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EDITORS Brijender S. Dua
Geeta Wahi Dua

ADVISORY PANEL Savita Punde, Landscape Architect | New Delhi
Rohit Marol, Landscape Architect | Bangalore
Akshay Kaul, Landscape Architect | New Delhi
Biley E Menon, Urban Designer | Cochin
Prashanta Bhat, Landscape Architect | Bangalore
Nikhil Dhar, Landscape Architect | New Delhi
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Jitendra Pawar, Landscape Architect | Pune

ADVISORY EDITOR Adit Pal, Landscape Architect | USA

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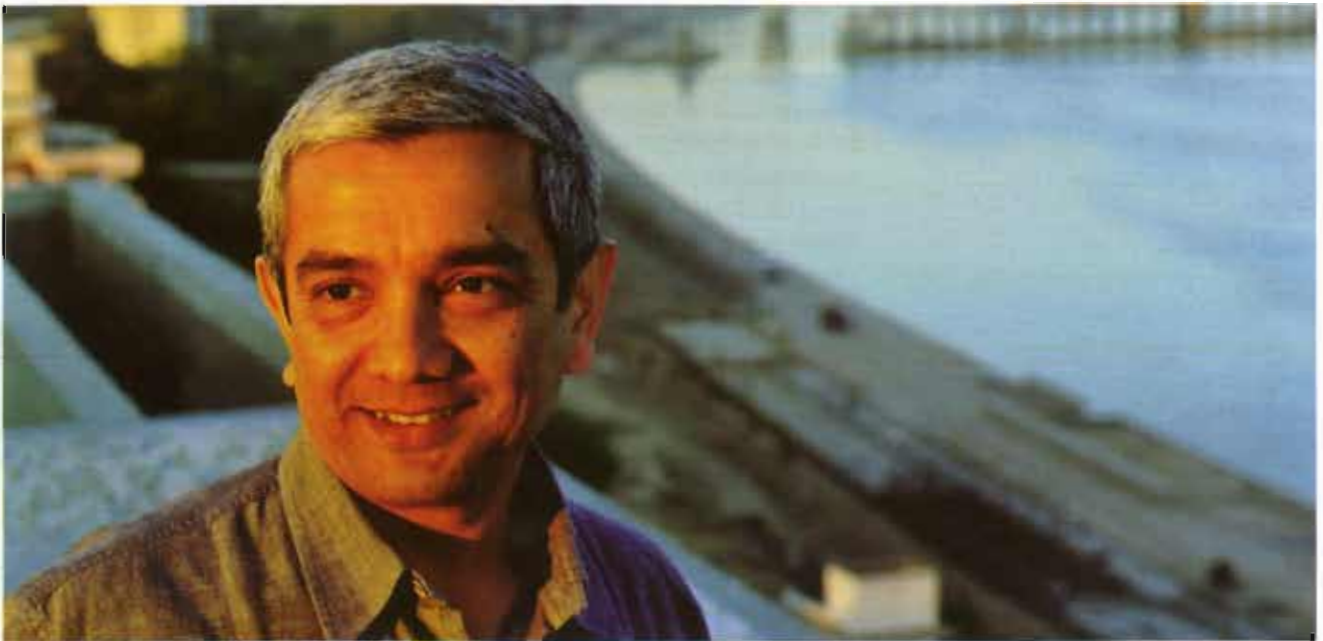
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Dr Bimal Patel and Shirley Ballaney discuss...

URBANISM, MASTER PLANS, AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS



On the challenges to urban planning and urban design

India faces a truly formidable challenge in making its cities more livable and efficient. In the last 50 years, we have neglected our cities. There are many historical reasons as to why cities were not considered to be important after Independence. We had many pressing problems facing us after independence. For example, we faced food scarcity, so the goal was food security and increasing agricultural production was a priority. We had no manufacturing, so the goal was self-sufficiency in industrial production and investments in heavy industries were promoted. Hence the national economic policy focused on promoting agricultural and industrial development. Our economy was predominantly agriculture based, with a major portion of the people living in rural areas and cities were thus not very important for people. As a result, during this period, we neglected cities and did not invest in planning them properly and providing the requisite infrastructure.

Another very important factor at play during 50 years after Independence was that, all of Indian economic policies were very centralized and of a command and control variety. The central or the state government decided who could do what, which industries could come up, how much they could produce, what place they could come up in and so and so forth. Everything was licensed (the era is also popularly referred to as the 'license Raj'). There was a mistrust of all market mechanisms and the private sector. This approach and attitude was also prevalent in city planning. The plans and the planning processes followed were akin to the economic policies of central government - command and control variety and centralized – indifferent to the market, not respecting of private property, unconcerned with fiscal realities and not particularly democratic. The plans were sometimes well intentioned but were not concerned with fair allocation of benefits and costs among end users.

Owing to different national economic growth priorities and adopting such an approach to achieve them, our cities stagnated and deteriorated. In the 90's there was a paradigm shift in the macroeconomic policy – we started liberalizing the economy and dismantling the command and control approach. Also by this time, our agricultural production had improved; food security was no longer a concern. It became clear after the early 90's that cities are the engines of economic growth and generators of wealth and will play a very crucial role in the further growth and development of the country. The role of agriculture in the economic growth is no longer significant, fewer people are required in agriculture and an increasing number of people are migrating to cities. Hence, the cities are going to rapidly grow and develop.



Inventory of Environmental Resources, Mumbai, 2008 - Ongoing;

Project Consultants: EPC Development Planning and Management (EPCDPM)

The project involves mapping and making an inventory of all environmental resources in entire Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM). These include rivers, water bodies, nalas, large urban greens and all open spaces. It will also include improvement plans for some of these. The project is being undertaken by Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) and is the first of its kind in India.

However by this time, our cities are a complete mess – unlivable and inefficient. The problems are of a very simple nature. There is no adequate housing; no water supply and sewerage systems; and there is pollution, overcrowding and traffic chaos. We had not invested at all in cities and building infrastructure till now. If we do not transform and improve our cities now, our goals of economic growth will be compromised. At this juncture, in a bid to improve and transform our cities, everybody is scrambling and struggling to find out how we can we

achieve this. It is at this time that we need the professions of urban planning and urban design the most.

But for 50 years, we have neglected both of these professions. Planning has yet not come out of its old command and control approach. It continues to be dominated by central planning approach. Urban design, as a profession, is still not established, because there is no money to invest in infrastructure and improvement of our cities. So, just when we need the disciplines of urban planning and urban

design most, we do not have them. Very few people in the country have realized that along with all the resources that we are setting aside for urban development, we will have to set aside resources for training urban planners, urban designers and landscape designers. Within a couple of decades, we need to quickly create a significant professional capacity to cater to all detailed planning that will be needed for these areas. Thus a daunting scenario that faces us today.

It is precisely this sort of a dilemma that faced European cities when they were industrializing and urbanizing. They were a mess at the start, but gradually they improved over time. We will have to improve our cities in the same way. But one must realize that

BELOW:

Concept Plan - Sabarmati Riverfront Development, Ahmedabad | Project Consultants: EPC/HCPDPM
A comprehensive environmental improvement project of the city's riverfront which involves river training, constructing retaining walls, providing storm water outfalls, ghats and jetties, reclaiming 162 hectares of land, providing interceptor sewers, creating parks and gardens, designing new streets & promenades with better street lighting, providing housing for economically weaker sections and informal markets and constructing utility buildings & structures.



there are differences between European and Indian cities which will call for innovative approaches:

- While they had a lot of time, in our case, we don't have time: our cities are growing very fast and we have to provide solutions at the same pace.
- European cities were improved over a hundred-year period; we do not want to wait for a hundred years.
- The advantage we have is that in those days when European cities were improved, the profession of city planning, the ideas and concepts that were necessary for making cities work did not exist. Today these concepts exist.

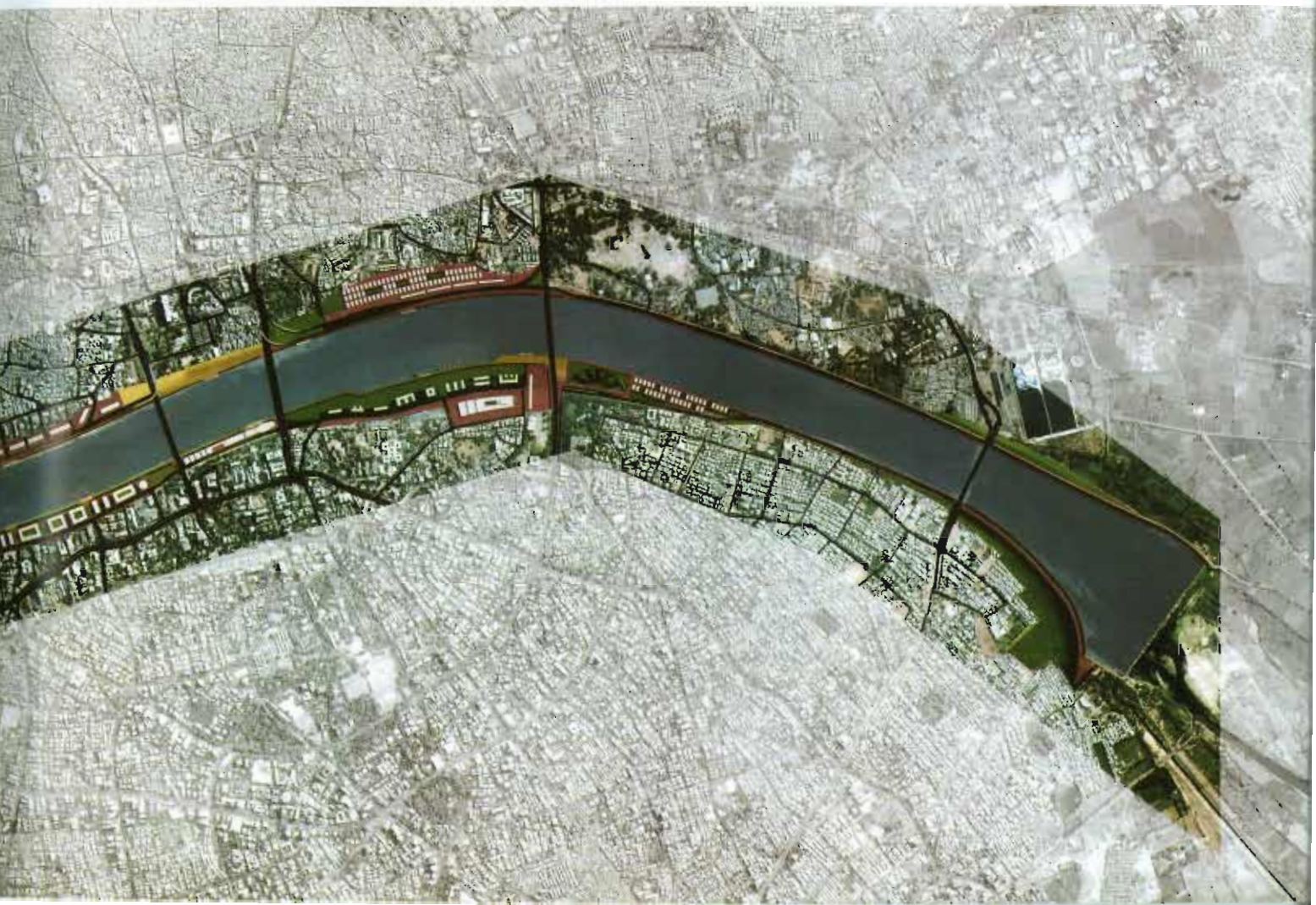
These in a sense are the challenges facing the urban planning profession today. All over the country many

different things are being tried out to make our cities more livable and efficient. So, we have to strengthen the mechanisms of learning from the experiments being tried out over different parts of the country.

On the relevance of traditional design and planning practices, and lessons to be learnt from traditional cities in terms of planning and spatial design for new urban settlements

By traditional cities we mean ancient cities and in India we have several of them. Pragmatically speaking there are very few things from such a distant past that are truly relevant today. If one looks at the long history of human beings on planet Earth, it is only in the

last 200 years that a million people thought of living together in one place. That's not easy. It requires technologies that are special, political institutions that are robust, approaches to planning and concepts of living that are altogether different from the earlier ones. So, while there are still few things that we can learn from traditional or ancient cities, a lot of the problems that we are facing are completely new. Nobody in the world has ever faced them before. For example, how to supply water for a million persons? That is not a joke. One cannot imagine a huge quantity of water supplied through *kunds* as was done in the past for a small population.



Our modern political systems are very different. We live in a democracy, we don't live in kingdoms. We enjoy certain rights and privileges that people in earlier societies did not enjoy. There was a certain level of force that you could use, which, today you cannot use. Some of the solutions that were appropriate at that time are no longer relevant. Instead of looking for solutions in the past, we will be better off looking for solutions (good solutions), that people all over the world have achieved in contemporary times. This does not mean western cities, but anywhere that people have tackled contemporary problems. That is where we ought to be looking.

On comparing the Master Plans of Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Bangalore

Actually these are two categories -- the Master Plans for Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore fall in the category of planning that is centralized and of the command and control kind, whereas the Development Plan for Ahmedabad published in 1999, makes a radical departure from this approach of city planning. In fact it is one of the first Development Plan for any city in India that does not propose any acquisition of land for public purpose and instead uses the land markets to achieve public objectives. Ahmedabad is one of the

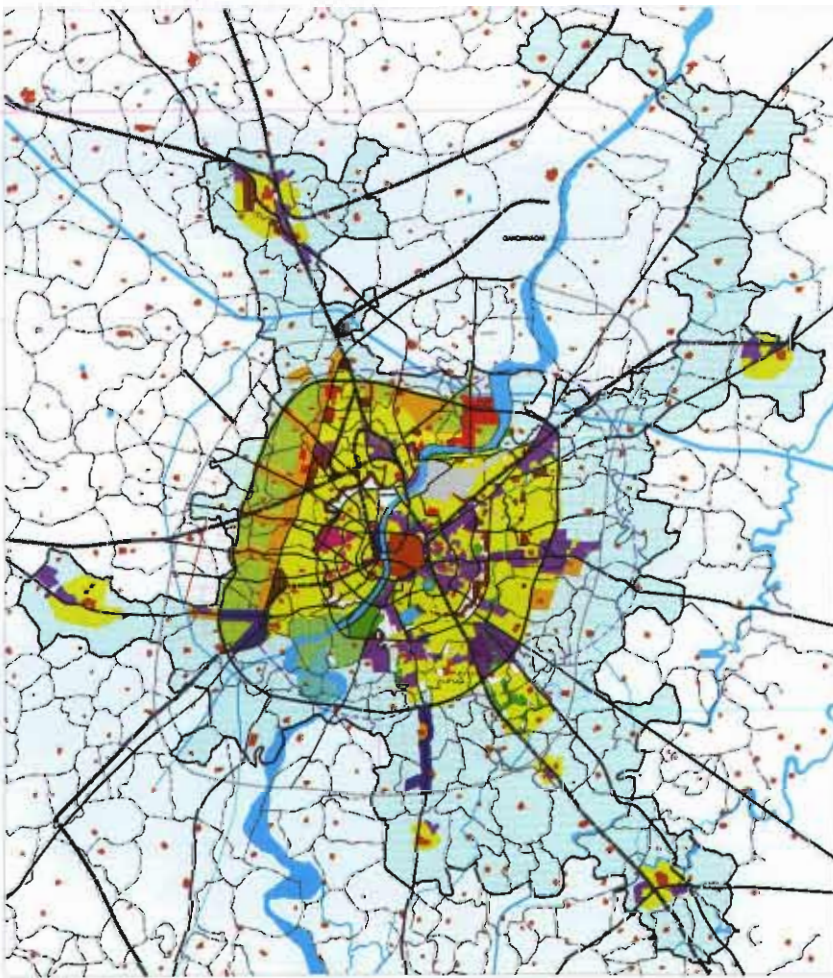
few cities where, on the periphery, you will find vast areas where roads have been built and development takes place afterwards. In most other cities, the growth happens first and then infrastructure is provided. So, this is one place where people can learn a lot from.

On public participation in the planning process

Where any planning is done, you ought to involve people, and have participation by the people, if you want your plan to work. You don't have to have a big public meeting to find out the views of people. You have to sometimes, by accepting the way in which the land market or real estate market functions, decipher what people want. Basically when you work against the market, you are actually working against the people. One must increase participation and one way of increasing participation is to be transparent, show the plans to people and work with the market rather than against it.

On professionals not working in the public realm

What's more important here is why are very less professionals working in the public realm? This is an altogether different issue. The present legislations or the Acts that enable city planning do not have adequate provisions for making peoples participation mandatory while preparing plans. So if one wants to increase participation, it will have to be mandated through legislation. In last 50 years, all of the planning and urban design has been done inside government offices. This was obviously not a big conspiracy; the reason for this was



Draft Development Plan of Ahmedabad, 1999

Project Consultants: *Environmental Planning Collaborative (EPC)*

actually quite simple. Since the planning was of a command and control type, it was obvious that the people who are going to command and control have to do the planning. Since you are disrespecting individual property rights, you are not concerned with allocating costs & benefits fairly. In fact your plans are going to make a few people rich and a few people poor, you have to keep everything secret till one day when the plan is released. So, obviously you cannot have private consultants working on your plan. If the government wanted a building to be designed, it could have a private architect working on the designs, but if it wanted to make a city plan, it did not have a private agency help working on the plan, because the two things were completely different. In one case you have to keep everything secret, but in the other case it was not important to keep a secret.

Today, if you are going to change the approach to planning and if command and control approach is to be done away with, then the private sector can be involved a lot more easily. The tragedy is that, because in the past, there was no work for the private sector, one does not find urban planning companies and urban design companies in the private sector. So, the government should very quickly work to promote the development of the private sector in urban planning.

On the new urban developments taking place in India and other developing countries and lessons to be learnt for the future

In India, in the last few years a new phenomenon we have seen is that the scale of real estate operations is going up. Everywhere, large townships and SEZs are coming up. Some private developer goes to the periphery of a city, buys or acquires a large piece of land and builds a new township. Undoubtedly, we are going to need such large scale developments given the fact that the prevailing mechanisms for providing serviced urban land have failed to keep pace with the demand. But, in our view the most difficult and in a sense even more interesting problem is how we are going to fix the existing cities. Township and SEZs are instances of planning or designing on a 'blank slate' and which are not a challenge at all. The more interesting issue is how we are going to fix the existing cities, because as it is, our cities are a mess, and most people live in them. We cannot build new cities for everybody, so we are have to fix the existing ones. In one way or the other, we must go about this task. And there lies the real challenge of urban designers and urban planners.



Teen Darwaza, Ahmedabad | photo courtesy: Rituraj Parikh

Architect – Urban Planner **Dr. Bimal Patel** has over 20 years of professional consultation, research and teaching experience in urban planning and architecture. He is a Director in HCP Design and Project Management Pvt. Ltd. (HCPDPM), a nearly 50 year old architecture, urban design, and planning firm. He is also the Hon. Managing Director of Environmental Planning Collaborative (EPC), a not-for-profit policy research and advocacy organization. EPC works with local and state governments and has undertaken pioneering work in urban planning and management.

Shirley Ballaney, an Architect – Urban Planner, has over 15 years of professional consulting in urban and regional planning. She is one of the few persons in the country working in statutory planning in the private sector. Through her planning projects, she has promoted modern planning concepts and used innovative methodologies and technology to improve the practice of planning. She currently leads the planning group at HCPDPM and is also associated with EPC.

email: hcpahd@hcp.co.in

website: <http://www.hcp.co.in>

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Images courtesy

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