



MUMBAI MUSINGS

Poornima Jayaraman traverses the route all Mumbai-ites take, and redefines it's little moments and meanings...

The bus screeches to a halt right at the Glaxo Bus stand. I barely get off before it re-starts with a roar and disappears in a cloud of carbon monoxide. Two young daredevils dangle precariously from the foot rail of the over crowded bus with just their hands and a leg each for support. Another bus wheezes to a stop. Vomiting forth its sweaty, irritable occupants and taking in many more, it soon hobbles along.

I watch this scene – a daily nightmare – lost in my own world. It ceases to impress me anymore. This mind-numbing journey straight-from-hell, where your body parts seem almost severed from each other, squashed in a tight, suffocating, all-encompassing crowd. It has become a part of my daily existence.

I wonder...Who are these people – my fellow travellers? What do they do? Is the arduous journey they undertake everyday worth their while? Do they even have a choice?

I amble slowly down a sidewalk, watching the traffic go by and inhaling the acrid fumes and the inky, black smoke. It's so easy to just give up, lie down and let the world go by. It's so much easier in another city, where you are guaranteed a better quality of life at the very least. It's so easy to walk away from it all and just disappear.

Why then do people consciously choose to live the kind of life, which is a daily battle? What makes them believe their dreams are just within their reach in Mumbai? What is it that makes them tick? Wherefrom their courage and strength of spirit to overcome the dismal quality of life that they lead?

To be fair, Mumbai has a special magic and palpable vitality more felt than seen. Yet it is the best example of the yawning valley between the haves and the have-nots. While the 'haves,' get their

"mercs" valet parked and boogie away at the city's hotspots, the 'have-nots,' ranging from the desperately poor to the middle class, struggle daily to eke out their living and buy themselves a few necessities.

Caught in a Capitalist culture, in the country's commercial Capital...every man comes to Mumbai with stars in his eyes and dreams in his heart. The harsh living conditions, the spiraling debts, the terrible commute to and from work, slowly numbs his heart and with it, his dreams slowly crumble and die. He continues eking out his daily living, in the forlorn hope that someday he will see a rainbow, which will wipe out his stormy days...

It's true that nowhere else will anyone get the opportunity to strike it big, like one does in Mumbai. But for all the success stories, there are still a million tearjerkers. For all the get-rich fables, there are still countless massive suicides and deaths by starvation. Yet, it's the Mumbaikar's indefatigable, never-say-die spirit and his inherent optimism that makes him get through every day on a positive note, hoping tomorrow will be better.

As the last bus rushes past me, the driver furiously blowing his horn, interrupting me from my far away thoughts, I quickly step aside. I am late for work. I watch people fighting to get off the bus...laughing as they disembark, and quickly patting their hair in place...proceeding briskly to their destinations. I marvel at their sheer spirit and wonder how happy they really are.

A bolt of lightning strikes me. Things suddenly fall into place. The sheer ability to laugh off life's problems, to retain that fundamental dream and go all out in the pursuit of that same dream - is what makes the people of Mumbai so special and oh-so Mumbai.

Hats off to the Mumbai resilience...may the spirit live on! GURLZ