

CHAPTER THREE

INHABITING SPACES

3.1 Spaces of Power

The reclamation of home after the outward-bound journey makes the child realize that home is the best and the most beautiful place in the world and the sanctity and security of home provides a safe haven for the child. Though the home regained at the end of the journey may not be the ideal home that the child visualized or conceptualized, yet the knowledge remains that the outside spaces are invested with power relations and it is the home where the child can feel safe and retain its own status of power. In the process of regaining home, the phase of childhood is often left behind and the child travels to an adopted phase of adulthood. This adulthood is brought in through the child's journey into the outside world and thus when the child traverses outside, it transgresses into the adult space and is thrown into the role generally played by the adult. The child also negotiates with its own space within the confines of home and thus crosses over the threshold of its own world into an alien world. The occupation of this alien world not only makes the child self-reliant but also ensures that the child understands the division of adult's space and child's place. It also brings forth the realization that inhabitation of different spaces can lead to broadening of one's own boundaries which provides an easy transition into the next stage of life—from childhood to adulthood. Problem arises when the child starts accepting this space outside the confines of home as home itself and rejects home altogether. How does the child reconsider its position within this newly configured "home" and does the child return within the confines of home or makes home elsewhere? These are questions that need to be analyzed in the context of the specific situations where spaces outside home are inhabited with the intention of making them home. At the same time, these spaces can also lure the child outside home as home can signify suffocation and confinement as also the fact that home can be boring and frustrating primarily because of the safety it provides. The child in its attempt to inhabit the outside world in fact crosses "the borders of the home [which] are also the borders between public and private, family and community, self and other" (Suzanne Carroll 19).

Spaces are always invested with power and any attempt to cross over into an alien space results in power relations being reassessed and questioned. Henri Lefebvre says, “Power aspires to control space in its entirety, so it maintains it in a ‘disjointed unity’, as at once fragmentary and homogeneous: it divides and rules” (388).¹ Thus spaces are segregated according to category of individuals. This division in fact helps in the retaining of power as movement from one space to another involves a lot of determination and intention, which is hardly available for those who want to cross over. Gill Valentine argues that the adult construction of external space for the child is always laden with fear and danger, which restrains the child from having a sense of competent authority and independent thinking (29). But Lefebvre again asserts, “How could one aim for power without reaching for the places where power resides, without planning to occupy that space and to create a new political morphology . . . ?” (386). Thus a child leaves the confines and security of home for the external spaces in an attempt to occupy spaces which are considered to be off-limits for the child. The earlier recognition of a child’s position at home has been one of marginalization and its space is one of constraint and subjugation too. Thus when the child transgresses to an external space does it do so as an act of movement from a marginalized position to one of dominance? Marginalization also acts itself out in society very often in the form of physical deformation. When a child is physically not on a par with other children marginalization exhibits itself in the form of relegation to secluded spaces where the child feels excluded from the normal day-to-day activities of other children. Does the child then move out to spaces beyond its reach, beyond the safety of home and parents to find its position within the potentially risk laden spaces?

The unsafe world outside is the same as the colonized place where the colonizer instills his own beliefs and value systems into which the native or colonized is indoctrinated. In turn, the colonized have to unlearn all their earlier conceptions of home. Clare Bradford says that postcolonial studies place emphasis “on the politics and ideologies of human geographies by investigating how colonizing powers incorporated the spaces of colonized lands into their own modes of thought and belief . . .” (126). The problem with the child is that it holds no preconceived notion of home on its own because it is already in a colonized state at the time of its birth and is immediately incorporated into the thought processes of the adult whose actions reflect the colonizing mentality. Childhood is therefore constructed through adult concepts of

it and it is a space of domination and control where adult norms of livelihood are played out. Within this constructed space of childhood, the spaces of home and away are imbued with meanings that make the child understand the importance and value of these places. But it is only in relinquishing home that the child understands the value of it and therefore the urgency of the return home. The dichotomy of the position is exemplified by Perry Nodelman who says that “children can and must stay as they are at home in the enclosed space of childhood that adults provide for them but also . . . children do and must change even in order to appreciate the value of enclosed space” (67). Does the child appreciate the value of enclosed space or is external space more important to the child once it tastes the freedom? We here try to understand the child’s endeavour in its negotiations through the external spaces in search of home and how the concept of home becomes diffuse into many ideas and realms of existence. We look at three texts here to understand the child’s construction of home in external spaces and locate the question of power within these texts as also the necessity of the child to leave behind its liminal space to inhabit the unknown adult world.

The first of the texts analyzed here is Ruskin Bond’s *The Adventures of Rusty*, which is set a few years before Indian independence and is divided into two parts. The first part chronicles Rusty’s life in Grandmother Clerke’s home in Dehradun and his Uncle Ken’s misadventures. The second part records the adventures of Rusty with his friend Daljit and their attempt to run away from boarding school. We here try to understand the urgency of Rusty to fill up spaces that do not belong to him and the ensuing tussle of sharing space with an adult. At the same time, we try to locate Rusty’s decisions within his and his community’s marginalized position in society to understand how home does not satisfy his requirements and therefore he finds it necessary to claim adult space, or in the case of the Anglo-Indian community, someone else’s space. The second text that we take up is Salman Rushdie’s *Luka and the Fire of Life*, which chronicles Luka’s adventures in an alternate world—the world of computer games. Luka’s adventures are interrogated in the light of his search for the fire of life which will restore Rashid, his father, to health; moreover in the meantime, Luka assesses and negotiates the adult constructed alternate world within the marginalized position of his left-handed self. The third text that we analyze is Arup Kumar Dutta’s *The Blind Witness*, which posits a blind boy, Ramu, as the key “witness” to a serious crime and

explores how he finds his way despite his handicap in a very dangerous adult world. All the three texts will question the marginalized position of the child in its attempt to negotiate the hurdles of the adult world and the cover of security that the child gives up in the process.

3.2 Adult Spaces and Child Transgression

Childhood by itself is a segregated space which is under adult supervision. As Susan Honeyman says, “writers often utilize childhood as a ludic space through which to criticize the adult world. In doing so, they mimic social constructions of childhood, exposing the very constructedness of such representations, decentering the adult discourse that created them” (6). If childhood is a created space then the child’s movement away from this space to cross over into the adult space involves agency and freedom to overcome adult constriction and restraint. The ways through which adult space is negotiated is different for different children depending on the conditions through which they are made to pass. And depending on the circumstances, the responses are also different primarily because each child’s perception of adult space is different too. The occupation of home in the first place needs to be interrogated so that an understanding of the reasons for crossing over into adult spaces can be found. And, in doing so, the subject position of the child is analyzed to assess the reasons why the child inhabits dual spaces—that of home and outside.

3.2.1 Food as Liberating Space

Ruskin Bond’s *The Adventures of Rusty* looks at the adventures of a young boy Rusty in his grandmother’s home and also elsewhere with his friend Daljit. The pre-independence setting of the novel puts forward the precarious condition of the Anglo-Indians in India and the necessity of the community to urgently claim space either in India or in England as its own, and this finds expression through many of the episodes in the text. At the same time, it also reflects Rusty’s desire to find love and the feeling of being wanted in his home through food. He does not find it in his father’s place and therefore searches for it in his grandmother’s place. Rusty is portrayed as any other young boy of his age who comes back home from school in search of the very things that any young boy desires—plenty of food to feed his hunger and plenty of adventures to consume his time. He finds both at his grandmother’s place and therefore there is

an outright rejection of his parents' home in Assam. In the predominantly Anglo-Indian surroundings of Dehradun, Rusty finds his saviour so far as food is concerned in his grandmother. The difference between his parents' home and his grandmother's home is evident from the description bestowed upon his grandmother's house by the first person narration. While the tea gardens of Assam and not necessarily his own home is just referred to as "great fun", the house in Dehradun is described in the following words:

A large rambling bungalow, on the outskirts of the town. In the grounds were many trees, most of them fruit trees—mangoes, lichees, guavas, bananas, papayas, lemons—there was room for all of them, including a giant jack-fruit tree casting its shadows on the walls of the house . . . it was a good house to live in, especially for a nine-year old with tremendous appetite. (6)

The narrative voice assigns to the house characteristics which are appealing to the young boy, especially since it is filled with various fruit trees and a good cook into the bargain. Rusty's home becomes synonymous with food for which he returns again and again to his grandmother's home. But Bond interrogates other issues too within the seemingly simple narrative structure. One of the important aspects of the first part of the text is the emphasis placed on Grandmother Clerke's life in Dehradun and her refusal to leave the place after India's independence. She feels that she has grown roots like an old tree and is unwilling to uproot herself till she is left without any leaves; that is without any life. She is reminiscent of other aged Anglo-Indians like Mr. Pettigrew and Rusty's aunt in *Vagrants in the Valley* who are relic of past times and are unwilling to leave the country despite so little being left behind.² The spaces that these people have inhabited all their lives are sacred to them. This is the only place they have known and their sense of belongingness emanates from this place—their homes—which is not to be found in England or any other place in the world. They are what Lionel Caplan termed "children of colonialism" who have accepted their homes or spaces outside home as home itself and are unwilling to relocate themselves in their actual homes. The power equation that comes into play by inhabiting someone else's space or place is also evident in the case of these adults who are unwilling to give up their places for an unknown and alien place in the land of their forefathers. It

needs a strong incentive to forego one's designated place and to struggle to populate a new place and fill up the space with one's own individuality and make it one's own. For Rusty, this attraction is the food of his grandmother for which he willingly gives up his own home and place and comes to Dehradun. Bond interrogates the role of food as a source of connectivity within families and shows how it serves as a reminder of home and belongingness.

Ann Alston makes an apt remark regarding food and belonging and how this sense of belonging can be associated with the idea of home too. She says:

Food signifies a sense of belonging and the need to belong is intrinsic to children's literature and of course to family. But belonging can also entail loyalty to both family and nation and it is noticeable that children's literature is often very conservative about the type of food which it promotes (119).

In the novel, food acts as a form of alluring prospect for Rusty; it is what invites him to his grandmother's place during the holidays and it is the same food that stops him from going to his parents' place in Assam. The sameness of food in his parents' house and the fact that his parents cannot cook emphasizes the importance of food in a child's life. The space provided for him in his parents' home in Assam is thereby rejected by Rusty and he consumes that space at his grandmother's place primarily because it provides him with what he wants as a child—food and love. At the same time, the grandmother acts as a substitute mother not only to Rusty but also to Uncle Ken through her acts of feeding them and cooking for them. By providing for the family, she is represented as the embodiment of matronly virtues, as also the fact that she holds the family together through food. Grandmother Clerke is all the more important in this context because she is also making a valiant attempt to uphold the waning importance of the Anglo-Indian community through one of the most potent of cultural signifiers: that of food. Eugene Anderson observes in *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (2005) that food is used across all societies in the world to communicate messages of group solidarity, that food sharing is not only sacred in religion but also assumes a near sacred quality in families and also carries messages regarding many social constructs like ethnicity, identity and so on (6). This notion of food as a system of communication is replete with critical considerations

regarding food and one of the most vehement of statements is the one put forward by Roland Barthes in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”. He writes:

[Food] is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior

food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies. That is to say that it is not just an indicator of a set of more or less conscious motivations, but that it is real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication. (24)

Carlita Greene and Janet Cramer take this idea of communication slightly further in “Beyond Mere Sustenance: Food as Communication/Communication as Food” by relating communication to the process “through which a society or culture comes into being” (xviii).³ Analyzed in the context of Grandmother Clerke’s cooking and young Rusty’s adoration for her food, what we can assume is that food acts as a means of communication not only of the Anglo-Indian identity but for Rusty it also communicates the sense of home. Margaret Visser looks at the act of food sharing as an act of family bonding and eating the same food actually signifies belonging and companionship(3). Thus family, home and food are intricately connected to each other. Rusty’s grandmother lives alone but through the act of sharing food with Rusty and Uncle Ken she creates a family for herself. Though Rusty says that she is not entirely alone as she has got her gardener Kanta and his son Mohan, plus a Siamese cat and a mongrel dog, yet she can cook for him chiefly. As Rusty, the narrator, says that “She didn’t enjoy cooking for herself . . . she had to cook for *someone*” (original emphasis) (7). It is mainly through Rusty that she has kept alive the tradition of culinary expertise which is so much symbolic of her community. What this also means is that she proves to be an ideal example of the virtues that are extolled in a woman, particularly because of her ability to feed others and to toil hard for the satisfaction of others. This is an image that forms a staple ingredient not only of children’s literature but also of literature per se.

One of the fertile signifiers of the synthesis of British and Indian culture is food and so Rusty's grandmother is equally adept in making both the English and Indian fare like kababs and curries, gulab jamuns, stuffed turkeys and chickens, chocolate fudge, peanut toffee and such other food. This ability to move expertly between different culinary cultures exemplifies the merging of both cultures. It was common for many Anglo-Indian women during those times to bring in a mixture and thereby newness to their cuisine by mixing English and Indian recipes. Blunt and Dowling remark in this context:

many Anglo-Indians who lived in India before Independence imagined that they were part of a British imperial diaspora. But whilst their home-life was in many ways more western than Indian – as shown by their home furnishings and embodied domestic practices, such as using cutlery rather than eating by hand – the food that they ate reflected both western and Indian influences. Anglo-Indians usually ate curry and rice at lunch but a western-style breakfast, tea and 'side dish' in the evening. (216)

This ability to synthesize reflects Grandmother's Clerke's, and by implication the whole community's, acceptance of their mixed heritage. She knows that hers is a complicated inheritance, something which is perhaps soon going to be lost forever after India's independence, when her children leave India for far-off shores. As mentioned earlier, like Mr. Pettigrew, she is also trying to hold on fast to a home and tradition which is gradually losing its hold in India. But unlike him, she is making a conscious effort to pass on her ways of life to the next generation. What remains hidden in the narrative is the fact that Rusty's parents do not have the same inclination towards cooking in particular and food in general, such that the grandmother cannot hand down her expertise directly. So, one of the ways she devises is to pass on the taste of food if not the actual process of making it. In this way she has secured a home for her food and thereby herself in the future remembrances of at least Rusty, if not the other people she has fed over time.

One of the other ways through which she keeps her tradition alive is by making pickles. In the making of pickles, another power play regarding food comes into being. This power play is also manifested earlier in the fight between Rusty and Uncle Ken regarding the stuffing of roast duck and apple sauce. The fight between uncle and nephew over food signifies the power struggle that comes into play over adult control of food and the child's desire for it. When the adult regulates the amount of food that the child is allowed to eat, the adult in a sense regulates the very process of being, of nourishing and sustaining oneself. In *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (1981), Gillian Feeley-Harnik looks at the Biblical meaning of food: "The power of the Lord is manifested in his ability to control food. . . . Rejection of the power and authority of the Lord is symbolized by seeking after food he has forbidden. . . . Eating joins people with the Lord or separates them" (72). Rusty's gorging on his grandmother's food is looked upon by his uncle as an attempt to eat what, according to the latter, is rightfully his. On the other hand, eating, and more importantly eating with relish what has been served by his grandmother signifies an obedient gesture on the part of Rusty who has already rejected his parents' table. Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard in "Power, Food and Eating in Maurice Sendak and Henrik Drescher: *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen*, and *The Boy Who Ate Around*" say that the child's world is one which is continually restricted through adult control and particularly so with respect to food, where adults control not only what to eat but also how much to eat (127). They also note, "The functions of food, as well as the rituals of eating and the rituals of the table, are compact metaphors for the power struggle inherent to family dynamics" (132). In grandmother Clerke's home, both Uncle Ken and Rusty engage themselves in power struggles over the acquisition of space and both of them want to appropriate it as their own. For Rusty, the necessity arises out of his rejection of his own home and, for Uncle Ken, the impetus is to retain his childlike status and his unwillingness to accept adult responsibility. Uncle Ken is dependent on his aunt and she takes care of his needs and attempts to find a job for him. Thus, Bond treats them almost on a par in their preference of food. Each tries to oust the other from grandmother's house as soon as possible so that the space available is solely for the one who can stay back. The ensuing dialogue brings this aspect to the fore:

“When are you joining your parents?” he asked fully, over the jam tart.
“I may not go to them this year,” I said. “When are you going to get another job, Uncle?” “Oh, I’m thinking of taking a rest for a couple of months” (10).

Both Rusty and Uncle Ken are postponing their departure from grandmother’s place as much as possible so that they can prolong their hold over the acquired space. It is interesting to note that grandmother Clerke’s home provides a queer meeting point for two individuals moving in opposite directions. On the one hand, Rusty in his abandoning of his parents’ home is moving towards adult aspirations by making a home outside his own home. On the other hand, Uncle Ken, despite being an adult, has not made his home anywhere and still retains his phase of childhood by being dependent on grandmother Clerke.⁴

In the struggle with his uncle, Rusty tries to take the upper hand by making his grandmother make pickles. He knows that his uncle does not like pickles and thus when his grandmother makes pickles, he, by implication, scores one over his uncle. The process of pickling is a recurrent theme in Indian English literature and shows evidence of an attempt to preserve the history of the times. Alex Tickell in *Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things* (2007) says, in the context of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, that pickles serve as the symbolic representation of the preserving or conserving of history as also the migrant’s desire to fix in time and place the memories of a past time and a past home (47). Vijay Mishra in *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007), refers to the same thing by explicitly referring to Rushdie’s text to correlate history with pickling:

The pickled version of history . . . gives shape and meaning—a form, to be precise (as Rushdie says)—to the ingredients of history. History gets written down or is encoded as a grand Indian conceit based on its cuisine, its smells, its tastes . . . (216)

Grandmother Clerke’s pickles serve two important functions. They are firstly a means through which she tries to augment her meagre income and earn a little extra money for the winter. As Rusty says, despite the fact that she feeds so many people there was hardly

a lot of money for her to spend. She lived on the small income that she gets as pension from the Railways and some money from the mango crop. The wonderful food that she cooked was not large in proportion but was actually good because of her culinary skills. Isha Doshi in “Food and Language as Markers of Identity: The Anglo-Indian Community’s Survival since Partition” says that Anglo-Indians by nature kept an open house and their sense of hospitality is derived more from their Indian heritage than their British one. The community by and large was very hospitable in nature and serving food became a marker of their identity. This is reflected in Rusty’s mention of the fact that his grandmother fed a lot of people and pets. Thus she makes pickles and asks Rusty and Mohan to go from house to house in their area to sell them. But secondly and more importantly, this process of pickling is a means through which she is preserving her identity and her tradition. Not only is she passing on the food to the next generation but she is also spreading her food amongst the inhabitants of her area. Food is also symbolic of the person who creates it. As the smells and sounds are representative of a particular place so also particular food brings memory of a place or more importantly the person who has created it. By cooking, grandmother has created or rather transmitted herself into the various persons and animals that she feeds. Cooking and pickling therefore serve as metaphors for preservation and transmission of identity beyond time and place.

For Rusty, the attachment to his grandmother and to her house is primarily through food. The home that young Rusty wants to go to during the holidays is the home that provides him with good food to eat and that home is the one of his grandmother. Young boys are represented in children’s literature very often as voracious eaters and Bond does not try to bring in the ideological or sexual implications connected with the notion of eating. He makes it a simple statement of demand and supply and, where the boy gets to eat he will return there time and again. It is the same with Uncle Ken too. He gets free food and lodging at his aunt’s place and it thus becomes his constant refuge without him feeling the necessity of finding proper work. Home for both Rusty and his uncle is symbolized through food and it acts as the means through which grandmother keeps her own home intact. The family is bound together by food and food is not only nourishment but also security: the fact that there is always someone to feed and something to eat whenever they turn to Grandmother Clerke’s house.

Though grandmother's food occupies an important part of the novel yet the emphasis is more on Uncle Ken and his misadventures. He is unable to find or retain a job for a long time and he spends most of his days shuttling among his various sisters and his Aunt May's place. Uncle Ken is the "uncolonial" Anglo-Indian (to use Meena Khorana's term), one who sees life in India as a long holiday without the necessity of work. But as his aunt very pragmatically points out to Rusty, that life is easy-going till his sisters can accommodate him. Once they leave India for England or other countries they will realize that life is not going to be so smooth and comfortable without the Indian servants to take care of their needs. Uncle Ken would not then find his sisters so accommodating and he would find life outside India not as cozy as he is seeing it through his rose-tinted spectacles now. Despite the fact that tales of Uncle Ken are hilarious and Bond's rendering them with humour is very simplistic in nature, the underlying message is poignant about the impending difficulties that the community is going to face. Already the strains are noticeable in Grandmother's Clerke's problems in coping with the expenses of living. She therefore tries to instill in her nephew the understanding that a ready home is not going to be available for him always in his sisters' houses and she too cannot sustain him for a long time. For her, home will always remain the house she has inherited from her husband with its shady fruit trees and the knowledge that she has rendered it into a home through her cooking and feeding and the love she has dispersed in this house. And, through the act of writing, Bond has been successful in preserving that memory, the home that many Anglo-Indians have built in India through various markers of identity, food being one of them.

3.2.2 Journey as a Liberating Space

Part I of the book is loosely structured with individual episodes forming a motley group. But part II, titled "Running Away" is set a few years after the time frame of part I and is structured around one particular plot. The narrative is again a reminder of Bond's *The Room on the Roof* as it reintroduces the tyrannical guardian that Rusty ran away from in the earlier work. The second part is in a way a prelude to *Room* as it is set in a time period before Rusty returns to his guardian's home. In a valiant effort to remove himself from the cloistered existence that we know he will be subjected to once he returns after the completion of school, Rusty tries to run away from school. If read in relation to *Room* then the subsequent outcome is already known. Bond styles