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Introduction: The Heart has its Reasons

Theoretical Domains, Exploratory Questions, Research Schema, Topographic Terrain and Personal Motives

And love
Is not the easy thing
The only baggage you can bring
Is all that you can't leave behind

QUEEN'S NECKLACE

Walking down Marine Drive at seven in the evening. Hungry Eyes Chinese Food truck is shut for the day. Every afternoon, it feeds the hordes that cannot afford a table at the Oberoi and the grub's better too. Twilight, dusk. I am surrounded by the Queen's Necklace. Very beautiful. High tide. The angry sea rises above the breakers and hits passers-by. I've seen it much angrier. Bombay has just had seven days of incessant rain. I have walked this route for years. It is my catharsis. All the way from home, down Colaba Causeway across Nariman Point and then along the seashore. I climb the rocks and look at the vast sea, the eternity beyond.

The Queen's Necklace begins with the high rise buildings of Navy Nagar—all similarly sized; then the tall Air India and Oberoi Hotel buildings at Nariman Point and the new NCPA complex with flats more expensive than Manhattan; the revolving restaurant of the Ambassador Hotel; the string of art deco buildings, none of them more than six floors high; the floodlight Wankhede Cricket Stadium, now dark, but when there is a match on, all of Marine Drive is electrified and people climb up to the terraces of the neighbouring buildings for a free aerial view. Walk past the flyover from Metro cinema, which curls in a sweeping arc on to the sea front. The point

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at which the flyover and Marine Drive intersect is the centre of the necklace. If you sit here, you can see the two ends in the periphery of your vision and the horizon beyond where the sky meets the ocean. I often pause at this point and wonder about life and being gay and finding happiness...rubbish like that. My yoga class is across the road at the 100 year-old Kaivalyadham Institute, but I've been skipping sessions.

Crowded traffic moving at 80 kilometres per hour. Crazy people running across at all the wrong places. 2002. I see a dead body on this very road as I speed home in my car from another bad day at work. A young man with his thigh torn from his body and flung across the road. There is a pool of blood and I can see the bone poking out of the flesh where the thigh used to be. So many vehicles are rushing by but no one stops. My driver reassures me that there must be an ambulance on its way. Cold cruel city—home, nemesis, love. Why do I hate you so much? Why can I not leave you forever? Why did I let my driver drive on?

What you got, they can't steal it
No they can't even feel it
Walk on
Walk on
Stay safe tonight

A light drizzle. Now past the new renovated Police Gymkhana, the dilapidated Hindu and Parsi gymkhanas, the old Taraporewala Aquarium, where no one really goes anymore, except poor country-hick tourists. Chowpatty and its massage men; crowded bhel puri and falooda stalls, sanitized and contained into a concrete food plaza. The beach is cleaner than ever. Very different from the Ganpati festival with all the Plaster of Paris statue immersions, and the hundreds and thousands of tightly packed bodies, squeezed next to each other on the sands. Devotion mixed with rough fondling of penises; sensations amplified by the noise, the smell, the spectacle and the release.

Nana-Nani park—a good idea for old people—but no parking, where I would take my grandparents when they were younger and I had car access. New Yorker's restaurant with the best Indianized nachos in the world outside—which there is always a line to get in, even on afternoons

and weekdays. The glittering skyscrapers of Malabar Hill and oversized hoardings in the distance. Some like Binani and Raymonds have been there for decades; others like Reliance India Mobile are new. And then, the clasp of the necklace, a stretch of pristine land with its private beach—the governor’s estate—Raj Bhavan.

And I know it aches
 And your heart it breaks
 You can only take so much
 Walk on

Tall swaying palm trees, sea salt water spraying on my face, wind running through my hair, tears flowing down my cheeks. Nariyal pani vendors huddled up under ineffectual beach umbrellas. Muscle men in their jogging suits, fat ladies in salwar kurtas and walking shoes, lots of people walking their dogs, lots of dogs walking their people; servants and children; beggars. Office-goers deciding to walk from Marine Lines to Charni Road station; the walk their only respite after a hard, hard day at work. The women will chop vegetables on the train ride home and men will play cards with their ‘train friends’ who will jump into fast moving trains before they stop at the station to claim a spot for them on the return journey. Trains filled with horror. Jayabala Asher thrown out, her legs cut off, for fighting a rapist while a compartment of men watches silently, not stepping in. The mayor gives her an award for bravery. Acid thrown on pregnant women from outside the train compartment. Aircraft engineer tossed out on to the tracks by rowdies. Killed. The city’s trains devour 10 humans per day. Always hungry for more. Sometimes they are racked with bomb explosions. Sometimes, they are submerged under water due to floods.

1996. Early morning train ride to Bombay University’s Kalina campus. Someone gropes me in the jampacked compartment. No standing room even. Can’t turn around and see who it is. Squatters are shitting on the railway tracks, their backs modestly turned towards us voyeurs on the trains, so that we can see their exposed bums and their shiny globules of freshly ejected shit with flies hovering above, but not their genitalia. One should never board a running train, I hear my mother say. I am 14 years old and running after a bus I have just alighted from because I left my pencil box

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in it—but I am too slow. My mother screams at me when I reach home. Is your pencil box more important, or your life? Never run after a moving bus, train or anything, do you understand?

Leave it behind
You've got to leave it behind

I see myself in the school boys walking on the road today, their shoulders hunched over with their overloaded bags. They have finished their extra tuition class and will go home to do two sets of homework while the rest of the family watches Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi on television. They have to study hard and run, run, run, so that they can keep up in the rat race. But they have their arms draped comfortably around each other's waists and their friends will not taunt them with 'that's so gay'—this is India and physical contact between friends is normal; we are like that only. So they walk about, bodies comfortably touching, flip flops tossing up brown splotches of mud on their bare calves. Lovers sit down on the rocks amidst the crabs, holding hands—a brief moment of intimacy before the policeman comes and shoos them away. The drizzle turns into a downpour. I open my umbrella, adjust my iPod, walk on.

All that you fashion
All that you make
All that you build
All that you break
All that you measure
All that you feel
All this you can leave behind.
(U2 'Walk On')¹

This book was written during the course of my Master's programme in Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—where I spent three years between 2003–06. It began its life as my graduate thesis, which I completed in May 2005. I then left it alone for a year and returned to it for a few months towards the end of 2006, after I relocated back to Bombay from Boston. In some sense, its publication marks the end of my coming out journey as an Indian