

Ephemeral Metropolis: Contemplations on the Vicissitudes of Trust and Transitory Nature of Bombay in Thrity Umrigar's *The Space Between Us*.

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Abstract:

Thrity Umrigar's tour de force *The Space Between Us* dive into the melting pot of Bombay. Her literary marvel breaks the mould by plumbing the depth of Bombay's mosaic metropolis. She projects Bombay's pulsating arteries and hidden sanctuaries in the novel. Beyond a geographical setting, Bombay emerges as a driving force in wielding the pen of character's destiny in the novel. She projects physical, emotional and societal gulf apart that exist between individuals in the society. The characters in the novel unfolds city's transitory nature. The characters in the novel experiences smoke and mirrors and exploiting to the hilt that serves as a metaphor for the fragile foundations of livelihoods in the metropolis. The novel's nostalgia trip illuminates the erosion of trust and vulnerability in a city. The city is portrayed as both a sanctuary and a crucible walking on a tightrope between fleeting faith and the enduring trials of human existence.

Keywords: Gulf apart, fragile foundations, nostalgia trip, erosion of trust, vulnerability, enduring trials, human existence.

The narrative centres around the platonic bond shared between Bhima and the Dubash's family. Bhima, a Dalit, serves as a dedicated servant in Serabai's residence. However, she is caught in the maze of uncertainty as a result of Maya, her granddaughter tangled in the threads of a forbidden pregnancy. "Bhima had been facing a crisis in her life. Her granddaughter, Maya, has been carrying a baby even when she is unmarried. Bhima feels that the shame of carrying a child by an unmarried girl which is a taboo in the Indian society" (Manto 230). Simultaneously, Serabai's family rolls in clover, expecting a blessed arrival of tiny feet through her daughter Dinaz. In portraying Bhima's character, Umrigar skilfully unveils the Bombay in the throes of a downward spiral, through the portrayal of slum in which Bhima survives. The slum adds a layer to a battle of her conflicting emotions. She views the slum as a place of a sinking ship and the survivors in that swim against the current. She portrays it as a forlorn place in a disheveled state, signifying the harsh living circumstances and neglect its occupants endure. "Economic equality plays a key role in sharing of natural resources and ecological space and to a large extent distribution of environmental pollution and its health hazards" (Kshama 155).

The slum in which she lives drowns in unsanitary conditions. The difficulty Bhima has adjusting to the joint venture in lavatorial matters shreds the cloak of self-esteem of the residents. "The slum in which they live is just not squalid and unhygienic but also unsafe for two women living on their own. The failure of the state in providing basic amenities and security for its women/female population" (Kshama 154). The unhygienic activities of the residents in the slum are emphasized through the Harijan woman's biting of the bitter bullet in cleaning the pile of shit produced by the slum residents. Dense population contributes to cutthroat competition for resources, privacy as thin as paper among slum dwellers. She bristles with frustration on her under the scrutiny of watchful eyes of her fellow resident while bathing. They are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea in seeking a

medical lifeline and threadbare amenities such as paved roads, reliable electricity, and proper drainage management. She longs for the residence with lavatory facilities that she enjoys during the early years of her marital life.



Serabai, a Parsi woman ensnared in the thorns of matrimony with Feroz, an employee at Tata Consultancy Services. During the early days of his marriage Feroz headed for the hills with Serabai. He feels like a deflated balloon on the prospect of returning to Bombay looms because it bustles like a beehive, crowded as a can of sardines and swelters in the heat of human activity. that disturbs the tranquillity he enjoyed in the peaceful surroundings. Slowly she navigates treacherous waters within the confines of Banubai, her mother-in-law's household. "Sera often fights back to her tears and determines to close the door of realities of the evil that creeps around her family" (Rai 14). In the midst of this marital turbulence, Freddy, her father-in-law serves as the solitary beacon of hope for her. Amidst the adversities that surround her, Freddy serves as a source of solace and succour. Her chaffing under the yoke of oppression compels her to seek shelter in the arms of her birthplace. Umrigar boldly illustrates the tranquil living environment of Serabai, a stark juxtaposition to Bhima's constrained circumstances. The day unfolds with serenity but she is unable to find solace in its beauty due to her inner turmoil. A whisper of frost in the breeze and a melodic serenade from the pigeon provide a fleeting respite from the agony of her marital existence. Umrigar projects both inner turmoil and differentiation in the living condition of two women due to a stark divide in the social fabric in Bombay.

Freddy implores Serabai to mend fences with Feroz, proposing the provision of separate living quarters. Drawing on his legal expertise, Freddy counsels Serabai that Bombay is a viper's nest and a moral quagmire, casts a pall over for the well-being of a child and a single mother. "Freddy goes a step further and devises a practical solution to the problem. He purchases a new apartment for Sera and Feroz to shift away from Banu. He hopes that in her own independent home Sera would enjoy a better life with her husband and daughter" (Poonam 64). Despite carving out their own space, the issue of physical abuse within their relationship persists between them. Her liberation from the shackles of her tumultuous marriage happens when Feroz's bites the dust and the paralysis of her mother-in-law. "Does she miss Feroz? She is unsure of the answer. She does not miss the shame-inducing beatings, his clenched anger, her cowering servility, and the hypocrisy of pretending that all is well in her Marriage. No, that she does not miss. What she misses is not the marriage" (TSBU 160).

Serabai extends her family ties to Bhima. She worries about Bhima's defeat in rectifying Maya's future. She ruminates Maya as a destroyer of Bhima's spirit. Sera befall the shrewd innocence of Maya and she decides to educate and uplift her life. Her heart of gold for Bhima stems from her inherent humanity. Mrs. Madhan insignificance of the working class is visible through her attitude. Her criticism on Serabai for equal treatment of Bhima shows the pecking order in Bombay "Umrigar's novel provides an opportunity to read the complex machinations of class differentiated patriarchal oppression and capitalist exploitation, particularly as they operate between women of upper and lower classes while exploring both the limits and possibilities of solidarity in spite of these forces" (Chowdhury 168). She spotlights the poor road facilities through her apprehension about the hazards present on the footpaths. She mentions that open manholes and pits makes walking paths unsafe for the public to navigate it. The lapse in road facilities projects the irresponsibility of local governing bodies and state

department transportations in its maintenance of public property. Even though the skyscrapers in Bombay represents economic prosperity and landmark of city's identity, she criticizes it for reduced sunlight exposure and availability of green spaces that affects the overall liveability of the city.

Maya grasps at straws to undergo an abortion and finds herself climbs the abyss of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Bhima initiates surf therapy to aid her recovery, recognizing the symbolic power of the beach in washing away one's troubles. "Together the two women laughed at the seashore as Maya heals and Bhima reconstitutes herself. (Chowdhury 186). The beach emerges as a transformative space by fostering spring in Maya's step by keeping her cool as a cucumber. The rhythmic susurrantion of the waves serves as a calming balm and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing mental relaxation in her. She eagerly seeks answers for her parents' demise, grandfather and uncle's abandonment. The evocation of the government hospital replete the foul aroma of decay and dashes her hope to the ground. Umrigar, provides the lens of up against the ropes of the working class in Bombay through Bhima's left in the lurch within the healthcare system. The stratified healthcare access is prevalent through physician's phlegmatic demeanour in explaining AIDS and insulting her for being ignorant. Disappointment in Bhima arises due to the deep-rooted systemic fall short and stripped of humanity of the working class in healthcare institutions. "The doctor does not give a good advice and also does not tell Bhima about the virus that attacks her children. The doctor as an educated man talks rude with the patient's family member. The class differences highly seen above that the low class has no power to cure the illness (Diaz 36).

Her narrative unveils a distressing episode of deceit orchestrated by her husband's clerk. He involves in manipulative ploy of informing her about Gopal, her husband's machine-related mishap. He implores her to sign in a document to facilitate medical expense claims for his injury. However, the veiled truth surfaces later that the document was an acknowledgment of Gopal's resignation. "An accident had occurred at Gopal's factory in which he lost his three fingers. The company without giving the right compensation chucked him out of the job" (Jain 177). His behaviour reflects the erosion of trust in the intricate social fabric of Bombay. The exploitation of her trust by the clerk, exemplifies the power dynamics in a society where the proletariat's human power is often used as commodity by bourgeoisie. "Gopal, like the hammer, is regarded by his employers as the sum total of his labor power, just a commodity to be used and then thrown away" (Mangharam 90). Gopal's inability to endure the duplicity of the residents of Bombay leads him to take a decisive step to migrate back to his hometown. In his letter, he expressed his initial fervent belief in being enamoured with the city. However, the bitter taste of deception prompted him to acknowledge that Bombay lacks loyalty, particularly towards the working-class populace. "Once, when I was a young man, I had believed that I was in love with Bombay and wedded to Her, that the city was my bride, my wife. But now I know—Bombay is mistress to Many, wife to none. My real life is in the village of my youth, to which I must return with humility and the hope of forgiveness" (TSBU 248).

Umrigar skilfully contrasts the unsavoury state of the beach in past and its reformation in the present. In ancient times, the sandy expanse teemed with individuals engaged in illicit affairs. Public urination was a common occurrence, devoid of the embarrassment in the presence of others. The transformation in the contemporary era is marked by a deliberate effort of the government in regulating and sanitizing the beach.

Some days it seemed to Bhima that all of Bombay was on these sands—Those engaged to be married, those involved in illicit affairs, those in romances. That could result in grave punishment if their parents found out. In contrast, she Felt safe and respectable being here with her husband. "Different how?" Maya is saying, and Bhima feels a moment's impatience at Being disturbed in her reverie. "The government has cleaned up the place," she says. "Before, this beach was Dirty and littered. People used to do soo-soo in the sand, right in front of your Eyes. And that part"—she points to the glittering half of the beach that's filled With food vendors—"that used to have many-many more panipuri and other food Stalls. Now it's all regulated by the government babus". (TSBU 198)

Umrigar brings out peaceful, challenging, rich and nuanced portrayal of Bombay's diversity. She captures the complexities, contrasts, and shared destinies of its inhabitants in the sprawling metropolis. "Told in a series of flashbacks and present day encounters. The Space Between Us gains strength from both plot and prose. A beautiful tale of tragedy and hope" (Cressida 133).

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