

Enclosed Spaces: A Deconstructive Feminist Reading of Vāstu Śāstra with Special Reference to Home and Temple Architecture of Kerala

Ajomy Maria Joseph

Abstract

In India most people follow the rules and regulations of the Indian architectural discourse *Vāstu Śāstra* in constructions. It is considered to be a vedic discipline authored by the rishis. This architectural discourse can be considered a masculine discourse when we look at it from various angles. This paper attempts to show how the Indian architectural discourse *Vāstu Śāstra* becomes a manifesto of gendering in its literal and metaphorical realms based on the house and temple constructions in Kerala. The paper discloses how the precepts of *Vāstu Śāstra* attempt a strategic enclosure of femininity within the privacy of homes. It also throws light on the way in which the temple architectures of Kerala appear to be masculine structures.

Keywords: Deconstruction; Feminism; Strategic enclosure; *Vāstu Śāstra*.

During the course of its evolution from an activist movement to a philosophical and practical discourse, feminist theory has incorporated several philosophies within its theoretical framework. It is a multidisciplinary formation that does not fix the frame within prescribed limits. Feminist philosophy has heavily borrowed from Psychology, Linguistics, Semiotics and many more to expand its scope and application in various fields. With the poststructuralist turn in literary theory, feminism also borrowed several precepts from Poststructuralism, especially deconstruction. Deconstruction has demystified the concept of single equivocal meaning that led to the subversion of many authoritative discourses. "The project of deconstruction is... to problematize the very idea of opposition and the notion of identity upon which it depends. Deconstruction therefore undermines identity, truth, being as such; it substitutes endless deferral or play for

these essences.” (Poovey 52). The impact of deconstruction is also visible in feminist theory and practice. The deconstructive dismantling of binary opposition heavily influenced the feminist deconstruction of male/female binary that legitimized the patriarchal authority. Such a deconstructive turn in feminist discourse challenged the notions of patriarchal gendering. Deconstructive feminism even attempts to interrogate many of the humanistic perspectives that feminism falls into while attempting to combat patriarchy. “To take deconstruction to its logical conclusion would be to argue that ‘woman’ is only a social construct that has no basis in nature, that ‘woman,’ in other words, is a term whose definition depends upon the context in which it is being discussed and not upon some set of sexual organs or social experiences” (Poovey 52).

Feminists who took up deconstruction as an interrogation strategy attempted to “demystify the category of ‘woman’” (Poovey 58) and this is seen in the theoretical outpourings of several theorists, especially the French feminists. “In other words, in its demystifying mode, deconstruction does not simply offer an alternative hierarchy of binary oppositions; it problematizes and opens to scrutiny the very nature of identity and oppositional logic and therefore makes visible the artifice necessary to establish, legislate, and maintain hierarchical thinking” (Poovey 58). A reading of the gendered spatiality of an architectural discourse based on this idea, discloses the oppositional logic of a discourse that claims to be designed to ensure the well-being of the inhabitants. The Indian architectural discourse *Vāstu Śāstra* claims to be a holistic approach to the creation of living spaces. A deconstructive reading of *Vāstu Śāstra* shows how this claim fails for women whose space is defined from the patriarchal logic of woman as the second sex. This paper is an attempt to read *Vāstu Śāstra* as a masculine discourse that limits its wellness claim to a highly misogynistic agenda. The study encompasses an analysis of the home and religious spaces.

The deconstructive feminist reading of the architectural discourse, *Vāstu Śāstra* involves a critique of the construction of separate spheres or the public/private division of gendered space. The most pervasive representation of gendered space is the paradigm of the “separate spheres” – an oppositional and hierarchical system consisting of a dominant public male realm and a subordinate private female one. The origins of this ideology which divides the public from the private and thereby men from women are patriarchal. This is problematic for the feminists. Feminist work in gender and space has taken this intellectual framework as a starting point for critiquing the definitions of gendered space.

A clear demarcation between public and private spheres can be seen in *Vāstu Sāstra*, through the association of the extended, spacious, front and open constructions with masculine public sphere, and the less spacious, unhygienic and the enclosed areas with the private female *site*. The front and back stages are culturally class defined spaces. The back stage is not supposed to be seen by the public. As per the norms of *Vāstu Sāstra* the living room and the dining room are the front stage whereas the back stage constitutes the kitchen, the bedroom and the bathroom. Upstairs has been traditionally called private, and downstairs, public, establishing a demarcation between the two. The upstairs coded public is the feminized space. The diagonal stairs represent the transition areas between the private upstairs and the public downstairs. In traditional palaces women who lived in the *anthapurās* (inner rooms) were denied access to the public space of festivity and art performances associated with patriarchy. They could have a glance at the performances through the small windows or holes built for them distancing themselves from the public sight. An instance can be seen in the construction of separate spheres for woman in the traditional palaces of India.



Fig. 1. Navarātrimandapam in Padmanabhapuram palace (This portion of the palace is the enclosed box like structure in which, the royal women sat and watched the performance hidden from the public audience.)

Mostly *Vāstu* based homes are quadrangular constructions (*Nālukettu*) with four *dikgrihas* and their associated *kōngrihas*. *Vāstu* considers *Nālukettu* structure as the ideal form of housing rather than single, double or

three block structures. *Nālukettu* is the traditional homestead in rectangular structure where four blocks of buildings are joined together with the central courtyard open to the sky. The four blocks on the sides are *Vadakkini* (Northern Block/hall), *Padinjattini* (Western Block/hall), *Kizhakkini* (Eastern Block/hall) and *Thekkini* (Southern Block/hall). (“Design of a Kerala Nalukettu” n. pag). Traditionally *Nālukettu* houses were built by the Nambudiris and the Nairs, the prominent castes of Kerala.

A deconstructive feminist reading of *Nālukettu* structure against the cultural background of matrilineal system prevalent among Nairs, reveals the gender politics behind the idealization of *Nālukettu*. Matrilineal system is generally considered as a system that provides immense freedom to woman as they were not dependent on their husbands. *Sambandham*, the marital system among Nairs, “refers to the actual marital alliance... that a woman of the matrilineal castes contracts with a man of the upper caste or same caste” (Nandakumar 57). “It was not seen as a sacred contract, but a purely fugitive alliance terminable at will” (qtd. in Ganguly n. pag.).

But, a deconstructive feminist reading of the system shows that the focus point of matrilineal system prevalent in the Nair families was not to provide freedom to woman, but to enclose them within the *taravad* under the control of the male head of the family. There existed the strong binary of man/woman within the space of *taravad*. The *karanavar*, a male member of the family, held the utmost power as the head of the family. “A *taravad* comprised several smaller units called *tavazhi*, each including a mother and her children together with the maternal uncle. But the eldest maternal uncle called the *karanavan*, was the head of family of the whole *taravad*, holding absolute and unquestioned authority over its administration as an overlord” ((Nandakumar 57 -58). The women had multiple partners mostly belonging to the Nambudiri community. But, the multiple partners the women had through the *sambandham* can never be considered as the freedom they enjoyed in their marital relationships. Instead, it was a system perpetrating strategic enclosure of women within the home. “As these women can never leave their natal homes because of the matrilocal pattern of residence and these homes were those large, crowded *taravads*, ruled over by despotic *karanavars*. In this situation life was intensely local because of the pattern of residence, lack of mobility and communication with the world outside” (Nandakumar 62). The women were considered as sexual objects for the gratification of upper caste male desire. This is well understood when we analyse the cultural background of Kerala in which the Brahmins enjoyed supreme position in the society. There are evidences that show how *sambandham* remained a celebration of lust, de-

grading the relation to mere concubinage. "...[Nambudiris] constantly referred to the castes below them as inherently incapable of practicing monogamy. For their part, they considered hypergamous relations with other castes as concubinage, 'as condemning the victim fits very well into the ideology and practice of dominance'" (Nandakumar 60- 61). *Sambandham* also ensured the glory of *taravad*. "... access to Nambudiri ritualism [through *sambandham*] and the extent of involvement with them brought greater glory to the *taravad* concerned and prestige to the *karanavan* as it was an efficient means of social mobility" (Nandakumar 57).

The structure of *Nālukettu* perfectly complements this scheme of subjection and enclosure ingrained in the *taravad* system. The hierarchies seen in the structuring of the house and in the administration of the home are similar. According to *Vāstu Śāstra*, *brahma* is the basis of all creations. It is called the *brahmastān* or sacred position of the land. It is the point of convergence and separation of the four directions of the land – North East (*Īsana*), South East (*Agni*), North West (*Vāyu*), South West (*Nrīti*). Therefore it is the focal point of positive energy and it flows to all directions. It is the gravitational centre of the home. As *Vāstu nābhi* which is also called *brahmastān* is the metaphorical centre of construction, the *Karanavar* of the family is the power centre who controls the matrilineal *taravad*.



Fig. 2. Nālukettu

In *Vāstu Śāstra*, it is the *nābhi* of *Vāstu Puruṣa* that acts as the energy

centre. *Vāstu Śāstra* insists that this portion (*brahmastān*) should be left open. From this tradition the concept of *Nālukettu* was developed, since this energy centre is left open and around this the building is constructed. Besides this, the major concern of *Nālukettu* house was to ensure maximum privacy for the female members inside the home. The enhancement of privacy for women through the construction of an enclosed space attributes privacy as inevitable to womanhood. The public sphere, both inside the house and outside the house, is associated with man. Augmentation of privacy delimits women within the male constructed space. It is a strategy, a mode of enclosure that keeps women within a definite, private sphere limiting their access to the public sphere. Coexistence of two courtyards, one outside – in front of *pūmukham* (the front part of the house) – and one inside – *nadumuttam* – in a quadrangular architectural body is paradigmatic of the public/private binary. Women seldom had access to *pūmukham* where the master of the house relaxed on a slanting chair. Constructing a structure to enhance the flow of light and wind is a mode of restraining women from exiting to the outer sphere where they are plenty. The glorification of quadrangular structure as the most livable in the following śloka – “*Śālātu vīvidā prōktā va□□akarmānulōmatah tadāpi bahubhigrāhya catuśālā viśē□atah*” (Moorthy 387) – reiterates the strategic enclosure of women within the privacy of home.

As per *Vāstu Śāstra*, any home small or big, should have a master bedroom, bedrooms for other members, a living room, a prayer room, a master’s private room, a study room, a kitchen, a dining hall, a bathroom, a store room and a toilet. As Biln says, such role mappings of space create a hierarchy. Separate positions are allocated for each room in such a way that, those associated with conversation, dining and study are front stage rooms or public space where as those associated with sexuality, dirt and hygiene are feminine private sphere rooms that are relegated to the back portion of the house.

In *Vāstu* the dichotomy between the auspicious and the inauspicious also establishes a hierarchy. Each direction has its own peculiarities and energy dimensions making them auspicious for some rooms and inauspicious for others. The eight directions include the East, West, the South, the North, the South East, the North East, the South West and the North West. The Eastern, the Northern and the North Eastern directions permit extensive, spacious and open constructions. Constructions in all the other directions should be confined to less space. As a matter of fact all the confined areas encompass the female space and the extensive areas are allied with male living. The scale difference within the *Vāstu*-based home testifies to

the opposition between the public realm and private realm. "Scale" is the term used to discuss the size of the space relative to something else. The allocation of various blocks for specific purposes indicates the demarcation between the public/private spheres. The sacrificial prayers and *pūja* are accomplished in the Eastern block (*Kizhakkini*). Northern block (*Vadakkini*) is prescribed for families to live in. Western block (*Padinjāttini*) is associated with storing wealth and Southern block (*Thekkini*) with hospitality. Rest of the space in Southern and Western blocks can be used for sleeping, education etc.

In the traditional *Vāstu* homes there is an "ideal social map" (Friedman) that regulates women's movements and basically restricts not to the house itself, but to the very specific sections within the house. "Kitchen should be at the backside of the house, either in the South East or North West. Since the kitchen is unhygienic, women engage in domestic chores carefree of their dress, it is advisable to separate kitchen from the eyes of the public" (Moorthy 440). Further attachment of privacy to the kitchen is seen in the conception that kitchen can even be separated from the house, if the land is extensive. Denial of access to women to *pūja* rooms and kitchen during menstruation, and making them stay in the lying-in rooms after delivery, distanced from the public sphere of the house, are instances of woman's body being considered to be impure. The impurity strategically assigns privacy as inevitable to women and becomes a source of their enclosure.

Mitre dakṣiṇa paścimē punrūdak -
Prācyē ca gēhē mitha -
stasmāttadyugalōthakōṅṅanilaya -
slēṅṅō vidhēyōṅṅpi ca
anyat kōṅṅayugam tadhaikamathavā
na slēsṅṅayet sūtikā -
sūdrādyāgamaniṅṅkramārthamudito
mārgōṅṅfjamēvātra tu (Moosath 146)

(There is a relation between the Southern house and the Western house, and also between the Northern house and the Eastern house. So those *grihas* (houses) that come between these houses can be built in relation to them (*dikgrihas*). Two *kōṅgrihas* can be left unconnected for the *sūdras* (the lower class people) and the women in postpartum period, to enter the courtyard, sparing the main building.)

This *slōka* bears testimony to the fact that woman is controlled by being

bounded and positioned at the end of a series of spaces, usually the kitchen or the bedroom away from the major masculine *space*.

Non substitutability of one room for another is an instance of compartmentalizing the public from the private. "Bedroom should not be used as prayer room, and the prayer room should not be separated by curtains to avail them for other purposes." (Moorthy 448). External toilets are preferred to the attached ones in traditional homes due to the impurity coupled with them. *Vāstu* does not prefer wells in the *vāyukōn* because of the belief that it is not good for women. Ironically, the lying-in room solely associated with women, falls here. Digging well in *agnikōn* is not entertained. It is the direction assigned for kitchen. In order to keep away wells from such an 'impure' site, and because the well is a public property, used not only by the men and women of the house, but also by the neighbours, it is separated from the private domain of women. Alberti says:

Women...are almost timid by nature, soft, slow, and therefore more useful when they sit still and watch over things. It is as though nature thus provided for our well being, arranging for men to bring things home and for woman to guard them.... The man should guard woman, the house, and his family and country, but not by sitting still. (qtd. in Heynen & Baydar 32)

Vāstu Śāstra affirms women as the guardians of the house, according to the laws designed and executed not by the women. This is the law of the father or the metaphysical beings, the sages, the law of the order and surveillance. They are powerless, passive housekeepers positioned against the active males.

Elizabeth Grosz has extensively argued how Plato's notion of *chora* (receptacle) is associated with spatiality and the function of femininity. In Plato's discourse, *chora* is the receptacle, the condition for the existence of material objects but without having a form of its own. *Chora* is the passive space of maternal care. The interiorization of women as a domestic being means identifying them only by their function (*chora*) not by their corporeal existence. Luce Irigaray asserts that the phallogocentric modes of thinking have obliterated the debt they owe to the maternal space that brings them into being. Sue Best also has pointed out the persistent discursive link between women and space; and bounded spatial entities are consistently feminized, in our discourses. As architectural theorist Mark Wigley opines that, since Plato, architecture has been an exemplar of the "metaphysics of presence" – that is pure interiority. In that sense it is a

metaphor that precedes metaphor. Wigley explains

As the traditional figure of an interior divided from an exterior it [the house] is used to establish a general opposition between an inner world of presence and an outer world of representation that is then used to exclude that very figure as a mere metaphor, a representation to be discarded to the outside of philosophy. But the figure always resists such exclusion. Inasmuch as the condition of metaphor of the house, the house is not simply another metaphor that can be discarded. And more than this, although metaphor is understood as a departure from the house, it is still not a departure from housing. (102)

Wigley also cites Rousseau in stating that language is not of domestic origin but is acquired "by the men outside the hut" (As per *Vāstu Śāstra* the Sages outside the realm of house and material world). Men who acquire language outside the house build the house. The house is then elevated to architectural status. "Men's language is written over the silent space of the originary house. As such, the house becomes the property of men and being brought into the realm of representation, it is domesticated" (Baydar 36). The structurality of the architectural structure of *Vāstu Śāstra* is questioned in the deconstructive vein since the structure has its centre elsewhere i.e., outside the domestic realm of femininity.

The temple culture of India was developed as a part of man's inevitable search for the unknown. The unknown can be anything beyond man's control. He gave shape to the uncontrollable forces and made temples for the gods to propitiate and please them for the well-being of man. In Kerala temples have been the soul of religious life. Great men at different points of time have given their hand to document various aspects of temple system that encompasses the making of the temple, the rites to be performed and the spaces to be occupied by various strata of the society. The temple culture of Kerala is a patriarchal phenomenon where there is strict gendered disciplinary system.

The construction of temple literally and metaphorically is an epitome of male dominated discourses of enclosure and subjugation. Religion and religious discourses have been hostile to female freedom all over the world. The case is not different in India. The texts like *Manu Smriti* reflect this hostility. In a society a church or a temple is considered to be the most attractive as well as important place as far as the social life is concerned. This is the place that unifies different families. But even these places of

unification have failed to demolish the gender biases.

The age old cry of women for equality and liberation is still at ignorance in the mainstream religious discourses. So many studies have been conducted by the western women in this regard to unravel the lack of space for woman in the major public spheres of Christian churches. But all religions hold a universal view regarding female freedom and their position. In India a temple is considered as the typical monument of architecture (Ramakrishnan 1). "Architecture in anyone's definition of it exists primarily to be at the service of the body" (Gins and Arakawa xi). In the case of houses it is the body within which we live and in the case of temples it is the body that contains the Almighty. So it transcends the status of mere monumental construction. Gins and Arakawa says: "We see architecture not merely as that which stands by and gets linked up with, as structures that life lightly avails itself of in passing; not passive, not passively merely hanging around to provide shelter or monumentality, architecture as we newly conceive it actively participates in life and death matters" (xi).

An architectural body can be classified into masculine, feminine, and androgynous structures. This is evaluated based on the curves and pointed constructions used in the structure of a building. Indian temples are generally phallic structures. The extensive use of square like structures and pointed roofs, stone pillars and wooden decorations bear testimony to this. "Wood panelling is conventionally used for sheathing recreational interiors which are codified as ruggedly masculine. Masculine properties of being hard, cold and crystalline are similarly attributed to glass, steel and stone" (Lico 35). The roof tops of the temple with *thazhikakudam* at the top most part proves the phallic nature of a temple (Fig. 3). The construction is overwhelmed by the extensive use of wooden panels and stony sculptures and pillars which add to the beautification process.



Fig. 3. Roof top of the temple with *thazhikakudam*

In temples wood carvings are widely seen on the *Namaskara Mandapas*. They depict figures of Navgrahas on the ceiling and Puranic figures on the rafters and beams. The *Kuthambalams* (recreational halls) are also noted for their fabulous wood carvings, as for example, those in the temples of Subramania at Kidangur and Haripad. Wooden walls with beautiful carvings are also seen in several temples. In addition, there are wooden bracket figures, sculptural columns, etc. The Mahadeva temple, Katinamkulam, the Sri Mahadeva temple, Kaviyur, the Narasimha temple, Chathankulangara, the Sri Vallabha temple, Tiruvalla, the Sri Rama temple, Triprayar and the Krishna temple, Trichambaram are some of the temples of Kerala noted for exquisite wood sculptures.



Fig. 4. Wooden roofing at Haripad Temple (Kuthambalam)



Fig. 5. Stone work - *Balikkal*

The construction of temple is completely based on the position of *vāstu puruṣamandala*. The concept of *puruṣa* is integral to this architectural discourse. The temple is built in relation to the body of a man. It has the body counterparts of a man in its construction. It is to show that the temple is the structure that embodies the soul of man. It is generally acknowledged that the offerings to god in fact are offerings to oneself. If it is so there is incongruity between the worshipper and the space occupied by the worshipped from the women's perspective. In fixing the statue of the god the symbolic prototypes of eight human *chakras* are laid as the foundation. It is called installing the *Shadādhāra*. *Adhārasila* corresponds to *moolādhāra chakra*; *dhānya peetha* to *swadhishtāna chakra*; *nidhi kumbha* to *manipooraka chakra*; *padma* to *anaahatha chakra*; *koorma* to *mani poorakachakra*; *yoga nāla* to *visuddhi chakra*; and *napumsakasila* to *aanja chakra*. These parts are either constructed by wood or by stone. *Adharasila*, *nidhikumbham padma*, *koorma* etc are exclusively constructed by stone (Namboothiri 33-34).

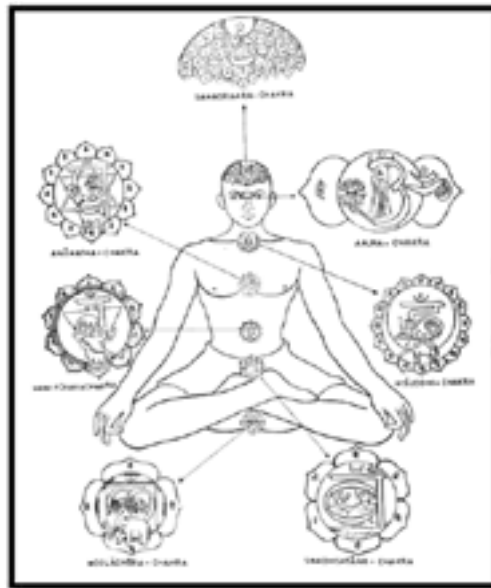


Fig. 6. Eight chakras in man's body

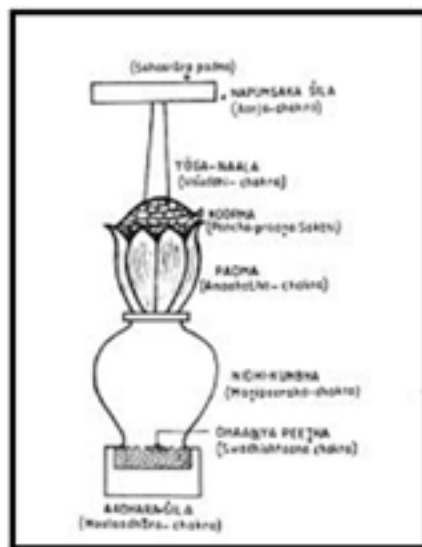


Fig. 7. Symbolic prototypes of the 8 chakras installed beneath the idol.

Woman has no representation in the structure. In the temple woman is used only as an object of beauty. The essentialist view with which the female body is used as a source of pleasure is very much evident in the erotic sculptures and paintings of many temples (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). "The medieval *Vāstu* texts specifically ordained the carving of female figures on temple walls." According to *Shilpa Prakasha*, "as a house without a wife, as frolic without a woman, so without a figure of a woman, the monument will be of inferior quality and bear no fruit." It projects the male female union and the female is only the sexual prop and reproductive agent for the man. She is the beautiful object of pleasure. The erotic is enhanced by the "the fullness of the breasts," "the twisting form of the figure," "loosened cloths," and the curves used in the sculpture. (Leuthold 134). This can be seen as an extension of the divine prostitution legalised through *Devadasi* system.

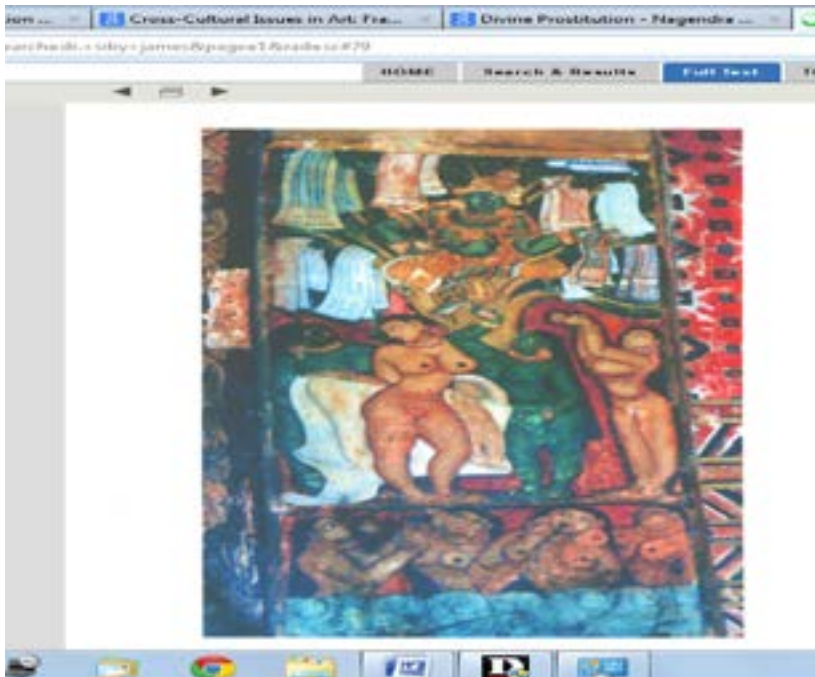


Fig. 8. Gopikavastrakshepam – wall painting in Ettumanoor Temple



Fig. 9. Erotic sculpture at Haripad Subrahmania Swamy temple

The *Srikovil* (Sanctum sanctorum) – the place where the god sits - is also known as *garbhagriha*. This is the womb that protects the god within. The temple presents femininity therefore as the caretaker and mother of universe. The notion of mother and woman as protector is very much embedded in the principles of temple architecture. Plato has talked about the concept called *chora*.

It can always be called the same because it never alters its characteristics. For it continues to receive all things, and never itself takes a permanent impress from any of the things that enter it, making it appear different at different times. And the things which pass in and out of it are copies of the eternal realities, whose form they take in a wonderful way that is hard to describe. (Plato 69)

The later feminists have taken up Plato's philosophical notion of *chora*, to designate the essentialist masculine notion of femininity. Elizabeth Grosz says: "*Chora* can only be designated by its, by her, function: to hold, nurture, bring into the world. . . . *Chora* has neither existence nor becoming. Not to procreate or produce – this is the function of the father, the creator, god, the Forms – but to nurse, to support, surround, protect, incubate, to sort, or engender the worldly offspring of the Forms" (213). The *Garbhagriha* metaphorically functions as the nurturer and caretaker of the worshipper. The image of god sitting within the *garbhagriha* implies femininity as *chora*; merely the receptacle that carries and protects the power inside. She is only the begetter of divinity, nor the divinity itself. *Garbhagriha*

thus becomes the passive space of maternal care that enables the birth of masculinity – power – where female has no space at all. Non entry of woman into the *sanctum sanctorum*, the feminine principle, reinforces the position of female only as the reproductive agent in man's life.

There are also temples that are dedicated to goddesses. They persistently propagate the traditional Indian notion of woman as *devi* and woman as mother. According to Indian culture *devi* or goddess is the highest tribute we can give to a woman. Just below this is the notion of motherhood. So the temples dedicated to goddesses illustrate the archetypal role of woman as mother, wielder of power/ protector, wife, helper, destroyer etc. For example the Goddess in the temple of Attukal is worshipped as the Supreme Mother, creator of all living beings and the mighty preserver as well as destroyer of them. At a superficial level the title *devi* seems to be out of reverence. But a deeper excavation of the notion drives home that it is a strategy to bar woman from moving in public space. So the social function of entitling woman as *devi* or mother seems to be marginalization.

Besides the phallic nature of the construction, there are other methods of restricting woman's space in the temple. The role of woman in spaces deemed to be sacred should be taken into account. According to Susan Wadley, women are assigned ritualistic status lower to men, because, the gendered hierarchy believes that, "the women's menses are polluting, but not as polluting as child birth" (qtd. in Patel 12). In the renowned pilgrim centre of Kerala, Ayyappa Temple at Sabarimala, entry is open only to those women who haven't attained puberty and those women who have reached menopause. This is because of the universal view that women's sexual functions are polluting. The repulsion towards what Kristeva calls "abject" triggers man's hatred towards female body. Woman becomes the abject itself in this process. Shan Renjit's words regarding the prohibition of woman's entry in the Sabarimala temple mirror how gendered views politicize the sacred space.

The curse on the women starts on the very first day she menstruates, a period in which the girl's body is considered to be very hot and polluting. It is also believed that the release of blood from a body orifice (opening) . . . attracts spirits and demons that can devastate a family's happiness and its power of vitality. Women during this period are considered to be impure, unclean, polluted and contaminated. (Patel 13)

Because of this she sacrifices for the sake of the family or the community

which the Hindu ideology always demands. This is a strategy to place woman in private spaces alone and to ostracize them from the public spaces.

The sacred spaces of temple are not innocent spaces. There is an ideology behind politicizing the space. This is a part of the age old attempt to construct and repeat the binary man/woman where one is always privileged. Religion, the dogmatic institution where questions are out of place, is the best way to keep woman under surveillance. Pierre Bourdieu talks about *habitus*, to designate, how social status, moral values, and class position become embodied in everyday life. He uses the term to characterize the way the body, the mind, and the emotions are simultaneously trained. Women are trained in their mind and body to be submissive and the temple is an architectural manifestation of man's habit to be powerful and overpowering and woman's habit of being in margins.

The representation of woman as an enclosed being in the private sphere in *Vāstu Śāstra*, and this too much certainty about the presence of woman as a domestic being is an obstacle to women's escape and a theoretical bar to political action. This biased notion will never put an end to the endless repression of women. What is required is a *ms. en abyme* (an adaptation of Gide's *mise en abyme* by Diane Elam) operation, which will not stereotype woman as a domestic angel. *Ms. en abyme* means endless femininity that does not limit the representation of woman as conceived by patriarchy. The work of *abyme* is a sort of filling up the image with more and more definitions that will not end. This endless deferral strategy makes endless spatiality possible.

Works Cited:

- "Design of a Kerala Nalukettu." *Kerala House Designer.com*, 2009. Web. 2 Dec. 2022.
- Ganguly, Surabhi. "The struggle for a home: How Kerala transformed from matriliney to patriliney," 2021. Web. 13 Jan 2023.
- Gins, Madeline, and Arakawa. *Architectural Body*. U of Alabama P, 2002. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Woman, Chora, Dwelling." *Gender, Space, Architecture*. Eds. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden. Routledge,

2003. Print

Hilde, Gülsüm Baydar. *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*. Routledge, 2005. Print.

Moorthy, G. Ganapathy. *Vāstu Śāstravum Grihanirmānakalyum[Vāstu Śāstra and The Art of Home Building]*. Sunco Publications, 2010. Print.

Moosath, Thirumangalathu Neelakandan. *Manu-yālayacandrikā*. DC Books, 2011. Print.

Namboothiri, Thaikkattu. *Bhashasilparatnam*. Devi Book Stall, 2009. Print.

Nandakumar, R. "The Missing Male: The Female Figures of Ravi Varma and the Concepts of Family, Marriage, and Fatherhood in Nineteenth Century Kerala." *South Indian Studies* 1, (1996): 54-82. Print.

Patel, Reena. *Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry*. Stanford UP, 2010. Print.

Plato. *Timaeus and Critias*, Trans. D. Lee. Penguin, 1977. Print.

Poovey, Mary. "Feminism and Deconstruction." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 51-65.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3177998>.

Ramakrishnan, P. "Temple Architecture." *Shodhganga*. Inflibnet, 2012. Web. 1 Nov 2021.

Wigley, Mark. *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*. MIT Press, 1995. Print.

Image sources:

Fig. 1. - Sommer, Manfred. "India - Tamil Nadu - Padmanabhapuram Palace - Navarathri Mandapam" *Flickr*, 2014. Web. Accessed 30 June 2022

Fig. 2. - "Kerala House Design." *Pinterest*. i1.trekearth.com. 2012. Web. 25 Dec. 2022

Fig. 3. - Mathew, Dennis Marcus. "Finial stolen from Kerala temple." *The Hindu*, 2016. Web. 1 September 2022

- Fig. 4. "The ceiling of the koothambalam (theatre) at #haripadsubramanian temple." Kerala Temple History. *Twitter.com*, 2018. Web. 21 Dec. 2022.
- Fig. 5. Kaniyamuri Kudumbakshethra Punarudharanam. *Facebook.com*, 2014. Web. 5 january 2022.
- Fig. 6. Nair, Manoj S. "ādaracakraṅgal" *Vastuvidya: Kshetravidhanam. Kottayam: MG University, 2012, 74. Print.*
- Fig. 7. Nair, Manoj S. "ādaracakraṅgal" *Vastuvidya: Kshetravidhanam. Kottayam: MG University, 2012, 75. Print.*
- Fig. 8. James, Siby. "Gopikavastrapaharanam, Ettumanoor Temple- 16th century" *Historicizing Manipravalam: Textualizing the History of Kerala. MGU theses. 2004, 64. Web. 15 Jan 2023.*
- Fig. 9. "Erotic sculpture at Haripad Subrahmania Swamy temple." Original Photograph taken on the spot.