

Urban Space in Human Life -within and beyond the Spatiotemporal Dimension; A
Comparative Study of 'Bombay' and 'London' in Rohinton Mistry's *Family
Matters* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*

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Abstract:

Urbanization and Industrialization are twin sisters and they always walk together though with their distinctive features. Since the time of the growth of human civilization urban space and city play an important role in human life and very often the urbanization in the countryside and westernization of the city changes its image wholly. 'London' and 'Bombay'(now Mumbai) are cities of dreams and hopes, the cities where one learns to live, and to explore many new dimensions of human living that flames one's ambitions and transform one's life forever. A city has turned out to be a difficult place to survive with immense mushroom growth of population. 'The city-life as depicted by Dickens and Mistry shows an entirely different picture which offers a potential and feasible area of study to explore and question the deeper meaning of life and existence and at the same time it leads this paper to search the significance of urban space in human life which shapes and reshapes one's individual human experience where the call of Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' and Camus 'existentialism' arbitrates within and beyond the spatiotemporal dimensions. This paper also aspires to trace the instances of reconstruction and deconstruction of human belief and philosophy in the urban space which have been magically

encapsulated by Rohinton Mistry and Charles Dickens, the two stalwarts of their time and space though they were not contemporary.

Keywords: realism, urbanity, city, politics, westernization

Introduction:

Rohinton Mistry is often compared to Charles Dickens for his representation of political milieu, social realities and artistic imagination of the city and urban life. As 'London' is to Charles Dickens, Bombay is to Rohinton Mistry. They both bring out the dark and the colourful side of the city in their own ways. Dickens *Great Expectations* and Mistry's *Family Matters* hold a similar view on the social and political images of their countries. They focus on the social realism of their time and the suffering and exploitation of the down trodden and neglected one in urban space. They both display the dark and oppressed lives of the middle class and Dalit. Dickens and Mistry's work is mainly for the issues faced by the common man which voices it out to the world. The representation of city in the novels of Mistry and Dickens makes them connected with their hometown and love for the place they live in.

Charles Dickens is regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era. He was born in Portsmouth. He is recognized as the literary genius by the 20th-century writers. He writes about the poor social conditions and comic characters. Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay that will be the reason; his works are mostly settled in and around Bombay. Bombay and London are the financial center in their respective countries and it is a place for the refugees and people who are looking for opportunities and livelihood.

Dickens' novels *Tales of Two cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Oliver Twist* bring out the conditions of human life and Mistry's works *A Fine Balance*, *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey*, expose the urban position and realities of the society. If it was industrial revolution which created a complete change in the city of London and affected the middle-class people then for Mistry it was westernization which affected the lives of ordinary people. Charles Dickens' works show the displeasure of the changing city through urbanization and development in the city and Mistry shows the disagreement on the changing of names of the places and beautification of the city. The political manipulations, corruption and altering law that affect the common man are shown by Mistry and Dickens respectively.

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens is set in Victorian England at the time where great economic changes started taking concrete shape by giving more urban space and comfort to human life in the country. The character Pip narrates tale of urban life in the city of London which gives opportunities to the people for better human experience with unmatched pace from the country to take a life in the city. The novel tells about the relation between home and the city. In *Family Matters*, Mr. Kapur tells about the city and its nostalgic past. The character of Mr. Kapur in *Family Matters* by Mistry brings out the changing Bombay. The political dominance towards the economically poor people has been shown openly in his works. The character of the novel Mr. Kapur shows the emotions and realities of Mistry and the people of Bombay. In *Great Expectations* when Pip visits the Barnard's Inn he finds it is different from the village. The author brings out the change they have made which has been disagreed in the novel.

"I supposed that establishment to be a hotel kept by Mr. Barnard, to which the Blue Boar in our town was a mere public-house. Whereas I now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit or a

fiction, and his Inn the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for tom-cats."(Dickens,21)

Dickens and Mistry's works are filled with the nostalgic moments of the city to bring out to the readers about how it has been changed over the past. When Pip visits Newgate with Mr. Wemmick he tells about the displeasure he feels as he passes through the lodge and finds out the disorder in the city. Pip has come from the countryside and finds it so different from his imagination. Now when the place, street, and buildings are changed suddenly, it was difficult for him to digest. He was trapped in between the city that is new and developing than the countryside he lived in.

"It was visiting time when Wemmick took me in, and a potman was going his rounds with beer; and the prisoners, behind bars in yards, were buying beer, and talking to friends; and a frowzy, ugly, disorderly, depressing scene it was."(Dickens,33)

Mistry's character Mr. Kapur tells about Bombay that the city is entirely altered than what he is seeing now. He says with his experience that only in a city like Bombay everything is possible even if you don't have anything you can grow well in Bombay. Kapur used to collect the old photos of the city and he compares the old city with the new one. He felt sad about the changes that are going on but he could not be able to do anything about that. He says that we have to enjoy the beauty of anything when you have that with you, after losing it you can only know the worth of that. Here 'her time of innocence', he means when the city is not eyed by politics. "These are my beautiful Bombay's baby pictures. Priceless. Her time of innocence. Now, look at the other one." [Mistry,153]

Mistry and Dickens feel the same way about the city that they lived and loved once and they could not able to withhold the changes in the place and buildings. These characters are presented as a person who lived and loved the city more than any other person. The industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries has transformed the lives of many in the city. Dickens shows the life of rich and poor in the city and Mistry brings out the life of middle-class men in his works. London was the prime capital in the mid of nineteen century for financial and political growth. Bombay was the city of dream and settlement of life. Both cities play an important role in the novels. The problems and emotions caused by the changing of the entire city resulted in the work of the authors.

Great Expectations centered on the life of a young man who comes to the city to make his fortune and trying to be a part of the city. *Family Matters* is about the importance of being at home where one feels safe and secure.

The narration of Dickens and Mistry are different in terms of providing a certain function and importance of urban space in human life and its value in exploring deeper meaning of life and living but the ways they try to bring out the issues are the same. Dickens's narration of home is about urban and domestic. In *Great Expectations*, the protagonist Pip is not finding a final home and place of belongingness. In Mistry's *Family Matters* the characters find a home and feel belonged in the homeland. Pip feels that the city is growing fast that he could not able to accept the unoriginal place which was one's his home. Pip's imaginary city is different from the original realities of the city where he could not accept the facts and tries to live in the fictional world of his own. Mistry's Mr.Kapur accepts the changes in the city but tries to fight against the brutalities of the city.

The urbanization and realities of the cities are brought up by both the authors in their works. Their novels try to express the problems and difficulties of the people in the changing city. The problems and solutions of family life have been shown by Dickens and Mistry.

Bombay and London can be compared to the "overurbanization" as Davis referred to in the "Planet of Slums" which clearly shows the poverty and unemployment of the people living in the metropolitan city. Davis says that the globalization and informal urbanization of metropolitan cities changed the complete lives of the people. Mistry has explained the same problem with the characters to show us the difficulties of the people because of the urbanization of the city. Dickens brings out how it looks different for a person from the countryside to accept and grow in the city where he feels ashamed of his birth as a blacksmith and tries to be one among the gentlemen in the city.

Mistry brings out the narration with history and politics and surrounding life but Dickens shows the single-family and protagonist telling the story of his youthful self. Mistry explains the dark side of the political issues which affected the lives of many families and individual. Dickens tells about the industrialization and how it affected the individual. The cities' social and political events are brought out by both writers. Mistry's character Mr. Kapur defining his vision of Bombay that how it accepts anyone who enters for a living, the city is ready to accumulate anyone who comes. It never checked on where the person belongs or his caste or community. It is ready to accept everyone as Bombayites but the communal riots and political influences that make them apart.

"The same way, Bombay makes rooms for everybody. Migrants, businessmen, perverts, politicians, holy men, gamblers, beggars, wherever they come from, whatever caste or class, the

city welcomes them and turns them into Bombayites. So, who am I to say these people belong here and those don't secular good, communal bad, BJP unacceptable, Congress lesser of evils?" [Mistry,362]

Pip's character had a different perspective of the city he thinks that bad things never happen in the city like the village as everyone there are well settled and when he finds everyone cheats others to find a living he is confused and Pip asks his friend Mr.Wimmik in Mr.Jagger's office about London where people get cheated, robbed and murdered for money but he says that everywhere those things happen and there are lots of people. This brings out the dark and criminal side of the city. "You may get cheated, robbed, and murdered in London. But there are plenty of people anywhere, who'll do that for you."(Dickens,21)

Mistry gives importance to political events like 'Emergency' that changed the life and dreams of many people and made them suffer and regret their life in the city has brought out openly. The novel tells about the struggles and suffering of the ordinary people and how it has been balanced in the end. Emergency period in India as it was "full of horror and real as life, but also full of life" they talk about the things that don't work in India as there are a lot of things where people can't go against the government. The problem created by the Shiva Sena is one among them as they try to change everything by forcing the people. They don't think about the freedom of people to follow their wishes. They are forcing everyone to follow the same language and culture which is not possible to accept.

Dickens puts the events differently as he brings out the social realities and practices of the city and countryside with the character. He brought out Pip's social class when he was in the countryside and when he reached the city how it has been changed. Pip explains the village that

he lives and the things that are surrounded by him. He says in a way that he is not happy with the place and he is interested in agriculture and likes to move to the city and enjoy his life.

"Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such time I found out for certain, that this bleak palace overgrown with nettles was the churchyard." (Dickens, 1)

Pip reaches London with Great Expectations of enjoying life with good earnings, but it doesn't seem to be real life in the city which makes him disappointed. He finds it is not easy to have a normal life in a city without good wealth. Pip forgets his hometown and his community as he wants to be one of the gentlemen of London. Dickens shows how people try to forget all the emotions and feelings as their intention is only to get a good income and food for the family. Dickens explains how the countryside has changed from the former poor financial situations to a different thing after he left for London. He tells about the urbanization that changed the countryside as everyone tried to move from their place to the city and the place and buildings left as it was. "There was no house now, no brewery, no building whatever left, but the wall of the old garden. The cleared space had been enclosed with a rough fence, and looking over it, I saw some of the old ivy had struck root anew and was growing green on the low quiet mound of ruin". (Dickens, 458)

Mistry and Dickens explore the same thoughts that migrating to the city brings lots of wealth and status and give urban space to enjoy human life at its best on surface level probably. Pip moves to the city to grow up as a gentleman and earn a good amount of money. In the same way, Mr. Kapur says how his father reached Bombay without anything and become prosperous. "... But

Bombay treated us well. My father started over, with Zero, and became prosperous. The only city in the world where this is possible." [Mistry, 151]

Mistry says about his community who left Iran and reached India without anything and living a successful life. He brings out the love for the land that made them prosperous. The whole thing is changed now because of the political dominance of the country. He says that nobody has the right to discriminate against them because they are not Marathas. He refers to the problems created by the political parties over the language and community. The people are not happy with any of these things because it has changed the overall Bombay which was the dreamland of many people.

Mistry's Bombay has a different image as he has grown up in Bombay his way of presenting it is in a different narration as he expresses love and liveliness of the city. Kapur's Bombay is different, it's like a woman who treated everyone with gratitude and love. He feels that the buildings and streets in Bombay will always remain the same but as the year goes he can see the changes brought by the Shiva Sena and Political parties who force the people to change the name of the streets and new constructions for factories and industries approved by the government transformed the beautiful city into a terrible city as he feels it. He says to Yazad that he is ready to do anything to save her life.

"..... What I feel for Bombay you will never know. It's like the pure love for a beautiful woman, gratitude for her existence, and devotion to her living presence. If Bombay were a creature of flesh and blood, with my blood type, Rh-negative – and very often I think she is – then I would give her a transfusion down to my last drop, to save her life." [Mistry,152]

The character of Mistry lives and dies for the urbanization of the city unlike the character of Dickens. Mistry's character shows a different attachment that he has with the city and narrates it touchingly. Dickens tells about the Victorian age where he criticizes the power of money and wealth in society. Mistry brings it out in a different way by connecting it to unemployment and poverty in the city.

Dickens' Pip was pushed from the urban area to modern city and he was at the margin, he makes a way to understand the situation that he is going through and tries to accept it and move on with it. The character was not able to understand and belong to the city that has a modern approach to everything. Pip dwells in the city but he could not be the one among them but Mr. Kapur's life ends with an accidental death as Shiva Sena activists stab him for not writing the name of his shop to Mumbai. By these things it brings out that there is no value for life even though you loved everything that was surrounded by your side, he ended up giving his life because of the small change he refused to do because he loved to keep his memories of the Bombay, not of Mumbai.

"To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, the transformation of ourselves and the world -- and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are." Marshal Berman gives the real image of how things will change because of westernization. The belonging of ourselves is lost while we are trying to follow what we can't overtake completely. For Mistry and Dickens urbanization, industrialization and westernization of the city are the main cause of the changes that took place. These changes have two faces one is for the good cause and other because of the political and economic issues that occur.

The city that we see in the works of Mistry plainly shows that the city has been transformed from a normal city to a well-known and largest city in India. The name of the city was changed to Mumbai from Bombay, the names of the streets have been changed which show as the childhood memories of many people have been lost just because, it not present in that place now. The place where they grow up is not the same when they are telling their stories to their children's it looks like the place is nowhere to be seen. The recollections, ambitions hopes and feelings of many people have been lost because of the modifications of the city.

Dickens' Pip tells about the place differently in the end as the place he grew up and the buildings are there yet, still, he recognizes the place where old house and brewery were. This shows that how much one tries to move away from his land still he cannot forgets the things that once his favorite memory.

"I could trace out where every part of the old house had been, and where the brewery had been, and where the gate, and where the casks. I had done so, and was looking along the desolate garden walk when I beheld a solitary figure in it."(Dickens, 482)

This line tells about Dickens' way of expressing the changes that undergo in the name of urbanization and industrialization but everything stays in the memory of the people who loved and lived there.

Mistry's and Dickens' narration of the city has a different way of expressing their thoughts and views of the city. Dickens' tells about the changes that a countryside man feels when he enters the city for his living and how the changes make him a different person. Pip was from a hardworking countryside blacksmith but as he starts life in the city he forgets the hard-working mentality and tries to earn quickly. The imagination of the city by Pip turns out to be the wrong

one as he finds it is not as expected. Pip's thoughts of being the wealthy person changes as he finds the urbanization and less fortune of his dreams of becoming rich. The dark and criminal and unpleasant reality of the city shuts out the dreams that he had about the city.

The character of Kapur has been a draw so well by Mistry which makes the reader imagine the beautiful city in two different images of old and the new city. He brings out the complete changes that happened in the city over the years. He shows how good life in Bombay was then it is now and gives the current situation of Bombay as the traffic increases and the street has changed, people don't have value for other fellow beings. He feels that humanity has been lost in everyone. He even gives about the political drawbacks of the city like congested pathways, uneven roads, and pathholes and traffic problems.

Conclusion:

Dickens' narration is with lots of satire and humor but Mistry brings out the fiction based on facts which makes it look like fiction. Their techniques are different but affection and representation of the city is relative. Charles Dickens uses Pip as a representation to tell about urbanization in the period of industrialization and Mistry uses Mr. Kapur as the image to show the Westernization in the city. They both give a glimpse of city life and its issues in their narration. Mistry's Bombay stays the same even now we can find the slum areas in Mumbai which means even if you change the name of the place, streets and things also; it is not possible to change the mind, way of living, character, and behavior of the people. The fortune and realities of the city stay similar in their writing.

Mistry keeps his character in the novel to tell about the political realities and changes brought to the city and ends in a sad reality as he wants to show the minute issues that affected the lives of

many through the character. Dickens' puts the protagonist away from his home to find a place in the city. Pip's ambition to become rich is what brings him down with debt and problems but Kapur's love for his city is the reason for his death.

For Mistry Bombay is a corrupted and dying city that lost its charm and beauty. His writings are realistic, formal and show the helpless condition of the people. Dickens' writings have a cultural and romantic touch to it. In *Family Matter*, he brings out the life in general and the realities of many. Dickens shows the life of the individual and the situations he went through. The comparison of Mistry and Dickens can be made about the way they represent life in the city and countryside, the lost memories and realities that overpower the dreams of many have been shown similarly. They brings out the city that is the financial center and largest city, it is a place to the refugees and people who are looking for opportunities and livelihood and how it captivates the people from countryside and every part of the country. The gradual changes that happened in the city of London and Bombay have brought out Dickens's and Mistry's love and affection towards the city which can be seen through the characters. To sum up, the representation of urban space in both the narratives are interestingly engaging and informative which can be felt beyond the spatiotemporal dimensions and at the same time leave us with some questions to explore further as to the concern of eco-friendly environment for all the bio-diversity in an era of smart cities.

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