# Bombay, Urbanism and Mobility: Reading the Post-Colonial City

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The city has been largely ignored in post-colonial studies, and the reasons are not hard to find. Cities exist in an interstitial space between the nation and the world, which prohibits them from playing any central part in the national psyche. National mythologies are *always* located in the rural heartland and post-colonial studies has inevitably been concerned with the contest between the nation and empire in its various forms. Cities, on the other hand, all appear to be, if not similar, at least similarly messy irruptions of global modernity. Since medieval times cities have been locations of health and justice, freedom and enterprise on one hand, and dingy dystopias of class inequality on the other. But from a post-colonial perspective the crucial feature of all great cities in history is that they have always been imperial, they have always been the centres of one form of empire or another. For these reasons and because of their multifarious and rhizomic cultural composition they are hard to fit into the classic discourses of decolonising rhetoric. The post-colonial city is habitually overlooked by both imperialists and nationalists: for one it is a hub for the exploitation of resources; for the other it is a colonial imposition lacking the focused mythic identity of the nation.

But the critical feature of post-colonial cities is that they are the first stage, and the microcosm, of the mobility and cultural intermixing that colonialism sets in motion. It is tempting to see the movement of colonized peoples to Imperial Metropolitan cities as a simple extension of the centuries old movement from country to city. 'Country,' according to Raymond Williams, comes from contra, meaning 'against' or 'opposite,' and 'City' from *civitas* or 'community,' with the broader connotation of 'citizenship'. (Williams 1973: 1) The colonial extension of this sees the ‘rural/primitive/ colonials moving to the urban/civilized/ metropolis at the centre of the web of empire, the centre of ‘civil society’. The myth of the country as the natural way of life (and the *characteristic* way of life of the nation) as opposed to the city as

the place of worldliness and ambition lies at the foundation of a prejudice that has made the post-colonial city invisible, merely a stage on the way to the metropolis. Consequently, in this global/local polarity we tend to think of the mobility of populations in terms of international diasporas. The circulation of imperial power, and its strategies of enforced mobilization such as indenture and slavery, produced a reciprocal movement in colonized peoples, a movement back to the imperial metropolises and across those national boundaries established by colonial administrations. The spread of empire resulted in the spread of the colonized – an acceleration of migration and a rapid increase in diasporic populations around the world over the last half century. We can now quite legitimately read these major 'diaspora magnets' – imperial centres such as London and New York, Paris or Berlin – as post-colonial, or at least in post-colonial terms, as John McLeod has demonstrated with *Postcolonial London*.

But the crucial and unrecognised factor in this increasing mobility has been the post-colonial city: the first stage in this movement towards the imperial metropolis is the movement to this peculiar and palimpsestic space. Far from being mere accidents of modernity, post-colonial cities are a particularly intense demonstration of the diasporic movement of populations, microcosms of the global flow of peoples that intensifies during and after the period of European imperialism. In most cases they are the destination of a population explosion so sudden that it quickly outstrips services and generates a sudden rise of shanty-towns and a poverty stricken city fringe.

No city embodies this function better than Bombay/Mumbai. Bombay is the *sine qua non* of the post-colonial city because in every respect it encapsulates the processes of post-colonial movement and settlement that come to extend globally. This is not to homogenize all post-colonial cities: Bombay is not Singapore. But the features Bombay displays to a vivid and sometimes extreme degree, are true in some way of all post-colonial cities, particularly their 'inner' diasporic heterogeneity and the conflict between this heterogeneity and the pressures of state control on one hand and ethnic communalism on the other.

Bombay was an invention of colonialism: it was not 'invaded' by colonial forces, it did not exist as a city before the arrival of the British. No city of Mumbai existed prior to colonization, but a collection of seven islands inhabited by the Kolis who worshipped a goddess called Mumbadevi. Constructed from a conglomeration of

villages, Bombay rose to become one of the most important cities in the Empire – "Star of the East / With her Face to the West" (Rushdie 1981: 92-3)[i] – a megalopolis demonstrating in heightened form every characteristic of the post-colonial city. Overpopulated, under serviced, an inadequate infrastructure, Bombay is a commercial centre that has always been a city of minorities, a diasporic city that represents in a concentrated form, the flow of populations that resulted from colonialism. The city is not just the home of Marathi speakers, but of speakers of Gujurati, Hindi and Tamil, not to mention English, different linguistic groups who referred to it variously as Bambai or Mumbai. As well as an internal diaspora, the city attracted itinerants from all over the world. Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* portrays Bombay's minorities - especially of the "left-over," ageing Europeans who still cling to the interstices of what used to be after (the metropolitan centre of) London, the greatest city of the British Empire. Bombay's cosmopolitanism, its economic success, and the fact that it used to be supremely indifferent to the varied pasts of its residents, had always been an attraction for sundry immigrants. The island's fabled tolerance had in the first quarter of the twentieth century been a magnet for White Russians, then in the 1930s and 40s for Jews fleeing the Nazis, in the 1960s and 70s for Hippies en route to Goa. But it is the city's place within yet 'beyond' the nation, its attraction of a national diaspora, that makes it significant. Bombay's radical intermixing is all the more indicative because the cosmopolitan complexity and tolerance of this melting pot of cultures was undermined by a violent ethnocentrism that not only led to the renaming but to an invasion by a rabid fundamentalism that attempted to homogenize its cultural variety and destroy its religious tolerance.

The function of cities in literary production is central. Whether a romantic rural nationalism, a passionate statement of national determination, or a nuanced evocation of cultural difference, whatever the setting (and in the early stages it is invariably located in the country), post-colonial literatures are produced in cities. Yet no post-colonial city has given rise to such a profusion of literature located in the city itself as Bombay. Most notably Rohinton Mistry, whose *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, *Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance* and *Family Matters* trace the fortunes of the immigrant villagers in the city, and Salman Rushdie, from *Midnight's Children* to *The Moor's Last Sigh,* perhaps the most dazzling Bombay novel, which manage to subvert almost all the master discourses of the post-colonial nation. All of these writers trace

the changing face of the city, and despite poverty, corruption and caste injustice, generate a utopianism that remains a peculiar characteristic of post-colonial literature. Apart from Mistry and Rushdie, Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990), Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants* (1988), and Ashok Banker's *Byculla Boy* (1994) trace the conflict between the boundless energy of the city's cosmopolitan complexity and the destructive forces of caste, ethnocentrism and religious fundamentalism. In many of these works an underlying theme is the corruption and tyranny of the Gandhian era, which pitches the city, an embodiment of the actual complexity of the *nation*, against the *state*. Another important Bombay novel, one rarely discussed in the company of the Bombay novelists, is Australian gaol escapee Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram* (2004), which lays claim to being the ultimate Bombay epic. This vast and sweeping novel seems to demonstrate the point in *The Moor's Last Sigh* that "places only yield up their secrets, their most profound mysteries, to those who are just passing through." (382) It gives a comprehensive account of the proliferation of culture, caste, class and linguistic variety in the city, but also suggests the extent of organised crime and the endemic and insouciant nature of Bombay corruption. The only one of these novels written by a non-Indian it offers a dazzling impression of the sheer extravagance of the city

> … the density of purposes, the carnival of needs and greeds, the sheer intensity of the pleading and the scheming on the street… It was as if I'd found myself in a performance of some extravagant, complex drama, and I didn't have a script. (Roberts 2004: 21)

While the post-colonial city is a microcosm of the fluidity, class disparity and ambivalent sense of home that has come to characterise diasporic populations, it not only focuses the dis-identification with the nation but hosts the ultimate disruption of the East and West binary – the development of alternative modernities. China and India, because of their sheer size and the volume of movement within their borders, demonstrate most clearly the concept of internal diaspora, and it is their cities that have become primary spaces of transition, movement, and exclusion. Migrant workers, cultural and religious exiles, all inhabit the 'nation' as a spectral space, a ghostly presence, with which they may or may not identify, but which has an enormous impact on their lives as they eke out a living on the fringes of the global

city. Rather than merely the site of uneven modernization, post-colonial cities become the crucial link between the post-colony and the global economy.

The dystopian view of this link is strongly articulated by Marxist critics whose analysis is supported by the sheer explosion of growth in the post-colonial urbanism. The statistics are telling:

> In 1950, 257 million in the third world were urbanised, since then there has been a five-fold increase and in 1985, there were 1,228 million people living in cities and the numbers are slated to go up to 2,200 million by the year 2000. This phenomenal demographic growth has taken place in about 30 years (compared to, for instance, greater London's population which went up seven-fold from 1.1 million to 7.7 million in one century, i.e, from 1800-1910). (Chandoke 1991: 286)

For social scientists the city, rather than the village or the nation, is the focus of larger questions because it is in "the city as a bounded socio-spatial unit that one can locate… the articulation of social processes" (Chandoke 2868). To Chandoke such cities are 'monstrosities' … 'centres of seething discontent and the inability of capitalism to guarantee social justice' (2868). Like European cities, post-colonial cities attract the rural poor because they maximise services, employment and modernity in general. They become the source of the country's modernization and consequently a centre of the inequalities such modernization brings with it. Rapid expansion exaggerates these inequalities and the city becomes a microcosm of the society, rather than an autonomous space, while at the same time bringing the issue of urban space to the forefront of the post-colonial concern with place.

For Marx, the nineteenth century European city completed the transition from feudalism to capitalism. But the comparative suddenness of the post-colonial city's emergence sees a blend of rural and urban, a chaos of modes of production that seems at the physical level to be a form of dysfunction, reflecting "the unpleasant side of third world capitalism: the shanty towns made of rags, paper, and tin and their inhabitants who eke out a living residing as it were on the periphery of both the spatial and the social worlds of the urbanite" (Chandoke 1991: 2871). A city such as Bombay reveals itself, at the level of social movement and literary production, to be an entirely different phenomenon from the European city. Cities always grew from a large-scale movement of people from the rural to urban areas, but this mobility in the post-colonial city is the sign of a larger global movement set in motion by

colonialism. The apparent divisions of economic disparity cannot conceal the intense interweaving of classes, castes and origins.

There is no doubt that post-colonial cities were established as centres from which economic surplus was appropriated by the colonizer. There is also no doubt that they are infected with the economic inequities of all cities, and on some continents to an extreme degree. But to see the post-colonial city as simply a 'centre of seething discontent' is both to homogenize post-colonial cities, linking Lagos, Mumbai and Singapore, for instance, and to see them in one dimension as simply mediators of the global economy. They are much more complex than this, even economically, for cities such as Bombay/Mumbai demonstrate the power and spread of an alternative, black economy that arises as a consequence of the city's sudden absorption of an internal diaspora.

But the dystopian view also fails to see the extraordinarily individualistic character these cities developed as social phenomena, the ways in which they came to determine the direction of their development and their extraordinarily energetic creativity. It may be literary works, works of the imagination, rather than social analysis, that best capture the exorbitant, enthusiastic and multi-layered reality of a city such as Bombay. As Moor says in *The Moor's Last Sigh*

> In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins … Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once. (1995: 350)

This "ocean of stories" may well get closer to the ambivalent heart of this amazing phenomenon than any social analysis.

A city such as Bombay breaks the National/Global binary by establishing itself as the threshold space between them. From its inception Bombay was a diasporic city, a city of immigrants who had never left the country, thus providing a case study of several larger issues: the increasing mobility of post-colonial populations; the transformation of modernity; and the creative proliferation of post-colonial art and literature. We may see these as utopian formations that stand alongside the deepening of class divisions, the exclusion of women and the increasing marginalisation of large groups of people.

If the post-colonial city is a 'monstrous dystopia of class and ethnic inequality' why is it also the site of a fantastic flowering of art and literature and why is that literature so deeply hopeful? One reason is, of course that all utopias are critical, imagining a future based on a lack of equality and amenity in the present. But there is something about the cultural profusion and intermixing of the post-colonial city that lends itself to hope. As Saleem Sinai says: "Five years before the birth of a nation, my inheritance grows, to include an optimism disease which would flare up in my own time." (Rushdie 1981: 107) The tolerance and equanimity attending the profusion of cultures, castes languages and classes in a post-colonial city such as Bombay seems of itself to develop an unquenchable utopianism that rises up over even the most corrupt effects of the state.

**Urban Hope**

The many different Bombay[ii] novels, poems and films all have different perceptions of the lot of individuals, but they all share a sense of the expansive character of the post-colonial city as epitomised in the radically hybrid nature of the metropolis and its subjects: the chutney identity for which *Midnight's Children* is famous; the radically unfocused identity of More Zoigoby in *The Moor's Last Sigh* that expresses itself as a religious inbetweenness

> I, however, was raised neither as a Catholic not a Jew. I was both, and nothing, a jewholic anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was – what's the word these days? – *atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix. (104)

'Chutnification' has become synonymous with post-colonial subjectivity, yet it is firmly located in the city because the city is a space of movement, collection, aggregation and interaction. Chutney, the metaphor of racial intermixing is a supremely Bombay image distinguishing itself from the linguistic partitioning that makes up the nation of India. Bombay may well be the source of that belief in hybridity for which Rushdie and Bhabha are so well known. Chutnification opens the way to a radical revision of the notion of subjectivity itself. When the young Moor rides the B.E.S.T trams and buses with Miss Jaya, while "she disapproved of their overcrowding I was secretly rejoicing in all that compacted humanity, in being pushed so tightly together that privacy ceased to exist and the boundaries of your self began to dissolve, that feeling which we only get when we are in crowds, or in love." (193)

The cosmopolitanism of Bombay is particularly focused in the co-existence of religions. Ashok Banker's *Byculla Boy* – the young Neilkant Jhaveri – is the product of a mixed-marriage. His mother is Christian and his father is a Hindu and *Byculla Boy* is a book about co-existence, a narrative of Bombay as the melting pot of minorities. In his grandfather's building Neil "smells the armpit of India ... smells the burnt out immigrant communities, Jews, Muslims, Anglos. He smells the melting pot that is Byculla" (Banker 1994: 219)

The sense of hope such an intermixing provides is beautifully demonstrated by the story of the painted wall in Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*. The wall behind Gustad's house had become a toilet where "the stink had been growing from strength to strength, with pools of ruinous ordure multiplying as the evening darkened… The insidious stink in his nostrils left no room for optimism." (Mistry 1991:165) Gustad comes up with the ingenious and optimistic idea of having the stinking wall painted by a pavement artist. But the wall is three hundred metres long. Is it possible?

> The artist smiled. 'There is no difficulty. I can cover three hundred miles if necessary. Using assorted religions and their gods, saints and prophets: Hindu, Sikh, Judaic, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jainist. Actually Hinduism alone can provide enough. But I always like to mix them up, include a variety in my drawings. Makes me feel I am doing something to promote tolerance and understanding in the world. (182)

Consequently the wall is transformed from a latrine to a holy place, the site of a floral homage as varied as the pictures. For the purpose of this occasion this may be the heart of this paper: there are more ways to deal with walls than to make gates. But this neighbourly profusion of religions suggests a utopian paradox: the very dislocation of the city dweller allows for the natural development of multiplicity and tolerance. Rushdie puts this less attractively in *Midnight's Children* where the city "is like a bloodsucker lizard basking in the heat. Our Bombay: it looks like a hand but it's really a mouth, always open, always hungry, swallowing food and talent from everywhere else in India" (Rushdie 1981: 125) Yet the crowds 'swallowed' by the mouth are able, by their very disengagement from a traditional sense of place, to accept a concept of identity that locates itself in relation to others rather than to an ancestral location.

We approach the heart of Kant's view of the ethics of cosmopolitanism here. For Kant, cosmopolitanism is a 'universally philanthropic' policy that would ensure peace among nations and grant individuals the right to international hospitality or 'the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory' ('Perpetual Peace'). Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity*, suggests that 'to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I', is 'to have the idea of infinity' (1969: 27). Furthermore "The welcoming of the Other is the beginning of moral consciousness." (1969: 84) Levinas's definition of ethics as a relation to the Other has become the corner stone of most discussions of ethics in literature and this dimension of human relations is critically important to post-colonial studies. Ulf Hannerz develops the Levinasian view of ethics, when he says: 'A more genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity' (1996: 103). In fiction and poetry Bombay is such a city. Whether its ethics of cosmopolitan openness is simply a matter of necessity, we see in instances such as Gustad's wall in *Such a Long Journey* that by loosening the ties of the subject the city provides the freedom to accept the Other.

Cosmopolitan theory still has many troubling questions to deal with: Who is the cosmopolitan? And of what class? Does the term work better as an adjective than a noun? Why do many still use the term as a synonym for 'sophisticated'? What are we going to do about *Cosmopolitan* magazine? But I think we can begin to see that the real source of a global cosmopolitan ethic may lie in cities such as Bombay rather than London or New York. That the Bombay version of mobility and heterogeneity in class, religion and ethnicity may breed a far more powerful cosmopolitan ethic than any we normally associate with the centres of global capitalism. This, at least, is the vision of possibility emerging in the literature.

Mistry is by no means a utopian writer. His novels are often characterised by a grim fatalism, a balance of good and evil, a sense that real choices are impossible for the marginalized and oppressed. Yet the curious paradox of Bombay is that the space with which nobody identifies is one with which *everybody* can identify. As Moor says: "O Beautifiers of the City, did you not see that what was beautiful in Bombay was that it belonged to nobody, and to all? Did you not see the everyday live-and-let-live miracles thronging I its overcrowded streets?" (Rushdie 1995: 350-51). There is

perhaps no better description of Bombay than Rushdie's city of "everyday live-and-let-live miracles."

Bombay is characterized by a troubling freedom: dis-identification with both village and nation leads to the acceptance of difference and variety, tolerance and intermixing. But this heady cosmopolitan mixture finds itself in conflict with two constricting forces: that of the nation-state on one hand, and, in the case of Bombay, of religious and ethnic fundamentalism on the other. For writer after writer, the Gandhian nation-state stands at odds with the multifarious and liberating character of the city. But at the same time the horror of Hindu fundamentalism under Shiv Sena, a fundamentalism that attacked the very identity of Bombay, operates as an equally oppressive force. For the Bombayite state power and race hysteria represent two forms of political oppression and in the case of the Shiv Sena and the riots of 1992, a form of tyrannical communalism that changed the city forever. If we broaden these concepts somewhat we can see that the two most significant impediments to cosmopolitan openness in general are the state, with its various forms of structuring oppression, and ethnicity, with its similarly rigid social and symbolic compulsions.

**City, Nation-State and the Transnation**

While the city may be the primary location of that print capitalism that constructs the imagined community of the nation, the inhabitants of the city bear no *necessary* relation to the nation outside that which is propagandised by the state. The nation is critiqued by post-colonialism because it betrays almost all the utopian promise of decolonising politics in the pre-independence period.

The post-colonial city is the place from which we might not only understand the disarticulation of the state's subjects from its own nationalist ideology, but from which we may best understand the increasing global movement of peoples. It refines our understanding of the movement between nations, from 'postcolony' to metropolis by capturing the essence of that movement, one captured by the term *transnation*, a word I coin to suggest the diasporic movement of peoples within as well as between nations.

'Transnation' is the constant movement of people within, around and between the structures of the state, a movement that questions the primacy of nation but also suggests the possibility of liberation even in the process of exclusion and

displacement. Transnation is neither 'transnational' in the sense of a relation between states, not is it a corporeal entity. It is not a formal reality in political space but a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live in-between the positivities by which subjectivity is normally constituted. Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation. It is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. And most significantly, its prime site is the post-colonial city, both the city in the postcolony and that interesting entity, the global city whose cultural interactions can be given a post-colonial reading. Thus while the economic inequities of the post-colonial city might be characterised as 'a centre of seething discontent' the transnation is the site of a potential liberation, the site of a utopian transformation perhaps best realized in literature.

The transnation, as it proliferates in the post-colonial city, is aptly described by the Deleuzian term 'smooth space' which exists in, around and between the structures of the 'striated space' of the state (2004: 475). Because the post-colonial city demonstrates in heightened form the age-old movement from country to city, with the addition, in a city such as Bombay, of a profusion of languages, cultures, castes and classes, it becomes the perfect example of the smooth space of the transnation. It seems uncontainable by even the structures of city government much less that of the nation. Nevertheless, two striations dominate the political reality around which the smooth space of the post-colonial city swirls: they are the forces of state control and corruption and the growth of fundamentalist violence. To understand the significance of this smooth space we need to examine the extent to which literature sets the city, with its unruly profusion, its complexity and endless adaptability, against the hegemonic structure of the state and the mindless certainties of fundamentalism.

This is particularly so in the Bombay novel, which arguably owed its very flowering in the 1980s to the perception of a corrupt state, a corruption ideally represented by the rule of Indira Gandhi. In the novels of Mistry and Rushdie, but particularly in Mistry, the Gandhian era offers a ready metaphor for the spectral but invasive presence of the state with its corruption and injustice. As *Midnight's Children* describes it "The Widow's arm is long as death and its skin is green the fingernails are long and sharp and black" (208) The Bombay novelists date the

oppression from the early 1970s and the war with Pakistan which culminated in the Emergency, a period of state restriction that had far reaching effects: "After the Emergency people started seeing through different eyes." Says Moor in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, "Before the Emergency we were Indians. After it we were Christian Jews. (1995: 235) As Moor ruefully notes after the Emergency: "Silence in Paradise: silence, and an ache. Mrs Gandhi returned to power, with Sanjay at her right hand, so it turned out there was no formal morality in affairs of state, only relativity." (Rushdie 1995: 272)

*A Fine Balance* focuses on the impact of the Emergency on Bombay and unlike *Such a Long Journey* with the symbol of Gustad's wall (a symbol that is destroyed during the Emergency) is an unremittingly dystopian landscape of poverty and misery. The poor, powerless and marginal, who had struggled to survive during the Emergency are 'cleaned up' by extra-constitutional state powers rounded up and put into labour camps. The novel exposes a horrifying link between politics and caste, first, when the low caste Narayan demands to cast his own vote rather than have it cast for him (along with the rest of the village) by the high caste Thakur, he is tortured and killed along with his entire family. Then, as a result of the Emergency 'clean-up' of Bombay, Ishva and Omprakash, who had escaped their caste and their village by taking up tailoring, are driven back to their village where the appalling Thakur has them sterilised and Omprakash castrated as well. For Mistry the hope for escape from caste and from the tentacles of the state are seen to be futile as poor and powerless individuals are regularly imprisoned in the warp and woof of state and caste. While the striations of the state and of fundamentalism seem to impact the post-colonial city in very different ways, there is a sinister connection between the nation-state and race hysteria that focuses in the phenomenon of nationalism, which in the twentieth century becomes imbued with both racism and religious fanaticism. The connection, as Pheng Cheah reveals, is one located in death:

> In the late twentieth century, nationalism is probably one of the few phenomena we associate most closely with death. The end of this millennium is marked (and marred) by endless acts of fanaticist intolerance, ethnic violence, and even genocidal destruction that are widely regarded as extreme expressions of nationalism: patriarchal fundamentalism in Afghanistan and other parts of the "Islamic world"; the atrocities designated by the proper names of Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo; the recent revival of the nuclear race in South Asia as a result of religious official nationalism in India and Pakistan, to name only a few examples. Indeed, one might even say that in our age, nationalism has become the exemplary figure for death. The common association of nationalism with recidivism and the desire for the archaic implies that

> nationalism destroys human life and whatever futures we may have because its gaze is fixed on the frozen past. (1999: 226)

The question we must ask of this grim assessment is: what is the place of the post-colonial city, which, in the case of Bombay, we associate with *life* in its teeming multiplicity? Can the city offer a path of cosmopolitan tolerance that can combat death? Can that moral consciousness Levinas sees manifested in welcoming the Other balance the forces in the contemporary world for which people will kill and be killed? Can the transnation exist protean-like around the striations of death? Certainly literature sees this possibility. For Ernst Bloch, the utopian function of art and literature lies precisely in the imagination of possibility, an imagination captured in the stronger term *Vorschein* or 'anticipatory illumination'. Such possibility is effected every time a reader feels empathy with the characters and situations of the text. But there is no doubt that literature's vision, its *illumination* of a future must come face to face with history: the history of racial religious and national conflict, as well as the history of oppression, inequality and displacement, all of which batter the post-colonial city and its literary vision of hope.

**Caste, Fundamentalism and Ethnocentrism**

Diasporas all deal, to varying degrees, with the issues of nation and ethnicity. The experience of mobility and absence from home often makes the idea of the nation and the affiliation of religion and ethnicity stronger than they may have been in the country of origin. But because 'immigration' to the post-colonial city produces what might be called a national, or intranational diaspora, forced by circumstances into a jumble of ethnic and religious diversity, the pressures of nation and caste may operate as an aggressive imposition on internal immigrants. 'Bombay literature' demonstrates these pressures in heightened form. While the Gandhian state had a major disruptive impact on the city, it was the sudden advent of Hindu fundamentalism, with riots and bombings in December 1992 and March 1993 that had the most disastrous impact on the Bombay psyche. "Language marchers demanded the partition of the state of Bombay along linguistic boundaries – the dream of Maharashta was at the head of some processions, the mirage of Gujarat led the others forward." (Rushdie 1981: 167). Even the affluent suburbs of Boman Desai's Bombay in *Memory of Elephants*, which are bland and peaceful at the beginning, are overtaken by the shrill cries of

fundamentalist mobs, Homi's safe, quiet city dissolving into a violent dangerous place.

Ethnicity, if not caste, is a significant, if somewhat ambivalent feature of diasporic life. Ethnicity, religion and nation become important symbolic affiliations with which the diasporic subject negotiates a path through the many different disruptions of immigrant life. In Bombay these affiliations (with the possible exception of the Gandhian state to which *everyone* seems to be opposed) operate in a relational way, subdued by the exigencies of a heterogeneous social existence. But the tolerance, co-existence and cosmopolitanism of Bombay seem to be suddenly destroyed by a fundamentalism as unpredicted as it was extreme. Because, as Moor says "all rivers flowed into its human sea" (1995: 350) so the did the worst aspects of the country's sectarian hatred.

> For the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. We were our own wooden horses, each one of us full of our doom… We were both the bombers and the bombs. The explosions were our own evil - no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible to defend. (372-73)

This is possibly the more insidious and damaging 'striation' because while the state can be the distant butt of all feelings of misfortune, the fundamentalist violence infected whole populations with stunning rapidity. It is possibly this realisation that no group was immune from communal hatred that became the most damaging feature of Bombay history. As Raman Fielding, the Shiv Sena strong man says in *The Moor's last Sigh*: "One day the city – my beautiful goddess-named Mumbai, not this dirty Anglo-style Bombay – will be on fire with our notions." (293)

This puts a different complexion on the city as smooth space. For while the state and municipal governments striate the space of the city, around which the population itself flows with varying degrees of detachment, the complex 'striations' of religious and racial identification managed to infect the smooth space itself because these identifications were simply a matter of life and death. The central 'striation' in this fundamentalist disaster was that of language, and the push for a central place for Marathi. In this way the city came to reflect, just as Rushdie's 'Midnight Children's Congress' gradually disintegrates from its absorption of national divisions:

> I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujuratis, and fair skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables… (1981: 254)

Thus the Midnight Children's Conference fulfilled the prophecy of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation (255). This too, was the direction in which Bombay came to be pushed by the riots.

Nevertheless, for all their horror and lasting impact on the city's psyche, and despite Shiv Sena's success in 2010 in having Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* forced out of the University syllabus, the riots of the early 1990s now seem to have passed into history, the threat to reduce Bombay to a mirror of the nation ironically unleashed by the Gandhi years as much by the Shiv Sena. The reason for Bombay's capacity to resist is given somewhat cynically by Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, for what neither the state nor religion can undermine is the city's enthusiastic taste for crime and corruption: "corruption was the only force we had that could defeat fanaticism…. Maybe." (1995: 332)

Rushdie's quizzical "maybe" leaves open the unpredictable and heterogeneous nature of Bombay's seething underworld life. This underworld reality, whether we like it or not, is just as much a feature of the city's smooth space as religious tolerance. As Roberts reveals in *Shantaram* the balance between organised crime and a corrupt police produces a paradoxical, but universally understood form of social order. However, the revelation that crime and corruption brings is that while nation and caste were the enemies of the city, capitalism, which arguably had a more lasting impact on the city's dysfunction and economic disparity, was embraced whole-heartedly (in both its legal and illegal forms) by all sections of this "live-and-let-live miracle."

**The Post-colonial City and Modernity**

Bombay's importance as a model of the post-colonial city goes beyond its ambivalent dis-identification with nation and caste, its swarming cosmopolitanism, its mobility and heterogeneity. The city is also a key site for the transformation of modernity itself, and an important indication of Bombay's global impact can be seen in the radical way its commercial and industrial life has intervened in generated a life of its

own. Nothing better represents the global impact on modernity exerted by the post-colonial city than the Bombay film industry.

Theories of modernity have been almost unremittingly western and it has been taken for granted that modernity accompanied European imperialism as it washed over non-western societies like a wave. This assumption comes from a belief in modernity as an inevitable, but essentially acultural movement of universal 'progress' and modernization. But Modernity is not a neutral acultural force of progress, it is multiplicitous and proceeds from many sites, adapted, transformed and often expanding to other non-western regions with little account of the West. It is the post-colonial city from which the multiplicity of modernity extends. Rather than a passive recipient of western technology, post-colonial cities have been the sites of a flowering of multiple modernities.

No city demonstrates this better than Bombay, for a fascinating model for the emergence and proliferation of alternative modernities is the phenomenon of Bollywood. Cinema was born in Paris with the Lumière show that opened on 28th December 1885. Maurice Sestiere, the Lumière man was on his way to Australia, but owing to shipping routes between the colonies had to stop over in Bombay where he decided to screen the Lumière film. Thus virtually by an accident of history and imperial geography, the Indian film industry was born. But that industry, appropriating and transforming a technology from the West, became a profoundly different cultural phenomenon with a different range of effects upon *other* modernities outside the scope of Western modernity.

Bombay cinema quickly gained a very important place in the consciousness of the city and of the country. Its early producers were Muslim: Mehboob Khan, under his studio's banner of hammer and sickle, completing his monumental saga, *Mother India* in the 1950s. Indian cinema became a protector of the official culture and the history of the nation, and gained the status of the generally accepted social and ethical consciousness of India. The film industry, with its indiscriminate mixture of Hindu and Muslim, of north and south Indian, in both its productions and plots, seemed to be the embodiment of Bombay cosmopolitanism (despite the deployment of a mythic version of India in the service of Nehruvian modernization in films such as *Mother India*). But the industry was not immune to the fundamentalist attacks. The demi-gods

and goddesses of the Hindi cinema were shocked to find themselves in the receiving end of threats rather than adulation, threats from both the sides - Hindu and Muslim.

It was the film industry itself that showed the resilience of Bombay cosmopolitanism. The best demonstration of this was the film *Bombay*, shot by Madras Based Mani Ratnam in Tamil and then dubbed into Hindi. It tells of a Hindu boy and Muslim girl who have to leave their conservative village in South India to marry. They elope to Bombay with its fabled tolerance and the two children born to them are named Kamal Bashir and Kabir Narayan, a symbolic combination of Hindu and Muslim elements – kamal is the lotus holy to Hindus, Kabir was a Hindu/ Muslim saint and Narayan is another name for the Hindu God Vishnu. But the religious riots envelope the couple, their children and their now reconciled parents in the conflagration. Although an imperfect, melodramatic and sometimes moralistic film, it played to packed houses in what came to be a cathartic season. It was only shown in Bombay after several cuts and much agonising. But the fact that a film that indicted the Shiv Sena and its supremo, and assigned responsibility to fundamentalists on both sides of the Hindu-Muslim divide, was actually screened, suggested that the old Bombay still survived. The cinema houses that showed this film did so under elaborate security, but no theatres were bombed and in spite of the exorbitant prices for tickets cinemas were packed for months. Bombayites of all religions, languages, castes and classes watched the film, sometimes amidst loud sobbing.

The Bombay film industry is just one example of the adaptation and transformation by which alternative modernities come into being. Such transformations of modernity occur in the contact zone between global and local and no space better frames this zone than the post-colonial city. In this complex relationship between nationalism, fundamentalism and cosmopolitanism we find a clue to the emerging identity of contemporary modernity itself. Each one of these features: the growing conflict between the *techne* of the state and the organism of nation; the global spread of fundamentalism and its curiously twinned opposite, cosmopolitanism; the increasing fluid character of globalization and the mobility of its subjects are all recognizable features of twenty-first century modernity. The fascinating prospect here is that the post-colonial city may not be merely a reflection of contemporary modernity, but a key agent in its development. Bombay modernity, as embodied in Bollywood is not so much a *counterculture* of modernity, as Gilroy

argues about the influence of Afro-modernism, (1993: 17), as a feature of the multiplicity of modernity itself. And the central feature of this modernity is mobility, a mobility that is not transnational so much as a feature of the transnation, which exists in and around the borders of the state.

While the post-colonial city is an interstitial space between the nation and global economy and culture, a point of flow in the mobility of populations in the post-colonial world, each city is a unique phenomenon located in its own culture and history. But as a convergence of mobile populations, a smooth space between the nation and religious/ethnic identity, the post-colonial city is a vibrant source of post-colonial creative endeavour, in literature art and film, and because of its cosmopolitan tolerance, a major site of the utopianism that makes that creative endeavour so hopeful.

[i] The British acquired the Bombay islands from the Portuguese in 1661 as part of the marriage treaty of Charles II of England and Catherine Braganza of Portugal. The wedding took place in 1662 but it was not until 1665 that the islands were reluctantly handed over to the British.

[ii] I will refer to the novels as "Bombay novels" and to the city as Bombay because for the most part the flowering of the Bombay novel occurred either before, and often in resistance to, the name change to Mumbai. Bombay best captures the identity of the city as a colonial construction. The name 'Mumbai' is, paradoxically, the sign of an ethnocentric identity that the post-colonial city earnestly resists, despite the name's obvious decolonising intent. In many respects "Mumbai" indicates a much deeper change
than the mere name.

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