

Chapter 3:

Mumbai: Modern Among Moderns

Other Indian Cities may rival and even surpass it in antiquity and fame, but no other city represents better the impact of the West on this country, the modern spirit, the new upsurge, that is aboard in the land, giving new shape to the life of its people and liberating them from the shackles of the past.

- A. D. Pusalker and V. G. Dighe, *Bombay: Story of the Island City*

Mumbai, previously referred to as Bombay, is a metropolitan city in the Indian state of Maharashtra, situated on the western coast of the country. The illustrious city and financial epicenter have consistently captivated every Indian, gaining the designation “City of Dreams.” It is India’s most populous city, with a population of 12,442,373. (As per Census 2011).

Mumbai comprises seven islands that served as the original home of the Koli people, who predominantly engaged in farming and fishing. As part of a reclamation project, the islands were eventually combined into a single land mass. It is believed that the name Mumbai originated from Mumba Devi, the city’s patron goddess. It was initially ruled by Hindu rulers, followed by the Mughals, before thriving under the Portuguese and British. During the entire latter era, it continued to be an important hub for economic activity and a port. The conquests provided the impetus for the city’s growth and development. It was the precursor to India’s modernity. As Sujata Patel writes:

In view of its range of manufacturing, finance and service activities, Bombay has been described as the first Indian town to experience the economic, technological and social changes associated with the growth of capitalism. (Patel and Thorner xi)

3.1 Early History

Historically, the location of modern-day Mumbai lacked a distinct identity. It belonged to the Konkan region on the western coast. According to Puranic history, the western coast was formerly known as Aparanta. From an unknown time until the sixth century, it was ruled by the Mauryan dynasty. Ashoka the Great appears to have been the first

ruler of Aparanta. Later, the Satvahana dynasty ascended to power. In 810 A.D., they were succeeded by the Chalukyas and then the Silaharas. During this period, the ancient temple of Walkeshwar was constructed. They permitted Arabs, Parsis, Christians, and Muslims to immigrate due to their acceptance of foreigners. After Silaharas was overthrown in 1260 AD, King Mahadev of Devagiri (Yadava) ascended to power. One of the clan's successors, Bhimdeva or Bimbdeva, established his kingdom in the north, made Mahim (or Mahikavati) its capital in 1294, and divided the country into fifteen districts. However, as per Bimbakhyana, Bimbadeva came to Konkan via Anhilvada in 1294 AD (Pusalker and Dighe 27). He brought some people with him, built several temples, and ordered the planting of coconut trees. "With the advent of Bimbadeva and his followers begins the history of the growth and colonisation of Bombay" (Pusalker and Dighe 29).

In 1348, it was captured by the Mahomedan rulers of Gujarat. During the reign of Bahadur Shah, the Gujarat Sultan and grandson of Muhammad Begarah, the Portuguese frequently visited the Bombay islands for trade and religious propaganda. Bahadur Shah, unable to evade them, reached an agreement with Nuno da Cunha in 1534 and bequeathed the city of Bassein, islands, and seas to the Portuguese king.

3.1.1 The Portuguese Era

The first Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, sailed on the coast of Calicut in 1498. Gradually, they took control of sea routes and started to establish themselves in India. They paid their first visit to Bombay in 1509. Through a treaty with Nuno da Cunha in 1534, they gain dominion over the entire area. They gradually expand their trade and authority over Bombay and its environs. When they acquired it, 'the land of the island' was "very low and covered with great and beautiful groves of trees. There is much game and abundance of meat and rice and there is no remembrance of any scarcity" (Pusalker and Dighe 44). But the Portuguese proved themselves poor traders and did nothing to develop it as a trade centre. Missionaries, on the other hand, bring with them religious propaganda about conversion and church building. As a result, at the end of the sixteenth century, religious leaders gained control of a substantial portion of the islands. Numerous mosques and temples were demolished because of their intolerance of native religions, including the revered Walkeshwar and Mahalakshmi temples.

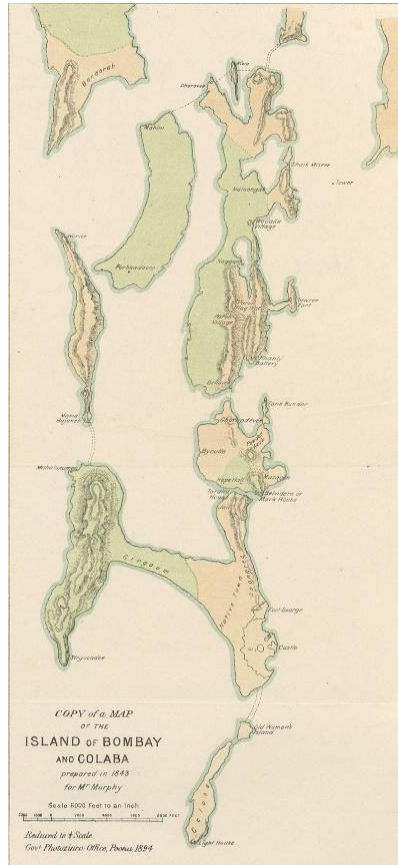


Fig. 3.1: Islands of Bombay and Colaba (before reclamation).

After 1580, Portugal’s commercial and political influence began to wane. During this period, the British firmly established themselves in India. They initially began trading in Surat before relocating their headquarters to Bombay. It was a pivotal time for Bombay, which would serve as a model for other Indian cities. Even though the treaty was signed in 1661, the British did not get authority over Bombay until February 18, 1665, when Humphrey Cooke took control. The only inheritance the British had was a group of coconut-covered islands.

3.1.2 The British Era

The British wanted Bombay but did not buy or conquer it. They received it as a dowery. A treaty was signed in 1661 to give Bombay as a dowery in the marriage of King Charles II of England with Catherine of Braganza. It was political in addition to a marital union. However, it was inevitable that Bombay would become a modern city, as the factors that make Bombay so great were made possible by British rule. Humphrey Cooke, on behalf of the King, claimed the island in 1665. He was more concerned with Bombay’s security and

began fortifying the city. King Charles II transferred control to the East India Company in March 1668, and Sir George Oxenden, the president of the Surat factory, became the first governor of Bombay. Gerald Aungier, who is considered the “real founder of Bombay,” succeeded him and permitted the Gujarati Baniyas to settle in Bombay, resolving land rights issues. Pusalker and Dighe emphasise:

About the middle of 1672, Aungier shifted his headquarters from Surat to Bombay and started his reforms that were to change the face of the island. The English Law was proclaimed superseding the Portuguese, a Court of judicature was established and a Court-house was built. A town was lined out. Other innovations of more or less importance were the establishment of a mint, the improvement of the fortifications, the building of a small hospital, the creation of panchayats for settling disputes among local communities, the opening of a printing press. (53)

Bombay’s estimated population reached 60,000 in 1675. In addition to the indigenous Kolis, the population grew due to a high number of immigrants. As the population increases, so do safety concerns. The existing fort was found to be insufficient as the town grew around it, necessitating the construction of a wall, which had been completed in 1716 under the governorship of Charles Boone. They also initiated temporary reclamation and constructed ports. In 1735, a Parsi foreman from Surat named Lowjee Nusserwanji was invited to build ships in Bombay for this purpose. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Bombay expanded its trade with Africa, Persia, the Gulf countries, and China.

Throughout the later period, political upheavals persisted, although they had no impact on the island’s growth and prosperity. The construction of new roadways made possible by the land reclamation project greatly enhanced the area’s ability to interact with its neighbours. Other developments, such as the founding of a bank in 1720, allotments of new building areas beyond the fort, and judicial facilities for crime control, reflected an increase in the island’s population to 75,000 in 1760. William Hornby, an ambitious man, became governor in 1772 and undertook further projects. The metropolis eventually took on the appearance of a new form. Many Koli homes on Dongri Hill and the residences of the poor were demolished, and specific sections were set aside for Europeans. Housing was set up in Colaba, Byculla, and Mazagaon. Administrative planning was necessary to deal with the city’s growth. The government established new agencies to manage commerce, security, health, urban planning, and sanitation.

Prior to the British occupation, most of the population was involved in agriculture and fishing. Other industries followed considerably later, with shipbuilding being the first. Cotton material woven in Bombay became popular in England, which led to a boom in the city's textile industry. However, this was not for an extended period since England started manufacturing.

The Industrial Revolution happened in Britain in the nineteenth century. Bombay began shipping raw materials to English factories, and eventually English goods and technology made it to Bombay's shores. A few European firms established themselves in Bombay. Sheppard believed that the 1854 opening of the Bombay Spinning and Weaving Company at Tardeo was the impetus for the growth of Bombay's and India's industrial sectors (89). Furthermore, Sheppard argues that:

In 1885 there were 49 mills in the city with 1,347,400 spindles and 12,010 looms. Until then spinning in the Bombay Mills had been done on the mule or fly throstle: but the Ring Spinning Frame, which was tested by Mr J. N. Tata at the Empress Mills, Nagpur, revolutionised the Bombay industry. Other innovations in machinery led Bombay millowners to renew their plant and still further enlarge the industry, with the result that there were 70 mills working in 1895. (90)

In the second half of the century, the arrival of the railway, telephone, and telegraph revolutionized transportation and communication. Bombay became the hub of all cities, and it grew into a contemporary metropolis on the Indian subcontinent. People came from all over the nation in the hopes of making a new start there. It has transitioned from a port city to a metropolitan and industrial hub. Growing cities required planning for the settlement of immigrants, and Sir Bartle Frere, who had been appointed governor in 1860, took on the responsibility. He was responsible for the reclamation and sanitation of the city. The old fort was destroyed in 1862 since it was no longer necessary, and rubble was used to level the land. Famous English architects were commissioned to design government buildings. (By 1875, the High Court, University Library, Post Office, Elphinstone College, and several more had been established.)

As the city increased, so did the number of educational institutions. An uplifted sense of purpose spread throughout the community because of increased literacy. The first school was founded in the 1920s by Stuart Elphinstone. It continued with the foundation of

Elphinstone Institute in 1827, Grant Medical College in 1844, and Bombay University in 1857. Numerous libraries were opened by city residents as a result of the rise in literacy. The city's cultural growth and prosperity were greatly aided by the philanthropy of affluent citizens of the city's different communities, who invested in amenities like hospitals and schools. These patrons are concentrated in their own communities, causing communal gaps. On the other hand, communities gradually break down caste and class barriers, which are most evident in public locations such as hotels, markets, workplaces, and congested modes of transportation, even though people reside in distinct neighbourhoods.

New types of amusement emerged as society adapted to its new circumstances, particularly towards the end of the century. Cricket and football grew in popularity as outdoor sports. New sports clubs and gymkhanas were established. Clubs gave women a safe space to break out of traditional roles, such as purdah, and take part in extracurricular activities and social events. Theatrical performances also emerged as a new type of entertainment venue. Plays in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, and Urdu were performed by theatres and drama companies. Bombay's Parsi population has made significant contributions to theatre. The Grant Road, Gaiety, Alfred, and National theatres are at the very top of the list.

The quick growth in population resulted in overcrowding as well as a lack of civic amenities and sanitation. This lack of hygiene led to the spread of infectious diseases. The year 1896 proved devastating for the city when the first case of plague was discovered in the densely populated Mandvi area. A substantial segment of the city's elite departed, resulting in widespread depopulation. People of the working class had few other employment opportunities within the villages; therefore, they stayed there and kept working. A large portion of the population was relocated into tents.

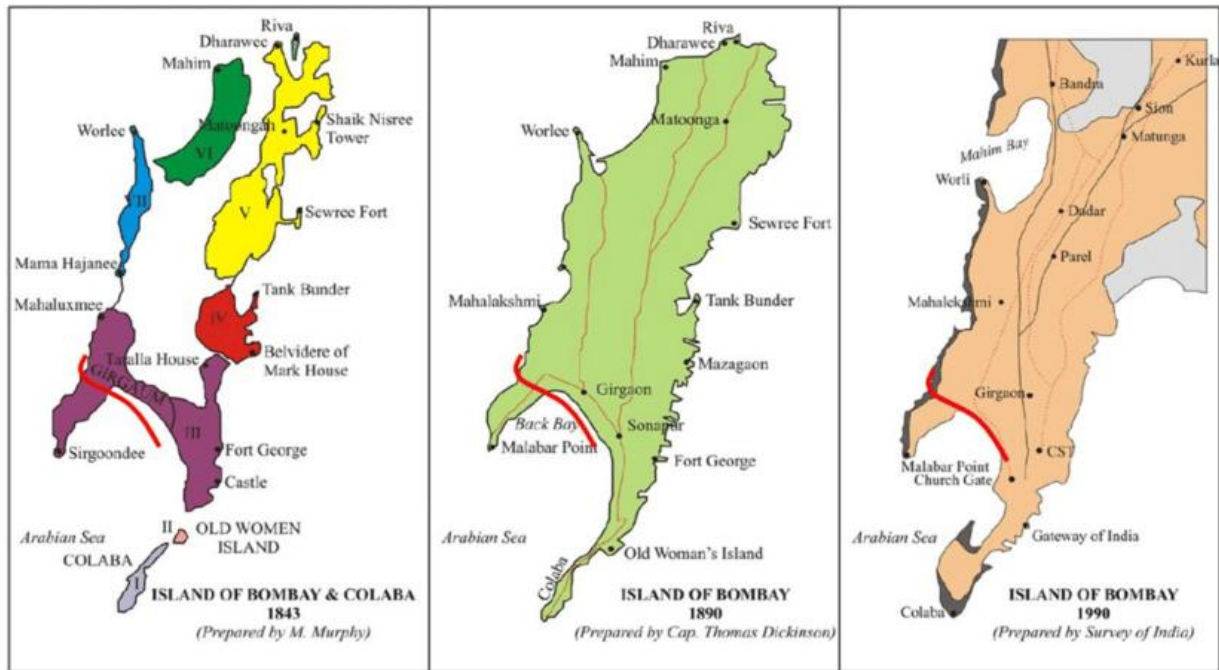


Fig. 3.2: Historical evolution of the Mumbai area (from 1843 to 1990)

There were a lot of shifts and relocations during the turn of the century. Renting homes was the preferred option for mill workers looking for inexpensive housing. These crowded dwellings lacked essential amenities and sanitation. A new style of structure known as the “chawl” was created in response to this demand. Chawls are a peculiar building type that has become synonymous with Bombay. Chawls are multi-story structures with single rooms that are owned by private landlords. In a chawl, everyone shares a single toilet and a single water tap. Five to ten individuals were compelled to share a single room due to high rent costs. The Improvement Trust erected chawls for the betterment of the community. Chawls were first constructed of wood before RCC was introduced around the turn of the century. In the subsequent years, there was a major change in architecture. A new architectural style known as Indo-Saracenic was introduced by Scottish architects George Wittet and John Begg (Dwivedi and Mehrotra 210). It was a significant change for Bombay as this style was used in government buildings, like the Institute of Science, the Gateway of India, and some hospitals and colleges that were built in the first three decades of the century.

On the other hand, the nation’s political landscape was marked by turmoil. The First World War and the struggle for independence both impacted the city. The reduction in imports and exports throughout the war affected trade and the economy. Prominent figures in the national independence movement, including Gandhi and Tilak, participated in meetings in the city. Gandhi’s unique ideals of Satyagraha and non-cooperation inspired public outrage.

In 1942, Bombay was the focal point for the All-India Congress Committee's initiation of the "Quit India Movement." On 15th August 1947, India attained independence, and Bombay, among other regions, commemorated this event.

A subsequent lifestyle emerged that can be deemed contemporary. Population expansion stimulated construction activities. Individuals acquired a greater variety of home possibilities; hence, the city demarcated residential zones based on socioeconomic status. Affluent families constructed bungalows and weekend houses on multiple seafront locations. The emergence of film as a new entertainment medium and the presence of social and sporting clubs facilitated community engagement and exposure.

3.1.3 Post-Independence Era

The initial years after the nation's independence were a period of consolidation for the new government. Local management was likewise engaged in a struggle to operate in Bombay. Prior to its independence, Bombay served as a hub for significant political and economic activity, flourishing throughout colonial rule and maintaining dominance in post-independence Bombay. An increase in industrial activity attracted migrants from many regions of the country, predominantly from adjacent rural areas and present-day Gujarat. Following a decade, Bombay state was divided into Gujarat and Maharashtra, with Bombay designated as the capital of Maharashtra.

In the following years of independence, Bombay experienced a notable surge in its population, predominantly immigrants who were attracted to the city in pursuit of improved living conditions. However, it was not advantageous for all individuals. Certain social strata advanced to more favourable conditions, yet the working class, including labourers, remained in obscurity. The majority of immigrants were engaged in manual labour who left their homelands for various reasons, such as the pursuit of enhanced economic prospects, trying to escape natural calamities, or the need to evade discrimination rooted in their social standing. By doing so, they could circumvent caste-based discrimination and secure a new beginning.

The potential for personal growth was enhanced by the incorporation of judicial norms into wage and hour allocation. In addition, leaving their villages liberated them from oppression based on caste and gender. The shifting gender dynamics in metropolises liberated women. These new developments provided them with a new identity as an urban culture. It was not an overnight alteration of identity, but a lengthy, incremental process. Certain

“products of urban existence” have “decisively” formed these identities (Patel and Thorner 12).

Even though they managed to sidestep one issue, they ended up getting caught up in another. But a search for a solution comes with a new problem, as Swapna Banerjee-Guha writes, “Each phase in Bombay’s spectacular urban growth over the past century has given rise to new problems and new projects aimed at coping with these problems” (Patel and Thorner 100). The accommodation of immigrants has become a formidable obstacle. To deal with the space crisis, Bombay needed to come up with a new plan. The city had no room to spread out horizontally, so it grew upwards toward the clouds. The city implemented numerous urban planning initiatives, such as the Bay Back Reclamation, the growth of New Bombay, and the Vasai-Virar Subregional Plan. In 1948, the Mayer and Modak Committee devised a strategy to develop and expand Bombay’s suburbs. Prior to the mid-1980s, New Bombay received significant private investment but had few public facilities. As a planned urban city, it was anticipated to offer middle- and low-income housing. The dominance of the private sector and the lack of the government sector, however, made it a “satellite centre for the finance and industrial capital of Bombay” (Patel and Thorner 114). The indigenous population was marginalised culturally and economically. Consequently, there is a substantial chasm between planning goals and the actual reality of the planned metropolis (Patel and Thorner 113–114). Vipasha Bhardwaj says:

The privatization of public spaces creates a camp-like situation, a space where law is suspended as a result of which the society is disintegrated. The space in the city is annihilated and the citizens reduced to ‘bare life’. Today, more and more people are exposed to the conditions of bare life: the homeless, illegal immigrants, the inhabitants of slums. The idea of shared or collective spaces can be traced in the Bombay poems when the poet talks about the journey by a commuter in the local trains. They show how these city-dwellers have embraced the brutality of the grotesque urbanism. (8)

Failing to manage cheap accommodation, and other issues like unemployment, poverty and social conflicts, migrants are forced to live in slums. Despite the city’s glittering skyscrapers, and alleviated housing and buildings, the slum is the terrible reality of Mumbai. A large part of the population was estimated to live in slums. As per the census of 1976, there were 2.8 million persons in 1,680 settlements. Panwalkar estimated that nearly 5 million

people, i.e., half the city population, were living on the streets or in slums in 1983 (Patel and Thorner 122). Several slum improvement schemes were introduced from time to time.

In the last decade, the city has experienced a significant upswing. In 1992-93, the destruction of the Babri mosque sparked communal riots in the city, resulting in many deaths. A little over a month later, 12 terrorist bomb blasts caused widespread death and destruction throughout the city. On the other hand, the city's socio-political climate tended toward saffronization. The dominance of a local political party called Shiv Sena emerged as a major Hindu party aimed at decolonizing the country and re-establishing its native value. For instance, in 1995, Bombay was renamed Mumbai, and in 1996 Victoria Terminus was renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus.

3.1.4 The Twenty-first century

The dawn of the twenty-first century marked a new era of optimism, with people across the world looking forward to the opportunities that a new millennium would bring. The same holds true for Mumbai. As a modern metropolis, the city has flourished tremendously. Mumbai has become a centre for trade, commerce, fashion, media, and entertainment. It has emerged as one of the most vibrant cities in India and is home to a range of industries, including finance, technology, and manufacturing. This economic expansion has resulted in an improvement in the quality of life for its residents, as incomes have climbed and employment prospects have improved. However, Mumbai suffered continuous bomb blasts. The first was in December 2002, followed by many in 2003: January, March, July, and August. In July 2005, the city received heavy rain that again destroyed the city. Following the explosions of seven bombs in 2006, terror was re-invoked with more bombings in 2008 and 2011, leaving the city shaken. These bomb blasts have not only caused significant damage to infrastructure but have also resulted in a heightened sense of insecurity among citizens ("Terrorist Attacks").



Fig. 3.3: Mumbai consists of two revenue districts

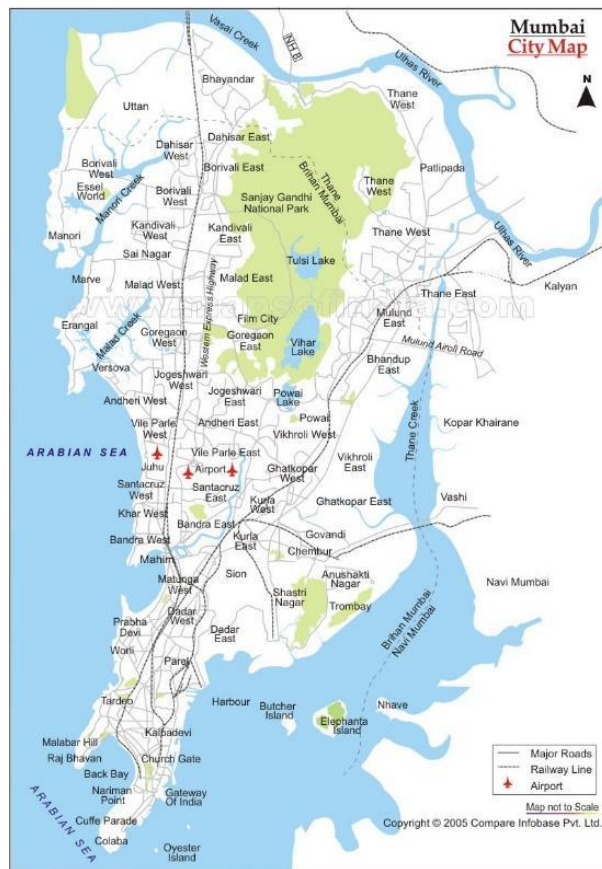


Fig. 3.4: Detailed map of Mumbai

Mumbai comprises two different regions: the Mumbai City District and the Mumbai Suburban District, both governed by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. Mumbai is India's most affluent metropolis, housing several multi-millionaires, industrialists, entrepreneurs, and Bollywood celebrities. It serves as a paragon for other cities; nonetheless, it also grapples with the challenges inherent to a contemporary metropolis. The residence of multibillionaires also accommodates the impoverished. Nearly fifty percent of the city's populace inhabits slums lacking access to water, electricity, transportation, or sanitation. Nevertheless, the city persists as a beacon of hope that consistently caters to its residents. The city upholds the heritage of its founders and embraces all permanent immigrants. The city has evolved into a hub of Indian culture over the centuries, from the Portuguese era to the present day. According to Leadbeater, it is "a city that was seized in childhood by the Portuguese, and raised by the stern hand of the British Raj, is now, in the full flush of adulthood, gloriously, superbly, unquestionably Indian—a cauldron of 22 million people with dreams as big as the sky."



Fig. 3.5: Dharavi (A drone photo of Mumbai where extreme poverty meets extreme wealth)

3.2 Mumbai In Literature (Poetry)

Bombay has long been the subject for literature in Marathi and Gujarati; nonetheless, there has been a paucity of works in English. There exists a possibility of working in English, although it pertains to research and archival studies that may result in the production of such works. A further issue is that any discoveries regarding Bombay would likely be confined to poetry, as prose was not widely embraced as a literary medium. Nevertheless, several pieces are available in English. The first work is Rudyard Kipling's poem about Bombay.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was born in Bombay, which instilled in him a profound attachment to the city. In 1896, he composed a poem titled "To the City of Bombay," articulating his affection for the city. Urban centres exhibit pride and engage in competition with one another. Soldiers from these cities attempt to conquer others but are unable to overcome Bombay. Kipling expresses gratitude to God for his birth in Bombay, as it bestows upon him a 'title to pride.' He paid tribute to Bombay by referring to it as mother:

Mother of Cities to me,
For I was born in her gate,
Between the palms and the sea,
Where the world-end steamers wait. (vii)

He even describes the topography of Bombay, it is situated "between the palms and the sea" and "where the world-end steamers wait." Bombay of his time was thriving with steamers from all over the world. It is famous for its faithfulness and love; hence it remains on top: "On high to hold her fame / That stands all fame beyond." The kings who ruled were 'orderly,' 'ancient,' and 'fit.' He considered Bombay as powerful and because he is from Bombay, he is also powerful.

"The Songs of the Cities" is another poem that comprises a stanza dedicated to several cities around the globe. The poem commences in Bombay, where the poet personifies the city. The city perceives itself as a regal queen due to possessing the 'richest sea with richer hands' frequented by trading vessels from other nations. It attracts individuals of diverse ethnicities from various regions. These symbolise the affluence of Bombay during its period as a trading hub.

Cowasji Nowrosji Vesuvala, a civil servant, wrote a poem on Bombay titled “Bombay Harbour” (1879). This sonnet celebrates the city’s maritime dominance, cultural diversity, and architectural beauty while reflecting the imperial pride of its era. Through vivid imagery and classical allusions, the poem captures Bombay’s grandeur and its unique role as a global hub of interaction and maritime activity. The poet emphasizes the openness and vastness of Bombay’s harbour, which welcomes the entire world, including “European, American, Orient race.” Another poem, “From Malabar Hill – Bombay,” explores the beauty of the city and the sea, presenting various natural images that transition from day to night. The poem offers a contemplative view of Bombay’s coastal charm and its harmonious blend of urban life with nature.

Josephine Miles, an American poet, portrays the chaotic life of the city in her poem “Bombay.” She highlights the disorienting nature of the metropolis, where the chaos and intensity of life often leave one searching for clarity or familiarity. Employing vivid urban imagery such as rooftops, streets, and faces, the poet captures the vibrant, overwhelming essence of Bombay, reflecting its dynamic and multifaceted character.

Nissim Ezekiel is recognised as the first known poet to write about Bombay, having composed numerous poems on the subject after a significant period of time. The period following independence in Bombay has seen an increase in poetry focused on the city. The period following independence was predominantly characterised by urban migration. Urban centres such as Bombay emerge as industrial hubs, drawing the attention of numerous individuals. However, on a more critical note, this contemporary city has emerged as a place devoid of culture, characterised by lack in humanity and mechanical behaviour. These serve as a focal point for poets and authors. The group of poets known as the ‘Bombay Poets,’ featuring prominent figures such as Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Adil Jussawalla, A K Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, and Dilip Chitre, captured the essence of urban sensibilities in their poetry.

Bombay has emerged as a prominent backdrop for fiction writers, owing to the popularity of books. Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, George David Roberts, Rohinton Mistry, Jerry Pinto, Vikram Chandra, Kiran Nagarkar. These literary writers depicted the complex nature of Mumbai in their works. Not only the tangible city but also the intangible one:

As a text, Mumbai speaks in many voices and it has been a powerful image in literature ever since its existence. In literature, Mumbai finds expressions not just

through its buildings and streets, but also through social relationships and links between people, both inside and outside the city. This socio-cultural world of Mumbai is spatially organized into a range of places in which different kinds of social activity occur—places of work, places of leisure, places of sleep—and all urban people are required to traverse these spaces and places. (Mantri xxviii)

3.3 Mumbai in Indian English Poems

Mumbai has been the centre of attention in various domains, including politics, economics, cinema, sports, and literature. This city has consistently captivated individuals from different regions because of its profound history, distinctive culture, and thriving criminal underground. The city has emerged as a distinctive motif in cinema and literature, captivating the interest of artists, filmmakers, and writers. Nevertheless, Mumbai continually evolves; the city's soul, however, remains constant. These alterations are evident in its portrayal in movies and literature while preserving the city's identity.

The city has preserved its position as a hub for intellectual pursuits, particularly poetry. The vibrant metropolis, including practically every culture in the nation, a hub of the underworld, and a residence for both the affluent and the destitute, definitely inspired the literary community. It has profoundly influenced the evolution of English literature in India. Nissim Ezekiel made substantial contributions to the development of modern English poetry, particularly following India's independence. Poets began to diverge from their heritage, influenced by nationalism, romanticism, mythology, and an idealistic vision of the world. They chose modern literary techniques. According to Bhardwaj, the poets of the post-independence era endeavoured to express the “existential tensions, anxieties and doubts of individuals sentenced to the solitude, ambiguity and anguish of the post-industrial urban infernos” (7). Bombay, the most urban and modern metropolis, serves as the backdrop for various manifestations of urban trauma. Poetry composed in Mumbai came to be known as ‘Bombay Poetry,’ and those who wrote it were referred to as ‘Bombay Poets.’

Poets from Bombay, or poets who have spent significant time in Bombay, have been profoundly influenced by the city's contemporary culture. Their experience in or with the city shaped their perspective, which served as the foundation for their poetry. In their city poems, the poets made an effort to convey the sense of anxiety, stress, and isolation that comes from

living in a large metropolitan region. The poet articulates the sentiments of all individuals in Mumbai who share similar feelings over the city's culture of violence.

“Bombay, it has been said, is not a city but a state of mind; a state of a young man's mind, exciting and excitable, exuberant and effervescent, dynamic and dramatic” (Bhardwaj 3). Through their depictions of its defining “state of mind,” poets from different periods offer unique insights into the city's complex social, economic, cultural, and religious fabric. Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawalla, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Tara Patel, Gieve Patel, Arundhathi Subramaniam, Melanie Silgado, Imtiaz Dharker, Amit Chaudhuri, and Jeet Thayli are among the poets under consideration for this research.

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004) is a seminal figure among modern poets for his work that explores contemporary urban concerns. A Jew who was born and nurtured in Bombay possesses a profound affinity to the city, which embodies the essence of his identity. Nevertheless, the rapidly evolving urban environment engenders concerns over its artificiality and disconnection from nature, affecting both its physical architecture and the human condition, which increasingly feels alienated from the natural world. The feelings of alienation and other characteristics of contemporary urban residents are themes evident in his poetry. As a pioneer of modern Indian English poetry, his poetry “was influenced by Modern poets like Eliot, Pound, and Auden” (Bharucha 100). His poems portrays the everyday struggles of the average person.

The disparity between the natural and the artificial is evident throughout his poem. “Urban” (1960), in which he describes an urban man oscillating between the city and nature. He sees the hills and roads leading to them as ‘broken,’ separating his sole existence from nature. The absence of the road confuses him and leads him to move in ‘circles tracked within his head.’ As a result of his internal anguish, the modern man is free to wander aimlessly, much like a raving lunatic, with no clear destination in sight. The river he loves has dried up before he wakes up, and the wind has died, symbolising lost vitality, emotional emptiness, or a loss of connection. The river and wind symbolize lack of continuity, freshness, or novelty of existence in the urban man, leading to a life of monotony.

The poet is not simply concerned with the physical environment or natural scenery like hills and rivers, which are far away. Despite being surrounded by the sun, rain, sky, and wind, he has created a mental barrier between himself and them due to the modern

sensibilities of city life and routine. He never sees the sky or the sunrise, nor does he enjoy being outside in the rain or on a breezy day. Distress and anxiety stalk him, and he acts like a machine with no regard for the seasons. Both the sun and the rain are unwelcome since there is no plant to absorb their warmth and nourishment. On the other hand, there is neither sympathy nor affection in human relationships.

Nevertheless, the city is a burning desire for people. The human strives ceaselessly for dreams and a peaceful life but is unfortunately unable to get both since there is no escape from city life. The speaker longs for solitude and a connection to nature, symbolized by the “morning walks” and “wave of sand.” These are idyllic images, but they remain only dreams, unattainable in his current state as the loud noise of traffic that surrounds him prevents him from doing so. He says:

The city like a passion burns.
He dreams of morning walks, alone,
And floating on a wave of sand.
But still his mind its traffic turns
Away from beach and tree and stone
To kindred clamour close at hand. (Ezekiel 117)

He “hangs between his two opposing worlds of dream and reality, he turns ‘To kindred clamour close at hand’ rejecting the hinterland of hill, wind and river” (Garman 217-18).

Ezekiel penned the poem in 1960, during a period of mass migration from rural to urban India. People moved to cities for a better life and growth, but eventually, they were caught in a lifeless environment. The poem expresses the despondency of a city dweller. The repeated usage of natural elements such as hills, rivers, wind, sky, night, sun, trees, and stones demonstrate a constant yearning to reconnect with nature. He finds himself at the crossroads between the natural and urban worlds, torn between his longing for the former and his inability to escape the latter. It is a common struggle faced by contemporary immigrants in Bombay. Ezekiel highlights this dilemma in his work. “As a modern poet, his poetry gives an impression of an oversensitive soul caught in the tentacles of a cruel city, unable to escape from its vagaries and consequently developing a love-hate relationship with its tormentor” (Katharpi 57).

In the previous poem, Ezekiel longs for a ‘morning walk,’ which is further depicted in another poem titled “A Morning Walk,” where the author blends natural imagery with the bustling cityscape. The poet had always wanted to go for a morning walk and was finally able to do so, but this walk met him with urban horror. This poem contrasts two very different worlds: the dynamic, upper-class part of the city and the more static, working-class part of town. He had a recurring nightmare that haunted him throughout the night. In that ‘old’ and ‘recurring’ dream, he was wandering around a hilltop and eventually came to a crossroads in a city that was ‘cold and dim.’ The poet contrasted natural elements (a hill) with urban elements (crossroads) to show his vacillation between the two.

The dream prevents him from moving forward. In a cold and dark city, his blood is like a sluggish stream waiting for the sun or a ray of hope that can provide him with both light and warmth. Still, he cannot leave his marshy hometown. The more he tries to flee, the more the marsh wants to swallow him up. The city’s charm is rooted in its apparent opulence, but the reality is much less glitzy. In addition to it, the poet describes an unpleasant section of the city. He witnessed slums and deemed the city ‘barbaric’ and ‘sick,’ occupied with hawkers and beggars who made their homes in confined, unsanitary streets. The poet attempts to create a contrasting image of a contemporary metropolis with a distinct residential section for the poor, who lack basic amenities. The compensation they receive is ‘words and crumbs.’ The author portrays Bombay as a hellish place due to its unsightliness, writing:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued
Whose wages are in words and crumbs. (Ezekiel 119)

The above stanza creates a novel depiction of the dreary and impoverished metropolis of Bombay. When he turned away, he heard no secrets in his ears. He was unable to pick up any fresh information or ideas. His ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ are worthless in the tedious routine, making him a robot. The person is portrayed as being hollow and without any real substance or purpose, appearing befuddled and without direction, much like a figure made of straw.

Seeing the city in such shards hurts him because he knows it will not change. It will appear elegant and formal, like a 'formal dress,' yet it is constraining. The past and future are both useless since the memories of the past are burdensome and generate stress, whereas his will or wishes are fleeting like dew and will never be fulfilled. The past is dull like a muddy pool, and he cannot hope for the future from it. The poem ends with him waking up from his dream and describing the persona as an 'active fool':

His past is like a muddy pool
From which he cannot hope for words.
The city wakes, where fame is cheap,
And he belongs, an active fool. (Ezekiel 120)

Here, too, the poet employs nature imagery such as the sun, rain, hill, trees, breeze, and birds, to express his dissatisfaction at being separated from nature. Another poem, "Island," echoes this mood of a constantly shifting natural world.

"Island" is a satirical poem on Bombay's development and progress. Once a collection of islands, Bombay has expanded into a sprawling metropolis, which the poet bemoans. The title Island is crucial since it refers to the modern city dweller's isolation or alienation; consequently, the poet begins the poem on a negative note by proclaiming it 'unsuitable' for poetry and even for the senses. Slums and skyscrapers cover the island (Bombay), which also reveals the poet's fluctuating thought process. Ezekiel supports Robert Park's claim that 'the city is a state of mind' by drawing parallels between the physical and mental metropolises. The city in his head is perplexing, and he is struggling to discover his route or the purpose of his existence. When he cannot find anyone to help him, he turns to his 'own counsel,' but his thoughts are clouded by the noise of the city. He makes fun of people by equating them with dragons. Humans on the island are just as dangerous as animals because they lack humanity and morality. The city may hold numerous allures, but according to Ezekiel:

Sometimes I cry for help
but mostly keep my own counsel.
I hear distorted echoes
of my own ambiguous voice

and of dragons claiming to be human.

Bright and tempting breezes
flow across the island,
separating past from the future;
then the air is still again
as I sleep the fragrance of ignorance. (Ezekiel 182)

The 'bright and tempting breezes' depicted here represent the improved prospects and glitz of contemporary Bombay that draw people there. Winds of progress divide the city's troubled past from its more promising present and its promising future. The allure of glamour and physical pleasure in contemporary life has made the present like 'still air,' which symbolises the apathy and helplessness of society.

In the next stanza, the poet finds the solution by emphasising ignorance as the only way to have a sense of salvation. His inability to leave the city is a result of his intense devotion to his birthplace:

How delight the soul with absolute
sense of salvation, how
hold to a single willed direction?
I cannot leave the island,
I was born here and belong. (182)

Through these lines, he defined his identity as a native city dweller as opposed to an immigrant. Despite his awareness and acceptance of Bombay's darker side, he seems determined to remain a resident of the city. His faith in the city is still prevalent because it is a place where miracles happen, and that enables him to work. He makes an effort to be a 'good native.' His sense of attachment to Bombay is repeatedly reflected in his poems. In an interview with John Beston, he asserts, "I have a strong sense of belonging, not only to India, but to this city. I would never leave Bombay—it's a series of commitments" (89).

Apart from the poems mentioned above, Ezekiel confirms his commitment to Bombay in an autobiographical poem titled "Background, Casually." his poem reflects the complex journey of identity, belonging, and the interplay between cultural influences, personal

experiences, and artistic expression. The speaker's identity is shaped by various cultural influences and personal experiences. From the very beginning, lines like "A mugging Jew among the wolves" and "They told me I had killed the Christ" highlight the speaker's feeling of being an outsider in a hostile environment. He depicts a childhood marked by fear, alienation, and confusion. Phrases like "the frightened child who would not eat / Or sleep" reflect the emotional turmoil faced by the speaker. The references to peers—"undernourished Hindu lads," "Muslim sportsman," and "Roman Catholic school"—illustrate a diverse yet tumultuous environment, further emphasizing the sense of not belonging. The concluding lines express a sense of resolve and commitment to the speaker's current place and identity: "This is one: to stay where I am." This declaration underscores a newfound understanding of belonging and the acceptance of one's past and present as integral to the self:

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am. (181)

He thinks of Bombay as a 'backward' city, yet he has no intention of leaving. He captures a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for home, particularly the speaker's connection to Bombay through the imagery of mangoes – "Bombay as the fruit / on which he has lived / winning and losing" ("from Edinburgh Interlude"). Mangoes are not merely fruits; they represent the speaker's cultural roots and emotional ties to Bombay. Being in Edinburgh, he misses Bombay, the city where he made his living. The contrast between the two places highlights the speaker's feelings of dislocation and the difficulty of reconciling these disparate aspects of their life.

Adil Jussawalla (1940–present) is another Bombay poet whose pen has drawn inspiration from his experiences in the city. Poems like "Sea Breeze, Bombay" and "Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay" provide not just a physical but also a psychological portrait of the city. "Sea Breeze, Bombay" is considered partition poetry, but it also emphasises Bombay's role during partition. The poem begins with a clear reference to the Partition of India in 1947, a significant historical event that led to the creation of India and Pakistan. This event caused massive displacement, communal violence, and the

uprooting of millions of people. Tracing history illustrates Bombay's virtues, which embraced every immigrant and refugee who sought protection. The Partition of India resulted in many individuals losing their homes. People fled to Bombay as their only hope, exhausted by starvation, bloodshed, genocide, and brutality.

The poet provides descriptive topographical information on the city, including its financial institutions, brokerages, bays, harbours, and ports. For refugees, however, it is a 'surrogate city' that provides shelter and jobs to everyone who comes to it. The term 'surrogate' indicates that it does not belong to 'others' but accepts everyone. People from Sindh arrived first, followed by those from Tibet, each group wearing distinctive clothing, bringing their own unique cultural traditions, and seeking a fresh start in the city. Unaware of the culture and atmosphere of the city, they wear woollen clothes in hot weather— "Wearing blood-red wool in the worst heat." The red woollen clothing is a symbol of the Tibetan refugees who have fled their homeland and are now trying to make a new home in Bombay:

Surrogate city of banks,
Brokering and bays, refugees' harbour and port,
Gatherer of ends whose brick beginnings work
Loose like a skin, spotting the coast,

Restore us to fire. New refugees,
Wearing blood-red wool in the worst heat,
come from Tibet, scanning the sea from the north,
Dazed, holes in their cracked feet. (39)

Bombay continues to attract communities with varying cultural backgrounds. The city welcomed everyone, regardless of culture, language, identity, or grief, "Dazed, holes in their cracked feet." A refreshing 'breeze' is impartial and relieves any suffering at the end of the day. The metaphor of 'breeze' implies that the city and its nature never inquire about the past or probe its history, and never scratch the wounds of a freshly settled community. It knotted the settlers with the mainland's history:

Restore us to fire. Still,
Communities tear and re-form; and still, a breeze,
Cooling our garrulous evenings, investigates nothing,
Ruffles no tempers, uncovers no root,

And settles no one adrift of the mainland's histories. (39)

Another poem that points to metropolitan India, poverty, and its population is "Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay." Jussawalla criticises the concept of the modern city and compares social structure. On his way back to India, the poet views the city from a landing aircraft. The poem begins with a striking contrast between the privileged (the popes) - "Loud benedictions of the silver popes," which suggests an authoritative, perhaps religious, perspective on life and morality, and the impoverished (the lower class) - the "union of homes as live as a disease." The upper class is always 'above' the lower class, which is considered a 'diseased' component of society. They exist in deplorable circumstances, yet the truth is consistently disregarded, and it is claimed that everything is wonderful. Poet reflects:

Loud benedictions of the silver popes,
A cross to themselves, above
A union of homes as live as a disease.
Still, though the earth be stunk and populous,
We're told it's not: (45)

Politicians, manufacturers, and the contemporary metropolis's corporate class have consistently denied the truth about the poor's stinking, suffocating living conditions. The city has traditionally been seen as a centre of progress and growth, where everything is wonderful and pleasant. Where planes land, the roadways are pristine, but on either side are slums that ridicule the concept of a modern metropolis. Abdul Mubid Islam adds: "The graphic image of the slums sweeping beneath the wheels of the aeroplane is undoubtedly heart rending and yet at the same time gives the impression of how politicised the category of "modernity" can be."

As the plane approaches, the poet sees the reality of the urban predicament. He considers himself to be one of the 'scavengers' who just knows how to use them in a poem. Similarly, they built a tidy runway, neglecting the slums that surrounded it. The poem uses two images to convey the contrasting feelings of optimism and pessimism that characterise contemporary modern cities. One is the pessimistic 'Indian diplomat,' who has visited many places and accepts that the underprivileged 'will stay just as they are,' yet the concluding sentence depicts a hopeful boy 'holding a mass of breadcrumbs like a stone.' It represents Bombay's ambivalent image, where different social strata hold diametrically opposed

opinions of one another. One has easy access to air travel, while the other is in a precarious circumstance, prompting the rhetorical inquiry, ‘Are they living for death or dying for life?’

.... The slums sweep
Up to our wheels and wings and nothing’s free
But singing while the benedictions pour
Out of a closing sky. And this is home,
Watched by a boy as still as a shut door,
Holding a mass of breadcrumbs like a stone. (45)

Arun Kolatkar (1932–2005), a bilingual poet, saw Bombay from a different perspective. His poem “Temperature Normal; Pulse, Respiration Satisfactory” illustrates “a slight manipulation of sight lines, of angle of vision” (Bhardwaj 24). The poet tries to capture two distinct Bombay moods. The poet strives to divert his gaze away from the city’s topography (terrace, chimneys, antennas, water tanks), and all that remains, in the end, is an open sky. The city is submerged both literally and metaphorically, disappearing from view and from the speaker’s immediate consciousness. His detachment from urban life allows him to ascend to the realm of nature. As the city ‘sinks’ into his peripheral view, he is blessed with the sight and sound of chirping birds in the twilight:

I lean back in the armchair
and Bombay sinks

the level of the balcony parapet rises
and the city is submerged

the terraces the chimneys the water tanks the
antennas
everything

the whole city
gone under (*Bomb*)

“The Turnaround” is an autobiographical poem illustrating how Bombay destroyed him. It is a symbol of a man who came to the city seeking betterment but was ultimately let down. Kolatkar talks about the challenging time of his life when he lost almost everything; hence, he says, “Bombay makes me a beggar.” Lines such as “I feasted on just plain ordinary water” and “I sat down under a tree, hungry no more but thirsty like never before” highlight the dire circumstances and the constant battle to survive. It was the 1950s when the poet left Bombay and set off on a journey through Maharashtra, giving up something and gaining some at each destination. It resembles the urban flaneur who wonders like a beggar:

It was walk walk and walk all the way.
It was a year of famine,
I saw a dead bullock,
I crossed a hill,
I picked up a small coin
from a temple on top of that hill. (*Bomb*)

As Laetitia Zecchini points out, the poem helps us to understand “Kolatkar’s affinity with improper, deviant and marginal characters. They no longer have any kind of exclusive belonging, and have *lost* everything” (67). She says further:

This picaresque poem that resembles the mock-heroic journeys of some of the blues-*bhakti* personas in other poems, begins with the line “Bombay made me a beggar” and narrates the gradual dispossession of an urban wanderer. But this dispossession, an equivalent to the ordeal of *tīrtha*, is the key to revelation. (67)

In 2004, he published a complete collection of poetry titled *Kala Ghoda Poems*, which is based on his observations of daily life in Mumbai’s Kala Ghoda circle. The poet depicts Mumbai through a series of interconnected scenarios that showcase the city’s residents, animals, and shops. His Bombay is not limited to skyscrapers or commercial hubs of a city, but also to the minor things one encounters from morning to night - breakfast, garbage, crows, tyres, lice, *charas* pills, and traffic signals.

The opening poem in the anthology, “Pi-dog,” gives a multifaceted image of the metropolitan dawn as seen by a dog. He traces the history and geography of the city. The pi-dog claims his belonging to and ownership of the city in the first stanza, as well as how much

it enjoys the morning, which is unoccupied and open, where it can lie down resting on the rough concrete surface:

This is the time of day I like best,
and this the hour
when I can call this city my own;

when I like nothing better
than to lie down here, at the exact centre
of this traffic island (*Kala Ghoda* 15)

It further identifies itself with Bombay of the seventeenth century with all the islands as patches on its body:

I look a bit like
a seventeenth-century map of Bombay
with its seven islands

not joined yet,
shown in solid black
on a body the colour of old parchment;

with Old Woman's Island
on my forehead,
Mahim on my croup,

and the others distributed
casually among
brisket, withers, saddle and loin (*Kala Ghoda* 16)

The multiculturalism of the city is depicted through a fusion of indigenous and contemporary perspectives. Native (the line goes back to the dog that followed / Yudhishtira) and non-native (matrilineally, / to the only bitch that proved / tough enough to have survived) cultures both contributed to the formation of the city. However, post-colonial Bombay reclaims its Indian identity; for example, the location “where the equestrian statue /

of what's-his-name / must've stood once" is now occupied by a pi-dog. The poet tries to relocate the history and culture, using references to myth and scriptures, but with very limited knowledge – "My own knowledge of the scriptures/ begins/ and ends, I'm afraid / with just one mantra, or verse."

At daybreak, the city resumes its activity as it 'slowly reconstructs itself,' 'stone by numbered stone' and makes visible the trees, St Andrew's Church, and the university, emphasising "each small unit of space rendered significant and meaningful to the constitution of the city" (Bird 104). The streets are now occupied by people with different attire, and the smell of nail polish, rosewood, and rosin warn the pi-dog to give ownership to its 'so-called masters.'

Kolatkár is a pioneering poet who wrote about the city in an unusual way. He did not just write from his point of view, but also from the perspective of a dog in "Pi-dog" and a drunkard in "The Shit Sermon." In the poem, a drunk awoke, saw the city, and exclaimed, 'Shit city.' The drunkard represents the poor, whose living conditions have not improved since the land was a set of islands granted in dowry, which has now transformed and rendered it unsuitable: "and now it's all / one huge high-rise trash." Swearing and yelling become louder, and they "circle in the sky above/over the stock exchange / the High Court and Mantralaya," which play crucial roles in the city's administration. He curses the city's legislative, economic, and judicial systems for not paying adequate attention to this marginalised class. The tone of the poem is brash, angry, and confrontational. The repetition of the word "shit" reflects a visceral and raw rejection of the city and its historical and contemporary circumstances. The poem is unapologetic in its harshness, using direct, crude language to express discontent.

Shit city, he thunders;
the lion of Bombay thunders,
Shit city!

I shit on you.
You were a group
of seven shitty islands
given in dowry
to the Shit King of Ing

to shit on

-- and now it's all

one big high-rise shit;

waiting for God (*Kala Ghoda* 119)

In “The View from Chinchpokli,” Dilip Chitre (1938–2009) describes his daily routines from dawn to dusk. An urban man in a megacity like Bombay leads a robotic existence. Even the sun, which rises from behind the textile mills (instead of the hills), is defective because it is ‘foul.’ Nightmares make him physically and emotionally drained, so he hobbles while walking. The poet presents two opposite pictures of the city where he ‘luxuriate(s) in the toilet’ but his “unprivileged compatriots of Parel Road Cross Lane / Defecate along the stone wall of Byculla Goods Depot.”

Throughout the poem, the physical environment of Bombay is suffocating, filled with industrial pollutants like sulphur dioxide and cotton particles from the textile mills. The mention of the ‘Bombay Gas Company’ further reinforces the imagery of a city choked by its own industrial production. The mills that ‘clothe millions of loins’ are a reminder that this pollution is a byproduct of the same economic system that provides for the masses, yet at a great cost to the people and the environment – “sulphur dioxide emitted / By the Bombay Gas Company, blended with specks of cotton / And carbon particles discharged by the mills.” From Nariman Point to Chinchpokli, the poet takes us on a virtual tour of well-known locations in Bombay. But he is not a euphoric tourist; he is just ‘an absent-minded’ observer who has seen it all before and is utterly bored. It is congested, polluted, and dirty in Chitre’s eyes, but he finds solace in the sea, his ‘daily sigh of relief,’ where ‘the gross millions are temporarily out of sight,’ and finds reason for optimism. The evening at Chinchpokli is horrifying:

At Chinchpokli, once I return in the evening,
I plot seductions and rapes, plan masterpieces
Of evasion. (“The View from Chinchpokli”)

At the end of the day, returning to his home in Chinchpokli, the speaker descends into a state of moral and physical decay. The imagery becomes increasingly grotesque as he describes the insects and pests that symbolize his deteriorating mental and emotional state:

Bedbugs bite me. Cockroaches hover about my soul.

Mice scurry around my metaphysics, mosquitoes sing among my lyrics
Lizards crawl over my religion, spiders infest my politics.
I itch. I become horny. I booze. I want to get smashed.
And I do. It comes easy at Chinchpokli,
Where, like a minor Hindu god, I am stoned
By the misery of my worshippers and by my own
Triumphant impotence. (“The View from Chinchpokli”)

The poet feels itchy, horny, and boozed up at the end of the day. At last, he feels “stoned by the misery of worshippers,” those suffering in the city around him, and by his own “triumphant impotence,” indicating a profound sense of powerlessness and frustration.

Another poem by Chitre, “Ode to Bombay,” illustrates the poet’s conflicted relationship with Bombay, where he felt both endearment and detachment. He intimately addresses the city. The poem opens with the poet’s promise of a poem before he dies, suggesting that this act of creation was once meant to be a final testament or offering. However, this promise takes on a darker turn as the speaker feels dismantled and destroyed by the city itself. The city has merged with the poet, but living in the city’s grasp has destroyed him, and now he seeks to free himself of every aspect that is a part of his being. The act of ‘dismantling’ these elements suggests a painful but necessary disconnection. Piece by piece, he crumbles and he finally admits:

I unfasten your bridges from my insistent bones
Free your railway lines from my desperate veins
Dismantle your crowded tenements and meditating machines
Remove your temples and brothels pinned in my skull (“Ode to Bombay”)

The poet appears pessimistic and aggressive while escaping the city, as evidenced by terms such as ‘unfasten,’ ‘free,’ ‘dismantle,’ ‘remove,’ ‘walk out,’ and ‘fall out.’

The ‘crowded tenements,’ where humans are ‘meditating machines,’ as well as temples and brothels on the same street, had left an indelible mark on his mind and taken his core human qualities. He is fed up with the everyday ‘murders and riots’ in the city and the pain of ‘burning languages’ that disturb his sleep. He held a strong affection for the city and had promised an epic, but now he feels weighed down by that bond and desires to break free

from it. The voyage that had begun with hope had devolved into a sensation of having been ‘robbed’ and ‘reduced to rubble’ from which the only possible outcome was death:

I walk out of murders and riots
I fall out of smouldering biographies
I sleep on a bed of burning languages
Sending you up in your essential fire and smoke
Piece by piece at my own feet I fall
Diamonds storm out of a black piano

Once I promised you an epic
And now you have robbed me
You have reduced me to rubble
This concerto ends (“Ode to Bombay”)

The feeling of having been robbed intensifies when there is no way to regain the loss through any means of employment. In metropolitan Bombay, employment has been a matter of luck, as everyone went out with the sun, some to work and others in search of it. Tara Patel’s “In Bombay” is the psychology of an unemployed section of the city. The city does not wait for anyone, nor does time; it ‘passes even when unemployed,’ and one must struggle to earn a living. People typically find temporary jobs, the poet claims – “I have been employed as many times / as unemployed. / And now I am unemployed. / Repetition does not make it easier.” Unemployed people leave home every morning hoping to find a job. Few people ever get a ‘real’ interview because:

In the beginning one leaves the house
in the morning as usual.
Pretences increase, imaginary interviews
Outnumbers unimaginary ones.
Waiting to be interviewed is a
test by itself. (92)

They visit the employment office regularly in the hopes of getting a job but are ultimately disappointed; still, they maintain their temper. They make friends with

unemployed people and spend their time in museums, libraries, and movie theatres like a college student. As unemployed people, all they can do is blame God for their situation.

Mumbaikars rely on the local train, making it an important aspect of their lives since it allows them to gain a broad experience of city life. “From Bombay Central” by Gieve Patel (1940 - 2023) is the poet’s experience of the crowded Bombay Central railway station while waiting for the ‘Saurashtra Express’ to depart. The poet takes his ‘reserved window seat,’ inhaling numerous odours emanating from the station, including that of human manure. Various odours have created a filthy atmosphere throughout the station. The only reason is that it is used by many people. Along with the passengers and stall-keepers, the homeless population of surrounding areas uses trains to relieve themselves:

The station’s population of porters,
Stall-keepers, toughs and vagabonds relieve themselves
Ticketless, into the bowels of these waiting pets;
Gujarat Mail, Delhi Janata, Bulsar Express,
Quiet linear beasts,
Offering unguarded toilets to a wave
Of non-passengers, Bombay Central’s
In-residence population. (“From Bombay Central”)

In addition to a wide variety of individuals, the station is also replete with the odours of diesel fuel, human sweat, dung, urine, ink, and biscuits. It comes “as one singular / Invariable atmospheric thing.” However, the odours do not bother him because they have become a normal part of the stations. This poem is a satire on the pervasive issue of cleanliness and mismanagement at urban railway and bus terminals.

Travelling in such a crowded and polluted train is a disaster for women. Arundhati Subramaniam’s (1973–present) poem “5.46 Andheri Local” explores the collective experience of a woman’s everyday life in the ‘women’s compartment’ of a local train. Subramaniam reveals the interior of the compartment by zooming in on Gieve Patel’s busy train station (“From Bombay Central”). Poetically presenting the feminist viewpoint, she describes the plight of working-class women in the women’s compartment of a local train. The train transforms into a symbol of unity as passengers stand together, shoulder to shoulder, though they have their individual aspirations and difficulties. The women here are

described as being “welded” together, using a vivid industrial metaphor of metal licked by relentless acetylene to evoke both the harshness of the urban experience and the strength that arises from it. This welding binds together their dreams, disasters, germs, destinies, and other intimate, biological realities such as flesh and odours. It portrays an intense fusion of emotions, experiences, and bodies, symbolizing how women are interconnected by the struggles and daily grind of life in the city. The poet perceives them as a collective entity like the Hindu goddess Kali with multiple limbs and tongues:

we are welded –
dreams, disasters,
germs, destinies,
flesh and organza,
odours and ovaries.
A thousand-limbed
million-tongued, multi-spoused
Kali on wheels. (178)

Anyone who has taken the local train in Mumbai can easily relate to the vision described by the poet. Suffocation and the foul odour of sweat have become the daily habits of *Mumbaikars* who have no other affordable mode of transport.

Melanie Silgado (1956–present) personifies the city and communicates with it in the poem *Bombay*, which has become a recurrent subject in contemporary Indian poetry. The poem, as Sharanya comments, ‘focus on movement within urbanity and less on urbanity itself’ (335). She states further:

The usage of human body parts to denote various events in the city’s history is not unprecedented, as has been discussed, but its overtly sexual description, with references to dissenting “flanks” and a “sluggish shore” that should “reclaim your cunt from time to time,” highlights other recurring concerns in Silgado’s poetry, such as sexual violence. (qtd. in Sharanya 335)

The poet emphasises the social features of the city along with its gradual development. After the city had been reclaimed, immigrants began to sail along the shore and establish a concrete city. The city grew to accommodate new settlements, but socio-political

factors segregated neighbourhoods by socioeconomic status. Today, there is a significant distinction between the living conditions of the upper and lower classes; the former resides in ten-story skyscrapers, while the latter reside in sewage tunnels:

Your future scrawled ten storeys high
and inside sewage pipes.
Some live unwarranted,
their carpet thicker than their lawns.
Their children suck their thumbs
to bone. (“Bombay” 281)

In her poem “Between,” she explores the theme of diaspora and the poet’s connection to two cities: London and Bombay (Mumbai). London is a ‘comfortable,’ calm and peaceful place where she can hear woodpeckers and watch the “tree fern unfurl its newest frond” and a parakeet. Suddenly, she flashes back to Bombay, an ‘uncomfortable’ city filled with the chaotic sounds of traffic horns. The poet hears “cricket commentary blaring, / and the clatter of stainless steel from/ the neighbour’s kitchen.” Although it is ‘bigger than life itself,’ overcrowding makes it disturbing, especially in hot weather- “The heat rots everything / and the fridge is never big enough.”

The poet has lived two very different lives and now wants to merge them into one. In the end, she recalls her dream:

I dream between continents.
Work can wait, lunch can wait.
For now I simply want to knit moment to
moment, city to city, the two halves of my life. (“Between”)

Mumbai was formerly known as Bombay before being renamed in 1995 by the local political party Shiv Sena. Both terms refer to the same city, yet each has its own unique political and historical connotations. Since colonialists chose the name ‘Bombay,’ the city still has a colonial demeanour and way of thinking. Mumbai, on the other hand, was designated for decolonization and the restoration of local culture. The term ‘Bombay’ is still widely used, however.

Imtiaz Dharker (1954-present) refers to this identity crisis inflicted on the city in her poem “Bombay, Mumbai.” The poet addresses the city and employs the imagery of building

materials to emphasize the decline of the urban area. Salty moisture corrodes buildings, causing cracks and peeling in plaster and concrete to lose strength. She emphasises the deteriorating conditions of the city using this metaphor. Its temporary smile “held on /with bamboo sticks and sellotape / and string.” Despite the city’s bravery in resisting:

Salt swoops in on a sea-wind
and eats you bite by bite,
making sounds like seagulls.
Paint, plaster, brick,
your lovely polished skin
gives in, peels and cracks,
but you fight back,
I am like that only,
you say, and toss your head. (*Terrorist* 137)

Not just the exterior, but even the structure beneath the ground, has been corroded by ‘white ants,’ who have transformed the spirit of the city into dust. The white ants represent internal forces that turn the soul to diamond dust, perhaps symbolizing the slow but inevitable erosion of the city’s spirit, while also transforming it into something valuable or enduring. The poet is concerned about the basic values (soul) of the city, which have been supplanted by invisible termites. Flood water slaps at the city’s glassy mouth, yet it continues to smile back, portraying an unyielding resistance to external pressures. The city smiles and welcomes every newcomer without exception. Its openness is captured in the metaphor of leaving doors open, suggesting a welcoming nature.

The same anguish is expressed in another poem, “Hiraeth, Old Bombay.” poem expresses a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for a past that no longer exist, both the physical space of the Naz Café and the city of Bombay, as well as the personal relationship between the speaker and their lost companion. Modern cities are characterised by constant transformation, but in Bombay, that transformation has altered the city’s identity. When Bombay was renamed Mumbai, the poet lamented that she would no longer be able to accompany her beloved to the Naz Café. She dwells on some of the notable locations she would have seen with her beloved. She probably fantasised about seeing dusty trees, cars on Marine Drive, Eros Cinemas, and a romantic moment with her loved one. Through the visual

imagery, the poet recalls the past that has been gone. The repetition “I would have taken you to the Naz café” indicates a strong desire to see the city, but things have changed now. Ultimately, the poem conveys a profound sense of loss on multiple levels—personal, geographic, and temporal:

I would have taken you to Bombay
if its name had not slid into the sea.
I would have taken you to the place called Bombay
if it were still there and if you were still here,
I would have taken you to the Naz café. (*Over the moon* 23)

Her another poem, “Mumbai? Kissmiss?” presents a localized, vibrant, and humorous take on Christmas in Mumbai, where traditions blend, the cityscape comes alive, and the festive spirit is infectious. The poet captures the heterogeneity of the city, where multiple neighbourhoods, each with its own identity, contribute to the city’s vibrancy. The phrase “rooftops are dancing in chorus” suggests a fragmented sense of community. Despite the distance between the different locations, there is still a shared participation in the celebration. Modernist poets often portrayed city inhabitants as connected in fleeting; superficial ways yet still linked by the overwhelming environment of the city. The soundscape of the city is captured through the “horns,” which shout joy and celebration. There is a mix of reverence and humour in the line about Santa Claus being an “honoured guest” at the Taj Hotel, blending local culture with a global Christmas icon:

Hear! Horns are telling at midnight on every street,
Happy Happy Happy! We know very well
to make good festival, and Saint Santa is
our honoured guest in Taj Hotel. (*Over the moon* 60)

The tension between the local and the global is a main theme in modernist urban poems. Here, Christmas (“Merry Kissmiss”) is celebrated in a city traditionally known for its festivals like Diwali. This reflects the broader modernist concern with how local traditions are altered by global influences. Mumbai, as a post-colonial city, becomes a melting pot of cultural symbols—Christmas is celebrated with “cotton-wool snow” and a “shining tree,” both foreign symbols made local through humorous adaptation. The refrain “allovermumbai alloversky is fully full with paper stars” adds a layer of artificiality to the celebration. Paper

stars are a symbol of manufactured joy, reflecting the modernist critique of the superficiality of urban life, where festivity and light can mask deeper feelings of disconnection. The stars are everywhere, yet they lack the permanence or depth of real stars, suggesting that the celebrations, while widespread, might also feel transient or shallow.

In this poem, the use of Indian English and phrases like “Merry Kissmiss” adds a playful, humorous element that subverts traditional depictions of Christmas. The mixing of Hindi-influenced English reflects the breaking down of linguistic and cultural barriers, which aligns with the modernist tendency to question established norms and structures.

Dharker vividly portrays life in Dharavi in poems such as “Namesake” and “Adam from New Zealand,” using the metaphor of Adam to depict the struggles of a ten-year-old boy. The poem “Namesake” juxtaposes the biblical figure of Adam, the first man in the Garden of Eden, with a modern-day boy named Adam living in Dharavi, a sprawling slum in Mumbai. Dharavi, as an urban space, becomes a focal point for modernist critique. The boy Adam’s life exemplifies the brutal realities of urban poverty. He has never seen experienced comforts, instead “survives with pigs” and begins his day at four in the morning, helping his mother at a hotel where he witnesses her selling her body to sustain their livelihood. His existence is a relentless cycle of toil, devoid of education and joys of childhood. Dharker describes his routine:

... He
has never faced the angels, survives
with pigs that root
outside the door,
gets up at four,
follows his mother to the hotel
where he helps her cut
the meat and vegetables, washes
it all well, watches
the cooking pots over the stove
and waits, his eyelids drooping,
while behind the wall she sells herself
as often as she can before
they have to hurry home. (*Postcards* 128)

Modernism often interrogates the relevance of traditional beliefs in contemporary realities. In this context, the biblical Adam, a symbol of universal human guilt and divine punishment, is contrasted with the boy Adam, who bears no responsibility for his suffering, underscoring the injustice and systemic nature of his plight. It also symbolizes the failure of modern cities to provide a better quality of life, exposing the stark inequalities and systemic neglect that leave the most vulnerable trapped in cycles of poverty and despair.

Similarly, “Adam from New Zealand” offers a powerful critique of the commodification of poverty and suffering by the privileged, particularly in journalism and media. The poem raises ethical questions about representation, challenging the voyeuristic tendencies of those who “document” poverty for external audiences. Through its defiant tone and vivid imagery, the poem emphasizes the dignity of those often reduced to mere objects in someone else’s narrative. It critiques the phenomenon of “poverty tourism,” vividly illustrated through the journalist’s tools— “cameras and microphones, sunguns, recorders, Dictaphones”—that transform lives into consumable stories, often stripping them of their humanity. They see the “real” India in Dharavi:

Adam is a journalist,
Newly arrived in India
At twenty-six, eager to seek
and understand,
and to record it all first-hand.
So on his way into Bombay
he has decided he must see
the real India in Dharavi. (*Postcards* 131)

Through these poems, the poet highlights the stark contradictions between the elite and the impoverished classes, shedding light on social disparities and the complexities of urban life.

Jeet Thayil’s (1959-present), “Slumming in Bombay, Beelzebub” presents a rich, ironic narrative about urban lethargy, redemption, and the contradictions of city life. Through the figure of Beelzebub, the poem explores the draining nature of modern urban environments like Bombay while also suggesting the possibility of transformation and unexpected moments of peace. The figure of Beelzebub and the depiction of Bombay serve as metaphors for the spiritual, emotional, and existential crises characteristic of modernism.

The arrival of the “boss” (presumably God or a divine figure) on a Sunday, a day of rest, further undercuts expectations. Rather than punishing Beelzebub or restoring order, the boss is “kind-hearted, distracted, funny, endearing,” embodying qualities that subvert traditional religious authority.

But the boss—now what?—had changed.

Hard as it was to believe,
she was kind-hearted, distracted, funny,
endearing even.

The day she came to take him home
they were seen at the Hanging Gardens,
hand in hand, watching the dust bees
ride their favourite pollen machines.

It was Christmas Day, just after dawn,
the heat and humidity at peace

it seemed, and Beelzebub’s boss serene. (*Collected Poems*)

Another poem “Blueprint, Bombay” is an evocative poem that captures the transformation of Bombay from its historical identity as a cluster of seven islands into a sprawling urban metropolis. The poem critiques the relentless march of urbanization and industrialization, exploring themes of environmental degradation, loss of heritage, and the dehumanizing effects of rapid growth. He laments the environmental destruction that accompanied Bombay's urbanization. The “trees” that once defined the islands have been reduced to mere “fodder” to serve the demands of modernity, symbolized by automobiles and industrial expansion. These metaphors of “maggot” and a “leech” underscore the sense of decay, overpopulation, and the unsustainable nature of Bombay’s expansion:

nothings once of the trees,
now fodder for automobiles and
quack of executive heels—
island grows to maggot
town, leech to permanent
sun, smile of stupefied
worm, turned, never done. (*Collected Poems*)

The poem “St Cyril Road, Bombay,” by Amit Chaudhuri (1962-present), begins by contrasting the minority community with the larger city. The Christian enclave of St Cyril Road in Bombay is depicted as a “tiny village,” “fortressed against the barbarians” of the larger city. The city of Bombay, referred to as “rootless, garish, and widely cosmopolitan,” is described in terms of alienation and disconnection. The speaker expresses a clear rejection of the modern, materialist city, characterized by towering buildings and “fat lights.” These “pillars of stone” are compared to lifeless, insect-infested structures, where people live like “ants and spiders” in a “sun-forgotten darkness,” disconnected from nature, community, and meaning:

...And each building a brooding tyrant
that
towers
over streets ogling with fat lights... Give me the
bougainvillaea
flowers
and a room I can hear birds arguing. I won't live in a pillar
of stone,
as ants and spiders live in the cracks of walls, searching for
food
alone
in the sun-forgotten darkness.... (379)

The comprehensive analysis of these Bombay/Mumbai poems provides a clear impression of the transition in the physical city that leads to a change in the psychological city, as represented in these poems. The depiction of the city also varies according to both time and individuals. Despite Ezekiel's negative assessment of the city (he calls it ‘barbaric,’ ‘sick,’ ‘unsuitable,’ and ‘cold and dim), he desires to live there and is reluctant to leave. He tries to establish his ties to the city by claiming that “he could not shun” and “cannot leave the island” since he “was born here and belongs(s).” He swings between the city and nature, between a dream and reality. Bombay, in Jussawalla's poems, is a socially and economically segregated city with a pronounced divide between the rich and the poor.

Kolatkár depicts a marginalised area of Bombay by focusing on a single location rather than the entire city. He records every movement of the metropolis from dawn to dusk,

demonstrating that it is an integral component of the city. He expresses the frustration and discontent of the twenty-first-century generation using modern slang. The drunk's language in the poem is a realistic picture of the character. Chitre is primarily concerned with urbanisation, industrialization, and the results of the deterioration in moral standards. He has been "robbed" and reduced to rubble by the urbanised city.

The poems of the other poets show a significant change. Subsequent poets focused on particular facets of urban life. Tara Patel describes 'unemployment' as a contemporary postmodern metropolitan issue. Gieve Patel illustrates an awful and unattractive vision of a foul-smelling railway station. Subramaniam shows the life of an individual in general, and a woman in particular, in a train compartment. Travelling in a suffocating Mumbai local is a disaster.

Diasporic poets such as Melanie Silgado and Imtiaz Dharker personify and address the city. Silgado traces Bombay's past and how it has deteriorated. She compares it to London and describes it as 'uncomfortable' to live in. Dharker, on the other hand, thinks back on her time in Bombay. The former 'Bombay' has fallen, making way for the contemporary 'Mumbai.' She narrows the city more by associating it with moments she desired to enjoy. Her Bombay is not merely a vibrant cityscape but also a poverty-stricken reality, exemplified by places like Dharavi, where the struggles of survival overshadow the city's glamour and progress. As a result, the city and its depiction change with each generation of poets. From Ezekiel's poems to Dharker's most recent, the city has been reduced from a broad representation to a specific place and location, and then to a specific moment.

The incorporation of myth in these poems serves as a powerful tool to explore and articulate the complexities of urban life, identity, and transformation. By referring to Hindu mythology and by employing mythological symbols, the poems bridge the ancient and the modern, imbuing contemporary experiences with timeless significance. The dog traces their ancestry back to Yudhishtira, a central character from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Yudhishtira is renowned for his unwavering commitment to dharma (righteousness) and his role in the great Kurukshetra war. Arundhati's poem employs Kali, the Hindu goddess associated with destruction, transformation, and empowerment, to describe the collective strength and chaos of women in the city. Thayil used Beelzebub, a biblical figure often associated with vice or temptation, in an urban setting.

The contrasts between two places in poems, primarily Bombay and London or Mumbai and Edinburgh, serve as a powerful lens through which to explore themes of identity, memory, resilience, and transformation. In Dharkar's poem Bombay is portrayed as a city grappling with pollution, poverty, overcrowding, and environmental degradation. In contrast, London is described as a "comfortable city," where the speaker engages in mundane activities like feeding birds and worrying about bees. This portrays London as a place of relative calm and order. Ezekiel's imagery of mangoes serves as a powerful symbol of home, connecting the speaker's past experiences in Bombay to their current reality in Edinburgh. The contrast between Bombay and London/Edinburgh in poems serves as a multifaceted exploration of urban life, personal identity, and the cultural shifts that define modern existence. Thayil portrays the city's oppressive atmosphere that mirrors the modernist city as a site of both existential crisis and potential transformation, making the poem a reflection on the spiritual and emotional complexities of modern urban existence.

Mumbai is portrayed through a wide range of locations, each serving as a symbol or backdrop for the poet's exploration of themes such as identity, nostalgia, modernity, and urban life. The Naz Café serves as a symbol of a lost era, representing a place of shared memories, intimacy, and nostalgia. Chinchpokli, a working-class neighbourhood, is used to represent the grim realities of urban life, where poverty, decay, and existential crises unfold. Bombay Central Station is a key transport hub in the city, known for its constant activity and heavy foot traffic. In the poem, it symbolizes Bombay Central Station is a key transport hub in the city, known for its constant activity and heavy foot traffic. In the poem, it symbolizes the convergence of various aspects of the city, such as its people, infrastructure, and economic activity. Other places like Marine Drive, Eros Cinema, Talk of the Town, and Stock Exchange, Victoria Gardens Zoo, Byculla Bridge, and Sassoon Dock, Flora Fountain, Bombay High Court, and University of Bombay, Parel Road Cross Lane and Byculla Goods Depot. The poets use a wide range of Bombay's landmarks to evoke different aspects of the city's identity, from its colonial past to its modern corporate ambitions, from its working-class neighbourhoods to its elite enclaves. These places become touchpoints for exploring themes of nostalgia, urban transformation, alienation, and cultural memory, reflecting how the city shapes and reshapes the speaker's sense of self and belonging. The reality is that a city is deeply embedded in the habits and traditions of its inhabitants. As a result, the city has both a moral and physical structure, with each influencing the other in distinctive ways, shaping and altering one another. While the city's vast and intricate physical structure is what

initially strikes us, this complexity is ultimately rooted in human nature, as it serves as a reflection of it (Park 5).

In conclusion, these poems beautifully encapsulate the intricacies of residing in a swiftly evolving city such as Bombay/Mumbai. Themes of urban deterioration, capitalism, alienation, identity, and the conflict between the personal and the public are examined. These metaphors not only mirror the city's exterior characteristics but also explore the interior lives of its residents, illustrating how the urban experience influences both the city and individual identity in the contemporary world.