Institute of Environmental Architecture

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The Rent Control Act

Main culprit in slumming Mumbai

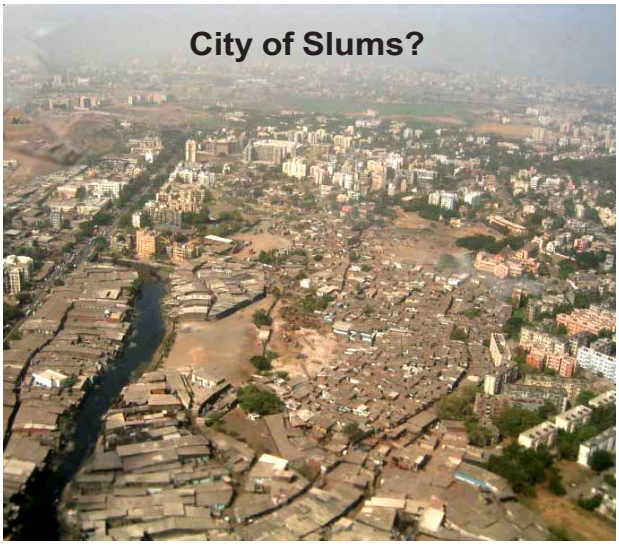
By Sulakshana Mahajan

Slums in Mumbai have proliferated at an exponential rate in the last 50 years. However, besides being discussed on grounds of human rights, especially during demolition drives, the reasons for their growth have hardly been given a serious thought by architects and town planners. Few have understood their link with the Rent Control Act.

The Planning Commission Report for years 2002-2007 clearly notes that the Rent Control Act has been the single most important reason for proliferation of slums in our cities. It records the following adverse effects of the Act on the housing sector:

1. Negative effect on investment in housing for rental purpose;
2. Withdrawal of existing housing stock from rental market.;
3. Accelerated deterioration of physical condition of existing housing stock;
4. Stagnation of municipal property tax revenue, as it is fixed on the rent;
5. Resultant deterioration in the provision of civil services;
6. Increase in litigations between landlords and tenants;

In Mumbai the housing construction for rent came to a standstill after 1950. Ownership housing was not affordable for those who had a steady job but no access to housing loan. Housing constructed by Housing Boards gave preference to long-term residents of Mumbai. Middle class people who could afford cost of long distance travel went for illegal, inexpensive rental housing beyond the city limits at Thane, Dombivali, Vasai and Virar. But most of the poor migrants who were pushed by the drought and unemployment from rural areas had no option but to settle on the vacant government lands and low lying marshy lands where their presence was not noticed. Private lands were also deliberately or forcibly exploited for the slums by unscrupulous elements and slum lords. Dalits and scheduled class families were the worst affected group as they had little connection with the already settled population.



The Rent Control Act completely protected the already housed people in Mumbai but denied access to rental housing to the migrants. What migrants paid to get a room in slums was many times greater than the old rental house in chawls and even greater than houses in many middle and upper class localities!

Mumbai has always attracted migrants. The migration and rental housing business grew hand in hand before independence. The system had coped with large-scale migration in earlier periods. Most of the migrants then coming to cities were as poor as migrants today. But the city provided them with work and a reasonable housing in

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Inside

Treating Water Nature's Way

This garden of Ipomeas and Hygroscopic plants, recycles four lakh liters of municipal sewage daily in addition to providing an aesthetically appealing garden

The World Health Organization (WHO) of the United Nations has declared the decade between 2005 and 2015 as critical years to focus global attention on one of our most precious resource: WATER. According to the WHO, more than 1 billion in the world have no access to safe drinking water. This perpetuates a silent humanitarian crisis that kills some 3900 children every day. The Secretary General of the United Nations states: "We shall not finally defeat AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, or any of the other infectious diseases that plague the developing world until we have also won the battle for safe drinking-water, sanitation and basic health care."

One of the most effective ways of ensuring the conservation of water is to recycle it back into the system. To this aim, the students of the Institute of Environmental Architecture visited a number of biological water treatment systems in Pune and Mumbai. This included the treatment of sewage water by Dr. Uday Bawalkar's Ecological Research Institute in Pune. The method involves the use of bio-sanitizers for water treatment. Next, was the treatment of water at Osho Park, Pune by aeration, oxidation pond and use of acquatic plants. Finally, a visit to the Golf course in Chembur which irrigates nearly 35 acres of the Course by recycling 4 lakh liters of municipal sewage water using a simple reed bed method!❑

Conferernce on Global Warming and oceans: Is India prepared?

The Indian Maritime Foundation organized its annual conference on Global Warming and Oceans: Indian Scenario on 9 March 2005 at the Central Park Hotel, Pune. The conference featured speakers such as Dr. G. B. Pant, Director of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Dr. M. Ravichandran, Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and Mr. John Smith Sreen, Director, Environment, Energy, Enterprise, USAID. For conference report contact, indmarfdn@eth.net

Events

World Water Day launches Water Harvesting Center

On March 21, the Institute of Environmental Architecture in collaboration with the Eureka Forbes Institute of Environment and the Lotus Suites, an Ecotel Hotel, marked the occasion of World Water Daywith the launch of Water Harvesting Center which will be permenantly based in the Lotus Suites Hotel in Andheri.
The program, part of a campaign taken up to promote water conservation and management, launched a five point water conservation program for mumbai citizens, the pledge for which was taken along with five prominent citizens of Mumbai on the occasion.

Conference on Building Materials for Urban Eco housing

The Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture in collaboration with International Institute for Energy Conservation (IIEC) & the United States Asia Environmental Partnership (USAEP) is organizing a Conference on Building Materials for Urban Eco-Housing in April 2005 at the Rachana Auditorium, Prabhadevi, Mumbai. The objective of this conference cum workshop is to bring together experts and leaders in this field, to explore various concepts such as LCA in detail for application on the field and to expose architects and builders to technologies and materials for eco-friendly building materials and construction practices. The Conference's five focus areas include:

- Embodied Energy of Materials
- Alternative Building Material
- Environmental Impact of Materials
- Strength of Materials
- Market Development

The First Day of the Conference will introduce delegates and invitees to the concept of green buildings and the Eco-Housing Mainstreaming Partnership. A roundtable discussion on 'Incentives and Policy for Eco-Housing' will be organized with panelists representing all stakeholders. The second day will have technical sessions on the five focus areas of the Conference cum workshop. ❑

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Slumming Mumbai

the form of chawls, lodging houses, etc. The Rent Control brought even the lodging houses under its umbrella and denied a decent roof, albeit at a cost for poor single migrants, who even today form a large proportion of migrants.

The Rent Control Act was not only applicable to private property but was also made applicable to all government and public properties. Thus public sector organizations such as Mumbai Port Trust, BMC, LIC as well as the State and Central government have lost huge revenues from its property rented to commercial organizations. Old commercial organizations are making huge profits and paying almost nothing to the rented properties.

Today, most people who are well settled oppose the entry of migrants and growth of slums. It would be prudent on their part to reflect on their own family history when their ancestors had come to Mumbai in the last 100 years. In Mumbai, they had easy access to rental rooms in chawls. Many households residing in such rental housing today enjoy all kinds of civil services without even paying for their upkeep. The rents even at prime localities in Dadar are as low as Rs. 10 or Rs. 20 - even today! The benefits received by such thousands of tenants would be in hundreds of crores! The rent paid by these tenants is so meager even in areas like Marine Drive that any slum dweller could afford it! It is essential for all those renters to reflect on their own rents and compare them with the prize paid by the slum dwellers today.

Those people who really want to save slum dwellers, and want them to be decently housed should insist on the removal of Rent Control Act. They would do a great service to the poor people rather than just rushing to stop bulldozers when they arrive and forgetting the issue when they retreat.❑

(The Author is an Architect, Urban Planner& a visiting Faculty at the Rachana Sansad Institute of Environmental Architecture)

Protecting Mumbai Mangroves

Mangrove forests around Gorai under threat by developers; a tour of the forests was arranged by boat for journalists, activists & students by the Mangrove society on 20 February 2005

The Mangrove Society of India organized a series of demonstrations, talks and visits in its resolve to build a strong movement against the destruction of mangroves around Mumbai. The students of Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture actively participated by preparing posters for the Mangroves March organized at Azad Maidan on World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2005. They also participated in discussions with other environmentalists as well as local fishermen and NGOs during a tour organized by the Mangrove Society of India to the Gorai Mangrove forests on 20 March 2005.

The Mangroves are a unique coastal natural wetlands ecosystem harboring hundreds of species of crabs, fish, mollusks, shrimps and worms. These forests have more than 13 species of mangrove trees and invite more than 185 species of birds each year including Harriers, Open Bill Storks & Black Capped Kingfisher.

It is our hope that city architects get sensitized towards the protection of these lungs of the city that are under serious threat.
(mumbaimangroves@yahoogroups.com)

Environmental Management Plan for Matheran

Architects Yateen Gokhale and Minal Vishwekar, past students of the Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture, under the guidance of Pallavi Latkar, a Mumbai-based Architect Town Planner and Environmental Researcher (Visiting faculty at the institute), are part of a team working on the preparation of an Environmental Management Plan for Matheran.

The project commissioned by the MMR Environment Improvement Society involves documentation, study and analysis of all the natural resources of the region. In addition to this, their intrinsic interconnectivity and thereby impacts of various interventions will be researched upon. The Environment Management Plan would also include Developmental guidelines for the Eco-sustainability of the region. ❑

Training Workshop on Geographic Information System

Students of the Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture accompanied by faculty members, participated in a one day orientation workshop organized by the Center for Resources Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mumbai on 12 March 2005 at the CSRE Auditorium on the GIS software, GRAMS ++.

The program included a talk by Mrs. P. Venkatachalam on general principles of GIS, followed by a demonstration of its application by Prof. B. Krishna Mohan. The afternoon session included a demonstration of the software.

Indigenously produced, the software costs less than 1% of the commercially available GIS software. The CSRE is promoting the widespread use of GRAMS ++ among academicians and professionals. ❑

Eco Housing in India

By Roshni Udyavar

The Western Region of the United States Asia Environmental Partnership (USAEP), an USAID program (facilitating the Green Revolution in Asia since 1992 with a vision to achieve environmental sustainability), embarked on the ECO HOUSING project almost 2 years ago to propagate the concept of developing environment friendly urban houses. In collaboration with organizations such as the Builders Association of India, the Indian Institute of Architects, the Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture and International Institute for Energy Conservation (IIEC), the USAEP launched an outreach program to promote the concept of Eco housing among architects, builders, policy makers and other stakeholders. In the first phase of the project, the program reached out to more than 1000 stakeholders.

Indian delegates of the Eco housing Tour discuss with members of the US Green Building Council at their headquarters at Washington D. C.

The result of this has been the Godrej CII Green Building in Hyderabad, the first and only building in the world to receive the LEEDS Platinum rating from the US Green Building Council. Now, nearly 13 such buildings are in the pipeline. The International Institute for Energy Conservation in collaboration with the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) of the Energy Ministry, Government of India, is already in the process of preparing guidelines for energy conservation in buildings as per the Energy Conservation Act 2001. Further, the Pune Municipal Corporation has donated land to set up a pilot project on Eco-Housing under the guidance of the USAEP and the project partners.

Green buildings are not yet the rule in the United States and Europe, but the movement is growing fast owing to a natural pressure to reduce resource consumption and minimize human impact on the planet. The latest example is the One Bryant Park building, headquarters of the Bank of America in Central Manhattan. Designed by Cook & Fox Architects from New York, the building's biggest savings besides energy, will be in Health Care through the use of filtered ventilation in floors, natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows providing psychological benefits as well, and individual temperature control. The headquarters also has a system to capture and reuse rain and waste water, and roof gardens to reduce the urban heat island effect. The building will be a showcase for the US Green Building Council, whose LEED rating system, a voluntary national standard certification system, has rapidly expanded in the past few years.

Considering that countries such as the US and Canada have the largest per capita consumption in the world and buildings consume nearly 40% of primary energy consumption, they have a long way to go. India, though hardly into the green building sector, consumes much less per capita as far as energy and natural resources used in the building industry is concerned. Moreover, nearly 70% of India still resides in villages and despite rapid urbanization, traditional Indian housing more than offsets the large number of energy guzzling commercial buildings in cities like Mumbai.

What is important from the Indian perspective, however, is the architectural education. The large numbers of professionals churned out by architectural colleges in India are hardly equipped to deal with the impending crises of environment. There is also a need to assess green buildings from an Indian point of view. Western Green Building Technologies and standards are not always suitable for our climatic and socio-economic conditions. Architects, designers and planners must adopt new tools if they want to provide habitats to people and deal with the impending resource-deficiency crisis.

We have to learn from our traditional housing while at the same time incorporate tools of the future such as GIS (Geographical Information System) and other passive solar design software that now exist in the market. The potential is huge - for energy saving and providing a better and healthy environment to occupants – by evaluating the life cycle assessment of materials, by using locally available materials with lower embedded, transportation and built energy, by using alternative energy sources which do not deplete the finite fossil store of the earth and do not pollute the air we breathe, by combining design with natural elements and ultimately, to learn from nature and her endless repository of knowledge. To implement these solutions, laws and standards need to be put in place that will ensure that our future habitats and cities are sustainable. ❑

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