

FOOT NOTES

A publication by students of the Centre for Media and Cultural Studies



**INVISIBLE
MUMBAI**



CMCS Class of 2012



FOOTNOTES

2011-2012

EDITORS

Aakriti Kohli
Anurag Mazumdar
Ufaque Paiker

PHOTO EDITOR

Kaikhro Paphro

DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR

Vikram Buragohain

DESIGN

Gin Khan Siam
Sandeep Kr. Singh

EDITORIAL SUPERVISOR

Sameera Khan

DESIGN SUPERVISOR

Sahar S Futehally

FACULTY ADVISORS

Anjali Monteiro
K.P. Jayasankar
Shilpa Phadke
P. Niranjana
K.V. Nagesh
Charu P. Gargi

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Barsha Dey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CMCS Staff

COVER PHOTO

'Dark side of the moon...'
by Arindam Banerjee

COVER DESIGN

Vikram Buragohain

BACK-COVER PHOTO

'The answer my friend is blowing
in the wind...' by Kaikhro Paphro

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Printed & Published by

Chairperson, Centre for Media & Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar, Mumbai
This publication was made possible by a grant from the Jamsetji Tata Trust

From the Margins

A series of films on M-ward

FROM THE MARGINS (8 MINS)

Script, Editing and Direction: Nikhil Titus Thomas, Camera: Mangesh Gudekar
An overview of the M (East) Ward, with its low social indicators, that makes a case for the M Ward project of TISS, a long term intervention for creating and implementing a people's development plan in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders.

KAHANI PANI KI (12 MINS)

A film by Devendra Ghorpade, Prakash Sao, Ufaque Paiker & Arpita Chakraborty

The film portrays the struggle of the residents of Sathe Nagar, a slum in Mumbai's M (East) Ward, for drinking water. Through the stories of Sushila Patel, a balwadi teacher, and Santosh Thorat, an activist, the film highlights issues such as the threat of demolition and the lack of access to basic amenities as well as the resistance of the community to this systemic marginalisation.

DO ANDOLAN (17 MINS)

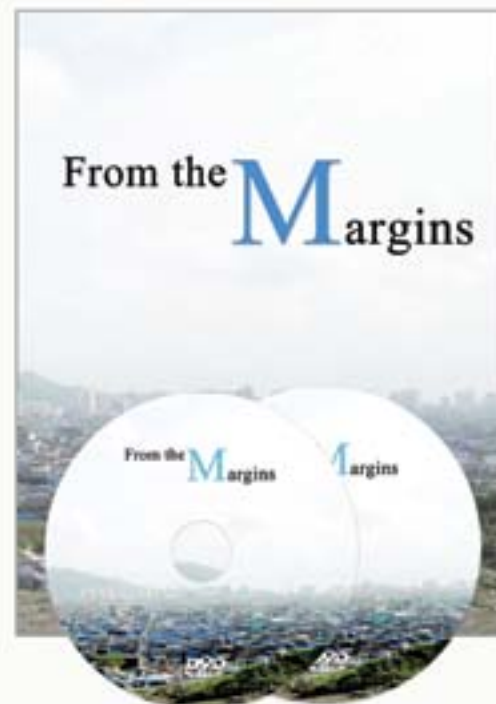
A film by Avadoot Khanolkar, Kaikho Paphro Chachei, Sumit Singh, Shazia Nigar & Raju Hittalamani

Slums such as Jai Ambe Nagar and Sathe Nagar in M (East) Ward have been repeatedly demolished by the BMC which dubs them as encroachments. Rabia, from Sathe Nagar, and Manisha, from Jai Ambe Nagar, are two women involved in the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan (GBGBA), a movement engaged with the struggle for affordable housing in the slums of Mumbai. The film explores the negotiations the women make in their daily lives as they manage their homes and participate in the movement to save their homes.

CORNERED CITY (12 MINS)

A film by Aakriti Kohli, Vikram Buragohain, Daisy Levon & Manoj Bhandare
Ravi, a college-going youth and his grandmother, Hirabai Korat, live in Lalubhai Compound, Mankhurd, which is considered one of the most 'successful' slum rehabilitation projects in Mumbai. Originally from the pavements of P D'Mello road, they faced constant demolition and eviction due to the state's 'clean-up' and 'beautification' drive. Through the process of narrating their personal stories they make us question the idea of an 'ideal' habitat and slum rehabilitation in the city of Mumbai. Through their accounts the film explores the implications of 'rehabilitation' for the people who are 'rehabilitated'.

For more details about the other productions of CMCS:
<http://cmcs.tiss.edu/cmcs/films/film-catalogue>



CITY'S EDGE (19 MINS)

A film by Sandeep Kr. Singh, Shweta Radhakrishnan, Gin Khan Siam, Sharib Ali & Abhishek Yadav

The Deonar Dumping Ground is the largest dumping ground in Asia. Everyday, on the back of thousands of trucks, the dump receives half of all that the city exudes. And everyday most of it finds its way back – picked and processed. The dump is a powerful symbol of most of the city's people who are constantly dumped, recycled, and dumped again, while perpetually remaining out of sight. The film explores this space through its protagonist - Mohammad Hussain aka Babu.

FISH TALES (12 MINS)

A film by Shweta Ghosh, Anurag Mazumdar, Joyashree Sarma & Amol Ranjan

Fish Tales is the journey of four student filmmakers through their attempt to understand the Trombay Koliwada within the framework of the 'modern' city. In the process, they explore and reflect upon the present lives of the fisherfolk along with their historic relation to fish, festival and sea through narratives of members from the community. This film traces the location of Trombay within the M-ward and the subsequent challenges posed to the Koli community in times that put into question their traditional occupation and customs, including the very borders of the fast-changing village.

DVD Pack available in English & Hindi
For Copies contact: sales.cmcs@tiss.edu

Invisible Mumbai Editorial

'If it bleeds, it leads,' is a fairly routine pointer used in most newsrooms to identify news stories that merit publication or broadcast. So the dead in a tsunami, the wounded in a riot, the bereaved in a terrorist attack and so also the stabbed lover of an aspiring actress will often find themselves in the news.

But this does not mean that the 'bleed-lead' rule applies everywhere. In fact, there are countless instances where the cries of those who 'bleed' are barely heard, their wounds seldom noticed. Like the woman who loses her home for a fourth time when the municipal bulldozers knock on her door. Like the roadside hawker who everyday faces the ignominy of being illegal and shoved around. Or the slaughterhouse worker, who can barely afford a bar of soap to wipe the blood off his torso. These are stories that are worth telling, these are lives worth knowing about. Yet often these articles are never done, their subjects just quietly hemorrhage to death in a cacophony of silence.

There are many more: the ragpickers who live on a garbage dump and fight over a plastic bottle; the Kashmiri migrants who seek refuge like beggars in their own country; the North-Eastern students who are constantly reminded of their 'Nepaliness'; the men who bake bricks for the houses of others but have no home to call their own. There are communities – of bandwallahs, street artists, ear cleaners and others – that are side-lined in the mainstream media; there are causes – relating to the poor, the working classes, the displaced and the evicted – that are habitually ignored or trivialised. Frequently the dominant narrative of the city does not include their voices or concerns.

In the past decade, Mumbai, like most Indian cities, has embarked on several redevelopment programmes, spatial transformations and 'beautification' and 'cleansing' drives. In the race to become a 'world-class global' city what has become invisibilised are the stories of people and communities who are at the very bottom of the class, caste and gender ladder. Their role in the economy is overlooked, their view of the world virtually omitted. As a result thousands of stories are submerged in this process threatening the very essence that has made Mumbai a vibrant metropolis.

We believe these stories are worth telling. Some of them are in this inaugural issue of *Footnotes** the magazine produced by the students of the Centre for Media & Cultural Studies (CMCS) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

These stories reveal how people at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum interact and negotiate with the city. The idea is also to make the reader critically reflect on how due to exclusionary practices the city gets appropriated by a particular class of citizens, leaving a huge chunk of people to develop their own strategies to challenge the dominant socio-economic and political forces impacting their lives.

TISS, currently in its platinum jubilee year, has always worked towards social equity and justice and CMCS is similarly committed towards training future media practitioners with a deep socio-political consciousness. CMCS prepares its students not just in documentary, journalism, and research skills, its concerns are wider. The aim is to encourage students to document the hitherto marginalised and disenfranchised and to make visible the issues that matter and the people who are often forgotten. This issue of our magazine on the theme of 'Invisible Mumbai' attempts to do just that.

**Footnotes are the backbone of any research work, providing much-valued information, context and subtext of the subject at hand. Our magazine, 'Footnotes' makes a similar valiant effort. Our 'foot' soldiers – or student journalists – attempt to open your eyes and ears to issues and people that are increasingly sidelined and lost in the mass of the mass-media today.*

From the Director's Desk



This is the first edition of *Footnotes*, the student magazine of the Centre for Media and Cultural Studies. We appreciate the tremendous effort and creativity that has gone into the making of this issue and are delighted to launch this initiative in the Platinum Jubilee year of TISS. The theme of the magazine, 'Invisible Mumbai', with its focus on marginalised voices and spaces in the city resonates beautifully with the commitment of TISS to social justice and equity.

As part of our Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, we have recently launched the M Ward initiative, which aims at collectively co-creating an inclusive, democratic development plan for our neighbourhood. I am pleased to note that this magazine also has a section on M-Ward. I congratulate the students on this endeavour and look forward to seeing *Footnotes* as a regular annual publication of the Centre.

Prof. S. Parasuraman,
Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences

The Bloody Life of Mumbai’s Slaughterhouse Workers

We may pretend that the meat on our table came from the cold storage. In reality, it is the product of the hard work of the men who work in our slaughterhouses

By Arpita Chakraborty



Kaikho Paphro

Can you consider living a life where you come home from work stinking of blood and flesh every single day? Can you imagine being so used to the smell of rotten carcasses that you stop noticing the odour anymore? This the reality for the men who work in the slaughterhouses of our city, the men who supply most of the meat that you consume on your dining table.

Across the city of Mumbai, there are around twenty-six slaughterhouses, or abattoirs, owned jointly by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Government of Maharashtra. These slaughterhouses supply meat not only to the local market but also export it to countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and European countries like Portugal. According to the Brihanmumbai Hindu Khatik Samaj

Sanghatna, an association of meat sellers, there are around 1,500 BMC owned or licensed meat-selling shops in Mumbai, apart from the numerous illegal ones, which together employ more than 25,000 slaughterhouse workers.

But what is the condition of these men who help us have those sumptuous lamb chop lunches and mouth-watering tandoori dinners? A visit to Asia’s largest abattoir brings up a revolting image. In spite of its distinction of becoming the first government abattoir to export meat, it defies all concepts of hygiene as well as decent working conditions.

We are talking about the 40-year-old Deonar abattoir located to the north of Mumbai’s Govandi Railway Station. The slaughterhouse at the Deonar abattoir greets you with a heap of rotting cattle skin. The sight of

the crows pecking at decomposing carcasses may disturb many but the 63 men who toil daily in its premises are immune to such charms. All the slaughterhouse workers have been working at the Deonar abattoir for more than ten to fifteen years. Among the 500 employees currently working there, most are lower-class Muslims. Migrating from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, these people help serve the palates of the city with mutton, beef, pork and sheep.

As 56-year-old Muhammad Ayub Ahmed Sheikh, working in the abattoir for the last 30 years, takes me around to show the mammoth slaughter machine, he goes on to nonchalantly explain how the cattle is skinned and processed before cutting it into two halves. “But you must have blood on you?” I ask. He laughs,

“We are used to it. Once the slaughter starts, you won’t recognize us. We are covered with blood.”

To cleanse off the blood, the slaughter house men are denied even a bathroom to take a bath after work. The only thing they have is a row of taps inside a huge dark hall, their restroom. Though they work for eight hours, there is no facility for proper meals on the premises. The dismal picture of the empty canteen shows that they do not have a place to eat during their long hours of grueling work. The lack of basic infrastructure makes the working conditions appalling.

The workers are provided with uniforms, shoes and soaps as amenities. But are they sufficient? Rues Iqbal Kasim Sayyed, “They give us two bars of soap every month. But with blood all over us, it’s hardly sufficient. With our meager salary, how can we afford to buy so many soaps for ourselves every month?” Apparently

the municipal union that represents them doesn’t do much of a job getting them even these basic necessities. The slaughter men are paid around Rs 21,000 each month. Though provided with housing facilities in the nearby BMC colony, the decision of the corporation to deduct 30 per cent of their salary as rent has forced many of them to evacuate their quarters and move to far-off places.

The profession has many of them suffering from occupational hazards like chronic back pain, chest pain and in some extreme cases, even slipped disk of the spinal cord. The sight of the machine, with huge hooks to hang the carcasses, sends a shiver down your spine. The gigantic space through which the cattle moves hooked to a gambrel above, in a Fordian production system, has a haunting look. It reminds you of Frankenstein’s evil laboratory. Being part of this system means that the men have to stand for hours at a

“But you must have blood on you?” I ask. He laughs, “We are used to it. Once the slaughter starts, you won’t recognize us. We are covered with blood.”



Vikram Buragohain

stretch in a hot and humid space with blood dripping from their body. Often, minuscule bones of the bovines get into their eyes, causing partial loss of eyesight in extreme cases. But even though they are permanent employees of the government, they are hardly provided any healthcare facilities for their services to the city. With no medical insurance, they are left to fend for themselves. When asked about the medical facilities provided to the slaughter men, the general manager of the Deonar abattoir, Dr. Ananda Dhondiram Jadhav was evasive. According to him, since the abattoir was jointly owned by the BMC and the Maharashtra government, it was entirely their decision and he didn’t have a say in it.

At Deonar abattoir, 1.25 lakh goats and almost 20,000 bullocks are slaughtered for the purpose of Qurbani for Bakra Eid each year. But this number has slowly decreased over the years. Laments Abdul Khalil Omar, 62, and Abdul Qadir Fakir Omar Qureshi, 61, who worked at the abattoir between 1973 and 2007, “There was a time when 140 slaughter men worked during Eid in every batch. Now, the general number is down to about 60.” With the increasing population, the demand for meat has surely increased over the years. Then why should the production of meat as well as the number of employees go down? According to Dr. Jadhav, the abattoir made profit for the first ten years. But there are various issues, which resulted in the abattoir making huge losses after that.

“One was the fact that Indians like fresh meat and not processed meat. Our meat is taken by the licensees to various parts of the city at night and is sold only next morning. People consider this as stale and hence prefer fresh meat from the illegal slaughter houses. Hence, the production has been decreasing day by day,” he explained. There are almost 800 such illegal slaughterhouses in the city, in areas like Bandra Bazaar, Crawford Market, Dharavi, Null Bazaar, Grant Road Market, Dongri Market, Dadasaheb Phalke Road, near Koliwada Station, Lal Baug Market and Vikhroli Railway Station.

There was also a protest against export by various groups which sounded the death knell for these government abattoirs. The demand to stop killing animals for export also resulted in a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) being filed in court after Deonar abattoir became the first government abattoir to export meat. In March 2010, the Viniyog Parivar Trust filed the PIL to protest against the modernization process costing Rs 125 crore.

There were also reports in the media about the torture of animals, violation of the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals Act, 1960, and flouting of the rules relating to hygiene. There was a huge uproar about the indiscriminate flow of untreated waste from the abattoir directly into the municipal waste and the toxic effects of it (*Times of India*, Nov 9, 2010). People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) had shot videos on the basis of which they charged the BMC and the Bombay Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA) – which is responsible for ensuring the ethical treatment of animals during transportation and slaughter – with gross negligence and inhuman cruelty towards the animals brought in.

The slaughterhouse, which is already running in a loss, has been further setback by these incidents. Exports have stopped and the abattoir now only supplies meat for the local population. Though the court is yet to give its verdict on the PIL, the modernization process has been stalled and it has been decided by the BMC that it will be privatized and given to licensees. The process of hiring new slaughter men, consequently, has also stopped. It has been more than twenty years since the last slaughterhouse worker was taken in. All of them, now in their late fifties, are waiting retirement, after which the BMC will lease the abattoir to the licensees. The workers refuse to believe that monetary losses are the only reason for its privatization. As Muhammad Gaus points out, “Employing new men had stopped way back in 1987. What was the reason behind it then?”

These men find their profession extremely demanding and economically exploitative. There is a social stigma attached to the profession of slaughtering animals. There is not enough recognition of the role played by these people in our lives. It is a profession mainly taken up by Muslims. Being part of a minority community and taking up such a profession, they face double marginalisation in the society. With the plan of the BMC to slowly privatise all the abattoirs, the prospect of a permanent job in this profession will also be lost. The slaughter men will be subjected to further exploi-

tation at the hands of the licensees. Also, modernisation might result in making the slaughtering process fully mechanised. With the government turning a blind eye towards the fate of these people, what does the future hold for them?

Perhaps, the next time we sit at the table and eat our way through a *mutton biryani* or snack on a plate of *seekh kebabs*, it might be worth remembering the blood-covered Ayub Ahmed Sheikh and the many others of his ilk who slaughter animals for a living so that our dining tables remain full and our appetites satiated.

Kaikho Paphro



Seeking Refuge in Their Own Country

Seasonal migrants from Kashmir come to Mumbai each year to escape the harsh winters of home but life in Mumbai is far from easy

By Aakriti Kohli

*Qismat pe aetbaar kis ko hai, Mil jaye khushi to inkaar kis ko hai,
Kuch majbooriyan saath hain aisi warna, Is zalim pardes se pyaar kis ko hai*

-Ghulam Mohammad

While making my way from the Bandra (East) station towards the Nirmal Nagar Police Chowki, who knew that I would meet Ghulam Mohammad who would recite these lines to me in a choked voice. One side of the road on the way to the police chowki was lined with ‘Maharashtra Relief Camps’ which were distributing clothes and food for the residents displaced by a fire which had razed down their houses recently. Crossing the police station and walking towards the pipeline, one sees a gated concrete compound with high walls. Entering the compound which is a bit of a struggle, I see Kashmiri women huddled in groups sitting on the road, cutting vegetables, sewing and combing each other’s hair. The men on the side of the compound are smoking and sipping tea. A sense of lethargy and despondency hangs heavy in the air. The kids are running amok and they come closer to you with a glint in their eye, looking curiously at the camera, and ask you in Kashmiri, what do you want? I point towards the women and they smile right back at me. I approach them for a conversation and they point towards the head of the camp, a well built man in his 50s making his way towards me with a questioning look on his face.

The groups of people living above the pipeline and the ones across the railway tracks – driven apparently by abject poverty and lack of livelihood during harsh Kashmiri winters – have been living in shanties and sewers in Mumbai slums, surviving on menial jobs. This group and other similar groups, impoverished and unable to find shelter or work at home during the harsh winter in the Kashmir valley, travel to Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad in search of livelihood and a warmer climate. Since November these families have been living on the pavements and above a pipeline near the Nirmal Nagar slum adjoining Bandra station (East). They primarily hail from Kupwara and Baramullah in Kashmir. “Since the last six years we have been coming here, before that we would stay in Garib Nagar,” says 55-year old Ghulam Mohammad, the head of the camp here. Coming to Mumbai has been a recent phenomenon of the past six years for this group. Prior to this they would seek refuge in Delhi.

In the last few decades, there has been a steady pouring of Kashmiri refugees into different parts of India. They can neither be termed as immigrants in the real sense of the term nor are they taken as formal refugees. For all practical purposes they are seasonal migrants who are forced to find a new sanctuary due to the extreme cold weather conditions, lack of work opportunities, militancy and suppression by the Indian armed forces. Ghulam Mohammad says that during the war of 1965 the bordering areas of Poonch, Rajouri, Kupwara and Baramullah witnessed



Vikram Buragohain

large-scale migration to other parts of India as well as Pakistan. He believes that Kashmiris living in these areas have had a troubled relationship with the Indian forces and hence many of the refugees come from these areas. The assistance provided to the Kashmiris in Mumbai merely suffices for their day to day survival. Government’s limitations and lack of seriousness towards addressing their problems with sincerity is responsible for the plight of refugees and abject economic, social, educational and health related conditions. “We pay Rs 3000 as rent to the landlord for these makeshift rooms. They provide one

electricity connection per room on which we can fit a bulb. But we still do not have water,” reveals 27-year old Riyaz Mohammad. Their 6 x 8 rooms have a single source of electricity supply and the rent excludes electricity charges. There is a water tap in one corner of the compound, but it often goes dry. “We pay Rs 10 every day for a bath near the toilets adjoining the station. We fill water to drink whenever it wishes to come otherwise we buy portable drinking water for Rs 5/20 litres,” adds Riyaz. The flock here comprises mostly of *tangawalaas*, fruit vendors, farmers and traders. In the winter months when they are here, they eke out a living by trading shawls to showrooms in Colaba or their permanent customers, some of

well then they will spend half their life in Kashmir and half their life here. Either they get a good job here or they do some business there and get settled,” remarks 50-year-old Bismah Malik. Most of the kids take tuitions for the time being to avoid falling back in their studies. “There is this Muslim *Aunty* near the station who teaches us English, Urdu, Math and Science. We don’t learn Hindi,” says Feroz. Feroza Shaikh, the Muslim Aunty who teaches the Kashmiri children for about two-three hours a day charging Rs 350 per child says “We need to do good actions. I’m usually free in the afternoon and I can help them gain knowledge from whatever I know. God willing, they will grow up to be capable enough to sustain themselves and

Kashmir. We stay in rented rooms in different parts of the city,” says 35-year-old Sarajuddin Khan who is staying in a shanty at Nirmal Nagar with his 30-year old wife Nashima and four children. “It is not easy to get our entire families and restart our lives here and then after four months go back to our village and again start from scratch on our fields,” said Khan, a corn farmer from a village in Kupwara district.

Khan says that hail storms and snow destroy not just their fields but also their wooden houses. “We have no other option. The people staying on the plains do not have to migrate, but our village of 3,000 is located on the foothills,” he explains. People from Jammu or Ladakh do not migrate to other cities. “Weather conditions are not so severe in Jammu and the population there is far more prosperous than we can ever be, and the conditions are also normal there,” adds Khan. He is elusive when I ask him to elaborate on ‘normal conditions’.

The sense one gets after talking to them is that most of them would give an arm and leg to go back to Kashmir. They don’t have a huge list of grievances since they manage to earn a better living here and also remain secure which is a major concern as well. “You are aware of the conditions there due to militancy, it is risky, but what to do, that is our home,” says Khan. Most of them find it easier to get work in Mumbai in comparison to Kashmir and other cities but the woes of finding accommodation are never ending. “This is a very expensive city. How does one live? A family of four lives in one 6 X 8 room. There are many who found work but could not find a place to stay,” says Riyaz. Abdul Aziz Khan, who came with his wife and two children but did not get a house on rent. He lives in a shelter of tattered mats because he was unable to find a dwelling in Nirmal Nagar. “When I arrived here, all huts meant for people like us had been booked, so we live under the sky,” rues 60-year old Khan.

There are about 300 people living in this camp and a thousand more in the camp across the railway lines. A Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation beat post within the compound is manned by a private security guard, Mahesh Gaikwad. He has been here since the last three months. He ensures that no further construction or encroachment takes place on the pipeline. “They are allowed to stay here for a few months. My job is to see that they don’t encroach further than the rooms they live in. Also if a new family or a person comes in I have to ensure that they go and get their police verification done,” says Gaikwad. The Nirmal Nagar Police Station just ahead of the compound comes under Zone 8 and its Deputy Commissioner of Police, Satyanarayan Chowdhary confirmed this that the Kashmiris had all the required permissions to stay in Nirmal

Nagar albeit for four months only. Seasonal migrants are not new to Mumbai which regularly attracts several communities of migrants providing skilled and unskilled labour to the city. In that sense this group of families living above the Bandra East pipeline is not unusual. But conversing with them and spending time with these families makes one acutely aware that the migration to Mumbai for a few months every year has little to do with choice and much more to do with escaping a conflict zone in search for a life of normalcy. There are no absolute alternatives for them, since neither living in Kashmir nor Mumbai is a viable option. To say that they are in exile will be a strong word, but their sense of belonging and their bearings do seem rather shaky. Every year they escape from their homes to seek refuge in a corner of this mighty metropolis; every year they yearn to go back, hoping desperately that things at home are much better. Perhaps, one day they will not need to return to this city and if they do, they will come as passing visitors and friends and not as refugees without a choice.



Kaikhro Paphro

“ Again, I’ve returned to this country
where a minaret has been entombed.
Someone soaks the wicks of clay lamps
in mustard oil, each night climbs its steps
to read messages scratched on planets.
His fingerprints cancel blank stamps
in that archive for letters with doomed
addresses, each house buried or empty.
Empty? Because so many have fled , ran away,
and became refugees there, in the plains,
where they must now will a final dewfall
to turn the mountains to glass. They’ll see
us through them - see us frantically bury
houses to save them from fire that, like a wall,
caves in. The soldiers light it, hone the flames,
burn our world to sudden papier-mache.”

- excerpts from the poem, ‘The Country Without A Post Office’ by Agha Shahid Ali

them sell dry fruits and *zaffran* while others take up menial jobs to sustain themselves and their family. The women in the group don’t move out for work and largely remain confined to the compound and involved in household chores. Some however do needle work to add income to the family. “We don’t go out to sell our work. All the women in the camp pool the clothes and we give it to the men to go out and sell to big shops and sometimes customers come here also. Yesterday a lady came and took almost 10-15 shawls in one go,” reveals 37-year old Farah Bashir. In the camp there are a handful of children who huddle close to us and are itching to speak. “I don’t like Bombay, *bahot garmi hai*,” (Its very hot here) complains Feroz, Farah’s 14-year-old son. There is a complete shutdown in the valley for about 2-3 months during snowfall and this is also the time when the schools are closed. The kids spend almost half a year away from school and this is a grave point of concern for their parents. “If they don’t study

their family.” After a few cups of tea and biscuits, the group warms up to me and becomes more at ease. “We prefer not to talk when people come here looking for us. It is as if we are animals in a zoo who people want to come and gaze at,” rues Ghulam Mohammad. Recently officials from the Crime Branch have visited them twice, once due to an article in the *Indian Express* and the second time due to a brawl outside the compound. “We are scared to talk because we are expected to lay low, work slyly, bide our time, eke out a living and go away quietly,” explains 82-year old Peer Baba, the oldest in the group. The younger ones move out for work and the kids, women and the elders stay back in the day, “It is too risky to confront anyone and we need to protect our women and children. I’m too old to fight with anyone. Look even all my teeth have fallen out,” laughs Baba. “We are not beggars; we do odd jobs in these four months in Mumbai to sustain our families before returning to

Amit Mishra ka Haseen Bollywood Sapna

For every Shahrukh Khan who sets the screen ablaze, there are at least a hundred others waiting in an audition queue, portfolio in hand, with a hope in their heart. Welcome to the city of strugglers!

By Avadhoot Khanolkar

Kishenbhai ki Tapri

Kishen bhai char cup chai dena,” shouts Amit Mishra. People stand in circles around the *chai ki tapri* (tea stall). A few sit on old furniture or bikes. Some stand in groups of three, others in larger groups. This *tapri* right opposite Infinity mall in Andheri is widely renowned among the community of film strugglers. They gather here in the evening for *chai*, cigarettes and *gupshup*. It’s five o’ clock now. The sun is setting behind the mall which makes the light perfect for shooting a film. In the film line, this light is called the golden light. I am here with three struggling actors – Amit, Jeetu and Amrendra, who’ve been waiting for their golden chance for the last five years.

Over a period of time Andheri has become one of the important production centres of the film industry. All the major production houses and auditioning centres are here. All the strugglers are here. “At this *tapri* you will find all the lower middle-class strugglers, down this lane in Barista you will find all the rich ones,” says Amrendra, explaining the class divisions among strugglers. Our *chai* is ready. Amit passes the cup one by one to each of us; it’s also to signal that Amit will pay for the *chai* today. “When I used to have no money I used to quietly come here and quickly drink my tea. I used to fear that if I spotted someone known to me, how would I offer him tea? Now I have a job and can afford endless cups of tea,” says Amit. He looks around, finds someone he knows and offers him *chai*.

“One struggler knows almost all the

others,” says Jeetu. They have met each other at some or the other audition. They might not remember each other’s name but they remember the face. “Look closely at each of the faces here, they all are character actors,” says Amrendra.

In recent years, Bollywood has opened itself up to different kinds of films. This has opened up more opportunities for talented artists. However unlike Hollywood, the Hindi film industry still functions like an unorganised cottage industry. Any new person trying to break in finds the going tough. There is no single official window where one can get all the information about upcoming film projects. For that the struggler has to be solely dependent on his/her peers. “This is the place where we get to know about auditions, who is looking for what kind of face, who got through and all that,” says Jeetu. You don’t just get *chai* at Kishenbhai’s *tapri*. You get information that has the potential to take you to stardom.

Amit Mishra: “It’s the writer in me that’s helping me survive this city.”

Amit Mishra came to Mumbai from Kanpur in March 2003. Like thousands of others he came here to become an actor. But he went back to Kanpur in just six months. “Nothing was working for me, absolutely nothing,” he says. He returned back in November 2005 with the same passion and courage. However there was a small change. His name. He is now Vinayak Mishra. “Vinayak is Lord Ganesha’s name. Whatever I am today in this field is because of his blessings,” he says.

Vinayak Mishra got his first break

in a television serial called *Kya hoga Nimmo ka*. After an exhausting day of giving auditions at random studios for random television commercials, he was sitting outside Infinity mall when he overheard two actors talking about an audition nearby for a television serial. He immediately ran to the audition studio. He saw that they were winding up and was told to go back. But Vinayak desperately wanted to give this audition. The money he had got from Kanpur was depleting. “*Main yahan audition dene aaya hoon aur main audition deke he jaunga* (I won’t budge till you take my audition),” he roared at the junior team member. This was loud enough to bring him to the attention of the casting director sitting in the adjoining room. He called Vinayak inside, took his audition and two days later the role was his.

That small role led to a few others but financially it was tough going for the next two years. He had to borrow money from his struggler friends or sometimes even from their friends. But for how long can you be dependent on the kindness of strangers?

Once again after an exhausting day, he was sitting at Infinity mall. Casually he looked up at the building and saw a poster of BIG 92.7 FM on the top of the mall. When he realised there was a radio station in the mall, he quickly ran in to check if there was a vacancy for writers. He had worked as a radio-play writer in AIR Kanpur and had an understanding of radio. They had a vacancy. He had the talent. *Ganpati Bappa Morya!*

Since 2007, he has been wearing the writer’s cap to keep alive the actor in

him. He leaves the job if he gets an interesting project. And then goes back to writing when acting jobs dry up. Presently he is working for a television game show. The pay is good. He has returned all the borrowed money and is now ready to help other struggling friends financially.

Jeetu: “It’s all about (inter-personal) relations. Talent comes secondary.”

The first thing Jeetu did when he landed in Mumbai from Gorakhpur in 2004 was to go to Prithvi Theatre in Juhu. “One of the first things a strug-

borrowed money from his friends. Sometimes even borrowed in order to return someone else’s borrowed money. “*Yeh sab to chalta rehta hai*,” he says.

Amrendra: “I can’t wait for my chance, I need to create one.”

Amrendra has been running around from 2005 for his “*ek chance*”. “I had my share of running for auditions. *Bas aur nahi hota*,” he says. He has done a few serials and films. But the feather in his cap is the film *Ravaan*. He was one of the gang members headed by Abhishek Bachchan. “They edited

Bhojpuri industry. He wants to become a star of Bhojpuri films. “*Konse bhi industry ka star star hota hai* (Whatever industry you are in, a star is star),” he says. Now he’s not waiting for chances, he’s creating them.

In the Bhojpuri film industry, all the major heroes are singers (except for Ravi Kishen) as there is a huge market for music albums. Hence Amrendra decided to make a music album. He borrowed money from other strugglers and collected Rs 1.5 lakhs. With that money, he recorded eight



gler does is to go to Prithvi Theatre,” says Jeetu. “To look for work?” I ask. “To look for stars,” he smiles.

Among the three, Jeetu comes from a relatively weak financial background. He had to look for a job as soon as he came. “I soon realized that one can’t work and give auditions at the same time,” he says. So he quit his job in a year to concentrate on acting but soon realised that getting the right role is not only about talent, it’s also about contacts. “You need to know the casting directors, *productionwallahs*. You need to build relationships with them,” he says gloomily. To build a relationship, you need to attend parties. To attend parties, you need money for good clothes and accessories. Jeetu came to the city to become a star and make money, not to spend money and become a star. Presently he has enough projects to keep him going. But in tough times he has

my dialogues,” he says with a frown. He smiles the next moment and says that they paid him well. It’s impossible to catch anyone of my hosts in a sad mood. They bounce back within no time.

In 2010, while hunting for a role in the Hindi films, he got a chance to play second lead in a Bhojpuri film. He didn’t think twice before taking the offer. “I was tired playing the sidekick again and again,” he says. *Pyar Bina Chain Kaha Re* (There is no respite without love), his first Bhojpuri film was a hit. His family back home in Patna saw the film. They were proud of him. But after few months things went back to square one. He didn’t have any project in hand. Even though he played the second lead in the Bhojpuri film, the payment was equivalent to that of any sidekick character in Hindi films. In spite of that he has decided to continue in the

songs and in three days shot videos of all of them. Now he is looking for a music label to buy his record. “I met one recording company. Guess what, they are asking me for Rs 30,000 to release the album. I just can’t borrow anymore money,” he says.

Golden Chance

We have finished our *chai*. Amit pays for it. While we walk away we bump into another struggler. They know each other’s names. Greetings are exchanged. “Did you go for Dibakar Banerjee’s audition?” he asks. The three of them look at each other and smile. “I have mailed my portfolio to the casting director and they haven’t called yet,” says Amit. “Where exactly is his office? *Kal ek chakkar lagata hu* (will go there once tomorrow),” says Amrendra. “I have already given the audition,” says Jeetu.

Will this film give one of them their golden chance?

The Trash Kings of Deonar

What we throw away as garbage, they build a life around. For the rag-pickers of the Deonar dumping ground, trash is cash

By Joyashree Sarma

In the suburban neighbourhood of Govandi (West), every empty plastic water bottle is greeted with a thousand smiles. Mohammad Asif, Noor Mohammad and all their ragpicker friends at the Deonar garbage dumping ground treasure these used mineral water bottles, often picking fights with each other over them. After all they fetch the highest price in the scrap market, a princely sum of Rs 10 a kilogram. It is here at the nearly 85-year old Deonar dumping ground that the city trashes almost 70 per cent of its daily waste. Almost 4,500 metric tonnes of discarded polythene bags, broken bottles and eggshells, crumpled tetra-packs, soiled paper, tattered pieces of cloth, vegetable and fruit waste, and so much more find their way into the 112-hectare dumping ground.

earn their daily living by collecting recyclable waste from the dumping ground. It has been eight years since 34-year-old Mohammad Asif migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Mumbai in search of a job. Initially he took up the job of selling saris door-to-door but when that didn't manage to sustain him, he took up rag picking as a means of earning his livelihood. Today he stays with his sister and brother-in-law, who are also rag-pickers. "My family did not have enough land to feed the family and jobs were scarce, so I came to Mumbai. Once I started earning, I got my sister married and her husband joined me too," says Asif. Like him, there are several migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who come to the city to earn a living; many living in these settlements which are deemed illegal by the city's municipal authorities.



Kaikho Paphro

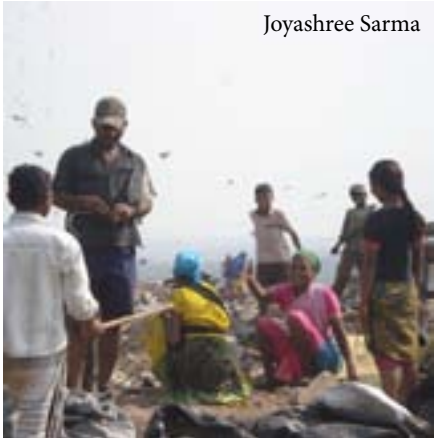
The high mounds of trash hide the brown earth and virtually shroud the city skyline. Crows hover overhead, packs of stray dogs loiter around as the overpowering smell of burnt plastic and putrefying garbage hangs in the air. One would think such an area is unfit for human habitation. But barely 100 metres away from the mountains of decaying waste in the settlements of Padma Nagar, Shanti Nagar, Indira Nagar – all unauthorized plots in the Baiganwadi area – live Mohammad Asif and his many friends who

Sheikh Mahmud, now in his early 40s, has been living in this area for the past 25 years. He took up rag picking as could not find any other means of livelihood. He says "I have no education and so had no option but to join the others in the dumping ground when I grew up," says Mahmud. Today his eldest daughter is in Class 10 in the nearby Municipal school. Though his wife also joins him in the dumping ground to support the five-member family, he insists that their children will not join the trade. "I have

never shown them the way to the dumping ground," he says proudly. Mohammad Omar Usman Ali Sheikh has been collecting waste from the dumping ground for 12 years now. For him the day begins at 5:30 am in the morning and by 6 am, he is at the dumping ground with his other rag picker buddies waiting for the first municipal garbage van to reach the site. By 1 pm the day's first collection is sold to the scrap dealers in nearby Gautam Nagar. By 2 pm, they are back at the dumping ground searching for treasure. While plastic water bottles are valuable, Sheikh Mahmud explains that metals in fact fetch a higher price but they are not easily found in the trash these days. So while segregating the waste, if they come across pieces of electric wires, bulbs etc they collect them for days, separating the metal alloy by burning, before selling them for a handsome amount. He further reveals that till some years ago one earned more from rag picking, especially from hospital waste such as saline bottles, pipes, tubes, cartons, and sponges. But now hardly any of that reaches the dumping site; most is disposed-off at separate bio-medical waste centres usually situated in hospitals itself. "Only household plastic waste that has been spared by the maids and helpers of the residential areas and the BMC cleaners reaches us," he says grudgingly. The rag-picker's daily earnings depend on his daily collection. Sheikh Mahmud earns about Rs 200 a day but spends almost Rs 50 on procuring two gallons of water every day. After selling the day's second collection, the rag pickers return around 9 pm to their single-room windowless homes. Some of these are held together by blue plastic sheets and gunny sacks, often lacking even a cemented floor. In fact it is ironic that many of their settlements have the suffix *nagar* attached to them, a term equivalent to the English concept of urban settlement, for there is little here that qualifies it as such. These

slums which are unauthorised as per the government have no water connection, no sewage or drainage lines and not enough public toilets. Most often the rag pickers have no option but to use the dumping ground like a public latrine. The women "go to the toilets that lie between road no 12 and 13 in Shanti Nagar and between road 14 and 15, close to Sanjay Nagar," says Sheikh Mahmud. However, these are not free and cost Rs 2 per visit and there is always a rush. Interestingly, the authorised slum-dwellers of Shanti Nagar nearby don't allow the populace of the unauthorized slums any access to their own toilets and keep them locked. "Why are these people treated this way, when in fact they should be paid by the authorities for the work they do in separating garbage?" asks the elderly Munna apa, who has lived in the area since the 1970s and works with the local non-profit, Apnalaya. She talks of the BMC's apathy towards rag-pickers who are restrained from entering the area from time to time, following which the non-profits working in the area issued them photo-identity cards in understanding with the BMC. "Many times, the rag-pickers are accused of setting fire to garbage in the dumping ground and earn the wrath of the officials and the residents of the nearby areas for causing pollution," says Munna apa. "But later investigations reveal that the fires are a result of the reaction of gases which are released by the decaying garbage." Apart from releasing toxic fumes, the garbage languishing in the dumping ground also contains harmful microscopic organisms which leave the rag-pickers vulnerable to respiratory diseases, skin ailments and other health complications. However, most of them deny suffering from any diseases. Kaushalya, a young mother of two who works in the dumping ground, says, "By God's grace, everything is fine with me." Mohammad Asif, Sheikh Mohammad and Mohammad Omar agree they have problems in

breathing but deny suffering from tuberculosis and other such long-term diseases. They say that they often get hurt by the metal hook which they use to scour and cuts and bruises from the glass materials in the garbage are common. Dr. Sameera (last name withheld), who has been treating patients in this area for the past three years, says, "Cases of tuberculosis, bronchitis and scabies are very common amongst rag-pickers. However, they will not reveal this to outsiders for fear of being barred from continuing with their livelihood." For the rag pickers, the municipal corporation and their officials are the demons with whom they fight for the supply of water, electricity, roads, toilets, access to the dumping grounds on a day-to-day basis. "*Sab chor hain* (everyone is a thief)," curses Mohammad Asif. But the other worry is how to fight the larger demons within the community itself, the "*dadas*" who siphon off the BMC water tankers and sell the water at higher rates or demarcate areas for themselves within the dumping ground and empty the garbage vans with their political connections and nexus with the police and BMC officials. With news of the dumping ground being leased off to private parties, the livelihood of these rag-pickers is under grave threat. However, for now the dumping ground is their '*mai-baap*' and the trash is a way to fill their bellies, at least for tonight. Tomorrow is another day, maybe the day they will find another empty plastic water bottle which will bring a smile to their lips.



Joyashree Sarma

From the North-East to Kalina: Nagas Make a Home in the Island City

As the Naga community establishes a presence in Mumbai, it learns to contend with ignorance and alienation

By Kaikho Paphro



Kaikho Paphro

As one walks down the lanes of the neighbourhood of Kalina these days, it is not unusual to hear Tangkhul Naga songs streaming out of a house. Or smell a whiff of pork being sautéed with *akhuni* (fermented beans). One might also easily bump into a person from the north-eastern states here, more often than not, it will be a Naga. It is as if this corner of Mumbai has been reclaimed as a home by the Naga community. “Kalina is now called ‘China Town’ because of our Naga dominance here,” says N. Talisunup Jamir, a superintendent engineer with the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), who has been living in the city for the past nine years with his family. There are approximately 130 Naga households in the locality of Kalina, which is about one-third of the Naga population in Mumbai. According to Toshi Ao, the former President of Naga Students’ Union in Mumbai, there are almost 1,500 Nagas working and at least another 150 Nagas studying in the city, all from a variety of tribes. There are over 25 different Naga tribes in Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and across the border in Myanmar. Hoping that the city would provide them with the best opportunities the Nagas come to Mumbai with an eagerness to explore the city. Yet often, this excitement dies down as they are

faced with constant harassment because of differences in their physical appearance, eating habits and dressing style. “Recently, there was an incident where a young Naga girl was harassed in Kolivary at Kalina. Following the incident, residents of the area under the umbrella of the Kolivary Village Welfare Association had a meeting where they openly told us that as we are fair in complexion, we look more attractive and therefore become easy targets for harassment,” says Leishipem Khamrang, a research scholar in Mumbai University who has been living in Mumbai since 1996. However, it is interesting that many of them have learnt to ignore or give a deaf ear to comments that they receive when they are out on the streets. “People call us ‘chinky’ or ‘Nepali’ and initially I used to be very offended but now I find it funny,” says Talisunep M Longkumer, an entrepreneur in Mumbai. “I’ve realized that only those who are ignorant and uneducated call Asian people ‘chinks’ or ‘Nepalis’. So I assume their geography is so poor they can’t differentiate between different Asian-looking people.” But other Nagas complain that despite having lived in the city for a long time, they still do not feel a part of the place. “I have been away from home living in different cities for almost 12 years now. Initially it was really tough but

over the years, I have started to relate with the people much better. But frankly sometimes I still feel alienated,” says Egum Nsarangbe from Nagaland who runs an online travel agency. In such situation, many people long for companionship and support from their own community, a space where they feel accepted and heard. “It is necessary to meet up with our own people not just for obvious social reasons but also for the fact that the emotional bonding is more vibrant and stronger amongst us. A better sense of belongingness pervades such interactions. Incidentally, this also serves as a support system for those who are new to the city,” says Chamillo Samuel Litingse, a manager at Reserve Bank of India (RBI) who has been working in the city for the last five years. According to Longkumer, with other people in the city, one is like a fish lost at sea, however by networking with one’s own community one can interact well and find better solutions to problems and doubts that one faces. For many students, it is important to come and be with other Naga friends and community as they get a sense of belonging. “For me it is important to meet up with my own people and be with friends from the northeast. This is one way I feel I am accepted, at least within my people,” says Visie Metha

who just graduated with a Bachelor’s of Arts from a prestigious South Mumbai college. However, there are a few who do not see the need to socialize among their own community in the form of social gatherings. “I feel it is simply a waste of time. When we meet for social functions, we do not get to learn anything. If one has to be in some intellectual discussions or discourse, that’s fine. Otherwise I feel it is not required,” says Raile Rocky, a final year Master’s student from Tata Institute of Social Sciences. It is interesting that most of the Nagas, students or those working, keep their relationships with other people from the city at a very professional level only. “My relationship with non-Nagas is mostly professional. I do relate well with colleagues and have no problem adjusting with them. After more than a year, I am already used to the struggles of living in this city; and hence have no apprehensions about being here for the long haul,” says Alan Vaca, a manager at the RBI in Fort who is from the Tangkhul Naga tribe. He and his family have been living in Mumbai for about one-and-half years. Marginalisation and discrimination, poor housing and labour conditions

characterise the lives of many Nagas living in this city. Finding a place to live is one of the biggest struggles. “The rent is too hyped up in Mumbai in comparison with other places in India. Rent is a killer and it’s so challenging to find an affordable house,” says Longkumer. Living in rented houses, there are places where more than five people stay in a single bedroom hall. “Houses and rooms are quite congested, students and working people are forced to stay together with students often getting disturbed,” says Ng. Star Shimray, Pastor, Life Resource Ministry, India who stays in Kalina. “Nagas struggle to live in such houses. Sometimes the water-supply is erratic so washing-drying clothes is a problem, with one person having to wash up for the others who are at work or study,” says Jamir. Naga youth are negatively impacted by the inadequate education systems, high unemployment rates, continued insurgency and various social problems in their home communities. They are frequently forced to move to other Indian cities to benefit from employment and education opportunities. Urban life boosts creativity and entrepreneurship among Nagas, who are particularly sought after in

the hospitality and BPO industry and are learning various skills to compete better in the marketplace. “Mumbai in spite of all the drawbacks is a world class city in terms of services, facilities and professionalism. There is nothing you cannot do out here if you have the will and dream. I think it is a good base to work here and learn,” adds Longkumer. “I like the hard-working culture of the people here and the fact that the city never sleeps. As long as you have the money, you can have all services you need in the city to do your job well. Movement around is easy at any hour of the day.” What is interesting to note is that many Nagas who live in the city plan to take back home the valuable experiences they have gained here. Adds Longkumer, “The notion of staying in Mumbai long term is not on the cards as the city is such a congested and stressful place. It is only good as a transit point, as a place to come, learn and leave with great experiences.” Whether in Mumbai for the short-term or long, one thing is for sure, Nagas are now going to be an enduring presence in the city. And the city had better come to terms with that soon.



A. Lohrii Francis



Kaikho Paphro

Holding the Key to the City

Traditional roadside key makers are thriving in the margins of modernity. But like most other way-side hawkers, they too suffer from the miseries of illegality

By Amol Ranjan

Sometimes dramatic things happen on very ordinary days to Haamid Ansari. “There were two men and they came in a car. Immediately they asked me to sit in the car and go with them. I asked them, ‘What has happened?’ They replied, “We have to break a lock, a young boy is locked up inside our house and we think that gas is leaking from the kitchen,” recounts Ansari. “I quickly took my bag and went with them in their new car. After a few minutes of a tussle with the door, the lock was broken. The boy was found safe and the gas connection was immediately switched off. I made a new key for them for Rs 150 and then they left me back here,” says Ansari, who sits on one of the footpaths of Bandra West and runs a duplicate key-making enterprise with his colleague Javed Khan. Surrounded by a duplicate key-cutting machine, costing around Rs 3000, assorted cutters, pliers, hammers, a bench clamp and a board displaying their mobile number, Ansari and Khan have been working at their trade for the last 30 years. They came to Mumbai from Aligarh, the city famed for its lock-and-key industry, in Uttar Pradesh. They are among the many road-side duplicate key makers who are found everywhere on the streets of Mumbai. If you lose or misplace a key or get locked out or simply want multiple copies of your house or cupboard keys, these are the people whose services you will solicit. Usually these key makers purchase keys in counts of a dozen or

by weight from Kalbadevi, Dadar, and Mumbadevi, where the hardware is imported from cheaper places in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh which have a lower sales tax. Ansari believes that his job is as important as that of any other professional like a doctor or an engineer. After all everyone at some point or the other needs a spare key made. So he is upset that “the police or municipality regularly come to drive us away as they believe we have no relevance at all to society.” Ironically, according to Ansari, they also come to them “when they have to unlock something or have to make multiple keys for themselves or their departments.” The reason why Ansari and his colleague are easily harassed by the local authorities is because they come under the category of unlicensed street hawkers. Not because they want work without a license but because as things currently stand in Mumbai (see box), they are unable to get a license to practice their roadside trade. Being illegal makes them vulnerable to all sorts of demands by lower level city functionaries. Often asked for a daily *hafta* (literally meaning ‘weekly’, but actually referring to a bribe), sometimes Rs 15 to 20, sometimes more. If you don’t pay up, you may have to cough up the official fine which is around Rs 1200 and of course lose your stall and tools. Then there are other kinds of troubles. While senior police inspector Sanjay Khaire, Trombay police station, claims

that key makers are so irrelevant in terms of size and level of encroachment that they are generally ignored by them, most key makers say they are a much harassed lot. Abdul Majid, a 30-year-old key maker who sits on a small stool under the bridge near Chembur Railway Station, remembers how six months ago, there was a case where the police suspected that a theft has been done with the help of a duplicate key. Then the police had rounded up all the key

in this city and people still come from the village here to learn and practice key making.” Mohsin dropped out of school and came to Mumbai at age 14 to join the league of key makers. Now he works with his 20-year-old brother, Hasan, and they generally get calls from already established clients or their acquaintances. While Mohsin does not attend to clients at late hours of the night except for occasions where the place is near or



Kaikho Paphro



Kaikho Paphro

Mumbai estimatedly has over two lakh hawkers and a mere 15,500 of them have a license. This is because in 1978, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) stopped issuing hawking licenses. Scholars like Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria believe that by refusing to issue new licenses, the BMC has effectively criminalised the practice of hawking in Mumbai. (‘Ordinary states: Everyday corruption and the politics of space in Mumbai’ in American Ethnologist, February 2011) Though most hawkers are illegal, says Anjaria, they have daily interactions with a wide range of representatives of the state. Between 1988 to 1998, the BMC collected small daily fees from unlicensed workers, colloquially known as a *pauvati* (receipt) system, whereby hawkers received a receipt after they paid these fees. It was a kind of proof of their legal presence on Mumbai streets. But a 1998 Bombay High Court ruling instructed the BMC to replace the *pauvati* system with licenses.

However, since there is a larger ongoing debate in the city, particularly among middle-class citizens groups and the state, about street hawking activity and concerted attempts by them to restrict it in its scope, the regularisation of hawkers has been on hold till the government approves the policy on hawking. This will bring several changes to the city’s hawking environment. In fact, as per the latest draft policy approved by the BMC in March 2010, no hawker will get a license if they don’t have a domicile certificate proving that they have lived in the city for at least 15 years. If approved, this will be a big blow to hawkers who come from outside the city to make a life for themselves in Mumbai.

makers of Chembur station area. Admits Ansari, “We (key makers) are not respected as some people think that we are involved in helping thieves to make duplicate keys for them. This is not true for all of us.” Munna *chabiwala* at Govandi station in fact is very careful. “We are wary of those people who come to us with soaps having the impression of a key and demand a duplicate key. Generally we decline their request,” says Munna, who is also careful when people tell him to break their locks or make keys for them. His usual practice is to go to the house and ask the neighbours first. That way he is assured that he is dealing with the real owner of the house. Even though keys are now being made with complex computerised technology, still the skill of the roadside key maker is in demand, says Mohsin, a 28-year-old duplicate key maker in Colaba, “There is plenty of work available

the client is familiar, Majid in Chembur accepts such assignments although it could be risky to go to unknown place at nights. Sometimes, it’s worth the risk as one could earn around Rs 500 on one such a trip, explains Majid. Almost all the men in his family are in the lock-and-key business for 40 years – his father Maqbool Ahmed occupies a small space under the same bridge selling locks. Despite the difficulties of practising their trade in the city, Majid says that business has been more than kind to him. About four years ago, he bought a small house with his earnings as a keysmith. More recently, Majid bought a new motorbike for himself. “It is nice to get keys (of the bike) which are not ‘made’ by me but ‘bought’ by me,” he laughs.



Kaikho Paphro

Sex toys on Mumbai Streets

Beneath the gloss and the glitz, there’s a quiet ongoing (and illegal) trade taking place in dildos and vibrators in a corner of the city. Unfortunately it’s not making everyone happy, with both the ‘toys’ and their sellers equally stigmatised

By Shweta Ghosh

If you’ve ever taken a leisurely walk along the beautiful streets of Fort, you might just find a little more than you expected. On these streets full of hawkers and matchbox-sized shops, between hairdryers and torches, an unexpected product category jumps out at you: sex toys. As you enter the cool, dimly lit lane of Mulla House, you see toolkits, radios, portable speakers and then sitting unassumingly right next to them several boxes and little vials with graphic pictures, cream tubes, dildos and vibrators. If a shopkeeper becomes aware of your interest in these products, you might find yourself caught in his gaze which invites you to have a closer look at the products, just for a minute or two. All this business is conducted in complete subtlety and silence.



A German advertisement by Michael Stich Stiftung promoting condom and AIDS awareness among those using sex toys.

The secretiveness linked to this trade comes as no surprise considering the legal ban on the sale of sex toys. Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code terms the distribution of sex toys as ‘obscene’ and offences are punishable by a maximum of two years for the first conviction and five years in the event of a subsequent conviction. The life of a seller of sex toys therefore is rendered rather unsure, as he negotiates his existence with policemen and society at large. Ratandeeep (name changed to protect identity), sells anything from none to five vibrators a month, along with other products, which give him a profit margin of Rs 25 to Rs 50 depending on the product. Most of the products are made in China. The most expensive products – rubber vibrators – cost up to Rs 1200. “There are times when we sell no vibrators at all. I have been selling these things for almost 8 to 10 years now. Earlier we sold them inconspicuously but today everyone knows that we sell it,” says Ratandeeep.

Sex toys, and products linked with sexual desire at large, are often seen as external and artificial, and hence not ‘natural’. The legal debate around the existence of sex toys probably stems from a certain anxiety about issues related to sex, ‘naturalness’ and morality. “It is indeed strange how any expression of love, desire or pleasure has to contend with the dominant moral panic that sees all this as a threat to ‘Indian culture’. Any expression of ‘desire’ has to conform to certain rules and codes such as heterosexuality, monogamy etc.,” say Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, Professors at the Centre for Media and Cultural Studies, TISS. Further, they add, “to invoke ‘nature’ in talking about sexuality and sexual preferences is to tread on dangerous grounds. Sexual expression is a complex and

personal choice and the category of ‘nature’ should not be used to delegitimize the use of sex toys.” Dr. Deepak K. Juman, renowned Mumbai-based sexologist, believes that the usage of sex toys comes often as an alternative to intimacy. “These products are used by people who do not have opportunity to have intimate, physical relationships. However, I would certainly encourage both single people as well as couples to go in for them if it helps them. It may prove very useful for masturbation while couples may use them as assistive devices to increase pleasure or just to add variety and break monotony. As long as the partners have the same wavelength, same level of enjoyment and involvement, I would never prohibit its use. It is much better than engaging in promiscuity, polygamy, infidelity or having multiple partners. I see no need for the government to make the sale of sex toys so problematic.”

“I don’t see why the government has a problem if it is making people happy whether Indian or foreign, old or young, male or female.”

Ratandeeep’s opinion, though simply worded, is similar. “Something like a vibrator is after all just a massager. A customer once wanted to buy a vibrator for his wife as he was going out of station. He thought that would be better than her going out of the house to fulfill her desire. I don’t see why the government has a problem if it is making people happy whether Indian or foreign, old or young, male or female,” he says. A commonly held belief is that sex toys are unsafe and unhygienic. Sex toys are made of different kinds of material including glass, plastic and rubber. Rubber toys have been known to contain the chemical phthalate in order to make them flexible, which is said to have side effects. The chemical is also found in several toys for children, pipes and flooring material. However, that does not go to say that all sex toys are unsafe. Post-graduate student Raju Hittalamani has an interesting take. “There is only a little debate in India about phthalates in toys for children, but the minute people want to refute the sale of sex toys, they come up with random arguments about its non-safety. For those anxious about sex toys in general, this becomes a standard excuse to brand them as bad. If there is a question raised about phthalates, it should be for all products and not just sex toys,” says Raju. Dr. Juman believes that the final decision to buy a product deemed as unsafe is on the customer. However, he suggests proper distribution channels. “If it is legalized, then the Government can set safety standards. Doctors can prescribe these products once the safety standards are met. But criminalising its sale will not serve any purpose,” he says. However, the toys sold on the streets are seen as questionable in terms of their quality. Rohan Hande, an advertising intern, says, “All the stuff here somehow seems like it’s already been somewhere before it was brought here! It’s all kept out in the dust and the quality of the plastic and rubber doesn’t look very good. I would definitely buy stuff on-

line, but not from here.” The increased reach of the Internet has resulted in an increase in the online sex toy trade in India by foreign and Indian companies alike. While this is good news for consumers of products from sex stores, it has posed a threat to the sale of sex toys by street sellers. According to Suresh, a seller of sex toys in Fort, since the last 4-5 years, customers check and compare prices on sex stores online and then come and bargain with them. With the stigma attached to sex toys at large, the sellers are doubly stigmatised by how they are perceived. There lies a certain fear in their minds, of being misunderstood and misinterpreted, due to which they abstain from interaction, especially with women. “Women come, but in smaller numbers than men. Yesterday a girl came to talk to me about what we do and sell. It gets difficult to talk to ladies about such things,” confesses Ratandeeep. Interestingly, the experience of the space and sellers by women is equally hesitant and compelling. Student Shweta Radhakrishnan who has often walked by the area, says, “The whole space feels so male-dominated. Once with a female friend, I went to just ask the prices out of curiosity. Some of them were businesslike and calm, but the others acted quite shady and gave round-about responses.” Although both men and women buy products from these shops, a large part seems to be male. A space such as the one inhabited by Ratandeeep and Suresh could, however, be termed as one of the few spaces that allow for the existence of relatively ‘rare’ sexual preferences, albeit more precariously than desired. According to Monteiro and Jayasankar, the dominant moral standpoint on issues related to sex and sexuality takes a toll on the possibility of a rightful claim to a free space by sexual minorities. Moreover, they add that our patriarchal setup privileges heterosexual male sexuality, and anything that does not fit into this project is not deemed as appropriate. For example, Ratandeeep and Suresh do not keep toys for sexual preferences even bordering on BDSM (bondage and discipline, dominance and subjection, sadism and masochism), which involves sexual acts seeking to inflict and receive pain and suffering. But since it is a business, they supply whips, handcuffs, air dolls, etc. on order, though more discreetly than in case of regular products. It is interesting to note how the dignified existence of a seller becomes inextricably linked with the way the society views the product sold by him or her. The survival of Ratandeeep and Suresh is deeply associated with the larger debate around sex toys, their legal possession and usage. The unease of the society regarding everything sexual makes them visible, yet in a disempowering way. As Monteiro and Jayasankar put it, “the most powerful sexual organ of the human body lies between one’s ears”. May be it is time we looked at sex a little differently.

Ulhasnagar & the Making of a New Life

Sindhi Hindus came to independent India as refugees from across the border. Many built homes and set up businesses in Ulhasnagar. However, though they have done well for themselves through hard work and talent, life in Ulhasnagar has been far from easy

By Sumit Singh

Prem Saneja first came as a young woman to Mumbai by boat. She never left.

Saneja was one of the over ten lakh Sindhi Hindus who migrated to India in the aftermath of independence and the partition of 1947. When it became apparent that the province of Sindh, which had flourished since the days of the Indus valley civilization, would fall entirely in Pakistan and as the Muslim refugees from north and central India began to move in, Sindhi Hindus started coming to India by road, rail and seaways. At the time of partition, 25 per cent of Sindhi Hindus lived in Sindh.

Those like Saneja who came with relatives from Karachi in 1946 escaped the riots that followed. “People ran for their lives to the borders of India to escape from the mass killings,” she recounts, even recalling how her relatives were killed when travelling from Pakistan to India by train.

In 1947 when Sindhis arrived in India, they found themselves hungry, homeless and unemployed. According to Prof. Dinesh Panjwani, the retired Principal of CHM College in Ulhasnagar, “Many people felt that the government would withdraw partition and they would be allowed to get back to their homeland, but this didn’t happen.” Those were emotionally trying times. Families had been separated – either members had been killed or lost in the riots. Many had lost businesses and wealth and found it hard to support their families.

Support came from the government in the form of refugee camps which were built to provide shelter but the conditions there were often miserable. Such camps were set-up in various parts of the country. In Mumbai refugee camps were set-up in Chembur, Kalyan and Ulhasnagar. According to Prof. Panjwani, “Sindhis were not accepted in this country, so the refugees were thrown almost 65 km away from the city to Ulhasnagar (Thane District). This was a military camp which was converted into a refugee camp.” Prof. Panjwani maintains that many Sindhis at that time also changed their last names in order to find acceptance in the country.

The living conditions at the camp were very poor. Water, electricity supply and finding enough space for everybody were the biggest problems in these camps. Lack of proper hygiene and sanitation caused lots of diseases and many people lost their lives due to tuberculosis, cholera, and also of snake and scorpion poisoning in the camps.

Many in the Sindhi community feel that they have been given a raw deal by the Indian government. Many migrant communities were later given the benefit of reservation in educational institutes and government jobs, but none of those benefits

were extended to the Sindhis. Till date lower-caste and backward Sindhis are not entitled to the OBC status.

Initially when Sindhis settled in the outer stretches of Mumbai, in Ulhasnagar and Kalyan, it was with a false belief that they would eventually be settled in Mumbai. But when that did not materialize, they started rebuilding their world in Ulhasnagar with whatever the government provided them.

In the year 1955, the Supreme Court of India ordered Maharashtra State to provide ownership rights to Sindhi Hindus who immigrated during partition. In late 1950’s, a Conveyance Deed was transferred to the Ulhasnagar Sindhi Association. Later the Bombay Housing Commission was set up, which provided affordable accommodation so that they could settle in the city.



Ulhasnagar is renowned for its small-scale jeans manufacturing industry. Photo credit: Sumit Singh

With the help of such measures, the community started to develop and soon set up their own businesses. Sewing and cooking were the main occupations of Sindhi women in order to earn a living. Making and selling *papad* was particularly common. Small industries flourished in Ulhasnagar; it became a residential as well as a commercial place for this community. Many Sindhis also got involved in the clothes manufacturing business. This also encouraged Sindhis from different parts of the country to migrate to Ulhasnagar.

In 1951, there were just 80,000 Sindhis in Ulhasnagar. In 2010, it was estimated that the population of Sindhi Hindus in Ulhasnagar was 400,000. In fact today Ulhasnagar is the only place in the world where such a large number of Sindhi Hindus live and

it is often referred to as Sindhunagar.

But as the Sindhi population grew, the demand for land for redevelopment also grew. According to Manish Mehta, a real estate agent in Ulhasnagar, “Land did not belong to a particular individual, so there was a big debate about the ownership of the land in this area. Government did not try to solve this problem as it was on the outer stretch of the city and Mumbai was not affected by it. Later the community itself decided that the ownership of the property belonged to those who were living on it.”

However, due to this problem planned development of the land never took place in Ulhasnagar. The absence of legal papers always restricted co-operative housing societies from developing in the area. Most of the buildings in Ulhasnagar have thus been built without any planning and permission. There is a general feeling that the builder lobby misused the lack of legal clarity as a tool to earn money from the people.

Eventually, the Ulhasnagar Municipal Corporation (UMC) listed 855 illegal structures and in 2005 started the demolition of these illegal buildings. The residents protested against these demolitions. The Supreme Court ordered a stay on the demolition of these buildings and the case is still being fought in the court. According to Neha Magthani, a student of CHM College, “Ulhasnagar city is facing a serious problem of congestion and traffic. None of the authorities were involved during the development of this area, now UMC wants to demolish buildings to improve the layout of the city.”

Volunteers at the Lal Sai Mandir in Sector 2, Ulhasnagar preparing for the parade and celebration to mark the end of the 40 day annual fast in August 2011. Photo credit: Kaumudi Marathe



Ulhasnagar, a satellite city, also faces a serious problem of road transport. None of the roads are in a proper condition and the maximum width of roads in Ulhasnagar is 25 feet. Several narrow roads are connecting the different parts of the town. Not a single highway crosses through this town. Even the State Transport (ST) bus station is very small and to use the ST bus facility people are forced to travel to Kalyan.

CHM College is the only college in this locality that holds a 4 star rating from National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Students travel around 30-40 km in order to reach their respective colleges in Mumbai. Many children travel at least 10-15 km in order to reach their schools in nearby cities like Kalyan and Dombivli. There is not a single college for engineering and medicine. It is felt by the community that the government is not providing equal treatment and facilities to several satellite cities. A large number of people living here travel to Mumbai for work daily.

Electricity and water supply issues have been a perennial problem in Ulhasnagar for the past 50 years. According to UMC, due to the illegal structures existing, equal distribution of water is not possible. Even now, there is almost 70 per cent of water shortage and two hours of electric load shedding is common every day.

According to Praveen Tendulkar, an engineer at Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB), “This problem is faced all around Maharashtra. The demand for electricity is more than the supply. But the situation here will improve soon since we plan to stop load shedding from this area.” Electricity theft is also one of the biggest reasons for load shedding in this area. However, according to the MSEB, electricity theft has decreased in the past five years.



Map of Ulhasnagar. Source: Google Maps

In spite of the presence of many industries in this area, it is not notified as a land under the MIDC (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation). This move may reduce the tax burden on manufacturers. The tax charged by UMC is much more in comparison to what the KDMC (Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation) and MBMC (Mira-Bhayandar Municipal Corporation) charge from their respective satellite towns near Mumbai.

In recent times, many chemical and polythene manufacturers have set up their factories in Ulhasnagar. In spite of the fact that there is a ban on the manufacture and sale of polythene bags below 50 microns, these factories have been set-up without any environmental clearance. This has increased a number of air borne diseases in this area, claim several local residents. At the same time, newer factories being set-up in the area owned by Sindhis is increasing employment opportunities particularly for migrant workers from different states.

Ulhasnagar has always had a reputation as an outlying area of Mumbai which was a civic nightmare. It has also been popularly known for its huge number of small-scale jeans manufacturers and other garment manufacturers and exporters. In fact, most *Mumbaiwallahs* recall how cheap unbranded jeans from Ulhasnagar were once sold with the label ‘Made in USA’.

Not that the label was terribly untrue. USA simply meant: ‘Ulhasnagar Sindhi Association’.

Grocer Lachman of Khubchand Pasari in Ulhasnagar’s Sector 2 stocks Sindhi food ingredients like *vadi*, *kachri*, and *papad*. Photo credit: Kaumudi Marathe



The Pursuit of Pleasure

A Photo-Feature by Kaikho Paphro Chachei & Pratik Bhakta

Pleasure can be found in the most unexpected of places. Between piles of garbage, in the space between two open gutters, in the palm of your hand. Momentary joy can be found in blowing bubbles, or racing through the by-lanes of a slum after an old tyre or in just letting go of a kite.



Children play video games at Wasi Naka in a half-closed video game parlour for just one rupee.
Photo by: Kaikho Paphro Chachei



Balancing the harshness of life with fun. Bhaura (top games), a much loved game among children.
Photo by: Kaikho Paphro Chachei



The ferris wheel is a favourite pass-time of children after school hours in Baiganwadi. A joy-ride for Rs 2.
Photo by: Pratik Bhakta

Life may be hard and uncertain, home may be a ramshackle tin shed, and public space a laughable dream – but still the children of M-East Ward around Baiganwadi, Sathe Nagar, Cheetah Camp and Wasi Naka find the time and space to enjoy the simple joys of life.



Aiming for the top: A ramshackle jungle gym adjacent to the dumping ground, perhaps symbolising the steep climb ahead.
Photo by: Pratik Bhakta



In Cheetah camp, children play with a spare tyre.
Photo by: Pratik Bhakta



Children in Sathe Nagar play in an abandoned factory site that they refer to as “company”.
Photo by: Pratik Bhakta

Following the Band Wagon

With recorded music taking over weddings, the going may be tough but Mumbai’s bandwallahs keep chugging along in grim times

By Anurag Mazumdar



Vikram Buragohain

Few of us would notice them for more than a second. They stand in obscure corners in dimly lit alleyways while the glitter and dazzle of the wedding party shadows them forever. They arrive at the wedding when no one else does only to wait patiently for the bridegroom to arrive in his chariot. Then in all the disarray of receiving the bridegroom, they are continually side-stepped. And still they keep their trumpets blaring, clarinets soaring, drums beating and their hopes fluttering. Even in the face of the worst crisis in their lives they are ever ready to bring a smile to the faces of the ‘baraatis’ (the wedding procession). They are the unsung artists of the city whose music drowns in the cacophony of noise that surrounds an Indian wedding. This is the story of the *baraati* bands. Their stories start from the distant villages of the country from where they travel to the big cities looking for better employment. Contrary to

popular belief they are schooled in the art of the *baraati* band from an early age. The training is often rigorous and involves a lot of patience, sacrifice and determination. According to Suresh Tamble, member of the Vishal Band, “One needs to start from an early age in order to achieve perfection when one grows up. This is an art form that requires you to practise for long hours.” The Vishal Band was started in a humble fashion with four members near Kurla station about five years back. Since it was started by a band member himself, people like Suresh found an interest to join the band when offered a job. But Suresh rues the lack of patrons for their art. While classical music receives a lot of attention and patronage they are often forgotten in the midst of all the music that surrounds them. Some say it is their lack of publicity that has rendered an air of obscurity to their profession. However, Suresh, who plays the clarinet and hails from

Latur in Maharashtra, disagrees. He says, “Coming from Latur I was always surrounded by musical instruments. I just happened to pick up one of them and learn the basics myself. Before I knew I was practising in my father’s band with the other regular band members. So for us it was never a matter of an exotic art form. It was a part of what we had grown up with.” Suresh’s voice finds support in the words of Shantaram Bhide who hails from Ulhasnagar. He has been a part of the New Brass Band for less than two months. However, the band has stood in the same position in the small office in Chembur for about thirty years now. He strongly feels that training is required but has his own reservations about it. He says that it would not be wise to give the clarinet or the trumpet to people under the age of eighteen years. “They are not developed for playing that instrument.” Shantaram had waited for a long time before he could play the

clarinet. He explains the intricacies of playing the clarinet while dressing up for his performance at the Ahobila wedding hall in front of Diamond Garden in Chembur. According to him the clarinet is one of the sweetest instruments of the band as it can imitate the voice of a female artist. It has twenty four keys which are very difficult to master. “If one can master the clarinet one can master any instrument as it is the most difficult instrument to play in the entire band.” Shiva Muni however would disagree. He belongs to the Vishal Band which is very close to where Suresh stays. He quips, “It is not very difficult to play the clarinet as there are lots of keys. But the trumpet is increasingly difficult as it requires a lot of energy in contrast to the clarinet that does not require so much energy after all.” He recounts stories of older musicians who develop bouts of illness where they vomit blood because of increased pressure on their lungs for insane amounts of time. Even though he does not play the trumpet and plays the clarinet which is less strenuous, he does not shy away from cracking a joke about the plight of the musicians who play the trumpet in the band. He says, “*Hum bolte hain ki upar ke sur bajate bajate ek din sach mein upar chale jayenge.* (One day we will make it to the top (meaning heaven) while playing the high notes of the trumpet).” It is these little jokes that bind these people together and provide the much necessary break that each of them deserve. Most of them live in the accommodation provided by the owner of the band. Venkat Nerale, who hails from Karnataka has no complaints about the place he is staying in. All he says is, “Sometimes there are too many of us in a room and it gets difficult for each of us to find a place to sleep. Then some of us move to the office downstairs and sleep there.” Most of these places meant for sleeping are atop the office room of the band and thus serve as a rest room for the band when they are not practising there. It is in these poorly lit run down rooms that the band members bond over music. Each of them comes from their own *gharana* and it is a matter of time before all of them start playing the same tunes. When they are not practising they discuss their families, most of whom live in the village, and make plans for the future. They discuss their wages which are often not sufficient for maintaining their families back in the villages. Anna Shripati Srinagare says, “It is rather difficult to keep your body and soul together during the initial days. One often thinks of switching professions.” Most musicians stick it out with the five thousand rupees that is handed to them by the band owner. However most musicians are hired on contract and are not paid more than two thousand rupees per month. Having been the bandmaster for the New Brass Band for over thirty years Anna Shripati thinks he has made a right choice by not letting his sons come into this profession. “My elder son is the manager of a bank and my younger son is studying medicine”, he gleams proudly. He is of the opinion that people who have some other talent or can develop any other skill should not

even consider joining this profession. This however does not deter others who want to join this profession out of their own will. Mohit Kudhe plays the *khanjar* in the Vishal Band and he is just eleven years old. He ran away from his home in Alandi near Pune to join his uncle who was in this profession. Looking sheepishly at the other band members who treat him very affectionately he says, “I want to play the clarinet when I grow up. I also want to be the bandmaster.” Mohit might be an exception but there are others who have joined this profession willingly. Take the case of Dilip Sinoon. Dilip is a student of a Masters course in Hindi Language and Literature from KSK College in Beed district of Maharashtra. He plays the trumpet in the band which he joined a couple of years ago. Even he knows the perils of working for a wedding band.



Vikram Buragohain

That is why he applied for the Maharashtra Civil Services examination for a government job but could not make it. But he is proud that he could make it to this profession even though none of his family members were in the *baraati* tradition. Most of the band members move to other professions when the wedding season – November to March – is not on. The Ganpati celebrations also keep them busy in the month of September. Apart from that they have to find alternate means of employment. Those who have migrated from the villages return to their villages in search of jobs. Others who stay back look for jobs in construction sites. Some are employed as carpenters. While the owner pays a salary to the permanent members even if the wedding season is not on, the contractual members are not paid during this time. Shiva, from the New Brass Band says, “It is during these times we feel like committing suicide. There are hardly any opportunities in the village. Who would go back there after living in a city?” The city is intrinsically related to the lives and professions of these men. While they don’t deny that the village is a better place to settle they also admit that the city has given them more than they ever imagined. Balraj from the Ma-

harashtra Dosti Musical Band says, “People in the city have become richer. Earlier they used to give us tips in hundreds. Now they give us money in thousands.” Their experience of the city is also linked to the charm of Bollywood. “Bollywood has used us in lots of its shoots. They are welcome from time to time as they pay us a lot of money,” says Suresh. He says he has been part of shoots for several films. He finds it funny appearing in films because all they have to do is stand in front of the camera and pose as if they are playing the instruments. In fact the members of the New Brass Band are regulars for the serials produced by Ekta Kapoor, one of the top producers of television soaps in the country who produced serials like *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*. They are generally hired by the event managers for a day of shoot where they don’t need to play their instruments.

Anna of the Vishal Band however warns them of the perils of falling in to the trap of event managers. “Event managers are the latest fad in the mar-

riage business. They generally eat up a major portion of the money and pay the band members poorly.” Trends are changing fast and the band members are only too aware of it. The event managers also organise the DJ (Disk Jockeys) on the day of the marriage thus undermining the importance of the *baraati* band itself. The bands had to include the synthesiser to combat the influence of the DJ and his electronic music. Though the older members would still want to maintain the pristine nature of acoustic music, the times are changing fast. This is evident in the selection of songs in the New Brass Band. The current favourite among the young is *Munni Badnam Huyi* from the movie *Dabang*. Though the senior members of the band scoff at these songs they are forced to play these songs reluctantly due to the demands of the *baraati* parties. “I would any day choose old songs of Mohammed Rafi as they had melody in them. Nowadays there is no melody in the songs. People just shout and scream,” laments Shantaram, one of the veterans in the Vishal Band.

These stories are nestled somewhere in the multibillion dollar industry aptly called the big, fat Indian wedding. Their tales are often brushed aside in the daily drudgery of life in the city. Their music is swept under our daily dose of digital music from our Ipods and laptops. While they wait patiently for the bridegroom to arrive in his car, they put on their glittery red garments with gold sequinned borders and get ready for their performance. They are hard to recognize once they put on this regal garb. As the groom arrives they quickly spring to action, their instruments come to life. The listless faces now become animated each with their own tune. Their own share of aspiration, hope and sadness follow the ebb and tide of the music flowing from their instruments. While the city lies unaware of their pain their music permeates its veins as they start playing their favourite song in the marriage...*Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai*..

Vikram Buragohain



Artists by the Wayside

Mumbai’s posh galleries are not the only repositories of its art, some of it is found on its pavements and it’s worth paying attention to its creators

By Shweta Radhakrishnan

Every day we pass by the work of several artists in the city without being aware of it. In little spaces, on crumbling walls, in cracks and fissures of the city, the nameless, faceless horde of artists try to speak through their art. We see their lives, their interpretation of the world around them, their expressions of their times and their surroundings and we remain oblivious to the hands that make the paintings come alive.

“If I’m not a Hussain, where do I go?”

The Jehangir Art Gallery is one of the city’s biggest art galleries. Some of the most high profile art and sculpture exhibitions in Mumbai have been held at this gallery. In many ways, it is the traditional Holy Grail for Art in Mumbai.

Outside the Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai sit a motley group of people. Some of them in kurtas and long, flowing beards. Others in jeans and t-shirts. Some of them walk up and down. A few are engaged in conversation under the shade of a flimsy little umbrella. Most of them are sketching furiously. All of them are artists. The cobbled sidewalk right outside the Jehangir Art Gallery is a haven for struggling artists in Mumbai. For those not so affluent so as to hold their shows inside the Jehangir Art Gallery, this pavement is one of the few places that grants them a visibility in Mumbai city.

The area has two galleries dedicated to struggling artists – the Art Plaza and the Kalaghoda Pavement Gallery. There are artists who are not associated with either gallery, who showcase their work along the wall of the Jehangir Art Gallery. The Pavement Gallery is supported by the Kalaghoda Association and the Art Plaza is supported by an independent group of Plaza artists and receives support from the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Both these organizations work with struggling artists to try and ensure that they get some place to showcase their work.

The Art Plaza is sponsored by Camlin. “For over twenty five years, we managed to keep it afloat without any sponsorship. But now, you can’t do without it, it seems,” says Ratnakar Nadkarni, a senior artist of the Art Plaza who has been associated with it for over twenty years. The Art Plaza is entirely free and works on a system of rotation and artists are allowed six days during one year to exhibit their work.

The Pavement Gallery right opposite the Art Plaza is slightly bigger and plays by slightly different rules. This gallery, run by the Kalaghoda Association, requires all showcasing artists to pay Rs 100 for every day that they

exhibit their work there. While that fee might deter some artists, others rationalise saying, “Hundred rupees is still better than paying sixty or seventy thousand to Jehangir for a week long exhibition. That is an amount we can definitely not afford to pay. When we pay, we can at least hope that we make our money back by selling a couple of our paintings,” says Kapil Kamble, a Pavement Gallery artist. The strategic location of these galleries outside the Jehangir Art Gallery ensures that they are able to gain some exposure and interact with an audience that appreciates art. In many ways, it also endows them with a certain air of credibility. Says Tanay Sule, an aspiring artist, “The first time I saw the Pavement gallery, I thought it was part of the Jehangir Art Gallery. It’s actually why I went through all the work.”

But these galleries get very little help from the established galleries that surround them. While the Secretary of the Jehangir Art gallery, K.G Menon states that it is a good opportunity for encouraging new artists, the fact remains that none of these galleries have actively done anything to help struggling artists. Even when established artists or art critics visit the Jehangir, at best all they do is browse through the paintings on the pavement but they haven’t extended any concrete support to these artists. “Many artists come to see our work. They keep saying good job and well done but provide no constructive criticism as such of our work,” says Kapil Kamble.

Another initiative that encourages struggling artists is the Wall project. As the website defines it is the ‘best open portfolio gallery’. Priyanka Kumble, an art student from B.D Somani Institute of Art and Fashion, who participated in the recent Dirty Wall Project in Sakinaka states that it’s an incredible opportunity for any aspiring artist. The paints are provided by the organizers themselves and while the project seeks to address greater issues faced by those living on the margins in Mumbai, it becomes a great way for marginalised painters to display their work. “It’s a great opportunity for any artist starting out because it offers you a giant canvas that is in a public space. It can be viewed anytime and since the artists’ contact details are also added on their part of the wall, it is possible to be commissioned for other paintings based on that piece.”

However, art critic Abhay Sardesai says that the problem lies in non-bourgeois spaces trying to emulate existing bourgeois spaces like galleries. “Pavement artists have the potential to critique establishments and institutions but all they end up doing is recreating these spaces themselves,” says Sardesai, who believes street art in India needs to be more daring.

“Even the government does not help”

The struggling artist in Mumbai has more than just the apathy of the art community to deal with. The first thing that most people lament about the art scene in India is the lack of an audience that truly understands and appreciates art. “More than anything, people’s attitude to art needs to change in India. A lot of people just mistake brand value

the opportunity for artists to come together and debate and discuss art.

Today any art that is not a product of the cultural elite is not viewed as art at all. To truly bring the hidden artists of the city out in the open, art needs to be democratised. “The creation of more street displays and more people-friendly galleries that give space to struggling artists will go a long way in taking art to the people. However, it is unlikely that the art market would support such initiatives as



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for good art. People tend to view art as something that is hardly profitable unless you’re an M.F Hussain or a Raza,” says Harshad Marathe, an illustrator and cartoonist. It seems that in India nobody wants to invest money or time in trying to encourage upcoming artists. The government has no schemes under which it encourages artists and even government sponsored painting competitions come with an entry fee which is more than what a lot of struggling artists can afford. “It costs around Rs 300 to 500 to participate in government competitions. Who’s got that kind of money?” says Dharmapal Kirdak, an artist who works on the pavement near Jehangir Art Gallery.

The lack of any investment in art also leads to stagnation in terms of style in Indian art. Most struggling artists do not have access to a formal art education and have taught themselves. This often limits them in terms of technique and style, explains Marathe. Politics within spaces like the Art Plaza and the Pavement Gallery are also stifling struggling artists. An artist from the Art Plaza mentioned that there is a strong Marathi lobby within the Art Plaza that tried to monopolise the Plaza and take more than the allotted six days for their exhibitions. More critically, the lack of any consolidated exhibition space has also limited

it works on principles of exclusiveness,” say documentary film-makers Anjali Monteiro and K.P Jayasankar.

“The biggest curse is that artists are not willing to help artists out,” complains Nadkarni. “Despite the fact that a lot of artists showcasing at the Plaza have made some money, none of them have ever considered giving a little bit to help other artists in their position. The bigger artists don’t even look back at those in the lower rungs.” Whether it is the semi-real cubism of Nadkarni or the raw energy of Kamble’s brushstrokes, these artists need to be allowed a space in India’s art world. Their hands must be allowed the opportunity to redraw the landscape of the Indian art scene.



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Searching for a Place to Call Home

First you reclaim the land from the marsh. Next you lay the ground, build the walls and raise the tin roof. Then a bulldozer mows it down and you start all over again. For many slum-dwellers, demolition is a nasty reality that steals away their homes

By Sharib Ali

For Salima Khatoon the entire nation state is different shades of yellow. Sometimes, it is the bright yellow of bulldozers and sometimes, the darker yellow of policemen and their *lathis*. And as far as she is concerned, they are almost always together. When they came some months ago, 35-year-old Salima was doing the dishes while her six-month-old girl lay next to her crying. She had been hearing the sound of noisy wheels and crushing metal for the last hour but had dismissed it as the usual cacophony of the bulky dumpers which regularly ply next to her house. In a

had only seconds to pack her entire life into torn plastic bags and disappear from the face of the earth.

In the next few moments, scrambling to collect her belongings, she would be pushed aside by a man in a dark yellow uniform. She would land on a stone, and her baby in front of the bulldozer. And while her husband would somehow be able to save her daughter, the bulldozer would run over her home and all that she thought she could call hers in the last ten years. And while she lay on the stone almost unconscious, all she could see around her were shades of yellow.

and the vast dumping grounds, the residents of Nirankari Nagar live on the edges of both. Though technically the residents do not live on the dump land and are registered renters to the Brihanmumbai Mahanagar Corporation (BMC), the expanding garbage dump, just like the expanding glittering city of Mumbai, has now spilled over in to their homes.

“*Ye tere baap ki zameen hai* (Is this your father’s land)? That’s what they asked me. I said yes,” says Salima, her eyes glinting with that quality of pain characteristic of those suddenly up

“*Ye tere baap ki zameen hai?*
That’s what they asked me.
I said yes.”

In February and March 2011, over 250 houses in the slums of Chikalwadi and Nirankari Nagar, the two slums on the edges of the Deonar dumping ground, were demolished by the BMC without any prior notice to the residents. Many residents fear that such demolitions will continue until the space is cleared out as the municipality is in the process of shutting down the landfill and has in fact handed over its management on a long lease to a private company, United Phosphorus Limited. Meanwhile, there is no talk of any compensation or rehabilitation to those whose houses were demolished.

flash she realised her mistake, and what the sound of crunching metal meant. Picking up her baby girl Salima looked out to find a string of massive bulldozers, surrounded by khaki-clad men, clawing away at a line of houses in which hers was just 5 meters away. At that moment, looking in the near distance at pleading, fighting crowds and whirring bulldozers reducing homes to rubble in swift, apathetic movements, she realised she

Salima Khatoon, along with more than 50 other families, lives on the edge of India’s largest dumping ground. This dumping ground in Deonar, Mumbai, which houses more than 10 million tonnes of garbage collected since 1927 – with about 4,000 tonnes of garbage dumped daily – also houses a small colony of people who have virtually fallen off the city’s map. Straddled between the housing colony of Shankar Nagar

rooted. Thumping her chest she goes on, “I came here in the early 90’s when there was no one here, and so did most of these other families.” Salima says her family was driven out of their village in Uttar Pradesh because of unpaid debts. Pointing at the row of houses next to her which have been demolished, she says, “Here in Mumbai, we came to survive. At that time the land was marshy with water up to our necks. Animals did not live

here, leave alone humans. Only every day the garbage dumpers would come and dump all that the rich folks had thrown out of their houses.” Salima pauses in her recollection. Her husband Rafique and neighbour Mohammed Ilyas, out for the day’s collection of scrap, have just returned. She continues, “My husband and I collected as much hard material as we could find, and working in water festering with insects with just our heads above it, we slowly pushed the water back, made the ground solid, and built a home on it.” According to her, their family was the first to come to the area and for the last five years, they have paid registered rents to the BMC. “And suddenly they come and ask me if this is my father’s land,” she adds with unmistakable anger in her voice.

Her neighbour Illyas nods and adds, “Every time the politicians come asking for votes, they say we will make sure your house is not destroyed. It’s been four months since the last bulldozers came and we have not seen them even once.”

Aamna Bi, a young girl of 16 from Kolhapur in Maharashtra, has just come to Nirankari Nagar after her marriage. “It feels strange to live with all this garbage around you. The water is not clean, and the place stinks all the time,” she says, talking about the sudden shift from life in a village to life on a garbage dump. “But what is good is that this very dump which is a bane for us is also a good source to fill our stomach. That’s the only difference. Here you know that if you work you will have food at the end of the day. The dump sees to it. But I am building a home, and I can’t imagine seeing it destroyed,” she says stopping only when the *azaan* from the nearby mosque calls the faithful to prayer.

More than 95 per cent of the population of Nirankari Nagar is Muslim, most of them manual workers or autorickshaw drivers. While some women work as housemaids to augment their income, the residents find enough to survive. There is even an

odd fridge or a radio set. Though materially Salima and neighbours have never faced destitution, what they really lack is permanency of residence and facilities like water and sanitation.

Aamna wakes up early in the morning to start for the water tap in the neighbourhood. After standing in queues for hours at a time, she returns home with a large blue bucket filled with water. And this is on days when they are lucky and a tanker is sent from the BMC for their needs. Almost all the time it’s ‘yellow water’ that has been literally sucked up from the ground using a communal electric pump. “We use this water most of the time for washing and bathing. But it’s poisonous and we cannot drink it. For drinking each one of us buys a can for Rs 30 every day or sometimes more,” explains Haroun Sheikh. “Most of us earn Rs 100 a day, and if we spend half of it on water, what will we eat?” But in the midst of their woes, the residents of Nirankari Nagar do find time for cricket and poetry. Mixed with the sound of the *azaan* is the hum of a running cricket commentary from a radio set. In between, one hears snatches of poetry spoken by refined tongues, sometimes by people with flowing white beards with that slight tilt of the head and in a manner reminiscent of the cultured families in Lucknow. It is difficult to place all of this together in place which is



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now just a huge pile of rubble (after recent demolitions). Young women, with duppattas over their heads and a sweetly flowing Urdu, speak from behind tarpaulins which they’ve stretched over their heads as a new roof. Children scavenge in the loose mud to find anything that resembles a plate or a saucer, or sometimes if they are lucky, a toy.

As I leave, Salima’s husband Rafique, a thin frail man of 40 who walks with a limp - the result of a childhood polio attack - comes over to chat. He points to his tin house and says, “This is the fourth time I have built my house from scratch. Like all the other times, I had to borrow almost Rs 40,000 to give a roof to my family. By the time I will repay the money they will destroy it again. It’s an endless circle.” Rafique goes silent. Then in a soft but firm voice, he pronounces, “But now it’s the end. I cannot take it anymore. The next time this happens, there may be violence.”

Hawkers: Fighting for the Right to Exist

On footpaths, on railway pedestrian bridges, at street corners, outside stations, hawkers in Mumbai vend everything from bhel-puri and fruits to toys, books and clothes. As much as their low-cost wares find a ready market, their make-shift shops also invite censure from various residents associations and law-enforcement agencies

By Manoj Bhandare

Day-in, day-out Jamir Ali lives with the rattling sound of Mumbai’s local trains. Standing on the pedestrian bridge leading to Kurla railway station, he earns a living by selling underwear. Occupying a space of 2 ft x 2ft, he has been there on that bridge for 20 years. His father and grandfather have stood there before him. At one time, they sold tea here, later food items like *bhelpuri* and *panipuri*, then cheap spectacles and clothes. The goods they peddle may have changed but the family hawking business on the railway bridge continues to this day.

Ali is one of the many people who hawk on Mumbai’s railway bridges selling a variety of cheap products to the city’s rushed train commuters. Everywhere in the city of Mumbai, there are bustling street and railway station markets and ingenious hawkers. Selling a variety of goods at bargain prices, these hawkers are patronized by all kinds of people.

In Mumbai, every main railway station junction such as Kurla, Dadar, CST and Kalyan has a lively street market. Kurla and Dadar stations have pedestrian bridges for rail commuters. On this bridge, there are many hawkers, some there since the last 40 years. Everything is available at this railway bridge market, certainly everything that meets a common person’s everyday needs such as vegetables, clothes, mobile parts, fruits, children’s toys etc. and everything is priced much less compared to the bigger markets and the malls.

On Kurla Bridge, the shopkeepers are from various states of India but all from the Muslim community while on Dadar Bridge, the shopkeepers are from more mixed backgrounds such as Hindu, Muslim, non-Marathi etc. Many shop keepers sell branded knock-offs such as Levis or Lee jeans, Calvin Klein shirts, Adidas and Reebok shoes etc. For working-class people who are not able to buy the expensive brands from a big mall, these street shop-keepers are a boon giving them an opportunity to buy goods just like those in the branded stores but at really low prices.

On Kurla bridge, the market starts around 10 am and closes at 1 pm. It then reopens in the evening around 5 pm and closes at night at 11.30 pm. This is the schedule from Monday to Saturday. The shopkeepers manage to keep their shops open in spite of threats from the police. It is illegal to run a shop on the pedestrian bridge as that is meant for the convenience of the public to walk. If they



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see a policeman, the hawkers usually pick up their stuff and run from the bridge only to return when the cops go away. In many cases, hawkers admit to paying a regular bribe to the police officers to keep running their makeshift shops. But Sundays and holidays are the best. They open their shop for the whole day then because the police and railway department staff are on leave that day.

The Dadar bridge market opens from 10 am to 11 pm. Since on an average thousands of people cross Dadar junction everyday, this is an extremely busy market. Hawkers here claim to have to have their own middle-men to deal with keeping the police away. But no source was willing to go on the record to confirm this. Their illegality and

not being recognised in the eyes of the law makes them vulnerable to exploitation by state functionaries (See the box on Page 17 for more on the political debate about hawkers in Mumbai).

“The police harass us but we can’t do anything,” complains Asharaf Qureshi, a 26-year-old hawker on Kurla bridge, who retails mobile phone accessories such as covers, earphones, and battery chargers. He recalls an incident when he had to stay in the police lock-up overnight because he was unable to close his shop on time. Earlier, Qureshi has tried jobs in a courier company and a bank but none of those jobs worked out. “Now I am happy with this work. Everyone uses a mobile, so I always have customers,” he says.

Ashok Sarvade, a 30-year-old hawker from Latur district of Maharashtra, had a similar experience in the job market. He tried working in factories but found little room for growth or promotion there. So nine years ago, after being disillusioned with opportunities in the formal job market, Sarvade started a footwear shop on Dadar Bridge.

Asim Khan may be only 20 but he has been working for a long time. He started working after the sixth stand-



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ard, at first as a mall helper, then in a cloth centre. Later, he assisted someone run a shop and since the last two years, he has had his own multi-brand undergarment store on Kurla bridge. He says that most hawkers buy their material at wholesale rates from Ulhasnagar and Masjid Bunder markets. Most often they buy the cheaper Chinese goods and export surplus or slightly defective clothing. While all kinds of people buy from them, it’s the working class families that find them most reasonable and useful.

Agrees Jamir Ali, “We face many problems – from the police but also from customers. So often, customers just browse among our products, they ask the price of this and that, they don’t buy anything only irritate us.” Says Sarvade, “The relationship which we share with our customers is professional, it’s restricted to the business transaction we do. There is no personal interaction with customers.”

Shailajanand, a 30-year-old graduate from Kolkata moved to hawking

“No one cares for us, we do not exist for the government or the people.”

“We are also lower-class like the people who buy from us,” says Bhushan Kumar, a railway bridge hawker from Uttar Pradesh. “But they don’t think about us, how we make ends meet. They want to buy things at a very low price so they bargain a lot with us. So if we get a shirt in wholesale for Rs 80, we sell it at Rs 100 but our customers want it at Rs 60 or 70. How can we sell it at that price?”

when he could not get any other job. “No one cares for us, we do not exist for the government or the people,” he says remorsefully. “In our daily interactions, we talk to many people. We stand for hours at a stretch, we stand besides the goods we sell. But for most people we are invisible, we don’t exist, only our cheap products do.”

Lal Topiwallas: At Your Ear’s Service

Traditional ear cleaners are now an almost extinct breed of Mumbai’s service professionals. Care to lend them your ears?

By Sandeep Singh

There are myriad art forms, from the very subtle ones like writing to the extremely evocative ones like music and other performing arts. But seldom do we talk about art forms that are not institutionalised or canonised. Such as the art of getting ears cleaned by professional ear cleaners. And there is a clan among them, colloquially referred to as *Lal Topi Wallahs*, who believe that cleaning ears is a highly evolved art form that deserves due credit.

“We have been cleaning ears since the last seven generations and we consider it an art,” says 46-year-old Kartaal Ahmed, who has cleaned ears for the last 29 years and wishes to continue doing so for the rest of his life. “It’s in my blood, it’s hereditary. My forefathers have been doing this from the era of the kings,” he explains.

In fact, in princely India it was rumoured that if somebody wanted to know the latest gossip about the king and the court in Delhi, they either went to the barber (*Hajam*) or the ear cleaner (*Kaan Maeliya*). Over a long period of time, a red turban became their identification. This tradition of wearing a *lal topi* dates back to the Mughal era, when it was part of a weekly treat to have the ears cleaned and oiled. The ear cleaners, along with the barbers, were trusted by the emperors because they were the only ones who could twitch the king’s ears and live to tell the tale! Unfortunately today, the *kaan maeliye* are a vanishing breed. With changing times their numbers have been declining and *Lal Topi Wallas* can only be found on the roadside in a few cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Meerut. They have a regularised schedule of visiting different parts of the city and fixed spaces to sit and solicit customers. In Mumbai one can spot them at the Veer Jijamata Udyaan in Byculla and Makhmali Talab in Thane because of their bright red turbans.

Besides the red turban they also carry a small shoulder bag or a steel box that holds their ear cleaning tools. The steel instrument used for cleaning is thin and spindly. One end of the instrument is wrapped in small wad of cotton and inserted into to ear. The ear-cleaner rotates his instrument in the ears for a while and withdraws, removing wax in the process. This is generally followed by oiling the ears with mustard oil. If a foreign body has to be extricated from the ear, then the cleaner uses a special tool with a tiny hook at one end.

The ear cleaners mainly carry two instruments (*auzaar*),



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one a needle (*chimti*) and the other a cleaner (*salaai*) for the job. *Chimti* is a long needle like object which is slightly flat at one end and this is used to slice through the wax and scoop flakes out of the ears. The *salaai* is used for cleaning the ear and applying oil. They claim that the oil is ayurvedic, usually it is mustard oil mixed with garlic and turmeric powder. In between clients, they wipe their instruments with locally made disinfectants.

Today most people use ready-made ear buds at home and that has adversely affected the ear cleaners business, admits 27-year-old Tahir Hussain who claims that the secrets of professional ear cleaning have been passed down several generations in his family. For the last eight years right after sowing seeds in his farm in Karnataka, Hussain comes to Mumbai to practice ear cleaning outside the Byculla zoo. Four months later, he goes back to harvest his crop.

The *lal topi wallas* at the zoo sit together and service regular customers who drop by once in a week to get their ears cleaned. “I’ve been coming to get my ears cleaned for over three years now and have never had any injury or any other problem,” says Kamlesh Sawant, a regular customer of Hussain. In a day they get around 10-15 customers but on weekends the number increases to around 25 customers. For a service of about ten minutes they charge Rs 20 advising clients to visit them at least once in two weeks. Al-



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though it is a part-time profession for some of them, they ensure that when some of them go back to the village there is another group left here to serve customers. “This maintains our customers and also ensures our fixed place for customers to visit,” explains Raja Mundhary, an ear cleaner in By-culla. But the customer base of such road-side ear cleaners, who usually train under their fathers or senior relatives, is dwindling rather than expanding and for this they blame ENT specialists who advise people against visiting them. Dr. Milind G. Ruke, an

process whereby the excess wax is sucked out and no insertion is involved. But Munawar Alam who has practised ear cleaning for 15 years dismisses any such fears. The 30-year-old who sits outside Byculla’s Gloria church however, says, “It’s not true. Even doctors come to us to get their ears cleaned. This is an art that has been handed over to me by my forefathers. My hand is better than a doctor’s.” He, however, admits that finding new customers is very difficult. “This raises questions about our centuries-old practice, we are capable of

Shripal who came to Mumbai from Moradabad in 1999 and settled near Makhmali Talab in Thane. “It’s easier here, there are others (referring to oil massagers, corn healers and traditional Jaundice doctors) like us.” Lal Topi Wallas are a professional community who face a hostile situation due to the apathy of the government as well as advances in modern medicine. Even though a group of them lives together, they are not attached to an association or union and thus have no official forum through which they can demand any professional privileges or rights. “If we had



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ENT specialist and a consultant at Joy Hospital, says that he gets at least two patients every week with ear drum perforations caused by ear cleaners. “The ear cleaners insert objects that are sharp and they clean the ear without seeing inside the ear. This visionless cleaning increases the chances of perforation of the ear drum,” he says. Moreover as the same instruments are used to clean many ears, doctors warn that the chances of fungal infection during the hot and humid months is very high. Generally doctors clean the ears by the “syringing”

doing what a doctor can’t,” counters Kartaal, who incidentally wants his son to become a doctor so that he can practice modern medicine and also marry it with traditional practices of healing. The traditional ear cleaners hawk their services on the streets, mostly around popular tourist spots. “Unfortunately, the police do not allow us to sit at places like Colaba and Gateway of India where there are more tourists and potential customers,” complains 33-year-old Shripal Singh. Ear cleaning is a full time profession for

better instruments, a fixed place to sit and maybe some more training, then we could have more and newer customers,” rues Shripal, who like many other Lal Topi Wallas insists that their knowledge of the human ear far surpasses any scientific progress on the subject. As things now stand, the kaan maeliye may soon become a man consigned to history books, his art deemed a mere amusement of Indian royalty and his trade one of many that is eventually erased from the memory of the city.

Maximum City’s Forgotten Builders

Each winter, brick makers flock to Mumbai to craft the bricks that build our homes. But their own life is stuck in a cycle of poverty and debt, ill-health and hopelessness

By Devendra S. Ghorpade

Every year at the end of November, the brick makers come to Mumbai. They work here for six months and soon after April they go back to their villages. Though they work in the city for almost half the year, rarely does anyone notice them; their arrival and departure from the city is barely noted. Meanwhile during this period they have been busy working for the city, using their hands to make millions of bricks which get used in the hundreds of towering buildings that are under construction at any given point all over Mumbai. Their labour is very valuable to the city, their bricks the building blocks to its future yet the hands that craft those bricks and the people who sweat in the kilns are virtually invisible to the larger Mumbai city.

Seasonal work

The labourers who work in the brick factories in and around Mumbai come from the tribal areas of Nashik, Jalgaon, Javar Wada, and other parts of Maharashtra. They mostly belong to poor tribes which are landless and below the poverty line. They work as farm labourers in the rainy season till October and after that due to paucity of paid work in the village, they come to the towns and cities for work. Traditionally they have learnt the art of brick-making and often the whole family works as labour at a brick-making factory, often for many generations. “My grandfather worked at a brick-making factory, at that time we also went with our parents to Kalyan, so I learnt to make bricks during my childhood,” says Sakharam Atram, a 48-year old brick maker. His whole family has worked in a brick factory for the past ten years.

In Mumbai, tribals from the Katkari, Gonds, Gawari, and Agri community work in the brick factories. Some upper-caste Maratha and Kunbi groups are also involved in this work. Ashok Bhagat, a 21-year-old owner of a brick factory says, “I have a group of Adivasi labourers from Nashik. They are my permanent labour, every year they come to me for work. I choose these people because they work very hard and in this field, hard work is very important. They are also honest and never cheat me.”

Cycle of poverty

At a brick factory, the same group of workers come to work for the same owner every season. Usually these groups are couples of the same caste or tribe. In a group, four to eight couples work together. Every worker group has a leader

known as the mukaddam, who is responsible for the group and takes decisions regarding payment, work area and job profile. Owners of brick-making units say that in many cases the brick workers are exploited by the mukaddams. “Earlier there was no mukaddam, so we directly dealt with the workers but with the mukaddams there is always a fear of being cheated as it has happened in the past. Some of them take advance money from us to pay the workers and never come back,” says Pundlik Mhatre, 48, owner of a brick factory at Asudgaon. According to him mukaddams are often responsible for the exploitation of the labourers as they take enough money from the brick factory owners but do not distribute it among the workers and there is constant fighting between them due to this.



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Usually a labourer earns Rs 2 for making one brick and in a season they made about 50,000 to one lakh bricks. “The owner of the brick factory always tries to take more and more work from us on very low wages. The owner gives the money to the *mukaddams* and we get peanuts in return for our hard work,” says Uttam Kamble, a 34-year-old labourer from Jalgaon. “We have no power to negotiate better wages and since we don’t have any other skills we are stuck in this field.”

The relationship between the brick workers and the owner is also reminiscent of the *jagirdari* system – where the worker remains tied to the same owner due to a relationship based on debt and gratitude. Here, the owner gives each family a ‘*Pavasali Bhatta*’, an advance amount during the rainy season because they don’t have other lucrative work options. The owner also gives them money for their festivals in advance. When they come to work, this amount

Most often they live at the brick making site in deplorable situations with no proper access to basic facilities like water and sanitation. At the factory site, the labourers make huts from grass and plastic sheets. They live in the dark because they usually don’t enjoy any power supply.

While living at the brick-making factory site, they and their families, including small children, face several health-related problems. The air near a brick factory is polluted and thus respiratory ailments are common. Many brick workers and their families suffer from tuberculosis, often even dying due to the disease. No one takes responsibility for their deaths, neither the owner of the factory nor the government.

The condition of women brick workers is even more precarious. While they work equally to men at the factory sites, their wages are usually lower. The women mix the mud for bricks; they collect them and arrange for the baking. At the same time, they also perform house-hold work



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is deducted from their wages which makes the money they receive at the end of a season of brick making very small. So they have to once again borrow money from the owner for surviving the next season. This way the workers always remain obligated to the owners and never manage to free themselves from the vicious cycle of debt.

Hazardous work

The brick-makers that build this city are not just invisible, they are also exposed to several workplace hazards and unsafe conditions of living and working. The brick-workers spend days and nights constructing a building for others but the irony of the situation is that they themselves are actually homeless.

like cooking, taking care of children, and another family responsibilities. Dr D P Singh, in his study on women workers in the brick kiln industry in Haryana, says that women are that half of the work-force who has to take care of both production and reproduction due to the economic constraints.

Sexual harassment in their field of work is apparently also common. “We are poor and helpless, who is interested in our harassment?” asks a 55-year-old woman labourer, who does not wish to be named. “Police station and courts are of no respite. We always live in fear of losing our jobs. No one will ever give us job if we complain about harassment from the owner or the site supervisor.”



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Future generation

In the shadow of the tall buildings that they build, the future of the children of brick-workers is dark and grimy. Most of them end up living in the same deplorable condition with limited access educational facilities and almost no opportunities to learn other skills. Since their families are constantly on the move from the village to the city, and then from one building site to another, often children are not able to complete their education. From a young age children are made to help out the parents – collecting fire-

wood and water and looking after younger siblings while the parents work on site. Sometimes to supplement family wages, they also get involved in the work themselves such as in the making of mud blocks. But the children get paid very low wages and sometimes they work without wages. “I want to go to school, but Baba does not allow me,” says Rahul Kamble, a 9-year -old who works at a brick making site in Mumbai.

Can we be hopeful of a better future for Rahul and his friends? Or will their dreams only be another brick in the wall.



Vikram Buragohain



Vikram Buragohain



Kaikhoo Paphro

Safai Kamgars: Giving Dignity to the Hands that Clean the City

Our antiquated colonial sewage disposal system is maintained by them. Our streets are swept clean by them. Our garbage is taken away by them. Yet, we barely acknowledge the work of the *safai kamgars* and accord them the respect they deserve

By Raju Hittalamani

The long road leading to Shivaji Nagar from Govandi station wears a deserted look in the early hours of the morning but for two figures slowly progressing along the street with a small pushcart and a long broom. The rest of the world might be asleep or getting ready for a jog or a job but at 5.45 am, 52-year-old Ravan Bhasole with a broom in his hand and 48-year-old Kamala Bamne pushing a garbage hand-cart are already hard at work. The city does not give due recognition to their work, usually designating them in the lowest category of unskilled labour. By virtue of the work that they do, they often carry the stigma of being unclean themselves. But it is their daily drill of sweeping the streets and collecting the garbage that keeps our neighbourhoods and streets clean and makes the metropolis a more habitable and livable place.

Bhasole and Bamne belong to a community of workers who are found in every city and village of India – they are the ‘Safai Kamgars/Karamcharis.’ They are often dis-

respectfully referred to as the ‘Class IV’ employees of the local municipality by higher officials and others. There are more than one lakh *safai kamgars* (Cleaning Workers) in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). According to 2007 statistics, only 22,000 of the one lakh *safai kamgars* are permanent workers drawing a monthly salary and other benefits. There are a large number of non-permanent workers who work on a contractual basis. This means that they are at the mercy of contractors for their salaries and other things related to work. The meager pay for contractual workers ranges from Rs 50 to Rs 80 per day. Every contract worker lives in the hope that someday he/she will become a permanent, regularised worker of the BMC.

Several reports and studies carried out on the working conditions of the *safai kamgars* clearly maintain that a majority of them work for ten hours or more a day. Often their working conditions (such as cleaning sewage pipes, entering manholes to remove the deposited sludge) are dangerous to their life and health. According to a study by Vivek P.S. on the ‘Scavengers of Mumbai’ (<http://www.ambedkar.org/News/hl/Scavengers.htm>), it is the scavengers – now more often referred to as the *safai karamcharis* – who maintain the complicated sewage disposal system of Mumbai, a task that at times involves serious risks and calls for much courage.

In most of the island city, the sewage pipelines that carry the waste coming from houses, offices and other commercial and non-commercial establishments are ancient, and were laid during the British colonial times. Thus there are often problems relating to the blockage or breakage of pipelines at different places. The workers are then sent to do repairs and have to immerse themselves in sewers with little thought paid to their own safety and health. Though gloves and facemasks are provided in some of the cases,

much of the work is done with bare hands even today. According to the government’s own shocking statistics, about 25 *safai karamcharis* die every month in 14 out of the 22 BMC wards and this does not account for the large number of contractual workers. The deaths are mainly due to lack of any specific safety equipment and training by the BMC. More often than not, the death or injury of a BMC worker inside a manhole or a sewage pipe filled with filth, human excreta and hazardous gases rarely hits the headlines.

Intervention by various political parties on the plight of the *safai karamcharis* has been dismally limited in its extent and nature. The parties limit their agenda to regularization of contractual workers of the BMC or at the most to demanding an increase in the salaries and other perks but sadly they haven’t taken up issues relating to the working conditions and health concerns of the *safai karamcharis* in Mumbai. It is only during elections that we come across



Kaikhoo Paphro

The death or injury of a BMC worker inside a manhole or a sewage pipe filled with filth, human excreta and hazardous gases rarely hits the headlines.

oblique references to their plight. Once the canvassing and campaigning ends, they and their issues are relegated to the ranks of invisible citizens of this country who ask questions but find that there is no one to provide them answers.

The working conditions of the *kamgars* and their very nature of work should shame any sensible society but perhaps society prefers to keep itself aloof from the problems of its own people. These are people who have been historically treated as outcasts and even today find themselves at the margins of society.

The lack of interest from government and civil society in general is due to the socio-religious and cultural stigma

attached to the occupation/profession of cleaning. Since the work is ‘dirty’, the people who do it are also considered ‘unclean’ or ‘filthy’. This leads to the process of segregation and oppression towards them. The communities that are involved in the BMC cleaning jobs are mostly from castes that were historically considered untouchables/outcasts in India.

The very way in which the houses of the majority of the *safai karamcharis* are located in the city is a telling example of the city’s attitude towards them. Their houses can be found in all parts of the city but usually in separate enclaves at the edge of the slum areas of Mumbai. Some also live in separate slum colonies such as ‘Bhangi Pada’, ‘Bhangi Chawl’, ‘Anna Basti’ and ‘Balmiki Basti’, located at Mulund, Andheri, Malad and Sion respectively. The *safai kamgars* are majorly concentrated in the areas of Colaba, Matunga, Bandra, Andheri, Malad, Borivali and Bhandup.

The *safai karamcharis*’ invisibility is due to their socio-eco-

Since the work is ‘dirty’, the people who do it are also considered ‘unclean’ or ‘filthy’. This leads to the process of segregation and oppression towards them.



Kaikhoo Paphro

nomie background as well as the stigma attached to the kind of work they do. It is time that the labour and life of these workers is understood and a dignity accorded to them. The conditions under which they work and the kind of work they have historically had access to, should be a point of immediate reflection and introspection for the people, the administrators and the leaders of the city.

The hands that clean the city have long been made invisible by society. It is time we visibilised the *safai karamchari* and acknowledged his/her labour as critical to our functioning as a city. It is time we changed our attitudes towards the act of cleaning and towards those who clean.

Media Coverage of the Golibar Slum Redevelopment

The media selectively covers the poor and issues that are of concern to them. This is particularly apparent when we see media reportage related to slum demolitions and government or builder takeovers of slum lands

By Ufaque Paikar

The Issue: Golibar Slum Redevelopment

Golibar is a 140-acre slum, the second largest after Dharavi, located in Santa Cruz (East), about 3 kms from the Mumbai domestic airport. The railway line is on its right side and the highway is on its left side, making it one of the most sought after lands in Mumbai. In recent times, Golibar has been in the eye of a storm because of forceful evictions of its residents by private builders supported by the state. In response, many families in the slum are putting up a sustained resistance. Golibar – which is made up of almost 46 housing societies and over 26,000 families – is slated for redevelopment under the aegis of Shivalik Ventures and the Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA).

As per SRA rules, the approval of 70 per cent of slum-dwellers is mandatory for a slum redevelopment and rehabilitation scheme to take place. The same rules also insist that the builder provides transit camps within 300 metres and a house within 500 metres of their slums.

In March 2003, Ganesh Krupa Society, one of those 46 societies in Golibar, signed a deal with Madhu Constructions for redevelopment. Out of 323 members, 283 were deemed

eligible for rehabilitation. In March, 2008, Madhu Constructions entered into a deal with a real estate company called Shivalik Ventures, transferring the right of redeveloping the society to them. Golibar slum-dwellers only came to know about the deal in January 2010 when they were served eviction notices by Shivalik Ventures. Incidentally 50 per cent of Shivalik Ventures is owned by Unitech, the same company now implicated in the 2G scam by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Golibar residents say that they never tendered the 70 per cent mandatory consent to Shivalik and were thus surprised when they received the notices. However, the builders claim that they had a general body meeting in 2009 when they received the written consent of the majority. The people of Ganesh Krupa claim that such a meeting was never held. They point out factual inaccuracies in the consent document such as Sulochana Pawar, one of the residents who died in 2005, being named as one of the signatories. But when the locals tried to lodge an FIR in the police station relating to these discrepancies, the police refused. Finally an FIR was lodged eight months later when the High Court, to which the residents have taken their case, insisted that the police do so.

Mumbai's second largest slum fights to save itself' (*Tehelka*, Feb 5, 2011)

By Chatura Rao

On one side was the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) demolition squad, guarded by about 300 police personnel. On the other were the women of Ganesh Krupa Society in Golibar, Mumbai, who sang the national anthem, chanted slogans and waved the Tricolour. Activist Medha Patkar appealed to the officials to leave the people and their houses alone. But the officials didn't heed her plea. They dragged the women and forced them into waiting police vans.

By afternoon on 20 January, the area was eerily quiet. The media was cordoned off as police and Slum Rehabilitation Act (SRA) officials entered the society to 'deal' with the frightened residents left behind.

"People were beaten up and their belongings thrown out. In some cases, they were summarily shifted to the Shivalik Ventures' transit camp," says an advocate from the Human Rights Law Network. "All this without making the panchnamas. The police tried to force people to accept rent cheques from the builder and to sign their acceptance on the builder's proposal..."

The locals are keen on getting a suitable and permanent home. The lands on which the buildings, where they are to be resettled, are being constructed are Defence, Railway and Waqf board lands. Some of this is also disputed land. There is in fact a pending disagreement between the Indian Air Force and the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) over some of this land.

Coverage by the English-language Media:

It is interesting to look how the media represents an issue which involves one of the largest redevelopment projects in Mumbai.

Largely, the media has chosen to ignore this issue. Though the conflict between the builder, state and the people in Golibar had been going on since January 2010, two out of the three English newspapers – *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times* – picked it up as a story as late as mid-November 2010, that too after residents took out a huge rally in a desperate bid to make their voices heard. Unfortunately, the coverage was miniscule and did not provide any context. The crux of the matter – the usurping of prime land, housing the poor, by private builder consortiums, with the help of the government, in the name of redevelopment – was ignored and continues to be overlooked.

Then came the large-scale demolitions and forced evictions in Ganesh Krupa Society in Golibar in early 2011. The demolitions took place on January 20, 2011 and for three days starting from February 2, 2011. The locals resisted forceful evacuation as they feared that they would be rendered homeless as there was a dispute about the ownership of the land where their new housing was to be provided. They were also concerned about the unliveable conditions of the transit camps. As said Prerna, a Golibar resident who has been active in opposing the eviction, "The waters are dripping from the walls, if this is the condition now I wonder what will happen after few years."

On January 26, 2011, 500 people from Golibar, along with

former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Suresh Hosbet; activists Medha Patkar and Vivek Pandit; Director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Prof. S. Parasuraman; land rights activist Daniel Mazgaonkar; writer-academician Chaaya Datar; and Dalit poet Sambhaji Bhagat met at the Sangharsh Maidan in Golibar and constituted a people's parliament. A few weeks later on February 6, more than 4,500 people took out a mass rally in Golibar where they appointed a people's inquiry commission. **Both these important events went unreported by the mainstream English media.**

What got reported was a small rally on January 30, 2011 against Medha Patkar, a social activist opposing the SRA scheme in Mumbai, and her interference in the project. This event got picked up by all three agencies with several contradictory facts. The *DNA* was the first to report on the issue – even before the event took place. On January 30th, it said, 'Golibar locals to take out anti-Patkar rally.' On January 31st, 2011, *The Hindustan Times* pointed out, 'Medha Patkar should see both sides of the coin: Golibar locals.' The news report pointed out that nearly 500 residents protested against Patkar for causing delay in the slum redevelopment. *The Times of India* seemed to have covered something else altogether. In a story titled 'Golibar locals protest against Medha Patkar' it reported: 'Over 4000 families from 46 cooperative housing societies protested against social activist Medha Patkar's role in a slum redevelopment scheme at Golibar in Santa Cruz east' (January 31, 2011). When this story was queried, several locals said that they did not remember talking to any reporter from this newspaper. Many of them wondered as to how a figure of "4000" was arrived at.

In contrast, the *Mumbai Mirror* ('Medha Patkar moves her catchment area to Mumbai', January 25, 2011), and the alternative English journals and magazines like *Tehelka* ('Mumbai's second largest slum fights to save itself', February 5, 2011 – see excerpt from this story in box) and *India Together* ('Who is illegal', February 23, 2011) have made efforts at understanding the people concerns. TV9 also deserves special mention as the only television news channel to have given the issue extensive coverage. Interestingly, in the absence of reliable information on the Golibar issue, locals and their supporters started a web blog to do just that (khareastandolan.wordpress.com).

It is interesting to note that the same media which aggressively pursued the Adarsh scam – which involved the illegal and shameful cornering of residential flats in a new South Mumbai building, meant for the kin of Kargil war heroes, by elite politicians and bureaucrats – has used very little of its energy to probe Golibar and more importantly the larger issue of slum redevelopment and housing for the poor. The stakes here are equally high: the lands are valuable, major builder groups are involved along with the state and its agencies and several lakh people are affected. Yet the media largely chooses to ignore the issue. Or it covers it as a series of events and does not choose to look closely at the processes at work. Often it provides minimal context and avoids looking at the larger picture. The issue begs more visibility in the mainstream media. How do we push for it?



Arpita Chakraborty



Arpita Chakraborty

Why this Slum Rehab, di?

Lallubhai Compound is a cluster of 65 buildings in Mankhurd which were constructed under the Slum Rehabilitation Act in the year 2005. In these tall buildings, each separated from the other by a few feet, people from all over Mumbai who once lived near railway stations, in slums and on pavements are housed. Having lost their original places of work, many people now have taken up small-time odd jobs for survival. Lallubhai is considered a ‘successful’ and ‘ideal’ model for rehabilitation, fit for further replication. The ‘rehabilitated’ residents, however, point out flaws in the resettlement especially the structural problems in planning and the lack of their participation in the whole process of building and relocation.

Photos by Vikram Buragohain
Text by Aakriti Kohli



Locating the M in Mumbai:

The M-Ward Project

Aakriti Kohli

“M-Ward is a dumping ground for waste generated by Mumbai. It’s also a dumping Ward for people who are displaced from elsewhere in the city. All the slums that have been cleared from other parts of the city are put in here. We are looking at about 5 years of intensive engagement and we need about 6 to 8 months to come out with a people’s plan. The initial assessment survey will feed into a broader people’s planning.”

- Prof. S. Parasuraman, Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS).

Sunita (name changed) and many others living in Sahyadri Nagar on the Trombay Hill have cracks in their roofs and damaged television sets. “From morning till night they keep blasting the rocks to make the road. The whole house vibrates with the noise,” says Sunita, a teacher in a nearby school. The Eastern Freeway corridor under construction at the moment will link Colaba to Mankhurd and will reduce travel time to a dream 35 minutes. It is a 22-km-corridor, which is being constructed by the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA). For this project two 500 metre long tunnels are being constructed under the Trombay Hill. In addition to this, a flyover is also underway at Wasi Naka. On the Trombay Hill people live in areas such as Sahyadri Nagar, Ashok Nagar, Indira Nagar, Kasturba Nagar, Rahul Nagar and Om Ganesh Nagar. These areas as well as areas such as Chembur, Mahul, Trombay, Govandi and Mankhurd come under the M-Ward. According to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation’s (BMC) human development report of 2008, M Ward has the lowest human development index among all administrative wards in the city. Located on the northeast edge of Mumbai, M-Ward mostly comprises of slums and slum rehabilitation buildings. It is also home to one of the largest dumping grounds in the country, the Deonar dumping ground, which was built in 1927. Along with the development of infrastructural projects such as the free-way, flyovers and monorail, the ward requires urgent intervention in terms of measures that improve the living conditions of communities and people living in the area. As part of its Platinum Jubilee initiatives, TISS, which is also located in the M-Ward, has decided to undertake transformation work in the ward and draw up a people’s plan for development to tackle issues such as health, nutrition,

schooling, housing and sanitation. For this purpose TISS initiated a baseline assessment survey from November 26, 2011, which is later expected to feed into a broader people’s plan.

TISS M-Ward Project

- Initial assessment survey to take into account socio- economic, demographic & environmental conditions
- Generating summary indicators to assess and understand current situation
- Identify locality level problems
- Sectoral plans related to health, education, sanitation and housing

A section of TISS students surveyed Wasi Naka and the adjoining areas on the Trombay Hill. “In Wasi Naka we endeavored to ensure that the community is already briefed about the project and the importance of their participation in this project,” said Satish More, a community facilitator of the area. Sunita is hopeful that the M-Ward project will help assess problems in the area and take corrective action for infrastructural issues such as schooling, public transport and drinking water facilities. Ramdas (name changed), a resident of Ashok Nagar whose house was recently surveyed, however shows certain skepticism, “I’m apprehensive about the outcome of this assessment as well as the project and the sustainability of such a project since it is spread across 5 years. But there is hope.” In Shivaji Nagar, Sanjay Nagar and Bainganwadi, where another section of TISS students carried out the survey, there was a certain ambivalence, doubt and anxiety in the community. However overall they were hopeful of better living conditions and the long-term impact of the project. “People genuinely displayed doubt but while we made our rounds during the survey, many people called us out to carry out the survey in their houses as well. Some of the people we surveyed also referred us to their friends and neighbours who they felt might be in urgent need of help,” said Haimanti Prakash, a student of TISS. The project is seeking partnerships with various responsible stakeholders such as the BMC, PSUs and other organizations, along with local community-based groups to make this an inclusive process. These sectoral plans will then be presented to various agencies to elicit their contribution for the transformation of M-Ward.

An Oasis in Baiganwadi

By Mridula Chari and Shweta Radhakrishnan

Every year, as Muharram approaches, several green and red water stalls decorate the gallis of Baiganwadi. These water stalls or *sabeels* are set up by residents of the area for people of all denominations to come and quench their thirst. The gaily-decorated *sabeels* range from large professional ones spanning entire blocks to small stands set up by children in the by-lanes. During this time, it is impossible to walk more than a few plots without running into them. These traditional constructions of Shia Muslims are meant to commemorate the death of Hazrat Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad who was killed in battle in AD 680 after three days of being deprived of water by the army of the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid. Today the *sabeels* exhort people to remember the thirst of Imam Hussein as they drink from the *matkas* placed on them. In plot no. 9 of Baiganwadi, 18-year-old Mehndi Syed has been building *sabeels* for the last five years. His sa-beel is different from the other green and red stalls in Baiganwadi in its stark simplicity. Covered in black and lit up innovatively with tubelights, Mehndi likes to keep it simple. In an area where drinking water is such a scarce resource, Mehndi loves the idea of putting up a water stall where people can access drinking water at all hours of the day during Moharram. For plot nos. 8-9 in Baiganwadi, drinking water is available only for 20 minutes every morning. This is scarcely enough for all the residents in the locality who buy water from private water suppliers every day at Rs 35 per drum. Mohammad Sher-e-Alam, another resident of the locality said that the area had no drinking water problems till four years ago. He stated that the problem seemed to have begun only after the BMC installed a new tank for the area near the highway. He added that even regular water was not easily available and they have to buy regular water at Rs 100 per drum. Sometimes the tap water is black and highly contaminated, state residents of the locality. A reliable source from the municipal corporation said that earlier water was supplied to the area from the Trombay reservoir through gravity pipes. It was changed after a few years to keep up with increased demand for water. Now 43 Sintex tanks have been installed in Shivajinagar, Baiganwadi and Mandala. Water is routed through these tanks to the different areas. It is expected that the water situation in plot no. 9 will improve in the next six months. For now, Mehndi walks to the highway and buys the five litres of water he needs to fill the *matka* he keeps in the *sabeel*. “Every year, I make this *sabeel* because I want to help those who are thirsty in this area at least for these ten days. Hopefully in the future, we won’t have to keep buying water to fill these pots,” he signs off.

Trombay’s Cricketing Marvel

By Shruti Ravi

Sarika Koli idolises South African cricketer JP Duminy and when asked why not Sachin Tendulkar, she simply smiles in reply. Sarika is the 17-year-old girl, residing in the Trombay Koliwada fishing village, who was recently appointed as the Maharashtra under-19 women’s cricket team captain. The residents of Trombay Koliwada are known to be the original inhabitants of the area and given the proximity to the Thane creek and the Arabian Sea, fishing here is the primary occupation. But for Sarika cricket has always been an obsession. A regular in the Mumbai Cricket Association since she was 15, she tried out for selections at the behest of her sports teacher Mr. Adhva from her alma mater, Nootan Vidya Mandir, Mandala. Now a part of the GN Khalsa College in Matunga, her team recently competed at the Maharashtra state divisions level, organized by the Maharashtra Cricket Association. An all-rounder, her figures in the last few matches have been remarkable: she scored a cumulative 215 runs in the last three matches. These numbers were instrumental in her appointment as the Maharashtra under-19 team captain. While she has played in tournaments as a part of the Mumbai Cricket Association, she is a relatively new entrant in the Maharashtra Cricket Association. She will play her first national level tournament representing the Maharashtra Cricket Association in Jammu, starting with a practice camp that will segue into matches, commencing this December. Her father, who also supports her financially, was initially reluctant and sceptical about her love for cricket but gave in soon after she started playing professionally. For her practice sessions, which include endurance training as well as batting in the nets, she ends up traveling to the Bandra Kurla Complex for about five-days-a-week from Monday to Friday. In addition to this the Mumbai Cricket Association coach Sanjay Gaitonde holds practice matches for the team over the weekends. She often plays with members of Kiran 11, a local Trombay cricket team, and credits them with helping her improve her bowling and fielding skills. Sarika, whose grandfather Ankush Koli is well-known for his social work initiatives in the Koliwada area, modestly conceded to a sense of pride in doing what she does. Her inspiration aside from Duminy is the young Indian cricketer, Poonam Raut, and she hopes to go on to play for India internationally.

Making Health Matter

By Aakriti Kohli

Hamida Khan makes daily rounds of houses in her neighbourhood, enquiring about people's health, reminding them about health check-ups, immunization and informing them about health camps. She is a community health worker in Kasturba Nagar and has been working in the area for 20 years. This 48-year old has seen the community grow in front of her eyes. "Kasturba Nagar, Sahyadri Nagar and many other areas come under Wasi Naka. Twenty years ago a health post was started in Ayodhya Nagar and since then I've been working," says Hamida.

As a community health worker, Hamida initially faced a lot of opposition from the people in her area. "When I would go door-to-door with three other volunteers then people would say, '*chaar chatur chali hain duniya sudharne*' (four over-smart women have taken over the task of transforming the world) or '*chammak challo ghoom rahi hai*'," says Hamida, who has ignored such comments and carried on with her task of providing community health care and critical information.

The last few years have also seen a surge in TB and HIV cases in the area. A medical camp is set-up every month to dispense medicines for TB. The patients are also taught how to take these medicines. "I also have to ensure that people come in for testing and check-ups. There is still a lot of stigma attached to the disease and I counsel people to come out and take timely treatment and not fear what society would say," explains Hamida. Women as well as children make many trips carrying 20 litres of water uphill everyday. This leads to body aches and has resulted in miscarriages in many cases. "There is high incidence of loose motions, cold and fever among kids. Health facilities here are ill-equipped and they usually just dispense Paracetamols, Brufen or Avil and tell them to go," says Hamida.

In fact, the absence of a well-equipped hospital adds to people's miseries. "Shatabdi Hospital is not equipped in terms of doctors and facilities to handle patients. Almost always they refer patients to Sion Hospital or K J Somaiya, which are very far," says Hamida. Shatabdi Hospital in Govandi was built in 1982 and is presently in a state to handle basic treatment only as it is poorly equipped and under-staffed. A proposed transformation of the public hospital has been on the anvil for two years but the project has currently been stalled due to insufficient funds.

The conditions are particularly grave for pregnant women. "Once a woman gets pregnant, we give her iron tablets, tetanus injections and ensure that she goes for regular check-ups but it is very difficult since there is no facility for them in Shatabdi and even the doctors don't want to handle deliveries," says Hamida. "It's used more like a dispensary where patients go in to collect only medicines," she adds.

It's a Beauty-ful World

By Shweta Radhakrishnan

In Baiganwadi, women have turned beauty into a thriving business. There are many beauty parlours in Baiganwadi that have been set up by women from the area. These beauty parlours seem to be a popular, viable occupational choice for women here. Apart from regular beauty treatments, these parlours also offer beautician courses. Several women from the community enroll themselves in these classes that teach beauty basics like hair styling, make-up, *mehndi* and facials.

Sheikh Mehjabeen Tabreez who runs Sana Beauty Parlour states that she began the beauty parlour to supplement her husband's income. She studied till the ninth grade in an Urdu medium school and then did a beautician's course from a local parlour. She rents the place where she has her parlour and runs it with the help of another friend. Apart from running the business, she also conducts courses for aspiring beauticians.

Salma Khan also owns a parlour in the area. She began Muskaan Beauty parlour after her husband deserted her, leaving her with two children. Encouraged by other women from the community and support from NGOs like Apnalay she took a loan to start the beauty parlour. With the money she made from running classes and her job as a beautician, she was able to repay the loan within a year. She says that she realised that it is essential for women to be self-sufficient and independent. "And only a job helps you achieve that," she says. "I realised this after I had to fend for myself after my husband left me. I had never really engaged with the world outside and I felt very lost back then. Now I realise how important it is for women to be acquainted with the ways of the world outside the home." Tasleem, a student at Mehjabeen's parlour, concurs saying that the reason she enrolled for the course was because she felt the need to have a commercially viable skill.

Both women have managed to keep their businesses alive despite the infrastructural issues in the area. Water has always been a problem in Baiganwadi. For a beauty parlour, lack of water can be somewhat crippling. While Mehjabeen has never had a major problem with water, Salma has seen days when she had to walk a great distance to get water for her beauty parlour. Fortunately after their nagar sevak (corporator) established water tanks in the area, the situation has improved.

Beauty parlours are not merely about make-up and facials in Baiganwadi. They are offering women a chance to stand on their own feet and supplement household incomes. It is an opportunity women are making the most of. As Salma puts it, "Somebody's desire to be beautiful is what puts the food on my table."

On the Margins of Birth: Midwives in M-Ward

By Sujatha Subramanian and Anurag Mazumdar

Malambi 'Dai'ma' (midwife), 65, covers her head with the scarf as she sits down on the floor of her house in Cheetah Camp in Trombay. "Why do you want to know about midwives now that everyone goes to a clinic to get their children delivered? I feel we have become old and probably our knowledge has no value," she asks suspiciously.

At a time when basic health facilities in M-Ward are in an abysmal condition and increasingly becoming expensive, traditional midwives like Malambi 'Dai'ma', Chandrabhaga and Laxmibai Nikaje have taken on the mantle of delivering babies with very little institutional medical intervention. "Nowadays most people rush to the nearest hospital the moment the mother experiences the slightest discomfort. We are called for only one to two deliveries a year," says Chandrabhaga, who lives in Ashok Nagar in Wasi Naka and has been a midwife for about 30 years.

Though most of these midwives are not trained in modern medicine and health care, they insist that they can deliver babies safely. Laxmibai Nikaje, another midwife from Ashok Nagar, says, "The mother needs to have *jawari ki roti*, pulses and nuts to supply nutrition to the baby. When the woman is experiencing labour pain, she should be given lukewarm water or sweet tea to fasten the 'normal' delivery. The hospitals these days insist on caesarean operations because they want to rip off the patients' family." The mother should have the juice of neem leaf after the delivery for proper development of breast milk, she adds.

Laxmibai, who once worked in a modern hospital, insists that the process of child delivery has not undergone a change. "Some basic rules need to be followed. One should take-off any ornaments before delivering a child. Also midwives should always clean themselves properly before and after the birth," she says. Some beliefs have however stood the test of time. Chandrabhaga insists that the umbilical cord should not be thrown away as medical waste. It should be buried deep into the ground in a pit. One might scoff at this belief as superstition but she says, "It is good for the environment."

Some midwives like Malambi 'Dai'ma' in Cheetah Camp however have adapted to some of the dictates of modern medicine. She wears gloves nowadays

because parents generally insist on it. She also uses an injection to induce the labour pain for a smooth delivery. "After the delivery I use Dettol and advise the mother on medication if required," she says.

But the profession is fast losing ground to the government and private hospitals, which deem this practice as unscientific. Malambi says, "Earlier I used to assist in five to six deliveries per month. Now only people who know me and are afraid of going to the hospitals call me to their house." According to Chandrabhaga, "The charges for midwives have increased and one can command up to Rs 5000 if the parents are well-off." But these are stray cases and normally they earn not more than Rs 500 to Rs 1000 per delivery. There are also the occasional gifts from the child's family. "But nothing can equal the joy of seeing a new born baby," says Lakshmibai, with childlike glee on her face.

Most of them do not hide the disappointment in their voices when they are faced with the inevitable question of the future of their profession. What gives them hope is the fact that most of them have assisted in the delivery of their own grandchildren at home without going to a hospital or clinic. "We want to pass on this knowledge and tradition to our daughters so that they can carry it forward," says Laxmibai. Though their services are largely ignored, Malambi continues to radiates positive energy. "The position of the 'dai'ma' (midwife) is even higher than the biological mother. As long as there is new life, nobody can spell 'our' death."



..... Vikram Buragohain

The Night Life of Wasi Naka

A Photo-Feature by Arindam Banerjee & Anurag Mazumdar

What seems like dismal, claustrophobic reality in the day can seem almost beautiful in the cover of darkness. That is what we found as we traversed by night the by-lanes and busy alleys of Sahyadri Nagar and Rahul Nagar in Wasi Naka, one of the many slums settlements in M-Ward East area. The symmetry of the huge trucks lined up for construction work on the Eastern Freeway. The run-down Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) buildings come to life with their many tiny windows of light. On a half-moon night, wedding lights illuminate one such SRA building while the local fairground abounds in laughter. Life in Wasi Naka is not just about abysmal poverty and elusive development. It is also about moments of pleasure, hope and transcendence.

A hawker at the local fairground selling lighted chimes. Photo by: Arindam Banerjee.



The abysmal symmetry: the SRA buildings at Wasi Naka in night. Photo by: Arindam Banerjee

Faith in the darkness: A temple at the fairground made of Plaster of Paris. Photo by: Arindam Banerjee



Circle of hope: The giant wheel with its thousand colours. Photo by: Anurag Mazumdar

Centre for Media and Cultural Studies

Developing critical perspectives on media, culture and society

Into the heart of darkness: Trucks lined up for construction of the Eastern Freeway joining Colaba to Ghakopar.
Photo by: Anurag Mazumdar.



The cluster of lights emanating from the SRA buildings at Wasi Naka. Photo by: Arindam Banerjee



Celebration time! Krishna Panchal

The Centre for Media and Cultural Studies (cmcs.tiss.edu) is an independent centre of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, engaged in media teaching, production, research and dissemination.

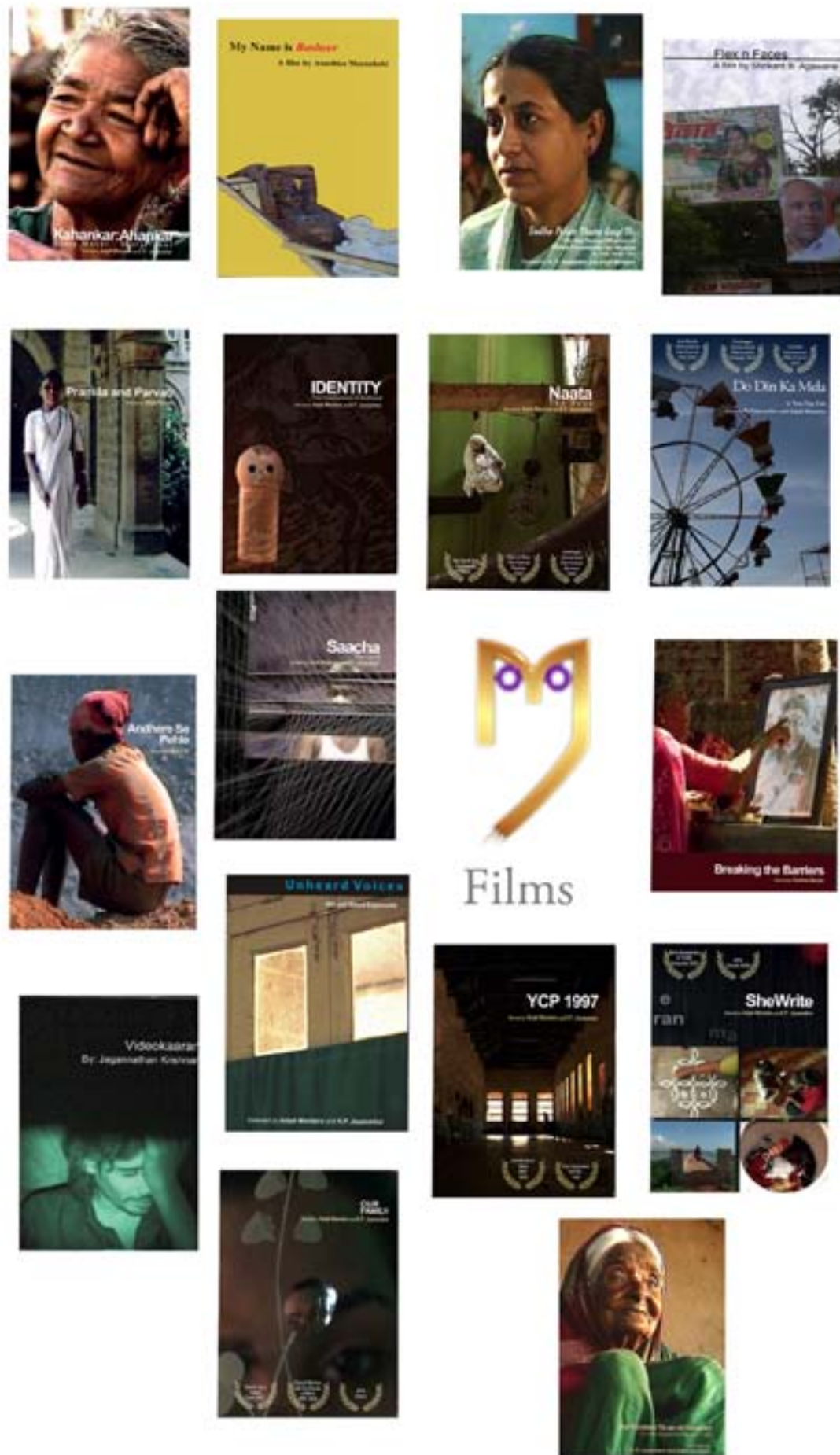
A unique feature of the Centre is the close linkage between the technical and academic areas of its work. The work of the Centre straddles both realms, thus facilitating a synergy between research, teaching and production, all of which are informed by a keen sense of connection with local subaltern cultures of resistance and invention.

The CMCS has done pioneering work in critical media education in the country. The two-year Masters degree in Media and Cultural Studies focuses on professional media practice and research within a framework that enables the development of a critical perspective on media, culture and society. It seeks to enable the creation of a lively group of thinking doers and doing thinkers. Besides the MA programme, the CMCS has M.Phil and Ph.D. students in the area of film, media and cultural studies.

Production has also been an important component of the Centre's work. It has to its credit more than 30 awards at national and international film festivals. It anchors a fellowship programme for early career filmmakers as well as an Artist/Scholar in Residence programme. The Centre also has a Digital Archive of films, video footage and photographs. The collection, with over 2600 films, can be accessed through a customised on-line data base, which is now available within TISS.

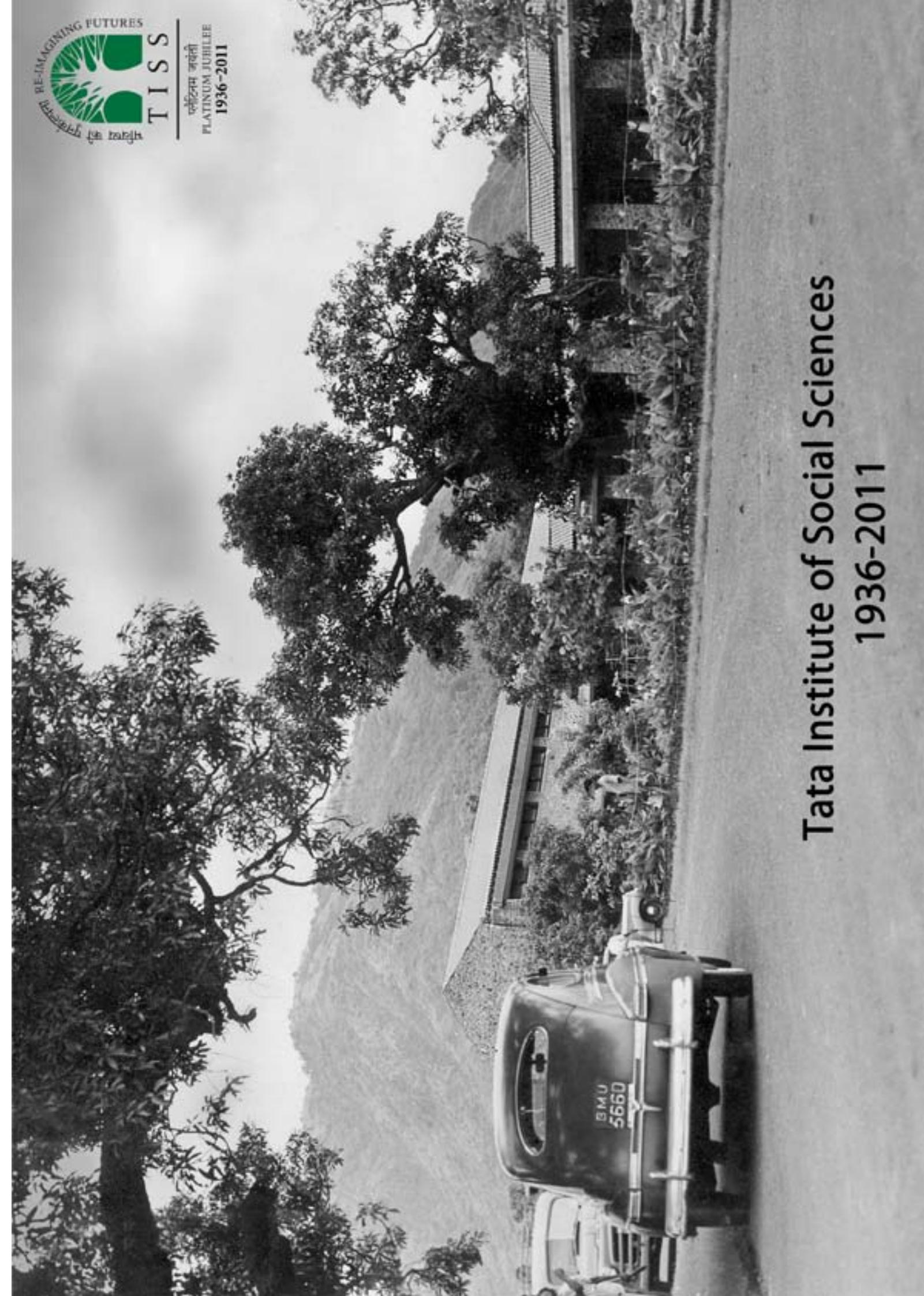


Meeting of Alumni, Students and Staff of CMCS, December 2011 Mangesh Gudekar



TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Centre for Media and Cultural Studies

www.cmcs.tiss.edu
sales.cmcs@tiss.edu
Tel: 022 25525670/5667



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1936-2011