

Q: How does Dharker present the area described in Living Space?

Dharker presents the area described in Living Space as incredibly damaged and unstable with a hopeful atmosphere consistently throughout the poem. The poem describes a ramshackle living space, with its lack of “straight lines” and beams “balanced crookedly on supports”, which refers to the cramped spaces of the poorly built slums in Mumbai India. The poem’s title “Living Space” is quite ironic as there isn’t much living space, making it seem more like the structures are built to only survive in and not live in like the title states. Dharker uses this poem to spread awareness of topics that are usually hidden from the media especially when it comes to poverty.

As we begin to read the first stanza, Dharker presents the “Living Space” in a negative manner as she expresses that “there are just not enough straight lines”, which could make the reader question how someone could critique such a structure without physically being in their position when building. The caesura used between the sentences “.That is the problem.” reflects the tight space between each “living space” ; this also could infer the lack of opportunities the habitants have as they are essentially trapped in this place just like the sentence seems to be “squeezed” in between the lines. Dharker continues by critiquing the government (in this case, the people in power in India) as the government has stated to plan on redeveloping the slums into houses with electricity, water and gas however have never begun due to the amount of money needed. Furthermore, the verb “balance” “crookedly on supports” refers to the challenges people have to face when lack of support is given consistently. The adverb “crookedly” emphasises this as it makes the reader imagine the inconsistent support the habitants receive and the impact this had on their “living space”.

As you continue reading, Dharker creates a trapped atmosphere within the area as the stanza is the smallest stanza within the poem. The stanza has been “squeezed” in between the two larger stanzas, symbolising how people have to “squeeze[d]” into small homes just to have a roof over their head. The noun “rough frame” could suggest that the habitants are still making memories which would be kept in this “rough” picture “frame”; this could suggest the habitants don’t mind living in such conditions as it could be all they have ever been exposed to. This may relieve the reader as knowing the habitants are somehow still enjoying themselves even in these conditions may relieve their worries. I believe Dharker used the phrase “rough frame” to teach the reader to feel grateful for everything they own as many others barely have a roof over their heads. Furthermore, Dharker used this skillfully and this links to Dharker being an advocate for the poor and using poetry as a way to bring issues like poverty to light in an unique way.

Finally, as we read the last stanza, Dharker presents the area in a very mysterious and unsettling way. She begins the stanza by stating that these people have been “dared to [be] placed” there, creating an unsettling atmosphere for the reader. She then continues to use symbolism of “these eggs in a wire basket” which foreshadows something negative happening to the “fragile curves of white”. The noun of “eggs” suggests Dharker is referring to the habitants as the eggs and the “wire basket” is the environment that they live in, implying that the environment is seen more like a prison than a “living space” possibly making the habitants trapped within the “basket” as they are “fragile” and inanimate. The words “dared” and “wire basket” both have negative connotations as well as connotations of mystery as it links to how Dharker could be secretly trying to critique the government again as the habitants are being treated like prisoners within the government's control. This would frustrate the reader as one would hope someone isn't trapped within their own home and can be free.

To conclude, I believe Dharker wrote this poem skillfully to bring light onto the struggles people have living in the slums and living in poverty. Furthermore, I find the comments that Dharker made throughout the poem about corrupt governments should be written more obviously as it would bring more people to unite against governments and help fight poverty.