

Reposition of Culture in Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*

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Abstract: The Rich culture tradition of Bombay has been exploited by the rich, powerful and the religious faith this glimpse was seen in the work of Suketu Mehta. This book waves his personal experience of the city and with the people who witnessed its change. Virtue has lost its value, religious its truth, the rich and politicians have turned as the decision makes. In the first part it covers the politics and power struggle; in second part he shifts his focus upon entertainment industry and sex work. In third part he mentions the binary division of Bombay by all this microscopic view of Bombay it shows the both positive and negative as the two sides of the coins.

Key words: Political, Sex worker, riots, bar line, history.

Suketu Mehta is an Indian American writer, essayist, and journalist. He does not like to be limited by genre. He writes fiction, non-fiction, and screenplay. His writings mainly carry the themes of culturally entrenched racism, immigration. He won a fellowship of the New York foundation for the arts. He has won Whiting Award (1997), O.Henry Prize, Pulitzer Prize (2005), Kririyama Prize for maximum city. He has also worked as a screenplay writer for these films: New York, I Love you, Mission Kashmir.

Culture is one of the important aspects of human life. To find out the history of a particular group or an individual, the basic and necessary thing is to trace their culture and tradition, which indirectly shows that culture have, plays the role of a group or person identity. That culture heritage has been became hybridity by the passing of time.

The writing of the human beings during the entire era of history have reflected the culture, lifestyle, society and the polity of contemporary society. In this process, each culture evolved its own language and created a huge literary base. This enormous base of literature provides

us a glimpse of the evolution of each of its languages and culture through the span of centuries (IAAC 11.2)

India is the land of diversity, wherein each state has its own culture. The South and the North vary almost in every walk of life. Suketu Mehta in *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* depicts the culture of the Bombay city. As time passes certain aspects of culture also changes, as language, culture is also not static it is dynamic. This change is victimised by the protagonist, who is the writer himself. Mehta has divided the book into three parts. Mehta encounters many personalities and learns about the pathetic condition of the deterioration of the culture in India. The rich cultural tradition of India has been exploited by the rich, powerful and the religious fanatic. It was not so simple to give many details about Mumbai, though he stayed in Bombay for two-and-a-half years. Bombay was once called as Heptanesia the city of Seven islands by Ptolemy in A. D 150. The Portuguese called it *Bom Bahia* or Bombain-Portuguese for “good bay”. In 1538, they called it *Boa-Vida*. Another story about its name belongs to 14th century. So some Hindu names for these islands were Manbai, Mambai, Manbe, Mumbadevi, Bumbai and now Mumbai. Bombay culture is unique in India. It is known as the trade city and the city of celebration. Every action that happens in Bombay is seen in the work of Suketu Mehta even some unseen world of Bombay is also bravely spectating by him. He does not forget to mention the gateway of India built by King, George V. After colonisation the customs, habits and culture of the Indians have changed. The impact of globalization has brought Westernization to every corner of the Asian Countries. The 21st century has marked a vast change in the culture which is portrayed by Mehta. Virtue has lost its value, religion its truth, the rich and politicians have turned to be Gods. There seems to be a dichotomy in every aspect of life.

Suketu Mehta said in his Ego Online Interview that he had always thought that his mission as a writer was to write about the human being struggle underneath the foot of history. This thought of Suketu is also seen in his work *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* which portrays a vivid picture of Mumbai in all dimensions like: history, politics, sex worker. In a single book Suketu Mehta had given the whole cultural history of Bombay. This book is first concerned with Mehta’s return to Bombay. He grew up in India then he moved to New York with his parents at the age of fourteen. He spent much of his childhood in Bombay and after twenty-one years later he is impending it as an adult. This insider-outsider perspective informs how he had seen the city upon his return. The book weaves his personal experience of the city with people who witnessed its change, as well as the lives of everyday residents in a variety of social and cultural situation. One important change is the name of the city: it changed from Bombay to Mumbai in 1995.

Mehta continues to refer to the city as Bombay throughout the book. Mehta had divided the book into three parts the first, part covers the politics and power struggle in India, which shows the in-depth view of the historical events. Suketu has also pictured the riot, which happened in Bombay between 1992-1993, very clearly. The riots happened due to the demolition of Babri Masjid, which created hatredness between

Hindus and Muslims, which was meant to be created by some political parties for their own favour, this hatredness still exists in Bombay. They created this in order to get the vote in election; they had generated the religious conflict. “No one will leave the house on that date” (MCBLAF Part 1) until now, people do not forget December 6. Riots first took place in Jogeshwari area where Hindus are living and Muslims are in slum which is the center of that area Suketu purposely makes conversation with Sunil who is a deputy leader of Jogeshwari. Sunil explains about his relationship with Muslims in that area, once his daughter was sick and no doctors could cure her, so he took his daughter to the Muslim holy man, and then she get cured of her illness. He was very close with Muslims but as a member of party, he was against them. After the riot, the political party told Muslims to “GO BACK TO PAKISTAN” (Part 1). The riot affected the thinking capacity of the educated people who have become anti-Muslim. The political party had police in their hand too. The riot had separated the friendship between Hindus and Muslim, Suketu’s conversation with the slum area peoples, which was filled with the majority of Muslims, shows how they had nationality pride in them “This is our watan” –homeland, “Whatever it is, it’s our India” (Part 1). In addition, they insisted a point that they had voted and have rights to live here, suddenly one young man got angry and expressed his own agony that nobody was arrested in the riot for killing his brother but when a Hindu family died, eleven Muslims were arrested. The law was equal for all the people in India there were not separate laws for Hindu and Muslims but at that time, the law was in the hands of the political party. If the members of the party were Muslims they must have supported Muslims, from this one can easily understand the cunning behaviour of the political parties in order to get the vote of Hindus they had used Muslims as scapegoats they do not give importance for religion but for votes.

In the second part, he shifts his focus to the entertainment industry and sex work in Bombay. Sunday gave them rest and happiness and helps them to feel as a human being. People run during week days and spend Sunday for their own happiness and the author also shares his experience in Bombay who had passed a year vadapav was the food eaten by chaul dweller, the cart puller, the street urchins, the clerks, the cops and gangster. This shows that Vadapav was the food which was eaten by all class of people without any differentiation as rich or poor.

India is one of the lands, which gives more respect for women. In most of the houses, women take the role of decision makers and some of the women go to jobs to support their families financially. The society, which respects women, had also categorized whom to be respected and whom not to by their choice of job. Certain professions are considered mean a dancer in clubs and bars had to face the society thrice stronger than a normal woman did. The society does not know anything about her personal life but they are ready to assassinate her character and blame her for doing such job. Even as a dancer Monalisa did not cross her limits but the society had its own vision of this kind of profession, they unknowingly or sometimes knowingly spoil her life. Suketu also thinks like that and offers money to a bar dancer Monalisa to speak

with him about her life as a bar dancer, through the conversation Suketu develops a positive thought about her because she refused to get the money.

She tells me about the bar she works in and its dancers. Sapphire has the best girls in the city, good sexy dancers, with good figures and height, fair, with long hair. Most of the bar-line girls come from the villages; they are very few native Bombayites. They are brought into the bar line when they're thirteen or fourteen by their parents, an older sister, or an agent; by this time they're in their mid-twenties, they're too old for it. (Part 2)

They do not get into this work out of their own choice rather they are sent to this work by their own parents when they reach teenage of thirteen or fourteen. They save their money and send them to their parents in village to buy house. Suketu interviews Monalisa and gathers this information. Her life as a bar dancer is not easy; she has to face many struggles as an independent woman. Dancers are used in bars in order to cover the customers, all the dancer girls are fully dressed and indulge their customers to drink more, and they do not sleep with their customers. As a girl she also has all the emotions of love, anger, hatred, longingness...etc. But she develops a negative connotation about her marriage life because of the society.

No, they won't. Even if love happens, how could I enter his family? What if I went somewhere with them and somebody recognized me, one of the customers from Rajasthan and Bangalore to see me" Besides, she says, she has no interest in getting married. "I am standing on my own feet; I am not living on anyone else. I never want to have to stretch out my hand towards my husband for five thousand rupees to go shopping.(Part2).

All her family problems and her breakups affected her psychologically which resulted in suicide several times. She got the company of Honey who was a transgender and later transferred as a bitch by the society. Both of them not had met sweet men and not felt the protection of men leading their life as a single courage woman, both of them desire is to come out of the bar and to lead an independent life because there was a problem in bar line "it's all going western"(Part2). Before ending about Monalisa, Suketu mentions the desire of her to talk in the stage of Miss India not as a winner but to express herself in front of the millions of people gathered there, "I'm in the bar line, but I am not doing anything wrong. I'm just dancing here" (Part 2). This shows the cognitive effect of independent women which was a gift by society for her courage.

Suketu had time to meet Sunil again, which shows the difference in democratic India. Once he was a deputy leader of a particular area but now, he got the position as Special Executive Officer who had done many murders and spoiled life of public but now he became rich and more political power even though he did not have enough education. This shows that anybody can be elected for names of without casting votes. India is denoted as a democratic country but the fact is different, one can do any type of crime and escape from it, if they are in power.

The final part focuses upon a writer Babbanji, who is a young poet who lives on the streets. Mehta follows him every day and comes to know about his poverty. The poet's perspective on Bombay offers a poignant closing analysis of the city. Bombay is the city filled with both desire and hope. Somehow, it seems to be filled with poverty, corruption, violence. It is the city of contradictions. "Why do people still live Bombay?" Mehta asks in frustration. "Every day is an assault on the individual's senses from the time you get up, to the offices you work in, in the forms of entertainment you are subjected to". Mehta's Bombay a city in heat as he memorably calls it part history, part travelogue, part memoir, his work illuminates this supercharged world through its people.

Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found gives the exact depiction of Bombay history and its culture through the interview which show the past time of Bombay which include riots and authors own experience. *Maximum City* shows the minute details of Bombay, both positive and negative as the two sides of the coins.

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