A Geocritical Reading of the Playwright Ramu Ramanathan's *Play The Boy Who Stopped Smiling*

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ABSTRACT

Today's education system is more focused on the development of the infrastructure of the institution than the mental and insightful development of the students. Rabindranath Tagore in his short story titled Tota kahinee or The Bird's Tale said that "the cage is improving, but what news of the bird?" (Tagore, 4). The playwright Ramu Ramanathan is an excellent vocal or throaty of these issues. Most of the writers in general and the playwright in particular associate children's stories with fairy tales. They don't often even write any sort of drama or any piece of writing from a small child's perspective. Their questions and queries are sidelined. The writers are least bothered about the mental space of the characters. We the people force the children to memorize our school syllabi, courses, formative and summative exams, and class work. According to Nehal Hardik Thakkar, "The children aren't given a proper individual space, and their issues have remained socially invisible". We don't often push them to enjoy and learn something. We never ask them to forget about marks and all. We don't also encourage them not to chase success. We insist and compel them to pursue success. If we critically think about it, we will come to know that we push them to get traumatized and assist them to stop their smiling. The epoch-making playwright Ramu Ramanathan in his play called The Boy Who Stopped Smiling talked about all these exact things. He breaks the traditional way of drama writing and here in this play, he uses the concept or the style of Grips theatre. The study of this paper will attempt to discuss this play from a geocritical perspective. Here the researcher will try to spend a maximum amount of time to discuss about the space, place, and several other things. Through the central character named Malhar, the playwright endeavored to provide a lifelong lesson to all the parents' community. Here in this play, other characters make fun of the protagonist named Malhar. They called him mad and also wanted him to be sent to a mental asylum. Nobody in this play thinks from Malhar's perspective; even the mother of Malhar avoids visiting the space and place of Malhar's mental faculty. All of the other characters stigmatized him as mental and crazy and also considered him as poorly weak.

Keywords: Grips Theatre, Production of Space, Third Space, Heterotopia, Geo-criticism, Geo-pathology

Introduction

"Each narrative is a voyage narrative, a spatial exercise". (Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life)

The playwright Ramu Ramanathan is an iconoclast in this 21'st century. He tried to highlight almost every tiny bits of social issues. His dramas are basically talk about the existing problems
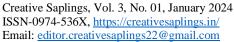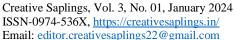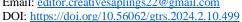
of the society. The sole intention of this research paper is to take off the wraps or dismantle the drama called The Boy Who Stopped Smiling from space, place, and several other perspectives. Here in this study, the researcher will attempt to unveil the text from a literary space's perspective. The playwright tried his level best to depict the text from a new way of technique and offered utmost energy to the central character of this play, Malhar only. He refrained himself from describing a text from an existing stereotype of style. Space can be classified into three sorts, according to Mieczysaw Porbski: extratextual, intertextual, and intratextual. The first is the storage area for artwork. It is tactile and three-dimensional, allowing readers to experience it (e.g. libraries). The second category is space simply in the metaphorical sense, a collection of conventions, a set of common frames of reference for a particular piece of work. It can refer to other works or literary traditions (for example, the appearance of dwarfs in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit alludes to fairy tales), or both, and as such, intertextual space is an abstract concept. Intratextual space, Porbski's final distinction, is what can be called 'intentional space,' because it is suggested and exists only in the supposed reader's imagination, prompted by the text itself. According to Juri Lotman, "artistic space is only a model of real space not its copy" (Lotman 1977, "Przestrzeń artystyczna w prozie Gogola", p.213). Literary space offers a writer to depict or delimitate a text from his own way of understanding. Here, he discusses whatever he wants to discuss. This literary space is an absolute representation of writer's mental world. Literary space varies from writer to writer. If we compare the Indian playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Ramu Ramanathan, it will be as clear as water that both of them are contemporary but their literary space doesn't match with each other. Both of them talk about social issues but their way of representing those issues in text has a huge difference. Basically, the playwright named Vijay Tendulkar talks about 'violence' in his almost all plays like Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder, The Vulture, Baby, and several others whereas the playwright Ramu Ramanathan discusses about the existing realities in his almost all the plays. His play titled 3, Sakina Manzil talks about several real issues like partition, war, Bombay Dock Explosion, Materialism, Disorder, and several other issues which have existed and people affected by them since years. He discussed about all these things on one side whereas in the side he also talked about a structure that totally dealt with place and space named 3, Sakina Manzil. This play can also be analyzed from a geocritical perspective.

Geocritical study or reading deals with a subject that is discussed from a geographical perspective. Geocriticism is a literary interpretation and its theory method that deals with the
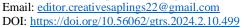
study of geographical areas. Here the researcher tried to dismantle the concept of geography. Geography doesn't talk only about physical space and place, it also talks about human mind and its behaviour. There is a geographer named William Kirk who said 'behavioral geography is a discipline of human science that studies thought abilities and their responses to their surroundings using behaviorism'. According to Elbert Hubbard, "morality is largely a matter of geography". Behavioral geography is a heterogeneous or stratified approach to human geography that looks at human behavior. The functions of the brain underlying spatial reasoning, decision making, and action are the focus of behavioral geographers. Linda Hogan said "there is a geography of the human spirit, common to all people". Furthermore, behavioral geography is human geography which deals with an ideology/approach that uses behaviorism's methods and assumptions to discover the cognitive abilities involved in a person's view of, response to, and interaction with their surroundings. Individuals have the capacity to generate mental images of their surroundings based on personal experiences. These connections enable us to construct mental maps in which we can store memories about space. It's a two-way process in which the environment suggests what should be viewed, and the spectator then gives those ideas meaning. In a nutshell, geography in literature means it talks/discuss about mental map of a character. According to Jimmy Buffett, "without geography you're nowhere" which means our entire life and our existence covered by geography itself. As we all know that literature basically talks about the affective domain of human beings, therefore Truman Capote said, "love, having no geography, knows no boundaries". Here in this play, we have experienced the same thing.

The playwright Ramu Ramanathan depicted the vast horizon of mental space of the protagonist named Malhar.it neither has any boundaries nor knows any sort of limitation. Mental maps are more than just visuals or maps; they are a combination of knowledge and interpretations about a certain subject, and therefore how that individual interprets that location (Johnston, 1986).

Grips Theatre: The Berlin-based Grips-Theatre is a well-known and recognized emancipatory children's and youth theatre. Dr. Mohan Agashe said "Grips plays portray the world through through the eyes of kids, not adult They deal with current events, and the themes of their plays are issues that children and teenagers face in their environments, such as authoritative teaching, school troubles, prejudices, pollution, hate against foreigners, and a desire for friendship and love, among other things. "Almost 30 years ago, Mohan Agashe was responsible for introducing GRIPS theatre in India" (Kapoor). Grips do not provide instruction in the classroom. It doesn't make sense in the traditional sense, and it doesn't provide answers. It

demonstrates how to ask the appropriate questions. Today actor Vibhavari Deshpande is "one of the younger flag-bearers of GRIPS" (Nambiar). Lakshmi Chandra notes "the GRIPS originated in Germany and is an offshoot of the Youth Movement, which swept the world in the seventies" (xiv). She further elaborates that GRIPS is based on "the ideology of opposition and the importance of questioning grown-ups, elders and the status quo"(xiv). According to her, GRIPS plays were not 'traditional' children's plays with fairy tales and dream-world" (xiv). Grip at a subconscious level, education works. It causes children to reflect. Grips enjoy creating new things. To comprehend is to laugh, and to laugh is to learn". This type of theatre attempts to reveal problems faced by children and youngsters and as a consequence of this provides "a platform to open dialogue that could lead to emancipation of youth and sociocultural evolvement and enlightenment" (Night of Theatre). The play "tackles a theme all too familiar to students – an insensitive society and pressurizing parents who fail to understand the psyche and pulse of the younger generation". In the play, "Ramu stresses on the importance of asking the question 'Why?'" (Chandra xiv).

It is "the world's first theatre to deal socio-critically with the lives and living situations of children and young adults, and to merge this into creative comedic and melodic dramas". Here the playwright doesn't focus on the story of fairy tales and some other silly themes that are associated with children, rather the dramatist pays heed to the issue or challenges faced by the children. This kind of theatre also talks about the mental geography of a child. The sole intention of this type of theatre is to unfold the latent cognitive geography of a child. Grips theatre always talk about a mental conversation between a reader and a writer.

Here, in the drama titled *The Boy Who Stopped Smiling* the playwright tried to explore the mental faculty of the protagonist named Malhar. Here he talked about the character's mind space. The playwright discussed everything related to Malhar in detail. If we study the subject named geography then we will come to know about the earth, sun, moon, galaxy, milky Way, and several other things which deal with a particular place or space. Similarly, we have also noticed so many things related to the protagonist named Malhar. The people of Malhar's family posed certain questions about the protagonist. They started to consider him a mentally impaired or mentally challenged person. They started to call him mad and crazy. People sidelined his queries. Here the researcher tried to emphasize his cognitive domain. If we critically analyze his brain then we will come to know that the brain itself deals with a certain kind of literary geography. As geography talks about place and space, similarly, the brain also talks about space

and place. As geography covers long and wide similarly the brain also covers long and wide. The brain can move from one place to another and even present to past and past to present. Through the process of imagination, people can move from one place to another. Here the researcher tried to depict the dark side of the parents community through the process of Grips Theatre. Here in this play *The Boy Who Stopped Smiling* Malhar's parents force him to go for rote learning, they didn't show their interest in paying heed to the protagonist named Malhar. His questions and queries are sidelined. Therefore, his brain got unrest, he couldn't find his level of friends. He started to utter some philosophical words. In this way, we come to know his behaviour, his way of talking, and several other things. Hence, we come to know about his mental space.

Production of Space: Henri Lefebvre in his magnum opus book titled The Production of Space said that this book is an attempt to reconcile mental space (the realm of intellectuals) with real space (the physical and social spheres in which we all live). Henri Lefebvre proceeds from metaphysical and ideological considerations of the meaning of space to its experience in the ordinary lives of home and city in the course of his investigation. In other words, he aspires to bridge the divide between principles and application, between the cerebral and the social, and between thought and reality. According to Lefebvre, "a theory of space should be a unifying theory that unifies the fields of the physical, cognitive, and social realms". (P, 11) Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space. Oxford, England: Blackwell. 1991.

Here in this play titled The Boy Who Stopped Smiling the playwright Ramu Ramanathan talked about almost the same thing. Here he introduced the character named Malhar whose mental space is so vast that the people of the society can't understand his articulated words, it seems to them a kind of philosophical words. In act 1, scene 1 a three people conversation was going on named Ashwini (friend of Mallika), Mallika (sister of Malhar) and Malhar (protagonist of the play).

> Ashwini: Hi Malhar!
> No response from Malhar. Uncomfortable silence.
> Ashwini: Hi Malhar?
> Malhar: Ummmm (thumb in the mouth, staccato speech).
> Palaeolithic.
> Ashwini: What?
> Malhar: P-A-LA-E-O-L-I-T-H-I-C.
> Ashwini: Oh, I see …
> Malhar (stuttering): Early hominids … known … known as Australopithecines. A-U-S-T-R-A-L-O-P-I-T-H-E-C-I-N-E-S.
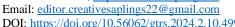> Ashwini (whispering to Mallika): Eh … Mallika … What's he saying? Is he mad or what?
> Mallika: Arrey, don't give him any bhav. He likes to show off …! (Ramanathan. P- 65)

Here, the characters named Ashwini and Mallika aren't in a position to understand the mental space of the central character named Malhar of the play titled The Boy Who Stopped Smiling. They stigmatized him as mad. The same thing happened in the society, people who couldn't understand someone, he/she marked him/her as a mentally challenged/mentally impaired person. People are least bother about the mental space of the victims. Here, in this play, it is noticed that how vast space is possessed by the protagonist named Malhar. The boy Malhar is studying in school only but it is quite surprising to see his enormous cognitional domain. He is like a hyper-average boy and a gifted child.

Third Space: The idea of "Thirdspace," developed by Edward Soja, is a revolutionary addition to the field of spatial theory since it subverts the traditional dichotomies that have historically characterized discussions of geography. Soja presents "Thirdspace" as a lived and performed world that blurs the lines between observed space and spatial practices in his quest for a more nuanced understanding of spatiality. The term "firstspace" has historically been used to refer to phenomena that can be measured and mapped empirically; these are the spatial results of social processes that make up the field of human geography. Conversely, 'secondspace' refers to imagined and thought space shaped by representations and personal interpretations. These dichotomous ideas are demolished by Soja's critical lens, which also challenges us to transcend the boundaries set by material versus mental, real versus imagined, and objectivity versus subjectivity.

"Thirdspace" becomes apparent as a term that transforms, symbolizing the lived experience that is beyond the limitations of traditional spatial reasoning. It blurs the lines between the imagined and the empirical, providing a new angle on spatial behaviors. 'Thirdspace' is actively performed and lived, unlike 'firstspace' and' secondspace,' which are only material or conceptual.

Reading literary works is essential to understanding the subtleties of "Thirdspace." They offer a glimpse into a reality that transcends conceptual or perceived space and material and mental barriers. Literature enables us to comprehend the complexities of "Thirdspace" through stories and representations, highlighting how crucial it is to comprehend spatiality as a dynamic interaction between the imagined and the real. 'Thirdspace' basically pushes us to reevaluate conventional spatial paradigms, calling for a change from binary thinking to a more comprehensive comprehension of spatial reality. By embracing space's lived and practiced

qualities, it invites academics, geographers, and thinkers to go beyond preconceived notions and discover new possibilities for spatial investigation and interpretation.

Heterotopia: Foucault's spatial term "heterotopia" is useful in achieving geo-critical /spatial interpretations of texts by connecting textual, fictional, and imaginary spaces to theories of space. A "heterotopia" is a type of space that can contain other types of spaces, whether they be fictitious, illusory, or actual.

The term "heterotopia," which comes from the Greek terms "heteros," which means "other," and "topos," which means "place," describes places that don't fit into the normative categories of utopias and dystopias. The concept of 'Heterotopia' as defined by Foucault goes beyond simple geographical places to include areas that have complex, contradictory, and paradoxical meanings. By upending conventional wisdom, these areas encourage critical analysis of the sociocultural, political, and historical contexts from which they originate.

Geo-pathology: "Geopathology," according to Una Chaudhuri, is the ongoing struggle with the place problem. "Geopathology" is the state of connecting and interacting with a foreign environment. Ramanathan's character named Malahar is largely displaced and consumed with a fear of mental homelessness and placelessness, as we shall see in the sections that follow. Una Chaudhuri's contends "geopathology" is a helpful tool for illustrating a different, heterotopic place of residence for Ramanathan's character, who is torn between alienation and belonging and home and exile from his mental outlook. Though he stays at home but he doesn't get the feeling which normal people get. He is treated as mad and therefore, being present at home, he is mentally absent at home.

Place, in Tuan's opinion, would be a confined and humanized setting, whereas space would be an area that offers liberty and the ability to move: "Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values" (Tuan, 1997). For Tuan, space becomes meaningful and defined when it becomes a place. Tuan also emphasizes the importance of home as an instance place where individuals experience a sense of belonging and connection.

Westphal unearths theoretical conjecture regarding connections between the referent and its representation or between the world and the text. Referentiality, a concept used to describe the relationships between the worlds of the text and the real world, is brought to light by Westphal. (Westphal, 2011, p. 6).

Conclusion

The conventional goals of literary criticism are fulfilled by this study, which is to deepen our comprehension of the works and highlight their significance. Since all art is considered to be the creation of human imagination, it is considered to be imaginary or made up. To study the writers' imagined worlds that can be formed as a "real" space, a literary thirdspace, and theater as a heterotopia, this chapter has demonstrated and supported a spatial reading. One way to think about dramatic texts is as a way to create space, and theories of place and space help one read a literary interpretation of how texts create space.

Ramanathan's play titled The Boy Who Stopped Smiling evokes mental spaces in addition to actual, tangible locations. Certain plays have a hazy, blurry, disorienting, unintelligible, and unreachable realm. His plays primarily emphasize a feeling of imprisonment, constraint, and paralysis that impedes one's ability to move physically throughout space. The characters create amazing other spaces known as "thirdspaces" in an attempt to escape their confinement. Rebecca draws a connection between wartime Germany and modern Dorset in her "thirdspace" and/or "heterotopia." The drama examines the characters' complicated psychological states in which the central character Malahar lives in imagined and real third realms inside the commonality of a confined room. Perhaps the current era will surpass the space era in importance. People live in a time of simultaneity: a time of juxtaposition, of the close and the far, of the adjacent and the scattered. (Foucault, Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias).
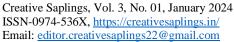
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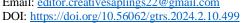Bachelard, Gaston. (1969), The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places. Boston: Beacon Press.

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