



HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR

began his career in 1968 with T Khareghat as an Apprentice Architect, and started his own practice in 1982. Between 1977 and 1980, he was a visiting faculty at the Academy of Architecture, Mumbai. Hafeez is a member of the Bombay Heritage Committee and New Delhi Lutyens Bungalow Zone Review Committee

In this century, India is going to urbanise at a scale and pace, which is unprecedented in history. Consider this: the world's urban population is set to double from the current 3.4 billion to 6.3 billion by 2050, according to the United Nations, and India will be at the forefront of this spiral. Clearly then, if we don't act fast to change our paradigms, we will plunge into social and environmental crises of disastrous proportions.

The present set of problems that the world faces in environment, poverty and health, demands that India crafts an entirely new developmental model. The manner in which cities have grown in the past thousand years has been acceptable till now. But we are at a tipping point, and have to embark on a new path.

At this point, I would like to state that cities, in many ways, are the custodians of the future. They are the most efficient way for human civilisation to share and distribute its resources fairly, and yes, even conserving its flora, fauna and biodiversity. Looking at cities today, you might laugh this premise out of court. But that's exactly my point. We have to trash the present model, and acquire a

completely fresh perception of the way cities must grow to best serve their citizens and the planet.

In the current developmental model, we constantly harp on a host of non-renewable resources. But we miss the most important - land. Arable land that grows food and nurtures the planet and its inhabitants (humans, animals, plants) is limited. The current model of urbanisation is life-threatening. It starves supply, and thereby the planet itself. We need to conserve arable land desperately and come up with a new vision for urbanisation.

This is how the future urban development model must shape out. It must turn the current model on its blinkered head. Instead of swallowing up thousands of acres of farmland and turning them into development zones like we do today, the urbanisation of the future will have to create farms and forests in already developed zones. Multi-layered high-density towers will be the way to achieve this development model, as they are the best way to ensure compact urban centres.

Today, high-density development has equalled skyscrapers, which are only seen in an iconic manner. Yet, these same high-density towers can become a tool to reduce our ecological destruction. Their design and form will have to be different. The highrise of the future will be small cities in themselves and will be self-sufficient pods. The mega towers of the future will have multiple levels of gardens, parks and even farms in the sky. They will have vertical networks of mass-transport.

In another reversal of the current pattern, instead of just using up energy, our future cities will be producing it - and conserving every drop of water that falls on them. The key task of the infrastructure provider will then be about adding to bio-productivity of the planet.

In this 180-degree change, I would like to put forth the revolutionary premise that the village will be part of this new city, and our existing villages will merely be historical sites, or a part of our collective memory. It may sound preposterous, but in the future, a large proportion of the agrarian economy will be centred in these new urban areas. Most of the world's population will live here, and will rightly leave large parts of our earth for other species.

The megalopolis of the future will require a whole new way of thinking, a whole new set of rules and laws. We will not have land rights, but we will have space rights, since land will be precious.

India's young population is going to be a great asset in this age, and cities will give them full rein. India's youth will be an asset not only for us, but also the whole world. In fact, 'them and us' in all its forms will lose meaning in this envisioned future. The world's people will be global citizens due to high levels of inter geography, migration and collaboration. The global city is already a reality, so the global state is not really a Utopian dream.

Does this sound like something out of science fiction, or a computer game? Think of the many developments, inventions and discoveries, which were once considered figments of a hyperactive imagination. My point is not 'Can we do all this?' It is 'Can we afford not to do it?' The future has no room for a sapping status quo.

The future of Cities

They are the destination of human habitation, and if they are to propel a country's future and safeguard their own, we will have to bulldoze all our old paradigms and build a bold new developmental model. The 0.9 version of Planet Urbania will contribute resources instead of omnivorously devouring them. It will erase the age-old boundaries, those of geography perchance even those of the mind

POWER TOWERS: As the commercial, financial and entertainment centre of India, Mumbai generates five per cent of India's GDP, 25 per cent of the country's industrial output, 40 per cent of maritime trade, and 70 per cent of capital transactions to India's economy. The recently anointed Alpha World city (a city deemed to be an important node point in the global economic system), is now home to 19 million people.



CUT THE CRAP: In a city teeming with millions of inhabitants, waste management raises a stink. With a daily mountain of approximately 7,025 tonnes of waste, the 35,000 workers of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai have their work cut out for them, collecting garbage from community bins scattered across the city, and transporting that waste to dumping grounds - a process that costs approximately Rs 15 to 20 lakh per day.



MASKED AND DANGEROUS: In August this year, the swine flu panic-demic had people queuing up outside testing centres and hospitals, and buying up surgical masks as if they were vada-pavs. Never before was a simple sneeze as anti-social an act. In a knee-jerk reaction, schools were closed for a week. But Mumbai did not become the ground zero that neighbouring Pune did. The last real epidemic to strike Mumbai was the plague in the late 19th century which killed thousands, mostly migrant mill workers living in insalubrious chawls.

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