

TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Horniman Circle is a great escape for the people to relax and catch up with some conversation, says **NIKITA PEER**

The Horniman Circle is one of the best attractions situated at Fort in South Mumbai. It has many lush green trees and is an ideal place for hanging out, especially for the office goers.

Over the years, Horniman Circle has changed substantially. In the 1800s it was a cotton trading ground, which later moved to Colaba. In 1855, the Horniman Circle land was barren. After a few years, there was a pond and trees around it and in 1910 this circle became Elphinstone Circle garden.

Many Mumbaikars, especially the Parsi community, started visiting this place regularly and over time it became a recreational spot. After Independence it was renamed as Horniman Circle after Benjamin Horniman, editor of *Bombay Chronicle*, who supported the Indian independence struggle.

Shirin Bharucha, trustee, Horniman Circle Association says, "About thirty years ago, this place was a desolate space

used mainly by the underworld. It was not at all safe. Thanks to Shahrugh Sabavala, Kala Ghoda Association office-bearer and Tata director to what it has become now. The commercial offices around the garden contributed 50 lakh to build this garden. After being made, it was funded by the TATAs for the first five years."

Until a few years ago, Horniman Circle was the point zero of the city and now it is Flora Fountain. It is in the midst of a commercial setting. It has ecology of its own with as many as 163 trees which is quite good considering that it is just about 10,100 sq m of land.

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The garden is divided into four quadrangles. At the centre of the garden there is a pond. It has two entrance gates in east-west direction. The entrance has a small board on the right hand side, which reads the history of Horniman Circle. There is a drinking water

station on the same quadrangle.

On the left hand side there is a security guards' cabin next to which there are toilets and storage rooms. There is also a BMC dump yard outside the garden.

On the other side, to the left of the gate overlooking the Asiatic library is a stage. A lot of cultural programmes especially during the Kala Ghoda art festival are held there. At other times this platform is used as a place especially for local workers to catch a nap. There is also a storage room, a Samadhi or a sacred tomb and a reading and a study zone. To the right of the same gate is the children's play area with a few swings, slides.

The Horniman Circle has also become a community centre. About 3000 to 5000 people visit the garden every day. Visitors include local workers, businessmen, young students, children and also a lot of people read there considering that the Asiatic library is just opposite. Many of its daily visi-

tors also include courier men who usually come there to sort out letters and parcels and also *dabbawallas* who catch a nap on the stage. The place is ideal for friends to spend time together. Overall, people of all age groups use it for various purposes like relaxing, sleeping, studying, working, sitting, eating and playing and also for drinking water.

A recent interactive seminar on a study of Horniman Circle by Priya Vakil's organisation Educated Environments (EdEn) touched upon various issues pertaining to transformation of Horniman Circle garden into an eco-friendly one. As part of their 'Less is More' initiative, an EdEn team sat in the park for six weeks and documented things and came up with measures that could ensure minimalistic wastage of resources. They have studied Horniman Circle from a sustainability standpoint which includes the behavioural pattern of users, waste and water management and have come up with various recommendations.

The various factors that need immediate attention, says Priya Vakil, Director, EdEn, are better seating arrangements, overall cleanliness and most importantly in the drinking water and pond water, adequate shading and better toilets.

According to Brinda Somaya, an architect who was present at the seminar, the youth plays a major role in making any city sustainable. Unfortunately, sustainability is not as exciting as Bollywood.

Talking about the sound analysis, Priya Vakil says, "The noise of the cars at the entrance gate is between 75-85 db and reduces, becoming 50 db near the central pond."

The seminar discussed various other issues like creating a civic sense among citizens. Vakil says, "It is really sad to see people littering in the garden. There is a sheer lack of regard for the environment. Besides, the garden is desperately in need of management for overall sustainability of the



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circle. We need to create awareness about sustainability issues by showcasing environmental and design solutions for management of our resources and enhanced functionality of spaces."

Appropriate waste management can not only help in making the place look clean but also in generating income. While suggesting a few measures to minimise the waste, Vakil says, "For waste management the garden needs separate bins for organic, recyclable and non-recyclable waste. Aerobic composting method will help in faster composting and would help in generating an income of Rs 5000/month. The estimated paper produced per month is 270 kg which would generate an income of Rs 3240."

According to Vakil, the root zone technology and rain water harvesting system can help a great deal in being water positive. The cycle control timer would help in saving electricity which gets wasted due to human error, thereby saving a lot of electricity.



QUICK BYTES

- THE HORNIMAN CIRCLE IS NOT JUST A GARDEN BUT IT HAS BECOME A COMMUNITY CENTRE
- ABOUT 3000 TO 5000 PEOPLE VISIT THE GARDEN EVERY DAY