

Callous citizens, negligent government

p r e s e r v a t i o n

In the second part on Mumbai's waterfronts architect/activist P.K. Das talks about how the situation is going from bad to worse...

EIGHTY per cent of the city's population lives under inhuman conditions, while a relatively small segment has access to a substantial share of all amenities and services. Thus apathy and detachment. This has contributed immensely to rapid deterioration of public spaces — they are either owned or else not cared for.

Marginalisation of 'Kolis' — fisher folk communities who have been living for several years on waterfronts — is also an example of growing sense of detachments. Koli villages have been reduced to slum-like situations where even basic amenities are not provided. Instead, there has been continuous efforts to demolish and evict them, whether in Cuffe Parade, Bandra, Juhu or Versova. The threat to their existence is also a result of unsympathetic constructions around their settlements. The Bhai Bhandarkar movement to protect the Koli-rights is an important struggle for human rights and environmental protection.

Unfortunately, environmentalists — even though they are sincerely campaigning for forests, hills and water — have been ignoring human rights and housing. In the case of Borivali National Park, five million people have built their houses here. Environmentalists have moved courts, which if up-hold their petition, there will be a large-scale demolition.

Simultaneously, various housing rights organisations have been fighting for the protection of the slums. As a result, progressive groups have moved apart on matters that require an integrated and unified struggle. Protection of the forest is important but its clearance programme must include plans for slum rehabilitation.

Detachments are further reinforced by a growing religious fundamentalism and communal fervour, leading to territorial control, whereby spaces are divided. This is publicly exhibited in temples or crosses or masjids in open spaces — pavements and waterfronts — and religious functions. The most prominent of these activities has been the Ganpati immersion. Mahim beach is often encroached upon by several Muslim festivals and gatherings. A similar event takes place on Dadar beach during Ambedkar Jayanti, a festival of the Neo-Buddhists.

Growing apathy is not only realised in individuals and groups but is also deep-rooted in the attitude of the government. Indiscriminate reclamation and supporting and nurturing anti-socials for encroaching upon open spaces are some examples. Construction of BMC's sewerage treatment plants by reclaiming large stretches of Bandra beach has completely damaged Mahim waterfronts. The corporation has not found it necessary to conduct a survey to identify alternatives where such projects could be built without damaging the environment. Several questions. No replies.

During one such discussion, the Additional Municipal Commissioner in-charge pointed out that they are concerned about environmental aspects in all such projects and therefore are carrying out tree plantation around the treatment plants.

The Marine outfall project by the BMC envisages construction of sewerage treatment plants at Bandra and Worli from where the treated waste will be carried to three-km deep into the sea before being released. However, the sewerage being released simultaneously

on the shores will continue to be discharged without treatment. There is no immediate plan for comprehensive networking of the sewerage system and implementation of the scheme to separate storm water drainage from sewerage. Also, if the Marine plan works, storm water drainage at Worli will continue releasing almost an equal amount of waste on the shores.

Proposals for flyovers and roads along the west coast without any plan for simultaneous development waterfronts is another example of government's detachment from sensitive environmental and social concerns.

Finally, the reluctance on part of the authorities to debate and disseminate information to the public about major proposals for development of open spaces and waterfronts, reflects an authoritarian, feudal and undemocratic attitude. In the case of the Marine-outfall, the BMC had promised to constitute a public committee to monitor the implementation of the programme. The public address was probably a clever move to calm down any opposition before the approval was received from the Ministry of the Environment. Since the approval has been received, the authorities have forgotten their promise.

SAVE MUMBAI'S **U**LTIMATELY, due to lack of



P K Das: Architect/activist
waterfronts

public control, apathy and growing detachments leading to environmental degradation, vital open spaces in the city and the waterfronts are being corroded and made inaccessible to public. This adversely affects the social, cultural and environmental conditions of the majority of the population. Therefore, radical interventions are required to restore and develop our waterfronts and public-spaces. These interventions suggest the following actions:

■ Declare the waterfronts as conservation and restoration zone. A comprehensive development policy for the waterfronts be formulated and no major construction be allowed.

■ The waterfronts must be primarily considered as public open spaces and not allowed for any restricted or private developments. These must remain the collective asset of the city and all its people.

■ Surveys must be carried out to record all existing activities and occupations.

■ Government should take lead in constituting people's forums in various parts of the city. These forums would co-ordinate and monitor restoration programmes and participate in the decision making process. Also campaigns must be carried out disseminating information for public awareness and to encourage peoples participation.

■ Adequate sewerage, sanitation and garbage disposal systems must be implemented. Also it is important to install proper lighting in public spaces for security.

■ Traffic movement to and around these areas must be reviewed and adequate parking and adequate public transport connections developed.

■ Landscaping that includes, horticulture, pavings, edge walls and erosion protection, lighting, conveniences such as drinking water, toilets and phones must be developed along the waterfronts.

■ To declare Koli settlements as protected areas and to prepare and carry out conservation and development plans.

■ Design as a generator: It is necessary to prepare designs for the restoration of waterfronts at different points in the city. Design proposals will lead to discussions and public campaigns and provide a planned basis