

On the Sabarmati Riverfront

Urban Planning as Totalitarian Governance in Ahmedabad

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The official narrative presents Ahmedabad as a pioneer in urban transformation in India. This paper questions whether these claims engage with the experiences of the urban poor in Ahmedabad by examining processes around the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project. Highlighted here are the roles played by the architectural consultancy, city administrators and political managers, as well as community groups, civil society and academic institutions. The efficiency of the administration showed an active anti-poor stance in the court proceedings and in the violence of actual evictions and post-eviction suffering. The evidence presented here also shows how “world-class” urban planning has facilitated yet another blatant instance of “accumulation by dispossession” via the flow of the Sabarmati.

The dominant narrative of governance in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, rests upon a storyline of efficiency. Its core elements are efficient plan-making by experts and implementation by efficient administrators. This narrative also rests upon the key role of new institutional forms of governance that bring governmental and a range of non-governmental actors together in decision-making on the expenditure of public funds. Moreover, this official narrative presents Ahmedabad as a pioneer in urban transformation leading the way for other cities in India. Its “exemplarity” is rewarded by the central government, and by international financial institutions modeling its experiences and strategies as “best practices”.¹

Such “awards” have become part of the official booster lore that has gone on to position Ahmedabad’s urban governance as a distinct brand, with an elaborate marketing machinery involving intricate formal and informal networks across governmental bodies and private actors. This paper questions whether this narrative engages with the experiences of the urban poor in Ahmedabad. Does the dominant discourse of “good governance” account for issues of poverty and inequity or does it exclude the poor from being seen as a category relevant to the goals of efficient governance institutions? What connects professional urban planning to the politics of governing urban populations and spaces characterised by poverty?

This paper seeks to address these questions by examining processes around a major urban renewal initiative called the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project. Highlighted here are the roles played by an architectural consultancy called the Environmental Planning Collaborative (EPC), city administrators and political managers, as well as community groups, civil society and academic institutions.

Apart from the violent demolition of their homes, evictions from habitations that provided access to livelihoods, schooling, social and physical security and public health services, the tens of thousands of urban working poor residents of the Sabarmati riverbank settlements experienced a traumatising and stigmatising change in their relationship with society’s dominant sociopolitical institutions. These families went from being self-organised and self-employed to being charity and welfare-seeking dependents. In fact, governance in the urban sphere in Ahmedabad, I argue, is almost entirely about such transformations that seek to forcibly create dependencies upon the state, adversely impacting citizenship rights in a myriad ways. This shift is accompanied by the creation and justification of new targeted welfare budgets as well as the

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inclusion of non-state actors as “service providers”, many of whom actually levy fees and charges for providing services. Such a shift imposes additional burdens for the displaced populations and adds to the subversion of their identity as rights-embodied citizens. They become target populations or consumers that are amenable to control and manipulation based on several assumptions undergirding the service delivery schemes of the state or non-state providers.

The research on which this paper is based was conducted through the author’s position as a situated participant and observer in the proceedings that are reported here. Apart from having access to the individuals who form the focal points of the Sabarmati project, I was also part of several groups (of researchers and other citizens) that organised and designed dialogic and deliberative forums towards participatory engagement with the project’s unfolding. The focus on the urban planner is integral to this methodological strategy, and is a conscious choice that helps frame the contours of the policy process around the riverfront development project, allowing the synthesis of perspectives of establishment actors as well as the responses from the resistance. This account illustrates the expansive space of action available to interested private experts in times of neo-liberal crises.

‘Globalising’ Ahmedabad and Its Working Poor

Ahmedabad is a city of about five million people, and once hosted a concentration of 64 cotton textile mills. The closure of these mills resulted in lay-offs of about 80% of the city’s workforce (Unni and Rani 2007: 221). Now, roughly 75-80% of Ahmedabad’s working population, particularly women, work on the streets and in open areas in diverse activities.² Open markets and street vending are among the biggest sources of livelihood for the poor in Ahmedabad, depending on a range of skills.

Ahmedabad is also an increasingly segregated city, both by religion as well as by economic class (Mahadevia 2007). Western Ahmedabad is predominantly residential, and houses the city’s upper- and middle-class households in addition to several elite institutions of higher education. This part of Ahmedabad is characterised by a near complete ban on roadside vendors and hawkers, supposedly for meeting the goal of improving traffic conditions and air quality (Mahadevia 2007). On multiple counts, the poor have lost access to livelihoods and services, but none of these have been more intense than ethnic violence-related segregation and exclusionary planning processes geared towards “world-class” urban infrastructure projects (Banerji 2011; Desai 2011).

According to Mahadevia (2011:62), quoting Our Inclusive Ahmedabad’s public hearing in December 2009, about 28,000 slum-dwelling units were demolished in the city in 2006-08, and another 2,000 households received eviction notices for a range of infrastructure projects. The Sabarmati Riverfront Project has officially evicted 14,000 households directly and indirectly.³ While a process of rehousing was conducted under litigation (Desai 2011), those who were not accommodated have been forcibly relocated on the periphery of the city on

open, swamp-like wastelands without basic services, causing thousands of residents to slide into poverty.

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project is an urban landscaping and transportation project primarily aimed at transforming both sides of the riverbank into leisure space, with claims of providing solutions to flood management, protection of the river from sewer pollution, as well as creating value on land that is wasted as currently used.⁴ Prior to this project, the riverbank encompassed 70 formal and informal settlements providing habitat to about 40 thousand families (Jadav 2011). It is also used for regular markets, and other livelihood activities, particularly urban farming, local laundries (*dhobi ghats*), as well as cultural activities of riverbank residents.

The first riverfront development proposal came from Bernard Kohn, a French-American architect who worked with the city’s elite industrialists and textile mill owners, in the early 1960s. He charmed his clients, according to Darshini Mahadevia, with the possibilities of Ahmedabad being experienced as one would Paris, only needing a Paris-like riverfront.⁵ Several proposals were submitted in the next 30 years but none were seen as politically or financially suitable (EPC 1998). In 1997, EPC submitted a successful proposal to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).

The AMC had already converted itself into a self-financing institution validated by credit rating agencies. The director of the EPC, Bimal Patel, has come to play an ambitious role in the public justifications regarding the reconfiguration of urban space in Ahmedabad through the riverfront project. A PhD holder, with a specialisation in urban planning, from a pre-eminent west coast United States (us) university, he has sought to establish his position as a key actor in structuring local discourses about the policy process, social inclusion and planning in Ahmedabad. From aligning abstract neo-liberal elements with the needs of the different populations in the city – open spaces for the middle classes, better housing for the poor, flood management, better transportation for all, etc, his proposal crafted entirely new modernist imaginaries into the realm of possibility. Their implementation required strong “collaboration” between experts, government agencies and the private sector – considered the relevant participants in urban development.

To further such imaginaries, on its part, the AMC formed a quasi-governmental body that included public officials, state government institutions, and technical consultants for the delivery of this project, often as proxy private sector actors from the real estate and finance industry through multiple and overlapping networks. The formation of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL) heralded an entirely new set of formalised relationships in urban governance processes in Ahmedabad. The SRFDCL’s prime consultant for the design of the project and to provide environmental and financial feasibility studies was the EPC, as well as a unit of CEPT University, a prominent Ahmedabad-based professional school of planning. The then president of CEPT R N Vakil was appointed as a member of the governing board of the newly

formed riverfront company. (Currently, Bimal Patel holds the President post at CEPT.)

The EPC proposal sought to “develop” or create new walled banks, with walkways and staggered staircases from the street level, along nine kilometres of the banks on both sides of the river. Apart from the key difference in scale from earlier projects, which were much smaller, one of the crucial components of the EPC proposal involved the commercialisation of land along the river (Desai 2008). The project cost is estimated to be \$300 million, and the project was to have been completed in 2008. It was also supposed to be self-financing, with loans being paid back through the sale of 21% land to the private sector through a bidding process.

The EPC proposal estimated that 4,400 families living on the riverbank would be considered “project-affected” and offered consolidated housing on the riverbank itself at three locations. While the project was approved in 1997, work on the project began as recently as 2005. Fearing widespread eviction, amidst the lack of a public process to inform the riverfront settlers (and the public more generally) about specific plans for rehabilitation, the settlers formed a coalition called the Sabarmati Nagarik Adhikar Manch (SNAM) or Sabarmati Citizens Rights Forum, facilitated by rights-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The coalition lodged a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Gujarat High Court to ensure that the local authority provided them a rehabilitation plan and a transparent process of identification and coverage of families living on the riverbank, prior to the commencement of project construction (Desai 2011). While this PIL was filed, the local authority created the possibility of “interim rehabilitation” in order to facilitate the riverfront company’s plans to start the project. At the same time, the court exhorted the riverfront company to provide a count of project-affected families requiring rehabilitation that matched the affidavits submitted by the SNAM more closely. This began a movement by community leaders for ensuring cohesion in their housing clusters, so that the differential deals offered by the company to individual households did not break the numerical and moral strength of the movement, which over time become more distant from local political parties, by actively rejecting political overtures during electoral campaigns.⁶ The leaders of the movement also spoke the language of resisting the state, and participated in the Mumbai World Social Forum in 2004.

However, in spite of these efforts, in the years 2004-05, 3,000 to 4,000 families were evicted from the riverfront as well as from a number of other urban infrastructure projects all over the city (Our Inclusive Ahmedabad 2010). Under a so-called “interim rehabilitation” scheme, the AMC shifted these families with negligible compensation to a marshland at the city’s edge in Piplaj, Pirana Road, which lay under electricity transmission towers and adjacent to a municipal solid waste dump site. The families were provided chalk-drawn open plots of 10 by 15 feet, with little and infrequent access to drinking water and minimal sanitation facilities, mainly provided by foreign donors for a child poverty action programme. The oustees were verbally promised education, health and

sanitation facilities, as well as compensation and loans to build new housing. None of these promises were actually delivered in the seven years that the evictees have been languishing in Piplaj. Apart from loss of livelihood, greater income insecurity and poverty, these families experienced serious adverse health consequences and a majority of children dropped out of schools.

The AMC provided unverified documentation in response to complaints by the SNAM to the High Court of Gujarat about the services available at the “interim rehabilitation” site. The court, in turn, was more amenable to the government view than the view of the residents’ groups.

‘Relevant’ Stakeholders and Key Actors

What makes the Sabarmati Riverfront so contentious? Among several perspectives on segregation and exclusion, I explore the narrative claims of those who exercised power in imagining the riverfront as a source of conflict and change. One such account emerges from Bimal Patel of the EPC, the architect and urban planner who designed the entire project, and offered the proposal that was seen as responding most successfully to the contemporary political project of urban reconfiguration in Ahmedabad. In contrast to several past proposals, this specific proposal was the only one that was acceptable and considered worthy of resource allocation by the state government.

In Patel’s view, the river has over time become polluted and its use had been privatised due to the gradual growth of informal settlements along the riverbanks.⁷ His key motivation in the project was to “return the river to the public”. According to Patel, the river had been disrespected, and evidence of this disrespect was the lack of water in it. In order to honour the river, a goal of the project was to fill the river with water, by diverting water from the Narmada River through canals and barrages channelling water to the Sabarmati project. Patel framed the use of the river by the vast numbers of poor residents of the city as a private use of the riverbanks, restricting use by upper income groups.⁸

The river’s many communities whose livelihoods depend on the laundry/washing stalls, vegetable farms on the fertile floodplain, numerous informal vending and market spaces, open areas for children to play, and the waste cleaning operations carried out by riverbank residents all contributed to this “private” use of the riverbank, in the planner’s conception. Moreover, Patel considered the riverfront project a boon for the poor residents of the riverfront clusters. According to him, it was due to the need to rehabilitate the project-affected households that the city was using Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) funds from the central government to build affordable housing. “We are giving them an asset with a current value of Rs four lakhs... a benefit beyond their wildest dreams”.⁹

The second key actor in the initiation of the riverfront project is a former member of the Rajya Sabha, Surendra Patel, formerly chairman of the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority. This was a political appointment that gave him immense political authority to manage land and real estate in the entire district of Ahmedabad. As an important member of

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he played a key role in crafting the implications of the riverfront project so as to make it both politically feasible and economically profitable. According to Surendra Patel, the two main purposes of the riverfront project were beautification and flood control. He saw the working class settlements along the riverbanks as “encroachments that were contaminating the river and contributing to its decay” (Banerji 2011:62, interviewed in November 2010).¹⁰ In his perspective, the improvement of and creation of new road infrastructure, drainage and storm water channels, gardens and promenades and river transportation were the major components of this project. These were necessary to achieve the goal of raising land values, and contributing to Ahmedabad’s real estate potential, akin to China’s world-class cities that achieved such distinctions due to their riverfront developments.

The primary motive of this trajectory was to enhance Ahmedabad’s potential for inviting business and investment. Moreover, while Surendra Patel acknowledged that EPC and Bimal Patel came up with an excellent proposal to fulfil these aims, it was Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi’s vision and support for this project that had made it a real success. Referring to the delays in the project, he condemned the role of the resident groups that supported by NGOs, sought a comprehensive rehabilitation policy as obstructing the project. In his view (Banerji 2011:62, interviewed November 2010):

they have made wrong use of the democratic system by going to court and causing impediments in the development of the city. We had taken opinion of people who all had agreed so there is no question of opposition, and we have resettled all the people who were surveyed, NGOs have taken undue advantage of the situation for sake of publicity.

He viewed NGOs as “slum culture loving”, working to prevent beautification and development, and believed that “common people have no vision of development”. He added that the river had been neglected for so long, and was finally being put to use for the public good, like all major cities in the world. Emphasising that Ahmedabad’s slum clearances along the riverbank will bring it in the league of foreign cities, he said “the slums looked so bad, and removing them will enhance the image of the city”.¹¹

Service to Humanity?

The third key actor is the then municipal commissioner of Ahmedabad, I P Gautam, the chief executive of the local authority, and also the chief executive of the special purpose vehicle (SPV), the SRFDCL, created to manage the entire riverfront project and chairperson of its governing board.¹² According to him, the riverfront company’s only task was to execute the project “without much confusion”. In his view, due to the multiple owners of the riverfront land – the irrigation department, the district collector and others – there were all kinds of problems in gaining access to land needed for the project. He claimed that the transfer of all land under the project area to the riverfront company simplified the ownership of land to one body. He also claimed that since this company had “representatives from all sections of society”, this land transfer was a resolution of all conflicting ownership and problems related to that.

Gautam emphasised that the Municipal Act under which the local authority functioned (the Bombay Provincial Municipal Corporations or BPMC Act) did not allow it to conduct this kind of activity. Therefore the SRFDCL’s creation was a strategy to not “disturb the sacrosanct BPMC Act”. He was insistent that the project was an environmental one to save the river from further abuse by people and animals alike, and that the lack of water in the river caused malaria. Filling the river with water dealt with health hazards in his view; diversion of sewage from the river to two sewage treatment plants would deal with the pollution. For the rest, 85% of the land reclamation would be used for parks, promenades and recreation, and the provision of clean drinking water for the people of Ahmedabad. Gautam emphasised that this project was:

not the creation of any one person, it has been evolving over decades and is the collective decision of the people of Ahmedabad, and various authorities have worked to bring it to fruition. The architect only worked on the physical design and is being paid for his services, he is a businessman. The major credit for the project should go to the Chief Minister Narendra Modi (Banerji 2011:63, interviewed December 2010).

Gautam also pointed out that several changes had taken place in the project, but did not mention what those changes were and what the implications of those changes would be for the public, particularly the evicted populations. Interestingly, Gautam considered the riverfront project to be 85% complete, while Bimal Patel considered the project to be over in one way and perpetually ongoing as a matter of course of urban development in the city.

These narratives primarily signify a story of decline (Stone 1989): the pre-project state of the river and riverfront were nothing short of human, ecological and economic disaster. In the claims of these key actors, the river’s condition was mainly attributable to the people who lived on its banks, and not so much to the planned discharge of the city’s sewerage into the river. Moreover, behind each problematisation lies a particular preferred techno-social solution (Rittel and Webber 1973) or as Scott (2010) calls it – a project of rule. Such problematisations, in Scott’s (2010: 2) view, are proffered by those seeking to leverage authority and resources to “transform” what they see as a sordid set of conditions and “...style themselves, unself-consciously, as bearers of order, progress, enlightenment, and civilisation”.

Consequently each of these actors, who played different but fundamental roles in the riverfront project, offer a vision that not only is totalising but also is articulated at the level of service to humanity. These articulations are seen in the views that emphasise “returning the river to the people”, “respecting the river”, and appealing to the dominant majority population in the context of segregation, and with religious Hindu imagery being used in films and photographs depicting the riverfront project.¹³

The Role of Alternative Experts

In the years following the start of the riverfront project, academic critiques began to emerge with early writings by Mahadevia (2002), Mahadevia and Brar (2008) and Desai (2006, 2008, 2009, 2011). As part of field engagement, students at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA) Public

Systems Group wrote term papers questioning the riverfront project's skewed perspective on the riverbank settlements, which viewed people as living in fixed, individual households, with little acknowledgement of the informality and nexus between shelter, livelihood and services. The project's lens ignored the everyday negotiations of the residents, workers and the riverbank space, and oriented the public gaze towards a disconnected rehabilitation plan. Overtime, collaborations between IIMA faculty, students and researchers, professors and researchers from the Centre for Urban Equity and other units at CEPT University, the National Institute of Design (NID), civil society organisations and community groups led to a number of workshops, seminars, and public hearings starting with a research-based documentary film.¹⁴

This film served to show the conditions of the displaced people, their struggles and the lack of transparency around the Sabarmati project, particularly the gap between its claims and actual experiences of riverbank residents. It also questioned how the SRFDCL appeared as a new governance institution, the product of a globalisation-induced urban reform strategy and its role in the reconfiguration of power relations in Ahmedabad's urban growth processes. The documentary looked at the comparative experience of how urban populations accessed services in pre- and post-relocation sites. Moreover, the livelihood – services nexus was further explored by investigating a major open informal market – the Gujarati Bazaar or Sunday Market – as a site for understanding urban governance priorities in service provision.¹⁵

The first workshop at the IIMA where this film was screened was designed to facilitate a more inclusive space for deliberation and dialogue about the nature of governance around the riverfront project. This workshop therefore included members of communities that were the subjects of urban governance institutions, NGOs as non-governmental services providers, academicians, government practitioners, members of the riverfront project planning team, human rights lawyers, and students and faculty of selected institutions. Bringing together representatives of the Gujarati Bazaar traders association, several community resident organisations' representatives and members to deliberate over the findings of the collaborative research, this workshop sought to discuss policy-oriented routes towards resolution of the problems that blocked or severely curtailed access of the poor to public services.

Called *Global Sites, Local Lives: Urban Governance and Development Induced Displacement*, the film was screened like a draft academic paper presentation, followed by revision through interaction with participants. The workshop was unanimous in seeking a more inclusive process of governance, facilitated by this research team and other participating academicians. As a consequence of this community workshop, a group of interested local citizens was convened over a two-month period in order to organise a public hearing on the issue of urban basic services and governance.

The convening group (informally called Our Inclusive Ahmedabad) consisted of NGOs, social service organisations, community-based organisations, community members, and

academicians. A 12-member jury of prominent jurists, academicians, public servants and community workers was instituted, and called for the deposition of all affected groups – street vendors, residents of informal settlements, traders in informal markets, members of denotified tribes at a public hearing attended by over 500 people. The jury also called for the deposition of government officials, urban planners, NGOs who were directly involved in service delivery and social workers with experience of working with communities displaced from shelter, livelihood and access to services. With immense public and media exposure, the then chief justice of the Gujarat High Court (S J Mukhopadhyay) took note of the issues raised in the public hearing and gave a favourable judgment in the PIL launched by the slum-dwellers/vendors associations (Express News Service 2009). A process of housing allotment began shortly thereafter, due to which the social movement led by the SNAM all but disappeared. The community leaders engaged instead in monitoring the allotment process and verifying the counting and identification process of eligible households for rehabilitation.

Testimonies of the Evicted

The deposition and testimonies of representatives of the evicted or soon to be evicted communities showed how urban renewal at the riverfront had imposed new layers of illegalities on the informal settlers and informal workers in the city due to need for real estate development on the riverbank and in other parts of the city. Caught in a bind of paper trails, requirements of proof of their "city"-zanship (based on specific papers attesting to how long they had lived at a specific site) in being considered eligible for social services and welfare schemes of the local government, the testimonies showed the multiple contradictions posed by the existence and process of new governance institutions. These institutions may speak a global language and receive awards for civic renewal and but simultaneously they produce destitution and political and social disempowerment.

The depositions at the public hearing could be seen through three distinct lenses in terms of the affected groups. The deponents speaking on behalf of the first group of people started with the violent incidents where people had to pack and remove their own belongings while the bulldozers began to tear down their houses without giving them adequate opportunity to move out of the way. Many of those evicted had been affected by a state-supported genocide a few years ago, where they had previously suffered loss of loved ones, their homes and belongings and were themselves subject to violence during those riots. Many in this group, survivors of a pogrom, had barely emerged from the pain and trauma of that suffering, and were involved in reconstructing what was left of their lives, families and neighbourhoods. They were displaced to a brownfield site, a snake-infested wasteland at the fringes of the city, adjacent to a solid waste treatment plant, under electricity transmission towers and high tension cables, with no shelter, infrequent provision of water (not of drinking quality) and virtually no toilet facilities. Having lived in the city-centre with access to health centres, schools and jobs, thousands of families now lived in this

barren wilderness in the open, in order to make way for an urban beautification project (Mathur and Joshi 2009).

This is where the clearest role of the urban planner's technical expertise has played out. Through technical considerations for zoning the riverfront appropriately in order to calculate project costs, the planner demarcated areas that fell within the project line and those that fell outside it, arguing that such lines are based on planning regulations and distances from various types of engineering features (EPC 1998), ignoring the social ecology and continuity of the neighbourhoods on the ground and how these spaces were traversed by residents for purposes that were integral to their community and economic lives. The technical requirements of the project created a sense of arbitrariness that collided with the realities of the neighbourhoods and its residents.

Another problem generated in the displacement from the riverfront was the requirement of documents to establish residency dating prior to 1976 in order for a family to be eligible for rehabilitation housing. This requirement produced further uncertainty and insecurity among the riverfront residents, and imposed social and emotional costs on how they negotiated their citizenship on account of the riverfront project. In Mahadevia's (2011) terms, residents had to undertake another test of citizenship, now being determined locally through the imposition of an arbitrary cut-off date. This set of impositions militates especially against migrant workers from anywhere outside the ever-shifting boundaries of the city, facing layers of hostility in terms of accessing basic rights of citizenship.

The third set of depositions was made by those whose livelihoods were due to be erased by the riverfront project. In the entire riverfront proposal, while there was some mention of replacement housing for a minimal number of families who resided on the riverfront, there was no clear legally mandated policy to deal with the number of self-organised markets catering to residents on the riverfront. The democratically elected president of the Gujarati Bazaar market association spoke of a market that was organised on the riverfront every Sunday since the 15th century. Six hundred years old, this Sunday market was run by an association comprising 1,200 members that included 400 independent women vendors. According to him, an additional 800 vendors worked outside the designated market but their activities are linked to the market. According to this testimony, this market was centrally located, in close proximity to major transport links within the city as well as to regional and national bus and railway stations. The market's customers came from different economic strata from within the city, from rural areas in the state, as well as from other cities in adjoining states. More than 2,00,000 customers visited the riverfront markets each Sunday, and according to research surveys, all footfalls translated into transactions, a ratio that would put any upmarket city mall in India to shame.¹⁶

Even during all the natural and manmade disasters in the city, the market had not closed for even a single Sunday. The Gujarati Bazaar association was very organised and took Rs 5 per day as membership fee. In return, the association arranged for the security of the area (by hiring five guards), issued

membership cards, and provided water taps. The district authority has been collecting taxes from the association since the 1960s. However, from 1978, the district authority transferred the riverbank land to the municipal authority, which in turn did not renew the lease agreement, though the traders' association continued to pay municipal service charges till date.

Nafisbhai, the association's president, in his testimony said that he heard about the riverfront project only through colour images in articles, and advertising in the newspapers. According to the newspaper articles he had seen, the market would no longer be at the riverfront, and it would be evicted. On behalf of the traders, he expressed great worry about the future of thousands of traders and their families as well as their customers, many of whom were completely dependent on the market for their own livelihoods. He emphasised that there has been no formal information given to them regarding their position vis-à-vis the Sabarmati Project. He spoke for all the traders when he stated that they were not against the development and modernisation of the city and that the riverbank could be developed as per the urban planner's masterplan but they should not be displaced. The traders and their association wanted to be integrated into the scope of the project itself to avoid eviction and to be included in the decision-making processes.

Rehabilitation?

After this citywide public hearing organised by Our Inclusive Ahmedabad, and the subsequent ruling on the community's PIL by the Gujarat High Court directing the local authority to provide some form of shelter to all those who had been evicted or faced eviction, the local authority began to formalise a process of paperwork regarding allotment of rehabilitation housing under the central government's part-funded Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP) scheme. Some 13 different sites had been identified where construction of four-storey "flats" of 25-28 square metres each were to be constructed to house each evicted family irrespective of family size, based on eligibility being validated through possession of identity papers, address proofs, birth certificates, etc.

However, none of these projects were habitable even after four months of the court's ruling, even though these housing estate projects had started a few years ago. The court then ordered the AMC to appoint a special committee to monitor and track the process of housing allotments on the riverbank. This committee was mandated to look into issues of habitation alone, and no consideration was given to the loss of livelihoods, or access to services for the evictees. Moreover, there was no process to allot houses in a way that could accommodate different family sizes, or to match families with individuals with special needs with appropriate housing. For example, families who were goat-herders would not have any space to keep their goats, or authorisation to graze them in the vicinity. There was no consideration for providing ground floor housing to older folk who might have had difficulties walking up four flights of stairs, as well as to the physically handicapped.

At the riverbank, in the self-organised settlements, neither difficulties related to old age nor physical handicaps were

stigmatised. Those experiencing these conditions were enabled to access both livelihoods and services through control over how the neighbourhood was built and negotiated.¹⁷ The new housing seemed only to be designed for a narrow section of the population. Pregnant women, senior citizens, physically challenged, infants and small children, people carrying heavy loads for work, those suffering from chronic health conditions or general ill-health would all be treated under the category “special needs”, thereby making a majority of the people disempowered and disabled in entirely new ways.

Moreover, a year later, while some of these housing projects were nearing completion, a massive spate of violent demolitions took place in May 2011 along the riverbanks, the hottest month in Ahmedabad (Mahadevia 2011). Neither having been allotted housing nor given alternative “interim rehabilitation”, over 2000 families, including small children and older folk were forced to live under the sweltering sun next to their demolished houses.¹⁸ The AMC made no effort to provide any services while these people languished around their broken homes, but deployed hundreds of police personnel so that there would be “no trouble”. Some 350 residents turned up in court just before the close of court time for the summers, and pleaded for mercy in the chamber of the chief justice of the high court. Even after the chief justice issued orders to the municipal authority to cease and desist any evictions and demolitions without completing and allotting rehabilitation housing, the AMC continued demolitions of hundreds of homes for the next couple of days with impunity (Mahadevia 2011).

The Saga of Gujarati Bazaar

In April 2011, a PIL was filed in the Gujarat High Court to prevent the eviction of the Gujarati Bazaar. The Gujarati Bazaar had formally been served an eviction notice in August 2010. Prior to this legal notice, the Gujarati Bazaar association had instituted their own process of designing an upgradation and modernisation plan, responding to the remarks of the urban planner and city authorities that “the market was filthy, disorganised and disorderly, lacks basic amenities and is generally unfit for the experience of the upper income groups”.¹⁹

Comprising the informal poor who made their own livelihoods not dependent on the state for largesse, nor on elaborate modernist urban designs for habitation, the market association understood that in the grand elite vision of the waterfront development, there really might not be space for this centuries old bazaar unless they make an effort to look “pretty” in an upper-class sort of way. Engaging with participatory designers and faculty members at the NID, the market members undertook a three-month process of developing a contemporary design that would fit in with the new look of the waterfront. But the plan would be based on respecting and honouring the social norms and networks that facilitated the market traders and its usual customers that numbered more than 1,50,000 to 2,00,000 each Sunday of the month.

After the preparation of this plan, the market association presented it to the city authorities and to the urban planner.

While the former ignored their submission, the latter commented “we are the professionals who are qualified to do things like this”.²⁰ In response, the urban planner held an exhibition of large, fictionalised, digitally created images depicting the riverfront after the completion of the project. The images included idyllic scenes of happiness and consumption, prayer and ritual and for good measure and inclusivity, did not leave out beggars, stray dogs, and people whose clothes and appearance suggested they were “Muslims”. The artwork included scenes depicting an ordered yet informal market, with the wares evocative of the Gujarati Bazaar.

Meanwhile, responses to a right to information (RTI) application filed by the market association yielded the information that the city authorities had considered no formal plan to rehabilitate the market, nor had it announced a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the design of the bazaar. There had been no official communication about the status of the bazaar with the traders’ association. However, space for their operation was decreasing everyday owing to construction work for the riverfront project.

In February 2011, a public seminar was organised at the IIMA, where the participatory design for the Gujarati Bazaar was to be presented by the market association and the NID team. Apart from a distinguished panel from the city’s academic and social institutions, the organisers invited Bimal Patel to be a special rapporteur to provide constructive comments on the participatory design so as to make it more amenable to absorption within the overall framework of his riverfront masterplan. However, the planner rejected the invitation, and labelled the participatory process that was being undertaken as mere “drama”, not a professional planning task.²¹ Moreover at the actual seminar presentation, armed police entered the IIMA classroom, with cameras and video recorders. The head of department of IIMA’s Public Systems Group, who had organised this seminar) enquired and found that the police had neither been invited nor had they gotten appropriate warrants or authorisations to enter the premises of the institute. They were politely escorted outside the campus gates.

Under such conditions, the market association requested the support of this author in filing a PIL to prevent the market from being evicted, and to pressure the authorities to at least consider the participatory design that the market association had developed. The court, in response, granted a stay order on any further construction that would adversely affect the market. However, during a vicious round of demolitions carried out in November 2011, where hundreds of police personnel were deployed, the local authority blocked the operation of the market by parking various trucks, buses and other official vehicles at the space where it operated. This was done with no prior intimation to the market association. As a consequence, more than a thousand market traders who put in tremendous effort each week to organise their wares and supply chains and bring their goods to the markets were turned away in the morning by police orders. The local authority disregarded the judicial directions with impunity, causing untold losses and damaging the livelihoods of the traders as well as the hundreds of

thousands of customers who made the trip to the Gujari Bazaar on Sunday, 30 November 2011.

Around this time, the local authority started a top-down process of negotiation with the traders association, by handing them a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU), that provided them a small space at some distance on the riverbank besides a very large parking lot meant for personal vehicles of visitors. This would take the market away from its existing designed spaces that were accessible for the traders, as well as closely linked to modes of public transport linking the market to other parts of the city, crossstate towns, cities and villages, as well as to interstate transportation. Accepting some minor requests, the local authority put immense pressure on the traders association and its office-bearers, holding the threat of blocking the market or prolonged legal wrangles that would have put the association at great burden.

The result was that the latter acquiesced to the MOU in court. The MOU offered by the municipal authority was seen no less than a “fait accompli”. The Gujari Bazaar association, well acquainted with the means and methods of the state, preferred not to fight back or prolong any emerging sense of confrontation. The municipal authority sought to extract high fees and charges on a commercial basis, something that would make most of the existing norms and governing principles of the market – low barriers to entry, growth and exit, when and if necessary – lose their viability. The fate of the market still hangs on a fragile thread since no time frame has been given for the allocation of new marketplace.

Distances

In the period 2011-12, around 19,000 families from the riverfront, have been resettled in the 13 new housing estates built under the BSUP scheme of the JNNURM, the central government’s flagship project aimed at some level of basic service provision for the poor (Times News Network 2012). However, while these housing estates are spread throughout the city, the evidence shows that the allocation of housing has been highly selective with regard to distance from the eviction sites. The minimum distance between an evicted family’s previous riverbank home and resettlement site is five kilometres, the average distance is about nine km, and the furthest relocation is about 16 km, even though estates closer to eviction points were available (Patel 2012). Not only do these distances sever links between the families’ work, food and nutrition security, education and health amenities, but also breaks long-established community relationships and networks. It violates one of the core principles established within the riverfront development project, of providing resettlement housing in close proximity to the previous site (EPC 1998: 52). Moreover, the devastating effects of far-site relocation are well established through empirical studies over the last 30 years (Cernea and McDowell 2000).

In the design of the riverfront project and the development of the masterplan, such effects seem to have been either completely ignored or vastly underestimated. At no point in discussions with the key officials or urban planner of the riverfront project, did they admit that relocation at such far sites would destroy the

social and economic backbone of hundreds of thousands of the working poor of Ahmedabad. Self-organised housing was actively brought under a “project of rule” by processes of urban planning oriented to commercial real estate development, and declared as “encroachments” by self-professed “progressive” urban planners and administrators (Scott 2010). At no point do these authorities also admit that the rehabilitation provided to the evictees was mandated by a PIL filed by the community organisation of the evictees themselves, and not through some benevolent state action, planned well and declared well ahead of the evictions. However, each of the authorities – the urban planner, municipal officials, even state government ministers – publicly take credit for providing housing to the helpless poor and “granting them benefits”. As far as the experiences of community organisers go, the municipal officials interpret each direction of the court minimally and conservatively and act under its duress, not in performing public service.²²

The Riverfront as ‘Public Space’

In orders given by the court’s bench on the evicted communities’ PIL, the language clearly sought the clearance of the riverbank settlements so that the riverfront project suffered no further delays. It urged the AMC to offer some form of alternative site to the remaining 12,000 evicted households if alternative shelter was not available for them. The municipal authority’s counsel showed sunny pictures of empty meadow-like landscapes which professedly would be appropriate as an alternative relocation site. In approval, one of the sitting judges remarked that everybody had to put up with a “little inconvenience” while building work is going on. “Even I had to bear inconvenience and noise, when an extension was built or renovation was taking place in my house”.²³

While these words were being spoken in the courtroom, deciding the fate of thousands of poor families, one of the worst winters of Ahmedabad had begun setting in. The temperature dipped to about four degrees centigrade, when thousands of families with the elderly, ill, children and infants were dumped in trucks on the same wasteland where thousands of people had already been languishing for the past seven years. While people braved the cold winds in the first few days, they spent their meagre savings on plastic sheets and bamboo poles to provide some minimal protection. The same little 10 by 15 feet plastic sheet enclosure had to be shared by entire families, their salvaged belongings, space to cook, sleep and everything else that required any minimal amount of privacy. Women were afraid to go to the few dry, stinking latrines that were already heavily in use by those who had moved in before them. In order to avoid constant trips to the toilet which was some distance away, children defecated and urinated in the spaces between shelters. There were no spaces allocated for bathing. Because of the lack of affordable food available close by, children fed on wild weeds and subsequently suffered poisoning and death. Infants died due to severe cold. Pregnant women died on the way to the hospital or suffered miscarriages. Healthy able-bodied working people talked of committing suicide, having been disempowered and forced to live in the most inhuman

conditions.²⁴ “Little inconveniences” in the view of elites were experienced as the horrors of internment camps by those termed “encroachers” by planners and city administrators.

At the same time, large hoardings advertised “the Riverfront Saga begins...” promoting luxury housing by real estate developer JP Infrastructure, with an illustration of dolphins jumping out of a schematic of the Sabarmati River (Maulik Pathak 2011). An RFP ending in February 2012 was announced by the riverfront company, for watersports facilities including jet-skiing, water scooters, water parks, waterfront entertainment, floating restaurants, and water-based transportation.²⁵ It had also been reported earlier in the press that Subhash Chandra, chairman of Essel Group, had signed a Rs 200 crore MOU at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in January 2011 for an Esselworld Watersports Complex on the Sabarmati Riverfront (Pathak 2011). More recently, it was reported that the Bollywood film actor Sunil Shetty has also sent a proposal to the riverfront company for a floating restaurant and other water-based leisure activities (*DeshGujarat* 2011), and a Rs 50 crore MOU was signed with another private entity called Indistocks Securities for a private Sabarmati Riverfront Sports Club. According to its Facebook page, this club will include a hotel, an “aquatic school” and India’s tallest ferris wheel with a name as original as “The Ahmedabad Eye”.²⁶

In December 2011, in the immediate aftermath of the latest round of winter evictions, a “beach-sports” tournament was held on the riverbank after the clearing up the rubble (Ahmedabad Mirror Bureau 2011a). The court’s hurry to evacuate the riverfront and its direction to the AMC to do what it had to do so that the project would not suffer any further delay, seemed as if the lives and livelihoods of the city’s urban working poor were being weighed against the leisure facilities for use by the wealthy in the Ahmedabad summer. In the court’s view, there should be no delay to the wealthy having access to a floating restaurant, while the damage, loss of life, health and livelihood to the poor took low priority as a “little inconvenience”.

Evicted and Resettled?

Since the project was first proposed in 1997, till date there has been no proper document on the nature of rehabilitation and resettlement and the process therein involved. While the proposal had indicated three resettlement sites on the riverfront itself, these disappeared from consideration without any public discussion. However, demolitions and forced evictions have been the major experience of the riverbank settlers. Legal processes evicted all others whose livelihoods depended on the riverbank space. Most evictees described violent incidents in which shifting from the riverbank involved houses being forcefully demolished with little warning and mercy. Some told heartbreaking stories of tearing down their own houses brick by brick due to the threats of the demolition team, while others spoke of trying to salvage from the remains of their houses post-demolition. The process of resettlement, however far or inappropriate, is being contested and fought for in and out of courts. The Sabarmati riverfront displaced people’s lives have been reduced to the level of bare survival at best and to one of untold misery, squalor, uncertainty and intense insecurity at worst.²⁷

Others, who managed to escape this fate through a minimal due process facilitated by the court-appointed Justice Buch Committee, or by paying hefty bribes, gradually rebuild their lives in a remote housing estate. The High Court of Gujarat hearing an appeal from the evicted peoples’ groups, stated that “there should be no more delay in the completion of the Riverfront” and allowed the relocation of thousands to a wasteland with no amenities (as in Delhi earlier according to Baviskar 2011), to brave an already harsh winter in the open with no shelter. Subsequently, deaths of children, infants, pregnant women were widely reported in the press. Hunger and ill-health set in almost immediately (Bhatia 2011, Sarabhai 2011, Gagdekar and Shah 2011). Appeals were made (by this author, among others) to the deputy commissioner of Ahmedabad, who also holds the position of executive director of the SRFDCL. He responded by saying “those whose hearts bleed for these people, should open *langars* (soup kitchens)”.²⁸ The attitude of officials in charge of the project through their formal positions in the SPV showed that their role as local government or public service officers was superseded, and they displayed little, if any, ethic of service to the public.

Where the EPC’s 1998 proposal zoned space for four markets, including two existing ones (Gujari Bazaar and Phool Bazaar or Flower Market), evidence from Gujari Bazaar tells a story of disingenuity in the rhetoric of inclusive planning. The market traders association was formally legally evicted in 2010, and the EPC, SRFDCL or the AMC made no effort to reach out to the traders association or establish a dialogue about their place in the designs of the riverfront project. Moreover, the traders’ enquiries under the RTI were met with no response. Later under duress, they were assured of a deal at a later stage, but the deputy commissioner of the AMC made amply clear to the president of the traders’ association that no detailed design of the new market existed or would be made available to them, stating that “...the government cannot recognise the claims of every NGO or Trust that comes along. I don’t know what is the legitimacy of any association of traders, there are so many, how can we keep track?”²⁹ The planner considered the traders of the market to be “crooks who don’t pay taxes”.³⁰

The riverfront proposal authored by the EPC (1998:5-6) also characterised the market as “lacking in accessibility, [amenities]... and takes place in an unorganised manner”. The market traders on their part, apart from the legal battle, had petitioned the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in April 2010 when they read newspaper reports that Ahmedabad was preparing a bid under the world heritage cities programme, but that the bid did not include the Gujari Bazaar as a vital part of Ahmedabad’s intangible cultural heritage. An international conference on heritage was organised in Ahmedabad in the same month, but apart from merchants’ houses with European decorative features, and facades of old neighbourhoods in the walled city, no aspect of Ahmedabad’s many historical communities that had conserved arts, crafts and social and economic networks were included. In response to the market traders’ petition, the director of UNESCO’s India office wrote to the municipal commissioner

of Ahmedabad to conduct documentation of Ahmedabad's intangible cultural and peoples' heritage, including the Gujarati Bazaar and two more sites, in conjunction with institutes such as the NID, IIMA or CEPT. However, this letter was ignored and no effort was made to include the Gujarati Bazaar in Ahmedabad's world heritage city bid.

After the submission of the participatory design made by the traders association, facilitated by the NID team, to the riverfront company, state government and municipal officials was met with a stony silence, a PIL was lodged in the Gujarat High Court in April 2011 (Express News Service 2011a). Over eight months, a top-down settlement was reached between the traders association and the AMC to prevent eviction and fix a spot for the market. After this settlement was signed, the planners and local officials took credit in the press for "rehabilitating Gujarati Bazaar, and providing a King-size bazaar for Ahmedabad's poor" (Kaushik 2011). The new commissioner of the AMC, Guruprasad Mohapatra was quoted as saying, "Unlike today's market which is highly unorganised, devoid of walk space and public conveniences and shelters, the new market location will have all these facilities. Besides each stall will have place for displaying wares and enough walking space for visitors to enjoy traditional shopping experience" (John 2011).

While the urban planner claimed that his involvement beyond the initial proposal was limited, interviews and conversations over two years demonstrated that he had actively canvassed support for the riverfront project from the city's upper income groups on behalf of the government. He organised exhibitions (one large rendering showed the Chief Minister Narendra Modi looking over the riverfront project with admiration) and presentations with professional organisations and elite citizens including some academicians, under the label of public interaction.³¹ Apart from being widely acknowledged as being the key force in designing and implementing the project, according to Surendra Patel, "he (Bimal Patel) was not only professionally involved but also emotionally involved in the execution of the project" (Banerji 2011: 62, interviewed November 2010).

The "interim" rehabilitation site at Piplaj on the city's outskirts presents further evidence of the "dark side of planning" (Yiftachel 1994, 1998, Flyvbjerg 1996, Flyvbjerg and Richardson 2002). Thousands of children dropped out of school after their families were moved out of the riverfront because travelling to their erstwhile neighbourhood school was either too expensive, or otherwise inaccessible, and schooling facilities did not exist at Piplaj (Ahmedabad Mirror Bureau 2011b):

Jasiben Panchal, a mother of two who used to live in the slums off Income-tax (sic), says, "My children study in class 10. We are facing a lot of problem here at Piplaj and it is difficult for them to commute to school. Hence, I have kept my children at a relative's place."

Many families mentioned that their school-going children had to either be left elsewhere to continue their studies, or fought, played and became indolent after moving to Piplaj. Ironically, in May 2012, a National Book Fair was organised on the post-eviction space at the Sabarmati riverfront, and banners all over the city depicted the chief minister exhorting people to read books. At the inauguration he is reported to have said that, "every house

should have a 'temple' stacked with books. Culture flows in a family that reads books." Further, "He said that books are like seeds that grow into trees of ideas, bloom as flowers of imagination and as fruits of hope" (DeshGujarat 2012).

Totalitarian Planning and the Rhetoric of Public Value

Having looked at the execution of the Sabarmati Riverfront project, especially through the lenses of the vast numbers of riverbank residents and the conversion of the riverfront to an elite recreation space, it is important to highlight how non-state actors facilitate predatory and totalitarian state functioning in the context of an electoral democratic framework. The riverfront project as it unfolds today is itself a totalitarian modernist planning project, treating (riverbank) space as devoid of the cultural, social, economic and political elements, through which the urban working poor negotiates its place in the city. Reduced to calculation-friendly units, working class families become pieces on a social engineering chessboard. Fitted into uniform boxes, they tick the state's requirement to provide "mass, scalable solutions".

The planner whose grandiose designs were intended to create an urban imaginary layered with fantasies of western cities and amenities for the global tourist, and local and diasporic elites, has played an important role in the valorisation of riverbank space in distinct ways. Moreover, the idea that the river has been "disrespected" till the riverfront project came along, casts the riverbank residents as not worthy of "being around the river", as it were. Indirectly, the language used to characterise the problem to which the riverfront project is the solution frames the riverbank residents as unworthy and illegitimate users of the river. High value uses, and a commodified publicness are attributed to the upper income groups in Ahmedabad, positioning them as moral superiors. There emerges a very strong moral perspective in the planner's vision, where the river is too valuable to be left to people who exhibit traits that are "uncivilised". The riverfront project is what would bring civility and a higher moral order to their existence.

According to Mahadevia (2011: 57), the newest paradigm in urban governance is one of deliberate confusion, not only in terms of the policy pressures that favour selected groups of elites but also often overlay the discourse of social inclusion as a justification for schemes that claim to address issues of the poor. In the larger context of urban transformation where the JNNURM has had a major role to play, the process of planning was instituted on the premise that the poor were to be viewed as dependents of the state from the very start, or in the words of Mahadevia (2011: 58), "as beneficiaries or objects of change and thereby at the mercy of the official stakeholders, experts and the urban local body officials". In Mahadevia's view (2011: 62), "the urban story so far has been one of big visions and elite capture, bordering on scam, through a predatory local state in cahoots with crony capitalists".

Adding to Mahadevia's characterisation of the new urbanisation story as a "paradigm of confusion", where both anti-poor and pro-poor discourses and practices collide much to the detriment of the poor, is Scott's (2010) "project of rule", whereby it is necessary for the (neo-liberal) state to gain dominance in the public sphere by seeking "to bring non-state spaces and people to heel".

His conception applies to “[G]overnments whether colonial or independent, communist or liberal, populist or authoritarian” and their “headlong pursuit of this end by regimes otherwise starkly different suggests that such projects of administrative economic and cultural standardisation are hard-wired into the administrative architecture of the modern state itself” (Scott 2010:4). A paradigm of modernist urban planning such as the EPC design of a revitalised riverfront, must necessarily “include” the myriad activities and people carrying them out on the riverbank; one of its key goals was to create “legibility and enumeration” using the coercive bureaucratic structures of the state itself.

The problematisations to which the riverfront project is offered as the solution articulate the river as a non-place (Baviskar 2011, drawing on Auge 2008), even while it was inhabited by hundreds of thousands of working people and their families. As the Yamuna’s thriving cultural and social worlds were invisible to the rest of Delhi (Baviskar 2011: 47), the Sabarmati’s million microcosms were actively made invisible under the barrage of colourful propaganda in the form of brochures, full-page colour spreads in daily newspapers like the *Times of India*, coffee-table books, glamorous exhibitions funded by New York-based institutions, advertising hoardings selling dreams of riverfront luxury, and public relations films aimed at the international investor. Drawing on bourgeois environmentalist sentiments, the 10-year campaign waged by the urban planner, local authority, and corporate media encouraged social hostility against the poor, especially those living around the riverbank of the Sabarmati, who now appeared to the rest of the city as the obstacle in the city’s “development”, and its achievement of global aspirations (Baviskar 2011: 50).

Through the demolitions and evictions campaigns, the complete evacuation of the riverfront provided a “blank slate” to the

planners, who would now transfer their prior inscribed “planned” geometric lines from paper to the ground. The experiences of hunger, malnutrition, loss of livelihood, loss of life and loss of the will to live were some of the benefits first experienced by Ahmedabad’s working poor who lived on the riverbank by the grand urban vision of the riverfront development project. It almost seemed like “planning for rehabilitation” had never been a priority or even a mandate for the urban planner. The focus had been on creating an abstract imaginary through modernist planning tools and techniques, not shaping a process of engagement with the everyday lives of hundreds of thousands of the city’s working poor who bore the brunt of such misshapen imaginations. In the imagination of the planners, the river appears as an assemblage of tubes and pipes with commodified openings for leisure and entertainment, not as seasonal ecological systems with floodplains as an integral part of its flows (Baviskar 2011). The floods downstream and even within the city were ignored as if they were caused by some external factor, other than attempts to “pinch the river” (Bimal Patel, quoted in D’Monte 2011).

The arrogance of modernism rises to the surface when “respect for the river” is imagined as forcing it into hydraulic calculations, which the river itself seldom obeys, as illustrated by the floods in Ahmedabad, downstream in Dholka, or even in Delhi, Mumbai and New Orleans where ecological water systems were actively ignored (Baviskar 2011: 52). The role of efficient administrators was highlighted in their active anti-poor stance in the court proceedings and the violence of actual evictions and post-eviction suffering. The evidence presented here shows how the role of the world-class urban planner has been to actively facilitate yet another blatant instance of “accumulation by dispossession” via the flow of the Sabarmati.

NOTES

- 1 The Bus Rapid Transit System (Ahmedabad BRTS-Janmarg) was recognised as the “Best Intelligent Transport System” in 2011, “Best innovation project towards improvement in urban mobility through new technological innovation” in 2010, and “Best Mass-Transit System” in 2010 by the central Ministry of Urban Development. The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project was awarded the Prime Minister’s National Award for “Excellence in Urban Planning and Design” in 2003, and “Innovative Infrastructure Development” in 2011 by Housing and urban development Corporation (HUDCO). In 2011, under the BSUP component of the JNNURM, Ahmedabad received the award of best city for affordable housing and services targeted towards the poor from the central government’s Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. Furthermore, it was reported in the press that Ahmedabad has made it to a UNESCO shortlist under its World Heritage Cities programme for conservation of its “historical sites”. In mid-2011, just before he moved on to become the senior-most official in Gujarat’s urban development department (as Principal Secretary) after serving a six-year term as Ahmedabad’s municipal commissioner, IP Gautam was bestowed the *Nagar Ratna* (Jewel of the City) award by the President of India. He had been Ahmedabad’s municipal commissioner and was specifically charged with managing the high-profile urban projects described here.
- 2 These activities comprise “...vending/hawking, shopkeeping, small manufacturing, repairing,

- paper and waste recycling (mostly on garbage dumpsites), diamond polishing, sandal stitching, garment-making, bag-making, kite-making, food processing, embroidery, domestic services, and as auto and cycle rickshaw drivers, barbers, cobblers, artisans, shopkeepers, head-loaders, donkey herders and cart-pullers” (Unni and Rani 2007: 227-28).
- 3 About 1,000 houses were demolished between 4 and 6 May 2011 in violation of the Gujarat High Court Order restraining demolition without alternative housing. Some 4,000 houses were demolished in November 2011 (Express News Service 2011c).
- 4 Author’s conversation with project architect, 30 October 2009.
- 5 Darshini Mahadevia, 2009, remarks in conclusion of seminar on “Urban Governance and Development-Induced Displacement: Sabarmati Riverfront Project in Ahmedabad”, IIMA, 9 October.
- 6 According to Desai (2006), cross-party support for this project demonstrated the embedding of the neo-liberal ideology that saw urban development and property development as keys to attracting capital investment into the city as well as integrating the city into the global economy. She adds that this also explains poor cross-party support for preventing and resisting the ensuing processes of evictions and displacement of poor populations living and working on the riverbank.
- 7 Presentation at EPC, January 2010.

- 8 Interview by author, 30 October 2009.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 All interviews from Banerji (2011) are quoted from the author’s interview transcripts.
- 11 Also from Banerji’s transcripts, interviewed November 2010.
- 12 Since July 2011, Gautam has served as Gujarat state’s principal secretary for urban development. Guruprasad Mohapatra was appointed municipal commissioner as well as head of the riverfront company.
- 13 See the 2006 EPC and AMC film, “Sabarmati Riverfront Development, Ahmedabad”, accessed on 5 November 2012: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9H_6ouFcPs
- 14 The collaborative research group for making the film included slum residents, youth volunteers, NGOs (ActionAid and Niswa), community organisations, researchers, students and faculty members from IIMA.
- 15 The film made on this research was directed by Dakxin Bajrange (a well-known media and cultural activist and film-maker) and his team, for dissemination in Gujarati, English and Hindi.
- 16 Shopping malls in India are touted to be mushrooming in all big and medium cities in India, providing western style shopping experiences with western brands being made accessible. However, these are also known to be costly and unviable for retailers and a financial failure (Krishna 2011).
- 17 Interviews with residents in Berhampura BSUP Site, 24 June 2012.
- 18 Thousands of families were made to spend the

- most summer months in the open without shelter or services, in a city that was being celebrated for its urban heritage, urban planning, infrastructure and tourism potential (Express News Service 2011b).
- 19 Interviews by author with Bimal Patel, November 2010 and Dilip Mahajan, September 2010.
 - 20 Conversation with author in April 2010, at EPC/HCP office.
 - 21 Conversation with author, 31 January 2011.
 - 22 Interview with Beena Jadav of Shelter Rights Forum, May 2012.
 - 23 Acting Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court, B B Bhattacharya, 25 November 2011.
 - 24 Author's field notes and interviews in Piplaj, January 2012.
 - 25 SRFDCL, "Expression of Interest", accessed on 3 May 2012; www.egovamc.com/tenders/DOCS/4689/EOL_SRFDCL.pdf
 - 26 "Sabarmati Water Sports Club", accessed on 5 November 2012: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sabarmati-Water-Sports-Club/144485262277504?sk=info>
 - 27 Interviews with evictees from riverbank, at Piplaj/Ganesh Nagar rehabilitation site, IIMA Newsletter, September 2010.
 - 28 Author's field notes, personal conversation at demolition site at Khanpur on Sabarmati Riverbank, 19 November 2011.
 - 29 Author's conversation with I P Gautam, Consultation on Rajiv Awas Yojana on "Slum Free Cities", organised by the Centre for Urban Equity, CEPT University, September 2010.
 - 30 Author's conversation with Bimal Patel, November 2010.
 - 31 After criticisms of the project resurfaced from 2009 onwards, such activities were quickly undertaken over a year by the planner, and described in a blog with seductive imagery for an international audience (Patel 2011).
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