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**Deathscapes, Decaying Bodies and Queer Citizenship as seen
through the Lens of the Contemporary Indian English Writings**

Kuhu Sharma Chanana

Fellow, NMML



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Deathscapes, Decaying Bodies and Queer Citizenship as seen through the Lens of the Contemporary Indian English Writings*

Abstract

Citizenship is an important marker to reclaim the space of nation and the significance of it can be seen from the famous assertion of Lissa Duggan where she has asked for the need of 'queering the nation'. Through this paper, I explore the entwining of deathscapes, the dying and the decaying body and their radical potential to create a new kind of appropriation of the land of the nation and thus open a new fissure for queer citizenship. This article is an humble attempt to excavate how queers assert their right on land through the trope of death spaces and decaying bodies (which are marked by the absence/presence of valency and thus are coterminous with visible/invisible entities of queers) as presented in the contemporary literary writings by a specific kind of radicalization of real, lived and imagined spaces (to quote Lefebvre) in a quite potent way. The theoretical apparatus for the same has been borrowed from the writings of Matthew Sothorn, Vincent J. Del Casino Jr., David Bell, Jon Binnie, A. Maddrell, J. Sidaway and Steven Sideman. And the few literary signatures that I could find worth critiquing in this respect are short stories such as "A Married Man" by Dibyajyoti Sarma, "Bargains with Gods" by Sandip Roy, "The Crocodile Tears" by Raj Rao and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy.

Keywords: Deathscapes, queer citizenship, AIDS citizenship, dying and decaying body, alternative family structures.

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There have been a lot of critical researches that centre around the death space, dying and decaying body and cemetery and the radical potential of such spaces to revolutionize the exposition of the marginalized entities. Apropos of the significance of the deathscapes,¹ Flynn and Laderman writes: “Throughout history, human communities have converted the dead into sources of living power by grafting symbolic structures onto them and their places of imminent. The impact of these structures on society, however, indicates that the ‘dead’ are understood as more than physical remains. The dead can be imagined also as memories, spirits, or deities, and the physical or spiritual locations where they reside are essential to the vitality of the symbolism....When conflict arises and the meaning and handling of the dead are disputed by interested parties, the battle for control can lead to important changes in both identity and the distribution of power” (p. 51). In fact as Woodthrope has said that since everyone is an ‘insider’ when it concerns death, because it has ‘universal reach’, and unlike otherwise sensitive issues like domestic violence and criminality, death is ultimately going to be experienced by everyone. Thus in one way negotiating queer entities through deathscapes, dying or leaking body becomes more palatable for a straight reader and somewhere blurs the boundaries between the insider and the outsider and works as a potent tool to bridge the gap. Thus, through this paper I have tried to map the trajectory of queer entities and their constant struggle to appropriate land and claim some kind of citizenship even if it is a debatable and dubious kind of citizenship such as AIDS citizenship—(which will be discussed in the first section of the paper) or claiming land even if it entails reappropriating graveyard space as will be discussed in the second section of the article.

Some significant works on the new perspective on space/place through interrogating death, loss and remembrances are quite conspicuous and widely referred to by various researchers (Johnson 1995, Hartig and Dunn 1998, Teather 1998, Kong 1999, Foote 2002, Maddrell 2006, 2009, 2010, Sidaway 2009, Anderson and Smith 2001, Bondi 2005, Smith 2009). Also, scholars such as Becker (1973) and others have incessantly talked about the serious linkages between ‘death denial’ or considered death a taboo. In fact Gorer has

¹ A. Maddrell and J. Sidaway in their seminal work, *Deathscapes: New Spaces for Death, Dying and Bereavement* affirm that “the idea of a variety of ‘scapes’ as a means of understanding contemporary social processes was proposed by the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. His reference to the interplay of ethnoscapescapes, technoscapescapes, finascapescapes and ideoscapescapes has since been supplemented by an edited collection on ‘border-scapes’ (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007) and taken up in work on ‘memoryscapes’ (Ballinger 2003). In a similar context of places, spaces, sites, flows, disjunctures and landscapes, we might think of deathscapes. The idea of deathscapes was set out by Kong (1999) and employed by Hartig and Dunn (1998) in relation to informal memorials for road accidents. We are adapting the broad heading of deathscapes to invoke both the places associated with death and for the dead and how these are imbued with meanings and associations: the site of a funeral, and the places of final disposition and remembrance, and representation of all these” (p. 4).

gone to the extent of declaring death as pornographic for it has replaced sex as taboo in modern society. Hence convoluted linkages between death and sex as taboo can be built. The overlapping of death drive, forbidden sex and love has been effectively catalogued by Ruth Vanita in *Love's Rite* where she asserts that if marriage is a public statement of life-long unification then joint-suicide or love-death is also analogous to a public statement of intent to be united forever. According to her,

Alan Bray, who has studied the marriage like imagery on tombs of same-sex friends buried together in Western Europe from the fourteen through the nineteenth centuries concludes that the communities who built those tombs understood the relationships to be friendships, not sexual relationships. However, in the case of recent suicides in India, when families accede to the couples' last wish for joint funerary rites, they know the nature of the relationship because couples make it clear in the suicide note...So when the cremation fire is lit for a same-sex couple, it is with the knowledge that they died in part because the wedding fire could not be lit for them (p. 143).

Most recently Madhavi Menon in her book, *Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India* showcases a connection between forbidden desires and deathscapes by citing the example of the dargah of Jamali and Kamali at Lal Kot, Delhi, who were buried as lovers side by side. She affirms that,

...often described as the gay Taj mahal, Jamali-Kamali's tomb is understood to commemorate a same-sex attachment as intense as the one that inspires Shah Jahan to build the mausoleum for his wife, these tombs are part of the landscape of monuments that mark desire in India (p. 32).

She further talks about the prevalent culture in Sufism of male-male love often resulting in common burial site. She has named it time and again as 'dargah desire'. Thus a kind of overlaps and linkages between same-sex love, death sites and a kind of reclamation of space through dying bodies become conspicuous in the writings of these critics though in a tangential way.

Despite a plethora of work being done in the critical sphere in the direction of showcasing a significant connection among death, dying body-spaces and sexual rights, in the creative space specially in the Indian context using the cemetery, dying and decaying body and graveyard sphere to negotiate queer entity's rights, specially on the land and spaces of significance, has not been much explored. And the few literary signatures that I could find worth critiquing in this respect are short stories such as "A Married Man" by Dibyajyoti Sarma, "Ulrike and Neville" by Meher Pestonji, "Bargains with Gods" by Sandip Roy, "The Crocodile Tears" by Raj Rao and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy.

Since citizenship is an important marker to reclaim the space of nation and the significance of it can be seen from the famous assertion of Lissa Duggan where she has asked for the need of ‘queering the nation’. Here, I explore the entwining of deathscapes, dying and decaying body and their radical potential to create a new kind of appropriation of the land of the nation and thus open a new fissure for queer citizenship. This article is an humble attempt to find out how queers assert their right on land through the trope of death spaces and decaying bodies (which are marked by the absence/presence valency and thus are conterminous with visible/invisible entities of queers) as represented in the contemporary literary writings by a specific kind of radicalization of real, lived and imagined spaces (to quote Lefebvre) in a quite potent way. The theoretical apparatus for the same has been borrowed from the writings of Matthew Sothorn, Vincent J. Del Casino Jr., David Bell, Jon Binnie, A. Maddrell, J. Sidaway and Steven Sideman.

Decaying Body Space and AIDS Citizenship

The concept of ‘sexual citizenship’, where the issues pertaining to the appropriation of the nation as a site by queers, first emerged in the writings of David Bell and Jon Binnie in *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond*. The kind of right a legitimate citizen has on the land of the nation is alien to the so-called inauthentic citizens. Apropos of the significance of citizenship rights, Steven Sideman contends:

Citizenship rights make it possible for individuals to protect themselves against social threat, to participate in public decision making, to make claims about national policy and culture, and so on. At stake is how the lesbian and gay movements approach questions of citizenship. Contestation should be over the basis of citizenship and the meaning of sexual and intimate citizenship. In short we need queer articulation of democratic theory (p. 189).

Thus in order to claim a right on the land of the nation it is important to have citizenship rights. In *The Sexual Citizen*, Binnie and Bell have talked about various kinds of sexual citizenships through which queers can claim their rights on the land of the nation but out of these the most prominent ones are familial citizenship, consumer citizenship (where queers contribute to the pink economy) and a very dubious and radical kind of citizenship known as AIDS citizenship. As opposed to the other kinds of citizenships that are shaped on the model of the ‘good gay citizen’ and are of homonormative sort, the twisted radical potential of AIDS citizenship is unparalleled. Homonormativity is a kind of queer politics where the queerness is only acceptable till the time it is not destructive to the larger heteronormative structure and does not contest heterosexuality in any concrete fashion. AIDS citizenship

allows the production of the 'counter republic'. According to Raj Rao, AIDS has hijacked the gay movement to such an extent that homosexuality was being seen as synonymous with AIDS. However in an inverted fashion it has accorded a certain kind of visibility to M.S.M. (men having sex with men) and gay people as can be seen in many literary signatures that I will be discussing in the later part of this section. According to Brown,

AIDS citizenship considers the AIDS quilt as public enunciation (or memorialization) of grief and rage---a kind of subaltern counter-public—which is simultaneously a site for both consciousness-raising (and fund-raising) and for the public affirmation of kinship and collectivity: a time space event of citizenship in civil society, that is many-layered, polysemic, both personal and public (p. 18).

Hence this AIDS quilt provides a certain kind of hybridity between family space (private) and civil society (public) or, in other words, between intimacy and citizenship. Support organizations for AIDS work as a blanket for the inclusion of all categories of AIDS patients in the new form of kinship which is being formed between the home and the 'shadow state' (Brown defines 'shadow state' as a voluntary organization linked to the state via funding and contracting). Brown asks for the broadening of our ideas of citizenship spaces by including the notion of 'buddying relationship' which makes the idea of overlap between citizenship and intimacy all the more conspicuous. He brings into its framework locations like home, the bedside and coffee shops and I will like to include another site to this list and that is the hospital space (which is a semi-public space on account of complex kind of privacy that it exudes despite being a public sphere). But this kind of citizenship is not devoid of problems as Philip Harper quotes from an AIDS patient advocate interviewed in Sullivan's 1996 *New York Times* article on the end of AIDS that there is a trend to reorient life in terms of happy citizen and this certainly is not a pleasant form of citizenship with which anyone will like to be associated and thus there is a tendency to slip back into a normative form of citizenship. However Sullivan, Brown and Binnie contend, "Indeed, why a pleasant existence should be constructed specifically in terms of citizenship in the first place---is not at all clear to me" (p. 19). Nevertheless it creates a certain kind of commotion in the fixed ideas of state (by forming the assumption of shadow state), space and civil society and creates a hybrid between the public and the private.

Moreover in the context of India, the big question is whether in the developing countries, the concept of 'shadow state' is actually applicable because the kinship between home, state and funding agencies is still at a juvenile stage and thus the assumption of

‘shadow state’ demonstrates numerous contradictory and ambivalent positions. Thus despite a lot of contradictions, AIDS body space not only creates radical slippages in the concept of citizenship by the formation of the ‘shadow state’ and ‘counter republic’ as discussed above, it also brings into discussion the social spaces of bed sides, home, hospitals and the spaces of public protests(through rallies against AIDS discrimination). Apart from this when we perceive body as a space, the body of an AIDS patient evokes a different sense of time-space compression as it is not oriented towards the future, longevity and respectability. Apropos of this kind of time-space compression produced through the body space of an AIDS patient it is pertinent to quote the observation of Matthew Sothern in “HIV+ Bodyspaces: AIDS and the Queer Politics of Future Negation”. He observes that the AIDS body space “squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand...(where AIDS) is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing. These new queer geographies of ‘what if’ are not a politics organized around an assumption of stable identity but instead a politics of liminal, non-identity that offers potential subversion to neoliberal formations of time and space...AIDS disrupts the assumed naturalness of time and place scripted by the assumption of what counts as the ‘normal’ life subject to the laws of the intelligibility”(p. 185). Thus AIDS creates slippages in the idea of nation space on account of the appropriation of the land by queers; firstly, through the introduction of dubious, oblique but equally potent kind of citizenship claims; secondly by creating new social spaces of coalition politics and solidarity like bed sides of home and hospitals and public sites of protests; thirdly an HIV+ body space is not oriented towards a future and creates a different sort of time-space compression.

The literary interpretation of these spatial gaps created by an HIV+ body can be seen in short stories such as “A Married Man” by Dibyajyoti Sarma, “Ulrike and Neville” by Meher Pestonji, “Bargains with Gods” by Sandip Roy and “The Crocodile Tears” by Raj Rao. The stories by Dibyajyoti Sarma and Raj Rao are significant because they put the issue of queerspawn (the child of queer parents) and the HIV+ body space at the center of the discourse and therefore I have taken into account only these two stories while shaping the trajectory of critical inquiry pertaining to this issue. Matthew Sothern in his seminal essay on HIV+body space has talked about the futuristic figure of a child or a queerspawn in contrast with the HIV+body space which is a ‘living dead’ (to quote William Harver’s term) or the space of future AIDS corpse (to quote Sothern’s term). The image of a queerspawn is generally associated with a homonormative gay or lesbian couple and therefore it

commensurates with the neoliberal capitalist agenda of heteronormative structure. The queerspawn of a heterosexual couple in which one of the partners is a closet gay and suffers from AIDS dismantles the logic of placing a queerspawn in the heteropatriarchal paradigm because the space of the HIV+ body entails “a figure over-determined by its subjection to a lack of futurity and therefore excluded a priori from the promise of the future afforded by The Child” (p. 182).

The acceptance of the homonormative family (with two queer parents and queerspawns) is on account of their membership to consumer citizenship (due to the emergence of pink economy because now the gays and lesbians have disposable income and the market wants it) and also due to the familial citizenship (family is the smallest unit of nation and producing future citizens warrants a claim on land). As opposed to the futuristic picture of child, the HIV+ queer body is synonymous with living dead and disrupts the homonormative familial structure (which is their way of claiming the position of a ‘good gay citizen’) in more than many ways. The state recreates conservative political structures as it by and large tries to invest in the conservative cultural politics of family, even if it means homonormative family “and self responsibility where the ideals of the long, productive and respectable life buttress the logics of flexible capital accumulation to ensure that ‘everything has a time and place’” (p. 185). In this manner the decaying and dying body of an AIDS patient disrupts the time-space compression by presenting an embodied expression of alternative queer space and time with no futuristic goals of permanence. It is in this way that the HIV+body spaces reorient not only the straight spaces that they inhabit but also radicalize the queer spatial formations of such places. Secondly the funding of NGOs that work towards the welfare of AIDS patient unwittingly helps in the formation of ‘shadow state’ and ‘counter republic’ that give impetus to the idea of AIDS citizenship as mentioned by Binnie and Bell in *The Sexual Citizen*.

Decaying Body Space: ‘A Married Man’

Now let us come back to the antithetical images produced by the child (a symbol of future and citizenship) and HIV+body space (which is a metonymic signifier of the negation of future) that form the center of these two stories written by Raj and Dibya. These stories have somewhat a similar kind of plot as the two men in question have heterosexual marriages and have children and both the protagonists of these two stories are closet gay men who suffer

from AIDS. In “A Married Man” the protagonist dies, leaving his lover and child to form a foster alternative family structure with his wife. Let me first examine “A Married Man” by Dibyajyoti Sarma and give a brief sketch of the storyline. The protagonist of the story is a successful closet gay, Mayank Mehta who is supposedly happily married to Aditi for six years and they have a child. A normal cold caught by Mayank takes a sinister turn and he has to be admitted to a hospital where a series of tests reveals his HIV+status. Heteronormativity is so much embedded in our psyche that all the time Aditi’s mind keeps on hovering towards Mayank’s prospective women lovers and not even once she suspects him of being gay. It is specifically strange as it is a common knowledge that MSM (men having sex with men) is one the most vulnerable groups for contracting AIDS. Generally the first reaction to this disease veers around the promiscuities surrounding illicit heterosexual liaisons. The same happens with Aditi. On constant pestering Mayank tells her that he is a gay. Thus AIDS works a catalyst to ‘out’ him and the hospital becomes the most conducive space for his ‘coming out’. The hospital space in this way became the most appropriate site for coming out in many stories including films like “My Brother Nikhil”. Thus in a dubious fashion, the stringent state-scrutinized hospital site becomes a site of contestation and from there on it reorients the home, living room and bedside as has been depicted in the story, “Ulrike and Neville” by Meher Pestonji. In fact Mayank’s lover Probhat visits him daily at the hospital and the hospital bed-side becomes the micro-space of their verbal and non-verbal interactions. Such is the radicalization of the hospital space that when the doctor tells Aditi that Mayank’s lover visits him daily, there is some kind of approval of their relationship in his tone. To quote from the text,

‘Doctor, tell me, didn’t Mayank ever tell you that he used to sleep with men? Aditi felt bitterness filling her mouth while uttering these words. ‘No. But I guessed as much after meeting his friend’. ‘What friend?’ ‘His name is Probhat. He is the only person who is visiting Mayank for the last one week’. Aditi did not like the doctor’s voice, as if he was comparing Aditi with Mayank’s new friend and had found her wanting (Sarma, p. 417).

Coming back to the story, one notices that the hospital space has been revolutionized so much so in this story that the identity of Mayank’s gay lover has been revealed by the doctor right in his clinic in the hospital. That they should meet at the cafeteria is a suggestion made by the doctor. “Then she said aloud, ‘This friend of his, what’s his-name, is he here?’ Dr. Batra looked at his watch. ‘He should be. Visiting hour is not over yet’, he said. ‘Do you think I can have a chat with him?...Do you think you arrange a meeting somewhere else, maybe the cafeteria downstairs?’ For a hospital, the cafeteria was nice and cosy”(416). And

she finally meets the gay lover of her husband at the coffee shop and builds a life-long connection with him. Thus the hospital with its micro spaces like bedside and cafeterias assumes the form of an ideal sphere to realize ‘buddying relationships’, to quote Brown’s term. Brown emphatically mentions these spaces where a ‘buddying relationship’ takes place and here it is visible in the amiable negotiation among doctor, Aditi and her husband’s gay lover, and a peaceful co-existence of homo and hetero desire can be seen at the hospital site. In this story the hospital space---which is otherwise considered a space of exclusion, on account of stringent rules and regulations as there is a strict enforcement of space (as there are plenty of restricted spaces at hospitals where entry is not allowed) and time (some parts of hospitals are open for a certain period of time only), and constrains the embodied experience of an AIDS patient---gets refashioned in such a way that the significant fissures open up. And it is a unique kind of semi-public sphere where a certain kind of privacy is warranted.

Now coming back to the story, a friendship develops between Aditi and her husband’s gay lover, Probhat and after the death of her husband Probhat becomes the foster father of Aditi’s child whose presence can be marked throughout the story. In fact the section which depicts the father-daughter bond between the little daughter of Aditi and Probhat is entitled as “How Probhat Nandi Found ‘A Family’”. Now the presence of a child is contrasted with the decaying body space of an AIDS patient and it evokes multiple convoluted meanings. As mentioned above, the futurity of the child is the primary signifier that is at the center of a homonormative family structure and when this child image is contrasted with the HIV+bodyspace (that defines the disruptive potential of queer space and time), one can presume as how the queerspawn is conducive for both homonormative queers and the state’s agenda of providing citizenship rights based on the familial structure. Apropos of this Sothern contends that “the HIV+ body space is a one that exudes a radically different non-future. This opposition of The Child as the signifier of the future (the phantasmic projection that is the stuff of the political) and the future negating queer (epitomized by the figure of the living-dead HIV+body---the body that spreads death) causes major problems for liberal gay and lesbian politics of homonormativity and their argument about gay benignity” (p. 190). Now AIDS in this fashion reckons the non-conformist queer politics without the tyranny of future by radicalizing the queer time and space in an entirely different fashion so that something altogether anew emerges out of it. HIV+ body space refuses to succumb to the ‘fascism of the baby’s face’ (to quote Edleman’s term). Now when we examine the story, “A Married Man”

in this light we find it lacking on many aspects as the constant presence of the child is not only indicative of normative time, space and future but also it points towards the formation of homonormative family structure because Probhat (the gay lover of Aditi's husband), Aditi and her little daughter Sia form an alternative family structure and even Aditi contemplates that probably Mayank would have liked it that way. In fact the erasure of explosive AIDS body can only give way to the homonormalization of this family and family is the smallest unit of nation formation and thus familial citizenship is an effective way to assert right on the nation. The heteronormative need to retain the future through the child is expressed in these words: "Yes, Mayank might have wanted it this way. But their strange family would not have been possible as long as he was alive. His own presence has been the flaw in the plan that he hadn't considered" (Sarma, p. 425). In this way the stable economy of identities remains intact. Hence through the formation of this kind of homonormative family (which is conducive to the larger heteropatriarchal politics as it produces 'good gay citizens' who may create harmless mutations at the boundary but can never effectively replace center) the rabid potential of HIV+ bodyspace has been hugely compromised. Embodied expression of AIDS body that can reinvent the temporal spatiality of any sphere has not been realized in this story at all. In this connection, Vincent J. Del Casino Jr. in "Health/ Sexuality/ Geography" comments: "HIV can be both enabling and disabling, productive of new sexual possibilities and limiting in other ways, particularly as antiretrovirals at least in the Western economies shift the temporality of HIV and recreate it as a chronic illness. HIV could enable the emergence of new communities of self-identified HIV positive individuals engaging in sexualized practices that are not tied to concerns about contracting HIV or even other sexually transmitted diseases. Once HIV manifests itself physically in outward appearance the relationships to sex and sexuality may once again shift as those HIV+ individuals with outward illness are marginalized in their sexuo-social communities as deceased. It is possible that a person living with HIV disease will move in and out of the regulatory frameworks of normative constructions of health and illness and therefore move between being constituted as sexual and asexual. Importantly this suggests that the embodied practices of various disabilities challenge the presumptions of a singular unitary and bounded body" (p. 49). Thus by annihilating the HIV+ body space through death and replacing it by a homonormative family structure, the normalcy of neoliberal conception of time and space has been retained and it is in this aspect that this piece of fiction does not adopt a radically affirmative stance, but on account of reorienting certain social spaces like hospital, bed-side and cafeteria coupled with asserting a unique kind of citizenship right by consuming state funded welfare

means (which forms the basis of ‘shadow state’ or ‘counter republic’ as mentioned by Brown), the slippages created by the embodied expression of an AIDS patient are quite visible.

AIDS Citizenship: ‘The Crocodile Tears’

Interestingly the story, “The Crocodile Tears” by Raj Rao presents an interesting intervention in the AIDS saga revolving around HIV+ body space. The narrator of the story is a gay lover of an AIDS patient, Ashutosh who is married to a woman for heterosexual privileges and they have a son. Once Ashutosh contracts AIDS, the protagonist has to assume the role of a foster father. Even before Ashutosh has been diagnosed with AIDS due to the narrator’s upper-middle class, English speaking background, he goes to school with Ashutosh for the admission of his son, Aakash. They bear the semblance of a homonormative couple at the regulated space of school. To quote from the text: “We made a queer sight on the day of the interview. Where moms and dads accompanied other tiny tots in red, blue and yellow, it was Ashutosh and I, both daddies, who stepped into the principal’s office with Aakash that morning. When committee members asked where the boy’s mother was, I lied. ‘You see, her uncle suddenly passed away in Gujrat, I said. And she had to rush there for the funeral’” (p. 258). The marginalization of a straight woman in this kind of framework is quite obvious and throughout the text we get significant glimpses of it. Now it creates a homonormative family within the heterosexual familial structure. Interestingly enough, this homonormative structure is replaced by a heterosexual family pattern in which Aakash (son of the narrator’s gay lover), the narrator and the wife of his gay lover bear a semblance of a normative family when they go to a holiday to please Aakash without Ashutosh who has been reduced to an HIV+ body space. The narrator reminisces: “Here in the car, Aakash sat with me in front, while his mother occupied the backseat, the picnic baskets all about her. Caretakers, gardeners and watchmen at the cottage all thought of us as man, wife and son as we offloaded our bags from the boot and settled down for the weekend” (p. 262). Now it could have been a regressive, the heteronormative familial structure, queer tale of succumbing to heteronormative familial structure like in “A Married Man” but there is a twist in the tale. Unlike “A Married Man” by Raj Rao, here the HIV+ body space has not been annihilated through death, rather it co-exists with the ‘child figure’. Now in this story the symbolic crystallization of futuristic stable normative compression of time and space (in the form of

child) co-exists with the explosive, ever-dynamic unstable and unique queer time and space as represented by the HIV+ body space of Ashutosh. In fact Ashutosh lives a perfectly normal life with these multiple set of family formations co-existing side by side. All these contrasting embodied spatial experiences create various contradictory contesting sites which are not antagonistic to one another (despite the fine balancing of futuristic goals and negation of future) but rather being negotiated in such a way that they create an all encompassing third space. The antagonism between the future time and the time incorporated in the living dead body of an AIDS patient has been reconciled beautifully in the last paragraph of the story. To quote from the text: “At times Ashutosh was envious of his own son. You love him more than you love me, his moist eyes would say. I would keep mum. Who was to tell Ashutosh that I loved Aakash because at the end of the day, he was born of Ashutosh’s cell? In appearance too, Aakash resembled Ashutosh. He had the same bone structure that made him stoop slightly, like his pa. One day I will be sixty and retire from the company. Aakash will be nearly twenty then. The age his pa was when I joined the company, met him, moved by his tears. The wheel of karma will come full circle” (Rao: “The Crocodile Tears” 268). Now despite having a similar story line, “A Married Man” and “The Crocodile Tears” are remarkably different as the first story caters to the issues of AIDS citizenship and appropriation of certain supposedly normative spaces in a farfetched way but neither it opens sites of contestations nor creates unique third space as the story “The Crocodile Tears” does and presents a specific kind of radicalization of real, lived and imagined spaces (to quote Lefebvre). However both these stories are able to create necessary fissures in the stringent ideas of citizenship rights, through liminality of dying bodies, even if it is in an oblique fashion.

Graveyard Space and the Right on the Land: *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Another important literary example in this regard is Arundhati’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* which centers around a hijra’s constant struggle to find a safe refuge in the country’s capital and how her/his efforts to find a safe home are constantly thwarted by the social opprobrium. However finally by using the politics of inversion or as Foucault has cogitated that power illicit its own origin, the protagonist uses the same tools of oppression for reversing the paradigm and asserting a claim on a piece of land (even if it is a land of a graveyard) and tries to assert her/his right as a citizen. Since transgenders are among the most marginalized entities within the LGBTQIA community, it will be interesting to critique as

how they assert their right on land or on the spaces of significance including public spaces and how deathscapes contribute to it.

This text is saturated not only with the tangible site of graveyard but also the metaphors of mourning, death and cemetery are present throughout the novel. According to Maddrell:

Mourning is inherently spatial as well as temporal phenomenon experienced in and expressed through/in corporeal and psychological spaces, virtual communities and physical sites of memorialisation...[these include] individual mappings of bereaved people's experiences of significant spaces/places and how these change over time, how they are expressed through performance in space written as corporeal, landscape or literary texts; and how these individual [and collective] emotional maps impact on particular places (p. 123).

And this aspect of mourning has been potently exploited by Arundhati Roy by portraying graveyard as a counter utopia and safe refuge not only for the gender and sexual exiles but also for the other minorities.

Let me briefly sketch the story line of the novel. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is set in Delhi and features a number of marginalized entities, hijras, dalits, Kashmiri migrants and an abandoned child. The writer takes us towards the unpredictable journey from Delhi to blood soaked Kashmir (the two extremely significant spaces of national discourse) and the negotiation between these two spaces is brought about by a cemetery run by a hijra, Anjum who after finding no space in this normative world (or *duniya* as s/he calls it) creates an alternative utopia in a graveyard that has place for everyone who has been shunned by the society, be it a pregnant dog with puppies, an abandoned child, religious minority, dalit or fellow hijras. Right in the center of Delhi, this space is run by a hijra and is called Jannat Guest House. Amidst the lost plot and series of lost characters and multiple stories it is only Anjum and her/his graveyard utopia, Jannat that binds the loose plot and characters and no wonder the story begins and ends with Anjum. The very first line connects the city space of Delhi (the capital of India, a power corridor and a metonymic signifier of India) with the trans-identity of Anjum. To quote from the text: "She was fourth of the five children, born on a cold January night, by lamplight (power cut) in Shahjahanabad, the walled city of Delhi. Ahlam Baji, the midwife who delivered her and put her in her mother's arms wrapped in two shawls, said, 'It's a boy'. Given the circumstances, her error was understandable...The next morning when the sun was up...that was when she discovered, nestling underneath his boy-parts, a small, unformed, but undoubtedly girl-part" (p. 7).

Interestingly enough to cure her child Anjum's mother takes her to a famous dargah in Delhi known as Hazrat Sarmad Shaheed's dargah and the writer narrates that this particular fakir was Jewish American and had travelled to Delhi from Persia in pursuit of the love of his life, Abhay Chand . Thus at the very outset of the novel the linkages have been built between the capital of India, Delhi, non-normative sexual and gender entities and 'dargah desire' (to quote Madhvi Menon as mentioned in the introduction of this article).

While Delhi's historicity is significant, there are chances of it creating an aura that leads to impediments in people's relations and interactions with the contemporary city that is rapidly transforming from the one chronicled in the history books. Delhi's broken history/ies of invasions and plunders lends itself well to the clichéd symbol of the phoenix that rises again with resilience after destructions. And that is where there is a great similarity between Khushwant Singh's Bhagmati, the hijra (as depicted in his novel, *Delhi*) and Anjum because they both are battered time and again but both resurrect just like Delhi after a horrible mutilation. Importantly, they not only resurrect themselves but also help the other marginalized human beings around them to get resuscitated. Apropos of the claim on the city of Delhi by hijras Ustab Kulsam Bi, the revered guru of hijras has proclaimed with utmost pride that they are not just ordinary hijras but 'Hijras of Shahjahnabad'. Tracing the spatial history of hijras vis-a-vis the capital of India she affirms: "When Shahenshah Shah Janan built the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid, when he built this walled city, he built our little haveli too. For us. Always remember---we are not *just* any Hijras from any place. We are the Hijras of Shajahanabad. Our Rulers trusted us enough to put their wives and mothers in our care. Once we roamed freely in their private quarters, the zenana, of the Red Fort. They're all gone now, those mighty emperors and their queens. But *we* are still here. Think about that and ask yourselves why that should be" (p. 49).

Significantly at one level Delhi is called a city of migrants, but on the other being the capital of India, it is also the center of power and thus relentlessly pushes its marginalized entities farther and yet there are radical ruptures available for these powerless identities. Similarly the places that cannot be accessed by women are invaded by their allies or MTFs (male turned female) and in this way they create much needed mutations. One fine example can be cited from the text where the writer depicts how women are prohibited at certain religious spaces but hijras have no such restriction as they do not menstruate. To quote from the text,

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They visited Jama Masjid and those dargahs that allowed them into the inner chambers (because unlike biological women, hijras were not considered unclean since they did not menstruate (p. 21).

Thus entry and invasion at certain restricted spaces by hijras create ruptures for the liberalization of women as well because on account of their sartorial identity, gestures and also due to their burning desire to look like a woman, hijras bear close semblance with women.

Thus coalition politics indubitably works here. As Anjum grew, she increasingly became more and more fascinated by the hijras who built their safe refuge right in the middle of the city and this home is known as Khwabgah--The House of Dreams. The spatial imagination (as manifested in the form of naming this hijra home as 'house of dreams' where so many subjugated individuals live) demonstrates the politics of inversion by naming a space as a utopian ideal in order to temporarily escape from the harsh daily realities of their lives. Interestingly, this is how Anjum's spatial identity takes form, the moment she enters Khwabgah.

It was the only place in his world, where he felt the air made way for him. When he arrived, it seemed to shift, to slide over, like a school friend making room for him on a class room bench. Over a period of few months, by running errands, carrying their bags and musical instruments when the residents went on their city rounds, by massaging their tired feet at the end of the working day.... He entered that ordinary, broken-down home as though he were walking through the gates of paradise (p. 20).

In fact that is why Khwabgah is called Khwabgah as has been told by the matriarch of the house, Ustad Kulsam Bi. She addresses normative world as 'Duniya' and states that ordinary people living in 'Duniya' have no idea as what it takes to live a life of a hijra. And 'Duniya' is synonymous with all kinds of oppressions and therefore there was a need to build a counter utopia and that is how Khwabgah came into existence.

The Khwabgah was called Khwabgah, Ustad Kulsoom Bi said, because it was where special people, *blessed* people, came with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya. In the Khwabgah, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated. (The question of what would happen if the Holy soul were a man trapped in a woman's body was not addressed) (p. 53).

However his/her happiness was short lived as s/he was banished from this space on account of his/her scuffle with the inmates.

Emplacement is a constant part of the hijras' existence but it is not always disadvantageous. Their emplacement and their lack of stable location in the society which are

reasons for their opprobrium also inversely serve as tools of liberation. Their nomadic existence gives them an inverted freedom that is alien to women. Apropos of this in the PUCL report (2003), there is an interesting observation. To quote from the report,

The linking of the criminal tribes to sexual non-conformity was due to the perception on the part of the colonial administration that the itinerant communities had a licentious lifestyles. The itinerant communities comprised entertainers such as acrobats, singers, dancers, tightropes walkers, and fortune tellers, who were perceived as a threat to the order of sedentary societies. As Meena Radhakrishna notes in PUCL report, ‘...the nomads’ lack of property, and supposed lack of due regard for others’ property, is seen to be a threat to the established order, and their independence from rigid norms and constraints of sedentary societies is found highly objectionable. In fact, itinerancy is seen as a possible escape route for the so-called outcasts and refuse of sedentary societies...In addition, for the keepers of social morality, (their) lack of visible social institutions implied complete disorder in their community life. Their lack of written codes of conduct, and absence of articulated norms of morality implied absolute licentiousness (p. 44).

In this manner emplacement also provides relative freedom and new opportunities and this is exactly what Anjum does. Banished from Khwabgah, she finds refuge in a graveyard and this incident is loaded with multiple meanings. At one level it is indicative of the fact that for sexual minorities like hijras there is no space in the normative world and death and graveyard are their ultimate domains, while on the other Anjum is able to reconstitute and change the meaning of the space of death and cemetery by turning this graveyard space into a place where all kinds of marginalized identities are not only welcomed but also live together. S/he also names it as a Jannat guest house which is reflective of politics of inversion. Anjum uses the same tool of oppression to invert her/his position vis-a-vis space and makes it a source of empowerment not only for herself/himself but also for many others like her/him. Describing her sense of liberation at graveyard space away from all kinds of social restrictions and protocols Anjum cogitates,

Not that anyone in the graveyard troubled her...no djinns arrived to make her acquaintance, no ghosts threatened a haunting... In that setting Anjum would ordinarily have been in some danger. But her desolation protected her. Unleashed at last from social protocol, it rose up around her in all its majesty---a fort, with ramparts, turrets, hidden dungeons and walls that hummed like an approaching mob (p. 61).

S/he builds a shack there and slowly encroaches that space, after which Municipal authorities started sticking notices every month stating that living in a graveyard is strictly prohibited and they will demolish it soon. To which,

She (Anjum) told them that she wasn’t living there in the graveyard, she was dying in it---and for this she didn’t need permission from the municipality because she had the authorization from the Almighty Himself (p. 67).

None of the Municipal officers dared to fight with her as they were scared of hijras' curse, thus fear mixed with phobia that encapsulates a hijra's identity works to her advantage. Hijras' liminal identity gets beautifully reconciled with the in-between space of a graveyard which is a negotiation sphere between the living and the dead. Slowly s/he expands the boundaries of her/his graveyard home, Jannat Guest House.

Over time Anjum began to enclose the graves of her relatives and build rooms around them. Each room had a grave (or two) and a bed. Or two. She built a separate bathhouse and a toilet with its own septic tank. For water she used the public handpump...The advantage of the guest house in the graveyard was that unlike every other neighbourhood in the city, including the most expensive ones, it suffered no power cuts. Not even in the summer. This was because Anjum stole her electricity from the mortuary where the corpse required round-the clock refrigeration (The city's paupers who lay there in air-conditioned splendour had never experienced anything of this kind while they were alive). Anjum called her guest house Jannat. Paradise (pp. 67-68).

Thus by reversing the paradigm and using the space and the resources of the state, Anjum is able to create her/his own alternative paradise which over a period of time becomes a safe refuge for the other kinds of disenfranchised citizens also.

Hence in the graveyard space an entirely new mode of kinships and alternative family structures take form and all this revolutionize the whole concept of family and home space. In this regard, it is significant to bring into discussion Park's (1967) concept of communities which he divides into three categories. The first one is based on locality, where communities are mapped around place, e.g. neighbourhood; the second one is ethnic community, based on cultural ties and institutional forms like clubs and associations; The third one is affective community—based on shared identities and interests that provides a sense of belonging. These 'affective communities' are just one of the ways in which one is witnessing a return to forms of group/communal celebrations as the traditional family and kinship systems are disappearing. In this manner the affective community created by Anjum with other marginal entities revolutionizes the city space through graveyard metaphor as the decaying modern city of Delhi bears a close semblance with the graveyard, specially when linkages are built between Delhi and the bloodied Kashmir. It fully exemplifies De Certeau's concept of the role of people's everyday practices in making an alternative space in the city that runs parallel or in defiance to the spatial order of planners defined by maps and schemes. Also as suggested by Mary Murray the cosmological cartographies of the burial spaces are considered to be profoundly 'other' to the ones that are inhabited by the living beings. Thus the 'othering' of hijras and their liminal corporeal selves are coterminous with the graveyard

space on account of the 'living dead' or absent/ present proposition of burial spaces and thus provides a flourishing ground for the exploration of the queer entities.

Hence deterritorialization and loss of space are incongruous with transgender and hijra identity as their unique corporeal selves make them both visible and invisible at the same time. Thus camouflage and secrecy as tools cannot be potently employed by them and emplacement, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are constant part of their lived realities, and they have to create tools within this limitation to assert their identity at any given space. However in India because of certain sort of religious sanction and fear mixed with awe (as they are supposed to have power to confirm fertility or curse) they are accepted at certain spaces though unwillingly, be it the domestic spaces at the time of childbirth and marriage or public spaces like streets which they reclaim through begging or *danda* work (prostitution). Their liminal identity challenges the polarity of gendered spheres. Their non-normative sexually suggestive behavior and the nuisance value radicalize street and public spaces in such a way that new fissures give way to other kinds of deviancies as well. In this fashion they are powerful catalysts in coalition politics as I have demonstrated when aligned with transfeminism (as depicted in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*). They bear a close semblance with street urchins in this respect because like them, hijras too are expected to puncture the so-called codes of behavior at public spaces and Anjum does it at a very unique kind of public space and that is graveyard space. Ranjani Majumdar talks about the tapori figure who by puncturing the idea of normalcy vis-a-vis language and public behaviour takes the possession of the city,

Drawing attention through linguistic and stylistic performances, the tapori creates a space where control is possible... In performing and depicting marginal figures whose narrative predicaments seem to mirror their psychological states of marginality, we see a social and verbal alienation expressed in tapori's performance. This alienation is countered through both shock and play with the signs of every day (p. 42).

Thus in a similar fashion, hijras reconfigure public spaces through specific use of language and gestures and this has been significantly exhibited in this text. Specially in terms of reclamation of the graveyard land by hurling curses and abuses on the officials who came to vacate the graveyard space. Another strategy to control is to operate in such a fashion that particular sites specially cemeteries appear run down sites and these tools can be littering, hanging around and vandalism to puncture the idea of conducive space so that the non-normative identities can get hold of these spheres. Anti social behavior that has been the greatest reason of opprobrium of these marginalized entities works to their advantage in

getting the control of a space. Bel Deering in “From Anti-Social Behaviour to X-rated: Exploring Social Diversity and Conflict in Cemetery” writes in this connection: “Littering, hanging around and vandalism do have a negative effect. Evidence suggests that when these activities cause a site to appear run-down and/or neglected, other potential users are deterred, interpreting this as signs of a lack of social control. Indeed this may well be intentional-- litter can be a tactical move, a way of claiming a space and exerting power and control over others (Delaney 2005). Many are influenced by the visual effect of littering and related activities and will avoid such spaces out of fear of crime” (p. 88). Thus all kinds of tactics have been employed by Anjum to get the control of graveyard space and use it for her and other minorities’ advantage.

Another significant aspect in this regard is even using the mundane surroundings of the burial ground to celebrate the child birth and bringing a joyous reconciliation between the dead and the living. Thus at one level to control the space, resorting to antisocial activities have proven useful, while on the other the normative joys of the life have also been celebrated here; the burial ground is in fact used as a site for festive occasions or recreational space. According to Bel Deering, cemeteries and churchyards have a rich role to play in hosting recreational activities. And these activities can work as a catalyst to cast these places as ‘sites of disagreement and conflict’. Celebration of life takes place when an unwanted mother and child duo come to Jannat guest house at the graveyard and a grand party is thrown by Anjum creating a contesting domain. In fact by turning the graveyard space into a place for merriment she has not only been able to satiate the homeless and poor but also could entice the municipal officers and had been able to make the state machinery work for her. To quote from the text,

The addict and homeless people from the periphery of the graveyard gathered to partake of the feast and the merriment...A few kebabs and some biryani were kept aside for the municipal officers who will surely come by later in the day. ‘Those fellows are just like us Hijras,’ Anjum said and laughed affectionately. ‘Somehow they smell a celebration and arrive to demand their share’ (p. 306).

Thus she draws a close parallel between hijras and municipal officers and a wicked nexus is built by revolutionizing the burial space into a recreational sphere.

Using cemeteries as recreational space has been documented by various scholars like Ariès (1994), Dunk and Rugg (1994) and Sloane (1991). According to Bel Deering,

Planners and designers of new cemeteries had a vision of them as parks or gardens, where people might walk and indulge in ‘rational recreation’....The main object of the burial ground is, the disposal of the remains of the dead...the secondary object is or ought to be, the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and specially of the great masses of the society (Dunk and Rugg 1994, Warpole 2003) (p. 76).

Thus the usage of the death-space for festivities also brings into consideration Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘carnavalesque’ that talks about as how a festival site recreates a symbolic ‘second life’ that is helpful in dismantling the hegemonic pattern as the spirit of festivities creates a symbolic space of utopian freedom. This utopian freedom is missing in the real world of day to day life. Thus the festivities specially create a thinly veiled virtual world which operates in a way where a certain kind of non-normativity, though temporary, is acceptable. In fact Deleuze’s theory of ‘affect’ has been used in an interesting fashion by Jason Lim in his outstanding essay, “Queer Critique and the Politics of Affect” to illustrate the porous nature of queer geographies in this regard. He tries to forge a bond between temporary virtual spaces and Deleuze’s theory of ‘affect’ that postulates the idea that an event can be considered a liminal entity between the actual and the virtual. He affirms that,

For Deleuze the ‘event’ can be thought of as virtual (and hence as enveloping a multitude of virtual worlds), as distinct from the actual ‘states of affairs’ by which events come to pass. Events are always (just) past or just about to come, but are never the present state of affairs, although they are contemporaneous with the present. Events are intimate to bodies (Deleuze 5) but not actually corporeal themselves.... This sense neither originates in the subjectivities of individuals nor is fixed in place by an objective reality (p. 56).

Thus the partially imagined world of festivities mitigates fixities and definitives, and a certain kind of allowance for deviation takes place and that is why the coalition regarding the graveyard space not only takes place between hijras, Anjum and other minorities but also between Anjum and municipal officers. Hence the festivities at burial space create contesting site to make the stringent boundaries of such places porous and radical mutations in the hegemonic structures become visible.

Hence the contesting domain which has been excavated through *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a burial ground that functions as a counter utopia. In this regard *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* indubitably radicalizes graveyard space through the re-appropriation of it by a hijra who not only establishes his/her claim on it but also uses her/his position as a potent agent to revolutionize and counter the hierarchal dispositions prevalent both in the heteropatriarchal and the homosexual world by turning this cemetery into a safe

refuge for the various kinds of other minorities. Kate Woodthorpe in her seminal essay, “Buried Bodies in an East London Cemetery: Re-visiting Taboo” questions as to whom and why buried bodies in cemetery matters.

One principal reason is the way in which the dead body—before burial even—challenges the boundaries of the ideal contained and controlled body. In a society...where bodies are ordered and controlled (Evans 2002), the uncontrollable, decomposing person-that-once-was presents an absolute rejection of efforts to order and control the body (p. 64).

Conclusion

Thus the radical potential of dying and decaying bodies, bereavement and graveyard space has been utilized with utmost efficiency by both Raj Rao and Arundhati Roy to lend a certain kind of citizenship rights to the queer protagonists of their fictional works. And the sheer liminality of death and life, imbued in these spheres, becomes coterminous with the non fixities and definitives of the queer lives as outside the graveyard, the spaces are infested with unhealthy coercion and here any kind of control over the body is mitigated by the spatial dynamics of the burial spaces. Apropos of this Rugg notes,

Burial space is essentially mutable: its meaning does not remain static over time; and its significance is not uniform all over the cultures. Even at a basic level, the significance of such spaces alters as time accrues between the living and the dead (p. 111).

In the end any discussion on this issue of depicting a tense negotiation among city spaces, graveyard sites, leaking and decaying bodies and queer entities through the lens of contemporary literature can be best summed up in the words of Berger,

Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you (p. 17).

Thus the radical potential of dying and leaking bodies along with death spaces to negotiatiate a unique sort of citizenship rights on the land of the nation is conspicuous from the above dicussed texts. And this paper is an humble attempt to showcase the subversive potential of deathscapes to reorient the whole idea of citizenship specially when viewed through the lens of queer studies and death studies.

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