



# Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found

By Suketu Mehta

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A native of Bombay, Suketu Mehta gives us an insider's view of this stunning metropolis. He approaches the city from unexpected angles, taking us into the criminal underworld of rival Muslim and Hindu gangs, following the life of a bar dancer raised amid poverty and abuse, opening the door into the inner sanctums of Bollywood, and delving into the stories of the countless villagers who come in search of a better life and end up living on the sidewalks.

As each individual story unfolds, Mehta also recounts his own efforts to make a home in Bombay after more than twenty years abroad. Candid, impassioned, funny, and heartrending, *Maximum City* is a revelation of an ancient and ever-changing world.

## Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found By Suketu Mehta Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Bombay native Mehta fills his kaleidoscopic portrait of "the biggest, fastest, richest city in India" with captivating moments of danger and dismay. Returning to Bombay (now known as Mumbai) from New York after a 21-year absence, Mehta is depressed by his beloved city's transformation, now swelled to 18 million and choked by pollution. Investigating the city's bloody 1992–1993 riots, he meets Hindus who massacred Muslims, and their leader, the notorious Godfather-like founder of the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena party, Bal Thackeray, "the one man most directly responsible for ruining the city I grew up in." Daring to explore further the violent world of warring Hindu and Muslim gangs, Mehta travels into the city's labyrinthine criminal underworld with tough top cop Ajay Lal, developing an uneasy familiarity with hit men who display no remorse for their crimes. Mehta likewise deploys a gritty documentary style when he investigates Bombay's sex industry, profiling an alluring, doomed dancing girl and a cross-dressing male dancer who leads a strange double life. Mehta includes so-called "Bollywood" in his sweeping account of Bombay's subcultures: he hilariously recounts, in diary style, day-to-day life on the set among the aging male stars of the action movie *Mission Kashmir*. Mehta, winner of a Whiting Award and an O. Henry Prize, is a gifted stylist. His sophisticated voice conveys postmodern Bombay with a carefully calibrated balance of wit and outrage, harking back to such great Victorian urban chroniclers as Dickens and Mayhew while introducing the reader to much that is truly new and strange.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Modern Bombay is home to fourteen million people, two-thirds of them packed into neighborhoods where the population density reaches one million per square mile. Its official name is now Mumbai, but, as the author points out, the city has always had "multiple aliases, as do gangsters and whores." Mehta, who lived there as a child, has a penchant for the city's most "morally compromised" inhabitants: the young Hindu mafiosi who calmly recollect burning Muslims alive during riots twelve years ago; the crooked policeman who stages "encounter killings" of hoods whose usefulness has expired; the bar girl, adorned with garlands of rupees, whose arms are scarred from suicide attempts. Mehta's brutal portrait of urban life derives its power from intimacy with his subjects. After clandestine meetings with some of Bombay's most wanted assassins, he notes, "I know their real names, what they like to eat, how they love, what their precise relationship is with God."

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From [Booklist](#)

"Bombay is the future of urban civilization on the planet. God help us," Mehta writes. As the world's third-largest metropolis at 18 million people, and with the fifth-highest density at 17,550 per square mile, Bombay ("Mumbai") commands attention. Mehta, a fiction writer and journalist, left Bombay as a teen to return 21 years later to try to grapple with his vastly changed hometown. Thus, Mehta brings the perspective of both newcomer and insider as he explores various aspects of Bombay life, from setting up residence to exploring the hugely successful domestic film industry; from detailing Bombay's sex industry to profiling the reasons behind India's own "September 11," the 1993 riots and bombings that exposed a vast enmity between extremist Hindus and Muslims. The subjects are skewed toward the author's journalistic brief, but with those limitations, Mehta delivers a fresh and unblinking look at contemporary Bombay. *Alan Moores*

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