	# Democracy, Housing Rights and Social Change **P K Das – Architect-Activist** Case study of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar and Sangharsh Nagar, Chandivali- Mumbai Talk at the SRM University Chennai, 30th March 2009, My Dear Friends,
	In the 1980s and then in the 1990s a NHSS - slum dweller's led movement led to successful rehabilitation of two slum settlements in the city of Mumbai. It reinforced the notion that housing is not merely a real estate issue but essentially a socio-environmental subject. The case studies of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar and Sangharsh Nagar narrate the stories of fight against eviction, rehabilitation justice, affordable housing models, participatory planning and creation of open spaces. It helps one understand the relationship between social movements and democratic planning.
	India's and Mumbai's tragedy however is that while there are new townships and high quality building construction, with exclusive colonies and gated communities, development is privatized, leading to lack of access and opportunity for the majority to buy a house. Over 55% of the Mumbai's population still lives in slums and affordable housing is one of the biggest issues challenging city development.
	The **central objective** of my talk is to suggest and submit that development of affordable mass housing is an effective democratic tool of social change and an instrument for mobilizing housing rights movements for equality and justice. I believe that a city can truly be developed through larger public participation and the engagement of people's organization in the development process. Democracy and democratic movements are the means to achieve this objective. Thus housing movements must integrate with it for enabling social changes and for achieving development justice.
	I will use the cases of the 'Sanjay Gandhi Nagar' and 'Sangharsh Nagar' in Mumbai to explain how democratic planning, architecture and the slum dweller's housing struggle have contributed substantially to social changes. The slums rehabilitation project is an important example in the understanding of our cities' development models, particularly in the context of neo-liberal globalization. Before I elaborate more on the case studies, we need to first understand why slums proliferate.

Manufacturing Slums: (Why are slums proliferating?)

There is just no supply of affordable housing for the vast numbers of urban poor and no land is designated exclusively for low cost housing for the working class. Therefore most people have no opportunity or access to formal housing. Thus slums do not develop by accident. They are promoted by a nexus, under oppressive development plans for our cities.

For Mumbai, in an area of 437 sq. kms, having a population of around 15 million, conservative estimates put over fifty-five percent (approx. 8 million) as slum population. This slum population spreads over around 2,500 settlements, occupies 2,525 hectares illegally, which constitutes merely 8% of city's total land area. This leads to a tragic housing situation in the city. It is also estimated that nearly 2.5 million people live as tenants in rented premises, a large number of which are old and dilapidated, cessed structures, including what are popularly known as the `chawls' of Mumbai. Approximately 0.5 million live in the most unhygienic and filthy conditions on the pavements and other marginal spaces. As a result, we find that nearly 11 million of the city's population lives in sub-standard/unsafe housing conditions under abuse and continuous threat of displacement.

About 82% of the population lives in one room abode (including slums). This housing situation blatantly exposes the continuing indifference, failure in planning our cities and neglect and lack of will of the Government towards housing and living conditions in the city.

Causes for degeneration and growing slums:

No Planning – Due to Government's commitment to facilitate the free market with its market led development policy, the government has given up planning for the city's development and stopped regulating its growth. It does not want to create any obstacles or restrictions for the private sector and its free maket led development policy. The MMRDA itself does not plan anything and just acts as mediator between the government and builders to enable them to promote profitable schemes at the cost of public good. Its helps in reducing the problems faced by builders to get permissions and fast track their demands. This leads to **anarchic growth** – There is economic growth but social inequality still persists and human development becomes challenging. The developments are disparate and usually conflicting. As real estate dominates city politics, disordered growth is on the rise. "More than ever before, what we now get is governments of the markets, by the markets and for the markets." 'Markets,' as one poet puts it, "knows all about prices but nothing about values".

Privatization and neo-liberal globalization – India was declared a socialist republic in 1950. Post independence the government had committed itself to social welfare but in the 1990s, it declared privatization of most developments

and commitment to free market led economy. It led to colonization of public assets. Even though growth had reached 9% annually last year, inflation had gone up to 13%.

Economic growth does not give the full picture, not even in the development context, because you need social equity and human development. It's quite clear that democracy is the best guarantor for the necessary checks and balances and conflict management that come with social disparities.

State of Underdevelopment – There is no known attempt to improve amenities, infrastructure or social development programmes as the government has given infrastructure upgradation responsibility in private hands. Private developers are only interested in maximizing profits by building expensive residential and commercial complexes, high end educational and health facilities. Thus the majority of people find them unaffordable and have no access to them. With this kind of investment and 'growth' more and more people are excluded from the fruits of development.

Irrelevant Development Plan and Land Use – The latest DP for Mumbai was revised in 1991. It is irrelevant today and does not reflect needs of the people. Unfortunately, it is now considered unnecessary by the market leaders. The government too thinks in the same way in order to not impose restrictions on the free market and hinder 'progress'. Reservations in the original DP are not followed and there is arbitrary change in land use making the DP completely useless. For example, there is no reservation of land for working class housing in our DP today. Therefore 55% live in 8% land and that too illegally.

Indomitable Real Estate- The real-estate business in most Indian cities and particularly in Mumbai is booming. Mumbai has a turnover, profit and property values amongst the highest in the world. Boom in the construction industry, real estate sector was pegged at $16 billion in 2006-07 and is likely to reach $60 billion by 2010, as published in a recent TOI article by Neelam Raj. This industry is growing at the rate of 30% according to Earnest & Young. Mumbai is undergoing massive expansion and significant transformation; as a result India's growth averaged 9% continuously for the past 4 to 5 years, with contributions from trade, transport, finance and communications as well. Tragically, we equate development in terms of Real Estate turnover and the volumes of cement and concrete use. Therefore as the city is proudly being 'built,' its public space is swiftly being infringed.

Housing Debacle – Slums are proliferating, as there isn't enough supply. Housing is seen as a commodity and not as a right. There isn't enough affordable housing as builders are not targeting the urban poor as clients. The private developer will not build for the poor, as they do not get the profit they would get from high-income housing. The gap is therefore increasing and the need to

deregulate is the government's argument now. In the 1980-1990s, the number of houses added in Mumbai each year by private and government organizations was around 20,000 units but the overall backlog was of 8,00,000 units!

No recognition to slum dwellers' financial contribution - Another major factor, which is continuously being refused recognition, is the ability of the people to positively contribute to housing development. In most cities or at least in the poorer areas of cities, the annual investment made by low-income house-holds who are de facto owners of their homes is many times the average investment per house-hold made by city and municipal authorities. This is especially so if a realistic monetary value is given to the labour time they put into improving or extending and reconstructing their homes.' (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1997:267).

On an average a sum-dweller family in Mumbai spends Rs.50,000 to Rs.1,00,000 in constructing their house, often several times due to continuing demolitions. This investment is not accounted for and not considered in the capital outlay for housing development. If recognized, it will exceed the combined capacities of all financial institutions that offer loans and investment for housing in the city. In a population of sixteen lakh slum-dwellers families, nearly Rs.7,500 crores (at an avg. of 75000/- per family) is mobilized as investment directly by the slum-dwellers themselves. But governments do not recognize these people as city builders. They usually refuse to recognize their capability and that they are citizens with legitimate rights.

The key issue is therefore the question of recognition of the slum-dweller's capabilities and rights and their placing as an integral part of the development process.

"On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of 'one man, one vote' and 'one vote, one value.' In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of 'one man, one value.' How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we do so only by putting our political democracy in peril," as quoted by **B.R. Ambedkar**, author of the Indian constitution.

Unavailability of Land – The Urban Land Ceiling Act was recently repealed. The government is thus pauperized and cannot carry out projects in public interest and social welfare programmes. The ULC Act, 1976 was passed during the emergency to prevent concentration of urban property in the hands of few and speculation and profit therein, to subserve the common good by ensuring equitable distribution of urban land, to discourage construction of luxury houses leading to conspicuous consumption of scarce building materials, and to secure

orderly urbanization. In order to achieve these objectives, a ceiling was placed on ownership and possession of vacant land in urban areas, and the excess land was to be acquired by the government for a nominal payment. `In Mumbai, 1360hectares of land were identified a surplus under the ULCA, out of which only 213 hectares was acquired by the government. Also, most of the acquired land was not put under effective use and was encroached upon in due course'. Instead of implementing ULCA more stringently, the National government decided to repeal, saying that the repeal would release large tracts of land and depress the inflated property prices. But they failed to mention that the repeal would lead to consequences contrary to the very objectives of framing the Act i.e., ownership in the hands of few, and therefore, speculation.

Skewed SRA Policy – The slum rehabilitation policy is biased towards developers. Often there are forced displacement programmes and trading in slums land. The Shiv Sena – BJP Government in Maharashtra came into power in March 1995. One of the promises given was that of providing free houses to 40 lakh slum-dwellers in Greater Mumber. This was the greatest bluff ever perpetrated on the city's poor. The scheme depended on private investments and increased the role of developers and builders in providing housing to the poor, the method generally being to allow `Incentive FSI' to the developers who could then make profit by selling the surplus FSI as tenements or in the form of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) in the open market. A part of this profit could thus be utilized to cover the cost of housing for the slum-dwellers. While a small section of the slum-dwellers, mostly the slum-lords, a large number of elected representatives and the highly opportunistic self-styled leaders were excited by the offer, the majority realized from the very beginning that this was merely a political gimmick. Mr.Bal Thackeray, founder and leader of the Shiv Sena who was also the architect of this scheme of free houses to the slum-dwellers, could not elaborate or how this target would be achieved, nor did he have any definite program to do so. After coming to power, the program was pursued by the Government for implementation. But if failed miserably and as expected, led to serious violations of land and housing rights, including the abuse of human rights. The slum-dwellers have been subject to greater abuse and threat of displacement.

This policy is being proudly continued by the present government led by the Congress and Nationalist Congress coalition. This government has further introduced a host of new concessions to facilitate and appease the developers and reinforce the earlier governments' oppressive plans and programmes. These clearly do not benefit the slum-dwellers nor the larger interest of the city's development.

Forced Displacements – There are sections of population, which do not come under the SRA scheme. They are sufferers of forced displacements with no

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31 32	rehabilitation policy. "The state itself has also come to threaten its own citizens, often as a direct consequence of its commitment to the project of development, which has regularly placed enormous burdens on those people least able to defend themselves," **Sunil Khilnani**
33 34 35	**Destruction of Environment** – Mumbai is known for reclamation of land but environment is dangerously being destroyed. There is depletion of public assets including ecological assets like salt pans, mangroves, mud-flats, beaches, creeks, etc. They are taken over for private business interests thus seriously affecting environmental balance. Due to excessive land filling new townships are on the rise resulting in exclusive real estate. The sea levels and flooding in the city have gone up due to this. Such places do not give any financial turnover by themselves and are thus misused, abused and built upon.
	Growth of the informal sector – There is a steep rise in the growth of the informal, unrecognized sector. Approximately 70% of Mumbaikars work in the informal sector. Their exclusion from city planning is deteriorating the quality of life in the city.
	The social outfall of this results in violence and displacements:
	Inequality is growing on many fronts; leading to sharp social divisions and polarization of exclusive interests.
36	**Violence** is perpetuated both by the government through new laws and by the might of the private developers, undertaking new responsibility for developing the city. Tagore notably quoted, "Unity cannot be brought about by enacting a law that all shall be one."
37	Government's method of **privatization of developments** and corporatization is leading to the **depletion of public assets** and the **pauperization of the state**. The government is backing out of its responsibility to directly develop social welfare projects and intends to facilitate private agencies to boost development. Their central idea of globalization is privatization. The government needs to take proactive measures in social projects and their intervention is a must.
38 39	Due to limited access to information and restricted participation in decisions there is **lack of public dialogue**. The public sphere itself is being downsized. **Access to information** is also limited in spite of the 'Right to Information Act.' On most occasions it has been seen that the selected information given to the masses is of little or no use. But RTI is celebrated as a victory by rights organizations.
	Also there is restricted space and opportunity for **public participation**. In spite of formal announcements for participation, public involvement only has a reactionary approach. The nature of projects and development plans are relevant

to the needs and aspirations of the selected few and public good is secondary.

In protest of this slumming phenomenon, *Sanjay Gandhi Nagar and Sangharsh Nagar* came into being. The above causes give one the reason to question the housing phenomenon in the city and give one the opportunity to organize the urban poor and mobilize the working class for their rights. The Housing Rights Movement and the struggles of the poor for housing should be considered as a part of a larger democratic rights movement. Housing is not and cannot be merely a real-estate issue but essentially addressed as a socio-environmental subject.

Sanjay Gandhi Nagar Rehabilitation, Goregaon

The slum dwellers of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, Cuffe Parade, with the help and leadership of the Nivara Hakk Sangharsh Samiti had to wage a protracted and bitter fight against the demolition of and eviction from their settlement. The government, finally, conceded to their demands and provided alternate land at Goregaon. Sangharsh Nagar is what they decided to call their housing colony (sargharsh meaning to fight)

As an architect and active member of the NHSS, my proximity to the people was a crucial factor in developing relevant housing models for their rehabilitation. Detailed discussions, presentations and models formed the basis of the design.

As the site, once was a quarry with excavations to depths of 10 to 12 metres, it had to be filled and dressed. The Municipality helped by dumping garbage and debris. First, the people constructed a common toilet for immediate use and then attempts were made immediately to get water connection.

Housing Programme: It was decided that activists connected with the NHSS and the elected representatives of Sangharsh Nagar take the lead in these matters, and monitor the housing programme. Institutional loans and donations to the society were not to be accepted, as these tend to become a burden and a tool for further oppression, exploitation and interference. It was also decided that they build their own houses like they built their slum with individual, financial arrangements.

I prepared a layout plan outlining the position of common toilets, water taps, community centre, society office, accesses and open spaces.

Planning principles - The plan proposed plots larger than the plinth area of every house in order to create a compulsory, open-to-sky space - a place to cook, sit out, wash clothes and sleep. Common, open spaces were along the accesses forming chowks for get-togethers and spaces for the children to play. Most importantly, it was proposed that every house be built independently and

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	extended as and when they manage some savings. Thus, subsequent repairs and maintenance, too, becomes simple, and one does not need to depend on professional help. Besides any repair or extension was not linked to the status or consent of neighbouring houses, and could be carried out independently. An open space in the north, along the hill, acted as a buffer and protected the house from possible landslides. A fairly large space was to be used for common facilities such as toilets and water taps. Also, an extensive tree plantation was planned in the area. A large, common space required for get-togethers, festivals, and for the children to play was provided along with the welfare centre as the common space. With architectural advice, simple design layouts and informative posters from experts, the project was a learning experience for all. With cent percent voluntary participation from the slum dwellers and management workshops from the NHSS, a new settlement came into being which was truly for the people, by the people and of the people. With a mechanism like the above, social and cultural needs of the people were simultaneously taken care of. The community spirit took a boost and the relationship between various society members became firmer. With enough open space for community affairs and sufficient health and educational facilities, the social fabric of the settlement strengthened. **Sangharsh Nagar, Chandivali** The project involved the rehabilitation of the evicted slum-dwellers at a Chandivali site measuring about 34 hectares and constituted a comprehensive and all-inclusive, new town. The town with 6500 houses included a large, 1.6-hectare 'maidan' as its central, social space. Two more playgrounds and over 60 community open spaces enriched its outdoors. More than 14 schools, medical facilities including two hospitals and two large community halls and religious institutions constituted its social infrastructure. Schools and community halls were annexed to these open spaces and playgrounds. The project was a part of the SRA scheme. **The above housing projects underline the relationship of social movements, democracy, architecture and urban planning. With a long fight against forced evictions and active participation in rehabilitation planning, the residents of the area successfully exercised their fundamental right of living as dignified citizens.**
	## In Conclusion The housing development process is a terrific means and reason for organizing social movements- to bring about a socio-political change and to challenge the ongoing marginalization of the majority people that leads to massive

displacements thus destabilizing our cities.

Democratic dialogue and participation in the housing process can bring individual and family stability and growth. Housing for all will promote equality and bring self-respect to all. It will nurture community and collective endeavours.

Thus there is a **need to integrate the housing struggle and architecture**, with larger democratic movements and to use it as an instrument to mobilize communities for political action to bring about development justice.

As Amartya Sen and Dreze believe `Public action can play a central role in economic development and in bringing social opportunities within the reach of the people as a whole. What the government ends up doing can be deeply influenced by the pressures that are put on the government by the public.' (Sen and Dreze, 1998: 38 and 39) Planners and architects can help mobilize public action.

Co-relating design with larger and more important determining factors of social and political importance enriches the architect's role and position in society to a much greater pedestal and engages the architect as an activist. Designs become an instrument for mobilizing and sphere heading the movement. Initially designs are used to attract attention and to bring together interested   people, particularly the neighbourhood citizens. A discussion of the design instigates participation. People begin to then realize the different dimensions of the project and chip-in their views. They also are able to then comprehend the physicality of the project and the important change that it would bring to their environment and their life in the neighbourhood.   Regular discussions of the design and aspects of the implementation then becomes engaging whereby more and more people get attracted to the project. Besides designing, the architects need to therefore undertake a larger responsibility and promote not just the idea but also the project itself. Through public dialogue people get to be an active part of the planning process. With the help of policies, legal interventions and pro-active governance, the democratic planning process must be included in legal framework for protection and successful implementation of equitable development.

Thus I believe that by the method of inclusiveness and totality, our cities can be Re-Visioned for its people and become a prominent symbol of the contemporary, democratic India. Close relationship with the needs and aspirations of the masses need to be developed and effectively be reflected through social democratic movements. Affordable housing is thus born out of these struggles.

Integration of democracy, housing rights and social change is our new challenge for our efforts in promoting affordable housing particularly for the urban poor and the working class.