

SPRAT's AUDA MUSKAAN PARK

For Adventure, Harmony and Science

Destruction of Dreams

A citadel of harmony razed to the ground.

The Inception

In the fractured and polarized city of Ahmedabad, SPRATians - committed to harmony & reason - had dreamed of promoting harmony by invoking reason.

In 2004 they set about erecting a unique multipurpose park to engage the Muslims of Juhapura and the Hindus of Vejalpur, two large sensitive and notoriously polarized pockets of Ahmedabad.

Securing a plot of low-lying mosquito infested land from AUDA [Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority], successive batches of SPRAT's employees, interns and volunteers labouriously collected resources, often suffering personal insults: metal pipes, car and truck tyres, batteries, elevator cables, wheels, angles, or what one could give - all used but reusable.

How did they christen the park? They called it AUDA MUSKAN! Appropriately enough to bring smiles on parched lips of the poor residents of the ghettos it served. The word "AUDA" announced that the land was not SPRAT's but theirs! This was also prominently written on its signboard!

SPRAT served about 15 lakh users over 16 years, but never charged a single penny. It built this multipurpose park to promote communal harmony, scientific temper, and adventure sport: to demolish the communally sensitive 'border' of Juhapura and Vejalpur. Indeed, SPRAT got no grant from the state government at all. Not even water for its lush greenery, nor electricity, or watch or cleaning service.

It recycled the industrial waste collected from BSNL, ONGC, IOC etc and from numerous individuals like you and I.

The Park was inaugurated by the then Governor of Gujarat, Naval Kishor Sharma, in the presence of AUDA Chairman, Surendra Patel, in 2006. A couple of years later the territory fell under the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).

In due course SPRAT built a 200+ seat auditorium, which was inaugurated by the then Mayor, Asit Vora. Pleased with the park, Mr Vora offered land for two more parks, which SPRAT politely declined. However, on its request AMC introduced a municipal bus route, setting up a bus stop right at the park.

Partners and Patrons

SPRAT built many facilities at MUSKAAN for other NGOs to offer their services. Thus, while one NGO offered career counselling, another taught Martial-arts and self-defense to girls. HelpAge Foundation offered free medical care for the elderly at the park.

With the benevolence of the illustrious Bakeri Group, a facility was setup to provide refreshing vocational skills for plumbers, electricians, masons etc.

The Park provided Yoga training to hundreds of locals, mostly Muslims. Thousands of Hindu and Muslim children from dozens of high schools of Ahmedabad used to participate in its cultural and educational competitions, patronized by the famous Painter Anjolie Ela Menon. US Consulate executives and numerous international students of exchange programs visited and appreciated the Park. Doordarshan also covered MUSKAAN in a documentary. Mr L K Advani routed a MPLAD grant through AMC for flooring, while Mr I K Gujral sent in a personal donation.

Low-Cost Recreation

Hasan Jowher - President of SPRAT, a national award-winning NGO, always dreamt of making low-cost recreation affordable for India's poor millions. "Unhappy children may grow to become sadists, and even terrorists", maintained Jowher. MUSKAAN furnished a model to conceptualize, execute and promote such recreation.

SPRATians conducted various padayatra through by-lanes of Hindu and Muslim ghettos, encouraging their youth to come and play in the Park. They used to organize competitions, even

offering token prizes, every now and then. A hobby center, computer and remedial coaching facilities were created in its fun-learn format, with daily cartoons and weekly edutaining films.

The hand-operatable science gadgets in the science gallery mesmerized the visitors. They explained concepts ranging from action and reaction, gravity, illusion, the physics of pulleys and mirrors, to force and distribution, motion and rotation etc

Though claustrophobic, the Park offered great fun through well-positioned play equipment and games imaginatively designed around them: climbing tower, wall-top walking, concave climbing wall, convex paleta throw ball, commando bridge, saddled mini-ropeways, variable see-saw, balancing cables, jumping net, treadmill tyres, merry-go-round, rotating tunnels... besides improvised swings and slides, exercise gyms etc.

Distinctly colored sections segregated users by age group with an additional section exclusively for girls. Discipline was ensured by innovative tools. The volunteers of 'Muskaan Police' inspired the urchins to behave.

An oversight body: the Muskaan Advisory Council [MAC] comprising local political leadership of BJP and Congress, and garden experts, kept improvising events and programs through distinct subgroups for social, educational, and cultural activities. This ensured transparency and public participation.

Reviews

Here is how some journalists had reviewed MUSKAAN:

- <http://www.bgverghese.com/Ahmedabad.htm>
- <https://www.thebetterindia.com/5200/sprat-from-riots-to-recovery-a-matter-of-rationality/>
- <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sundaymagazine/Power-of-smiles/article15402174.ece>
- <https://www.thebetterindia.com/364/a-reason-to-smile/>
- <https://www.yogabasics.com/connect/muslims-continue-to-practice-yoga/>

Impact

Earlier, the two localities were barricaded by extra high walls with secondary gates opening on to the "safer sides". Post MUSKAAN, the interactions growing between Ashoks and Akbars, and between Latas and Hameeddas, resulted in significant reduction in new wall heights and some openings on to the "common sides".

All that, Alas! has now stopped!

Mindless Bureaucracy

When in 2017 AMC asked SPRAT to vacate the land, the former AUDA Chairman Surendra Patel and 6 local Municipal Corporators asked AMC to regularize the allotment, appreciating MUSKAAN's work. AMC then issued a letter seeking SPRAT's consent for PPP. SPRAT, of course, readily gave its consent, but nothing was heard thereafter, ever.

In early 2020 AMC issued a notice again asking SPRAT to vacate the land "within 7 days". This notice arrived 3 days after its expiry! Nevertheless, after having selflessly served Ahmedabad for 16 years, SPRAT sought merely 3 months' time to unweld the huge equipments and auditorium, arrange JCBs, trailer, traffic police permission etc. Instead, AMC sealed the Park on 25th Feb 20.

SPRAT and some NGO leaders met the then AMC Commissioner, Mr Vijay Nehra, who after studying the case, expressed regret on the sealing of the Park and asked SPRAT not to bother about vacating it immediately. He telephonically instructed the Deputy Commissioner not to proceed in the matter and told that he would personally visit the Park and, if found necessary, may ask SPRAT to vacate it. But Mr Nehra was transferred unceremoniously within weeks and SPRAT heard nothing in the matter thereafter.

In February 21 SPRAT voluntarily wrote to the Commissioner – who was brought back after removing Mr Nehra – requesting AMC to unseal the Park so that it could remove its goods and vacate the land in 5-10 weeks. Again, it heard absolutely nothing while the Park remained sealed.

That was until Friday, the 4th June 21, when SPRAT suddenly learnt that AMC was actually demolishing the Park. Its desperate phones to the Commissioner and the Dy Commissioner went

un-responded while the bulldozers razed to the ground in hours, what was selflessly and laboriously built by numerous SPRATians and its volunteers, over many years.

There ended a cherished and painstakingly nurtured dream of dedicated social servants: to build a citadel of communal harmony and rational thinking. Contrast the images of the lush green park full of happy children before the Park was sealed, shown in the attached photo gallery, with those of mindless destruction of such productive assets.

Legality

Some irresponsible press that reproduced the AMC story seemed to suggest that SPRAT 'encroached' upon AMC land, or that it is 'land mafia' or that there was any illegal construction. SPRAT's response: No, no, never! *None of this is true even remotely.*

SPRAT was allotted this land by AUDA. Though technically the term was for one year, it was inaugurated by the Governor and presided by AUDA Chairman himself two years later! In 2010 the so-called construction [the metallic auditorium] was inaugurated by none other than the AMC Mayor. Its flooring was funded under MPLAD of Mr Advani, while three local BJP and Congress Corporators funded its ceiling fans and tube lights. These, and SPRAT's computers, projectors, sound system and many more utilities can be seen lying in the debris of demolition right now.

SPRAT never EVER declined to vacate, nor to dilly-dally vacating the land. In fact, when AMC staffers came to Seal the Park, SPRATians were actually packing things for transport. SPRAT had only asked for 5 week's time to unweld, dig up, fold up and transport the huge material. That was the last communication between SPRAT and AMC. *No notice was received either of removal of the Seal, or of the demolition.*

As of 8 Jun 21 - 5th day of merciless demolition by bulldozers – AMC has moved to its godowns about 25 truckload of material and several more will yet have to go, which may take some more days. As of this moment all this remaining stock is lying in the open, with urchins pilfering SPRAT's valuables freely, through the broken rear walls, as AMC has placed no watchman, nor has it allowed SPRAT to remove its valuables at its own cost.

Do remember that SPRAT was asked to do all this removing and vacating in "seven days". And SPRAT's only fault was that it realistically sought 5 weeks. There never was, nor now is ANY ILLEGALITY, whatsoever, by SPRAT.

Vengeance

SPRAT has been warned against protesting. VENDETTA, vengeance, revenge... are the words in the air. Beware, they say: some officials of AMC take things personally and rake up controversies to harass you. They remind that the Park Eviction notice was issued within weeks after SPRAT had protested the demolition of its Q-Mark Circle [see SAWAAL FB Group], the lovely traffic island SPRAT had built right opposite its headquarters 9 years ago! AMC had never questioned the Park's validity until Oct 17. That is two or three weeks after this traffic circle was demolished. Will AMC that has handed out scandalous and highly defamatory press-notes to local media resort to other illegal pressure tactics and coercion?

Questions

SPRAT asks:

- Why could AMC not wait for a mere 5 weeks, when SPRAT served for 16 years, for free?
- Why could it not notify demolition plans? Or ask SPRAT to collect its assets, or at least to witness the demolition and salvage its valuables: from columns and trusses to the shed, from electronics to books, and science toys to digital storage media?
- Why was the beautiful national property [worth about Rs.35 Lakhs] mercilessly bulldozed and razed to ground like enemy property, and not dismantled safely for reuse?
- More importantly, why have Ashoks and Latas had to be separated from Akbars and Hameedas, as a consequence of this destruction?

Questions that all concerned citizens must ask, and the establishment must be made to answer. Perhaps these questions can go viral if you like and share this. A photo gallery follows.

SPRAT'S AUDA MUSKAAN

MULTIPURPOSE PARK FOR ADVENTURE, HARMONY AND EMPOWERMENT
GLIMPSES OF A DREAMLAND FROM CONSTRUCTION TO DESTRUCTION - 2004 – 2021

CONSTRUCTION

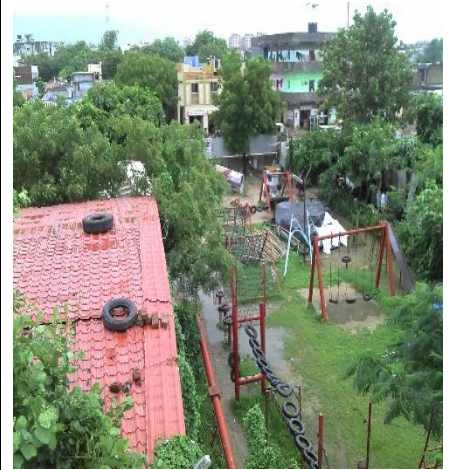
The Making of MUSKAAN - 2004



Adventure Sports



Greenery



Free Yoga Training



Medical Care Through Helpage Foundation and Others



Educational and Socio-cultural Empowerment



Promoting Harmony



Launch of AMTS Bus Service



Inauguration of Auditorium by AMC Mayor - 2010



AND NOW, THE DESTRUCTION!

GLIMPSES OF RAZING DOWN OF THE MUSKAAN PARK

On 4 Jun 2021



DESTRUCTION MCRILESS CONTINUED

GLIMPSES OF RAZING DOWN OF THE MUSKAAN PARK

25-30 TRUCKLOADS OF GOODS HAVE BEEN SHIFTED TO AMC GODOWNS

AT LEAST 10 TRUCKLOAD WORTH OF GOODS LYING TO BE MOVED ON 9 JUN 21 - UNWATCHED, UNGUARDED - ALMOST FREE FOR ALL



SPRAT's AUDA MUSKAAN PARK

VITAL STATISTICS

CONSTRUCTION

- Extensive greenery produced on a barren, mud-pool
- Dedicated to Promoting communal harmony, scientific temper and low cost adventure sports
- Served 1.5 million users in 16 years completely free of charge
- All construction within the Park, electricity, watch and ward, greening and cleaning, administration... funded by SPRAT. Even water was purchased by it privately!

MULTIPURPOSE

- Multipurpose Empowerment Park, not some plain greenery
- AMTS Bus service routed and stop created at MUSKAAN
- Auditorium facilitated Science hobby and fun-learn centre, remedial education, computer training, livelihood support, Yoga, school competitions in essay, science, painting etc.

PATRONAGE

- Land allotted in 2004 technically for 'one year' by AUDA, Park Inaugurated by Governor – with AUDA Chairman - in 2006
- AMC Mayor himself inaugurated its 200+ seat auditorium. Pleased with it, he offered two more plots of land, which SPRAT thankfully declined.
- Healthcare offered through HelpAge Foundation etc
- International visitors included US Consular executives, global exchange prog students etc
- Mr L K Advani funded flooring under MPLAD while Mr I K Gujral made a personal donation.

LEGAL

- MUSKAAN never claimed land, never denied vacating the land. Indeed, it named the Park as AUDA MUSKAAN and prominently announced on its sign board that the land belongs to AUDA/AMC
- It only sought 5 week's time to methodically remove its massive property for reuse elsewhere and vacate the land
- The Park was sealed in Feb 20 when SPRATians were removing goods, and it remained sealed till 4th June, when suddenly it was demolished without notice.

SPRAT

The NGO that built the MUSKAAN PARK

* A registered Public Charitable Trust and Society operating from Ahmedabad * Enjoys Sn 12AA and 80-G IT Exemption, FCRA registration * Was recognized as one of India's 13 best NGOs * Partnered / patronized by the US Govt, Ford Foundation, RGF, Govt of Gujarat, Microsoft, Google, AutoDESK, BSNL, ONGC, IOC, Mr L K Advani, Mr I K Gujral etc * Guided by Dr I G Patel, Lord Bhikhu Parekh, Dr Y K Alagh and the like * Helped empower over 1.5 lakh youth and women including educating 13,000+ women and children * Ran 8 innovative Empowerment centres for a decade * Now striving to set up the House of Reason at Matar * Was empowered by 300+ committed employees and interns from all over India and abroad

For Clarity: SPRAT - Ar Komal Kotiya [Manager] / Wasim Saiyed [PRO] - Tel: 91-79- 26623655/66/77