

Understanding Deviant Space: A Study of the Subversion of Power Dynamics in *Paharganj*

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Abstract

This paper, preoccupied with intersectionality in spatial criticism and broadly portraying the visual representation of urban space in popular culture (film), critically looks into the lived experiences around the Delhi neighborhood, Paharganj, as illustrated in Rakesh Ranjan Kumar's 2019 film *Paharganj*. Theoretically grounding on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and production of space, and on Michel Foucault's "panopticon" and "heterotopia," this paper investigates (a) ways in which Paharganj turns into a deviant and dangerous space with its countercultural brooding and camouflaged criminality and how such deviant "lived space" negates or adds dimension to the "conceived space," and (b) how such subversive space (Paharganj) challenges territorial jurisdiction by creating an alternative and resistant power nexus which sometimes leads to its denomination as the "Republic of Paharganj," a status as "dangerous" or desired space in the film. As a part of its spatial reading of popular cultural texts, this paper primarily takes on *Paharganj*. However, to substantiate Paharganj's spatial representation in popular culture, this paper also secondarily makes reference to two other films: *Holy Smoke!* (1999) and *Dev. D* (2009).

Keywords: Spatialization of Counterculture, Spatial Partitioning of Power, "Production of Space," Deviant Space

Introduction

French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's pioneering text *The Production of Space*, arguing in favor of the social status of space as continuously constructed by human interactions and thus shaping human relations, paved the way for a cultural turn of spatial criticism. His notion that space does not represent any "preexisting void" pointed at the curious investigative approach towards space, in literature and popular culture, as something being both productive and a product. Following the critical path of Lefebvre's sociology of space, French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault added the power dimension to Lefebvrian spatial criticism in his prolonged genealogical study of power. Foucault's extensive lecture series (including "Des espaces autres"/"Of Other Spaces") of the 60s later revived the discussion on space from a more political perspective putting notions like "heterotopia" and "panopticon" into the context of hegemonic power relationships. Foucault's spatial discourse conflates gaze as an essential component for the understanding of such power dimensions in social relations. For him, spatial organization informs and



determines our power relationship which he famously calls “cartography of power” (Deleuze 21-23). This paper, broadly portraying the visual representation of urban space in popular culture (film), critically looks into the lived experiences around the Delhi neighborhood, Paharganj, as illustrated in Rakesh Ranjan Kumar’s 2019 film *Paharganj*. Theoretically grounding on Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad and production of space (for the first research question) and Michel Foucault’s “panopticon” and “heterotopia” (for the second research question), this paper investigates (a) ways in which Paharganj turns into a deviant and dangerous space with its countercultural brooding (i.e., drugs, alternative spirituality, queer encounters, etc) and camouflaged criminality (i.e., murder, rape, etc) and how such deviant “lived space” negates or adds dimension to the “conceived space,” and (b) how such subversive space (Paharganj) challenges territorial jurisdiction by creating an alternative and resistant power nexus which sometimes leads to its denomination as the “Republic of Paharganj,” a status as “dangerous” or desired space in the film. As a part of its spatial reading of popular cultural texts, this paper primarily takes on *Paharganj*. However, to substantiate Paharganj’s spatial representation in popular culture, this paper also secondarily makes reference to two other films: *Holy Smoke!* (1999) and *Dev. D* (2009).

“It’s like a whole new world”: Paharganj, A Deviant Space

Rakesh Ranjan Kumar’s *Paharganj* (2019) is the tale of a Spanish girl, Laura’s search for her missing German boyfriend Robert who is reportedly in Delhi and, to be more specific, lives in the hood area outside Delhi Central Railway Station called Paharganj. To a European woman unaccustomed to the Indian urban landscape, Paharganj appears to be a chaotic yet spatial maze and she gradually entangles her quest for her boyfriend with the local police’s quest for the same person as the prime suspect of the murder of the Home Minister’s son, Jeetendra Tomar. In another parallel segment of the story-line, the involvement of Tomar, himself a basketball player, in the murder of basketball coach Gautam Menon’s brother and in drug-dealing adds to the aspects of gang-feud and social justice. Thus, the trajectory of two quests and Menon’s attempt to get away from his trauma gradually unveils the complex and subversive nature of Paharganj and how this market-place, popularly perceived as bustling, accommodates alternative practices of everyday life. Besides, the representation of Paharganj in a visual fiction adds a cultural dimension to the real-life version of the place. Kumar’s *Paharganj* has a deviant and clandestine face with BDSM sex-parlors, queer orgy lounges, basketball betting zones, make-shift brothels, scattered drug zones, alternative spiritual dens, and last but not the least, crime sites. Apart from the quotidian dinginess of the place, a dark and counter-productive force is at work at Paharganj which challenges the normative urban ethos of Delhi and jeopardizes the administrative and legislative authority’s hold on the neighborhood.

First, let us consider how we understand Paharganj. While Paharganj, a backpackers’ must-visit for countercultural indulgence, is a legally defined geographical entity lying

within the urban vicinity of Delhi, it is represented as an imagined cartographical entity in popular visual culture in *Paharganj*. In the film, it is portrayed with its usual colors with cheap lodges, street food, tickets counters, bustling narrow alleys and by-lanes, money-exchange bureaus, dance bars, brothels, and the like. Such real and representational aspects of space, as Edward Soja contends, is called “real-and-imagined” space (11). A real-and-imagined place opens up the avenue for literary and cultural representation of space and how such a representation construes and deconstrues our conception and lived experience of a place. Authors and film directors act as literary and cultural cartographers of space, attracting our curious attention to a space’s conversation with social and human representational factors within the dialectical dynamics. Such representation manipulates our perception of space through the depiction of a novel set of lived experiences, and consequently, transforms a place’s conceptual essence. This is what Henri Lefebvre calls “social production of space.” Lefebvre’s tripartite understanding of space has three dimensions: perceived space (*espace perçu*), conceived space (*espace conçu*), and lived space (*espace vécu*) (38). To Lefebvre, it is our human actions which produces a place and likewise the space manipulates, influences and sometimes determines the social relations (170). To put it in the context of *Paharganj*, the physical and material geography of *Paharganj* with its common everyday practices (spatial practices) is the perceived space, while our idea of *Paharganj* as an affordable tourist neighborhood situated on the map with a demarcated territory is what he calls the conceived space and the real-time or/and actualized living experience as represented in art and literature is the lived space. Theoretically speaking, the lived or third space might transcend (or rather, deviate) the balance between the popular perceived space and official conceived space.

In line with Lefebvrian consideration of space as a social production, *Paharganj*’s visually represented living condition among drug dealers, hippies, prostitutes, sex-customers, criminal gangs, libertine spiritual devotees, human scavengers, “slumdogs,” and spiritual tourists depicts a complex yet charming space. The everyday interaction of drug-lords, lowlife urchins, foreign tourists, and businessmen constructs a *Paharganj* which is risky yet accommodative, deviant yet caring. Munna, apparently a juvenile gang leader, is attributed a mass-friendly impression who responds positively to the petty local injustices such as taking goods without paying. Even on a larger scale, this is Munna who, through his underworld connection, kills the minister’s son, Tomar, thus ensuring a deviant or legally unsanctioned manner of justice for Coach Menon’s brother. Moreover, *Paharganj* helps us to understand the same space in different lights at different moments (“slices of time,” in Foucauldian terms). Munna’s criminal engagement also transforms the premises of the railway line going across *Paharganj* into a subversive space of criminal encounters and a symbol of spatial domination. In this way, while these rail tracks become the place of contention over domination between the local mobs during the day, it produces the alternative sporting capital through basketball betting once the sun goes down.

Such undercover gambling/crime sites participate in their own (deviant) capital production and the local gamblers serve as the forces of capital production in such periodically recurring events. The same space also serves as the hideout for the murder suspects as we see the investigating officers browsing through the betting zone in the evening. The rail track loses its popular signified (alluding to Saussure) as a public space when it goes through Paharganj. Moreover, the production and distribution of substance drugs (in particular, heroin) in Paharganj and such production-induced capital also ties up different unholy alliances often leading to murder, like that of Robert. Thus, Paharganj reorganizes the spatial capital, produces contentious social relationship based on this capital among the forces of production (Tomar/Robert vs Pradhan/Munna), and gradually produces a shield through renewed spatial practices.

Not only does Paharganj endorse unsolicited modes of capital production, its complex geography creates varied assumptions about identity. Spaces like the railway premises, slum area, dingy hut, cowshed, Mughal-styled buildings, and neon-signed stores create an ontological mirage. Laura came across myriad (mis)-conceptions from the inhabitants of Paharganj about her identity during her spatial exploration into the place following the desperate quest for Robert: when at a BDSM parlor to search for Robert, Laura was taken as a client; while asking the pimp about Robert, she was mistaken for a prostitute; while at Baba Ghantal's den, she was conceived as someone to be offered to Baba or when at the hippie concert at Paharganj, people took her as a member of the community. Apart from encountering such ontological misconceptions, Laura had her share of disillusionment with her imagined notions of Paharganj. For instance, Baba Ghantal's conflation of spirituality with sexuality is stereotypically understood as having countercultural hippie underpinnings and hence, Laura's initial reaction to Baba's den, marked with half-naked devotees, dancers, weed-smokers, and hippies, reflects her countercultural preconception of oriental mysticism. However, (mis)-taking Baba as a potential locator for Robert, Laura gets disillusioned in her experience inside Baba's den, and her rape unveils the (s)exploitative nexus closeted behind the countercultural spirituality. The Bengali Baba, popular as a spiritual panacea in exchange for material and sexual offerings, has his own shield against the local administration which will be discussed in the second section. Thus, from Laura's perspective, Paharganj as a lived space dynamically negates or adds dimensions to Paharganj as a conceived space. Sitting in a local café, she meditates over the contrast between her prior conception of Paharganj evoked through the videos sent by Robert and her "real" lived experience of the chaotic hood-scape of Paharganj that she encounters, "The videos of Paharganj that you sent me are quite different from what the place is like, in reality" (00:44:15 – 00:44:21).

Spatially speaking, *Paharganj* construes two replicated entities – one is the simulation of another cityscape, i.e., Amsterdam's Red District area, while the other is a subversive microcosmic representation of India. Such spatial reconceptualization sanctions moral deviations. The film poster, adding a subtitle "The Little

Amsterdam of India” with the main title “Paharganj,” echoes the tainted drug and sex landscape of Amsterdam in Paharganj. The subtitle itself creates a presumption vis-à-vis the sexual and narcotic license of the space. However, while the red-light district of Amsterdam has an established legal authorization, its spatial simulacra Paharganj negotiates with the legal structure and spatial organization of India and creates a queer and deviant underworld, a category which Richard Symanski calls “immoral landscape” (162). The assertive rendition of Paharganj as a miniature version of India’s constitutional entity is indicative of an alternative spatial right. The participation and holding of the placards inscribing “Republic of Paharganj” by the foreign mourners along with the locals in the funeral procession suggests two things – first, a symbolic proclamation of Paharganj’s alternative sovereignty and ritualistic uniqueness and then, foreign tourists’ territorial re-appropriation and revised identification based on their lived experiences across Paharganj. It is as if, apart from the people of the Republic of India, a “new” people are emerging from the (Re)Public of Paharganj, a simulated administrative entity which has its own Pradhan (Headman) and where they follow a transfer of power from one Pradhan to another. Such alternative spatial consciousness is reflected in Yousuf Khan’s voice when, after being asked by the investigating officer if he knows about the murder of the Home Minister’s son, he wittily retorts, “The Home Minister of which country?” (01:25:25 – 01:25:28). Due to the general sense of stigma towards non-normative sexuality and sexual practices, and the resulting policing and zoning of the area as a sex capital, Paharganj, as an indulgent space, becomes a non-repressive (also de-stigmatized) safe-zone for queerism, BDSM, spiritual non-conformity, and prostitution. The co-existence of hetero- and homosexual space adds to the dimensionality of this place and hence, Paharganj’s spatial practice questions the monolithic conception of space as heterosexualized and hence, streamlined. Thus, apart from its taken-for-granted status as a dingy and cheap tourist hub, it is newly conceived as a shelter for the so-called social and moral deviants. As the lived space is now differently conceived, social relations and presence of individuals in this space are now conceived in a different light. Such a pluralistic cultural situation is what David Harvey, author of *The Right to the City*, considers to be a condition of “multiple liberties” (29), an essential component to resist any hegemonic practice of in the spatial geography.

There are other films which portray the deviant nature of Paharganj, though it is mainly *Paharganj* that combines the power with spatial re-appropriation. Jane Campion’s *Holy Smoke* (1999) underscores a similar vein of representation of Paharganj with tainted zones of prostitution and the influential spiritual guru named Baba who indoctrinates sexual freedom as a means of spiritual awakening, thus attracting tourists like Ruth Barron (played by Kate Winslet) from across the world. Ruth, the Australian girl, is seduced by the exotic world of Paharganj completely different from her own, and she decides to remain there for the rest of her life amidst the “divine” intoxication of sex and “holy smoke.” The hypnotic

sessions along with intoxicating drugs deeply ties Ruth in with the countercultural religious cult. The Rastafarian ritual of smoking marijuana or cannabis to achieve a heightened spiritual state has its resonance in what the Baba of Paharganj practices. Thus, Paharganj of *Holy Smoke* turns into an alternative spiritual space. Anurag Kashyap's *Dev. D* (2009) portrays the spatialization of prostitution across the Paharganj neighborhood with a rather empathetic pitch. Leni aka Chanda (played by Kalki Koechlin), a Delhi student of half-European descent and victim of public shaming for an accidental MMS scandal, begins prostituting herself part-time and finds at least some dignity and independence in her life. Her part-time profession in Paharganj brings her back to life with an allowance for body-capital and where she does not feel the sense of moral otherness. Paharganj's mid-range brothel with its stigma-less ethos becomes her new shelter/sanctuary, one of the three factors that Symanski identifies with urban brothels, the other two being customers/business and police presence (88).

In *Paharganj*, though the director did not show the presence of queer, trans- and extreme sexual culture (BDSM) in long shots, the collage-like quick shots of gay lounges, BDSM parlors, and Baba's transman pimp, all hint at the sexual geography of Paharganj and reflects the growing visibility of LGBTQ presence and extreme extent of the Indian cultural landscape. Such sexual turns in spatial criticism can lead us to the understanding of body-capital involving non-conforming expressions of sexual orientation, which till the 90s referred primarily to prostitution (see Symanski). The production of sex-capital as well as narcotic capital are two strong by-products of Paharganj and these two products establish the dialogue between two subversive forms of geography – sexual geography and narcotic geography. Not only that, the drug mafia, otherwise known as the waste collector, Triloki Pradhan's underground organ-trade produces illegal bio-capital for him. Gang-rivalry-induced victims are the primary source of such clandestine forms of capital production as Pradhan's boastful assertion hints at the bodies from which he collects the organs, and "if anyone interferes with my work, I kill him" (01:20:44 – 01:20:50). Such illicit liaisons put him into business dealings with countries like America, Columbia, Israel, Turkey, and Japan, and hints at the potential for medical-tourism even though the local authority is unaware of it. Paharganj, a singular geographical dot on the map, becomes the center of multifarious capital productions and its capital responds to deviant desires, and sexual and narcotic emancipation. It thus turns out to be a social product that produces new relations/identities. This section is primarily concerned with how the space, encompassing diverse countercultural and deviant capital formation, dynamically transforms itself into a deviant space and also produces and is produced by social relations. The following section analyzes how such deviant space unsettles the power dynamics.

Spatializing and Subverting the Power Nexus: A Foucauldian Reading

Michel Foucault, in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977), has presented a genealogical study of spatial manipulation in maintaining the homogenous power hierarchy.

He illustrated, with reference to Jeremy Bentham's architectural model of the prison-house called "panopticon," how spatial structure by creating an "unequal gaze" can serve to uphold the power relation for the purpose of regulatory control over individuals. If Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja can be labelled as social cartographers of space, Foucault's in-depth investigation of space in maintaining the power/knowledge hegemony rightly earns him the title of political cartographer of space, or, in Deleuzian terms, "new cartographer." Foucault echoes the Lefebvrian proposition by claiming the space to be dialectical, not to be assumed as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (qtd in Tally Jr. 119). Foucault's contribution to the spatial turn of cultural studies is evident in *Discipline and Punish* where his spatial analysis of power helps us to understand the significance of space as a political production and a means of power.

In *Paharganj*, the godforsaken urban neighborhood of Paharganj, though commonly conceived of as a dingy tourist location for so-called forbidden pleasures, has turned into an underworld powerhouse which encounters the state law and order system. The state police is uncomfortable in its confrontation with the gangsters of the chaotic outskirts of the Delhi railway station, Paharganj. The murder investigation of Jeetendra Tomar initially puts the local police in jeopardy as they were trying to get through the cobwebbed underworld of Paharganj in order to solve the murder-mystery. As stated before, the parallel quests of Spanish girl Laura for her boyfriend and of the police force for the murder suspect are directed to the same person, Robert, who is involved with the Paharganj drug cartels. The drug-and-sex induced capital and spatial organization of inhabitants and their houses rendered Paharganj into an ambiguous and heterogenous power nexus. Here, the young ganster Munna, spiritual Baba, marriage-counsellor/pimp, Headman Triloki Pradhan, Yusuf Khan, are all involved in the deviant practices that have a certain share in the power dynamics. In the beginning of the film, though Laura was wondering why people come to such dingy places as Paharganj, we understand that it is not the one-dimensional crowd that gives it a signature. Rather, the narcotic and subversive sexual ecosystem of this place has turned it into a Foucauldian "heterogenous space," a space that "claws and gnaws at us" (*Other Spaces* 3) unlike the Cartesian "homogenous extension" (*res extensa*) (qtd. in Tally 235). Paharganj's spatial appropriations as the "Republic of Paharganj" and/or "Little Amsterdam" are some material entities that act as other spaces alongside the commonly held ideas, a phenomenon that Foucault calls "heterotopia" or "other spaces" where the norms of behavior are suspended and deviations are exercised ("heterotopias of deviation") (*Other Spaces* 1).

In Paharganj, the interdependence of countercultural phenomena (i.e., drugs and sexuality) and the ensuing capital controls the threads of the local political nexus. As we see in the film, even the local police officer hesitates to take up the murder case fearing fatal consequences and another officer denounces Laura's rape accusation against the spiritual Baba Ghantal, asserting that it was false. Instead of playing the role of a "syndic" (Foucault uses this term to mean government authority) or

corrector, the police inspector refuses to recognize Baba as a sex offender. We hear the officer-in-charge of Paharganj police station calling the Paharganj slum area “risky.” The complex huddled mushrooming of structural establishments in Paharganj denies easy access to and any panoramic surveillance of this crime zone. As a result, the police cannot keep track of the town’s inhabitants, and instead, the inhabitants track the movements of the police and inform the up-and-coming gangsters like Munna and Pradhan. Therefore, the CCTV cameras become a mockery in the Paharganj slum area, and in the police stations, the CCTVs lose their power. Thus, when the police officer threatens the local hooligan Sonu (Munna’s rival) with “I’ll take off your pants and beat you up,” Sonu apathetically retorts, “There are cameras here.” As a result, the policeman’s right to observe is reversed as the right to be observed. Whereas the panopticon ensures the dissociation of the see/being seen dyad, i.e., “in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen ” (*Discipline 202*), in Paharganj, the authority oftentimes fails to maintain constant visibility of the underworld and, rather, is caught up in the underworld’s surveillance. Thus, the Foucauldian panopticon becomes dysfunctional in Paharganj. Rather, a subtle reversal of the panopticon can be seen where the police are actually unable to locate the gangsters. The unusual use of spatial components (such as stinky cowshed, shabby billboard stands, sex parlors, waste-dumps, and narrow by-lanes like Charas Galli) as hideouts entangles the visibility of Paharganj’s goons and their evil nexus, and, thus, challenges the “gaze” of the local police. The police’s ways of exercising power are slackened due to the chaotic partitioning of Paharganj. Instead, the angry gazes (Fig. 1) of Baba Ghantal’s devotees destabilize the police officers when they enter Baba’s den to investigate. They become the unwanted outsiders in Baba’s so-called spiritual space.



Fig. 1

Another example in the film’s context is how the investigating police officers are constantly being watched and escorted by Triloki Pradhan (Fig. 2) and Yousuf Khan’s bodyguards (POV shot in Fig. 3 also hints at counter-surveillance).



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Such spatial settings reflect the Foucauldian panopticon, an “enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point” (*Discipline* 197). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault argues that subjection through visibility is a desired outcome of the panopticon and he extends his argument, asserting that “visibility is a trap” and constitutes an unequal power relationship (200). However, Paharganj’s subversive spatial partitioning coupled with the sex-narcotics nexus challenges the normative entrapment mechanism.

Sexual capital in the form of body-politics also functions to uphold Paharganj’s mafia dealings. We observe an upturn in the power-relation in the scene where the local police officer, attempting a raid at a Marriage Counselling Office (in actuality a BDSM parlor), was whisperingly reminded by the camouflaged pimp-turned-commercial matchmaker of the call-girls that she has procured him; thus, buying his/the authority’s silence by exploiting the stigma associated with sex. Her unsettling question, “Where are my receipts for the girls I supplied to you,” helps viewers to understand the under-the-table tampering of the law by the camouflaged sex-dealers. The police officer’s out-of-focus face and the pimp’s sharp gaze (Fig. 4) is a visual indicator of the alternative power nexus of Paharganj.



Fig. 4

Munna, the urchin who fights to stake his claim on the Paharganj slums, haughtily pronounces that “all the cops of Paharganj are on my payroll,” further showcasing a subversion of the power relation. Irregular “spatial partitioning” (Foucauldian coinage qtd. in Tally 123) and discontinuous changes in identity have rendered the

place complex and sometimes impenetrable, thus denying an automated cognitive (mental) mapping about this place. Laura's utterance "Oh, God! This place is much more complicated than I had imagined" (00:09:20 – 00:09:25) or the police's skepticism over the possibility of carrying on an investigation in such a cob-webbed space echoes such complexity and informs us of the dynamics of lived space vis-à-vis Paharganj.

Alternative libertine spiritual rituals complement the power structure of Paharanj and adds to its mysticism. The adherence of foreign tourists to the countercultural spiritual practice of an Osho-esque Sex-Baba Guru Ghantal also adds to the ambiguous power construct of Paharganj. His tantric practice of meditative congregation and sexual libertinism has given him a twofold enigma: the awe-inspiring devotion of mostly foreign orange-clad devotees (especially women) and the status of a sexually-charged spiritual cult. The popular belief that women willingly offer their sexuality for spiritual sanitization and he can solve problems of all sorts add to this cult status. This Baba's den is considered by the police officer in *Paharganj* to be a holy shrine not to be trifled with to avoid danger or Baba's anger. However, the same policeman's unquestioned devotion to the Baba leads him to evade Laura's rape complaint against Baba. Clad in the cloud of alternative spirituality, the popular Baba thus endorses sexual abuse and takes carnal pleasure in bodily violence (Laura's rape by Baba Ghantal), a crime which even the local police tend to overlook. Thus, the moral sanction of alternative spiritual practice in Paharganj diminishes the legal concern.

It turns out to be impossible for the mainstream power structure (so-called dominant power exerciser) of Delhi to map the mechanisms of power in the Paharganj underworld. Absence of such easily decodable symbols of Paharganj's sources of power turn them into non-localizable power centers. Such mapping is what Foucault calls "cartography of power" (qtd.in Tally 122) which helps the dominant forces to retain its power. Without it, they are helpless and then they have to employ contributors and informers like Parvez in *Paharganj*. Inside Paharganj, it juxtaposes the power hierarchy of real space like Delhi (again, a heterotopic phenomenon): Triloki Pradhan succeeds the previous Pradhan in the dealing of the slums, drugs, and waste/scraps; Munna fights with his rival to come close to Triloki Pradhan; Robert and Jeetendra Tomar are ousted from the slum-scape as the potential rival to Pradhan's drug cartel to mention a few political instances. Within the power matrix of Paharganj, we also find intra-tension and a reversal of power relations. Robert and Jeetendra Tomar, the once high-end drug dealer of Paharganj (apparently with whom the police sympathize) are killed by Munna, the gutter-born slum orphan. And, till the end of the film, Paharganj has retained a resistance to and not been "subjected to [the] field of visibility" of the mainstream disciplinary mechanism, never letting it be the monopoly of the Delhi police (*Discipline* 203).

Conclusion

Due to the material complexity of spatial practices, space no longer remains a void. Rather, it changes its shades and produces novel human relations and revolutionizing human conceptions about space. Likewise, Paharganj, a so-called cheap tourist hub, becomes a site of politics, struggle, desire, and contention. Such fragmented and tentative zones resist homogeneity, thus challenging the mainstream hierarchy of power and creating an alternative zone for sexual freedom and subversion of moral and cultural borders. Paharganj, literally meaning “hilly neighborhood,” ironically owes its name to its geographical proximity to Raisina Hill, the center for the Government of the Republic of India and the place where the *Rashtrapati Bhavan* (Presidential Residence) is located. However, as far as the visual representation of spatial practices and the lived experiences are concerned, the film *Paharganj* delineates how a space is socially produced and productive, incorporating a gamut of heterogenous and non-normative ethos. Broadly speaking, this paper has been an investigation into the sociological dynamics of a space represented in popular culture, and its resulting counter-hegemonic power nexus which destabilizes the disciplinary model. Placing itself in the South Asian context and incorporating aspects of literary geography and spatial humanities, this research has thus explored the interdisciplinary and transnational potential of the study of space represented in popular culture.

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