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Urban Liaisons in Contemporary Literature: The Multifaceted Indian Cosmopolitan

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Abstract:
Throughout the course of recent decades, contemporary literary works have increasingly reflected the complexities and nuances of urban life, especially within the context of Indian cosmopolitanism. The narratives of the literary works capture the tension between aspiration and alienation, portraying cities as crucibles for both opportunity and marginalization, ultimately revealing the multifaceted nature of modern Indian identity forged in urban crucibles. The selected studies of Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others* and *A State of Freedom*, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games*, Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and *Selection Day*, Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* offer a comprehensive overview of contemporary Indian literature that navigates the urban cosmopolitan experience. These texts vividly portray cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Calcutta not merely as backdrops but as active agents shaping narratives of power, desire, and resistance. The selected studies offer a comprehensive overview of contemporary Indian literature that reflects the contemporary urban cosmopolitan experience, offering insights into the dynamics of cultural synthesis, the quest for identity, and the challenges of globalisation. In this study, we aim to explore the multifaceted nature of Indian cosmopolitanism as depicted in contemporary literature, focusing on themes of migration, identity, and intercultural interactions. This study also examines the strategies employed by authors to cope with the dilemmas of intercultural interactions, such as the use of satire, irony, and humour. It explores into the ways in which Indian cosmopolitanism has been shaped by factors such as colonialism, globalisation, and cultural hybridisation and examines the potential of Indian cosmopolitanism to shape the future of India and the world.

Key words: Urbanity, Identity, Cosmopolitan, Contemporary Indian English Fiction

Introduction: Urban Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Indian Literature: Contemporary literature has increasingly become a mirror reflecting the complexities and nuances of urban life, especially within the context of Indian cosmopolitanism. They explore the multifaceted nature of Indian cosmopolitanism as depicted in contemporary literature, highlighting themes of migration, identity, and intercultural interactions. The selected studies of Neel Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Vickram Chandra and Aravind Adiga give a comprehensive overview of contemporary Indian literature that navigates the urban cosmopolitan experience, offering insights into the dynamics of cultural synthesis, the quest for identity, and the challenges of globalisation. The exploration of urban liaisons in contemporary literature, particularly within the Indian literary context, reveals a multifaceted cosmopolitanism that is richly layered with themes of identity, migration, and intercultural interactions. This cosmopolitanism is not just a backdrop but a dynamic character that shapes narratives, characters, and the very essence of storytelling.

Conceptualizing the 'Urban': Beyond Geography to Process: While "urban" typically refers to a geographical location and its residents, we use it to signify a process and practice of coexistence. In this context, the urban is shaped by socio- cultural, economic, ecological, political, and technological processes despite appearing or aspiring to be global. Contemporary Indian writing in English, such as works by Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Seth, Meena Kandasamy, Vikram Chandra, Karan Mahajan, and most importantly Aravind Adiga demonstrate the imaginative geographical and historical scope beyond the paradigms of national, postcolonial, or transnational diasporic literatures. Their works not only exhibit cosmopolitan moments where histories and geographies are rewritten and reimagined, but also remapping and rethinking narratives of time and space. (Santra and Tiwari 74)

Cities as Narrative Agents: Literature and Urban Experience: The multifaceted nature of Indian cosmopolitanism in contemporary literature reflects the dynamic interplay between urban experiences and global cultural flows. These works pursue the diverse ways in which contemporary authors engage with the complexities of urban life, cosmopolitan identities, and the redefinition of community in an increasingly interconnected world. Through their narratives, they contribute to a richer understanding of urban liaisons and the cosmopolitan ethos that characterises contemporary Indian literature. As Rushdie in his recent novel Victory City states:In this they, like the civilian population of the city, became human beings, even if the stories in their heads were fictions. Fictions could be as powerful as histories, revealing the new people to themselves, allowing them to understand their own natures and the natures of those around them, and making them real. This was the paradox of the whispered stories: they were no more than make-believe but they created the truth, and brought into being a city and an army with all the rich diversity of nonfictional people with deep roots in the actually existing world (47).Present-day literature often explores the complexities of urban life and cosmopolitan identities, particularly in the Indian context. They reflect the diverse and dynamic experiences of individuals in India's cities, focusing not only on the physical aspects but also on the psychological and cultural dimensions of urban existence. The concept of cosmopolitanism in this literature emphasises global citizenship and the interconnectedness of diverse cultures within urban settings. Indian literary works exemplify this by depicting characters who navigate the complexities of cosmopolitan cities, forming complex identities amid extravagant lifestyles and opportunities, while also facing challenges in maintaining their self-identity. It is recognised for its imaginative geographical and historical scope. The literature goes beyond national, postcolonial, or transnational diasporic paradigms, embracing cosmopolitanism as a concept that encompasses the negotiation of ethics and practice of migration, community, responsibility, difference, and sameness. This approach allows for a critical examination of migration and globalisation in literary texts, as seen in most of the works of contemporary authors.

Theoretical Perspectives on the City in Literature

The study of urban margins in contemporary literature, particularly regarding European cities shares similarities with the Indian context, where urban experiences and spaces are crucial to the narratives. These analyses highlight the significance of urban narratives in reflecting socio-political dynamics and evolving urban landscapes, which are also pertinent to the cosmopolitan environment of Indian cities. David Paigneau's *The Poetics of the City* in Georges Rodenbach's Works and Ross Chamber's *An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise* both explore the literary representation of cities, focusing on authors like Rodenbach and Baudelaire that captures the essence of urban life through their works. These studies underscore the role of literature in mediating urban experiences and contributing to our understanding of the city as a space of sensory, emotional, and intellectual engagement. In this context, Paigneau writes on Rodenbach:

The work of the Belgian novelist, short story writer, poet, and journalist Georges Rodenbach (1855–1898), a prominent representative of fin-de-siècle symbolism, is structured around several recurring themes and motifs, both poetic and narrative. The interactions between the inner evolution of protagonists and their wanderings through a city—conceived either as their privileged interlocutor or as their alter ego—constitute one of these unifying principles that ensure the overall coherence of the author's writings (Paigneau, Sec. Introduction).

He further points out:

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In Rodenbach's writings, the City often appears with a capital 'C,' signalling, with a particular form of solemnity or even reverence, that the urban space represents far more than a simple geographical setting for the unfolding action. The 'Foreword' of Bruges-la-Morte makes this role assigned by the novelist to the City-character explicit:

"Dans cette étude passionnelle, nous avons voulu aussi et principalement évoquer une Ville, la Ville comme un personnage essentiel, associé aux états d'âme, qui conseille, dissuade, détermine à agir." (Rodenbach et al. 49)

(In this study of passion, we also wanted to evoke a City, the City as an essential character, associated with states of mind, advising, dissuading, and determining actions.)

On the other hand, Ross Chambers in his text, An Atmospherics of the City: Baudelaire and the Poetics of Noise (2015) argues what Paigneau had emphasised. The studies highlight how cities serve as a backdrop for exploring themes of anonymity, alienation, and the sensory experiences of urban life. Baudelaire is widely recognised for emphasising the essential role of the aesthetic in the modern age. This work argues that Baudelaire's unique contribution was in defining modern art as an 'atmospherics' of urban life and in allegorising the everyday reality of Paris life for his readers. By doing so, he introduced a new, previously unacknowledged function for the aesthetic amid the utilitarianism of bourgeois modernity.

Chambers states: All this city noise - alienating din, steady background hum, unruly disorder bordering on chaos but also a certain intriguing strangeness - contrasts, of course, with the supposed stillness, silence, and timelessness of "immutable" nature" (20).

In his work, he viewed the atmosphere emerges from the city's noisy, inhabited nature, suggesting both occupancy and haunting. It is synonymous with the urban crowd and the energy it generates, influencing the city's mood and creating a variable 'weather' of community. In this context Chambers emphasises:We might say, then, that the area of chiasmus presents a map of the city's atmosphere, understanding that word to name the epiphenomenal effect exerted by the whole city— the ville or urbs—when, crowded with people as with dreams, the city is understood as the site of a social configuration, a civitas. And if so, we might add that atmosphere arises, therefore, as an effect of the city's noisy inhabitedness, where inhabitedness implies also hauntedness…And surely the true subject of "Les sept vieillards" is none other, therefore, than urban crowdedness and its (everyday) spectrality or power to haunt. That would be why, of all Baudelaire's treatments of the urban thematic, this is the poem whose writing is most incontrovertibly a writing of atmosphere, but of atmosphere understood as something crowded and multiplicitous like foggy weather: le temps qu'il fait dans la cité or city weather (84).

Similarly he also shares that, "…under an ironic and seemingly disengaged sky, by the long history of humanity's turning away from nature in favor of the artifice inherent, since Troy, in urban civilization, with its consequent fall into time and noise" (126). The narrative identity of cities is a recurring theme in contemporary literature. These findings highlight the dominance of socio-politics in urban narratives, offering critical readings on the value of local urban stories. And in the same argument it emphasises the representation of mid-sized European cities, often overlooked in favour of metropolises, showcasing their unique appeal and specificity. However, the focus on mid-size European cities and the dominance of socio-politics over other dimensions in narratives provide a parallel to the Indian urban experience, where local urban narratives offer critical, sharp, and relevant readings on the value of urban experiences.

Indian Cosmopolitanism: Identity, Migration, and Cultural Hybridity

Indian cosmopolitanism in contemporary literature is a rich tapestry of themes and narratives that reflect the diverse experiences of urban life. From the negotiation of identities to the representation of urban margins, these works offer critical insights into the complexities of cosmopolitan cities. They challenge traditional notions of community, identity, and space, presenting a multifaceted view of the urban liaison in Indian literature. Through the themes of identity, migration, intercultural interactions, and interreligious solidarity, contemporary Indian literature offers a nuanced exploration of urban liaisons. These narratives not only reflect the complexities of the cosmopolitan experience but also contribute to a broader understanding of the globalised literary genre.

Indian cities, particularly cosmopolitan hubs like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Bangalore, and Kashmir serve as vibrant backdrops for narratives that examine the formation of transnational identities and the negotiation of cultural boundaries. It portrays women striving for professional success while navigating relationships in complex urban environments, giving rise to new forms of identity and sites of collaboration and contestation. The works of authors like Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) & *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Salman Rushdie's *Two Years Eight Months* and *Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015), Jerry Pinto's *Em* and *The Big Hoom* (2012), Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017) & *The Lives of Others* (2014), Ruchir Joshi's *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (2000), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2005) and many more engage with the mobility and are noted for their works that remap narratives of time and space, reflecting a critical engagement with cosmopolitan thought. Similarly there are other contemporary novelists such as Raj Kamal Jha's *The City and the Sea* (2019), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013), Anees Salim's *The Blind Lady's Descendants* (2014), Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006), Saikat Majumdar's *The Scent of God* (2019), Manu Joseph's *The Illicit Happiness of Other People* (2012), Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* (2014), Karan Mahajan's *Family Planning* (2008), Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis* (2012), Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* (2016) & *Last Man in Tower* (2011), Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* (2011) whose texts reimagine histories and geographies, offering a critical perspective on migration, globalisation, and the negotiation of community and identity beyond national or postcolonial paradigms.

Sacred Games not only deals with an intense exploration of Mumbai's criminal underworld, politics, and society, but also it captures the essence of the city through its sprawling narrative and complex characters, reflecting on urban environments shape individual lives and societal structures. He stated, "if you want to live in the city you have to think ahead three turns, and look behind a lie to see the truth and then behind that truth to see the lie" (Chandra 35). On the other hand, Thayil's *Narcopolis* is also set in Mumbai, focuses on the city's opium dens, providing a vivid picture of urban life with its mix of brutality and beauty.

The author's use of the city's past and present paints a potent love letter to Mumbai, highlighting its cultural and social transformations. As Amrutha Kunapulli states: The treatment of Bombay in *Narcopolis* aligns with this separation between cityscapes and the national psyche. Apart from passing mentions of the partition, there is little-to- no allusion to India as a nation-state, despite being well into its third decade of sovereign existence at the outset of the novel (71).

While Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* explores the narrative spans in different cities, it starts in Mumbai's slums and moves to the city's underbelly, showcasing the stark urban divide, corruption, and the pursuit of dreams in a chaotic urban setting. Manu Joseph's *The Illicit Happiness of Other People* is set in Chennai and shows urban life through the lens of family, loss, and the search for truth in a city where appearances can be deceptive. It's a dark comedy that reflects on urban existentialism. Similarly, Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* focuses on cricket and the aspirations of two brothers from Mumbai's slums, highlighting themes of class, ambition, and the harsh realities of urban sports culture.

In Raj Kamal Jha's *City Signs: Toward a Definition of Urban Literature* (1978), Diane Wolfe Levy explores the concept of urban literature and its significance in literary and urban studies. Her analysis begins by noting the heightened interest in urban studies in the late 1960s and questions whether a distinct category of 'urban literature' exists or is still being defined. She examines the complexities of defining urban literature, considering whether it refers to literature read or written in cities or literature with an urban setting, suggesting that the term may be

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misleading due to its apparent concreteness. She inspects that while cities have long been central in literature, serving as settings that reflect the extremes of human experience and the dichotomy between good and evil, contemporary literature treats the city differently. In modern works, the city becomes more than just a backdrop; it actively influences the narrative. She proposes that 'urban' literature might be characterised by the setting taking precedence over character, with the city itself becoming a protagonist, offering a direct, experiential translation of urban life without moral judgments or comparisons with the natural world.

An analysis of the various 'city novels' and their depiction of city life, reflects that the novels tend to focus more on character than on the city itself. However, Levy identifies a shift in contemporary literature where the city's setting becomes a protagonist, influencing the narrative significantly. This shift is illustrated through novels like Dickens' *Bleak House* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, contrasted with more contemporary works that emphasise the experiential aspect of urban life. Levy also explores the portrayal of urban life in poetry, highlighting poets like Baudelaire and Whitman capture the essence of city life. The works of Raymond Queneau and Alain Robbe-Grillet present the city as an active component of the action, shaping the fiction. As Levy writes:The study of urban literature seems natural at first. The city is the dominant ecological feature of modern western society; it is not unreasonable, then, to seek an expression and reflection of urbanism in literature. The very term, however, is treacherous. Its concision fosters a sense of concreteness. We have urban planning, urban transit, urban redevelopment—why not urban literature? Yet on close examination, this neat rubric becomes meaningless. What is urban literature after all? Literature read in cities or written in cities? Literature with an urban setting? (65).She further adds that the theme that is being dealt with dates back to classical literature. However, there is something new in contemporary literature dealing with the city. And "an investigation of the changing function of the city in literature may help to clarify this change and contribute toward a definition of urban literature" (65).

Modernity, Globalisation, and the Changing Cityscape

Gyan Prakash elaborates in the 'Introduction' that 'modernity is a Faustian bargain' to unlock human potential and control nature, finds its most powerful expression in modern cities. These urban centres, including London, Paris, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Mumbai, New York, and Mexico City, have been shaped by the intense dynamics of modern life. They have witnessed major historical events such as industrialisation, capitalism, political upheavals, colonialism, and anticolonial movements. Cities have also been crucibles for evolving social relations based on race, class, and gender. Urban life, experienced in streets, apartments, and slums, has fostered new identities, solidarities, and cultural meanings. The cityscape, with its streets, public spaces, crowds, and transportation infrastructure, has been the backdrop for dynamic human interactions. Modern literature, art, and cinema are deeply intertwined with the modern city. Since the early twentieth century, writers and social commentators have critically examined urban life. Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin have provided insights into the metropolitan experience, mass culture, and commodity fetishism, which continue to influence our understanding of contemporary urban life. However, recent urbanisation challenges the traditional notion of the European metropolis as the quintessential modern city. Globalisation has extended urban forms worldwide, integrating cities into vast networks of communication, finance, commodities, labour, images, and ideas. This has led urban theorists to declare the traditional concept of the city as obsolete, suggesting that we now live in expansive urban networks rather than clearly defined cities. Despite these changes, cities are still seen as distinct spatial formations, each with its unique social fabric, history, and memory. Urban experience remains deeply local, shaped by specific practices, imaginations, and memories, even as cities become increasingly globalised (Prakash and Kruse, sec. Introduction).

Ranjani Mazumdar, in her work, *Spectacle and Death in the City of Bombay Cinema* (2021) explores the intricate relationship between the cinematic portrayal of Bombay (now Mumbai) and the city's real-life urban experiences, focusing on how cinema reflects and shapes the public's perception of urban life, spectacle, and death. She studies the dual nature of Bombay as both a physical space and a cinematic city, highlighting films produced in Bombay not only depict the city's unique urban landscape but also contribute to the construction of its mythic image. This chapter examines various Bombay-based films to analyse the city's representation in cinema often oscillates between glorification and critique, showcasing its vibrancy and vitality on one hand, and its darker aspects, such as poverty, crime, and communal violence, on the other.She argues that Bombay cinema, through its narratives and visual aesthetics, creates a spectacle that captivates audiences, drawing them into the city's alluring yet chaotic urban fabric. The spectacle of the city in films often serves as a backdrop for exploring themes of aspiration, desire, and the struggle for survival, reflecting the lived realities of Bombay's diverse inhabitants. However, the chapter also addresses cinema portrays the city as a site of death and decay, where dreams can be crushed and lives are often lost amidst the urban chaos. This portrayal serves as a critique of the city's harsh realities, highlighting the social and economic disparities that define urban life in Bombay. Furthermore, She discusses the role of cinematic techniques in enhancing the spectacle of Bombay, such as the use of montage, aerial shots, and location shooting, which contribute to the creation of a hyper-real image of the city. As she states:Metropolitan India after globalisation has been convulsed by a frenzy of chaotic construction—overpasses, shopping malls, multiplexes, hotels and highways, coffee shops, and ATMs—along with a massive automobile boom. Added to this is the transformation of both the home and the outside, where cable television has in a dynamic way affected the eye's optical capacity to wander through diverse locations of the world. The streets and markets are awash with new electronic gadgets, mobile phones, computers, and DVDs, each promoting diverse advertising strategies on walls, on billboards and on lampposts (Mazumdar 402).

Narrating Urban Experience: Form, Space, and Consciousness

Maren Hogevold Busterud's thesis, Narrating Urban Experiences in the Contemporary Novel: An analysis of how social analysis and analysis of form contribute to conveying contemporary urban experiences in English literature, investigates social analysis and literary form interact to express the experiences of 21st-century London. It argues that urban novels represent battles for space and representation in urban life and engage with anxieties about the future of urban living. Literature plays a crucial role in representing individual and community life, with the urban setting emphasising social conditions due to population density and a fast- paced environment. The city serves as a location, subject, cultural source, and symbol of change, blending the global and the local.Modernist writers often explored ways of living and the experience of time, challenging traditional systems and institutions. Their focus on representing consciousness and sensuous experiences was influenced by changing environments, cultural thought, and political conditions. Kennedy and Smith's novels are read as contemporary works drawing on modernist experiments, particularly in their representation of consciousness and urban life. Both novels represent subjective consciousnesses and reveal social analysis and commentary on contemporary urban living. They highlight individual experiences to describe societal and cultural changes in the urban environment. As the introduction states:Literature plays an important role in representing how we live as both individuals and communities, and the urban setting provides a microcosm in which social conditions are emphasised due to population density and the fast-paced environment. However, the urban is not only a microcosm of society at large. It is also an own, specific type of environment and literary setting, and object of study, with a history and connotations of its own. Contemporary fiction uses the city as "location, subject matter, a cultural source, for energy and as symbol of change", and its mobile form makes possible a combination of the global and the local (Busterud 1).

Narrating Urban Experience: Form, Space, and Consciousness: The thesis examines these novels convey the experiences of London's citizens and the changes occurring in the city, using theoretical backgrounds on the interplay between the mind and the metropolis and relevant spatial theories in literary studies.Postcolonial Urban Outcasts: City Margins in South Asian Literature is an edited collection of Madhurima Chakraborty and Umme Al-wazedi that explores the experiences of marginalised communities in South Asian cities. The anthology brings together diverse critical approaches - geospatial, urban-theoretical, diasporic, and subaltern to examine South Asian literature addresses urban margins. Chakraborty's *Whose City?,* chapter collectively express empathy for urban outcasts and question why cities are significant in South Asia, where national and nationalist discussions have traditionally dominated. The collection builds on recent scholarly shifts from focusing on nation and nationalism to emphasising urban centres in South Asian cultural studies. The volume implicitly acknowledges the importance of cities while maintaining a critical skepticism about urban exclusionary practices, as "we define those margins spatially, psychologically,

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sexually, or sociopolitically" (Bhattacharya 1). The focus is on long-standing practices of marginalisation, intensified in the neoliberal era, which have exacerbated poverty and other social issues. The volume emphasises the processes and practices that produce urban inequalities, moving beyond the notion of developmentalism that characterises the emergence of South Asian cities into global capital. It critiques the portrayal of urban dystopias, arguing for a focus on everyday practices rather than crises. It not only investigates the literary representation of urban margins in South Asia, but also highlighting the importance of cities and the need to understand the everyday experiences of their marginalised communities, as Chakraborty notes:

Our focus on marginalised urban communities is related to, but ultimately different from, gauging a city's "developmentalism"—the primary characteristic of the "not (yet) city," usually a third-world megacity, that is understood to be "lacking in the qualities of city-ness" such as effective governance, service production, etc. that might presumably characterise a more so-called First World city (Chakraborty and Al-Wazedi 3).

Sourit Bhattacharya's *The Margins of Postcolonial Urbanity Reading Critical Irrealism in Nabarun Bhattacharya's Fiction* observes in the same way that the dynamics of marginal space in the postcolonial city, focusing on marginalised individuals use urban space to resist the capitalist logic imposed by the postcolonial state. It examines the central contradiction in postcolonial urbanity: the clash between rationality and "irreal" activities. The term "irreal" is borrowed from Marxist scholar Michael Löwy, who distinguishes it from "unreal" and "anti- real" to argue for its use in dissent and critique. The chapter argues that "irreality" is essential to the practice of space in the postcolonial urban world. (Bhattacharya 39). In this context, Bhattacharya observes:

The literary writings on postcolonial urbanity that specifically highlight this contradiction can be meaningfully read through the lens of critical irrealism which combines irreality with the element of authorial critique. For the literary part, the chapter reads the fictional work of Nabarun Bhattacharya (1948–2014), son of Mahasweta Devi and Bijon Bhattacharya, whose work centers around the margins of postcolonial society; the domain of the urban poor—beggars, prostitutes, small-time crooks, freaks, drunkards, rickshaw-pullers, hired assassins and others—who are stampeded by the joint forces of multinational capitalism and consumerism (39).

He deciphers the work of Nabarun Bhattacharya, whose fiction centres on the margins of postcolonial society, particularly the urban poor such as beggars, prostitutes, and small-time criminals. Bhattacharya equips the urban poor with the "armory" of the spectral and mysterious to resist the bourgeois forces of instrumental rationality and class dominance. His narrative technique of blurring spaces, times, and processes of reason-making empowers the subaltern and outcast, prompting a rethinking of postcolonial urbanity and modernity. The text discusses the concept of modernity in postcolonial India, focusing on Nabarun Bhattacharya's work. It highlights the need for a broader understanding of modernity beyond the urban middle-class elite, incorporating the experiences of the suburban poor and the effects of capitalist aggression in rural areas.The text references Dipesh Chakrabarty's work on "historical difference" and the need to consider non-modern and supernatural elements in postcolonial contexts. It also discusses the impact of neoliberalism and global capitalism on widening inequalities and the resurgence of "occult economies" in urban spaces. Nabarun Bhattacharya's fiction is analysed as a critique of postcolonial urban life, where the supernatural and non-rational powers of the urban poor are mobilised against the rational instruments of the state and capitalism. The text emphasises the importance of considering temporal and spatial unevenness and the ghostly and spectral elements in Bhattacharya's novels to understand the complexities of postcolonial urbanity (Bhattacharya 42–44). He writes:

Another critic of postcolonial space, Rashmi Varma reads in the literary-cultural registrations of spatial unevenness in the postcolonial Bombay, Nairobi, and London the relations, imprints, inheritance of imperial and colonial power structures. The postcolonial city, for her, needs to be read as "conjunctural space," that "produces a critical combination of historical events, material bodies, structural forces, and representational economies that propel new constellations of domination and resistance, centres and peripheries, and the formation of the new political subjects" (Bhattacharya 44).

Subashish Bhattacharjee and Goutam Karmakar, in their edited volume *The City Speaks: Urban Spaces in Indian Literature*, explore the theme of urban representation in Indian literatures in their introduction, titled Introduction: Writing Cities: Appropriating the Urban in Indian Literatures. Cities are remarkable places that serve as centres of innovation, wealth, and opportunity. They are where goods and intangible experiences are created, and they nurture millions of people.

However, cities are also chaotic, unequal, dirty, and inhumane. They can segregate and exclude, reflecting both meticulous planning and accidental development. Indian literature, in various languages and eras, has a deep connection to urban spaces. These spaces are crucial for the creation of narratives that reflect the complexities of urban life. Cities are vital in shaping cultural affects and have been central to the narratives of many civilisations, including India. They are seen as nerve centres of culture, influencing the study of history and collective memory. They in their work *Writing Cities: Appropriating the Urban in Indian Literatures* eloquently state:

Markets and factories, skyscrapers, shopping malls, stadiums, and cities are places where things get made, whether that be cards, toasters, furniture, laptops, or less tangible things like experiences, trends, contracts, and code. Cities also shelter and nurture millions of people in ways that often feel close to magical. They are full of communities and people fashioning novel and striking ways of pursuing desire and self-expression." (Bhattacharjee and Karmakar 1).

'Consider cities as nerve centres of any culture' and cities are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the country's multilingual and diverse society. They produce a variety of narratives that capture the essence of urban life, including its challenges and triumphs. Despite issues like pollution and inequality, cities transcend their problems to represent the strata of society and its people. Modern cities, as argued by Gyan Prakash, are powerful expressions of modernity, embodying the intense and dynamic nature of contemporary life. They are essential to understanding a nation's literature and cultural history, providing a framework for interactive encounters and relationships. Therefore, studying a nation's literature requires examining its cities, their histories, and their spatial ethos.

The significance of cities in Indian literature is not a new concept, rooted in the idea of India as a postcolonial location and the renewed interest in urban studies as a cultural intervention. While the importance of urban centres in Indian culture is longstanding, recent scholarship has shifted focus from nation and nationalism to urban studies, highlighting a gap between the lived and academic significance of cities. Indian cities have always been evolving, serving as junctions of religious, linguistic, and cultural incorporations. Literature and media have consistently represented these changes, reflecting shifts in resources and availability (3).

Cities in literature act as universal settings, embodying shelter, comfort, nostalgia, opportunity, fantasies, myths, fears, crime, alienation, and more. They become central to contemporary Indian literature, reflecting the development of modern urban spaces from the turn of the last century. Poets and writers depict the filth, squalor, disease, terror, loneliness, and corruption of cities like Bombay, Pune, Benares, Cuttack, and Delhi. Dramatists explore the notion of spatiality and urban space in their works. Recent humanities scholarship has focused on studying cities culturally, socially, and politically, presenting new paradigms of study. The city has been a zone of contention in literature, embodying characters and narratives reflective of its topology, genealogy, and living archaeology. Literature serves to excavate cities through its representations, becoming unearthed in the process. The urban space in Indian literature has reached a tipping point, necessitating subjective evaluation informed by critical theorization (5).

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Indian literature uses cities as locations or metaphors to showcase urban problems and depict cities give birth to images, experiences, and realities of society. Their works represent the sounds, spaces, and places of cities, reflecting human emotions, spirit, and societal development. By adopting and exploring Western urban theories and local thought, a unique presentation of Indian literature is possible, projected against a seemingly monolithic Western qualification of urban literatures. The characteristic cosmopolitanism, heterogeneity, and fluid nature of Indian urban clusters filter down to their depiction in literary works. The study of Indian cities in literature reveals a bias towards larger cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata, but it also includes other urban centres. The chapters in this volume are organised to cover both geographical and demographic aspects, ensuring an inclusive study of Indian cities (10). As they articulate gracefully:

Cities, then, hold a significant cache for the Indian historical, social, cultural, and political landscape in a similar fashion as they do for countries with a substantial recorded historicity. But cities are not entirely devoid of human connection, and a relationship that verges on the synthetic – cities are as much habitable geographical markers as they are the refuge of demographics that often develop into the culturations of these cities, the affectation of which takes place primarily in the realm of cultural manifestation (Bhattacharjee and Karmakar 9).

Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies' work, *Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructures, Literature and Culture*, express that novel enacts resistance to planned violence through its form, reconfiguring literary infrastructures as a counterpoint to urban infrastructure. This theme is echoed in works like Rana Dasgupta's Capital, which explores Delhi's embedded inequalities and the reconfiguration of urban spaces by interstitial subcultures. As mentioned in Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructures, Literature and Culture they observe:

Rana Dasgupta's *Capital* (2014), a love-hate song to Delhi and its singular brand of modernity - ribald, brutal, cacophonous, exhilarating - similarly represents the city as a place of embedded inequalities through its non-fictional yet literary form. For Dasgupta, the city's divisions and layerings are cross-hatched with a globalised mass- culture born of post/colonial conflict, in this case the 1947 Partition. Meanwhile, interstitial subcultures also work to re-elaborate and reconstruct streets, markets and other spaces in ways that involve the city dwellers themselves. Imitating Dasgupta's own movement through the city, the book's mostly untitled chapters rocket the reader through a series of formative post-1991 Delhi experiences, from outsourcing and Americanisation to corruption and the accumulation of waste (4).

The collection draws inspiration from these creative works to focus on literary and cultural production can critique planned violence and contribute to the reimagination of urban spaces. The concept of planned violence is rooted in the historical continuities of colonial urban planning and the utopian hope in postcolonial texts for more democratic, inclusive, and egalitarian urban spaces.

Slums, Poverty, and the Postcolonial Uncanny

Ankhi Mukherjee offered an insightful exploration of 'slums' in Slums and the Postcolonial Uncanny; the term 'slum' originated in Victorian canting speech, with J. H. Vaux using it in 1819 to mean "a room." By the 1820s, it had three distinct meanings: a room, a street or alley inhabited by the poor, and slang. Charles Dickens was fascinated with London's notorious slum, St Giles, as depicted in Hogarth's "Gin Lane." Dickens's works, such as Oliver Twist and Our Mutual Friend, describe the noxious rookeries of Millbank and the fictional slum Tom-all-alone's. The slum poor are often shunned and shamed, treated as idle and vicious. The Chicago School's urban theory treats slums as spatial disruptions that undermine the city's intelligibility and autonomy.From Victorian London to contemporary global cities, the slum poor are routinely shunned and shamed, treated as idle, vicious, and of low worth. The Chicago School's urban theory of human ecology, which has dominated the geographic study of poverty for much of the last century, treats slums as the spatial disruption that undermines the city's intelligibility, autonomy, and inviolability (A. Mukherjee 88).However, a Marxist geographer Mike Davis sees slums as instances of "informal survivalism" and violent resistance. The emergence of slums like Dharavi in Bombay is inseparable from Bombay's colonial history. Dharavi was one of the six great koliwadas or fishing communities of Bombay. As Bombay expanded, Dharavi became more central to the city. The value of land in Dharavi is estimated to be $2 billion, leading to financial powers pushing for slum clearance. The slum is an uncanny infrastructure, both present and absent in the field of vision. The chapter examines the psychopathologies of the slum dismantled through embodied and embedded reading practices.Sigmund Freud's concept of "the uncanny" is explored, with the uncanny being tied to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes. The essay "The Uncanny" begins with Freud's unease and his exploration of the words heimlich [canny] and unheimlich [uncanny]. The uncanny is the instantiation of ontological nothingness, an agitation, a repercussion, and a movement from fear to fear without telos. The uncanny sensation arises in the gap between the idea of India and the embodied experience of it. The postcolonial uncanny is about repeated failures to secure a vantage point to articulate a landscape of difference.The acclaimed Indian filmmaker Anurag Kashyap's 2004 film, "Black Friday", refuses to see the slum as an occulted space. The slum is inseparable from the workings of the metropolis. The non-fiction works discussed in this final section provide a corrective to the uncanny rendering of vulnerable populations and habitats. Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned* shares Fitzgerald's mission to ponder lives within a society in great ferment. The journalist Sonia Faleiro's Beautiful Thing traces the entangled lives of bar dancers, bar owners, sex workers, transvestites, and transsexuals. Faleiro befriended a young bar dancer for intimate access to the netherworld of Bombay's dance bars. Faleiro's testimony enjoins us to rethink the lexicon and temporality of trauma and its cure.

The psychic malady that Beautiful Thing anatomises is not post-traumatic stress disorder but continuous traumatic stress. Faleiro's Beautiful Thing perfectly captures the social worker's or immersive journalist's sense of immobilised terror when confronted with victims subject to prolonged and ongoing danger. The narrative succumbs to Faleiro's melancholic sense of the futility of preventive and curative measures in the situations of endemic poverty and sexual violence she details.

Urban Transformation and Identity in Arundhati Roy

In her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Arundhati Roy presents a figurative digression on the transformation of Delhi, describing the city as an ancient woman undergoing a grotesque makeover. This metaphor reflects Delhi's new status as the "supercapital" of the "world's favourite new superpower." Roy writes:

She remembered reading somewhere that even after people died, their hair and nails kept growing. Like starlight, traveling through the universe long after the stars themselves had died. Like cities. Fizzy, effervescent, simulating the illusion of life while the planet they had plundered died around them. She thought of the city at night, of cities at night. Discarded constellations of old stars, fallen from the sky, rearranged on earth in patterns and pathways and towers (214).

Roy's extended metaphor, ending with the city becoming "a whore," highlights the undignified transformation of the ancient city. This reflection on urban change becomes more nuanced in the novel's first sections, involving the difficult transgendered negotiation of the Muslim teenager Aftab into his womanly alter ego, Anjum. Both Aftab/Anjum and Delhi's makeover involve the adoption of new identities with far-reaching collateral effects. As he writes:

Roy's use of setting is suggestive, presenting the urban subaltern community both as a surplus population to be driven out of the refurbished city in a necropolitical beautification drive, and also as the residents of a literal 'dead space' - a necropolis. As for Roy's opening image of the city as sorceress, a kind of violence and indignity is intrinsic to this fictional imaginary, and the reader is persuaded that it is only in a profound lack, or in a grotesque gothic form, that a civic community of the poor can be realised. Thus, as she responds to the emergence of a hegemonic neoliberal urban aesthetics, Roy, like Aravind Adiga, or, in a slightly different regional context, Indra Sinha, is compelled to map a new, civic counter-aesthetic that is monstrous, pregnant with anger, and at times nightmarish in its rejection of earlier literary modes of imagining the city (Tickell 197).

The growing field of urban studies has opened up new ways of reading the transformation of India's cities. This chapter investigates the city as a cultural setting in Indian English fiction, focusing on urban space is written as a residential locale. In the context of profound changes in public discourses about the city in postcolonial India and the emergence of a globalising "World Class City" aesthetic, the imagined urban

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architecture of Indian English fiction is examined. Roy's city-sorceress of Delhi and other urban imaginaries in Indian English fiction reveal the difficulty of finding a sustaining aesthetics of "neighbourhood."

Staying with *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the creative predicament posed by Delhi's post-millennial transformation is traced further in the novel's evocation of the old Mughal city, Shahjahanabad, where Aftab/Anjum grows up. Roy's use of setting presents the urban subaltern community as a surplus population to be driven out in a necropolitical beautification drive and as residents of a literal "dead space" - a necropolis. Roy's opening image of the city as sorceress involves a violence and indignity intrinsic to this fictional imaginary, suggesting that a civic community of the poor can only be realised in a profound lack or grotesque gothic form. As Roy responds to the emergence of a hegemonic neoliberal urban aesthetics, she maps a new, civic counter-aesthetic that is monstrous, pregnant with anger, and nightmarish in its rejection of earlier literary modes of imagining the city (197).

In Indian English novels of the past four decades, the built structure that predominantly expresses the idea of the urban neighbourhood and provides the benchmark setting for a certain - somehow always embattled—civic-societal vision is the low-rise urban apartment block. Unlike the great house or more modest extended family residences, Indian English writing attains a particular civic texture in the tenuous vertical 'neighbourly' affiliations of the older- style apartment block. Civic life seems to accrue a particular imaginative depth in accounts of these built spaces. The small-scale apartment block complexes that are so visible a feature of India's modern urban cityscapes are often organised into 'colonies' and 'societies.' These highly resonant labels promote a certain historically inflected associational ideal and have rich figurative potential when read politically. As a type of contained neighbourhood, they are now such a constitutive part of cities like Bombay that local cognitive mapping tends to be organised not by street names but by prominent colonies.

Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* moves between Mumbai and other Indian locales, exploring themes of migration, exploitation, and the nuances of urban and rural interactions. Its narrative structure reflects the chaotic, interconnected lives in modern urban spaces. Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness narrative weaves through Delhi's urban landscape, touching on themes like social activism, gender, and the plight of the marginalised in the city, providing a kaleidoscopic view of Indian urbanity. The Folded Earth, though the story moves between the Himalayas and urban settings, it touches on the lives of those who have left the city for the mountains, reflecting on urban-rural contrasts and personal transformation.

In the novel *The Lives of Others*, Neel Mukherjee uses themes as urban environments shape individuals' sexual identities, desires, and the societal constraints they navigate. The city of Calcutta becomes a microcosm where personal and political revolutions intersect, influencing characters perceive and express their sexuality amidst the broader urban narrative. At one point, He makes the two siblings go through phases of growing sexual consciousness and then find themselves unable to hold onto their repressive desires since that is not a part of the accepted social narrative. At a certain moment, Priyo slides inside the bathroom when Chhaya was inside the bathroom already:

The silence in the bathroom, punctuated by the drip-drip-drip of the tap onto the water's surface in the full bucket under it, conducted Priyo's supplication, and Chhaya's instant granting of it, in a way that would have been ruined by language. Priyo watched Chhaya sluice her arse, pour four big mugs of water down the latrine to fush the shit away, then wash her hands with soap. There was no trace of shame or inhibition in her face, just the abiding fuidity of something routine done without thought (N. Mukherjee 108).

The Lowland has multiple settings, significant parts are set in Calcutta's (Kolkata's) urban environment, examining the political turmoil of the 1960s and '70s, alongside personal narratives of love, loss, and migration. The Hungry Tide has significant urban elements, especially in its depiction of colonial Calcutta, exploring the urban-rural dynamics through the opium trade. The Blind Lady's Descendants goes into the life of a family in a small town near Kochi, but the influence of urban culture and the aspirations to move to the city are central, focusing on themes of legacy, identity, and change. The Scent of God explores the life of a young woman in Kolkata, focusing on spirituality, desire, and the clash between traditional values and modern urban life. The Gypsy Goddess based in a village but with strong urban influences, this novel deals with the aftermath of a massacre, reflecting on caste, politics, and urban narratives shape rural experiences.

In comparison, the Bengali writer Priyanath Mukherjee's best-selling series *Darogar Daptar* (The Detective Bureau) was an exact contemporary of Holmes. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee expressed suburban disorder and 'informed' governance similarly appear as problems in Mukherjee's fiction, but they have a very different relationship to the narrative function of clues. The absence of the charismatic detective and the absence of the detective's recitation of street names correspond to an absence in both the registration of urban and suburban data and their conversion into 'governmental' information. The problem indicated by the passage is not one of the accumulation of illicit wealth in the hands of a fraction of the middle classes, but rather the sudden illicit and murderous desire of subalterns who serve those middle classes and are envious of their wealth.

The 'Calcuttan' suburbs induce class anxiety and demand literary strategies to address it, but these differ from those induced and developed in the British metropolis. Victorian Calcutta posed a related but distinct problem to that of London, offering the unsettling spectre of feudal aristocrats, 'modern' European and Indian traders, indigenous servants, and British colonial governors co-existing in a web of relationships that could be intensely oppressive. The ideological and moral problem raised by this kind of uneven development's spatial logic is thus resolved slightly differently in Bengali crime fiction, which borrows from, but also departs from, that of Conan Doyle (U. P. Mukherjee 283–86).

The apartment block and its ready-made nexus of human relationships offer writers a compelling, structured setting for literary fiction. Enshrined forcibly in the modern apartment block is an idea of common urban modernity, but also, through older understandings of neighbourliness, a concept of community and conviviality. The block therefore speaks of mutual recognition in the anonymity of the city. So great is the currency of the idea of community that it has generated its own academic literature and, it has been argued, is especially prone to a kind of false nostalgia. Represented as 'a community of belonging,' it is hard not to see in this literature 'a certain nostalgia for a way of life which has bypassed the actual history of the past in order to critique the symptoms of the present.' Moreover, the sheer speed of urban change in India, and the aforementioned association of these kinds of neighbourhoods with childhood in diasporic fiction, has deepened the sense of a vanished urban civic past (Tickell 203).

Bombay (Mumbai since 1995) has been a particularly rich site for 'apartment fiction.' The chawl, a subaltern version of the apartment block distinctive to the city's industrial past, features in Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie.* Rohinton Mistry uses the block as a 'multi- story' framework for his short fiction in Tales from Firozsha Baag and for a nuanced political realism in *Such A Long Journey*. Manil Suri revisits the social dynamics of the apartment block in his novel The Death of Vishnu, and more recently, Anjali Joseph's Saraswati Park explores the same space. However, the nostalgia and neighbourliness of the apartment block is always prone to a kind of beleaguered potential encounter with wider society (Tickell 204).

Urban Liaisons and the Future of Indian Cosmopolitanism

To sum up, cities exist in a liminal space between the nation and the world, challenging traditional notions of national identity centred on rural life and highlighting the complexities of modern urban existence. To quote Bill Ashcroft:

Cities exist in an interstitial space between the nation and the world, which prohibits them from playing any central part in the national psyche. National mythologies are always located in the rural heartland, and postcolonial studies have inevitably been concerned with the contest

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between the nation and empire in its various forms. Cities, on the other hand, all appear to be, if not similar, at least similarly messy irruptions of global modernity (Ashcroft 497).

Thus, Urban Liaisons highlight the intricate relationships and connections formed within the bustling cityscape. The very narratives peruse the complexities of human interaction in densely populated areas, exploring individuals navigate social networks, build communities, and negotiate personal and professional relationships amidst the chaos of urban life. Through these stories, authors shed light on the transformative power of city living and its influence on identity and belonging. The city is frequently depicted as a site of negotiation for identity and belonging. Characters in Indian English fiction grapple with their place within the urban milieu, often confronting issues of alienation and rootlessness. The city serves as a backdrop for the exploration of personal and collective identities, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of urban centres.

'Modernist city is the formal and ideological precursor of postcolonial city'. I will use the subsuming phrase 'urban space' to designate words like 'city' and 'town' in which the specific mention of 'town' will indicate the liminal space between city and village: a transitory geo-spatial reality that lies between modern and 'primitive' societies. (Biswas 157).

In brief, "urban space" is used to encompass both cities and towns, acknowledging the nuanced relationship between these different types of settlements. The term "town" is specified to indicate a liminal space between the city and the village, representing a transitional geo- spatial reality that exists between modern and 'primitive' societies. The statement highlights the influence of modernist cities on the development of postcolonial cities, while also acknowledging the complex relationship between different types of urban spaces.

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