

7.35 a.m.

She grabbed her lunch; wrapped in aluminum foil and packed in the airtight Tupperware box, a deep blue (with lifetime warranty), FM radio, mobile phone and the morning "Bombay Times" enroute to work. On slamming the front door shut she shoved all of this inside her bag with one hand and adjusted her dupatta with the other. She pressed the button for the elevator, faint strains of "Jingle bells jingle bells.....Bang bang bang!

Some floors below the watchman who `dropping of the keys, he would hold open the elevator door to avoid waiting for it again, reluctantly he lets go of the door.

Finally on her way down, Mrs. Saxena enters on the third floor with her 8 year old, she is braiding her daughters' hair with black ribbon, "its still so hot for this time of the year hai na?" she politely agrees, glances at her Titan. Five minutes to reach the temple.

Indian cities can actually be navigated with the help of sacred spaces. The Banyan tree is claimed by the devotees of the saint who sat under its shade, the stone that bore a resemblance to the linga, the phallic symbol of Lord Shiva is converted to a shrine clad with marble engraved with the name of the donor who paid for its erection, no matter that it obstructs smooth flow of traffic.

7.43 a.m.

She rummages through her coin purse, to drop of some in the extended hands (which appear outside every temple), drops on her knees, touches the floor and then on her toes to ring the bell. The sweet smell of agarbatti mingling with that of crushed marigold and the boondi laddoos invades her as she bows her head in holy reverence. Once outside she bargains for her "gajra".



Mumbai from space:
Satellite image of Mumbai



Siddhivinayak Temple :
queues lasts hours on Tuesday here



Vada Pav: The Indian
Burger found on Mumbai's
streets at Rs.2 a piece

(Jasmine flowers strung on a short thread and pinned to the hair).

She hurries to the bus stop, avoiding the potholes and almost banging into the autorickshaw who has pulled in close hoping to lure her into a trip to the station. She curses under her breath, "do you have no mother and sisters at home"

7.55 a.m.

She balances herself expertly and gropes for a few rupees in her bag, she needs change and the bus conductor will oblige if he is in a good mood. Finally she gets a seat, adjusts her FM radio and is transported to the wedding sequence of the latest Bollywood flick.

8.13 a.m.

She is waiting on the overbridge between platform 3 & 5. She has to reach the platform before the tide of people wash ashore (and start swelling up the stairs), and after the train is visible to decide which platform to descend upon. Luckily it's the 8.17 fast; Monica will be in the middle second (*class*) ladies Compartment.

As the train slows down she gathers her dupatta and bag and braces herself to get into the train. There is only one-way in and one-way out, and that is with the herd. It's not a job for the faint hearted amateur.

The bhajan mandali (*troop of religious singers*) in the third compartment is chanting to the tunes of the clanging plates and the urchin is singing the latest bollywood tune to gain sympathy and ofcourse some moolah! The entrance is blocked by the basket of the fisherwomen. One needs to navigate with as much skill as a mosquito, which finds the smallest gap in the nylon net.



Auto rickshaw:
The motorized tricycle



Coconut water on the beach: Beats Colas



Commuters at a station:
Any Day any time rush



Hot Coture: Fashion Street

She books her seat with the lady who will get off 4 stops before her. As she moves in and balances her bag her attention is drawn to the moving scene outside.

Through the bars of the little train window is a whole world outside. Slums built dangerously close to the tracks. Little naked children chasing tyres with a stick... young girls picking nits from each other's hair. The huts built of all possible materials. The gunny bag, to the tin sheets, the corrugated cardboard to the blue plastic sheets are tectonically balanced, swaying to the beat of the steel monster and its blaring horn and oblivious to the threat that it can pose to their very existence. Even the hen and chicken are running around in abandon.

The low north light structure of the distant buildings, punctuated by tall chimneys. Majestic truss of steel spanning wide chasms. It tells the tale of the glory that the cities cloth once brought to not only herself but to the rest of the country as well. The finest muslins legend had it that could pass through a needles eye. Their broken glass however tell another story. The tussle between the mill owner and the mill worker. The landowner and the tenant. Where the tussle has been settled by consensus or by force is now spanking new boutiques which convert to pubs at sun down. The bowling alleys built in the name of entertainment for the workers! High art is hand in glove with the car garage servicing the latest model of the BMW convertible. The skyscraper (excuse me, the bungalows in the air) dot the landscape interspersed with chawls. (one room tenements provided to the mill workers)

9.37 a.m.

The train pulls into its final destination before its trip back again. The trussed ceiling of the station serving as hooks from



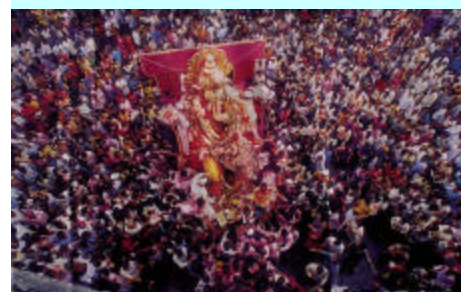
Mac Donalds: Food for thought?



Dabbawala: The science of delivering tiffins!



Victoria Terminus: Neo-Gothic train halt



Ganpati: Immersion crowds

which the ancient fans are hung which hardly seem to push around the humid air. She hurries out dodging her way expertly through the maze of people.

The dabbawalas are ready unloading on their handcarts with their expert coding that delivers the right lunch tiffin to the right office goer and returns it back in the evening. She hurries through the subway lined with hawkers selling duplicate deodorant Rs.100 for 3. on the footpath above, beckons the now familiar yellow and red "M" that dots in and around Mumbai's suburban station. It is the sign of the Mac. A favourite rendezvous to meet people used to be under the train indicator is now shifting to outside McDonalds. And no doubt a softy at Rs.7 is a pleasing thought on a hot day. Most days are hot in Mumbai, unless it is raining. Then it is hot and wet!

She skips over the pothole along the arched stone arcade that provides relief from the suns glare. Posters of Bollywood stars and cricketers can be found next to posters of Indian Gods. Though ironically bollywood and cricket are more of a religion than any other in India!

10.00 a.m. –5.00 p.m.

its time to go home. The same route but different sights. The mandatory stop for a snack with her boyfriend on the way home. Yesterday was vada-pav the Mumbai burger, so today it will be Bhelpuri! The hawkers are strategically located at unmissable location all over. The bhel was too spicy. He rushes to buy her a small bottle of mineral water. The brand name often takes over as the name of the item itself. So Bisleri is



Sachin Tendulkar:
Mumbai's little master



Devdas: Bollywood
unplugged

bottled water, no matter it is not of the bisleri brand, likewise a Xerox is a photocopy!

The crowded city has no place for lovers who gravitate towards the coastline. The promenade or the beach might be the only place you can spend some time together but no holding hands or even touching, else the moral police will round you up literally!

6.45 p.m.

He drops her a little away from her house on his bike. She must walk the last two blocks not to be noticed together by neighbors.

The residential buildings of Mumbai's suburbs have started resembling birthday cakes. The pretty pink icing on a brown chocolate cake. the renaissance columns which surround the overhead tank are the twirled candles on the cake. The erstwhile compound which were the cricketing pitches of the young cricketers are now parking spots for the Honda city. Infact broken glasses have banned the sport in many housing societies. There are cars everywhere. In the stilts and on the streets. In the compound and in the basement. And now even on the podium built above the stilt for still more cars!

Each and every resident wants to maintain the very best inside the house. The NIMBY (not in my backyard theory) is all prevalent. It just doesn't matter how it looks from the outside.

As she hurries inside her building to rest her weary bones and then next morning back to square one!!

Pooja Rastogi



Birds eye view of Mumbai



**Night view: Mumbai
Ancient Rome? Paris?**



**My big shoe: where did
I take it off?**