



THE ASIATIC SOCIETY



# REVISIONING MUMBAI

CONCEIVING A MANIFESTO  
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A Collection of Papers / Presentations edited by  
Vimal Shah & Pankaj Joshi



Middle ground  
Show



Street Play (4)  
by Sudbir Patwardhan





## imaging mumbai



Anjali Monteiro &  
K. P Jayshankaran

Both are renowned film makers with their deep interest in the city of Bombay and its critical problems. Their films are realistic and convincing.

If one looks at the way in which Mumbai has been represented in the media, one finds that there is a range of representations that creates a field that is as complex and contested as the city itself. Underlying this idea, is a perspective that the city cannot be taken as a given objective reality, something out there that is the same for everybody. It is a space that we all imagine and comprehend differently, through sound, images and stories; what we broadly call representations of the city. Every active representation is an act of power and resistance that relates to a larger relationship of power and through processes of inclusion and exclusion that depend on the city. For instance, if you look at the dominant media discourse, you would find that the poor would be represented as dirty, an eyesore, a burden on the city, unproductive, creators of law and order problems on the one hand or as helpless victims of the cruel system on the other. We find that these stereotypes underpin the way in which the media approaches stories and talks about slums demolition or hawkers' erections. They also begin to govern the way in which, civic society begins to perceive the other section of Society and begins to address their issues.

The display on the poor in the city is also tied up with the idea of migration and migrants. We know this, and we ourselves are first generation migrants in the city, so one of the key motives that we work within our film, or in our ideas of documenting the imaging the city, has been the idea of migrants itself. But somehow when you talk about migrants and migration, we ourselves don't realize that we are first generation migrants, the middle class. We don't see ourselves as migrants at all, we see ourselves as something that deserted the poor of the city, who have been here all along. It is a feeling in the poor that we have access to the property in the city's resources itself that makes us rightful heirs to the city, as opposed to the migrant.



For this fact, these migrants have actually contributed a lot to the wealth of the city by providing labour and productive services and also contributed to the revenue of the city. Now, one has to examine the city historically. Mumbai has been conceptualized as a secular space and would attract labour force from the hinterland to work in its mills and factories. It is this secular fabric, which probably is under seize or threat so the kind of process of exclusion which is now prevalent has begun with slogans like 'Me Mumbaikar'. The city belongs to a certain class and that is something that threatens others. The very fabric of Mumbai is getting shattered and we try to incorporate this change in our work in the city.

In this particular session, we would be focusing our work as examples by showing two films that we made on the city. One is called '*Sacha*' which stars Sudhir and others, and the other is called '*Nata*'. In both these films, what we have tried to do is, in some way to present the kind of dominant discourse on the poor and in the process try to re-examine our relationship in that space and the modes in which we perceive them. We like to share the first two scenes from *Nata*. This is a film set in Dharavi, and it tells several different stories of Dharavi itself as a space and its history; how it developed. We try to represent a productive space. The other is the story of two friends, one is Bhau Kode, who lives on the outskirts of Dharavi and Khar Khan, who is a resident of Dharavi and they very inspiringly work around the theme of communal amity which started after the 1992-93 riots. The third story that the film tells is the story of the two of us. First generation migrants to the city belonging to different communities and the kinds of issues of identity that we face. What we would be showing now is just two shots. The first one relates to how people in Dharavi perhaps live and people like us who go to intervene and the second looks like some media work has been done for communal harmony, and shooting done when

making a film. The residents of Dharavi got together to make a short film, a promo on communal harmony which was shown on Doordharshan.

As film-makers who have spent a major part of their life in the city, we feel great affection and attachment to the space and appreciate the resilience of its people. In the past 30 years we have been in the city, as Sudhir was reflecting, we have seen space change and we see that a part of history has been erased. We see mill area has given space to entertain the rich and there is a pain and a sense of loss that one feels in all this. This is something that we were trying to explore among other themes through the film *Sacha*, which has two eminent persons, Narayan Surve, the poet and Sudhir Patwardhan the artist, and our images of the city. Weaving these three together, we have tried to look at the city, over a period of time. We have tried to look at the city's veins which have changed and we have tried to reflect also on the whole idea of politics of representation.

When I (Jayasankar) came to Mumbai and started looking around, the first fruitful image was the image of workers. As I have working drawings, I was projecting myself. But this confrontation with another person, who had life that was different from mine and who belongs to a class that was different from mine. I did not really know the first time, what this life was, I was looking at it, but that was not the life that I lived. Basically this is an artist's emotion. I must observe more objectively and I must draw back the projections that I am making to do that figure.

We are trying to come to terms, as Sudhir puts it, in terms of images and experiences and sound. So we were trying to look desperately for a metaphor that would begin to make sense and help us in adding space. Therefore, we thought that the idea of a loom was very handy and a useful metaphor to work with. A look is of dynamic site, where upper end kind of antimonies

now begin to weave unified kind of fabric of many directions, between forces, but at the same time it makes possible that larger fabric. This we thought as an interesting metaphor to use and speak about its experience. Inspiringly it begins to weave together experiences both personal and public. The experiences that Sudhir as a person spent on working on images in the city and Narayan Surve with words so it kind of gave us a device to put together, the personal and public and to an extent a part of the whole and begin to understand in that sense. The other idea that this city is kind of changing and one is worried about the change that is taking place. How does one now begin to embed into one's imagination of city, this kind of change. What we did in the film, was to look at virtually the work at Ulhasnagar, divided into many different elements that come together. What we attempted to do was to use images, to re-visit some of the images, some of the spaces, metaphorically within the film. You saw the image of a woman selling tomatoes. Now we will show another look at that space and one realizes that the image was a business-like image that appeared in the beginning. When it recurs, it is much more an urban image, like her, the women who sell tomatoes on the street. We are also in a way trying to hang on to the memories of the city, memories which are beginning to fade away and to use a metaphor we thought of making Buddha's image out of ice, iconic representation of ice and butter which melt away. Using that as a device to look at the position from which we come and look up to the city, we represented ourselves.