



Original Article

# A Study of Intermingling of Socio-cultural Norms and Supremacy of Patriarchal Domination on Female Nuptial Space in Jaishree Misra's *Afterwards*

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## Abstract

The present study focuses on the process of arranging marriages in the Indian cultural space creates a complex situation before the new generation. Due to the social norms and cultural constraints, girls are forcefully thrown into the unnegotiable and unknown marital space where they are given off to a person who is completely unknown to them or does not match their spaces. As per the cultural norm, girls are supposed to marry a man whom they never meet and even unknown to his familial, cultural, social, economic background. Misra, through her narratives, tries to showcase the fact that her female protagonists are middle-class but educated, empowered, bold, and courageous women who always show their strength to challenge the dominant patriarchal society. They are confident enough to lead their life independently while raising their voice against the patriarchal hegemony. They are ready to fight and challenge the age-old traditions and customs of a conservative society that compels women to occupy a subordinate space. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, gets the subordinate place in her traditional arrange marriage. Her arrange marriage denies her to occupy variant spaces to share her thoughts, ideas, principles, feelings, and emotions. She is supposed to live in her marital life in a silent space that abides by the rules and norms of patriarchy and cultural codes and conducts of the tradition-bound society.

**Keywords:** Space, Indian cultural space, Unknown marital space, Gender, Culture, Social, Political Domination, Patriarchal Space, arrange marriage etc.

## Introduction

*Afterwards* (2004) opens with the death rite of Maya that is performed by her parents, three years before her actual death. The reason behind her death rite is, her elopement with Rahul Tiwari, a foreigner, though she is a married woman. People in society declare her as dead because she violates societal and traditional norms in a social space. Her adultery and extramarital relationship with a person who is NRI causes the loss of her family's social respectability and brings dishonor to both the families. Maya belongs to Pulayil Varma, a more aristocratic family, performs the death rites of their child for extending space that is against the rules and norms of their culture. Misra rightly observes:

Restless and caged, iridescently beautiful, terrified suddenly at her own freedom. But alive-as happy as she could be under the circumstances. About to start new life when, back in her homestead-Pulayil Veedu, the family seat of the Pulayil Vermas-they performed her death rites, instead. (Misra 4)

The family completely sets in the conservative space where social reputations and respectability are primarily kept on the front more than the spatial feelings and emotions of the individual. They, to maintain the place of social space, forget to provide proper space to their daughter who wants to extend her personal space to live freely in a society. But, instead of supporting her spatial feeling, they declare her as dead, though she is alive. Maya loses her spatial environment where, she tries to create her existence, space, and identity as a woman. She becomes a victim of arranged marriage that is performed by her family members to save their social prestige and cultural space. It shows the violation of female spaces of any individual and how the women in their spaces are disappointed by the people of their blood relationship, marital relationship, and even community.

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In declaring the death of Maya though she alive by her parents it exhibits virtual honor killing by her family. The story of the novel revolves around the protagonist, Maya who is a beautiful, ambitious, cheerful girl and later a sympathetic daughter, dutiful but confused housewife, and at the end, a disappointed woman in a more polluted environment of patriarchal space like Janu of Ancient Promise. She smothers and suffers herself in her marital space under the burden of loveless, respects less, unsatisfied, disappointed, and disharmonious marriage. She fails to create her own space before and after her marital life because of her parents' conservative thinking and her husband's suspicious nature. She tries to achieve her position back while demolishing various spaces like cultural, social, physical, and psychological that help her to stand in the society as a new woman. Misra designs the story of the novel with the presence of Maya before and after her death as she is deceived by both the families, her parental family, and her in-law's family but she creates her own family in international space. The various issues related to Maya's life are handled thoroughly in the novel that incorporates the themes like woman subjugation, gender discrimination, and violation of various spaces. Maya is a victim of social respectability, social and familial reputation, fake ethics, fake identity, unhappy marriage, and domestic violence.

Misra explores the transformation of Maya from a normal woman into a new woman when she stands against her husband's parochial cryptograph. She occupies her space

Generally, Marriages are conventionally and traditionally arranged in Indian culture by their parents for girls who are from the modern generations and space. Such a conservative setup of arranging marriages creates a complicated environment and multiple challenges for girls from traditional families. Maya does not get parental love but her parents use her presence to maintain the traditional formalities of marriage in a social space. Maya is unsatisfied with her marriage and even the unsecured and unfaithful companionship of her husband, Govind. She feels strange in their marital relationship because of his cunning, suspicious, and domineering nature. Before marriage, she is totally unaware of his nature and background. The women in the feminine space within their feminine world are bound by the traditional method of arranged marriage as their final destiny. They are supposed to marry a man who generally wants a subordinate woman slave to maintain their masculinity. The social status of marriage provides ill-treatment to women in their personal and private spaces.

Even, the parents of a girl fail to realize the fact that the marriage is a bond of two souls filled with joy, happiness, love, care, and harmony in marital space. Maya's marriage with Govind becomes the marriage of possession and adjustment. She enters a new space that encircles the negative waves around her because she feels uncomfortable in Govind's company. In his masculine space, Govind shows the signs of arrogance towards Maya and never misses the chance to dominate and torture her in her personal space. He never shows any sign of love, sympathy, and harmony in his relationship with his wife. Maya always tries to search the love and comfort in the company of Govind but he never loves her as a wife. Maya, to maintain the social status and

and stands against the complex situation to overcome the barriers to create her space. She desires to create her own space away from patriarchal norms and dominance. Her exploitation in a patriarchal space leads her to emerge as a new woman. She decides to set her boundaries for space around her to become an independent woman. She is a modern young woman of a new generation who struggles to achieve her space to get a peaceful life. She observes the space of independence and liberation from Rahul. He gives her the support and courage to proceed successfully ahead in life. She emerges as a new woman and makes herself bold enough to crash her present identity and space to shift herself in desired space. Her bold and strong decision to betray her husband and remove him from her conjugal space is quite shocking and unbelievable for her parents. Her parents deny her entry into their parental space and declare her dead.

Maya, being a decent woman, obeys her parents' choice and inaudibly crouches down before them and their spatial decision about her marriage, without raising any question and cross argument. She accepts the unaccepted marriage proposal but as a consequence of the acceptance, she throws away her identity and space for the sake of maintaining their parent's social status. The familial space for girls is temporal and it is not permanent like that of men. But, the parents in their parental space of love and affection, fail to provide her the notion of spatial fixity of comfortable life.

respectability of her family, leaves her natal place and shifts herself to the new and unknown land while leaving behind her parents, her customs, her culture, and traditions and make herself ready to follow the new tradition and values of her in-laws family.

Misra puts forth the appalling picture of the women characters who attempt to find their space and identity to place themselves in society. They are thrown away from their own identity by society and allot them a subordinate place in their familial space. In their subaltern position, they suffer physically, mentally, emotionally in their spaces. Maya is a victim of emotional independence, male dominating society, and patriarchal space. She and her husband, Govind lose their marital space and lead a loveless, meaningless, joyless, disharmonious marital relationship. She has all the luxuries and essentials of life but she spends her life without the emotional bonding and space that is required to lead a harmonious marital life.

Govind, Maya's husband, gives her all the comforts of life but fails to understand the space of emotional relationships that are based on love, faith, honesty, loyalty, and freedom of each other's spaces. Though she is fulfilled in her familial space of comfort, in her in-law's home, she eventually, becomes a victim of unhappy, unsatisfied, boring, and anxious married life. She tries to keep herself involved in her space of marital relationship to maintain the space of loyalty and honesty with her husband. Maya shifts herself in a space of conventional environment to make the spatial fixities of social norms of marital life. She confines herself within the institution of uncertain and suffocative marital space. In her personal space, she expects love, support, and space of

peaceful life in her marital space, especially from her husband, Govind. But, she fails to get a harmonious and successful marital life and even she never raises many questions about her husband's dominance, in his patriarchal space, exercise upon her in a challenging marital relationship.

Govind always prefers to live in a conservative space who gives more importance to old beliefs and traditions that become the hurdle for Maya to live harmoniously in her marital life. Govind's intention of living in a more conventional space makes him cruel and practical towards his wife. He always tries to walk into the space of social and cultural position to maintain the respectability of his family. He is very possessive towards his marriage and the space of his wife. He forces Maya to shift from her modern space to the conservative space and expects her to be like a traditional wife to follow age-old traditional and cultural beliefs of conventional society. He confines her in a constrained space and denies her entry in his personal space. He, in his masculine space, suspects her chastity every time without making love to her in their marital life. He dominates her in a patriarchal space and compels her to live in a space of confined cage of traditional marriage.

Thus, Maya rebels against the traditional role of a woman and overcomes a patriarchal space and the dominance of her husband. In her personal space of love and intimacy, Maya expects marital harmony from Govind but he doesn't show any sign of love and affection to maintain the harmony of their marital space. Maya decides to throw

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away her marital identity and move away from the confined space of loveless, respect less, faithless marital life. She takes a step to resolve herself biologically, psychologically, culturally, socially, mentally from the suppression and domination of her husband and his cultural and traditional space.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, Jaishree Misra's *Afterwards* vividly exposes the deep-rooted intermingling of socio-cultural norms and patriarchal domination that governs the female nuptial space in Indian society. Through the character of Maya, the novel highlights how arranged marriages, guided by rigid traditions and social expectations, often deny women the autonomy to shape their own identities and emotional lives. Maya's journey from submission to resistance reflects the struggle of modern, educated women who are caught between inherited cultural values and the desire for personal freedom.

The study demonstrates that patriarchal structures not only confine women physically within marital spaces but also suppress their emotional, psychological, and intellectual agency. Maya's eventual rebellion against an oppressive marital relationship signifies a powerful assertion of selfhood and the reclamation of personal space. Her transformation into a "new woman" challenges the legitimacy of traditional norms that prioritize social reputation over individual happiness.

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#### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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