

An aerial illustration of Mumbai, India, featuring a wide river flowing through a dense urban landscape. The city skyline is filled with numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The river is populated with several boats, including a large cargo ship and smaller vessels. Lush green trees line the riverbanks, and a bridge is visible in the distance. The sky is a warm yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise, with a large white sun or moon in the upper right corner.

RECLAIMING THE WILD

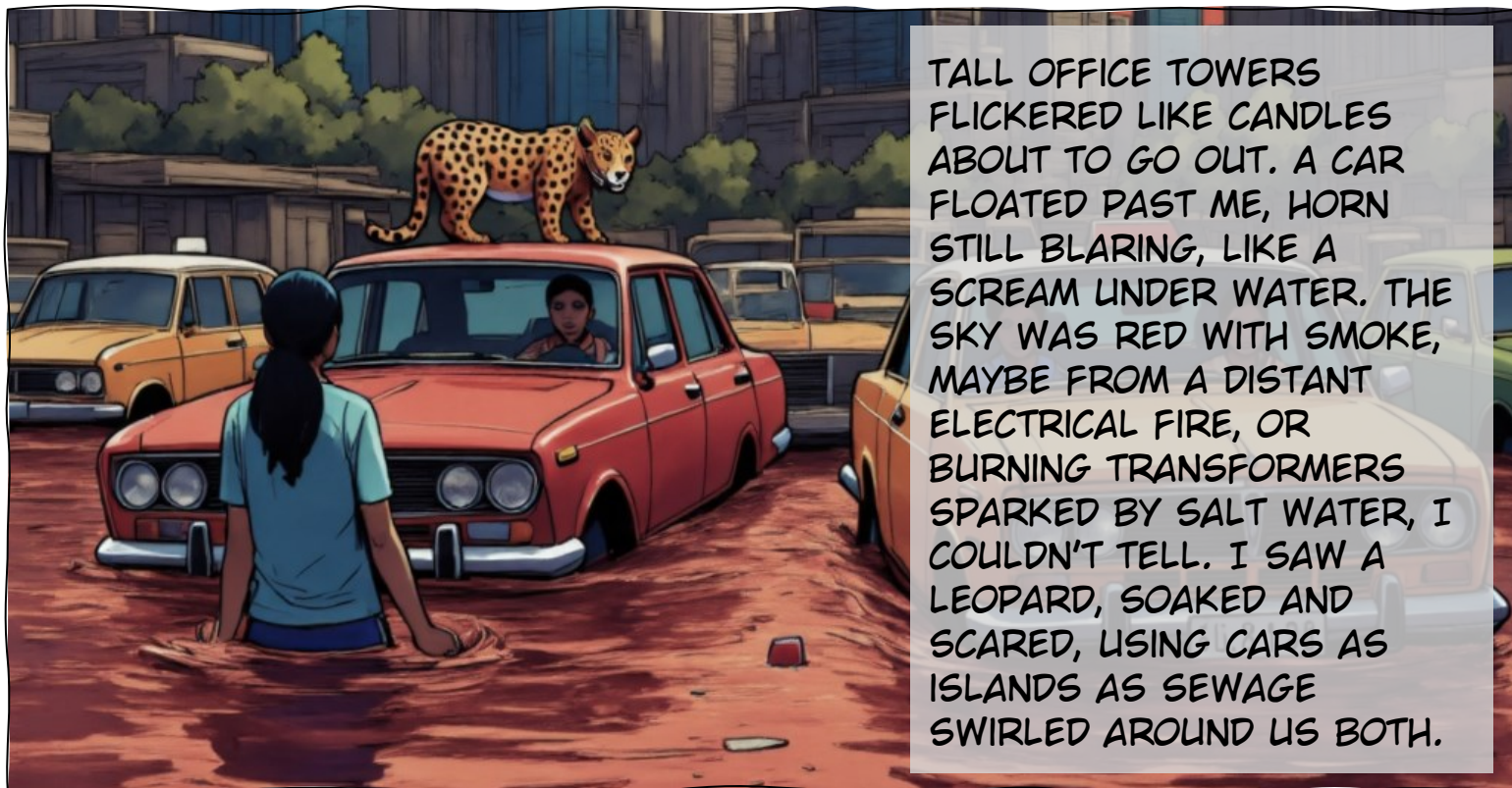
MUMBAI'S SECOND LIFE

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**2050, MUMBAI. VOICES OF THE CITY:
THIS IS ANJALI: URBAN ECOLOGIST. TIDE LISTENER, EDUCATOR.**

THIS MORNING, I
WOKE UP GASPING. I
WAS BACK IN 2037.
IN MY DREAM, I WAS
STANDING IN WAIST-
DEEP FLOODWATER.
THE ROADS WERE
GONE, SWALLOWED
BY THE SEA.

THE AIR ITSELF
FELT SCORCHED,
THICK WITH
SOMETHING MORE
THAN JUST FEAR.



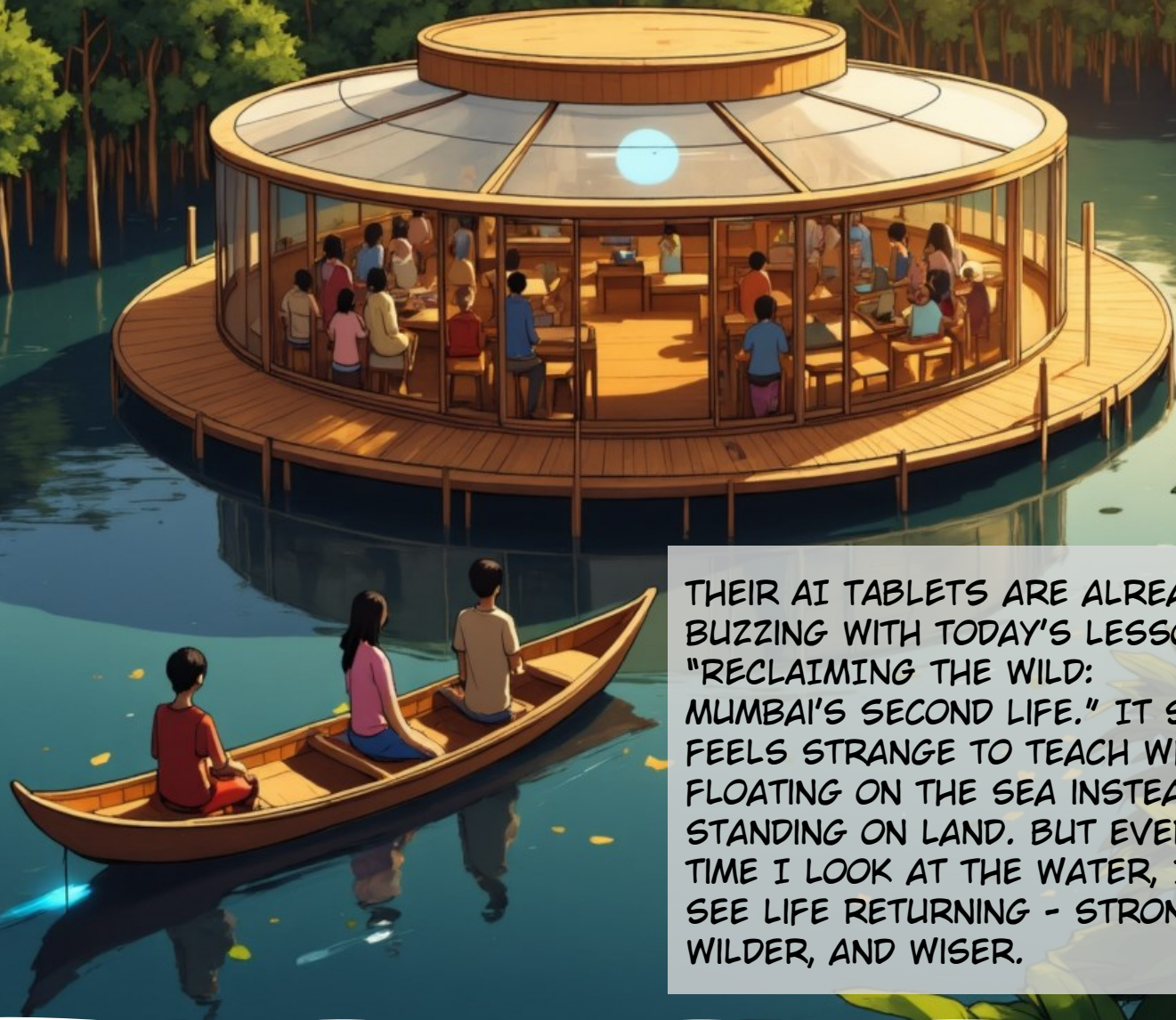
TALL OFFICE TOWERS
FLICKERED LIKE CANDLES
ABOUT TO GO OUT. A CAR
FLOATED PAST ME, HORN
STILL BLARING, LIKE A
SCREAM UNDER WATER. THE
SKY WAS RED WITH SMOKE,
MAYBE FROM A DISTANT
ELECTRICAL FIRE, OR
BURNING TRANSFORMERS
SPARKED BY SALT WATER, I
COULDN'T TELL. I SAW A
LEOPARD, SOAKED AND
SCARED, USING CARS AS
ISLANDS AS SEWAGE
SWIRLED AROUND US BOTH.

NOW IN 2050, THE SEA IS CALM. THIS MORNING I AM IN MY FLOATING CLASSROOM OFF THE COAST OF WHAT USED TO BE WORLI, ONE OF THE MANY PLACES THE SEA TOOK BACK AFTER THE GREAT FLOODS.



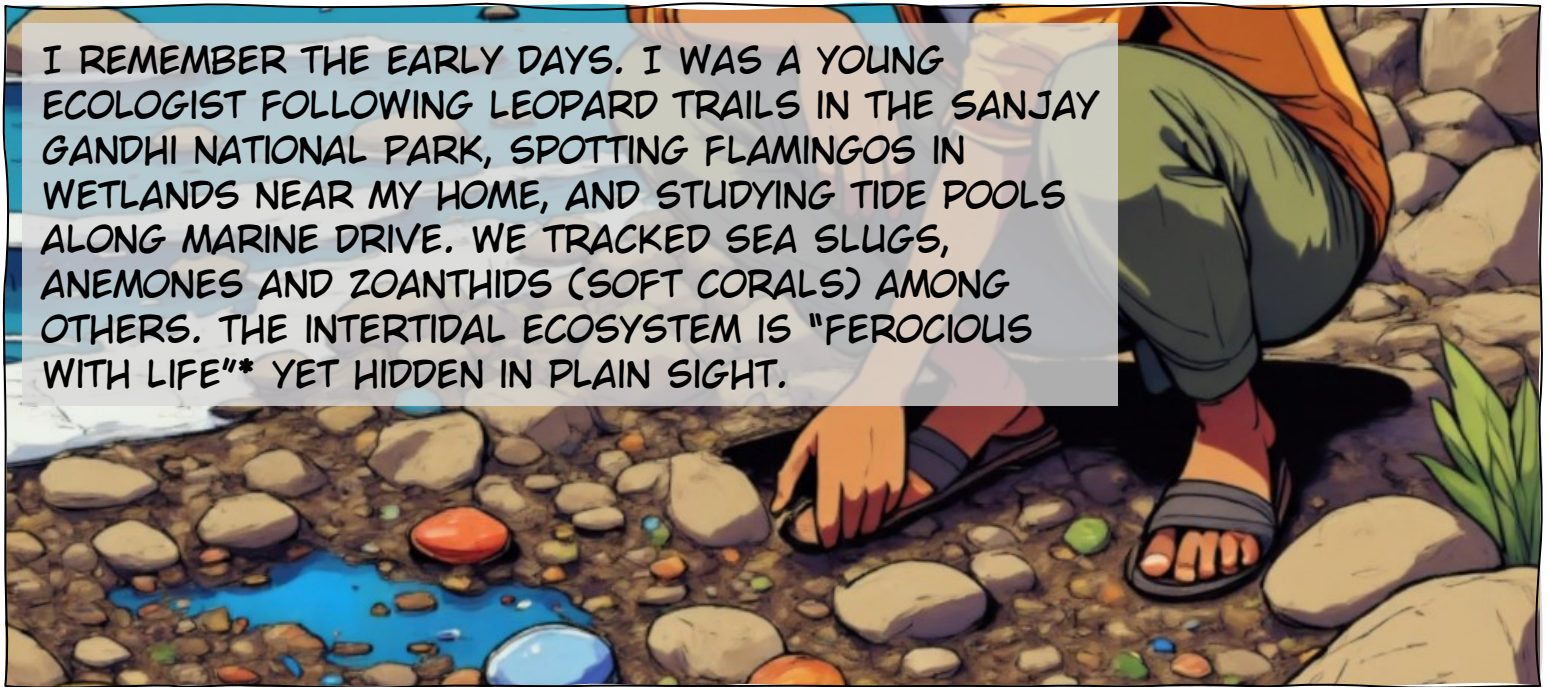
BELOW MY GLASS FLOOR, I CAN SEE THE MANGROVE ROOTS MOVING GENTLY WITH THE TIDE.

MY STUDENTS - BAREFOOT AND SMILING - WILL BE HERE SOON.

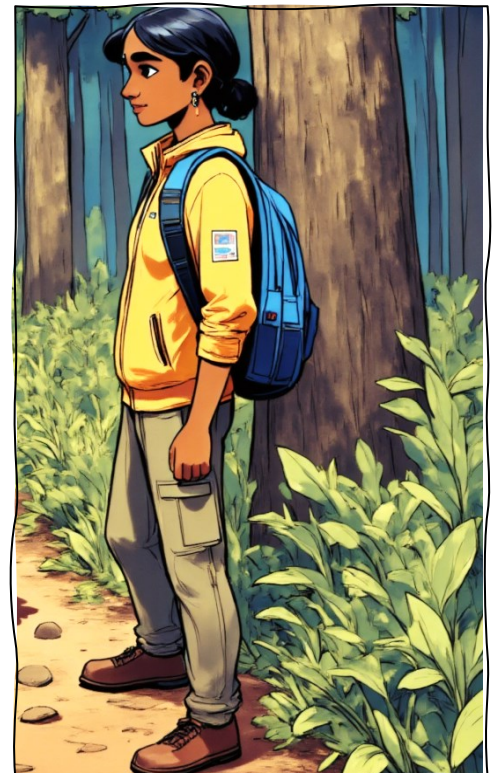


THEIR AI TABLETS ARE ALREADY BUZZING WITH TODAY'S LESSON: "RECLAIMING THE WILD: MUMBAI'S SECOND LIFE." IT STILL FEELS STRANGE TO TEACH WHILE FLOATING ON THE SEA INSTEAD OF STANDING ON LAND. BUT EVERY TIME I LOOK AT THE WATER, I SEE LIFE RETURNING - STRONGER, WILDER, AND WISER.

I REMEMBER THE EARLY DAYS. I WAS A YOUNG ECOLOGIST FOLLOWING LEOPARD TRAILS IN THE SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK, SPOTTING FLAMINGOS IN WETLANDS NEAR MY HOME, AND STUDYING TIDE POOLS ALONG MARINE DRIVE. WE TRACKED SEA SLUGS, ANEMONES AND ZOANTHIDS (SOFT CORALS) AMONG OTHERS. THE INTERTIDAL ECOSYSTEM IS "FEROCIOUS WITH LIFE"* YET HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT.



MUMBAI STILL HAD POCKETS OF WILDNESS BACK THEN. BUT GREED SPOKE LOUDER.



*JOHN STEINBECK, THE NOBEL-PRIZE WINNING AMERICAN AUTHOR, DESCRIBED TIDE POOLS AS "FEROCIOUS WITH LIFE," AND COMPARED THEIR RICHNESS TO TROPICAL RAINFORESTS. [\(CREDIT\)](#)

SANTOSH: KOLI FISHERMAN. ACTIVIST, SON OF THE TIDE.

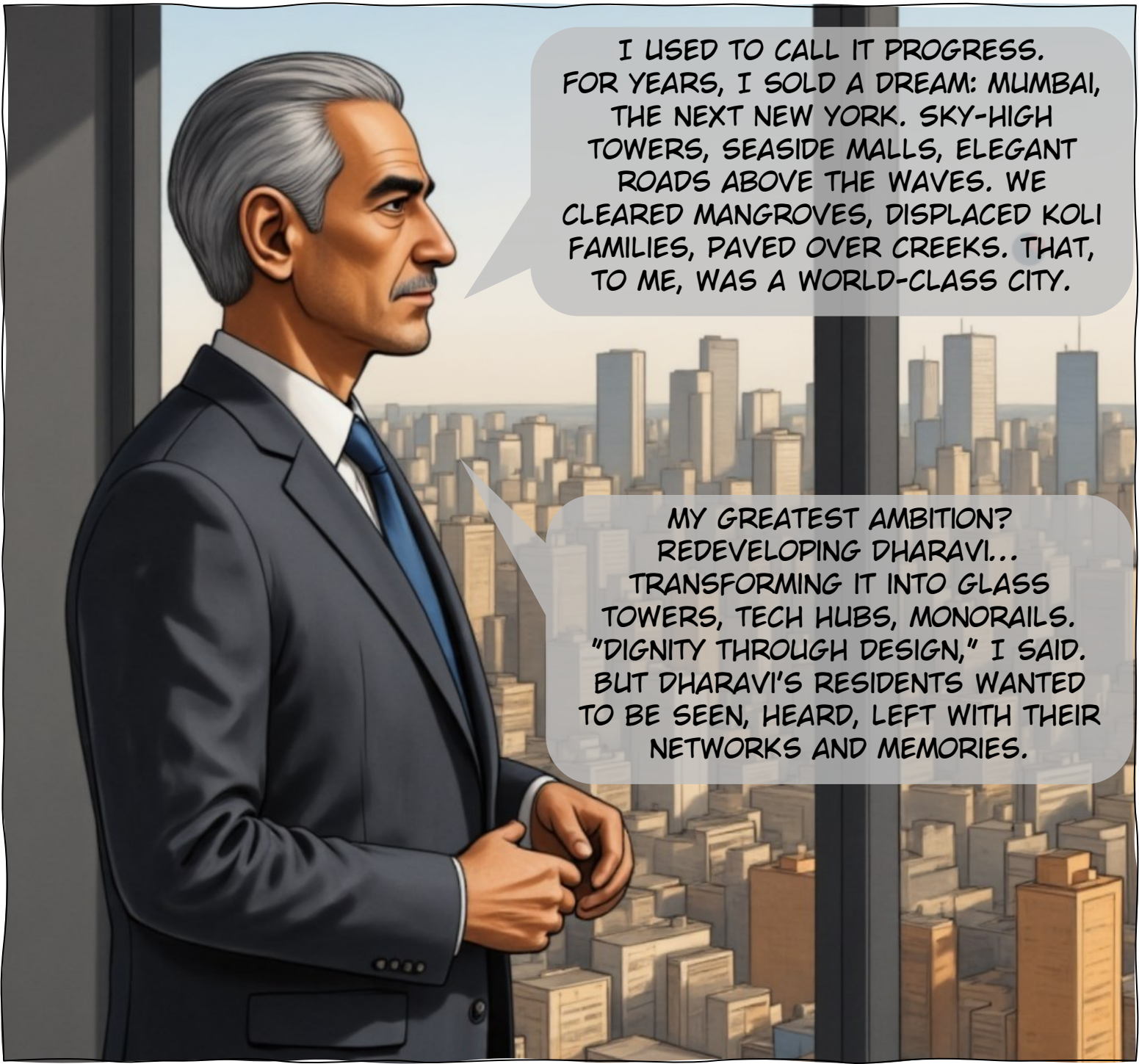
THEY CALLED US
ILLEGAL. BUT WE WERE
HERE BEFORE THE
TOWERS.
I FISHED WITH MY
GRANDFATHER WHERE
THE TIDE SANG
THROUGH MANGROVES.

WE KNEW WHICH FISH
CAME WITH WHICH
MOON. THE TREES WERE
MORE THAN PLANTS:
THEY WERE SHIELD,
HISTORY, FOOD.

AFTER 2025, THEY BLOCKED THE
CREEKS, DUG UP DOCKS, LAID
CEMENT, DIRTIED THE WATER. FISH
DISAPPEARED. WE WERE TOLD TO
LEAVE. "IT'S FOR PROGRESS,"
THEY SAID. "WE'LL GIVE YOU NEW
HOMES." BUT HOMES DON'T
REPLACE WAYS OF LIFE.



RAJIV: REAL-ESTATE TYPCOON, DEVELOPER. DREAM SELLER.

A man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue tie, is shown in profile from the waist up. He is looking out of a window at a dense city skyline with many skyscrapers under a clear sky. The scene is set in a high-rise building.

I USED TO CALL IT PROGRESS.
FOR YEARS, I SOLD A DREAM: MUMBAI,
THE NEXT NEW YORK. SKY-HIGH
TOWERS, SEASIDE MALLS, ELEGANT
ROADS ABOVE THE WAVES. WE
CLEARED MANGROVES, DISPLACED KOLI
FAMILIES, PAVED OVER CREEKS. THAT,
TO ME, WAS A WORLD-CLASS CITY.

MY GREATEST AMBITION?
REDEVELOPING DHARAVI...
TRANSFORMING IT INTO GLASS
TOWERS, TECH HUBS, MONORAILS.
"DIGNITY THROUGH DESIGN," I SAID.
BUT DHARAVI'S RESIDENTS WANTED
TO BE SEEN, HEARD, LEFT WITH THEIR
NETWORKS AND MEMORIES.

I BEGGED POLITICIANS AND PLANNERS TO SEE REASON. THE COASTAL ROAD PROJECT DEVoured CENTURIES-OLD MANGROVE BELTS AND THEIR DELICATE BUT RICH ECOSYSTEMS, WHILE FLAMINGO CREEKS TURNED TO SLUDGE.

I FOUGHT THEM EVERY STEP.



THE MUNICIPALITY SPENT CRORES ON A GLASS TUNNEL AQUARIUM IN BYCULLA ZOO. SOUTH KOREAN PENGUINS GOT AIR-CONDITIONED CAGES, WHILE US FISHERFOLK LOST OUR LAND TO LANDFILLS..

*WE PROTESTED.
BUT NOBODY CARED.*

ANJALI AND SANTOSH CHALLENGED US, THEY REFERENCED SEA LEVELS, FISH MIGRATION, STORM BUFFERS. I COUNTERED WITH GDP, INVESTORS, RANKINGS.

I BELIEVED I WAS FIXING SOMETHING BROKEN. THEY DIDN'T FIT OUR BROCHURES. THEY WERE... IN THE WAY.





THE COASTAL ROAD PROJECT WAS SUPPOSED TO MAKE THE CITY FASTER, BIGGER, AND RICHER. IT DESTROYED MILES OF MANGROVES, PLANTS THAT PROTECT THE LAND FROM STORMS. THE MAHIM CREEK WAS TURNED INTO A SEWAGE DRAIN. ANCIENT FISHING GROUNDS BECAME GARBAGE DUMPS AND PARKING LOTS.



THEN CAME 2037. THE FLOOD. ENTIRE NEIGHBOURHOODS VANISHED OVERNIGHT. ROADS CRACKED, BASEMENTS FILLED, SALTWATER SURGED INTO LUXURY TOWERS. SYSTEMS FAILED. ORDER BROKE DOWN. EVERYTHING UNRAVELLED.





TOWERS OR SHACKS—IT DIDN'T MATTER WHERE YOU LIVED. OUR OLD BOATS BECAME RESCUE BOATS., WE SAVED PEOPLE WHO NEVER SPOKE TO US BEFORE. THAT NIGHT, THEY HELD OUR HANDS LIKE LIFELINES.

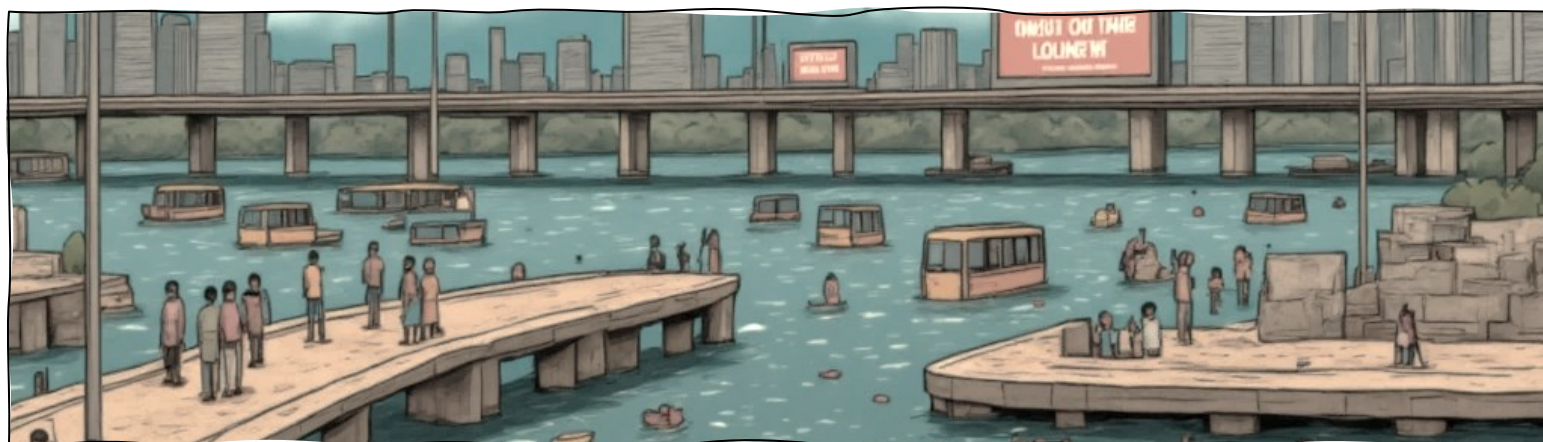




WATER SPARED NO ONE. FOR ONCE, NO ONE WANTED TO BUY WHAT I SOLD: NOT LAND, NOT HOPE.

THEY SAY A CITY IS ONLY AS STRONG AS WHAT IT'S BUILT ON. WE BUILT MUMBAI ON SAND, ON FORGETTING, ON SHORT-TERM, SELFISH DREAMS.

WE CLEARED NATURE FOR BUILDINGS AND ROADS. WE CUT DOWN MANGROVES, DRAINED CREEKS, AND ASSUMED THE SEA WOULDN'T NOTICE.



AND THAT'S WHEN THE CITY FINALLY LISTENED. WE CALLED IT THE ECO-TURN.



IN 2040, I WENT QUIETLY TO ANJALI'S RESTORATION EVENT. SHE RECOGNIZED ME, HANDED ME A SEEDLING, AND SAID, "HELP UNDO WHAT YOU BUILT."

AND I DID.

WE LISTENED: TO TIDE, LAND, SCIENCE, PEOPLE.

I LED THE ECO-TURN, UNITING EX-DEVELOPERS, DISPLACED LOCAL LEADERS, AND ECOLOGISTS.



IT WAS TIME TO USE TECHNOLOGY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND EVERY TOOL IN OUR ARSENAL TO SAVE OUR CITY.



An aerial, isometric view of a city. In the foreground, a large, modern building with a grid-like facade and a flat roof with solar panels and greenery is prominent. To its left is a smaller building and a bridge over a blue river. The river flows through the city, with green islands and small boats. In the background, a dense city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible under a hazy sky.

"WE STOPPED NEW LAND RECLAMATION. FUNDS ONCE ALLOCATED FOR ZOO EXPANSIONS WERE DIRECTED TO SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK. CREEKS WERE REOPENED."

"WE HARNESSSED AI TO PREDICT, PROTECT AND PRESERVE. WE BUILT A COASTAL MONITORING SYSTEM - AI-LINKED BUOYS THAT TRACKED WATER LEVELS, SALINITY, AND TEMPERATURE SHIFTS IN REAL TIME. THESE SYSTEMS TALKED DIRECTLY TO CIVIC WARNING NETWORKS AND SCHOOL SAFETY PLANS."

CHILDREN LEARNED TO READ TIDE CHARTS LIKE THE WEATHER. FISHERMEN GOT EARLY FLOOD ALERTS SYNCED TO THEIR BOATS. STORM SURGES WERE NO LONGER A SURPRISE.

OLD CONCRETE LOTS BECAME SPONGE PARKS - PUBLIC SPACES THAT SOAKED UP EXCESS RAINWATER AND FILTERED IT THROUGH NATIVE PLANTS.



SOLAR PUMPS FED ARTIFICIAL LAGOONS, BOTH WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES AND RESERVOIRS IN ONE.

WE WORKED TOGETHER, GRADUALLY REPLACING THE FANTASY OF MUMBAI AS A SECOND NEW YORK WITH SOMETHING REAL:

**MUMBAI AS MUMBAI.
WILD, WATER-WISE,
ROOTED IN MEMORY.**



EDUCATION SHIFTED. KIDS
USE AI HOLO-TABS FOR
BIODIVERSITY TRACKING,
TAGGING BUTTERFLIES AND
OTTERS FOR GLOBAL CITIZEN
SCIENCE. SANTOSH'S DAUGHTER
TEACHES BESIDE ANJALI.

WE TEACH SCIENCE, YES, BUT
ALSO TO LISTEN TO FROGS,
READ CLOUDS, RESPECT THE
MANGROVE'S QUIET WISDOM.



A GENTLE TAP ON THE GLASS
TELLS ANJALI HER STUDENTS ARE
HERE.

"WE'LL BEGIN TODAY
UNDERWATER, WHERE SUNBEAMS
SLICE THROUGH MANGROVE
LEAVES."



"I'LL TELL THEM HOW
THIS CITY NEARLY
DESTROYED ITSELF;
HOW ONLY WHEN WE
REMEMBERED WE
WERE PART OF IT, DID
WE BEGIN AGAIN."

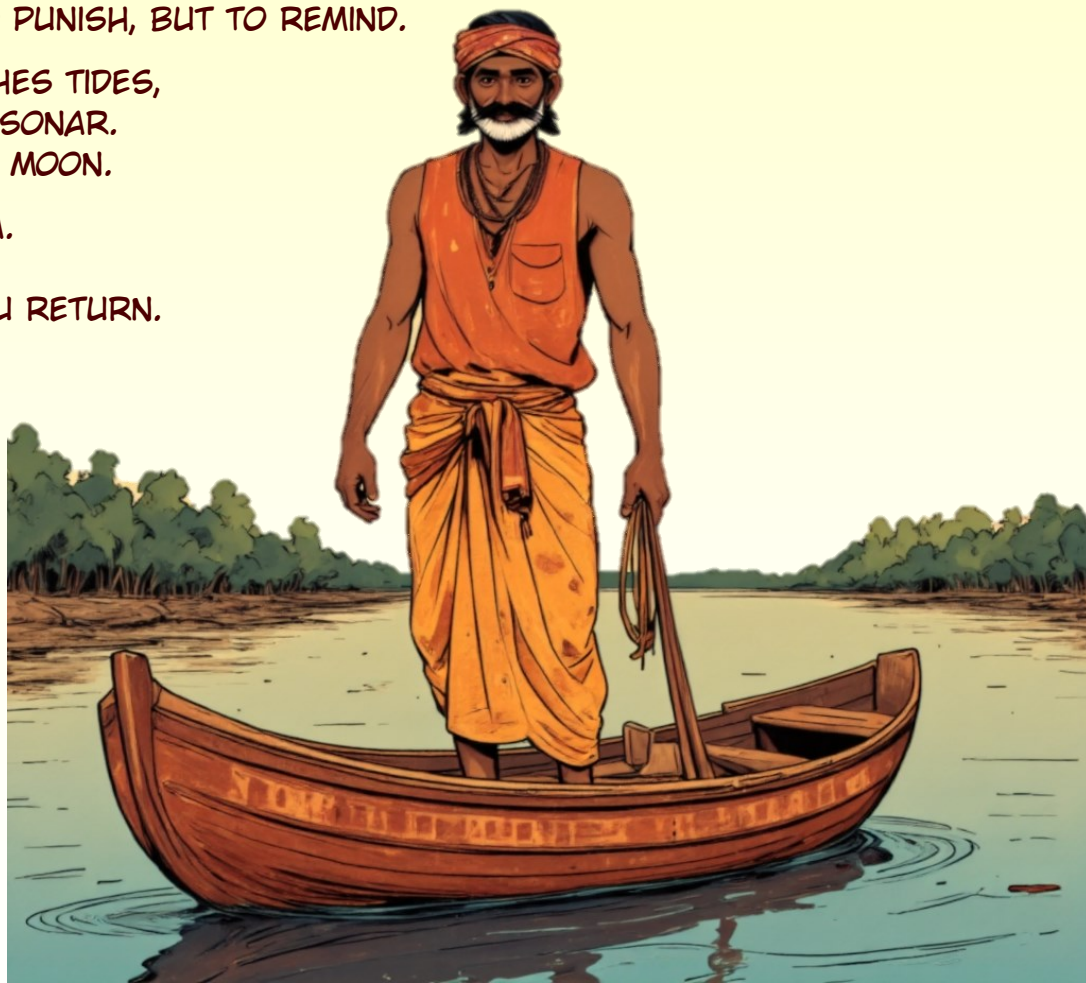
I WAS BORN WITH SALT ON MY SKIN
AND THE SEA IN MY BREATH.
WE READ TIDES BEFORE MAPS AND ROADS.

WE WERE IN THE WAY –
THEY RECLAIMED OUR LANDS AND PAVED OUR PATHS,
SILENCED OUR BOATS, BURIED OUR STORIES IN CONCRETE.

BUT THE SEA REMEMBERED.
WHEN THE CITY DROWNED, WE STEERED THE RESCUE.
THE WAVES ROSE NOT TO PUNISH, BUT TO REMIND.

NOW MY DAUGHTER TEACHES TIDES,
MY SON TRACKS FISH BY SONAR.
I STILL GO OUT WITH THE MOON.

YOU DON'T FIGHT THE SEA.
YOU LISTEN, YOU LEARN,
AND IF YOU'RE LUCKY: YOU RETURN.



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FELLOWSHIP 2025 SUPPORTED BY JAAGA, GOOEY.AI, AND MEWS.

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