

Gully news

With the release of a newsletter dedicated to the Bandstand Promenade, we went on a trip to discover others like it devoted to roads and neighbourhoods in Mumbai highlighting local history and civic concerns

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LAST month, the Bandra Bandstand Residents Trust brought out the first issue of The Promenade, a quarterly newsletter to keep citizens informed about the activities of the Trust which presently concern the welfare, maintenance and security of the Bandstand promenade. Joy Bimal Roy, who was appointed a trustee two months ago and given the responsibility of bringing out the newsletter, felt it was essential to outline its history in his very first editorial. "I wanted to bring out the feeling that people have of living on the Bandstand and in Bandra," he tells mid-day, keen to set it apart from an earlier one-page newsletter published by the Trust that concerned itself mainly with local statistics.

In this new 12-page first issue then, of which 300 copies have been printed and distributed, he writes about how in 1995, the area along the seafront in Bandstand had become a dumping ground and a parking spot for trucks, not allowing people to walk. This led several residents, among whom was late gallerist Kekoo Gandhi to complain to the BMC and the

police but no cognisance was taken at the time. Then in 1997, architect and activist PK Das prepared a report on saving Bombay's waterfronts and joined forces with the residents of the Bandstand, bringing on board the then Rajya Sabha MP Shabana Azmi who donated ₹30 lakh from her MP fund towards saving the Bandstand waterfront. Among the endorsements carried by this first issue is one by Azmi, who was, as Roy points out, "integral to the genesis of the Promenade", along with those by MLA Ashish Shelar and corporator Asif Zakaria.

Shireen Gandhi writes about Kekee Manzil, her 102-year family home on the Bandstand and her father Kekoo Gandhi. Gandhi loves the path, pointing especially to the sociability that came with it, with people from different communities meeting there for walks, but also remembers a time during her years growing up on the Bandstand when there was more access to the sea. "The roads led you straight to the rocks. You owned that sea more than you own it now because of the path."



(Below) Priyadarshini Park, Nepean Sea Road and Banganga Tank. FILE PICS



(Left, above) Architects discuss the design of the promenade with citizens and contractors in 1999. PIC COURTESY/ARUP SARBADHIKARY



Joy Bimal Roy with the newsletter at the Bandstand Promenade. He speaks of a deep emotional connection with the site. Its sculpture Requiem was erected in 2017, in memory of Roy's late mother Manobina Roy, one of India's earliest women photographers. PIC/PRADEEP DHIVAR

JK Tandon, Chairman of BBRT, writes about the newsletter's involvement in expanding the Trust's field of activity to impact other aspects of the neighbourhood and mentions issues like supporting the education of children impacted by the pandemic and preparing them for the future through the initiation of competitions with local schools and imparting skills for jobs. The newsletter also contains an article with photographs of the birds and trees of the promenade, by trustee Roy Fonseca. While subjects in future issues will expand to include matters concerning the neighbourhood, there will be something about the promenade itself, says Roy. "There are little signs [along the promenade] that say that Spanish soldiers used to use this as their watering hole that people miss," he points out, keen to bring attention to the site's various pockets of history.

The Nepean Sea Road Citizen's Forum has also had a newsletter titled The Public Eye for some years, the citizen-driven initiative releasing 44 issues in all. It was published three times a year, with 4,000-5,000 copies physically distributed to residents. However, they were forced by the pandemic to halt production and transition to social media where developments affecting Nepean Sea Road were published. Its ed-



Both The Voice of Malabar Hills and Public Eye were forced to halt production during the pandemic



TUSHAR PRABHOO

itor Nazia Vasi wrote its articles, culling from events happening in the locality and activities of MPs and MLAs. "When you are talking about civic issues to do with the roads, things move very slowly, so in a three-month span, you don't have that much to say. So, we used to ideate on initiatives people had taken," says Vasi, pointing out that there was never any promotion of businesses, the work done ad hoc and managed primarily through favours and networks that they had. Vasi remembers how older members of the forum were keen on physical copies, because there would be something to keep on file. Moreover, "if one newsletter reached a household, there would be multiple people reading it." Acquiring people's email addresses on the road too would be no easy task. Vasi however expresses interest in restarting a digital edition.

Monthly newspaper The Voice of Malabar Hills, for residents of Altamont Road, Carmichael Road, Pedder Road, Kemps Corner, Breach Candy and adjoining areas, was started in February 2014 by resident Tushar Prabhoo who inspired by neighbourhood newspapers popular in the US and Germany carrying local stories and ads, started his own featuring news about local kids excelling, sports facilities in the area and steps being taken for animal welfare, among other things. The paper, distributed free of charge,



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Joy Bimal Roy

offered low ad rates and aimed to support local businesses and started with a circulation of 1,000 copies which by 2020 had increased to 14,000. The paper however had to temporarily suspend publication in June 2020 when people stopped taking newspapers and its press closed down after COVID cases of workers were reported. The newspaper's first edition, he recalls, drew attention to the area's history and had articles on the Hanging Gardens, the Banganga Tank and Chowpatty, with Anita Garware, Chairperson of Indian Heritage Society, writing about local heritage issues. "When I started it, it was only in print, but soon we were sending PDFs to 3,000 email addresses because many of the residents live abroad and yet wanted to know about the local goings-on," says Prabhoo, who is hopeful that publication will resume by April this year.

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