



'CITYSCAPE METAMORPHOSED - INDICATIONS OF SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION IN LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI'.

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ABSTRACT

Cityscapes are witnessing a tremendous transformation in contemporary times. So is the case with Mumbai, an Indian city where many of its neighborhoods have been undergoing a spatial transformation. One such neighborhood is Lower Parel, which in the past used to be a cotton manufacturing hub where many of Mumbai's (then Bombay) cotton mills flourished. However, following the closure of the textile mills and the phase of deindustrialization Lower Parel lost its inherent character. Today, it stands as a posh urban neighborhood characterized by the presence of newly developed high rises that lie adjacent to the remnants of the bygone era of the cotton mills. The paper examines the apparent changes in the cityscape of Lower Parel that are taking place as a result of the shift in its economic base.

KEYWORDS

Cityscape, Transformation, Neighborhood, Textile Mills

Introduction:

Cities are dynamic entities that are shaped by myriads of processes possessing varied characteristics. These processes range from physical to political and economic to social in nature. Contemporary times are witnessing a tremendous spatial transformation of cityscapes across the world. An important reason to expect spatial changes within cities is the changing nature of economic activities and the concomitant shift in location of components of the production process (Marcuse.P and van Kempen.R, 2000). This holds true for India's commercial capital, Mumbai too. With its humble beginning as a fishing hamlet, Mumbai grew into a textile manufacturing center in the middle of the 19th century and then as a center of India's finance and commerce in present times. The unprecedented economic transformation of Mumbai has led to a series of alterations to its cityscape.

A systematic study covering all aspects of Mumbai's cityscape transformation is definitely meaningful. However, realizing certain constraints, this study is deliberately restricted towards examining only the metamorphosis of the cityscape of Lower Parel, a neighborhood in Mumbai. The choice of Lower Parel as the areal unit of investigation is vested in its evolution from a prominent industrial hub to a post-industrial neighborhood that gives its cityscape a metamorphosed appearance.

Methodology:

The study is based on both field survey and collection of data from various sources. Empirical observations for the study are made by personally visiting the study area. Besides, various secondary sources of data published on the topic from time to time are also consulted. The data thus collected through personal observation and secondary sources like books, journals and reports are synthesized to prepare the paper.

Objectives:

The main objectives pertaining to the study are –

1. To identify the nature and trend of spatial transformation in the study area.
2. To examine the implications of this transformation.
3. To evaluate the possibility of deriving optimum benefits from the spatial transformation.

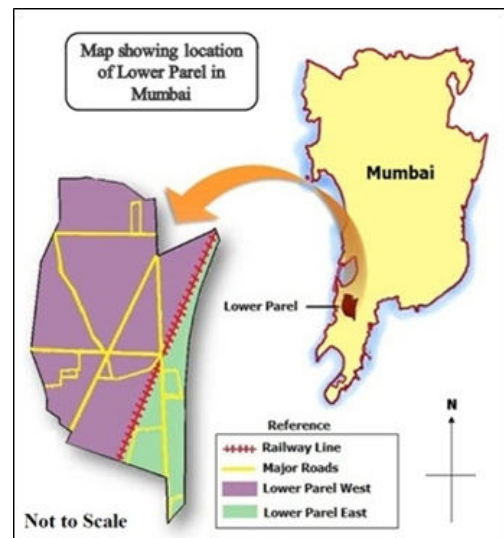


Fig 1.1 - Map of the Study Area

Study Area:

The study area, Lower Parel, is located in the southern part of Mumbai. It extends from 19°00'N to 18°59'N latitudes, and 72°49'E to 72°50'E longitudes. It lies in the G/S ward of the Mumbai City district. Lower Parel is surrounded by the neighborhoods of Prabhadevi to the north; Worli to the west and south; and Parel to the east. The region used to be a prominent textile manufacturing area of Mumbai. However, at present Lower Parel bears the identity of a business hub and a posh urban neighborhood.

Discussion on Lower Parel's transformation:

Lower Parel grew as a textile hub in the colonial and post-colonial era when many textile mills flourished in the region. The booming economy of the region led to an influx of migrants who came to work in these mills. Thus, the mills stimulated economic growth as well as employment. For over a century Lower Parel has been the industrial heart of Mumbai filled with composite textile mills and crowded workers', housing and market (Malcolm and Hall, 2005). The landscape of the region was then dotted by the presence of huge mills, tall chimneys, and chawls (residences of the mill workers). However, by 1970 the industry began to decline for a number of reasons (D'Monte, 1998). The final stroke to the closure

of textile mills was given by the 'Great Bombay Textile Strike' that took place in 1982 – 83 and continued for 18 long months. The introduction of the policy of economic liberalization in 1991 brought a major change by de-licensing the textile industries of Bombay.

Following the closure of the textile mills, began an era of Lower Parel's post-industrial transformation. The state government brought into effect the Development Control Rule 58, in 1991, which allowed the mill owners to sell their mill lands under certain conditions, either by demolishing or retaining the old structures. As per the rule, demolishing of the mill structure entailed handing over 33 percent of the area to Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC), and 27 percent to Maharashtra Housing Area Development Authority (MHADA). The remaining 40 percent was to be the share of the mill owners. Thus, by demolishing the mill structures, the mill owners could only develop 40 percent of the land. Developing this small percentage of land was not considered profitable by the mill owners and they resorted to a disorganized redevelopment of the old structures followed by renting and leasing parts of them.

After a decade, the Development Control Rule was amended in 2001, which paved way for the mill owners to demolish the old structures without the need for giving any share of land to the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) or to the Maharashtra Housing Area Development Authority (MHADA). This led to a steep rise in the owner's share and consequently there took place extensive redevelopment of the mill lands. The cityscape earlier dominated by mills and chawls started giving way to the growth of malls, high-rise residential towers, corporate offices, boutiques, and discotheques. The manufacturing base of the region came to be replaced by the service industry. The rise of service sector jobs in the region started attracting professionals from various parts of the country, thus bringing about conspicuous changes to the migration and occupational pattern of the region.

According to the BBC Report – Lower Parel, Mumbai: One Square Mile of India' (2011), "Mumbai has always been short of space, and with so much prime land up for grabs, the developers moved in". Thus, many of the defunct mill areas came to be redeveloped. For example – the Phoenix Mills have been transformed into High Street Phoenix Mall; the Kamala Mills have been redeveloped into the Kamala Mills; and the New Islam Mills have been transformed into the One Avighna Park, a high-rise residential project. Thus, there has been a phenomenal rise in property prices in Lower Parel (Fig 1.2).

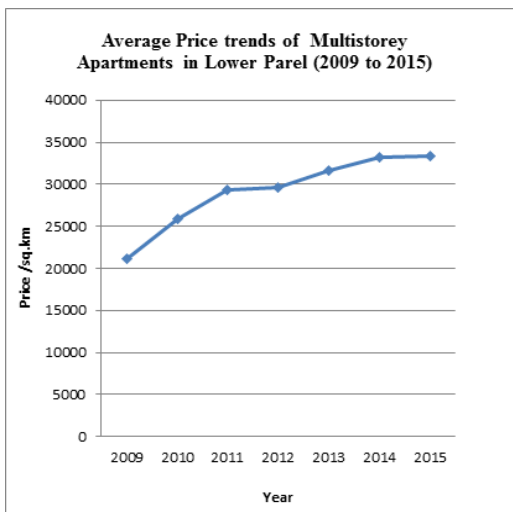


Fig 1.2 – Average Price trend of Multistorey Apartments in Lower Parel (2009 – 2015)

Source: Estimated by author (using reference from various property portals)

Though the redevelopment of mill lands is gradually leading to the metamorphosis of Lower Parel's cityscape, the infrastructural drawbacks existent in the region imposes upon it a conflicting character. Outside the compounds of the redeveloped properties and the gated communities formed, there lies an array of narrow roads and lanes along with other decaying old structures. Vehicles getting stuck in jams while maneuvering across the narrow passages and people often bumping almost into each other are not a rare sight in Lower Parel. Besides, in the wake of the rising number of vehicles in the region, lack of parking space contributes further to the congestion. This stained infrastructure is a major jolt in the region's carrying capacity that poses a threat to its sustainability.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the above discussion that the efforts of redevelopment in Lower Parel have overlooked the possibility of its overall urban regeneration. The redevelopment, for various reasons like political issues, the emergence of land mafias and lack of proper planning have failed to benefit the region as a whole. However, still, a lot can be done to benefit the region and to sustain its growth. The transformation of the region would remain in a piecemeal state unless these infrastructural drawbacks are taken care of. In this regard the plans come up by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for decongesting the region by the building of green space and widening of roads is commendable.

Thus, in the conclusion, it can be said that Lower Parel is indeed undergoing a metamorphosis from its industrial to post-industrial form. However, in the light of the existent infrastructural loopholes in the region, it cannot be termed to have completed the process. It is hoped that in the coming future by the concerted efforts of the decision-makers, landowners, and other stakeholders, Lower Parel will overcome the current constraints and develop into a completely metamorphosed urban neighborhood with proper utilization of its sustainable growth potential. The recent decision of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to flag off its smart city project with a focus on Lower Parel has also shed a ray of hope to the growth prospects of the region.

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