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SIGNIFICANCE OF SPACE IN "A ROOM 10 X 8" BY S.K. DUGGAL

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ABSTRACT

The short story, "A Room 10 x 8" by Duggal brings out the significance of the term 'Space' in relation to a room with 10 m length and 8 m breadth to be constructed, in a new house planned by Malik family. S.K.Duggal was born in Rawalpindi (Pakistan) in the year 1917. As the Station Director of AIR and the Director of the National Book Trust, he had contributed immensely to India. Since he had been a polyglot, he had written with ease in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. He had received Sahitya Academy Award for his work *B. Come back Master*, *Death of a Song* and *Ranjet Singh* are some of his important works.



KEYWORDS: polyglot, Duggal revolves, constructing.

INTRODUCTION

The story "A Room 10 x 8" by Duggal revolves around the idea of building a house with a room of 10m length and 8m breadth. The very title of the story is suggestive of the theme to be expounded here. The Malik's family consisted of six members -Mr. Malik, his mother, his wife, and his children- a daughter and a son and his daughter- in law. The story exposes how the construction of a house of their own stimulates various ideas or views in them and it also revolves around the theme of constructing a house and designing various parts of it.

The story gets started at the point of suggestion given by Mrs. Malik to the architect. Mrs. Malik looked at the draft plan and pointed the square in it to the architect and asked him to plan a room with 10 x 8. At that moment, her suggestion went unnoticed by her husband and the architect. But a few minutes after, her suggestion got hold of their attention. Thus, she got succeeded in constructing a room with 10m length and 8m breadth. It is to be noticed at this juncture, the reason for constructing the room. It can be understood by the readers through the talk she had with the architect. The talk and the reactions are given as:

'Yes, but I thought it could be my mother- in -law's room and after her time, we could use it as a storeroom'.

The architect didn't seem to understand. He looked puzzled. 'I mean ... my mother - in -law could use the room for the present ... as you know she is an old woman. She isn't going to be here for... and after her it could be converted into a storeroom'. Mrs. . . . Malik explained haltingly. (61)

Her idea of constructing such a spacious room was accepted by her husband also. She wanted to have it as spacious for the reasons of possessing a commodious storeroom, of moving about trunks freely and of keeping it tidy.

After having designed the draft as they wished, they had to get the approval of the corporation. Once the approval was got, they executed the plan with care. Of both the Malki's, Mrs. Malik was more interested than Mr. Mali, in visiting the site every day, supervising every details and lending help to masons and other women there. She would be the first to go to the site and the last to leave. During this time, besides lending help to the constructors, in order to have a cordial relationship with their future neighbors, she met them and befriended them. The things discussed in this passage shed light on the fact that the care, desire and so on involved in the act of constructing the house changes the identity of the house as a mere building, that is place, into a place with spatial values.

The story focuses on the place where they wanted to have their space. It is understood that long back Malik's had purchased a plot in the most fashionable colony in Delhi. The plot was left lying as such as they did not have the thought of constructing a house there then. But, once Mr. Malik was posted back to Delhi the thought of building a house of their own entered their mind. The house, which they wanted to construct, creates a lot of expectations and desires in the heart of Mrs. Malik. She was sick of the transfers of her husband to different places. So she decided to live in the new house, once it would be constructed. Despite the fact that her husband might get transferred to other places, she wanted to get settled permanently in the new house with their children. There was no objection from her side to keep her mother-in-law with her.

Shifting a house from one place to another involves a lot of mental processes and this process lets one take some decisions regarding the physical things that one has. In this context, one has to make a selection of what to take and what not to take. Mrs. Malik is no exceptional to it. What Mrs. Malik wanted to bring to the new house shows the notions she had about the space where she had been and where she would be. Her house where they were residing had furniture. But Mrs. Malik did not like to take even a single piece of the old furniture from there to the new house. She wanted to have new furniture to the new house. This reveals Mrs. Malik's divided views about the old space and the new space and her desire\ decision to do away with the old and to have the new for the new space. Once the construction got started, she engaged herself in getting new furniture to their new house. She was not interested in taking even a single piece of the old furniture with them. This shows that Mrs. Malik had developed or conceived certain notions in her mind regarding the shifting of house/s. According to the change in the space; she wanted to bring change in the furniture that she might possess in future.

There is a well known proverb that man proposes, but God disposes. This proverb would very well be related to the contrary events that happened to the Maliks at the end. Once the house got built, they could not go there, as Mr. Malik got an offer from the Government to run its office there. The economic value of the space, in other words the economical support that would be gained by the Maliks from the new space, made them postpone their desire to live in the house as soon as it was constructed. For the sake of the financial support, Maliks had to compromise with their desires, likes, plans and so on.

When the thought of getting settled emerged from them, they could not get it easily. They had to fight with the Government to restore their paradise. Meanwhile, their son got married and Mr. Malik got retired. Soon after, Mr. Malik passed away. His absence brought changes in the power of the inmates. Their daughter-in-law was very keen in settling in their new abode. She had the power to act according to her decisions. When the architect showed the sketch of the house in the colour, Mrs. Malik saw the figure of the lady of the house standing on the verandha leaning against the marble pillar. Mrs. Malik thought that, "The figure in sketch ... was as tall as Mrs. Malik. Leaning against the pillar, she stood the way Mrs. Malik used to stand." (62) She thought that the architect had painted her in maroon, though "she never wore maroon" (62). She wanted to show the figure to her daughter-in-law.

As they were shifting from their old space to new space, while travelling along with her son and daughter-in-law, it occurred to her whether "the figure painted by the architect was that of her daughter-in-law". She also thought how it could be possible, as her daughter-in-law was not there at that moment. As she was going with them, she thought of the great care she had taken in constructing the house.

What happened as they reached the new space shows the power shift from one person to the other. The daughter-in-law took decisions to place their things in their new space. Much to the

disappointment of her mother-in-law, as soon as they reached the house, "daughter-in-law jumped out and went into the verandah. She stood leaning against the marble pillar exactly the way the architect had painted the woman in the sketch. Mrs. Malik felt a wrench at her heart." (63) To add to her (Mrs. Malik's) sorrow and disappointment, her daughter-in-law directed her to go "to the room, 10 x 8" (63). Thus the room 10 x 8 as **space** had played a significant role in bringing out the characters' changing emotions, thoughts and viewpoints in relation to it. Thus it is clear that the paper has focused on the points of spatial theory expounded by Henri Lefebvre. The idea of his theory runs as follows;

The 1991 English translation of Henri Lefebvre's pioneering 1974 book, *La production de l'espace*, heralded a new interest in the study of space. Lefebvre challenged traditional notions of space as an abstract arena and passive container, proposing a theory that unified physical, social, and mental conceptions of space by emphasizing its continual production and reproduction. . . . Since the spatial turn, space is no longer viewed as static or inert background action, but as an arena of struggle that shapes ideas, beliefs, principles, and values. Modern spatial theorists understand space as dynamic, relational, and agentive. Space is intertwined with embodiment and lived experiences, touching every arena of social and cultural life, including, of course, religion. (Cited in sites. Utxas.edu)

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