

The Bombay of Rohinton Mistry: Mapping the cityscape in *A Fine Balance* and *Such A Long Journey*.

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Bombay¹ has none of the imperium of Delhi, the self-conscious stasis of Calcutta or the provincial self-satisfaction of Madras. It is the ugly step-daughter city but Prince Charming must cut his heels off to win her hand. It is a city in which no one dies of starvation but the vast majority is forced to endure living conditions that no enlightened zookeeper would allow for his animals. Yet the exiles and arrivistas...never leave. (Pinto and Fernandes xi)

Towards the beginning of his essay “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment”, Robert E. Park mentions how the idea of a city is never limited to “a congeries of individual men and social conveniences” (Park 578) or “a mere constellation of institutions and administrative devices” (Park 578).

Instead, it assumes a “body of customs and traditions” (Park 578), and the sentiments entrenched in these customs, transforming itself from a construction of artifice into a “product of nature, more specifically, human nature” (Park 578). The evolution of such an idea of the city occurs from being a bare site of transition between feudalism on one hand and capitalism, economic exchange, and bourgeoisie modernity on the other, to a location where human agency, in its numerous socio-cultural manifestations, territorial moorings, and historical and communal consciousnesses fleshes out these abstractions, consequently rendering to it an “importance of locality and distinctiveness of place” (Chandoke 2869).

In two of Rohinton Mistry’s novels, *Such A Long Journey*² (1991) and *A Fine Balance*³ (1995), the idea of a city⁴ assumes a sensate configuration. On one hand, there remains the towering physicality, as an evidence of its spectacular urbanity, mounting an assault on the senses and mesmerizing the observer (whether active or passive, voluntary or involuntary) with the sheer variety of sensory impressions it can generate, thus constituting the body. On the other hand is the mind of the city, symbolized by an unrelenting, humanized fortitude that allows it to absorb almost any degree of shock and horror. There exists, in both novels, a direct correlation between the onslaught of crises and the degree of endurance; the more the

brutalization on its body, the more resilient its mind becomes. And coursing through the interstices of the mind and body of this city are the million aspirations, disappointments, hopes, emotions, and memories that are borne by their inhabiting characters.

Sensations and memory

Charting a genealogy of smell that signals the development of the industrial city from the vernacular town, Ivan Illich writes, “Complex non-visual sense perceptions gave way only slowly to the enlightened predominance of the eye that we take for granted when we “describe” a person or place” (Illich 355). Unsewered industrial shantytowns, engulfed in the odour of “shit and stale urine” (Illich 357), emit an aura that renders them a perceptible entity, even though that same odour makes them “smell alike” (Illich 357). In *Such A Long Journey*, the locality that the Khodabad building is housed inside makes for an appropriate example of a space in its early stages of industrial development. Consequently, the compound wall of the building becomes an acknowledged site of public urination. Towards the beginning of *A Fine Balance*, the hutment colony where Ishvar and Om reside is not significantly affected by fetid stench from the railroads. But with the addition of another “fifty ramshackle huts” (Mistry 210) in the field nearby, the smell hangs “permanently over the shacks, thicker than smoke”

(Mistry 210), indicating the gradual appropriation of the hutment colony which, as the narrator says, “... has nothing to distinguish ... from the huge slum across the road ...” (Mistry 210).

The process of identification by odour, simultaneously, becomes a strategy of difference between the public and the private, the habitable and the dangerous, and the socially privileged and the socially inferior, chiefly enforced by the dominant order in a social structure. In *A Fine Balance*, Dina discerns strangeness in the odour of urine after both Om and Ishvar have used her bathroom. “Different diets, different habits—it was only natural their urine left a strange odour” (Mistry 83), she muses. The tables at Vishram Vegetarian Hotel are mostly referred to as “smelly”, while there is no such pronouncement when Dina sits the three persons down to dinner at her flat.

While smell is used prominently in its various connotations, it is not the only sensation that Mistry takes into consideration in both novels. Infusing it with a riot of sensory impulses, in similar ways visual and auditory, the city is written as a sentient entity. The act of traversing the city and imbibing its variegated stimulations causes an interaction between the private life of a character and the public space in question. Gleaning through their memory, the lived experience becomes a tool for the

character to interrogate the cityscape. A visit to Crawford Market to buy a live chicken for Roshan's birthday dinner brings back for Gustad childhood memories of accompanying his father there, a place that intimidated him with its crowds, filth, slippery floors and menacing butchers. Likewise, Dina's memories of Rustom permeate through places within the city: the concert hall, the streets and footpaths, the sea-shore, and the Hanging Gardens.

The State and space

The relation between space, and the state as a political body, can be enunciated by considering Henri Lefebvre's categorization of space into three kinds. Firstly, there is the material space, that is, a "national territory" traversed, configured, and altered by communication networks.

... this space is a material - natural - space in which the actions of human generations, of classes, and of political forces have left their mark, as producers of durable objects and realities...During the course of this process, the city and the country develop a new relationship in and through the mediation of the third

term---the State that has the city as its center.

(Lefebvre 224)

The second is the production of a social space, “an edifice of hierarchically ordered institutions, of laws and conventions upheld by ‘values’ that are communicated through the national language” (Lefebvre 224). Lastly, there is the mental space that comprises of “the representations of the State that people construct---confused or clear, directly lived or conceptually elaborated” (Lefebvre 225). Lefebvre’s idea of the State as being “a pyramid that carries at its apex the political leader-a concrete abstraction” (Lefebvre 224), exemplifies the structure of political power in both novels, namely the Emergency government in *A Fine Balance* and the Shiv Sena party in *Such A Long Journey*, effectively correlating the existence of the dominant power group in question and the city space.

Social negotiations in both novels are predominantly mapped by the entwining of State power with the private lives of the characters. There being a “minimum of consensus” (Lefebvre 225) in such social spaces, inhabitants without a significant urban identity become victims of persecution at the hands of the dominant political force, for instance through beautification drives⁵ that result in the permanent removal of the

hutment colony and sidewalk dwellers, and the Sterilisation Programme⁶ which affects among others, Om, when he returns to his village. Even among the characters that are economically and socially stable, the social space manifests through State intrusions in several forms, albeit indirectly. Some of these include the various representations of Indira Gandhi⁷ (the political leader) on disparate locations which cause displeasure to the inhabitants, and occurrences of displaced violence whose consequences disrupt the daily routine of non-participants (the speculation that a dead body, which one person attributes to the Emergency⁸, has caused the train to stall during Ishvar and Om's first visit to Dina's residence). In *Such A Long Journey*, it is Shiv Sena⁹ who manufacture a space based on a parochial "Maharashtra for Maharashtrians" rhetoric by altering the Anglophone history of the city into one decorated by figures of Maratha nationalism, performed chiefly by renaming the streets.

Lastly, the mental space, though intertwined with the social space, is for the most part removed from it. Since it is derived from representations and ideas which may or may not be clearly lived, there is little political immediacy to it. As such, it takes the form of impressions and opinions, although it is shaped by the State in question. In *A Fine Balance*, both Mrs. Gupta and Nusswan, two characters outside the site of political oppression,

have flattering opinions about the Emergency. In one instance, Mrs. Gupta says, “The Emergency is good medicine for the nation. It will soon cure every one of their bad habits” (Mistry 406). Likewise, in *Such A Long Journey*, the removal of Anglophone street names and their substitution by Maratha names prompts Dinshawji to express nostalgia for the colonial history of the city, which had been the markers of his childhood, as well as exasperation at the workings of the governing body.

In his essay “On Cosmopolitanism”, Derrida argues that cities bear the potential to become sites of unqualified and unconditional refuge, giving rise to “a new cosmopolitics” (Derrida 19). In doing so, he is very careful in laying out the reason behind choosing the city over the nation-state as capable of providing refuge by functioning as a unit independent of the state and reorienting “the modalities of membership by which the city belongs to the state” (Derrida 19). The “city by the sea” (Mistry 13), initially considered one such place of refuge for Ishvar and Om, promises them a means of survival away from the village where the caste animosity which had claimed most of their family still bays for their blood in wait.

The paradox inherent in the mutually opposite roles which the industrial or commercial city plays in the regulation of its working population has been underlined by Louis Wirth. It stratifies the population

by putting a premium on efficient performances, unique abilities and, inventive specializations while functioning as a great leveller at the same time. As Wirth writes, “The social interaction among such a variety of personality types in the urban milieu tends to break down the rigidity of caste lines and to complicate the class structure and induces a more ramified and differentiated framework of social stratification than is found in more integrated societies” (Wirth 100). This contradiction has mixed implications on Ishvar and Om’s experiences in Bombay. If back in their village caste and class were inextricably linked whereby the upper caste was always rich and the lower caste invariably poor, in the multitudinous life of Bombay their caste identities are rendered immaterial whereas the class identity becomes a matter of contingency against the rapidly shifting socio-economic conditions under the Emergency.

The hutment colony becomes a ground for accommodation, irrespective of one’s caste and creed. The necessity of procuring living space for the thousands arriving to the city entailed an economic opportunity for lobbyists, often settling at prices slightly steep for the occupants to part with. Despite Navalkar’s figures, Ishvar and Om, goaded by Nawaz, settle for a shack at the colony. The place hosts a gamut of characters and their myriad professions, but these are underscored by their

meagre income and inability to procure proper housing, correspondingly grouping them as the urban poor. This section of the population becomes the subject on whom the Emergency government exercises its control through acts such as coercing them to attend a rally, or demolishing the colony entirely for beautification purposes. Class and economic privilege become the criteria in their urban identities, depending upon which the government responds to their presence inside the city premises. The Derridean vision of havens of refuge is turned on its head by the Emergency laws that could turn the city into a dreadful and hostile reality for the urban poor overnight. Not even Ishvar's cries, that they are tailors and not pavement dwelling beggars, could assuage their condition at the irrigation project.

For Mistry's writing of the tyranny of the Indira Gandhi government inside the space of city, the indicators are drawn from fictional dystopian representations. Brutal policing is utilized to establish control, particularly over the economically weaker sections of the city's population. Ishvar and Om witness punishment when a group of commuters are assembled in a lot and threatened for a crime as innocuous as travelling without a ticket. The engendering of a militarized state, formation of inconsiderate policies such as beautification and forced Family Planning and creation of nonsensical

governmental positions such as Family Pursuit Motivator, in the pursuit of a utopian urbanity can be called to exist as relationships of power do inside socio-political situations. Projecting that one is pro-government was not a choice but a matter of survival for the common man during this period. During one of their visits to the Vishram Vegetarian Hotel, a large picture of the Prime Minister catches Om's eye:

In the window Om noticed a large picture of the Prime Minister that hadn't been there before, along with a poster of the Twenty-Point Programme.

'You have a new customer or what?'

'That's no customer,' said the cashier. 'That's the goddess of protection. Her blessing is a business necessity. Compulsory puja.'

'How do you mean?'

'Her presence keeps my windows from being smashed and my shop from being burned. You follow?' (Mistry 358)

Ishvar and Om are rendered homeless when, acting on the perverse Beautification Project of the government, the hutment colony is razed to the ground. After desperately trying their luck at numerous places, they manage to secure the verandah of a chemist shop to sleep every night in. But when the government's campaign of "Garibi Hatao"¹⁰ turns into what can be called "Garib Hatao", on the pretext of beautifying the cityscape, thousands of homeless are displaced from their only refuge---the sidewalk.

Sidewalks and resistance

Lampposts and neon fixtures washed the sidewalks in a sea of yellow watery light, where slumbered the shrunken, hollow-eyed statuary of the night, the Galateas and Gangabehns and Gokhales and Gopals, soon to be stirred to life by dawn's chaos, to haul and carry and lift and build, to strain their sinew for the city that was desperately seeking beautification.

(Mistry 436)

The narrator provides a panoramic description of sidewalks when the truck carrying physically unfit labourers enters the inner areas of the city. The irony in the statement that those who "strain their sinew" to ensure

that the city functions seamlessly as an administrative unit later become eyesores for the same administration, underscores a relationship between the common perception of these individuals and the city “desperately seeking beautification” (Mistry 436). This is articulated in another passage, where the narrator uses a dermatological metaphor to critique the policy of Beautification:

Splotches of pale moonlight revealed an endless stretch of patchwork shacks, the sordid quilting of plastic and cardboard and paper and sackcloth, like scabs and blisters creeping in a dermatological nightmare across the rotting body of the metropolis (Mistry 436).

In both cases, the city is portrayed as being intrinsically linked to those persons whom it seeks to dissociate from at the very first opportunity. Considered to be nothing more than “scabs and blisters” (Mistry 436), these people are the inhabitants of squatter settlements which, according to the government mandate, ought to be eradicated in order to ensure an aesthetically pleasing urban experience for its more privileged residents. However, their indispensability towards the city’s beautification, whether in the capacity of non-entity turned exploited labour, or the very essence of

what constitutes the “rotting body of the metropolis” (Mistry 436), makes them inextricable from the situation. This embodies a pattern of resistance on the part of squatter settlers¹¹, which Neera Chandhoke writes about:

Squatter settlements interrogate urban planning, which builds cities on the backs of these workers, but does not have any place for them in the produced built environment. They symbolize the determination of those who are excluded, to make a place for themselves, in areas which are forbidden to them. And by challenging the spatial ordering of cities, the inhabitants of these 'dwellings' challenge the social order itself. (Chandhoke 63)

Spatial forms such as these violate the perfection that a cityscape aspires to achieve. Appropriating the urban landscape, often by reducing the symmetry of the planned city into a “haphazard” and “unintended” structure, these settlements remind one of “an unequal society, which has no place for the majority of its people” (Chandhoke 64). However, the resistance of this “unorganized working class” (Chandhoke 68) is limited to spatial intervention and passive visual incoherence, as compared to sidewalk dwelling beggars, whose method of spatial interrogation also

incorporates bodily grotesqueness, thus, enabling them to reclaim the sidewalk by subverting its associated notions of safety. This is reiterated by Beggarmaster when he says, “It’s a freak show. People forget how vulnerable they are despite their shirts and shoes and briefcases, how this hungry and cruel world could strip them, put them in the same position as my beggars” (Mistry 579). The sharp delineation between the civilized and the barbaric, both of whom use movement in the form of walking, to reconfigure the space of the sidewalk, is adopted by Beggarmaster and his associates, most prominently Shankar, or Worm, to fashion their defiance of urban exclusivity.

The sidewalk becomes a site of contestation between its dwellers, the controlling power (Beggarmaster), and the Emergency government’s representation of political dominance. Sometimes this occurs between the three sections, sometimes one negotiates for another’s continuation, and sometimes there is no reprieve altogether. The sidewalk attains a totalizing meaning against which the map of the city is drawn. As Jane Jacobs writes, “Sidewalks, their bordering uses, and their users, are active participants in the drama of civilization versus barbarism in cities. To keep the city safe is a fundamental task of a city’s streets and its sidewalks” (Jacobs 106). This is because sidewalks, as Jacobs had enunciated earlier in her essay, are

“abstractions” in themselves, deprived of a character without the presence of buildings, pedestrians or other urban signifiers to support it qualitatively. Since its primary concern is propagating an image of safety for its operators, especially in conjunction with the street which is the most basic component of a city, it is incumbent that encroachment of any kind be reduced to a minimum. This is echoed by the characters of Nawaz and Nusswan, both locationally stable characters, who look upon the sidewalk life with disdain, otherising it to draw a line of difference between the participating classes. Upon being asked about a loud scream that Ishvar had heard the previous night, Nawaz says, “It was those sidewalk-dwellers. One fellow was sleeping in someone else’s spot. So they took a brick and bashed his head. Animals, that’s what they all are” (Mistry 178).

The kind of intrusion that the Emergency government forcefully neutralizes through the eradication of squatter settlements is justified under the pretext of civilizing order and safety. However, as Om observes, the drive is not necessitated so much by the urge to clean the city, as it is by the need to procure cheap, subdued labour. Therefore, the supplanting of fringe identities, who are, in Neera Chandhoke’s words “denied personhood, because they are denied a home” (Chandhoke 64) as part of a Beautification process, becomes an act of claiming their bodies, under the

guise of the reclamation of the city's safety and aesthetic appeal. On a comparatively lower level, another attempt at reclamation of sidewalks is undertaken by the municipal bodies by repeated "injunctions" featured on several billboards along the street: "Pedestrians! Walk On Sidewalk!" (Mistry 178)

The sidewalk remains a location of the daily struggles for power in *Such A Long Journey*, although in a severely depoliticized manner. Infusing religious pluralism, Mistry makes the sidewalk artist draw figures of gods and goddesses of different religions at the corner of Vir Nariman Road, which attract both the reverence and coins of office-goers working in the area. The artist's stretch of the sidewalk is treated as hallowed ground by the pedestrians who tread carefully around it lest they commit desecration of these images. Later in the novel, Gustad requests the artist to set himself up outside Khodabad Building, using the latter's deity images and the pedestrian's fear of desecration to keep the compound wall from being urinated on. Eventually, the stench and mosquitoes bred by the wall are subsumed by the fragrance of incense lighted by passing devotees.

Parsis and Bombay

Bombay in *Such A Long Journey* is charted through the perspective of the Parsi community. Nilufer E. Bharucha, in her essay “Why All this Parsiness? An Assertion of Ethno-Religious Identity in Recent Novels Written by Parsis”, writes about the generalizing tendency within the Euro-American academia to collate Parsi novelists belonging to the second-generation of Indian-English novelists under the umbrella label of postcolonial writing, or sometimes even “post-national” theory. This, she writes, sweeps over the important nuances implicit in “differences of nation, ethnicity, religious background and gender” (Bharucha 253).

Bharucha’s argument is for a centrifugal approach to Parsi texts, which according to her create an ethno-religious niche for themselves first and “only afterwards are they postcolonial” (Bharucha 255). This liminal perspective accords such unique insights and inroads into the character of the city that perhaps would have been overlooked by a casual observer. A case in point would be Parsi funeral rituals¹². These rituals warranted specific architecture, in the form of Towers of Silence¹³. In Bombay, the Towers of Silence are situated on the eastern edge of Malabar Hill, the first of them stretching as far back as 1670. Once secluded, they are now surrounded by a busy part of the city, with high-rise residential complexes framing its edges. In *Such A Long Journey*, Mistry has acknowledged two

histories of the structure by using both names in his text; the pre-colonial Doongerwadi, which is the Gujarati phrase for “orchard on the hill” and Tower of Silence which was a nineteenth century British coinage. The author has also devoted ample space to the raging debate of the time over the Parsi funeral ritual. There were complaints from tenants in the nearby buildings that vultures were supposedly strewing bits of human flesh from the Towers in their balconies. He voices the contentions on both the attackers’ as well as the defenders’ side of the controversy. While orthodox apologists of the custom had voiced the necessity of its preservation for the smooth passage of the soul into the afterworld, reformists had pointed out the anachronism of the practice in the context of the twentieth century.

Ivan Illich mentions how the eighteenth century in Europe had ushered in a consciousness about the incongruity of the living and dead spaces inside the city, a practice that had been significantly ignored earlier. In fact, he locates the apathy towards the sense of smell at this moment of objection to the cohabitation of the living with the dead. He writes, “universal olfactory nonchalance came to an end when a small number of citizens lost their tolerance for the smell of corpses” (Illich 357). By referring to the Tower of Silence controversy, Mistry foregrounds the tension between what Illich calls the “auras” of the living and that of the

dead, the latter fighting for inclusion inside the city space. This struggle of the Parsi cremation site to remain a part of the cityscape contains within it telltale incidents that resonate with the gradual decline in the population of the community.

Diasporic consciousness and the city

If we are to depart from the Barthesian contention of “The Death of the Author” (Barthes 140) and consider the authorial voice inflecting the narrative, the subjectivity of the double diasporic individual comes into play. As a Parsi from Bombay who had settled in Toronto, Rohinton Mistry writes from a position of double liminality, being an ethno-religious minority in both India and Canada. In the last story¹⁴ of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*¹⁵, Mistry undertakes almost a quasi-autobiographical and meta-fictional account of his authorial situatedness, addressing certain crucial questions pertaining to diasporic writing in general. The narrator of the story is a young Parsi immigrant to Canada, a product of pull-factor propelled diaspora. Memory of the abandoned homeland impinges upon the author’s imaginary of his native city and the displacement in time and space provides the necessary aesthetic distance:

... he is probably not using his Toronto experience because it is too early...it takes a writer about ten years time after an experience before he is able to use it in his writing, it takes that long to be absorbed internally and understood, thought out and thought about, over and over again, he haunts it and it haunts him if it is valuable enough, till the writer is comfortable with it to be able to use it as he wants. (Mistry 233)

The character's theoretical justification echoes Vijay Mishra's formulation of the diasporic imaginary in the essay "Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning", where he foregrounds the importance of keeping the spectres of the past alive. The loss of the homeland needs to be "constantly recalled so that diasporic lives do not become footnotes to a neutral multiculturalism" (Mishra 37). When Rohinton Mistry was asked in an interview how he had such vivid memory of a place he had left twenty-five years ago, his reply underscored the fact that the city never quite left him. The departure was never final. He has kept coming back and never recorded his observations consciously. "When you have grown in one place", he says, "and spent the first twenty three years of your life there---

that's how old I was when I left---it is almost as though you are never going to be removed from that place" (Shaikh).

Nostalgia for the stability that the colonial period signified for them was a prominent characteristic attributed to the Parsis, as European enterprising allowed them to prosper. Jane M. Jacobs in *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* writes how imperialism may be "reactivated in the present through various nostalgias which seek to memorialise the period of imperial might" (Jacobs 4). Living in the hills, Farokh Kohlah (Maneck's father) and his army friends had adopted a British cantonment-like lifestyle away from the dust and drudgery of the plains. They reminisced the good old days of the past that signified order and discipline for them, as opposed to the chaotic present. Kohlah resents the Partition which spelt a loss of, among other things, enormous ancestral property for him. The grocery shop was all that could be salvaged on account of being situated on the "right side of that magic line" (Mistry 238). The border is just a juridico-political division, a line drawn by a foreigner that erased all livelihoods like a conjurer's wand, according to Farokh Kohlah; "modern maps could ruin him, but they could not displace his dreams for his family" (Mistry 239).

In Maharashtra, the rise of Hindu nationalist forces in the decades following independence made the community feel threatened for the first time. In *Such A Long Journey*, Dinshawji expresses resentment tinged with grief about the change of street names that Shiv Sena had brought about as part of its propaganda. Most of the Anglophone street names harking back to the colonial history of the city have been renamed after personalities associated with Maratha nationalism. For Dinshawji, it is as if his life so far has been belied and the markers of his childhood snuffed out. Beyond the level of individual affect, this segment of the novel brings out the larger discursive implications of altering names of places. Dinshawji's rant works itself into a frenzied anger by the time he and Gustad Noble reach Flora Fountain on their way out of their office for lunch. The narrator seizes this opportunity to describe his impression of the city's famous landmark and the traffic around it:

... the main intersection of Flora Fountain, where the great traffic circle radiated five roads like giant pulsating tentacles. Cars were pulling out from inside the traffic island and recklessly leaping into the flow. The BEST buses, red and double-deckered, careened dangerously around the circle on their way to Colaba.

Intrepid handcarts, fuelled by muscle and bone, competed temerarily against the best that steel, petrol and vulcanized rubber threw in their paths. With the dead fountain at its still centre, the traffic circle lay like a great motionless wheel, while around it girdled business of the city on its buzzing, humming, honking, complaining, screeching, rattling, banging, screaming, throbbing, rumbling, grumbling, sighing, never-ending journey through the metropolis. (Mistry 92)

Paul Carter writes, “Spatial history begins not in a particular year, nor in a particular place, but in the act of naming. For by the act of place-naming space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history” (Carter xvii). The history that the regional party wanted to memorialize and celebrate was however a unilinear and exclusivist one in concordance with its ideological imperatives. As Althusser noted, the easiest way of bringing individuals to subjection in an authoritarian system is by “hailing” them as subjects of that system, that is, by naming them (Althusser 11). By renaming street and place names as conducive to their politics, the party intended to sideline dissenting voices and claims under

the assimilationist rubric of a unified Maratha state identity. It was a run up to the final renaming of the city's name from Bombay to Mumbai that would happen around two decades later. A.D King writes how the processes of undoing and replacing monuments and street names with their own folk heroes don't pose a considerable challenge to the political elite of the new postcolonial nation:

... However, endowing the city with a totally new national identity, one that draws on its own vernacular cultures, representational spaces and modes of signification, was not only a much longer-term project but also because of competing regional, ethnic, linguistic, and other tensions in newly established nation-states, a deeply contentious one. (King 2)

It gives credence to Jacobs's argument regarding the city's dual potential for revitalising the imperial past and for "the destabilisation of imperial arrangements" (Jacobs 5), which "may manifest through stark anticolonial activities (in this case renaming of places), but also through the

negotiations of identity and place which arise through diasporic settlements and hybrid cultural forms” (Jacobs 5).

Conclusion

The constant tug of war between forces of the past and contingencies of the present operating in the city seep through to the fore in the novels set against the turbulent decades of 1970s and early 1980s, be it the Tower of Silence controversy, the renaming of streets, the expansion of the airport or that of the Vishram hotel. In *Such A Long Journey*, the narrator comments on how the city had fared badly at negotiating the change from its nineteenth century moorings to the twentieth century, a change that had been sudden, unprepared for and thereby incomplete. “Sometimes swallowing up a hundred years in one gulp caused acute indigestion” (Mistry 200). The neighbourhood of Dr. Paymaster’s dispensary registered the most apt example of this fraught transformation. While the basic problems of sewage, water, rodents and garbage persisted, the neighbourhood underwent cosmetic changes of new signboards with flashy names, partially renovated tenements and new enterprises of motor repair shops. Madhiwalla Bonesetter, who healed fractured bones with his bare hands and a collection of herbs, also offers an apt contrast between indigenous clairvoyance and Western epistemic systems of knowledge

represented by Dr. Paymaster's clinic. In reposing faith in both the Bonesetter as well as Dr. Paymaster, Gustad articulates what Neera Chandoke writes as the harmonious co-existence of non-capitalist modes of production or service (Madhiwalla never charged money for his services and kept the names of his herbs a secret to prevent their unscrupulous commercial exploitation) and the dominant capitalist mode (Chandhoke 2868).

The most traditional facet of city life is its monotony and cyclicity. Rohinton Mistry, while not overemphasizing this in his writing, doesn't discount it either. The daily migration of life from the residential northern part of the city to the workplaces in the south and back at the end of the day is imagined as a river of humanity that reverses its direction like the tide. What is foregrounded is the movement of life that configures the city with its varied pace and its diverse destinations, but remains a movement nevertheless. At the end of both the narratives, a sense of routine is restored, a normalcy that comes in the wake of calamitous upheavals, massive losses and tragic deaths. Gustad starts taking down blackout papers from the ventilators, releasing a frightened moth trapped inside. Ishvar and Om leave Dina's house after their clandestine lunch to resume their begging on the streets. The city's indomitable will and resilience finds

an extension in the populace it encompasses, only to be perpetuated interminably.

Notes

- 1 The name “Bombay” was changed to “Mumbai” by the Maharashtra Government in 1995. Arguing that the name “Bombay” was one of the prime examples of an unwanted colonial legacy and therefore corrupt in its nomenclature, Shiv Sena, who had won the State elections of 1995, instituted a change in the naming of the city. Another reason cited was that this change would consolidate the region’s Marathi identity, as compared to any anglicized renditions of the same.
- 2 Set in the year 1971, *Such A Long Journey* follows the life of Gustad Noble, a Parsi living in Mumbai, Maharashtra. His daily interactions with his family as well as his eccentric neighbours and friends, particularly Dinshawji run alongside a political conspiracy which he is forced to partake of due to the involvement of an acquaintance from long ago. The novel was published in 1991 and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

- 3 First published in 1995, this novel follows the lives of four characters (Dina Dalal, Maneck Kohlah, Ishvar Darji and Omprakash Darji) from disparate backgrounds, whose paths converge in the unnamed city where most of the incidents of the novel take place. In his portrayal of the economically and politically motivated discrimination that occurs inside the space of a city, Mistry is not only critical of the governing body and the unaccommodating urban mentality, but also portrays the pervasiveness of violence on people belonging to certain social class, which exists irrespective of a city or a village.
- 4 While Bombay is named as the location of the incidents in *Such A Long Journey*, the city is not mentioned directly in *A Fine Balance*. Instead Mistry refers to it as “The City by the Sea”, although there are implicit references that confirm it as being Bombay.
- 5 During the Emergency of 1975, certain governmental policies had been formulated, among which numbered the demolition of sprawling settlements in order to “beautify” the cityscape.
- 6 A widespread compulsory sterilization program was initiated in September 1976 with the aim of curbing population surges. Primarily

involving male vasectomy, this program also set up ‘quotas’ which both officials and supporters toiled to achieve. Coercion and violence were two of the methods used on unwilling participants, particularly those belonging to a lower class or caste, which Mistry portrays in *A Fine Balance*.

- 7 Indira Gandhi is never mentioned by name, though the period, location and political environment confirm her identity.
- 8 In effect from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977, the Emergency was a period when the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, had a “state of emergency” declared throughout the country, due to an existing “internal disturbance”. The passing of such a declaration enabled the Prime Minister to suspend all civil activities, bestowing upon her position the authority to “rule by decree”. Severe violations of fundamental and human rights were alleged during this period, including the absolute curbing of political opposition and freedom of the press.
- 9 Founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena is a political party whose ideology is based on a pro-Marathi and Hindu nationalistic agenda. Despite beginning as a regional political outfit, it gained

prominence as a force of Marathi sub-nationalism within the Congress ruled state. In 2010, Shiv Sena was purportedly responsible for the removal of *Such A Long Journey* from the curriculum of the University of Mumbai due to allegations over its denigrating portrayal of both the party as well as Bal Thackeray.

- 10 “Garibi hatao” can be translated as “eradicate poverty” and “garib hatao” can be translated as “eradicate the poor”.
- 11 Also called shanty towns, squatter settlements usually found on the fringes of an industrial city. Comprising improvised structures built of corrugated metal, accumulated plastic, and wood these are direct indices of the outpouring of population as a result of industrial development. In Mumbai, these settlements are called “jhopadpattis”.
- 12 The idea of purity forms the cornerstone of the Zoroastrian belief system. The community doesn’t subscribe to cremation or burial as that would contaminate the sacred natural elements such as the air, water, earth, and most importantly fire, which is considered the purest emanation of the divine. To circumvent this sacrilegious pollution by the flesh of a dead body, Parsis developed excarnation

as a system for disposing of the corpse, culminating in a final act of charitable offering to carrion birds.

- 13 A Tower of Silence or Dakhmeh is a cylindrical construction usually atop a hill. Bodies are arranged into three concentric circles: outermost for men, middle for women and the innermost for children. The top of the tower is exposed for the sun and vultures or other birds of prey to participate in the decomposition process. It also includes a small verandah in the front that lead to the prayer hall and a bathroom in the rear where the deceased would be washed in a last bath of purity. Following the incantation of verses from the Avesta by the Dustoorji, friends, and colleagues pour in to pay their obeisance to the dead. In *Such A Long Journey*, when Dinshawji dies, his wife settles for single day prayers at the “lower bungalee”, instead of the four day prayers for an “upper bungalee”.
- 14 This story is titled “Swimming Lessons”.
- 15 A collection of 11 short stories published in 1987. They are centered on the residents of Firozsha Baag, a predominately Parsi residential apartment in Mumbai.

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