



Mapping “Spaces of Rejuvenation” through Cognitive Mapping in *Shantaram*

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Abstract

By analyzing the theory of Geocriticism, this research provides spatial criticism of Gregory David Roberts's *Shantaram*. The research finds Bombay a "space of rejuvenation," where Roberts forgets the past of criminality and moves ahead for the spiritual journey. The research follows three concepts, "cognitive mapping," "architectural narrative," and "mapping narrative," which aim to present geography as the emotional and intellectual content of the story. It also gives a thematic and figurative analysis of narrative strategies described by Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse* combining with spatial criticism. It presents how Roberts uses 'mimetic' and 'diegetic' narrative mode to figure real and imagined spaces, how he uses 'focalization' to tell the story, which gives internal and external details of characters or the spaces. The blending of spatial criticism in narrative strategies takes readers one step further in the research area of the literary text.

Keywords: Geocriticism, Cognitive mapping, Architecture mapping, Mapping narrative

Since a century literary theorists, critics, research scholars, geographers, urban planners, and architects have been trying to establish the relationship between space-time-being, and since a decade after the publication of Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Fictional and Real Spaces* (2011), it has taken solid ground to understand the subjectivity of space in the works of literature. Geocriticism is an interdisciplinary literary approach to understand the city and its real and imagined places, which have been the primary concern in postmodern novels. It incorporates the study of society, politics, culture, psychology, geography, architecture and many more. Because it is a spatial criticism, the theory aims to explore geography and architecture of the spaces as the influencing force where an event or story is created by an author. Talking about the



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importance of architecture in literature, David Spurr writes in *Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature and the City* (2018):

The human body and psyche are affected by architectural space in powerful but often imperceptible ways. Beyond the literal interior of architectural space, then, there lies a further interiority opened up by the subjective experience of that space in feeling and in spirit, derived from the manifold perception of substance, material, depth, light, shadow, and sound. Like literary form, architectural form, in the senses of its design and its material substance, is capable of recalling cultural memory, telling a story, and transforming human subjectivity. (Charley; Foreword)

"Architectural narratives" breaks new ground in spatial criticism as space acts as the protagonist in the literary text, and more focus has been given to that spatial and architectural representation of the spaces and its impact on individuals. The related term of "architectural narrative" is "mapping narrative" given by Robert T. Tally in *Literary Cartographies* (2014). He believes that "narratives are in some ways devices or methods used to map real and imagined spaces of human experience" (3). Mapping narrative thus follows the dialectic tendency of the spaces; it follows the path where spaces give meaning to an individual's life. The significance of "mapping narrative" lies in a broader context. It maps the different spaces on geography, whereas "architectural narratives" deal with the topographical and chorographical representation of the spaces.

Bombay, as depicted in *Shantaram*, can be observed as the subject of the novel. For Gregory David Roberts (2003), it is "a space of rejuvenation" where he can breathe, explore himself and understands the value of life. It is the space of his spiritual journey. *Shantaram* is set in 1980 when Roberts reaches Bombay after running from Australia prison. It is terrifying to be lost. Not to know where one should go, not to know where one is living, and not to know where one wants to go. Being an addict and a criminal, Roberts has been leading a life on the run and eventually finds solace in Bombay. He does not know how long he will live in that space, but by changing



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the space and giving himself a new name Lindsay and a new identity as a writer from New Zealand, he wants to forget his past criminality. Bombay becomes the place that helps him transform himself, from the past of criminality, from the elsewhere to the spiritual journey of knowing the 'Self,' all take place in Bombay.

Roberts presents Bombay as a place of immigrants and the city of contrast. The beauty of seven islands versus filthiness of slums, the richness versus poverty, the huge skyscrapers versus slums, the crowd on the road versus peace at sea, and the crime in public spaces versus spiritual journey in mental space. *Shantaram*, along with the chorographical details of the places where Lin has lived and visited in Bombay, also presents his relationship to every aspect of that external reality which he experiences and the characters to whom he meets in those places contribute a profound change in him to know the value of life. The spatial presentation of the places is not essential for its own sake. The historiography, geopolitics, and the social-cultural dynamics of that place give much knowledge about an individual's ability to have a relationship with the physical space and its impact on mental space in a crisis. In Fredric Jameson's term, it is called "cognitive mapping" in the postmodern perspective when an individual finds difficulty locating himself with the external world (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1992).

Shantaram is a story of criminals; all the characters are criminals, immigrants, leading a life on the run, and finding a space to hide and survive by adopting illegal ways. They find it difficult to locate themselves in the external world. Lin too gets into the world of crime, but his journey, unlike other characters, is one step ahead. He raises questions behind the reason for his existence in the world. Lin wants to know the meaning of life, wants to repent for the wrong he did in the past, and wants to know the future. Why is he into crime? How long will he live this life of crime? Whether he will survive or die are such questions that he continually asks himself.

The narrative is not linear as it goes in flashback. With the main story, which is Lin's life story in the flashback at Bombay, Roberts uses several flashbacks or memories as the tool to handle time and to tell his biographical details before coming to Bombay. When at Leopold, his



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friends ask him when he will go back from Bombay; he lost in the lane of memory at Australia, giving readers important details about his past:

And I was a writer. In Australia I'd written since my early twenties. I'd just begun to establish myself through my first published work when my marriage collapsed, I lost the custody of my daughter, and I lost my life in drugs, crime, imprisonment, and escape.
(43)

These are not mere biographical details; such narratives also work as mapping narrative. Roberts takes the reader from Bombay to Australia. For readers, the imagined space is Australia, where they come to know about his life before coming to Bombay. The novel is divided into five parts, and each part discusses the major events of Lin's life. It can be observed, firstly, that every part deals with "space and its ideology." This research analyzes what Lin has learned from the spaces which he has visited. What kind of virtues he explores within himself in those places. How spaces help him to understand Bombay and its people, what kind of relationship he develops with the people of that space, how he feels enlightened or reinvents himself in Bombay, and the last, what is necessary to live in a space?

Secondly, *Shantaram* deals with "the crisis of space" in Bombay, immigration, homelessness, poverty, and the role of the power structure in it. Thirdly, *Shantaram* exposes geopolitics, Shiv Sena, and its role in spreading criminal culture in Bombay, the drugs and arms smuggling, slave markets, religious riots, killing and mafia culture gives the image of Bombay as the "city of crime." The novel gives a detailed description of the public spaces where criminal activities take place. The black market of several businesses and their working process is discussed through the mimetic mode of description. Fourthly, it deals with "moral complexities." The guilt of the past keeps haunting him, but Lin stands strong to overcome the past of criminality, even in his then-current course of action, he always tries to know the reason behind committing the crime. The characters and the places give him intellectual support, and eventually, he resolves the moral conflict of what is right and wrong at the end of the novel.



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Freedom is presented as the theme of Part one. Every space at Bombay adds virtue to his character. For instance, while living in slums, Lin learns how to be ‘caring’ or ‘selfless’ and develop the feeling of ‘togetherness’ with others. The architectural narrative of slums goes in this way:

Like brown and black dunes, the acres of slums rolled away from the roadside, and met the horizon with dirty heat- haze mirages. The miserable shelters were patched together from rags, scraps of plastic and paper, reed mats, and bamboo sticks. They slumped together, attached one to another, and with narrow lanes winding between them. Nothing in the enormous sprawl of it rose much above the height of a man. (7)

Lin finds that the space of slums is too dense, and lanes are too narrow, but every person is busy and free. They are energetic, beautiful, maintain cleanliness in their small huts, and live like a family. The most astonishing thing about slum people is that they seem to be very happy and content in such a poverty-ridden lifestyle. Lin says, “And half an hour after the bus ride began, I smiled for the first time” (8). The structure of poverty, ubiquity of slums, and happiness all around act as building an architectural environment in the novel that inspires Lin the most. Lin knows that he has started to love this city to see its architectural, social, and cultural diversity, which is a sort of attraction that cannot be found anywhere in the world.

Even at The Gateway of India, he gets the meaning of freedom. He notices that it is a kind of place where crime takes place; from pickpocketing to black market trade, it is the center of crime, everyone knows about it, but nobody bothers because it is the money which is revolving around. Through the mimetic mode of narration, The Gate of India is presented as a heterogeneous space.

Hundreds of people walked there, or stood in talking groups. Shops, restaurants, and hotels filled the street side by side along its entire length. Every shops or restaurants featured a smaller sub-shop attached to the front of it. Two or three attendants, seated on folding stools, manned each of those small encroachments on the footpath. There were



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Africans, Arabs, Europeans, and Indians. Languages and music changed with every step, and every restaurant spilled a different scent into the boiling air. (20)

It can be observed here that the architectural narrative is not limited to the visual image of that place. It also stimulates readers' sense of smell and hearing, and the combination of all gives the illusion to live in that place. The heart which is trying to bury the guilt of painful past and full of remorse suddenly becomes enthusiastic, and he feels that Bombay is the place where he can survive, forget his past and find love and relationships which he lacks most in his life. Lin feels:

To my eyes, the city was beautiful. It was wild and exciting. Buildings that were British Raj- romantic stood side to side with modern mirrored business towers. The haphazard slouch of neglected tenements crumbled into lavish displays of market vegetables and skills. I heard music from every shop and passing taxi. The colors were vibrant. The fragrances were dizzyingly delicious. And there were more smiles in the eyes on those crowded streets than in any other place I'd ever known.(21)

Roberts finds that in every space, there is an unconstrained spirit that directly responds to the heart. The spaces are free for shopping, for walking, for stealing, for crimes, for begging and for lavishing. Bombay is the place for foreigners. They love it for many reasons; for its beauty, seven islands, old and new modern architecture, the film industry, drugs, and for crime because it is the easiest way of survival to thousands of immigrants who come here in search of occupation.

The next space is Leopold Bar, where he develops 'friendship' and becomes 'intellectually strong' by the endless philosophical discussions about life with other characters. Leopold is a heterotopia, a space of gangsters, addicts, and alcoholics, a place where all illegal activities take place. Roberts presents Lin as a passive observer who keeps a record of the places and the events taking place there. Readers come to know about the back story of the novel from this place. The dominant political party Shiv Sena, with its regional language-based, anti- migrants, anti-Muslim agenda, becoming more potent by forcing people to migrate, by closing opium dens and controlling the state power. Space and geopolitics have a great effect on the psyche of



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individuals, especially the poor who become executors and victims of religious riots and inter-gang rivalry.

The spatial presentation of Leopold as 'rectangle ground floor,' 'metal doors,' 'the cedar chairs,' 'thirty tables with pearl-smoked Indian marble,' 'white-glass pendulum lights' and 'the view of the causeway.' It helps readers in making a visual image of a space where crime is taking place. Moreover, Lin observes that a peculiar dialect defines the relationships among different spaces and the crimes within Leopold. Indian prostitution is for 'upstairs,' European prostitution goes 'downstairs,' drug dealings at the table 'inside' the bar and exchange of money and goods 'outside' the bar. The diverse society of Leopold is unique in itself. Everyone follows those unwritten laws of crime. Everyone notices those forbidden acts, even people from the street, the taxi drivers, the police, but all are paid hefty bribes to look away. Later it can be seen that Lin's life revolves around at this place. The reason may be his new friends or love for Karla and the long philosophical discussions about love, power, money, freedom, and many more topics to please the intellect; it helps him understand life, Bombay, and its people. He loves to sit there alone and make notes on whatever he sees and feels at Leopold or even outside it.

To know more about Bombay and its people, Lin takes a journey to Prabaker's village known as Sunder Village, which helps him overcome the guilt of the past. He lives there six months and experiences how the innocent villagers have 'trust,' 'faith,' and 'love' and have 'sympathy' with each other. Even the name Shantaram is given to him by villagers as they find him as 'the man of peace.' Roberts chooses it as the title of the novel because it is the village where he (Lin) gets peace of mind. He surrenders himself to Bombay, learns Marathi language, experiences 'togetherness', and willing to live a new life by forgetting the past. It is the village where he finds his lost soul and reinvents himself.

The first experience of the journey starts from the crowded railway platform to the train's coach to Sunder village. Can a railway platform teach a person anything? In Lin's case, yes. He learns how the Indian people are 'patient' and 'tolerant'. He witnesses the nudge with a foot,



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pushing, biting, brawling, and violent scramble to board the train suddenly disappears when the train starts and people adjust not only themselves but also help each other sit on the train floor. He says, "In the carriage and the corridor beyond, the other passengers were similarly respectful, sharing and solicitous with one another" (104). Lin realizes that it may seem hypocritical to others, but the real hypocrites are those who come from the land of plenty, they have not to fight for seats, but what if it happened to them, writes Roberts:

If there were a billion Frenchmen or Australians or Americans living in such a small space, the fighting to board the train would be much more, and the courtesy afterwards much less. (105)

After reaching Sunder village, Lin mesmerizes to see the many fields of maize, endless rows of millet plants, and the overhead height plants. The figurative language, like simile, describes cool breeze as "like a child's sleepy whisper" and milled plants as "thick-walled labyrinth," and the deep, profound silence intoxicates the whole atmosphere. It defines the character of the space. Here freedom and peace act as metaphors for the village. Lin wonders how villagers always look happy there, how they laugh hard when they listen him to speak in the English Language, how they always use the pronoun 'our' rather than 'I' like, 'our village,' 'our space,' 'our river' which gives a sense of family and a sense of being one, how they are intimate with nature; understands weather conditions and even know where the direction of the flood will take place, how they sing with the music of air in the sunshine and in the moonlight which is a contrast with the life at the city where people listen to the noise of people and automobiles and need to have a radio, hi-fi or walkman to listen the music. Such minute details of the people and their lifestyle make it a real space and help readers understand the social and cultural value of the space. Roberts gives a heartfelt internal focalized expression of himself of what he feels at the village. He says:

It was only there, in the village in India, on that first night, adrift on the raft of murmuring voices, and my eyes filled with stars; only then, when another man's father



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reached out to comfort me, and placed a poor farmer's rough and calloused hand on my shoulder; only there and then did I see and feel the torment of what I'd done, and what I'd become- the pain and the fear and the waste; the stupid, unforgivable waste of it all. My heart broke on its shame and sorrow. (124)

The next space which brings a significant change in his life is slum at Cuffe Parade, where he spends six months. Lin always calls it Prabaker's (the Bombay guide and Lin's good friend) slum because he offers him to get that slum that is treated as house and high in demand because Bombay suffers from spatial crisis and homelessness. Roberts carefully chooses words that are fit for giving subjectivity to topographical details of slums and gives readers an everlasting visual impact through descriptive writing. The way to his slum is described by sensory language like, "Open latrines concealed by tall weeds," and the whole space is predominated with the smells of "noisome stink from the latrine, smells of spices, cooking and incense" altogether. He provides rich details to slum's architecture that has the contrast with many multi-stories air-conditioned buildings filled with shops that display "jewels," "silks," "carpets" all-around at World Trade Centre which is brightened by "neon lights" and "floodlit fountains." He visualizes his hut in these lines:

The roof was a sheet of black plastic. The frame was made from thin bamboo poles bound together with coconut- fiber twine. The walls were made from hand woven reed matting. The floor was bare earth, pressed flat and smooth by the feet of the hut's previous tenants. The door was a thin piece of plywood dangling on rope hinges. The plastic ceiling was so low that I had to stoop, and the whole room was about four paces long by two paces wide. It was almost exactly the same size as a prison cell. (159)

Several adjectives to visualize hut and the comparison from prison cell create a parallel image of prison, and readers can assume how he would have spent time in prison. People from Roberts's slums are decent, highly cultured, and have high moral value. They always support each other, ready to hear each other in good and bad times and live together with harmony. Lin



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observes that feeling of ‘sacrifice,’ ‘acceptance to crisis’ or ‘happiness’ and ‘love for humanity’ for which a man needs a big heart prevails everywhere in those small slums.

Part two in the novel deals with another flashback as he recalls the incident when he runs from Australia prison. The prison time puts fear into him, but he feels completely safe as he walks alone in the street and enjoys sitting at Marine Drive. Roberts uses personification to give subjectivity to the spaces. He says, “My heart backed away into a black cave of memory. And I walked most nights, while the city slept” (178). Each space where he goes to stays or lives becomes part of his memory. Roads of Bombay look like his friends and gives happiness to him. At Marine Drive, the guilt of past coming in the form of sea waves, telling him to fall and die, the shame crushed his self-esteem. The feeling of repentance originates from Bombay and so the purgation of the soul. To forget all his crimes and to heal himself, his job as a slum doctor is a kind of rejuvenation to him.

Part two also throws light on “the crisis of space,” which raises the immigration issue of thousands of people as pavement dwellers and discrimination towards them. The corrupted cops, the Bombay Rent Act, and the real estate market are highlighted as the reason behind homelessness. The narrative gives cartographical details about the places like Tardeo, Hazi Ali Shrine, and architectural details of the restaurants at Hazi Ali and the societal structure and cultural details of Worli where Hazi Ali is situated. The place can be seen as a heterogeneous space where people come to pray, shop, eat, take or give bribes, and deal with several crimes. Moreover, people of every class, religion, culture, language, and nationality can be seen doing all these activities.

The clubs and home of mafia don Khader Khan are presented as imperial places. Use of comparison incorporating colors, objects, and the spaces of nature like the sky and clouds create the mental image of that place. For example, “the walls and vaulted ceiling featured a mosaic of pale blue and white miniatures, presenting the effect of a sky with drifts of cloud” (286). These places become a space for ‘philosophical discussion on life about destiny, fate & chance,



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good&bad, logic &reason, real& illusion’ and several more topics. In these places, Lin develops a father-son relationship with Khaderbhai and intimate friendship with Abdullah, which remains an integral part of his life to understand love and trust.

The narrative maps more public spaces like Chowpatty Beach, Nana Chowk, and Tardeo, where the description of the city by its market, diversity of language, and religion occurs. The social structure of the Cuffe Parade slums and the establishment of brotherhood, secularism, and non- delaying judiciary system by the leader Qasim Ali have a contrast with the social-political and religious conflicts at the center of the city.

Part three deals with the spatial presentation of Colaba Back Bay, Colaba, Arthur Road Prison, and Fort. The Colaba Back Bay is suited for ‘spiritual and physical stocktaking’ and the place of getting ‘solace.’ Roberts presents it as the place of ‘mental healing’ when worries surround life. In contrast, Colaba is also presented as a heterogeneous space. He presents the social-cultural and topographical details of Colaba, which along with its famous markets, also known as the space of crime. It raises ‘the issue of survival’ in the marginalized community as another important theme of the novel. Roberts observes that how crime becomes the only way of survival for homeless and marginalized people.

The crisis of the space and the struggle for survival not only exists at the geography of Bombay but also on those spaces that are meant for punishment, like a prison. The horror of Arthur Road Prison lies in the atrocities of prisoners on newcomers or with each other. The struggle of space and power lies much there as nobody is worried about the law in prison, which is considered a place of repentance. There is always a fight for getting sleep on the floor; because the space is congested, so prisoners wait for their turn to sleep. There is always a fight for watery tea, which they suck on the dinner plate and for the meal, which serves only once a day at four o clock in the evening. If they do not fight for the space to wait and watch in the queue, they are afraid of being starved as most prisoners are left hungry either by the privileged, wealthy prisoners or by the shortage of meals. And then the most dehumanizing thing is that there is a



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fight for the space to stand for pissing in the toilet where shit and piss flowed on the floor in ankle-deep. By lying down on the hard floor, beaten by the cops, prisoners and oversees with lathis, bamboo sticks iron rods and by swallowing the blood of his own body which is full of body lice Lin realizes that it is only 'will' and 'heart' that keeps one alive in the space. (415)

Since the beginning, freedom, and survival are the themes of the story. Whether they are criminals, poor or homeless, it takes more profound ground from the experience of living in prison. Roberts raises a question about the worth of this place. For what way it can be looked upon? Is it a place for crime, punishment, or redemption? Furthermore, the answer is, 'for all'. The prison, though it is a place of getting punished for the crime, teaches him the bitterness and cruelty of life, makes him a strong person than before.

The narrative also takes readers to Shuklaji Street of Kamathipura, a famous red light area for brothels and opium dens. Lin spends three months on drugs because of the depression he faces after the death rumor of Abdullah and the sudden invisibility of Khaderbhai and other men of his gangs. Guptaji den symbolizes a space that helps him forget everything; the bitter reality, the guilt, and the truth of feeling empty, feeling nothing. He wants to experience death while being alive in the cruelest manner.

The mapping narratives further map Lin's journey from Bombay to Karachi, then Quetta, and then Afghanistan in 1985, starting from Part four and continuing in Part five. As Lin has decided to take part in Khader's war to save his land from Russian invaders, it can be observed that now novel deals with "moral complexities" in Lin's mind. He finds difficulty to locate himself in the wider world. He raises questions about his existence and his course of actions, which seem to define uncertainty of his future on an unknown land. There are some questions that trouble readers, like, "Why is Lin going to Khader's war?" How long will he lead this life of crime?" and what if he dies or survives? It seems he is a man of no land.

Roberts writes, "Land matters a lot," "Every door is a portal leading through time and space." The land of Afghanistan becomes that portal. The questions and reasons for every event of his



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life after reaching Bombay, his meeting with Khaderbhai, and the endless suffering in prison seem like a God's plan to punish him for his past crime. A new country eventually becomes a space where his spiritual journey ends as it deals with the revelation of truth that Khaderbhai has used him. The land of Afghanistan becomes a heterogeneous space and a metaphor for Lin's redemption. It was the country where Khader was born had lived with peace, and it was the country which became a land of havoc and bloodshed when Russian invaded, and Khader's life threw him in the world of crime. It is the space that creates a voice. It is not void; it has a history, social relation, and memory. Michel Foucault observes that the study of space is not limited in knowing whether there will be enough space for men in the world but also knowing that of

What relation of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in given situation in order to achieve a given end. Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites. (3)

Afghanistan has given subjectivity. The physical action, the war, and the built environment eventually help Lin find solace and peace. However, he fights as a warrior or criminal, whatsoever, but he is close to the truth. He realizes it very later that though it is Khader who puts him again in the crime but from deep within his heart, he also wants this. Lin confesses why he has committed the crime and joined Khader's new gang after his death because:

There was a sense in which I'd been able to say, with sincerity, that I'd committed them[crimes] for love of him: for my own safety, certainly; but, beyond every other reason, for the father's love I'd craved from him. With Khader gone, I could've made the break completely. I could've gone...almost anywhere. I could've done... something else. But I didn't. I joined my fate to theirs [the new gang after Khader's death] and became a gangster for nothing more than the money, and the power, and the protection that their brotherhood promised. (829)



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Roberts here presents the theme and the hidden message of the story. He realizes that love, freedom, protection, money, and power are breaking laws of living. Man's life is always governed by those actions in which he chooses to get all these things. Some choose the right path, but for some, it is full of all the wrong deeds, and they are bound to bear suffering, tortures, and repentance. Nevertheless, it is God who saves us. To some, he gives unbearable torments and everlasting guilt, but to some who can do right within wrong, who knows the value of human life and can spread love and happiness, are given a chance to save himself and ask forgiveness from God. In the last line of the novel, he states that to believe in God is the only way to get redemption in the world. He states:

With love: the passionate search for a truth other than our own. With longing: the pure, ineffable yearning to be saved. For so long as fate keeps waiting, we live on. God help us. God forgive us. We live on. (933)

Thus, through "cognitive mapping," *Shantaram* can be read as a story of space and people's struggle for survival. The "architectural and mapping narratives" present Bombay as a heterogeneous space. In Bombay, Lin gets everything; a space to live, friends, love, money, and fame, but still, his heart is empty as if it is in search of something he does not know. The struggle, the torture in prison, and every person he meets teach him something about the value of life, and since then, his journey of knowing the truth, knowing the Self and the reason for his existence becomes reasonable to him. He turns out to be the strongest and toughest character with several intellectual discourses, punishes himself through cold turkey and beats death. He comes to know that life is all about having human contact with those who love us and helps us to explore our capabilities. Bombay rejuvenates him. He understands that life means saving himself from harming others or saving other people lives rather than killing them or making money from such more crimes. Lin understands that life means to have a heart full of freedom, love, patience, tolerance, and sympathy. He understands that life means to bear responsibilities and save humanity.



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