

Mumbai's Demonstration and Literary Imagination: analysis with reference to Jeet Thayil's Narcopolis

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ABSTRACT

A metropolis like Bombay has become a subject of literary exploration. Cities' dystopic characteristics are increasingly becoming the focus of a number of studies that are guiding predictions about future cities and the future of cities in general, as well as the future of cities themselves. Mumbai is shown in three dimensions - as a mirror, a mirage, and a magnet - reflecting the lives of its inhabitants, eluding their dreams, and attracting those who come into contact with it, respectively. The city, as a character - or, more precisely, as the protagonist around whom the entire plot revolves - is therefore established as a plot device.

Keywords: Mumbai's protest, literary imagination

1. INTRODUCTION

Narcopolis is set primarily in Bombay, but it is not the glorified slum Bombay of *Slumdog Millionaire*, nor is it the Anglo-influenced post-colonial India of Vikram Seth's novels or Satyajit Ray's masterful films. Instead, Thayil's *Narcopolis* is set in a post-colonial India that is influenced by the British Empire. He instead chooses Bombay as the setting for his rich, chaotic, hallucinatory novel, a city built on islands reclaimed by the British, a polyglot culture where all of India's languages, faiths, and castes mingle, where money is the prevailing currency and its dreams are told in those schmaltzy, kitschy Bollywood movies, and which lives on the edge, periodically blown up by terrorists who set explosives, but reborn. The brilliance of Thayil's work resides in the way he has condensed this entire cosmos into an opium den, complete with all of its captivating filth in the 1970s and 1980s, and a cast of pimps, pushers, poets, gangsters, and eunuchs, to tell his story in a single volume. "Bombay is the first and last word in this first novel, an urban history told by a former drug addict through the shifting composition of opiates and the changing characteristics of their users," the judges wrote in their assessment of the novel.

Thayil's portrayal of Mumbai is sharp and uncompromising. The pace of life in the city is fast, but in the opium den, time flows extremely slowly. He recalls his long-standing relationship with Bombay, his drug addiction, and the process that led to the publication of this book: "I attended school there when I was a boy. I enrolled at St. Xavier's. When I was eight years old, my family relocated to Hong Kong, where my father was employed as a journalist. After that, I went to school in New York before returning to Bombay in 1979 to study at Wilson College. In total, I've been a resident of Bombay for about two decades." (Jaiman) On being questioned why he has such strong feelings for the city, he responded as follows: "Bombay has a way of doing that to people. In other words, it establishes a (relationship) with you. It makes it more difficult for you to do your job. It bludgeons you into submission. Shuklaji Street is an area that I've been reading a lot about. Currently, Kamatipura, Shuklaji Street, and the entire region between Mumbai Central and Grant Road are disappearing, having been bought up by real estate sharks who are buying up all of the abandoned residences and erecting skyscrapers in their place. So very soon, the entire area will vanish, taking with it a million stories with it, and the world will be changed forever.

A look from Bombay will be gone... and so will a certain persona. Those who are currently residing there will, of course, be unable to afford to continue to do so." (Jaiman) At the conclusion of *Narcopolis*, the author expresses his displeasure with the depiction of present-day Bombay as a very uniform-looking place with a high-rise tenement kind of uniformity brought about by political changes that have been entirely supported by the right-wing, as well as the kind of socio-economic changes that have widened the rich-poor gap. The face of old Bombay, which embraced people from other communities and, for that matter, anyone with talent, ambition, beauty, and intellect, was slowly being chipped away by the passage of time. The name change from Bombay to Mumbai alludes to this transition, from the romantic, glamorous, tranquil, and slow world of opium in the nineteenth century to the rapid, harsh, contemporary, and degrading world of cheap heroin in the twenty-first century. There has been an interesting shift in social class; today it is the lowest and most destitute in society who are turning to it for their livelihoods. Earlier, when opium production was taking place, it was considered respectable because it was carried out by the wealthy, upper-class Urdu-speaking elites.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Tariq Anwar's news story in the *India Times* quotes Khairati Lal Bhola, a member of the Sabha, as saying, "Young and addicted boys are abducted and subsequently indoctrinated to homosexuality by agents of eunuch's gurus," according to Khairati Lal Bhola's statement. Ironically, relatively few people have the fortitude to retaliate when castrations are secretly forced upon them."

We can observe how flexible Gender and sexualities are by looking at Judith Butler (2002), who could either confirm or reject the heteronormative views of the social patriarchal system in her writing.

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Despite the widespread belief that Hijras are intersex individuals who are "born with the combination of features" (Davis), this is not the case. An investigation conducted by the All India Hijra Kalyan Sabha in 2016 found that only one percent of eunuchs are born as such, with the remainder either pretending to be hijras (eunuchs) or having been forced to join the group by kidnapping and castration.

As explained by Hanna (1988), one of the reasons for this is the sense of belonging to a community that one receives after being acknowledged as a hijra in South Asia. The Hijra community, despite the fact that they are a minority, is admired or feared because it is thought that they possess "powers to bless and curse." Because of this, they are required to "dance and sing" when a "baby is born," and the general population demonstrates respect for their authority by doing so.

Eunuch subjectivity, according to Haywood (2017), can be informed by factors other than heteronormative notions of identity and is not dependent on sexual object choice. In contrast to theoretical debates of gender diversity that develop from inside the heteronormative model, eunuch gender identity is not defined by sexual orientation or sexual object choice, as is the case with many other gender identities. Furthermore, the eunuch identity transcends gender binaries and provides an alternative space for identity. It has the ability to exist outside of this, rather than in a condition of gendered dimensionality, and so to inhabit an entirely different kind of gendering.

Heteronormativity and performance are discussed by Dr Prabhat Jha (2020), who is from the Hijra community in South Asia, and how they influence an individual who belongs to this community. In order to comprehend this, we will examine Dimple's performance as a "woman" in Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*, as well as her desire to conform to conventional conventions of being a heterosexual lady in a family setting.

3. MUMBAI'S DEMONSTRATION

➤ Mumbai is known as the "Maximum City

Bombay originally came to the attention of a global audience as a literary subject as a result of the popularity and renown of Salman Rushdie, whose work *Midnight's Children* evocatively depicted the rhythms and flows of the city where he was born. Bombay's film industry was immortalized as a result of his infamous *Satanic Verses*, which became a worldwide sensation. *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, by New York-based writer Suketu Mehta, was published over a quarter century after *Midnight's Children* and portrays Bombay on the global stage in much the same, compelling way as the previous work. Both works are literary events that accomplish the objective of identifying a certain city on the world map at two different points in time in different historical periods. When compared to Rushdie's novel, which is an artifact of the post-colonial period in world cultural history, Mehta's *Maximum City* appears in a global moment. This is a period characterized by a great deal of

uncertainty, particularly with regard to boundaries and the functions they serve in distinguishing citizens from others in a world with numerous and shattered identities, which is particularly true today. As Chris Anderson, editor of the prominent technology magazine *Wired*, points out in his blog, although Bombay has become a compulsory destination on the itinerary of global CEOs, the city remains unique in that it can still be seen as a strange land by foreign correspondents. 'Maximum City' serves as an evocative entryway to understanding Bombay's foreignness for Anderson, as it does for many others.

➤ **The City at Risk**

Recent developments in Indian cinema, particularly in Bombay cinema, have brought the city to the forefront as an important venue for understanding the formation of a national public. In addition, this comprehensive investigation of Bombay's place in Bombay film may be the most effective way to better understand the specific location of the city as textual subject. Because of its prominence as a film production center for Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani films, it would seem reasonable to assume the city would also be a natural venue for the art of filmmaking. Although Bombay is associated with several genres of film, as film historian Ravi Vasudevan illustrates in his study "Disreputable and Illegal Publics: Cinematic Allegories in Times of Crisis," it is particularly associated with the crime film genre. While researching "political and formal resonances that emerge in cinema's recurrent engagement with the subject of crime," Vasudevan argues that "criminality provided particular access to the city as experience and afforded experimentation with film style... The genre gives spectators access to the sensorium of the city in novel ways." Vasudevan is a professor of cinema at the University of California, Los Angeles. As a result of his research, it has become evident that Bombay itself is the city that serves as the natural habitat for this particular type of urban experience.

➤ **The Subject of the City**

As part of his research on slum-dwellers demanding housing in Mumbai, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai examines their politics of claim and rights-seeking practices, as well as how they use their life-experience of surviving poverty to generate knowledge that they can use in the context of seeking recognition for their rights. Thus, he investigates housing as an integral aspect of the phenomenology of urban life, considering its precise location not only as something susceptible to policy, but as a fundamentally important cosmological practice for the functioning of society as a whole. According to him, "Housing is the site where infrastructure meets the routines of social life..." or, put another way, "Housing is the place where infrastructure meets questions of dignity, style, social position, and all the other things that make humans humans." It is through this method that a vivid image of the different forces at work emerges, in which interactions among city-based technologies, the human body, and the larger social community are constantly remixed and reimagined. In this sense, risk is regarded as both a bad and a positive aspect of the situation. The cultivation of practices of the imagination as a collective force in mapping the future for communities, particularly those of poor and disenfranchised peoples, is a constructive feature in this framework.... Appadurai's understanding of the city as a social-theoretic topic is

fundamentally shaped by the process of "creation of locality," as he puts it in his own words. In other words, the process of "production of locality" reminds us that "for the local to have some spatialized embodiment, it takes an effort that transcends that very spatiality... that is to say, for mere spatiality to take its form, there has to be an effort, a "production of locality," that is, one that is much more complex."

4. THE DEMONSTRATION OF MUMBAI AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

A great deal of attention has been paid to Mumbai's urban environment. A total of 46 passages written about Mumbai's cultural life are collected in the edited book *Bombay, Meri Jaan: Writings about Mumbai* (2003) edited by Jerry Pinto and Naresh Fernandes, which was published in 2003. 2 Amit Chaudhuri, a Sahitya Akademi award-winning novelist, has exploited the city space of Mumbai in his novel *The Immortals* (2009), whereas Mahesh Dattani focused on the city by describing it as a "big fat city" in his drama of the same name in the year 2014; by surrendering to the streets of the city in his novel *The Immortals* (2009). Piyush Jha is the author of the crime novels *Mumbaistan* (2012) and *Raakshas: India's No.1 Serial Killer* (2013), as well as other short stories (2016). In these works, Mumbai is described in three dimensions: as a mirror, a mirage, and a magnet, each of which reflects the lives of its inhabitants, eludes the hopes of its inhabitants, and draws those who come into contact with it. In Piyush Jha's criminal thriller *Mumbaistan* (2012), we see the same urge regarding the trajectory of urban life that we see in Piyush Jha's urban implosion:

Because of my extensive understanding of Mumbai, I did not have to conduct any further research on the cityscape, which would have been necessary for a non-Mumbaikar. Police procedure, as well as medical pharmacology and toxicology, were the topics of my recent research. All of the other stuff I made up were just for fun... I draw on every single experience that I've had to create a sense of reality in my stories, no matter how insignificant. In fact, I've walked all of the streets that I write about, eaten all of the cuisine that I write about, and met the kinds of people who appear in my writing. In order for all of this to be interesting and engaging, I make room for hefty dollop of fictionalization. Otherwise, it would be dry and dull.

The city, as a character — to be more accurate, the city as the protagonist around whom the entire plot revolves — is established.

Avinash (2002), a treatise on Mumbai's urban area written by Shanta Gokhale, is an example of this. One character, Anu, may be viewed as a map of the imbrications of space-specific salient categories, which include: "What people do and become has a great deal to do with their surroundings." (Gokhale) In Gokhale's drama, readers will come across a character who proclaims, "Life in Bombay has changed." Dramatist Mahesh Dattani's *The Big Fat City* weaves its way through three stories of the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Sahitya Academy.

In their one-bedroom-hall-kitchenette apartment, Niharika and Murli's narrative invites others to share theirs, as well as their own. The so-called urban luxury flat is transformed into a microcosmic portrayal of Mumbai's varied macrocosmic area, which forms the focus of the exhibition. It is always the case that the titles of Dattani's plays convey the essence of the text, and so in this text, where the word itself emits the essence of a metropolis, the reader is fully prepared to be confronted with a multidimensional place. People from all over the world travel to Mumbai to partake in this 'big fat' life, as suggested by the title's tautology, which titillates the reader into thinking about the city's heaviness, which draws them like a mirage to this mega metropolis. Reading this work, readers will come to discover that reality is both clearly and risibly (since the drama is classified as a black comedy) different from what the protagonists are experiencing in their lives. However, beneath the glitz and glam of the huge 'big' city, there is a scar that oozes fetid fatness on a constant basis. Lolly's life in the city provides her with the opportunity to perform the role of an actor for the rest of her days, but simultaneously removing her from her life the true role of a mother. Harjeet's remarks perfectly capture the essence of the city and the role it has to play in the lives of people, whether they are present or absent: The city of Mumbai is the setting for all stories, no matter where they begin. (239) Dattani's etymology In order to fully participate in the city life, those who come to Mumbai must have a great deal of aspiration in their hearts and eyes. They are almost completely blinded by their brilliant ambition. Because of this, like in Niharika and Murli's case, the city sends them back to their homeland, but Niharika and Murli's lingering last glance is captured by Murli in his words: "It's a longing lingering last gaze."

We look forward to seeing you again. LOLLY (at the door): Niharika takes a close look at the painting. MURLI: We'll do it. We'll be back, I'm sure. (Dattani) When one engages in this type of drug trafficking, one finds themselves always on the run. An individual's home space is driven away by the exhilarating glitz of the city: LOLLY. I'm unable to return home because the police, the drug cartel, and the news media are all chasing me!

In this fast-paced metropolitan life, the concept of home becomes increasingly hazy, and the house gradually transforms into a hellish prison: This brilliant mingling of cultures and languages gave Bombay the appearance of being open and promising. A diverse range of people lived and worked in the city: manufacturers and merchants; bankers and brokers; shipping agents; shopkeepers and artisans; clerks; mill hands; dockworkers; and temporary laborers... The toil and sweat of immigrant workers enabled the city's businessmen to earn vast fortunes in the process. Bombay was transformed into the "Golden City." In this case, the phrase "Prakash 43" means "Prakash 43." Niharika is in desperate need of money in order to keep her little apartment. Her affinity to the city is so strong that she leases her little apartment only for the purpose of making money and obtaining a taste of city life. It would be appropriate at this time to refer to Suketu Mehta's observation in the article "Mumbai," which states that:

As with Delhi, land has become the dominant fixation, fetishized object of desire, *raison d'être*, and focal point of all conversations, commercial dealings, and newspaper articles as well as daydreams in Bombay. Property is

the obsession of island inhabitants all over the world, and Bombay is surrounded by water on three sides, making it a particularly attractive investment. It sees the rest of India in the same way that Manhattan sees the rest of America: as a country that is distant, unknown, and inferior to its own.

It is in keeping with Kamala Das's sensitiveness that Niharika and Murli say goodbye to Mumbai in the poem "Farewell to Bombay" that they leave the city. Despite the fact that Bombay had a significant impact on Das' nerves, she writes a heartfelt farewell to the city: "I take leave of you, fair city, while tears / Hide somewhere in my grownup eyes / And sadness is mute as a stone / In the river's immovable / Core..." Pico Iyer, in his piece "Bombay: Hobson-Jobson on the Streets" (1997), makes the following observation:

As a social hub, it is the epicenter of the subcontinent's bright lights and big-city dreams, and it is also the hunting ground for mobsters and their molls. It is at once the 'Capital of Hope,' to which hundreds of thousands of newcomers flock each year in the hope of making their fortunes, and a decidedly ruthless place, where more visitors find jobs than homes...

Despite the fact that this enormous, fat metropolis has nothing significant to offer its population, people continue to flock to this Mumbai mirage in order to carve out a niche for themselves in this diverse urban environment. According to Khushwant Singh's article "Impressions of Bombay" (2002), Dattani asserts that *The Big Fat City* is the first black comedy in Indian theatre because it satirizes the stylized lives of city dwellers and their participation in socialization. In an interview to Antara Majumdar published in a Bengali daily *Ebela* (30 Oct 2013), Dattani asserts that *The Big Fat City* is the first black comedy in Indian theatre because it satirizes The mellowed humour of the characters' comments is interspersed throughout the film, despite the fact that there is no direct satiric criticism or caustic remarks.

CONCLUSION

Bombay is India's wealthiest city by a long shot. This one city is responsible for more than half of India's income tax revenue. Bombay is also India's most corrupt city, with more than half of the country's black money being created in the metropolitan area. It boasts more millionaires than the combined total of the other three major metropolitan areas. It attracts a never-ending influx of strangers who come with the aim of making their riches here.

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