

**‘It’s a Small World’  
Social Architecture For Our Cities & Anti-Globalization**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Propaganda machinery is working over-time trying to seduce and bluff us as to how much possibility and success lies in the present form of urbanization. Media and advertising too promote aspirations of global lifestyles and consumption. Many people in our cities feel elated and excited over the opportunity that globalization provides, even though in very short period of time since liberalization the inner contradictions and short-comings have exposed its dubious intentions that undermines ‘development’ interest. The polarization of the rich and the poor and the growing in-equality is more evident than anytime before.

It is also evident that the present trend of urbanization and city development plans are in fact contemporary forms of subjugation that are being aggressively pursued in many parts of the world under the aegis of neo-liberal globalization. In fact these vigorously pursued investments and development projects are the means of exploitation and appropriation of profit for private interest thus, subverting larger social development objective.

It is necessary, therefore, to evolve alternatives that will effectively challenge the present form of urbanization. Hence, I propose that we understand and accept urban planning and architecture as an effective democratic tool of public action against such subjugation and for achieving development justice.

Therefore, Planning and Architecture must be recognized as a ‘public right’ and cities considered as objects of public interest. It is our responsibility to ensure that equal participation by all is a necessary condition for planning. Participatory planning process will lead to better understanding of public interest and programmes relevant for larger public good. Decisions taken in public interest would strengthen democratic values and processes. Importantly, such an approach will enable us to evolve Social Architecture for our cities with anti-globalization thrust. This I consider to be our key objective.

**SKEWED URBANIZATION:**

Today, the understanding of urbanization itself is skewed and synonymous with cities. This is commonly justified by the fact that the population of people living in cities is rapidly increasing and more and more people are migrating from villages to cities. According to UN estimates, the world’s urban population has risen from 30 percent in 1950 to 47 percent in 2000, and it is expected to reach 60 percent by 2030. This phenomenon is being cited at all levels to determine the criteria for planning and investment. There is no doubt that urbanization is a central force in the contemporary world but should this be pursued merely with an objective of building mega and obese cities that in most parts of the world are failing to support population pressures and often collapsing in so many different ways without being able to fulfill basic human needs. “The mega cities of the developing world, swollen with rural immigrants, are burgeoning with slums and squatter settlements, pointing to the increasing urbanization of poverty and raising the specter of a “planet of slums”. (Gyan Prakash – Mumbai Fables).

In spite of such adverse situation in our cities, urban development is limited to the promotion of real-estate and construction turn-over and the ultimate success of this objective is symbolized in the production of high-rises. The more we build and build more high-rises means we are more developed. Such simplistic is our dominant notion of urbanization and 'development'. For me 'high-rise' is a metaphor for high-cost; exclusive, gated and controlled spaces; un-sustainable in environmental terms with high-energy consumption; undermining the idea of neighbourhoods thereby, inflicting permanent physical injury on the urban landscape. This is particularly true for housing of the poor and the low-income people.

This trend of population shift towards cities and the in-growth of city population is reason for our ruling elite to demand and dedicate higher investment in cities, at the cost of villages and small towns. This in turn is leading to further neglect of our country side. Tragically the marginalized existence and state of underdevelopment of the poor in both the places is an outcome of this phenomenon and contrary to the very idea of urbanization, urbanization being essentially a social development process.

The trajectory of liberalization is caught in its own web of contradictions. While there has been rapid growth of capital and 'booming economies' in many countries particularly, China & India there has also been alarming increase in poverty and inequality. In fact it would be appropriate to say that there has been a sharp decline in growth in the neo liberal era. As Noam Chomsky aptly describes the neo liberal development period as having "downward growth trend (that) is even more dramatic when measured per capita, with increase in inequality and little or no reduction of poverty". As for Mumbai now being considered as a global city having high financial and trading turn-over, the Municipality revealed that 2.5 million people (belonging to nearly 500,000 families, which officially fall under BPL or below the Poverty line) live on less than \$13 a month per head.

#### **UNDERSTANDING CITIES:**

Interestingly towns and cities were perceived as zone of liberation particularly by the working class and the poor who migrated, lived and worked out of their villages where feudal control and exploitation was the economic and social basis for survival. In cities they could live without the oppression and might of the feudal lords. More importantly they shared a new sense of freedom and progress and could organize themselves to act collectively – through unions, social movements, cultural forums etc, and put forward their demands for fulfilling their aspirations. But this was not to be for long. As cities grew and as people experienced the economic basis of cities, they realized the emergence of new forms of oppression and control. Today in most cities across the world the working class power represented through various organizations at work and living places have weakened, even systematically decimated in many instances. Today, Cities embody exclusion, deprivation and injustice, even with blatant violation of human rights.

"As globalization produces different kinds of legal regimes and citizens, new hierarchies of cities and urban dwellers, it poses a new set of questions for citizenship, identity and politics". "The contemporary urbanization and its global processes and representations have destroyed the halo of this modernist urbanism". (Gyan Prakash – Mumbai Fables).

Tragically as our cities are expanding, public spaces are rapidly shrinking and democratic space is on a steady decline. Growing inequality, marginalization of more and more people from the main stream of development and lack of participation are leading to social tensions. Simultaneously, colonization of spaces and public assets under the guise of privatization and corporatization is fragmenting our cities into ghettos of the rich and the poor. Thus we cannot proclaim to be developed having extreme rich and poorest of the poor living cheek-by-jowl. It is also of serious concern to us as to how poverty, lack of freedom due to in-equality and un-equal participation, are deeply undermining democracy itself.

Opportunities that are perceived in cities, regulated and offered by the State power are put to competition for drawing benefits from it. Under the logic of 'free market', various benefits that include basic needs for survival including 'rights' are available at high cost. Eligibility criteria for accessing the various benefits are placed entirely on financial terms. High cost of opportunity coupled with un-affordability have made the poor and even the middle classes to survive in cities but without its advantages and the joy of urban life. Thus, cities must not be considered as grounds for competition but developed as spaces and opportunity for forging unity and co-operation for collective democratic action for the inclusion and benefit of all.

Deteriorating conditions of living of vast numbers of poor and marginalized people including sections of the middle class, due to inadequate and high-cost services and infrastructure is most glaring today. The Human Development Report 2009 published by the Municipal Corporation of Mumbai presents a dismal picture for the majority of the citizens' malnourishment; cramped and unhygienic housing, sub-standard but high-cost services and infrastructure, diminishing open-spaces and even more crowded suburban train travel to work that characterize their lives.

Vast numbers of people living in cities cannot afford housing. This is because Housing is considered as a commodity in the market. Hence its production and marketing has been important for maximizing profit. This has led to the construction of houses and apartments for the middle and upper classes as these houses can fetch better prices for profit. As governments under liberalization have withdrawn from social welfare provisions that include housing for the poor, there is no production and availability of affordable housing for the poor. Therefore, the poor are forced to live in slums and squatter settlements in cities.

Wherever and whenever there is any construction undertaken for housing of the poor, the production of un-ending colonies for rehabilitation schemes ignores completely the humane and qualitative content of life and relationships required to nurture communities and turns them into monotonous and repetitive units of exchange value.

The destruction of natural environment is also contributing to these deteriorating living conditions in our cities. Yet we are obsessed merely with construction turn-over while a miniscule can afford to buy any real-estate or housing in most cities across the world. As many other cities, Mumbai too is rapidly slipping into decadence. Absence of planning and indiscriminate and unplanned construction activity for quick turn-over for private profit is leading to far-reaching consequences including a shrinking democracy thus, adversely affecting the quality of life and environment.

Both our natural and built environments are in critical condition. Indiscriminate land-filling, dumping of waste, destruction of mangroves and the take-over of mud-flats for construction have led to critical environmental conditions including climate change – realized through the recent floods in many cities across the world and threats due to rising sea-level. Similarly, the quality of water and air has deteriorated, threatening our health and lives. Interestingly, this environmental condition adversely affects the lives of the rich and the poor equally. Even then the rich are not interested in the improvement of conditions that directly concern their own lives.

While open-spaces in cities and towns are taken-over we experience new quality of 'public' spaces in the atriums of shopping malls and clubs. As we read in the press, certain malls and clubs have in fact announced morning walks and jogging hours open to the public. In the case of Mumbai it has the dubiously unique distinction of possessing 0.03 acres of open space for every thousand people, while the norm is 4 acres for thousand people. It works out to a single square meter per person, which must be the lowest in the world.

## **CORPORATIZATION OF DEVELOPMENT :**

A hall-mark of neo-liberal development programmes is Corporatization. Privatization and corporatization of development are means for establishing control over finance and resources. Today planning, management and implementation of all the development works including vital services and social infrastructure is entrusted to the private corporates. These corporates draw funds largely from governments and public banks while profits are entirely appropriated by them. Various resources – land, mining and other public assets are taken over for successful implementation of the various projects. Also most services, including water, electricity, transportation are privatized and therefore, prohibitive for most people. Even education, health-care is not spared from being controlled for individual business interest.

Under the present economic models we are ensuring that public wealth and assets are appropriated for private profiteering . Sadly there is no concern for social development that broadly includes affordable education, health-care and recreation. While investment in each of these areas is increasing many fold, the percentage of population falling-out of these benefits is staggering - children in the case of access to higher education and vast numbers of poor from access to health-care. It is obvious that these emerging social conditions will undermine ‘development’ while adversely affecting urbanization itself.

Basic principles of corporatization within the premise of modern capitalism are that costs and risks are socialized to the maximum extent possible, while profit is entirely privatized. There can be no better example of this phenomenon than reflected in the concessional agreements that are being executed for the implementation of various projects in ‘public interest’. Metro Rail projects in over 6 cities in India are examples of such dubious intentions.

“Corporatization is one element of growing deterioration in functioning of democratic institutions”. Even democratically elected governments as in India and other countries are shirking their responsibility in undertaking social development measures by entrusting the responsibility on to the private sector. Today peoples struggles and movements experience a new form of negotiation for their demands. They no more take their demands to governments but have to negotiate for their ‘rights’ and seek concessions from private agencies instead. It is for this reason that we are deeply concerned about the path for development that we are pursuing. The conspiracy by a few with which the city and all its resources are being colonized, along with the exclusion of more and more people from benefiting is pushing us to state of underdevelopment.

This ‘development’ and ‘growth’ euphoria promoted under corporatization considers the (re)construction of our cities only through mega projects. This in turn is ignoring ideas pertaining to conservation and redevelopment of city areas. “Revitalizing the older parts of our cities rather than knocking them down brings huge benefits. It retains our sense of place and history. If we don’t preserve the past, we have no future. We must ensure that our core areas are restored and revitalized. Our sense of place is also connected to our natural heritage which includes our mangrove swamps, beaches and the national park surrounding our city”. (Brinda Somaya-Times City- 7<sup>th</sup> October,2010)

## **PARTICIPATION & MOVEMENTS:**

We are concerned with people-oriented policies; specially those relating to education, health, nutrition, social equality, civil liberties, and other basic aspects of life. No doubt that physical planning, land allocation and access to affordable services is significant to enabling opportunities that people have in cities to improve the quality of their lives.

Participation is primarily a political act. Greater participation of more and more people in decision making can be best achieved at local levels. Achieving greater democracy at the local level can directly be an important step towards social change. The practice of local democracy is also a form of wider political education. This is best realized through certain urban projects that I will come to later. “These pursuits can be achieved through participation of more and more people in decision making. Actual participation in political movements and public action can make a major difference to the agenda of governments and influence its priorities”. – (Sen & D’cruz)

“Participation can also be seen to have intrinsic value for the quality of life. It is worth noting that the process of public discussion and participatory interaction can make citizens take an interest in the lives of each other”. (Dreze & Sen). Mumbai’s citizens activism both historically and now challenges the drive to impose from above the fantasy of a global city – Mumbai to be transformed into Shanghai. Even then the ruling classes pursue programmes and projects that advances the ‘generic city’.

“The growth of the Social Forums, first in South America, now elsewhere, has been one of the most encouraging steps forward in recent years. These developments might bear the seeds of the first authentic International, heralding an era of true globalization: international integration in the interests of people, not investors and other concentrations of power. Those taking part in this Social Summit today are right at the heart of these dramatic developments, an exciting opportunity, a difficult challenge, a responsibility of historic proportions.” (Chomsky – ‘Hopes & Prospects’)

Tragically the organizations of the working class and social movements have been replaced by a host of exclusive middle and upper class ‘citizens’ movements in ‘public’ interest. This has led to the strangulation of democracy; thus restricting participation of the vast majority of urban poor and the middle class even in decisions that directly affect their lives. Today’s popular public interest is upper class and ruling elites views

**At this critical juncture we have to choose and pursue alternatives that not only challenge the forces of neo-liberal globalization, but simultaneously promote ideas and directions in urban planning and architecture to achieve equality and development justice.**

#### **‘NEIGHBOURHOOD-WAY’ FORWARD:**

For undertaking planning and city (re)development, I propose ‘Neighbourhood-Way’ as a way forward. ‘The Vision Juhu Plan’ is an illustration of this idea.

Juhu is a residential suburb in the western part of Mumbai and has an iconic image in the minds of millions of Indians where many of their favourite film stars live and an area with exclusive and premium real estate. The name is also synonymous with one of the most popular public spaces, the Juhu Beach. This dual identity of Juhu as a glamorous neighbourhood while also an accessible leisure destination for visitors sets up the matrix within which the democratic planning process can be initiated and ‘Vision Mumbai’ can make the first move.

Vision Juhu has evolved, keeping the larger issues of Mumbai in mind. It includes conserving reserved open spaces and creating new ones, pedestrianization, significant solutions to flooding in Juhu, development of the Irla nala, improvement in transport infrastructure by skillfully integrating the proposed Metro rail and re-planning traffic flow, opening up of several accesses to the beach, appraisal of social amenities like educational and health facilities and making them accessible to all, improvement in the standard of living in slums and gaothans, provision of space and security to hawkers and including them in mainstream development plans and networking this public realm.

It aims to protect the natural environment and the best features of the built environment, increase commercial viability, encourage tourist and leisure facilities, protect and support communities, create social inclusion, provide people with a voice in landscapes of rapid change and design urban places and spaces for people.

A firm partnership between the people of Juhu and the government can help bring about simple, pragmatic solutions to complex problems. With support from all its stakeholders, Vision Juhu can be a resounding success within a limited span of time.

Neighbourhood approach overcomes the alienation that is generated in city or regional development plans. Also, Neighbourhood discussions encourage maximum participation. It enables us to evolve a collective culture including participatory governance models. Then the ideas and plans are people oriented, rooted in daily life experiences.

Every city in the world evolves by itself and every area has typical challenges. Each neighbourhood has its own unique set of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities; best understood by the people who live and have an interest in it. Allowing citizens to utilize this awareness of their neighbourhood will result in a vision best suited to them and to their city. Neighbourhood Planning, keeping larger, city issues in mind is the way ahead. It will empower local residents and make them responsible for their area development. This will truly be our Vision, our desired future for our surroundings and our cities.

**I present two projects initiated in Mumbai through citizens movements that demonstrate the idea of 'Neighbourhood-Way' for city (re)development.**

**(1) Walking & Cycling in our cities - 'Mumbai On Two Feet':**

'Walking & Cycling' is a metaphor for multitude of alternate ideas for city development and humanizing our environments. This idea also addresses issues of transportation, affordable mobility, pollution control, congestion mitigation and opposes our increased dependence on high-cost motorized transportation. Importantly, this also reflects our ideas about social networking and an integrated view of city planning.

There should be true democracy on the roads. Roads are for people, not only for motorists. They should not be mere corridors for motorized traffic. Most road users are ordinary people, pedestrians. Planning has to shift in their favour. Inequality is growing in India and nowhere is the injustice to ordinary people more visible and obvious than on roads. The ordinary man feels totally alienated, overpowered, neglected, dwarfed by the whole culture of cars and skyscrapers and shopping malls and other centres of consumption. The street has traditionally been a great social, public space all over the world. The 'Mumbai on Two Feet' movement in Mumbai aims to reclaim public spaces for the people.

**(2) Reclaiming Public Spaces – 'Mumbai's Waterfronts Redevelopment':**

In the years 2000-2002 a popular citizen's movement led to a major transformation of nearly 8 kms of Mumbai's western waterfronts in Bandra and Juhu. I voluntarily prepared a comprehensive development plan for the western waterfronts of Mumbai, with the participation of many citizens' organizations, which provided the basis for public action.

The Mumbai Waterfronts project that I am presenting here is a part of a larger democratic movement for re-claiming public spaces and must be understood in this context.

Both the movement and the project is thus a protest against the abuse, neglect and misuse of public spaces and the waterfronts in particular. The waterfronts movement in Mumbai, explain how democratic planning and architecture have contributed substantially to social changes.

#### Key Aspects:

- The Mumbai Waterfronts project that I am presenting here is a part of a larger movement for re-claiming public spaces.
- Both the movement and the project is a protest or an intervention against the abuse, neglect and misuse of public spaces and the waterfronts in particular.
- The movement aims to restore and expand the meager open space- 0.25 ac / 1000 people.
- Mumbai is a city on the water, but the waterfronts have never been considered an integral part of the city's land mass.
- Our objective is to prepare a comprehensive plan for the city's waterfronts, integrate it with the development of the city.
- To begin, we have addressed the western waterfronts – nearly 40 kms, the Bandra project being approx. 4 kms.
- Protection of the environment and conservation of the eco-sensitive borders of the city is also one of the prime objectives.
- The waterfronts project is a precedent for democratic planning and collective action bringing together professionals, neighbourhood citizens, private sponsors and the govt, BUT with the citizens at the helm – setting-out new governance models.
- Through succinct struggle and collective action, the waterfronts treated as a backyard of and a dumping ground of the city, both physically and metamorphically, are proposed to turn into provisional social and cultural forecourts.

#### The Beginning:

- The waterfronts project has been a bottom-up process – relying on views from below and active participation of the public.
- The initial plans for the 40 kms of the Western Waterfronts prepared voluntarily by me was widely discussed, popularized and accepted by different neighbourhood resident groups who stood up to own the plan and implement the project.
- The residents for its implementation filed several PILs too.
- Subsequently the BMC & Govt. accepted and accorded recognition.
- Bandra Waterfront's successful implementation popularized the need for protecting the waterfronts of the city and generated a movement for reclaiming public spaces.

**The Central Objective in both these projects are to expand public spaces and simultaneously aim to ;**

(a) Revive government's role and responsibility in promoting and undertaking social welfare projects.

(b) Bring-in legislation to regulate and control the development works in larger public interest.

- (c) Strengthen democratic processes and public institutions to carry-out and monitor various plans and projects – affordable housing, affordable health-care, education, recreation and so on.
- (d) Evolve new urban governance models based on larger participation and build an alternative public-private- govt. partnership framework with public control. To challenge the alienation and intimidation that is generated through exclusive mega projects and corporatization.
- (e) Promote the idea of Planning and Architecture as a ‘public right’.
- (f) Prepare plans and policies with public participation, public response & public decisions, in order to evolve an effective ‘Democratic Social Architecture ‘ for the development of our cities.
- (g) To challenge the idea of ‘generic cities’ and promote the idea of ‘Neighbourhood-Way’ for city development..

### **ARCHITECTS ROLE:**

As Planners & Architects, we understand better the various social, cultural and political processes when reflected in plans and projects. Our ideas too are best reflected in the plans that we prepare. Drawing Plans is our script for directing various development works. Plans can be autocratic dictatorial, fascist, upper class based, tainted in religious and sectarian colours, promoting colonization of land and assets and above all promoting free ‘market’. But plans too are an effective democratic instrument for political, social and cultural changes, promoting ideas of democracy, equality, freedom and inclusiveness, this must be pursued instead.

“Asif Hasan, a Pakistani architect, said if the present trends in many cities continue, the rich-poor divide will worsen, evictions will increase and a sense of exclusion will grow stronger, with not only the poor, but also the rich living in ghettos, the rich surrounded by armed guards and security systems.” He suggested the creation of a Hippocratic Oath for planners obliging them to include the marginalized in every stage of their work. Personally I have always advocated that the role of the architect has to go beyond buildings as he or she is the guardian of the built and the un-built space”.

The choice is ours, based on our understanding and the commitments we make. Therefore how do we draw plans, who provides the brief for it or how is the brief evolved, are important questions. Our paths are paved accordingly. We become partners and active supporters of certain ideas & ideologies. We therefore knowingly and / or unknowingly promote through our plans certain political objectives. We are political; deliberately or because of circumstances, partnering in active politics.

Let’s not shy away from politics. The most common remark I hear is – ‘I am not interested in politics’. This is to bluff one-self and be naive. Rather we must engineer our practices to enhance participation and effectively promote equality, inclusiveness and freedom, thus evolving a new Democratic Social Architecture. Plans for our cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods and our attitude towards natural environments ought to be transparent and must promote larger public interest.

Therefore we all must collectively intervene, protest, fight and put-up our alternate plans on the streets and in public places. We have to individually and collectively prepare plans rooted in the various movements of struggling people. There cannot be any negotiation for concessions but struggle for enabling planning and architecture as a ‘public right’ reflected in public knowledge, public dialogue and public reasoning.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We professionals who are committed to achieving equality and development justice have to build strong anti-globalization networks and organizations to campaign and expand our ideas for the success of 'Democratic Social Architecture'. To build and facilitate peoples collectives and movements has to be our mission too. The launching of the 'Social Forum of Architecture' with the initiatives and efforts of the Turkey Chamber of Architects particularly, the Ankara chapter is note-worthy.

Thus, evolving a new Democratic Social Architecture for our cities is our objective and our plans & proposals for its achievement are our weapons of selective destruction of exclusivity and growth. 'Neighbourhood-Way' as the basis for city development and projects such as the 'Mumbai on two feet' and the 'Reclaiming Public Spaces: Mumbai's Waterfront Development' are important examples of interventions and protest for expansion and democratization of public spaces. This task has to be undertaken with intimacy and humaneness built upon the ideas of equality and justice rooted in our 'small worlds' – our neighbourhoods and streets but, with strong national and international networks for achieving our globalization.