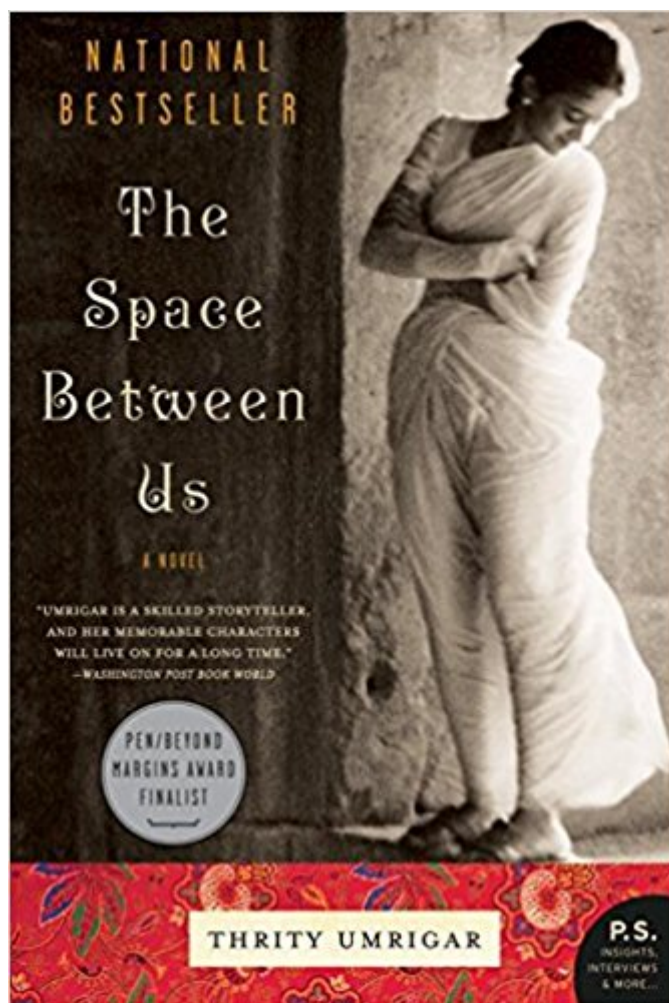


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The Space Between Us



Synopsis

“This is a story intimately and compassionately told against the sensuous background of everyday life in Bombay.” —Washington Post Book World
“Bracingly honest.” —New York Times Book Review
The author of *Bombay Time*, *If Today Be Sweet*, and *The Weight of Heaven*, Thrity Umrigar is as adept and compelling in *The Space Between Us* — vividly capturing the social struggles of modern India in a luminous, addictively readable novel of honor, tradition, class, gender, and family. A portrayal of two women discovering an emotional rapport as they struggle against the confines of a rigid caste system, Umrigar’s captivating second novel echoes the timeless intensity of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* — a quintessential triumph of modern literary fiction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Space Between Us, Thrity Umrigar’s poignant novel about a wealthy woman and her downtrodden servant, offers a revealing look at class and gender roles in modern day Bombay. Alternatively told through the eyes of Sera, a Parsi widow whose pregnant daughter and son-in-law share her elegant home, and Bhima, the elderly housekeeper who must support her orphaned granddaughter, Umrigar does an admirable job of creating two sympathetic characters whose bond goes far deeper than that of employer and employee. When we first meet Bhima, she is sharing a thin mattress with Maya, the granddaughter upon whom high hopes and dreams were placed, only

to be shattered by an unexpected pregnancy and its disastrous consequences. As time goes on, we learn that Sera and her family have used their power and money time and time again to influence the lives of Bhima and Maya, from caring for Bhima's estranged husband after a workplace accident, to providing the funds for Maya's college education. We also learn that Sera's seemingly privileged life is not as it appears; after enduring years of cruelty under her mother-in-law's roof, she faced physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband, pain that only Bhima could see and alleviate. Yet through the triumphs and tragedies, Sera and Bhima always shared a bond that transcended class and race; a bond shared by two women whose fate always seemed to rest in the hands of others, just outside their control. Told in a series of flashbacks and present day encounters, *The Space Between Us* gains strength from both plot and prose. A beautiful tale of tragedy and hope, Umrigar's second novel is sure to linger in readers' minds. --Gisele Toueg --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Umrigar's schematic novel (after *Bombay Time*) illustrates the intimacy, and the irreconcilable class divide, between two women in contemporary Bombay. Bhima, a 65-year-old slum dweller, has worked for Sera Dubash, a younger upper-middle-class Parsi woman, for years: cooking, cleaning and tending Sera after the beatings she endures from her abusive husband, Feroz. Sera, in turn, nurses Bhima back to health from typhoid fever and sends her granddaughter Maya to college. Sera recognizes their affinity: "They were alike in many ways, Bhima and she. Despite the different trajectories of their lives—circumstances... dictated by the accidents of their births—they had both known the pain of watching the bloom fade from their marriages." But Sera's affection for her servant wars with ingrained prejudice against lower castes. The younger generation—Maya; Sera's daughter, Dinaz, and son-in-law, Viraf—are also caged by the same strictures despite efforts to throw them off. In a final plot twist, class allegiance combined with gender inequality challenges personal connection, and Bhima may pay a bitter price for her loyalty to her employers. At times, Umrigar's writing achieves clarity, but a narrative that unfolds in retrospect saps the book's momentum. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I don't review often but I felt compelled to after reading this. The writing is beautiful, but I felt like I had been assaulted by the time I was finished. The ending is one of the worst endings I have ever read. There is no resolution whatsoever, even though the blurb on the back presents it that way.

There is only disappointment and sadness. If you want a book to throw you into a state of depression, this is for you!

An interview with the author on the radio prompted me to buy this book. Culturally different from anything I've read as its based in Bombay. It's a story of two women, one wealthy but broken, the other woman, her slum dwelling servant. Well written as it reveals the background of each family and how they are intertwined. I would recommend this book.

A wonder novel about a subject rarely written about: the lives of people in the slums of India. Bhima started out with much better circumstances but through an industrial accident which her husband went through, being cheated out of his due compensation by the company, he finally left his wife, and she had to move into a slum area to have any shelter at all. She is fortunate to have a job with a family that has employed her for many years. Things eventually go from bad to worse when her granddaughter gets pregnant out of wedlock, and the shame and aftermath affect their whole lives. A surprise ending does not trade reality for the sake of a good ending, but is masterful nonetheless. The writing is good, lots of description, setting the place in front of you. The author clearly knows of what she speaks, but finds hope in the midst of ugliness and despair. An excellent and inspiring book indeed.

My third book by Thrity Umrigar and I am convinced that she is one of the most talented and insightful writers I have ever been privileged to read. 'The Space Between Us' is a perfect title for the story of two women. Set in India... Bhima of low caste, and Sera of upper class. Dark skinned and light skinned. Illiterate and educated. Poor and of means. Slum and uptown. Bhima is the servant of Sera for many, many years... witnessing the goings on and always being there supportive to her special family. Sera too has championed Bhima in her need as well. Sera, her mistress, who deigns at times to treat Bhima with equality and respect and at other times, refuses to allow Bhima to sit on her furniture and eat on her dishes. Both women have had husbands, children, in laws... challenges, abuse and courage to somehow get thru. They are alike but they are different. Ultimately as the story unfolds the reader learns the secrets, the bond, and the walls between them. The emotions expressed in the two main characters' thoughts and words are uncanny in ability to say so much. So much that every woman might have visited at a time or heard at a time. I just cannot get over the wonder of Thrity!

The more I think about this book, the more I realize how much I liked it. The most important thing to me when I am reading is the characters - does the writer give me a good feel for who they are, whether good or evil, and at the end of the book, do I care what happens to them? The author had two main characters in this book, both women - one educated and wealthy, and the other her servant. We learn a lot about their lives and their struggles, and their relationship in a culture where mistress and servant are not expected to be "friends". The other thing that I really enjoy is learning about a new culture. This book was entirely set in Bombay, India and the author did such a wonderful job of putting the reader there - the food, the language, the culture, the religion(s), the politics, where and how the characters resided. At times I could visualize their homes, the streets, the crowded buses - makes me really want to go there and see it for myself. The book is well-written - beautiful language and descriptions, a compelling story, interesting characters. I do recommend this book and after some thought have changed my rating from 4 stars (which I often give) to 5 stars (which I don't give very often).

This story is written in the true Indian style, & makes the reader feel as if they are in Bombay. It's a fascinating look into the lives of the rich & the contrast of the lives of their poor servants.

Bhima, a lower class woman and Sera, who is an upper class Parsi woman, have had a long term personal relationship. Bhima is Sera's cleaning lady and cook. Although Sera is devoted to Bhima, she still makes her use her own cup and makes her squat on the floor when they have a cup of tea daily. Bhima doesn't mind--it should be no different. Both have their stories--Sera is widowed and had had a very difficult marriage. She lives with her pregnant daughter and her son-in-law in her home. Bhima lives in the slums with her granddaughter Maya, who is pregnant. And Sera stops in daily to check on her bedridden mother-in-law, who has had a stroke and whom Sera calls the Monster. She is cared for by aides, one of whom had been Maya. Their lives are intertwined. Such an interesting book I couldn't put it down.

excellent book that looks at the relationship between employer and employee - having lived in the emerging markets (not India) I see many similarities in the relationship there to other countries. It's also a good book for anyone managing people, whilst not apples to apples, it reminds one that how a manager might view things could be very different than the employee

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