



VISUAL & MEDIA HISTORIES  
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# WOMEN ARCHITECTS AND MODERNISM IN INDIA

NARRATIVES AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES

MADHAVI DESAI



A Routledge India Original

## 27 Pratima Joshi (1964–)



Plate 27.1 Pratima Joshi  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi

The career narrative of Pratima Joshi is rather different from many women profiled here. She has trodden on a less-travelled path and has made an enormous difference in many lives. Her organization has led several community-based projects where the users have been fully involved. Her aim has been to work towards the recognition of slum dwellers as legitimate city residents with rights to basic public services and housing. Her organization generates and analyses information on slum demography by mobilizing the slum youth to collect data. She pioneered the use of geographical information system (GIS) technology for mapping poverty in a creative and innovative manner.

Born in a progressive Kokanasth Maharastrian Brahmin family, also with a last name Joshi, in Chennai, Joshi had a happy childhood with two brothers. Her father is a metallurgical engineer and her mother a homemaker. Her mother is rather academically inclined with extensive interest and capacity to lead in cultural events. She has a *visharad* (equivalent to a master's) degree in classical music and has conducted Marathi plays in Chennai on Maharastrian reformers like Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi and Karve. Her mother still goes regularly to the gym for a workout and has set an example of perseverance and time management for Joshi. While she was studying in a convent school in Chennai, Joshi took an active interest in sports, especially athletics, dramatics, music and elocution. She also regularly performed under Hindustani light vocal section of Air India Radio. She was not a tomboy but had only boy cousins to hang out with. Actually, it was Joshi's mother who went and got an admission form for architecture for Joshi from the Anna University in Chennai.

Joshi found architecture to be a good combination of the arts and sciences when she joined the course in 1981. Out of 19 students in her class, six were girls. Though Joshi enjoyed the five years of her studies, she found the large studio projects rather unrealistic. Two important personalities during her college sowed the seeds of her alternative work trajectory. The first one was her climatology teacher, a visiting professor from Britain called Michael Slingsby, a sensitive human being. Michael was involved in 'Sites-and-Services' projects supported by the World Bank. When Joshi visited the projects, she was greatly impressed by the respect he drew from people, his personal concern for the labour and his simplicity and deep involvement. Another personality who formed an impression on her mind was Dr Chamanlal Gupta, an internationally known expert on renewable energy, under whose guidance she completed her dissertation in Pondicherry on 'Looking at Passive Solar Concepts and Applying to Architecture'. After graduating in 1986, Joshi immediately went for further studies to the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, partially supported by an Aga Khan Scholarship. Her master's course in building design for developing countries impressed upon her the need for using alternate energy and a more sustainable approach to the resources of the world, leading her away from mainstream architecture towards development issues.

Joshi returned to Chennai in 1987 and had an arranged marriage with an electrical engineer of her caste in 1988, after which she moved to Pune. A daughter was born to them within a year. For the next four years, Joshi worked part-time in Christopher Benninger's organization called Centre for Development Studies and Activities (CDSA) in Pune. In 1992, she left CDSA (while being pregnant with her second child), and a year later, she formed her own non-governmental

organization (NGO) called Shelter Associates with two close and committed friends. They were funded for the first five to six years by another NGO called SPARC (The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres), run by Sheila Patel in Mumbai. The three bright individuals toiled very hard to work with slum dwellers in the area of cost-effective housing. They separated from SPARC in 2000, and over the years the two friends went their way, therefore for the last ten years Joshi is solely in charge. Shelter Associates has grown steadily in number and scope of meaningful work with strong support of some enlightened municipal leaders and funding from organizations such as the Tata Foundation, US AID, the World Bank and Cities Alliance.

The organization now comprises architects, social workers, GIS experts, community workers and mostly foreign volunteers. It works with the urban poor, particularly women, in informal settlements to facilitate and provide technical support for community-managed housing (slum rehabilitation) and infrastructure projects, always partnering with Baandhani, an organization of women and men slum dwellers. Joshi believes that the poor have to be totally involved in the decision-making process. They have been successful with projects like smokeless *chula* and community and individual toilets, besides conducting educational and training workshops to impart lessons in health, hygiene and sanitation and to create employment generation initiatives.

Joshi has realized that there is very poor information system on slums in the government, which results in mismatched data and disjointed ground reality for practice and policy issues. Therefore, they bought GIS software and after a year's efforts tailored it for mapping poverty, user profile and spatial layouts for surveys to collate information about slums for an inclusive urban planning. Their research and documentation ranges from film documentaries, photographs and one-page flyers to in-depth analysis of settlements, including physical land use and socio-economic factors. Extensive primary research and accessible reporting heightens awareness of slum areas and their residents, and this, in turn, improves levels of participation and the sustainability of projects. The study material directly feeds into their work, and the information is also made available to stakeholders for planning projects and impacting policy.

As a woman, Joshi has personally never experienced any discrimination. In her work, it has been an asset as she is able to strike a dialogue with women of the slum communities immediately. There are 60% women in her staff, as it is the poor women who are affected by the woes of water supply, sanitation and housing in any slum. Joshi is aware of the women's movement in Maharashtra in particular and in India in general. She realizes that she could not have been where she is without the steps taken by the earlier generations. With two children, she has managed her responsibilities on both the fronts with the help of considerate in-laws and with incredible support from her husband who would get up in the middle of the night not only to change diapers but to prepare a snack for the children. She also credits her success to her sound upbringing and to parents who practised what they preached while valuing ethics and transparency. Her maternal uncle, Vasant Sathe, was one of her role models. Her father, who is a man of principles, has contributed to her organization when they faced the challenge of making sense of the enormous data collected. Joshi's work is recognized internationally, but it has remained relatively unknown in Pune as well as in India. Her organization received the HUDCO award for best practice under sanitation category in 2015.

Prathima Joshi projects

Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, Pune, 1997–2004

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) asked Shelter Associates to carry out detailed surveys of six slum pockets along the river. Kamgar Putala, one of the oldest slums in Pune, was the worst hit by floods in 1997. The only solution was for the people to move to a different area.

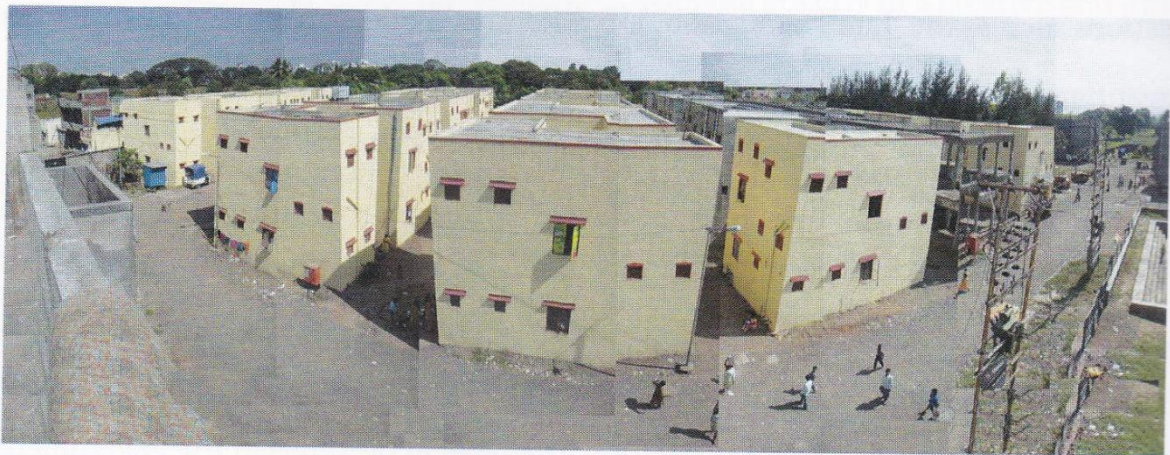


Plate 27.2 Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, panoramic view  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi

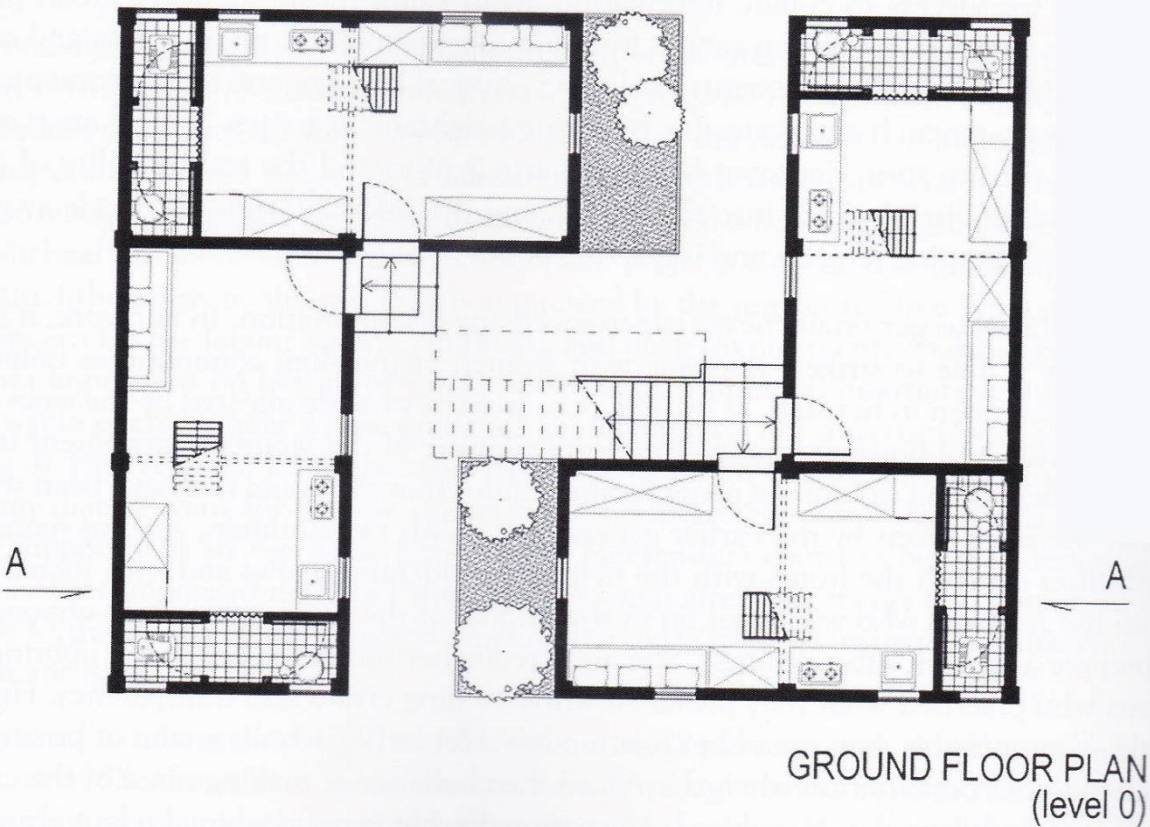


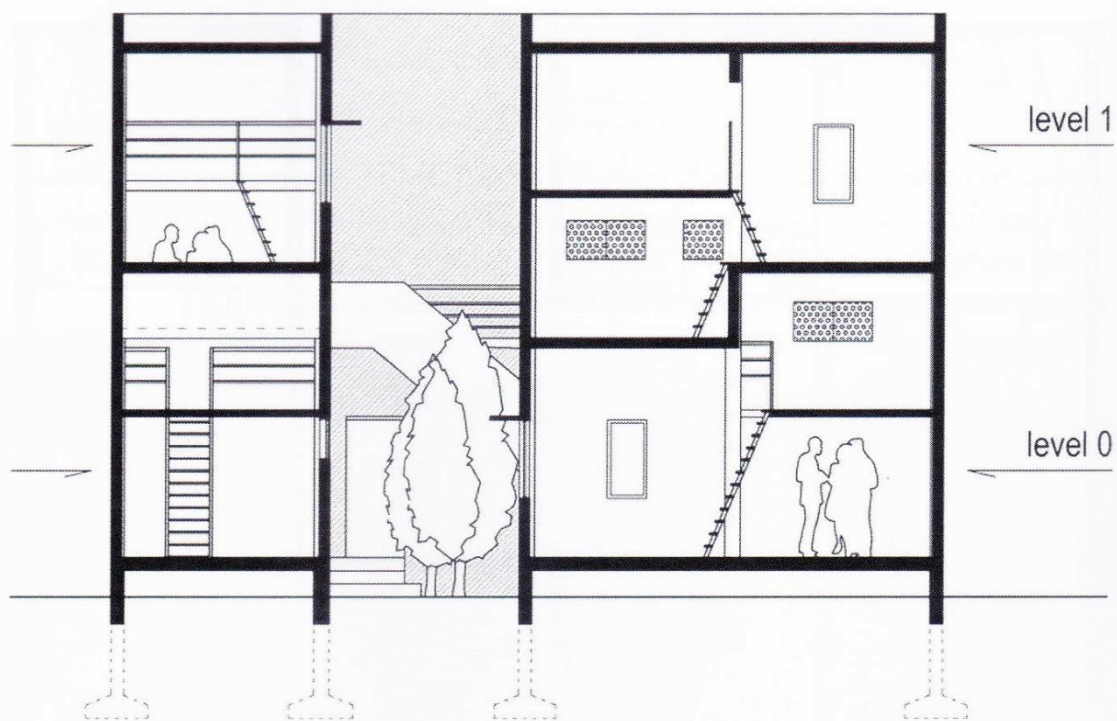
Plate 27.3 Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, ground-floor plan  
Drawing courtesy of Pratima Joshi



Plate 27.4 Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, first-floor plan  
Drawing courtesy of Pratima Joshi

One hundred and sixty families in this settlement became part of Baandhani (a federation of slum dwellers) as they struggled to resettle on an alternate site. As negotiations continued, Baandhani and Shelter Associates tried to improve the existing environment. When it was announced that the PMC would cover the expenses of making vermiculture pits in housing societies, Shelter Associates got this facility extended to slums as well. Vermiculture is an ideal way of dealing with garbage in slums as most of the garbage generated is wet garbage. Baandhani made the pit with PMC funds.

After continuous efforts of Baandhani, the municipal commissioner Ratnakar Gaikwad (2000) agreed to visit Kamgar Putala and listen to what the people had to say about moving. He visited the Shelter Associates office and saw tentative plans drawn up for them. The basic design was in modules of eight tenements: four on the ground and four on the first, clustered around a central courtyard with just one flight of stairs leading to the first floor. The courtyard was flanked asymmetrically by two small courtyards, which provided access to the individual tenements on the ground floor and the staircase. This design allowed plenty of sunlight and ventilation. It was



SECTION A

Plate 27.5 Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, section  
Drawing courtesy of Pratima Joshi



Plate 27.6 Rehabilitation of Kamgar Putala, a decorated kitchen  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi

decided with the community that each house would have one big window and five concrete *jalis* or trellised openings. The community had voted for individual toilets, and this was incorporated in the design.

By then HUDCO was willing to give loans and to handle the entire construction and management, finding this an extremely viable and interesting project. They identified relocation land in Hadapsar, and the project was completed in 2004.

### Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, Dattawadi, 1999

In May 1996, during the first rains of the monsoon, the houses of Rajendranagar slum were demolished by the city authorities. In September 1998, families moved into their brand new community-constructed houses in a slum rehabilitation housing project in Dattawadi from their informal settlement.



Plate 27.7 Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, external view  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi



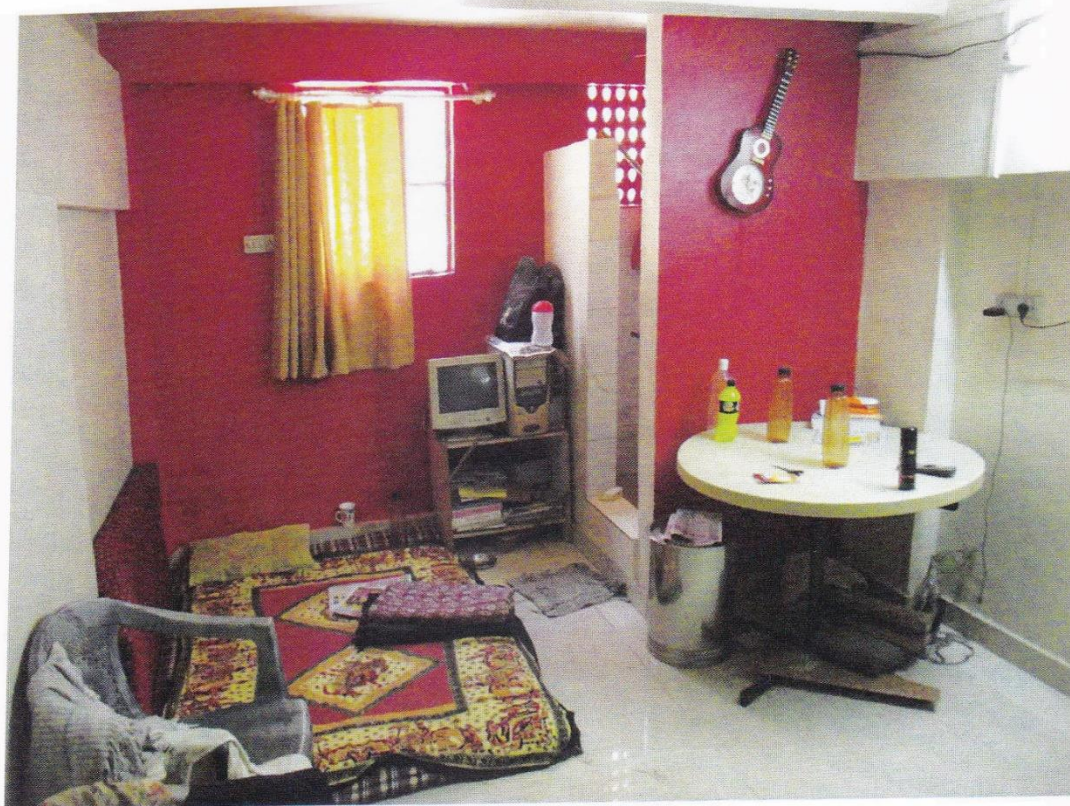
Plate 27.8 Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, side view  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi



Plate 27.9 Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, view of the internal courtyard  
 Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi



Plate 27.10 Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, view of a house unit  
 Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi



**Plate 27.11** Rehabilitation of Rajendranagar slum, view of a living space  
Photo courtesy of Pratima Joshi

Shelter Associates and another NGO were the architects of the rehabilitation project and worked with the community of the Rajendranagar slum to provide them with new houses, essential services, sanitation and freedom from the threat of eviction on a site less than two kilometres from their slum. Shelter Associates envisioned the two-storey residential building to have sustainable impact on the quality of their lives in relation to health, hygiene, safety, employment, education and matrimonial options. The community took more responsibility for the cleanliness of their environment, especially the public areas. There were 12 toilets between the 50 resident families. This strategy was devised and adopted by the community to ensure that toilets remain clean and well maintained.

All children, regardless of caste or religion, play in the central courtyard, which is a safe place constantly under supervision. This space has also encouraged a feeling of community spirit as no child is marginalized. All children now receive education, even the poorest among the lowest castes. Today, the situation has improved as more members of Rajendranagar community are now employed in the service sector. The youth also receive better education, hence have better employment opportunities.

The rehabilitation scheme has had a positive impact on the quality of life of Rajendranagar community. All the residents have reported that, compared to the slum where they used to reside, their new homes are healthier and safer, and as a result, education, employment and marriage options have all increased.