

Ethical Considerations for Urban Planning

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I was born in the town of KOZHIKODE in erstwhile Malabar. The commercial town became historically famous with the arrival of Vasco de Gama the Portugese sailor in the fifteenth century. The joke during my childhood days in early 1940's was that if the sailor was to revisit the town he would not find it difficult to locate places. Compared to Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram which were under the rule of respective Rajas, Kozhikode was directly administered by the British and the development of the town took a back seat, even though it was a very prosperous trading town famous for pepper, coconut, fish, etc. Now the town has developed into a city with an engineering, a medical college and an IIM functioning. University of Calicut is not far away from the town. But the suburb of Chalapuram where I stayed during my childhood has not changed much, except for the heavy movement of city transport buses hurtling down the narrow streets, endangering pedestrians. The picturesque town of Ernakulam has developed into a sprawling city where road blocks are endemic due to heavy movement of automobiles and other motorized vehicles. In fact the old cities and towns have lost their original character with new buildings taking shape and the inflow of population from rural areas.

My first visit to Bangalore, was in the year 1951 when it was a veritable pedestrians' and Retirees' paradise. Later when I started living

in the City from the year 1981 it had developed into a major city but commuting from different locations could be done within reasonable time thus allowing residents to participate in the cultural events of the city. But with the advent of I.T. and other associated services coming up, the city lost its original character and movement from place to place became difficult. With the continued expansion of the City and the population increased to more than ten times from early 1950's the quality of life suffered. During 1950's strolling along the foot path of South Parade (now M.G.Road) enjoying a cup of coffee from the Indian Coffee House, seeing a movie from one of the theatres and walking back to Contonemnet Y.M.C.A. was a routine affair. Now they fade into realms of nostalgia never to be repeated anymore. Same is the case of Chennai, where I had my professional education. These cities have become mega cities and the infrastructure like roads, schools, hospitals, market places, etc have not kept up with the influx of the population, resulting in high transport costs, delay in connectivity, increase in pollution affecting the health of the population. In Bangalore in spite of the best efforts put in by B.M.T.C., most of the office goers take out their own transport, spend hours in traffic jams and return to their homes tired after a day's work. No wonder that they are

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stressed and prone to many ailments and operational related diseases not heard of earlier. "India To-day" brought out a series of articles on "How to save our Cities" by eminent persons and each one has given his or her views in the issue of 20th September, 2010.

Mumbai

The renowned architect Charles Correa writes that the most essential characteristic of Mumbai, one which distances it from all other Cities of India, is the public transport. He says that the British connected the seven islands to form an elongated land mass that is really an extended backwater protecting the port from the open sea. The port is situated on the Southern end of the back water and from this port the British connected two railway systems, goods and passengers across the country – the present Central and Western railways. The railway authorities constructed stations along these routes and people began to live around these stations thus sowing the seeds of Mumbai's extended suburb. These corridors of demand created by Mumbai's linear structure made it possible a much higher frequency of trains than in the evenly distributed sprawl of Chennai, Delhi and Kolkatta. He says that this mobility available to all its citizens is the essence of Mumbai's success. The mass transport systems, by definition is linear and therefore can cater to the high density demand by the nature of its formation itself. Mass transport system carried out after the cities have developed, became very costly as can be seen in the case of Delhi Metro and Bangalore. Within a few years we all at Bangalore, will be in a position to see the effectiveness of Metro in the mass movement of people and also know whether the present chaos in the city roads would become more manageable. In foreign metropolises like London, New York, Washington and Moscow the underground and surface rail transport

systems are very effective and with the integrated road network in position, access to places is not difficult. But these mass transport systems were put in place along with the development of the cities and became very effective. But in our case these are being constructed after the places are developed and therefore it may take many years before the M.T.S can meet their projections of mass transportation. The City of Mumbai because of the suburban railway system, was very hospitable upto 1970's but now it has burst all seams and a Navi Mumbai has taken shape to cater to the never ending influx of population from hinterland and elsewhere.

Lure of Mega Cities

Mega Cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, etc attract thousands of migrants daily from hinterland and from other States seeking their fortunes and better opportunities for a livelihood. Even if they manage to find a vocation or a means to work they have to put up without a roof over their heads, do not get their daily needs of water and sanitation. Cities are unable to meet the ever expanding demand and ultimately they develop into slums. Bangalore which had no slums in the 60's and 70's have many slums, thanks to the construction of high rise buildings and the expansion of the city by leaps and bounds. It was reported in the papers that for the construction of Commonwealth Games in Delhi more than 90,000 people had worked and after the jobs were completed they had to leave the place seeking employment elsewhere. These are tragic instances and need be remedied if not completely eliminated. "India Today" in their issue of 20th September 2010 reports.

30 per cent Indians live in Cities generating two thirds of G.D.P. and 90% of Government's revenue.

140 million people will move to Indian Cities by 2020 and 700 million by 2050.

5 of the World's 20 most densely populated Cities are in India.

In 1981 there were 12 Cities with a population grades than one Million. There may be 68 such Cities by 2020.

With agriculture becoming a non-preferred occupation, the land holdings becoming more and more fractured, migration from rural areas to Cities can only increase in future and most of them will land up in Mega Cities. It is necessary to find a solution. One such way is the creation of Compact Medium Density Cities.

Medium Density Compact Cities

With the present augmentation of the road and rail connectivity, locating such medium density cities may not be difficult as a long time solution for the development of the Country. With the extended communication network already established, working away from mega cities may also not pose any serious problem. Rather than extending the Mega Cities where land, services, labour, etc are a premium with much lesser cost habitats can be constructed and suitably connected to the road and rail network. Such modern medium sized Cities can be established on the rail or road routes between Bangalore – Chennai, Bangalore – Mysore, Chennai-Hyderabad, Ahmedabad – Delhi, Mumbai-Ahmedabad, Mumbai-Indore, Kolkata – Delhi, Kolkata – Vishakapatnam, etc.

BRAND SCHOLL of ZURICH who has been involved in heritage based planning of many Cities in Europe says that the crucial factor is awareness about the importance of heritage and history and their conservation should be part of modern planning of Cities.

The local people should have the power to decide as to what would come up in the City. They have to receive advice from experts on line. The Private developers involved in construction should set apart, part of their funds towards development of social infrastructure like roadways, school building, etc which after construction, would be maintained by the Municipal administration. These plans envisage future requirements, take into consideration that energy is a premium and make provisions for forestry, water harvesting, garbage management, etc from the inception itself with public and private participation. Internal transport within the City should be minimum and preferably the offices and working areas should be within walkable distance from houses or at least reached by cycle. Recreation facilities and cultural complexes are to be inbuilt so that social interaction takes place.

Heritage Site and Pilgrim Centres

Our country is famous for heritage sites and pilgrim centres which could be developed as places of tourist spots with the construction of approach roads, hotels, shopping establishments, etc. The medium density cities could be located not far away from such pilgrim centres so that over a period of time they become self employment generating centres. The labour force involved in the construction of such cities naturally find good vocation after the construction work is over, to engage themselves in lucrative pursuits. In such ventures, the State Government, major Corporates should actively involve themselves so that over a period of time they become self generating economic power houses. An attractive city not far from pilgrim centre would attract many visitors for spending more time, with the availability of good hotels bringing more revenue and more

employment, besides instilling a sense of pride in the heritage of the Country.

Developing compact medium cities nearer to pilgrim and heritage centres would need partnerships between Governmental and private enterprises and Society groups. Also incentives like transferable development, sellable rights, change in land use, market value compensation, subsidy for traditional building materials, etc are necessary to create an atmosphere for participation from the public and Private sector. Unlike the foreign

countries we have neglected heritage sites for many years and it is high time we utilize our efforts on reclaiming them and making them once more vibrant to attract tourists and revitalize our own culture and heritage. Under-developed States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, etc have thousands of places which were famous and they could be magnets for attracting people for their habitation and livelihood. The Country's future and national integration will also be ensured. _____

