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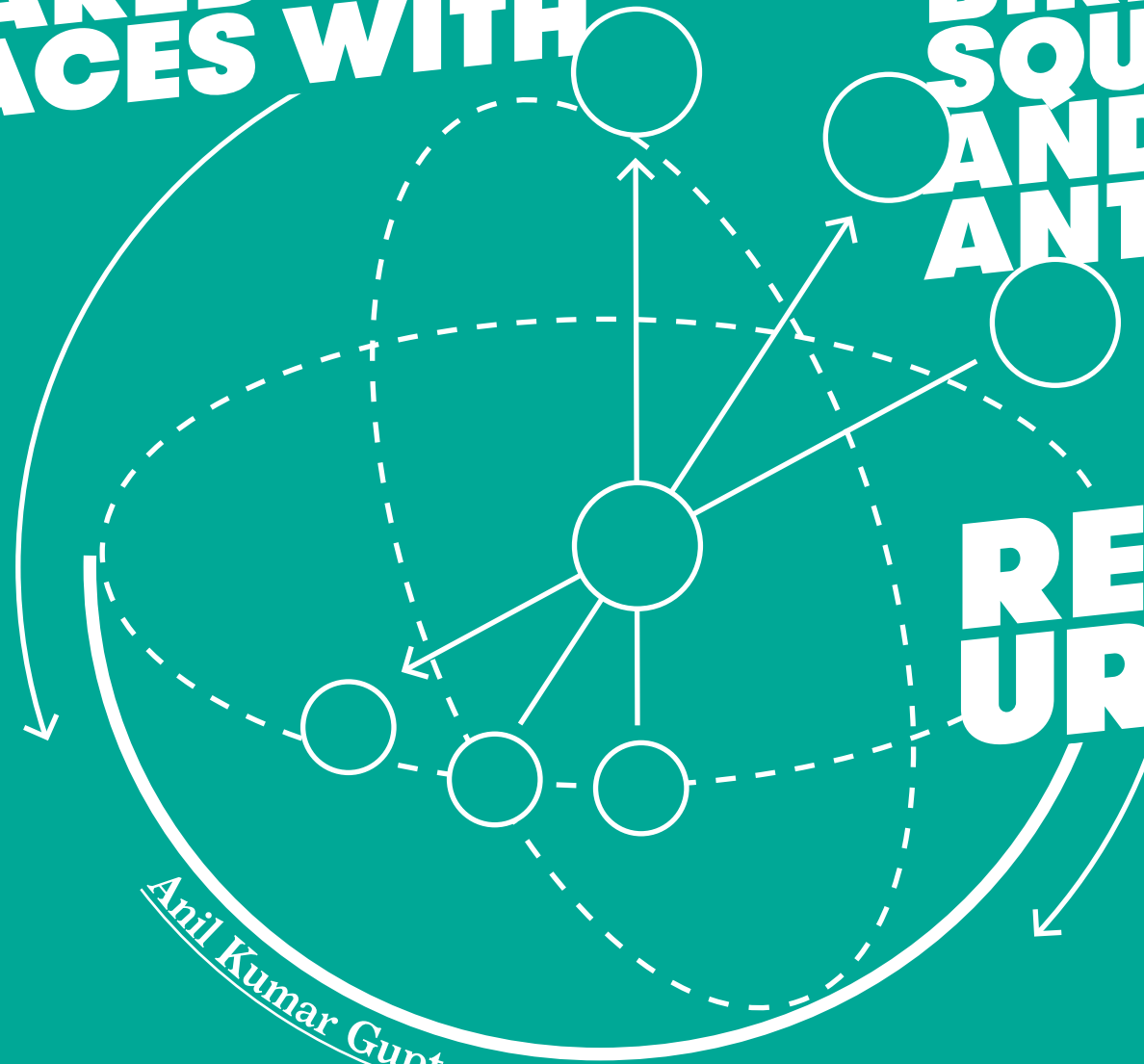


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**SHARED URBAN  
SPACES WITH**

**BIRDS,  
SQUIRRELS  
AND  
ANTS:**

**REDEFINING  
URBANITY**



*Anil Kumar Gupta*

Urban ecosystems very seldom provide systematic spaces for the conservation of birds, squirrels, ants and other wildlife. It is not just what we do for the birds that matters; what they do for us is no less important. Children in particular feel charged when they can connect with nature without fear or doubt. Chosińska, Duduś and Jakubiec [2012]<sup>1</sup> also found the connection with nature as being the major motivation for people to feed birds in urban areas. Fuller, *et al*, [2008]<sup>2</sup> noted a decline in bird feeding practices as socio-economic deprivation increased. These practices increased with the richness and abundance of avian species. In India, we have observed an opposite trend. In the richer localities, the practice of feeding birds and squirrels is less frequent whereas in poorer regions, more people do this. These practices of course indicate a cultural connection that communities have with nature. There is little else with which they can enrich their life so much.

Every day in the morning and at lunch time, Gupta feeds the birds, squirrels and ants in the garden. By now, he has identified different moods and methods that specific birds follow while picking up the food. Similarly, some squirrels prefer to be fed directly rather than being expected to pick up whatever, wherever. There are times when there is a delay and they audibly make their displeasure apparent; sometimes they knock at the kitchen door. It is possible that the

inner nature of the observer gets projected onto other non-human sentient species. In millions of homes, the first bread cooked is not used for one's own consumption. It is supposed to be fed to the cows, birds or other animals. It is natural that setting a share aside for wildlife makes them part of the conscious eco-community. One can miss them and one can also pamper them. Who gives more love to whom is very difficult to estimate. In this paper, we discuss the ways shared spaces evolve in urban areas to trigger not just the conservation of biodiversity but also associated cultural connections. The enrichment of conscious space through cognitive collaboration



cycle photo with squirrel

can become a very important part of urban planning.

In part one, we share how the landscape of love transcends the limits of physical boundaries. In what way can shared space with other living beings enrich our life experi-

ence and perhaps create more compassionate communities? In the second part, we describe the arrangements for bird-feeding platforms in cities but also some villages. Finally, we draw some lessons for policies, institutions, technologies and culture.

## PART ONE

### SHARED SPACES: BRINGING NATURE IN

The definition of any urban community which does not incorporate other life forms is an incomplete definition. It is bound to lead to fragmented designs and fractured minds. There is no way human consciousness can ever fully accommodate concern for 'others', including perfect strangers [the unknown and unknowable, future generations and other wildlife, Gupta, 1995].

Carr, *et al*, 1993:3 observes<sup>3</sup>

*Public space is the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds. The streets, squares, and parks of a city give form to the ebb and flow of human exchange. These dynamic spaces are an essential counterpart to the more settled places and routines of work and home life, providing channels for movement, the nodes of communication, and the common grounds of play and relaxation.*

Professional planners estimate the value of a landscape more in terms of how residents assess it rather than on other considerations. With the steep rise in property value and population size, space has become a valuable commodity and emphasis is now being given to the design of these

ture and urban public space, accessed at <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/b003-collective-culture-and-urban-public-space> on June 28, 2014

spaces in a way which is more than just "spaces of civic inculcation and political participation." [Amin, 2006]<sup>4</sup>. Urban space designers suggest that these spaces now need to move on from their traditional roles towards more multifunctional roles. The nature of exchanges has changed over time; probably more so with social media, hence the role of face to face interactions has decreased. However, the historical and cultural significance of running into strangers sharing similar spaces and/or the concern for nature has not yet been completely lost. One should re-interpret the role of such living and vibrant spaces where people feed birds or other animals. These are also the arena for fostering encounters of shared love between human and non-human species.

But why did society feel the need for such spaces in the first place? Classically, these spaces were seen as areas of random exchange, collaboration and creative discourse. In India, people would hang out around tea stalls discussing various issues from politics and inflation to social safety. Such institutions have existed informally for ages to serve as the nodes of creative discussion and dissemination of both useful and harmful knowledge [rumors]. Nevertheless attributing some items of knowledge as good or bad and deciding which knowledge to propagate and indulge in is often a matter of individual moral discretion. In South Italy, there is an everyday ritual called La Passeggiata, which means "to walk". Every evening, citizens would go around the streets greeting each other. While for some it serves as the 'centerpiece of local culture' for others it serves as an opportunity to interact with prospective marriage or business partners [Negro, 2005]<sup>5</sup>. But these shared spaces also make the society more tolerant, spon-

1 Chosinska K., Duduś L. and Jakubeic, 2012. Supplemental feeding of birds in human settlements of western Poland, 2 36: 95-102, In *International studies on sparrows*, Jerzak L., [Ed.], University of Zielona Góra, Poland, 120 pages, accessed at <http://iss.wnb.uz.zgora.pl/assets/files/di->

dactic/ISoS\_Vol\_36\_do\_sieci.pdf on June 30, 2014  
Fuller R. A., Warren P. H., Armsworth P. R., Barbosa O. and Gaston K. J., 2008. Garden bird feeding predicts the structure of urban avian assemblages, *Diversity and Distributions*, 14[1], pages

131 – 137, accessed at <http://www.fullerlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Fuller-et-al-2008.pdf> on June 30, 2014

3 Carr S., Francis M., Rivlin L.G. and Stone A.M., 1993. *Public Space*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p 420

4 Amin A., 2006, *Collective cul-*

taneous and curious about randomness. Engagement at different levels and to different degrees, is believed to be one of the ways of increasing tolerance [Bannister and Kearns, 2013, p.176]<sup>6</sup>

Institutions were embedded in such shared places to keep people engaged with others and, in a way, with their own inner self. Such institutions might as well teach us to have a more poised view on giving space [physical, mental, emotional and cultural] to others, human or non-human.

The institutions were embedded in such places to ensure their continuity; often but not always, religion and beliefs have played important roles. But what kinds of institutions and designs have kept them alive and in sync with rapid urbanization and a changing landscape?



The sculptors of the institutions grafted them into the existing culture which could be planned or triggered serendipitously. This could also result in the fusion of traditional and mod-

ern institutions as is evident from Gupta and Chokakula [1999]<sup>7</sup>

*There was an interesting case in Bhutan, which went to the court on the grounds of violation of sacred space. A farmer had cut a tree from a sacred space from the upper reaches of a stream. When people protested, he did not confess his fault or do anything to atone for the mistake. Eventually, the case went to the higher court where the judge found the offender guilty and asked him as part of the punishment to plant trees in the sacred space and take care of them regularly until the trees were established. Incorporating respect for such institutions in modern jurisprudence may help in recognizing that sustainability without involvement of the spirit is not possible in the long term.*

Hence, continuity could be ensured by: i] blending traditional and contemporary institutions—which might as well give birth to a new institution, otherwise both can continue in their previous form, ii] incorporating discrete components of the traditional institution into modern rules, iii] protecting institutions through legal and state policies and iv] institutionalizing through religion and culture, beliefs, folklores, folktales, dance forms, festivals, etc.

If one feeds the birds in one's garden in the morning and tries to prevent them from perching on the air conditioner outside one's window in the office during the daytime, is one not trying to find coherence in contradictory behavior? Why wouldn't

many architects learn from the communities which have tried to integrate nature in urban spaces? In Ahmedabad, we have sacred trees being worshipped by the people who tie a fragile thread around the trunk of a strong tree



seeking solace, safety and strength. Fragility is actually the foundation of love. Without being vulnerable, we are seldom able to access feelings in our own inner recess (Gupta, 2010)<sup>8</sup>. Authenticity, so fundamental to making a breakthrough, requires a close sync between the inner and the outer parts of our being. The built environment, urban landscape, narrow corridors, common spaces and intertwining of nature and human habitations call into question the degree to which we have such sync.

The custodianship of non-human sentient beings has always been embedded in our culture. Many of the edicts of King Ashoka the Great had inscriptions wherein the state

**15. Shared urban spaces with birds, squirrels and ants: redefining urbanity**  
A. R. Dey, C. Patel, M. Esders and A. K. Gupta

accepted responsibility for the welfare of animals [both domesticated and wild] and humans alike. He was probably the first ruler in India who had wildlife reserves for the conservation of wild species. He rendered medical facilities for both human and non-human sentient beings [Dhammika, 1993<sup>9</sup>; Avari 2007<sup>10</sup>].

*Its first two edicts state: "All life is sacred and there will be no more slaughter of animals for the sacrificial altar or royal table," and "The well-being of all living things shall be the duty of the individual and of the state."*

– Hass, 1998<sup>11</sup>

Hence, the concept of shared space with and shared responsibility towards other living beings has existed in history since time immemorial, probably with greater conviction than is seen today.

Urban renewal and rejuvenation requires synergy among technology, institution, culture and educational processes. It is obvious that platforms which will strive for this synergy have not yet evolved. The municipal authorities are too bogged down with providing services using age-old models. Rarely, if ever, have new models been experimented with in a diversified manner. The arena for discourse, diversity and inclusive development has to expand. Public places, particularly roadsides and crossroads will become more and more critical in the future.

5 Negro G. D., 2005. *The Passeggiata and Popular Culture in an Italian Town: Folklore and Performance of Modernity*, McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, Ontario, 183 pages

6 Bannister and Kearns, 2013 observe quite poignantly, "Yet to live in the presence of difference requires embracing

uncertainty—about who we will meet and how they will behave. The frequency and uncertain nature of encounters in cities make the urban experience quite different from a rural one". Jon Bannister and Ade Kearns, 2013, *The Function and Foundations of Urban Tolerance: Encountering*

and Engaging with Difference in the City, *Urban Studies*, 50[13] 2700-2717, October 2013, <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/50/13/2700.full.pdf+html>

7 Gupta A.K. and Chokkakula S., 1999. *Sustaining success and learning from failures: Farmers' institution strength-*

*ening for watershed management*, pp.14-18. In *The status of formal watershed management in Asia*, Sharma P.N. and Wagley M.P., FAO, Rome, 108 pages.

8 Also see Gupta A. K., 2010.

9 Dhammika S., 1993. "The Edicts of King Asoka: An English Rendering", *The Wheel Publication No. 386/387*,

Buddhist Publication Society, Kandi, 23 pages, accessed at <http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/misc140016.pdf> on June 28, 2014

10 Avari B., 2007, *India: The Ancient Past A history of the Indian sub-continent from c. 7000 B.C. to A.D. 1200*,

## DESIGNING SHARED SPACES

Cooper-Marcus and Francis [1997: 9]<sup>12</sup> did not include concern towards non-human but sentient beings in the characteristics of public shared space. The reason might be that economy now treads a little away from ecology. While the words have a common etymological root, their meanings have diverged. Kurtz [2006]<sup>13</sup> points out the difference; saying that while economy speaks of “use”, ecology tends to harbor “relationships”. Indigenous institutions took care of this component quite effectively. Even in the heart of ancient civilizations, common open public places were very much a part of the urban architecture in the form of gardens, step wells, common water reservoirs, etc. They were an integral part of Indian lifestyle since ages. Shashidharan and Prospero [2012]<sup>14</sup> classified the urban spaces into functionalist, performative, symbolic, political and cultural dimensions. In their study, they found that urban shared spaces protected by strong cultural relevance and community fervor remained timeless, while others more ephemeral changed their status on more utilitarian grounds. However the spaces which were important, especially for any particular segment of society, were taken care of much better than by the more affluent societies even when resources were scarce.

Gupta took the students of the CINE class for a walk around the IIMA campus. Students started from the backyard of the houses of class

four employees [lowest income group like peons and drivers] and then walked towards class three, class two, class one and faculty houses. The lowest paid employees mostly kept the common land clean, regularly filled up the bird and squirrel watering pots and shared the food and grains with the birds. The spaces in which poor people feel squeezed out are also generally the spaces where wildlife often feels safe. Undoubtedly, the faculty bungalows which have more diversity and shrubs harbor greater avian diversity in terms of shelter. The abundance may be in the places where people feed the birds [rich or poor] and the diversity may be higher where the habitats have more plant biodiversity.

Most of the studies on the design of urban shared spaces deal with the function they intend to perform, for example parks where children play, temple courtyards in which people pray, small platforms for the elderly to sit, and bird feeding platforms. It is often argued that the change in lifestyle has amounted to a decrease in the number and quality of these spaces, except for probably the bird feeding platforms. As long as people have more access to a distributed network of entertainment such as TVs, computers and group hangouts, why would a city invest in keeping bird feeding platforms alive? Is it a sense of responsibility towards other living beings which is culturally embedded in society? Does the place have a sanc-

tity which binds/bonds people to their inner selves? Can these places serve in a greater capacity than they were designed for? Was it the modus operandi of society to make communities more empathetic or more receptive towards others' wellbeing?

Gupta [1999,<sup>15</sup> 2004]<sup>16</sup> has argued that most community members participate in multiple institutions. For individual members, the incentives or disincentives for cooperating with one resource institution are not delinked from similar incentives in other resource based institutions. His “Portfolio theory of Institutions” implies that any attempt to evaluate the viability of an institution in isolation is unlikely to be sustainable. People do not evaluate the pros and cons of collaboration and sharing resources and opportunities in any single resource market without reference to the implications of participating in other resource markets. In urban areas, people in a neighborhood may have several informal institutions including the ones concerned with taking care of wild birds, squirrels, ants or dogs. We came across many examples where some people would collect waste food every morning from different houses and feed it to the stray dogs. Maybe in such shared spaces the chances of dog bites are drastically reduced compared to those where other means are employed. It is not uncommon to see the stray dogs sharing beds and other intimate spaces with the urban poor. Recently, a student gave an ex-

## 15. Shared urban spaces with birds, squirrels and ants: redefining urbanity A. R. Dey, C. Patel, M. Esders and A. K. Gupta

ample where he went to a restaurant outside of which a poor person was sitting with a dog. After a few days, he offered some monetary gift to that poor person who nevertheless refused the money and instead requested that the dog, which was sick, be given treatment. There was no dilemma in the mind of the poor person as to who needed the help more.

People often cooperate more easily in one institutional context than in others. We do not mean to imply that those who care for animals also care for other disadvantaged human beings. In fact, in some areas, love for animals can be quite compatible with hatred for certain other communities.

Multiple institutions also imply multiple structures of governance. Some spaces may be managed as public spaces, others as commons and of course, large spaces are owned privately. Knowledge of species, plants or animals can vary a great deal. Recently, a global study by Aronson, *et al* in 2014<sup>17</sup> on the Impact of Urbanization on Bird [54 cities] and Plant Diversity [110 cities] showed a significant decline in the number of species per sq.km. Only about eight per cent of the native bird species and about 25 per cent of native plant species were found to be present compared to the estimated diversity in non-urban areas. The authors estimated that city support 92 per cent fewer birds and 75 per cent fewer plants than undeveloped land. This is the price we pay for urbaniza-

accessed at [http://vedicillumination.com/downloads/Academic%20General/Avari\\_Burjor\\_-\\_India\\_The\\_Ancient\\_Past\\_\\_A\\_History\\_of\\_the\\_Indian\\_Sub-Continent\\_from\\_c.\\_7000\\_BC\\_to\\_AD\\_1200.pdf](http://vedicillumination.com/downloads/Academic%20General/Avari_Burjor_-_India_The_Ancient_Past__A_History_of_the_Indian_Sub-Continent_from_c._7000_BC_to_AD_1200.pdf) on June 28, 2014.

11 Hass K. B., 1998. A history

of wildlife conservation and rehabilitation. *Wildlife Rehabilitation Today*, 9:26-31, accessed at <http://www.angelfire.com/nj/woundedknee/rehabhist.html> on June 29, 2014

12 Cooper-Marcus, C. & C. Francis (Eds.). 1997. *People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban*

*Open Space*. New York: Wiley  
Kurtz M., 2006. *Economy and ecology: Matthew Kurtz examines 'economy' and 'ecology' and encounters their entwined etymologies*, accessed at <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/geography/economy-and-ecology> on June 28,

2014.

14 Sasidharan P. & Prospero D. C., 2012. *Dichotomy of Urban Public Spaces: "Timeless or Ephemeral" – The Indian Experience*, 48th ISOCARP Congress, Perm, 10-13 September 2012.

15 Ibid 6

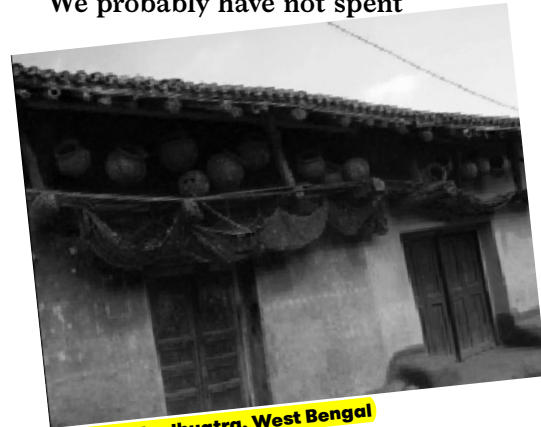
16 Gupta A.K, Chokkakula S.,

Sinha R., Patel K.K., Muralikrishna S. and Koradia D., 2004, *Harnessing Wisdom for Managing Watersheds: Honey Bee Perspective on Innovations, Institutions and Policies for Marginal Environments* accessed at <http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/publications/data/2004-07-02anilgupta.pdf>

17 on June 28, 2014.  
Aronson M.F.J., Frank A. La Sorte, Charles H. Nilon, Madhusudan Katti, Mark A. Goddard, Christopher A. Lepczyk, Paige S. Warren, Nicholas S. G. Williams, Sarel Cilliers, Bruce Clarkson, Cinnamon Dobbs, Rebecca Dolan, Marcus Hedblom, Stefan Klotz, Jip

tion. Large industrial projects as well as ports, special economic zones and other settlements cover the ground with concrete and quarantine the other spaces to prevent birds and squirrels from making their homes. The planners have paid much more attention to the conflict concerning human uses and have seldom looked at the demands of the meek wildlife.

waters and it is very easy to catch them. But, most cultures around the world have a taboo against catching fish during this period. It makes sense from the point of view of the reproductive dynamics of the fish. But persuading people to observe self-restraint during the period of abundance requires institution building. We probably have not spent



Purulia, Shodhyatra, West Bengal

### INSTITUTIONALIZING SHARED SPACES

While on the Shodhyatra walk in Purulia, West Bengal, we came across a practice of hanging earthen pots outside the home and also sometimes inside the house for pigeons to make their nests. The local people believe that the breeze triggered by the fluttering of the wings of the pigeons is very healthy for the people living there. What a way of sheltering birds. In Jharkhand, a tribal area, we came across similar practice.

Such practices when institutionalized have led to many commonly pooled resources which are often born or strengthened by the scarcity of resources. Surviving collectively presupposes scarcity [even if created artificially], and requires interdependence. The trick is that even in regions of material abundance, we can create scarcity through institutional constraints. Cooperation thus becomes inevitable. During the spawning period, the fish become very dull-witted. They move upstream towards shallow

as much time attempting to understand and negotiate the common spaces of collective responsibility.

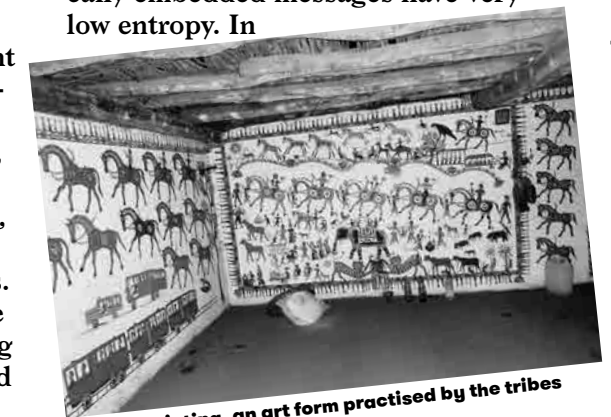
Conserving nature involves not just crafting conservation spaces. It is also grafting the values of conservation on existing institutions. The crafting is like creating new structures and spaces, generally over long time-spans. Ostrom [1992,<sup>18</sup> 1994<sup>19</sup>, 2001<sup>20</sup>] argued that institutions have survived by the ability of the commons to crafting institution. However, institutions have also survived by grafting [Gupta and Chokakula, 2000, Gupta, 1992].<sup>21</sup>

Grafting assumes the existence of a stock on which a scion is embedded. There is no place in the world which does not have some institutions; the challenge is to discover them and build upon them. In Sikkim there is an annual festival wherein people collect nine grains from nine different households. This ritual has many implications; while conservation is at the heart, meeting people and take cognizance of the neighborhood might be another. Similarly, rituals and religions shrines serve to rejuvenate ties and, as is observed throughout India, these places serve to be a haven for many other sentient beings like birds, monkeys, elephants and even rats and feeding them is considered pious. These were probably grafted onto the existing religious institutions. Forging resonance with nature was considered an important pillar of sustainability.

In almost every Shodhyatra, we discover unique nuances of cultural expressions and the space communities have created for birds, ants, squirrels etc. During the Shodhyatra in Dahod District, we discovered that a family would vow to get a wall painted by a local tribal artist if a sick person recovered fast. People who did not have much in their home in terms of any asset or any sign of wealth would spend a few thousand rupees to engage an artist to paint a wall to celebrate the recovery of their sick kith and kin. These paintings, also called *pithora* paintings, have an underlying narrative. One does not wish for people to fall sick in order for an artist to get work, and not everybody follows this rule. But so long as

### 15. Shared urban spaces with birds, squirrels and ants: redefining urbanity A. R. Dey, C. Patel, M. Esders and A. K. Gupta

some people do it to celebrate recovery in this way, the *pithora* art survives and the narrative continues. Discourse takes place about why artists incorporate different forms and shapes into the narrative. Art being metaphorical in nature, full meaning is never accessible. The local communities have discovered that metaphorically embedded messages have very low entropy. In



Pithora painting, an art form practised by the tribes of Chhota Udehpur

our digital age, wouldn't this be a worthwhile lesson? What Schama called *memoryscape*<sup>22</sup> (also see Schuman 2005)<sup>23</sup> is actually an inversion of landscape in our minds. Paul Basu also very aptly calls it *palimpsest*, *memoryscape*.<sup>24</sup>

### NATURE OF CONTESTATION IN URBAN SHARED SPACES

Shared spaces can be publicly, commonly or privately owned. Contestation may arise at the interface of the property owner, the owner of knowledge and owner of resources for maintenance each of them can be public, common or individual in nature and clashes may arise

Louwe Kooijmans, Ingolf Kühn, Ian MacGregor-Fors, Mark McDonnell, Ulla Mörtberg, Petr Pyšek, Stefan Siebert, Jessica Sushinsky, Peter Werner, and Marten Winter, 2014. A global analysis of the impacts of urbanization on bird and plant diversity reveals key anthropogenic drivers. *Proceedings*

of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 281, 20133330. ??  
Ostrom E. 1994. Constituting social capital and collective action. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6, 527-562.  
Ostrom, E. (2000). *Understanding Social Capital: Learning from the Analysis and*

*Experience of Participation. Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective*. P. Dasgupta. Washington D.C., World Bank.  
21 Ibid 6  
22 Schama S., 1995. *Landscape and Memory*, New York: Knopf  
Alfred A., p652  
23 Shuman, A., 2005. *Other People's Stories: Entitlement*

*Claims and the Critique of Empathy*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press  
24 Paul Basu, *Palimpsest Memoriscapes: Materializing and Mediating War and Peace*

in Sierra Leone accessed at [http://www.cnmd.ac.uk/archaeology/people/staff/basu/usercontent\\_profile/basu\\_palimpsest\\_memoriscapes.pdf](http://www.cnmd.ac.uk/archaeology/people/staff/basu/usercontent_profile/basu_palimpsest_memoriscapes.pdf) on June 29, 2014.

whenever they the boundaries which if cleanly drawn gives rise to more clashes. Society at times has deliberately kept boundaries fuzzy in order to sustain institutions, it seems.

Contestation might result from conflicts, encroachment, usurpation or gender dimensions. Increased contestation over space has resulted in further fragmentation of the shared spaces with the share of non-human sentient beings declining considerably in the recent past. Contestation may also arise among species which interact



Bird feeding platforms managed by the community, Ahmedabad



Feeding ants somewhere

over the space in question, for example squirrels and birds (having similar feeding habits) or even among different species of birds. Some of them are also influenced by human behavior, or at times by the mere presence of humans.

In the study on urban contestation in St. Petersburg, Tykanova [2013]<sup>25</sup> found that local communities resorted to strategies while the stronger advocacy groups took the help of spatial tactics resulting in the complete reversal of roles played historically. While in some cultures, a compromise is embedded to avoid conflicts. Muslims conceded “prescriptive rights” to the Hindus, enabling the latter the right to pray in the *chabutara* next to the now demolished site [Dhavan, 1994].<sup>26</sup>

## PART TWO

### BIRD FEEDING PLATFORMS/ CHABUTARAS

*Chabutaras* are bird feeding towers/platforms found across cities and villages in India. Varieties of forms, sizes, heights and locations provide a playground for numerous institutional arrangements. In some places, *chabutaras* have a dome shaped roof which is known to have been influenced by Rajasthani architecture. Some believe that the concept of a bird feeding platform might well have been influenced by Jainism and its doctrine of Ahimsa and servitude to all living beings alike. Gujaratis, like many oth-

er Indian societies believe that after death people assume other life forms like birds, animals, etc. Hence, by serving them food and water, they are in a way serving their departed loved ones. Such institutions might well have emerged to make humans empathize with other non-human sentient beings as their kith and kin.

Several stories have been associated with *Chabutaras*. It is said about *chabutara* that at Karnej, about hundred and thirty seven years ago, a saint stopped to quench his thirst. He was on his way from Dakor to Dwarka. Seeing that there were very few trees in the region for the birds to perch on or take shelter, he wished that there could be a *chabutara* for the birds. Bapalal Modi, a grocery seller, heard this and decided to make one before the saint returned from his pilgrimage. Bapa was about to sell his shop and his wife’s ornaments to raise money for the cause, when the whole community came to his rescue and the *chabutara* was made.<sup>27</sup>

### CHABUTARAS, URBAN AND RURAL

In our study, we noticed that the *chabutaras* in rural Gujarat are generally built in secluded open spaces. So, more bird diversity of birds is seen there. In urban spaces, the *chabutaras* are generally found in old crowded parts of the city, which has grown even more congested over time. Birds which shy away from humans or are scared by the daily commotion do not go there, leaving only Pigeons and Mainas to have their share. The newer, modern parts of Ahmedabad don’t have many *chabutaras*. What kind of modernity is it?

The makers made sure that the *chabutaras* were well protected from the predators. They are either built

15. Shared urban spaces with birds, squirrels and ants: redefining urbanity  
A. R. Dey, C. Patel, M. Esders and A. K. Gupta

at the top of towers or fenced when made in open spaces. Over time, the building material has changed from wood to RCC cement. Vinod Kamaliya, a villager, noticed that the beaks of the birds were hurt due to continuously pecking at the hard cement in order to pick grains up. He got the nearby *chabutaras* covered by a layer of cow dung mixture which solved the problem. He embedded an old technology into a new *chabutara* embedded in an old institution. This is generally missed in the urban *chabutaras*. In recent times, *chabutaras* have been made up of iron which is relatively cheaper. But as metals heat up quickly, these *chabutaras* find a smaller number of avian visitors compared to their concrete or wooden counterparts.

In both these places, the roof of the *chabutara* is generally kept low to keep it shady. The grains are protected from rain so that they don’t rot. In many places, the water pot is hung inside the *chabutaras*. The birds come and sometimes take a bath, spilling the water around which in turn rots the grains.

Institutions have formed for the management and sustenance of the *chabutaras*. In continuance of some ancient traditions, cash collections made at the end of “*bhawai*” [traditional folk dance and singing form] are used for procuring grains and the maintenance of the *chabutaras*. In another institution, when somebody’s cattle would foray into someone else’s field, damaging the crop, a fine was imposed as a penalty which was then utilized for the maintenance of the *chabutaras*. In one of the villages in Rajasthan, a defaulter who was caught poaching tree twigs from sacred land was given the task of feeding the birds standing in the sun as a punishment [Agrawal, 1995<sup>28</sup> in Gupta, 1995]<sup>29</sup>. It was done to make him feel the pain, introspect,

25 Tykanova E. V.[2013], Contestation Implemented by Strong and Weak Advocacy Groups [on the Example of Conflicts around Urban Development in St. Petersburg], Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogouniversiteta, Seria 7, Geologia,

26 Geographia, Issue 1, 156-157. Dhavan R. 1994. The Ayodhya Judgment: Encoding Secularism in the Law, Economic and Political Weekly, 29 (48), [Nov. 26, 1994], 3034-3040 accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/4402069>.

27 pdf?acceptTC=true&jpdConfirm=true on June 29, 2014. *Chabutara* of Ahmedabad, May 14, 2008. Accessed at <http://indiahistoryspeaks.blogspot.in/2008/05/chabutara-of-ahmedabad.html> on June 29, 2014

share his mistake with children any who gather around, earn some good deeds, and invoke the feeling of servitude towards other living beings.

People would donate generously for bird feed on occasions like childbirths, marriages or funerals. The building of *chabutaras* in memory of the deceased loved ones is common in many villages/cities. During the kite festival, people are more inclined towards sacred giving and bird feeding is often considered a good karmic gesture. Hence, during this season, one sees much higher bird feed donations. Especially after the kite festival, street plays are organized after which organizers accept donations. These donations are used to buy grains for birds and grass for cows.

In some villages, elderly people would participate in 'prabhayatra' [chanting walks done in the morning] and carry a bag to collect donations of bird feed and place them at the *chabutara*. Sometimes, as the penalty for a mistake, individuals are asked to donate specific quantities of grains to *chabutaras*. The main grains generally used to feed the birds are wheat, bajra [pearl millet], jowar [sorghum], and maize.

There were many ways in which the communities managed the maintenance of *chabutaras*. Often schools organize field trips in which children help to clean up the *chabutara* and feed the birds. Around major festivals like Diwali, the youth in the villages take the initiative to clean the *chabutaras* before decorating and painting them. Many people volunteer

to help with the maintenance. When the panchayat [village council] hires someone to clean the public spaces, *chabutaras* are also included. We found that the Banskantha and Sabarkantha districts in the dry northern parts of Gujarat had the best *chabutara* facilities and maintenance procedures. The community played an active role in maintaining the cleanliness of the *chabutara* and ensuring a steady supply of bird feed.

In urban places, the birds are generally fed by individuals. Seldom do we find specific institutions for maintenance. Cleanliness is at the mercy of few good individuals who have taken the task upon themselves, or at times by the Municipal Corporation. For this reason the *chabutaras* in the urban spaces in Ahmedabad are probably not as well cleaned and maintained as in some of the villages.

In some places, the bird feed is also decided by the diversity of birds. For example in a village where pigeons are greater in number, people would feed maize even if it is a little more expensive than bajra. In places where sparrows are more common, however, one would use bajra for their feed. In urban spaces diversity in feed is more comparable to the rural *chabutaras* with lentils, fruit pieces, bread, etc., while the rural *chabutaras* generally offer grains like bajra and jowar.

In the village of Aniyari, people noticed that donations for bird feed were more than they needed. They decided to use the extra money to get food for stray dogs and cows. In another village, people organized pro-

grams, like *Rasgarba* [a folk dance]<sup>30</sup> and called people from the village now settled in cities to donate money to get bird feed and also books for the kids, make provisions for clean drinking water for all, etc. While designing bird feeding platforms, safety from predators and opportunities for periodic cleaning is generally factored in.

### PART THREE

#### SUMMING UP: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is time to rethink our urban landscapes to make them more inclusive, not only in terms of class or gender, but also in terms of sharing our space with non-human sentient beings. There has been increasing concern about the decreasing population of house sparrows. With the new design of houses, ventilators, which were generally the places preferred by sparrows to make their nests, are no longer preferred. Some people have now started putting earthen nests in their building where the birds can perhaps make their nests. A college teacher, Dr. Paresh Raval, contributed more than ten thousand clay nests to people in the city in order to save sparrows.

Urbanization has been increasing almost everywhere in the world and is bound to increase still further in the future. The concentration of developmental infrastructure in cities invariably pulls people in from rural areas. The corresponding neglect of rural areas has aggravated the problem. PURA [Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas] promoted by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President of India and RURBAN [Rural and Urban Co-development] are being promoted by the Prime Minister of India as a strategy to reduce rural-urban migration. However, even if the rate of new

immigration slows down, there are already a lot of people competing for the space that urban wildlife may also like to lay claim on. It is understood that in an anthropogenic world order, human preferences will take precedence over the needs of other species. But, it is also possible that a new arena of shared spaces be designed for enriching the environment and choices for the birds, squirrels and ants.

While building any infrastructural projects, some patches of land should be left untended as a signature of native biodiversity habitat. Future generations would appreciate being able to experience undisturbed nature, even if only in small scattered plots.

Just as urban farming is becoming popular and in some cases, imperative for food security, urban sanctuaries for wildlife should also get a share of space in the minds of designers and planners. The bird droppings were the first source of manure that was traded between Europe and Latin America. Although rearing birds for their droppings is a utilitarian logic and may not persuade many, some may adopt them for this reason alone.

Every school and college ought to have bird feeding platforms so that visits to the psychiatrists may be reduced and people may perhaps feel relaxed in the company of birds and squirrels.

While planning avenue plantations or green plots, the diversity of the plant species must be given special importance so as to encourage avians and other biodiversity. Diversity of thoughts cannot flourish while walking through a monoculture of roads.

The landscape of love, sharing and caring for the birds, squirrels and ants is an inclusive platform for the nourishing of compassion and creativity.

28 Agrawal A., 1995. Later published as "I Don't Need It, but You Can't Have It: Politics on the Commons," 36-54, In Collection of papers from Gujarat and Rajasthan.

29 Gupta A. K., 1995. Sustain-

able Institutions for Natural Resource Management: How do we participate in people's plans?, Chapter 15, pp.341-373, in "People's Initiatives for Sustainable Development: Lessons of Experience". [Eds.,

Syed Abdus Samad, Tatsuya Watanabe and Seung-Jin Kim], APDC  
30 Traditional Gujarati dance form in which generally the whole community takes part