with a eulogy of boat space:

The boat is a place without a place, a floating piece of space that exists by itself yet is the greatest reserve of the footloose imagination 'given over to the infinity of the sea, floating from port to port, tack to tack, brothel to brothel...in civilization without boats, Foucault concludes, 'dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police takes the place of pirates (Soja 1996, p. 162)

While discussing about the cruising *flaneur*, I am also reminded of one very interesting story, "Upstairs, Downstairs" by Nikhil Yadav. In it the protagonist is a writer who presents a counter narrative of the city. In his own words he writes about the city that

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

is hidden from the majority of the people. He talks about the ‘mouldy bylanes’ and crumbling ruins of Delhi. In the process of discovering the underbelly of Delhi, his own gay identity gets enmeshed with the spaces of the city that have been largely away from the heterosexual gaze of the normative world and this helps in the production of a gay spatial culture. His necessity to discover uncharted territories of Delhi coupled with his gay identity opens before him a world that has been alien to a straight eye. The intriguing codes of recognition and camouflage that a queer person negotiates at these spaces have been effectively described in this story. The re-territorialization of straight city spaces through queer eye has been depicted by the writer in these words:

as the auto-rickshaw battled its way through evening traffic and lurched passed Pragati Maidan, Tilak Marg, India Gate and merry-go-around of Lutyens Delhi...All along the shadow lands of the city’s railway lines, parks and public toilets, a penumbral existence was beginning to wiggle its way out. Eyes lingering in curiosity, darting about seeking recognition for a common ache, and the quick second that passes between recognition and action. Where daily boredom can end in a flash with mouth gorging at crotches, with hands rubbing warmth...everything popping out joyously in this pasture of the fearful, empty, twilight spaces of the city. (Yadav 2012, p. 155)

His own *flanerie* through the underbelly of undiscovered Delhi and placing the queer desire at the center of it, even translating it inside a normative heterosexual household manifests itself during his visit to a small seminar in the posh colony of Delhi. From there he is picked up by a rich so-called heterosexual man. His friend Binno Nanda’s home is situated in one of those posh colonies where only drivers, servants and guards can be seen on the roads. Throughout the text a contrast has been presented between how a rich claims the city and how the minorities including sexual others reinvest the city. Even during one of the discussions, he makes it quite clear that he has specifically chosen not to write about Delhi’s power corridors but about the spaces that produce the counter culture of minorities’ existence intricately interwoven in this city of mighty people. He states:

Well that’s because I know more about the bowels and armpits of the city than its monuments, Binooo. My research is, you will excuse me, on the sewers and gutters of Delhi. (ibid., p. 161)

He also emphasizes through various incidents that when these rich, elite and so-called heterosexual men transcend the binary of homo/hetero then also the actual spatial and sexual identity transgressions do not take place. When he was picked up by one such person during a meeting at his friend's place and was taken to his palatial home he could see the signs of overt heterosexuality embossed in his home. He cogitates that this person is a rich, public school- pick-up-boys type. This world to them is not a contrary world both spatially and as identity marker but rather a normal extension of their boarding schools where men are known to have a taste of twisted pleasure and “where they know that men will always get it on with other men”(ibid. p.164). Thus the spatial and sexual identities of such people do not create any radical ruptures in the largely heterosexual structure of the city. As opposed to this, as a researcher and cruising *flaneur*, he has been able to discover and re-discover contesting sites that topple the hierarchies of different orders, specially in the context of Delhi. It is all the more meaningful because being the capital of India, it is considered not only a centre of power but also a reservoir of all the values that are deemed important in the nationalist discourse. Through the gay *flanerie* of the protagonist, one witnesses a shift in the way the capital of India is being conceived and perceived by the general public. As opposed to his sexual rendezvous at normative household hidden from the prying eyes of straight people, he depicts these open public spaces as sites of multiple possibilities. To quote from the text:

Everything popping out joyously in this pasture of the fearful, empty, twilight spaces of the city. As we passed by the Pragati Maidan intersection remembered the long empty lane behind the railway colony where in a dark corner a footballer had dropped his loose shorts, and with my arms around his footballer's legs, I had senselessly eaten what had been offered so generously. A quiet celebration of accidental sex right there in the unlit lanes of the railway colony where, to the dismal sounds of pressure cookers going off in kitchens and housewife settling in front of their television sets and the trains roaring past behind us, sending shivers all across our bodies. (ibid., p. 155)

Thus not only the drudgery of the heterosexual households, presented through the sounds of cookers and imaginary viewing of television by housewives, has been contrasted with the thrill and excitement of homosexual mating outside these homes in the open spaces (which are supposed to be policed but at particular time are open to non-normative

activities) but also the gay couples are surrounded by the passing trains behind them which are classic heterotopic sites and ideal for alternative sexual rendezvous. It clearly evinces as how the queer spaces are configured and constituted within the context of this unique ambivalence. Hence the documentation of the contrasting spaces and at the same time their peaceful co-existence point towards creating a third space, where homo and hetero identities can co-exist without any antagonism.

This cruising *flanerie* of Nikhil's protagonist through his queer gaze produces many contesting sites and also spaces of negotiation and reconciliation which are coterminous with the idea of the modern city that is no longer a heterogenous space of binary oppositions. Barthes in "Semiology and the Urban" talks about the indeterminacy of urban landmarks and stresses that there is a necessity for absent centers and empty signifiers for a 'meaning' to be derived from urbanities themselves. As Robert E. Park argues in *The city* that it is more than a physical location now. Similarly quoting Elizabeth Grosz, Soja contends:

The city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified', urbanization as a distinctively metropolitan body. (Soja 1996, p. 112)

Thus the ever dynamic and evolving nature of the city where a strange reconciliation of contradictory threads takes place flourish under the eye of a cruising *flaneur* whose gaze constantly changes the normative complexion of the city of Delhi.

Cruising *Flaneur* as Photographer

On *flaneur*, so far I have discussed only the cruising *flaneur* whose hopping in and out of public spaces in search of potential cruising partner finds articulation in train compartments and other associative spaces and for this purpose I have critiqued Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* and now I will like to further investigate the concept of a street photographer and *flaneur* and for this effect I have tried to analyse *Six Inches*, a play by Raj Rao. As mentioned above since queer gaze is misinterpreted as the look for the commodity, *Six Inches* by Raj Rao is saturated with this theme, though the queer gaze is employed through the eye of the camera in this play.

The story of this play revolves around a gay couple who lives in a Mumbai flat. Rashid is a fashion designer whose partner, Ashok is a photographer. Rashid finds a photography assignment for Ashok where he has to click pictures of gay men of India in action. Now considering the social environment of India, it first seems impossible to them. But the lure of money is there---an international gay magazine is ready to pay a huge amount to them for the same. They devise a unique method of clicking pictures of homosocial spaces in Mumbai like Marine Drive, Chowpatty, Juhu or jammed compartments of Mumbai local trains by combining the clever tricks of camera with their queer gaze. For the first photograph the protagonists cleverly manipulate the Chowpatty beach where many men are sitting together and holding hands:

Rashid and Ashok camouflage themselves in the crowd. Ashok has a camera hanging from his neck. He searches for an appropriate shot, then zeroes in on a pair who clasp each other so low on the waist that they virtually look like they're clasping arse. (Rao 1999, p.134-135)

For the second picture they go to Marine Drive Wall.

The wall is lined with people from hotel Natraj to the Air India building at Nariman Point. Rashid and Ashok walk as if on a march past, closely scanning the faces that are seated before them. They stop before the two collegians, one of whom has his leg on his friend's. Ashok physically rearranges the lads in such a way that one's knees is almost on the other's crotch. He clicks (ibid., p. 135)

When he is inquired by the two guys about the publication of the picture he tells them that he is doing a story on Marine Drive for a magazine. These photographs have been shot skillfully with such an angle that these straight spaces appear as queer sites and these non-sexual activities of straight men appear to be acts of homosexual mating. Now here we can envisage an ingenious mix of cruising *flâneur* with the *flâneur* as a photographer. This connection between *flanerie* and photography becomes conspicuous in the writings of Susan Sontag's "On Photography". She affirms:

Photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class *flâneur*, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the *flâneur* finds the world 'picturesque'. (Sontag 2005, p. 55)

Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

Through the cunning manipulation of camera angles while idly strolling through the streets of Mumbai, both Ashok and Rashid are able to capture some homosocial spaces in such a way that these apparently straight public spheres turn into queer spaces and here the agency of exchange is not only the visual erotic pleasure but also the monetary gain as they are supposed to get a huge amount for it. It makes them fit candidates for cruising flâneurs who are armed with the weapon in the form of camera to appropriate the straight public spaces through their gay gaze.

Further analyzing the confluence between the spatial practice of a *flâneur* and the spatial practice of a photographer in his insightful essay, “Eye-swiping London: Iain Sinclair, Photography and the *Flâneur*” Kirsten Seale writes:

The *flâneur's* movement creates anachrony: he travels urban space, the space of modernity, but is forever looking to the past. He reverts to his memory of the city and rejects the self-enunciative authority of any technically reproduced image. The photographer's engagement with visual technology is similarly ambivalent. The photographer reiterates the trajectory of technological advance through his or her acculturation to new technologies, yet the authority of this trajectory is challenged by photography's product: the photograph, a material memory which is only understood by looking away from the future, by reading retrospectively. (<http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2005/seale.html>).

Talking about the concept of the ‘eye swiping’, Seale describes how the instability of a camera’s eye commensurates with a *flâneur's* eyes. And through the magical eye of the camera the everyday practice of common life at common spaces takes a dramatic turn, and the queer gaze through camera completely transforms the everyday reality of these spaces into something magical and utopian where articulation of the gay identity becomes a reality as is evident in Rao’s *Six Inches*. Talking about this magical prowess of camera, John Berger describes as how a camera depicts itself. To quote from the text:

I’ m an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I’m in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse’s mouth. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, maneuvering in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations. (Berger 1972, p. 17)

Coming back to the text under discussion, let us further examine as how these two cruising *flaneurs* metamorphosed the everyday straight spaces into queer sites through the fantastic queer gaze of camera. For their next picture they choose a gym where a lot of youngsters dressed only in shorts are exercising. Their bodies seem to glow due to the excessive perspiration. Again camera angle has been used to show queer transactions. Talking about the dynamic and evolving nature of the photographs and how multiple meanings can be extracted out of them Ashok comments:

Meaty, I'm learning so much about the intricacies of my craft. How a photograph can so completely change the meaning of an action if it pleases. (Rao 1999, p. 139)

The power of the art of photography can be seen from the fact that the scene in which two men squatting and facing each other while they excrete at an open space in Mahim creek has been turned into queer erotic site by the cunning maneuvering of the camera angle. It is quite similar to what Shohini Ghosh describes as an intervention of queer gaze to extract homoerotic pleasure out of simple cinematic tales of heterosexual love. While talking about the *gay flaner* and the power of camera, it is important to bring into discussion the powerful observations of Roland Barthes on this topic.

According to Roland Barthes (as mentioned in *Camera Lucida*), it is a photographer's capacity to surprise which forms the core of this genre of art. He further divides them into five kinds of surprises that can emanate from a photograph. Firstly the element of surprise can be evoked from the 'rarity of the referent'. He gives an example of a photographer who has spent four years to make a photographic series on the theology of the monsters which consists of a man with two heads and a woman with three breasts, etc. It is this capacity to surprise a straight onlooker, who has never seen these every day spaces of city life merged into homoeroticism, that makes these pictures a radical work of art because they bring forth the fact as how homosexuality is forged into the very matrix of these every day straight public spaces. The affect of these photographs is such that when unknowingly Rashid and Ashok click the photographs of the two police men who have been in plain clothes at a non-descript street of Mumbai, the police men immediately notice that there is something notorious about the pictures. To quote from the text: "He produces the photographs and we see each one of them at close quarters. They look

sinister...The pictures look dirty. Your intentions are malafide” (142- 143). What is there in these seemingly innocent pictures that has stirred something within the police men who represent state scrutiny although in the later part of the play there is a reversal of paradigm as the police men are shown sleeping with Ashok and Rashid in their flat. But none the less the photographs are imbued with *punctum*, a term used by Roland Barthes.

On the basis of affect Barthes divides the photographs into two groups; one is *studium* and the other is *punctum*. This gives a certain kind of duality to a photograph. According to Barthes, *studium* produces “a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity” (Barthes 1982, p.26). Thus this is something which do not operate at a deeper level and there is something superficial about it. *Studium* lacks the capacity to touch the core of the being. This quality of a photograph helps in getting the attention of the viewer and makes him/her participate in it but it does not alter anything in the core of the being of the spectator. As opposed to this is the quality of *punctum* that has the capability to puncture the *studium* to create that extraordinary affect because of which there is an inner quivering in the soul of the spectator. And precisely because of this quality a seemingly ordinary picture becomes extraordinary. It is this quality of *punctum* because of which a photograph does not remain inert and assumes a dynamic shape. The photographs under discussion are not only politically affirmative at many levels as discussed above but they also carry an element of *punctum* emanating from duality, paradox and dichotomy forged into the very matrix of the photographs. Thus with the simple click of a camera, the stringent straight spaces have been reterritorialized as queer friendly domains. In this regard it is consequential to talk about the pictures of the two other spaces that these two cruising *flaneurs* clicked. One is of a *dahi handi* festival and another one is once again of a cramped railway compartment of a Mumbai local. Let me first talk about the picture taken at a Mumbai local train. As I have mentioned above that since these spaces are overcrowded, the question of personal-physical space does not arise here and passengers are bound to get touched by one another. Thus deciphering the coded sub-terrain of queerness at these cramped spaces becomes quite easy. The Mumbai locals ferry more than six million passengers daily. Talking about this aspect of Mumbai local trains Suketu Mehta in *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* affirms:

The Manager of Bombay's suburban railway system was recently asked when the system was going to improve to a point where it could carry its 6 million daily passengers in comfort. 'Not in my lifetime', he answered. Certainly, if you commute into Bombay, you are made aware of the precise temperature of the human body as it curls around you on all sides, adjusting itself to every curve of your own. A lover's embrace was never so close. (Mehta 2005, p.183)

It is this aspect of the bone crushing crunch of space in Mumbai locals that has been cleverly exploited by these two gay photographers, Ashok and Rashid. They took a vertical view of the compartment.

The compartment is so over packed that the commuters, as they alight virtually look as if they are on the top of one another, especially as Ashok takes the picture from the floor level. (Rao 1999, p. 136)

For their last picture, they cunningly turn the religious space of *dahihandi* festival into a homoerotic zone by manipulating the pictures of wet male bodies falling on one another. All these photographs have been shot skillfully with such an angle that these straight spaces appear as queer sites and these non-sexual activities of straight men appear to be acts of homosexual mating. They are classic examples of 'drift photography' a term used by Christopher Luessen in "The Flaneur, Psychogeography and Drift Photography". Drift photography is an act of urban rambling of dispossession and possession of public spaces through using different means to reorient them. Hence the reclamation of straight public spaces through the ingenious working of camera has been used quite effectively by Raj Rao and creates a unique kind of queer spatial politics by combining cruising *flanerie* with photography.

The above discussion leads me to conclude that the gay spatial reclamation, as represented in these texts, is saturated with ambivalent dichotomy of overt visibility and camouflage techniques. On the one hand the atrocities committed by the police in terms of blackmail, physical violence and extortion (because of the criminalization of homosexuality till recently) force the postcolonial gay subject to use codes including linguistic codes at certain spaces to transform these domains as safe zones for queer articulation, while on the other the densely populated public spaces such as train spaces, railway stations, railway platforms, public toilets and festival sites, etc provide ample opportunities for erotic transactions. Hence these texts depict this alternative cartography

by fine balancing the act of visibility and invisibility. And thereby they are able to portray a specific postcolonial Indian gay subject who not only retains his individuality but also forges linkages with the global gay subject as has been illustrated by the close reading of the various texts. For example the cruising *flaneur* in Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* not only vehemently appropriates the public spaces overtly and uses train as a medium to express gay desires but also employs the techniques of linguistic codes like *biryani khaega* (which means rimming) or *dhakka start* (which means being a gay person) to reconstitute public toilets of the railway stations in such a way that the fear of disclosure and violence is minimised. Similarly at one level, the cunning manipulation of camera angle by the two photographers (in Raj Rao's *Six Inches*) at *dahi-handi* festival or Marine Drive Wall to make these homosocial spaces as gay only spaces brings forth the issue as how homosexuality is entrenched in straight domains, but on the other it also points towards the fact that finding an open gay couple at public spaces in India is next to impossible. Raj Rao's *Six Inches* is also important because it is probably the only text that demonstrates the nuanced understanding of the concept of the cruising *flaneur* by combining the element of photography with it. These texts are also conducive in demonstrating the difference between the gays and the other gender queers like lesbians and transgenders vis-a-vis spatial consumption and reveal the obvious hierarchy of gay identity. It is precisely for this reason that I have deliberately chosen the so-called public or semi-public spheres to depict the various dimensions of the spatial reclamation by gays who are more conspicuous at varied public spheres as compared to the other sexual deviants. Thus this article is a humble attempt to examine the relatively unexplored spatial aspects of the queer texts which can provide effective tools to unearth the still uncharted areas of queer and literary studies when perceived through the lens of queer geography, specially in the Indian context.

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Travelling Imagination and Gay Spatial Politics

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