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## Mumbai 2020: A little fantasy about this mumbai — my very own mumbai

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Shilpa Phadke

Imagine an inclusive Mumbai where women and men are out on the streets without fear.

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A few weeks ago, I saw *City on the Water* (1975), a documentary film about Bombay's past that speaks to Mumbai's future. The film, directed by architect Charles Correa, reflects on the plans for New Bombay and the hope that this new settlement will transform Bombay as well.

As we know in dismal hindsight, no such transformation was forthcoming. Since then there have been many such plans of varying ambition: slum rehabilitation, flyovers, a sea-link and a freeway; and soon a metro and monorail. And yet, because all of them address the symptoms rather than the problems, they don't make more than a dent in the crisis of space in the city.

Just last week in the compound of the dilapidated Shakti Mills compound a young journalist was gangraped. There are fears expressed about how dangerous the city has become. There is a conversation about escalating violence in the city. Typically, parochial politicians have invoked the 'outsiders' bogey.

At various points in the city's history different groups of people have been 'outsiders'. This is a city that has increasingly become focused on excluding: Muslims, Dalits, women, the disabled, the queer. In this piece I focus on gender as the lens through which to view this city, my city.



On the promenades people can now eat and drink. There are several dustbins for them. Couples hang out there and the police have been ordered not to disturb them unless they seem to be in the middle of a physical flight.

It is true that women get attacked in public spaces in cities (and elsewhere), but it is also true that every day women access the city for work and pleasure, often enjoying this engagement with the city. Even as we petition for better policing and speedy justice, we must also demand better infrastructure in the shape of transport, lighting and toilets that make it possible for women to access the city.

Further, we must also demand as our right, parks and promenades where we might seek pleasure in our cities. Our quest for pleasure in the city and our struggle against violence are not mutually exclusive goals.

We've heard the phrase Mumbai 2020 reasonably often. Not so much now that 2020 is only seven years away and no longer really "in the future" as such. But still one hears it.

Except now it's a whisper. It is clear that there will be no miracle by 2020.

And yet if we so desire, and if there is the political will, there could be a series of interventions, creating possibilities for change. So here's my fantasy for a safer and more pleasurable Mumbai in 2020. Not so difficult, not so radical. Just a series of little changes that could transform the city, not just for women but for everyone.

Transport: The metro and monorail lines are running, creating much better east-west connections. The existing suburban railway network runs for 'all the 24 hours' putting end to anxieties about catching the last train. The railway stations have bright lights and lots of

benches.

The bus-stops have seating too, comfortable seating. The buses are plentiful. They are no longer crowded. At night buses stop at in-between stops for women to get off so they don't have to walk long distances. Because, the buses and the trains are so convenient, people leave their cars at home and travel by public transport.

Toilets: There is a toilet every 500 metres. It is well lit. It is clean. It is open 24 hours.

Parks: Every single park has had its fences or walls removed. Yes even the Oval Maidan which was 'beautified' and restricted in 1997. People have taken to sitting at it's edges on the wide kattas, eating sandwiches and drinking cutting chai easily available. There are lawyers, bankers, students, teachers, labourers rubbing shoulders with each other. The cricket in the middle goes on. No park closes.

Ever. In the night the parks have bright lights at the edges and not so many in the middle. The city also has a large new park. Two adjoining mills were brought together. The National Textile Corporation donated the land to the Department of Parks and Gardens. You cannot see from one end of the park to the other.

Promenades and waterfronts: On these promenades and waterfronts people can now eat and drink if they like. There are several dustbins for them to throw rubbish into. Couples hang out here and the police have been ordered not to disturb them unless they seem to be in the middle of a physical fight (verbal fights are fine for where better to argue than the seaface).

There are hawkers here too. They dot the landscape offering affordable food and eye the street. They are here till late in the night. Little escapes their eyes. Their lanterns add to the lighting. There are the new eastern waterfronts, they are inclusive, inviting, and people love them.

The city does not sleep: Restaurants, coffee shops, bars and other establishments no longer have a closing time.

They close when they choose. By the time they close, often the early-morning udupis are opening. The dance bars are functioning, the dancers are back by court order. The middle class moral minority still whinges about them. There are sex workers too.

The clause that makes soliciting in a public space illegal has been read down. There are people on the streets, they are wandering, walking on the streets, they are commuting (on the 24 hour transport), they are having fun. The city crime rates are down because the streets are full of people 24/7.

In Mumbai 2020, there is a woman who lives alone in a flat. One night at well past midnight she feels like going for a walk. So she does.

*The writer is co-author of Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets.*

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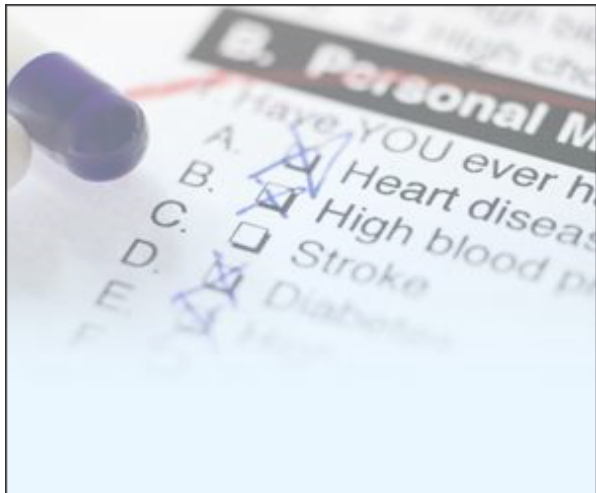


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