Dreamworlds

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"Haay Haay Haay Haay..."

On the pavement by the sea, a dark thin man is smacking his blood-spattered naked back with a whip made of rags. People have thrown coins in front of him. This is the first time that Neel has seen such an original method of earning a livelihood.

Tonight he will reach his shack. Just as a middle-class man's wife greets him with a cup of tea, this man's wife will welcome him by soothing his bloodied back with balm. He never found work as a load carrier or as a security guard. Never learnt to mend shoes, broken umbrellas, or sing with his harmonium on the local train. Never acquired the skill to pick pockets, to snatch purses and chains. He could not even manage to get hold of two-dozen bananas in a broken basket. He and his family reeled with hunger. So, he made a whip out of his torn shirt and started beating his back. After a few hours, when blood started spluttering, a pious woman threw him a five-rupee bill. Why has the President not awarded this ingenious man with a prize for India's greatest scientific invention?[1]

This is a scene from a Hindi novel about two men from North India, Neel and Bhola, who meet on a train on their way to Mumbai to seek their fortunes. "I am going to Mumbai to earn a hundred thousand rupees in two years," Bhola announces soon after making Neel's acquaintance. His plan is to land a job as a security guard in an apartment building, like many of his North Indian compatriots. Neel has set his sights higher. After all, unlike the aspiring security guard, he is educated.

With his fledgling academic career in Delhi having gone up in smoke because of an affair with his PhD adviser's niece, he is in the city to make a new beginning. Money and success will come easily in Mumbai for a man of his education and youthful good looks, he has been told. In spite of the difference in class and education, Neel feels a strange closeness to the simple and generous-hearted Bhola and is happy to take him around the city that he knows from a guidebook.

Both Neel and Bhola have landed in Mumbai, drawn by its fabled opportunities. It is another matter that one will become a gigolo and the other will join the underworld. Upon arrival, they take in the tourist attractions. The sights live up to their fabulous image of the city. As they gaze upon the city from the windows of Naaz Restaurant on Hanging Gardens in Malabar Hill, the clustered towers on Cuffe Parade, then Express Tower, then the Air India building, and finally the string of buildings on Marine Drive sweeping into Chowpatty come into view. The sight of the limitless expanse of the Arabian Sea is entrancing. Waves crash into the seawall, turning into foam, then transforming back into a lacework of water drops. The crimson rays of the setting sun are reflected on the surface of the water.

Neel is witness to Mumbai's doubly colonized history -- the colonization of nature by culture and its formation through the British territorial conquest.[2] The fables spun by this doubly colonized history are embodied in the structures spread out before his eyes. But what are the stories hidden in this fabled city by the sea?

Neel finds the answer at the Gateway of India, an area that was witness to a furious symbolic contest to claim the city. Standing tall by the sea is the Gateway, built in 1923 to monumentalize the visit of the Prince of Wales. Nearby is the colossal statue of Shivaji on a horse, contesting the British claim to ownership of Mumbai. The immigrant duo does not notice the Maratha warrior. Instead, their eyes are drawn across the road to the opulent Taj Mahal Hotel, a tribute to the pride and wealth of its Parsi founder, Jamsetji Tata. Bhola knows the story that Tata built it when he was refused entry into a British-owned hotel. Neel patiently answers his uneducated companion's questions about the Taj and discusses its architectural merits in comparison with the Intercontinental Hotel. The thin dark man whipping his body breaks their reverie. His bloodied back wins the symbolic contest over the city. Barely a day in his new home, Neel grasps that hidden in Mumbai's fabulous history are stories of its legendary spirit of survival. You duck and weave, grab opportunities, licit and illicit, to survive. And when all else fails, you turn to your own body, whip it bloody, or become a gigolo, as Neel does, in exchange for a few coins.

Neel's life in Mumbai speaks to the essence of the city's fabled history. It evokes both its alluring promise and the mythic struggles of immigrants to survive and forge the modern city as society. Excess characterizes Mumbai -- excesses of power and ambition, of profiteering and exploitation, of aspirations for justice and equality in the face of terrible injustice and inequality. It is, as Suketu Mehta says, a "maximum

city." How could it not be? Consider its forging as a thriving metropolis out of seven islets. Power, ambition, fantasy, and violence -- all had to be enlisted on an extraordinary scale. Its stories contain a surfeit of dreams and nightmares, lofty aspirations of cosmopolitan openness and violent nativist and communal passions. These are what pulsate Mumbai with energy and dynamism.

Mumbai grows unabated, a megacity devouring mangroves, swallowing the graceful line of bungalows, covering the landscape with apartment towers and shantytowns, and enveloping it all in its polluted air. The infrastructure creaks under the growing population pressure. The city appears out of control, its urbanism splintered by nativism and communalism. Where the aging Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena have lost some of their roar, Thackeray's nephew, Raj Thackeray, has picked up the slack. His Maharashtra Navnirman Samiti (MNS) has grown from strength to strength, eating into the support of the Shiv Sena from which he broke away. A cartoonist like his uncle, Raj Thackeray rides the tiger of populist politics by targeting North Indian immigrants. These contemporary excesses produce despair and pronouncements of the city's death. But as Gillian Tindall reminds us, Mumbai's problems are due not to its weakness and decline but to its strength and dynamism.[3] The city's troubles mount because Mumbai continues to draw people by its promise.

Vision Mumbai

If mounting problems produce despair, they also generate grand visions.

A new vision for Mumbai appeared in 2003. It was based on a study conducted by McKinsey and Company for Bombay First, a nongovernmental organization of business leaders. Carried out in cooperation with the relevant government bodies, the study published a report entitled Vision Mumbai: Transforming Mumbai into a World-Class City. The consultants developed a database and framework for "benchmarking Mumbai" and for the "calibration" of its performance under different parameters along a spectrum -- from "poor" to "average" to "above average" to "finally world class." In McKinsey's judgment, the city's slipping economic growth and quality of life placed it at the lower end of the range on a number of categories. Its recommendation? A change in Mumbai's "mind-set." Instead of the timid attempts at "incremental improvement and de-bottlenecking," it advocated bold "step jumps."[4]

The Maharashtra government promptly succumbed to the seductive vision of Mumbai's rise to "world-class" status. The chief minister appointed a task force composed of senior government officials and Bombay First's representative, which endorsed the "world-class" aspiration. Enumerating the city's woes, it painted a picture of Mumbai hovering "perpetually on the brink of collapse, with its swelling population, deteriorating environment, income disparities and lack of funds." The city risked "entering the graveyard of failed cities" unless it took command of its future. Fortunately, there was hope. It recommended seizing the potential presented by globalization for

increased trade and "the transfer across geographies of investment, technology and talent" and proposed a ten-year strategic plan to improve governance, accelerate economic growth, construct affordable housing, and develop infrastructure. If financed by a $40 billion investment and fast-tracked by a series of "quick wins" to secure public support, the plan would turn Mumbai into a world-class city by 2013. "The world is watching. Mumbai is waiting."[5]

Here it is once again, an enticing planned vision of the future city. However, unlike the modernist twin-city project, this initiative comes not from architects and urban planners but from business leaders and a global consultancy firm. Echoing the ascendancy of the market-based ideology, the proposal advocates a "public-private" partnership, rather than a public undertaking. The market orientation is particularly visible in its proposals for private capital-based slum rehabilitation. Unfairly holding slums responsible for bottling up Mumbai's growth, the document recommends offering builders incentives to construct towers to house the slum dwellers. Particular attention is showered on Dharavi -"Asia's largest slum" -three sectors of which are to be cleared and developed as office and commercial space. With its proximity to the corporate Bandra-Kurla complex, Dharavi is a real estate El Dorado, prompting attempts to drive away slum dwellers. The city beautiful can be built only by chasing away the poor with the help of the market, supplemented by evictions and demolitions that miraculously follow the unveiling of "Vision Mumbai." Several

critics charge that the "world-class city" is a dream sold to facilitate the corporate takeover of the city's future.[6]

The "Vision Mumbai" focus on housing is no accident. Over sixty percent of Mumbai's population lives in slums. The density of the city's population is 29,000 per square kilometer, the highest in the world -compared with 13,000 in Shanghai, 10,000 in New York City, and 5,000 in London. Break it down further, and the figure for the densest Mumbai ward climbs to over 100,000. The colonial state had resorted to the ruse of a housing shortage to launch the Backbay reclamation, a ploy that was used by the postcolonial government in the 1960s to push for further seizure of land from the sea. The aspiration to become a world-class city returned to this tried-and-tested tactic in proposing slum rehabilitation. Builders enthusiastically endorsed the move. Why would they not? The Dharavi Rehabilitation Project is a gold mine for them. As a newspaper comment points out: "Builders get 535 acres of prime land, in return for providing free housing to 52,000 families -plus hospitals, schools, international craft villages, peace parks, art galleries, an experimental theatre and a cricket museum!" But since each "apartment" measures only 21 square meters, and the minimum distance between two buildings is only 5 meters, there will be 1.8 million square meters that the builders may sell in the commercial market. Furthermore, the government has granted an unprecedented floor space index of 4.1 -- as opposed to the standard 1.3 -- to attract developers. "No wonder the sharks can't wait to bite.

And with Rs 2,700 crore [$574 million] expected to land in the official kitty, neither can the state government."[7]

Counterdreams

Since the start of the building boom of the early 1990s, the real estate industry has aggressively sold the dream of owning a home. Glossy brochures and colorful advertisements promise richly appointed apartments equipped with the latest appliances and housed in exotically named residential complexes boasting lush green lawns and recreation facilities. Meanwhile, the developers and the government entice displaced slum dwellers with offers of marginally larger living spaces in modern towers equipped with plumbing and electricity.

Luxurious 1,2 & 3 BHK Flats, By Meera Devidayal. Mixed media on can vas, 40 x 30 in. Courtesy: Meera Devidayal.

Urban activists have criticized the serious shortcomings of the private capital-led makeover dreams of the city. A compelling critique also emerges in the works of Meera Devidayal, a Mumbai artist. What is different about her commentary is that it engages with the dream of a home at the level of its image. Devidayal began by collecting images circulated by newspapers and brochures from property developers. People were "being bombarded with the marketing of dreams by the media, by banks offering easy home loans, by developers offering everything from free vastu consultation [supposedly from the ancient science of construction] to British governesses."[8] Her 2003 "Dream Home" exhibition responds to the fantasies spun by real estate entrepreneurs. In canvas after canvas, Devidayal brings into view the repressed desires of the dream home. Gold Valley presents a lifeless, gray tenement building superimposed on a lush green landscape that is watered by a stream. The fantasy of luxuriant nature, the "Way to Gold Valley," as the sign reads at the bottom of the painting, crashes against the incongruous bleak reality of the square, cagelike tenement rooms. Through the windows, we see nature mapped as numbered property lots.

Her Luxurious 1,2&3 BHK Flats is dominated by the image of a blueprint of an apartment building elevation drawing. The bright red tulips at the bottom suggest the dream home stored in the image. Running through the smooth surface and neat lines of the elevation is a brick crack, the trace of a demolished structure. Together with the antique lamp shade on the upper left, the crack envisions or visualizes

what is hidden by the blueprint, what the new will reduce to rubble.

With an ingenious superimposition of architectural drawing over the painted surface of the canvas, Devidayal suggests the complicity of architecture in the destruction of life's rich texture. Unmindful of the concrete experience of home, the real estate industry forges ahead by reducing it to the abstract space represented by geometric lines.

But are the experience and meaning of home in an immigrant city like Mumbai reducible to owning a dwelling? Feeling at home in the impersonal metropolis is always a challenge. This is even more so for immigrants in Mumbai. Because of their precarious livelihood in the city, they have traditionally maintained ties with their native places. Mumbai is just a mahanagari, a metropolis that poor immigrants endure to earn a living. They may live two or three generations in slums, but home is still the village or the small town they came from. Belonging is a complex emotion for those who struggle to survive amid daily injustices.

Muzaffar Ali's 1978 Hindi film Gaman (Departure) offers a haunting perspective on the meaning of home for immigrant taxi drivers in Mumbai. We see the city from the point of view of Ghulam, a Muslim who leaves his North Indian village after the family is cheated out of its land by the landlord. Leaving behind his ailing mother and wife, he lands at the door of Lallu, a taxi driver, who is his friend from the village. Lallu warmly welcomes Ghulam, offers him some space in his shack, and then takes him on a ride

to the city's tourist attractions. Much like Neel and Bhola, they go to the Gateway, the Taj, and other sights. When Ghulam expresses his awe at Bombay's grandeur, his friend remarks that it is grand outside but rotten inside. We are warned that things are not what they seem in the city. Sure enough, when the suburban train suddenly stops because someone has died under the tracks, a passenger remarks: "Why did he die under the train? The delay is costing me money! Just drag the carcass out. Why waste time?" When Ghulam expresses shock at this indifference, his friend says: "Give it time, you will also become indifferent."

Ghulam does not become indifferent, but we see an impersonal city emerge through his eyes. Taxi drivers eke out a miserable living and suffer humiliations inflicted by haughty passengers and heavy-handed policemen. Lallu's girlfriend's old father, who drove a taxi for thirty years, is now addicted to gasoline fumes. Shots of Marine Drive and Cuffe Parade seen through the taxi window are contrasted with the squalid shantytown in which the cab drivers live. But unlike the superficial and uncaring milieu of the rich, depicted through the conversations of passengers, there is humanity and solidarity in the world of taxi drivers. Lallu not only shares his shack with his friend but also gets him jobs, first as a taxi cleaner and then as a driver. He is Hindu, and Ghulam is Muslim. But religion does not stand between their friendship. Their world is cosmopolitan. Underlying it is not some developed philosophy of cosmopolitanism but a bond formed by village links and the experience of struggling to survive in the stone-hearted city. Gaman shares

this conception of Mumbai's vernacular cosmopolitanism with Chetan Anand's Taxi Driver (1954). But its style is realist, and the tone is melancholy. Unlike Taxi Driver's detached observer's perspective, Ali's film evokes the city through the protagonist's experience and emotions. As Ghulam drives his taxi, lost in the anxiety of gathering enough money to send home for his mother's medical treatment, a song plays in the background:

Seene mein jalan
Aankhon mein toofaan kyon hai?
Is Shahar mein har shakhs
pareshaan sa kyon hai?
....
Kya koi nai baat nazar aati hai hum mein?
Aainaa humein dekh ke hairan kyun hai?
[Why] this heartburn
Why these storm-filled eyes?
Why is everyone so troubled in the city?
....
Is there something new about me?
Why is the mirror aghast
at the sight of me?
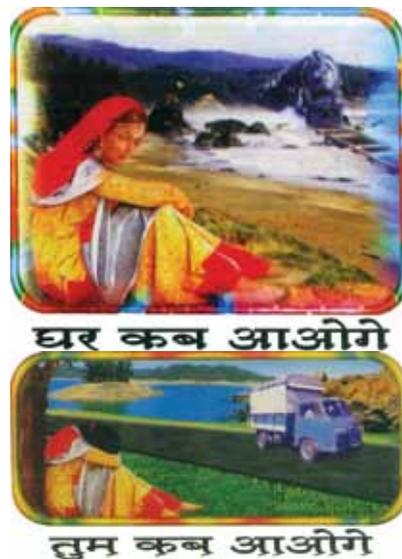
Taxi stickers

The merciless metropolis, the relentless routine of work, and the loneliness of separation from his wife have changed Ghulam. The cruel city even snatches his friend away when Lallu is killed by the hired goons of his girlfriend's family. They are opposed to their friendship because it threatens their designs on her as a passport to wealth. There is no limit to Bombay's inhumanity. How can Ghulam belong here? In the film's last scene, he goes to the train station to return home. But as the engine blows its whistle, we see Ghulam watching the train leave, his face framed by a row of steel bars. Bombay is not home, but that is where he lives.

What is home, then, for the immigrant taxi drivers? In her series Tum Kab Aaoge (When Will You Come), Devidayal delves into the immigrant taxi driver's imagined home in the city. The city's fleet of yellow and black taxis is manned predominantly by immigrants from North India. Most live and sleep in their taxis; it is their home on wheels. In 2004 stickers entitled "Tum Kab Aaoge" started appearing on these taxis. The images varied, but all of them pictured a pining woman against the background of a lush, green countryside and mountains, with a train engine, truck, or taxi in the foreground. The images, with the captions reading "When Will You Come" or "When Will You Come Home," express the immigrant's nostalgia for home. Uncannily, the question these images pose is also the one that Ghulam hears his wife ask in Gaman as he gazes at the green countryside through the door of the train racing toward Bombay. It is a question that his wife will keep asking in her letters throughout his stay in the city.

When she noticed the same question being asked by the image on taxi stickers, Devidayal set off to explore the fantasy homes the immigrants created in their taxis by decorating them with floral and velvet seat covers, miniature shrines, stickers, and other objects. Her paintings are not a journalistic report, nor an anthropological study of the materials she encountered in taxis. Rather, they are a "pictorial take based on a play of signs which morph reality into fantasy, fluidly erasing the boundaries between the two."[9]

Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy while insisting on their difference. The swans gliding through pristine waters, seen through the windshield, spill inside the taxi, appearing as a reflection on the dashboard, invading the inside world of the vehicle. The caption declares that the dream is closer to the dreamer than we might think, but set against the colorful yet tranquil image of swans is the darkened silhouette of the taxi driver, who watches them as images on a screen. The taxi driver's figure is dislocated from the ground. You cannot place him in the dreamy image on the windshield. He views the swan scene as a movie, sitting in a darkened theater, retaining his separation from the dreamscape on the screen. This point is stressed by the picture of the woman to the left, who stands in the doorway against a black background, her face half covered by shadows. Serving as a reminder of what the taxi driver has left behind, her image suggests that the taxi is not his home; he is out of place. In other paintings in the series, the dreamworld seeps into the taxi driver's

body, obliterating the distinction between the dreamscape and the dreamer.

But Devidayal does not allow illusion to overwhelm reality. There is always something that breaks the reverie -- the cityscape, the conspicuous yellow and black image of the taxi, the steering wheel -- and underlines the distinction between fantasy and reality. Her use of mixed media on canvas -- paint, photograph, and print -- underscores boundaries and distinctions. She unsettles the world the painting depicts by underlining the out-of-place nature of things, by drawing attention to the fantasy, and by her clever use of different materials.

Through these methods, her work suggests that the immigrant lives his reality in the city by assembling an imaginary home with objects around him, by putting together a world with irreconcilable things. Viewed against the illusions of home sold by the wily real estate promoters, Devidayal's paintings pay tribute to the inventive survival tactics of Mumbai's lonely taxi drivers.

Objects in the Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear, by Meera Devidayal. Mixed Media on canvas, 30 x 42 in. Courtesy: Anant Art Gallery, New Delhi.

Altamount Road, by Meera Devidayal. Digital print, oil, enamel, and epoxy galvanized steel sheet, 49 x 36 in. Courtesy: Meera Devidayal.

The portrayal of a resourceful and distinctive style of everyday, popular urbanism can be discerned in Devidayal's paintings. The world she presents in her Where I Live series is far removed from that of the architect and the urban planner. Once again, the theme is a dream home, and her subjects are poor immigrants. She does not romanticize them; nor does she share the reformer's response of recoil and outrage at the sight of their abysmally cramped and desperate living conditions. Devidayal's art represents not "slums" but homes.

Devidayal's compassionate engagement with the imagination of poor migrants, with people living on the edges of survival, is evident in the very medium of her art in Where I Live. Consisting of digitally printed photographs on recycled sheets of galvanized steel, her art incorporates the material of their lived lives, of huts fabricated with used, cast-off objects. The medium captures the "everyday alchemies of Bombay's informal sector" that "turn dross into gold, giving a second life to the broken and redundant objects of daily use."[10] She counteracts the coldness of steel by splashing its surface with color. The result is a work that not only pays tribute to the survival strategies of the poor by using recycled steel but also attributes them with richness and dynamism. Thus, in Altamount Road the bright photograph of a film star, affixed on a steel almirah, in striking contrast to the gray corrugated sheet, offers a cheerful portrayal of the poor's patched-together home. The reflected images of the television, the utensils stacked on top and beside the almirah, add a colorful dimension. Devidayal does not romanticize the life of the poor. Her use of different surfaces and the spotlight on dissimilar objects draw attention to the jagged world assembled by the poor while also recognizing their creativity and desires. The portrait that emerges is of an urbanism that turns necessity into opportunity, an imagination that squeezes color and pleasure from the gray and dreary conditions of the poor in Mumbai.

Everyday Tactics of Survival

The clichéd description of Dharavi as "Asia's largest slum" depicts the 175-hectare tract, housing eight hundred thousand people, as a place of misery and oppression. In the corporate and middle-class visions of Dharavi, it is an obstacle in Mumbai's path to achieving a "world-class" status. It is for this reason that many critics in India accuse the Oscar-winning film Slumdog Millionaire of portraying Mumbai in a bad light. For them, the film is one more example of the West's obsession with poverty and wretchedness when it comes to representing India. In fact, the critics share with the film the vision of Dharavi as an abject slum, rather than a place where the poor live and work with imagination and enterprise.

Prior to the late nineteenth century, Dharavi was a swamp inhabited by the Koli fishing community. Fishing died out as the swamp was filled. Poor migrants moved in from different parts of India, making the land habitable. Their resourcefulness transformed Dharavi into a flourishing economy. The eighteen-year-old Shamsuddin, for example, traveled all the way from Tamil Nadu to Dharavi in 1948, looking for work.[11] He worked initially in his uncle's rice-smuggling business, transporting the grain from the outskirts to the city to sell it at nearly ten times the original price. The rice business ended after a few years when his uncle moved back to the village and the cousins migrated to Pakistan. Shamsuddin survived by working first for a coal company and then at a printing press. He got married, and the couple moved into a ten-by-ten room in a "settled chawl" in 1961. A little later, Hamid, a man from his native village, arrived in Dharavi and made him a proposition. "Give me space and I'll make chiki [sesame brittle]." Shamsuddin procured him a shack and went from shop to shop selling chiki and other snacks. When Hamid moved away to Calcutta, Shamsuddin and his wife took over the business. They learned how to make chiki, which he sold in cinemas every day, returning home late at night. They packaged it and named their product "A-1 ckiki." It grew into a successful business employing twenty workers, who lived in the two-room chiki factory's loft.

Shamsuddin's story is not exceptional. Dharavi is full of such tales of migrants making a go of their lives. Their ingenuity and spirit have transformed Dharavi into a thriving economy amid poverty and squalor. Seen through the jaundiced eyes of the middle-class reformer the city is full of only claustrophobic density, fetid drains, garbage, and ugliness. But if you open yourself to observing the drive, the enterprise, and the spirit of survival amid the incredibly wretched physical conditions, you cannot help but be uplifted. Rarely do you see idleness and despair associated with this "slum." From the establishments manufacturing leather goods for export and selling knockoffs of designer brands on the main street to artisanal establishments in the tight inner lanes, the picture is one of pulsating energy. Recycling is a way of life and livelihood.

Dharavi is an economic success story. It has developed without any public state subsidy or assistance. Illegality thrives and is visible. Until police pressure chased him out to Tamilnadu in the mid-1980s, the notorious underworld don Vardarajan Mudaliar used to distill and distribute illicit liquor from his operating base in Dharavi. Today, although all kinds of illegal activities are openly carried out in the area, it is not infested with crime and violence, as the popular middle-class

Free enterprise in Dharavi

stereotype insinuates. Rather, Dharavi is a zone of booming free enterprise and a tribute to the ingenuity and hard work of the migrants, who come from everywhere in India. Tanners from Tamil Nadu, leatherworkers and artisans from Uttar Pradesh, potters from Gujarat, and migrants from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, and elsewhere work in Dharavi's amazing variety of trades, legal and illegal. Every religion is represented. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians coexist despite bouts of communal violence. Every linguistic group is present, but the language on the street is the mongrel tongue Bambaiya. A mix of all the regions from which people come, Dharavi is "allah ka gaon [God's village]," says Khatija, the old Muslim woman who migrated from Kerala decades ago.[12] It is a cosmopolitan mix brought together by dhandha -- business deals, clean and shady. Dharavi is pure Mumbai.

"No master plan, urban design, zoning ordinance, construction law or expert knowledge can claim any stake in the prosperity of Dharavi."[13] Though far from perfect, it represents a form of urbanism characteristic of what architect

Rahul Mehrotra calls the "kinetic city." He distinguishes the kinetic city from the static city, which is composed of architecture and monuments built with permanent materials. The kinetic city represents the city of motion -- "the kutcha city, built of temporary material"; it is temporal, a city in "constant flux."[14] In the apparent chaos of narrow streets crowded with people disgorged by suburban trains, in the constant making and remaking out of recycled materials in Dharavi, in the vital pulsating energy of the informal economy, in the exuberance and spectacle of wedding processions on the street, and in the multiple uses of space, he finds a dynamic urbanism. The vibrant urbanism of the kutcha city shares urban space with the static urbanism of the "pucca" (permanent, stable) city, colliding with it, provoking its wrath. The slum rehabilitation projects represent attempts to displace the kinetic city, to expunge its existence, and to order Mumbai to the dull discipline of the static city -- to the delight of real estate magnates and the middle-class heritage activists. Fortunately, the kinetic city survives in Dharavi; Mumbai's legendary everyday tactic of survival

with wit and enterprise stubbornly persists under the looming shadow of the bulldozers of "development."

The Layered City

Mehrotra's "kinetic city" is a city of layers, with multiple and successive historical slices of Mumbai coexisting in the same time and space. Henri Lefebvre wrote that urban space has a structure more like that of "flaky pastry" than like the homogeneous and isotropic space of classical mathematics.[15] This is true as much of the so-called bounded places of the cities of an earlier time as it is of the new urban constellations of shopping malls and the displaced poor.

You can get a vivid sense of this layered history in Chor Bazaar (Thieves' Market), the city's flea market. The place has intrigued me from the very first time I set eyes on it a few years ago. Since then, I have returned several times to the dense maze of shops that are located between Sardar Patel Road and Grant Road. As you traverse the narrow lanes packed tight with vendors and stores selling a bewildering array of goods -- genuine antiques and knockoffs, old coins, furniture, hardware, automotive parts, records, Hollywood and Bollywood film posters and lobby cards, shoes, clothes, and just plain junk -- it becomes clear that this is no ordinary flea market. An extraordinary history is on display here.

The objects on sale and the people who sell them embody the heritage of Mumbai's urban life. Yes, it is a market, but the trade in the debris of commodities of modern life here tells stories about the city. To make sense of these narratives, I had to begin with the name.

"Let me tell you how Chor Bazaar got its name," said Zafar Bhai, the owner of Jubilee Decorators, a shop selling antique furniture and decorative objects in Mumbai's legendary market. The owner of another furniture shop introduced me to Zafar Bhai as an old-timer, as someone who knows and has lived through Chor Bazaar's history. One look at this man in his seventies with his courtly manners, and you knew that there was something terribly odd and inappropriate about the bazaar's name. The soft cadence of his elegant North Indian Hindustani language spoke of a sophisticated urbanity, not devilish thievery. But he good-humouredly accepted Chor Bazaar as the name for the market where he earns an honest living.

"You see, the name goes back to the time when the Gateway of India was built, when Queen Victoria visited Bombay." He continued with a tale about a theft. "When her ship docked, she discovered that her violin was missing." It was the queen who ordered that the market be rechristened Chor Bazaar after the stolen violin was found on sale on Mutton Street. "This is how the place got its name."

Of course, Queen Victoria never set foot in Bombay. The Gateway was built to commemorate the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1911 and was completed only in 1924. I did not point out these inaccuracies. To be sure, the story is apocryphal, and yet it contains a representation of the past, one that is very different from that which appears in the archives. Like the bazaar, which exists on the margins of the mainstream markets, this historical representation

lurks outside the shadows of disciplinary history. There are no documentary records or commemorative plaques to substantiate this expression of the past; instead, it survives precariously in recycled stories as a faint impression, imperfect and obscure.

Enter the world of this past, and unexpected knowledge greets you. To begin with, let us take the colonial genealogy of the name suggested by the story. Flea markets are not unusual; all across the world one finds places for trade in the debris of modernity. But to my knowledge, nowhere are these places called Chor Bazaar. It is telling that this term was used in colonial cities to name sites for the trade in used goods.

Delhi also had one with this name. Such bazaars probably followed the establishment of orderly markets where colonial subjects were expected to act as modern bourgeois consumers. But when commodities sold in the organized and official precincts are used up, they lose the legitimacy conferred by the shine of newness. Faded and worn out, when these artifacts returned from the dead to assume a second life as recycled goods, they probably appeared as illegitimate. To the British, Chor Bazaar must have seemed an appropriate name for a place where Indians (who, in any case, frequently appeared as untrustworthy and dishonest in colonial stereotypes) bought goods to live stolen lives. It is no wonder, then, that Zafar Bhai's story pins responsibility on the British for the naming of the market.

Chor Bazaar probably followed the establishment of Crawford Market

and the founding of shopping arcades on D. N. (Hornby) Road during the late nineteenth century, when the city expanded beyond the Fort precincts. The Gazetteer, published in 1909, does not mention it, suggesting that the bazaar emerged only in the early decades of the twentieth century. By this time, the cotton mills had expanded, and the city was flush with poor migrants who were employed as mill workers. Its location in an area thoroughly revamped by the City Improvement Trust during the 1910s also suggests that the market made its appearance when Bombay became a thriving industrial city. Bhai's references to Queen Victoria (or the Prince of Wales) and the construction of the Gateway of India also suggest the same.

The apocryphal story, then, captures something of Mumbai's colonial heritage as a modern industrial city. But it refers to a heritage that is very different from that monumentalized in the parade of Gothic Revival buildings; rather than commemorating the self-representations of British power, it registers the colonial framing of the life cycle of commodities as they changed from their state of glittering newness in shopping arcades and established markets to their condition as old, used debris in Chor Bazaar.

Modernity and debris go hand in hand. As commodity production quickens the pace of life, it also hastens the speed of obsolescence. Not only does it label existing artifacts as traditional and thus outmoded, it quickly renders its own products out of date. Commodity production, aided by advertising, constantly strives to disseminate new styles and fashions, casting away

yesterday's goods as old-fashioned, as junk. You can find these outmoded commodities in Chor Bazaar -- old mariner's compasses, cuckoo clocks, Art Deco furniture and decorative objects, film memorabilia, and a baffling assortment of other goods. Each object tells you a story of Mumbai's urban life. Take, for example, old jazz records, which you find for sale in specialty stores. Besides telling us about the change in the recording technology and medium, the presence of these records in Chor Bazaar suggests a decline in the appreciation of jazz in Mumbai. Restaurants where jazz was regular fare until the early seventies either no longer exist or have moved on to other musical offerings.With the change in the social world that patronized jazz, the records too have moved on, ending up on the dusty shelves in Chor Bazaar. Look closely at the fusion music of Hindi films and Latin beats, and you will find the lost world of Goan musicians who were in the forefront of Western music in the city until the early seventies. Synthesizers and changes in musical taste in Hindi cinema have rendered this earlier form of musical cosmopolitanism obsolete. Visit the store selling old film

magazines, posters, lobby cards, and songbooks, and you become aware of an earlier technology of advertisement, now overtaken by television and computer graphics. The bazaar is a rich archive of such discarded histories.

At first glance, the odd collection of old artifacts in the bazaar appears as just that -- odd. But if you examine it carefully, you find that the arbitrariness repositions commodities; it tears them away from their original historical context and places them in a new environment. The unexpected juxtaposition of records and postcards, clocks and curios, posters and furniture, in the bazaar functions like a montage, breaking up the smooth and evolutionary surface of historical representation.You see the city's urban heritage not in a linear fashion but in the heretical arrangement of fragmentary and spatial combinations. History appears jagged and disjointed as your eyes move from old hardware parts to beautiful objects sculpted in glass, from jazz records of the sixties to knockoffs of Art Deco furniture fabricated today. The aura of heritage is broken by the arbitrary collection of commodities.

Collectors of discarded history in Chor Bazaar

If the ephemera on sale in Chor Bazaar offer us a heretical archive of Mumbai's commodity life, they also provide glimpses into changes in the fortunes of families. Goods end up here not only when they become obsolete but also when death and disputes break up families. Chor Bazaar is the repository of changed and broken families. Interviews with shop owners suggest that this was particularly the case during the 1940s and the 1950s, when the Partition saw both a flight and an influx of people. Muslim families who moved to Pakistan sold their belongings before seeking a new home in the new country. The fact that most of the Chor Bazaar merchants are Muslim may have eased these transactions. This was also the time when the outward trickle of Europeans began. If there was an outflow of people, there was also an inflow of immigrants, particularly the Sindhis, who made Mumbai their new home.

Chor Bazaar became one of the places where these refugees bought furniture sold by departing Muslims. The next two decades witnessed the departure of Parsi families to the UK, Canada, and Australia. Furniture dealers speak of these decades as Chor Bazaar's golden age, when the market was flush with quality goods. Parsis, in particular, were valued as sellers and buyers because of their strong preference for heavy, Victorian furniture. Well preserved, the exquisitely made Burma teak and rosewood furniture, designed in Victorian and modern styles, along with delicate, decorative objects, were bought from Parsis in estate auctions and household sales during the sixties and seventies. Apparently, this was when the market for used goods morphed into a bazaar for antiques.

Antiques emerge only with modernity, when mechanical reproduction deprives objects of their originality and authenticity. Devoid of any original essence and uniqueness, industrially produced goods acquire an aura only when they lose their novelty and are discarded. Then, what the city throws away as junk is recommmodified and assumes its second life as a residue of the past.

As representations of a disappeared era, as condensed remainders of an elusive past, antiques do not have use value; they are valued precisely because they are useless. No one actually uses these spittoons, clocks, picture postcards, and film posters. Even the delicate decorative furnishings you can buy at Bhai's store are valued as reminders of a bygone era and are used in film sets to evoke the past.

The aura of antiques springs from their value as remembrances, as evocations of style. For this reason, too, one finds copies of antiques in plentiful supply at the bazaar. Both owners and consumers will tell you that there are very few genuine antiques in Chor Bazaar; for those you have to go to expensive dealers elsewhere in the city who can authenticate their collections.

In the bazaar, you mostly get knockoffs, which lack the aura of uniqueness and genuine essence. Yet, the bazaar is always crowded with people. While some hunt for that rare thing that they cannot find anywhere else, others eagerly acquire copies of antique furniture and replicas of old gramophones. They are in the market for style. The city is

an emporium of styles. While modernity homogenizes urban life, standardizing individuals and their environment, it also creates a strong desire for differentiation. Style provides one way to assert individuality. The city is where you find the dandy, who draws attention to his person through fashion, flamboyance, and wit. "In the old days," said Bhai, "a hundred rupees bought you a good suit, shoes, and a tie; and with a little more money, you could throw in a bowler hat as well, and there you were -- a proper city man!" Today, one does not see dandies with bowler hats in the city, but one finds Mumbaikars furnishing their lives with both genuine antiques and copies secured from Chor Bazaar. Surround yourself with an old gramophone, Victorian and Art Deco furnishings, film memorabilia, and jazz records, and you can rescue

yourself from the modern jungle of urban anonymity and assert your uniqueness.

Not for nothing, then, does Chor Bazaar stand as the heretical heritage of the city. Existing in the shadows of the mainstream markets and carrying an air of illegitimacy both in its name and in the goods it transacts, the bazaar represents the city's history in junk, memorabilia, antiques, copies, and kitsch. There are no stories of a rise and fall, of glory and decline, but only the debris of Mumbai's modern life. You do not find history memorialized and frozen in a museum here. The remaindered past is alive, active in the present and exerting pressure on it by breathing life into what has been discarded as junk by history. [This essay is drawn from chapter 9 of my Mumbai Fables (Delhi: Harper-Collins, 2010)].

Notes

[1] Surendra Verma, Do murdon ke liye guldasta [Bouquet for Two Corpses] (Delhi: Radhakrishna, 1998), 22. All translations are mine.

[2] Ibid., 20.

[3] Gillian Tindall, City of Gold (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1982), 3-4.

[4] McKinsey and Company, Vision Mumbai: Transforming Mumbai into a World-Class City (Mumbai: Bombay First, 2003), vii.

[5] Government of Maharashtra, Transforming Mumbai into a World-Class City: First Report of the Chief Minister's Task Force (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 2004).

[6] Darshini Mahadevia and Harini Narayan, "Slumbay to Shanghai: Envisioning Renewal or Takeover?" in Inside the Transforming Urban Asia: Processes, Policies & Public Actions (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 2008), 94-131, particularly 121- 27.

[7] Farah Baria, "A Pile of Dirt Worth Its Weight in Gold," Sept. 24, 2006, http://www.indianexpress. com/news/a-pile-of-dirt-worth-its-weight-in-gold/13295/2 (accessed July 20, 2009).

[8] Cited in Meher Pestonji's catalog essay in Dream Home (Mumbai: Chemould Gallery, 2003).

[9] Nancy Adjania, "Gaman/Aagaman: The Interstitial Spaces between Departure and Arrival," in Tum Kab Aaoge (exhibition catalog) (New Delhi: Anant Art Gallery, 2005).

[10] Nancy Adjania, "Narrative Geographies: Meera Devidayal's Map of Bombay," Where I Live (exhibition catalog) (Mumbai: Chemould Prescott Road, 2009).

[11] Kalpana Sharma, Rediscovering Dharavi: Stories from Asia's Largest Slum (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 76-78. Sharma's sensitive & insightful account demolishes the stereotypical image of the area as a miserable slum of squalor and crime.

[12] Ibid., 36.

[13] Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava, "Taking the Slum Out of 'Slumdog,'" New York Times, February 21, 2009.

[14] Rahul Mehrotra, "Learning from Mumbai," Seminar 530 (October 2003).

[15] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 86.