

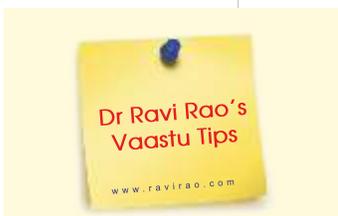


## CONTENTS



- Architect's Voice  
Dr Bimal Patel

1



- Dr Ravi Rao's Vaastu tips  
Doors, Windows, Ceilings

8



- Corporate Logos  
Nestlé

10



- 12 Jyotirling  
Omkareshwar

13

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## EDITORIAL



Welcome to the June 2013 issue of Vaastuyogam.

Two articles of this issue deal with themes I have touched upon time and again.

The first theme is the River Sabarmati . I believe that one of the causes of the woes of Ahmedabad in the recent past can be directly linked to the drying up of the Sabarmati . The one great benefit of the Sabarmati River Front Project will be that the River Sabarmati will have water in it throughout the year. This is good news for the prosperity of Ahmedabad city.



River Sabarmati

The second theme is the lacklustre / below par construction quality of buildings, especially flats and tenements constructed by builders. In my article on Vaastu tips I have drawn attention to heights of ceilings and number of doors and windows in homes. If you cannot get these correct , the Vaastu of your home remains flawed.

Happy reading

Dr. Ravi Rao ■

## ARCHITECT'S VOICE

This month the Vaastuyogam team met with one of Ahmedabad's leading architect & leading planner Dr Bimal Patel, Director at HCP Design, Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd. and Founder-Director of Environmental Planning Collaborative.

He spoke at length about The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project and the Ahmedabad ringroad both of which have been designed by him.

*Excerpts from the Interview:-*



Dr. Bimal Patel Architect And Urban Planner

**On Architects, Urban Planners and Urban Designers:**

First of all you must make a distinction between Architects, Urban Planners and Urban Designers. They are three different professions. At one end is the Architect and at the other there is the Urban planner and somewhere in between is the Urban Designer. Architects are different from Urban Planners and Urban Designers. The profession of architects – to put it simply – deals with the design of buildings on private plots. He is usually working on plots that have a single ownership. As soon as you have to do a design that affects a lot of different land-owners, then life becomes very difficult.

When you have multiple land-owners, then anything you design might create some benefits for some people but add costs to other people. This raises a whole set of different problems. It is these problems that Urban Planners have to deal with;

continued on page 2 ►



## *“What Indian cities lack is good planning and not good architects”*

- Dr. Bimal Patel architect and urban planner

◀ continued from page 1



### ARCHITECT'S VOICE

where there are multiple owners of land and the questions of how to distribute costs and benefits become a major consideration. Urban Planners usually work for governments because when you have multiple land-owners then the only way to make a design that is applicable to all is possible only by the government, because only the government has that kind of authority. Architects know very little about this kind of work. What Indian cities lack is good planning and not good architects.

Architects – as professionals – do not deal with city planning. Indian cities are suffering from lack of urban planning and not from the lack of good architects. There are many good architects who can design good buildings inside a single plot of land but if you were to tell them to do it where there are multiple land owners, they would not be able to do anything.



Dr. Bimal Patel Architect And Urban Planner

**First of all you must make a distinction between Architects, Urban Planners and Urban Designers. They are three different professions. At one end is the Architect and at the other there is the Urban planner and somewhere in between is the Urban Designer.**

If you take Edwin Lutyens who designed New Delhi, he was designing, essentially, one big capital city on a piece of land that belonged to one owner; the British government of India. He had a blank state and a free hand to do whatever he wanted. If you take Chandigarh, it is the same story. There was one architect, Le Corbusier and there was a single owner of the land – the Government of India. Le Corbusier had a blank slate and he could draw whatever he wanted and it would be built. He - just as Lutyens in Delhi – did not have to worry about unequal distribution of costs and benefits. The story repeats itself when Gandhinagar in Gujarat was built. The entire land, on which Gandhinagar was to be built, belonged to the Government of Gujarat. Whatever was designed could be built. There were no worries, for instance, that whilst building a road somebody's property would have to be taken away etc.

In existing towns and cities this is not the case. Existing towns and cities are not green field sites. These are brown field sites. These are sites with multiple land-owners. To do anything in existing cities is very

difficult; to do it you need Town/City Planners. We have with us city planners but they are trained like architects and they behave like architects and therefore do not manage to do good quality planning. What do I mean by this? What I am saying is that when they make a plan they do not bother how it is going to affect everybody. They disregard people's property rights. They disregard the fact that people will do whatever is in their interest. They create plans which benefit a few people and put the costs on others. This is not the way to plan.

If you want to plan a city properly, then you have to take all of these facts together into consideration. The fact that there are several different stake holders and their rights and concerns have to be taken into consideration. That you have to be fair in distributing the costs and benefits and that if you do not take care of all of this you will not get a good solution. So this is the issue underlying town planning in India. So, when people tell me you need good architects to plan a city I say that planning a city is not an architect's business; he does not know how

continued on page 3 ▶



◀ continued from page 2

**ARCHITECT'S VOICE**

to do it. Architects are trained to design buildings and that is what they should do. Planning cities should be left to the city planners. In some sense, I know this issue very well because I wear both hats. I am both an Urban Planner and an Architect and I practice in both areas and therefore can speak with a degree of confidence that the two are different fields. I have to think differently as an architect and differently as a City Planner.

**Vaastuyogam:** Do you think that at the bottom of planning is another set of planning that is aimed at aggrandizing the well-connected few at the cost of the remainder population?

No. I don't think so. I'll put the matter in a simplified way. Let us say there are fields where you want to put a highway. There is no other agenda. To make the highway is the only agenda. Now, as soon as you make a road, you will need a certain "Right Of Way" for the land to be cleared. Whatever, the alignment of the highway that you take, you will have to acquire land. The fellow who loses his land – even if you compensate him at market rates – will have to walk out from there. His neighbor, whose plot is right next to him will have the highway adjoin his plot and receive free appreciation of market value for his plot. So, by the sheer act of putting a road you have thrown out one fellow and (with intent) favored another. What you have done is that you have put the costs on the head of the fellow who is leaving whilst the benefits have accrued to another whose plot now stands adjoin the road. This is patently unfair. What will be the reaction of the fellow who is losing his land? He will try to shift the alignment of the road away from his plot whilst his neighbor will try and keep it as it is. This is – in a simplified way – what I mean when I say unequal distribution of costs and benefits.

How do you solve this problem? The way to solve this problem is something like this:- Let us say there is a room. It is packed choc-

continued on page 4 ▶

**Dr. Bimal Patel Architect And Urban Planner****Dr. Bimal Patel**

Dr. Bimal Patel is an architect and urban planner with more than 25 years of professional experience in both fields. He is the Director at HCP Design, Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd. and Founder-Director of Environmental Planning Collaborative, a not-for-profit, planning research and advocacy organization that works with local governments and other agencies. Dr. Patel is the President of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) University, Ahmedabad. Dr. Patel obtained a Diploma in Architecture from the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology in 1984. Following this he obtained a dual Masters in City Planning and Architecture from the University of California at Berkeley and Doctoral degree in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley in 1995. He is actively engaged in understanding and transforming urban design and urban planning practice in India to make them more effective in improving the quality of life in Indian Cities.

**AWARDS (Selected List)**

- College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley, Distinguished Alumnus Award, 2008
- Prime Minister's National Award for Excellence in Urban Planning and Design, 2003.
- AR+D, Emerging Architect, Commendation Award, 2001
- World Architecture Award, 2001
- UNCHS, Best Practices Award, 1998
- The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1992



◀ continued from page 3



## ARCHITECT'S VOICE

a-block with people. There is no space in the room. Everybody is standing right next to each other. Now, suppose you want to create a path through the middle of the room. You have two options. You can say "All of you who are coming in my way, please walk out of the room" That is one way of doing it. Another way is that you ask everyone in the room to push back a little bit. So, if everybody moves one inch, in the middle of the room you get 30 inches space. In the second option, no one has to leave the room. Everyone loses a little, but at the end of it you have a road that all stand to gain from. This, in my opinion, is a fairer solution than asking a few people to walk out of the room.

The Ring Road in Ahmedabad was made like this. It was not done by the acquisition method. Nobody's land was acquired; everyone was asked to shift backwards by a bit. That is why that road was made in four years and that is why Bangalore – that used the acquisition route - was not able to make its road without its set of hiccups , delays and problems. Whilst building roads, using the acquisition method is a patently unfair method and invariably will fall flat.

I had drawn the Ring Road with my hands in 1999. By 2002 the drawing was passed and

continued on page 5 ▶

## Sabarmati Riverfront



Sabarmati Riverfront is among the most innovative projects in the world according to leading international advisory firm KPMG.

KPMG, one of the world's top advisory firm has included Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project in the list of '100 Most Innovative Projects' towards urban regeneration that make cities livable as well as sustainable.

A release by the KPMG about the Sabarmati Riverfront states, "The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project is an urban regeneration and environmental improvement initiative currently under way in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It involves the reclamation of a 10.5 kilometer stretch of the banks of the Sabarmati River, creating a new public space for cultural and civic institutions. Along the river, space will be made for recreation use and markets. The aim is to transform the stretch of river from a geographical divider in the middle of the city to a focal point for leisure and recreation."

Recently, in April this year the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) received HUDCO National Award 2012 for innovative infrastructure development for the Riverfront Project. On an earlier occasion, the Sabarmati Riverfront project also bagged the Prime Minister award for the best concept and design of a public project. In 2006, the Sabarmati Riverfront Project was the recipient of the National Safety Council of India, Safety Award (Prashansa Patra).



Gardens at Khanpur between Gandhi Bridge and Nehru Bridge on eastern bank, Sabarmati Riverfront



◀ continued from page 4



## ARCHITECT'S VOICE

**Planning strategies must not create losers and winners. Draconian land acquisition works only in dictatorships. India is a democracy and it will never work here. It is my contention that as soon as you make a plan that distributes benefits and costs equally and when, at the root of the plan there is no unfairness or political agenda the plan becomes implementable.**

by 2006 you could drive around the road. It has never happened like this in India before. All this happened not because I had drawn it; it was the strategy (along the lines of my simplified example of a room discussed above) that AUDA used. This may seem like a dream solution that is not practical but in fact this is exactly how it was done.

To take another example: In Ahmedabad, or any city, when you make a layout. Let us say that in the outskirts the city is going to grow and you are drawing a new layout. You will need road, parks and lots of other things. You will need lot of land but from where will you get this land. Earlier, planners used to draw two lines and say "ACQUIRE" They may like plot X for a park and would simply acquire it without bothering about the fate of the land-owner of plot X. No doubt the plot is being put to public use but the land-owner of plot X is going to ask why me. He will say, "Why do I alone suffer for the public good. Thus forceful reservation or acquisition of my plot is putting all the cost on me while the benefit goes to the public. I don't agree to this. One way or the other, I am going to fight this. I will use the courts; I will pull political strings..."

Remember that all along it was /is never the specific agenda of the planners or politicians to take act unfavorably against the owner of plot X. What the planners or politicians think that it is OK to take away someone's plot and

put it to public use because it suits their planning requirement. This is how city planning is done in India. And that is why the planning has gone haywire.

Planning strategies must not create losers and winners. Draconian land acquisition works only in dictatorships. India is a democracy and it will never work here. It is my contention that as soon as you make a plan that distributes benefits and costs equally and when, at the root of the plan there is no unfairness or political agenda the plan becomes implementable.

### The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project

*The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project is an initiative by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to develop the Sabarmati riverfront in the city of Ahmedabad, India. It is being developed by the Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL) that was established in May 1997 with a seed capital of 1 crore (US\$180,000) and was charged with the responsibility of developing the approximately 10.4 km stretch along the river in the city; the mission being "to revivify the city centre by reconnecting it to the river"*

*The Sabarmati River Front Development Corporation has bagged the Prime Minister's award for excellence in urban*

continued on page 6 ▶



Shopping plaza envisioned at Vallabhsadan on the western bank between Nehru Bridge and Gandhi Bridge - Sabarmati Riverfront



◀ continued from page 5



## ARCHITECT'S VOICE

*planning and design for cleaning up the river and getting water to the nearly dry river in Ahmedabad. The Lead Architect and Urban Designer for this project is Dr Bimal Patel's HCP Design Planning and Management Pvt. Ltd.*

**Vaastuyogam:** *As you are involved closely with the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project, could you tell us something about it? Many people think this a merely a beautification exercise without much else going for it.*

The Sabarmati river has many problems and the Riverfront project will solve many of them.

**Cleaning the Sabarmati River:** There was untreated sewage that was flowing into the Sabarmati. The only way to stop the untreated sewage was to put up a pipeline that would connect all the sewage lines. If you try to put such a pipeline in an open river then that pipe line is not possible because it

may not withstand flooding. However, if you bury the pipeline then it is possible to have the pipeline. Thus, the first objective is the cleansing of the Sabarmati river and stop untreated sewage from entering the river.

**Private Ownership of the River banks:** The second issue was that despite Ahmedabad having a river flowing through it the general public were cut off from the river banks because the properties along the river extended right into the river banks. Thus the river banks belonged to private owners. By creating a sliver of land on both the banks of the Sabarmati the river banks have been made public.

**Flooding and unstable river banks:** Sabarmati being a seasonal river, floods during monsoons could and did happen. When there was flooding the banks – being sandy and are very unstable -gave way. Anybody who could afford it built protective walls. The first to do so was the Gandhi Ashram. Had the big concrete wall not been there, Gandhi Ashram would have been

washed away long ago. The long term solution lay in having a concrete wall, throughout. This is what the Riverfront project has done. The Sabarmati river banks are stabilized now.

**Parks and Gardens:** Ahmedabad is in dire need of public parks and gardens. About 50% of the land created by the Riverfront Project will be used for parks and gardens for the public.

**Narmada Connection - Not a river but a lake:** Actually now the river is more like a lake. There is a barrage at one end and from the other end we are putting water from the Narmada. So, in effect we have created a linear lake in the middle of the city. In the Mughal times – in Ahmedabad - they built Kankaria. That was a circular lake. Now, you have a linear lake which has a surface area equivalent to about 22 Kankaria lakes. The amount of water needed to fill this lake is about 17 days of the water supply requirement of Ahmedabad city and this

continued on page 7 ▶



View of Lower promenade - Sabarmati Riverfront



◀ continued from page 6

**ARCHITECT'S VOICE**

water has been taken from the Narmada canal.

**Recharging lost water:** Of course this water storage comes with issues of water lost by evaporation and seepage into the ground. 95% of the water lost is by seepage into the ground. Since all of Ahmedabad is pumping water up from the ground, the water seeping back to the ground is a good thing. So, how much water we need to replenish losses by evaporation and seepage? Incidentally, this amount is a little less than the sewage Ahmedabad generates every day. All we have to do is treat the sewage and put it back in the river. All water loss issues resolved!

**Vaastuyogam:** *As we understand it from you, this project is a win-win situation any way you look at it. Yet it has been stalled for decades.*

The Riverfront project has had more than its share of setbacks and flip flops right from the time it was initiated in 1961 by prominent Ahmedabad citizens and the French architect Bernard Kohn.

One key reason for the delays is that it was envisaged all along that the project would be funded by Gujarat government. That's where the matter rested till 1996 when the project was revived once again (this time by my company) we designed the thing in a way that it would make the river banks social and that it would be self-financing through sale of part of the land that we would be creating along the banks. 50% of the land created would be for Parks and Gardens. 15% would be used for roads. Some percentages were earmarked for other amenities. Only 20% of the Land would be sold and that would be enough funding for the project. Upfront, the money would be borrowed from HUDCO with seed capital of one crore rupees provided by Gujarat government. Project delays are not crippling because the additional interest that will accrue due to delay will be more than compensated by appreciation of the land price. ■

*(To be continued next month.)*

**Sabarmati Riverfront**

*"The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project will transform Ahmedabad's historic but neglected riverfront into a vibrant and vital focus for the city. The project consists of several linked initiatives aimed at addressing the many environmental and social problems of the riverfront."*

*- CM Gujarat Shri Narendra Modi*

The Sabarmati Riverfront project is an environmental improvement, social upliftment and urban rejuvenation project that will renew Ahmedabad. The project aims to reclaim the private river edge as a public asset and restore the city's relationship with its river. The Riverfront project presents a great opportunity to create a public edge to the river on the eastern and western sides of Ahmedabad. By channeling the river to a constant width of 275m, riverbed land has been reclaimed to create 11.25 kms of public riverfront on both the banks. The total land reclamation is 202.79 hectares. The Narmada Canal located towards the north of the city channels water into the Sabarmati, which is retained in the river because of the existing Vasna Barrage. Hence, the traditionally monsoon-fed Sabarmati is able to hold and replenish water year-round.

The first objective of the project is to effectively manage the river as critical infrastructure. The riverfront development includes major interceptor sewer lines on both banks of the river, capturing more than 38 sewage discharge points and routing sewage to newly-commissioned treatment plants south of Vasna barrage. Both banks of the river have diaphragm walls built into the riverbed at a depth of more than 10m, and retaining walls which protect low-lying areas from periodic flooding. The Sabarmati has been channelized to a constant width without altering the flood carrying capacity of the river.

A key feature of this project is a two-level, continuous promenade on both sides of the river. It is built just above the water level to serve only pedestrians and cyclists and to provide access to the water. The upper promenade is being built to host a variety of public features: cultural and educational institutions, leisure activities, large public parks and plazas and a few areas for commercial and retail development.

The Sabarmati Riverfront project sets new standards for public projects. The project is designed to maximize the use of reclaimed land for public purposes. The Riverfront will upgrade 18 precincts, revitalizing the heart of Ahmedabad and leading the city's future growth. The Riverfront project is completely self-financed through the sale of a small percentage of reclaimed land for commercial and retail space, sufficient enough to generate resources to pay for developing the riverfront and managing it.

The Sabarmati Riverfront is designed to shape Ahmedabad's future as a city oriented towards residents' needs and poised for responsible, inclusive growth. As a usable central artery, the river will likely revolutionize the development of Ahmedabad as an urban center and raise the threshold for city planning.