

Case Study

# City Building and Regime Creation in the Peripheries for Mumbai

---

**People, Places and Infrastructure: Countering urban violence and  
promoting justice in Mumbai, Rio, and Durban**

Lalitha Kamath

Radhika Raj

*Maps:* Nisha Kundar

*Photographs:* Author

March 25, 2016



Centre for Urban Policy and Governance

School of Habitat Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences

This work was carried out with financial support from the UK Government's Department for International Development and the International Development Research Centre, Canada. The opinions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect those of DFID or IDRC.



## Acknowledgements

---

This work has been a long engagement with several respondents from, but not limited to, Vasai Virar who have helped us decode this complex field. We greatly benefitted from our discussions with social workers, activists, musicians, politicians, researchers, students, party members, academicians, urban planners, architects, government officials and workers. We would like to acknowledge the time they spent sharing their struggles, strategies and insights on the rapidly transforming periphery. We would also like to thank government officials at the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation for their support through the project.

Several people allowed us access to otherwise difficult-to-reach places and deserve special thanks. Sachin Marti gave us our first introduction to the emerging city. Ramanuj Pathak, our project fellow, opened up a whole new world through his music and performances on the urbanising periphery. Mahendra Jadhav, provided us with great support during fieldwork in an uncertain terrain. We are very grateful to them.

Over the course of the project, we have had several interns and research officers who have contributed to building this study. Nirali Joshi's work in the initial few months of the project set the tone for the research and her encouragement and critical comments of an earlier draft have been invaluable. Supriya Sonar supported us on translating complex legal and other material. Nitin Meshram supported us during field work with his enthusiasm and pertinent questions during interviews. Shrilakshmi Iyer greatly contributed to drawing links between players and projects operating in the peripheries that were not apparent on the surface.

The case study has been tremendously enriched by the conceptual frameworks, analysis and questions raised by our colleagues at the Centre for Urban Policy and Governance. Amita Bhide, Himanshu Burte and Ratoola Kundu have helped develop this piece of work through their critique and contribution across three years. Nisha Kunder's maps added the much needed spatial dimension to the case study. Her perspective as an urban designer and architect also contributed to how we understood the social geography of the emerging city. We would also like to thank Smita Waingankar for her continued guidance, Shruthi Parthasarthy for the photographs and Durgesh Solanki for the administrative support. Finally, the Secretariat of the School of Habitat Studies as well as the Finance and

Accounts Division of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences Administrative deserve our thanks for their support throughout the project duration.

This case study would not have seen the light of day without the funding and the support of the International Development Research Centre, Canada. We appreciate the organisation's commitment to a research-driven approach towards impacting policy and bringing about social change in the Global South.

## Table of contents

---

Acknowledgements .....	iv
Table of contents .....	vii
List of Images and Maps .....	ix
1            Opening Up the Periphery: Understanding Urbanisation in the Metropolitan Region    10	
1.1      Methodology.....	13
1.2      Theoretical framework.....	14
2            How Regional Plans and Policies shaped the contours of urbanization of Vasai-Virar    21	
2.1 Urbanizing VVSR: The convergence of builder and politician interests locally and regionally.....	24
2.2 Building a Regime of Informal Sovereignty in Vasai-Virar Based on Land and Violence.....	26
2.3 Resistance from the ‘No Urbanization’ Coalition in the Coastal Belt: Campaigns Around Water and the Environment.....	28
3            The Move to Legitimate Sovereignty: Inclusive Politics and Ruling by Numbers    34	
3.1      The Formation of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation: Resistance, Cooptation and Capitulation.....	39
3.2      The Formation of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation: Resistance, Cooptation and Capitulation.....	46
4            Controlling Land-use: Calculated Informality, Differentiated Rule and Splintered Geographies.....	52
4.1      Three Cases of Differentiated Rule .....	55
Makrand Nagar .....	55
4.2      Santosh Bhuvan .....	61

4.2.1	The Reign of Ramprasad Gupta .....	67
4.2.2	Young Men's aspirations and organisations.....	70
4.3	Sai Welfare Society .....	73
4.3.1	Social Capital and Opportunist Urban Relations.....	75
4.3.2	The Absent State: Middlemen and the Process of Building Citizenship 77	
4.3.3	Migrants as City Builders and Public Servants .....	80
5	From Agriculture to Real Estate: Imagining Vasai Virar as a 'World Class', Cosmopolitan Destination .....	83
6	Concluding Discussion: The State-market Axis, Violence and Spatial (In)justice 90	
6.1	Agency and new modes of inclusive-exclusive politics .....	97
	References .....	102
	Mapping References .....	106

## List of Images and Maps

---

### Maps

Figure 1: Location of Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation in Mumbai Metropolitan Region .....	12
Figure 2: An Old Map of Vasai Virar showing different contours of the sub region .....	22
Figure 3: The first development in Vasai Virar took off around the Western Railway stations .....	30
Figure 4: Map 3: Prominent zones in Vasai-Virar according to the Development Plan of 2007 .....	32
Figure 5: Growth of informal sprawl over the years in Vasai and Nalasopara (East).....	38
Figure 6: The ‘no urbanisation’ protest march enters Mumbai and blocks several arterial roads: Source Mumbai Mirror .....	41
Figure 7: The villages in the West have a mix of two to three-storey houses and narrow winding lanes.....	45
Figure 8: Makrand Nagar 2005: The image shows subdivided agricultural plots with no informal settlements .....	56
Figure 9: Makrand Nagar 2015: The image shows a sudden rise in informal settlements across the industrial area. The yellow structure marked is the Patil’s house .....	56
Figure 10: Land use in and around informal sprawl.....	62
Figure 11: Map showing extent of informal sprawl into Green Zone .....	64
Figure 12: Above is an image of unoccupied housing slots built on levelled farm land in Santosh Bhuvan by small-time builders. These blocks with rolling shutters are often used as residence by migrants and are a common typology .....	68
Figure 13: Cover page of BVA’s election booklet shows Hitendra Thakur with all the 'development' projects undertaken in Vasai Virar .....	84
Figure 14: The VVMC has spearheaded several projects that encourage the residents to reimagine the sub-region as a new emerging city. Initiatives include new road constructions, a Vasai Virar Mayor’s Marathon, Olympic-style swimming pools and beautification of lakes .....	86

## **1 Opening Up the Periphery: Understanding Urbanisation in the Metropolitan Region**

The emerging city of Vasai-Virar is situated at the periphery of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). This analysis focuses on understanding the nature, drivers and consequences of the socio-spatial and governance transformation Vasai-Virar has undergone over a period of about 45 years from the early 1970s, when it was carved out as the Vasai-Virar Sub-region in the newly demarcated MMR, to the formation of the Vasai-Virar Municipal Corporation in 2009 that has consolidated its construction as an emerging ‘world class’, cosmopolitan city. We trace the landscape of this transformation at two levels: at the level of the region- viewing Vasai-Virar’s position within the MMR, and within the city itself covering a range of ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ types of settlements across multiple territories. The focus of our investigation was to analyse what the consequences of largely ‘illegal’ city building have been for different groups of people within the city, particularly relating to spatial (in)justice and violence. How different groups located in specific territories reveal their agency by refashioning their exclusion by the state-market alliance into greater autonomy for themselves and strengthening their claims to place and the city is also a central focus of the study.

The paper is part of a larger research project that interrogates how socio-spatial transformations enacted by an alliance of state and market forces sets into motion different kinds of violence and spatial injustice in three cities in the Global South since the onset of neoliberalization. Mumbai and its Metropolitan Region comprises one of these cities, the others being Durban and Rio de Janeiro. The larger project was conceptualized around a few core ideas: the state-market axis, spatial justice, violence and the interlinkages between poverty, inequality and vulnerability. The case study clearly articulates their centrality to the Vasai-Virar story. In the concluding section of this case, we revisit these concepts to outline their meaning and contours, revealing how such concepts can be useful in grasping the import and consequences of processes of socio-spatial transformations enacted by a coalition of state and market actors in the contemporary moment.



According to the 2011 census, Vasai Virar is the fifth largest city in Maharashtra with a population of 1,222,390. It is located in Palghar District<sup>1</sup>, 50 km north of Mumbai, on the north bank of Vasai Creek which is part of the estuary of the Ulhas River. It is connected by the Western suburban rail line to the Mumbai mainland, a key factor in its rapid urbanization over the last few years.

The particular nature of the regime of rule in Vasai-Virar has been shaped by its particular location in the periphery and by the calculated deregulation of the regional or state government. It was first seen as a marginal space (i.e a 'buffer' zone) and then deliberately opened up for lucrative real estate development but outside of normal laws – with no public provision for infrastructure or serviced land, the suspension of normal legal guarantees and regulation over land and building construction, and the denial of basic rights to many poor, working groups. The regime of rule has therefore been founded on violence and informality, driven by a configuration of 'big men' with close ties to wielders of power within the state government. Urbanization has been the motor of accumulation for this regime and the urban local government has served as a crucial means of directing this real estatization and securing legitimacy.

The variegated nature of actual and threatened physical and structural violence has been the key to both -- the production of this rule and resistance to it. However, only violence cannot sustain rule and nor can power be wielded by a singular sovereign; this is particularly the case when urbanization is seen as the driving force of the economy and those who control land (and by extension, groundwater) also control traditional village social and economic governance by virtue of their caste, kinship and economic ties. In Vasai-Virar, members of this class-caste of elites (comprising peasant dominant caste- Marathas and Catholics) deeply resisted the urbanization process seeing it as an attempt to unseat them from power. The nature of the regime and the power-sharing arrangements it negotiated with different local leaders to effectively wield power is important to understand. Unlike conventional models of states, this involved a (hierarchical) network of 'big men' whose individual acts of patronage or terror typically dwarfed the institution of the state. However, they effectively referenced the

---

<sup>1</sup> In August 2014, Palghar district was formed by bifurcating Thane district.

state in their operations seeking legitimacy for the public authority and decision making they invoked on an everyday basis.

The need to gain greater legitimacy and sovereign power over land use and development control regulations found its ultimate expression in the formation of the local government Vasai-Virar Municipal Corporation



**Figure 1: Location of Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation in Mumbai Metropolitan Region**

(VVMC). Since land and how it is managed was critical to the growth of the regime, through its control of the VVMC it sought to gain control over land use planning and deploy the informality inherent in it (Roy 2009) to give itself territorial flexibility to change land use,

permit unauthorized construction in zones designated as ‘no development’, actively promote large commercial and infrastructure projects and re-imagine both the built and lived city. This was achieved through building strategic political coalitions with regional government and gaining its support to form a legitimate, democratically elected local government. This new phase saw the regime using its ‘stateness’ to innovate developmental visions building on aspirations, lifestyles and attitudes of a new middle class, a state project that has acquired near hegemonic competence. The distance between these visions and the actual situation of rule faced by different groups in everyday living has however engendered a range of responses including resistance, compromise and negotiation. What this agency implies for challenging the exceptional power of the state and bringing about a more just and inclusive city is a central focus of this paper.

## **1.1 Methodology**

This case study tries to address the following questions: What is the nature of socio-spatial transformation and what have been the drivers and mechanics of its unevenness and informalization? How do we characterize the regime of rule and the nature of its power? How do different groups of people located in specific territories respond to the violence and (in)justice visited upon them? What does this agency reveal about achieving a more just and inclusive city?

Fieldwork in Vasai Virar was conducted over a little more than a year, starting in May 2014. Since the scale of this newly-formed city was vast, the study was conducted on two levels – meso and micro. At the meso level, we studied the role and journey of Vasai Virar from being a set of independent small towns and villages to a singular entity, the municipal corporation. Crucial to this journey was the particular spatial location of Vasai-Virar at the edge of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, with close linkages to events taking place in the megacity of Mumbai. The formation of the VVMC was studied through not just its municipalisation but also through the collective mobilizations, protests and violence that followed. In particular, we looked at the role and emergence of a single-party regime that paralleled the making of a new city on the periphery of Mumbai. Besides in-depth interviews and more informal discussions,

we relied on a host of secondary data such as Development Plans, project and city related reports, reports by research and non-profit organizations, census and elections data to aid our analysis. We also utilized data from social media and other websites run by locals and political parties such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter; propaganda election material, advertisements and extensively followed regional and local newspapers.

A micro scale enabled us to use ethnographic methods to understand narratives of place-making, resistance, violence, agency and negotiations in relation to city-making and rise of the political regime. Three territories (Santosh Bhuvan, Makrand Nagar, Sai Society) with different geographical and political-economic trajectories were strategically chosen. Each of the territories looks at struggles from the ground up such as those of claiming and defending one's land under numerous jurisdictions, formation of communities influenced by caste, religion, livelihood and trust networks, and the strategies employed to move up the political ladder. These micro investigations unearthed processes and tactics used to both counter and perpetuate violence as a way to respond and innovate in a political economy controlled by the regime of rule.

The case study also uses mapping to represent spatial dimensions of change/transition and analyse what this means for inequality and vulnerability in the region. In particular, the study contrasted the Vasai Virar Development Plan (2007) with early maps of the region showing the topography of the land and changes in land use. This helped understand how different territorial and social identities were associated with different places (eg the village or town) and how planning had served to shape the notion of the 'city' of Vasai-Virar: the move away from rurality and shift toward 'dormitory' towns and then opening up for large parts of the region for development and informal urbanization.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

We are in an era where the urbanizing peripheries (of cities) are increasingly the theatre where new kinds of states or regimes of governance that drive processes of accumulation, subject

formation and (illegal) city building emerge. These result in terrains that are very unequal, typically highly fragmented socially, spatially and temporally, experiencing different states of being developed, redeveloped, imagined, 'waiting'. An examination of how such regimes acquire and consolidate power and constitute authority and how this results in the splintering of cities is important to understand contemporary urbanization processes, speculative real estate development and the possibilities of challenging these via new modes of politics. The aim of this section is to build a theoretical framework for understanding the nature and logic of the regime of rule that emerges in one such periphery, the city of Vasai-Virar, in the context of urbanization and real estatization, its often violent effects on places and people, and how this has been contested.

Anthropologists have contributed greatly to our understanding of post-colonial states by denaturalizing the state as the sole repository of power and sovereignty, writing extensively on how the state is not unitary, but that power is dispersed among individuals and networks (Foucault 1991). These multiple sovereignties reflect a departure from seeing sovereignty as only vested in law or legitimate rule (Hansen and Stepputat 2001), focusing rather on sovereignty in practice, including forms of state power like surveillance and regulation vis-à-vis markets, populations and external agencies (Ong 2000). Lund (2006) discusses how politics and power in the African context has been characterized as the process of negotiation, coalition building and competition between governmental and traditional (eg chieftaincy) institutions as they seek to constitute public authority. A similar process can be discerned from Sharma's (1991) recounting of how the Congress Party consolidated its power post-Independence in India by accommodating existing power centres- rural landowning elites- who then became political intermediaries. The Congress supported them for their caste, kinship and economic ties, their ability to wield power using patriarchal and patrimonial strategies (Lele 1981) and they, in turn, provided votes in return for tangible benefits from public resources. Since the authority of informal sovereigns might be furiously contested, the need to form networks is manifest. This implies fluidity of groups and continuous forming and reforming of alliances to defend common interests or dissipate due to internal differences or changes in the external political economy.

The configurations of power among multiple sovereigns in the Vasai-Virar landscape are unevenly distributed but with a clear hierarchy and centre – that reposed in an individual ruler. The power relations of this networked regime seems to resemble that of patrimonial domination, an ideal type of domination coined by Weber that refers to forms of government that are based on the ruler's family, where the ruler organizes his political power over extrapatrimonial (outside of his estate) areas and political subjects just like the exercise of his patriarchal power. Such a system operates through multiple lower-order sovereigns being granted fief and becoming clients or agents of their ruler in different territories; in this moment they become potential rulers and patriarch principals themselves (Adams 2005) re-enacting the domination and exploitation of the ruler in their own territories. This kind of negotiated rule among a set of dispersed power centres involves differentiation in how territories are governed, largely according to real estate potential. Thus different territories in Vasai-Virar represent different degrees/forms of integration with structures of state power and global/provincial capital—and are treated with different disciplinary and biopower technologies (Foucault 1991) and development visions. It also implies uneven access to infrastructure and services in different territories as well as different opportunities and constraints with respect to opening up or closing off of (in)formal urbanization and real estatization opportunities, on which the growth of the regime is premised. But how is this goal of (in)formal urbanization and real estatization achieved?

Metropolitan transformation, Roy (2009) argues, has been achieved via the production of urban informality. Enabled by flexibility in land regulations and strategies of deregulation and 'unmapping', these uneven suspensions of regulation and law are purposeful. The process of produced informality in Vasai-Virar is directed by the patriarchal ruler and caters to the interests of informal sovereigns and the network of middlemen. Land is occupied by the flexible yet deliberate suspension of landuse laws, the complicity of political actors in state/district government and private developers, and a range of rewards and threats meted out to persuade and coerce actors in government, landowners and activists to advance this process. Further, settlement is enabled through the provision of a range of services by these same networks via the exercise of public authority. Importantly, since a large number of settlements and territories have 'illegal' status, informal sovereigns and a network of middlemen provide

‘protection’, sometimes for a fee, and also broker the process of incremental citizenship whereby residents deemed “illegal” accumulate documentation and support for their claim to citizenship (Benjamin 2008). Thus, the uneven suspension of regulation and calculated absence of functioning state systems creates conditions conducive for multiple sovereigns and the network of middlemen to thrive. While these often reach services to vulnerable groups, they are usually highly exploitative.

Informal sovereigns come in a range of shapes and sizes – ‘mafias’ in land, water and services, traditional landed elites, builders cum politicians. They share a complex relationship with the state and notions of legitimacy and legality. Lund (2006) deploys the concept of public authority - a sovereign power to act over and control others – to reveal how the exercise of power by a variety of sovereigns is closely conjoined or related with the idea of the state. This is reflected for instance in the relations between informal sovereigns, junior bureaucrats and party workers (Ranganathan 2014). While on the one hand power is exercised by informal sovereigns to make public decisions, yet their power is strengthened by references to the state (Moore 1978) and the ‘social work’ they are engaging in for the good of the citizenry.

Informal sovereigns, in the case of Vasai Virar, are not necessarily non-state actors. Several are firmly located within state structures such as ward offices, and the municipality. For instance, a local corporator may rule through a simultaneous deployment and combination of legal and extra-legal strategies of rule (Roy 2007) Several corporators within Vasai Virar are builders of ‘illegal’ settlements and simultaneously also order demolitions of a political rival’s informal settlements to settle scores by taking the recourse of law. It is this carefully crafted and delicately managed arrangement that is key to the production of this sort of regime. It is neither within the state nor outside it but at the cusp of both.

Constant references to (the idea of) the state reveals a wish for the legitimacy that comes with state recognition of their position, and the importance of the state that informal sovereigns seek to emulate through use of language and symbols of the state (eg registration of associations). The ambiguity of informal sovereigns’ positions (“both being and opposing the state”) as well as the fluidity of their alignments with other actors seem focused on the search for greater legitimacy and the consolidation of their power. How they are perceived – as successful in achieving legitimacy and consolidating their power or not - by the regime and

their constituencies depends on their efficacy, their ability to ‘get things done’ (Piliavsky and Sbriccoli 2016). What aids them in this is not only their position in the existing social structure or on individual skills (such as charisma or networking ability) but, crucially, on the ability to deploy the resources and (coercive and legitimizing) power of the state.

The fluidity of informal sovereigns’ alliances, the opposition by land-owning dominant castes and classes to urbanization, and the limited powers of urban local government in India, we argue, militates against achievement of the hegemonic competence required to comprehensively control the urbanization and real estatization that lies at the heart of this regime’s power. This, we argue, propelled the move to legitimate sovereignty through the formation of the urban local body (ULB). It enabled greater legitimacy, the ability to deploy and amend the law (ie DCR) that the state as sovereign custodian has control over (Agamben 2005) as well as the public resources that can come with building more stable (party) political alliances at the regional and national level. Beneath the veneer of the formal state there still operated the older core of the patrimonial one but the formation of a singular urban local body has led to some changes. Gramsci’s concept of hegemonic state projects provides insights to understand the changing logic of rule and struggles it propels.

As a loose assemblage of disparate institutions that are spatially dispersed, Gramsci saw the unity of the state and its capacity to act as not assured but one achieved politically through the alignment of specific social, economic and political forces in a contingent articulation (Jessop 1997). This takes the form of concrete programs of action that draw from Gramsci’s notion of hegemonic political or state projects<sup>2</sup>. Hegemonic state projects generate an institutional form for the state that, in certain times and places, can achieve broad legitimacy and acceptance while favoring the advancement of dominant economic, social, and political interests. These interests are conceived as a hegemonic or historical bloc<sup>3</sup> and provide a social base of support for

---

<sup>2</sup> Gramsci’s (1971) notion of state projects utilized the concept of hegemony, which he developed to refer to the persistence of economic and social structures that systematically favor certain groups. Hegemony does not rely on coercive control by a small elite but on developing coalitions and compromises that accommodate other groups, and on ideologies that convey common interests.

<sup>3</sup> Gramsci’s (1971) notion of an historical bloc relies on a specific configuration of social groups, economic structures, and ideological superstructure.



hegemonic state projects. The construction of a state hegemonic project brings some degree of resolution of the conflicts between different interests, and relative coherence and unity to the various (in)activities of the state (Jessop 1997).

The hegemonic project sought to be constructed is one of making Vasai-Virar a world-class destination through the vehicle of the ULB and the infrastructure/cultural projects it imagines for the city. The dominant interests are committed to urbanization and real estatization as the means of capital accumulation (Lefebvre) and achieving a certain lifestyle and consumption experience. Becoming a legitimate urban local government implies gaining legitimate control over state policies, especially landuse planning and building construction and regulation, and the propagation of a range of disciplinary techniques and developmental visions to reinforce power and shape new subjects. Futurist, 'world-class' visions are supported by a stream of launches, announcements and rumours of projects-to-come. The Gramscian concept of hegemonic projects thus helps disclose the political forces, socio-economic practices and cultural discourses that activate specific regimes that are committed to urbanization and real estatization. This is in large part because it situates processes of accumulation in relation to specific state projects.

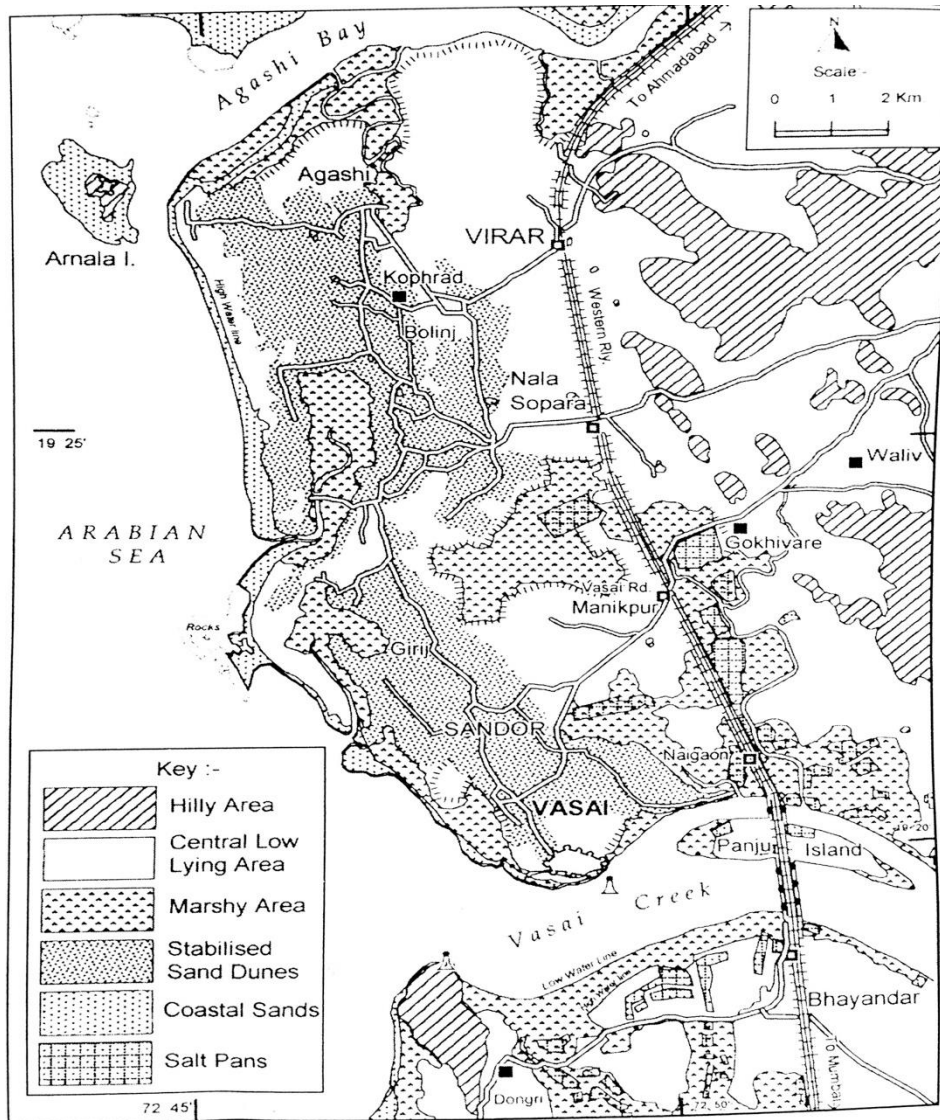
Visions, their associated projects, and the process of subject formation are deeply contested especially by those groups who live in uncertain conditions, and whose lifestyles, homes and livelihoods might be displaced and dislocated by the 'development'. Three territory level case studies reveal that contestations are uneven and depend on the collective agency and networks resisting groups can call upon. The resulting new modes of politics emerge through construction of new kinds of citizens-in-the-making and citizens, circuits of power and conflicts. Thus while this state indulges in purposeful differentiated rule, it also brings forth new modes of politics that are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive.



## **2 How Regional Plans and Policies shaped the contours of urbanization of Vasai-Virar**

Regional Plans, prepared by parastatal agencies have greatly influenced the making of Vasai-Virar as a city. The first way it did this was by delineating the boundaries of the Vasai-Virar Sub-Region (VVSR), influencing what was considered ‘inside’ this region and would be bound by the conditions of a Development Plan, and what was not. The idea of forming a Mumbai Metropolitan Region (then called Bombay Metropolitan Region- BMR) was given concrete shape by demarcating its boundary in 1967 and establishing an agency, the Mumbai (Bombay) Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA – then BMRDA) in 1975 to ensure coordinated and effective planning for the BMR. In 1973, the first Regional Plan (RP) by the BMR was sanctioned. This RP carved an area known as the Vasai-Virar Sub-Region out of the BMR, comprising 380 sq. km and included four towns (Vasai, Navghar-Manikpur, Nalasopara, Virar), forty-seven villages, two industrial zones and agricultural and forest land. With this demarcation, the identity of these disparate settlements were tied to each other within a single region – later to turn into the Municipal Corporation.

Secondly, this planning has been at odds with the ecology of the region, largely because the Regional Plan focused exclusively on catering to Mumbai and its needs, and not on understanding VVSR as a distinct region with its own ecology and specialised work-based settlements, such as agricultural villages, fishing villages, villages of toddy farmers and of saltpan workers. Scrutiny of VVSR’s ecology reveals four distinct geographical zones (Kewalramani 2011) that can be seen in Map No 1. The western coastal belt consisted of fertile soil rich in water supply that over time had developed a flourishing practice of floriculture and horticulture. The settlement pattern was characterized by dispersed, small land holdings populated by relatively affluent and educated land owners (Vasai Catholics, Agris). The zone to the east of the coastal belt is at a lower elevation, popularly called the kharpāt, and forms the natural flood plains. The railway line divides this belt. The zone to the east of this low-lying zone has a higher elevation and is dominated by subsistence agriculture. Irrigation is non-existent here. The NH8 forms its eastern edge. Further east are the rising hills of the western ghats, with two thirds of this zone covered by forests and inhabited by tribals.



**Figure 2: An Old Map of Vasai Virar showing different contours of the sub region**

The RP saw its main aim as decongesting Mumbai through strategies such as industrial dispersal and restrictions on industrial growth in Mumbai, and the development of the planned township of Navi Mumbai as a counter-magnet (Phadke 2014; Sharma 1991). It viewed the Vasai-Virar sub-region not as a region on its own terms but with the goal of servicing the city of Mumbai and demarcated it largely as Green Zone. “The Vasai-Virar belt was always meant to be a buffer zone for Mumbai,” said Chandrashekhar Prabhu, an urban planner, architect and former president of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority, “the low-lying areas of the Vasai-Virar region and the Vasai and Thane creeks should act as a drainage

area for excess monsoon water, ensuring that Mumbai doesn't flood", Prabhu added (Timeout 2010). The only parts of Vasai-Virar that the RP viewed as open for development were dormitory towns that would grow along the 3 suburban railway stations of Virar, Navghar-Manikpur and Nalasopara and therefore the area within a 1.5km radius of the railway station was declared 'urbanizable' - this constituted about 6% of the total area of VVSR. Despite the fact that the kharpat was low-lying and prone to flooding, the entire 'urbanizable zone' was located within it. Clearly the logic of decongesting Mumbai by situating towns next to commuter railway lines triumphed over potential environmental disasters from flooding.

Thirdly, regional planning has influenced the nature of VVSR's urbanization to be highly informal. While nodes along the Western suburban railway line were strategically opened up for urbanization, this was done without any planned public investment in infrastructure and led to a pattern of informal, highly privatized, urbanization. Three dormitory plans were formulated but without statutory basis – merely stating that the dormitory plans would help the District Collector in examining Non Agricultural (N.A) building construction proposals. Moreover, the RP identified 200 hectares of land in Waliv, Gokhivare and Sativali villages as an industrial complex but didn't formally demarcate it as such; however, the Collector was instructed to permit industrial development there. Thus right from the outset, informality was inscribed in the plan and planning practice by the state government as building proposals and industrial enterprises were permitted to be set up but without formal sanction in plans or accompanying regulation or provisions for infrastructure or amenities.

There was little construction in the VVSR<sup>4</sup> until the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act (ULCRA) came into effect in 1976 when VVSR became attractive to developers as all lands beyond the Vasai Creek (which is the beginning of the VVSR) were exempt from the provisions of the Act. Developers who could no longer assemble large parcels of land for development in Mumbai and locations in the MMR up to the Vasai Creek started looking at VVSR with new interest. Newspaper reports discuss how in the late 70s as Mumbai's land prices had become high and population was rising, VVSR beckoned to people looking for cheap housing and this rush of house seekers attracted the land mafia and builders (Mumbai

---

<sup>4</sup> Sharma (1991) adds that this was mainly because of a shortage of water.

Mirror, July 4, 2006). This marked the beginning of a shift from rurality to a certain mode of urbanization, one that had been ushered in by informality in the planning of the region by state agencies.

## **2.1 Urbanizing VVSR: The convergence of builder and politician interests locally and regionally**

Produced informality as a mode of expansion in the VVSR continued in the 1980s. In 1988 when the Congress politician, Sharad Pawar came to power in Maharashtra, his government converted 8500 hectares of 'green' land in VVSR into 'urbanisable' land<sup>5</sup>. Another 2000 hectares were added in 1990. This change of land use from 'Green' to 'Urbanizable' brought the proportion of urbanisable land to almost 28% and propelled massive and unregulated real estate development. Even before the BMRDA formally took charge of the area as Special Planning Authority in Dec 1988, local officials started granting building permission to builders (Sharma 1991). In 1990, the state government made another irregular move when it removed BMRDA as planning authority giving the responsibility for formulating a Development Plan (DP) for the sub-region to the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO). This was seen as a political move that gave greater control to the state government over the kind and quantum of development in VVSR as it could exert more influence over CIDCO<sup>6</sup>. The DP became an important site for deliberate deregulation by the state because the demarcation (and manipulation) of 'urbanizable' zones dictated the potential for 'legal' development that commanded a higher price over 'illegal' developments in zones not marked for urbanization, such as the green zone.

The decision to open up land for urbanization was questioned on several fronts. While one of the main reasons given by the state government for the calculated decision to open up the

---

<sup>5</sup> On August 31, 1988, the Government of Maharashtra issued a notification under the Maharashtra Regional Town Planning (MRTP) Act 1966, to modify the BMRDA plan under section 20(3), seeking to convert about 65 villages comprising 8,000 hectares of land from Green to Urbanisable zone.

<sup>6</sup> CIDCO was seen as more manipulable than the MMRDA especially since the Chief Planner was an officer who had been accused of irregularities in land allotment and owed his loyalty to the ruling state government since he had not been punished (Sharma 1991).

VVSR was the expected ‘population explosion’ in the region (Sharma 1991), several scholars questioned the basis for making this argument. Tinaikar (cited in Sharma 1991) for example cited the low population density in the towns and villages, low response to the industrial estate of Waliv and Gokhiware and largely agricultural setting of the region. Several questions were also raised regarding the poor levels of infrastructure prevailing, especially of water, and the inclusion of certain lands within ‘urbanizable’ zone - low lying salt pan land and undeveloped lands close to the forest region (Sharma 1991). This suggested a calculated effort on the part of the state government to open up this area to builders (Sharma 1991). Newspaper reportage described how a few months prior to the announcement of the modified DP, builders and politicians bought large land parcels in villages that then got included in the DP with their land prices rising exponentially- from 50,000/acre before to 50 lakh/acre after (Rahman TOI July 31, 1990). The entire process of opening up VVSR for urbanization was led by a coalition of regional and local politicians and builders, what Nainan has called a ‘pro-growth coalition’ (2012). The two-tiered leadership of this pro-growth coalition played a crucial role in this opening up - between Sharad Pawar, senior Congress leader, and the Thakur family, ‘big men’ that exercised sovereignty locally.

Locally the coalition was led by the two brothers Jayendra alias ‘Bhai’ Thakur and Hitendra Thakur who had a stronghold over the entire VVSR (Banerjee and Tellis 1989). Former aides of Dawood Ibrahim (Frontline, December 4 to 17, 2004<sup>7</sup>), they had become extremely powerful locally by channeling funds from smuggling activities into land transactions. This was facilitated by their close connections with Sharad Pawar and big builders operating in the BMR<sup>8</sup>. A slew of local elites as well as Gram Panchayat officials reportedly functioned as middlemen (identifying plots and obtaining NA, making changes in land records) facilitating land transactions and earning the state government huge monies in transaction fees (Nainan 2012). The opening up of the VVSR for urbanization highlighted the building and leveraging of local-state political coalitions that were mutually beneficial; in the Indian climate where

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2125/stories/20041217001704400.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Amongst the builders who reaped huge benefits from the de-zoning of the Vasai-Virar Region, as mentioned on the floor of the Assembly by Manohar Joshi of Shiv Sena, were Hiranandani, Diwan, Lodha, Pereira, Raheja, Roshan Agarwal and Shriprastha builders. This was in addition to a select group of senior leaders/Ministers of the Congress party (Nainan 2012).

cities are extremely weak legislatively and financially, local informal sovereigns needed the state government's legislative and financial support, while senior politicians earned private and party gains in land, money and votes.

## **2.2 Building a Regime of Informal Sovereignty in Vasai-Virar Based on Land and Violence**

The early days of the regime of informal sovereignty were marked by tremendous violence around land (Pioneer, 20 October, 2012) since land and its control was seen as the main route to consolidate the regime economically and politically. Adivasis who owned large tracts of land and engaged in settled agriculture across this region became a particularly easy target. Interviews with activists who worked to protect tribal land revealed how many adivasis were duped into giving up their lands by manipulating land records<sup>9</sup>. Land was also bought through force using strategies like destroying the crops adivasis were cultivating, kidnapping their children or harassing their women (ibid). Buying land cheap and selling it at higher prices to developers enabled the concentration of power in the hands of a few in VVSR. This domination came to the fore through the murder of human rights activist Navleen Kumar who had been working to retain tribal land ownership in Nalasopara (Pioneer, 20 October, 2012; Frontline, August 3 - 16, 2002 et al).

“Navleen's was not the first murder, there were many who were killed before her. In the large scale acquisition of land, the most prominent name was Hitendra Thakur, then an NCP (backed) MLA. In the early 1980s, when Hitendra Thakur went about acquiring land in Thane, there are allegations of threats and brute force against him. ... Because Navleen blocked the development of Sriprastha Mall and was the primary witness of the shooting of a builder by Bhai Thakur she was eliminated by them.”

---

<sup>9</sup> Adivasi lands cannot be transferred to a non-advasi under the Maharashtra Land Revenue Act 1966. In some cases, adivasis had deliberately been portrayed as not adivasi in order to evade this provision for protection of adivasi lands (Interview with activist, May 27, 2014).



Land owned by adivasis in the 'urbanizable' zone, particularly that near the railway stations was the first to be (forcibly) acquired and built up. With CIDCO facilitating building permissions in the region, buildings mushroomed on both sides of Naigaon, Vasai Road, Nalasopara and Virar railway stations. A host of land agents, middlemen and builders were birthed in this process, all of whom owed their existence to the informal sovereign and repaid it with loyalty, muscle power and information.

It was not long before scarcity of water became serious, since the areas around the railway station were very saline being close to the creek and low-lying. This led the rulers to invest in the development of a tanker business where, with the complicity of a few local (Hindu) residents, water was extracted from wells in the green coastal belt, which had ample water, and ferried to areas undergoing construction in the East (interviews with Manvel Tuscano and Marcus Dabre, May 14, 2014). With about 10 tanker trips per household, the amount of 400-500 rupees/day seemed like easy money for these residents (interview Fr D'britto, May 2014). The Catholics in the coastal belt however grew fruits, vegetables and flowers on their large land holdings and needed their wells to irrigate their crops. They feared depletion of the water table and resisted the movement of tankers with 'their' water. This continued resistance made it imperative for the informal sovereign to control land in the coastal belt which possessed ample sweet water. The land along the coast, however, was far less easy to take over as farmers were educated, well-off, belonged to the dominant peasant landowning caste<sup>11</sup>, and deeply resisted sale of their lands that were a crucial source of livelihood.

---

<sup>10</sup> Death of a Crusader 20 Oct, 2012, Pioneer  
[http://archive.dailypioneer.com/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=102987:death-of-a-crusader&catid=391:cover-story&Itemid=614](http://archive.dailypioneer.com/?option=com_content&view=article&id=102987:death-of-a-crusader&catid=391:cover-story&Itemid=614)

<sup>11</sup> Vadvals (who are both Hindu and Catholic) and Kuparis (Catholic) owned much of the land in the coastal belt as narrated by an informant, and even among Catholics, the structure of caste was still very prevalent in the community.

### **2.3 Resistance from the ‘No Urbanization’ Coalition in the Coastal Belt: Campaigns Around Water and the Environment**

When Fr D’britto arrived as a local priest in the VVSR in 1984, he was unsettled by the pervading fear amongst the local communities (interview dated May 2015). He described the tremendous violence in grabbing and transacting land-- usually done through a combination of money, muscle power and bureaucracy – as responsible for making people too frightened to gather or mobilize. To combat this, the Harit Vasai Sanrakshan Samiti (HVSS) was formed in 1989 with Fr. D’Britto elected its convenor. The HVSS’s first campaign was focused on preventing the ‘irrational’ use of their well water which was being transported to newly developing urban areas (Times of India May 20, 1991). Smaller meetings and a systematic conscientising programme were followed by a large meeting of 35,000 organised by the HVSS to exhibit its strength<sup>12</sup>.

Fr D’Britto recalled how the informal sovereign and its network of agents strategically targeted Catholics with the aim of intimidating them since they posed the main resistance through this campaign (Television interview on IBN Lokmat, January 4, 2014<sup>13</sup>). He described strategies used to intimidate the Catholics. An army of local boys was mobilised to lay claim to spaces such as bus stops, bazars and railway stations that were used by Catholics to sell their fruits, vegetables and flowers. Catholics were easy targets because of the way they dressed and the cross they wore. Bandhs were sporadically declared forcing people to close their shops and trains were stopped from plying thus ruining the day’s business.

Simultaneously, the informal sovereign would support festivals, including Christmas, in an effort to coopt locals. Being an educated, affluent and influential community, the Catholics managed to get media to highlight their plight, “The Christian population of the Vasai–Virar region is being terrorised by groups of toughs, allegedly let loose by local politicians and builders... The unprecedented and unprovoked violence against innocent people has its roots in the agitation against the overuse of wells in the Vasai–Virar green belt” (Times of India

---

<sup>12</sup> The meeting was addressed by eminent people who agreed to support the movement such as Vijay Tendulkar, noted Marathi playwright, Kisan Mahta, renowned environmentalist, RV Bhuskute, a former tahsildar of Vasai.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMoDrgLHzF0>

May 20, 1991). One result of this visibility was that HVSS was represented in Ministerial level discussions on this issue and tankers were banned from withdrawing water from the Vasai–Virar green belt. It seemed a clear victory for the Harit Vasai Sanrakshan Samiti and the Pani Andolan.

Looking back, this campaign had mixed success. For one, actual practices of extraction continued and got more sophisticated. In Nalasopara, which was experiencing highest population densities, the tanker lobby actually bought land in the green zone, dug wells and laid underground pipelines taking water further east (interviews May 2014). Catholics couldn't stop the water from moving as they could with the tankers (Interview Marcus Dabre and Manvel Tuscano, May 14, 2014). Second, while coastal Catholics saw the Pani Andolan (Water Campaign) as the first people's movement that brought them together, it was seen by (non-Catholic) others as a 'priest's agitation' that actually increased the divisions between Hindus and Catholics, a conflict that had a clear spatial dimension (Interview with Pandit, April 29, 2014). Pandit argued that the Pani Andolan led to a deep geographic divide between the green coastal belt in the West and the areas around the railway station - the urbanizable zone in the East. The informal sovereign controlled the use of public amenities, with the logic that if the Catholics did not give water to the East, then they would make it difficult for them to use services in the East, such as parking, railways stations etc. (Interview with Pandit, April 29, 2014). Playing the communal card by the informal sovereign was clearly an effort to pit communities against each other and weaken the opposition of the dominant landowning caste-class (which included Hindus and Catholics) to 'no urbanisation' (Interview Fr D'britto interview, May –2015; Firstpost, July 2015). This strategy had some success.



**Figure 3: The first development in Vasai Virar took off around the Western Railway stations**

Meanwhile CIDCO had released the Draft DP for VVSR in 1995, one that strongly promoted urbanization. This spurred a fresh campaign by HVSS that centred on protecting the environment, providing proper infrastructure and demanding the complete revision of the plan (<http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/dec00/cover1.htm>). The HVSS had realized that they needed a broad-based campaign platform that would appeal to a broader swathe of locals than just those residing in the West. It therefore focused on issues of infrastructure provision and threats of flooding that more urbanization brought. Two aspects of the DP were contested (Interview with Marcus Dabre and Tuscano, May 14 2014). One was CIDCO's disclaimer that drinking water was not to be its responsibility even though it was the planning authority. The other was the acknowledgement by CIDCO that the marshy areas which were to be opened for development were the most low-lying and prone to flooding and that this would cause inundation of the coast and destruction of agriculture there. HVSS used a multi-pronged strategy to launch its campaign – it launched street level agitations, filed a legal case, used the

media, theatre persons, and the Church to gain visibility and lobbied with senior politicians (Interview with Marcus Dabre, May 14 2014).

Due to the substantial opposition to the DP, a three-member committee under the MMRDA was appointed by the state government in 2001 to finalise the DP for the region. In what was seen as a victory for the HVSS, the new DP (2007) made several concessions. The first was that the Green Zone was bifurcated to carve out a separate zone as Plantation Zone to give clear identity to the coastal belt where orchards, vegetable and fruit gardens, and old village settlements existed along the coast. The aim was to maintain the existing character of the region, prohibiting large green zone users like race course, golf clubs, amusement parks etc. Proposals for Tourism Development Zones (in the west coast and near the NH8 Highway) were also dropped due to protests. The carving out of a Plantation Zone (See Map 3) revealed that the strongly organised Catholic community along the coast had won for itself a significant victory – greater control over the degree and type of urbanization proposed for their region.

This section reveals not only how porous the top-down ‘expert’ planning process of CIDCO was to the influence of a local pro-growth coalition led by the informal sovereign but also how contested it was by local groups who mobilized to amend it by modes of politics and struggles from the ground up. It also highlights the limits of coercion and the partial and contingent nature of the informal sovereign’s power.



**Figure 4: Prominent zones in Vasai-Virar according to the Development Plan of 2007**



### **3 The Move to Legitimate Sovereignty: Inclusive Politics and Ruling by Numbers**

Having encountered the highly organized resistance of a coalition of local groups backed by caste, class and land capital, the informal sovereign realised the need for possessing stronger sovereign authority to more effectively make rules and control how development could take place in the region. This implied the need for greater legitimacy, for shifting from a more coercive approach to one that relied more on cooptation, and winning hearts and minds. We argue that this revealed a turning point in the regime of rule, propelling greater attention to winning at electoral democracy and forming a ULB.

In 1990, Hitendra Thakur had formed his own political party called Vasai Vikas Mandal but in the Assembly elections that year he stood and won as an Independent candidate supported by the Congress Party<sup>14</sup>. In 1992, the Sharad Pawar government lost power at the state level; this loss affected the fortunes of the Thakur brothers too. Subsequently, they were arrested on the orders of the new Chief Minister, Sudhakar Naik, who wanted to crackdown on illegal activities (Frontline, December 4 to 17, 2004<sup>15</sup>). Hitendra Thakur, however, was released in 1994 due to a lack of evidence. After being released, Hitendra Thakur went on to contest Assembly elections, although this time the Congress didn't support him due to his criminal record.

By 1994, Thakur had managed to garner support from not just people who did business with him but a huge popular support base. A vast network of 'big men' and intermediaries were dependent on him for business from land transactions, construction, water sales and providing protection. Apart from this Thakur or 'Appa (Hitendra Thakur is called "Appa" locally - meaning father) had an active, popular support that followed him since his college days when he was elected the student president. Several of his close college friends -- including the ex-

---

<sup>14</sup> Sharad Pawar as Chief Minister of Maharashtra supported his candidacy

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2125/stories/20041217001704400.htm>



Mayor and the current Deputy Mayor -- are known to hold senior party positions even today (Interview with Pankaj Deshmukh). Stories of Appa's rise are told with much adoration and admiration by his followers and tales of how people and children would follow 'Appa' from village to village when he was on his political rallies were common. Hence, while Thakur's rule depended on the network of 'big men' and their economic interests, his charismatic leadership is undeniable. The criminal charges did not shake his loyal support base. Instead it added to his repertoire of being masculine, dangerous and effective. Piliavsky and Sbricolli in their study of '*goondaraj*' or the rule of strongmen in north India have argued that 'goondas' who climb the political ladder are not necessarily loved for being virtuous but for 'the ethics of efficacy' or their ability 'to get things done'.

With support from this vast network of 'big men', intermediaries and followers, Hitendra Thakur won the Assembly elections by a huge margin. He went on to win the 1999 and 2004 elections as an independent candidate, although he was simultaneously building his own political party's base.

In 2004 Hitendra Thakur re-branded his political party, changing its name from Vasai Vikas Mandal to Bahujan Vikas Aghadi. This reflected very important shifts in ideology, ambition and strategy while retaining the core of his earlier style of governance. The first was the shift from the local (i.e Vasai and Vasaikars) to the regional and even the national as exemplified in the term 'bahujan' - wooing a host of different 'lower caste', 'migrants', 'religious minorities' from Mumbai and elsewhere. The entry of these groups would bring in potential voters and serve to erode the tight control over land exercised by the dominant caste-class. The second was the explicit deployment of a rhetoric of both inclusion and development. The rhetoric of inclusion was particularly targeted and welcome to poor migrant families who seemed no longer wanted in Mumbai. Increasing evictions in Mumbai post 2000 had created a climate hostile to both new and older non-Maharashtrian 'migrants', campaigns that were spearheaded

by the nativist regional political parties of Shiv Sena and MNS<sup>16</sup> that had wielded deep influence on Mumbai's politics (Interview with a small-time builder, November 29, 2014). The rhetoric of inclusion served the dual purpose of attracting cheap labour for the booming construction industry as well as voters who would be loyal. The language of development, on the other hand, was targeted to the existing middle classes that lived across villages and towns in VVSR and potential middle-class migrants who could serve as the demand (investment and living purposes) for all the new apartment buildings that were coming up. The politics of land owners in the coastal belt and in villages that dotted the East was derived from the idea of themselves as land owners - bhumiputra – and sons of the soil; as such their politics had similarities with that of the Shiv Sena and MNS. This was in stark contrast to the explicitly secular, bahujan politics of the informal sovereign who made every effort to state that they welcomed people of all religions, castes and classes. The most recent example of this is the party's plea for using the minority language 'Urdu' in all public places under the reign of the state ruling parties that have an explicit nativist agenda<sup>17</sup>. Overall it is important to acknowledge that this re-branding exercise did not completely revamp the BVA's style of governance but kept its narrative of violence alive and tapped into it as and when required.

The party's shift in ideology and strategy was backed by an explicit spatial strategy of settling different kinds of residents. As a several-term MLA, the informal sovereign was attuned to the importance of numbers in electoral democracy. Those in the coastal belt that were opposed to the growth he wanted were few in number and could be outnumbered by the settling of new 'migrants' in the East. The BVA heavily promoted the urbanizable zone along the railway line as a destination for middle-class residents who wanted to move out of Mumbai in search of affordable and larger homes. Meanwhile the industrial policy of the state government had spurred the re-location of industries from Mumbai that were deemed polluting to the MMR

---

<sup>16</sup> Founded in 1966 in Mumbai, Shiv Sena is a right-wing regional, political party and is infamous for having orchestrated communal violence in the past. It is currently in power in coalition with Bhartiya Janta Party at the state government. MNS or the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena was started in 2006 by the nephew of the founder of Shiv Sena. It follows a similar far-right, nativist ideology.

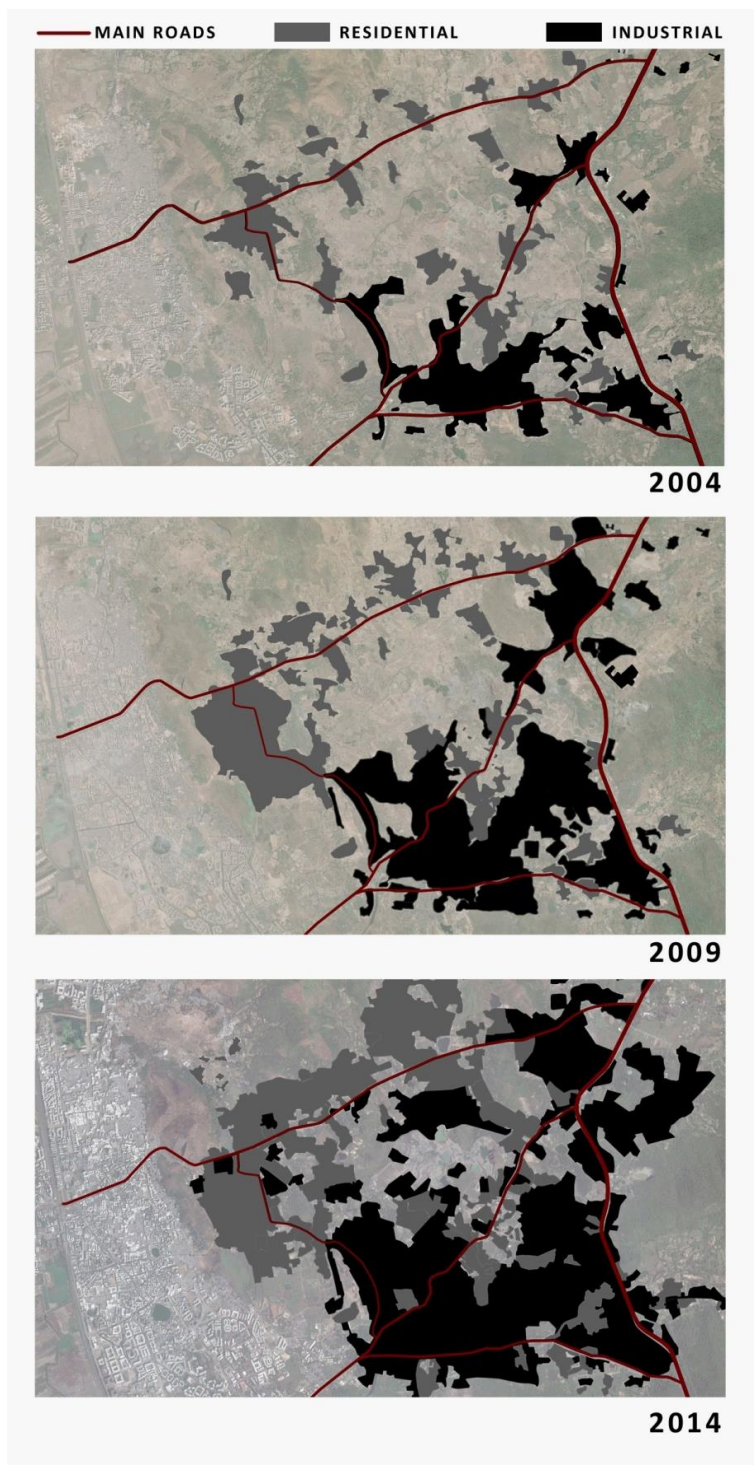
<sup>17</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Bahujan-Vikas-Aghadi-party-demands-use-of-Urdu-in-public-places-in-Maharashtra/articleshow/51468168.cms>

(Bhagat et al 2011)<sup>18</sup> and many small-scale industries had shifted to the area designated as ‘industrial’ around Waliv, Gokhiware and Sativali villages. Seizing this opportunity, the BVA created conducive conditions for poorer migrants to informally settle in Green Zone land close to the industrial estate of Waliv. This two-pronged strategy resulted in an influx of new settlers, in legal and illegal habitations, that greatly enhanced the vote base of the informal sovereign. This support base had little connections with agriculture or land; they therefore did not identify with the struggles and suffering that land-owning communities in the West had earlier experienced (Interview member CRIT, Sept 9, 2014) and felt complete loyalty to the informal sovereign.

The settling process also set in motion a flourishing (formal and informal) building construction industry and land market that multiplied the opportunities for business and revenues of the informal sovereign, local ‘big men’, and a network of middlemen. While in the areas closer to the railway station middle-class apartment housing was built by small and medium developers, the Green Zone land was seen as risky by large builders because building on it was ‘illegal’; this left room here for smaller players (both locals as well as ‘migrants’) who plotted and sold rooms for workers in the nearby industries (See Map 4). Thus the story of the settling of this ‘city of the poor’ is one which has been inclusive for poor groups because they have been allowed to settle. But it has also been a highly exploitative and uneven one with regard to service provision and access to legal documentation such as ration cards, voter ID cards etc. Since this was Green Zone land and no development was permitted, no services could be legally provided. This entailed the occupiers looking to the informal sovereign for provision of services and the emergence of a new set of middlemen to reach services to them. In such a situation, people’s agency is provisional, relying constantly on negotiation.

---

<sup>18</sup> The state industrial policy which encouraged establishment of industries in backward areas and shifting polluting industries to peripheral areas and relatively high costs of inputs such as electricity, water, transport, land etc.



**Figure 5: Growth of informal sprawl over the years in Vasai and Nalasopara (East)**

Realising the need for providing (service) facilities a large ‘city’ undergoing transition from agricultural to urbanization needs, and expanding his business interests at the same time,

Hitendra Thakur has over time diversified his business interests from construction and water to education, trade, real estate and social work. Apart from numerous construction companies, such as VIVA Group and VIVA HOMES Pvt Ltd, he established the Viva Trust in 1988 that focuses on the “provision of education, medical and social facilities to the residents”<sup>19</sup> of the then Vasai Taluka. Particularly successful have been the establishment of a range of college-level educational facilities that cater to the steady demand from both working and middle class families cutting across the villages of the West and the towns of the East. “Our leader’s idea is that all students should study in Vasai Virar and for that he built VIVA college, soon they will get jobs here too. Nobody will have to travel then [to Mumbai]” (Interview BVA youth member May 26, 2015).

By 2009, as Map no. 3 illustrate, the growth in the Green Zone around the industrial area was rapid. Such explosive and unplanned growth enabled the informal sovereign to push for forming a municipal government that could enable coordinated planning and provision of infrastructure and services while being democratically voted in to rule the region (Televised election debate on June 9, 2015). The informal sovereign had thus prepared the ground for legitimizing the takeover of building construction rule-making and infrastructure development via the formation of a municipal corporation.

### **3.1 The Formation of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation: Resistance, Cooptation and Capitulation**

Stories abound regarding the genesis of the formation of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation (VVMC). The gist is that a deal was struck between the BVA and the Congress government - the BVA MP provided political support to the Congress Party coalition government at the Centre, and allegedly the Congress ruled State Government returned the favour by declaring the VVMC on July 3, 2009 (interview with journalist on June 20, 2015,

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.vivatrust.in/>

Kamat). The VVMC was formed by merging four municipal councils (Virar, Nalasopara, Vasai and Navghar-Manikpur) and 53 villages. Upon declaration of the VVMC, the Gram Panchayats of these villages, a majority of which lay in the Catholic dominated western belt of Vasai-Virar, were dissolved. Thus at one stroke, the village governance institutions that were a site for local decision- making and mobilization were dealt a death blow and the BVA had the chance to control the lands of the entire region, including villages in the coastal belt, legitimately through the VVMC.

This did not eliminate resistance to the merger however. Villagers discussed how they were well aware that being included within the VVMC meant being completely under the control of the informal sovereign (interview with Dabre, May 2014). Protesting villagers spearheaded the agitation against inclusion of their villages in the newly formed VVMC through forming a Vasai Gaav Vachva Jan Andolan Samiti. This organization fielded a "joint candidate" to be supported by local leaders cutting across party lines in the upcoming Assembly elections in Sept 2009. Vivek Pandit, founder of Shramajivi Sanghatna and deputy leader of Shiv Sena was nominated as the consensus candidate<sup>20</sup>. Pandit argued that the declaration of the VVMC was what brought people together in a true sense, unlike the 'Christian' HVSS campaigns (Interviews May, 2014). "Whatever the stand of political parties such as the Indian National Congress and the Samajwadi party was at the national level, at the local level, all of them supported the Jan Andolan. The BJP too extended its support." (ibid). Somewhat surprisingly, Hitendra Thakur did not stand for Assembly elections this time stating that he was giving an opportunity to his son, Kshitij Thakur, to stand from Nalasopara. Given the emotiveness of the issue of village exemption and the united support of different political parties and peoples' groups, Pandit won the Assembly seat from Vasai.

---

<sup>20</sup> According to Pandit, prominent Vasai leaders who supported his nomination included Manvel Tuscano and Milind Khanolkar of the Janata Dal, Domnica Dabre and Michael Furtado of the Congress, Ishwar Dhule from the RPI, Praful Thakur of MNS, Vijay Machado from Swabhimani Vasaikar Sanghatna, Datta Nar from Vasai Sangharsh Samiti, Kedarnath Mhatre and Shyam Patkar from the Bharatiya Janata Party.



**Figure 6: The ‘no urbanisation’ protest march enters Mumbai and blocks several arterial roads: Source Mumbai Mirror, April 20, 2011**

The agitation of the 53 villages against being included in the VVMC revealed clear continuities (in the members and their perspectives) with the ‘no urbanisation’ coalition that had been active in the 1990s. But by this time there were considerable internal differences in the vision for the region and these different aspirations for development served to fracture the Jan Andolan. While a large number of people, led by Pandit, argued against all development, a few wanted ‘planned development’ arguing that progress would not happen via Gram Panchayat rule. “We are very backward; there is no development that has taken place here. ... I am in support of getting the villages included in the corporation we will get funds and loans to better our conditions,” said Marcus Dabre (Kolhatkar DNA 18 April 2010). On the other hand, another local leader argued, “All of us here are happy with the nature of life and amenities in our villages - we have our land for agriculture, our own water and take care of our own businesses. Why should we pay taxes to the Corporation when we really are not receiving any services from them?” (interview dated May 2015, Veronica Dabre). Whether to



participate in or boycott elections was another issue on which the Jan Andolan faced irreconcilable differences. Those who were completely against urbanization of any kind wanted to boycott elections but others, including Pandit, said, “We believe in the Constitution and the rule of law. We will participate in the coming elections to show our mandate on this issue. We are clear that all 53 villages have to be excluded from the VMC jurisdiction.” Pandit fielded several candidates from Jan Andolan Samiti in the VVMC elections. Pandit’s volte face on the issue of participating in local elections was seen as a betrayal by some local groups, a move made purely to serve his political career (Interview with Parmar, November 2014). Clearly the internal fractures within the Jan Andolan had greatly weakened it. By contrast, the BVA had made huge strides forward from what it had been a decade earlier.

The BVA was a well-organised party with a large base in the East particularly in Nalasopara where most migrants lived and Virar, which was the headquarters of the BVA. Moreover, in this battle, the state government seemed squarely on the side of the BVA. It issued a notification to 35 of the 53 villages asking for their objections to being included in the VVMC<sup>21</sup> but simultaneously elections in 89 wards to VVMC were declared. The BVA launched an intensive campaign focusing on ‘development’ and in particular promising to improve water supply that was in serious shortage in the city (Interview with senior party member, July 13, 2015). Given the lack of unity within the Jan Andolan and the organization and strength of the BVA, it was not surprising that the BVA secured a large majority (55 of 89 seats) in the first VVMC elections on 31 May 2010 (June 1, 2010 Indian Express)<sup>22</sup>. Pandit’s campaign attempt to remind people of the violent way in which Hitendra Thakur had seized power in the region had little effect as most of the people who had overwhelmingly voted for Hitendra Thakur did not own land and did not connect to the earlier struggles around water and land (Timeout 2010). Rajeev Patil, a cousin of Hitendra Thakur, became the first Mayor of VVMC. The informal sovereign had now proved his legitimacy to rule and become the

---

<sup>21</sup> Several interviews with locals revealed that nobody was sure how 18 villages had been left out but there were rumours circulated that the BVA had something to do with it (Interview dated July 13, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> 19 for Pandit’s Jan Andolan Samiti, 3 for Shiv Sena, 1 for BJP, 1 for MNS, 1 for Congress and 8 Independents. NCP drew a blank (ibid).



sovereign custodian of the city through the vehicle of elected local government.

Despite the Jan Andolan losing steam, protests didn't cease<sup>23</sup> and in response to these the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Ashok Chavan, issued an order in May 2011 that 29 of the 35 protesting villages would be excluded from the VVMC. The decision was immediately challenged in the High Court by the VVMC, following which the Court stayed the government's decision to withdraw the villages from the municipal limits. A decision is still pending from the Court. Despite no decision on the inclusion of 29 villages into the VVMC, in actuality they have become part of VVMC through a range of practices. First of all, these villages have de facto been governed by the VVMC in one way or another since 2009. They had elected corporators, many of whom were from the BVA. Moreover, in wards where the opposition had won, the BVA appointed "cops" or co-opted<sup>24</sup> corporators to informally monitor and take care of those areas (Interview BVA member July 13 2015). Additionally, the BVA elevated one of their corporators (belonging to an old political, Catholic family) from a ward in the coastal belt to be the 'sabhapati'<sup>25</sup> with the charge of development works for the 53 villages (Interview dated June 16, 2015). In June 2011, the Thane Zilla Parishad appointed 14 officers to take over the functioning of the 29 villages<sup>26</sup>, it is alleged at the behest of the BVA<sup>27</sup>. Industries located in the 29 excluded villages were made to pay LBT<sup>28</sup> to the VVMC despite the matter of exclusion pending in the High Court<sup>29</sup>. Putting their own people in

---

<sup>23</sup> On 10<sup>th</sup> April (blocking the highway) and 20<sup>th</sup> April (blocking the Western Expressway and walking on the Bandra-Worli sea link), Mumbai Mirror, April 20, 2011: <http://www.mumbaimirror.com/mumbai/cover-story/How-sea-link-was-breached/articleshow/16119638.cms>

<sup>24</sup> Five seats are set aside within a municipal corporation for "co-opted" corporators. These seats are reserved as honorary posts given to activists, artists, professionals etc

<sup>25</sup> Here the sabhapati defined his role as a person in charge of minor developments such as road repairs, new drain constructions within the 53 villages.

<sup>26</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Officers-for-Vasai-Virar-villages-appointed/articleshow/8903796.cms>

<sup>27</sup> <http://archive.indianexpress.com/story-print/627554/>

<sup>28</sup> Local Body Tax or LBT is imposed by civic bodies on the entry of goods into a local area. Over the last few years there has been severe resistance by shop owners and business owners against this tax

<sup>29</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Industries-in-Vasai-villages-say-no-to-paying-tax/articleshow/10970628.cms>

charge of areas that had been hotspots of resistance enabled disciplining them but also manufacturing consent for the policies and existence of the VVMC.

Second, the VVMC brought in increased funds for infrastructure from a range of sources<sup>30</sup> and these were used to provide services like roads, garbage collection and city bus transport (earlier there had only been State Transport buses). Interviews (September 24, 2014; April 24, 2014) revealed that villagers in the West liked and were getting used to ‘urban’ services provided by VVMC. Starting the ghantagadi (the vehicle that collects garbage from door to door) in villages protesting the merger for instance was one way of the VVMC ‘laying claim’ to the area. The Sabhapati argued, “Since the creation of the VVMC, the people have seen that no taxes have increased, in fact the services are so much better. We have built gutters, roads in the area. The people in this area already use the VVMC bus service that does not go through our village [in the West] but goes through neighbouring areas. Now people know that we [ie BVA] are here to work for the people.” (Interview Jun 16 2015). This revealed the success of (indefinitely) stalling a legal decision on the exclusion of the 29 villages while using strategies to coerce and coopt resisting local groups on the ground.

---

<sup>30</sup> These sources included central schemes (Satellite city scheme), through raising its own revenues by levying property tax and local body tax (LBT), and by demanding the transfer of Rs 160 cr of development charges from CIDCO (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Rs-1600-millions-boost-for-Vasai-Virar-development-plans/articleshow/6198299.cms>). There were records that VVMC was able to collect 2cr in LBT in 2 days with 36,500 traders being registered for collection of the tax and VVMC reducing the rate of LBT to incentivize compliance (<http://manickpur.com/2-crores-in-2-days-for-vvmc/>).



**Figure 7: The villages in the West have a mix of two to three-storey houses and narrow winding lanes.**

Over time a consistent pattern has been observed, we argue. The ULB has been used as a vehicle to open up new areas for development and then to re-imagine and re-develop these areas through an iterative process, generating wealth and value add with each iteration for the real estate economy and those who control it. Within this system there have been a few key players. In different localities, existing elites like former sarpanches now turned corporators, and other ‘big men’ have served as centres of sovereignty to provide housing and services to this informally living population, while a set of middlemen have facilitated the slow, incremental process of becoming citizens (accessing voter id cards, and other documentation that enables accessing government schemes). At the regional level, the state government has stepped in to regularize or demolish some parts and open this land up for redevelopment as towers and malls. The party and its leaders have provided the direction and inspiration for achieving this.

### **3.2 The Formation of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation: Resistance, Cooptation and Capitulation**

The particular nature of the regime of rule in VVMC has been shaped by its location in the periphery of the MMR. First seen as a residual space (i.e a ‘buffer’ zone) and then deliberately opened up for lucrative real estate development but outside of normal laws – with no public provision for infrastructure or serviced land, the suspension of normal legal guarantees and regulation over land and building construction, and the denial of basic rights. The exceptional power wielded by the regime of rule could be sustained in such a vast and differentiated peripheral ‘frontier’ (Simone 2007) we argue only through a decentralized power-sharing arrangement with multiple centres of power. While the configurations of power among multiple sovereigns in the Vasai-Virar landscape are unevenly distributed there is a clear hierarchy and centre – that reposed in the patriarch or ruling ‘father’. The fact that he is called “Appa” by everyone is a powerful signifier of how he and his rule are viewed by people of the region. In this networked regime, power tends to diffuse downward in patrimonial arrangements as the ruler distributes bits of resource-bearing political privilege (Adams 2005). The growing pool of informal sovereigns is thus accommodated through coveted shares in local infrastructure projects (through building, transport or supplies contracts) and positions in institutions (gym leader, library leader, building/youth coordinator). The ruler also obliged them through investment of public resources in infrastructure and cultural programmes. In Vasai-Virar the BVA party structure cements these networks together; it functions as an ‘extended family’ with a core leadership (consisting of the Thakur Family) extending out to multiple sovereigns in different territories, who are connected to it through a series of networks and (shifting) alliances.

Informal sovereigns in the region comprise old and new power structures, located according to a pattern of spatial differentiation. Old power centres tend to be from dominant caste landholding families (Marathas and Catholics) that have used their traditional hegemonic status in village political economies to gain control of Gram Panchayats and possibly the VVMC and have, to differing extents, retained control of land holdings. New informal

sovereigns have usually risen through two circuits that are integral to the real estate- centred economy: building construction (and its allied economies) and politics. Old power centres are predominantly found in villages in the West or gaothans (urban villages as they've become) and their outgrowths in the East. The territorial identity of the "village" is deeply connected to the cultural and caste identity of the community that lives there and has served as an important binding force for political mobilization. New power centres are mainly located in the large urban centres in the East, where growth of buildings/chawls and 'migrants' has been fastest. These typically break with traditional structures of dominance (such as caste) and hence represent new avenues of opportunity for middle/lower caste/class 'migrant' groups. One such strand of opportunity is the formal reservations system in the ULB for women and historically marginalized groups (i.e, SC/ST and women) and Appa's own informal reservation system for young leaders from different caste groups to enter politics. Thus, inclusion through the vehicle of the VVMC is used as a strategy to reward certain young men and women, while also serving to curb the power of existing leaders by making their wards reserved ones.

Multiple sovereigns serve as crucial 'vote aggregators' for the Thakurs but also have some autonomy within their own territories with respect to rule-making, providing housing and services to 'informal' residents, facilitating real estate/ infrastructure deals or becoming real estate developers themselves. Their public authority is constituted by making public decisions and providing services as non- state actors but while referencing the state (Lund 2006). Referencing the state to strengthen their power takes on two dimensions: drawing on their privileged access to public resources (such as water supply from municipal handpumps) and harnessing their knowledge of state policies regarding possible conversion of rural to urban spaces. Their privileged access to public resources and landuse policies is largely derived through their affiliation with the party, making it essential for them to cultivate networks of support within the party structure.

While large numbers of migrants have moved to the East and, as seen on the map, the growth of informal settlements may seem explosive and uncontrollable; it is neatly kept in check by a

mechanism that is calculatively controlled by the big men. Who gets a voter's ID is decided on the basis of loyalty and connection to the party and without voting rights the new migrants have little bargaining power. Hence localities without voting cards are some of the most vulnerable with respect to access to basic services and other state benefits. Despite the migrants being in large numbers in the East many corporators, apart from the reserved seats, come from the landed castes. Hence, the 'secular outlook' and 'inclusiveness' often seems like a clever strategy that the party successfully employs to garner popular support.

The BVA needs to be understood both in terms of the economic enterprises it runs/facilitates but also possessing a distinct culture, social relations and leadership style. Leaders of the BVA talk about the party and its symbol of the whistle or 'shitti' as being like currency – whatever you want – college admissions, electricity problems – you can buy anything” (interview, journalist June, 2015). The caveat is that only BVA members are eligible for these benefits. “What do people want in Vasai-Virar today? Water. Who has the water? Shitti. They won't release water until we vote for them. If a Shiv Sena candidate is chosen from an area, the people there can forget about water” (Interview auto driver June 11, 2015). The party system also operates by way of threats: If people do not support it then water supply in the area will be blocked, funds for development won't be released or even worse, the municipal corporation that is with the party will demolish all the jhopadpatti [illegal settlements] overnight. (Interview with Fatherwadi resident June, 2015).

Membership in BVA is also important for benefiting from the development contracts the VVMC disburses.

“Hitendra Thakur meets with people, then looks at the “development” work that the people need. Then he gives contracts for building roads or gutters to those from within the village itself. The people get employment and they become loyal to Thakur -- he builds local leaders out of them... He and his people – they take care of this area – they have strong networks, they are strong pillars of this area. No police, no revenue

department, no Mahanagarपालिका is stronger than them. They run the VVMC like a Private Limited Company. Their 'karyakartaas' [party workers] are 'thekedaars' [contractors] of Vasai Virar." (Interview Fatherwadi resident June 20, 2015)

This reveals that the rule of individual 'big men' subsumes the state and the rule of law, highlighting how the distinction between public and private, state and market is increasingly blurred. The conjoining of economic and political interests has also been crucial for earning the loyalty of its members. A BVA youth leader discussed how knowing their corporators and MLAs helps them to connect with them. "So this network not only becomes a party network but also a business network – we get contracts and jobs through this network" (Interview BVA youth member May 26, 2015). At higher levels as well, investments in building construction and real estate bind the interests of informal sovereigns and senior political leaders regardless of party affiliations (Interview journalist June 20, 2015). These alliances that politician cum builders have across parties furthers the real estate economy that generates wealth for the sovereigns of the city.

The party's culture is also important to comprehend as its inner life and everyday practices shape social relations and behavior of its members. Members talk repeatedly of volunteerism based on 'family' membership and the importance of building and belonging to networks that connote valuable social capital. "Hiring wouldn't have had the same commitment – this is where the personal touch comes into play. I do something for friend, the friend returns the favour. This works like a "friendship", this works like a family and whoever is part of this "family" is taken care of" (Interview BVA leader June 13, 21 2015).

The party's culture therefore takes off from and revolves around the informal sovereign's charisma, the intimate relations he develops with his subjects and his style of doing things and getting things done. This charisma is both inherent within his performative style -- his baritone voice, his habit of remembering every person by name, his anger, his love, his flamboyant speeches, his humble demeanour and the multiple rumours of murder and illicit activities that

surround him -- but it is also deliberately produced through party propaganda and the numerous memes and photographs circulated on social media. Weber (1978) in his formulation of 'charismatic authority' as an ideal type of legitimate rule argues that 'charisma' is a "certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." (p359) Appa in interviews has been referred to as Lord Vishnu's avatar (cite --). However, the legitimacy of this charismatic rule depends on not just this performative style but also on subjects who accept and reproduce its validity (Weber 1978). Members often speak of how easy it is to meet Appa and approach him even for "private matters". He is known to have resolved people's divorces and affairs. "Eighty per cent of the problems solved in his office are family matters," a senior party member said (Interview with party member, July 13, 2015).

The personal leadership style emanating from the top reinforces the sense of belonging to the Party/family,

"Appa [Hitendra Thakur] goes for every karyakarta's wedding, every one of their children's communion so children know him from a very early age – every child in Vasai- Virar knows who Appa is ... this does not work as 'Party' but as a family" (Interview BVA member July 13 2015)

While on the one hand the party structure is extremely well organized (at building, chawl, village, ward and zonal levels) and coherent, on the other its calculated informality in planning and its multiple sovereignties has led to a highly fragmented landscape. While legal apartments for the middle-class have come up on either side of the railway line, there is a swathe of informal construction extending into the interiors, especially around the industrial estate of Waliv, Sativali and Gokhiware. These include a range of settlement types, including chawls, galas and jhopadpattis. Interviews reveal that these informal settlements form the strongest vote base of the BVA regime, have been built by them and are protected by them



(Interview with journalist, June 20, 2015). The greenery and village-like surroundings of the Western coast is in stark contrast to the built-up ‘cities’ of the East with their high densities and bustling, but often unserved, interior neighborhoods. Key to this process of fragmentation is land use planning and how it is managed through building political alliances and using the informality inherent in the planning process (Roy 2009).

## **4 Controlling Land-use: Calculated Informality, Differentiated Rule and Splintered Geographies**

Land and how it is managed is critical to the growth of the state in Vasai-Virar and the informality inherent in (land use) planning is an instrument deployed purposefully (Roy 2009). At the regional level, the regime uses its sovereign power to build political alliances with the state government and thereby give itself territorial flexibility to change land use, permit unauthorized construction in zones designated as ‘no development’ and selectively promote large commercial and infrastructure projects in certain territories. Locally, within the VVMC, the regime has relied on differentiated techniques of rule calibrated to suit the appetites of different cultural groups tied to specific territories. This has led to an uneven geography differentiated by legality, built form, real estate values and infrastructure.

Regional level:

Throughout his political career Hitendra Thakur and the BVA have been very effective in building regional political coalitions with the state and central governments in order to consolidate and enhance their position in the region. This has also involved making strategic alignments and changing these depending on the need at hand. For instance, a senior BVA leader described how the Thakurs had been loyal allies of Pawar especially after he opposed the then Chief Minister Sudhakar Rao Naik's move to take action against the Thakur siblings for their alleged connections with the underworld in 1993 but that they had shifted loyalties to the Congress Party because aligning with the latter offered significant benefits<sup>31</sup>. The Urban Development Department (UDD) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) were controlled by the Chief Minister and Vasai-Virar as a newly constituted municipal corporation needed the financial support of the Congress-controlled state government.

---

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/news/pawars-protege-moves-closer-to-congress>

“We are getting closer to Congress just because they control these two important bodies. The UDD sanctioned Rs 2500 millions for a water scheme in Vasai-Virar last week. The MMRDA has approved a plan to supply piped gas to the consumers in Virar. The Congress controlled Railway Ministry too has accepted our demand to run a suburban train till Dahanu on Gujarat border. We can seek votes by showcasing these works," a senior BVA leader said (ibid).

In return, the Congress expected the BVA's support in at least eight Assembly constituencies in Thane district where the BVA has significant presence (ibid)<sup>32</sup>. Building strategic alignments with the regime in power at the state and central government has enabled the regime to secure approvals and funds for large infrastructure projects located in VVMC such as the Virar-Alibaug Corridor project undertaken by MMRDA. In turn these have been used to entice private developers to invest in VVMC<sup>33</sup>.

Negotiating change over land use that is ostensibly locked by the DP or belongs to the Central Government (salt pans are under the control of the Central government) is also facilitated by the amicable political equations that exist between the BVA and the current BJP- controlled state government<sup>34</sup>. In February 2015 the UDD headed by the CM issued orders extending development regulations of the VVMC to 21 peripheral villages. The order announced the withdrawal of CIDCO as the Special Planning Authority for the villages and its replacement by VVMC. This implied that the DP and DCR of VVMC will now apply to these villages

---

<sup>32</sup> The alliance between BVA-Congress has meant that the BJP has supported Pandit. The BJP and the Congress are traditional opponents.

<sup>33</sup> “Our corporation has land which are used by saltpans and the lease is expiring in 2014. They account for around 1500 acres of land and... we have already spoken to MMRDA and have submitted letters to the CM [Chief Minister] to develop these lands on the lines of Bandra-Kurla Complex. We have spoken to him about IT and ITES [IT enabled services]. We are looking at KPOs [knowledge process outsourcing companies] and BPOs [business process outsourcing] because many of the employees that currently work with KPOs and BPOs in Mumbai and Pune actually come from Vasai-Virar” (Kshitij Thakur, MLA Nalasopara, <http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/conversation-corner-vasai-virar-the-new-promised-land-1673364>)

<sup>34</sup> The current BJP government was elected into power in Sept 2014.

despite them not being included in VVMC<sup>35</sup>. The state government argued that this would promote planned development and provision of infrastructure in the region. This once again underscored the alignment between the BVA and the state government which has facilitated the BVA to execute its vision for the region.

Locally:

Analysing the situation locally, the earlier experiences of mobilizations and struggle in Vasai West were tied to collective identities around land-ownership, livelihood, caste and culture and in large part derived strength from the binding force of these identities. The use of violence and threats by the regime couldn't succeed in dissipating their resistance or the identities they derived strength from. This led to the regime focusing on a different strategy – a state hegemonic project of building links with global/provincial real estate capital and producing and governing the middle classes through the creation of a new set of binding identities based on aspirations for 'development' that could overwhelm older collective identities around land, livelihood, caste and culture. These new identities are inextricably connected to what we think of as 'urban' or city life- based as they are on the individual, the market (and the profit interest) and on consumption. What is distinct about the developmentalism of this state, however, is the combination of an ideology of a new imagined community (Anderson 1991) together with a particular relation to real estatization of the economy. The new imagined community emphasizes cultural unity and continuity with a glorious past while foregrounding the path to the future of making Vasai-Virar a world-class and inclusive destination. The vehicle for imagineering new aspirations is the ULB. While disciplinary techniques continue to be used to shape subject formation, it is a series of developmental visions that take centre stage.

The ushering in of the VVMC has provided the regime the opportunity to (re)imagine and (re)develop the city in its entirety - to see new possibilities for (re)development and new

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/vertical-push-for-weekend-home-hotspot-near-mumbai/>

connections between geographies that didn't exist earlier. The rationale for such decisions seems largely based on market calculations – the real estate potential of the area - but an important additional factor is the negotiation with local sovereigns who have emerged due to specific histories of settlement and often exert considerable control over localities. This has meant that creating aspirations for 'development' has taken different forms in different geographies in accordance with local power interests and realities. The next section develops 3 small case studies to illustrate the nature of this differentiated rule, its consequences for local residents, and how they show their agency in the city.

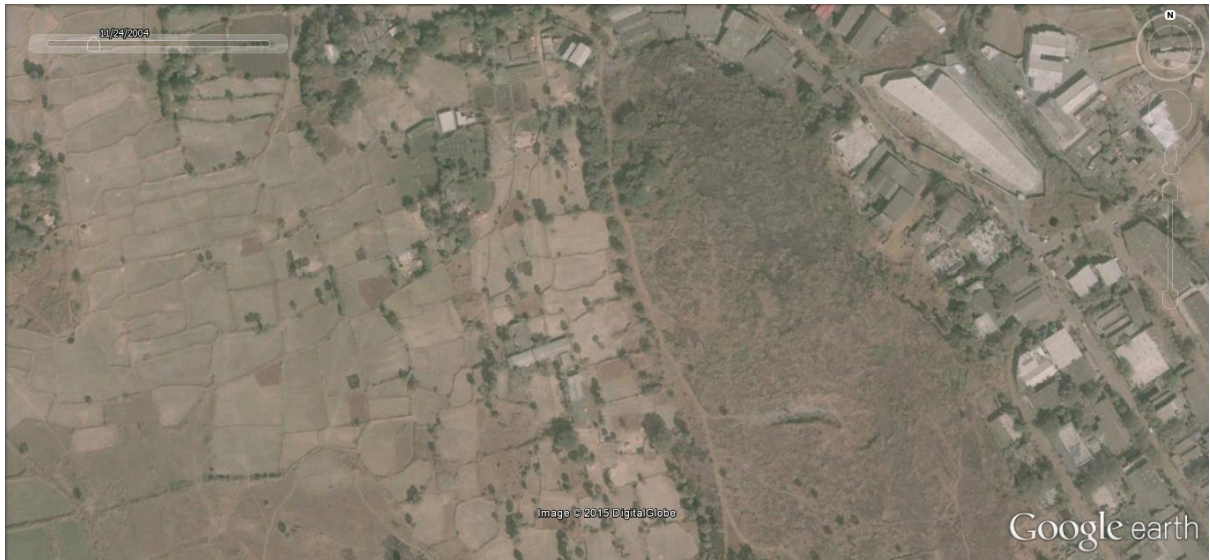
#### **4.1 Three Cases of Differentiated Rule**

##### **Makrand Nagar**

Makrand Nagar is an informal settlement on the edges of an Industrial Zone in Vasai (East) owned and ruled by two local step-cousins. The settlement has no tar road, no municipal water connection or sewage management system. Hence, the tenants of Makrand Nagar are often at the mercy of the landlords for basic needs such as water. Stripped of all benefits and rights of legal citizenship, the residents have come to share a complex patron-client relationship with the landlords. Transgressing this relationship not only invites violent suppression but also diminishes opportunities of negotiation with the Patils. Of the 3000 odd families of Makrand Nagar – mostly North Indian workers employed in the adjacent industrial complex – nobody has a voter's ID card. No official identity proof or voter ID cards means that residents of Makrand Nagar cannot mobilise or bargain for resources and services from a local politician in exchange of loyalty and votes. No voter ID cards renders the entire settlement insignificant/invisible in the eyes of the state.

The Patil step-cousins who rule and own the land in Makrand Nagar recognise that their rule is highly unstable and vulnerable to the political shifts and planning at the municipal corporation. Maintaining this unstable rule is contingent on constant surveillance and the

repeated performance and reinforcement of violence – both physical and structural. For Surendra and Vasant Patil this everyday production of order is justified through the discourse of ‘safety’, the need to protect their community, honour and daughters from the criminal, migrant ‘other’.



**Figure 8: Makrand Nagar 2005: The image shows subdivided agricultural plots with no informal settlements**



**Figure 9: Makrand Nagar 2015: The image shows a sudden rise in informal settlements across the industrial area. The yellow structure marked is the Patil's house**

Surendra Patil was born in a land-owning caste called Agris in a neighbouring village, Gaurai Pada. Gaurai Pada lies about 300 metres from Makrand Nagar and like most gaothans has markers of an old settlement – temples, aging trees with bulbous trunks, a municipal school, a gram panchayat office. It has winding lanes that lead to clusters of houses and a few brightly-coloured two to three-storey bungalows. Those who rent homes in Makrand Nagar often tell stories of how the ‘gaonwalas sold farm land and made lakhs of rupees’. These multicoloured bungalows – pink, purple, orange, yellow, blue – stand as testimonies of their recent prosperity.

Patil speaks of his childhood as a time spent in vast verdant fields but abject poverty -- plenty of area to play in, clean air to breathe but no food to put on the table. Today they argue that have exchanged the safety and scenic surroundings for financial stability. “More than a decade ago, Makrand Nagar was only rice fields – you could see right till Santosh Bhuvan then. It didn’t have a name – the village was called Gaurai Pada, and these fields were an extension of the village,” he says. In the 1970s the first industries were constructed across the road from Makrand Nagar, in Gokhiware. The Gram Panchayat was actively involved in the creation of the industrial zone as they collected higher taxes from the industries – but Surendra’s family had little to do with it.

With the moving of industries, the land prices increased. However, the Patils who had no say in the zoning, and owned land in the demarcated Green Zone, could only take advantage of the new development once they started building chawls. Villages around Makrand Nagar had already started selling portions of farm lands for a good sum to the migrating populations that were evicted from the informal settlements in Mumbai and those who followed the industries that moved to Gokhiware. Patil, after much deliberation built eight rooms, two toilets, dug a bore well and started renting out first to “chedda bhai”, single migrant men. However, over the years he has only started renting to families and not single migrant men, since the families are seen to be “safer” and trustworthy tenants.

Patil today owns 40 rooms – all built in neat rows and painted in baby pink. His two-storey mansion is constructed with a balcony that has a panoptic view of the rooms below. “It is easier to keep an eye on the bhaiyyas from the balcony,” he says. Stretched on the verandah he speaks of Achole, a neighbouring village, as a lesson to be learnt. “Go look at the state there, you won’t find a single local Marathi Manos in power. The sthaniks (landowning locals) in Achole suddenly saw a lot of money, -- sold their lands to the North Indian and built mansions but today they are bankrupt, they have no money, they have no power over their village because they have no rights over land. You have to invest money, keep it rolling. Money that you earn quickly, disappears just as quickly.” When Patil first built his chawls, he made a decision to not sell them but to rent them out – this meant he did not become “rich overnight” like the others. He then sat with his cousins and they made a conscious decision to not sell but only rent land. Locals owning and thus controlling land and land use was a major source of power in the village.

In 2009, after the municipal corporation came into force, none of the cousins were sure if the chawls are legal or illegal. “The Municipal corporation is no longer giving permission to build more chawls, some say these chawls are illegal. We now get permission for only towers, which are beyond our reach, perhaps our children will take it up. Our corporator is also a North Indian. I can feel the difference from the days we had our panchayat. We were involved in the decision making – that is no longer the case,” says Patil.

One of the most important things they have learnt over the course of the decade is that a piece of land in the Green Zone is much cheaper than the land across the road in the Industrial Zone. “If a guntha<sup>36</sup> costs Rs 7 lakhs in Makrand Nagar, it costs Rs 15 lakhs across the road in Gokhiware.” Most of the construction in Makrand Nagar is done on Green Zone with permission but is “illegal”, he says. Hence, recently, there has been much lobbying on the part

---

<sup>36</sup> A guntha is a local metric system used in India to measure a piece of land. 1 Guntha = 121 square yards



of the landlords for amalgamating it within the Gokhiware Industrial Zone so that the land prices rise. Thinking ahead, Patil has already built chawls with rolling shutters instead of doors, so when the zone is extended the rooms can be sold as commercial slots to the industries. Sheela Saroj, a tenant complains that landlords have said that they will demolish their homes when the zone is extended and build industries and give people rooms on an extended first storey. “How will we live above the industries,” she says. “I am not sure what they have in mind for us, they don’t bother telling us.”

While Patil has managed to overcome the poverty, he keeps reiterating how he has exchanged it for a life of insecurity and fear. The constant vigilance and surveillance of their property adds to every day stress and movement around the area has become a struggle. Patil religiously scans all newspapers every morning and keeps a close eye on crime and election news. He regularly goes for electoral meetings. This is also evident from the double locks on the doors of their houses and the extra metal grills.

**Patil:** There aren’t enough locals people left in Makrand Nagar, only North Indian migrants... Earlier, as a part of the village we all knew each other. Women could walk about freely. Now, every person is different, from a different place. “Konachi guarantee nahi ahe.” (You cannot guarantee anyone’s good behaviour)... There are villages now where the migrants are just not entertained. *They will starve but they won’t sell their land to the migrants.*

A major unanticipated shift in power dynamics took place the day Vasai Virar was declared a municipal corporation. The gram panchayats were dissolved and fresh corporation elections were held in 2010. The local panchayats that usually consisted of landowning Patils as village heads, lost power over night.

During the 2010 VVMC elections a migrant Ramprasad Gupta was elected as corporator, he tells us. “We let the bhaiyyas<sup>37</sup> buy land and settle there. Their population grew by leaps and bounds and we lost power. We have only ourselves to blame,” he says. This is the reason why Patils have kept a close eye on who can vote and who cannot. The residents of Makrandnagar cannot vote.

**Patil:** Don’t think that these men are powerless just because they look poor. They have *dalals* who know exactly who to go to and how to get these cards. How do you think these bhaiyya log become corporator? If a migrant and a local goes to fill the voter ID cards at the municipal office or the corporator’s office, the “bhaiyya” will get it first.

This fear and suspicion is further articulated through the fear for the safety of the daughters of Makrandnagar. “Our daughters are not safe here anymore. All these migrants are away from home, living with other men. To satisfy their urges they download blue [porn] films on their phones and spend hours watching those,” says Patil. His daughter is in class 10<sup>th</sup> and is no longer allowed outside the door after sunset. Though no cases of rape or harassment have been reported against anyone from the village, women and young girls now travel in groups to school and back as precaution. “If you want to see Kalyug<sup>38</sup> – it is here in Vasai-Virar,” says Patil.

Patil is now patiently awaiting the 2021 Vasai Virar Development Plan when another round of zoning will once again decide the fate of his land. He is positive that his land will no longer be under Green Zone. In his lifetime, he says he has managed to provide for his family and keep

---

<sup>37</sup> Bhaiyya literally means brother in Hindi. While in North India the term is used respectfully to address a senior person, a brother or an endearing title for friend, in Maharashtra, particularly Mumbai, the term is usually used derogatorily for migrants. The nativist movement led by the Shiv Sena and MNS claims that the growing number of migrants or “bhaiyyas” has snatched jobs and housing from the local Maharashtrian and is a central reason for the rising unemployment in the city.

<sup>38</sup> According to Hindu mythology Kalyug is the final stage of a spiritual man’s evolution. It is considered the age of vice and human downfall.

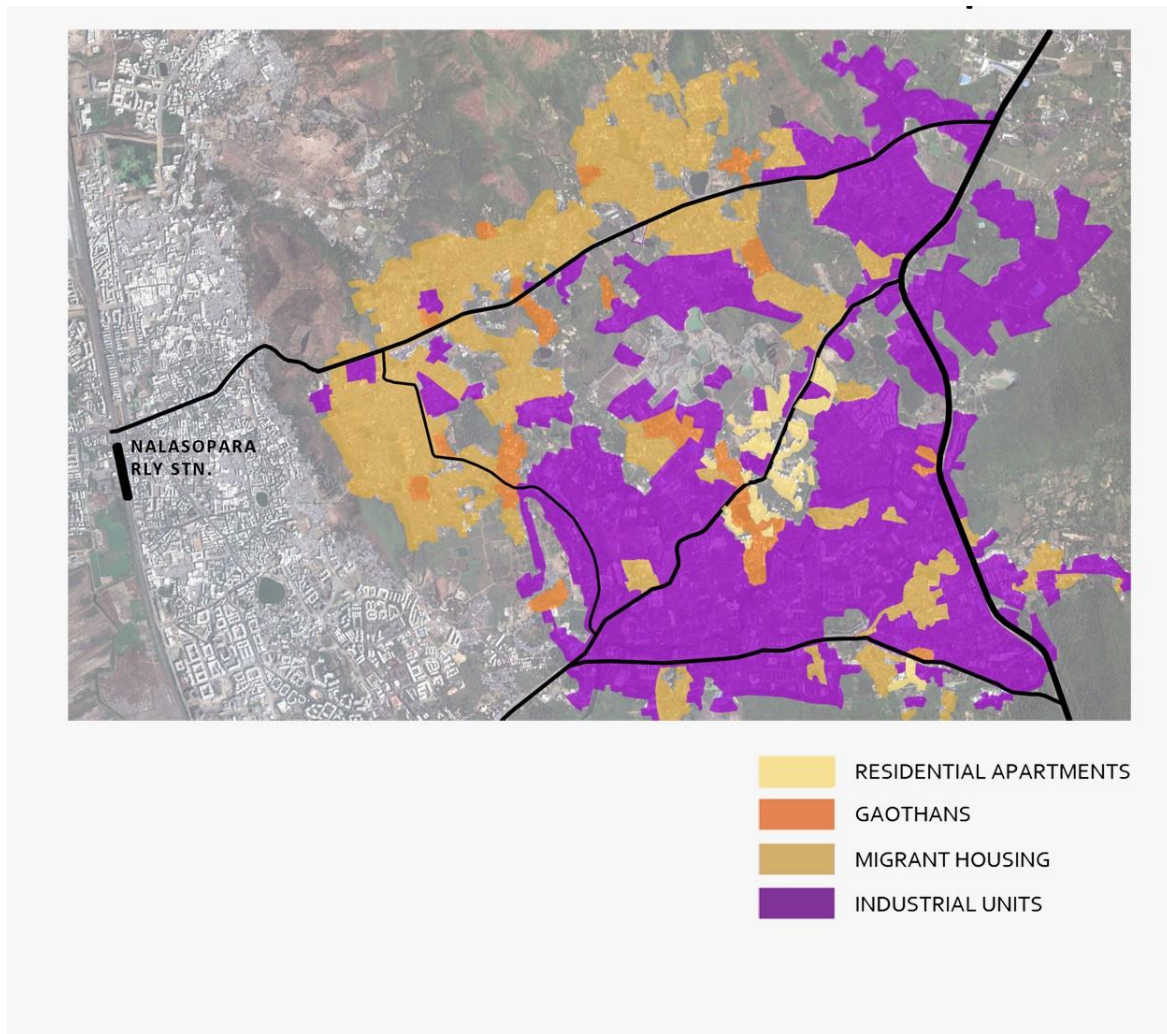
them safe, but he hopes his son will have the opportunity to dream beyond “illegal” chawls and build large towers and residential complexes fit for a new city.

The case of Makarandnagar illustrates how the old elite, the Patil landlords, function as informal sovereigns in their domain. These communities derive their power from their ownership of land that they have increasingly found profitable to subdivide, build chawls and rent out to North- Indian tenants. While the locals or ‘sthaniks’ deeply resent the entry of ‘migrants’ and the regime that has encouraged them, they represent a valuable source of rents in the present and aspirations for upward mobility in the future. The tensions however between the North Indian ‘migrants’ and the locals are palpable, with the land-owners engaging in different disciplinary practices - ranging from the denial of water to prevention of associationism - to reinforce their control over their tenants. This is a landscape that is unstable, where at any moment their opposition to the regime in power can make them vulnerable. They therefore have to seek accommodations with competing sovereigns, such as the North Indian corporator Ram Prasad Gupta, who has risen to power as a candidate in this electoral ward due to the increasing strength of the North Indian migrant voter base. This complicity enables the denial of voter ID cards to tenants, reducing them to what Agamben calls ‘bare life’.

## **4.2 Santosh Bhuvan**

Santosh Bhuvan lies in the Green Zone in the suburb of Nalasopara (East). It is a sprawling “illegal city” situated on swathes of, what were only a decade ago, paddy fields. The area lies on the edge of an Industrial Zone that was carved out to relocate “hazardous” industries from Mumbai’s core. Many who inhabit Santosh Bhuvan, have been a part of the informal manufacturing industry and have followed these factories to the margins for work. Several others have been evicted from slums in Mumbai during demolition drives and found their way

here<sup>39</sup>. (See Map 6 for the growth of the informal settlements around the Industrial Zone) Other “undesirable populations” who have been pushed out of the city – migrants, bar dancers, sex workers, petty criminals, drug peddlers who are largely from the North Indian states of UP and Bihar – have allegedly found home here. It was where, many told us, the Mumbai underworld moved. In media and in interviews with local informants, Santosh Bhuvan is repeatedly described as “the hell of Vasai Virar.” A newspaper report described the place as:



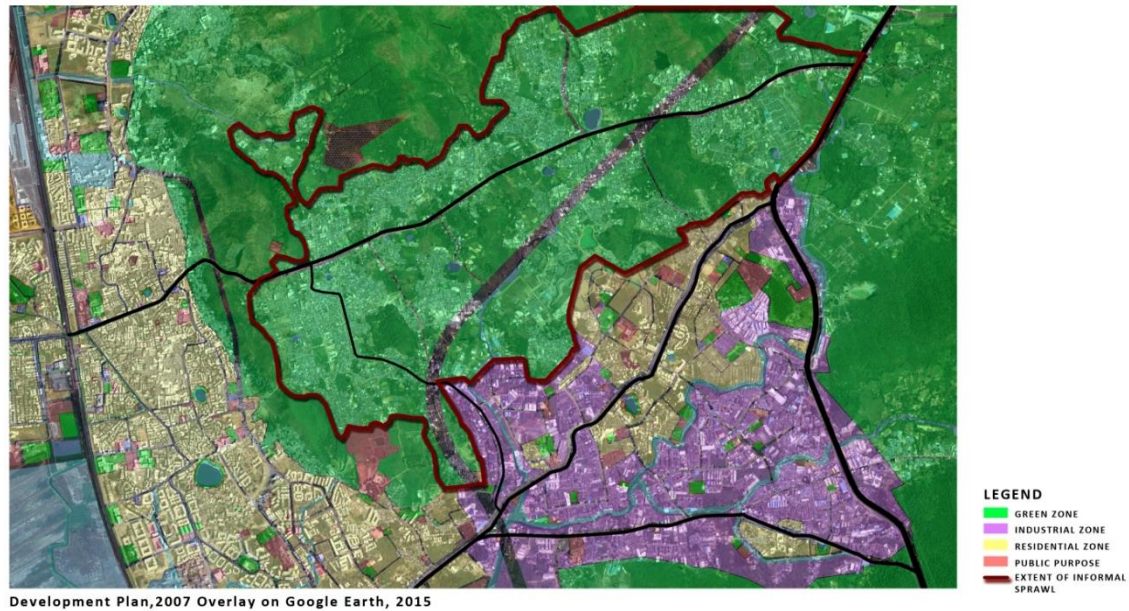
**Figure 10: Land use in and around informal sprawl**

<sup>39</sup> A particularly noteworthy case were the evictions of slums in the vicinity of Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) which were done to conserve the park and forest land against encroachments. This led to the demolitions of homes of over 80,000 families spanning 1999 to 2004.

“The ghetto has seen exponential growth since 2002, when it was just a collection of small shanties on a hill side. A majority of the residents, officials said, are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. While some of the chawls have been regularised, a majority of them remained illegal and were controlled by a strong mafia...”  
(Mumbai Mirror; December 8, 2012)

But for insiders, Santosh Bhuvan is a place built mostly by the agency and resourcefulness of migrant rickshaw drivers-turned-builders.

Counter-narratives on the ground constructed Santosh Bhuvan as the ‘City of the Poor’ where the settling of poor, ‘undesirable’ populations has clearly filled the need for cheap labour that the booming building construction industry is in sore need of. It is a place of stark contradictions - where tremendous physical danger coexists with immense security from eviction, where being poor doesn’t mean being without the opportunity to acquire social mobility. “The biggest relief in Santosh Bhuvan is that there is no fear of demolition. We have always lived on public land, in illegal rooms but we have never had this security” said a local musician from the area. The “illegality” much cursed outside Santosh Bhuvan, provides those living within it an opportunity to become rich and acquire social status via real estate development. “Here 85% of the builders are autorickshaw drivers evicted from Mumbai”, claims chawl builder Pintu Singh, “and it is because of autorickshaw drivers there is “development” here. Public aayi, toh development hui. Varna saare khet the.” (People came here and the area developed. Or else there were only farms.) A good way to tell what the place stands for, says Pintu Singh is to look at the names of the places. “Places here are called Pakistan Naka, Hindustan Naka, Don Gali, Kargil Nagar and Chotta Pakistan. Pandey built an area so it is Pandey Nagar, Ramprasad built a chawl in some place so now it’s Ramprasad Nagar. If the state were involved these places would’ve been named differently – after some national leader.”



**Figure 11: Map showing extent of informal sprawl into Green Zone**

Officially Santosh Bhuvan lies within Ward no 77, under the BVA corporator, Ramprasad Gupta. Its boundaries, however, seemed fluid and ambiguous because its name and notoriety swallow all other villages and farmlands around it. Beyond a certain point, everything is Santosh Bhuvan. This informal city is a vast expanse of uneven, undulating land with a wide concrete main road that runs through the settlement and symbolises the recent “development” of the area. Four- to five-storey, illegal structures flank both sides of the main wide arterial road. Several of them are at varying stages of construction – some are simply concrete skeletons that have now been occupied by squatters who have built rooms out of tarpaulin sheets. Most don’t have load bearing structures or a deep foundation. As you move away from the heavily developed main road, you come across arbitrarily placed clusters of chawls -- single tenement rooms that share walls and open on to a narrow lane – built on, divided agricultural plots. The narrow roads that lead to the chawls sometimes end abruptly before the mouth of most blocks -- a kutchra road, often flooded with sewage, leads you into the settlement. Each lane has several Bhojpuri<sup>40</sup> CD shops playing loud music on speakers, sweet marts and restaurants selling North Indian food. In stark contrast to these are small village-like

<sup>40</sup> Bhojpuri is an Indian language spoken in the Bhojpuri region in North India. It is also known popularly as a growing genre of music and films.

settlements beyond the chawls surrounded by large trees -- what were earlier gaothans<sup>41</sup> -- with colourful bungalows and SUVs, which belong to the locals who sold their lands to the slum builders and built mansions. The absence of clear grids and constantly evolving road with area names that often depend on the local builder or goon makes the space unreadable for the outsider. It renders the “knowledge of the space highly localised, than abstractly knowable and manipulatable from above” (Ghertner 2011).

Gandhali, an activist living in Nalasopara, discussed how the city had been founded on violence. In the 1980s, activists Gandhali and Navleen Kumar taught children and worked with tribal women in Vasai Virar. These women often told them stories of how in caves across the hills the land mafia murdered tribals who did not part with their land. They said that women were raped and burnt there. Gandhali narrated an incident that was characteristic of the everyday violence of the place. A lady called at their office -- she was crying and could hardly talk. “When she arrived we were shocked to see her state. She was badly beaten up and bruised- her clothes were torn all the way down to her back, her hair had been pulled, and a part of her scalp was hanging,” says Gandhali. “She had had a fight with a water tanker owner who was also the chawl builder. When she asked why he wasn’t providing enough water he got angry and dragged her by her hair down the chawl steps. Then he beat her brutally.”

Migrant labour within Santosh Bhuvan provides the cheapest possible labour but faces everyday violence in their working lives. By virtue of being poor and lower caste<sup>42</sup> migrants they contribute cheap labour for meeting the needs of the burgeoning real estate market and building industry but at a high cost. A local resident discussed how labour contractors arrange for labour all the way from Bangladesh and their settling in Santosh Bhuvan is facilitated by the informal sovereigns. Because of their ‘illegal’ status such migrants pay ‘protection’ money every month to the police (who are in cahoots with contractors and the informal sovereigns)

---

<sup>41</sup> A gaothan is a portion of land within the village boundary that used for settlement by the local people. A gaothan is the heart of the village where people live and schools or gram panchayats are located.

<sup>42</sup> See writings by dalit scholars on the phenomenon of caste labour that they argue provides the cheapest labour in capitalist, post-colonial societies.

on threat of being picked up and deported. Despite being highly exploited, these migrants stay on because they make more money here than they could in their home town. They are left without alternative, better options.

While technically under the rule of the VVMC, what is striking is the absence of the institutional presence of the state and the omniscience of Gupta, the most powerful ‘big man’ who is also the corporator. Work in Santosh Bhuvan gets done through Gupta and a slew of middlemen who exercise their public authority to provide a whole range of services - land transactions and disputes, water supply, loans identification, job opportunities, college admissions, getting voter cards. It is through these that the state is experienced on the ground in Santosh Bhuvan.

Middlemen essentially thrive on the ability to relocate within different frames of identity and recognition, and make themselves socially visible to the powerful and available to the vulnerable at key moments (Simone 2004). Being located in or with access to powerful institutions -- police, media, political party, VVMC, NGOs -- provides these middlemen with a vantage point. The economy of this place depends heavily on exchange of ‘inside’ information around land and building transactions, making threats, blackmailing etc. Here having the right information and building fluid, provisional relationships with powerful builders and political actors is key to social mobility.

The BVA is the only strong party in the region and enjoys significant support. Gupta by all accounts provides votes for the party and payoffs accruing from the large volume of land and building transactions, and other “illicit” economies. In return, he rules the area as his fiefdom wielding authority over a difficult and dangerous terrain. Babloo Singh, a taxi driver turned builder, describes how “Thakur lets them grow, leaves them alone and every once in a while provides a service. A few years ago he repaired the drains, then some years later he built the roads.”



#### **4.2.1 The Reign of Ramprasad Gupta**

Twenty-four year old Ramesh had been living in Santosh Bhuvan for the last 20 years. He took us for a tour through parts of corporator Ramprasad Gupta's ward, especially through Ramprasad Nagar to show us the developmental work Gupta has done. The settlement is a set of illegal chawls built by Ramprasad Gupta. The "development work" we were shown largely consisted of building of gutters, concrete roads and pavement blocks between chawls.

Large vacant plots with heaps of construction sand and brick in the middle of a densely populated area, it seemed like construction was anticipated in the near future. Most of the chawls were not a series of homes but galas -- single rooms with rolling shutters. It was a common building typology across the area -- people lived in homes where curtains were used to partition a commercial unit-like room. Galas with shutters fetched higher prices than homes since they are commercial units. "People assumed that someday the industries would extend beyond the zone, so they built galas everywhere," he says. Gupta's ward has been 'developed' with gutters and concrete roads even though the entire ward was in the Green Zone. There is considerable hope that it will be turned into Residential Zone in 2021 when the new Development Plan will be formulated. Till then, life here is lived through a constant process of waiting and speculating new modes of official state planning that can be harnessed for individual benefits. Hence, illegalities are not constructed outside the law but after a thorough knowledge of the law and the Development Plan.



**Figure 12:** Above is an image of unoccupied housing slots built on levelled farm land in Santosh Bhuvan by small-time builders. These blocks with rolling shutters are often used as residence by migrants and are a common typology

The story of Santosh Bhuvan, many say also runs parallel with the making of the most powerful big man of the area. It begins with Ramprasad Gupta and his tea stall. Ramesh narrates the powerful story of Gupta's journey from a local rickshaw driver to tea stall owner to 'seth'. He describes Gupta as a generous, populist hero. This resonates with Sahlins' description of the "big man" as a political type: defined by how "he combines with an ostensible interest in the general welfare a more profound measure of self-interested cunning and economic calculation" (Sahlins 1963).

Gupta first came to Santosh Bhuvan in 1986 and settled here because there were a few industries around the Pelhar road and opportunities for employment. He was an ordinary rickshaw driver, but Ramesh says that he was always a visionary – "Aage ki sochte the". He saved enough to buy a small tea stall. That chai ki dukan is now Ramprasad Hotel and is one of the biggest landmarks in Santosh Bhuvan.

According to Ramesh, Gupta started saving money and buying land for cheap from the adivasis. There was no value for the land in those days. In the year 2000, when large scale demolitions took place in Kandivali (East) a number of people heard of how there were industries here and people could find jobs, and there was land to live on. Several people sat on the road with their children, clothes and buckets in front of Ramprasad's tea stall, and 'seth' started distributing vada pao and chai for free. This continued for weeks. Then he started making land available for cheap. In fact, to some people he gave homes without asking for any money.

“He wanted to do this for the people. “Yahan logon ko basaya hai.” (He has settled people here.) Seth has “made” “banaya” at least 300 builders here. They all have come up because of him. You will find a builder on every road in Santosh Bhuvan and he is there because of Ramprasad Gupta.”

Ramprasad personified the local big man – the defacto state in Santosh Bhuvan.

**Gupta:** Whatever problems people have, I resolve them in this office. They don't have to go to the ward office or the police. I am always here for them.

Gupta's office seemed like a place where people walked in needing help with all sorts of grievances – injuries, electricity bill payments, school admissions. He sits on a large, leather chair in his office under a framed photograph of a smiling Hitendra Thakur. He is dressed in all whites. His personality is overbearing.

“Over the last four years we have spent Rs 5000 millions on development,” he says. “But the growth is tremendous and everything we do falls short. Nalasopara (East) has seen

exponential growth over the years as seen on the maps<sup>43</sup> and a large part of this growth can be attributed to Santosh Bhuvan. The large increase in population resulted in Santosh Bhuvan being divided into 6 electoral wards during the 2015 municipal elections. The seats were divided among Gupta's most trusted men. "All the candidates from six wards that Santosh Bhuvan has been divided into will campaign under me and then work under me," says Gupta. "We will also work under him," confirms his right-hand man, Sharma, also a builder. "We have learnt everything from him."

In many ways, Gupta personifies what Santosh Bhuvan stands for. While Santosh Bhuvan, like Gupta is perceived as 'illegal' and violent, where the reign of power is unstable and highly dependent on the larger politics of Vasai Virar, it is by no means a timid place on the margins. Santosh Bhuvan epitomizes the booming real estate economy of the city, and an entrepreneurial, macho/masculine culture that rewards/valorizes the perpetration of violence while providing protection to navigate the difficult and opaque (to outsiders) nature of its terrain. It serves as a rebellious counter-narrative to planned modes of city building by planning experts and through globalized financial capital. It challenges common definitions of marginalised 'migrant' poor groups as lacking in agency. MLA Kshitij Thakur (Televised election debate on June 9, 2015<sup>44</sup>) mentions that over 150 illegal buildings were demolished in a span of three years. However, new ones rise with even greater frequency.

#### **4.2.2 Young Men's Aspirations and Organisations**

Builders are very important people in Santosh Bhuvan and come in all shapes and sizes. Some are small-time builders who only construct chawls, while others build illegal four-eight storey buildings in Santosh Bhuvan. It is a space where "little is expected from the municipal government and much social and economic life is founded on the spontaneous outcomes of local negotiations" (Gandy 2006). In the case of Santosh Bhuvan these negotiations are held mostly with builders. For instance, over the last few years 10-15 English and Hindi medium

---

<sup>43</sup> According to the Development Plan (2007), Nalasopara Municipal area has shown growth rate as high as 236.02% and 176.64% per decade in 1981-91 and 1991-2001 respectively. However, locals claim that the population has risen by twice as much since 2001

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zH17aQyunFk>

schools have opened in the area. Most of them are unrecognized by the government, built by builders. “They give people homes, then they see that their children need schools. So they build schools. The builders also build hospitals and clinics,” confirms Pradeep, a young aide of Gupta.

Given the low scope for employment in the area, the most important route for social mobility for young men in the area is to locate themselves within these networks of politicians and builders. Though men can find jobs in the factories adjacent to Santosh Bhuvan, these jobs are unskilled and considered hard, with fewer opportunities of social mobility, and are left for the poorest of the poor. Becoming a ‘builder’, and entering politics as a BVA politician, is the singular aspiration.

What these young men do for the big men remains highly flexible and situational. They don’t earn regular salaries but the big man is known to reward them every time they do a good job by giving them a contract for building a road or a gutter which acts as source of income. Sometimes they’re rewarded by smaller positions of power such as becoming the president of the local “mitra mandal”, a youth community club, or the secretary of the party-sponsored gymnasium. They contribute to circulating knowledge, keeping the area under close surveillance and also acting as middlemen for the community. They are usually related to one of the party bigwigs or own or have some control over parcels of land or display a skill to manage people and garner support when required. They are young, popular, tech savvy and hyper masculine distinguished by their large mobile phones, gold chains and metal bracelets.

Sometimes young men are enterprising enough to create their own opportunities to “shine” and gain visibility – such as organizing a cricket match or a blood donation camp by asking the corporator for sponsorship. These avenues which are described as “social work” provide men with platforms to display leadership and organization skills. Most importantly, they also provide them with an opportunity to showcase their reach. How many people can they organize for an event in a short period of time? How many people do they have on their

Whatsapp network? These skills come in handy during elections campaigns. “I can get 50 men to stand behind you in two hours,” was a boast by one man. However, this race is also intensely competitive.

Pradeep has managed to rise through such a process. “I hadn’t even heard of BVA as a child, I only knew whistle, which is the logo of the party. I used to run for it every time the karyakartas distributed it. Now I know who the BVA is, who heads it, where to go to get work done, who to speak to in the VVMC,” he says. He says that his father and Gupta have been friends so he turns up every time Gupta needs him. For example, during the election time he needs people he can trust.

**Pradeep:** The youth will go wherever they will get some money or some benefit. There is no sense of loyalty. Today if somebody realises that you can gain by attaching yourself to this politician, the person will then just walk into his office and stick with him. Now there are several opponents of Ramprasad Gupta within Santosh Bhuvan. You never know when these boys will switch sides.

This reinforces the importance of building a party network that serves as a ‘transactional machine’ to effectively distribute benefits (Kothari 1984) but also one that is founded on trust. Once they are attached to Gupta, says Pradeep, they benefit in other ways – in case they need some work done, in case they need some sort of support then they can easily approach Gupta. “The idea is to build a trustworthy circle,” he says. “Gupta asks me to join, then I ask my friend or my brother to join. This circle grows.” People join these circles for protection, for getting work done, for camaraderie and for being part of a network that can be called on.

The narrative of Santosh Bhuvan reveals one of patchy service delivery but increasing ‘development’ through paver blocks, gutters and roads. While it is hazardous and unsafe to live in physically, it possesses enormous security from eviction along with the real potential to

make it big via the real estate economy and a host of other economies deemed “illicit” by the ‘main city’. Thus while outsiders consider it full of crime, the “hell” of Vasai-Virar, for insiders that are ‘unwanted’ elsewhere it represents a safe haven with possibilities for upward social mobility. The rise of Gupta and his leadership has been instrumental in building this place – his power results in the regime leaving this area alone. While one can argue that this represents a victory of sorts – of a landscape of possibilities- the question remains: at what costs and who faces these costs? It is a harsh territory to make a life, one where “illegal” labour is exploited on a daily basis, often denying them the building blocks of political citizenship- voter ID cards.

### **4.3 Sai Welfare Society**

#### **4.3.1 Public Servants and Social Workers: Social Capital and Shifting Urban Alliances in the Vulnerable Margins**

On the Development Plan of Vasai Virar (2007), a large part of Sativali is demarcated in purple as the Industrial Zone, surrounded by Green Zone on either side. A small portion along the national highway and a plot of land around a lake is marked as the Residential Zone in yellow. However, a local informant says that a far more efficient way of identifying the land use pattern on the ground is to simply look at the type of construction. Most of the Green Zone in Sativali is now covered with rows of slum-like informal settlements called ‘chawls’ and industrial units called ‘galas’. The Industrial Zone has a number of small and large gated industrial complexes, guarded by security personnel in uniform. A part of the residential zone which was once the Sativali village has several two to three-storey bungalows. The plot adjacent to the lake has been taken over by ‘Reliable Builders’ to construct a residential complex.

Sai Welfare Society lies on the edge of the Green Zone between a nullah, a dumping ground and a crematorium. It is an informal industrial complex inhabited by scrap dealers who were evicted from the main city in 2003, for running “hazardous” businesses. By 2009, Nezar Bhai,

Sai Welfare Society's secretary says, almost an entire stretch in the eastern suburbs was wiped out to make way for a swanky new metro line.

Today, the settlement looks like it is standing on waste – used plastic bottles are heaped in corners, the lanes are levelled with debris of earlier demolitions, and industrial and plastic refuse spills out of every unit. The only accessible concrete road ends at the boundaries of the crematorium from where the residents walk through mounds of rubble, broken glass, discarded plastic and industrial waste to get to a narrow entrance. The entrance – as wide as an auto-rickshaw – opens on to a large compound with 88 industrial galas. While the settlement shows no signs of residential living; about forty families also live amidst heaps of scrap -- usually the recycling takes place in the front half of the gala and the family lives in the other. All families except three are Muslims and come originally from Siddarth Nagar, a village in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

One of the biggest problem Sai Welfare Society faces, says resident Balram Swarup, is sanitation – there is only one toilet near the crematorium that overflows with shit, hence, on most days they end up defecating in the nullah. There are no gutters or water pipelines in the settlement either. Earlier, the residents travelled to a borewell a kilometre away and paid Rs 5/ can for water. Three years ago, Salman Bhai, 52, a resident, spent Rs 2.5 lakhs to dig a borewell within the compound and now charges Rs 2/ can. Salman Bhai's son runs this "business". The money, he says, pays the electricity bill and his son keeps a little extra for regulating the process every morning. "You can call me a public servant," he laughs. "I provide water when the government doesn't." Due to no attention from the state or any political party, Sai Welfare Society has learnt to fend for itself in similar ways. "We are migrants here, who will look after us? That is why unity among the migrants is important," says Salman Bhai. The residents say they'd rather depend on networks that are routed through Siddarth Nagar in Uttar Pradesh than the Urban Local Body. "Politicians don't pay us any attention because we are Muslims," says Wahid Bhai, Salman Bhai's nephew "Every day we



read stories of how a Muslim brother is denied a job or a Muslim woman is denied a home in the city.”

The settlement is most popularly known for Salman Bhai’s two-table hotel that sells strong cups of piping-hot tea, plastic pouches of water, biscuits and soap. It is here that Nezar Bhai, the secretary of the society, and he gather with other men to relax, discuss business and politics, resolve disputes, and take crucial decisions for the settlement. Apart from his aging mother-in-law who turns out cups of tea at remarkable speed, women are rarely seen at the stall.

#### **4.3.2 Social Capital and Opportunist Urban Relations**

After the demolitions, while a large number of people moved to Santosh Bhuvan in Nalasopara (East), Salman Bhai returned to Siddarth Nagar, his home town in Uttar Pradesh, in search of support. The social networks of the village were strong enough to put him in touch with others from Siddarth Nagar who had faced evictions. Soon Salman Bhai reached out to a certain ‘chedda bhai’ Hafiz, who had moved to Sativali in 1995. Chedda bhai (meaning brother) is a fictive kinship term of great value amongst migrants in informal settlements in Vasai Virar. The term can be loosely translated as ‘brothers from the same village’, however in Vasai Virar this often extends to anybody from the North Indian states who enables a network that the men can depend on. Men from Sai Welfare Society often tap into this network to gain access to land, employment, resources or bits of crucial information denied to them in a city that they are marginalised in by their occupation, religion and caste-class. During fieldwork we were told that many villages in North India have migrant men engaged in a dominant profession. “Scrap or waste recyclers across Mumbai largely come from Siddarth Nagar, just like several rickshaw drivers come from Jaunpur,” says Wahid Bhai. Labour is derived from these networks that further deepen it.

Salman Bhai was 13 when his brother-in-law first brought him from Siddarth Nagar to work in the scrap business for a meagre salary of Rs 90 per month. He has spent most of his growing years picking up waste from the roads of Mumbai and selling it to the recyclers. “Garbage of the city feeds me, so now I have grown fond of this garbage,” he says. Ever since

he has moved to Mumbai, Salman Bhai makes it a point to quit work after the Friday prayers and set out in search of others from Siddarth Nagar in the city. “Even if I meet one person from Siddarth Nagar, I feel like I met the whole village,” he says. While this gives Salman Bhai great pleasure, it also helps him build his network. In 1988, he built himself a small room in Kandivali (East) with his savings. Building of a house on public land is a persistent, continuous process, he says. You build a house in the morning; the authorities demolish it by evening. “You gather your belongings from the rubble, and rebuild it. This can happen for several days until you build something strong enough or the other side gives up. Then you slowly start concretising the house,” he says. By 1990 he had a ration card and voter’s ID. After two decades of cultivating relationships and making a room out of rubble, Salman Bhai lost his home in the 2003 demolition. A long process of struggle and consolidation was destroyed over night. When everything was lost, Salman Bhai returned to his village.

Hafiz helped Salman Bhai, and eight other families, find a piece of land that originally belonged to a tribal under the 99-year-old lease, to settle on. The particular nature of this land tenure meant that it could not be sold or purchased for development; it thus enabled occupation by Salman Bhai. The scrap dealing business depends on the industrial waste that factories produce; hence, a plot near an Industrial Zone meant that Salman Bhai could restart his business. While the constrained nature of the land tenure (on a tribal 99-year lease) made place making possible for this group, it also meant that there was little interest (from the state or informal sovereigns) in investing in infrastructure or services. This made living on a plot with no electricity, toilets or accessible water connection a grave challenge.

The social network routed through Siddarth Nagar that Salman Bhai tapped into, is not naturally accessible but is a product of endless effort and investment strategies that reinforce relationships through a series of favours and exchanges (Bourdieu 1986). Today, Salman Bhai lives in Sai Welfare Society with his 30-member family who are employed in his scrap business. He fiercely protects his family that is also labour for his business. He has six sons and two daughters. Every man in Sai Welfare Sociey has at least six children, he tells us, as

men seated around the hotel nodded in agreement. Salman Bhai's sons joined the business when they were still in school but the daughters strictly stayed at home. The daughters are usually given in marriage within the network in order to strengthen it. This not only reproduces social capital but an economy of favours and obligations built through religio-cultural norms (Hariss-White 2003). The network further perpetuates patriarchy that excludes women from key decision-making processes. "We will die hungry if we have to but we won't let our women work," Salman Bhai says "A woman is the veil of our homes, she is the honour of our family. She cannot step out to work."

During every harvest and summer holidays entire families return to work on ancestral lands, though it does not yield much profit. The camaraderie that is built through manual labour and toiling on farms is harnessed in the city that excludes them. "If you were to go Siddarth Nagar during this period you will only spot cars with the MH04 number plate," says Nezar Bhai<sup>45</sup>.

#### **4.3.3 The Absent State: Middlemen and the Process of Building Citizenship**

Today, the land on which they live is officially owned by an adivasi but residents pay a monthly rent to Hafiz who overlooks all land transactions in the area and functions as the unofficial landlord. The residents say that Hafiz over the years has made enough money and now lives in a large, bungalow far away from Sativali. Middlemen such as Hafiz play an important role in land deals, especially those involving tribal land.

While the residents have little choice but to occupy Green Zone, tribal land illegally, they also make efforts to consolidate their claim to that place and to the city, activating various strategies of claim making through payment of property tax and electricity bills, attempts to register a society etc. Making each of these claims requires negotiations with a slew of middlemen who are not of the state but reference it and use its resources in the exercise of public authority (Lund 2006). In 2008, Nezar along with other members of the settlement

---

<sup>45</sup> MH04 is the code for a Mumbai-based car license plate

hired a fixer for Rs 80,000 to register the area as a “co-operative welfare society”. Registering a society does not assure legitimacy in the eyes of the state, he said, but it is the first step towards collective mobilisation for those living in informal settlements. To strengthen this claim, Nezar Bhai pushed for *ghar patti* (property tax) through a fixer.

Middlemen are particularly prevalent in Sai Society due to the complete absence of the state. Sai Society residents hope that once they have voter ID cards they will attract the attention of the state and the provision of services. “Without voting cards no politician visits us, nobody asks us what we need, we are invisible,” says Irfan, a scrap dealer, “Once you have voting cards you can demand development.” Hence, getting a society registered is not enough; paying property tax for ‘illegal’ constructions gives them no rights; in order to open negotiations with the ULB, residents need to have a sizeable number of voters.

The journey from non-citizen to citizen is an uphill one. This move has been particularly difficult for those living in Sai Welfare Society. Despite constant efforts for the past decade the residents haven't managed to obtain voter ID cards. During the recent assembly elections around 50 people from the society filled forms in the local ward office, they also paid Rs 20 per person as bribe to the office clerk, however when the voter's list came out, none of their names were mentioned.

Irfan describes how they have been neglected,

“The nagarsevak is supposed to issue both – voting card and aadhar card, but we have neither. We went to the Sarpanch before this place was a municipal corporation, then after 2009 we went to the corporator who is also a Musalman brother but there has been no response yet. We have gone to the collector as well.”

Nezar Bhai says the only time this area received any attention from the state was when there was fire in 2010. One of the industries caught fire and that spread to the galas. “The fire swallowed everything – money, machinery, the little jewellery women owned.” In spite of this the residents had to pay a bill of Rs 5000 to the fire brigade and another Rs 5,000 in tips to the firemen. The local corporator Mohammed Khatik, Ex-Mayor and current Mayor, all from the BVA, came to visit the people. They made promises but nothing reached them. Dejected, they went to Hitendra Thakur for help. Every Saturday, Appa sets up a “sabha” in the Waliv BVA office. For hours, people queue up outside the office with their grievances. Appa meets each one of them and personally hears them out. For people in this “illegal” city, this is one of the few means of grievance redress or indeed of access to the state. It was Appa who instructed the local corporator, Mohammed Khatik to personally sit within Sai Welfare Society for a week till things were resolved or improved. Thus, it was only due to the ruling patriarch’s benevolence that Sai Society enjoyed the presence of the VVMC corporator for an entire week.

Clearly while middlemen and their social networks are durable and have enabled engagement with the state and partial access to services, they have been deeply violent and exploitative. They have created a certain opportunity structure for social mobility where the journey from victim to agent (Tarlo 2003) depends on the efficacy of actors to move between often contesting networks. It depends on the individual actors’ constant preparedness to shift gears, to travel between camps, to seize every opportunity to swing from being the oppressed to the oppressor (Simone 2004).

Apart from the opportunities for individuals to move from oppressed to oppressor, generating a climate of uncertainty benefits middlemen and is good for reinforcing relations of dependence and exploitation. Residents are therefore frequently sent demolition notices that pushes them to start a fresh process of negotiations -- visiting ward offices, setting up meetings with fixers and local political party offices, bribes, favours, lobbying. Hence, all the structures in the settlement are temporary and built from asbestos sheets that are easy to

reassemble after a demolition. Hafiz turns up every once in a while to collect rent – he increases it as he pleases, leaving the residents at his mercy. This puts them in a permanent position of precarity.

The instability of their lives in Vasai-Virar is balanced with investments in other stable destinations. Nezar claims that every person invests in land back home even if it produces little. He has built a 11,000 sqft house in Siddarth Nagar but only two people live there. “We are all landlords in Siddarth Nagar but Siddarth Nagar is now filled with only the elderly,” he laughs.

#### **4.3.4 Migrants as City Builders and Public Servants**

In 2015, Sai Society was informed that the nullah would be extended and about 20 galas that were on its banks were to be demolished. Hafiz and Mohammed Khatik were supporting the demolition. Salman Bhai and Nezar Bhai along with a few others planned to meet Appa again in Waliv. Despite several efforts and meeting with middlemen, a few months later contractors turned up to demolish the 20 galas.

“I begged the person who was demolishing to let my neighbour Mulchand’s gala go. ... What we do here is honest work, we should be left alone. This waste we collect is honest. Who will take care of all your waste if we don’t?” asks Salman Bhai, visibly furious and anxious. “We collect plastic because it brings us a little money but if we don’t do it, Bombay will be nothing but mountains of garbage. We are recycling the city. We are public servants.”

Though Salman bhai says that the construction of the nullah was important -- Sativali floods frequently during the rains – it conveniently expanded from 60 feet in other places to 100 feet when it reached Sai Welfare Society. He alleged that Khatik and Hafiz were working together

to clear Sativali for bigger builders. “Despite Khatik being our Musalman brother, he is of no help. He wants this land and he knows we are not strong enough to protect it,” he says.

Mulchand, whose gala was one of those to be demolished, says

“Who develops a city? The poor do,” Mulchand says. “We clear large swathes of land with great effort, build homes and make it available for the bigger crocodile (builder) to demolish and reconstruct. Whether the poor find room in the city after the crocodile takes over is another matter. Then we come to places like these and clear more land and prepare ourselves for another demolition, wait for the crocodile.”

**Salman Bhai:** This is the reason I want my children to go to school and learn so nobody has the power to demolish their homes, so they can live in a flat. Though it is not convenient for a large family such as ours to live in the small flat the government provides, there is dignity and respect in living in a flat. I am used to living in garbage but I don’t want my children to.

However, ironically, Salman Bhai’s 15-year-old son wants to be a builder. “In the construction line you build good contacts. These contacts help move up in your life. The construction line can give you access to big people who have power and money,” he says.

The narrative of Sai Welfare Society reveals the huge inadequacy in services faced by this community at the margins of the Green Zone and the industrial area. It also reveals the calculated absence of the state in its formal guise and its presence in an informal avatar - where the MLA dispenses justice in a parallel forum to that of the state, the “sabha”. The community both relies on a series of middlemen and are disciplined by them; disciplinary practices include the denial of voter cards, the right to form an association, and basic services. The inability of residents to consolidate their claims to this land over time is largely because

of the nature of the land tenure (99 year lease) but also due to their identity as Muslims and the fact that they engage in the marginal, 'dirty' occupation of waste recycling.

Vasai- Virar as a city is characterized by many such fragmented territories constituted by multiple, overlapping sovereignties that are unstable and competing, needing constant reinforcement and performance. While local sovereigns focus more on performing power through a series of disciplinary practices, at the top the regime in power reinforces its power through disciplinary techniques as well as developmental visions. Disciplinary techniques range from constant surveillance to prevention of livelihood to violence against one's crops or family. While disciplinary techniques are effectively deployed to reinforce power, it is the enacting of developmental visions that takes centre stage. These futurist visions have a strong specificity with respect to place whereby different visions can be mapped onto different geographies thereby drawing from different cultural identities and aspirations of groups inhabiting these places. Such cultural specificity and customization has manufactured enormous consent for the regime and enabled its sovereign logic to grow stronger vis-à-vis other social forces.



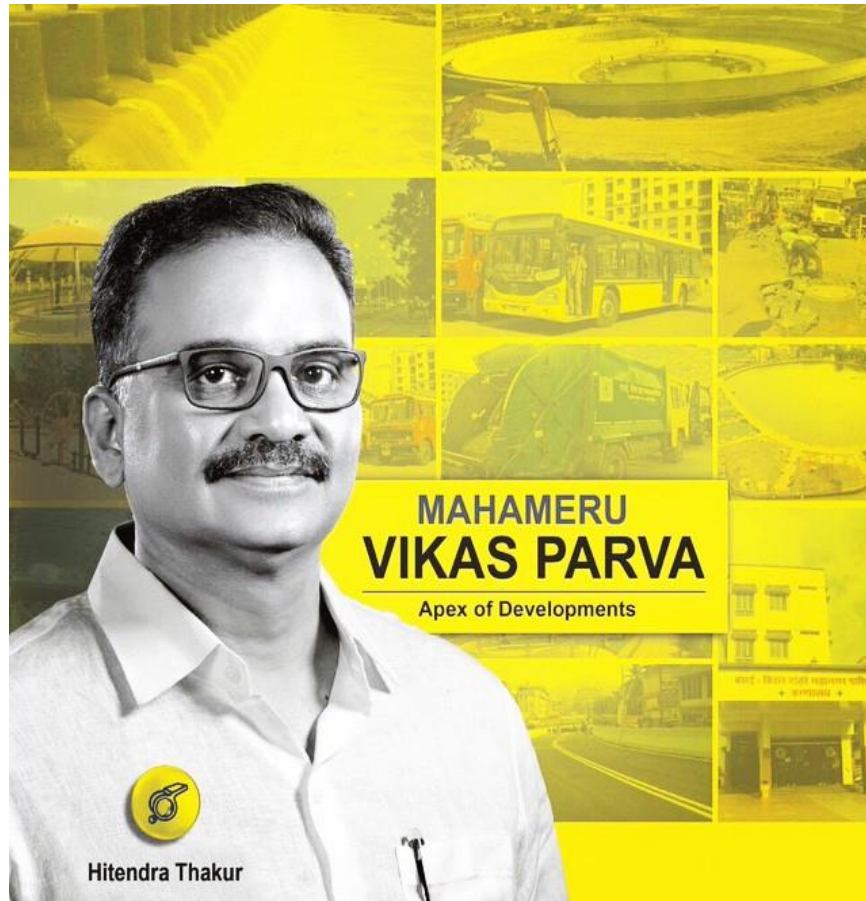
## **5 From Agriculture to Real Estate: Imagining Vasai Virar as a ‘World Class’, Cosmopolitan Destination**

For years, Vasai-Virar has been seen as the backward countryside with the real city being Mumbai to which people had to go for jobs, education and entertainment. But now, the regime had changed all this by bringing ‘world class’ amenities and infrastructure to Vasai-Virar. The event of elections as well as actual rule by the VVMC have resulted in a steady diet of futurist, cultural visions. Illustrating how these tap into and fuel peoples’ cultural pride and aspirations for benefitting from a larger vision for the region a youth party member leafs through the BVA election manifesto booklet (2015) saying,

“Vasai-Virar is developing and we want to be a part of this development. We have an Olympic level swimming pool and skating ring. We have a big Surya Dam project, the ring road will connect every place in Vasai Virar – you will reach anywhere in less than 20 minutes. Kshitij Thakur participated in a community wedding. But the most important thing is the Vasai Virar Smart City (MLA Kshitij Thakur Vision for development of Vasai Taluka, Promotional material, October 10, 2014<sup>46</sup>). It is coming up in Vasai East on salt pan land. About 500 acres of salt pan land will be converted a technologically advanced, high- end smart city. There will be corporate offices like BKC, an entertainment complex and a residential complex all in one place so people don’t have travel. Ameya Builders [owned by the ex-Mayor Rajeev Patil] is constructing this. (Interview BVA youth member May 26, 2015)

---

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn3EoJMonSk>



**Figure 13: Cover page of BVA's election booklet shows Hitendra Thakur with the 'development' projects undertaken in Vasai Virar in the backdrop. Source: BVA Facebook page**

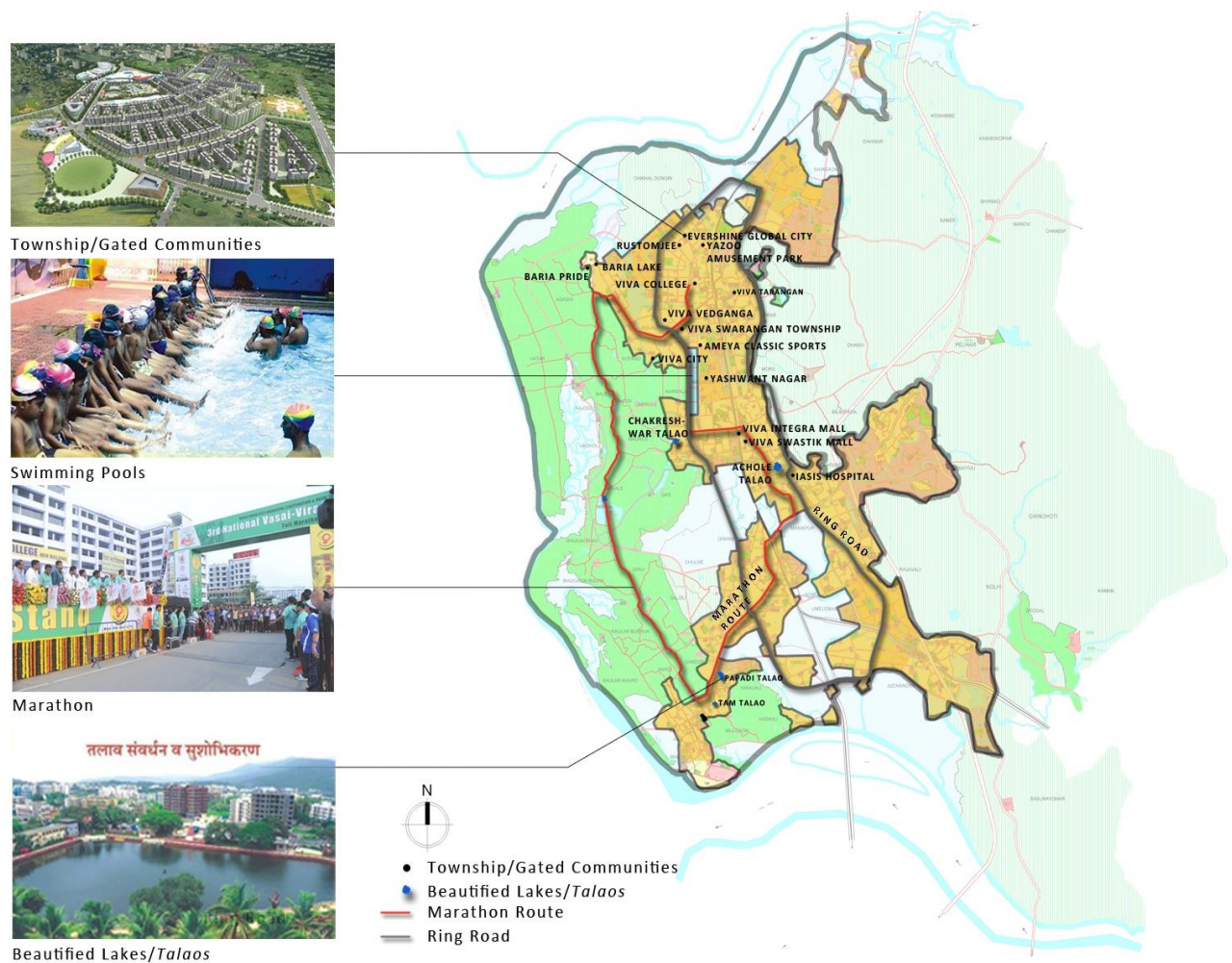
Increasingly Vasai-Virar is being marketed as a luxury, second- home for city-dwellers<sup>47</sup> and an aspiring global city with “world-class” facilities (See Map 8), very different from the Regional Plans that first conceptualized it as a buffer ‘green zone’. As part of this agenda, the VVMC has introduced projects such as lake beautification, the construction of Olympic- size swimming pools, skating rinks, jogging parks, libraries, gardens and shopping malls. It sells a certain “lifestyle” that inspires the image of luxury as well as community well- being, achieving a balance of urban infrastructure while being nestled in the greenery of the countryside. The talk on infrastructure development is two-pronged - one that guarantees electoral success and extends an invitation to real estate investments. This seems to indicate a shift from a focus on land to one of infrastructure. An interview with an official at MMRDA

<sup>47</sup> Times Property Feature, Times of India, 12 June, 2015.

(Interview Sept 9, 2014) revealed that contractors push projects at the state level for funding and that these contractors are also corporators belonging to the regime. “If you open any project document their names are explicitly there or his company’s (VIVA) name will be there. The nexus is very clear and there is nothing hidden about it” (ibid).

A key accompaniment to the infrastructure and real estate projects are the festivals and cultural programmes that build a consensus around regional pride and cultural unity (the idea of ‘vasai asmita’). While they aim to build an overall regional consensus, different sorts of cultural programmes are organized in specific geographies to appeal to different groups. Given the fragmented geography of the region and its history of conflict, this construction is important to maintain and consolidate the sovereignty of the regime. The Kala Kreed Mahotsav (cultural and sports festival) has been celebrated for 26 years and has gained great popularity as a festival for all ‘Vasaikars’. Special events are curated for different age groups. There are sports for students and senior citizens while the women participate in make faraal (snacks for diwali) which are showcased in a special programme displaying local heritage through the snacks made. Participants expressed their pride in the worthiness of the cause. A 13-year old student said that they had been practicing for three days through their vacations for the march past but she doesn’t regret missing her holidays because she is “proud of Vasai” (Interview December 26, 2014). Her mother, a housewife, said that this festival brings all ‘Vasaikars’ together (ibid). At the inaugural speech (December 26, 2014), the Secretary of the Kala Kreed Mandal ended with a promise that someday they would take Vasaikars to the Olympics, that nothing was impossible. Another important festival - Mahi Vasai - reflects the ‘real’ culture of local or ‘sthanik’ communities in the region showcased through folk songs and plays (Interview December 26, 2014). The festival includes a huge set that replicates the greenery and heritage of Vasai along with large statues of Indian leaders. This display of regional pride and festive presentation of ‘culture’ and nationalism has proven potent among a section of the old residents whom it is clearly targeted towards going by the specific locations of the events and the ‘culture’ they showcase.

Other events such as the Mayor's Marathon have a broader constituency among the middle classes. Started in 2011 the route of the Mayor's Marathon covers both the coastal and the urbanizable zones starting and ending at VIVA College, the college established by Hitendra Thakur and a landmark building in Virar. Each tree along the route is marked with yellow and green (the VVMC's colour) signifying the complete penetration by the regime and the municipal corporation into formerly hostile territory via the 'world-class' marathon.



**Figure 14: The VVMC has spearheaded several projects that encourage the residents to reimagine the sub-region as a new emerging city. Initiatives include new ring road constructions, a Vasai Virar Mayor's Marathon, Olympic-style swimming pool and beautification of lakes with jogging tracks**

Not all of the regime's visions (see Map 8) are backed by investment allocations linked to projects. What seems to be equally important is the stream of media announcements, the (online and offline) circulation of rumours about projects-to-come, and the regime's prowess with respect to claiming credit for their landing. A respected journalist narrated how when work started on the Bhayander-Vasai bridge, there were multiple parties that were trying to claim credit for it. "Shiv Sena-BJP that are strong in Mira-Bhayander sent me photographs on Watsapp claiming credit. A few hours later BVA sent me pictures, claiming they had done it." (Interview with journalist, June 20, 2015). The predilection for using social media among the large youth population of this city magnifies many times over the force field of promised visions and the charisma of the regime's claims.

While cultural and sporting events like Mahi Vasai, Mayor's Marathon, Kala-Kreed Mahotsav, and other attractions such as drag- racing are employed to build a consensus around the constructed idea of Vasai- Virar, they are just as clearly targeted to particular communities, customers and markets. Thus, for instance Vasai is typically represented as the "gaon" or village that is picturesque, quiet, and has high-quality amenities; Virar is the "city" with high-rise settlements, large-scale infrastructure and real estate investments and up-and-coming integrated townships/smart cities; Nalasopara on the other hand is the fringe city that welcomes a range of lower caste and class working people and has low-income housing and developing infrastructure (Televised election debate on June 9, 2015). The delineation of markets and customers hark back to earlier geographies albeit whose inhabitants might now have new aspirations for development. But apart from social media/media representations, the discourse that surrounds development in the region is extremely important to cognize.

The regime has played the secular card in its (online and offline) promotional material. Every speech includes mention of how people from all communities are welcome, thereby underscoring the secular and 'inclusive' nature of the regime (Interview with senior party member, July 10, 2015; interview with Nandakhal resident June 16, 2015). This has garnered

tremendous support from the large majority of city-dwellers who are new entrants, and considered ‘migrants’. A middle-class dweller discussed how the BVA “provides an alternative to the native Shiv Sena – Vasai Virar is truly cosmopolitan in that sense” and that it was a real relief to be in Vasai-Virar because one didn’t have to constantly face the ‘Marathi Manos’ discourse that privileged ‘locals’ and vilified ‘migrants’ (Interview September 24, 2014). The importance given to an individual’s ‘dignity’ in the discourse cannot be underestimated, especially since it is wedded to the aspirations for development.

The second civic elections were very telling of the party’s reach and how the resistance from the West had been successfully stifled. June 2015 saw the second VVMC civic elections where the number of demarcated wards went up from 89 in 2010 to 115 in 2015 because of the rise in population<sup>48</sup>. A total of 371 candidates contested for the 115 seats. Even before people voted four of the seats had already been secured by the ruling BVA as strong party candidates, such as Hitendra Thakur’s wife, won unopposed. The BVA won with a thumping majority of 105 seats, while, Shiv Sena won a mere five seats, Congress won one and the remaining seats were won by three independents candidates (Asian Age, June 17, 2015).

It is on the basis of this victory that MLAs Hitendra Thakur, Vilas Tare and Kshitij Thakur approached the state government arguing that the majority was an indication that villagers were now in favour of being under the municipality. In January 2016, the Maharashtra State Government issued an affidavit to the Bombay High Court stating that it had no objection to the villages being merged with the municipality<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup> Newspapers reported that following the ward demarcation, over 50 per cent of the sitting corporators lost their areas to new wards or reservations. The BVA seats were in great demand in most areas -- party members mentioned that there were at least four applicants vying for every seat. In order to resolve this, the party issued forms and printed advertisements asking for applications. Extensive interviews were conducted by the ex-mayor to find suitable candidates for each ward.

<sup>49</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Maharashtra-gives-nod-to-include-29-villages-in-Vasai-Virar-municipality/articleshow/50536612.cms>



## **6 Concluding Discussion: The State-market Axis, Violence and Spatial (In)justice**

At the city level, the state has functioned as a complex assemblage comprising political party, state system through the institution of the VVMC, and business conglomerate with a non-profit division (Viva Foundation). These are deeply inter-twined in their functioning and management but are constituted via separate body corporates/institutional forms and laws. This regime has always incorporated the state and market as separate but enmeshed constituents of itself, although the nature of both has changed over time. The biggest change is in the calibrated move towards formalization to take advantage of neoliberal capital. Earlier, the state was recognized as informal sovereign that didn't possess the legitimacy of democratically sanctioned rule but rather ruled through a combination of fear, coercion, violence and efficacy. On encountering organized resistance, there was a shift towards incorporating greater legitimacy through elections (standing for MLA elections), forming a political party and forming a local government. The VVMC as the formal state could legitimately deploy the rule of law and (often violent) landuse and development control regulations, as well as pursue policies of investment in infrastructure and culture to deliberately produce inequality. The market trajectory of the regime has also witnessed a move from purely 'mafias' and informal providers of services to also include formal businesses, real estate companies and education and cultural enterprises. This trajectory of formalization has greatly expanded the scale and scope of the regime both in the domain of politics and business. However, while the move to include more official businesses has been made, the regime and its networks still run parallel "illegal" businesses that are often more financially lucrative than the new ones. Hence, it should be noted that the shift to formalization has not rendered obsolete informal practices and middlemen but rather that legal and extra-legal strategies are simultaneously and strategically deployed in different territories according to market calculations and to quell dissent.



The particular nature of the regime of rule in VVMC has been shaped by its location in the periphery of the MMR. It was deliberately opened up for real estate development but outside of normal laws – with no public provision for infrastructure or serviced land, the suspension of normal legal guarantees and regulation over land and building construction, and the denial of basic rights for many poor groups. The exceptional power wielded by the regime of rule could be sustained in such a vast and differentiated ‘frontier’ (Simone ---) we argue only through a power-sharing arrangement with multiple centres of power. While the configurations of power among multiple sovereigns in the Vasai-Virar landscape are unevenly distributed there is a clear hierarchy and centre – that reposed in the patriarch or ruling ‘father’. In this networked regime, power tends to diffuse downward in patrimonial arrangements as the ruler distributes bits of resource-bearing political privilege (Adams 2005). The network of informal sovereigns is thus accommodated through coveted shares in local infrastructure projects, positions in institutions and investment of public resources in infrastructure and cultural programmes in their territories. The BVA party structure cements this network together.

Overall, the rule of individual ‘big men’ subsumes the state and the rule of law. These local sovereigns are the immediate face of the state, the market and the community for residents, straddling the private and public divides with ease. Thus, at the territory level, differentiated rule has been a prime feature of the state’s functioning - both as system and as idea (Fuller and Benei 2001), one that has shaped everyday lives and future aspirations for various collectivities. The three territory-level narratives highlight different configurations of rule in areas that have been deemed “illegal” but settled through the complicity of the state. They range from complete to partial abdication of the state as functioning system.

Different territories reveal not just the spatial and social inequalities particular to each place but also the agency, (collective) political practices and the violences that are inherent to it. For locals or ‘sthaniks’ inhabiting Vasai West and villages pockets in the urbanizable zone the state consisted of ‘traditional’ power holders based on control of land and ritual distinction

(Interview with Dabre, May 14, 2014). Thus rich, land owning upper caste (Hindu and Catholic) communities ruled their villages through social and religious-based institutions. In essence, the Thakur's regime was a threat to these rich, land owning communities (Interview April 26, 2014) as it sought to take control of their land and its development, often using considerable violence. Resistance was tremendous as earlier sections chronicle. What motivated collective action and peoples' agency was a collective identity based on land and culture – a larger identification of themselves as bhumiputra (sons of the soil) and an identity tied to their village. Weiner (1978) argues that an influx of migrants that are perceived as culturally different and usurping resources and jobs is often the trigger for nativism, a form of assertion based on the sons of the soil ideology. The antagonism between the Maharashtrian landlords and the North Indian 'migrants' is a case in point.

Urbanization that was initially imposed by the state and unwanted by the landlords, over time became a means for upward social mobility particularly for the next generation that were not interested in farming their land. While becoming builders of chawls (with aspirations to become developers of towers) for 'migrants', this population simultaneously resented being overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of 'migrants'. Keeping tight control over land ownership, by virtue of belonging to the same caste, was their main strategy to ensure their hold over their locality. This control over the local construction industry and land market has enabled accommodation with the VVMC elected representative in their ward (a BVA corporator) such that he (as the face of the state) denies the migrant tenants voter ID cards. This denial of voter ID cards ensures that migrants cannot negotiate independently with the state for services as political citizens nor does their influence get counted in number of votes. Sustaining this accommodation requires maintaining a delicate balance and the continuous negotiation and exchange of favours. Thus, the landlords' agency becomes a stranglehold for the 'migrants' – the oppressed (as the landlords see themselves) becoming the oppressor (Freire 1968). Simultaneously, the state's cultural programs and re-imagining of (the idea of) the region has enabled locals to feel pride and take consolation in the fact that their culture is the 'real' culture of the region, a regional pride with nativist (bhumiputra) leanings.

For middle class and laboring ‘migrants’ inhabiting the urbanizable zone and the outgrowths of informal settlements, the institution of the state is overwhelmed by individual personalities and leaders. The most important of these is the ruling patriarch whose regional leadership and secular, ‘bahujan’ discourse has enabled greater ‘dignity’ as well as ‘development’ for them. His secular credentials are of importance here as this holds out the promise of upward mobility to all groups, regardless of caste, class, religion or tribe. This sets into motion a constant striving to take risks and be entrepreneurial, particularly around land where huge profits can be made. This approach promises a safe harbor for all (including ‘illegal’ groups and activities) but is a highly exploitative and uneven one where all services have to be negotiated through different middlemen who perform a paradox of often being sources of violence and the only shields against it (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009). These middlemen function at the intersection of public and private (Ranganathan 2014), often mobilizing public authority and state resources to provide services that benefit their private interest.

For those who have shown entrepreneurialism along with the political smarts and ruthlessness to use it, it has meant upward mobility - as builders, politicians and social workers who have achieved wealth and social status. The case of Santosh Bhuvan illustrates this well. By building up a vibrant (illegal) economy around real estate in their localities and inhabiting positions within the BVA and VVMC, they are powerful local sovereigns influencing the development and growth of their areas. They have successfully used their privileged access to public resources and knowledge of land use policies to secure investments and service contracts from the VVMC for the locality. They sometimes funnel profits from their building construction enterprises into ‘social work’ activities that gain visibility for them, such as providing ambulances or getting free health checkups. These local sovereigns are thus the immediate face of the state, the market and the community for residents, straddling the private and public divides with ease.

For those who occupy lands that are ‘tied’ with little real estate potential, and don’t have local political or cultural capital to boot, we see a reduction to ‘bare life’ (Agamben 1998) with the

struggle to maintain existence. The abdication of even the occasional presence of the elected representative of the state has meant that residents of this place have been denied voter cards and therefore their demands are not taken cognizance of nor do they have rights. Their only recourse is to approach the patriarch ruler as supplicants pleading for his generosity in the informal “sabha”. This is ‘bare life’ which is managed to be sustained only through social, kinship and religious networks that are external to and not of this place – with their religious community especially those engaged in similar line of work, and their village in Uttar Pradesh.

How does one understand the nature of violence in such a space? The Vasai-Virar case discusses the key role played by the state in processes of reproduction of violence through a range of disciplinary techniques and developmental visions but also highlights that the state is not the monopoly holder of violence since there are multiple sovereignties. The calculated deregulation of the state has meant the absence of services, law and order and justice as traditionally discharged by the state system and, instead, service by middlemen, the imposition of street justice (Gillespie 2013), vigilantism and violence with impunity. The patriarch ruler typically has not taken steps to reign in the violence and often feudal control enjoyed by different informal sovereigns in their fiefs. We therefore need to differentiate between the violence of the weak and the systematic violence that’s meted out to marginal territories (deemed “illegal” for instance) where the state has abdicated as functioning system and all services have to be negotiated through different middlemen who perform the paradox of often being sources of violence and the only shields against it (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009).

Anthropologists have argued that violence in volatile spaces is mimetic -- it produces and reproduces itself (Das 1990, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). In places like Santosh Bhuvan violence is an everyday occurrence -- dead bodies are found with regularity in gutters, and rapes and armed robberies are common. Both physical and structural violence, is produced and reproduced with a specific agenda -- to stifle resistant voices and to manufacture consent. In turn, violence is also used as resistance against these dominant forces. Hence, here

violence is both a message and means (Eckert 2001) of attaining power. The message is relayed as not just the 'threat/potential of violence' but as constant 'readiness and preparedness' as seen through explicit threats in party/politician speeches. Violence, however, is not only about a climate of fear but also the circulation of a certain charisma; stories of murder, gang wars and violent exploits are told with flavor, relish and even pride. The routinisation of the fear and charisma of violence makes the area volatile, with a feeling that anything could erupt, anytime -- "Kuch bhi ho sakta hai". This makes everyday life uncertain and unpredictable requiring hyper-vigilance on the part of residents to read the codes and meaning behind violent messages/actions.

The psychological and symbolic dimension of violence is also important to cognize. The perception of powerlessness and inferiority springing from nativist politics giving rise to humiliation among non-natives or then the potency of policies of 'inclusion' by the ruler that emphasise the dignity of human beings but do not provide basic living conditions. Developmental visions that are propagated by the regime are anchored by infrastructure and real estate projects have particular potency in building consensus among the ruled, a consensuality that lies at the heart of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence has been identified with disdain for the other, which contributes to the possibility of violence- the injustices meted out to the 'migrant's of Makarandnagar or the residents of Sai Society clearly bear this out. These injustices further diminish groups that are weak, reducing them to what Agamben has called 'bare life', without political citizenship and devoid of rights or voice.

What the territory studies effectively highlight is that the violence faced by different groups – lower castes, 'migrants', adivasis, women - is not the same and cannot be understood as a singular, universal category; it needs to be understood in relation to the 'oppressor', the 'oppressed' and the particular condition within which it plays out. The danger of understanding violence as a category without placing it within the socio-economic and socio-spatial context of those who inflict and those who suffer has the potential of greatly undermining the 'before' of violence and conducive to producing (false) fixed categories of the

"victim" and "perpetrator". The case also advances the notion that it is important to be attuned to the margin of freedoms experienced by different groups under different kinds of regimes and rules and how this might change over time in order to move towards a more just and inclusive city. Thus for instance confronting the complex tradeoffs faced by different groups: between being allowed to settle in Vasai-Virar but not being provided the building blocks of citizenship (i.e voter ID cards, basic services or the right to demand them)

While on the one hand the party structure is extremely well organized (at building, chawl, village, ward and zonal levels) and coherent, on the other its calculated informality in planning and allocation of resources and its multiple sovereignties has led to a highly fragmented spatial and social landscape. While legal apartments for the middle-class have come up on either side of the railway line, there is a swathe of informal construction extending into the interiors, especially around the industrial estate of Waliv, Sativali and Gokhiware. Key to this process of produced inequality is land use planning and how it is managed through building political alliances and using the informality inherent in the planning process (Roy 2009). Also important are the developmental visions that fuel speculative action as well as concrete investments and shape the nature of place, real estate values and infrastructure development.

The uncertainty of everyday life is further exacerbated by the speculative culture and the constant re-making of place. The liminal nature of the urbanizing periphery is a crucial factor here that encourages rapid, speculative development and constant building and rebuilding. The process of 'always becoming' provides little ability to settle in place, we argue, and build ties through the process of everyday living and the social relations and exchange that living in a place facilitates. In fact, the regime deliberately creates challenges to place-making, so that BVA remains the only dependable network. While communities have known to register societies they have constantly faced resistance and physical and structural violence from landlords, the land mafia and local strongmen. Social relations tend to then become confined to building relations based on primordial attributes of caste, region, religion or then, in Vasai-

Virar the vehicle of the party. This has implications for both violence and the potential for justice. It becomes easier to unleash violence on people that you do not consider 'your people'. It also means that communities find it difficult to transcend the fragmented and unequal landscape to come together in common cause. The lack of opportunities and constant violence in the face of place-making reduces the ability to build strong associations, networks and collective resistance against the regime of rule. While new communities are being built and networks expanded, they are orientated towards building access to the party that emerges as the primary source for achieving security of tenure and social mobility.

The case overall points to the simultaneously exclusive and inclusive nature of the regime of rule. On the one hand, the differentiation of territories has created a system of differentiation of inhabitants based on the crystallization of certain identities that got associated with particular territories. These facilitate notions of binaries and acceptance of inequalities. Particular identity characterizations include cleavages of 'order' and 'chaos', 'dangerous' and 'safe', 'city' and 'village'. This was furthered through the regime's usage of different developmental visions and disciplinary techniques to appease/control different territories and groups. This has provided scope for groups to distinguish themselves from others ('migrants' vs 'locals') and enact local processes of exclusion and control (such as denying water, voter ids) on the identified 'other'. On the other hand, the regime has welcomed the occupation of 'unwanted' groups in the city, one of its strategies of inclusion, and deliberately set about creating the category of 'middle class' to which all citizens can aspire to belong based as it is on consumption-related attitudes, values and lifestyles (Fernandes 2006).

## **6.1 Agency and New Modes of Inclusive-exclusive Politics**

Drawing from Gramsci, we see conceptualizing the agency of the subaltern subject- one that is formed in relation to and embedded in multiple fields of power- as critical. In our study, we conceptualise agency at the level of the individual and at the level of the collective. In both cases, individuals and particular communities are engaged in a process of building/tapping networks, and agency is routed and amplified through particular circuits of power to enable the conversion of exclusion to autonomy. While individual agency is important particularly in

enabling access to services and public resources, it is collective modes and the harnessing of communal circuits of power that we focus more on as we deem them critical for achieving greater spatial and social justice. The channeling and amplification of agency via such networks and circuits enables individuals and communities to advance their self-interests locally through the imposition of violence and forms of street justice, by achieving greater social status and legitimacy, and by bolstering their bargaining power with the regime. The three networks that are most important here are those based on (land-owning) caste, kinship (village and religion-linked), and BVA membership<sup>50</sup>. Those territories that harness multiple networks have been most successful at winning for themselves a measure of autonomy. Equally clear is that without BVA membership, a community's agency is limited in scope and outcome, confined to the immediate locality.

In Makarandnagar, the landlord Patils build a community based on caste and kinship; they deployed these networks of social capital to further the common cause of maintaining land ownership and control of development in their village. Their control of land cemented by their caste and kinship ties enabled them to oppose the regime's entry into their dominion as witnessed by their successful accommodation with the BVA corporator and the denial of voter's ID cards to their migrant tenants. This was given further traction by their political affiliation with and support for parties like Shiv Sena and MNS that focused on protecting the interests of the 'sons of the soil'. "Only Gokhiware and Fatherwadi have Shiv Sena and MNS leaders respectively. BVA has captured everything else... These two villages are strong because the majority are "proper" (i.e., 'sthanik') people and they have managed to resist his power" (Interview Fatherwadi resident, June 20, 2015). Land ownership (which effectively steers real estate speculation) and a strong caste/kinship identity (which prevents easy land takeovers because it enables solidarity and collective mobilization) are two very important factors in understanding the challenge they posed to the regime.

---

<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that these 3 networks are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. However, we see each network as predominantly organized around one set of identities that give it its label.



In Santosh Bhuvan, the ‘city of migrants’ the prime network harnessed was that of the BVA community. The territory case study reveals the different strategies of migrant youth to gain access to politicians and builders (who are often the same people) and connect to the BVA family for its funds, opportunities for job contracts, and political clout. While caste and kinship are not used as primary networks, they are by no means absent; they have often provided the ‘trust’ for pooling land and developing it, expanding one’s network or for giving out contracts/jobs. A large part of the success of Santosh Bhuvan as a hub for building construction, real estate and incrementally improving services can be laid at Gupta’s door. His leadership and sovereign rule has expanded the possibilities for all residents to become partially autonomous in political and economic terms. Residents are unconcerned about being evicted and see the possibility for achieving wealth and social status. Moreover, they vote in large numbers and in the 2015 elections this ward was split into 6 electoral wards, evidence of its growing power in electoral democracy. In its pride at building a “city of the poor”, Santosh Bhuvan unsettles official logics of hierarchy and inclusion and insists upon political recognition for itself and its growth. Strategically leveraging the BVA network and maintaining Santosh Bhuvan’s notoriety as the ‘hell of Vasai-Virar’ has increased Gupta’s power as well, enabling him to mount a challenge to the regime’s sovereignty. But these successes are illusory, tempered as they are by the tremendous violence of rule and uncertainty in living conditions for the large majority of people who live in precarity.

In Sai Society, it is primarily the ‘chedda bhai’ kinship network based on the village that provides the foundation for channeling agency and communal power. All efforts are thwarted, however due to the marginalization of the Muslim community, the ‘dirty’ and polluted nature of the work they do, as well as their lack of ownership/control over land. However, residents continue to try to entrench themselves and their claims to their locality through deepening their networks and inter-linkages outside the city. It is important to note that the belief of these marginal groups in the state, as idea and functioning system, persists and it is this hope that fuels their collective action.

Overall, we argue that the liminal and highly uncertain, indeed precarious, peripheral context generates new forms of politics. New modes of acting and being political emerge through construction of new kinds of citizens-in-the-making and citizens, circuits of power and conflicts. We see the construction of citizens-in-the-making in Sai Society, who claim for themselves the role of ‘public servants’ that clean up the garbage of Mumbai and therefore are deserving of citizenship. We see the crafting of a rebellious counter- narrative to the planned and ordered ‘main’ city in Santosh Bhuvan where entrepreneurial ‘migrants’ see themselves as city builders. Opposing ‘migrants’ are the locals who propagate a nativist politics built on the notion of ‘bhumiputra’. At the city-level, we see the conscious construction of the ‘middle class citizen’ by the regime, an identity that cuts across the stratified geographies of Vasai-Virar to iron out differences between ‘sthanik’ and ‘migrant’ and position the consumer-citizen as an ally of neoliberal capitalism. As Fernandes (2006) argues, the potency of this new category of ‘middle class’ is in the promise it holds to all other groups that they can become a part of it. Thus lower caste and class groups who had little hope of owning land or being upwardly mobile in earlier dispensations now have a new set of opportunities open to them via this regime.

Do these new modes of politics, however, constitute real resistance to deliberate deregulation by the ruling regime and hold out hope for a more inclusive and just city? All indications are to the contrary. In no case do residents approach the state as citizens with rights; rather it is as clients of a patronage regime or “supplicants in an extremely unbalanced bargaining position where imbalance is defined by their extreme vulnerability and constant threat of eviction that is reproduced daily through surveillance, harassment and rents paid to state agents” (Banda et al 2014). Further the (deliberate) absence of the state entails the substitution of public or individual morality and street justice for Constitutional morality and justice. This has naturalized the suffering of violence to a very high level. However, the regime’s propagation of the discourse of ‘dignity’ and inclusion does create a sense of security and dignity for those who suffer from being unwanted in Mumbai. The ‘secular outlook’ and ‘inclusiveness’ are clearly a political strategy that the party successfully wields to garner popular support, stifle dissent and the emergence of potential rival leadership.

Thus the nature of rule contributed not only to the creation of a macro identification with ‘the city’ that had not earlier existed (indeed, one can argue that Vasai-Virar didn’t exist as one city) but also fashioned it as a variegated, spatially, socially and infrastructurally unequal landscape that is characterized by high levels of violence and informality. This splintered city is sustained however through the part-mythic re-imagining of the city as being a world-class, cosmopolitan city and this sublimates differences of history, inequality and spatial injustice with the common aspiration for development and pride going into the future.

## References

- Adams, J. (2005) "The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe," in Max Weber's *Economy and Society: A Critical Companion*, ed. Philip S. Gorski and David M. Trubek (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 238.
- Agamben, G. (2005) *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. London: Verso.
- Banerjee, I. and O. Tellis. 1989. "Pawar's Plots." *Sunday*, July 30.
- Bardhan, P. 1985. *The Political Economy of Development of India*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Benjamin, S. (2008) Occupancy Urbanism: Radicalizing Politics and Economy Beyond Policy and Programs', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3): 719–29.
- Bhagat, R.B. (2011) Emerging Pattern of Urbanization in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46, 10-12.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood), 241-258.
- Das, Veena. 1990a. "Introduction: Communities, Riots, Survivors—the South Asian Experience." *In Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press
- Das, Veena. 1990a. "Introduction: Communities, Riots, Survivors—the South Asian Experience." *In Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Eckert, J.M. (2003) *The Charisma of Direct Action: Power, Politics, and the Shiv Sena*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Fuller, C., and V. Benei. (2001). *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. London: Hurst.
- Hanley, L. 2007. *Estates: An Intimate History*. London: Granta.
- Fernandes, L. (2006) *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reforms*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Foucault, M. (1991) (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fuller, C., and V. Benei (2001) *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. London: Hurst.
- Hanley, L. (2007). *Estates: An Intimate History*. London: Granta.
- Gandy M. (2006) Planning, Anti-Planning and the Infrastructure Crisis Facing Metropolitan Lagos. *Urban Studies* 43(2):371–396;
- Gillespie, K (2013). *The Context and Meaning of ‘Mob Justice’ in Khayelitsha – Report Prepared for the Khayelitsha Commission: Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Police Inefficiency in Khayelitsha and a Breakdown in Relations between the Community and the Police in Khayelitsha*.
- Ghertner, D. (2011). Rule by Aesthetics: World Class City Making in Delhi. In A. Roy and A. Ong, eds. *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 279–306.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. (Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Trans.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hansen, T.B. and F. Stepputat (eds) (2001a) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Hansen, T.B. and Verkaaik, O. (2009) “Introduction” – Urban Charisma: On Everyday Mythologies in the City, *Critique of Anthropology*, 29:5–26.
- Harriss-White, B. (2003) *India Working. Essays on Society and Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harriss-White, B. (2003/4) ‘Inequality at work in the informal economy: key issues and illustrations’, *International Labour Review* 142 (4).
- Jessop, B. (1990). *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in its Place*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Jessop, B. (1997) “A neo-Gramscian Approach to the regulation of urban regimes: accumulation strategies, hegemonic projects and governance,” in Lauria, Mickey, ed. 1997. *Reconstructing Urban Regime Theory Regulating Urban Politics in a Global Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Kewalramani Gita (2002), Land Use Changes in the Peri-urban Interface of Mumbai: A case study of the Vasai-Virar Lowlands, in *Managing the Urban Fringe of Indian Cities*, Institute of Indian Geographer, University of Pune.
- Kothari, Rajni (1984) "The Non-Party Political Process," *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 4, 19(5), pp. 216-24
- Lele, Jayant (1982) *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule Political Development in Maharashtra*; Popular Prakashan, Mumbai
- Lund, C. (2006), *Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa. Development and Change*, 37: 685–705.
- Moore, S.F. (1978). *Law as Process*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 51–84.
- Nainan, N. (2012). *Lakshmi Raj: Shaping spaces in post-industrial Mumbai: Urban Regimes, Planning Instruments and Splintering Communities* (Ph.D Dissertation). University of Amsterdam
- Ong, A. (2000) "Graduated Sovereignty in South-East Asia." *Theory, Culture and Society*. Vol. 17. No.4: 55–75.
- Phadke A. (2014) *Mumbai Metropolitan Region: Impact of Recent Urban Change on the Peri-urban Areas of Mumbai Urban Studies*, 51 (11) , pp. 2466-2483.
- Piliavsky, A. and Sbriccoli, T. (2016) The ethics of efficacy in North India's goonda raj (rule of toughs) *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2), 1-19
- Ranganathan, M. 2014. Mafias in the Waterscape: Urban Informality and Everyday Public. Authority in Bangalore, *Water Alternatives* 7 (1): 89-105.
- Roy, A. (2002) *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Roy, A. (2009) Why India Cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence, and the Idiom of Urbanization. *Planning Theory*, 8 (1), 76–87
- Sahlins, M. (1963). Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Polynesia and Melanesia, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (3): 285-303.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., and Philippe B. (2004a) Introduction: Making Sense of Violence. In *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, pp. 1-27. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

- Sharma, R.N. (1991) Land Grab Bombay Style : Urban Development in Vasai-Virar Hinterland of Bombay,. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26<8>, 413-7.
- Sharma, Shalendra D (1999) *Development and Democracy in India*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers
- Simone, AbdouMaliq (2004) People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16(3), pp. 407-429.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq (2007) At the Frontier of the Urban Periphery in *Sarai Reader 2007: Frontiers* edited by Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Jeebesh Bagchi and Ravi Sundaram (Delhi, India: Centre for the Study of Developing Societies,): 462-470.
- Weiner, Myron (1978) *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## Mapping References

**All satellite images used as base maps are taken from Google Earth.**

**Figure 1:** Location of Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation in Mumbai Metropolitan Region<sup>12</sup>

*base map:* a. development plan 2007

b.a.<http://epaper.timesofindia.com/Repository/getimage.dll?path=TOIM/2007/09/21/4/Img/Pc0040600.jpg>

**Figure 2:** An Old Map of Vasai Virar showing different contours of the sub region

*Source:* Kewalramani Gita (2002), Land Use Changes in the Peri-urban Interface of Mumbai: A case study of the Vasai-Virar Lowlands, in *Managing the Urban Fringe of Indian Cities*, Institute of Indian Geographer, University of Pune.

**Figure 4:** Map 3: Prominent zones in Vasai-Virar according to the Development Plan of 2007

*base map:* a. development plan 2007

**Figure 14:** The VVMC has spearheaded several projects that encourage the residents to reimagine the sub-region as a new emerging city. Initiatives include new road constructions, a Vasai Virar Mayor's Marathon, Olympic-style swimming pools and beautification of lakes<sup>86</sup>

*base map:* a. development plan 2007