

hemming the way: our un-tethered pavements



Example of blocks placed without preparing ground or applying any adhering treatment to secure them to the ground



April 2006: The tarmac on the road is not laid evenly to bleed to the edge so as to reinforce the side of the pavement



November 2007: In time, the unsupported blocks begin to gradually fall, resulting in cracks on the top of the pavement

A pavement stone sitting along the edge or lying in the middle of the road causing grave danger to motorists, especially during night driving - this is not an uncommon sight on Delhi roads. However, in case of accidents caused by these wayward pavement stones lying on the carriage way, the onus may often be placed on the driver and the case registered as one of 'negligent driving'.

POWER OF SEEING

Navtej Johar

How do these 'innocent' looking pavement stones get to become so dangerous?

Reason: They are no longer anchored or adhered to the ground they were meant to stand upon!

These days, Delhi pavements are being re-done with new asphalt blocks lining the edges; these blocks when neatly lined can give definition to the pavement and also help in hemming-in the raised pedestrian surface. Thus, they are not only cosmetic, but also serve the purpose of containing the pavement, for which they must be securely anchored.

In this issue, we focus on the anchoring of pavement stones, looking at ways in which they are (a) anchored or adhered to the ground they stand upon, and (b) reinforced by material or surfaces that come in direct contact with them.

The principles of sound construction require that all materials used, i.e. the tarmac, asphalt blocks and adhering agent (cement) must all work in conjunction with each other, keeping in mind the properties of each material, to result in a secure and long lasting pavement.

In our attempt to examine the pavements and see how they become unfriendly to pedestrians and dangerous to motorists, we share with you a few close-ups of Delhi pavements, pointing to factors that result in the asphalt blocks along the edges coming off:

- First and most basic omission lies in the fact that these blocks are simply placed on the ground without applying any adhering treatment that would anchor them.
- In the second example, we revisit a pavement where the tarmac did not bleed to the edge of the carriage way, thus supporting against the base of the asphalt blocks, reinforcing them.

Sure enough, as suspected, within a year, we see a wide crack developing at the top (there are other reasons too that result in these cracks, but we will address them in later articles as they do not pertain to the current focus of adhering the blocks to the ground).

- The third example documents a dramatic falling apart of a pavement. In two years, since the pavement was constructed, its edge has completely come off.

It is important to note that we now use specially commissioned expensive material on our roads. However, since a few common-sense details are consistently overlooked in the actual placement and adhering of the material to the site, this material becomes hazardous rubble in the path of both pedestrians and drivers.

Through our 'Power of Seeing Project', we attempt to look closely at our urban environment, our streets and public spaces, with the aim to identify and list factors that may be contributing to urban chaos.

At this stage, the project involves inviting school and college students to adopt a street element in their immediate neighbourhood and document its history over a period of time, and in the process discover factors - big and small - that make our streets and urban spaces inconvenient or even unsafe.

In a way, this exercise 'states the obvious' - the obvious factors which are actually glaring and open to the eye, and yet have the potential of going undetected and thus unregistered for generations. The collation and comparison of our collected urban case histories reveals that these detected flaws are not isolated instances, but are replicated endless number of times all over the city, and thereby they constitute patterns that permeate techniques of city-building.

Through this column, we invite your participation in the Power of Seeing Project. All we are doing at this stage is listing and documenting factors that lead to chaos in our urban spaces and further force a disconnection with our environment. If you see these flawed patterns permeating into your neighbourhood, please document them.



Photo document of an edge of a pavement on Aurobindo Marg that has been slowly falling apart over the last two years, littering the road with cement blocks

These will both add to our bank of case histories plus widen the network of 'seers' within the city. We need to see, and we need to see together. That is the first step. Documenting case histories excites a considered and concerned act of looking, seeing and connecting with our immediate environment, which happens to be our city. We need a better city, but we don't need to superimpose foreign models upon ourselves, aping the west or a Singapore. We can create our own indigenous model that is friendly to humans and in harmony with nature. But, for this, we first need to express and excite that initiative to connect and it actually begins with 'seeing'.



The Power of Seeing is a Studio Abhyas project initiated by dancer and yoga exponent Navtej Johar. It questions the absence of the human body as a central point of reference in urban design, making our cities inconvenient, unsafe and hazardous. Log onto www.abhyastrust.org.