

Home I Call My Own: My Everyday and Beyond

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Abstract: *There is nothing more real in our lives than the reality of our everyday. The everyday that is created through earthly, disciplined, relatively insignificant actions helps us to look at our past, to pass through our present and to solidify, and secure the path of our future. But the everyday of each of us are differently constructed because it is shaped by the difference in our cultural contexts based on our identities such as caste, class, gender, religion, geographical disparity and ethnicity. I would like to show in this paper that my home, a physical structure is not a configuration in itself but an organized space where there are different objects used giving the space a definite meaning. The way I have redefined the place into space according to the culture I bear in my mind and through my actions and how I reformulate my idea of home: how my everyday are constructed through this arrangement. This paper shall also delve into how in the process of creating all everyday, living in the space has created an identity for me vis-à-vis how I have consciously created that identity for myself by creating a space called my own.*

Keywords: Everyday, home, home in everyday, home in memory.

Introduction

In this discussion on everyday life, I would like to analyse the question “What is a home?” and “Which can I call my Home?” We know that a place transforms into a space by giving meaning to it or through our interpretations. So, to understand the question of which one is my “home” it would be equally important to understand the relation between “proximity” and “distance.” Simultaneously we need to understand how a home can be called “mine” and how proximity is ensured between me and my home. This proximity is revealed through my sense of “home” as a close space to my heart even if I stay at a distance from it and it can remain at a distance (not nearby in terms of senses) even if I stay in the space. I shall try to

comprehend this proximity of a space called home through the difference in the dimensions of proximity and distance. In my *everydays* I enjoy the access to a space nearby. I can accept the proximity through the manipulation of my bodily functions. So, I can comprehend my *everydays* and can plan how I would like to spend them. A space that is at a distance cannot be equally comprehensible as I do not enjoy access to it and therefore becomes less significant for me. Whenever there is a comprehensible sense of distance the dilemma with the space comes to the forefront as to what and how I can call it my own. This dilemma renders a multi-dimensional and layered understanding of “home.”

A home is a place where emotional and social relationships are created (Easthope 2004; Gomman-Murray and Dowling 2007). It is a space where love is slowly built up, where the simple feelings are bound by emotional attachments so that members feel emotionally secure and a “we” feeling is developed as a consequence. As we grow old every day, we understand that our present is bound to our past and that our past manifests itself in new forms in the present (Ratnam). This manifestation may be partial. The memory of my home is discrete. It helped to create an identity of who I am and the family traditions, conformity to those, opinions, disagreements etc had created the identity. Home is a very complex space. It is a space where habit develops (Arnold 2016). As manifested in extended families there was an economic pool where older members contributed to fill this pool to the requirements of all members of the family. It was a pool of resources from where the basic requirements were first dealt with (Hage 1997). The members were also supported in times of emergency, a security shield for younger ones, and the corrective and advisory board on matters of concern. It was a controlling mechanism. All members shared what could be shared, and grew together in strength to strength in our sense of belonging.

Methodology, Theoretical Underpinning of the Paper

Every individual belongs to several groups, based on our communal identities, beliefs, interests and backgrounds and therefore we have numerous collective self-images and memories (Assmann 2011). These shared backgrounds interplay with our identity and experiences at home. A framework of family memories created in the home where stories, traditions and materials serve as landmarks. These stories and traditions can permeate through collective family experience to ensure collective cohesion and continuity. A home is a

pivotal place where these memories have resembled thereafter; home is an embodied and embedded memory (Braidotti 2006: 29). These recreations are based on our collective and social contexts as well as through narratives (Fortier 2000; McLaughlin 2015). The paper is framed within the cross-disciplinary body of work - including geography, anthropology, sociology and heritage studies. By interrogating home, the author has weaved experiences in (re)creating a home. The author has used triad concepts of memory, identity and home to understand how our experiences and texts interplay with memory and identity. Encountering and (re)creating such places are important since they provide a place for reminders, remembrances and identities to be created, fostered and maintained.

The Space I Called “Home”

I was born into an extended family in North Kolkata. It was a space, rented, a three-room apartment where I had experienced my childhood and young adulthood. If home can be called a physical structure, then I had this space. It means this “place” was an objective reality where I grew up with many people. I called this place mine; it was my home. I shared the idea of home with others and started to learn to create a space of my own. I expressed my emotions, love, respect, sorrow, and sentiments here in this space. I conducted routine activities here and that is how the different corners and spaces within the space became significant to me and I interpreted those spaces as such in the context of these expressions. It became a space where I formed experiences and also learnt from them. These experiences were objective and subjective. Moreover, I created and assumed a familiarity with the space and with the people residing there. I started to learn to maintain my privacy within the space under the surveillance of many and started to form ideas of myself in the same context.

The context was set every morning. The playing of *Rabindrasangeet* on the radio along with other kinds of sounds like the vendors of the market below our Apartment, and the siren from the factory nearby all created a multiple and complex environment. The members often entered the room where the music played and interacted among themselves on the merit of the song and the rendition of the singer. We, the younger ones received that information and created an understanding of what it was and what it stood for. We had no choice. At regular intervals, members of my family also heard news relayed from Delhi for local stations. Through these repetitive actions, a space/milieu was created that constituted the space-time chain

in every regular action (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 313). At different times of the day, different sounds created different milieus. The coo of the pigeons on the sunshade in afternoons was sharp and melodious. Each sound was repetitive, mundane, contingent and temporary. Besides sounds, the things of daily use created a milieu, an old broken door frame, and the calendar on the wall each was stable and emotionless but they together created a space that was very close, understandable and mesmerising. So, we had rules: could not walk after wiping the floor, school bag, and cricket bat never changed positions. The space was produced not only by sounds, or objects. The smoke of the coal harness in the early mornings signified the meals to be prepared by my grandmother for herself devoid of any impure touch. We being members of higher caste had very strict rules to adhere to maintain the ideas of purity (*sudhha*) and impurity (*asudhha*). The maid who regularly visited our home had a specific place to do her work and after she left the place was cleaned up with *gobor* (cow dung). We could never touch our grandmother after she had a bath. If someone did, she bathed again. I picked up the idea of untouchability early enough. Our lived experience was created within this space. This milieu created our lived experience. But it had its boundary. The boundaries sometimes got blurred, and overlapped but were distinct from *others*. The home was liberal yet limited: a space of its kind different and distinct from the *homes* of my friends.

Walter Benjamin had once said to live be to leave certain signs behind (Boym 194: 150). The signs were permanent. For example, the place where *gobor* was smeared after the maid left everyday had left a lasting impression. The demise of my grandmother ensued changes in the rules: there was not a marked division between what pure food could be taken, how and what festivals were to be celebrated etc. The sense of absence slowly waned into a new form of presence. The new present manifested itself in a new way. Every everyday became different. In contrast to the stagnant, sterile presence of objects, sounds and rules the space called home was very dynamic in the sense that the members had relationships of cooperation, conflict, love, and intimacy. The space was together a liberal space that was local and global through their communication and interrelationships.

There was no or little scope for decorations in our rented home. Rooms were fewer than members. A minimum of three nuclear families stayed in the space with one toilet at their disposal. The furniture was kept to a minimum so that there was ample room for others (who came to stay) to

sleep on the makeshift bed roll spread over the floor. Moreover, the quality of the furniture was low and the design was old. It echoed the economic strength and the viability of buying new ones as a bad investment. None talked about such new ventures. It was a matter of survival because there were more members dependent than earning ones. Everyone dreamt it big one day to have a home of their own but this was their reality to stay hooked in the space and call it their own. There was a sense of temporality to the space. Since they thought this space to be a temporary one no one thought it necessary to decorate it. If anything broke it was a ritual to get it mended at low cost. To the elders, it was a shelter to us the younger ones it was our home. Since nothing was moved, nothing was reorganized ever; we were used to the arrangement so much so that whenever my mom bought a salt dispenser or a decorative bowl it was considered to be too expensive.

Identities were not created from here. It is more related to a particular space (territory) within the home. The territory is the *place we are* (Wise 2000). Even if identities are not created from home the relation between territory and the home is interrelated. Both are produced by the space called home. The identity of a younger member was created within the space of the extended family rendering itself through the context of the power structure of an extended family. We jointly held a sense of occupancy and a sense of possession of the space.

Relocated Home: Changing Identities, Changing Milieus

I had already mentioned that the space I started to call my own was not owned by my family. We had to shift to a new place in the suburbs connected to the city by train services and bid goodbye to the place of my birth. This was an experience in the early years of my adulthood and I felt I was displaced. We brought everything we had to the new place, furniture, old books, a clock that did not work anymore even a stray cat that we fed on the corner of the road. We could not leave anything behind sans our memories of the place. The objects got relocated and placed in the new home but I could not connect with them for a long time. The table, the clock, and the vase seemed to have been displaced too. They did not look similar to me in the new place. I started to think about myself and what is mine, connected to my “significant other” there. My society, my world, the “generalized other” how I see them, how they look at me, and the responses to each other all were formed there at my earlier home. It was a shared

social world where everyone involved interpreted and gave meanings to their actions and created a world of our own. My everyday experiences were formed, shared and transmitted in the milieu. The objects and the social space created a relationship between each other and me or was it vice-versa? It became a space subjectively meaningful. My *everydays* were created, maintained and situated there. We consciously act towards all this but we rarely think that there is an intention behind anything we do. The relationship that I started to create with objects, interactions and people reflected an experience but this experience was layered. The study of everyday is to understand this layered multidimensional structure. A postman visited my old home with letters almost at a regular interval. In my new home, a postman started to come but the man was different the physical environment was different; the situation was so different, unrecognizable. The newspaper vendor threw the newspaper from his bicycle on the run at the same place from the road to my balcony on the third floor everyday with utmost accuracy. I missed him when I had to take the newspaper from the vendor by hand as it was not a custom to throw newspapers here. It was a significant practice of city life. We had a lot of space at our new home but I felt I was not in my home. The relationship was subjectively meaningful. I experienced a transition to a new place, unknown, unrecognizable, significantly different from old relations, old furniture, and old objects in a new space. This transition for me was a shock. This transition had an impact on my concentration. New smells, new sounds, new places, and new responses to actions created a variable new situation a newer *everyday* started to be created.

Vanishing Home

This new everyday life experience forced me to concentrate on the new forms of interactions. The taken-for-granted *everyday* that I had vanished suddenly. The shared reality and the contexts all changed giving me new challenges to create a new understanding of my home. But my work life took me to another new place in my adulthood. It was a small town away from the metropolis. I started to find a shelter, a physical structure where I stayed but could not relive my experiences here and found it easier and found myself happy to return to my family at weekends. It was again a call for readjustments to a new culture, a new form of interaction, new demands of work and the “social.” I was again displaced from a familiar to an unfamiliar situation. I call it multiple displacements. The books, the furniture, all were out of place. A new kind of relationship of negotiation has started

to grow between misplaced objects and displaced subjects. The objects that were here at my second home were found to be a mismatch at my new home. The spoon, the bed sheet, and the dish are all in a different place, devoid of the meanings they had imbibed. I continuously try to think about who bought them, why, and when and create a new understanding of those and me in the context. Home is not stable. Home is a thread, not a line or a destination. At the same time, it is non-linear (Puar 1994: 5). It is neither an ordinary point to which we may return nor an end point at which we will eventually arrive. We are always in between. Nostalgia may be a tool used to create that space, but it is not the heart of home (Wise 2000).

Conclusion

The making of a “home” is a process (Wise 2000). It vibrates through different milieus: a cultural expression of different territories, and objects. Culture gives them meaning and it is reflected through how we give meaning to objects, situations and actions. It means a subject is an expression of the territory, rather than of the process of terrorization. Every milieu is a block of space-time constituted by periodic repetition of the component (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 313). The repetition of behaviour that is no longer conscious reflects a process of learning (Reading 1994: 477). This is called habit. It is through habit that culture is manifested. It means we cultivate habits and that they are encultured. The *everydays* is contingent and unstable. The moments experienced cannot be repeated. My identity is also unstable, floating to be precise. The disembeddedness in a new place impacts the everyday reality. The analysis of everyday may have an element of continuity in it but in real terms, this is discrete and varied. Memories of an old place, of an old relation can be revived but it is never lived anymore. The technology helps us to restore old memories and it also envisages new meanings, fast adaptations to new situations and is a blockage to memorising old ones. The *everydays* changes, give place to new, directing us to live a new life and experience them so that we can have a memorable past and a formidable future.

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