

Corporate Quotient

Pune Mirror 9
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feedback@punemirror.com
facebook.com/thepunemirror
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ATUL GOEL

FIRST WE ROAST. THEN WE DROWN. WHEN IS PUNE GOING TO SAY, "ENOUGH!"

Lets's get Real!

The monsoon is just about beginning. And Pune has already been flooded. Thrice. By pre-monsoon showers. On the 8th of June this year Pune reported massive traffic disruptions. All arterial roads saw traffic jams that lasted several hours. The subway near the railway station went under water. People were stranded, they missed trains, planes, buses. The annual rains had not even hit the city and already we were in a huge mess.

Before this we were reeling from a summer the kind of which we have simply never borne the brunt of. We were suddenly and brutally made to face the fact that Pune has lost tree cover, and the city is getting roasted.

We can talk about climate change all we want, but the more pressing issue is what are we, as a city, going to do about it. It is very easy, and far too often, very attractive to blame it all on real estate. The plight of Pune is often pitched as a battle between real estate and the city. But in truth, the battle lies elsewhere – between illegal, unplanned, construction and the city.

The real estate industry today is a highly regulated industry. We have rules, regulations, safe-

guards, checks, balances, and so much more to ensure that the real estate industry contributes positively to the well-being of the city. And it does.

Any legal real estate project plants trees, creates open spaces for residents, treats the sewage produced in the project, recycles that sewage for reuse, installs rainwater harvesting systems so that there is no run off of the rainwater and that in fact the ground water table is recharged, uses renewable energy, supplies extra energy generated to the main grid, and takes good care to ensure that through excellent designing the project uses energy and water very efficiently. We don't realise it, but organized real estate takes care of even the smallest details – installing low-flow fixtures, for instance, saves hundreds of thousands of gallons of water for the city; or building projects according to the sun path movement maximises natural light and ventilation and significantly lowers energy consumption.

And then, on the other hand, is the vast unorganized real estate mammoth. It is everywhere, right before our eyes. It is spread across huge parcels of land. Anywhere up to 60% or even more of the citizens of Pune occupy these spaces. And there is absolutely zero regulation. We need to confront the fact that this section of the citizenry receives

protection because they are very dedicated voters. Vote bank politics comes into play and the unorganised real estate sector remains unregulated. While this may pay electoral dividends, the city as a whole suffers massively. The unregulated mushroom growth soon becomes uncontrollable. Mumbai is today a prime example of this. Pune is not too far behind. With such a massive proportion of the population occupying spaces that do not bother to follow even the most basic real estate development regulations, we have a problem.

Think about it – what happens to the sewage generated in these areas? It is discharged directly into the soil, into our water bodies, without being treated, causing massive and unrestricted contamination and pollution. This untreated sewage

is a huge health hazard for the entire city, and yet, no regulation is imposed. Let's talk about how space is utilised in these areas – no planning, no concern for safety, no consideration of things as basic as fire safety norms, no green spaces, no ventilation, no renewable energy installations. And again, ZERO regulation. If as much as 60% of a city's population is going to live in a manner and in areas that deplete the natural resources, destroy

the ecosystem, consume disproportionately large energy and water, contribute absolutely nothing to ground water recharge, recycling and reuse of water, controlling of the consumption of electricity, then what are we even talking about?

What is worse is that there is no recourse either. The illegal construction problem is one that is a potent mix of demographics and posturing. What happens is that vast swathes of land are illegally occupied. Then some miscreant takes on the mantle of being the messiah of the encroachers and occupiers. And then, with relentless

pressure created on the government bodies, the system bends to reverse regularize the illegal construction, with no regard for the rules that are applicable to the organized real estate sector.

This has a double impact, and all of it is negative – on the one hand, the illegal and unorganized real estate mafia (sorry, but that is what it is) continues to flagrantly flout the rules that have been created to build sustainable cities; and on the other hand, the good builders, the genuine real estate developers feel more and more disheartened by the punitive demands made upon them almost as if to overcompensate for the leniency shown to the other side.

Is this good for Pune?

Is this going to help us build a Real Rich Pune?

How many more scorching summers and submerging monsoons will need to pass before we begin to demand change? Is it not time already?



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GETTING REAL ABOUT REAL ESTATE

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