SHRINKING PUBLIC-SPACE IN MUMBAI

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A   It is true that public space in Mumbai is continuously shrinking. This is in contrast to the historical experience in this city which at one time was seen as a zone of liberation that provided a tremendous sense of liberation, mobility and freedom. Bombay then was a nurturing ground for many important social and cultural movements.

Tragically today the city is moving in unequal ways. The Urban Poor who constitute the majority population are living and functioning in a more oppressed way and more and more marginalized from the main stream of development. City's governance stand at a critical junction where its failures is often with serious and irreversible consequences. Public-space in Bombay was truly dynamic reflecting the social and political commitment of the time which over whelmingly persued social welfare and related schemes on priority. Unfortunately, today the growing inequality in housing and space including land control is leading to larger marginalization of the working class and the urban poor. Public space thus is rapidly shrinking. This is manifest in different ways including the sharp reduction of public open-space.

Undoubtedly the living environment in Mumbai is on the fast track of deterioration. Social and environmental violence arising out of the decline of public-space has come to be an integral part of life in the city. There are many reasons for this unhealthy environment and growing social tension adversely affecting the quality of life in the city. This undesirable and deteriorating quality of life in the city reflects the state of our development or underdevelopment today.

B.   The various influences that have led to our present state of underdevelopment can be broadly classified as being local, national and now increasingly global.

I will explain these influences through the following 4 socio-political phenomenon-

1.   Demand for Right to Stay – Slumming Mumbai
2.   Urban poor are not citizens – perpetuating social violence and divide.
3.   A city of Excuses – Story about tactical errors and misleading development.
4.   Undermining the city's Development Plan – Discarding planning & Planned development of our city.

Demand for Right to Stay

`Slumming Mumbai'

1. Voilation of Urban Laws has become not just the accepted but expected way of life. This has become a substandard for pro-active planning.

    - The poor use the same principle, slum-dwellers against eviction.
    - Railing elite and Builders & Developers
    - Politicians & Administration

        The Nexus – led to Anarchy in Planning
    - Act of Negotiating Space in the city

2. Short-term and Long-term interests – Generalists Lead and rule.

3. Mis-representation of facts
    Bluffing as a way of life

    - That slums are encroaching o all lands – Over 80% do not have houses
    - The BNP misrepresentation
        Total – 103.09 Km2
        Core - 28.18, Tourism – 8.66, Buffer – 66.25
        Slums only in Buffer zone – 1.87 Km2
        Other encroachment   - 7.73 Km2

4. All the above – Right to Stay is leading to Anarchy & Colonisation and undermining planning & planned development

5. Stop Colonisation of Space

    How do we stop colonization of space and the misappropriation and mis-utilisation of vital resources including open-spaces.

a. 'Right to stay' has been sadly reduced to merely an act of negotiating space in the city. This act has come into being as the most important programme for a majority of housing rights organizations. Unfortunately, most movements begin and end with demands against eviction. While opposing and stopping eviction is necessary in the interim period, to consider that as the only programme in our housing struggle is a setback to the future of housing rights movement. While the right to stay is an important step in the democratic rights movement its impact on the planning and development for our cities has been counter- productive particularly in the development of housing and living environment.

We have to challenge the present land-use maps, development plans, nature and priority of schemes, infrastructure and transport proposals, etc., that all individuals shortly and together are against the poor people's interest. But what are our alternatives? Alternatives in which cities can be better planned for the vast majority of the working class and the Urban poor and a plan in which adequate and desirable housing can be promoted.

b. Limited demand for mere regularization and right to stay is the same principle and approach that our land-sharks and real-estate developers use for their interest. They are constantly trying to regularize their own illegal occupation of land and resources. If both the ruling elite and the working class including the urban poor follow the same path for their individual interest our cities will die due to unplanned growth.

c. "Violation of urban laws become not just the accepted but the expected way of city life. This has become a sub-standard for proactive urban planning. Such attempts at willful modification of the city development plan does not urge well for urban development.

d. Right to stay is also a popular slogan of opportunist politicians. These people do not even remotely relate the right to stay with to long term development or planning for the city. The constant uncertainty arising out of this short- term outlook has contributed immensely to the underdevelopment of the city in general and of housing for the working class in particular.

e. Responsible activists contributing to mass movements have to be careful and answerable to long term city development vision and objective, while tactically dealing with immediate need of the right to stay .

f. What is our own philosophy for city planning and land-use ? How do we intervene and stop the on going colonization of space and misappropriation and misutilisation of vital resources. How do we check the present development trend and not merely get stuck in the negotiation for marginal and secondary spaces while getting dwarfed and doomed by contrary developments?

g. Simultaneously, our activists and leaders in the forefront fail to invite new people and inbibe new ideas in different directions. Mostly generalists dominate our discussions and decisions on all matters including in planning and other technical housing questions. Even when a few architects and planners come to support mass movements they shy away, alienated and left out. It is therefore necessary for both that is our forefront activists and professionals to initiate a dialogue and evolve ways to function together to develop our movements. It is for a similar reason, that the World Social Forum is significant. It is a "movement of movements" and an opportunity for developing and building stronger ties amongst groups who are committed to democratic principles and who also strongly oppose the present trend of globalization i.e., stifling us and our freedom and increasingly side lining the toiling masses.

While I have argued that we need to understand city planning and developmental work in the working class interest and work towards a fair implementation of the same, we need to simultaneously question the development plan that sets out corrupt and unbalanced reservations and demands. Most development plans are mere physical mappings but reflect a strong social and political agenda contrary to the interest of the working class.

i. Right to stay has also led to a convenient nexus between the encroachers, land-grabbers, opportunists and the various authorities including politicians. Growing nexus of these groups has led to anarchy in planning and development. It has also led to the growth in criminalisation in all spheres of urban life including in the housing sector.

The Working Class and the Slum-Dwellers are not Citizens

`Perpetuating social violence and city's divide'.

1. This is common press language
2. P.I.L in courts & Courts too accepting their views as Public opinion.
   - Citispace + BNP petitions.
3. Excluding the poor from programmes that directly affects them.
   - The BNP rehab. Comm.
   - Developments are for whom - ?
4. Use of force – forced displacements & demolitions.

5. Denial of access to civic amenities including drinking water + electricity
   - Geeta Nagar got water in '90's & BNP has no water – amoebiosis deaths.
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6. Environmental Movement as a means of attack.
   Environment Vs Hsg. – Tragedy of unequal development

7. Violation of Human Rights.
   Oppose recognition policy

8. SRD Voilence –

   Even this housing policy meant for slum-dwellers hsg. Interestingly does not recognize their capabilities and infact is a greater abuse and threat of displacement.

Another emerging new trend in the city calls for further reflection. Outfits of `citizen' groups representing small and exclusive groups of middle and upper classes are now intervening in the housing sector. Their strategy is to oppose those policies of the government relating to the housing right of the poor, upgradation of slums and protection against eviction. These groups and its leadership influence **(have an access to)** the media too; they campaign in the press against the interests of the slum-dwellers. `Citizens oppose slum-dwellers', is a common media slang these days. In the recent past many such groups have organized campaigns in the press to oppose the policy of the government for the recognition of the residential right for slum dwellers and for the right to rehabilitation of those who are evicted by the development **(policies) programmes** of the state. These groups have used the courts and have filed public interest litigation on behalf of the `common citizenry'. In many cases the Court has acknowledged their representative character suggesting that because they make public opinion and work in public interest, their demands should be upheld. This legitimacy from the courts has enhanced the prestige of such `citizens groups' and made them more powerful. As a result the discussion and therefore the discourse on rights of slum dwellers is being subverted. This means that these exclusive groups possess **(exclusive)** <u>elite</u> right of citizenry while the majority people are subject to questions to their very right of existence, let alone their right to citizenship. Not surprising therefore most of the government policies and plans for the poor and the working class express a tone of pity and sympathy, particularly in matters relating to **(the)** housing **(question).** Thus the very right to housing itself for the poor is questioned.

(Additionally, these groups question the credibility of the leadership that represent slum dwellers) As a result there is sharpening of class conflict in the city. <u>**Simultaneously,**</u> most of today's leading environmental cases are against the interest of the majority people. These cases do not consider the issues of housing of the poor and the working class as an integral subject of environmental concern, thereby, aberrating the poor from environmental cause. The recent case of the brutal attack on over 400,000 slum dwellers residing for several years in the buffer zone of the Borivali National Park and the demolition of their houses without consideration for rehabilitation first has exposed not only the upper class interest of this environmental movement but has also made the environmental movement for the protection and conservation of the National Park at Borivali unsustainable. Can our forests be protected without involving people? Deployment of armed constabulary is counterproductive as in this case of the National Park. Infact the poor and the working class are seen to be the principal cause of environmental destruction by such exclusive environmentalists.

The environmental movement fails to contribute to major debates on development policy and implementation programs. What is needed instead is that the environmental concern must be seen as an integral part of shelter and development program, particularly in the urban context. The housing question would have to be at the core of environmental discussion thus, closely relating the environmental concerns to the needs of people and in the process forgoing an effective socio-environmental movement. <u>**Not surprisingly the exclusive environmentalists conveniently forge alliance with the exclusive citizens to ascertain their position. The environmentalists alliance with the citizens gives them public interest credential. The two together upset the real public interest concern.**</u>

A City of Excuses

`A story about tactical errors and misleading development'.

1. - Govt's inaction as an excuse
    - Administration seek, excuses too in the name of politicians
    - Both seek excuse under Court orders
    - Citizens movements excuse – reliance on Laws.

2. Legitimizing failures and Promoting policies and programmes as excuses

    -   Free houses to the poor slogan abusing their very dignity – SRD plan
    -   Failure in traffic planning – excuse of building more flyovers and more confusion
    -   Creating land in the city – as D.T.Josept put it – TDR policy
    -   FSI Bonus – even for gardens & roads
    -   Conditional land tenure to the poor under the cover of SRD condition.
    -   Repeal ULC – Govt. looses control over vital resources. It is argued that ULC looked land from development
    -   A lie & an excuse.

3. Lastly the greatest of all excuses for our failures and underdevelopment is the present Privatization & Corporatisation policy

    Excuse for Market led dev.
    Shrieking responsibility
    Subverting democratic principles

    We are seeking single solutions as models but not considering multiple options.
    SRD Vs inciter dev.

Undermining the City's Development Plan

`Discarding Planning & Planned Development`

1. **Irrelevant Dev. & Land-use plan**

   - Lack of open-space-lowest rates among most big cities and the world.
   - Lack of Land for Hsg. Of the poor
     60% occuping 8% land and that too illegally.

2. **Market – led Development**

   - Surrendering social welfare development thrust by the Govt. to private and market led dev.
   - MMRDA policy – formal surrender of planning to Market forces

3. **Ghettoisation –**

   - 'Secondary Development'
   - Further marginalization
   - Promoting secondary places- secondary projects & finance
   - Promoting class divide in the city – counter productive to social & environmental justice
   - Alienating people – against participation – fundamental ten acts
   - Perpetuating

4. **Anarchy**

   Individual, disparate , often conflicting and competing plans and developments is the order of our city today.

   - Suburbs as a dumping ground, garbage, TDR
   - Depletion of open-spaces for other developments and management of spaces
   - Uniform FSI – disregard to ecological and natural environmental conditions.
   - No to planned, cohesive and comprehensive plans
   - Water-fronts
   - Mill lands dev. – Corres. Report
   - Transportation plan – individual fly-overs
   -

5. **Lack of Rehab. Policy**

   Idea being to not just expect development but pursue planned development that is all inclusive.

a. Most of our cities development plans are irrelevant to the needs of the city and its people. They do not respond to the present demands for e.g. , adequate land for housing of the urban poor is never provided in the land use plan for our cities. In a city like Mumbai while 65% of its population live in slum, they occupy a mere 8% of land and that too as encroachers. There is no land in planning to meet with the housing requirement of the vast majority of the cities' population. Development plans of our cities also lack adequate open space, particularly for the poor and the working class. Instead there is an ever increasing activity in the construction and development of exclusive Shopping Centers, Air-conditioned markets, Entertainment Malls, etc., which restrict access to the poor. More importantly this trend in city development encourages the depletion of vital resources and colonization space for exclusive interest

b. Ghettoisation: As a result of the marginalization of the poor in the development plan for our cities, the settlement of the urban poor get ghettoized. Ghettoisation of people on class basis is counter productive to social development and prosperity of a city. These ghettoized settlements are intensely cluttered and cloistered having inadequate and sub-standard amenities and infrastructure. Supporting the growth of such exclusive colonies of the poor in our cities is furthering discrimination and marginalization.

c. Our cities are therefore sharply divided. This undesirable division perpetuates unhealthy social environment in the city. Social tension rise as a result often sparking violence in many ways. The ghettoized settlements get further marginalised from the main stream of development leading to deterioration of the living environment. As slums grow, the environmental condition of the city gets badly effected. Growth of slums in our cities lead to sharp decline in the city environmental condition thereby, slumming our cities constantly.

d. Ghettoisation of the urban poor has led to a sharp division of people in the city. The ruling elite including large sections of the middle class are against slum-dwellers. They even oppose recognition of housing rights of the poor and provision of infrastructure and services to them. "Citizens oppose slum-dwellers", is the common press language today. Citizens have begun to question the very existence of the poor.

D. Bandra sea–fronts dev.

1. It is interesting to find how people of all ages from different classes frequent these sea fronts now and how their relationship and public-sense have been greatly affected. The young who otherwise were spending time into late nights, drinking, smoking and loitering, often being violent between themselves and with others have either left the place or have found a new ground to spend time and develop their relationship for better. There is virtually no rash driving and broken bottles of alcohol littering the sea-front. Similarly women have found an opportunity to walk in leisure, to be to themselves, meet friends and be an active part of a public sphere. Children including toddlers crawl, run and play with their parents, which they don't get to do otherwise in an open public-space in Mumbai. There are ofcourse the die-hard health conscious freaks who now find ample space and opportunity for jogging and workouts. This project and the ensuing movement has thus restored safely while promoting respectability and dignity to all those who come here.

2. The redeveloped space has thus established a new meaning in the relationship of people and their attitude to public-space. What was for several years together the backyard with filth and violence is now transformed as a forecourt of social and cultural activity. It is interesting to observe the radical change in the behavioral patterns as well as in the relationships due to this development. A new sense of pride and dignity is seen beaming on the faces of the people, particularly the neighborhood citizens. Personalization of this space and a sense of belonging by those who come here are the hallmark of this development.

3. What bothers us often in the city is the growth of apathy and detachment. People in general seem to be growing apart from one-another, concerned less for the other and apathetic to incidences that are anti-social and detrimental to common good. A deep sense of detachment from one-another and with the city's public-space is worrying. Further under the present trend of privatization of development, spaces for public life are down sized and emptied of their interactive and deliberative purposes, people live in more isolating and privatized spaces. This development programme is a challenge to this demeaning trend. The movement is an attempt to overcoming this undesirable social trend and help in providing a place for the growth of better relationship and concern for the public-sphere.

4. These developments are not barricaded and are freely accessible to one and all. While this description may seem to be like of any other large unguarded public space, along these sea-fronts there is constant vigilance by the respective neighborhood communities. People in the immediate neighborhoods have come together to form neighborhood Citizens Associations to maintain and manage these places and guard it too. Association members comb these areas to ensure high standards of maintenance. They meet regularly to discuss on all matters that affects this space and their neighborhood. This is an important beginning in the movement for citizen's participation in decision making and for control-over development programmes that affects their neighborhoods. Leaning to work together for public good and taking collective decisions is an important democratic process. It is for promoting a notion of public without which it is hard to imagine a "Democratic Democracy". This is an important lesson for the majority of the middle and upper classes who otherwise are used to taking decisions independently at their individual and personal level. Their sense of independence stems from their better economic position. This project is a small but important action that is affecting social behavior in public-space, challenging the hyper-individualization and isolation that is fast eroding social development. This movement along with other important citizen's activity in different parts of the city for similar issues has set a new direction in the city's governance.

5. This citizen's Associations organize various cultural programmes too. Music, dance, art shows etc., are regularly held. Exclusive spaces in the form of galleries at the waters edge provides dynamic ambience for such programmes at Band-stand and Carter Road. People participate in large numbers and passers by join in too. There is neither ticket nor any other restriction to their participation. The idea is to renew activities at the water edge that bring people together. As a matter of fact the seafront at Bandra is popularly named as Bandstand. Once upon a time a band used to play music and people used to gather. It is this gathering or coming together that we want to renew. Many new relationships and many new ways of addressing and understanding public issues will emerge from such gatherings. We would like to watch the social and cultural dynamics that will undold in this process. Thus the movement will be continuously enriched and strengthened.

6. This project and its implementation has led to a new and meaningful relationship between the neighborhood community and the local government. Otherwise an apathetic Municipal administration, uncaring about the city's public-space and the coastline in particular, is now more responsive and supporting the citizen's movement. That these developments and the facilities are the basic rights of people is being increasingly realized. The Police too behave differently now. They too respond and co-operate with the local citizens. This collaborative effort has enabled the formation of a more meaningful and effective monitoring group to not only execute this project but to maintain discipline, confront dubious interests and challenge encroachments. With this development various anti-social elements and boot-leggers have left the place. Land grab, illegal land-fill, illegal constructions, attempts to colonizing space against larger public interest has been checked. This movement is not merely a beautification programme but is a part of a larger democratic struggle for reclaiming public-space and establish public-space rights, to create space where people meet, share with others and come to care about each other.

7. Development of the seafront at Bandra Cater Road and Juhu has provided an alternative to the majority of the middle and lower income groups who have very little opportunity otherwise for leisure and relaxation in this expensive city where more and more facilities and space are being privatized, restricting their use to a few and the rich. Increasing colonization of space and development by the rich and the powerful under the guise of privatization is fast eroding the public sphere of its democratic values.

8. This project stands to protest against various forms of urban crime. It challenges the attempts for land grab by developers and other commercial interest, it opposes the growing nexus between anti-socials, politicians, police and officials that is increasingly eroding public interest. It stands against environmental pollution and ecological damage, while demonstrating simple ways by which natural conditions can be protected and developed. The project is not meant to promote any grandeur plans for construction of buildings and entertainment malls. It is a humble attempt to protect the coastline, safeguarding the ecologically sensitive areas, protect mangroves, beds of rocks, sandy stretches etc., and simultaneously developing space along it as an effective public forum for social and environmental justice.