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The Right of Entry: Spatial Politics and the Gendered Home in Kundanika Kapadia's Seven Steps in the Sky

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intersection of spatiality, gender, and agency in Kundanika Kapadia's seminal Gujarati novel, Seven Steps in the Sky (Sat Pagla Aakashma). Moving beyond purely Western spatial theories, this study employs a framework grounded in Indian feminist criticism and post-colonial theory—engaging with the works of Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar, and Michel Foucault. It argues that the domestic sphere in the novel functions not merely as a private dwelling but as the "inner domain" of cultural preservation, where the female subject is surveilled and silenced to maintain the sanctity of the patriarchal kula (clan). The paper analyzes the protagonist Vasudha's trajectory from the stifling enclosure of her marital home to the limitless expanse of the "sky", interpreting this journey as a radical reclamation of the swadharma (self-duty) that transcends traditional domestic obligations.

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE MYTH OF THE SANCTUARY

The literary geography of the Indian novel has often contested the Western notion of the "home" as a site of privacy and individual nurturing. In Kundanika Kapadia's Seven Steps in the Sky (Sat Pagla Aakashma), the home is not a Bachelardian "felicitous space" that shelters the dreamer from the storms of the world; rather, it is the storm itself,

frozen into the architecture of walls, thresholds, and locked doors. The novel serves as a rigorous investigation into the spatial politics of the middle-class Gujarati household, revealing it to be a sophisticated apparatus of gendered confinement. Through the protagonist Vasudha, Kapadia critiques the "Right of Entry"—the privilege to occupy space as a sovereign subject—which is systematically denied to women within the domestic sphere.

Vasudha's narrative begins with a profound sense of dislocation. The transition from her father's house to her husband Vyomesh's house is not a movement from one home to another, but a transfer between two institutions of containment. She reflects early in the text on the ontological homelessness of the Indian woman: in her childhood home, she is a "guest" awaiting departure; in her marital home, she is an "outsider" awaiting assimilation. This perpetual transience suggests that the woman has no natural habitat; she is a squatter in the house of patriarchy, residing there only by the grace of her functional utility.

To understand the specific texture of Vasudha's confinement, one must situate the novel within the post-colonial framework of the "inner" and "outer" domains. Partha Chatterjee, in The Nation and Its Fragments, argues that Indian nationalism resolved the conflict with colonial modernity by dividing the world into two spheres. The "outer" domain is the material world of economy and statecraft, where the man must navigate Western influence. The "inner" domain is the spiritual, domestic sphere, which must remain the uncolonized sanctuary of "true" Indian identity. The burden of maintaining the purity of this inner domain falls entirely on the woman.

In Seven Steps in the Sky, Vyomesh embodies the hypocrisy of this dichotomy. He is a modern man in the outer world—ambitious, rational, and socially mobile. However, he demands that his home remain a fortress of feudal values. He requires Vasudha to be the static anchor to his dynamic life. Her immobility is the precondition for his mobility. Every time Vasudha expresses a desire to learn, to read, or to engage with the world outside, Vyomesh perceives it as a breach of the "inner domain." He does not fear her physical departure as much as he fears her intellectual migration. If the guardian of the culture (the wife) begins to think like a modern individual, the sanctity of the home—and by extension, his identity as a traditional Grhastha (householder)—collapses. Thus, the walls of the house are fortified against new ideas, turning the home into a museum of obsolete values where Vasudha is both the curator and the exhibit.

The structural organization of Vyomesh's household operates on the logic of the Panopticon, as described by Michel Foucault. In a Panopticon, power is visible and unverifiable; the inmate must always behave as if they are being watched. In the novel, this surveillance is not conducted through guard towers but through the "unspoken rules" and the omnipresent gaze of the family unit.

The architecture of the house denies Vasudha any privacy. The concept of a "Room of One's Own", famously championed by Virginia Woolf, is an impossibility in the joint family structure depicted by Kapadia. Space is communal, which effectively means it is policed. Vasudha is constantly visible—to her husband, to her mother-in-law (Faiba), and to the extended family. This visibility is not benign; it is a mechanism of control. When she is in the kitchen, she is watched for efficiency; when she is in the living room, she is watched for decorum. The character of Faiba represents the internalization of this surveillance. Having been a victim of the patriarchal structure herself, Faiba does not seek to dismantle the prison but to become its warden. She scrutinizes Vasudha's movements with a critical eye, enforcing the "laws" of the house—how to cook, how to dress, how to speak. This dynamic illustrates how spatial politics often pits women against one another, fighting for meager territory within a structure owned by men.

The layout of the house reflects a rigid, caste-like hierarchy of gendered space. The Living Room (Baithak) constitutes the seat of power. It is the stage for male performativity, where Vyomesh entertains guests, discusses politics, and asserts his social status. Vasudha's relationship to this room is purely functional. She enters the living room not as a participant in the discourse but as part of the infrastructure—silent, efficient, bearing tea and snacks. Her "Right of Entry" is conditional on her silence. She is there to verify Vyomesh's status as a man who is well-served, not to exist as a person with opinions. When she attempts to speak, her voice is treated as "noise" that disrupts the serious male signal.

In stark contrast, the Kitchen (Rasodu) is the designated female enclosure. However, Kapadia refuses to romanticize this space. It is not the

"heart of the home" but a site of repetitive, invisible labor. It is a "morgue" where dreams are preserved in pickle jars. The kitchen is designed to consume the woman's time and energy so completely that she has none left for rebellion. The heat, the smoke, and the endless cycle of cooking and cleaning act as physical barriers to her intellectual growth. Vasudha feels the "heaviness" of the air in the kitchen—a sensory description of her stagnation. She is the Annapurna (Goddess of Food) who feeds everyone but is herself starving for intellectual nourishment.

Kapadia uses the material culture of the home to further highlight Vasudha's alienation. The house is filled with objects—furniture, utensils, decorations—that Vasudha is expected to maintain. She spends her life polishing surfaces that do not belong to her. The novel poignantly contrasts the abundance of domestic objects with the scarcity of intellectual objects. The motif of "books" is central to this spatial analysis. In the Indian bridal tradition, the trousseau includes jewelry, clothes, and stainless steel—objects that define the body and labor. Books are conspicuously absent. Vasudha notes the cruelty of this omission: "Jewellery and utensils don't teach anything... But no parent ever gives books."

The absence of a bookshelf for the bride is a deliberate architectural exclusion. A book represents a portal to the "outside", a breach in the wall. By denying her books, the family attempts to seal the cracks through which she might escape into a "counter-space" of the mind. Vasudha is surrounded by things that demand her service, but she possesses nothing that serves her soul. She is trapped in a world of matter, denied entry into the world of the mind. This material deprivation reinforces the "architecture of confinement" that is the antagonist of the novel. Before Vasudha can take her steps towards the sky, she must first map the contours of her prison. She must realize that in Vyomesh's house, she is everywhere as a servant, but nowhere as a citizen. The silent violence of the domestic sphere lies not in explicit physical restraint, but in the relentless erasure of the self through the control of space and objects.

If the architectural layout of the house provides the static framework of confinement, the rituals of entry provide its geometric logic. The "Right of Entry" into the domestic sphere is not a simple unlocking of a door; it is a complex, ritualized surrender of sovereignty initiated by the wedding itself. The title of Kundanika Kapadia's novel, Seven Steps in the Sky (Sat Pagla Aakashma), functions as a profound ironic counterpoint to the central rite of Hindu marriage: the Saptapadi. Traditionally, these seven steps taken around the sacred fire symbolize a co-pilgrimage of the couple towards Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire), and Moksha (liberation). It is inherently a ritual of movement, implying a linear journey forward into a shared life of mutual spiritual growth. However, Kapadia engages in a radical revisionist reading of this rite, positing that for the female protagonist, Vasudha, the Saptapadi acts not as a vector of liberation but as a geometric circumscription. Instead of a progression towards the "sky"—the novel's ultimate metaphor for limitless possibility—the steps trace a tight circle that hermetically seals the woman inside the domestic sphere.

This "geometry of containment" is evident from the very inception of Vasudha's marital life. The ritual, ostensibly a sacrament of union, functions socially as a contract of transfer. The concept of Kanyadan (the gift of the maiden) underscores the transactional nature of the wedding, where the guardianship of the female body is passed from the father to the husband. Kapadia subverts the sanctity of this transfer by highlighting the terrifying finality of the "seventh step." For Vasudha, the completion of the ritual does not open a door; it closes a gate. The vows she recites—promising service, fidelity, and obedience—are not mutual pledges of partnership but unilateral declarations of surrender. As critic Vrinda Nabar argues in Caste as Woman, the Hindu marriage ritual is the "primary institutional mechanism" through which the caste-patriarchy nexus exerts control over female sexuality and labor. In Kapadia's narrative, the Saptapadi effectively transforms Vasudha from a mobile subject into a fixed object, rooted to the spot of her husband's home. The movement around the fire is the last free movement she is allowed; thereafter, her orbit is fixed around the husband-sun.

Once the circle is closed, the boundary is reinforced by the concept of the threshold, or the Umbaro. In the cultural imagination of the Indian middle class, the threshold is not merely an architectural feature but a moral boundary, heavily laden with mythological significance. It evokes the Lakshman Rekha from the Ramayana—the protective line drawn by Lakshmana to safeguard Sita. However, feminist scholars like Nabaneeta Dev

Sen and Jasbir Jain have long pointed out the double-edged nature of this protection. The Rekha protects the woman only insofar as she accepts her captivity; the moment she exercises agency to cross it, she is punished.

In Seven Steps in the Sky, the "unspoken rules" of Vyomesh's household function as a modern, invisible Lakshman Rekha. Vasudha is indoctrinated with the belief that safety lies in immobility. The world outside the threshold is coded as "unsafe", chaotic, and morally compromising for a woman of "good family." Yet, Kapadia brilliantly inverts this mythology. The narrative reveals that the true danger to Vasudha's spirit does not reside in the "Ravanas" of the outside world, but in the suffocating "safety" of the interior. The threat is domestic, not foreign. By keeping her within the Rekha, Vyomesh does not protect her from harm; he protects his own honor (izzat) from public scrutiny. The threshold, therefore, becomes a site of intense policing. Every time Vasudha approaches the door—whether to buy vegetables or to simply look out—she is reminded of her boundaries. Her physical movement is tethered, creating a psychological state where she feels "heaviness" even when standing still.

The spatial politics of the home extends aggressively to the most intimate territory of all: the female body. If the house is the "inner domain" of the nation, the woman's body is the "inner sanctum" of the house, and it must be kept inviolate. However, Kapadia exposes a disturbing paradox: the woman's body is inviolate to the outside world only so it can be violated with impunity by the husband. The transition from the public threshold to the private bedroom does not bring freedom; it brings a different, more intrusive form of occupation.

Vyomesh's relationship with Vasudha is defined by a distinct separation between her Sharir (body) and her Atman (self/soul). He claims absolute ownership over the former while remaining aggressively indifferent to the latter. The bedroom, typically romanticized in literature as a sanctuary of private love, is depicted by Kapadia as a site of silent, sanctioned violation. Vasudha's internal monologues reveal a profound dissociation during moments of physical intimacy. She remarks with chilling clarity, "You only know my body, that's all you enjoy of me. And I feel repelled because I have a heart. I am not only a physical body."

This statement constitutes a spatial critique of the marital bed. Vyomesh treats her body as property he has the "right of entry" to by virtue of the marriage contract. The concept of consent is rendered moot by the institution of marriage itself, which, in the traditional context, views the wife's sexual availability as a permanent obligation. Veena Das, in her work on the "language of pain", suggests that the female body often speaks the language of compliance while the self screams in silence. Vasudha's revulsion is a desperate attempt to reclaim the "boundary" of her own skin. She retreats into the recesses of her mind, leaving her body behind like an empty shell—a "house" that Vyomesh occupies but does not truly inhabit.

The hierarchy of the household is further spatialized through the daily rituals of food and eating. In the traditional Gujarati household depicted in the novel, the dining table is not a circle of communion but a stratified pyramid of consumption. The order of eating—men first, children second, women last—is a spatial enactment of the family's value system. Vasudha's role is that of the Annapurna (the goddess of food), but Kapadia strips this title of its divine power, revealing the exhaustion underneath. She is the provider, yet she is excluded from the act of enjoyment. The dining area becomes a "border zone" where she is present as infrastructure but absent as a participant.

This marginalization is reinforced by the subtle violence of criticism. If the salt is low or the roti is cold, the critique is directed at Vasudha's "service", interpreting a minor domestic lapse as a moral failure. When she finally sits down to eat, often alone or with Faiba, she consumes the "leftovers" of the family's time and energy. This is reminiscent of the concept of Joothan (pollution), though here it operates within the caste-privileged home as a gendered pollutant. K. Satchidanandan has described the kitchen in Indian women's poetry as a "morgue" where dreams are preserved in jars. For Vasudha, the act of eating is purely functional—refueling the machine so it can serve again the next day.

The Hindu ideal of the Ardhangini suggests that the husband and wife are two equal halves of a whole. However, Kapadia illustrates that in the lived reality of Vyomesh's world, the wife is not a half; she is a shadow. A shadow has no mass, no dimension, and occupies no space of its own; it merely mimics the movement of the object it is attached to.

Vasudha's struggle throughout the early chapters is the struggle to gain "dimensionality."

The "seven steps" led her into a hall of mirrors where she sees only the infinite reflections of what she should be. The Saptapadi did not lead to the sky; it led to the ceiling. The roof of Vyomesh's house becomes the limit of her vision. Every time she looks up, seeking the expanse of the Aakash (sky), her gaze is intercepted by the beams and plaster of domesticity. This architectural blocking is deliberate; the patriarchal home seeks to eliminate the uncontrollable vertical axis of the sky. By keeping Vasudha's gaze fixed on the floor (modesty) or the stove (labor), the house prevents her from looking up. The "Right of Entry" she ultimately begins to crave is the right to enter the vertical axis—to ascend. But to do so, she realizes she must dismantle the horizontal "steps" that bind her. The revocation of the marriage vow becomes the only way to fulfill the vow to her own Atman.

If the external architecture of the home is designed to enforce the "Duty of Remaining", as established in the previous sections, the protagonist Vasudha initiates her rebellion through what can be termed an "Insurrection of the Interior." To fulfill the vow to the Atman requires a transgression that is initially invisible, taking place within the silent, unmapped cartography of the mind. Kundanika Kapadia masterfully delineates this phase of resistance not as a physical departure—which constitutes the climax of the novel—but as a psychological secession. Before Vasudha can physically leave Vyomesh's house, she must first evict Vyomesh from her internal consciousness.

This process begins with the reclamation of silence. In the cacophony of the joint family, where every female utterance is expected to be an agreement, an apology, or a service, silence is often misread by the patriarch as submission. However, Kapadia reconstructs Vasudha's silence as an active, defiant withdrawal. Indian feminist critics like Susie Tharu have noted that for the subaltern woman, silence can function as a "strategic enclosure", a space where the self is preserved against the erosion of daily life. Vasudha's silence at the dinner table or in the bedroom is not emptiness; it is a refusal to participate in the charade of domestic bliss. By withholding her words, she denies Vyomesh the validation he seeks as the benevolent patriarch. She creates a "counter-space" within her own skull, a room that Vyomesh cannot enter because he does not possess the language to unlock it. This constitutes the first significant breach in the domestic Panopticon: the guard can see the prisoner, but he no longer knows what the prisoner is thinking.

Spatially, this internal rebellion is anchored by the architectural feature of the window. While the door represents the regulated entry and exit controlled by social norms and the husband's permission, the window represents the unregulated gaze. Vasudha's relationship with the "Sky" (Aakash)—the titular motif—is mediated through the window. In a house characterized by closed circles (the Saptapadi, the daily routine of cooking and cleaning), the sky offers a verticality that disrupts the horizontal oppression of the domestic.

Kapadia invests the sky with a specific agency; it is not merely a backdrop of nature, but an active interlocutor. When Vasudha looks out at the stars or the vast expanse of blue, she is engaging in a dialogue that bypasses the social hierarchy entirely. The sky does not ask for her caste, her marital status, or her culinary skills; it asks only for her capacity to witness. This engagement aligns Vasudha with the Indian Bhakti tradition, specifically the archetype of the female mystic like Mirabai. Just as Mira rejected the earthly husband (the Rana) for a divine lover (Krishna), thereby delegitimizing the domestic authority, Vasudha begins to reject the authority of Vyomesh in favor of an abstract, elemental truth. She does not seek a new lover in the human sense; she seeks an ontological vastness that the finite, petty space of the home cannot contain. The window, therefore, becomes a site of "spatial leakage", where the hermetic containment of the home fails, and the infinite bleeds in.

As Vasudha's dissociation from the domestic sphere deepens, the narrative introduces the concept of Anandgram—the community of service and spiritual liberation that stands in binary opposition to Vyomesh's household. In the context of spatial theory, Anandgram functions as what Michel Foucault calls a "Heterotopia"—specifically, a "Heterotopia of Compensation." Foucault describes these spaces as real places that function as "counter-sites", where the real sites within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.

If Vyomesh's home is a space of private accumulation, rigid hierarchy, and stifling tradition,

Anandgram is constructed as a space of communal living, fluid roles, and liberating labor. It is the "perfect" space that highlights the "messy, ill-constructed" nature of the domestic reality Vasudha inhabits. Crucially, in this third part of the narrative arc, Anandgram exists for Vasudha primarily as an idea—a mental refuge before it becomes a physical destination. It validates her intuition that "another way of living" is possible. The mere existence of Anandgram destabilizes the hegemony of the patriarchal home by proving that the Grhastha (householder) model is not the only valid form of existence.

Vasudha's encounters with characters from this alternative world—like the empathetic and intellectually vibrant figures she meets—serve as incursions of the heterotopia into the home. These interactions emphasize the intellectual poverty of her marital life. Vyomesh's conversations are restricted to money, status, and the trivialities of social climbing. In contrast, the discourse of Anandgram revolves around humanity, service, and the cosmos. This juxtaposition highlights the "spatial mismatch": Vasudha's body is trapped in a space of petty materialism, while her intellect belongs to a space of high idealism. The friction caused by this mismatch is the engine that drives the narrative toward its climax.

The tension between Vasudha's internal counter-space and her external reality inevitably leads to the breakdown of her performance as the "ideal wife." The Indian concept of the Pativrata—the wife who is wholly devoted to her husband—relies on a seamless integration of will and action. The wife must not only serve; she must want to serve. Vasudha's rebellion disrupts this seamlessness. She continues to cook and clean, but the "affective labor"—the emotional warmth and devotion—evaporates.

Kapadia portrays this breakdown not as a hysterical outburst, but as a chilling clarity. Vasudha begins to look at Vyomesh and Faiba not with fear, but with the detached curiosity of an anthropologist observing a strange, cruel tribe. She deconstructs their rituals. Why must the woman eat last? Why must the widow shave her head (in the case of Faiba's past)? Why is a son's birth a celebration and a daughter's a burden? By asking these questions, even silently, she strips the domestic rituals of their sacred aura, revealing them as bare mechanisms of power. This "de-sacralization" of the home is a pivotal moment of transgression. In a culture where the home is the temple of the family deity, treating it as a mere cage is blasphemy. Vasudha's "madness"—as it is perceived by the family—is actually her sanity asserting itself against an insane system. She realizes that the "peace" of the house is maintained by the "war" against her individuality.

A significant portion of Part III deals with Vasudha's realization that the domestic space cannot be reformed; it can only be escaped. The liberal humanist solution—that the husband can be educated, or that the system can be tweaked to be more equitable—is shown to be a fallacy in the face of deep-seated patriarchal conditioning. Vyomesh is not a villain in the melodramatic sense; he is a product of his spatial conditioning. He cannot conceive of a wife who is an equal because his "mental map" of the world has no coordinates for such a relationship.

Vasudha attempts, at various junctures, to communicate her inner life to him. She tries to open the door to her "internal counter-space." These attempts are met with incomprehension. Vyomesh dismisses her philosophical yearnings as "morbid" or "impractical." This failure of communication confirms that the two inhabit different ontologies. They are legally cohabiting, but spatially, they are living in different dimensions. The Saptapadi bound their bodies, but it failed to bridge the abyss between their minds. Thus, the internal counter-space, initially a refuge, becomes a launchpad. Vasudha realizes that she cannot live a double life forever—a body in servitude and a mind in the sky. The cognitive dissonance becomes physically painful. The "heaviness" of the threshold transforms into an unbearable weight. The "Right of Entry" she desires is no longer just entry into a room of her own, but entry into a life where the inner and outer are aligned. She prepares to take the step that will shatter the Lakshman Rekha once and for all.

The tension accumulated in the domestic panopticon—the silence, the surveillance, and the dissociation—culminates in the act of rupture. Vasudha's decision to leave Vyomesh's house is the pivotal moment where the "internal counter-space" constructed in the previous chapters exteriorizes itself. In spatial terms, this is the most radical act a woman in the traditional Indian context can perform: the voluntary crossing of the Lakshman Rekha without the promise of protection from another male figure. Kundanika Kapadia frames this

departure not as an act of abandonment, but as an act of arrival. When Vasudha steps over the threshold (Umbaro) for the final time, she dismantles the binary of "inside/safety" and "outside/danger." The threshold, once a line of prohibition, transforms into a line of liberation. This moment signifies the collapse of the patriarchal architecture that defined her existence. She does not leave because she hates Vyomesh, but because the space he commands has become too small for her expanding consciousness. It is a spatial necessity; the plant has outgrown the pot, and the pot must break.

The narrative treats this rupture as a reclamation of the "Right of Entry" into the world. By walking out, Vasudha asserts that she belongs to the cosmos, not to the clan (Kula). This aligns with the feminist critique of the private/public divide. As Carole Pateman argues, the separation of the private (domestic) and public (civil) spheres is the foundation of women's subordination. Vasudha's exit is a rejection of this separation. She moves into a space where her private self and her public actions can finally merge, rejecting the role of the "angel in the house" to become a human in the world.

Throughout the novel, the "Sky" functions as the central counter-motif to the "House." In this final section, the metaphor is fully realized. If the house is defined by its limits—walls, ceilings, locked doors—the sky is defined by its limitlessness. It is the ultimate "anti-architecture." It has no owners, no deeds, and no partitions. Kapadia writes of the sky not merely as a physical expanse but as a phenomenological state of being. For Vasudha, "Reclaiming the Sky" means reclaiming the vertical axis of existence. In the domestic sphere, her gaze was forced horizontally (towards duties, people, objects). In her new life, her gaze is allowed to travel vertically. The sky represents the potential for the Atman to expand without encountering a ceiling.

The title, Seven Steps in the Sky, suggests that the true marriage—the true Saptapadi—is not between man and woman, but between the individual and the infinite. To take steps "in the sky" is to walk where there is no solid ground of tradition to support you. It requires the courage to float, to be untethered. This terrified the "domesticated" Vasudha, but it liberates the "awakened" Vasudha. The sky offers a space where gender dissolves. The stars do not distinguish between male and female observers. In the vastness of the cosmos, the petty hierarchies of the Vyomesh household are revealed to be insignificant dust.

Vasudha's destination, Anandgram, serves as the concrete manifestation of her liberated spatiality. If Vyomesh's home was a Panopticon, Anandgram is an "Open Plan." It is a community designed around the principles of shared labor, intellectual freedom, and integration with nature. In Anandgram, the architecture is permeable. The boundaries between "work" and "life", and between "indoors" and "outdoors", are fluid. Vasudha finds that labor here is not Seva (servitude demanded by duty) but Karma Yoga (selfless action performed for the greater good). The kitchen in Anandgram is communal, stripping it of the isolation and hierarchy that plagued the kitchen in her marital home. Here, she cooks not to please a master, but to nourish a community of equals.

The presence of the Himalayas in the final setting is crucial. The mountains, like the sky, represent the sublime—nature in its most sovereign form. Against the backdrop of the Himalayas, the claustrophobia of the urban middle-class apartment evokes a distant, bad memory. The landscape itself participates in Vasudha's healing. The open air, the flowing river, and the vast horizon act as corrections to the enclosed, stagnant air of the domestic sphere. This validates the eco-feminist argument that the liberation of women is intrinsically tied to a reconnection with nature, which patriarchy seeks to dominate just as it seeks to dominate women.

The conclusion of the novel brings the reader back to the motif of the "Seven Steps." In the Hindu marriage rite, the seventh step seals the union, making the couple "friends for life" (Sakha). However, in the context of the novel's trajectory, Vasudha takes a metaphorical seventh step away from the marriage to find friendship with herself. Kapadia suggests that the traditional Saptapadi creates a closed circle of repetitive time (reproduction, maintenance, death). Vasudha's journey breaks this circle and turns it into a straight line—a vector pointing towards self-realization (Swa-dharma). She realizes that a woman is not born to be a "half-body" (Ardhangini) to a man, but a whole universe unto herself.

The reconciliation she finds is not a return to the husband, but a peace with her past. She does not hate Vyomesh; she pities him for being trapped in the very house he thinks he owns. By leaving, she

frees herself, but she also exposes the hollowness of his authority. The "seventh step" is thus the step into autonomy. It is the realization that the only person who can grant the "Right of Entry" into a meaningful life is the self.

II. CONCLUSION

Kundanika Kapadia's Seven Steps in the Sky remains a landmark text in Indian feminist literature precisely because it engages in a sophisticated critique of spatial politics. Through the journey of Vasudha, the novel demonstrates that the oppression of women is not just legal or social, but fundamentally architectural. The "Home", often eulogized in Indian culture as the temple of the family, is revealed to be a site of sophisticated confinement—a Panopticon where the female body is surveilled, the female intellect is starved, and the female soul is tethered.

This paper has argued that Vasudha's liberation is a fundamentally spatial process. By establishing the home as a hegemonic "inner domain" that systematically erases female subjectivity, the analysis reveals how domestic rituals—from the Saptapadi to the Lakshman Rekha—function as mechanisms of enclosure. Vasudha's trajectory, therefore, requires the construction of an internal "counter-space" of the mind, a necessary precursor to her physical rupture from the domestic sphere. Ultimately, her journey culminates in the reclamation of the "Sky", a metaphor for a limitless, un-gendered ontology that transcends the binary of the gendered home.

The "Right of Entry" that Vasudha ultimately secures is not an entry into another man's house, nor a return to her father's house. It is the right to enter the world as a sovereign entity. It is the right to stand under the open sky without a roof filtering the light. Kapadia's novel asserts that for the Indian woman, the path to the sky does not lie in the seven steps around the fire, but in the steps taken away from it, towards the horizon of her own potential. In doing so, Vasudha redefines the geography of womanhood from a fixed point on a domestic map to a fluid motion across an open sky.

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