

Confetti Of Literary Thoughts

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Notions and Place Making: A Study of the Film *Dharavi*

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2012 National Geographic Bee. “The study of geography is about more than just memorizing places on a map. It’s about understanding the complexity of our world, appreciating the diversity of cultures that exists across continents. And in the end, it’s about using all that knowledge to help bridge divides and bring people together.” (President Barack Obama Geographic Bee)

As Barack Obama said studying an area is the best method to know about that place thoroughly. Area studies also known as regional studies are interdisciplinary fields of research and scholarship pertaining to particular geographical, national/federal, or cultural regions. The term exists primarily as a general description for what are, in the practice of scholarship, many heterogeneous fields of research, encompassing both the social sciences and the humanities. Typical area study programs involve international relations, strategic studies, history, political science, political economy, cultural studies, languages, geography, literature, and other related disciplines. In contrast to cultural studies, area studies often include diaspora and emigration from the area. Today's area studies can be seen as having their origins in the colonial expansion of European powers during the 18th century and the accompanying academic efforts to better understand the languages, cultures, and social organizations of colonized peoples. The basic concept of area studies is that the people of a definable geographical sector, acting in their society and their environment, offer an appropriate unit for scholarly attention. The concept is not a new one. Research as distinct from speculation, demands an objective locus.

Area studies have been subject to criticism. Many of the area specialists alleged that because areas today were connected to the cold war agendas of the CIA, the FBI and other intelligence and military agencies, participating in such programs was tantamount to preserving as an agent of the state. Some argue that there is the notion that US concerns and research priorities will define the intellectual terrain of area studies. Arguably, one of the greatest threats

to the area studies project was the rise of rational choice theory in political science and economics. Dharavi is a suburb in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. It has often been considered to be one of the world's largest slums. Dharavi has an area of just over 2.39 square kilometers and a population of about 10 lakh (Chadha, Vipra. Dharavi Slum Mumbai: History, Real Estate and Re-Development) With a population density of over 277,136/km², Dharavi is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Dharavi slum was founded in 1884 during the British colonial era, and grew because the expulsion of factories and residents from the peninsular city centered by the colonial government and from the migration of rural Indians into urban Mumbai. For this reason, Dharavi is currently a highly diverse settlement religiously and ethnically. Dharavi has an active informal economy in which numerous household enterprises employ many of the slum residents like leather, textiles and pottery products are among the goods made in Dharavi. The total annual turnover has been estimated at over US\$1 billion. Dharavi has suffered from many epidemics and other disasters including a widespread plague in 1896 which killed over half of the population of Bombay. Sanitation in the slums remains poor. Dharavi is often compared to Orangi slum in Karachi. While Orangi has double the population of Dharavi, it is spread over an area of 60 kilometer square about thirty times that of Dharavi. Effectively, Orangi slum dwellers have 15 times more land per capita than Dharavi. In the 18th century, Dharavi was an island with a predominantly mangrove swamp. It was a sparsely populated village before the late 19th century inhabited by Koli fishermen. Dharavi was then referred to as the village of Koliwada. In the 1950s after decades of urban growth under East India company and British raj, the city's population reached half a million. The urban area then covered mostly the southern extension of Bombay peninsula, the population density was over 10 times higher than London at that time. The most polluting industries were canneries and the first cannery moved from Peninsular Bombay into Dharavi in 1887. People who worked with leather, typically a profession of lowest Hindu caste and of Muslim Indians, moved into Dharavi. Other early settlers included the Kumbhars a large

Gujarati community of potters. The colonial government granted them a 99 year land-lease in 1895. Rural migrants looking for jobs poured into Bombay, and its population soared passed

1 million. Other partition like the embroidery workers from Uttar Pradesh started the readymade garments trade. These industries created jobs, labour moved in but there was no government effort to plan or invest in an infrastructure in or near Dharavi. The living quarters and small scale factories grew haphazardly, without provision for sanitation, drains safe drinking water, roads or other basic services. But some ethnic, caste and religious communities that have settled in Dharavi that time helped build the settlement of Dharavi, by forming

organizations and political parties, building school and temples constructing homes and factories. Dharavi's first mosque, Badi masjid started in 1887 and the oldest Hindu temple Ganesh Mandir, was built in 1913(Dharavi. Wikipedia, Wikipedia Foundation, Modified on March 18, 2023.<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharavi>).

At India's Independence from Colonial rule in 1947 Dharavi had grown to be the largest slum in Bombay and all of India. It still had a few empty spaces which continued to serve as waste dumping grounds for operators across the city. Bombay, meanwhile continued to grow as city. Soon Dharavi was surrounded by the city and became a key hub for informal economy. Starting from the 1950s, proposals for Dharavi redevelopment plans periodically came out but most of these plans failed because of lack of financial backing and or political support. Dharavi's Cooperative Housing Society was formed in the 1966 to uplift the lives of thousands of slum dwellers by the initiative of Shree. M. V. Durai swamy, a well-known social worker and Congress leader of that region. The society promoted 338 flats and 97 shops and was named as Dr. Baliga Nagar. By the late 20th century, Dharavi occupied about 175 hectares, with an astounding population density of more than 2900 people per hectare. Settlements like Dharavi from the life stories of the people who inhabit them. They are not the planned townships such as desired as a solution to urban blight. The way they grow merges with the lives of the men and women who imbue them with a personality.

How the representation on Dharavi is created by the movie titled *Dharavi* directed by Sudhir Mishra Thus how a place is made and re made through different portrayals have been identified by the researcher. People have many perceptions of the area as a typical slum area. But the slum area of Dharavi is entirely different. What many people do not realize is that, it is different from the normal slum areas. There are many things, that most of the people are not aware about it. So this project challenges the common perceptions and along with that make the people understand what Dharavi really is. The first chapter shows a typical understanding and setting of the area in the movie *Dharavi* directed by the Indian director Sudhir Mishra. As a movie can make the people understand about a society, culture, economy and politics, people believe that this is the real face of

Dharavi. Second chapter explains the reality of Dharavi in the light of the book *Rediscovering Dharavi* written by Kalpana Sharma through many interviews with the natives.

Dharavi, the slum is the most populated area of Mumbai. It is considered to be one of the world's most populated slums, covering around 520 acres of land. It is surrounded by west Bandra, Mahim, Mithi river in the north, Matunga in east and Sion in the south. Founded in 1884 during British colonial era, Dharavi was first inhabited by the fishermen. Maybe the lands of Dharavi are owned by the government but the houses are maintained by the individuals who reside in Dharavi. These 520 acres of land is not like any other slum. It is a place which defines unity of diversity precisely. This multi-ethnic slum residing lakhs of people is not only a place of residing but is also a tourist destination. Dharavi has an active informal economy in which numerous house hold enterprises employ many of the slum residents—leather, textiles and pottery products are among the goods made inside Dharavi. The total annual turnover has been estimated at over US\$1 billion. Dharavi has suffered from many epidemics and other disasters, including a widespread plague in 1896 which killed over half of the population of Bombay.

The slum, in some way, makes Mumbai stand out, Scores of foreigners visit the place every day to get a feel of the place and are willing to spend money to get the experience. It is also ridden with gangs, gang wars, and crime. Overall, the slum itself has an interesting character that is different from any other slum in the world. Movies like *Dharavi*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *GullyBoy*, *Kaala* and *Dharavi Bank* are a few impactful films that revolve around the slum and tell its story. Movies can give viewers a different view of society than they are used to, broadening their horizons and making them think about problems in new ways. They can offer a different perspective on the lives of people in other societies, providing insight int

the live and cultures of other people. As movies have strong impact in creating images in the minds of people, they blindly believe what they observe in movies as true. But sometimes it might be mere prejudices and wrong notions.

In the movie *Dharavi* itself the plight and condition of the area is portrayed as very pathetic and dangerous. They have to struggle a lot to get a job and follow their dreams. Women also have to work to support their family expenses. Prostitution, crimes and other social elements are displaced as normal. People are represented as aggressive and they fight each other for trivial things. Drinking is normalized as they drink at every opportunity whether they are happy, sad or angry. Cheating and robbery are so common that even children grow up with a cruel mind in the movie.

It is commonly perceived that Dharavi is a city within a city, it is one unending stretch of narrow dirty lanes, open sewers and cramped huts. People have to live with very problems. They have to go to the toilet in the street. Children play amongst sewage waste and doctors deal with cases a day of diphtheria and typhoid. Next to the open sewers are water pipes which can crack and take in sewage. At the edge of Dharavi, the newest arrivals come to make their homes on waste land which is not suitable for habitation. In the west monsoon season these people have huge problems living on this low-lying marginal land. There are also toxic wastes in the slum including hugely dangerous heavy metals. People live in very small dwellings often with many members of their extended families. Water is a big problem for the population. Stand pipes come on at 5:30am for two hours as water is refreshed. These stand pipes are shared with many people. The houses often have no windows, asbestos roofs and no planning to fit fire regulations. Rooms within houses have multiple functions including living, working, sleeping. The slum has severe public health problems with a long history of epidemics and other disasters. Virtually all housings have been constructed illegally and are extremely crowded and small. It is one of the least clean places in Mumbai.

The entire residential district lacks any kind of infrastructure, like roads, public conveniences, and toilets. With an average of 1 toilet per 500, most residents use alleys or the local river as a toilet, even though the river is also a source of Dharavi's freshwater. Open sewers become play grounds for children, while dead rats line the alley ways, and live ones run up and down. Sanitation is one of the most important concerns of this settlement because the mangrove streams that run through the fishing village are replaced by sewer lines and contaminated streams. To one's surprise, according to a study done in 2006, there is only one toilet per 1440 people in this settlement (Sinha, County, Times of India. Published on November 10, 2006). This scarcity in sanitation facilities has led to the contamination of the Mahim creek that runs through Dharavi, which has been heavily polluted by sewage and garbage, which also adversely affects other parts of the town that the creek flows through, ultimately resulting in the contamination of the Mahim Bay.

The condition of Dharavi has been portrayed in the movie *Dharavi* by one of the famous Indian directors Sudhir Mishra. The film was a joint NFDC-Door darshan production and went onto winning many awards in the following year, including the 1992 National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi. The film was also invited at the London Film Festival, Mannheim International Film Festival and Festival 3 Continents Nantes in 1992. The film stars Shabana Azmi and Om Puri in lead roles, and is set amidst the backdrop of India's largest slum, Dharavi. This gritty film by Sudhir Mishra offers window into life in the Bombay slum. It's harrowing yet compelling, and though its focus is a depressing tale of defeat and loss, it somehow achieves a hopeful tone at its conclusion.

The plot of the movie reveals that, Rajkaran (Om Puri) is a cab-driver living in a tidy, one-room Dharavi shack with his mother (Anjana), his wife Kumud (Shabana Azmi), and their son. Rajkaran yearns for success in business and a better life; he is gathering funds to buy a small cloth-dyeing factory. When one of his partners pulls out unexpectedly, Rajkaran reluctantly accepts a loan from the local underworld boss Tiravi, whose goons are suspected to be behind any number of neighbor hoods beatings and murders. Now in debt to Tiravi,

Rajkaran finds himself drawn into ever more shady dealings, to the despair of Kumud, whose brother dared to stand up to Tiravi's tyranny and was murdered for it. Kumud finds solace in the peaceful company of her first husband Shankar, with whom she had parted ways years before, and who has returned to Dharavi helpless and partially paralyzed after suffering a stroke. On the verge of losing his livelihood and alienating his family, Rajkaran grows ever more desperate.

What is most fascinating about *Dharavi* is its slice-of-life look at Bombay's slums. In small but vivid details as well as in big-picture themes the film illuminates this world that is so different from others. The slum neighborhood itself is like a village, where everyone is all up in everyone else's business, one cannot keep secrets, and you cannot cross the thugs and heavies who rule over the place; there is violence almost daily. Kumud engages in a daily struggle with the local corrupt water-mongers; they illegally tap the municipal water supply - there are no official municipal services in Dharavi - but they won't let Kumud take more than one bucketful without a fight. But there's also a strong sense of community; women gather in the streets to make pappadums and gossip, and in the evenings, everyone gathers in a little alley movie theatre to watch escapist movies strengthless of Anil Kapoor and Madhuri Dixit. Rajkaran has romantic dreams in which he and Madhuri (who plays herself) roll around in mustard fields, he confiding his troubles to her, she confessing her love for him. Rajkaran and Kumud live in a tiny one-room corrugated shack, reminiscent of the shantytown dwellings. But Kumud keeps it tidy and neat; there is a pretty little rug on the floor and potted plants on the sill, and other small comforts that can help preserve one's sanity and dignity when living in squalor. Kumud works in a small oppressive tailor shop, like the old sweatshops of the lower east side tenements in New York, working a sewing machine while sweat beads on her forehead. As hard as their life is, though, Kumud seems to manage it - early on, she questions why Rajkaran isn't satisfied, why he has to try to push for more - she doesn't seem, at least at this point in the movie, to share her husband's eagerness to get out of Dharavi. But while his ambition might be inspiring, it enrages him when his industrial dreams beg into

crumble, and his rage drives away everyone around him. Dharavi, a land of promises and despair, A land of treachery and miseries and what not. A satire on the canvas of the maximum city, Mumbai. Anyways it creates a perfect backdrop for story tellers to express ordeals and hardships of the common man. A common man, so extensively portrayed in the films from time to time that he has become kind of cliché'. All have certain expectations from him. He must be honest, should be in loose plain shirts, dropped shoulders, find happiness in his wife and children. He may sometimes have big expectations but in no way are they bigger than his ethics and his family.

Here the hero Rajkaran is a common man, earning from hard work and still in debt. He also has big dreams, to rise higher in life. But he is uncommonly common. He has a family, but he is not happy with their burden. He has ethics, but only as far as they don't come in his way. He drinks a lot. Can easily put a blind eye whenever sees any trouble. Heck, he fantasizes about Madhuri Dixit! He is in every sense in the modern world-just a human. He takes all the right steps needed. In his eyes, he has done nothing wrong. But the world is determined to take him down. His wife, Kumud is also common in every sense. Content, hardworking and loving. or it seems so. Maybe she is tired of fighting with the destiny and accepted her status in society. What destiny plans for them is for you to watch. Om Puri and Shabana Azmi, two of the stalwarts show us yet again what playing a character honestly is.

Om Puri plays a flawed and thus a very human character. His character Rajkaran, shows how a dream can possess a man. His ambition of going up the social ladder forms the base of story. And his wife Kumud, a woman with huge responsibilities of chores upon her shoulders, is one who has to bear all her husband's fault without questioning. Played brilliantly by Shabana Azmi, the character shows how a woman sacrifices for a man and yet has to rely solely on him. In other characters, Raghuveer Yadav and Virendra Saxena play their part with ease and finesse. Sudhir Mishra handles the subject of poverty, greed, injustice and crime without being biased and keeping every character flawed in

some sense thus adding to the perception of story. The message of the film is therefore a little ambiguous - should one just accept one's lot and leave well enough alone, or should one try to make something better for one's self and family? The film resolves this ambiguity for the best by allowing Rajkaran to emerge from his trials bruised and setback, but not defeated.

The movie portrays the place from only one specific side of it. One cannot blindly believe or ignore what the movie represented. From the beginning itself hooliganisms showed and it continues till the end. Conflict and violence are displayed every time even for trivial matters. Demolition of buildings and vehicles are done without any regret. The movie portrays the inhabitants of Dharavi as most aggressive people. Conflicts and violence have been normalized as it becomes their part of life. There is no difference in age, religion, gender for conflicts. Many victims of domestic violence came to the hospital, but interaction with doctors and nurses tended to stop at treatment for injuries. Even the children are growing with aggressive mind. There is a scene in the movie that a gang of children frightening a little girl who cries because of fear.

Women in the movie are represented as something different to the common notion. In the movie women portrayed as self-employed. Most of the women are doing their own small-scale works. The wife of Rajkaran, Kumud is working in a tailoring shop with many others. Some women are engaged in small scale industries like papad and laddoo companies. But there is a contradiction in dealing women. In one hand the hero is treating his wife and mother in a good manner. In another hand women is portrayed as powerless and helpless treating as a business thing. Prostitution and suppression of women can be seen in the movie. Kumud the wife of Rajkaran is accepting all the flaws her husband made without questioning.

The people are very much influenced by movies. Even the fight scene in the movie they watched led them to be realistic. People put much interest in entertainments like music, movies, games and dance. Drinking is a habit of the inhabitants both in happy and sorrow situations. The slum is a place of inadequate water supply. Movie shows people queueing a long period for water supply even at the midnight. Some people with power are controlling and also, in terms of money. The people can take only limited amount of water.

Also, people are depicted as ambitious. They possess a lot of aims and dreams. Everyone dreams to go out of the slum in order to get a better life. They dream of becoming factory owners and entrepreneurs, managers. The hero himself is an example for it. He is highly ambitious and always dreams of better life. His dream is to become a factory owner. In the movie there is a shot where he shows his mother a factory and said: “see the colored cloth hanging there, amma? I am buying that factory. So do not say did not tell you”.(40:12)The movie basically revolves around his ambition.

People have been portrayed as illiterate and uneducated in their language and style. Sanitationist much concerned as it's very bad there. Poverty is another striking feature of Dharavi depicted in the movie Dharavi 1992.They all are always greedy for money and do various methods to fulfil their aims. But as they are not bothered and aware about the consequences of it, it leads them to huge troubles. They are only looking to the moment only, not thinking about the future in dealing with money. But they are closely packed with religion. A scene shows people are continuing their namaz while the police was demolishing their houses.

The mood of the people in the movie is always sad, confused, tensed, busy, unhappy and angry. Happy moments are portrayed less in it. They all are tensed and confused with their own business. Something is related to their aims and something related to their personal matters. They are always using bad word search other even in the normal talks. When the wife of Rajkaran asked him what is wrong with him, he replied: “get out you shit” (1:45:18). They are not even bothered about what they call others and what others call them back. It has been normalized that much. The movie portrayed the people as lazy men. As they dream big with doing nothing. But also, people are closely connected to their objects like vehicles and animals.

The plight and miserable condition of Dharavi cannot be completely ignored. This information cannot be applied one ached every person who live in Dharavi. But it neglects the general notion on slum and considering it as normal as others. There might be poor's, with no concreted houses, uneducated people, unemployed people, drinkers, people who engage in

crimes etc. But it cannot be generalized as majority live with a moderate status, educated, employed and living under good condition, as observed by Kalpana Sharma in her book *Rediscovering Dharavi*.

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