

Colourful past, green future

Delhi's history and future have to be woven into a Master Plan that does not view the Capital as a machine

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We need to recognise that Delhi is an

ancient city, or a conglomeration of cities, built over time. We cannot use Master-Planning principles that deal with the city as a machine, as a formal system of cars, roads and flyovers fails to integrate the organically evolved parts of the city

Two crucial developments in post-colonial India have had an impact on urban growth and development: 1947 (independence) and 1991 (liberalisation of the economy) and played a major role in the evolution of our cities, especially Delhi.

All the master plans of Delhi: MPD 1962, MPD 1991, and the latest, MPD 2021, have failed to make our city safe and liveable as half of its population lives in "unauthorised" settlements.

The failure of Delhi as a city has been consistent throughout because of lack of affordable and rented housing models, leading to ever-increasing slums, lack of sewerage handling systems,

excessive garbage generation, water woes, traffic congestion, lack of safe walking options for pedestrians, footpaths, and finally, a complete lack of urban identity.

Be that as it may, all is not lost.

Delhi can still be amongst the most liveable cities in the world. For this to happen, though, a fundamental shift in thinking is required. It has to be a shift in consciousness, moving away from our current understanding of the world, wherein we place ourselves above and outside nature to one where we consider ourselves as part of nature, as part of a delicate ecosystem which is interconnected.

It is crucial for the Master Plan of Delhi to become the Master Plan for the environment of Delhi, with all other issues becoming a subset towards fulfillment of this single agenda - protection of the environment. The very basis of life, the existence of a city and its inhabitants, is dependent upon the basic needs of air, water and public health.

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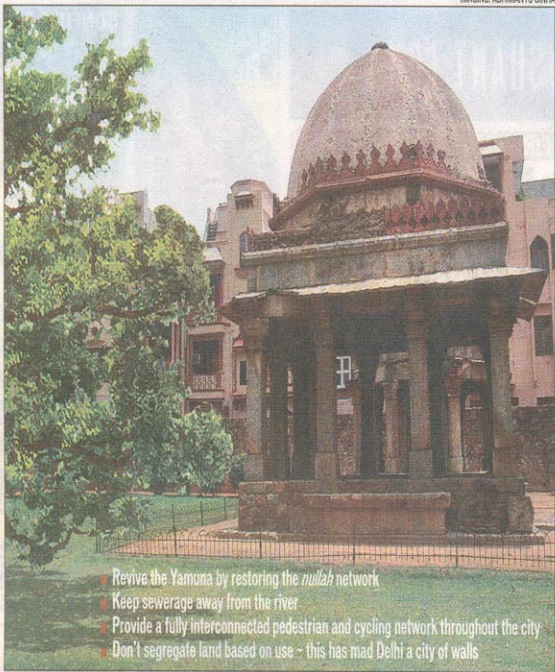
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Delhi's older parts are informal in character, more bazaar-like, and were designed to be reliant on pedestrian and non-motorised forms of transport. The city has to be greater than the sum of its parts, and in our case, strategic intervention based on existing local conditions will be more successful than the long-term implementation of an overall Master Plan where these conditions are ever-changing.

All cities are known by their common spaces and accessibility to these commons — public spaces, pedestrian pathways, parks, riverfronts, forests, etc. The fact that all our Master Plans segregate land based on its use leads to a city full of boundary walls — making access to the city and its infrastructure possible only



- Revive the Yamuna by restoring the *nullah* network
- Keep sewerage away from the river
- Provide a fully interconnected pedestrian and cycling network throughout the city
- Don't segregate land based on use — this has mad Delhi a city of walls

for a privileged few. We need to shift away from a model of land-use segregation to one that defines building use with the net effect that the entire open space of the city

is available as a resource to all. This is a fundamental shift, albeit the only one offering equitable possibilities for all.

As a simple beginning,

revive the Yamuna by restoring the *nullah* (drain) network of Delhi and preventing the entry of Delhi's sewerage into its primary source of water. Treat sew-

erage at source before it enters the *nullahs* and convert these to fresh water streams, thereby replenish the water table of Delhi and also provide a fully interconnected pedestrian and cycling network throughout the city on the banks of the *nullahs*.

And finally, complex governance structures and multiplicity of agencies further worsen the possibility of collective thinking and implementation.

A city is an ecosystem. It cannot be governed in isolated parts. Delhi needs a single nodal agency, which ensures and implements a health balance between an environmental master plan and strategic intervention. Let there be no doubt, if we do not act now, our city is in peril.

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