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BOMBAY AS REFLECTED IN THE NOVELS OF SHOBHA DE, SALMAN RUSHDIE AND ROHINTON MISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Bombay or Mumbai, is considered as one of the largest metropolitan regions in the world. This city has been nominated as India's most modern and advanced city. It is also referred to as a space of ambiguity- which is in itself conflicting. Bombay's genesis as the commercial and cultural capital of India is defined by the city's historical discontinuity. Fiction after independence, portray metropolitan cities. The post colonial problems severely aggravated the metropolitan cities first, which witnessed a radical socio-cultural transformation, as a result life became very hard to live. This cosmopolitan Bombay of ethnic and religious assimilations, of social and economic opportunities of success and failure stories, of class unities has been celebrated with much splendor in many literary works and the cinema of the period. In the writings of Shobha De Bombay is portrayed as a living entity. However, on reading the novels of Shobha De one can get some idea about Bombay. Rohinton Mistry has also brilliantly captures the crowded, throbbing life of Bombay in his novels. His novels are closely linked with social and political background of India. Bombay in Rushdie's novel is also presented as a unique city flavored by a typical Bombay-variety of cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: Bombay, extremes, globalization, cosmopolitanism, post colonial

The name 'Bombay' is a container of the unique experience of colonial and post colonial modernity that was dynamic, extremely commercial, heterogeneous, disorganized and yet impulsively tolerant and unprejudiced. Literature is the reflection of the life in all its varied forms and shapes. Literature is the mirror to life and society. It depends upon the writer where he places the mirror. Novel emerges as a powerful medium to present the age in a descriptive and analytical manner. The layering of cultures and the complex social mixtures that wove the urban fabric of Bombay, gave it a powerful edge over other colonial cities like Calcutta and Madras. Bombay is

inextricably linked to Cinema. The 1990's witnessed a major transformation of cities in India as people migrated from village to cities and thus Bombay became a city of extremes that is a city of slums to a city of aristocrats with it the city represented wealth and success as well as the disappointments and anger of the urban people. As globalization wrought changes in the city, it re-emerged in the public consciousness as a 'new home' of hope and promise. Alex Perry in the article " India Inc: Bombay's Boom" rightly advises that to catch a glimpse of " the new India, with its dizzying promise and turbo charged ambition, then head to its biggest, messiest, sexiest city- Bombay."

In Shobha De's novels Bombay stands out prominently as a character. Women protagonists in De's novels grapple with their dreary daily existence in this city. The city of Bombay as described by De has been marked as the facilitator of humble dreams of a better life. Millions of people who migrate to the city in search of a better life and livelihood view the city as one of promise and potentialities. For instance, Amrita of *Strange Obsession* migrated to Bombay from Delhi to become a Model. Her dreams to a great extent was even fulfilled but with it the darker side of the city also affected her and she became the victim of a lesbian relationship. Again in *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna migrates from remote village of Maharashtra to Bombay in a hope of having a prosperous future but ultimately finds herself trapped in an unhappy marriage bond.

In the light of struggle and resistance, Bombay is also depicted as a place of temptation and betrayal. In almost all the novels of De we find that the protagonists of De are tempted in many ways. For example Asha Rani of *Starry Nights* is tempted for a career in Bollywood in professional level and in her personal life she is tempted to have relationship with a married man Akshay Arora and also even tempted to destroy his marriage and marry him. Betrayal in all relationships is found immensely in the novels of De. Asha Rani is betrayed by her mother Amma, again betrayed by her beloved Akshaya Arora and also by husband Jay. This is only one example and many more are found in the novels of De.

In Bombay the concept of 'home' is paradoxical. It is a city where people meet with each other or share life with each other for need not for love or attachment. A home is made up of mutual love, affection and understanding. But Bombay reflected in De's novel is devoid of love and affection resulting in homelessness. For example, Mikki of *Sisters* loses her home after being cheated by her husband. Aasha Rani of *Starry Nights* migrates to New Zealand only in search of home. The need of a happy, home is a dream in a city like Bombay and especially in an urban as projected by De. The same is also reflected in Salman Rushdie's depiction of Bombay, the city comes across as

"process"; a site of interconnection and flows; balanced perilously between movement and stasis; always a migrant's city of transience where simultaneously loving and demonic homes are built, but only temporarily. However, despite the lack of fixity and stability in its depiction, Bombay in Rushdie's novel is also a unique city flavored by a typical Bombay-variety of cosmopolitanism.

Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* writes, "Bombay is a city built by foreigners upon reclaimed land". The Bombay that we find in Salman Rushdie's novels comprise largely of these prosperous localities and neighbourhoods built upon the lands of Backbay reclamation, connected by the boulevard of Marine Drive. For example, the elite neighborhood of Malabar Hill is very well captured in all the Bombay novels – the Methwold Estate in which Saleem lives in *Midnight's Children*; Aurora Zogoiby's Elephanta in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, which Sir Darius Cama visits, and Dolly Kalamanja's stately mansion "Dil Kush", in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*; demolishing which comes up Gibreel Farishta's penthouse located on the top floor of the Everest Villa in *The Satanic Verses* are all located in the Malabar Hill. In *Midnight's Children*, we find Bombay of the fifties and the sixties; Saleem along with son Adam returns to it in the seventies but only at the last to find it changed. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie again contrasts Bombay of the fifties and sixties with Bombay of the eighties; in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rai leaves Bombay somewhere in the seventies; in *The Moor's last Sigh*, we find the most recent depiction of Bombay as Moraes Zogoi by leaves Bombay after the Bombay blasts in 1992. Therefore, in matters of periodizing, Bombay that we find depicted in Rushdie's novels is mostly at a point in history where its spatial restructuring in the Backbay area is informed by the ideology of postcolonial modernity rather than a postmodern globalization

The concern that emerges in Rushdie's portrayal of Bombay is that the emergence of Bombay as an entrepreneurial city is eroding away the exquisite charms; the delightful eccentricity; the peculiar rhythms; and the enthralled life-style of a unique city. In its first step of registering itself as a global (post)metropolis, Bombay is getting

efficient, mechanized, and imbibing the unhappy conditions of monotony and the boredom of the placelessness of our times. The city also produces the social black holes of the effort to embrace and seduce global capital in their own particular ways, which are tied to varied histories (colonial and otherwise), varied political cultures of citizenship and rule, and varied ecologies of production and finance .

Rohinton Mistry has emerged as a significant literary figure in the twentieth century. He is a socio-political writer. He lived in Bombay. It makes him depicting the life of the Parsis in India and portraying the corruption of the city. The literature of Parsis is characterized by both the features of ethnocentric and minority discourse. They suffer from the sense of insecurity and identity crisis.

Mistry's most recent novel, *Family Matters* can be called a retreat into the Bombay Parsi world. Rohinton Mistry has portrayed the life of a middle-class Parsi family of Bombay. The focus of the novel has shifted from the 1970s and the years of the Emergency to the more recent times. The Shiv Sena is still around the novel. The time of the novel is the Post Babri Masjid Bombay. Like the earlier novels, the main characters in *Family Matters* are Parsis. Though the story is located in Bombay, it has a universal appeal. Rohinton Mistry's shares his feeling for Bombay in *Family Matters* where Mr Kapur tell Yezad:

What I feel for Bombay you will never know. It's like the pure love for a beautiful woman, gratitude for her existence, and devotion to her living presence. If Bombay were a creature of flesh and blood, with my blood type Rh negative- and very often she is- then I would give her transfusion down to my last drop, to save her life. (152)

Bangalore is the technology hub teeming with expatriates and bright young Indians, Calcutta is a land of literature and culture, and Delhi the capital where power meets noir But Bombay is such a city where the rich live with the poor, a city which attracts writers from Vikram Seth to Shobha De and many more. VK Karthika, chief editor of Harper Collins says,

Of late, Mumbai seems to have definitely taken over [in the number of stories being told]. It's like the city is teeming with stories just waiting to be picked up. Or maybe it's do with the number of immigrant writers who've made it their home and as new immigrants, are constantly taking stock of their new environment.

The city doesn't inspire fiction alone - one of the best non- fiction books to come out of India are Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City*, a gripping exploration of the city's turbulent heart. "There will soon be more people living in the city of Bombay than on the continent of Australia... Bombay is the future of human civilisation. God help us," Mehta wrote.

As projected by De Bombay had the aspirations and heartbreak of the film world, the violence of the underworld and the power struggles of the corporate world. Rushdie's focuses upon Bombay as a space of the inhabitants, who gain their right to the city by being users rather than being natural or legalized occupants of it, intuiting a "global" sense of place of hopeful adaptations and resistances. Where as Rohinton Mistry represents Bombay within family and life through routine life of Bombayites. He writes his novels from a socio-historical- political perspective with a touch of realism.

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