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Cost to coast

By [Reema Gehi](#), Mumbai Mirror | Jul 21, 2019, 06.00 AM IST



Photo by Satish Malavade

Architect and urban planner Rahul Kadri has been organising various awareness lectures across the city to discuss the pitfalls of the coastal road.

Last Tuesday, the Bombay High Court (HC) ordered a stop to the work on the Rs 14,000 crore-plus coastal road project, quashing various environmental clearances granted by the Centre and state government. It was a small victory for a group of concerned citizens comprising lawyers, architects, filmmakers, and businessmen, who have taken on the mighty government in what seems like a long and arduous battle. Among them is architect and urban planner Rahul Kadri.

Over the last few months, the 56-year-old has organised lectures across various platforms in the city discussing the pitfalls of the coastal road. “The CRZ (coastal regulation zone) rules say only under exceptional circumstances can the sea be reclaimed to build something. In this case, clearly, it isn’t. There are studies that suggest that only 10 per cent of the city travels by car. Of that, only four per cent travel on the western side,” explains Kadri, seated in his commodious office in Worli. “Besides, car trips between north-south — Mahim to Nariman Point — have actually come down in the last decade.”

It’s surprising, he says, that the report submitted by the government relies on a comprehensive study done in 2006, given that the overall structure of Mumbai has reconfigured in the last decade. The centre of the city has moved to Andheri, Lower Parel and the Bandra-Kurla Complex. “Nariman Point is not the financial district any more,” he emphasises. “So, this link between south and north is becoming less and less important. The traffic patterns are changing. And the question that we are asking is, ‘Has the BMC or the MMRDA done a comprehensive traffic analysis recently?’ They are willing to spend over Rs 14, 000 crore, but not willing to conduct a proper study.”

A thorough analysis, according to Kadri, would mean looking at how people commute. “The Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI) conducted a ward by ward study, with the Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute for Architecture and Environmental Studies, which suggested that 50 per cent of the population walks to work. Another 30 per cent take the train; while 20 per cent take the bus. Only 10 per cent travel by car,” he shares. “Going by this record, what we actually need are wider footpaths because most of the people are walking. They need to augment the train; Rs 1,20,000 crore was sanctioned in the last five years for eight new metro lines. The BMC commissioner Praveen Pardeshi has done an excellent job by subsidising the bus cost. But, why are they building an eight-lane highway?”

Another statistic he offers is that the Metro Line 3 alone will introduce 12 lakh more passenger seats. “The Metro representatives are arguing that nearly four lakh cars will come off the road. The entire traffic on Pedder Road is 80,000 cars a day,” he adds. “Something is seriously wrong with the math.”

Kadri moves his focus to the Bandra-Worli Sea-link, which was designed to accommodate 1.2 lakh cars a day. “It has never in its history crossed 58,000 cars. On an average, it crosses only 38,000 cars. In the 10 years of its existence, it hasn’t been used to its full capacity. And now, they are spending Rs 14,000 crore for 1.2 lakh cars which are not there,” he says. “In urban planning, there’s a well-known fact that if you build a road, it will induce traffic. People will be encouraged to buy cars.”

Apart from the poor planning, what perplexes Kadri is the lack of BMC’s environmental considerations. “The sea, like a forest, is so rich in animal life. We are unaware of it since we don’t experience it on a day to day basis. The fish, for instance, lay their eggs in the intertidal space, which the coastal road will encroach upon,” he says. “The road is not the most intelligent and efficient way to solve the problem. It’s a fail.”

Though Kadri is currently in the process of building a 650-bed hospital and medical college in Pune under a pressing deadline, being an active and conscientious citizen is something he imbibed osmotically from his parents — the illustrious architect IM Kadri and late social worker Vipula Kadri, the founder of Pride India, Save the Children India. “Seeing them, I learnt that you just got to give back to society. Somebody has to do it, and you can’t pass the buck,” he says.

In 1989, upon his return from the US, where he completed his Master’s in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan, Kadri quickly became instrumental in the welfare of their neighbourhood, “starting first as a committee member of my building, then the Rungta Lane Association where our place is located and then as the founding member of the Nepean Sea Road Association”.

“Whenever the opportunity came, we found bigger ways to contribute,” says Kadri, who has also actively been involved in analysing the city’s development plan for various citizen groups. “It has been a constant effort to know what’s good for the city; how we articulate that and how we improve it in various ways.”



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