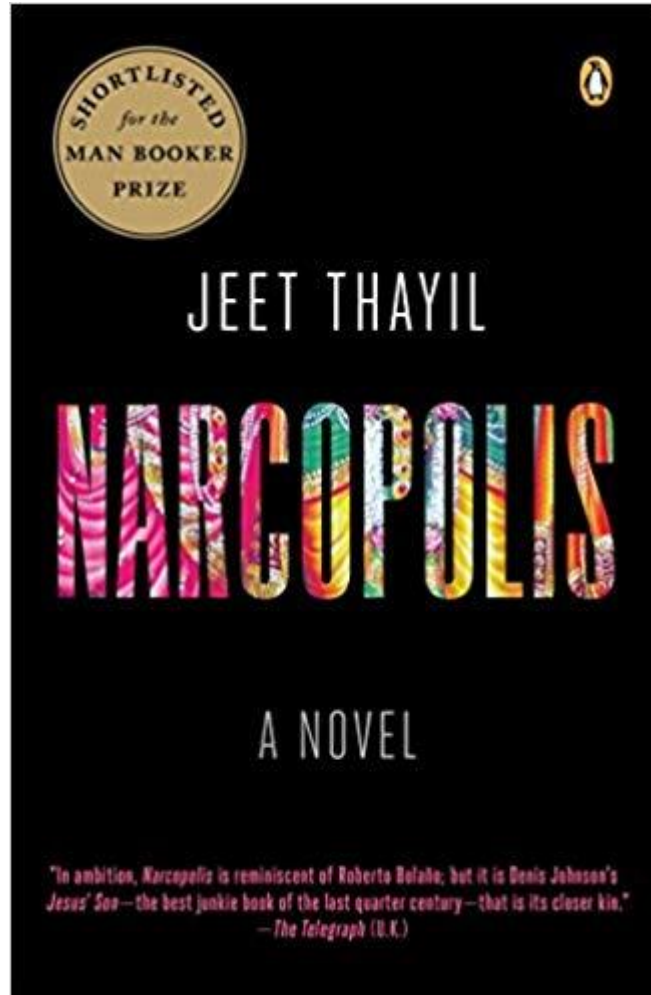


Portrayal of Mumbai in the Novels of Jeet Thayil and Kiran Nagarkar: Representation of Post-Independence India

Prof. Rameshwar B. Dusunge



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Narcopolis-Novel-Jeet-Thayil/dp/0143123033>

Abstract

Cities are the sites of complex and varied global and local interconnections that have the capability to generate diverse economic, social, political forms and spaces. Cities cannot be perceived in one perspective, and thus, have to be concluded with various underlining themes and notions that defines its existence. Cities must be understood from a variety of perspectives that adhere to the social,

cultural, economic and political constructs (Bridge and Watson, 2002). Such an understanding will aid in the absolution of the pressing issues that plague the development of the current city or state. The idea of a city or a state is not just limited to its geographical boundaries, rather, it is defined by the collective approach of the population which reflects the psychological state of the city. Thus, the idea of identity of the city and those of its people is trapped in a vicious cycle, wherein one impacts the other in equal measure.

Cities are defined by its buildings, roads, infrastructure and various materialistic aspects; however, cities, in an equal measure, also reflect the intricacies that occur within their geographical realm. Such intricacies are often reflected in literature. The city is a central theme in modernist literature. Numerous novels and poems reflect the ways in which cities generate state of shock, exhilaration, alienation, anonymity, confusion.

Keywords: Mumbai, diversity, reflection of the city, perspective, limitation, collective approach, identity, impact, aspects, intricacies, power to generate.

Introduction

Ever since the rise of the metropolis (19th century), the cities have played an important role in the literature, not just as an antecedent setting but as a crucial aspect. The portrayal of Mumbai in literature is not a mere reflection but is also a reflection on the society. This double reflection as mentioned above in the context of a vicious cycle, is important for the proposed study to represent post independent India and to assert its representation in Indian English fiction novels.

Raban (2008) asserted that cities are comprised of two competing versions: “the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps, in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture”. For Mumbai, the idea of soft city has dominated the historical and political rhetoric without excessively acknowledging the narrative artifice implied in the identity of the city. Prakash (2010) pursued a historical investigation of Mumbai and argued that deeply flawed “narratives of change” about “the rise and fall of the city” dominate textual depictions of it: “Pick up recent novels on the city, read nonfiction writings, turn the pages in newspaper and magazine files, talk to people, and you will be confronted with a story that purports to tell us what the city was as Bombay and what it has become as Mumbai”.

Thus, the novels selected for analyzing, the portrayal of Mumbai and representation of post independent India are *Narcopolis* by Jeet Thayil and **Ravan and Eddie**: by The Extract; Kiran Nagarkar. Both of these novels are part of contemporary literature and explicitly describe the state of Mumbai and signify certain themes around which the life of the protagonist revolves round. These themes are in congruence with the psychology of the city.



Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_1_15?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=ravan+and+eddie&prefix=Ravan+and+Eddie%2Cstripbooks%2C494&crd=63GXPHZMZ
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Research Methodology

Literary works are used to entertain, to teach a moral lesson, to convey meaning, or more importantly, to make the reader aware of some aspect of the human condition. Through their work, writers creatively share their ideas and express themes that are timeless and universal. In any field of research, after recognizing the meaningful research problem, for investigation and to get its reasons, some medium is required to further assess the solutions presented in the problem. The proposed study required comments and opinions of the critics and the perception of the researcher to identify the representation of Mumbai in the selected novels. Thus, this research paper contains following methods:

1. Content Analysis Method
2. Subjective Analysis Method

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyse different themes such as those of politics, drugs, underworld and chawls that are prevalent in the identified novels for this study. The collected data evaluates joy using test analysis which augments the understanding. The study in addition, follows validation measures and ethical criteria.

This study, specially aims, to explore the works of Jeet Thayil in *Narcopolis* about the dens of opium and underworld set in Mumbai To study the work of Kiran Nagarkar as represented in *Ravan* and *Eddie: The Extras* for depiction of struggle to succeed in life and sprawling chawl and pessimistic approach of two young protagonists to look dark side of Mumbai.

Thus, in this study, the representation of Mumbai as reflected in the works of the selected authors is analysed. The main purpose of this study is to understand how the state generates various notions of the society and define the personality of the individual. The idea of the isolated self, the one involved in drugs and mafia, and the one that lives within the enchanting tales of *sprawling chawls*, are various themes that are generated in the works of the selected authors post decolonization. Thus, this study represents Mumbai as a state highlighted the political turmoil, drugs and mafia menace and *the*

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chawls. The current study has selected the novels of the two authors as it reflects the various parts of the Mumbai life, not the limited portrayal of glam and glitter. The selected novels are a deep probe into the heart of Mumbai and brings out the nook and corner of the city to the readers.

Despite the prevalence of the themes of cities in the literature following the era of postmodernism, rare studies have been pursued along the lines of Indian English fiction. Separate studies have been conducted on the works of Jeet Thayil (Mazzarella, 2003) and Kiran Nagarkar, However, there hasn't been a collective study that assesses the representation of Mumbai in the works of these selected authors.

Study of Novels

i. **Narcopolis**- A novel full of drugs, crimes and hard-partying lifestyle.

Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis* is set in Mumbai and explores the opium dens and brothels with the help of the protagonist.

According to Jeet, "Mumbai mingles with people, creates problems for people, provides pleasure to the people, and thrashes people". The novel traverses through the smoke alley of Mumbai's drug world. Mumbai is as the central theme of the novel and presents a discerning image of the city with the help of the characters, their relationships, behaviours and the style of living (Sharma,2016).

Ravan and Eddie

Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie: The Extras, set in Mazgaon, Mumbai explores the life of two young boys, Ravan and Eddie and their struggle to succeed in life. The grim world of the Mazgaon chawl, the beating heart of the lower middle-class Bombay, the dejection and disappointment of life is brought forth through the eyes of two young protagonists. Sarcastic, witty and funny; the novel explores the illegal bars, the Bhendi Bazar, brothels, Mafia and underworld in Mumbai. Nagarkar centralizes on the world of Bollywood and the multi-cultural setting of the chawls of Mumbai (Yatnalli,2016).

Post-Independence India and Representation of Mumbai in Literature

History

Britishers ruled over India more than 150 years. India gained independence in the year 1947, which paved the way for Indian writers to write novels in English. Originally, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote the first novel 'Rajmohan's wife' (1864) before independence. Under the colonial rule, English education was delivered in schools as per the demands and recommendations by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Macaulay. This linked literary transit between India and Europe. There was a rise of getting education through English medium after independence which has been carried out vigorously up to the date. The literature was given wider scope and opportunities to express public voice at a large in the post-independence era and the writers fully opened new avenues and put forth, social, political, economic problems. The term 'post-colonial literature' does not only refer to the past of a country and

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the literature in existence in that particular period but shares the similarities and differences by comparing past to the present.

As India gained independence many writers concentrated upon the setting of cities in literature by making comparison between the cities before independence and after writers like Salman Rushdie 'Midnight's children', Manil Suri – 'Death of Vishnu' and so on represented the setting of Mumbai by showing impact of underworld, mafia, menace, drugs, sprawling chawls upon the city. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial writers.

Narcoplice, Ravan & Eddie: The Extras are the novels of post-independence era which assert political turmoil, cultural conflict, dominating national values of Mumbai as a city.

The world of the novel is made up of locations and settings, arenas and boundaries, perspectives and horizons. Different places are imagined, perceived, and settled in by the protagonist of the novels, by the author and is correspondingly lived by the readers (Rai,2005). Therefore, different novels present themselves with resonating with different realms, experiences, and knowledge of the geography, they are entitled with. Resonating with this thought, these geographies and locations are harmonized with varied worldly awareness and experience, from circumscribed routines to linear notions of progress or transformation (Barrell, 1982; Said,1989). Cities are known to generate states of shock, exhilaration, alienation, anonymity, confusion or thrill that further generates various notions of the society and define the personality of the individual. According to Levy (1978), the role of a city in a novel, moves from the "setting for the action to an active component of the action". Mumbai as a state has been the focal point for many changes that have developed the country of India, by large. Thus, the idea of Mumbai as central point which impacts and influences the characters in a novel is palpable and has been implemented by various authors. The relation between the characters and the state of Mumbai, particularly Mumbai, is showcased as the relation that transcends evolves with time, wherein, both the variables are impacted by the action of one another. The buildings in Mumbai symbolized ideas, such as, patriotism, religious identity and regal power. Soon, after decolonization, the life in the urban cities of Mumbai were constantly altering, which is clearly reflected in various in various works of the selected authors (Minerva 2014

Significance of the Study

The study of these two novels i.e. 'Narcopolis' and 'Ravan and Eddie: The Extras' is limited but in number of works viz. Vikram Chandra, Siddharth Shangvi, Vikas Swaroop have demonstrated 'Mumbai' in post-independence period. This study considers only English fiction authors penned by Indian writers and involves the novels of post-colonial period.

An extensive review of literature has been pursued to obtain the required data towards the research topic. 'Representation of Mumbai in Maharashtra in Indian English Fiction' aims to focus on the works of the selected authors and understand their depiction of the state within the context of their novel. This research is inclusive of the perception of the state and its influence on both the author and the protagonist of the novel. There is an unexplainable collaboration between the city and the worldly awareness that leads to material, social, cultural, mental, and societal transformation. The political realm, and intrinsic characteristics of state bring forth the advent of modernization in a given society

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and highlight its process of urbanization. However, despite such a relevance of city in a novel, there have been rare studies that focus on the geographical realm of a literature work, particularly in the context of Mumbai. Thus, this study will be crucial for researches further pursuing this arena of literature and can also be used for pedagogical purposes.

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