

TRAVAILS OF AN ORDINARY CITIZEN

A Tale From Mumbai

A senior minister and a top rung bureaucrat were jailed in Maharashtra recently for flouting environment norms and the Supreme court's directive. In such a scenario it is not surprising that the whole political, urban, physical landscape of Mumbai is changing, for the worse...High rise buildings, exploding numbers of cars, luxury hotels, shopping malls are altering the face of Mumbai, straining its resources. But it is the poor who are being blamed. The victims are at the receiving end of an aggressive campaign by middle class groups.

Mumbai is to have its twin towers, both of 57 storeys, taller than any other high rise in the city. The residential blocks will ironically come up on the land of Apollo textile mill at Chinchpokli, as if rubbing salt into the wounds of the textile workers being thrown out by market forces. So like the Greek god Apollo they will look handsome but also pitiless and cruel.

The first three floors will be for car parking which shows that automobiles are far better looked after in this globalising city than people.

With this kind of development it is not surprising that the city's roads are clogged and the first rains of the season on May 31 made things worse...Vehicles were caught in traffic jams for hours and streets were flooded making a mockery of claims of the official machinery that it was fully geared to face the monsoon.

The common people are the victims and the sufferers, not the cause of such dislocations. But it is they who are being blamed by those in power. And while injustice and insolence grow in the city, the victims have fewer and fewer spaces for protest or discussion...

Look at the reaction of Mr T Chandra Shekhar, commissioner of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), who is known for ruthlessly implementing the so-called beautification projects in urban areas.

He fulminates against democratic dissent describing protesters as 'so-called social activists and so-called human rights activists.' He accuses them of 'taking undue advantage of the democratic process in India.'

He said in an article in The Times of India (19-5-06) that 'in the West fewer people take undue advantage of democracy.' Of course, that is not true. The West has a much stronger tradition of protest on urban issues as against the general apathy in India. Jane Jacobs, the outstanding urban planning expert, relentlessly fought vested interests all her life.

Just a few days before her death at age 89 in April this year, she had sent a letter of support to the residents of Vancouver in their fight against a destructive highway project that would harm the local wetlands. And one of the last public acts of celebrated economist J.K. Galbraith, just before his recent death at the age of 97, was to attend a rally of immigrants during the nationwide struggle of immigrants in America...He was so impressed he called the awakening as the new morning for America in an article in the Guardian.



Source: Kristen

Vidyadhar Date

Ironically, on the very day Mr Chandra Shekhar launched his diatribe against the common people, one of his seniors in the Maharashtra state bureaucracy, the additional chief secretary Ashok Khot, was nabbed by the police at the Mumbai airport...He and the state's forests minister Surupsing Naik had been sentenced by the Supreme court to jail for a month for flouting the court's directive for several years and allowing illegal running of timber saw mills and destruction of forests.

So here are two top most authorities found guilty of harming the environment. But it is protectors of the environment who are dubbed as villains. Mr. Chandra Shekhar and the likes of him have seldom attacked builders who flatten entire hills, pollute lakes, dump construction debris into the sea and lakes and destroy mangroves.

Rehabilitation of the poor is not on top of the agenda in such a situation. It is not surprising that the World Bank had strongly disapproved of the rehabilitation work of those displaced by road and rail projects by MMRDA. It has suspended assistance for the bank-aided projects in Mumbai. That has angered Mr Chandra Shekhar. He now says we should have never taken the bank loan and his opposition is not for ideological reasons.

A few months earlier the state's environment minister Ganesh Naik asserted that Mumbai's open spaces should be sold to builders to pay off the government's rising debt. And this in an overcrowded city which is notorious for having the lowest open space per 1000 residents. Mr Naik had made a calculated statement at a press conference, it was not an off-the cuff remark.

Slum dwellers are blamed for encroachment but the area they use is insignificant considering the thousands of acres which have gone to private builders in the wake of the closure of hundreds of factories in the last few years. With a little imagination at least a part of this land could have been used for civic amenities which are desperately needed.

It is the form of development of high rise buildings, flyovers, airport expansion and the development of the Bandra Kurla complex that has created major problems for Mumbai, not the so-called encroachment by slum dwellers. The rulers realized the folly of this form of development only when vast parts of the city were submerged and hundreds of people were washed away by floods on July 26, 2005. It was such a traumatic event that it is now remembered as 26/7 .

The city came to a standstill with the collapse of the government, municipal and corporate machinery. It is the common people who rose heroically rescuing thousands of other people, giving them shelter. Yet, the poor remain the object of laughter for the upper class. A popular Hindi television mimicry programme called Laughter Challenge made fun of people seeking shelter during the floods.

After this havoc the ruling class realized that it needs much more than flyovers, malls, multiplexes and fast cars. It needs basic infrastructure like the drainage system. There is now less fancy talk of converting Mumbai into a Shanghai. But the upper class remains quite bullish.

Road building and road expansion to facilitate the movement of cars is the main agenda of this form of development. This will take toll of even the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, one of the few icons of high standards. The move will involve pushing back the campus wall by nine metres and demolition of nine residential buildings for facilitating the World Bank-aided Jogeshwari-Vikhroli link.

The upper class is now brash enough to browbeat politicians and senior bureaucrats. This was clear at an interactive programme organized by the Times of India and Times Now television at the elite St Xavier's college on May 20. Theatre director and advertising guru Alyaque Padamsee asked in a mocking tone why enough funds were not being made available by the Central government for Mumbai. Such a display would have been unthinkable a few years ago. The audience repeatedly jeered at architect Hafiz Contractor whose panacea for building higher and higher is finding favour with corrupt politicians but can prove deadly for the city.

But while the upper class has become empowered under the regime of globalisation, the common people are being gradually eased out by market forces and have little voice. They have little chance of confronting a bureaucrat. Front organizations of the upper class calling themselves citizens' groups have acquired considerable clout in the last few years and are increasingly asserting themselves making constant demands on the bureaucracy and the political class. They are obsessed with seeking the ouster of slum dwellers and hawkers. The irony is that Mumbai has enough space to meet the construction boom for high class housing and for shopping malls occupying millions of sq ft of land but the upper class would not let the poor occupy even the most degraded land vulnerable to landslides and other hazards.

One shopping mall in the prime area of Mumbai has come up on land reserved for housing for the poor. The issue has been taken to court by Medha Patkar, an icon in the struggle for the rehabilitation of tribal people ousted by big dams. Perhaps it is in keeping with the times that the mall has come up next to Nehru Centre, a memorial to the champion of democracy and socialism. It is also an irony that the recently launched national urban renewal mission is named after Nehru and it is felt that the renewal would actually work against the poor. Also a shopping mall and multiplex theatre has come bang next to the Vidhan Bhavan, the state legislature building at Nariman Point.

Shopping malls, supermarkets and shopping arcades are sprouting all over, driven by a new consumption culture. The Inorbit mall in the former downmarket suburb of Malad is spread over a staggering 550,000 sq ft. The built up area of all shopping malls in Mumbai is expected to rise to a total 17 million sq ft by 2007 (Times of India – 31-5-06). So, there is actually enough space available in Mumbai. The problem is it is

so unequally distributed. The poor have very little share of it and even that little is being taken away. So all the public spaces so teeming with hawkers and which are such an eyesore for the middle class actually take up much less space than the shopping malls. Another calculation shows that slums take less space than space occupied by motor cars in the city.

Similarly there is a big boom in property construction for the upper class as seen from pages full of advertisements for apartments in high rise buildings and supplements brought out by newspapers on the property market. Slum dwellers contribute to the pumping of the economic growth of the city and occupy far less space than the rich but they are seen as an eyesore. It is not that the slum dwellers are dirty, one can see that their utensils are clean and shining. The problem is their areas are not cleaned regularly by the civic machinery.

The developers are now grabbing space on television as well with advertisements showing fancy buildings, gyms, tennis courts, horse riding, golf course, a whole glamorous lifestyle. One of them, DLF, projects itself as the maker of a new modern India which shows the spatial colonization of this section.

Hawkers cater to much bigger numbers and to the really needy than shopping malls. People buy from hawkers because it is so convenient to do so, picking up vegetables and sundry things on way from the railway station to home after an exhausting, stifling journey in overcrowded trains. Hawkers are there because there is no planning for them, no legal space is allotted to them. The upper class organizes street shopping and food festivals for its own consumption but frowns on the poor occupying the streets.

The leading architect Charles Correa is right. Mumbai's degradation is partly due to government apathy. Great architecture and good city planning cannot come about without commitment from the government. Other arts can thrive amidst adversity. Not architecture. On hawkers also he has an interesting observation. He thinks the municipality deliberately allows chaos on the streets. It could give numbers to hawkers, allot them specific places. But it does not do this because chaos helps corrupt civic employees to extort money from hawkers.

The trouble with Mumbai is not only the politicians and the bureaucracy but also the upper class has failed the city. Occasionally, the upper class does intervene but only to beautify its neighbourhoods as in the case of the affluent residents opposite the Oval Maidan ground who have saved and improved the green space with generous corporate support.

The Shiv Sena, the pro-fascist, regional political party which speaks in the name of local culture and identity, has proved to be even more friendly to big builders and business interests. Raj Thackeray, the 'dynamic', former Shiv Sena leader, now leader of a breakaway party, is turning a cotton textile mill into a

shopping mall with the son of another prominent Shiv Sena leader and former speaker of India's lower house: Manohar Joshi.

The role model of some Congress yuppies is Rudy Giuliani, the former New York Mayor, known for his distaste for civil liberties and demonstrations. Much more relevant to Mumbai is the former Bogota Mayor Enrique Penalosa who laid out cycle tracks, cut down car use and pedestrianised large portions of the city. But our elite would have nothing to do with him. In a sense our democracy is less sensitive to the poor than the military regime under which Penalosa functioned.

A big group of bureaucrats from Mumbai recently visited car-dominated cities in the United States and England on a study tour not the bicycle and pedestrian friendly cities in Denmark, Germany and Netherlands.

Even the judiciary is now becoming increasingly unsympathetic to the problems of the homeless and jobless delivering harshly-worded judgements so much so that a group of activists held a protest meeting in the city in May with support from retired high court judge H. Suresh.

Open spaces are seen mainly as a recreational issue but there is little awareness that these spaces are also vital for democratic expression and such articulation whether on streets or in other public spaces is being stifled. Even in citadel of capitalism, the United States, millions march on the streets to protest against the war on Iraq or to oppose attacks on immigrants. People demonstrate even on the Washington Mall, the very heart of the political establishment in the US or in the heart of London but morchas cannot be taken in Mumbai to Mantralaya, the seat of the state government. And this in a city once famous for its working class militancy, demonstrations and highly disciplined marches and strikes. The demonstrators are now confined to Azad Maidan, a colonial era ground and their isolation is enhanced by a humiliating barbed wire fence. The protest movement is considerably weakened through systematic attacks on the working class and yet the repression on demonstrations increases. A few hundred people who used to hold demonstrations near Churchgate station during rush hour are now forced to stand in isolation in a corner with very little visibility.

Besides, few turn up for demonstrations because it is so hard to travel in overcrowded, humid conditions. The mobility of the common people is hampered in many ways while the rich have more and faster cars at their disposal which pick up speed in seconds as ceaseless images of luxury cars and SUVs (sports utility vehicles) assault the senses.

In Paris barricades were the weapons of resistance in the heady days of 1968, in Mumbai they are the weapons in the hands of the police to keep the ordinary people from coming in the way of

motor cars. Even footpaths are now barricaded, reducing walking space and barriers are built in the middle of the road to prevent people from crossing. There is definitely a spatial apartheid in Mumbai.

Of the few green open spaces in the city, several are not accessible to common people as these are controlled by private luxury clubs and other institutions. Several municipal parks are being privatized with entry fee which is unaffordable for the poor. So these cease to have any meaning as public spaces... I see how vital public spaces are to common people during a daily visit to the Almeida park in Bandra which is still fully accessible to the people. It is clear that the economically deprived couples desperately need these little private moments. Some couples sit close together or even lie on the concrete benches. But there is nothing obscene about it. Clearly, they are not there for romance, they just need some private space to talk or merely be together. Usually, no one bothers them in this more tolerant suburb. But elsewhere young people are routinely harassed by the corrupt police force. So ordinary people actually have less and less access to public spaces.

Of the very few democratic spaces we have, one is the Horniman Circle Garden, maintained by the industrial house of Tatas. It actually reserves one area of the lawn for common people to eat food. This is very important considering that normally people are barred from even sitting on or walking on the lawn, not to speak of eating in the space. The other space is nearby, the Central library in the Town Hall where anyone can walk in to browse through the newspapers and journals and books on display. Such facilities should be available all over, especially in a democratic regime and in the information age. But they are not. The steps of the Town Hall serve as a space for study for the poor at night. Behind Podar hospital in Worli one lane has become an area for students to read. **India's richest city whose upper class wants to make it a world class city has not created a single decent public library since Independence.**

Eating houses, formerly accessible to the poor, are now closing down as in the case of the historic Irani restaurants, they are being converted to other uses or being upgraded to serve higher income groups. A Gujarati writer J.P. Shukla told me a street cobbler, he knew, could share a table with him in an Irani café at Chowpatty 30 years ago. This is unthinkable today. It is not just the prices, the whole ambience has changed. So ordinary people are now forced to eat street food. For the rich street food is a diversion but poor deserve a place to sit down and eat after a hard day's work and oppressive mass transit trips.

There is not a single accessible restaurant in the entire Nariman point business district which came up 30 years ago

with a large concentration of high rise buildings. So roadside eateries have sprung on the road side and the corporates see them as eyesores. The badly designed area provides little pedestrian access to buildings in the vicinity forcing people to drive a car and take a long detour to cover what should normally be a very small distance.

A war is now being launched against footpath dwellers. Much is made of slum dwellers and hawkers blocking footpaths and inconveniencing pedestrians. The fact is most of Mumbai is not provided footpaths by the richest civic body in the country, this is a denial of a most basic amenity, of a basic human right in fact. Besides, the municipal authorities have removed book sellers from the pavements between Hutatma Chowk and Churchgate station widely used by thousands of commuters. The reason given is that books obstruct traffic. So the logic is that cars parked on footpath do not obstruct pedestrian traffic but books do. The exploitative colonial era was better in this one respect. It took much better care of pedestrians. The brown-skinned rulers are now positively hostile to footpaths, they are cutting them down, handing them over for car parking, or just destroying them altogether.

And only sadists could have built most of the new footpaths. They are so high, it is a torture to climb up and down. It requires no particular engineering skill, just a little application of mind is needed. Yet, the footpaths are so badly built even the thought of walking becomes a torture. This is an insult to the people apart from bad economics. Pedestrians need no fuel, cause no pollution and require such little space. Yet, they are most discriminated .

It is rare that the elite takes note. Surprisingly, Ananda Mahindra, noted industrialist, went out of his way when he wrote ‘pavements represent everything that is wrong with our attitude and culture, no attention is given to details, they are almost always never finished and are always unclean.’ (his article in Times of India – 30-5-06).

Imagine what a lovely place Mumbai can be simply by having neatly laid-out footpaths. It will be a pleasant sight and it will be a pleasure to walk. Many trips, which can be made by walking, are now made by bus or auto-rickshaw because it is such a pain to walk.

There is a substantial increase in recreational walking space for jogging and running. These are nice and created by affluent residents with corporate support or funds from the government. But these are limited to upper class areas. Marine Drive is now being beautified at the public exchequer's cost of Rs 30 crore. What it needed was only a little maintenance. Instead it is to be made so shining and posh that the poor will hesitate to reach there or feel ill at ease. I have seen this happening in the Times of India where I worked for decades.



Source: Rajesh Vora

Ordinary people with their grievances stopped coming as they felt unwelcome.

The function to launch the Marine Drive beautification project was held earlier this year at the far end of the promenade, opposite the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), an elite institution associated with the industrial house of Tatas. This shows the distance already maintained from ordinary people. The more appropriate venue would have been the other end, the Chowpatty beach, where thousands of ordinary people gather every evening.

The NCPA is a classic case of the state subsidizing elite culture which looks anachronistic in an era when subsidies for the poor are strenuously opposed by the upper class. The state government has given a large plot in a prime area by the sea virtually free to the centre and has also allowed it to build a luxury residential building where prices are higher than in London or New York.

At the Marine Drive function organized by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority leading industrialist Ratan Tata was a dominating presence which shows how things are changing under globalisation. He was warmly welcomed by chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and a few days later was given the state's highest honour, Maharashtra Bhushan.

The phenomenon of private luxury juxtaposed against public squalor that J.K. Galbraith, the celebrated economist talked about, is becoming more and more visible in Mumbai. While there is a mushrooming of luxury hotels, pubs, multiplexes, shopping malls, gyms and exclusive housing estates, public squalor is growing. I am a commoner living in up market Bandra. Squalor is appearing even here as the drains are overflowing because rampant high rise constructions are an assault on the basic infrastructure. And it is hazardous to walk on the road because of heavy car traffic and lack of proper footpaths.

Right outside the fashionable Joggers Park in Bandra a school girl Divyalahari, 15, fell into a manhole 20 ft deep and would have been washed into the sea nearby had it not been for her bravery and swimming skill. The incident was so shocking that it made front page news on March 24, this year, in the Times of India which normally prefers to highlight stories of glamour, sex, fashion, corporate deals and cricket. The manhole remained uncovered despite previous reports in the media.

That is the sort of infrastructure you have for the common people and still the upper class constantly harps on visions of making Mumbai a global city. Never mind the poor pay a heavy price for the new development. Six workers were killed last April when the wall of a shopping mall under construction collapsed in Navi Mumbai. While there is much emphasis on flyovers, highways and airports, basic amenities like post-offices, primary

schools, hospitals and foodgrains shops for ordinary people are shrinking and crumbling.

In south Mumbai as the poor are moving out to less costly residential space, primary schools are closing down while in the suburbs where the poor are in large numbers students spill over into staircases and open spaces outside classrooms which are crumbling in any case.

Mumbai was a much more inclusive city a few years ago with fine infrastructure available to the poor. In the very heart of the working class area of Parel is a very big complex of top class public hospitals including the Wadia hospitals, one for children, another for women, the KEM hospital, Tata cancer hospital, and a health insurance hospital. These are all very big and with excellent facilities, known all over the country. The hospital complex is unique in the world, says Vidya Acharya, a veteran doctor and teacher. Generations of doctors have studied here and generations of children of working people are born there. Besides, the hospitals are of considerable architectural and heritage value. But the Wadia hospitals particularly are under threat of privatization which means they will be out of bounds for the poor. The area has excellent access to other basic needs like the city railway and bus service, has wide, though not well-maintained footpaths. But gradually, the poor are being thrown out of the area with the closure of cotton textile mills and the area is being swamped by luxury residential buildings. The textile workers, who laid the foundation of the industrial revolution in India, now have to make a living by selling bananas or vegetables. Some of them have not got even their wages.

The scale of current destruction of textile mills for building high rise towers could be compared to the damage caused by bombing in city centres in Europe during the second world war. In his book Destruction of Memory – Architecture of War, Robin Bevan talks about Britain having a list of ‘burnable’ towns with densely packed wooden buildings in Germany. Our developers probably have a similar list of properties that can be demolished to building towers of profit.

The state has now abandoned construction of houses for the poor. The poor cannot expect to buy even from the market forces as private developers build only large apartments where profits are much higher. Several large housing colonies built by the housing board in Mumbai are now in a rather run-down condition but they have marvellous open spaces, they are built on a human scale unlike in the monstrous high-rise clusters where you feel completely dwarfed, unsafe.

The judiciary and the upper class are increasingly unsympathetic to the homeless and seeking their ouster. Even in Los Angeles, the glamour capital, the judiciary is more sympathetic to the homeless. It ruled last April against the

police arresting the homeless sleeping on the streets. The judge said human beings cannot remain in motion perpetually and need place to rest. The authorities must provide them shelter before throwing them out. And last May a homeless man marooned on an island in the Los Angeles river was rescued by helicopter (Los Angeles Times 23-5-06). This is unthinkable in Mumbai.

Another large category of victims of the new form of development is of children. Several developers do not leave mandatory open space in building compounds, leaving no space for children to play, for parking of cars or for fire fighting equipment to come in. If there is any open space at all, it is taken up by motor cars.

There is a very dangerous trend of children now joining gyms to tone their muscles which can be very harmful at this age. Unscrupulous gym managements and ignorant parents are encouraging the trend. Gyms are sprouting all over Mumbai like pubs and restaurants indicating growing corporatisation of the human body. In a city with obscenely wide income disparities even the middle class now thinks it is below its dignity to walk and do normal physical exercises. So it goes to the gym submitting the body to the machine for artificial muscle enhancement and create a macho image for men and sexist image for women.

Mumbai was famous for producing Test cricketers who learnt the basics while playing in little lanes and streets. These are now out of bounds due to hazards of increased traffic. In future children may have to go to indoor cricket coaching centres run by corporate interests. Huge shopping malls are also now beckoning children; some have playing facilities right at the entrance. But these few corporate profit-oriented islands can be no substitute for dwindling public spaces for children in parks and gardens. In the corporatised privatized parks not only is playing not allowed, one cannot even sit on the grass. This is a travesty of Nature, robbing people of the very basic longing to be in touch with mother earth, greenery. So there are some green patches but devoid of human beings as in a corporatised park in Nehru Centre in Worli.

In a hot and humid city with a large number of people who walk in the course of their economic activities there is a deplorable lack of street furniture; things get worse in the suburbs. There are few benches to rest for a while even at prime railway stations like Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus or Churchgate. The older ones are better, the newer, industrially produced steel benches provide for a very precarious, uncomfortable sitting.

The sad thing is the basics are not provided though this requires no expertise at all and little money. The problem is mainly of lack of respect for common people. See the contrast between Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, the architecturally

majestic Victoria Terminus, built in the 19th century, and the more recent terminus Churchgate. The Victorian era station is far more pleasant, more airy, more spacious, one would not mind standing there in the absence of benches. Churchgate is pathetic in comparison. It gives you a feeling of claustrophobia with its low ceiling, poor ventilation and little social space. And this in one of the busiest of stations in the world, used by tens of thousands of people daily. One does not expect something like the dance floor being designed at one of the terminals at Kennedy airport but one is entitled to basic amenities, especially when conditions in overcrowded trains are sub-human.

The idea that street space should be shared by various road users, which is emerging in the West, is unknown here. In Europe road space is being increased for pedestrians and reduced for cars.

In Mumbai feudalism still prevails, the motorist is the king and other subjects must make way for him, suffer the insulting horn blowing, the hot exhausts and be ready to be run over or knocked down. To add to that the pedestrian has to put up with hot blasts from air-conditioners from banks, other offices and shops.

There are occasional eruptions of public anger and vehicles are set on fire when children or other innocents are crushed under wheels. But by and large people are more tolerant than in Kabul under American occupation. In Kabul people reacted so angrily against continued rash driving and killing by military vehicles last May 1 that curfew had to be imposed for the first time since the fall of the Taliban. (International Herald Tribune 3-606).



Source: Kristen

The trouble with Mumbai's upper class is it is completely unaware of emancipatory ideas about road culture. A rich man in Mumbai would rather be dead than be seen walking on the road. He will only walk and jog in the park not on the road. The whole culture of taking a stroll, socializing on the road is missing. Mumbai desperately needs a movement like Reclaiming the Streets. President Bush may ride the bicycle often on his ranch but our rich would never pedal, walk, take a bus or local train. In the West the same people would ride the Metro train without a murmur, not here. That again has something to do with class, they would not like to brush shoulders with 'social inferiors.'

The result is public spaces and streets are badly neglected. Public urinals are few and badly designed, even those in architecture colleges. These are built slavishly by Western standards for men of six six feet and above, without any consideration for the average height of an Indian male. Of course there are no separate facilities for children, it is almost as if children do not exist or do not count. It is only in five-star hotels, the British Council, the American Centre and a few such places



Source: Kristen



Source: Kristen

that one notices usable urinals. And things get far worse for women as a study has shown...It reminds one of the observation by the eminent urban theorist Mike Davis that elimination of public urinals is part of a planned drive against the poor in Los Angeles.

Mumbai's corporate sector has now launched a big drive to make Mumbai into a world class city even though the city lacks the most elementary infrastructure like adequate drinking water, drainage, primary schools and postal services.

The corporate sector's fancy ideas of running Mumbai city with a powerful corporate-oriented CEO may not be realistic if one sees experience abroad. Just think of it, there was a move to make Kenneth Lay of Enron the Mayor of Houston, the man who was convicted in the biggest corporate scandal in history... Though Rudy Giuliani had some success with New York as Mayor he is also seen as extremely undemocratic.

While slum dwellers are routinely blamed for encroachments, the encroachments by the powerful on seafronts and on the national park land in Borivli, Mulund and other areas have raised few eyebrows.

During his visit to Mumbai in November, 2003, Prince Charles made it a point to meet the dabbawalas who deliver tiffin or lunch boxes to office-goers. After all, dabbawalas are an exceptional lot. These pyjama and Gandhi cap-wearing humble people have won praise in Fortune magazine, the Guardian and the Times, and from management gurus.

Prince Charles chatted with them in the Western railway headquarters and was in fact apologetic and asked them if his visit did not delay their work. But railway and police and municipal authorities in Mumbai are from being helpful. In fact, they are doing nothing but harassing these hard-working, honest, intelligent people and delaying their work.

The accuracy with which the dabbawalas deliver the dabbas from one point to another, several km away, through a pretty complex system of picking up the dabba, loading, unloading at numerous points in hand-carts, buses and trains, is said to carry only one mistake in millions of cases. No wonder, the dabbawalas are being heard with attention in Indian Institutes of Management and in business seminars.

The dabbawalas are not asking for any highway or flyover. All they are asking for is a little amenity that will not cost a single paisa. They merely want a little passage to cross the road from Churchgate station side to the other side where the Western railway headquarter is located. The crossing will also benefit millions of other commuters.

But so insensitive and brutal is our system that while hundreds of crores are being spent on building freeways for the benefit of motorists this little amenity is being denied to the dabbawalas and other commuters. And all this because a few motorists must get priority over millions of ordinary people. That crossing on the road is desperately necessary at this busiest train terminal is clear from a photograph carried in Hindustan Times on March 2, 2006. It shows a traffic police constable in uniform jumping over the road divider. An ordinary man doing that would be fined, even jailed. It is not just that the cop is breaking the rules. I do not blame him because the whole barricade is so unjust, cruel, against all norms. His action shows the desperate need, demand for a crossing.

Till about three years ago, people could conveniently walk across this section and there was in fact a traffic signal there. Then the authorities built a wall at the Churchgate side, built a road divider wall on M Karve Road and removed the signal.

The most charitable thing one can say about the authorities is that they are supremely ignorant. They are never tired of aping the worst models of traffic in the West but seem hell bent on denying the most basic facilities to common people which are given most liberally in Europe.

It is elementary knowledge that maximum facilities should be given for hundreds of thousands of people coming out of the train terminus so that they can disperse quickly. Nowhere else in the world perhaps so many people pour out of railway stations and they are all working people, contributing to the city's economy. But in Mumbai maximum impediments are being created for commuters by simply blocking their exits and forcing them to use the tunnel, forcing people go up and down. All this because the authorities want to give priority to motor traffic. Here again they are completely wrong because in the West there is now growing realization that motor traffic must be discouraged. And there is a whole science of what is known as containing traffic, ensuring that car trips are reduced.

The pedestrian tunnel at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and Churchgate terminus in Mumbai is an example of the insult to which hundreds of thousands of commuters are subjected to daily. They are made to walk through a long tunnel with suffocating heat and humidity. The municipal corporation, which has an army of engineers and which designed the subway, is squarely to blame for the horrible mess. It has doubly punished pedestrians. First it makes them go up and down the stairs for the convenience of motorists and then makes pedestrians suffer heat and congestion. Then it has recovered the cost of this outrageous project through devious commercialization by letting out the space to a row of shops which create a tremendous amount of heat and add to the misery of commuters. So, the civic body is not merely harming pedestrians, it is making money in the process..

Poor ventilation and extreme heat have created serious health problems for the shop-keepers also inside the subway. They have respiratory problems and skin disorders to contend with. The transparent brown-tinted polycarbonate funnels of the structure at CST may compliment the Gothic arches of its surroundings. But this design has failed to keep the human element in mind. The 2870 sq. metre area tunnel at Chhatrapati Shivaji terminus built at a cost of Rs 15 crore and opened in 1999 is so horrendous, many commuters desperately avoid it even though this may mean missing the regular train home or reaching office late. This in a metropolis where every second counts due to the frenetic pace of life and inhuman conditions of daily existence. The commuters have to take a detour because an almost fascistic traffic pattern has built barricades for them all around.

The feeling inside is one of claustrophobia and one experiences breathing problems. It would be a decent idea to punish corrupt municipal engineers by making them work in the subway for a few hours every day.

One can feel the difference in temperature in two segments in the Churchgate underground crossing. The portion where there are no shops is much more tolerable, has less heat while the portion where all sorts of shops and eateries are allowed is unbearably hot and uncomfortable.

There is still a colonial, arrogant mindset in much of officialdom and political class. In terms of traffic, the British were actually better because they built proper, broad footpaths in Mumbai even when the number of pedestrians and cars was far far less than at present. And to the eternal shame of our present ruling class, even these pre-independence facilities are being curtailed if not withdrawn completely.

Among the traffic police in Mumbai, only Dr P.S. Pasricha, former traffic police commissioner, now director general of police, truly knew his job. He has also extensively written on the subject and he knows the importance of pedestrian traffic. Most other officers appointed to the post have little or no background for the job. That would not matter so much if one is oriented to serve the common people. Now in the road expansion frenzy, driven by considerations of the automobile, there is a plan to provide a number of subways and pedestrian bridges. These are being touted as facilities for pedestrians. In fact, they will inflict more misery on pedestrians so that motorists can go fast. The authorities are getting away with these anti-people schemes because there are few activist, knowledgeable groups to oppose them.

Now walking to Marine Drive, Mumbai's most famous landmark, will also become torturous. A fancy project of making Marine Drive posh and shining at a cost of Rs 30 crore involves building

underground tunnels for pedestrians so that motorists will have a more free run on a road notorious for overspeeding by the rich and killing of innocent pedestrians.

Worse, shopping space will be provided in the tunnels which means the heat these generate will make life more miserable for pedestrians as in other tunnels. Money from the state exchequer will be used to punish pedestrians and reward shopping culture and car traffic.

Everywhere the authorities are callous towards pedestrians. In Chennai a brand new subway at Tambaram leaked heavily in the rainy season in 2005 causing misery to its users who were already being inconvenienced by the subway. (Hindu 21-1-05).

I was in a small town Takamatsu in Japan three years ago. Although there were very few pedestrians, they were given high priority, were given ample time to cross the road as cars respectfully came to a halt at traffic junctions. There were traffic signals all over.

In India it is many times more important to provide such basic amenities, not to speak of courtesies, to people because we have a far higher number of pedestrians.

Such is the callousness of authorities that two years ago they started imposing Rs 100 fines on people not using the subways at Churchgate and CST stations and some other places. If the police are really interested in doing their job efficiently, there are many better ways of doing that. Here, existing facilities for pedestrians are withdrawn brazenly. Thousands and lakhs of vehicles are parked on roads, causing hindrance to traffic but the authorities are not taking any steps to prevent this. In fact, the authorities are providing more facilities for car parking. Besides, what moral right do the police have to penalize the common people when the cops themselves are not at all doing their job properly? Besides, a section of officers are involved in the most heinous of corruption cases. Mr Rahul Gopal, director general of police, who holds the highest rank in the police hierarchy, was arrested in December, 2004, in connection with accepting bribes from contractors for releasing them funds for the work they have done for police housing.

This is shocking enough. But what is more startling is that in 1991 he threatened the driver of the state assembly's deputy speaker Moreswar Temburde as his car overtook the vehicle of Mr Rahul Gopal who was then deputy inspector general of police. The officer allegedly took out his revolver, the Times of India reported on December 22, 2004. He was reprimanded by the state government and the issue was raised in the legislative assembly.

So police officers can get away with such wild behaviour while the ordinary people must pay a heavy price for the comfort and

convenience of the car lobby.

While the police launched a drive against commuters crossing the road, refusing to use the subway at certain places in Mumbai, police callousness took the toll of 13 lives and serious illness to several others as they drank liquor mixed with ethanol from an illicit joint at Mahalaxmi in central Mumbai on December 23, 2004. Obviously, it is more important for the police to obstruct common people on roads, give priority to cars and it is quite all right if people are killed elsewhere because of police corruption and their protection to illicit liquor manufacturing and sale.

The irony is that the police put up banners at Churchgate station and elsewhere telling commuters that 'jaywalking is injurious to health.' Have they ever put up banners asking motorists to use public transport instead so that there would be less pollution, less congestion on roads and less consumption of fuel ?

A pertinent point in this connection is made by Dan Burden, state bicycle and pedestrian coordinator for the Florida department of Transportation. He asks why pedestrians should be made to walk half a mile to a traffic junction to cross the road when the traffic light does not give them enough time to cross the road anyway? It is much worse in India. Crossing the road by foot at traffic junction with green signal for pedestrians is extremely hazardous instead of being safe. That is because the pedestrian crossing and the area beyond is already occupied by motor vehicles. By the time the pedestrian starts walking, he or she is suddenly confronted by a roar of traffic. The best comparison would be with fierce dogs of the Nazis baying for blood seen in some films.

And while the authorities force pedestrians to walk through the hot, suffocating tunnels they do not care if these are badly constructed. They are heavily flooded in the monsoon. In Vashi in Navi Mumbai there was so much flooding in the newly built tunnel that an agitation by the residents forced the authorities to reconstruct the subway. Everywhere the tunnels are shoddily constructed but when people refuse to use these they are blamed for walking on the road and coming in the way of motor vehicles.

Ordinary traffic constables should actually be clearly on the side of pedestrians and against motor cars because policemen bear the brunt of pollution and not a few have been killed or injured due to reckless driving by motorists.

While pedestrians are targeted for allegedly slowing down vehicular traffic, officialdom thinks nothing of holding up traffic for glamorous film stars for film shooting. However, shooting is permitted only when municipal corporation officials are adequately bribed.

The railway officialdom may not be notorious for corruption but they surely need to be more accountable to the people. These officials, who live in huge flats, travel in special saloons in trains and enjoy all kinds of perks and luxuries, do not think it is necessary to provide as simple a basic amenity as toilets or benches at railway stations. Is this an issue for which people have to agitate ? Communist Russia made not a few mistakes but it created what is probably the world's most beautiful Metro railway. Every station is a work of art.

In Mumbai the state has virtually abandoned its basic duty of protecting the life of citizens. It is directly responsible for the murder of many pedestrians on roads. Pedestrian deaths are nothing short of murders if one considers how insolently cars are driven and how the authorities fail to provide any protection to pedestrians. Let me just cite one example. **A little brief para tucked away in the media on December 21 last year... It says Kisan Pawar, 10, was killed and two children were injured when a motorist, aged 18, ran over them. He was riding a motor cycle and they were sleeping on the road divider at Marine Drive. As is clear, they were not crossing the road. Their only crime was that they were poor.**

Collecting fines from motorists is not a real deterrent. Other sterner steps are needed.

The trouble is the police collect something else, that is hafta or bribe. Everyone knows that. But what was new was that a senior inspector R.G. Vesave recently openly accused his superiors of corruption and said constables collect money because they have to pay to higher ups. This was at a meeting convened by joint commissioner Satish Mathur. One officer asked a junior to pay his bill of Rs 3000 for his consumption of chewing paan and expects others to foot his bills monthly provisions and liquor bottles.(S. Balakrishnan. TOI 13-1-06).

In a most brazen step the municipal authorities have now cut the footpath, bang opposite the Mumbai high court, abutting the Oval Maidan, to provide for car parking. Cars also block the passage meant for pedestrians. This is a fit case for the high court to initiate a suo moto case and pull up the civic authorities.

A pernicious film is sometimes shown on Doordarshan, the state-run television channel. It shows people running helter skelter at traffic junction without bothering about the traffic signal. At the same time a dog very obediently crosses the road only when the light turns green. This is



Source: Bombay Citians Within

terming human beings lower than dogs. The film does not carry credits but is obviously made by the traffic police or at least legitimized by them.

They would be justified in their criticism of ordinary road users and pedestrians if the system provided them the most elementary facilities. I have been observing the traffic signal at Mantralaya for nearly 30 years and noticed that cars very often blatantly jump the signal nearly running over pedestrians. Not a few vehicles are of the police themselves.

What the authorities need is commitment to help the common people, not just a select few. The sole purpose of the traffic police seems to be to ensure speedy movement of motor vehicles while they are simply not bothered about other road users who are far greater in number and are contributing to the economic growth of this city and country.

The least the police can do is to ensure some order outside suburban railway stations. A number of auto-rickshaws crowd the area making it very difficult for commuters to come out of the stations. Is it too much to expect these small mercies from the cops ?

While the authorities are spending lavishly on flyovers and freeways, basic amenities are being denied to people. Officials and politicians living in isolation and luxury, do not realize that it takes as long as 15 to 20 minutes simply to cross a bridge at some of the railway stations. And that the bridges are poorly maintained and it is difficult to walk on the worn out, broken down steps ? Such is the abysmal denial of amenities to commuters.

The issues of urban land use and mobility for common people were driven home to me suddenly in one of my usual conversations with the Nepali gorkha watchman near my house. He keeps a night-long vigil on dozens of cars which are on sale but are parked 24 hours free of cost on the road around Almeida Park in Bandra. For this he gets just Rs 2000 per month after years of service. And the man in his sixties, who guards the cars, cannot afford even public transport. He walks daily five km each way between his little shelter in Santa Cruz and his shelterless work place. Yet, he has the artistic spirit to play the flute every morning. And clearly, he does have talent. If I had heard this from somebody, I would have thought this was romanticizing an ordinary man. But this is a sight I see daily.

Death traps

Rlys warn motormen of Mumbai's killer spots to save 'careless' commuters

BINOQ NAIR

The Motorman's Manual, considered the bible of all train drivers in the city, has a new chapter — one that will probably prevent track deaths. Sick of people being run over by trains and motormen bearing the mental brunt of it, the Central Railway has added to the manual a list of spots where both the driver and guard have to be extra careful.

HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

Last year, under the then divisional railway manager Madhav Pathak, CR had conducted its first track deaths survey which threw up places where people were crossing tracks with impunity. Motormen, guards and senior officials of the Operations Department conducted the survey. Continuous checks confirmed that in some of these places, the situation had become so endemic that putting the list on a document as important as the Motorman's Manual was the only solution.

WHAT ARE THE DANGER SPOTS PAGE 4



Source: Mumbai Mirror

Killer spots in motorman's manual

From page 1

MOTORMAN'S MISERY

As a rule, every time a train runs over someone crossing the tracks, the motorman has to personally ensure that the train is in a condition absolutely safe for further journey. Very often this means getting down and retrieving mangled bodies from under the train. The stress has seen about 15 per cent of motormen on Central Railway fall prey to diabetes or becoming mentally unsuitable to run trains.

MOTORMAN'S MANUAL

The manual contains the technical nitty-gritty of running trains, like which signal to stop at and directions in case of large-scale traffic disruption. Here is a list the danger spots now included in the manual:

THE DANGER SPOTS

No	Section	Location	Reason
1	Mulund-Bhandup	Kms 29/15 and 29/01	Call of nature
2	Mulund-Bhandup	Kms 27/10A to 27/10	People crossing under foot-overbridge
3	Kanjurmarg-Vikhroli	Kms 23/14 to 23/01	Call of nature
4	Kurla-Sion	Kms 13/14 to 13/15	People crossing under foot-overbridge
5	Sion-Matunga	kms 12/10 to 11/01	Call of nature
6	Sion-Matunga	kms 11/4 to 12/05	Call of nature
7	Byculla-Sandhurst	kms 03/12 to 02/15	Central Excise Office-goer crossing tracks
8	Kalva-Mumbra	kms 38/08 to 38/13	Boundary wall broken
9	Thane-Diva	kms 34/08 to 35/07	Hutments and call of nature
10	Kalyan-Shahad	level crossing 41 (53/12 to 53/27)	Trespassing
11	Ambivali	kms 59/01 to 59/02	Trespassing
12	Kalyan-VLDI	level crossing at 54/08 to 54/18	Trespassing
13	Cotton Green-Sewri	kms 05/15 to 06/11	Call of nature
14	Wadala-GTB Nagar	kms 11/04 to 11/05	Trespassing
15	GTB Nagar-Raoli Jn	kms 10/05 to 10/29	Trespassing
16	GTB Nagar-Chunabhati	kms 11/18 to 13/04	Trespassing
17	Khandeshwar-Panvel	kms 48/01 to 48/11	Trespassing