



The Space Between Us

By Thrity Umrigar

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“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.*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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*

From Publishers Weekly

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.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Sera Dubash is an upper-middle-class Parsi housewife in modern-day Bombay. Bhima is her domestic servant. Though they inhabit dramatically different worlds, the two women have much in common. Both married men they alternately love and loathe: Sera's moody husband frequently beats her, and Bhima's betrothed falls into an alcohol-drenched depression after losing his job. Sera's civil treatment of her servant--she overlooks Bhima's frequent tardiness and treats her like an equal--dismays her neighbors and friends. She also offers to fund the college education of Bhima's granddaughter, Maya, whom Bhima adopted

when the girl's mother died of AIDS. The bond between the two women deepens when Sera (whose own daughter is happily wed and expecting her first child) arranges an abortion for unmarried Maya. Veteran journalist and Case Western Reserve professor Umrigar (*Bombay Time*, 2001) renders a collection of compelling and complex characters, from kind, conflicted Sera to fiercely devoted Bhima (the latter is based on the novelist's own childhood housekeeper). Sadness suffuses this eloquent tale, whose heart-stopping plot twists reveal the ferocity of fate. As Bhima sits at her dying daughter's side, a fellow hospital visitor speaks the simple, brutal truth: "Here, we have all hit the jackpot for grief." *Allison Block*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Raymond McMillion:

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Laura Enriquez:

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