

Mera India or Mailla India

I was born and raised in Bombay (Mumbai). Just after completing the academic carrier in 1969 my mother insisted that we visit a soothsayer/astrologer in Wadala to forecast my future. The astrologer took me to the terrace and measured my shadow against the morning sunlight and smiled in puzzlement and exclaimed: “What are you doing here? Your destiny is to be in a foreign country!” Sure enough and to my astonishment, in a matter of 72 hours, at the crack of dawn I boarded the flight to Hong Kong, like the thousands who migrated to be domiciled permanently and to be branded as the “NRI’S”.

I believe every NRI even though not residing in India, his heart will always experience that extra pump when reminiscing about India especially if born, educated and having lived his youth in “Mera India”.

Anyways as time lulled by and all efforts were being made to settle down in a new environment and country, memories of our youth would consistently bring tears to the eyes in a trickle or two, elevating our emotions to sentimental highs, with a nostalgic fervor.

The bhelpuri’s at Shetty’s, tandoori food at Berry’s and the Tad-Gule’s and kulfi’s from roadside vendors, the pan at Chowpatty and the hot Gulab jamu’s from Kalyan and the recurring laughter and enjoyments amidst sincere friends and relatives, all these memories would echo to a serenade in our meandering minds once a while.

Those were the days, the exuberating walks at Beach candy, the lashing dips at Juhu beach, the picnics at Aarey milk colony, excursions to Lonavala & Mahableshwar, and morning walks at Malabar hill. It was a clean and the environment conducive to health and harmony.

Every year we looked forward to visit Mumbai with a raging excitement, in spite of feelings duly punctured by the insolent fears of late arrivals, and thoughts of being hassled by custom officers at the airport.

Several decades have passed and buckled in memory lane, and over the years there have been several charges, some good and some bad, and of course some things never seem to change.

But the most appalling aspect that every sensitive NRI is confronted with is the horrendous traffic, unsanitary conditions instilled by litter on the street corners.

The general uncleanliness at substandard airports, horrific railway stations and dented roads with potholes are a sight in trauma for practically every Indian and not to mention the bystander tourist. Needless to say the advent of five and six star hotels which seem to paradoxically flourish amidst the backdrops and areas of filth and squalor adds more intrigue and despair to the passing NRI.

Children born abroad, whilst visiting India for the first time with their parents have only on sentence to remark ‘Oh! It’s so dirty’

What does a parent say to a child when feelings and observations are similar in perspective to mostly all of us NRI’s.

Every time I leave Mumbai airport and arrive at airports of Singapore or Kuala Lumpur in transit, it feels like returning to a Disneyland or a fairyland.

Proud to be an Indian, but am I ashamed to a Mumbaikar? How does one response to candid remarks by other nationals “Oh! Is it the gateway to India or Gateway to hell” or “Oh! It is the country of 3G’s: “Gandagi, Goondagiri, Gareebi”

When people like us ask the so called residents as to why people have such a complacent attitude in tolerating such unsanitary and other abhorrent conditions the only reply that erupts in the typical Mumbai accent “Arre yaar when are you going back to Hong Kong? Ah! You please go! Nothing is going to change here so easily” It seems with many of us that everyone was or is simply existing hopelessly in some kind of fear and subdued by a defeatist mentality.

On the positive side, Mumbaikars did show their mettle and potentialities recently at the handling of the devastation by the rain enduring floods. They have been efficient and resilient when triggered by apt motivation to bring back the city to its normal functioning, as compared to other urban residents of other countries, affected by natural catastrophes. So from this incident we can observe that Mumbai has the potentiality. It is now a matter of tapping this potentiality to its optimum.

If Mumbaikars on a collective scale could act in unison with hands on co-operation from government bodies, then Mumbai has every potential to transform itself into a Shangri-la.

We have heard several calls by certain Ministers to make Mumbai in the likes of Shanghai or Singapore. This can be only achieved if there is sufficient awareness amongst the populace who can all muster under one banner of “Clean Mumbai campaign” in concurrence with whole hearted support of government agencies to bring that “New look” to Mumbai.

Obviously, if the stalwarts of society i.e. the Bollywood Galaxy, the TV Media, University students’ and our Cricketers were to pitch in their bats, it would certainly make a radical difference in the momentum of this cause to an early compliance or fructification. Instead of relying on the isolated efforts of certain individuals or social groups it would be congenial to unite under one banner.

What have we become at this time? Immune to what we see, callous in our attitude, paralyzed by corruption and crime. The question to be asked by every responsible local Indian or NRI or Mumbaikar is “What kind of environment or legacy are we leaving to our future generation?” “Can we all do something to make a difference?”

Flora and fauna, clean surroundings, natural and architectural beauty, all these create a happy disposition and thereby a highly efficient society that is inspired to contribute a faster pace of economic development and social sanity.

An economist forecast spells that this decade belong to China, but the century belongs to India. Why wait so long, when it is in our reach and power to create an accelerated growth by being resolute about environmental issues and improving infrastructural programs and combating crime and corruption.

Until such time that Mumbaikars or Punaites or resident of other major cities have not resolved firmly with the roots of every repulsive phenomena, vociferous and dubious calls by politicians of “Shining India” simply falls flat on the pot holes of our entire infrastructure.

I know that along with the many who left Mumbai –Pune can never return to the past, but at least we can all work towards a common goal and anticipate returning as often to Mumbai or Maharashtra “a paragon of the future.”

Daduzen