URBANISING INDIAN CITIES:
Mumbai experience

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(A) Introduction :

The achievement of equal & just urbanization of cities in India have come to be a critical concern, encompassing social, cultural, environmental, human development and a host of other issues that include urban planning and design. Therefore urgent interventions are necessary towards the objective of urbanizing Indian cities with higher levels of accessible human development opportunity in a democratic and participatory environment.

Urbanization and growth of cities are two independent phenomenon. Each do not necessarily complement nor supplement each other. Our cities have reflected poorly in human development and environmental conditions.

My objective is to consider how democratic planning and design of cities can contribute to the enrichment of urbanization and the deepening of democracy.

(B)   Background

1. **Exclusions & Marginalization:**

   Cities and towns of India are continuing to witness the <u>exclusion and marginalization</u> of vast majority of the population from the benefits of development. These people are also subject to deteriorating quality of life and environment and deepening social tensions.

   Quote from Sen & Dreze - **'An Uncertain Glory':**
   "The majority of Indian people have been left behind in the enhancement of living standards. <u>Many of the new freedoms and fresh opportunities can be enjoyed only by a minority of Indians -</u> a very large number of people but still only a minority". In comparing India with the rest of the world to see how India is doing, the results depend greatly on which sections of the Indian population we look at".

2. **Fragmentation:**

   Also, cities are being further fragmented into exclusive colonies of gated communities and backyards of discriminated or marginalized poor and working people.

   Quote from Annapurna Shaw. **– 'Indian Cities':**
   "In the gated communities, there is a lack of tolerance for plurality and its accompanying untidiness that marks the rest of the Indian city. They represent a new and exclusive environment that has been purposely created to be orderly, clean and with   sharp

boundaries. They reflect the increasingly disengaged nature of the rich and upper classes in urban India who want to be left alone to enjoy their lives and not be disturbed by the heterogeneous clamor of the city. The formal private sector are increasingly high-rise to support the high cost of land, allow for open green spaces, and guarantee a sky-view of the city <u>and the feeling of being far away and above the din and dirt</u>".

3. **Mega Plans, Displacement & Gentrification:**

   Displacements:
   In the case of Mumbai too, we are experiencing mega plans and programmes, most of which has been detrimental to larger public good while causing massive displacements. This is probably best reflected in the <u>urbanization plans for the metropolitan region</u>.
   Even various plans and policies for Mumbai's redevelopment are rooted in mega high investment projects that impose huge burdens on people. Slums redevelopment schemes, cessed buildings reconstruction are few examples. Development of the cotton textile mills redevelopment of course, is a significant case of mega schemes that led to further pauperization of the city in terms of its infrastructure, amenities, open spaces and affordable housing.

   Gentrification:
   Mega projects and high investment plans are leading to gentrification of the cities core social and cultural ethos, besides causing major displacement of the original people, including the working class, who have defined the history of these places. Both displacements and gentrification are causing further deprivation of fundamental human development opportunities. The systematic decimation of Girangaon is a perfect example.

Quote from Rajnarayan Chandavarkar
" The closure of the industry was thus intimately related to the defeat of labour, the clawing back of their employment rights and the dissipation of their stake in the city. At the same time, the Shiv Sena, characterized by its explicitly communal agenda, actively contributed to and was, at times, even instrumental in undermining workers' resistance and in breaking the communist trade unions. The marginalization of the claims of the working classes and the urban poor to citizenship could not have been achieved without a wider degradation of governance", that has led to the skewed redevelopment of the Mills Land.

Quote from Annapurna Shaw.
"Gentrification, a process familiar to cities in advanced countries, is generally associated with a displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders. When wealthier people move into a neighbourhood, there is an increase in rents and property values and changes in the neighbourhood's character and culture".

4.   Upscaling, construction turnover & urbanization synonymity:

Scale of cities has come to be an important criterion in the assessment of urbanization. Up-scaling cities and towns has in fact been a central tenet of growth and development plans. Need for larger and more compact cities are being pursued internationally by agencies that are committed to market oriented development, including the UN. City building is considered in terms of maximizing construction turnover. As a result, real estate business has come to dominate city development plans and policies. Besides, it is also realized as the means for fast reproduction of capital. For all practical purposes, urbanization has come to be synonymous with construction turnover and real estate business.

This has led to the idea of mega projects instead of localized small efforts with which neighborhood people can relate to in their daily life and more importantly participate in decisions.

Quote from David Harvey – 'Social Justice & the City':
"Any successful strategy must appreciate that spatial form and social process are different ways of thinking about the same thing. We must therefore harmonize our thinking about them".

5.   Aesthetization:

Architecture of our cities is reduced to embellishments and veneered beautification. Aesthetisation of urban development has indeed been a process of creating elite and exclusive spaces. Beautification and aesthetisation of public spaces have produced and reproduced new forms of segregation, resulting in the polarization of different groups on class, caste, religion and other differences.

Physical planning and design have been subsumed in the narrow and oppressive business interest of the real estate developers and builders. Architecture of our cities is smeared with ugliness and reduced to embellishments and veneered beautification. Aestheticisation of urban development has indeed been a process of creating elite and exclusive spaces. Beautification and *Quote from* _____ "aestheticisation of urban public spaces have produced and reproduced new forms of segregation. Such attempts in many instances are creating greater social differentiation and class polarization." Spaces are conceived and governed increasingly on the basis of exclusion and elimination of more and more people.

Economic, social and cultural consumption and benefits by the ruling elite and the privileged has been an underlying current in the development of cities under neo-liberal globalization. But such severe trends in the development of public spaces does not necessarily negate the need for popular aestheticisation of cities evolved continuously through larger participation and struggles for democratization of cities.

6. **Lack or Absence of Planning & Design:**

Simultaneously, lack or absence of democratic planning and design is sharpening this <u>fragmentation and divide into individual, disparate and conflicting parts of contested spaces.</u> Under the privatization thrust, governments in India have considered that planning would impose impediments and restrictions to the freedom of free market forces who are to lead the development of our cities.

7. **Development Anarchy:**

All of these factors and phenomenon's is leading to development <u>anarchy</u>, best evident in the physical structure of cities that are overwhelmingly unequal and exclusive. The anarchy city structure is experienced in both the social, cultural, informalization of employment without job guarantee and minimum wages.

Quote from _____
"The general state of public services in India remains absolutely dismal, and the country's health and education systems in particular have been severely messed up. While the privileged are able to take refuge in private arrangements (expensive as they tend to be), the rest are deprived of essential facilities that ought to be available to all as a matter of right".

But this anarchy is also reflected in the terrible disjointed, in-harmonious ugly and monotonous standardized building blocks defacing cities landscape.

(C) Shrinking Public spaces – Physical & Democratic:

Therefore, with cities expanding its public spaces are rapidly shrinking, both in physical and democratic terms.

(D) Chellenging this ongoing sub-urban trends:

This has to be challenged by waging protracted Democratic struggles on social, cultural & political questions including Planning & Design issues.

Physical planning and design are effective democratic instruments of social change. This could invite a high level of public participation and evolve through the process significant ideas about development and about the very understanding of its approach and methodology.

This is in fact a sure way of democratizing planning and design of cities. Sadly, the present trend is limited to merely promoting projects and their implementation without planning. Absence of planning and design of cities has ensured deep cuts and divisions in the distribution of vital resource access to land and developmental works. Their devastating impacts are long lasting and for practical purposes permanent, as the physical edifice that are produced in the process cannot be easily demolished and rebuilt. As a result, today cities are experiencing anarchic growth and lop-sided development.

There is often a seeming conflict between environmentalism and urbanism. Traditionally the natural and the designed, the wild and the built, have been conceived, especially in the psyche of the industrialized and formerly colonial powers as separate. But the questions of urban change and transformation must be met on a different footing straddling both nature and culture.

Integral urbanism re-builds community along with a quality public realm for the twenty-first century, by cultivating relationships through a process that engages and builds mutually supportive networks of people. The trust on which relationships and communities rely ensues. The modern era divided the world and our thinking about it into fragments and our landscape followed.

(E) Illustrations :
Mumbai's experiences.
I. Open Spaces abuse & Environmental damage

Open Spaces & Environmental abuse – Physical & democratic :
Therefore, with cities expanding its public spaces are rapidly shrinking, both in physical and democratic terms.

1. Open Spaces
2. Urban ecology – environmental integration
   "This devastation is often seen as a symptom of the conflict between 'environment' and 'development'. But this interpretation is thoroughly misleading. If development is about enhancing human freedoms and the quality of life – an important understanding for which we have argued – then the quality of the environment is bound to be part of what we want to preserve and promote. In fact, this broader view of

development can help not only to integrate development and environmental concerns but also to achieve a better understanding of our environmental challenges, in terms of the quality and freedom of human lives".

Urban Ecology : Quote from Brian McGrath
"Cities and other urban ecosystems are jointly biological , social, built and geomorphic. This is the essence of urban ecology".

3. Participation, Public Action & Governance :
   Quote from Sen and Dreze
   Public Action – "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"

   Various struggles for housing and other city-development issues critical to the quality of life and just development of the city are significant for political and social change.

4. Citizenship issues
5. Exclusivity, fragmentation – barricading & cohesiving
6. Unification, social networking – challenging, privatization, colonization and expanding public space
7. Mobility – Mumbai on Two Feet.- Quote Gautam Bhatua July 21, 2013.

"It is a strange paradox that some of the world's best places are in fact ordered by public inconvenience and restrictions. The Indian city needs to create severe disincentives to curb its growing car population. Posing restrictions on cars may be seen as undemocratic by some; yet truly democratic governments work on imposing norms that emerge from a common set of urban values. That a pedestrian takes precedence over a vehicle and a cycle ride through parkland is more desirable than a ride on asphalt in a closed machine, are preferences that need to be clearly stated in city plans. More than ever, transport planners require a freer hand in determining a fresh mix of transport modes throughout the city. Indian cities need to take decisions out of municipal hands, to a fresh band of urban bodies capable of big imaginative leaps in reversing conventions and inventing new urban ideas. Henry Ford began the decline of urban life with his car; it may take a greater invention to eventually kill it.

II.   Slumification of cities : Affordable Housing & Slums Redevelopment:

Affordable Housing & Slums Redevelopment:
1. Govt. backing out
2. Privatization
3. Monetising slum land & colonizing for private profit
4. Commodification – products – only numbers
5. Social amenities
6. Environment diversity

Commodification of social goods:

Under privatization and free market policies, all social goods including housing is commoditized, packaged and made marketable only to fetch high profit, in spite of them being inaccessible to not only the poor but also the middle class. This is resulting in the absence of construction of affordable mass housing, thus leading to proliferation of slums. Bonus FSI, TDR etc. are few examples of the many tools that are devised to aid such commodification programmes.

Increasingly, public assets including land and resources are being colonized for private profit at the cost of human development and public good. This trend is aggressively pursued under neo-liberal globalization and privatization policies, to which we as a nation have committed.

1. Mapping & Data – *Quoted from*_____
   "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. Residential colonies, Slums, Schools, hospitals, industries, mills, open spaces, water bodies, vegetation, wildlife".

III. Exclusive development plans for cities :

Quote by K.C. Sivaramakrishnan
"One is that the city master plans generally follow an exclusionary model that reserved 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, resorting to auction of the limited land available with them in cities and setting exorbitant benchmarks for the market price of land".

1. Land question
2. Redevelopment question
3. Gentrification, Responding to informalization
4. 'Cities within' – Rights to concessions – Mills land, slum land redevelopment, cessed bldg redevelopment etc.
5. Urban Design & Aesthetics
6. Area Plans as the basis of City Planning – A Bottom-up – small as Mega projects.

Quote from Partha Chatterjee &as quoted by Chandavarkar
"Until recently, he suggestes, cities wre characterized by mixed neighbourhoods, in which the poor existed in relationship of clientage with their rich patrons, in which 'the wealthy' provided 'social, cultural and moral leadership to the urban neighbourhood' and in which 'a dense network of neighbourhood institutions' created 'an active and participatory sense of urban community".

This trend of exclusivity, colonization, lack of participation by the poor and the marginalized and the elitization of spaces have to be steadily challenged by development plan and projects.

"Jacobs planner consciously makes room for the unexpected, small, informal and even nonproductive human activities that constitute the vitality of the 'lived city'.

Only time and the work of millions of its residents can turn these thin cities into thick cities.

She stresses the minimal degree of continuity, social networks, and 'street-terns', acquaintanceship required to knit together an urban locality.

These networks are a city's irreplaceable social capital".

(F)   Conclusion:

In conclusion, the challenge lies in the successful application of Planning and architecture as effective tools of social change. How can such endeavors be means for open public participation in matters relating to the development of their area and the city at large? What would the new languages be for such communication? How can trained planners and architects work closely with social movements in order to understand the needs and demands of social change for equality and access to the benefits of growth by all? How could social movements consider and include trained professionals to actively engage in their movements and be able to translate their demands into forms of structures and spaces? Democratisation of planning and design continues to be a critical issue in our efforts towards urbanizing cities better.

1. City planning effective democratic instrument & HD factor
2. Popularising planning and design
3. Equality & Justice
4. Accessibility, participation