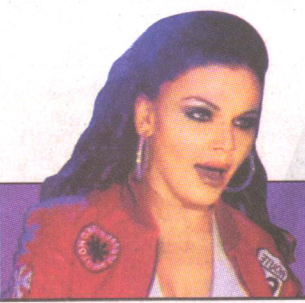




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City's Open-Air Shore Rooms

Prasad Kumar

A Dream

Mumbai could be stunningly beautiful if the waterfronts along its coastline, the Mithi river and various creeks and their inlets were developed into a cohesive and contiguous public space. People could then walk along the waterfronts to different parts of the city and also use the spaces for leisure and relaxation. The waterfronts would be rich and varied—mangroves, bird-watching areas, gardens, parks, promenades and play areas. There could also be spaces for performances, exhibitions and dialogues, enriching the quality of life in the city. The waterfronts could become the heart of our social life in the Mumbai.

Our Tragic Reality

Tragically, we have turned our backs to the waterfronts and abused and misused them as the backyard of the city. Indiscriminate land filling, dumping of waste coupled with land grab and conflicting development have destroyed the waterfronts. Destruction of mangroves and misuse of rivers and creeks as sewage channels have led to alarming environmental damage, including flooding.

Lack of planning in waterfront development has led to the neglect and abuse of this valuable environmental and social asset. Indeed, the waterfronts have never been considered integral to the city's landmass and, therefore, been excluded from city planning and policies.

A Master Plan

My report on Mumbai's waterfronts outlines a master plan to restore their natural beauty. It concerns itself with the phased rejuvenation of three types of waterfront areas: public spaces like beaches and waterfront promenades; old settlements, such as fishing villages; and seaside heritage precincts like the Worli, Mahim, Bandra and Vasai forts. The larger objective of the



The restored face of Bandstand, Bandra: The beautification of public spaces is essential for the city

plan is to initiate a movement for the restoration and development of Mumbai's public spaces, and the waterfront in particular.

With this plan and citizens' participation, we restored 4 km of Bandra waterfront and are now restoring Juhu beach. A nourishment plan for Dadar-Prabhadevi beach is on the anvil. For all these waterfronts, the ideas and designs were uncomplicated and no major construction was advocated; instead, the task was to halt the abuse of the waterfronts and reallocate spaces and activities with minimum restructuring. Most importantly, the underlying philosophy was that the waterfronts should stay the collective asset of citizens and a vital element of the city's environmental and social fabric.

Citizens' Agenda

Activism in Mumbai has most often centered around the protection of existing open spaces but seldom for creating new ones.

The struggle by residents of Bandra to reclaim their waterfront and the subsequent development of promenades is part of the larger story of Mumbai's coastline, though residents' initiatives to restore and reclaim their open spaces have not succeeded everywhere. People's participation, collective control and democratisation of public space should be vital aspects of the larger goal of development.

Given the current trend of development that Mumbai is saddled with—a mega-construction syndrome and the promotion of real estate, commercialisation, abuse and neglect of open spaces—the present Development Plan needs to be radically altered in the best interests of the citizens. This is the only way the healthy development of waterfronts and public spaces can be effectively carried out. There is an urgent need today for city planning to respond to natural and environmental conditions, to preserve natural resources and conserve the coastline.

The increasing deterioration of the urban environment and the laxity on the part of government bodies to check the process, along with a growing sense of people's rights and power, has resulted in the growth of a number of associations and groups. Small, informal groups have been asserting their rights to challenge an indifferent government and demand amenities which enhance their lives. The underlying impulse behind these decentralised, informal, non-bureaucratic and spontaneous associations is to work outside the government and sometimes independently of government bodies. In spite of our cynicism and lack of faith in the government agencies, we cannot function independently of them. The ownership of public spaces, and land, in general, must vest with the government; only then will it be available for development for the larger public good. This will ensure collective control of common assets and people's participation for their development.

On The Water Front

Mumbai's beaches, steadily ravaged by encroachment and filth, have got a fresh lease of life thanks to citizens' initiatives. P K Das, the architect who restored many of the city's beautiful waterfronts, charts an agenda for the future

MISSION MUMBAI
Because Our Great City Deserves Better
WATERFRONT

Want five more Bandstands?

Mumbai has a long stretch of waterfront on its east that could be opened to the public. But the government and the MbPT don't seem interested

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

A few years ago, an exciting possibility awaited the weary Mumbaikar, fed up of the congestion and concrete clogging the city. A task force was set up by the Maharashtra government to look into the planning and redevelopment of the eastern waterfront, a 14.5-km stretch of coastline from Colaba's Sassoon Dock to Wadala. Three years later, however, nothing has come of it.

Architects from the Urban Design Research Institute and the Kamala Raheja Institute of Architecture had come up with a detailed study and regeneration plan for the area. Planners believed that if some of the properties owned by the Mumbai Port Trust were opened up to the public, the possibilities for transforming the city would be tremendous: a new rail corridor, instant access to the mainland, an alternate waterfront, more parks and gardens and new work spaces.

An architect involved with the study admits the task force has now lapsed. "There were three proposals," he says. "One involved minimum intervention, where all the port activities would remain but the city would also gain some public seascapes. The second suggestion involved



Ferry Wharf or Bhaucha Dhakka on the eastern waterfront: Immense potential

moderate intervention, where the profit-making activities could be retained and underused lands could be developed for public housing, infrastructure and open spaces. And the third proposal envisaged a stage where port activities would be completely shifted out of the city."

The idea behind chalking out an integrated plan was to avoid piecemeal development as happened in the case of the mill lands. But the Mumbai Port Trust's response, says the architect, was very unfavourable. "Since the Maharashtra govern-

ment doesn't have much of a say on the MbPT lands which come under the centre, nothing happened after that," he says.

Apart from the Gateway of India, the eastern waterfront has no spaces open to the public. While a whole edge occupied by Hindustan Lever and the Maritime College are blocked to outsiders, areas like Sassoon Dock and Ferry Wharf (more popularly known as Bhaucha Dhakka) are open but are not really public spaces as on the western waterfront—the former is an industrial area (a fish market) and

the latter a transport terminus. Other areas along the coastline have been encroached on or lack infrastructure. "There are potential areas, such as the Sewri fort area and the mudflats where the flamingos come, which could be developed as public spaces," says the architect. "There was definitely a possibility of opening up some patches along the waterfront, but the government did not show a clear interest while the MbPT is showing great resistance to redevelopment even though it could maximise its returns on the lands it holds."

Tere mere beach mein A STATUS REPORT ON MUMBAI'S WATERFRONTS

● **Gateway of India:** INTACH's proposal to redesign Apollo Bunder has just got the go-ahead. The plan includes a new promenade, a boat jetty, a single planned parking lot and new spaces and activities.

● **Marine Drive:** The battered sea wall is in the process of being restored as part of architect Ratan Batliboi's 3-phase plan to restore the whole waterfront.

● **Girgaum Chowpatty:** Once the most badly battered beachfront in Mumbai, Chowpatty was given a new lease of life by Pramod Navalkar. Food stalls were relocated and the Nana-Nani park created.

● **Worli seaface:** The untouched seafront here still looks straight out of the 1950s, but the Bandra-Worli sealink will ruin it. The Worli fort here needs to be restored, says P K Das.

● **Bandra Reclamation, Bandstand and Carter Road:** Bandstand and Carter Road, till a few years ago, were being used as dumping sites and areas where crime and drug abuse were rampant. P K Das drew up a regeneration plan for the two, with promenades and gardens, and the seafronts were restored through citizens' initiatives. The beautiful Bandra Reclamation was created by MMRDA.

● **Dadar Chowpatty:** Completely eroded by haphazard development. P K Das has drawn up a plan to nourish the beach and recreate 4 km of it for public use, but funds are currently a problem.

● **Juhu Beach:** The Juhu redevelopment plan, again helmed by Das, is nearing completion. Beach encroachments have been cleared and 4 km of space reclaimed this way for the public.

● **Versova Beach:** Taken over by slums and methi farmers, the beach needs a comprehensive restoration plan.

● **Marve, Goral and Madh:** MMRDA is preparing a tourism plan for Marve. Goral and Madh, says Das, are different from the rest of Mumbai's beaches because of their ecological sensitivity, and so must be treated as special planning zones.

Illustration: Deepak Harichandan