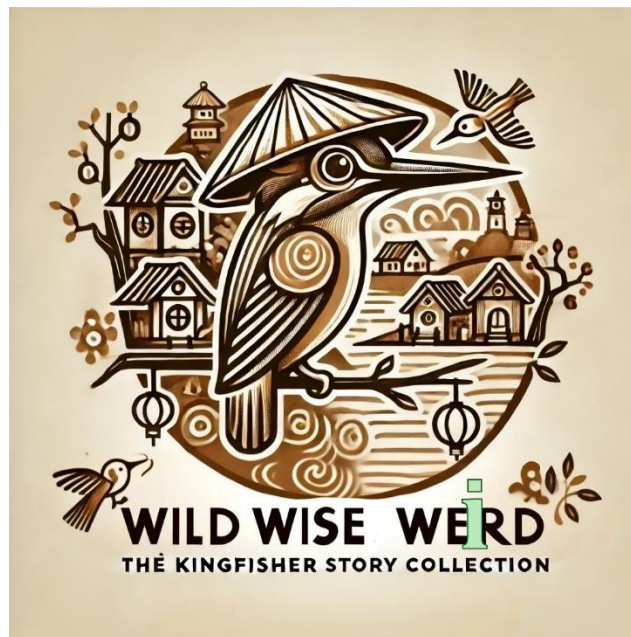


# Living with the Unfinished: How Mumbai's Sewage Delays Reshape Urban Life

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“All Kingfisher needs to do is use his peck and legs to swipe here and there, fix this and that, plus a couple of hours digging, there he finally has a proper mansion. One that even has a food inventory.”

In “Mansion”; *Wild Wise Weird* [1]



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Mumbai's sewage infrastructure—marked by chronic delays, systemic inequalities, and enduring incompleteness—functions as more than a technical or bureaucratic undertaking. As Purva Dewoolkar [2] reveals, it is a lived condition, a fluid and adaptive framework that shapes and is shaped by daily urban life. Grand plans such as the Mumbai Sewage Disposal Project (MSDP) and the Mumbai Sewerage Improvement Programme (MSIP) promise comprehensive waste management. Yet, after decades of stalled implementation, many low-income communities continue to lack even the most basic sanitation services.

Dewoolkar [2] reframes infrastructure not as a fixed, final product but as a process of unfinishedness—a state of ongoing formation. Drawing on Tim Ingold's [3] unfinished concept, she challenges linear notions of development, showing how infrastructural incompleteness generates spaces of improvisation. In Bhimnagar—a post-2000 informal settlement in Mumbai's marginalized M East ward—residents face layered exclusions: temporal (because of when it was established), spatial (due to its peripheral location), and administrative (owing to its absence from official development plans).

Denied legal status and basic services for years, Bhimnagar's residents eventually secured water connections through a protracted legal struggle. Yet, on-the-ground realities remained fragmented. In the face of partial implementation, residents forged their own infrastructural solutions: repurposing unconnected sewer pipes to store groundwater, diverting waste into open storm drains (*nallahs*), and constructing makeshift toilets within cramped homes using salvaged materials [2].

Dewoolkar's ethnographic research (2014–2023) reveals how everyday adaptations in places like Bhimnagar reflect both resilience and the enduring effects of infrastructural violence [4]. While national and global initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission proclaim the goal of universal sanitation, informal settlements are frequently framed as temporary, enabling their exclusion from permanent infrastructure systems. The concept of “unfinished” exposes this recursive logic—where policy-induced uncertainty forestalls integration and perpetuates infrastructural inequality [5,6].

Ultimately, cities are not solely shaped by master plans or formal projects but also by the incremental, embodied practices of those living at the margins. In Bhimnagar, residents craft dignity and functionality within policy voids, revealing how urban life unfolds through the entanglements of nature, infrastructure, and human ingenuity [7,8].

## References

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