

SLUMS, SOCIAL HOUSING & URBANISATION OF THE CITY MUMBAI

TALK AT KALA GHODA FESTIVAL ON 6TH FEBRUARY, 2018

Am sure, we all are concerned about the deplorable State of housing in Indian cities. I attribute three key factors that have significantly contributed to this human tragedy: **Mis-utilisation of land, Exclusionary city planning and The sub-urban condition** in which large numbers of people are forced to live in highly oppressive situations in slums and dilapidated buildings, thus undermining the idea of equality and justice and above all **the urbanization of cities?**

Undoubtedly, it is a failure of the free market and various city and state governments in undertaking the larger responsibility of social housing production and supply. More specifically, it is the lack of availability or absence of formally developed affordable houses that is contributing to the proliferation of slums.

Film Starts

As a matter of fact, slums are the only places where people find affordable housing option, for outright purchase or on rent, even though legally un-tenable in most instances. Also, integral to the housing question is the extent of access to social amenities- education, health care, open spaces; infrastructure- sewage, sanitation, safe drinking water, waste disposal. Needless to say that the environmental condition too, that directly impacts the quality of life and individual and community relationships, is also a critical matter of concern.

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In this presentation, I will dwell upon just three aspects that impact housing- **land, city planning and urbanization of cities** and relate to some of my experiences in Mumbai in this regard. Central to the issue of affordable housing, is a deeper understanding of slums and the deplorable living conditions that millions of marginalized toiling people who contribute significantly to cities economy and their diverse political, social and cultural life, are constantly subjected to.

My thoughts and ideas on the question of housing are synonymous with the various struggles of millions of poor and marginalized people and the movements they have waged in Mumbai for claiming right to housing, in which my organization Nivara Hakk and I, have actively participated. Our understanding and assessment of the various issues relating to the housing question are squarely based on the needs, aspirations and demands of these struggling people and their relationship, or the lack of it, with the city.

Sub – Title slide

1. Land: Land Equity & Occupy Slum Land :

Sanjay Gandhi Nagar slides- at Nariman Point

For me it all started in the year 1980 when the slum dwellers of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, situated at Nariman Point, along with my organization Nivara Hakk opposed their demolition and forced eviction. **Their struggle was essentially a battle for land. They fought a heroic battle for homes and shelter and won when the state government gave them alternate land on ownership.**

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Sanjay Gandhi Nagar slides- at Goregaon

Initially, with the active participation of the slum community, we prepared a layout plan for the new place and accordingly apportioned land to individual families. Together, we prepared a set of development control regulations and guidelines. It was a self-help housing scheme that was pursued. People built their own houses and developed common areas like open spaces, a balwadi, a community center and a health care unit. Houses were built independently by each family and grew differently, the expressions reflecting their needs and life-styles and their economic condition and also their attitude and interaction.

If it is one thing that we have learnt from Sanjay Gandhi Nagar and other struggles for housing rights, it is that, people must continue to occupy land on which they have painstakingly built their houses and work places. Left without any option, slum dwellers have fought against multiple evictions and rebuilt their houses many times over with unbearable expenditures, besides suffering from enormous mental and physical stress being subjected to constant abuse, humiliation and uncertainty.

These achievements have not come on a platter due to the wisdom of the state government. **These are, indeed, matters of great achievement of people's movements for claiming right to housing and participation in decisions that affect their lives. It is land rights alone that forms the foundation of a path towards achievement of the "Right to City".**

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Any discussion of social housing begins with the question of land- its availability, access to it and its price. In most cities, allocation of land for the construction of affordable housing and social amenities for the poor and the middle class is denied. Also, it is high land price that makes housing unaffordable to most people. In the absence of availability of formally developed affordable housing that vast numbers of the people find living in slums an alternative, **thereby occupying open land.**

Therefore, it is not the shortage of land but its manipulation and mis-utilization that has made affordable social housing unviable.

Land occupied under slums is an example of people claiming their right to land. It is in this context that movements against forced evictions and displacement is a significant political action for the achievement of the ‘Right to City’ objective that is rooted in the idea of equality & justice. Therefore, I urge that **Recognition and inclusion of existing land occupation pattern must form the basis of development plans and programs.**

But, after 30 years or so, the people of Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, decided to sell off their development rights to a builder, who under SRA regulations built 25 storied buildings for their rehabilitation on just 25% of land they own.

New rehab buildings

From Nivara Hakk’s point of view, the residents, who had fought a heroic battle for homes and shelter and won, thereafter squandered a great opportunity – the opportunity to develop for themselves a progressive and

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modern community and neighbourhood with sustainable density, without multi-storey buildings which will over the years demand a heavy price for maintenance. Effectively, nearly three acres of land, won with the blood and sweat of slum-dwellers has passed into the hands of a for-profit middle and upper class housing project.

Year 2000- The Battle for Sangharsh Nagar:

I now fast forward to a period much later, year 2000, when a spate of violent demolitions of over **80,000** slum houses built in the periphery of Sanjay Gandhi Rashtriya Udyan were carried out, thus putting the lives of over 400, 000 people to threat and uncertainty. My organization along with the slum-dwellers challenged their eviction.

Demolition and struggle slides at Kandivalli

After a long and violent battle, including legal challenges- -----, Nivara Hakk carried out negotiations with the State Government for rehabilitation of the displaced people. By 2015, nearly 15000 families had moved to an alternate site setting up their new town named Sangharsh Nagar, with amenities, open spaces and infrastructure. Though a lot more remains to be done with regard to infrastructure and conveniences, **Sangharsh Nagar is significant for Mumbai not only for the large number of housing units and its sheer size, but also for the impact it has made on the struggle for housing rights, including claims for right to land and the formulation of housing policy by the government- provision of social infrastructure and open spaces as**

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per T.P. norms. Also, it is an example for critical discussion on matters relating to FSI, density, building heights etc.

Sangharsh Nagar Slides at Chandivali

Through a participatory process and extensive dialogue, a rehabilitation plan was prepared for 25,000 houses and undertaken at the alternate site with ground and seven storied buildings. Prevailing FSI-2.5 had to be consumed and a host of other regulations imposed by the Slums Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) had to be followed too.

In order to enable effective participation, campaign posters and models of the development were also prepared. Today, over 200 Co-Operative Societies have already been registered and an apex body – ‘Mahasangh’ has been established too. It is the Mahasangh that organizes and manages the common property- streets, community centers, schools etc., while coordinating with various co-operative societies on day-to-day matters. Lessons drawn from this rehabilitation project is of immense value to the specific subject of slums rehabilitation and redevelopment and the larger question of development of affordable housing.

In cities like Mumbai, where vacant public land is seldom available for social housing & amenities (shrunk post 1991, the year India committed to liberalization of its economy and the privatization resources including land and development works), reservation of slum land would help in substantial terms in building pools of land bank for affordable housing.

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Also, participatory planning of slums redevelopment can lead to substantial improvement in the conditions of living and the provision of social amenities and infrastructure, as we witness in the plan of ‘Sangharsh Nagar’.

Sub- Title slide

2. Inclusive & Integrated Planning: Development Plans must be based On Existing Land Occupation Pattern -

We have also learnt through the struggle for housing by the National Park slum-dwellers that it is important to achieve the integration of slums with various neighborhoods and the city. Segregation of Slums from other developments due to various forms of exclusion and discrimination that prevail leads to polarization of communities and rising social tension, thereby undermining the very idea of cities.

Slides – Slums jostling with other developments

Sadly, as cities are expanding, public spaces are rapidly shrinking. This means space for wider public participation and dialogue are shrinking. Cities are constantly being divided into contesting people and spaces. City landscape is fragmented into exclusive gated enclaves and ghettoised colonies with multiple barriers and boundaries.

Current trend of urbanization is producing more backyards of neglect, abuse, discrimination and segregation of people and spaces, leading to

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divided and disparately fragmented cities. **Therefore, it is the unification of the segregated people and spaces that has come to be a necessary sustainable urban development condition.** I believe, it is through the implementation of social housing projects that such unification can be effectively addressed and partially achieved through inclusionary planning.

Planning:

Planning, as we know is a tool for the achievement of development objectives. But when development objectives are skewed in favor of a few who control land and resources, then planning is skewed against public interest.

‘City master plans generally follow an exclusionary model that reserve land for housing of high and middle-income groups, commercial, institutional, recreational and other uses, with no earmarking for low-income groups. These plans are not in consonance with the income distribution structure of cities and towns. The norms of planning including density and development also favour the comparatively better-off sections. These deficiencies are further compounded by state agencies, such as development authorities, MMRDA’s BKC being an example, resorting to auction of the limited land available with them in cities and setting exorbitant benchmarks for the market price of land’- K.C.Sivaramakrishnan.

It is not just the poor but also large sections of the middle class are who are excluded from access to land & housing that is available in the open

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market. In Mumbai, more than 80% of the city's population constituting over 9 million cannot afford to buy nor rent houses being built and marketed by private developers. As a matter of fact, the mighty real estate agencies- builders and developers, cater to just about 15% of the city's population in Mumbai. The numbers of those excluded include 50% living in slums that occupy just 15% of the total developable land, 5% living on footpaths and marginal spaces, 25% living as tenements that are very old and dilapidated many of which are cessed buildings built in the fifties after the war. Then there are 5-10% (figure not established through survey) live in housing provided by their employees. Therefore, not more than 10-12-15% people own houses in which they live, or live in safe conditions. Mumbai is the worst among the big metros in respect of the average living space occupied by families. Here, 65% of all households are living in spaces with one or less than one dwelling room.

Mapping of slums:

Another issue that deeply effect us, is information that is skewed to consolidate the control of a few over land, resources & development rights. Information is constantly manipulated and manufactured to scuttle public interest and undermining public good. It is in this context that Collective Mapping is important.

In the case of Mumbai, Mapping of slum land by my organization gives an interesting insight of facts and data and a redevelopment perspective that is contrary to the information & path that governments provide that is obsessively tilted towards the interest of private builders and their profit motive.

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As evident in the case of Sangharsh Nagar, we find that through comprehensive planning of slum land, it is possible to set aside land for necessary amenities, open spaces and infrastructure. Also, it is possible to plan for a mixed-use development by including affordable work- spaces. Thus, it is slums redevelopment that forms an effective means for the achievement of inclusive cities.

Our slum mapping, Mumbai- slide

Another objective of mapping would be to determine and demand the fixation of land value in relation to the social objective of its use and not the way governments get driven by the prevailing market conditions that determine one common value for land of an entire area depending on their location. This is not a new idea. Governments in various countries, particularly in Latin America, have introduced varying land prices depending on the social objective of their use. In Maharashtra, the state government too has through its slums redevelopment policy has done away with the consideration of market value of land in the calculation of cost of slums redevelopment projects. In the open market, we find that a 300 sft. house, in central Mumbai for example, as available in the open market would cost over rupees one crore (ten million Indian rupees or 150,000 US \$).

Maps are an insight into a nations progress. Not maps that define National boundaries, but maps that define cities and neighborhoods. Maps that reveal the resources we may have lost or colonized, Maps that make us vigilant and protective. Effort must me made to continually map

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the city in extensive detail.... if we are to build a more equitable city for its citizens.

Our alternate plan -slides

Slums Redevelopment Master Plan:

Preparation of Slums Redevelopment Master Plan prepared by us would enable us to achieve the integration of slum land and slum dwellers with the city. It is participatory urban planning with thrust on affordable housing that has the power if undertaken through democratic means, to stitch together the disparate city fragments and enable the sharing of resources.

Sub – Title slide

3. Urbanisation of Cities:

Housing Beyond the Free Market

The two issues and objectives that I have argued- occupation slum land & the achievement of land equity and re-envisioning cities based on existing land occupation pattern, takes us to third important objective, i.e. the urbanisation of cities and production of affordable housing beyond the free market. As a matter of fact, the first two objectives themselves, but

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not exclusively, contribute to the achievement of the third, i.e. the urbanization and democratization of cities objective.

Struggle for housing that is essentially a democratic rights struggle. Movements and struggles for housing are effective democratic means for the achievement of equal and just cities. Participatory housing and development plans and programs are a necessary tenet of democracy. It is a struggle not just for individuals gain but also for building collective power.

Urbanisation vs City-Making:

It is necessary to understand that urbanization and city making are not the same, certainly not synonymous with each other, as it is been made out to be, accepted and spoken about. The two are independent of each other, in spite of city- building being an incredible means for the achievement of urbanization.

The exclusion of more and more people from the benefits of development, particularly their access to formal and dignified housing is squarely a failure of the current pattern of urbanization which is steadfastly undermining the very idea of cities. The fact of cities expanding rapidly in size and population is not an indicator of desirable and sustainable urbanization. Achievement of higher human development standards, along with equity and justice for all, would be true indicators of successful urbanization and city making effort. It is in this context that the Housing Question has to be understood and evaluated. Our failure to ensure these basic human rights to vast majority of city population

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exposes our failure while challenging our collective capacity and capabilities.

I repeat, Growth is increasingly dividing our cities into disparate fragments, both in social and spatial terms. Indeed our cities are producing and re-producing backyards of exclusion, discrimination, neglect and abuse; even natural habitats are being systematically destroyed, leading to increasing levels of intolerance and social unrest, thus undermining the very idea of cities.

SRA slide

Redevelopment of slums has to be through participatory planning and reconstruction, and it has to keep out developer lobbies whose only interest is to grab the best portions of slum lands for their commercial projects and squeeze the slum dwellers to a corner of the land which they occupy. Importantly, such development models under SRA is slummifying the city. Till people are rehabilitated, municipal and state governments must budget for up-gradation of slum communities by way of providing quality civic services and transport connections, and building necessary infrastructure of roads and pathways. Rebuilding the over 3,000 slum colonies across Mumbai cannot happen in a short time.

Understanding Slums:

Living conditions in most slums are deplorable and oppressive. Low-grade, and

Insufficient services and amenities coupled with overflowing drains and garbage pile-up has led to unhygienic living conditions, thereby adversely affecting the health and labouring capacity of slum dwellers. Repairing

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and retro-fitting the various adhoc civic services and collapsing infrastructure will not work, a planned redevelopment is the need of the hour.

It must be realised that slums are not homogeneous, but are a microcosm of society at large with all inherent differences and conflicts. There are critical differences between individuals and groups of people living in slums, not only in terms of their incomes but also in their needs and aspirations.

Residing in slums is not the preferred choice of the poor as some would have us believe. It is the forced ghettoisation of the poor and marginalised people. Rule of law seldom works in these pockets of parallel power where a nexus of slum lords, government officials and police, and political representatives control and manage land and the manner and method by which houses and services are built and distributed.

Conditions as they exist in slums cannot be accepted as they are nor continue to be the way of life of the slum dwellers. Slums have to be majorly rebuilt through participatory and democratic means for the achievement of urban conditions of living and working that include, open spaces, social amenities - health care, education and recreation, besides access to safe drinking water, planned sanitation, drainage and solid waste management.

Importantly, reconstruction of slums and informal settlements would be an effective means for harnessing collective and community union

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and power, much necessary at a time when various forms of social divide is constantly threatening the very idea of urbanization and the making of democratic cities.

To challenge these prevailing socio-political conditions, that participatory slums reconstruction program with comprehensive planning of slum land across the city could be an effective means for bringing about significant social and political changes.

Planned redevelopment of slums cannot be pursued independent of the larger city planning objectives. **The integration of slums and informal economic activity with the neighborhoods and the city is a necessary condition of sustainable development.** Thus, their inclusion and integration ought to be accepted as a mandatory condition in defining land-use and planning of cities. **Rather, these conditions should constitute the key principles of city planning and development programs for now and the future.**

Newspapers coverage -slides

Development of Affordable Housing being centrally a political question has to be pursued through collective dialogue and participatory endeavors. It is in this context that I argue that **participation in urban planning and design ought to be considered a right. The democratization of planning and design, indeed of housing, would be a significant step towards the democratization of cities.**

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Slide : MHADA + Slum chart

Conclusion:

Nivara Hakk's contention is: if lands occupied by slums and those controlled by government agencies, such as MHADA, are reserved for affordable housing and judiciously exploited for enabling construction of 300 to 750 sq. ft. housing units with regulated pricing, then Mumbai city can not only rehabilitate, on land that they currently occupy, the entire population of slum dwellers in 12 lakh homes and the population residing in MHADA layouts in another 1.69 lakh homes, but also create additional stock of over 9 lakh housing units, thereby wiping out the entire deficit in the city.

To end I would say that the key to solving the complex problems of housing undoubtedly lie squarely with the respective governments. They must abandon their reliance on the free market and intervene aggressively with greater responsibility and answerability to create pools of land bank and housing stock aimed at providing affordable homes for all.

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