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The city as you don't know it

A cultural fest brings to focus crucial and ignored aspects of our urban lives

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A conscious attempt to portray Delhi as a world-class city by a certain section of the media is on currently. And here is a festival that comes at exactly the same time, and examines the city too, only it looks at the image of the world class city by different sets of people.

The festival, called shehar.com, at Delhi's India Habitat Centre on February 4 and 5, brings together a host of cultural performances and exhibitions, but above all makes the viewer think about the city. For in the media brouhaha, what are often lost are the complex juxtapositions that exist to make this city function, often in a manner that is unsustainable and unjust.

Organised by the Hazards Centre, the festival provides a platform to ordinary voices, how to embrace world-class basic amenities for a majority of the city's population in the midst of mushroom malls,

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**GROUP SITES**

hotels and multiplexes.

The festival has plays from groups like Jagori, We, Chintan, Chetna, Pravah, Ankur, Manzil, Gandhi Smriti, Steps for Change, Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan, Kislay, Toli, Action India, Salaam Balak Trust, IPTA, besides colleges like Hansraj, Kirori Mal, Motilal Nehru, Kamla Nehru, and Jawaharlal Nehru University. What provides the edge is the fact that the performers for many of these plays are from the poorer economic backgrounds, and actually bring slices of their lives onstage. The 'conversation' from Manzil has two 'working class' boys from the elite Sujan Singh Park sharing their concerns on the changing city around them. Action India's play Har Mod Par, by a youth group in Tughlaqabad village, highlights the increasing violence against women in a world-class city.

"One of the things we have been feeling is that the articulation of people cannot really match the sophisticated verbal jugglery of the bureaucrat-politician nexus. Thus, much of their feelings and thoughts are expressed through what they pick up from mainstream media, including film and television. So for the last six months or so we have been encouraging them to find other forms to express themselves — painting, posters, songs, poems, sculpture, and even theatre," says Dunu Roy, Director, Hazards Centre.

The festival also has sub-themes in exhibits titled How the City Lives, Moves and Works, Delhi Through the Ages, How the City Transforms and How the City Resists.

A festival for those willing to make Delhi a world-class city for all, not just a few. And ready to face up to facts and act on them. Truly a festival with a difference, it seeks to sensitise citizens through cultural idioms.

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