

MAPPING THE GENDERED SPACE IN NORTH EAST INDIA



Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

By

ROSSA MARY JOB

Register No. AB20ENG022

III B.A. English Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Cochin-682 011

Kerala

Supervisor

Ms. Athira Babu

Department of English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam, Kerala

March 2023

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Mapping the Gendered Space in North East India”, is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms.Athira Babu , Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of this dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title of recognition.

Rossa Mary Job

Register Number:AB20ENG022

III B.A. English Literature and Language

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2023

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Mapping The Gendered Space in North East India” is a record of bona fide work carried out by Rossa Mary Job under my supervision and guidance.

Ms. Athira Babu

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank God for giving me proper guidance throughout the process of crafting this project.

I would like to extend my gratitude towards Dr. Alphonsa Vijaya Joseph, Principal St Teresa's College (Autonomous) for her support.

I am deeply indebted to my guide, Ms. Athira Babu , Department of English, St Teresa's College (Autonomous), who has acted as a constant pillar of support from the very beginning, without whose guidance and constructive feedback I would have never completed this project.

I am greatly thankful for Dr. Preeti Kumar, Head of Department of English, St Teresa's College (Autonomous) for her constant encouragement and motivation.

I am grateful for Dr. Jeena Ann Joseph , who has given us a strong base on Research Methodology and all other faculty members of the department for their help and encouragement.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1:	4
Chapter 2:	20
Conclusion	38
Works Cited	41

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of space has long been a fascinating and captivating subject for humans. From the earliest observations of celestial objects to the first steps on the Moon, the study and investigation of space has shaped our understanding of the universe and our place in it. However, the representation of gender in the space industry has been historically unequal, with women facing numerous challenges and barriers to participation. The exploration of space, both physical and metaphorical, has long been linked to discussions around gender and the experiences of women. The documentary *The Day I Became Woman* takes a unique look at these intersections, following the stories of women in North East India at different stages of their lives as they navigate the limitations and expectations placed on them by society. Through a lens of gender and culture, the film explores themes of agency, autonomy, and freedom, highlighting the ways in which women in Iran and beyond are often denied access to these fundamental rights. At the same time, the film offers a nuanced portrayal of the complex realities of gender in the region. In this introduction, we will explore the relationship between space and gender, considering how the physical and social environments in which we live shape our experiences of gender and influence the opportunities available to us. We will also examine the ways in which *The Day I Became Woman* engages with these themes, providing a powerful and insightful look at the lives of women in North East India and the challenges they face in navigating the complex and often contradictory forces that shape their experiences. The relationship between space and gender has been a topic of interest for scholars across various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. In the context of the documentary *The Day I Became Woman*, this

relationship takes center stage as it explores the experiences of North East Indian women in different stages of their lives, negotiating societal expectations and cultural norms in public and private spaces. The documentary captures the lived experiences of North East Indian women. Through their stories, the film examines how gender roles and expectations are enforced and perpetuated in Indian society, particularly in the realm of personal autonomy and individual freedoms. Additionally, the documentary raises important questions about the intersections of gender, space, and power, particularly in the ways in which women navigate and inhabit both public and private spaces in their daily lives. The theories of Judith Butler and Doreen Massey are highly relevant in understanding the portrayal of gender and space in *The Day I Became Woman* documentary.

Doreen Massey's theory of space highlights the ways in which space is socially produced and constructed through power relations. In the documentary, we see how the women's interactions with their physical environment are shaped by their gender and societal expectations. For instance, a young girl is forced to participate in a ritual as she reaches the age of womanhood. The ritual takes place in her house as a grand festivity where she is adorned with ornaments and expensive clothes. The fact that this is the only day in her life where she is treated as a queen and from henceforth be victim to the various taboos surrounding menstruation is an example of the contradictory nature of space and gender.

In order to understand the nature of how women's movement is restricted in space, this thesis examines the conceptualization of space that embeds patriarchal mechanisms of power. Based on the theories of Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau the construction of social space and spatial practices are used as a basis for analysis.

In this, the particular spaces of interest are gendered spaces as theorized by feminist geographers Daphne Spain and Doreen Massey. Here, the particular focus point lies on the way in which gender and gendered spaces are constructed in India and how they function to ensure the (patriarchal) status quo. Moreover, feminist movements and visual activism will be examined as to their potential for claiming said space and for creating representation for women's issues in public.

In this project we will go through the various theories revolving around space, gender and representation by theorists such as Massey, Foucault, Bourdieu, Certeau etc. Chapter One will deal with these theories extensively. Chapter two deals with exploring the gendered spaces and visual culture in the documentary under study, *The Day I Became Woman*. It will give us an in depth understanding of how gender and space mingle with the daily lives of the women in North East India

CHAPTER-1

Gendered Space: A Theoretical Framework

“One of the key concepts in geography is space. Yet among the other related key concepts place and scale it is arguably the one that appears to be the most abstract” (Uhlenwinkel). There is no universally applying definition of space that can serve as a basis for any analysis in academic contexts. Therefore, this chapter aims to clarify what space entails by contrasting it with the key concept place. It then focuses in-depth on the theories of scholars such as Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau and Bourdieu who in their respective fields have conceptualized space. At last, their theories will be used to understand the construction of gendered spaces.

“Cultural geography is the study of relationships between humans and location.”(ThoughtCo). In the late 19th century, cultural geography sought to compare and contrast different cultures around the world and their relationship to natural environments but gave emphasis to people’s connections with and use of place. Since the 1980s cultural geography has developed to examine the broad range of ways in which culture evolves and makes a difference to everyday life and places. Wagner and Mikesell , in 1962, defined that cultural geography is:

concerned with the diverse geographic expressions of culture (such as the distribution of traits like religion and language), the imprint of material culture on the landscape and

the ways different cultures use, and interact with, the earth. Cultural geography focuses on cultural struggle, on the imposition of social control through “cultural means,” and on the construction of and resistance to the cultural spaces that define social life in different settings.

As power and meaning are deeply inscribed on to the surface of the world (4), "geography [is] an interpretative art" (11) that aims to make sense of them. Accordingly, the specific field of

Cultural geography looks at the way different processes come together in particular places and how those places develop meanings for people. Cultural geography is about the diversity and plurality of life in all its variegated richness; about how the world, spaces and places are interpreted and used by people; and how those places are interpreted and used by people; and how those places then help to perpetuate culture.

(Crang 3)

A first step towards clarifying the concept space is to contrast it with the concept of place. Place is seemingly easier to pin down and invokes “a sense of 'belonging' to human beings” (Crang 102). Ever since the 1960s and 1970s, however, discussions about the meaning of space in contrast to place have become crucial in the social sciences. Essentially these discussions revolved around defining geography as "the study of distribution in space rather than particular places" (Crang 101) and declared it a spatial science. Space is constituted and constructed by all the social interactions within it. Forsyth (2013), identified four structures, a normative structure, an affective structure, a communication structure, and a role structure, but essentially, these structures come down to the same cultural artifacts. Within these structures, communicating

persons may experience a shared social identity, group cohesiveness, connectedness with others, mutual trust, a sense of belonging, a sense of community, a social climate, and an open atmosphere. Hence, we speak of a social space. French sociologist Henri Lefebvre conceptualized space from a neo-Marxist perspective. While acknowledging the existence of physical space, he emphasized a space of social interactions. However, as opposed to Marx and other theorists before him, he did not think of social space as a separate entity but as linked to physical space (Kajetzke and Schroer).

Within social space, Lefebvre points out three different yet interwoven levels as categories for analysis. Lefebvre calls this “the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived [space].” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 39). The ‘perceived’ refers to Spatial practice. It “connects agents and their perceptions inseparably with the material world.”(Kajetzke and Schroer 12). Simultaneously, it “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33). The ‘conceived’ or Representations of space, which are the dominant spaces of societies. They are imagined by scientists, planners, architects, i.e. all agents of knowledge. Hence, representations of space are inextricably linked to relations of production and power hierarchies, as well as to the distribution of knowledge. The ‘lived’ space incorporates Representational spaces. These are the ones that the conceived space tries to dominate and which is, therefore, passively experienced. It is “directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists [...], who describe [it]” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 39, own emphasis). Representational spaces are filled with symbols that are occasionally coded (33). Moreover, they can be linked to obscure forms of spatial practice such as subcultures as

they incorporate "all other real and imagined spaces simultaneously" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 61). As already established, space is inherently structured and hierarchized through mechanisms of power. Yet, it is also created and altered through spatial practices.

It is now widely accepted, "that the social and the spatial are inseparable and that the spatial form of the social has casual effectivity" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 255) and that "social relations and material social practices" (254) establish space itself. Therefore, another aspect of space and its construction was voiced by feminists, particularly feminist geographers, who have pointed out the link between space and the social construction of gender. Like other social relations, gender is a socio-spatial phenomenon that becomes material through enactments which reinforce and/or challenge dominant norms and relations. Scholars from different theoretical backgrounds and disciplinary learnings have studied how gender comes to matter in the way spaces and places are constructed. Feminist geographers have long argued that gender varies both historically and geographically and is a product of specific practices, places, spaces, and discourses (Massey, 1984). Massey points out:

Geography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development (*Space, Place, and Gender* 2).

In that sense, the rendition of belonging to the category 'woman' can be seen as a form of creating "spatially based homogeneous groupings" (Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space" 106) to enforce power structures in space. Correspondingly, the

separation of 'woman' from 'man' in certain spaces can be seen as "segregation that is both cause and effect of the exclusive usage of a space" (ibid.). Space comes into existence through performative acts, yet there is also an interrelation between the social construction of gender "and the visible and invisible boundaries that affect how women use urban space" (Rieker 1). However, there is not just one way in which space can be gendered as this concept is strongly influenced by time and culture (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 186). Moreover, gender identity and sexuality undeniably intersect with the categories race, ethnicity and nationality. Accordingly "any corporal identity that falls outside the established parameters for personal identity will encounter disciplinary force, the same disciplinary force that produces heterosexual men and women" (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* 166). The gendering of space is most notable in the distinction between public and private, in which the public domain is generally perceived as male space and the private as female space (Spain; Storey). Echoing neo-Marxist ideas, the respective importance of public and private spaces "separate[s] spheres of production from spheres of reproduction and assign greater value" (Spain 7) to the former, i.e. the public male space. The particular spaces Spain attributes to these spheres and in which gender is consequently constructed are the home, the workplace, and the community (ibid.). Accordingly, the distinction between public and private has "resulted in social practices which see certain activities and certain spaces as male preserves" (Storey 160), e.g. gentlemen's clubs or going out alone at night. In this way, women's movement in public space is restricted and only justified by a specific purpose for being in space and comes with the requirement to follow certain rules (Paul and Raju; Phadke et al.). Therefore, the division of space "acts to transmit inequality" (Spain 4) and is held in place by "patriarchal systems of power [which] have tended to reinforce male dominance" (Storey 160). In this way, gender segregation ultimately

contributes to the subordination of women. All people experience space differently depending on their respective positions in society. Therefore, spatial segregation according to gender reproduces hierarchies of power. Linking Bourdieu's effect of naturalization to the concept of gendered spaces, the dominant group, in this case men, constructs what the dominated group, women, perceive as reality. Hence, women subconsciously accept their subordinate position by abiding to rules of gendered spaces and indirectly enable men to reaffirm their advantage in society (Spain 15). The question of cause and effect of gendered spaces and their construction as a contributing factor in gender stratification and power relations is not an easy one: "While it would be simplistic to argue that spatial segregation causes gender stratification, it would be equally simplistic to ignore the possibility that spatial segregation reinforces gender stratification and thus modifying spatial arrangements, by definition, alters social processes" (Spain 6-7).

The argument on power and social space is incomplete without addressing Michel Foucault's theories as one of the biggest influences on feminist and postcolonial conceptualizations of space. Foucault was interested in power and social change. In his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued that French society had reconfigured punishment through the new "humane" practices of "discipline" and "surveillance", used in new institutions such as prisons, the mental asylums, schools, workhouses and factories. These institutions produced obedient citizens who comply with social norms, not simply under threat of corporal punishment, but as a result of their behavior being constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalize the dominant beliefs and values. According to Foucault's theories, there are certain spatialized mechanisms that regulate the way in which we navigate space. As Foucault argues in

the example of prisons, the panopticon regulates the behavior of prisoners because they never know whether a guard is watching them or not. In this situation, it does not matter whether someone is actively watching them in real-time or not because the possibility of being watched is enough to control one's own behavior. In addition to panopticon power, "[m]any of the relationships of power in the modern political state are exercised indirectly on and through the body" (Sturken and Cartwright 109). For this concept, Foucault employs the term biopower. Therefore, the way in which subjects and their bodies are regulated in any given space reproduces dominant ideologies and reinforces power structures in societies and economy. Foucault also highlights the potential for resistance against mechanisms of power in space (Kajetzke and Schroer). He conceptualizes spaces that allow resistance as 'other spaces', so-called 'heterotopias, because they have specific functions. There are two types of heterotopias "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 24). The heterotopias of crisis that are, based on culturally-specific definitions of that word, for people in crisis, e.g. adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly (ibid.). However, they are mainly found in pre-industrial cultures and have more recently been replaced by heterotopias of deviation. Examples of such heterotopias are psychiatric hospitals, rest homes, nursing homes, and prisons. Moreover, heterotopias function in various ways connecting many real and imagined spaces at the same time. Within heterotopia, time can be perceived differently from general perceptions of time. Such heterochrony of time means that time within heterotopias may be accumulated and/or seem to be endless, e.g. in libraries and museums. In contrast to that time can also be experienced as something short-lived or even as a limiting factor that enables transformation as is the case with festivals. Additionally,

the nature of heterotopias is regulated by their accessibility. In that way, “systems of opening and closing” play a huge role in the way heterotopias work because they are generally “not freely accessible like a public place” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 26). Furthermore, heterotopias can also become spaces of illusion or compensation.

However, as opposed to Foucault’s construct of disciplinary power mechanisms regulating agents in space, French sociologist Michel de Certeau emphasizes every day practices in space (Kajetzke and Schroer). Some of them (re)affirm it, and some of them subvert it. For de Certeau “spatial practices refer to a specific form of operations (ways of doing); they reflect ‘another spatiality’” (126). Correspondingly, the way in which space is used contributes to the creation of “the determining conditions of social life” (129). Moreover, various usages of space create “a theory of daily practices, ... a theory of experienced space and of the disturbing familiarity of the city” (ibid.). In this, spatial practices do not necessarily have to follow the rules of dominant space but are still exercised within its realms, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” like brothels, the latter “create[s] a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.” (27) In line with Foucault’s argument on heterotopias, anything could become a heterotopia that exhibits certain features. For example, while technically a public space, the street functions as a space of fear, in the way that it regulates women’s movement and even excludes women from using them at certain times or for certain purposes. Hence, as they are not accessible by all, their public nature can be questioned. Within de Certeau’s argument the city, i.e. urban space, plays an important role. As a result of processes of transformation, urban reality has become the concept of city:

While in discourse the city acts as a totalizing and almost mythic gauge of socio-economic and political strategies, urban life allows what has been excluded from it by the urbanistic plan to increase even further. The language of power is 'urbanized', but the city is subjected to contradictory movements that offset each other and interact outside the purview of the panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme of political epic ... Beneath the discourses ideologizing it, there is a proliferation of tricks and fusions of power that are devoid of legible identity, that lack any perceptible access and that are without rational clarity - impossible to manage. (de Certeau 127-128).

As indicated by this quote, the city is a multi-faceted space that both encourages participation and creates exclusion. Thereby, the interactions of different agents within space are always subject to and regulated by dominant ideologies and mechanisms of power. Furthermore, de Certeau addresses the significance of marginalized groups in and for urban space to some extent. As he points out, "it is where [...] visibility ends that the city's common practitioners dwell. [...] These practitioners employ spaces that are not self-aware; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of one body for another" (124). Thus, more than anything the way in which space is used by marginalized groups holds potential to subvert dominant ideologies.

Pierre Bourdieu particularly emphasizes the hierarchical structures that are enforced in space, e.g. through spatial segregation. Bourdieu argues, that "[t]here is no space, in a hierarchical society, that is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion" (Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space" 107). Bourdieu believed that having similar tastes,

behaviors, qualifications, etc. defines one's position in society and creates a sense of shared identity like social class does. However, he also argued that cultural and social capital are key sources of inequality among classes. This is because the middle class has higher access to cultural and social capital than the working class and is dominant in society. Bourdieu applied this to education, pointing out how schools and academies operate on middle-class cultural norms and in their interests. This meant that middle-class students are more likely to academically succeed, retaining their societal advantages, while working-class students are prevented from moving up the ladder. In his line of thought, agents construct the world from their specific and fixed position in social space, hence, from their individual point of view. In his line of thought, agents construct the world from their specific and fixed position in social space, hence, from their individual point of view. This process happens under the influence of “structural constraints” (Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power” 18) without the agents – especially those dominated in society - necessarily noticing their oppression. Accordingly, an Indian woman living in Delhi might not be aware that she avoids certain areas of the city at specific times or that her movement through urban space due to obscure factors are different from other people's. This unawareness is due to the assumption that one's own perception of the world is an accurate, unbiased depiction of the “real” world. Bourdieu calls this effect of not questioning the status quo naturalization of said hierarchical structures. This effect of naturalization is also achieved by habitus. As defined by Bourdieu, habitus serves as a system through which agents in space perceive and appreciate practices and through which they structure their own actions due to their respective positions in society over time and space (Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power” 19). Accordingly, habitus also produces practices and representations (ibid.). Furthermore, the conscious and subconscious exercise of

power within social space can also be identified as an appropriation of said space. Accordingly, in appropriated spaces this process takes place “under the most invisible form, that of symbolic violence as unperceived violence.” (Bourdieu, “Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space” 108).

According to feminist theory, gender is a social construct. Massey brought the impact of space and place on gendered experiences into the theoretical context of describing spatial values in contemporary society, thus giving an added dimension, that of social grouping, of when justice is fair as well as equally accessed in space and place. While Massey has argued for the importance of place, her position accords with those arguing against essentialism or static notions, where:

- places do not have single identities but multiple ones.
- places are not frozen in time, they are processes.
- places are not enclosures with a clear inside and outside.

In a Podcast interview with Social Science Space Massey talks about the idea of physical space being alive:

A lot of what I've been trying to do over the many years when I've been writing about space is to bring space alive, to dynamize it and to make it relevant, to emphasize how important space is in the lives in which we live. Most obviously I would say that space is not a flat surface across which we walk; Raymond Williams talked about this: you're taking a train across the landscape – you're not traveling across a dead flat surface that is space: you're cutting across myriad stories going on. So instead of space being this flat surface it's like a pincushion of a million stories: if you stop at any point in that walk there will be a house with a story. Raymond Williams spoke about looking out of a train

window and there was this woman clearing the grate, and he speeds on and forever in his mind she's stuck in that moment. But actually, of course, that woman is in the middle of doing something, it's a story. Maybe she's going away tomorrow to see her sister, but really before she goes she really must clean that grate out because she's been meaning to do it for ages. So I want to see space as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment. Space and time become intimately connected.

Massey claims, "The hegemonic spaces and places which we face today are not only products of forms of economic organization but reflect back at us also - and in the process reinforce - other characteristics of social relations, among them those of gender" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 183). Therefore, making certain spaces more accessible to women could lead to the implementation of gender equality in other areas of life. This notion of accessibility to certain spaces, can also be found in the potential connection between gendered spaces and the access to knowledge and resources. For example, the separate areas for women and men in mosques, synagogues, and early churches can be interpreted in this way (Morgan and Welton 107). By controlling access to knowledge and resources the dominant group is able to reinforce their privileged position in society (Spain 15). Spain describes the nature of this link between power and knowledge by pointing out that, "masculine spaces [...] contain socially valued knowledge of theology, law, medicine, while feminine spaces [...] contain devalued knowledge of child care, cooking, and cleaning" (Spain 10–11). Hence, Spain argues that spatial structures would have no effect on gender stratification if knowledge and access to it were equally distributed between men and women (27). By accepting and abiding to rules that restrict women from access to knowledge and power, they are consequently "as engaged in upholding gendered power

differentials as [are] men." (Spain 18) However, while men do so because "it serves their interests" (ibid.), for women this might be caused due to lack of alternatives. As pointed out in the previous chapter, cities are important in the production of space. Correspondingly, cities and urban space also play an important role for gendered spaces. "Cities and the built environment provide the artefactual settings where gendered meanings are developed and represented as well as reproduced. The built environment not only evokes experiences and behavioral responses, but also reproduces and structures institutional norms and social relations" (Paul and Raju 128). Going back to the modernist period, Massey argues that the spaces "mostly celebrated are the public spaces of the city" (Space, Place, Gender 233). Yet, most of the cultural products of that time dealing with urban space were created by men for men, in and about male spaces. One reason for that is the restriction of access for women to certain spaces of gathering but also because women were not allowed to just 'be' in space. In this context, she points out the existence of the term *flâneur* and contrasts it with the absence of a female counterpart *flâneuse* "because 'respectable' women simply could not wander around the streets and parks alone." (Space, Place, Gender 234) This was partly because of the social construct of respectability but also because of a restriction of movement due to "the threat of male violence" (Massey, Space, Place, and Gender 233). Accordingly, "[t]he city has been perceived primarily as a male place in which women and other underprivileged social groups and minorities have survived in its interests in their own particular way." (Paul and Raju 128) To this day, the city and its spaces function as an important context in which gendered spaces are created. Their contribution to the construction of gendered spaces is probably even more current today, because the society of the future will be predominantly living in urban settings.

According to feminist theory, gender is a social construct. In the sense of Butler's definition of gender, voiced in her publication *Gender Trouble*, the biological or supposedly natural sex assigned at birth is just the first step of many in the cultural and social construction of gender. In its essence, Butler's approach to gender denies the existence of a biological sex because the binary categories assigned at birth effectively lead to the production of gender through discourses surrounding femininity/masculinity in the upbringing of a child in society. Throughout a person's life these discourses are reinforced and naturalize gender. In that way, they reproduce patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormativity that further gender stratification. On the level of the body, at least on the surface, gender constructs act to regulate and produce heteronormative subjects. In that way, "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 138). Following this assumption, performativity leads to an internalization of gender identity and all that this entails and is constantly reaffirmed through repetition. Bodily acts that aim to subvert this notion of gender can be found in cross-dressing, drag, and butch lesbian identities (138). Accordingly, spaces are also constituted by and through performative actions. Therefore, "heteronormativity has spatial consequences. Constant repetition of relationships between humans constructs spatial contexts of exactly these specific social relations". *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* is a book by the philosopher Judith Butler in which the author argues that gender is a kind of improvised performance. Butler criticizes one of the central assumptions of feminist theory, that there exists an identity and a subject that requires representation in politics and language. For Butler, "women" and "woman" are categories complicated by factors such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Moreover, the universality

presumed by these terms parallels the assumed universality of the patriarchy and erases the particularity of oppression in distinct times and places. Butler argues instead that gender is performative: no identity exists behind the acts that supposedly "express" gender, and these acts constitute, rather than express, the illusion of the stable gender identity. If the appearance of "being" a gender is thus an effect of culturally influenced acts, then there exists no solid, universal gender: constituted through the practice of performance, the gender "woman" (like the gender "man") remains contingent and open to interpretation and "resignification". In this way, Butler provides an opening for subversive action. They call for people to trouble the categories of gender through performance. In the book *'Undoing Gender'*, Judith Butler talks about how gender is performed without one being conscious of it, but says that it does not mean this performativity is "automatic or mechanical". They argue that we have desires that do not originate from our personhood, but rather, from social norms. The philosopher also debates our notions of "human" and "less-than-human" and how these culturally imposed ideas can keep one from having a "viable life" as the biggest concerns are usually about whether a person will be accepted if their desires differ from normality. Butler writes that justice is not only about how people are treated but also consists of which societal norms must be honored and expressed. Then she gives an account of someone who underwent physical and psychological treatment for gender "normalization" and discusses the long-term effects of that process. Butler revisits her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and discusses what she sees differently now. She also returns to questions she asked earlier about how people define life and quality of life, suggesting that "keeping our notion of the 'human' open to a future articulation" is important because the current way of defining humanity only benefits a certain few. Technically every person is "human" and yet the full privileges of humanity are afforded

only to a chosen few. Often the people who get to be completely human subscribe to a heteronormative agenda.

CHAPTER-2

Exploring Gendered Spaces and Visual Culture in *The Day I Became Woman*

To understand the nature of gendered spaces in India, it is necessary to understand the construction of gender and gender roles first. A common conception within the reviewed literature is that Indian culture is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and mindsets “which consider ‘women as a class’ subordinate to men” (Bhattacharyya 1346) and that “Indian society witnesses a culture of misogyny” (1345). Accordingly, women are considered as a category inferior to men. The notion of a “good Indian woman” has been a basis for criticism in India. A “good” woman does not leave the house unless she has a reason to leave”, as observed in Shilpa Phadke, ‘s book “*Why Loiter?*”. As a result of being limited to their households, women in India are subjected to domestic violence but are expected to remain faithful to their husbands. From the historic inequalities faced by Indian women such as child marriage and Sati, the present-day Indian woman is also still a victim of the society. In Veena Das’s Essay “Modernity and Biography: Women’s Lives in Contemporary India”, she quotes Charles Taylor, who states that the people in traditional cultures are given “an unchallengeable framework” which is expected to be followed and reflected upon in their lives which hinders in the notion of modernity. This creates a glass ceiling which creates restrictions and hindrances in the lives of women in India, a country of traditional cultures, who are forced into leading lives by the cultural norms. Practices that emphasize the subordinate status of women are female feticide and dowry death. This latter practice means that marriage is accompanied by the payment of a dowry that can be very high for the parents of the bride (Fernandes). Dowries reflect the overall lower status of women in

India, because they suggest that women are property, which is transferred from the natal family to the family of the husband after marriage (Bhattacharyya; Fernandes). After marriage, a woman is no longer responsible for taking care of her own parents and siblings but is expected to “abide by the habits, customs and practices” of her in-laws (Bhattacharyya 1342). In some cases, this sense of ownership and a greed for higher dowry payments by the family of the husband can result in violence against the woman and can even lead up to her murder, coining the term dowry-death (Rudd). Thus, for some parents having male offspring outweighs that of having female offspring in order to secure their own future and potentially spare themselves pain. This is a contributing factor in the practice of female feticide, which refers to the abortion of female fetuses and the killing of newborn girls – a practice not limited to India but of pressing importance there. Aside from the general assumption that any kind of gender-selective abortions are a form of gender-based violence, female feticide is already affecting Indian society and will impact it even further in the future. As of today, a demographic imbalance due to female feticide in many parts of the country can be observed. This imbalance can also be linked to an increase of violence against women and a declining birth rate (Gupta). The deficient sex ratio due to female feticide also mirrors the difficulties of raising a female child because of other practices such as the payment of a dowry and more limited opportunities for work and education. By now, female feticide is an issue that transcends the individual level as it affects the general social security system. In order to prevent female feticide, the PCPNDT13 Act was passed in 1994, which forbids prenatal chromosome-determination in order to prevent prenatal abortion of female fetuses. The law also comes with punishment, i.e. fines for doctors and parents (Gupta). However, up until now cases rarely get convictions and the sex ratio is still declining.

In order to discuss the construct 'woman'. Furthermore, it is useful to look at Indian feminism over time. In this, it is elemental to understand Indian feminism as divergent from feminism in the Global North and to establish that women in India as well as generally in the Global South are neither a homogenous group, nor viewed as "sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, family oriented, victimized" (Ghosal 808). The difference in feminism is partially due to mechanisms such as (post)colonialism and religious aspects rooted in the Hindu caste system. During the emergence of a national identity to become independent from the British in the late 19th century, the creation of an ideal of Indian womanhood rooted in tradition became an essential aspect of the independence movement (796). This new understanding of womanhood put "emphasis [on] caste morality and [the] concept of purity" (797) and was accompanied by a sense "of extremely fragile feminine moral vulnerability" (ibid.), which also ultimately aided the reinforcement of the upper and middle caste domination. Ghosal points out that, after independence was gained in 1947, feminist movements grew rather quiet until the 1970s. Young middle-class women in India today seek employment and generally find it in the new service sectors, i.e. in communication and information technology such as call centers or engineering (Raju and Paul 132). These employment opportunities should thus provide and foster equal access to public space for women. However empirical research suggests otherwise (133). Furthermore, despite working in these new highly technological sectors, women's careers are still considered to be of secondary importance after their responsibilities in the family. Therefore, Raju and Paul argue that despite employment outside of the household and an accompanied increase of public male space, "the spatial boundaries of new urban spaces in India are actually being reconstituted and redrawn in a manner that does not challenge traditional gender roles and gender relations" (Paul and Raju 132). Feeling unsafe and vulnerable in public

space is not just an exclusively female problem. However, the “ordinary and continuous nature” (Mehrotra and Viswanath 1542) of violence against women and its normalization leads to the incorporation of a sense of vulnerability in such spaces. Particular forms of violence against women, are domestic violence in private space and sexual assault in public space (Bhattacharyya). However, these categories are not just self-contained categories but influence each other. While domestic violence can occur in other places outside the home too and can also happen to other genders, Bhattacharyya points out that mostly women are affected by it in India. The history of the Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contribution of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India newline will occupy the foremost place. The history of freedom struggle is replete with the saga of sacrifice, selflessness, bravery of women. They fought with true spirit and undismayed courage. The Indian women broke away from various restrictions and got out of their traditional home-oriented roles and responsibilities. It is not easy for women to fight as warrior's in the male dominating society.

Various studies reveal that the Northeast is better off than that of the Nation as a whole in terms of gender equality. However inequality between women and men exists in the region in spite of the predominance of various ethnic groups who by and large do not believe in sex discrimination. The study reveals that women are relatively disempowered and enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in the region. Gender gap exists in terms of access to education, employment and health. A large gender gap exists in political participation both at the levels of state and nation. Among the northeastern states, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram show relatively lesser degree of gender inequality in terms of work participation, literacy, infant mortality and sex ratio. The situation is however adverse in case of Tripura, Assam and Sikkim.

The studies conclude with an observation that access to education, employment and health are only the enabling factors that may not guarantee the achievement towards the goal, which however, largely depends on the mindset of the people. North-eastern Indian literature is sometimes interpreted as “literature of terror,” “literature that is too conflict-ridden,” “literature that portrays aggression and anger,” “aggression as thematic interest,” (Longkumer.2014). Yet meticulous analysis reveals that a continuous attempt to maintain peace has been made in all these writings. Writing from the north east of India has always had an interesting texture to it. It is distinct. Although the “north east” is clubbed as one region, the variations that exist in the seven states constituting this region are mind-boggling. Much of the writing that is available from this region is a combination of original writing in English and some in translation. Writing in other Indian regional languages has a very distinct local cultural feel to it with preoccupations that are understandably of the region. Two marvelous collections of writings — *The Many That I Am: Writings from Nagaland* (Ed. Anungla Zoe Longkumar) and *Crafting the Word: Writings from Manipur* (Ed. Thingnam Anjulika Samom). These are collections of writings — fiction, essays, poems, illustrations, comic strips — by women from the north east of India. The volume of writings from Manipur throws the spotlight on recent decades of activism by women and many of them being at the forefront of the armed conflict that has plagued the state. The nature of contributions in *Crafting the Word* is a little more languid and gentler as compared to ‘The Many That I Am’ which is puzzling. *Zubaan* is a legendary feminist press. It is known for its fundamental work on literature by women. Sometimes the contribution of women is expressed in myriad ways. The hard labor that women put in to keep their households going as in *Vili’s Runaway Son* by Abokali Jimomi, *Martha’s Mother* by Hekali Zhimomi, and *As Spring Arrived* by Kshetrimayum Subadani (Translated from Manipuri by Sapam Sweetie) and in many cases

helping the next generation fulfill their dreams as in “*My Mother’s Daughter*” by Neikehienuo Mepfhuo. The essays in these volumes vary from memoirs to fascinating accounts of the flourishing of women’s writing in Manipur. The “outbooks” or the books apart from the Bible and the school textbooks, in a lovely essay by Narola Changkija (“*Outbooks: A Personal Essay*”, September 2018), an essay in which she reflects upon how her mother banned all outbooks in the home but her father, a police officer, on his travels would fulfill his daughter’s wish and buy her the books she desired

What matters is that his reverence for the written word was catholic, in the very best sense of the term. Literary or pulp fiction, any ‘outbook’ was evaluated and read and appreciated for its unique self. I like to think I have, finally, developed a similar catholic patience towards books, and life, and other human beings. At least, I hope I’ve learned how to value the things worth valuing and let the rest be.

The Many That I Am is a very powerful collection. It creeps upon the reader to leave a delicious sense of sisterhood and belonging, an empowering feeling to know that one is not alone in the daily grind of being a woman in a society still governed and defined by patriarchal norms.

Literature is a consequential medium that reflects human phenomena through artistic mode. It helps in recalling past traumatic experiences though more often in a masked form. literary texts play avital role in recalling and understanding a particular conflict through the wounded psyche which no historical or any other narratives can reach as efficaciously is one of the main reasons why literary discourses rather than historical narratives are comparatively more efficacious in portraying conflicts. North-eastern region of India is ethnically, linguistically, and culturally very different from other states of India as much of the tribes of the region have been

traditionally related to the Tibeto-Burman/Mongoloid stock and closer to Southeast Asia than to South Asia. A Comparative approach to literary discourse exhibits that these writers through their work have largely favored the idea of gender inclusion. These writers have silently portrayed the unclad authenticity of the region's suffering by recording the perspectives of prevalent people and highlighting the conflicts faced by them. Majority of the work done by these writers deal with the volatile socio-political conflict and its consequences. In the context of Northeast India, peace turns out to be a more critically overloaded term as the region has experienced all types of conflicting occurrences leading to varied forms of violence. In a region where violence and oppression are legitimized by the power, these writers have been endeavoring to portray the unclad truths of belligerent conflict and to rehabilitate the torn social fabric by pointing out the mistakes and miscommunications where everyone has a component. These writers have managed to prosperously capture the sufferings, causes, and effects, perspectives, and prospects of the mundane people in the backdrop of the protracted identity conflict, ethnic, separatist forms of movements in the region that has been going on since India's independence. Women writers like Arupa Patangia Kalita, Ratna Bharali Talukdar (State of Assam), Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu (State of Nagaland), Irom Sharmila, and Ningombam Sunita (State of Manipur). All of them are venerated with prestigious literary awards and their indictments have magnetized scholastic attention. These writers are associated with three categorical genres of literature-short story, novel, and poetry and all six of them write in their respective vernacular languages as well as in English and most of them have witnessed conflict in different calibers and dealt with it in their inscriptions. Among them, Irom Sharmila was associated with sixteen-year-long fasting for the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) in the state of Manipur. Arupa Patangia Kalita was an active activist of the Assam

Movement (1979–1985), a movement led by a group of adolescent leaders demanding identification and deportation of illicit immigrants from Bangladesh along with issues of an identity crisis, economic exploitation, socio-political safeguards, cultural threats, etc. Temsula Ao and Easterine Iralu have been live observers of conflicts arising out of ethnic and identity issues in one of the most volatile states of Northeast-Nagaland. Ningom-bam Sunita is a comparatively puerile writer from the state of Manipur, representative of the younger generation who had experienced all possible bellicose manifestations of socio-economic conflict in the denomination of nationalism, identity, and ethnicity.

In our current time of sophisticated visual technology, wide ranging and reaching modes of visual communication and predominantly visual modes of entertainment, contemporary Western culture has been widely characterized as a 'visual' culture (Schroer, 2013:206; Mirzoeff, 1998:5). Although visual images have a long standing importance within Western history, they have historically served the function of illustrating ideas, and were perceived as a lesser form of communication compared to the written or spoken word (Mirzoeff, 1998:5). Visual representations permeate all aspects of our culture, from medical equipment demonstrating the rhythm of a heartbeat, to communication via Facebook. One of the key aims of visual culture as an academic discipline has therefore been to disrupt the separation of “high” and “low” culture. The study of visual culture seeks to explore all moments of cultural life, provoking examination of “the everyday experience of the visual from the snapshot to the VCR and even the blockbuster art exhibition” (Mirzoeff, 1998:7). If our identity is formed through the power of visual media(s), it is important for us to ask to what extent visibility, and modes of visible representation, impact on how we understand ourselves. Historically, feminist theorists have centered their attention on

the representation of women within visual texts, and the perceived negative impact such representations posed to the lives of women. Through the work of second wave feminists, visual culture was seen as forming and perpetuating stereotypes, a force which positioned women as objects to the 'male gaze.' Media was conceived of as tyrannical, a monolithic force which 'injected' its message of feminine objectification through visual texts (Gill, 2014:592). Gerbner argued television homogenized and stereotyped its portrayal of women, rendering them powerless victims. The absence of women within mainstream media was described as the 'symbolic annihilation' of women within visual culture (in Gallagher, 2014:23). The systemic lack of female perspectives within such forms of media revealed its underlying male perspective of the world, perpetuating misogynistic attitudes and supporting the patriarchal structure of western culture. Mulvey's (2009:17) essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' also informed early feminist readings of visual culture. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey documents how the cinema induces 'scopophilia' – a manner of viewing “people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.”

Newspapers give place to the news related to rape, crime, politics, scandals, sports and economics, serious debates and discussions on issues related to women in general are completely missing. The columnists of the newspapers are rarely females. Most of them who find a place in the leader pages are political activists or so-called socialites. In vernacular press the depiction of women gets a share only in coloured pages where there is a lot of gossip about actresses of T.V. serials or film stars along with some hot pick-up and pinups. For this reason early feminist examinations of gender within visual culture focused largely on the representation of women, under the assumption that male representation did not require examination (Gallagher, 2014: 25). A more accurate, or 'truthful' rendering of women within visual media was one of the foremost

aims of early feminists, driven by the belief that greater visibility of women within the media could change sexist behavior throughout wider society. As Franzwa (1978) stated “televised images of women are largely false trying them as less than they really are” (in Gallagher, 2014:24). It is only by asking women and girls about the frames of reference they use to contextualize visual images, that we will come to understand how such cultural environments are mediated, interpreted and potentially resisted (Bragg, 2014:326). Instead of treating women and girls as inextricably 'infected' by the 'virus' of culture, and therefore incapable of autonomously responding to the effects of sexualised culture we must “start asking (girls) what they mean... making them actors rather than objects” (Duit and Van Zoonen, 2007:166). To move beyond 'pro' or 'anti' debates regarding the sexualisation of culture we must examine the “complex meanings people craft in relation to sexualised media and goods, and the tactics they adopt to deal with them” (Atwood, 2014:465). This requires recognition of the complicated and sometimes contradictory relationships between agency and oppression which mediate and form our understandings of gender within visual culture.

The Day I Became Woman is a documentary directed by Moupia Mukherjee. Moupia Mukherjee is an independent filmmaker, producer and writer. *The Day I Became Woman* is her debut film as a director. The film is a journey of the director to find an answer behind the trauma that shook her one fine morning at the age of twelve, when she had her first period. Away from home and her mother on that particular day, she feared for her life, as she did not have the slightest clue about what was going on in her body. Her journey within the film extends to the experiences of several women around menstruation, through interactions with her daughter and a few friends. Finally after 30 years she confronts her mother. Throughout the journey the director is seen confronting the women belonging to the North Eastern states of the subcontinent why they blindly follow the various restrictions and taboos that are placed on them due to their gender. As Massey points out:

Geography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development (*Space, Place, and Gender 2*).

In that sense, the rendition of belonging to the category ‘woman’ can be seen as a form of creating “spatially based homogeneous groupings” (Bourdieu, *Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space* 106) to enforce power structures in space. Correspondingly, the separation of ‘woman’ from ‘man’ in certain spaces can be seen as “segregation that is both cause and effect of the exclusive usage of a space” (ibid.).

The opening scene in the documentary shows the director and her daughter playing on the beach. The daughter asks her mother why she was refusing to get into the water. Moupia responds saying that she is on her menstrual cycle. Now there are two things that are of importance in this scene. The first detail one must keep in mind is that the daughter is only six years old yet she understood what her mother meant by 'menstrual cycle'. Second and more important is the way Moupia made sure her daughter and the viewers understood that the decision to not play in the water was completely hers and not because of any pre-existing taboo. According to Foucault, "Many of the relationships of power in the modern political state are exercised indirectly on and through the body" (Sturken and Cartwright 109). For this concept, Foucault employs the term biopower. Therefore, the way in which subjects and their bodies are regulated in any given space reproduces dominant ideologies and reinforces power structures in societies and economy. Foucault also highlights the potential for resistance against mechanisms of power in space (Kajetzke and Schroer). Foucault conceptualizes spaces that allow restrictions as 'heterotopias'.

In the documentary most girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating. Not entering the "puja" room is the major restriction among urban girls whereas not entering the kitchen is the main restriction among the rural girls during menstruation. Menstruating girls and women are also restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books. The underlying basis for this myth is also the cultural beliefs of impurity associated with menstruation. It is further believed that menstruating women are unhygienic and unclean and hence the food they prepare or handle can get contaminated. Michel de Certeau emphasizes everyday practices in space. For de Certeau "spatial practices refer to a specific

form of operations (ways of doing); they reflect ‘another spatiality’” (126). Correspondingly, the way in which space is used contributes to the creation of “the determining conditions of social life” (129). Moreover, various usages of space create “a theory of daily practices, ... a theory of experienced space and of the disturbing familiarity of the city” (ibid.).

“I started painting at the age of 16 or 17. The feeling of menstruation and the color of menstrual blood has always dominated the concept of style and form of my paintings. She believes that “it was a way of connecting with the universe because every woman menstruates universally”, says the painter to Moupia. Moupia now focused on the rural parts of north east India, Dwaronda Village in West Bengal. The first woman she meets in this village talks about how she got to know about this while bathing together. She overheard the older woman gossiping and every time she laughed they mocked her saying she will experience space too . They almost made her believe that menstruation was a sort of punishment. She goes on to tell the director that she never got an opportunity to discuss menstruation with anyone in the past forty years and that she still does not know why women menstruate. She tells the director how her own mother was hesitant to talk to her directly about periods and had to ask her sister in law to talk to her about it.

“Sex organs of a girl never get importance to her mother or anyone else. She cannot see them, she is asked to hide them as if it’s better to forget about those organs “ A girl who was in 9th standard revealed how she had never seen her naked body. Gradually it was revealed that her parents forbade her. She was in grade 9 and had started menstruating a few years before that. She never knew how to clean herself because she never learnt it. It was forbidden to look at her own body. It was revealed because she was in a very unhygienic condition. Such taboos about menstruation present in many societies impact on girls’ and women's emotional state, mentality

and lifestyle and most importantly, health. Massey claims, "The hegemonic spaces and places which we face today are not only products of forms of economic organization but reflect back at us also - and in the process reinforce - other characteristics of social relations, among them those of gender" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 183). Therefore, making certain spaces more accessible to women could lead to the implementation of gender equality in other areas of life. This notion of accessibility to certain spaces, can also be found in the potential connection between gendered spaces and the access to knowledge and resources.

In the documentary women who are on their period are banned from entering temples or places of worship. Most sources say that it is because these women are considered "ashuddh" or unclean and so, need to stay away from temples - the most holy of places. This adamantness on the impure and holy is even taken to new extremes with women not being allowed to touch the tulsi plant, since it's considered holy. Some say that the impure bleeding woman will ruin the pickle with her body heat. Some say that women were discouraged from eating pickles when on their period because it was acidic with lots of salt and vinegar which would give you acidity and cause water retention. One way or the other this very specific period taboo is particularly silly and irrelevant in the present times. A lot of the hue and cry about women being impure when we bleed stems from the story of Indra's sin associated with killing a Brahmana. The Vedas say he offloaded part of his sin onto women, who have been considered impure for that time of the month when they're bleeding. Today, even the most modern households follow at least a few of these practices. Whether they actually believe in them, or they're so used to the inertia of the ingrained patriarchy that manifests as beliefs. The women of Assam say it is forbidden to enter the fields while they are

menstruating. They are restricted from doing any sort of work including household chores. Suppose a woman starts menstruating today all the elderly women of the village will gather and they will keep the women in a separate room. The girl will then have to observe austerities for the next three to four days. On the last day, her mother offers betel leaves and nuts wrapped in a banana leaf. Space, Massey reminds us, is always being made and remains unfinished, a “sphere of a dynamic simultaneity” that segues into “loose ends and ongoing stories” (107). Space comes into existence through performative acts, yet there is also an interrelation between the social construction of gender “and the visible and invisible boundaries that affect how women use urban space” (Rieker 1). However, there is not just one way in which space can be gendered as this concept is strongly influenced by time and culture (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 186). Moreover, gender identity and sexuality undeniably intersect with the categories race, ethnicity and nationality. Accordingly “any corporal identity that falls outside the established parameters for personal identity will encounter disciplinary force, the same disciplinary force that produces heterosexual men and women” (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* 166).

In the documentary, it is shown how the people compound cultural norms and religious taboos on menstruation by traditional associations with evil spirits, shame and embarrassment surrounding sexual reproduction. In some cultures, women bury their clothes used during menstruation to prevent them being used by evil spirits. In several parts of the country, menstruating women are prohibited from entering the kitchen by virtue of being on their period and thus, “impure”. Women are often made to eat alone, and it is ensured that they use separate utensils on ‘those days’. It gets worse. In many parts of the country, people

are extremely particular about prohibiting women from participating in normal life while menstruating. They're made to avoid sex and sleep separately from other family members. They're discouraged from washing their hair for the first few days of their period. The reasons given for this by strict elders are vague and varied and range from "you just shouldn't". Women's movement in public space is restricted and only justified by a specific purpose for being in space and comes with the requirement to follow certain rules (Paul and Raju; Phadke et al.). Therefore, the division of space "acts to transmit inequality" (Spain 4) and is held in place by "patriarchal systems of power [which] have tended to reinforce male dominance" (Storey 160). In this way, gender segregation ultimately contributes to the subordination of women. All people experience space differently depending on their respective positions in society. Therefore, spatial segregation according to gender reproduces hierarchies of power. Linking Bourdieu's effect of naturalization to the concept of gendered spaces, the dominant group, in this case men, constructs what the dominated group, women, perceive as reality. Hence, women subconsciously accept their subordinate position by abiding to rules of gendered spaces and indirectly enable men to reaffirm their advantage in society (Spain 15). In his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued that French society had reconfigured punishment through the new "humane" practices of "discipline" and "surveillance", used in new institutions such as prisons, the mental asylums, schools, workhouses and factories. These institutions produced obedient citizens who comply with social norms, not simply under threat of corporal punishment, but as a result of their behavior being constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalize the dominant beliefs and values. According to Foucault's theories, there are certain spatialized mechanisms that regulate the way in which we navigate space.

The documentary depicts women who have internalized the various taboos of menstruation imposed on them. They don't have an interest in even trying to change their plight by questioning these norms. They live in such a way that following these norms and taboos have become a part of their daily lives. It goes a step further when they train their children to live in a society that has inculcated and imposed these taboos. This unawareness is due to the assumption that one's own perception of the world is an accurate, unbiased depiction of the "real" world. Bourdieu calls this effect of not questioning the status quo naturalization of said hierarchical structures. This effect of naturalization is also achieved by habitus. As defined by Bourdieu, habitus serves as a system through which agents in space perceive and appreciate practices and through which they structure their own actions due to their respective positions in society over time and space (Bourdieu, "*Social Space and Symbolic Power*" 19). Accordingly, in appropriated spaces this process takes place "under the most invisible form, that of symbolic violence as unperceived violence." (Bourdieu, "*Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space*" 108).

In the concluding part of the documentary, the director confronts her mother. The director tears up as she recollects the first time she got her period cycle. She was terrified thinking she was about to die. She talks about how it has turned into a lifelong trauma for her. Moupia ensures that the same does not happen to her daughter. She has broken away from the taboos that prevented her ancestors from talking to her, as a result of which Moupia is traumatized for the rest of her life. She has taken control of her own life and the 'space' which surrounds her. As Massey talks about the idea of physical space being alive:

A lot of what I've been trying to do over the many years when I've been writing about space is to bring space alive, to dynamize it and to make it relevant, to emphasize how important space is in the lives in which we live. So instead of space being this flat surface it's like a pincushion of a million stories: if you stop at any point in that walk there will be a house with a story. (Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*)

In the book '*Undoing Gender*', Judith Butler talks about how gender is performed without one being conscious of it. Butler writes that justice is not only about how people are treated but also consists of which societal norms must be honored and expressed. According to feminist theory, gender is a social construct. In the sense of Butler's definition of gender, voiced in her publication *Gender Trouble*, the biological or supposedly natural sex assigned at birth is just the first step of many in the cultural and social construction of gender. In its essence, Butler's approach to gender denies the existence of a biological sex because the binary categories assigned at birth effectively lead to the production of gender through discourses surrounding femininity/masculinity in the upbringing of a child in society. Throughout a person's life these discourses are reinforced and naturalize gender. In that way, they reproduce patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormativity that further gender stratification. Representation indeed conceptualisation has been conceived of as spatialisation.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the concepts space and gender as social constructs, this thesis provided an overview of the ways in which particular spaces are gendered. Respectively, the argument of this thesis shows how gendered spaces serve as an instrument of power to enable dominant groups in society to reaffirm their position. As illustrated, India provides a variety of ways in which public spaces are gendered and how these gendered spaces thus aid patriarchal hierarchies and gender stratification. Old and new conceptualizations of how an Indian woman should behave and present herself in public space, aid to enforce gender-bias and patriarchal gender roles further. Additionally, issues like gender-based violence and the notion of honor and respectability also play an important role as to how gendered spaces restrict women's movement in public spaces. Feminist movements around the world actively reclaim public space to question the status quo, create visibility for women and demand equal rights. By exercising their right to the city, these movements give urgency to matters of gender equality and shed a light on gender-based violence. As another form of protest, visual activism also aids these kinds of protest movements by enabling self-representation for individuals, groups, and their claims. In this, the internet and social media have been highly influential.

In this way the documentary *The Day I Became Woman* is a good example for the way in which visual media can facilitate processes of claiming space. This approach gives a voice to marginalized groups of society, i.e. in this case women with a low socio-economic status. In this,

they help to empower these women to embrace their right to claim public, urban space. However, not all feminist art necessarily achieves this process to the same extent. While the documentary certainly creates representation for women and their issues, the viewers of this documentary need not necessarily take away the same sense of empowerment. As meaning is always produced in the process of interpretation, individual knowledge, experience, and a certain degree of awareness with regards to gender inequality is necessary to further feminist ideas in the viewers' interpretation. Because patriarchal hierarchies and their effects are naturalized, they are also embedded and intertwined in the production of meaning.

In this way, some feminist visual art forms can even emphasize underlying gender bias and heteronormative thoughts. Therefore, the initial thesis that feminist visual art facilitates processes of claiming space only proves to be partially true. The extent of these processes aided by would require further research. Overall this thesis shows how in certain parts of North East India there still exists a set of women who are suppressed and restricted within their homes due to the various taboos that surround menstruation. The thesis shows how women are restricted in various spaces that are otherwise part of their daily lives. Only when women have equal access to all spaces at all times and for all purposes, gender stratification can be abolished and equality in society will be achieved.

The situation of women in North East India, in relation to space and gender theories, is an important and underexplored area of research. There are several avenues for future research in this area, some of which are outlined below:

Gendered experiences of displacement: North East India has witnessed several conflicts and displacements, which have disproportionately affected women. Future research could explore how gendered experiences of displacement affect women's sense of place and belonging, and how they negotiate and navigate new spaces. Access to public space: Women in North East India face multiple challenges in accessing public space, including safety concerns and cultural norms. Research could examine the ways in which gendered expectations and social norms influence women's access to public space, and how this affects their sense of agency and mobility.

Women's work and home spaces: Women in North East India are engaged in diverse forms of work, including agriculture, weaving, and handicrafts. Research could explore how gendered divisions of labor influence women's access to and use of space in their homes and workplaces, and how this affects their social and economic empowerment. Intersectional experiences of women: Women in North East India come from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, and their experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting factors. Future research could examine the ways in which gender interacts with other factors such as ethnicity, religion, and class to shape women's experiences of space and place. Women's movements and activism: North East India has a rich history of women's movements and activism, which have challenged gendered power relations and advocated for women's rights. Future research could examine the ways in which women's movements have mobilized around issues of space and gender, and how these movements have contributed to women's empowerment and social change. Overall, there is a need for more research that examines the intersection of space and gender in the context of North East India, in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing women in this region. Such research could inform policy and programmatic interventions that aim to promote gender equality and social justice in the region.

WORKS CITED

Bourdieu, Pierre. “*Social Space and Symbolic Power.*” *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1989, pp. 14–25.

JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/202060.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2018, pp. 106–14.

DOI: 10.1111/1468-2427.12534.

Brinkley, Adrian. “JR’s “Inside Out” Project in Tunisia.” *Hypebeast*, 20 Mar. 2011, www.insideoutproject.net/sites/default/files/group-actions/documents/tunisia.pdf.

Butler, Judith. “*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*”, Routledge, 1990. Thinking gender.

Certeau, Michel de. “*Practices of Space. On Signs*”, edited by Marshall Blonsky, 5th print., Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991, pp. 122–45.

faculty.washington.edu/plape/citiesaut11/readings/de_Certeau_1985_Practices_Space.pdf.

Crang, Mike. “*Cultural Geography*”. Reprint, Routledge, 2004. *Routledge contemporary human geography*.

Dana, Marie Noelle, and Magda Danysz. “*From Style Writing to Art: A Street Art Anthology*”. Drago, 2011.

Fernandes, Leela. “*Beyond Public Spaces and Private Spheres: Gender, Family, and Working-Class Politics in India.*” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1997, p. 525.

DOI: 10.2307/3178384.

Foucault, Michel. “*Two Lectures.*” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 78–108.

pdfs.semanticscholar.org/aefc/b8115ea4232f03f84c121a28d0ff8fa96267.pdf. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.

Foucault, Michel. “*Of Other Spaces.*” *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27.

www.jstor.org/stable/464648.

---. “*Panopticism.*” *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, edited by Michel Foucault, Second Vintage Books edition, Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 195–228. foucault.info/documents/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism/.

Ghosal, Sarbani Guha. “*Major Trends of Feminism in India.*” *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2005, pp. 793–812. www.jstor.org/stable/41856169.

Gupta, Alka. “*Female Foeticide in India.*” 1 Jan. 2016, www.unicef.in/PressReleases/227/Female-foeticide-in-India.

Hall, Stuart. "*The Work of Representation.*" *Representation*, edited by Stuart Hall et al., SAGE; The Open University, 2013, pp. 1–60.

Lefebvre, Henri. "*The Right to the City.*" *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*, edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell publishing, 2005, pp. 147–59.

---. *The Production of Space*. [Nachdr.], Blackwell, 2011.

Massey, Doreen B. "*Space, Place, and Gender*". 4. print, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005.

---. *For Space*. Reprinted., SAGE, 2009, www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0657/2004094666-d.html.

Mukherjee, Moupia, director. "*The Day I Became Woman.*" 2001.

Paul, Tanusree, and Saraswati Raju. "*Public Spaces and Places: Gendered Intersectionalities in Indian Cities.*" *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 43, 3/4, 2016-2017, pp. 128–38. www.jstor.org/stable/26317320.

Spain, Daphne. "*Gendered Spaces*". [Nachdr.], Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998.