

The epistemology of a sea view: mindscapes of space, power and value in Mumbai

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ABSTRACT: Mumbai is a collection of seven islands strung together by a historically layered process of reclamation, migration and resettlement. The built landscape reflects the unique geographical characteristics of Mumbai's archipelagic nature. This paper first explores the material, non-material and epistemological contours of space in Mumbai. It establishes that the physical contouring of space through institutional, administrative and non-institutional mechanisms are architected by complex notions of distance from the city's coasts. Second, the paper unravels the unique discursive strands of space, spatiality and territoriality of Mumbai. It builds the case that the city's collective imaginary of value is foundationally linked to the archipelagic nature of the city. Third, the paper deconstructs the complex power dynamics how a sea view turns into a gaze: one that is at once a point of view as it is a factor that provides physical and mental form to space. In conclusion, the paper makes the case that the mindscapes of space, value and power in Mumbai have archipelagic material foundations.

Keywords: archipelago, form, island, mindscape, Mumbai, power, space, value

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Introduction: unearthing the archipelagic historiography of Mumbai

A city can best be described as a collection of spaces. Not in any ontological sense or in a physically linear form, but in an ever-changing, ever-interacting mesh of spatialities and territorialities that display the relative social relations of power existing at that particular point in time (Holstein & Appadurai, 1989). Some of these spaces are material, others non-material and several epistemological (Castells, 1989; Mayaram, 2013). Various configurations of a city's urbanism are housed, often literally so, in the interstices and intersections of these physical and metaphorical spaces (Appadurai, 2011, 2006, 2001, 1986; Prakash, 2010, 2006; Patel & Thorner, 1986; Patel, 2003, 2008). When they interact and engage with each other they transcend 'the epistemological realm and the practical one, between mental and social, between the space of the philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things' (Lefebvre, 1984). Daily narratives of urbanity, intimate and self-contained lifeworlds themselves, and overarching discourses of power emerge out of these continuous, simultaneous and intricate interactions of these spaces. Mumbai is a particularly unique example of this complex and historically layered process that's part social, part cultural, part economic, and intensely political.

Less than 600 years ago, neither Mumbai nor its previous avatar Bombay existed as a city. It was just a collection of seven islands and several islets used by the local Koli fishing community as an outpost and resting point. It is rare for a global city to emerge out of a motley

collection of geographical features so quickly with its own nuanced sense of history and complex patterns of intersected narratives. Six hundred years is not even a passing moment in urban historiography. In that fleeting moment, seven disparate islands and several islets got connected with each other through a mixture of reclamation of land from the sea and a rapid expansion of rail and road networks. There were colonial imperatives of trade and transport of raw materials to Europe behind this process. But those imperatives were fuelled by the unique archipelagic nature of Mumbai, especially its coastal location, availability of several natural ports and a unique melting pot of different global cultures and influences from Central Asia, West Asia and Europe. The post-colonial imperatives were substantially different. They revolved around development of Mumbai and its hinterland into an industrial, textile and pharmaceutical hub and a decongestion of the city's colonial-era housing and business centres. One can directly trace the development of the western suburbs (from Bandra to Borivili) and the eastern suburbs (from Bhandup to Vikhroli and Chembur, Wadala to Trombay) to these twin imperatives. Interestingly, the western suburbs in daily narratives of 'sense and meaning of urban complexities' are often called as 'sea view localities' and the eastern suburbs referred to as 'harbour fronts'. Each highlights the curious ways in which the archipelagic genes of the city manifest itself in unexpected ways.

There are three big landmarks – Haji Ali Dargah, Gateway of India and Bandra-Worli sea link – that have come to define the identifiable milestones of the complex historiography of Mumbai. The narrative architecture of each one is deeply intersected with multiple imaginaries of the sea and the coast.

Figure 1: Haji Ali Dargah. Photo © 2014, the author.



The first landmark is the Haji Ali Dargah located on an isle just off the coast of Worli in southern Mumbai (Figure 1). It is an early leitmotif of Mumbai's unique transregional and migrant culture that's been liberally shaped by its archipelagic nature (Green, 2011). The Dargah was established in 1431 when a prosperous Uzbeki businessman Sayyed Pir Haji Ali Shah Bukhari, after travelling all around the world, found spiritual solace in the Worli isle of modern-day Mumbai. There are several fascinating landscapes of collective consciousness that map the Dargah's ideational architecture. Interestingly, each one conceives the sea and its coastal features as an *active* participant in construction of an overarching discursive framework of a non-Western modernity and secularism. A Dargah is a Sufi Islamic shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure called a *Pir*. The dominant narrative informing the imaginary of the *Pir* (saint) of the Haji Ali Dargah is explained by one of the members of the managing committee of the Haji Ali Trust.

One day, the Sufi *Pir* saw a woman crying near the coast of Worli holding an empty vessel. Inquiring, he found out that she had spilt some oil and was afraid that her husband would berate her. Touched by her plight, the *Pir* jabbed a finger at the sand where the oil had spilt and the spilt oil gushed out, filling her vessel. The woman was overjoyed. But the *Pir* had a recurring dream that he had hurt the coast and earth. He was filled with regret and soon fell ill. He decided to go to Mecca, but knew his end was near. He directed his followers to cast his coffin into the Arabian Sea in case he died on the way. He did, in fact, die on the way and as directed his followers cast his coffin into the sea. Miraculously the casket carrying his body floated back to the Worli shores and got struck in a string of rocky islets. The Dargah was constructed there. (Excerpt of a personal interview with Suhail Yacoob Khandwani, an additional trustee of the Haji Ali Dargah Trust, conducted on January 23, 2013.)

The sea, its coast, its sandy banks and its rocky islets play an *active* and *participative* role in this narrative. The water body is collectively imagined as a living, breathing organic being, and its subjectivities, say tides for instance, are seen shaping human action, agency, material and non-material environments. The physical accessibility to the Dargah also reflects this worldview, with its causeway emerging out of the water during low tides and submerging during high tides. The time-space continuum created by this archipelagic logic of the Dargah extends to daily encounters of diversity of the city, creating unexpected configurations of mindscapes of power and value of different kinds of sea views.

From the balcony of my house [*in the 12th floor*] in the summers the Dargah shimmers and seems to float above the sea. It is one of the most beautiful sights in the city. For me the way the Dargah appears in the sea also sets my mood. It is both spiritual and real. Sometimes the way the sea lashes the walls of the Dargah I feel as if the sea is communicating with me. Just seeing the people going through to the Dargah during the low tide makes me realize how we as a people have lost our connection with the sea. It reminds me of how the red sea was once mythically parted by Jesus Christ. (Excerpt of a personal interview with 63-year-old Kirti Sangghvi, resident of a housing complex at the Worli intersection, on February 05, 2014.)

Figure 2: Gateway of India. Photo © 2014, the author.



The second landmark is the Gateway of India (Figure 2). Within the broad spectrum of academic narratives on Mumbai's urbanity, the structure is most often seen as representing the high point of the colonial and Eurocentric urban discourse that shaped contemporary Bombay (Simon & St-Pierre, 2000; Dwivedi & Mehtrotra, 2001). A majority of the scholarly work across the disciplines of sociology, political science, urban geography and history on Mumbai's urbanity focuses on the 'long nineteenth century' (Kidambi, 2013 pp. 561-580), a flexible chronological scale that lasts from the establishment of the first European outpost in Bombay in the late 16th century till the last part of the 1930s (Dobbin, 1972; Masselos, 1974; Bayly, 1983; Dossal, 1991) or on quantitative models of town planning and increasing spatial spread of urban sprawls, or on narratives of migration, interaction of diversities, identity and assimilation (Hansen, 2001; Patel, 2003). The construction of Gateway of India officially began in 1911 at Apollo Bunder when King George V and Queen Mary visited India, to oversee India's formal integration with the British colonial empire. Built in Indo-Saracenic style the monument was completed in 1924. The Gateway was later the ceremonial entrance to India for Viceroy and the new Governors of Bombay. A crude fishing jetty once used by the local fishers was transformed into the official gateway of a Eurocentric and colonial modernity in less than three decades. Colonial Bombay, as exemplified by the Gateway of India, became a 'metaphor for modernity' (Patel & Thorner, 1996). The mainstream academic imaginary of Gateway of India predominantly conceives it as a representation of a colonial logic of urbanity and modernity. Yet the Gateway of India is also emblematic of the transformation of the earlier overarching archipelagic logic of the sea as an *active* participant in daily narratives into a more reductive logic that limits the imaginary of the sea to a mere channel of communication and transport of worldviews. The coast is also transformed into just a port of entry and exit of

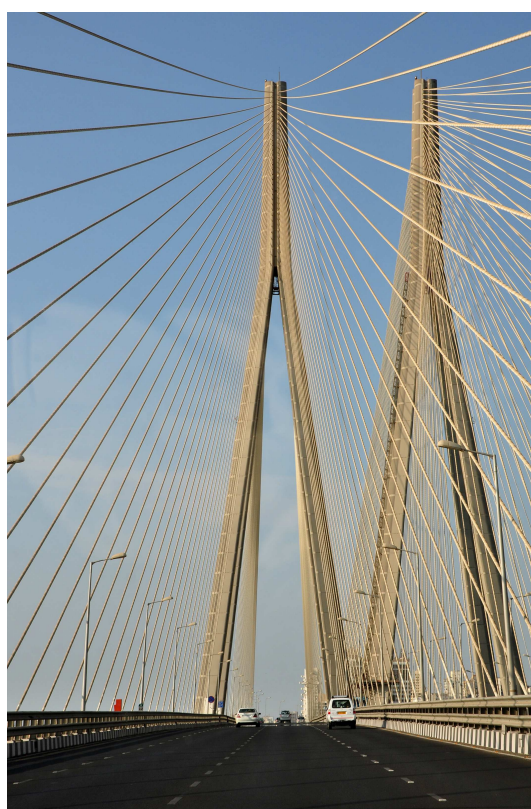
material, non-material and epistemological foundations of modernity and urbanity. The narratives surrounding the Bombay Presidency Radio Club and the Royal Bombay Yacht Club, both intrinsically connected to the Gateway of India, are indicative of this transformation. The Radio club was established in 1932 and was one of the first meeting grounds of technophiles of that era. Radio was quite like the Internet of today, generating the same kind of enthusiasm and social transformation. Several members of the Radio Club often described it as the Facebook of that generation. The first programmed radio broadcast in India was made from the club, and till 1927 was the only radio station of the country. The Royal Bombay Yacht Club (RBYC), on the other hand, was founded in 1846 and is the oldest yachting club in Asia. Originally founded for the British community in Mumbai who were into sailing, the club moved into its current premises near the Gateway of India after yachting received a major stimulus in 1911 when King George V and Queen Mary landed in Bombay from the Royal P&O liner *S S Medina*.

The Radio Club was a meeting ground for technologically astute Indians and, of course, the British expatriates who ran the colonial administration of Bombay. It was established next to the Gateway of India because the club wanted itself to be seen as representing a Bombay that was on par with European capitals of London and Paris. It was a time of exploration, new ideas, and scientific discoveries and advances. It was also a time when rules of nature did not seem to apply. Voices could travel distances, trains were cutting down time and art deco houses were redefining urban living. Establishing the radio club near the Gateway of India was also a practical decision. The club's activities depended on the availability of radio channels for hamming (*sic*). The Gateway of India was also symbolic of Britain's naval presence and was near the British naval bases. This allowed the members access to clear and powerful signals. They would spend hours tuning to distant stations, listening to the latest news, radio dramas and music. (Excerpt of personal interview with 71-year-old advocate Mohan P. Mirchandani, March 3, 2013. Mirchandani has been Radio Club president on three occasions.)

The history of the Royal Bombay Yacht club is fascinating. It is the oldest yachting club in Asia and was established to give British naval and military personal an opportunity to indulge in the leisurely activity of sailing and yachting. The club was also quintessentially European, with its own culture of old boys' network, continental bars, reading rooms and butler service. The philosophy of sailing is one of leisure, conquest, discovery and a spirit of adventure. These are attributes that one commonly associates with refined, modern and civilized living. The local Kolis were employed by the Club, as they are today, and they know the sea like the back of their hand. Yet many of them can never understand how sailing could be an activity of leisure. For them the sea is life; it gives them food and is a divine gift. They have their own set of dos and don'ts. When I first embarked on my trip to circumnavigate the world my Koli sailing mate gave me charms and bracelets to grace me with divine protection of the sea gods. (Excerpt of a personal interview with 74-year-old Gulshan Rai, president of the Royal Bombay Yacht Club (RYBC), on August 07, 2011. Rai has been awarded two of India's highest civilian awards, the Padmashree, and Arjuna award, and has circumnavigated the globe in a 32-ft cutter, Jaykus II.)

Both conversations highlight the subtle and nuanced manner in which a non-Western narrative of a sea view gets increasingly intersected with Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and urbanity. Such intersections inform daily imaginaries of leisure, adventure, exploration and conquest, in the process reductively transforming the organic subjectivities (participative and active nature) of the sea into an objective and value neutral landscape dominated by a 'triumphalist human vision'. The sea and its associated geographical features, its archipelagic nature itself, are seen as challenges of nature that can, and should, be subdued by human enterprise and initiative. The larger processes of reclamation of land, both colonial and post-colonial, and the consequent physical contouring of space and mindscapes of spatiality and territoriality of a contemporary sea view can be traced to this changed discursive architecture.

Figure 3: Bandra-Worli sea link. Photo © 2014, the author.



The third landmark is the Bandra-Worli sea link, which connects the islands of Bandra and Worli of Mumbai archipelago (Figure 3). It represents a logical extension of the discursive architecture displayed by the narratives surrounding the Gateway of India. Such a framework of *meaning* and *sense* has over a period of time replaced the active and multi-vocal archipelagic narratives of the sea with a dominant singularity of the sea as a passive and value neutral mass of water that can be parted, reclaimed and built over. This singularity is powered by an overarching logic of globalized modernity and urbanity that informs almost every aspect of daily encounters in Mumbai and the construction of an *ideal* urbanity. Two narrative strands

of this logic system – one overarching and one exclusively archipelagic – will help locate the contemporary mindscapes of power and value associated with a sea view.

Bombay had a world-wide brand image. We now need to build a similar brand image for Mumbai. How about making Mumbai the Las Vegas (casinos)-cum-New York (finance and entertainment)-cum-Paris (fashion)-cum-Singapore (law and order and cleanliness) of the world? We need a city where the sea line is not dotted with dirtiness, slums and unclean fishing docks filled with chaotic movement of people and traffic. For this, Mumbai definitely needs a CEO like Lee Kwan Yu of Singapore or Chandrababu Naidu [former chief minister of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh and credited with transforming the city of Hyderabad into an information technology powerhouse]. Today, Mumbai is a city with a brilliant brain but paralysed limbs. The infrastructure needs to be completely overhauled. Double-decker roads and trains need to be built — like Bangkok — to decongest traffic. Hovercrafts can be used to link the western coast of the city while a helicopter service can link the airports to the heart of the city. For slums, the Singapore example can be followed. In the 1960s slum-dwellers in Singapore were rehabilitated in high-rises with shopping centres at the bottom where they were given work. You would be surprised how fast efficiency seeps downwards once you begin wielding the stick. Of course, for this, the CEO needs to operate without political influence. (Alyque Padamsee, CEO, AP Amalgamated and Naushad Forbes, Vice-chairman, CII Maharashtra speaking at July 26, 2007 release of McKinsey-Bombay First report, Mumbai Vision 2015).

From my office in Bandra on the 14th floor I have the best view of Mumbai. I can see the skyline of Worli from my office. The seas are very calm. This is unlike the nature of the sea at the Bandra Bandstand, Carter Road or Marine Lines. There the sea changes its mood with the weather. In Worli the sea is more or less calm and peaceful. It has always been a good view, but I would always be comparing it to the view from my earlier office in the Air India building on 19th floor, which would be an endless sea view framed by the Queen's Necklace or from the Taj Chambers where the view would be framed by the iconic Gateway of India. The Bandra-Worli sea link has made my sea view a premium one. If Marine Lines and Gateway of India are historical and iconic, the Bandra-Worli sea link is modern and contemporary. My sea view is now no less than the water front views that you find in Singapore, Hong Kong, London or New York. It shows that Mumbai has arrived. We can also climb mountains and straddle seas. (Excerpt of a personal interview with Sunil Karve, a prominent Chartered Accountant and founding trustee of the Mumbai Education Trust on May 19, 2010.)

In terms of a collective urban imaginary, the Bandra-Worli sea link is emblematic of the larger narrative of a globalized urbanity and modernity; a narrative that invariably subsumes the sea view as part of the larger processes of power, value, real estate pricing and class distinctions. There are startling similarities in how the engines of globalization and borderless finance capital that transform and reposition organic social contexts into decontextualized products, say Christmas as a festival of deals and discounts, also fundamentally relocate the sea view as a *valuational* context and background. It is a process that's seen as much in Singapore and Manhattan as in Hong Kong and Macau. Singapore is particularly emblematic for Mumbai,

with its 63 islands and islets linked through a constant process of reclamation of land from the sea and transport connectivity. Such has been the focus on reclamation that the island city's land area increased from 581.5 km² in the 1960s to 716.1 km² in 2013. The land mass is projected to grow by another 100 km² by 2030. Some projects have actually merged smaller islands to form larger, more functional islands. Jurong Island, Pulau Tekong and Sentosa are some examples. In fact, both the connections to Malaysia – the Johor-Singapore Causeway in the north and the Tuas Second Link in the west – are constructed on land reclaimed from the sea. The imaginary of the sea is so deeply embedded in the city's collective psyche that the old name of Singapore, Temasek or Sea Town, attaches itself to material objects and cultural products from streets and avenues, food carts and restaurants to even pawn shops and investment banking firms. It transforms the physicality of the sea, its views and coastal features into a metaphorical landscape that churns out narratives and discourses of power and global urbanity. The sea view, similarly, has become secondary to the Bandra Worli sea link, creating a system of value, power and pricing that architects new categories of aspirational imaginaries of urbanity. The *packaged* sea view, like a globalized product or service, has now become a gaze. It has become an epistemology in itself, just like how a Porsche is more an idea than a car. The *packaged* sea view in Mumbai today is a symbol of the high point of modernity and urbanity: an embedded and degendered *episteme* (Foucault, 1970). It is fundamentally redefining conventional relationships between material means and non-material modes of cultural production. This degendered sea gaze is almost Newtonian in nature and actually echoes early 20th century triumphalism of scientific rationality and fact-value dichotomy. The mindscapes of space, value and power in the city of Mumbai have to be contextualized and positioned within this archipelagic historiography and contemporary reality of the city. Historical and contemporary academic focus on Mumbai has broadly coagulated itself around a set of five binaries of colonial-post-colonial, nationalist-internationalist, local-global, cultural-economic and migration-identity (Haynes & Rao, 2013, pp 317-335; Parthasarathy, 2011; Patel, 2009; Pendse, 1995; Phadke, 2007; Prakash, 2006; Punjwani, 1984; Singh (mimeo), 2005). All five sets have dealt with questions of modernity, urbanity, secularism, religion, notions of urbanism and city life and continuing linkages to rural landscapes and imaginaries. In all these approaches, however, the archipelagic nature of the city as an entry point for research to understand the unique configurations of urbanity and urban imaginaries is either marginalized or completely ignored.

Architecting landscapes and mindscapes of space, power and value

The modern sea view intersected by processes of globalization and notions of ideal urbanity and a global city replaces real distance and real height with a perceptual distance and perceptual height. Both are key structural ingredients in transforming a historical sea view informed by archipelagic-material foundation into a contemporary sea gaze informed by non-material notions of space, power and value. The imaginaries emerging out a sea gaze blur the once clear distinctions between material foundations, non-material underpinnings and epistemological realms of urbanity. A good example of this complex and emergent process is the manner in which real estate developers specializing in ultra-luxury, high end residential and commercial properties use the concept of perceived value pricing to contour space, value and power. The concept was first evolved by media executives. In order to give a certain tangible value to various components of the same media product, say a newspaper, the media executives

started differential pricing of advertisements in different pages. So a quarter page advertisement on the front page of the newspaper was priced higher than a half page advertisement in the inside pages. The logic was that front page of a newspaper had greater visibility than inside pages. Today, perceived value pricing determines display advertising across television, Internet and print media. The concept has now travelled from the non-material domain of the media to the material domain of real estate where built environment is being moulded to evolve new configurations of urban space, spatiality and territoriality.

Lodha Costiera invites 15 residents to a world of privileges. Where they will wake up each morning to a splendid ocean view, and watch the sun set in a blaze of glory, from the edge of an infinity pool. They will retire to a world of extravagance and will be the envy of everyone for they will be residing at the swankiest address in town, Lodha Costiera. (Retrieved from <http://www.lodhagroup.com/costiera/>)

The project defines itself as ‘the house by the sea’ and despite being located in Napean Sea Road, one of the city’s most desired and expensive localities, architects a narrative of value, power and space that constructs an overarching discursive structure that simultaneously subsumes and augments earlier dominant narratives of value and power. It does that by offering its residents ‘a world of their own’ where the gaze starts with the ‘first living level [*begins*] at 8th floor offering unhindered views of Arabian Sea’. By eliminating the ground floor as well as seven other floors a discourse of power underpinned by perceptual height is architected where an epistemology of sea gaze replaces a direct imaginary of a sea view. By offering a home ‘where you can shut out the world with a single click, by closing sound-proof windows ... and sleep in comfort ...’ an autonomously distantiated model of selective engagement-disengagement with the physical urbanism of city is also architected. This creates unique and emergent forms of territoriality and spatiality that expands and contracts depending on the relative autonomy of an individual’s access to the epistemologies of perceptual height and perceptual distance. Height and distance, in this manner, become important contouring tools of value of space and spatiality, with height used to create a perceived value for an ‘unhindered’ gaze, one that’s not broken by the physical discontinuities of a city.

With native forms of coastal engagement in terms of an *active* and *participative* archipelago marginalized in daily encounters of urbanity, the dichotomy between real distance and perceptual distance has become an important institutional and non-institutional mechanism of determining value, and by extension the provision of basic civic amenities. Colaba is an interesting mix consisting of clusters of traditional Koli fishing villages, modern urban landscapes of exclusive residences and apartment complexes, institutional and formalized spaces of Indian State (Indian Navy), all held together by a dominant narrative of a globalized and ideal urbanity. It is a locality that is home to clusters of Koli fishing communities who have over the years been ghettoized to specific physical spaces. It is also home to some of India and world’s richest industrialists, high profile corporate and business headquarters, Indian Navy’s Western Naval Command and pockets of environmentally critical mangroves that act as a natural buffer against tidal currents and sea flooding. The modern-day Marine Drive, which is often called the Queen’s Necklace because of the way in which it lights up the coastal areas during the night, starts from Machimarnagar Nagar (a name that can be literally translated as a fisher’s alcove) to Girgaum Chowpatty (a locality inextricably linked to socio-cultural productions powered by narratives of an active and participative sea). However, the

multivocal, yet strangely singular, narratives surrounding the Marine Drive beautification project gives an indication of how traditionally and organically contoured public spaces of socio-cultural production are marginalized and eliminated from the globalized discourses in public and semi-public spaces through a complex process by which notions of perceptual distance intersect with real and physical distance.

The project will completely transform Marine Drive. It has been one of the city's iconic public places and we want to make it a world class public space. Marine Drive needs to reflect the idea of a modern and urban India. Once the project is completely implemented you can walk into the sea on a walkway, view the Marine Drive from a gallery at the Air India building and skate at an open space near the NCPA. There will be a host of facilities for beach side leisure activities from changing rooms, lockers, bathrooms and toilets. It will rival facilities in Australia and the US. (Excerpt of a personal interview with Nana Chudasama, former Sheriff of Mumbai and one of the prime movers of the Marine Drive beautification project, on May 02, 2014).

The globalized imaginary painted by the dominant discourse of a beautified Marine Drive sidelines the active and participative archipelagic narrative intrinsic to the socio-cultural productions (Adorno, 1991; Habermas, 1996, 1997, 2003) of the Koli fishing community. It also marginalizes other local foundations of daily life. It ranges from processes of museumification, creating 'enclaves for fishing community where their ways of life are preserved', mimicking structures of globalized cultural tourism that dominate the touristic landscape from Bali to cheese-making regions of France and Switzerland (Srinivasan, 2012), to processes of ghettoization where the indigenous and local community practices are physically and metaphorically 'distanced, confined and controlled', ironically imitating how modern health systems quarantine areas and population to reduce the impact of communicable diseases.

Several years back, the corporation [BrihatMumbai Municipal Corporation] came and hacked down mangroves saying they posed a security threat. That was the official reason, but we know that several rich residents and property dealers just could not adjust to the nature of the mangroves. During the low tides, the area smells. The mangroves need constant cleaning up as it catches up everything in the sea from plastic bags, lose corals, dead fish, snails and organic matter. We are all used to it. We have festivals about it... the sea is our land...no one from the land will understand it. Now the same corporation offers us concrete blocks [interlinked tetrapods] to prevent erosion. What's the point? The blocks prevent our boats from accessing the sea. We find it difficult to dry our nets, prawns and lobsters. We used the coast to clean and paint our boats. Now, where do we go? Our sea has been snatched away. They *need* [emphasis added] our women to work as maids, they *need* [emphasis added] our men to fish for them, but they don't *want* [emphasis added] us. (Excerpts of conversations with 70-year-old fisher Rajan Dalvi conducted over a month, January to February 2014).

Converting a sea view into an epistemology

The intersected mindscape of power, value and space of a sea gaze is constructed by this constant friction and interplay between the conceptualizations of perceptual height and distance

and the constant physicality of real height and distance. The narratives and discourses of an ideal urbanity and a global city not only take natural roots in this landscape, but also contribute towards enriching it creating a self-sustaining, and closed loop, material, non-material and epistemological ecosystem.

In epistemologically packaging, and repackaging, the multi-vocal physicality of a sea view into an all pervasive sea gaze singular in its form, structure and narrative architecture, the *ideal* sea view literally and materially gets exhausted. The relational dynamics of the contemporary power, value and space of a sea view is informed as much by the non-material and epistemological superstructure, as it is by its material foundations. In fact, the transformation of a sea view into a sea gaze complicates the neat conceptual and linear relationship established by mainstream academia between material foundations of a society and its cultural productions. An ideal sea view is as much a mindscape as it is a physical landscape. Alternate water bodies are reconstituted as *substitute* sea views. The most popular and dramatic instance is the reconstitution of Antop Hill in Wadala (East) in the last two decades as a physical landscape embedded with *ideal* sea views. Salt pan lands and accumulated water bodies, including stagnant estuaries have been packaged as sea views.

We used to call the view from our Bhakti park house as the Dead Sea view. The marketing of the Lodha project next to it as the new Cuffe Parade [*The original Cuffe Parade is in South Mumbai and has a rich colonial and post-colonial history*] is also a good example of the processes through which an aspirational and ideal imaginary is transmitted and transported in both material and non-material forms. This is also reflective of the aspirational middle classes that cannot afford a real sea view, but definitely want to be part of the imaginary ... (Email conversation with urbanist and researcher Maansi Parpiani.)

This nuanced reconfiguration of the urban landscape through a non-material reconstitution of the mindscape redefines physical space. By embedding notions of spatiality and territoriality within an ideal sea view, the value of a square foot of living space with a sea view increases manifold. Interestingly, in the last ten years localities with an artificially constructed sea view have seen an appreciation in real estate value of over 200 percent, substantially more than localities with an 'original' sea view (FICCI-Knight Frank, 2013). This overarching logic of the sea view also informs tactical decisions of the marginalized and disempowered communities of migrants and poor who do not have access to basic civic amenities, property rights and adequate institutional protection.

I came from a small village near Latur [*one of the driest areas of Maharashtra*] to Mumbai after the 2009 drought. I work as a construction worker and my wife is a maid. We settled down next to Mithi River because water is available all the time. We wash and clean in the river. Also people from my village who had come here earlier said that if we squat next to a water body we will get a good price when real estate developers want it. (Excerpts of conversations with Sanktoba Jadhav, December 19-26, 2013.)

In becoming a part of daily lives, almost as an unquestioned common sense, of the marginalized communities, the sea view, in a startling way, provides an important node of non-institutional and collectivized tool of agency and action for poor and migrant communities.

This allows them to negotiate, engage and contest with institutional forces and dominant elite discourses. The sea view-cum-sea gaze is as much a tool of accentuating existing class distinctions and creating newer ones, as it is an agency for blurring the distinctions between elite and non-elite imaginaries of the city and creating a narrative bridge between the two.

The logic of the sea view also extends itself to riverfront development, but in an unexpected manner. Rivers are a rich landscape of contestation, negotiation, interaction and formation of public culture in major cities of the world. But in Mumbai rivers are a strangely neglected domain. The dominant narratives surrounding the Mithi River deconstruct a natural, organic and intrinsic habitat and reconstruct it either as a 'danger to the city', a perspective that's taken deeper roots after the July 2005 floods that devastated the city, a 'stream of pollution' or a 'river that needs to be reclaimed to its past glory'. As part of the perceptual reconstruction of the river, the dominant narratives extend their structures of sense and meaning to include 'methods' to 'manage, contain, reclaim and restore' the river. The river is a confluence of tail water discharges of Powai and Vihar lakes. The river originates from the overflow of Vihar Lake and also receives the overflows from the Powai Lake about two kilometres later. It flows for a total of 15 km before it meets the Arabian Sea at Mahim Creek flowing through residential and industrial complexes of Powai, Saki Naka, Kurla, Kalina, Vakola, Bandra-Kurla complex, Dharavi and Mahim. These 'methods' range from silting, planting of mangroves, bioremediation measures and social policy initiatives of 'relocating slums, people and industries' (Natu Committee Report, 1975; Mahim Creek Reclamation Report/CWPRS, 1978; Dharavi Storm Water Drainage Report, 1988; Brimstowad Report, 1993; Mithi River Pollution and Control Report, 2004; Madhav Rao Chitale Committee Report, 2005; Environmental Improvement of Mithi River and its Banks Report, 2006; ORF Mithi River Restoration Report, 2010). The inherent technological determinism in the frameworks anchored to this perspective automatically embeds the narratives with an *apparent inevitability* (Hill, 1998, p. 23) of technology and progress. As Hayles (1993, pp. 69-91) writes,

... in a world bespoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons ... it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as informational patterns ...

It is most prominently seen in the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) where real estate developers use technology and modern architectural methods to not only construct alternative sea views, but also screen out views considered to be 'unnecessary and redundant'. The methods of building value, space and power range from green walls, public art graffiti walls to digital screens and technologies embedded into private, semi-public and public built environments. Nicholas Negroponte (1995, p. 165), Chairman Emeritus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab, in a completely different context though, summed up the current globalized processes at play best,

... living will include less and less dependence upon being in a specific place at a specific time, and the transmission of place itself will start to become possible. If I could really look out the electronic window of my living room in Boston and see the Alps, hear the cowbells, and smell the (digital) manure in summer, in a way I am very much in Switzerland ...

This contemporary and globalized valuation framework of a reconstructed and reconstituted sea view also informs discourses of maintenance and repair of these views, creating legal, institutional and non-institutional structural nodes of action and agency. These range from policy measures that protect coastal areas through zoning, environmental regulations and access limitations to civil society campaigns that amplify organic and native practices, like the daily offering of coconuts, flowers and other 'divine' offerings to the Mithi river and the sea, as 'polluting, ecologically unfriendly and environmentally unsustainable', while de-amplifying larger environmental concerns related to rapid development of coastal areas, riverfront development and leisure fronts.

The sea view has over the years been marginalized as an independent lens of academic enquiry to understand the narrative construction and the physical constitution of Bombay-Mumbai. In doing so, the academic world unwittingly reflects its own absorption of the processes by which an *active* and *subjective* archipelagic imaginary of Mumbai is reconstituted into a *passive* and *objective* coastal rationality. In a concerted effort to study the so-called inevitability of progress and development, and the reconstruction of the city's landscape to fit an ideal of a global city, serious urban scholarship tends to position the unique relational dynamics of a sea view-sea gaze as part of larger (conventional) frameworks of enquiry. Such frameworks are invariably contoured by the binaries of colonial-post colonial, migration-identity, cultural-economic, formal-informal and local-global. Even where serious scholarship breaks the mould of strict binaries, the sea view is either explained as part of an elite 'imitationist' discourse that informs the imaginary of an ideal urban living (Rao, 2007), or as a collection of 'mythic stories' (Prakash, 2011).

Yet, the city's ports were prominent markers of its daily life; they were the heart of the city. Today, though, with the archipelagic nature of the city being reconstituted as a passive commodity, readily moulded and packaged into any global form, the ports have all but vanished from the dominant imaginary, as also from the city's physical and social geography. The ports were unique locales of colonial and post-colonial contestations. They were sites of nationalist mutinies, important cauldrons of class struggle and emergent forms of social engineering. Today, ports wake up from their hibernation only as part of the larger narrative logic of the city literally running out of physical space. The Mumbai Port Trust has close to 1,300 acres of land; a prized asset eyed by government and private real estate developers alike.

The sea view is an important tool to create and recreate public spaces; and especially so for waterfronts and promenades. The larger movement to democratize Bandra Bandstand, Marine Drive Promenade and Worli Promenade, making it open and accessible to all, creating pathways for walkers and joggers, senior citizens and cyclists, converting once private enclaves into public spots, is indicative of a countercultural contestation to reject any monopoly over sea views. Concurrently, the increasing strength of the narratives to 'control and contain' displays of public affection and regulation of couples' comportment in public spaces reflect frictional contestations between different imaginaries of the waterfront. There is a strong case to revive archipelagic means and modes of urbanity as independent nodes of enquiry into the continuous formation and reformation of cities. The logic of the sea has permeated the consciousness of daily common sense, so much so that it exists, as it were, without any material foundations. Ironically, this logic, while fragmenting the material and non-material means and modes of social production, the sociality of life, seems to be increasingly based on a singular and global imperative of order and control: from the genetic manipulation of ecology and eco-systems to socio-technical reconfiguration of physical and imagined spaces.

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