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Democratic Planning, Design & Architecture in the making of our cities :
The case of Mumbai

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A Understanding Planning, Design & Architecture :

We as Planners & Architects are indeed concerned about issues relating to design. From the manifold ideas about planning & design, I choose to explore the idea that planning and architecture are effective democratic tools of social change and instruments for mobilizing and facilitating social movements for equality and justice.

We know that Planning & Architecture in its physical manifestations greatly influences life. Through them we could contemplate the futures of our cities.

It is therefore necessary to democratize planning & architecture and their implementation process. Simultaneously, they must be popularized and planning & design activism made it into a movement worldwide.

In order to achieve these objectives we must undertake three fundamental steps :

- a) Placing Planning & Architecture in the domain of public knowledge,
- b) Promoting Planning & Architecture as subjects of public dialogue and
- c) Evolving Planning & Architectural decisions through public reasoning.

I believe that public action can play a central role in city planning and development decisions. What the government ends up doing can be deeply influenced by the pressures that are put on the government by the public.

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. Planning and Architecture must integrate with it for enabling social changes and for achieving development justice.

Achievement of this integration is our challenge and therefore it forms the focus of my lecture today.

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B Why is this Inquiry necessary ? :

Exploration of such an understanding of Planning & Architecture is an important necessity today particularly since public spaces are rapidly shrinking while our cities are ‘expanding’, as exclusivity and exclusions are increasingly becoming the priority basis of development due to which vast majority of people are being excluded from the benefits of development.

In the case of Mumbai, I will explain how democratic planning and architecture in two significant movements have contributed substantially to social changes and have raised many important questions and provided solutions to urban development and governance issues. Both these examples also illustrate the present state of Mumbai.

C Today’s context & two significant examples: .

• Slums redevelopment and affordable housing question :

Over 55 – 60% of the city’s population i.e., about 7 million people live in slums. Housing is undoubtedly one of the biggest issues challenging Mumbai’s development. Interestingly there is no provision of land for housing of the working class and the urban poor in the Development/Land-Use Plan for the city nor there is any production of affordable housing for the poor. Therefore living in slums is a solution to the housing problem for the majority of people. Slums redevelopment is therefore extremely important not only in the interest of the slum-dwellers but also for the overall development of the city and improvement in the quality of life that is fast deteriorating.

For me housing, particularly for the middle class and the poor, is not merely about developing beautiful or pretty buildings contained within specific boundaries as gated communities but, it effect the integration with open spaces and various amenities.

• Movement for re-claiming Public spaces:

The state of public-spaces is a direct reflection of the dignity of public life and the environmental quality of a city. In Mumbai, the state of public-spaces is in the pits–neglected, encroached and constantly abused including the destruction of the natural environment. The proportion of open-space to population in Mumbai is a meager 0.25 acres per thousand people, compared to 6 acres in New York & 7.3 acres in London. Also the systematic depletion of these meager open-spaces is leading to serious socio-environmental consequences. Moreover, there is no plan for its protection and development. For these reasons the movement for reclaiming public spaces achieves significance.

Similarly, the development of open spaces is not about pretty gardens and exclusive landscapes only. Accessible to all open spaces and their contiguity and integration with other developments are necessary urban development objectives.

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D MUMBAI & INDIA:

Geography:

Mumbai is an island city with a land area of 482 sq. km. This city has a very narrow southern tip and a broader northern, suburban region. Its population today is estimated to be around 12.5 million.

Mumbai’s Movements:

Mumbai’s distinction and strength lies in the organizations and movements of its people. Historically, the city has witnessed significant struggles and in fact was perceived as a zone of liberation, particularly by the working class. Continuing till date we witness a large volume of citizens movements that are influencing the city’s policies and development programmes. A few social movements which are significant to both the city & the country are as under;

- Mahatma Gandhi’s Quit India Movement against the British rule started in the city in 1942.
- Ambedkar’s Dalit Movement started in the early 19th century at a national level where the basic structures of the Indian caste and social system were challenged.
- Workers Union and Rights Movement was established in 1937 by the British which gained great significance post independence too.
- Slum Dwellers’ Housing Rights Movements started in early 1990s, which aimed to rehabillitee slum population in new urban townships.
- Citizen’s Civil Rights Movements is ongoing today and gaining popularity by the day.

Privatization and neo-liberal globalization :

There has however been significant changes in the class, nature of social movements and serious departure from history and political engagements. Let us look for a short while in understanding these changes.

India was declared a socialist republic in 1950.

Post independence the Government has been committed to social welfare and it brought in:

- Neo liberal globalization in 1990 with privatization of all developments
- Withdrawal and Facilitation
- Commitment to Free Market & Market led development thrust
- Colonization of public assets - Back to company days
- 9% average annual growth for over 5 years and now down from 10% avg. to 5.5 – 6%
- But also 8 - 9% inflation

Today, we are overdriven by finance and financial turn-over defines economic growth. Finance and economic growth are generally considered synonymous. But such an economic growth does not give the full picture, not even in the development context, because we 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. Through all our works we must evaluate the contribution we make to social and human developments.

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Indomitable Real Estate:

The most powerful influence in all spheres of life is the real-estate business, which has influenced the politics of the city too. Historically this has been the central phenomenon in the city’s development.

The real-estate business in Mumbai is booming, with a turnover and 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. The 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, development is believed in terms of Real Estate turnover and the volumes of cement and concrete use. As the city is expanding its public spaces are shrinking.

- 1 Presently, cities world over are considered by the ruling class as an opportunity to build more to merely increase real estate turnover.
- 2 Real estate development is and has been one of the best means for fast multiplication and growth of capital.
- 3 Urbanization is mis-represented and often limited to the idea of building cities.
- 4 Cities as an opportunity to build more in order to increase real-estate business.
- 5 Thus, urbanization has been the buzz word under the present trend of neo-liberal globalization programmes and the motto of corporate finance and banking organizations world-over.
- 6 That urbanization is a way for achieving better quality life and for the liberation from oppressive social and economic relations, lack of freedom, oppression and injustices is consciously avoided by the promoters of the present trend of ‘development.’

Re-visioning Cities:

1. Instead, we want to Re-Vision our city with expanding, public spaces
2. Creating more open spaces, affordable housing, access to education and health-care and public transportation into the heart of planning in Mumbai.
3. We want to see the city upside-down, the city not as an opportunity for real-estate turnover but as a basis for expansion of public spaces.
For me cities are an opportunity for co-operatives. Cities are not spaces for competition or for individual, disparate efforts. To me they are a fantastic opportunity for forging collective and co-operative effort.

Informal Sector:

The city has a phenomenal growth rate, especially in the informal sector. As a result the employment patterns in the city have undergone a major shift. Today, over 70% people in Mumbai work in the informal sector, with no job guarantee, no minimum wages and no insurance.

Slumming of our Cities : Manufacturing Slums

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.

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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.

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!

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 Mumbai. 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.

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.

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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 market led development policy. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, The government’s own planning agency itself does not plan anything anymore 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”.

Irrelevant Development Plan – 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.

The Land Question – 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 sub serve 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, 1360 hectares 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.

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Slums Mapping :

All you need is the plan, the road map, and the courage to press on to your destination.

Maps are an insight into a nation’s progress. Not maps that define national boundaries, but maps that define cities and neighbourhoods. Maps that reveal the resources we have and how we share them. And the resources we may have lost. Open spaces, water bodies, vegetation, wildlife. Maps that make us vigilant and protective. Ours is a voluntary effort that has helped create a basis for the ‘Open Mumbai’ vision plan. An even more concerted effort by government is needed to continually map the city in extensive detail... if we are to build a more equitable city for its citizens.

Slums Re-development overview

Sanjay Gandhi Nagar:

The slum-dwellers of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, Cuffe Parade, with the help and leadership of the Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti (NHSS), 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 alternative land at Goregaon. Sangharsh Nagar is what they decided to call their housing colony (sangharsh meaning ‘to fight’).

As architects and active members of the NHSS, our proximity to the people was a crucial factor in devising relevant housing models for their rehabilitation. Detailed discussions, presentations and models formed the basis of the design.

As the site was once 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 and then tried to obtain a 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.

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

Planning principles: The plan proposes 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 are along the accesses, forming chowks for get together and spaces for the children to play. Since every house was to be built and extended according to the individual’s means, subsequent repairs and maintenance too became simple without dependence on professional help, nor linked to the status or consent of neighbours. An open space in the north, along the hill, acted as a buffer and protected the houses from possible landslides. A fairly large part is to be used for common facilities such as toilets and water taps. Also, extensive tree plantation is planned. A large, common space required for get-togethers, festivals and children to play is provided along with the welfare centre.

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Sangharsh Nagar :

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.

Each 22.5-square-metre, well-lit and adequately ventilated house comprises a room and kitchen with a balcony and toilet.

Each pada (cluster) comprises two societies with 550 houses and 16 common units for balwadis, society offices, crèches, a women’s centre and other common facilities. A central court provides openness, light and ventilation. The common units abut this court. The entrance to each building is marked by a baithak, a meeting place alongside the central open space.

Every three clusters form a wadi (sector), which is serviced by a marketplace that houses shops, banks, post offices and other commercial establishments. Two primary schools are alongside such marketplaces, and their playgrounds provide relief to the crowds that gather there.

Low-rise (ground plus four stories) clusters evolve into small, familiar neighbourhoods and involve the people in the control, management and maintenance of their township.

A network of internal pedestrian streets connects the groups of houses to their markets, facilities and common recreation spaces and the gateways to the houses are on these streets. Walkacross pathways, shaded by pergolas, intersperse the clusters. These promote a sense of unity between the different parts of the development.

The tragedy of the slum-dwellers evicted from Sanjay Gandhi National Park defies imagination. They have suffered untold misery ever since the Bombay High Court ordered demolition of the hutments on forest land on May 7, 1995. The last nine years have been a history of bloodshed and brutal repression by bulldozers and the police. Four of our brethren have been killed in repeated waves of demolition.

Countless children have died due to lack of shelter. People have been beaten and loss of property incurred by forest and police personnel.

While the environmentalists and courts have been so active in protecting the forests, no one has shed a tear for the plight of nearly 33,000 recognized families who, today, are without a roof over their heads.

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The Government of Maharashtra and Nivara Hakk Welfare Centre Rehabilitation plan at Chandivali is the largest rehabilitation project for the urban poor in India, with an investment of Rs.450 crores. What is noteworthy is that this scheme is a comprehensive development, including 14 schools, two medical centres, 180 balwadis, 180 welfare centres, 800 shops, two community halls, four religious institutions, several playgrounds, open spaces, a maidan, roads, lighting and other services.

Both 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 in the location of their choice in their own country.

Expanding Cities, Shrinking Public Spaces :

‘Open Mumbai’ Introduction

As Mumbai expands, its open spaces are shrinking. The democratic ‘space’ that ensures accountability and enables dissent is also shrinking, very subtly but surely.

The city’s shrinking physical open spaces are of course the most visible manifestation as they adversely affect our quality of life.

Open spaces must clearly be the foundation of city planning. An ‘Open Mumbai’ ensures our physical and democratic well-being.

Instead, over the years, open spaces have become ‘leftovers’ or residual spaces after construction potential has been exploited.

Through this plan, we hope to generate dialogue between people, government, professionals ... and within movements working for social, cultural and environmental change.

It is a plan that redefines land use and development, placing people and community life at the centre of planning — not real estate and construction potential.

A plan that redefines the ‘notion’ of open spaces to go beyond gardens and recreational grounds — to include the vast, diverse natural assets of the city, including rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds, mangroves, wetlands, beaches & the incredible seafronts.

A plan that aims to create non-barricaded, non-exclusive, non-elitist spaces that provides access to all our citizens. For leisure, relaxation, Art & Cultural life.

A plan that ensures open space is not only available but are geographically and culturally integral to neighbourhoods and a participatory community life.

A plan that we hope will be the beginning of a dialogue to create a truly representative ‘Peoples’ Plan’ for the city.

‘Open Mumbai’ Objectives

- Expand and network public open spaces
- Conserve natural assets and protect eco-sensitive borders
- Prepare a comprehensive waterfronts plan
- Establish walking and cycling tracks
- Promote social, cultural and recreational opportunities
- Evolve and facilitate participatory governance practices
- Democratise public spaces
- Undertake necessary amendments in the DP and DCR

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‘Open Mumbai’ Plan Elements

- Seafronts
- Beaches
- Rivers
- Creeks and Mangroves
- Wetlands
- Lakes Ponds and Tanks
- Nullahs
- Parks and Gardens
- Plot and Layout Recreational Grounds (RGs)
- Historic Forts and Precincts
- Hills and forests
- City Forests
- ‘Open’ people-friendly Railway Stations
- Roads and Pedestrian Avenues
- Area Networking

As it all started –

Reclaiming Mumbai’s Waterfronts :

- 1 In 2000-2003 a popular citizen’s movement led to a major transformation of nearly 3 kms of Mumbai’s western waterfronts.
- 2 Both the movement and the project are a protest against the abuse, neglect and misuse of public spaces and the waterfronts in particular.
- 3 Demonstrating ways by which we can expand public spaces through democratic planning and collective governance.
- 4 An example how democratic planning and architecture have contributed substantially to social changes.
- 5 The waterfronts project is an important example in the understanding of our cities’ development models..

CONCLUSION:

These plans and proposals are essentially rooted in ideas of conservation, restoration, recycling, re-planning and re-structuring existing realities and their spatial transformation. Rather than mega projects with large-scale displacements and enormous revenue burdens, this approach is based on more pragmatic and people-oriented alternatives. Firstly, we believe that all re-developments should recognize and respect existing realities as part of the planning and urban development process. Such an approach engages citizens, leads to better quality life and ensures a more ‘democratic’, more equitable city. By achieving intensive levels of citizens’ participation we wish to engage and influence governments to devise comprehensive plans for a democratic & equal city.

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