

Karachi – Mumbai Dialogue

Webinar

On Saturday 5th December, 2020

(Reference : Vineeta Shetty)

WATER : LET'S RECLAIM OUR ECOLOGY

INSTEAD: WATER : LET'S BUILD A SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGY

What I am deeply concerned about is the state of relationship between people and collectively with nature.

For me, Ecology includes People & Nature. The two are inextricably entwined and the recognition of this in relationship is critical for our understanding of the current state of our ecology and its future. Any attempt to separate one from the other is to undermine our struggles for the achievement of sustainable ecology.

Sadly, this relationship has been severed. Our governments and the various development agencies have continued to attack nature and systematically destroy the natural habitats, the natural conditions, including water, that sustain our lives. The rampant destruction of nature has led to frequent experiences of climate catastrophe that is threatening our health, indeed our very survival.

Governments response to people is no different. Polarisation of people on the basis of caste, religion, faith, gender etc. continues to be re-enforced. Today, we stand sharply divided. An intense state of violence defines our way of life. This is leading most people to conditions of underdevelopment in which more and more people are denied access to resources and their rights. We are increasingly experiencing a world of uncivilized people and places.

What we are deeply concerned about, is the constant division of our cities into such disparate fragments; both in social and spatial terms.

Let's take a look at the CASE OF MUMBAI, A CITY ON THE WATER—





In Mumbai, we have turned our backs to water and the incredible coastline of the city. We have continued to treat the waterfronts, watercourses and water bodies as the dumping ground of the city, both physically and metaphorically. Indiscriminate land filling and destruction of the natural areas that include the creeks, rivers, wetlands, mangroves, forests, hills, etc., have been pursued.



NATURAL AREAS MAP

149.67 km²
29.93%

Lakes, Ponds, & Tanks	7.06 km ²
Creeks,	9.25 km ²
Rivers, & Nullahs	340.7 kms
Hills, Forests	53.60 km ²
Wetlands	8.01 km ²
Mangroves	61.42 km ²
Beaches	1.44 km ²

Neither have the vast extent of the 150 sqkm of the natural areas been considered in the planning and development programs.

WAY FORWARD:

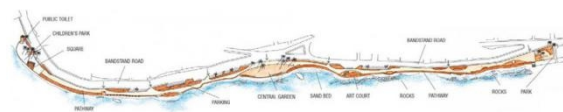
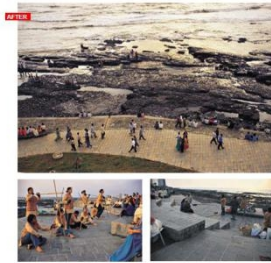
1. INTEGRATION & UNIFICATION

BANDRA BANDSTAND PROMENADE

A product of a strong citizen's movement in the area, this promenade meanders along the western edge of Bandra creating a contiguous open space where people can walk, relax and experience the vast beauty of the seascape.

Project undertaken by Bandra Bandstand Residents' Trust in association with social activist and actor Shabana Azmi, and architect P.K.Das.

Funding: Shabana Azmi (MPLAD Fund)
Water front length: 1.25 km
Cost: Rs.140 lacs.
Period of construction: 2003-02.
Structure and restoration: Arup Sarbadhikary

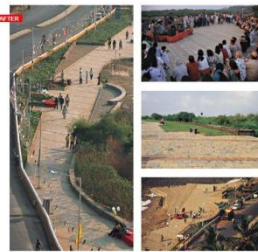


CARTER ROAD PROMENADE, BANDRA

This project too was part of the larger movement in the city to reclaim public space and to protect Mumbai's coastline. The development at the Carter Road seafront regenerated the mangroves, hitherto abused as a dumping ground, and their lush greenery has greatly added to the beauty of the waterfront. The mangroves formed the central point of interest at the Carter Road seafront. Our development meanders around it. Patches of grass, planted adjacent to the mangroves, extend the lush green expanse.

Project undertaken by Bandra West Residents' Association with social activist and actor Shabana Azmi, and architect P.K.Das.

Funding: Shabana Azmi (MPLAD Fund)
Water front length: 1.25 km
Cost: Rs.150 lacs.
Period of construction: 2003-02.



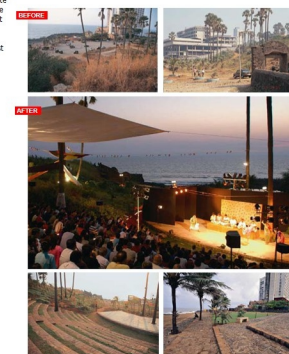
Integration of the natural areas and the unification of people and nature is of utmost priority.

LAND'S END AMPHITHEATRE, BANDRA

The project includes restoration of the hill slope and its contours, which had been dug up mindlessly by a hotel to create a garden that has no relevance to the immediate natural and historical environment. The project includes plans to conserve, restore and develop appropriately the existing ruins and to regenerate the palm forest that once stretched over its slopes.

Project undertaken by Bandra Bandstand Residents' Trust with social activist and actor Shabana Azmi, and architect P.K.Das.

Funding: Shabana Azmi (MPLAD Fund)
Area: 16,000 sq.ft.
Cost: Rs.90 lacs.
Period of construction: 2002-03



We have to work towards turning the abused backyards of people and the natural habitats into our proud forecourts.

2. NEIGHBORHOOD BASED BOTTOM-UP PLANNING PROCESS : demonstrating change and collective experiences that develop through the process of integrating the backyards is important.



Active participation of people in the decision-making process is fundamental. It is a bottom-up process instead of a top-down model that we are committed to.

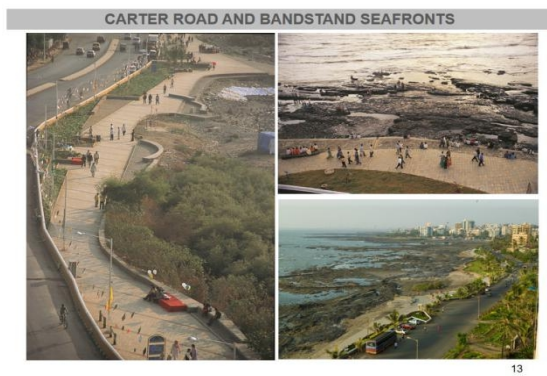


As a matter of fact, the undertaking of plans and projects that would bring about significant social and environmental change have to be led through people's movements. Therefore, I refer to these works as movements, not projects.

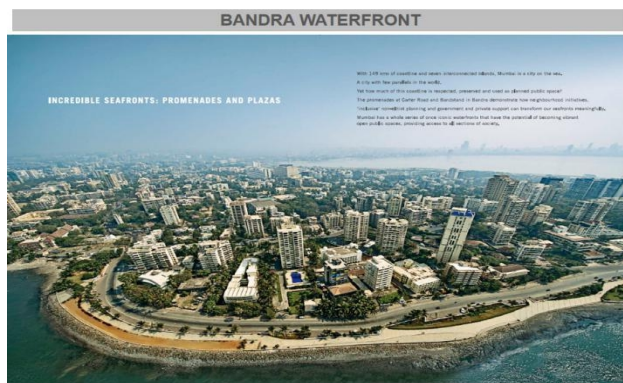


In order to effectively implement the bottom-up model and achieve maximum participation, it is prudent to undertake Neighborhood based city planning – for neighbourhood people know best about their area, otherwise alienated from the big top-down city vision plans that reflect a brutal colonial order.





Through a neighbourhood-based development approach it is possible to decentralize and localize projects: thus breaking away from monolithic planning and design ideas that are disconnected from most people (and often serve the interests of the few, not the many). 'Master Plans' for cities are generally top-down models, drafted by elite groups of designers, and fail to engage with citizens on their ideas.



Popularisation of plans and works is important. Today, hundreds flock these areas. Importantly, people relate tp. These spaces in their daily schedules.

3. RE-ENVISIONING CITIES

OPEN MUMBAI PLAN



149 kms of Coastline
16 kms of Beaches
40.7 kms of Rivers
300 kms of 'Nullahs'
9.25 sq kms of Creeks & Mangroves
64.31 sq kms of Forests and Hills

It is necessary to Re-envision cities in order to elevate the quality of life and environment that we are subject to. Networking of people and places that includes the natural assets, is an effective democratic tool for the achievement of this objective. Connecting the dots or the various individual neighbourhood movements is the way forward for preparing city plans.

Sole objective being to bring about significant social and environmental change through connected places and people – holding hands across the multiple barriers of social divide.

It is the networking of places & people across boundaries and the conservation, restoration and integration of water, water bodies and watercourses along with all other natural areas.

At a political level, our struggles are against the rapidly expanding phenomenon of segregation exclusivity and discrimination; against the abuse, misuse & colonization of public resources and exclusionary city planning. Our fight is for networking and integration, for equality, environmental justice and democratization of the ecology.

Conclusion :

In conclusion I would like to say that the reason of success or failure in the democratization of ecology through the making of places or place-making is measured by the extent of relationship between people across the multiple boundaries of divide and collectively their relationship with nature.

Thank you all.

P.K. Das