

MUMBAI MERI JAAN

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF AGNI

Action for good
Governance &
Networking in
India

AGNI

Editorial

VJTI and IIT to check quality of Roads

BMC has the best process for road building, but unfortunately they do not follow the same with letter and spirit. A few years back Bhaskar Prabhu of Mahiti Adhikar Manch and AGNI's former F/South Ward Coordinator, in a citizen's audit of a road in F/South, found that the newly laid road in his Ward F/S was not up to the mark. He got the road redone by the same contractor at his own expense.

With many citizens posting pothole riddled roads in social media and the criticism of pot holes on Mumbai roads, BMC has decided to rope in experts from Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mumbai to confirm the quality of the material to be used in concreting the Mumbai roads and only those which they have approved the contractor can use. Further, the experts have also been requested that they should do random checks while the concretising is in process, so that the contractor does not use inferior quality of material.

In November 2022, BMC invited tenders worth Rs. 6,079 crore for concretisation of 400 km of roads, of which 71 km is of city, 70 km for eastern suburbs and 275 km for western suburbs.

MMJ

Swachh Bharat 2 – SWM project in L Ward

 Zahida Banatwala, AGNI Trustee

Mumbai First jointly in collaboration with K C law college planned a pilot study on Solid waste management in L Ward. Having studied the waste generated by the maximum city it was observed that L Ward (Saki Naka) Andheri East was most challenging and a case study to be undertaken to see how one could change the same.

This in keeping with the initiative launched by the Prime Minister in phase one of



"Swachh Bharat Mission 2" and his vision of making Indian Cities Garbage Free.

A Knowledge Session: Transforming Solid Waste Management in the Sakinaka area (L ward) was scheduled for the students of KC Law College on January 6th, 2023 at KC Law College.

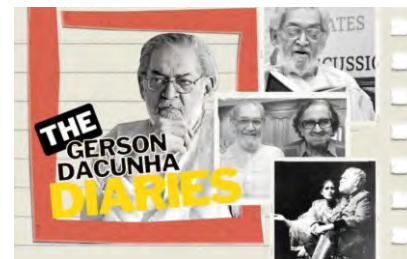
The objective being that students and educational institutions **Contd. on Page 4**



Remembering our Dear Gerson who passed away last year on 7th January



As remembrance of Gerson, we are sharing a very Special and interesting article on The Gerson daCunha Diaries by the international known writer, director, producer and the only Indian member of AWD (Alliance of Women Directors of the USA) Nilakshi Sengupta. Courtesy: "the dailyeye"



On the 7th of January, his first death anniversary, we remember Gerson Dacunha through one of his last conversations with Nilakshi Sengupta.

The journalist, the Adman, the social activist also played a huge role in the English language theatre of Mumbai. In this piece he recollects how he got involved in the English language theatre and how it helped him evolve as a person. Ad verbatim, from GERSON DACUNHA.

How did you begin Gerson?

I began in the theatre in Bombay, when it was still Bombay, in St Xavier's college. I was in the St. Xavier's college dramatic club and I got in there by sheer accident. A professor of English there said to me one day, after hearing a reading that we were doing - are you a member of the dramatic club? I said - no. Have you ever acted in the St. Xavier's College dramatic club contest? I said, No. He said, I will make you a member, I will find you something to do. And thus began my love for theatre.

So, it was never an ambition, was it?

I never intended to be a part of the theatre in this city. But, once I was part of the theatre in Bombay, it was like a never-ending ailment. I could not leave it. In fact, that theatre was the beginning of a relationship with people like Alyque Padamsee and me. The theatre nourished my life. We made our living from advertising. I was in advertising. I began in journalism, but then I was advertising with JWT (J Walter Thompson) for a year. And then for 26 years in Lintas,

where I had joined as a copywriter and left as its head.

How did theatre grow in those days?

English theatre brought development, advances, novelty in the theatre in the city, because it was the natural conduit for what was new. And at that time, soon after the war, World War Two, which ended in 1944, 1945 there was a lot of relief. This relief developed into lots of openness and novelty.

For instance, Satyajit Ray in cinema, the progress of artists groups in Bombay, the Hussain's and the Gaitonde's, Manto, Kaifi and so forth, all this was a result of the ferment that followed the awfulness of World War Two. All were a product of that great wave of relief and the novelty that swept the country.

This also reflected in the lives of the students of St. Xavier's?

In St Xavier's College, we were in the shallows of this surge and we had people like Adi Marzban, Derek Jeffries and later Ebrahim Alkazi who chose the plays that we would do and directed us.

Adi Marzban and Derek Jeffries are two people who were very busy. Adi Marzban ran a daily newspaper, The Jam-e-Jamshed, and Derek Jeffries ran the city's buses. It is not as if they did not have anything to do. In fact, they did have a lot to do, but still found time to be involved in theatre. They enjoyed and thought it their duty to give time and attention and their experience to St Xavier's College. And that made the St Xavier's College dramatic club the seedbed of a lot of people - Alyque Padamsee, Pearl Padamsee. And that group grew out to become the St Xavier's College dramatic club of that era.

Now, the major contribution of the college, Adi Marzban, Derek Jeffries and Alkazi was that they made the English theatre in **Contd. on Page 3**

Good Governance Series

 Shrikant Soman, MMJ Editorial Board Member & Ward Coordinator, R/North

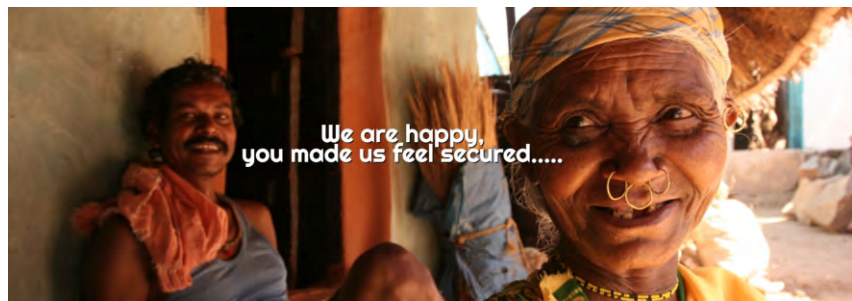
The theme is about 'Stories of Good Governance'. I intend to highlight the success stories of good governance at various locations and levels. My main interest is at the village level, about which we city people are least informed and interested. But I believe that a true progress of the nation can happen only when the people at village level get empowered towards ensuring good governance.

In the first in the series, I am covering the story of SOVA in Odisha which has done exemplary work in empowering poor tribals in remote villages in Odisha.

Good Governance at Village Level - SOVA

While NGOs like AGNI, ADR, PRAJA are working mainly in cities, the need for good governance at village level through participation by the citizens is strongly felt in order to have vibrant and

monitor various government schemes and initiatives and to protect and ensure the viability of the community against external threats such as economic exploitation, social and political marginalisation and discrimination.



prosperous India right from the grass root village levels.

There is one community level organisation working in the remote tribal areas of Orissa for the past two decades in undivided Koraput District to have effective good governance at the ground level in remote villages. It is named South Orissa Voluntary Action (SOVA). This district is one of the poorest districts in Odisha. SOVA empowers the most disadvantaged members of society, with special emphasis on women and children, to have good governance in the areas of healthcare, education, livelihood, disaster relief and child rights. Their participatory process motivates tribal and other marginalised people to work together to fight poverty, exploitation and discrimination.

SOVA aims to strengthen the capabilities at grassroots governance institutions like Gram Sabha, Palli Sabha, village level committees and Panchayat Raj. They facilitate these arms to manage their resources, to demand the implementation of and

SOVA focuses on:-

1 Capacity Building of Community Leaders to have leadership quality and skills in resource mobilisation.

2 Information dissemination on different government policy, provisions and its accessibility through Village Development Committee, Child Club and Women's Groups to support in planning and implementation of the program.

3 Linkages and advocacy with Government Departments, PRIs, Tribal and Community Leaders for hassle free access of services and peace building among the displaced and non-displaced community.

4 Establishment of Panchayat Federation to make a stronger impact of the village issues at block and Panchayat levels. This federation takes up the issues at political and administration level to ensure that the benefits are given to all the deprived but eligible individuals.

5 Strengthening of the Village Development Committee is done so that they take up the ownership of community issues and **Contd. on Page 4**

MLA Ameet Satam meets citizens

 Sandra Alex, K/West Ward Coordinator

A meeting with MLA Ameet Satam of Andheri Assembly Constituency was held at the Gandhigram garden, in the presence of Ms Zahida Banatwala, AGNI Trustee and other citizens.

Shri Satam was appraised about various works done by the Citizen Groups / NGOs as under:-

- Removal of encroachment created by TRIG SECURITY AGENCY as also removal of 2 pockets of slums in Juhu
- Relocation of hawkers at Juhu Church Road as per Court order.
- A footpath was created on Shree Mukteshwar Devalaya Road for the safety of pedestrians
- Cleaning of the privately owned Nasta Plot, which became a dumping ground for garbage with a proliferation of mosquitos.
- Relocation of food court on Juhu beach following a PIL.
- Citizens requested for a structural audit for the Municipal school, and were actively involved in developing gardens on the beach, as per the High Court order.

Members also drew his attention, that despite public participation, quality of roads, footpaths, waste disposal and hawkers' issues, a marginal insignificant change had taken place.

What about Swachh Bharat Abhiyan? Seems to have come to naught. Cleanliness should be paramount, illegal hawking



and debris dumping on the beach, as well as sewage treatment should also be taken cognizance of on Juhu beach.

Why are Crores of Rupees being spent on Mumbai Beautification Project, when the need of the hour is pothole free, well lit walkable encroachment free roads, a centralized Municipal Market and the Municipal School in the vicinity. Citizens' inputs as to the utilization of these funds was suggested.

Shri Satam heard the grievances and resolved to investigate the same. He explained his commitment to several of the above inputs, as also his inputs towards contracts for the same being given to credit worthy Companies for implementation.

However, clarity on development of the Market and commencement of work on the now demolished school is still awaited.

The requirement of a safe boundary wall and varied other matters of existing Gandhigram Garden were requested.

Shri Satam assured citizens of his support and continual efforts facilitating a safe & clean Juhu.

MMJ

WADALA Swachh Abhiyaan

Swachh Abhiyan resumed at Wadala, with citizens and BMC staff participating in cleaning the Karve Garden at Wadala.

The idea was for citizens to join the BMC staff in day to day



clean up and at the same time keep monitoring them and report any laxity. This would also inculcate responsibility of citizen participation.

MMJ



The Gerson daCunha Diaries

Contd. from Page 1 Bombay, the best of modern European theatre. And the modern European theatre at the time was taking a new direction. For example, you had Samuel Beckett with *Waiting for Godot* in 1951, which is really post war 51. And we did *Waiting for Godot* here. It is in fact a play in which nothing really happens, in which performance takes precedence over plot. And that was one of the many directions that the theatre was taking after the tragedy of World War Two. And we were swept along. Alyque Padamsee for example, was very much a product of those years. And Alyque had directed 77 plays in his lifetime.



Were there many English theatre groups then?

There was at that time in the 1950s and 60s, something called the Oxford and Cambridge societies. There was the Oxford society, there was a Cambridge society, and there was the Oxford and Cambridge society plays. The two societies came together to do a play every year. Now, the great thing about the Oxford and Cambridge societies was this: the people in them were people that the amateur theatres would never be able to afford. These were people who came here from Oxford and Cambridge, like Barry Barker, like John Smith R. These are people who were in theatre in their universities, in their colleges. And they did Shakespeare there.

I mean, I remember doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Barry. Barry was the director of the play and he taught me about speaking. Now, the marvellous Shakespearean lines, how to speak them was more or less taught to us by these chaps. They had done their stint in colleges and in those great universities in England. And they transferred that knowledge to us.

Could our Indian actors adapt easily?

There were no worries about ethnicity. No worries about the colour of skin. Yes, there was a certain problem about speech, because you had to speak and speak the language correctly. But as long as you spoke it correctly, they did not worry about the accent, for example.

It was a wonderful time. It really truly was a wonderful time. The Oxford and Cambridge societies were an education in themselves. And that was a feature of the 50s and 60s in Bombay; they must have done about

20 productions here. They left in their wake, a tradition of production and direction for us to use in the days to come.

Your collaboration with Alyque is well known. Tell us more please.

Alyque did *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Cabaret*. He brought a vigour and a professional expertise to the theatre in Bombay that did not exist before. And whenever he tried something new, whenever he tried to localize something, as for example, he took Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and made it a Hindu Muslim story where the tensions between the Montagues and Capulets became a reflection of the Hindu Muslim tensions, whenever he tried to localize a major play, a classic, he would fail. But when he did a play that respected its origins, he was wonderful.

He did *Man of La Mancha* for example. He did wonderful musicals. In fact, it was Alyque and Pearl Padamsee, his wife, who brought the musical to Bombay. Pearl began the musical with *Godspell*. And Alyque followed immediately after, with roughly the same story as the story of *Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ Superstar*. When I think of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, I am not just in admiration of the quality of the performance or the quality of the direction. But I am in admiration of the difficulties that it conquered.

For instance, I saw *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Soon after he performed here in Bombay, I saw the production in London, and ours was better. Ours was better not only because of the quality of singing and acting, which were wonderful. We had marvellous voices here as a matter of fact. But the handicaps that we mastered, for instance, there in London, you had a full-scale orchestra. And each singer was miked whereas here, our orchestra was a keyboard, a guitar, a drum set, and a violin - four people. And we had three microphones, and those microphones had to be placed after you use them. You had to place them without looking in a precise place on the platforms that we used as a set, because if it was not placed there, the next person would have to reach for it without looking and pick it up. So, it was full of difficulties. And we, I thought, did remarkably well.

You had mentioned how much you learnt in theatre. Would you like to elaborate?



That was another thing about the English theatre at that time, certainly about the theatre group. It was an education for us, just by belonging to it.

We learnt from Derek, Adi and Alkazi. We learnt about sculpture and about poetry, we learnt about TS Eliot, WB Yeats. Yes, we had heard of TS Eliot, Yeats, but had not appreciated and savoured the quality of their poetry. Sculpture, painting; these were all things that came to us as a result of our belonging to the theatre group. Being in English theatre at that time and by 'at that time' I mean in the 50s, it was an education, and besides, it was a wonderful social life.

Every week, every Saturday, we had what we called 'hunts'. Hunts? Why 'hunts'? Nobody knows. And nobody can explain why there were parties. Everybody brought food, and the host, it happened at the different hosts' house every week, he supplied the drink, and the drinks were not alcohol as there were many prohibitions then. Not that we cared about prohibition, but alcohol was not that important to us either. We had things like lemonade, strawberry, and raspberry. And we all brought some food. They became very popular, not only with just the core group, but with a lot of others who became interested in the group in order to attend the Hunts.

So, the English theatre at that time, certainly for me, and certainly for people like Alyque and Pearl, was something that gave us a lot of fascinating things to do and kept us from wasting our time.

How difficult was finding finances for the English language theatre then?

In fact, the theatre in English and in Bombay, was always a bit of a problem because we never had the money that we needed. But after we had been at it for a while and when I say a while, I mean something like 10 or 12 years, it was no longer a struggle to drum up the money to start, that money was there. The theatre group to which we all belonged, had laid a kitty that enabled us to start and we

Beautification below Malad Flyover

The BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation plans to beautify the space beneath the flyover at Malad (East). The flyover



connecting Goregaon and Kandivali via the Western Express Highway (WEH) will have a first aid centre, a jogging track, yoga space, kids play area, an amphitheatre and also a public toilet beneath it. The beautification project, estimated to cost around Rs2.4 crores, is expected to be completed by March 2023.

This is the second such project, the first being the garden developed in Matunga.

Under **Contd. on Page 4**

knew that as long as a production was not an utter failure, we would be okay.

What was society like then?

At that time in Bombay, the economics of the city was changing. Jobs were becoming more plentiful. So, we had no problem getting a job and rising in the places we joined. For example, I joined as a copywriter, became copy chief and became creative director because there was a process called ization that was happening. 'Ization', which meant Indian-ization of jobs in commercial companies, and among which, of course, you had advertising agencies.

Jobs that once were occupied by the English people and the French people began to be occupied by Indians - the ization part of their policies. So, during the day we were earning our living in offices of one kind or another and in the evenings, we spent a lot of time rehearsing. So, we had a damn good time, a damn good life.

MMJ

An appeal for donations

AGNI is a movement managed and run by volunteers. Being a voluntary movement, AGNI needs the support and contribution of every citizen to continue its work. Citizens are invited to contribute their indispensable ideas, time, effort and financial support. Send Cheque / DD in favour of "AGNI" to any of our Ward Coordinators as listed on Page 4 or to AGNI Office: Chadha

Bldg, 1st Floor, Plot No. 95, Wadala (West), Mumbai 400 031
Bank Details for donations transferred electronically:

Account Name: AGNI,
SB A/c No.: 000710210000005
Bank of India, Breach Candy Branch, Mumbai 400 026.
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AGNI is a Charitable Trust. Donations are eligible for exemption under 80G of the Income Tax Act.

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LACC BORIVALI/ DAHISAR meet

Willie Shirsat, AGNI's R/North Ward Coordinator

A new recent SHO E VENDOR exhibited his GOODS - SHOES on the wall of a PUBLIC SAUCHALAYA at BORIVALI station (west}. The shoes displayed covered the painted portion of BHARAT.



This display became most embarrassing and disgusting hurting our National PRIDE.

One of our distinguished member of LACC, Mr Rajeev Mulik, took objection and his personal intervention helped in



INSTANT RESOLVING THE ISSUE, instead of waiting for authorities to act. BRAVO Mulik!

MMJ

Beautification below Malad Flyover

Continued from Page 3 its "Mumbai beautification project" the BMC has allotted a fund of Rs30 crore to each of all the 24 administrative wards. Accordingly, P/North ward has come up with a unique idea of beautifying the space beneath the flyover. The 25,000 square-foot area under the 150-metre-long flyover in Malad (East), will be designed by MM Naik. "The area near the flyover is surrounded by slums but there are no open spaces for residents. So the place beneath the flyover will be developed in a way that it will create breathing space for people to relax. Provisions will also be

made for facilities like drinking water, public toilets, waiting area and a first-aid room," said Architect Mayuri Naik.

The route is frequented by college students from Kandivali, Borivali, Dahisar and Mira Road area. The area under the bridge connects the Datta Mandir road and the Malad subway where there are several colleges. The BMC is also developing an amphitheatre with seating arrangements for students to relax, study or carry out educational activities. The ambulance on standby with the first-aid centre

Contd. in Col. 3

Good Governance - SOVA

Contd. from Page 2 bring them up before the Panchayat Federation and strive to address the common community issues.

6 Participation by Women - SOVA facilitates the inclusion of women in village self-governing bodies and encourages them to hold their own meetings to discuss their issues.

7 Community Monitoring Information System (CMIS). This is a pictorial tool that helps even illiterate people understand and take ownership for their village issues. This has proven to be community friendly and easier to track by both literate and illiterate villagers. As it provides a picture of the village who have benefitted and those who are waiting to benefit, it increases curiosity and interest.

MMJ

Continued from Col 2 will also be helpful for accident victims in the vicinity and can be taken to hospital if needed, civic sources said.

"To give people an idea about real heroes, the feature wall created here will have all the information, portraits and pictures of soldiers, so the children coming here will know the importance

Contd. in Col 4

SWM project in L Ward

Contd. from Page 1 could gain ground experience by being a part of this field project. It was also decided that Mumbai First along with the students and members be involved in the project would work closely with Municipal authorities to develop a method for dealing with the waste management in L Ward.

Speakers for the event:

Ms Nandini Dias, Mumbai First; Dr. Krishna Lala, Director ERAF; Mr Ajit Kumar Jain, Chairman, ERAF; Shri Sanjay Ubale, Executive Board, Member, Mumbai First and Zahida Banatwalla Trustee AGNI.

Along with Eminent speakers and experts on the subject I was invited to speak on the role of "ALM's in waste management and development of the same.

We had a bunch of very enthusiastic and attentive students who were eager to know about the waste management situation and how it could be improved. The plan ahead is for them to visit the L Ward and study the situation at ground level. Needless to say they will have the support of the team involved in the project. Success in this pilot project would help to create city wide awareness and promote the campaign.



Sanjay Ubale IAS, Executive Board Member, Mumbai First, Ashank Desai, Vice Chairman, Mumbai First, S Ramadorai, Former CEO & MD, Tata Consultancy Services, Narinder Nayar, Chairman, Mumbai First & Roger CB Pereira, Vice Chairman, Mumbai First, at the Valedictory Session on Day 2.

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Contd. from Col 3 of the military. Also an LED screen will be installed that will display all the emergency service numbers and the information of important tourist places in Malad," said Naik.

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Published by

AGNI

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Printed at

Audumber Press, Wadala

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