



**Research Paper: Representation of Bombay (Mumbai) in the select Poems of
Nissim Ezekiel, Dilip Chitre, Gieve Patel and Imtiaz Dharker**

Rajesh P. Dangar

A Research Scholar

Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies
Saurashtra University,
Rajkot.

Abstract: Mumbai is a city of dreams, fame, name, money but it has its dark side too. It can be felt by the people who actually live there. Human values are decaying here everyday, it can give you a lot and can take everything from you as well. Such is a theme or subject of this paper and for the same four poems have been analysed here. The city has become an island and people who are living here are compared to a dragon by Ezekiel. While in Chitre's view once it's seemed to him worthy, to write a poem, but at the end

He changed his mind too. In the third poem, every Indian find relatable situations and in the last poem, Dharker do not find the city same as it used to be.

Keywords: *Bombay, Mumbai, City, Island, Metropolitan, Alienation, Old vs. New, Humanity, Train, Cafe.*

Writing is to showing to the world, the world that you are seeing, so this can be benefited in this way, how London was looked during the time period of William Wordsworth and how he was looking it, is recorded in his Sonnet 'London, 1802' the Sonnet was composed in 1802 but was published for the first time in "*Poems, in Two Volumes*" (1807).

And today is the year of 2023, so it has been almost two decades and twenty years since then. So, firstly, We are getting a picture of the London of 19th century. Another point is, that, it is very important for our society, for our identity, and for our development and that is comparing today's scenario with the day of which is shown in the poem. So it can be taken as a kind of measurement for the progress that we have made so far.

Primarily the poem addressed to one of the greatest English poets Milton saying that His presence is much needed at present time and only he can save his city with his nobility and virtue. Because according to Wordsworth, societal values have been degraded, people have become selfish now. England was a driving force, and a vibrant center of industrialization, but, to Wordsworth, the country's technological advancements mean nothing compared to its decadence of values.



Reading this poem today in 21st century, We have to think that, even now, have we come out from that societal evils? Have We observed that problem that showed in the poem? Our endeavour should also be directed towards solving such problems. So, such small literary pieces showing us our picture of the past and present.

Similarly, this paper will discuss four English poems that present the picture of India's cultural capital and one of the biggest cities of India, Mumbai. In India, what is so special about Mumbai? Mumbai is known for its lively and cosmopolitan atmosphere, as well as its rich history and culture. The city has long been associated with the film industry and is often referred to as the “Bollywood capital.” Mumbai is famous for its bustling markets, street food, and iconic landmarks such as the Gateway of India. So these and so many other features of the city attract people from all over India, and some of them turn into artists, actors, traders, writers etc. And thus people from all over India settled there. So that results in one group of poets called Bombay Poets. Bombay Poets (or, Bombay School of Poets) was one of the founding schools of poets of Indian English literature of the post-independence era, consisting of both prose and verse. So even Bombay can also be considered as a capital for Indian English poetry in post independent India.

In these four poems, three out of them are written by Indian English writers and one is by a Pakistani-Scottish writer. In all these five poems, We will see and examine how Bombay has been presented in these poems.

Nissim Ezekiel, the father of modern Indian English poetry, and one of the members of Bombay Poets calls this city an Island. He has written a poem titled Island and it opens like:

Unsuitable for song as well as sense

the island flowers into slums

and skyscrapers, reflecting

precisely the growth of my mind.

I am here to find my way in it. (lines 1 to 5)

The word Island is used metaphorically for Bombay (Mumbai) city. It represents the isolation and disconnectedness of humanity from each other in this metropolitan city. According to the poet, the city is not suitable for song and for sense because art gives us happiness. The city is not even worth looking and it is not giving pleasure, happiness and kind of positive vibes to the speaker. Here we come to know that the speaker of the poem is a writer because he himself declared that the city is unsuitable for song. This is the direct statement the speaker gives to their readers. So here we can also feel the poet's sadness. Further he indicates



his growth. The growth of his mind here indicates he is as a poet not finding this city to be worth looking at and even worth living and worthy to write about. So a feeling of alienation and isolation is strongly represented here. Speaker of this poem finding his way in it, he is asking for help to come out from these feelings of unhappiness, alienation and uncertainty of the things that are happening in the city. But at the end he finds that nobody is going to help him and take his own counsel and he consoles himself. Now what has put poet in such situations in answer to that, he gives description of the people of the city and says:

and dragons claiming to be human. (line no. 10)

This line shows how humanity has vanished in the people of this city. Poet calls these people dragons. This is not just the case in Mumbai but We can see it today in every city. So this is the suggestion from the poet to their readers about the condition of human beings. But even in this agony, there is one thing that gives him pleasure and helps them to forget everything about past and future and put him in the present moment and that happens to be nature.

Bright and tempting breezes

Flow across the island,

Separating past form the future;

The the air is still again

As I sleep the fragrance of ignorance.

How delight the soul with absolute

Sense of salvation, how

Hold to a single willed direction? (lines 11 to 18)

In the entire poem there is no mention of Bombay or Mumbai, so how can we say that it is about Bombay. The answer to this question we can get from the poem itself. Poet says himself that He cannot leave this city because he was born here. Further poet says everything changes here everyday like miracles, so he also used to it, so he also accepts the changing nature of the city as a good native should do.



Similarly there is another poem by another famous Indian English writer Dilip Chitre on Bombay. Dilip Chitre (1938 2009) is best known for his bilingual contributions to Marathi and English literature. He was one of the foremost Indian poets and critics to emerge in the post-independence India. He was born in Gujarat but at the age of 13 he moved to Bombay with his parents. Where he completed his further education so Bombay has influenced him significantly. The title of his poem is *Ode to Bombay*. Ode means according to Cambridge Online English Dictionary; a poem expressing the writer's thoughts and feelings about a particular person or subject, usually written to that person or subject, for example John Keats was famous for writing these kind of poems like *Ode to Nightingale*, and *Ode on Grecian Urn* etc.

The poem *Ode to Bombay* also engages with the dark reality of the city, human ambitions and speedy progress that we are making and the side effects of these all rapidly changing socio-cultural phenomena is harming the mental health of the society. This dark reality and condition of the city is beautifully presented here in this poem. That we will first see from the first line and some last lines from the last stanza

I had promised you a poem before I died (line no. 1)

Once I promised you an epic

And now you have robbed me

You have reduced me to rubble

This concerto ends. (lines 19,20,21 and 22)

First, if we observe these lines given above, We can get sense of two moods of the poet, in the first line poet says about his promise that he has made to the city that as an artist living in the city, he will write a poem on it, but what kind of poem he has written? Is it admiring or praising this city? No. But rather we can say it is kind of complaining to the city. Poet says once I had promised you that I will write poem on you, so one can understand that this promise was made earlier, when poet must be happy for the city, and this city must have given him something as he wants to write poem on it, because as we know Bombay is city of dreams here overnight one can get name, fame and money. But something went wrong here with poet, because the poet says, once he has promised that he will write a poem on the city but the city has robbed him, and rubble him and in this way this promise ends. What situation does the poet face that made him write a poem which is complaining to the city instead of praising it? The answer to this question lies in the middle of the poem. Where he says; "piece by piece I fall at my own dead feet" and it is kind of freedom for the poet from this city



where he sees crowded streets, so many machineries, busy railway lines, murders, riots, temples and brothels all these happening in the city is kind of depressive to the poet. It is not just a big city but it is the place where many crimes happen on a daily basis.

Further the poet says he is releasing the poem like concerto from his silence, which means if We see the word concerto it is associated with sounds and instruments but poet says it comes from his silence. Which means there are many things that the poet is observing in the city since many years silently, which is released through this poem. Further the poet compares City's bridge to the Bones, Railway lines to his vein, which shows that Bombay became an integral part of his life.

Our next poem is by Gieve Patel. He is a renowned playwright, poet, artist and a practicing physician. He has written three books of poetry, *Poems, How Do You Withstand, Body and Mirrored Mirroring* and three plays *Princes, Savaksa and Mr Behram* and held several exhibitions of his paintings in India and abroad. He lives in Mumbai. The poem that I take here for discussion is *From Bombay Central*.

This poem is very simple and shorter than two earlier poems that I have discussed, it has no deep meaning. It is about Bombay's central railway station. In this poem the poet has successfully created a realistic picture of the station. Any good reader can feel that he is standing on this station and seeing all these things that are happening while reading this poem. In the opening the poet says, Saurashtra express is waiting to start. And the narrator or speaker who has already reserved his seat earlier takes his window seat. The compartment is half empty. But suddenly what happens is the smell from the train's toilet comes. This is just a single idea presented in this poem, this smell took the poet into deep thinking. Who uses these toilets on the railway? Just passenger? In answer to this question poet writes:

The station's population of porters,

Stall-keepers, toughs and vagabonds relieve themselves

Ticketless, into the bowels of these waiting pets; (lines 9, 10, and 11)

This is not the only train but every train that stand at the station these workers, stall keeper, Chaiwala and anybody is using these guardless toilets. Further poet says, this smell do not offend him, because these station has varieties of other smells as well like, perfume of some passengers, an eternal smell of station, human sweat, diesel and Parle biscuits, urine, and newspaper inks. All these smells coming to the nostrils of the poet and it has become a single atmosphere of the station. Then suddenly the poet realizes that he is seated on his seat, and he reminds himself suddenly that do not give close attention to this, because it is not even nature



and true beauty and this is not that he is looking for. This poem has not actual description of the city but it has described the railway station of Bombay which is a significant part of it.

Last poem that I have taken for discussion about Bombay is not written by an Indian author but by Pakistani-Scottish writer Imtiaz Dharker. She was not born in India but she spends her time in London and Mumbai. So her experiences of Bombay, she pours in her writings. Apart from this she has also written another poem 'Blessings' which is based on the slums of the Bombay city.

In this lyrical poem '*Hiraeth, Old Bombay*' if we observe the title of the poem it also has something to say about the city. The poet uses the word hiraeth here, which is a Welsh word that has no direct English translation, but it means a nostalgic longing for a place which can never be revisited. This hiraeth and adjective old suggests that the poem is about the old Bombay city which no longer remains the same at present time. This poem is about a 'wish' of the speaker, and the wish is to take her beloved to the place called Naz Cafe, but she wants to fulfill her wish with some conditions and that is the subject of this poem.

The poet imagines the moments she would have liked to have shared with her husband in the one Cafe known as Naz Café with "the best view and the worst food in town". This one of old cafe in the Mumbai. In many Dharker's poems Mumbai is a cultural melting pot, created by an interchange between Britain and India. Here the poet put a condition to her husband that she wants to go to Naz Cafe only if the city is same as earlier. Because with its name many things also changed as well. According to the poet, Naz Cafe has best view and worst food in the town, here town is Bombay. Then further there is description is that they would have been to the dusty trees on the road on Marine drive, which is known as necklace and Eros cinema which are the talk of the town in the city. Further there is a sense of admiration for the Bombay stock exchange, which is the investment capital of India, Taj Mahal Hotel, Sasson dock which is also known as the largest wholesale fish market and Gateway of India. These all descriptions show admiration for the city for the development that it has made. And at the last stanza the poet says:

I would have taken you to Bombay

If its name had not slid into the Sea

I would have taken you to the place called Bombay

If it were still there and if you were still here, (19, 20 21 and 22)



She would have taken her beloved to Bombay if its name had not changed and if the place is still the same because Bombay does not change just its name but it has changed everything, it is true that it has made many developments but with these developments there are so many negative things came as well which are disturbing so that is why she wants to go to Old Bombay.

Thus all four poems presents picture of Bombay, Nissim Ezekiel call it an Island where humanity in the people is very rare to find, similar is the case in the poem of Dilip Chitre where poet himself is empty and exhausted because of the situation of the city. Poet and artist Gieve Patel gives realist picture of Bombay's railway station and railway which can be relatable to every people of India. And last Imtiaz Dharker in her poem, she wishing to have that Bombay again which was earlier at some extent better than today's Mumbai. In every poem there is a feeling of alienation, quality of life which is decreased. As we know that literature is mirror of society, this poem has recorded and present the evil sides of society and faces which became causes of degradation of humanity.

Work Cited

Ezekiel, Nissim. "Island - Island Poem by Nissim Ezekiel." *Poem Hunter*, 28 March 2012, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/island-12/>. Accessed 12 May 2023.

Chitre, Dilip. "Ode to Bombay - Ode to Bombay Poem by Dilip Chitre." *Poem Hunter*, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ode-to-bombay/>. Accessed 13 May 2023

Patel, Gieve. "From Bombay Central - from Bombay Central." *PoemHunter.Com*, 19 June 2012, www.poemhunter.com/poem/from-bombay-central/. Accessed 14 May 2023.

Dharker, Imtiaz. "Hiraeth, Old Bombay - Hiraeth, Old Bombay." *PoemHunter.Com*, 11 Dec. 2018, [https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/hiraeth-old-bombay /](https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/hiraeth-old-bombay/). Accessed 15 May 2023.

"Ode." ODE English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary, 10 May 2023, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ode.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt, and Meyer Howard Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning, 2015.



**MULTIDISCIPLINARY COSMOPOLITAN JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
(MUCOJOR)-2583-9829 (On-line)**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Certification of Publication

The Board of Multidisciplinary Cosmopolitan Journal of Research (MUCOJOR) is hereby awarding
this certificate to

Rajesh P. Dangar

In recognition of the publication of the paper entitled
**Research Paper: Representation of Bombay (Mumbai) in the select Poems of Nissim Ezekiel,
Dilip Chitre, Gieve Patel and Imtiaz Dharker**

Published in Volume 03, Issue 05, June 2025.

EDITOR IN CHIEF