

## Exploring Urban Margins: (Re)presentation of Resilience in Mathangi Subramanian's *A People's History of Heaven*

Amrita Talukdar and Dr. Priyanka Tripathi

The concept of a city often evokes an extravagant perception of bustling metropolitan skyline, intertwined with ideas of splendor and magnificence. However, these metropolitan cities in India i.e. Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai and Hyderabad are often hubs for migrants due to their thriving economies, large consumer markets and notable concentration of enterprises. This rapid urbanization vis à vis industrialization has occurred at the expense of marginalizing and exposing rural areas, migrant laborers and urban workers towards a state of precarity (Dwivedi, 2022). The consumerist urban life offers individuals with a diverse ontological experience apropos of class, caste and especially the space to which one belongs. While the ideological affluence of opportunity, glamor of modernity and profundity of privileges are being relished by the people living in a big mansion in a city, the crude reality of existential struggle conveys a disparate narrative from the individuals who belong to the slum area in that city. The capitalistic pursuit for sustaining the cycle of development and maximizing the profits engulfs such spaces like slums considering those spaces as “unnecessary settlements” or “informal rehabilitation area”. Therefore, the people living in those spaces are deemed as disposable. Mathangi Subramanian's in her novel, *A People's History of Heaven* (2019) critiques such capitalistic endeavour which is prevalent in this neocolonial era. The narrative of five women in Subramanian's novel serves as a powerful demonstration to the resilience and agency of marginalized communities in navigating the challenges of urban life. Their resistance against the forces of displacement underscores the importance of collective action in challenging entrenched power dynamics and reclaiming agency over urban spaces. The solidarity among these five women not only demonstrates a strong sense of belonging but also a determination to preserve the history and memories linked to their slum—a space that capitalists would readily demolish to make room for shopping malls and parking lots. The prime objective of this presentation is to reestablish the approach towards studying cities in the global south, focusing on their (re)representation in contemporary urban narratives. Drawing on Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, this paper explores how capitalist growth and urbanization have been built at the expense of social division and denial of human rights; hence, aims to provoke critical reflection on the moral implications of current urban development paradigms. In conclusion, this paper calls for a re-evaluation of urban development policies and practices to centre the experiences of marginalized communities and prioritize justice, dignity, and human rights in urban futures. Through critical engagement with this select contemporary urban narrative, this study unravels the complexities of urban life and strive towards building cities that are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable for all residents.