

Redevelopment of Mill land: Constructive addition or commercial exploitation?

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Abstract: *The objective of this research paper is to study the chain of events that brought about the shutting down of textile mills in Mumbai, specifically focussing on the Great Strike of 1982. This study helps in understanding the conflicts, struggles and issues related to the mill land area. The closing of mill lands, though sad, was a natural outcome of a free-market economy that did not have a clear political vision. With the closing down of mills the land value in the surroundings areas and neighbourhood grew exponentially. The mill lands thus became a prime real estate with private developers and even mill owners wanting to redevelop these sites into high end infrastructure. Mill workers and surrounding residents were kept oblivious to these developments which resulted in discontent amongst them. This paper looks at the aspects of disagreement between the various stakeholders involved; existing community, politicians, bureaucrats, builders and mill owners. It also studies the changing landscape in terms of the socio-cultural structure, land use and byelaws or development control rules of the city of Mumbai. The paper looks at these factors to present an argument whether the mill sites in Mumbai were an opportunity for constructive redevelopment or a liability for commercial exploitation. In the absence of fair institutional mechanisms, such an occurrence could potentially repeat itself in other parts of the country. The paper argues the need to develop these institutional mechanisms.*

Key words: *Mumbai textile mills, redevelopment, Industrialization*

Introduction: The demise of textile mills in Mumbai is an important event in the history of the city. Representatives from different fields like policy making, economics, social activism, urban planning and architecture have debated, discussed and written regarding the same. Textile mill closures have significantly impacted the overall urban fabric of the city. The closure has resulted in huge swathes of unoccupied, expressionless land located in the heart of the island city, along with the loss of some significant industrial heritage of Mumbai city. These mills were once an essential part of the city's history and culture and now with their closure many important structures and buildings that were associated with the industry have vanished. There are numerous versions regarding the reasons for shutting down of Mumbai's textile mills, but the underlying cause and its decay is rooted elsewhere. In the writing by Atreyee Sen called "Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay slum"¹, it documents the experiences and involvement of women who worked in these textile mills, in the great strike of 1982 that ultimately resulted in the closure of the mills. In the book Atreyee Sen talks about communal tensions and political factors being the influencing factors for the death of mills and not just the economic factor. Another prominent book written by Hub Van Wersch, "The 1982-83

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1. Harman, William; Sen, Atreyee ; Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum. The Journal of Asian Studies; Pittsburgh Vol. 68, Iss. 1, (Feb2009)324. DOI:10.1017/S0021911809000527
 2. Hub Van Wersch; The 1982-83 Bombay Textile Strike and the Unmaking of a Labourers' City. ISBN : 9789388874151 year : 2019
 3. Krishnan, Shekhar; The Murder of the Mills: A Case Study of Phoenix Mills (Mumbai: Girangaon Bachao Andolan, Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana, April 2000).
 4. Prakash, G. (2010). Mumbai Fables. Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7srq>

Bombay Textile strike and the Unmaking of a Labourer's City"², gives a comprehensive critical description of the events that led to the mill strike, its aftermath and how the workers survived the period of the strike, their mindsets and motivations. In "Murder of the mills: A case study of Phoenix mills", the author Shekhar Krishnan recounts the textile mills area history in the background of a shifting economy of urban politics and deliberates the evolution and transformations of the textile industry in the city. He also tackles the issues of urban development, city spaces and what the community should demand³. "Mumbai Fables" by Gyan Prakash gives an account of how the broader shift of economic and globalization of Indian markets resulted in the decline of the city's textile industry⁴. So, there are many interpretations and deliberations, regarding the reasons for the closure of the mills. Much has been written and talked about it. The subject is multifaceted and while the ground for the textile mill closure has been extensively covered over a period of time, it is imperative to understand what the underlying causes were for the death of textile mills.

In 1976, the Urban Land Ceiling Act⁵ brought about a massive boom in the land value within the city. The mills were all centrally located within the city. Mill owners were in the meanwhile looking at other profitable commercial ventures. But mill lands were strictly reserved for industrial use as per the Development Control Rules (DCR) of Mumbai. This was because mill lands were allocated to the owners at concessional rates by the then colonial Bombay government, for use for textile mills only. As a result neither the government nor the mill owners could benefit from such mill lands, which was now a valuable land asset. The land could not be sold off or siphoned off legally. The degeneration of the textile mills and its land needs to be considered with this context. The root cause of the decline of textile mills is that the real estate has surpassed textile production in value⁶.

Historical summary: The first textile mill chimney was constructed in 1854, after which Mumbai witnessed an influx of prominent merchant families entering the profitable cotton textile industry. Vast tracts of unoccupied, reclaimed land that were within city limits were given to individuals to set up cotton textile industries. A lot of rural migrants started getting employment opportunities in these textile mills. A significant share of these migrant workers hailed from the Konkan region of western Maharashtra. This influx shaped the distinct cultural identity of the city. "Girgaon" was where textile mills were largely located and spans from the southern side of Byculla and Chinchpokli extending towards the north through Parel- Lalgate, Mahalaxmi, Elphinstone Road and reaching the outer limits of Dadar and Worli. Along with the textile mills, workers' housing, markets and maidans also grew. The first major mill strike took place in 1919, with 150,000 workers stopping all work for 18 days for demand of higher wages⁶. The strike proved to be successful even though there was no union leader. Girgaon witnessed several labour strikes during the period of 1920s and 1930s. These initial strikes along with the growth of trade unions served as a catalyst for the onset of the decline of the textile mills in then Bombay. This marked the beginning of what would culminate in the the Great Strike of 1982.

The Great Strike of 1982: Mumbai's economy was driven by the textile industry, which was also a large contributor to employment in the city. However, workers were paid low wages and working conditions were poor. This led to growing discontent amongst workers and they called for a strike on January 18, 1982, which was led by Dr. Dattatray Samant. This was a significant labour movement by mill workers demanding a 20% increase in wages and better working conditions. Worker unions were formed, protests held and the strike lasted for over a year. The workers refused to start work until their demands were met. The great strike of 1982 had widespread participation by over 250,000 mill workers who supported and rallied behind Dr. Samant, challenging the Bombay Mill Owners Association. The strike crumbled in spite of the workers' union efforts to engage in negotiations with the government.

5. The urban land ceiling and Regulation Act of 1976

6. Krishnan, Shekhar; The Murder of the Mills: A Case Study of Phoenix Mills (Mumbai: Girangaon Bachao Andolan, Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana, April 2000).

7. Gurnani, Reshmi; The Murder of Mumbai's Mills and Marathon of Malls, (Ulhasnagar, Thane: Smt. Chandibai Himathmal Mansukhani College).

There was no favourable resolution being reached for the workers either. The strike dragged on for an exhausting 18 months and over 150,000 textile mill workers losing their jobs⁷. This caused a massive social mayhem, not just in Girgaon, but across the city and left a long-lasting impact on the community. Some of the textile mills eventually moved from Mumbai and the few left behind got replaced by power looms. The closing down of the mills was seen more as a stimulator for economic growth rather than loss of heritage. It opened up new job prospects in diverse sectors throughout the city. According to the Mumbai Human Development Report of 2009⁸, released by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), *“the downfall of the mills inverted the city’s employment pattern, but until the 1970’s Mumbai was different; in the city, the organized sector had always been the predominant employer. That changed as the textile industry withered”*. By the end of 1980s, the mill land value was much more than the textile production itself, which resulted in further decay in the future prospects for the workers. This decline was deepened by the consequent economic boom, which further marginalized the workers. Even before the strike, the workers’ prospects, due to lack of education and advanced skills, was already on a downward trajectory. This rendered them ill-equipped to prosper in the evolving economic landscape.

Textile mill land redevelopment: DC Regulation 58: After the unsuccessful strike of 1982, neither could the mills be revived nor the wages of the workers paid⁹. But in 1991 the economy changed due to liberalization and Government of Maharashtra introduced Regulation 58 in the Development Control Regulations (DCR)¹⁰. The DCR permitted for the development of a portion of mill lands with the aim of using the resulting funds to be reinvested back into the recovery⁹ and modernization of the mills subject to authorization by the Board for Industrial & Financial Reconstruction (BIFR). Out of 58 cotton textile mills located in Mumbai, 26 of them were classified as “sick” and were subsequently acquired by the Government of India. The remaining 32 mills were in private hands. DCR 58 allowed redevelopment of mill lands by setting aside 33 percent of its land for open space and 27 percent to 37 percent to be handed over to Maharashtra Housing and Development Authority (MHADA) to create housing infrastructure¹¹. The objective was to create open spaces and public housing that would contribute to a more organized and cohesive urban landscape for the city. Mill owners, in return for the conceded land, would get Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) equivalent to the area given up. According to DCR 58, the “complete open area and the land under the structures was to be considered” while calculating the area to be surrendered to MHADA and BMC. Only buildings that were to be kept for the revived mills were to be exempted. With this blueprint, the city of Mumbai would get over 200 acres of open community area and a considerable measure of land for affordable housing for 28,500 families in tenements of 323 sq.ft per household. It is important to note that DCR 58 was not originally intended to promote real estate development, but to protect the mill workers’ jobs by allowing partial sale of land only. . A comprehensive development plan should have been formulated for the entire Girgaon area. However, the outcome was fragmented, haphazard and motivated solely by commercial gains from real estate exploitation.

8. Mumbai Human Development Report 2009, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

9. Gurnani, Reshmi; The Murder of Mumbai’s Mills and Marathon of Malls, (Ulhasnagar, Thane: Smt. Chandibai Himathmal Mansukhani College).

10. Development Control Rules (DCR) – Regulations that shall apply to development of any land situated within the Mumbai Metropolitan Region defined by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority Act 1974.

11. Edited by Darryl D’Monte- Mills for Sale. The way ahead; Marg Publications. ISBN: 81-85026-77-7

The Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS) Mill Workers Action Committee organized a protest march on 9th August 1992, which included workers, artists, activists, and local residents to voice their opposition to the government's new real estate developments, which they argued ignored the needs of the neighbourhood. The demonstration aimed to draw attention to the negative impact that unregulated, commercial-driven development was having on the community and how the needs of the neighbourhood people were totally ignored¹². Government of Maharashtra took action by establishing a Study Group on February 29, 1996, with the aim of developing an integrated plan for the textile mill lands¹³. This initiative was intended to address the pressing need for a comprehensive, well-coordinated approach to the development of mill lands that would prioritize the needs of the local community. The Study Group was chaired by the distinguished architect and urban planner Charles Correa and convened by V.K. Phatak. It included a range of experts and stakeholders, including Deepak Parekh, D.M. Sukthankar, G.S. Pantbalekundri, and A.N. Kale. Over the course of several months, the Study Group developed a comprehensive blueprint for the redevelopment of textile mill lands, outlining strategies and institutional changes needed for successful implementation.

The final report, which was completed in August 1996 and consisted of two volumes. It presented a detailed vision for the future of the mill lands and the surrounding area.

They based their report on the following principles;

1. To develop a comprehensive plan and strategy for the mill lands that would help create a cohesive urban form for the area
2. To provide affordable housing for low-income groups in the area.
3. To provide for creation of public spaces, parks, community centres, schools, and other essential infrastructure to serve the needs of the local population.
4. Recognizing the impact that the closure of mills had on employment in the area, the Study Group also worked to develop strategies to generate new job opportunities for workers who had been displaced by these closures.

In developing its vision for the redevelopment of mill lands, the Study Group took into account the Development Control Regulation (DCR) of 1991, which had set out guidelines for the regulation of land use in the city. To ensure a fair and equitable division of land, the Study Group recommended that the land be divided equally among the City Municipal Corporation, Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) and the mill owners.

According to this proposed division, one-third of the land would be used for public housing, to be developed by MHADA; another third would be set aside for open spaces and public amenities; and the final third would be made available for development by the National Textile Corporation (NTC), the government agency responsible for managing the remaining mill lands. The study group's thinking was to provide large and feasible land parcels for each of the three groups instead of an incoherent and disorganized mix of development. The study group submitted their report in 1996, but no action was taken on their proposal. Another committee was formed in the year 2000 by the state government under the Textile Minister Mr. Ranjit Deshmukh to amend the policy for the sale of mill land. The committee was also to look into the complaints and objections of mill owners and workers as many private mill owners found the regulations of DCR 58(1991) to be too restrictive and burdensome, and chose not to comply with them.

The report was submitted by the committee in 2001. In March 2001, the original DCR 58 of 1991 was amended by the government, under section 37 of the MR& TP act¹⁴. The 2001 amendment to the DCR

12. D. D. Monte 2006, 94 – 107

13. Government of Maharashtra (1996) Report of the Expert Group on Development of Textile Mill land (also known as Charles Correa Committee Report), Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai.

14. Sankarn, Sushma; Mumbai – Mill Land Redevelopment, (Mumbai, 2005).

15. Frank, K. (2005) Mumbai Cotton Textile Mills, Research Report, Knight Frank India Ltd., Mumbai.

58 (1991) allowed for the distribution of have any existing structures on it¹⁵. Words like “open lands and balance FSI” were replaced and words like “lands under the structures” were omitted. As a result, the land area to be surrendered considerably reduced. Due to this policy change, many private mill owners rushed to the civic authorities to have their plans for redevelopment approved. The development of the vast mill lands in Central Mumbai gained momentum, with the BMC officially giving the green light for redevelopment plans of over 15 private mills¹⁵. The city was stripped of four-fifths of its claim to green space as the open space area reduced to 32 acres from 166 acres. Even the public housing land reduced to 25 acres from 160 acres, less than one-sixth of what was initially envisaged. The initial housing which originally was to cater to 28,500 families would now house only 3375 families. Civic activists and architects vehemently opposed the proposal, arguing that the city was entitled to a higher share of the mill lands, given that the total area of all the NTC mills combined is approximately 300 acres, while the land coming to BMC and MHADA under the new provision was only 38 acres¹⁴. The development of mill lands in Mumbai was considered a rare and valuable opportunity for planned urban growth, and many were reluctant to let it slip away. Given the density of Mumbai and its open space ratio, this was a huge opportunity to create public open space for the city. The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that each city should aim to offer a minimum of 9 square meters per person^{16,17} of accessible¹⁶, safe¹⁸, and functional¹⁹ urban green space. WHO recommends that an optimal amount of urban green space would be as generous as 50 square meters per person²⁰. Whereas Mumbai's per capita accessible open space is a meagre 1.24 square metres.

In late 2004, the BMC granted permission for the sale of seven NTC units in Mumbai, which NTC decided to proceed with. However, shortly thereafter, a public body raised concerns about the impact of the ongoing mill land development on overcrowding, haphazard planning, and the reduction of open space in the city. This led to a general demand for a review of the DCR 58 (2001). To prolong the dispute and primarily to delay the disposal of NTC and other privately-owned mill lands, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) contesting the legality of the 2001 amendment to the DCR 58 (2001) was lodged in the Bombay High Court in February 2005. An injunction was requested to prevent any further authorizations for development under this regulation and for those outstanding approvals. The primary argument put forth was that the amendment represents a significant alteration that needs thorough examination and preparation. The 2001 amendment was supported by the mill owners, the then ruling government and RMMS and GKSS supported the PIL filed by Bombay Environmental Action group (BEAG). The judgment given by the high court initially was in favour of Mumbai city needing more green open spaces and affordable housing. The high court decision was challenged by the NTC and mill owners and they appealed in the supreme court against this decision. The supreme court looked at the amendment more as a construal of the town planning act. The Supreme Court granted approval to the NTC for the development of seven of its mills and it upheld the DCR58 modification carried out by the government as acceptable. The NTC had already secured all necessary clearances from the Maharashtra Government and BMC to sell and redevelop these mill lands. This transaction yielded an additional development potential of about 3 million sq. ft in the Central Mumbai real estate sector.

It was only a matter of time before the cultural heritage of Mumbai faded away, giving way to upscale properties developed and controlled by the affluent class. Anyone who drives or walks through the Girgaon area can see the effects of redevelopment. The process of gentrification, fuelled by private capital, has dramatically transformed the Central Mumbai landscape and the surrounding regions. The former workplaces and residences of mill workers have been replaced by luxury apartments, high-end

16. World Health Organization (2010). Urban Planning, Environment and Health: From Evidence to Policy Action. From http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/114448/E93987.pdf?ua=1. Accessed on March 22, 2023.

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offices, hotels, malls, and entertainment complexes, with more such developments in the pipeline. This trend continues to gentrify the area at a steady pace.

In his article 'Tragic Fable of Mumbai Mills', Gyan Prakash describes this as a chaotic development process that navigates through a maze of legal disputes, opposition from existing residents and civil society organizations, and market forces²¹.

Present Scenario: Shift in real estate demand: Girgaon is on its way to becoming an urban chaos with its 600 acres of land now being developed in piecemeal manner instead of integrated planning. The consequences of the judgement in the long term has serious aftermaths in terms of overall ecosystem, civic well-being and health. The mill land locations served as a vacuum that the city was surging to fill in and take over. A report by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 2005 has revealed that the count of affluent households, with earnings over Rupees 1 million per annum has gone up from 0.27 million in 1995-96 to 2.3 million in 2005-06, a nine-fold escalation over a decade. The rise in the number of affluent citizens, coupled with the growth of the credit industry with low-interest rates and less stringent trade policies, has revolutionized the market demand and supply choices. The rising impact of transnational migrants and returning non-resident Indians is also apparent in the shift of consumer culture and preferences. A significant outcome of the expansion of this consumer segment is the desire for high-end apartments in proximity to the Central Business District (CBD), resulting in competing demands for textile mill lands to be redeveloped for residential purposes.

It has been contended that the repurposing of textile mill land has created a beneficial impact on the local economy, resulting in a more stable and predictable property market that has stimulated development in the border areas of CBD and suburbs. This improvement in market performance is reflected in lower vacancy rates, which in turn have helped to attract new economic actors to the area, generating a positive feedback loop of growth and development.

Post liberalisation changes in national and local economies led to the emergence of Mumbai as a financial hub that led to investment inflows through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investors (FII). These economic forces have been a driving force for local demand for property. Such strong forces of demand made a strong case for possessing property, which would give both consumption benefit and any expected surplus returns over and above the costs of holding it. Therefore, changes in mill land redevelopment not only changed the physical and landscape contours of city but also resulted in underlying changes in property values and local economy.

The transformation of Mumbai's landscape represents a departure from the industrial era characterized by mills, chawls, and factory chimneys, towards a post-industrial economy that is now highly service centric. The city has become a hub for international finance, trade, and commerce, with a new knowledge-based and highly skilled workforce, much like the shift from the industrial age to the era of globalization.

Conclusion: The process of industrial land redevelopment entails more than just altering the physical and visual aspects of a city's landscape; it also brings about significant shifts in property values, the local economy, and cultural values. These changes reflect broader social and economic trends that can have far-reaching impacts on the affected communities, both positive and negative. Redevelopment of textile mills in Mumbai is a complex issue that required a multi-faceted approach. A variety of factors contributed to the failure to redevelop mill lands in Mumbai. Factors like corruption, bureaucratic red tape, disagreements between different arms of government and stakeholders all played a role in it. However, there are successful land-related issues that have been successfully handled in India and globally. One example is the redevelopment of the Bhendi Bazaar area in Mumbai, which involved extensive consultation with residents, a transparent bidding process, and the involvement of local and state government agencies, as well as private developers. Another example would be the redevelopment of the High Line in New York City, which involved collaboration between city agencies,

21. Prakash, G. (2010). *Mumbai Fables*. Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7srq>

private donors, and community groups. The High Line was a disused elevated railway that was transformed into a popular park and tourist destination.

These examples highlight the importance of collaboration and transparency in solving difficult land-related issues. In the case of Mumbai's mill lands, it is be important to identify the key stakeholders, address any concerns or conflicts they may have, and work towards a shared vision for the redevelopment of the area. This will require strong leadership, political dexterity, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. It is important to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in an open and transparent dialogue that values and incorporates their perspectives. One approach that has been successful in generating dialogue and fostering good will is the use of participatory governance mechanisms such as citizen assemblies, deliberative polls, and public consultations. These mechanisms allow citizens to come together and deliberate on issues, share their opinions and experiences, and develop solutions that are responsive to the needs and concerns of the community.

Political and administrative dexterity is extremely crucial in effectively managing complex issues. This involves having the ability to navigate political dynamics, manage conflicting interests, and develop creative solutions that balance competing needs and priorities. It also involves building coalitions and partnerships across sectors and communities, and leveraging available resources to achieve the desired outcomes. We must shift towards participatory planning strategies that prioritize community engagement and empowerment, rather than relying solely on top-down directives and interventions. This approach is essential to prevent the negative effects of new luxury spaces, which often rely on exclusionary tactics to entice consumers.

Mumbai, like many other cities, is constantly evolving and changing. Mumbai cotton mills is a case of "What existed yesterday may no longer be present today, and what exists today may not be there tomorrow". There is no clear justification for this development, regardless of whether it is labelled as gentrification, revitalization, redevelopment, or an urban renewal policy. The proposed changes should withstand critical scrutiny and have a strong rationale. It should fully consider the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts on the affected communities

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