

FROM SPACE TO PLACE: CONSTRUCTING CALIFORNIA IN *DAUGHTER OF FORTUNE*

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Abstract

Isabel Allende, in Daughter of Fortune tells the story of Eliza and through her the development of California as a part of the US. In short, California was founded by the forty-niners as a result of the Gold Rush of the 19th century. Through the eyes of Tao, Eliza, and Paulina the author explains the evolution of a new place, California.

The production of space popularized by Henri Lefebvre explains how a space gradually becomes a place. To distinguish between the two, space is an abstract idea and a social construct, while place is “lived space”. A space becomes a place only when people live there and a society evolves. The news about the discovery of a new space results in the rush of people with different goals. The people with different cultures and identities come there, and soon there may be the amalgamation of these different aspects, which becomes the culture and identity of the new society. When a new city evolves, there will come into being various ideologies, along with bureaucracy, production, sensuality, and imagination. Thus, with all such different aspects a space gives rise to a place.

Governmentality is another aspect seen Daughter of Fortune. In the case of California reverse governmentality results in governmentality. At first the different groups of people worked unknowingly together for the formation of a controlling power best suited for them. Later this authority brings full control over the people. Lefebvre’s idea of the “critique of everyday life” can be applied in Daughter of Fortune. This results in the arrival of a particular society which stays in motion in a particular fashion. Thus evolves California through the eyes of Tao, and Eliza.

Isabel Allende's *Daughter of Fortune* is about the transformation of Eliza from a fortunate orphan to a full-fledged woman, which is parallel to the growth and development of California from a banned space to a place. Eliza was a Chilean adopted by Miss. Rose, John Sommers, and Jeremy Sommers, a wealthy family. The story deals with Eliza's search for her lover Joaquin Andieta. Tao, a Chinese physician, in Eliza's secret voyage to California, gives her accommodation and helps her in the search for Joaquin. Eliza's lover went to California, as the news spread that one could become filthy rich in no time. He wanted to save his mother from their present poverty. Isabel Allende through the eyes of Tao Chi'en and Eliza shows the development of California from a space to a place. "Doreen Massey (1994) comes up with five key themes about space.

1. Space is a social construct.
2. The social is located in space.
3. Social space is always dynamic, constructed by social relations.
4. Space is also about power- real or symbolic.

Social space might consist of contradictory, even conflictual spaces; it is never one space but many spaces" (Nayar 79). In simple words we can distinguish between space and place in two ways. While space is an abstract idea or concept, place is lived space. Also, space is something that can be drawn on paper, while place emerges when people occupy space.

It can be said that, both space and place are socially constructed realities. That is, there is the presence of social constructionism. As per the definition by Wikipedia group, "social constructionism... is a theory that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world. It assumes that understanding, significance and meaning are developed not separately within the individual, but in coordination with other human beings". This theory tries to tell about the ways in which people come together to construct their social reality. So a "new nation" is a socially constructed one. From what Ian Hacking had observed, in the present state of affairs, the "new nation" is taken for granted; it seems inevitable. Also, "new place" need not have existed or need not be at all as it is. It is the construction of the people.

California was a place which sprouted out from nothingness. "That territory had been largely ignored before it was known that it was sitting on a never-ending treasure. North America had thought of it as Indian hunting grounds, and the pioneers had preferred Oregon, which they had found better suited for agriculture. Mexico had considered it a wasteland bristling with thieves and hadn't bothered to send troops to defend it during the war" (Allende 120). California got the full attention of the world only in the 19th century with the gold rush. Since then, many people started settling down in the place, which finally resulted in the transformation of California from a space to a place. During this time of progress, in California many new institutions were formed, businesses got firm grounds, people from different nations, occupied in different professions and attitudes settled down, and new ideologies were established. So, for a new nation to be formed, all

the above mentioned should be there along with a common urge for something, a new culture and a new identity.

The concept of 'imagined communities' is an aspect which can be seen in *Daughter of Fortune*. This was coined by Benedict Anderson. As per the definition given by Wikipedia group, "an imagined community is different from an actual community because it is not... based on everyday face- to- face interaction between its members". A nation is actually a constructed community. The members of this community may not know each other fully. But they may have common interests, which drive them to the same goal, as a result of which a new nation takes shape.

In Allende's work, the common urge of the people was to mine out as much gold as they could. "At the cry of "Gold! Gold!" three out of four men dropped everything and set out for the placers" (Allende 121). The formation of a place sometimes starts with material prosperity, giving no heed to religious aspects. " " They look for gold, and along the way lose their souls," Captain Katz had repeated tirelessly in the brief religious services he imposed every Sunday on the passengers and crew of the *Emilia*, but no one paid any attention, blinded by dreams of the sudden riches that would change their lives" (Allende 223). Those who think spiritually and peacefully will be mocked at. This gets revealed from Eliza telling Tao, "'There's no one left on the ship, only that Captain with his Bible'" (Allende 232). Even those spiritual people will ultimately become materialistic.

"Space is not... a neutral geographical territory. Space always encodes power, and power informs production, housing, consumption, regulation of walking and leisure, building and 'use' of space" (Nayar 221). There are four impulses generated in the development of a city:

Bureaucracy: This impulse involves naming territories and mapping. This is visible in *Daughter of Fortune* in that, the little village Yerba Buena, with the coming of the miners was given the name 'San Francisco'. When the foreigners increased in number, there arose various buildings, "...and dozens under construction, including some announcing themselves as future luxury hotels..." (Allende 223). After a few months, the space got the position as a town. But then there arose two argumentative opinions among the people. Some were of the opinion that when the gold rush comes to an end the city will get transformed into the old sleepy town it was before. But some others said that, it will not go to that condition, but will develop. As told by the former, California did not go for hibernation, but started its development. Sacramento, a town in the developing city prospered. New shops were opened there and land was sold at a high price, and not for free. The barbarous names of various places changed into stylish ones. Thus the formation of California resulted in the correction of the world map.

Production: This impulse looks at the organization of labour, sites of production and finance. With the gold rush there came organizing the space as production sites and finance. Organization of labour was also there. Certain people sent labourers to work hard in the mines to gain gold. The workforce did everything to make their masters wealthy. Thus the rich from other nations saw California as a space for production and finance.

There we can see the presence of master- slave relationship. Submissive people of scattered nationalities become slaves to the powerful even without their knowledge. "...she saw Americans, Europeans, Mexicans, Chileans, Peruvians and long lines of silent Chinese under the command of an overseer although of their race... treated them like servants and paid them with crumbs" (Allende 277, 278). Related to this is feudalism. Even though everyone wished to go to California, it was not possible. So they set up various corporations, or sent a confidant with an agreement to share profits. Some of the people, forced by greed, left their native places with the "...best and most loyal miners, promising them a reward as incentive to get them to leave their families and jump into such a risky enterprise" (Allende 121). Once when John Sommers supped with the Santa Cruz brothers in the best hotel in San Francisco, through his eyes Allende says that, at the end of 1848, these brothers had brought to work under them eighty submissive peasants. They knew nothing about mining but learnt that skill quickly. They were kept working on the Banks of the American river under the command of an overseer. In this way the feudal ideology took shape. The people sent by their masters understood that, whatever gold they mined was not theirs, but their masters'.

"Sensuality: The city is the site of bodily experiences- pleasure, pain, happiness, inconvenience. Spaces in city are organized accounting for these sensual and sensory experiences" (Nayar 221). Sensuality can also be seen in *Daughter of Fortune*. With the help of the adventurers California started getting civilized. Later, women from high class families arrived there. This changed the society. They worked hard and were no longer considered the weaker sex. " They worked in jobs forbidden to them everywhere: they prospected for gold, worked as cowgirls, drove mules, tracked outlaws for bounty, managed gambling halls, restaurants, laundries, and hotels" (Allende 357). The arrival of Paulina as described in *Daughter of Fortune* gives us a hint regarding the socialization of tourists. She reached California in a luxurious ship with her children, and a lapdog, a symbol of richness. When she stepped down from the ship, her husband and brother-in-law were seen on dock. For Paulina's comfort they had built a huge house filled with costly items.

Imagination: This is the impulse to imagine what all things are not available in a space. This aspect can clearly be seen in Allende's work. Imagination is one of the aspects that can develop the field of trade and commerce in a new nation. Paulina, with her crude business mind estimated that, each and every person who reached California will be in need of day to day necessities. She says "...The real money isn't in gold...it's just yellow crap. The real money is in the miners. They are going to need everything when they get to California, and they will have ready cash..." (Allende 123). She filled her steamship, *Fortuna*, with tools, work clothing, domestic utensils, and food items. Since this idea got inside every entrepreneur's head, Paulina decided to do something different. She decided to export fresh products: fruits, vegetables, eggs, good cheese, sausages, and many such varieties. Apart from food items, building materials, musical instruments, theatre extravaganzas, etc. were transported to California.

Business included not only the import of items, but also the sale of one's talent for money. In one way or the other, Eliza too became a business person. Her friendship with the mailman transformed her into a scribe. So Eliza, with her knowledge in English and Spanish read letters to the immigrants sent to them by their relatives living far away. Also, she wrote for them letters to be sent to their dear ones. For this she demanded money and the people, with great pleasure, paid her. When the prostitutes came she started her job as a pianist for them. Even though she was not an expert in playing the instrument, she became the one-eyed king in the land of the blind and earned money.

When there happens the transformation of a space to a place and then to a city, there occurs the interaction between many different cultures. That is, interculturality is a major element when it comes to the production of space. Interculturality becomes a major issue when people with different culture migrate to a different country. This is the same that happened in *Daughter of Fortune*. Understanding interculturality along with imagined community help us to reach the conclusion that, the rush for gold resulted in the communication of the different cultures, which in turn resulted in the formation of a new culture. Tao's skill gained popularity all over the land. He was visited even by the whites, who disliked the Chinese, for he knew western medicine as well, with his interaction with Dr. Hobbs. Thus we can say that it was the sharing of Dr. Hobbs' culture that helped Tao become successful in the new land. Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that, interculturality is an integral part in the formation of a new nation.

Culture can be considered as "the mode of generating meanings and ideas" (Nayar 4), and these meanings are controlled by the elite culture, as it is the most powerful one. When a new city forms out from a space, there will be the joining together of various popular cultures, as people from different nations occupy the city. Popular culture is said to be the culture of the masses. "It is the culture of the everyday life of the larger number of people" (Nayar 5). When different cultures come together, there will be one culture among them which may get the position as the elite culture. This will be the culture of the wealthiest country. Thus, "non-elite views on life and art are rejected as 'tasteless', 'useless' or even stupid by the elite" (Nayar 4). Thus another definition of culture can be formed; that is, culture is the collective programme of how the world is viewed from the perspective of a particular culture. In such a situation it is not surprising when we see the Indians becoming playthings at the hands of the plunderers. With the harassment received from the so-called elite culture the weaker culture moves away from the place and joins some others with similar cultures. In this way they become strangers in their own land. So, we can come to the conclusion that, culture is not something that is natural; it is produced. "...the production and consumption of culture is linked to power and identity. The production and consumption of culture defines one's identity" (Nayar 6).

When this new culture arises, the native culture goes to oblivion. As said earlier, California was occupied by Indian tribes. With the coming of the foreigners they were completely destroyed. These people were accused for every criminal activity taking place in the newly built California. In *Daughter of Fortune* Eliza can stand for the native Indian culture. Her search for Joaquin can mean the wandering of the Indians for the revival of

their culture, which is in vain. Soon they find that their culture has perished (Joaquin's death). They decide to merge with another culture (Eliza going with Tao), and there develops a new culture. The natives themselves forget their culture and identity with the development of another culture. This can be proven with Tom No-Tribe being rescued by Eliza. Tom is an Indian. He represents the Indians in the new city. He lives with Joe Bonecrusher and gets a mixed identity. When the brothel gets burnt, he is stuck inside. It can mean that when the gold rush started the Indians stood bewildered. They did not know what to do. Eliza rescuing Tom can mean that, when the rush for gold (fire) was over, the Indians lost their unique culture, and got a mixed identity.

Identity is another social construction. A "new place" or "new nation" develops with the coming up of the powerful, and the oppression of the weak natives. To become part of the new nation, people from different countries change their attitudes and accept a mixed identity. Those who are unwilling to accept the mixed identity will be thrown out from the new nation. "... Indians, who by now had lost everything in the stampede for gold and were reduced to filthy bands of nomads in mangy coyote skins and European rags... they no longer found a promising spot than they were chased away. When left in peace, they set up small villages of huts or tents and stayed for a while, until once more they were forced to leave" (Allende 238). The identity of a person depends upon the roles played by that person; that is, the signs that signify him or her.

In the new place the government is the body, creating a group identity for the people, by making them accept the culture of the 'elite'. Here the position as the elite nation is achieved with muscle power by the Americans. This culture and identity later become those of the everyday life. That is, the everyday lives of the people get forcefully colonized. When this situation continues, the people fight against it. From the case of California we can say that, muscle power was the sole reason for the building- up of the various socio- political and cultural aspects in the society. When this gets established, there arises various movements, which to a certain extent destroy the existing principles. The people react against the rules and regulations.

Within a country there can be group identity. The process in which people acquire a group identity or an ethnicity is called 'ethnogenesis'. The interaction with the physical environment, the division of the various sections of the society depending upon culture and religion, migration etc. results in ethnic subdivision. Ethnogenesis can also occur when people deliberately and directly create separate identities to solve political problems which can include the preservation or imposition of certain cultural values, power relations etc. Groups of people who settle down in remote habitats will gain distinctive cultural and genetic traits. But through their everyday interaction there will arise a unique ethnicity.

The Spanish expedition in America carries the best example for ethnogenesis. The Spaniards who were frustrated with not finding gold in the suspected areas in America destroyed the villages and natives. Their actions resulted in the arrival of various diseases which weakened the natives. So, these people were forced to move away from their present land and they formed small villages and new political structures in the countryside. The smaller tribes started forming small villages. This blending of the various tribes created new

ethnic groups and identities. Ethnogenesis is the aspect which is mainly seen in *Daughter of Fortune*. The different groups of people came together to settle down in the Golden State, which finally resulted in the formation of a group identity, as a result of which new controls came over the people in the form of a government.

Related to this are the concepts 'nation- building' and 'governmentality'. Nation-building as per Wikipedia refers to "the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state". This is mainly seen in the newly carved- out nations. The process of nation- building explains the effort by a foreign power to establish the institutions of a national government. In *Daughter of Fortune* this element can be seen towards the end when a government, controlled by the most powerful nation settled in California, is set up.

Survival of the fittest is practiced in the developing California. To survive there, one should forget the moral values and should get possessed with power, greed, and violence. The Americans were given great importance in California. "Hispanics; they were denied the right to work the mines because they were not Americans..." (Allende 239). The Chinese had to face great humiliation. In the so- called hotels even though there were empty beds they were not given space, only because they were Chinese. In the mines the class prejudices were forgotten, but there often exploded fights due to racial hatred. When the theory of the survival of the fittest starts operating in the minds of the people, the weaker section resorts to cruel activities. They do whatever they can to protect themselves and to punish their opponents. When there arose a conflict between the American and Chilean miners, the judge fired the latter. Many of them ended upon the gallows. Those who survived formed various criminal gangs to fight away the opponents.

Later comes governmentality which means how a government produces the citizen best suited to fulfill its policies, thereby controlling the agency of the people. Thus the people lose their freedom to behave as they like. This aspect too is seen in Allende's work. When the controlling power starts its functions, we see that, taxes and other restrictions were introduced in the newly formed California.

The government tries to make the people work for it. In California, in 1850, the legislature imposed tax on mining operations in order to protect the whites. Blacks and Indians were exempted and they were supposed to work like slaves. The "...foreigners had to pay twenty dollars and renew rights to their claim monthly" (Allende 329). If this were not done, the sheriff took over their mines and gave them to Americans. The people who implemented these measures were chosen by the government and it was a perfect set up for encouraging corruption. The law was applicable only to the dark skinned foreigners. The government supported only the Americans. They were the least affected by these laws. "...the Americans accused the foreigners of being greedy and of getting rich without contributing to the nation's prosperity" (Allende 328). The Indians and the Chinese were not welcome anywhere. According to the whites, they were the lowest among the foreigners, and so their prosperity created insecurity in the minds of the whites. The Americans treated them in the cruelest manner, attacking them in the street, robbing them, burning their shops and homes, and also murdering them. Apart from all these, an American was not punished for his

crimes and also in the court he was able to choose his own jury. This sort of a government was molding the people in such a way that they become suitable enough to satisfy the new policies. This was done rather forcefully, and the policies were those which favored the so-called elite nation. With the coming of a controlling agency, the people get transformed from subjects with duties and obligations into individuals with rights and freedom. This 'freedom' means freedom within the limits of the controlling power. With the freedom people unknowingly fight against the policies of the government in their everyday lives.

Henri Lefebvre was a theorist whose most important idea was the 'critique of everyday life'. According to him, everyday life was the coming together of "illusions and truth, power and helplessness; the intersection of the sector man controls and the sector he does not control," (Lefebvre 302). Thus we can say that, everyday life is the space in which all life occurred and between which all fragmented activities took place. Lefebvre also says that, everyday life should be colonized, for it helps capitalism to survive and grow. "Without revolutionizing everyday life, capitalism would continue to diminish the quality of everyday life..." (Lefebvre 309).

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* says how people individualize mass culture, by altering various things in order to make them their own. As per the Wikipedia group, "*The Practice of Everyday Life* begins by pointing out that, while social science possesses the ability to study the traditions, languages... it lacks a formal means...to examine the ways in which people reappropriate them in everyday situations". It is only in this reuse that ordinary people come to know how these can be changed in order to suit them in their everyday life.

Certeau is of the opinion that, the city is something produced by the governments, corporations and institutions. In order to understand a city created by the controlling agency, Certeau takes the example of a person who views a city from the top of the World Trade Center and a person walking along the street. The person on top of the World Trade Center sees only those institutions and structures made by the government or the controlling power. But the person walking on the street finds out new structures, not made by the power, but which he can utilize in his everyday life to reach his destination very easily. It is a kind of revolution against the power. In *Daughter of Fortune* this concept is seen in another way. The people who came to California formed their own places, according to their nationality. In those places people from other nations were not allowed to get in. That is, in one way or the other people became slaves of customs. When Tao Chi'en went to the area occupied by the Chinese, he found that the people had built a complete city there. Mandarin and Cantonese were spoken there, and there were boards written in Chinese. Everything there was Chinese. This was the uniform condition everywhere.

Eliza was actually a Chilean. In order to reach her goal she creates various shortcuts in her life by pretending as a Chinese boy when she was in the place occupied by the Chinese, a Mexican in their place, and so on. This disguise is actually a revolt against the disciplinary institutions in the particular places. Others also do such activities. When such activities become strong, the government becomes a little liberal for its existence, and allows the people to work against it, but all these revolutions will be under the surveillance of the

government. This means that there is the presence of panopticism. That is, everything that the people do comes to the knowledge of the controlling power, and the people are aware of it. They revolt against the power with this awareness, and also with the silent permission of the government, which is there to make comfortable, the lives of the citizens and California becomes a place to live in by the cultured masses.

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