

Indian Architect & Builder

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- HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR CREATES A NEW WESTSIDE STORY
- BOBBY MUKHERJEE: MUMBAI'S MR AMERICAN PIE
- SKYSCRAPERS AS SYMBOLS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

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COVER STORY



Shorebuilder or Shorebuster?

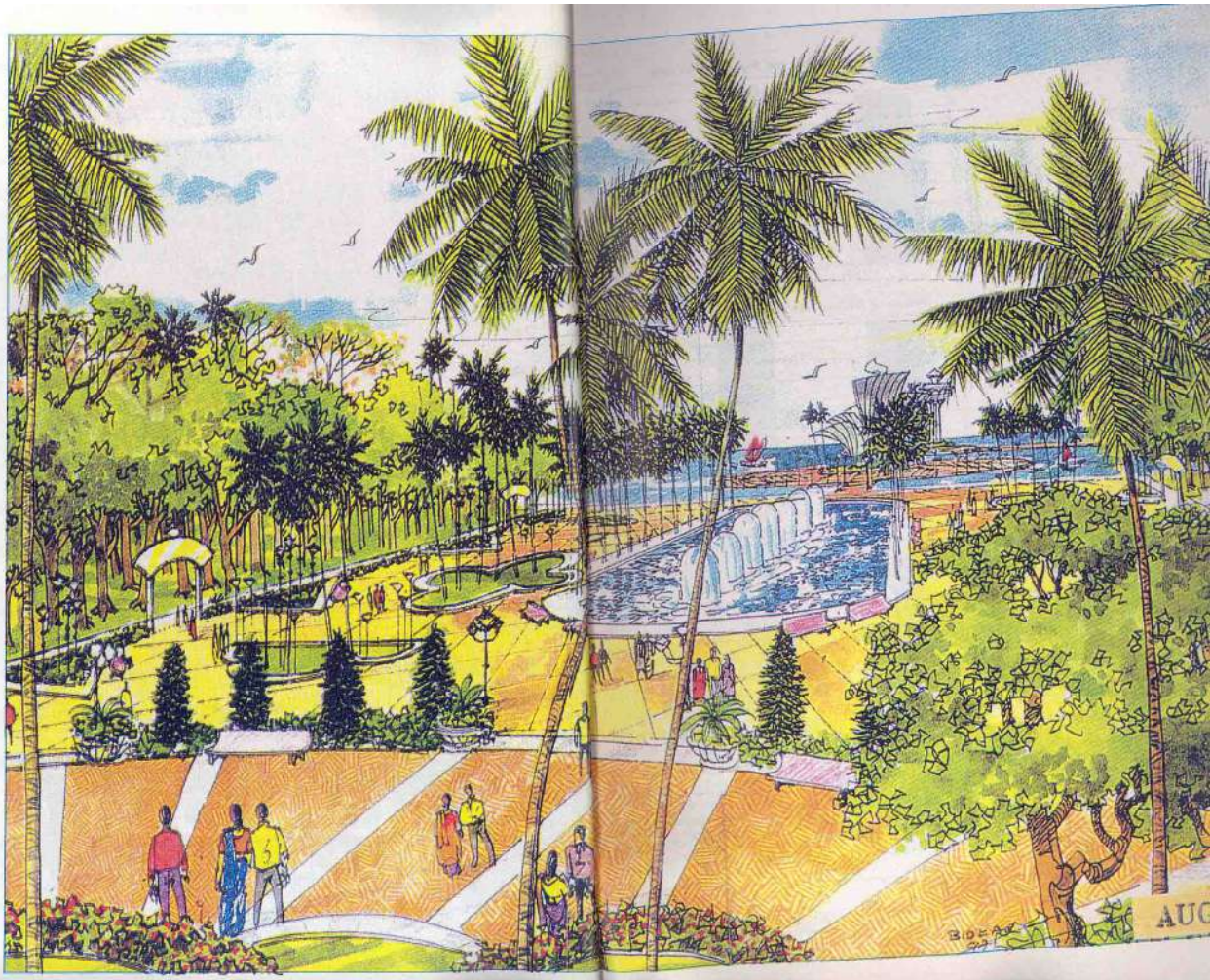
Sarayu Ahuja
Architect, Mumbai

The Afternoon Despatch and Courier, dispatched to its afternoon readers architect Hafeez Contractor's plans for the western shoreline of Mumbai. It said it was a commendable proposal and should be supported by one and all. It was with full-dosed skepticism that I ventured into Contractor's office to find out what was so commendable about it, and more importantly, what was in it for him. After all one could not forget his nexus with the builders - the profitmakers; profit couldn't be further away from his mind.

Contractor sat in his private heaven. A precarious wooden flight of steps lead to it: two flights and a midlanding; one flight without a handrail and the other with one. I watched his profile as he seriously contemplated whatever was facing him on his table. Then he sent a glance down, saw me and beckoned with a wave of his hand: "Come, come"

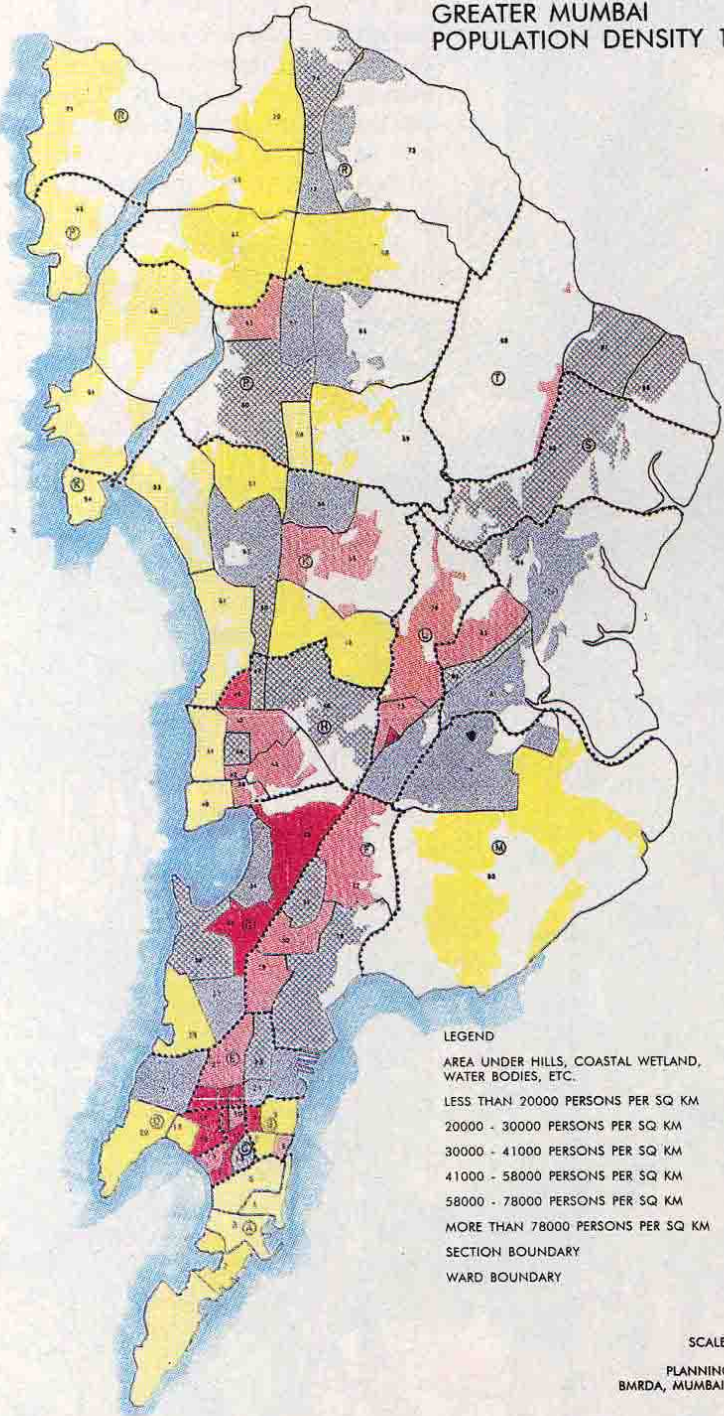
I made my way up the perilous stairway with a 'I-beg-your-pardon, it's-ours, not-yours' attitude about the shoreline, displaying a shade of belligerence. The last time, which is about eight years ago, when he had told me rather heroically that he would change the face of Bombay, frankly, I did not take him seriously and look at what he did! This time I decided to take him seriously because now he was talking about the coastline which essentially is the 'Face of Bombay'.

From where he sat in front of a large table he had a mezzanine-level-view of all levels above, below and sideways. Rather godlike. "Ravi, Pushkar, Bobby," he yelled out at intervals asking for drawings and such. Shuffles and scurries followed his command. His mobile beeped. "Don't worry. Don't worry. It will be done," he drawled god-like into the cellular wonder. His phone rang. 'I don't want

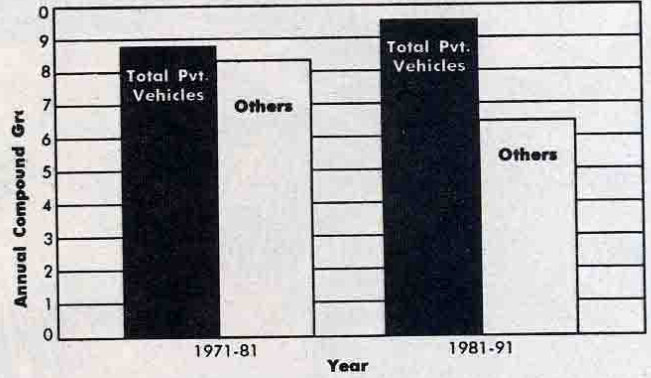


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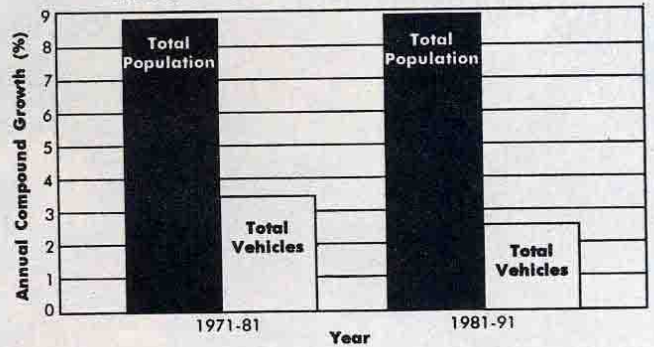
**GREATER MUMBAI
POPULATION DENSITY 1991**



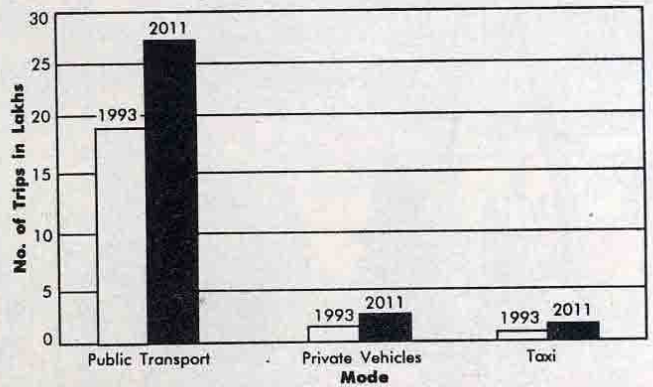
Growth of Vehicles and Population in BMR



Growth of Private Vehicles and Other Vehicles



Total Travel Demand in BMR

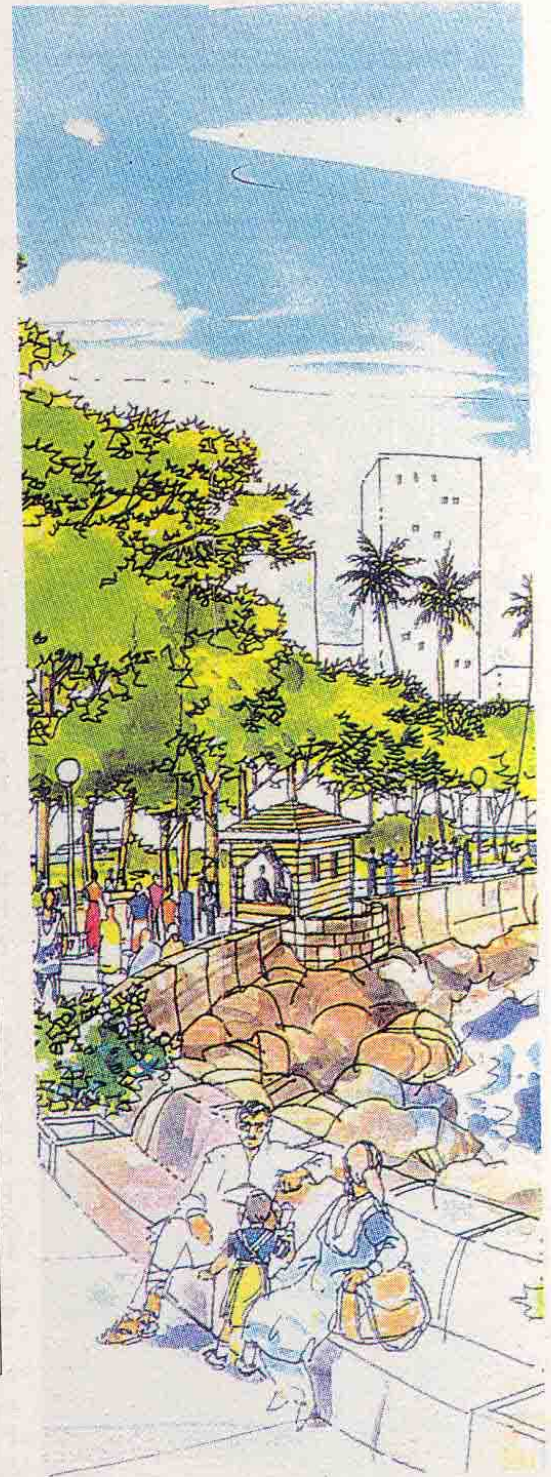


*** MUMBAI ROAD NETWORK**

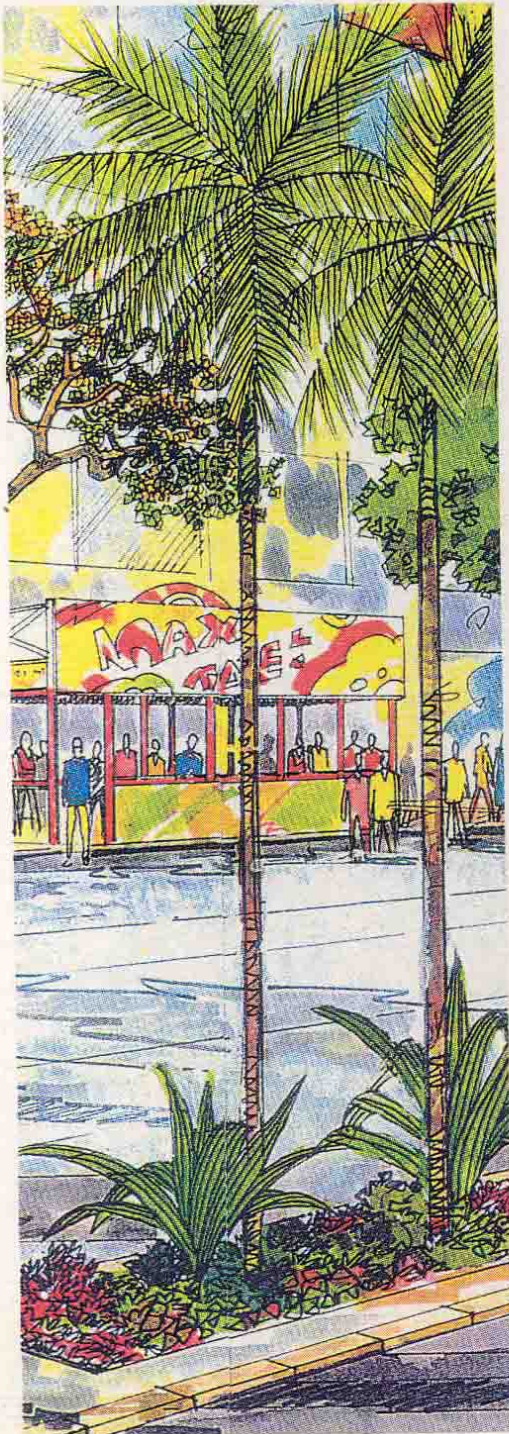
B.M.C. ROADS	:	1630 KM
NATIONAL HIGHWAYS	:	4415 KM
STATE HIGHWAYS	:	44 KM
TOTAL	:	1678.55 KM

Briefly...

- Plan for a Westside Parkway for Mumbai, extending across the shoreline.
- It will complement the government's proposed bridge-cum-highway linking Bandra to Worli and beyond.
- It has met with the approval of several town-planners, civic organisations and even environmentalists.
- The government's west island freeway, linking Bandra to Worli, is a fait-accompli. Environmentalists, no matter how good-intentioned, will not be able to prevent it, and in any case it is needed to keep the traffic moving.
- Have the road, but with that give the city more open land, forests and greens alongside the highway.
- Government is going to spend money on the expressway, it will only be an additional amount that it will have to spend.
- Large tracts of Mumbai's shore are rocky most of which are occupied by hutment dwellers. To reclaim land, all that has to be done is pump seawater on these rocks. The sand that comes along with the sea water will make a solid base.
- Trees and grass could grow easily on these which do not require much maintenance.
- Residents all the way will have a green belt within walking distance of their homes. There will be paths between buildings that will lead to this parkland.
- The expressway, presently much opposed by environmentalists and residents of the areas along which it would pass, would be separated by the forest land.
- Some of the highway would be on stilts and bridges, such as across Mahim creek, some of it will be underground, with a green mound on top, say along Worli.
- The process could be repeated along the city's eastern shoreline, and it would be easier here, since empty land is already available, most of it belonging to the port trust.
- As traffic would lessen, trees could be planted on Peddar road, a nice road divider provided, and residents could walk down Gama-dia and across to the parkland at Mahalaxmi.
- The westside parkway looks all set to be Hafeez Contractor's gift to Mumbai.



Also, in a coastal city; gardens, plazas, marinas along the coast are an inevitable solution.



any calls for the next half hour,' he bellowed to no one in particular. Someone in particular heard and obeyed. "Bring coffee," he yelled. Coffee arrived.

"Remember," he said beaming at me, 'I told you I will change the face of Bombay,' he said as Mogambo had said in some Hindi thriller about changing the face of earth. 'Now I want to concentrate on the coastline. And mark my words, it will happen.'

I paid attention to his prophecy. These days everyone has their brand of fortune tellers and astrologers. Deve Gowda went to one before he set up home at No. 7 Racecourse, New Delhi. I am sure he has changed his astrologer given the sequence of events that followed his move into central residence. Or maybe not, since our astrologers can always hide behind their *shanis* and *rahus*. So taking Hafeez very seriously I wondered what was in it for him.

'Is it for publicity?' I ventured. 'What? You think this is for publicity. How can you think so? In fact I am counting on you media people to take up this project - to create an awareness amongst other professionals, amongst people. That is what we need. This is our city. We are its citizens. We have a duty towards our city. We all have a responsibility. We all want a beautiful city.'

He grabbed a piece of paper and drew large bubbles of different sizes. 'Look. This is Shivaji Park, this - Oval maidan, this - Sanjay Gandhi National Park, this is Priyadarshini and this one, Jogger's Park in Bandra. See how small they are - like pockets. Where will the people go? And these

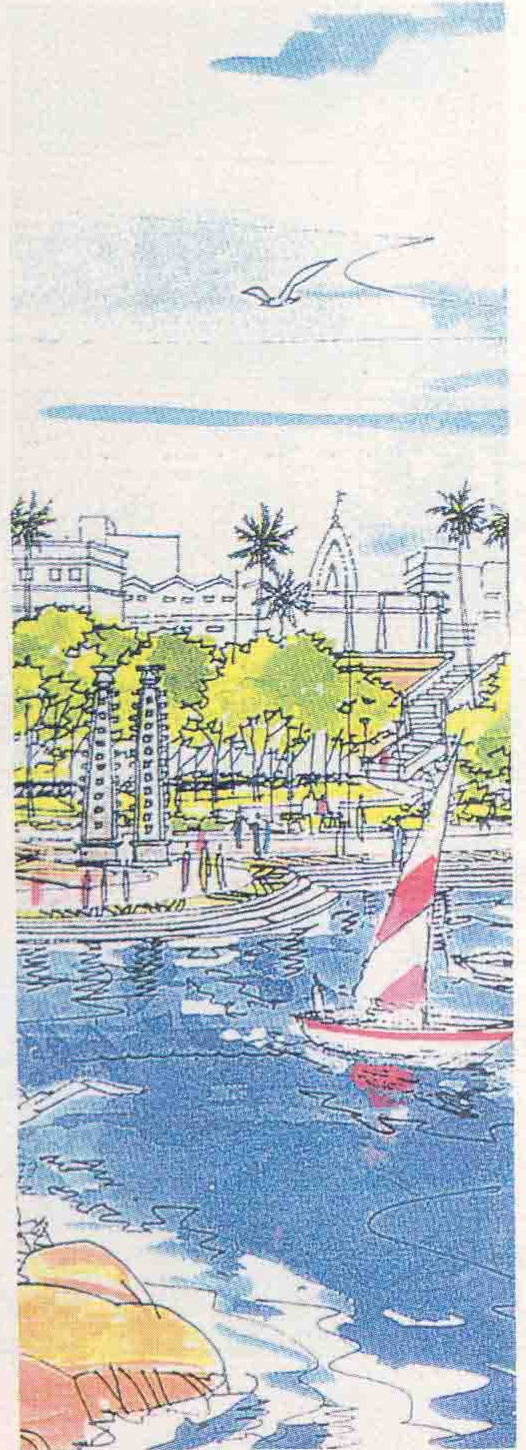
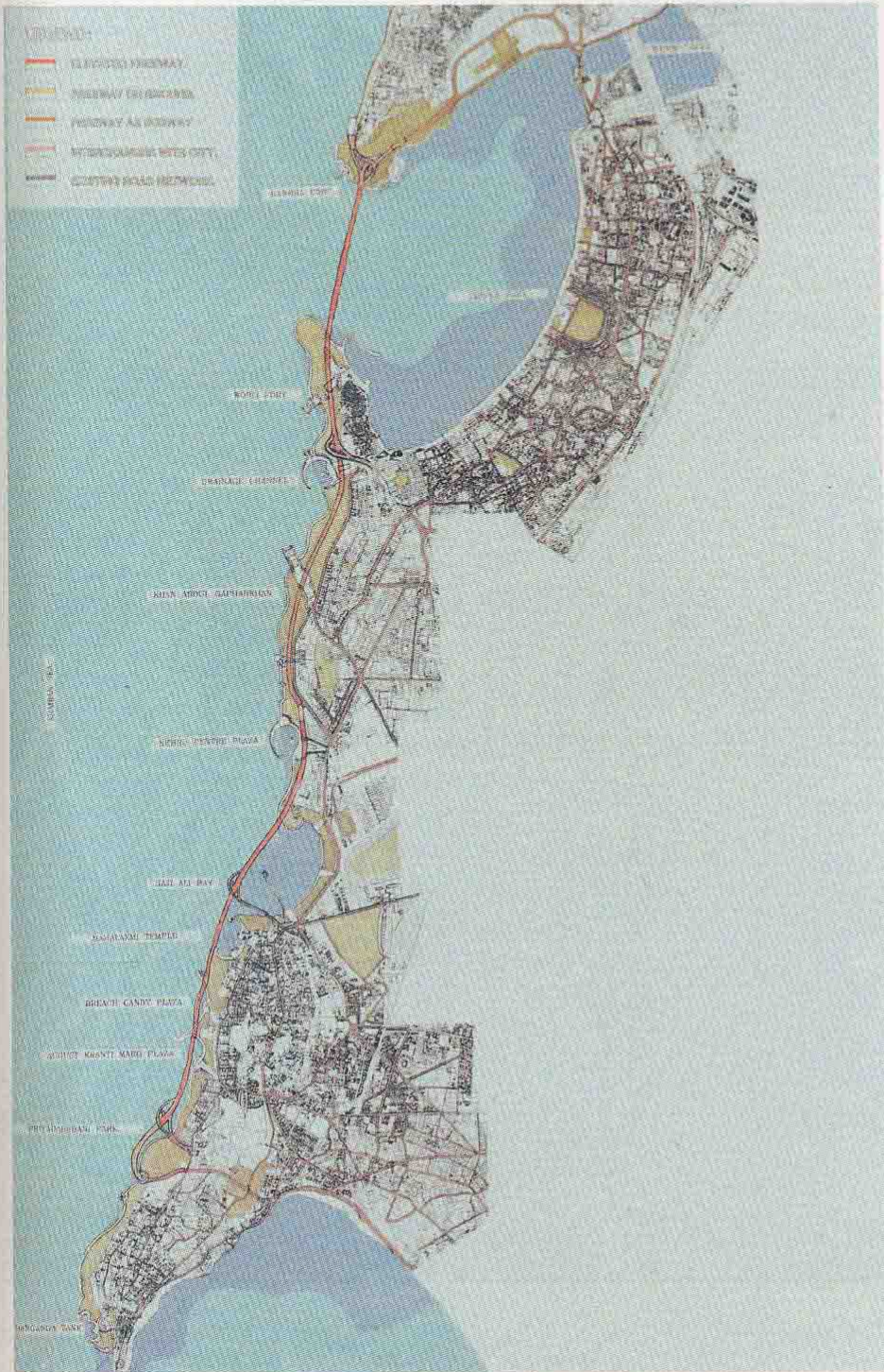
inland open spaces with traffic all around. So much noise. So much pollution. In the last thirty-four years no green spaces have been added. It is best to add to it along the coast. Good sea breeze, good view and lots of open space. It is all a matter of numbers. Look at the population today. The old green spaces are just not enough. Where can you take the kids out on Sundays?'

Point taken! I wasn't questioning the validity of his idea. It is a good idea but also an obvious one. Bombay is a coastline city, and that the coastline should be developed and be accessible to people is self evident. It is another matter that nothing has been done so far. However, this is not surprising at all. Laudable piecemeal plans and good intentions of architects and the like; have either ended in the oldpaper marts, or in dusty files. In the meanwhile, hotel owners and the rich bungalow-owners have apportioned the coastline in large bits for themselves and their customers and friends as the case may be.

Also, in a coastal city; gardens, plazas, marinas along the coast are an inevitable solution. Particularly in Mumbai because the island is narrow in width and the coastline easily accessible and because pockets of inland green spaces cannot compete with what the coastline gardens can offer: the sea and the sea breeze; and expansive space. But, no one had volunteered to address the citizens of the city with a comprehensive plan and programme. Hafeez was doing his bit. Why?

'Look,' Hafeez said and drew the entire coastline in one sweep. Then

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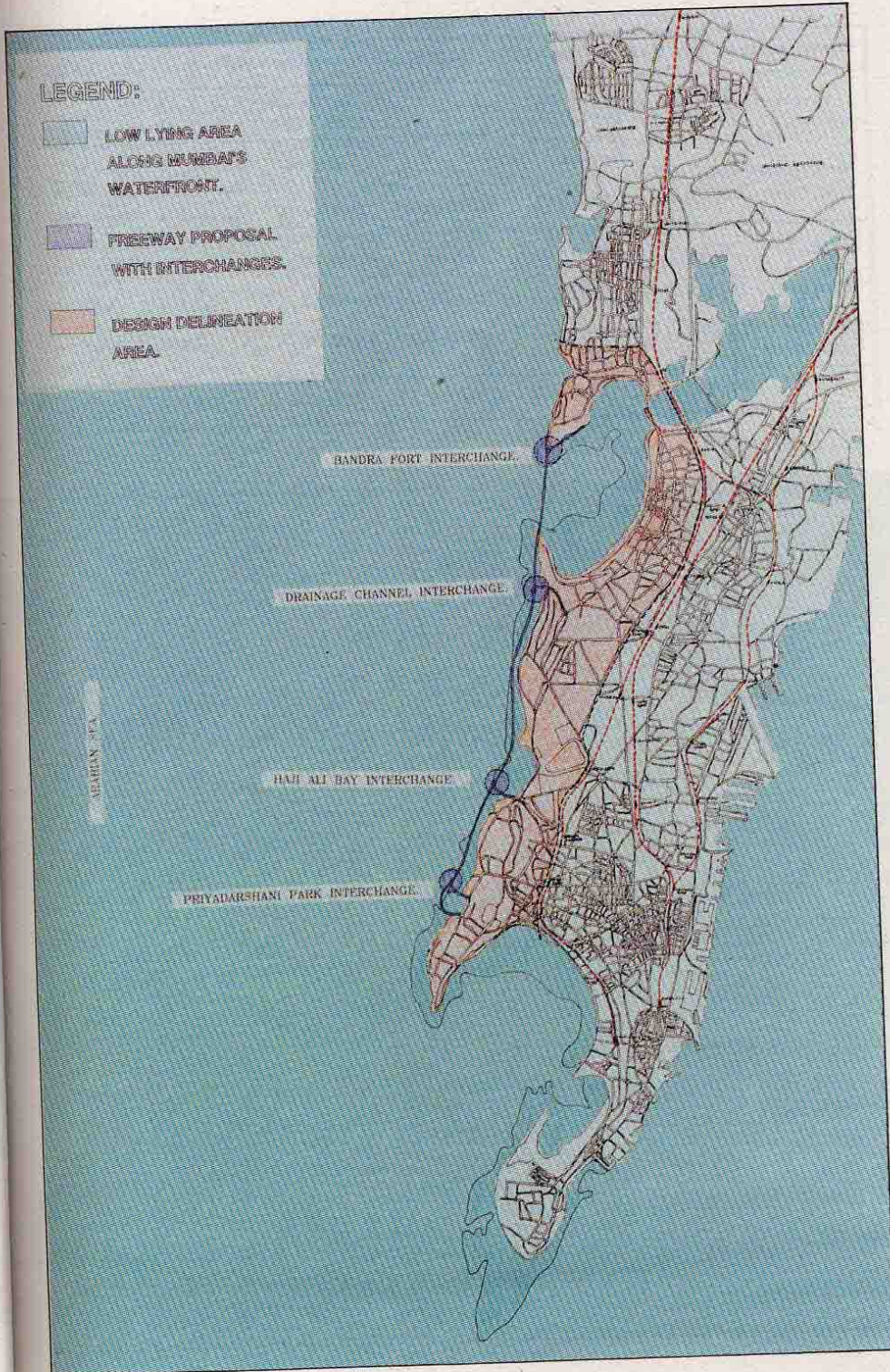


One can understand having a coastal regulation for those regions far away from the cities which bask in pristine natural beauty, but to have such a regulation in and around cities only leads to misuse, underuse and deterioration. Use and constant rejuvenation and revitalisation is one sure way of arresting deterioration and apathy.



MAHALAXMI TEMPLE PRECINCT

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he drew the highway, 'the highways are being planned for years. Nothing happens. Only costs go up. What would have cost Rs 100 crores ten years ago will cost Rs 300 crores today. Still, it's never too late. Highways must be built. They will eventually be built. We can't do without them for long now. Bombay is the commercial centre of India. It must operate like one. Easy and quick accessibility is most important. Also it saves energy. People's energy and petrol energy. This is an energy-saving plan.'

I did not argue with that. In fact I agreed. Different cities give rise to different problems and require different solutions. What is more we need different grades of development and environmental intervention: grade I, grade II and so on and so forth. So in a commercial city like Mumbai we need grade 1 development to be clubbed with say, grade III environmental requirement. That is to say, development should have a certain precedence over the environment. This does not imply that environment should be superseded. Also, the grades should not have fixed indices like in the case of FSI but it should be evaluated on a case by case basis with adequate citizen participation so that the decisions taken for the city are made by the professionals and people who use it.

In cities like Mumbai one has to look at basically two kinds of streets: a link street whose purpose is to link strategic points of the city, a practical kind of street whose only criteria for design are to convey large numbers of people from one point to other. Nothing

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Open spaces for Recreation (EXISTING):

	Area in Sq.Kms	Population 1991 Census provisional figures	Total		Per 1000 Population	
			Available	Desirable	Available	Desirable
Island City	75.74	3,159,907	656.62	1,263.99	0.20	0.40
Suburbs	201.22	3,945,685	304.62	3,156.53	0.07	0.08
Extended Suburbs	213.87	2,803,955	3,352.80	5,607.90	1.19	2.00
Total	490.83	9,909,547	4,314.04	10,028.42	0.44	1.01

Open spaces for Recreation (EXISTING):

	Area in Sq.Kms	Population 1981 Census provisional figures	Recreational Open Spaces in hectares			
			Total		Per 1000 Population	
			Available	Desirable	Available	Desirable
Island City	70.27	3,285,040	406.62	1,314.05	0.12	0.4
Suburbs	192.34	3,504,498	304.62	2,803.59	0.09	0.8
Extended Suburbs	203.74	1,453,867	3,352.80	2,907.73	2.31	2.0
Total	466.35	8,243,405	4,064.06	7,025.37	0.49	0.8



NEHRU

more, nothing else. Such streets may have to pay for itself; it would be like paying for a service. How this is done is totally a different matter altogether. Toll collection would prove disastrous since it would require manpower and also result in long queues of cars and bottlenecks. In any event bottlenecks are prone to occur at the start and the conclusion of each highway. Such details will have to be looked into or the exercise in quick mobility would only prove futile.

The other kind of street is the inner street, the residential and the shopping streets. These will be scaled down and therefore more intimate. People will be able to identify with them and relate to them: they will be meant for people and not just traffic. These streets would form a dense network in the living, shopping and entertainment areas holding together large parcels of localities which then would be connected by the link streets.

'Every other third grade city has a ring road,' Hafeez continued, 'but the difficulty with Bombay is that residential streets have turned into thoroughfares. Look at Peddar Road. Look what has happened to it. All these inner roads once had tall trees. Every time a road needed to be widened the trees were knocked down. We need to preserve old trees not just heritage buildings.'

I was talking about this to Cyrus Guzder of the Heritage Committee and he said, "Yes, I agree everything has an age limit and we need to create new things but we are not the architects. You are. So you guys give us some ideas." This is an idea. This is to be vetted by people and developers and environmentalists and heritage specialists. Everyone must be agreeable and they should be. Why not? This is what Bombay needs and it is our duty to give it to the city. Do you know what Moses did?'

I am used to architects wandering off to Vedic and Biblical times to borrow phrases, ideologies and

what not to justify or prove a point. I wandered off to Moses, who had parted the Red Sea to enable the Jews to cross it dryshod. When the pursuing Egyptians attempted to follow, he made the sea come back and drown them all. He then went on to Mount Sinai to keep an appointment with God. What had Moses to do, I wondered, with shoreline development?

'Do you know what Moses did for New York?'

I shook my head, stunned.

'He built all the highways along the coast and connected the entire shoreline and see how beautiful it all is.'

'I don't know this Moses.'

'Edward Moses or Abraham. I forget his name. He was the mayor. A visionary. You see, we need visionaries for big plans. Technical aspects, environmental aspects - all these can be tackled. To give you an example. How do you reclaim the coast for the gardens? No. Not by filling with garbage and plastic bags. That is environmentally damaging. I have one idea.'

'Next time you fly look down at the coastline; it is mostly rocky. So what we do is to scoop sea and sand on to these rocks. The water will go away and the sand will remain. We can reclaim the coast like this. Then we plant hardy trees. See, there are various ways. And we need to get together and work out the details. But the basic plan is one of vision. What is the use of piecemeal development? One highway, two highways? No. We must have comprehensive development. And in any case this plan is not about highways it is about coastline gardens. And amidst these gardens the artery goes above and below ground so what you see is always gardens and forests. And there are plazas at focal points. I am even thinking of a platform for Ganpati. There will be a permanent Ganpati in this plaza and a platform for immersions.'

Good point. Social and religious



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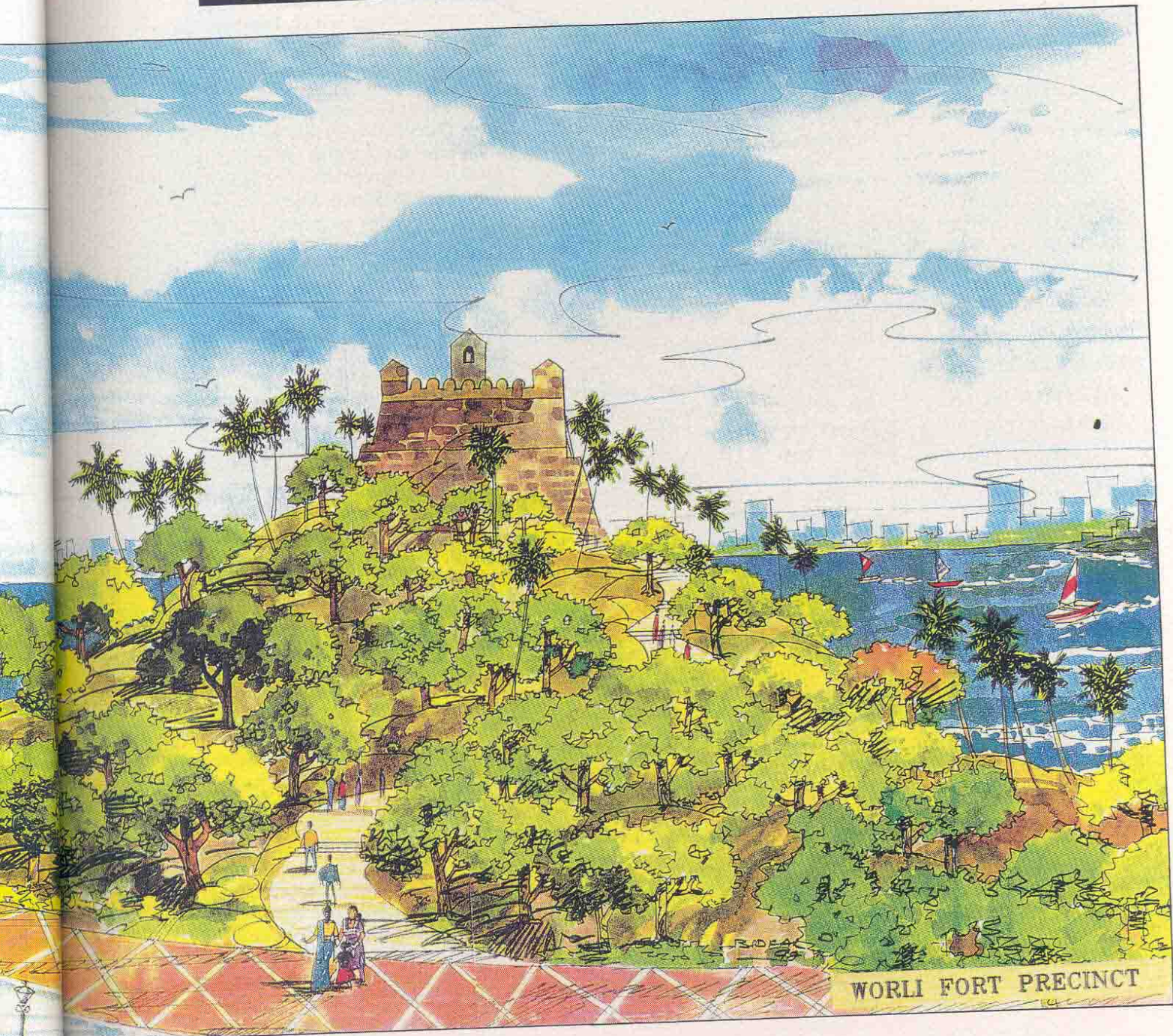
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WORLI FORT PRECINCT

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rituals must be given prominence as they form an essential part of the way of life in the city and give identity to it. Much like the carnival in Goa or the 'Temple-Rath' in Madras. In their own way, they are a form of social heritage. Heritage is not just about the preservation of monuments and old buildings. Forests and coastlines also require to be preserved. They are part of our national resource and heritage.

"I am concerned about heritage and preservation," Hafeez confessed. 'Earlier I used to always say that we must build highrises to make money and use the money for public amenities. I look at it differently now. We have to bring the environmentalists and the developers together. They must have a dialogue and out of their consensus we can have a blueprint for proper development. And we as the citizens of Bombay must contribute in every way possible. I did this plan. I am not getting anything out of this. In fact I have spent six-seven months on this and my staff have been working on it. Do you know, there are no computerised drawings at the BMC? Now I have it all in the computer in the office. Any part of Bombay can be reproduced just like that.' He clicked his fingers. 'We owe it to our city.'

If I have sounded skeptical so far in the interview it is because I was. Bombay has witnessed plans and more plans for development and beautification; all of them in vain. Lesser cities in Asia, lesser because they have less human resource, and lesser area have forged ahead to make living in them better for people. Here the developer and the environmentalist sit in watertight compartments with a singular dilemma: to develop -

not to develop, to develop - not to develop.

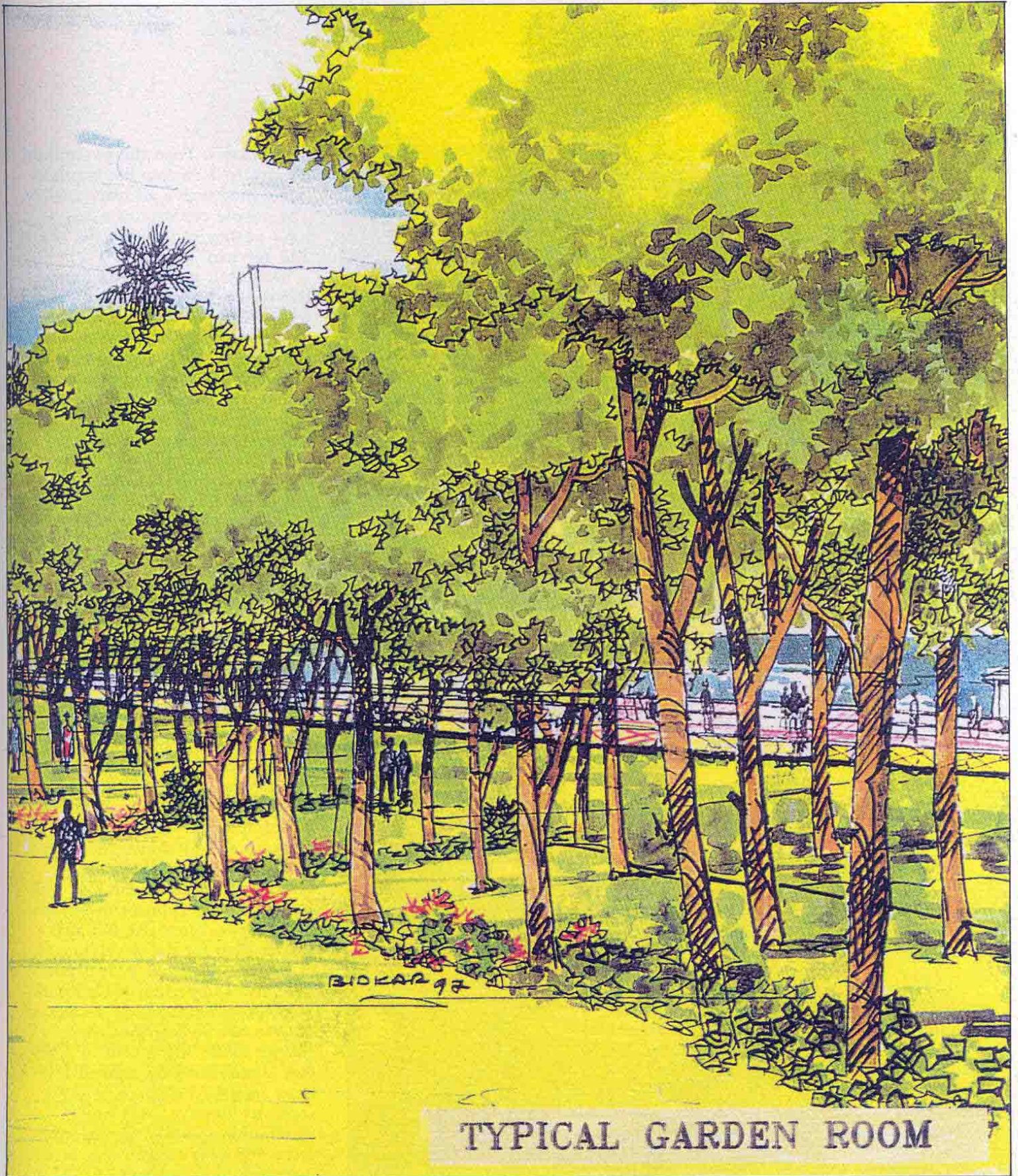
Not all forms of development are against the environment and there is always a viamedia. And the government which has been at best reduced to being a mere agency has no will, voice or direction; they slap on degenerative laws: In the name of rural development they parcelled off land to farmers - a benevolent act, but what did it lead to? Fragmentation of land. Piecemeal produce. Middlemen and dalals who swindled the farmers. Hoarding and black marketing. Middle level banks many of which misappropriated the funds meant for the farmer's upliftment, for seeds, manure and agricultural equipment. The result of all this was lower produce.

In order to curb exploitation and accumulation of land by a few rich people, the urban land ceiling act was introduced. This again only resulted in the fragmentation of urban land and parcels of land lying vacant, undeveloped, often usurped by slum dwellers.

It is the same case with the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) act which bans development in the coastal areas leading to a development-freeze that is detrimental to the growth of the city.

One can understand having a coastal regulation for those regions far away from the cities which bask in pristine natural beauty. But to have such a regulation in and around cities only leads to misuse, underuse and deterioration. Use and constant rejuvenation and revitalisation is one sure way of arresting deterioration and apathy.

First the government handcuffs those who could possibly do something constructive by passing



TYPICAL GARDEN ROOM



absurd laws. Then the government handcuffs itself into life imprisonment: they waive all responsibility. The people couldn't care less as long as they can exploit the city and services.

Don't tell me that you haven't heard of tax evasions, taped electricity meters that guarantee you subsidised electricity, free phone calls, water pilferage, ticketless travelling...If we are to have a livable city, the people have to contribute in every possible manner, in a way that is constructive. No more debates and paper plans or ideological pursuits. We want a city with a beautiful coastline, usable and accessible; and with gardens and forests.

Despite the intractable nature of difficulties, bureaucratic and mental, that attend every development process in India, there are signposts for us, with singleminded purpose, which can be achieved. Operation Flood initiated by Kurien ensured that milk is now available in shops any time, all times. Then the almost overnight clean-up of Calcutta and Surat is another relevant indicator that what seems impossible is possible. And the computerisation of services like railways and air travel today ensures some level of service.

Good old Hafeez. He has, without any client, sponsor or government support in sight, initiated a master plan for the development of Mumbai's shoreline. It is possible and I hope that Hafeez can accomplish what he has set out to do. We need a city for people, a city for better living. But in a city that is mobilised by a greed for more money and space, it is not sophistry to have reservations about which people would profit most. We have to wait and watch. But most of all we have to 'do'. □