Journey from a City to an Urban Village: A Study on India

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A B S T R A C T

At the end of the 20th Century, noticeable development in telecommunications and the ascendance of information industries led urban planners, analysts and the politicians to proclaim the end of cities and rise of suburbs. It was an obvious prediction that cities would become obsolete as the centres of economic activities-with large scale relocation of office spaces and industries to less congested and comparatively low-rent/cost areas than central cities to the suburbs. Such urban activities while entering the city region or the continuum transform it into a land of forking paths, from utopia to nightmares. Perhaps the only solution to this is adopting the deep ecology scenario that people should live and work locally, consume less space and share resources with their neighbours. The objective of this paper remains into the complete journey from the emergence of the city to the rise and expansion of the same into the peripheries and suggests the post modern views regarding the concept of urban village and how or whether it fits to the growing economies.

'If development is sustained at high levels, rural-urban differences are progressively eliminated and the space-economy is integrated by outward flow of growth impulses through the urban hierarchy and the inward migration of labour to the Central Cities' (Berry, 1967).

1. INTRODUCTION

Lately, physical planning has emerged to exist in a more relevant way that what it was decades ago. Since its inception as a respectable activity of Government in the early years of the Century, in parts of Europe and in North America it has had a chequered history [8]. On the one hand some remarkable success can be claimed among the British achievements since the Second World War – for example the rebuilding of Coventry, the new towns, the conservation of areas of fine landscape, and the maintenance of a large measure of public faith in the World's most intricate and comprehensive planning systems on the other hand [21]. As long as a city continues to grow, there must be constant planning in regard to all these phases of civic growth if congestion is to be kept within reasonable bounds. It is now generally recognized that when congestion develops, it makes the transaction of business difficult and brings serious economic disadvantages to a city [19].

Schlager's Land Use Planning Design Model highlights his viewpoints regarding urban studies as a subject of designing and re-designing urban settlement for a conscious synthesis of urban forms to meet the growing human needs [27]. It becomes a challenge, according to him, to fit a theoretical land use model in a wider framework of the city-making process. In this context Mitchell gave a list of the pre-requisites of planning for urban land uses that includes inventories (survey information) of present transportation, facilities and services, movements of persons, goods and vehicles, population, employment and land use, the economics and financing of development in land and transportation, the various power and responsibilities of central and local government and other public bodies concerned with urban and regional development, the best possible projection of population, employment,

income opportunities and economic growth for the area as a whole [25].

What followed next from these studies was an urgent need to formulate a dynamic metropolitan growth model expressing the relationships among the components and influences on the future area distribution of population, employment and land use.

1.1. The new argument for the old

The argument and the views of Cities' as dynamic systems is by now familiar to the readers. According to Schlager, there are two basic points that should be kept in mind while planning for a city. They are:

- the mutual inter-dependence of activity locations and communication opportunities;

- the reciprocal nature of change in these and how they occur incrementally through time [27].

There is a need to approach the planning of cities and regions comprehensively based on the statement of Harris that once mentioned that the entire system of Metropolitan function is the environment of the decision making that shapes metropolitan growth [8]. While formulating a plan to cope with the gradual deterioration of the urban environment of any city like Calcutta, urban planners and the policymakers try to eradicate the already existing imbalances and bring in the notion of sustainable cities [23]. By 1756, Calcutta became the major centre of colonial trade (exceeded one million sterling yearly, and around fifty vessels annually visited its port) for the British Empire. Today it remains as a haphazardly grown metropolitan conurbation that any day and everyday demands futuristic planning [7]. However, for that matter, planning in an innovative way always takes a back seat. What it takes place is allocating resources in a way which hardly sustains long term solutions. It has been already felt that efforts should be made to improve the city's condition with a regional approach taking into account the issues in relation to abolish slums or providing some easy and economic alternative dwelling facilities, and to create satellite towns well equipped with sufficient water supply, drainage, pollution free environment, improvements of communication system with increased employment potential through the establishment of new industries. Now here remains the scope of dichotomy; the urban planners foresee a 'land' without pollution and congestion and at the same context they give proposals for new industries to bacon employment [14].

1.2. Some underlying queries

It has been a well known fact that the spatial incidence of economic growth is a function of distance from the central city. Therefore, Berry B. J. L. (1967) argues that areas of economic backwardness lie in the

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most inaccessible areas along the inter-metropolitan peripheries [4]. Impulses of economic changes are transmitted from higher to lower centres in the urban hierarchy in a size ratchet sequence so that continued innovation in large cities remain critical for extension of growth over the complete economic system. Here a question may arise that if there have been deliberate hierarchies of urban arrangement then will there be any scope or chance of a central city or town losing importance anyway? There will always remain some specialized functions that only the core city can provide to its peripheral counterparts. Urban studies reveal that the growth potential of an area situated along an axis between two cities is a function of the intensity of interaction between them [9]. But this causes the biggest hurdle to overcome when the policies are needed to be framed in order to reduce the interaction altogether and *bypass* it. Understanding regions in urban context may only be and completely understood with an approach that concerns the regional economy and regional growth[1] [14]. It is perceived that cities organize the space economy. They are the centre of activities and of innovation, of intellectualism, of specialization and diversification, a melting pot of varied cultures and place of opportunities. There are two major elements in this organization of economic activities in space. Firstly, a system of cities, arranged in a hierarchical order (according to functions performed by each of them) is taken into account. Secondly, corresponding areas of urban influence or urban fields surrounding each of the cities in the system are also accounted for [18]. It might appear that settlement planning is just a passive variable in economic development- away to accommodate growth. However, the trickle down mechanism it provides is a way to cut through the excessive concentration of economic and social activities in a few centre and the maintenance of the rest of the nation as an overwhelming, stagnant, traditional and haphazard. Yet, there remain the greatest legacy that we the urban planners take every opportunity to give a thrust to the Johnson's 'centralized upward activities' attempting to urbanize countryside. It makes us self-critical in today's context, that if a rural-urban characteristics is expected to head towards complete urbanization which would eventually abolish troughs of economic backwardness, then how may the evils of over congestion in cities like income disparity and lack of basic services can be tackled in a post modern backdrop.

Mitra (1963) argued that strong walls do not make a city. Neither places nor complexes nor all the well tended parks and civil centres in the world can make a city thrive [24]. It is indeed a complex function

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[1] Friedman argued that planners who seek to affect the course of regional development must understand the process by which it is generated that includes an open regional economy to the outside world and regional economic growth that is externally induced.

of the skill of man, investment, power, transport, water, living and working space that make it (the city) feel like reaching up to the sky.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology here followed is more of narration of a much cherished concept that if executed can initiate sustainable urban activities. Eyeing on the sole aim of sustaining the cities and its peripheries, urban village 'making' can be a suitable alternative. The methods followed here while preparing this paper, encompass a narration of the whole journey from a city after its birth through the various stages it passes through and thus highlights the need to develop urban areas in a sustainable manner through cherishing and realizing Urban Village. The purpose of this study is to highlight that the concept of Urban Village still 'new' in the developing nations and it demands clear perception and understanding before execution in the given backdrop.

3. DISCUSSION

Villages are sustainable. They have sustained themselves since the beginning of civilization. Their ways of living, doing business, community engagement, public spaces, institutions and various other aspects of civilized human settlements have survived through the ages. Thus a village in the middle of city is like a fossil of old age civilization amidst an elephantine urban mass scattered in steel and concrete. In the organic proliferation of cities in most of the developing world, urban villages are the *in-situ* testimony of village life. Combining the two notions of urban villages in the developed and developing world, the idea of an urban village is to see a massive city as a collection of neighbourhoods which are self-sustainable and where people can collectively share and own the neighbourhood while still retaining the sense of being part of the bigger city. The idea of an urban village is thus a space that could keep the best of both, rural and urban, in a harmonious and symbiotic way. And it is one of the more sustainable means of retaining urban ways of living in urban spaces.

3.1. Rise of interaction fields

There remains always an inner dilemma surrounding the actual role played by a *peri-urban* or *rurban* area. On one hand it is an easy solution for alternative urban settlement once the main city fails to bear excessive pressure of population and its activities [23]. However the negative consequences remain in the loss of country-side and rural habitation due to rapid swallowing up of villages. Rees (1996) pointed out that this 'interaction fields' adjacent to the city, yet fully not part of it, experience evils of civilization the waste disposal and pollution at the cost of the advantages they get from the city [23]. The field of interaction or the suburbs are technically inhabited districts located either on the outer rim of a city or outside the official limits of a city, or the outer elements of a conurbation. They depict those residential areas which surround the central area of the urban area of a town or city. They were indeed the inferior areas where lower to middle class population resided during the ancient period in Rome. The point remains if the journey of evolution of countryside towards urbanization initiated with the concept of segregation then probably the idea of peri-urban areas remain constricted to be considered only as an alternative to the city when overcrowding creates pressure on civic amenities? In specific context it acts as an alternative. For instance, Bangalore's urban releases it's over congestion in some newly planned areas of Bangalore rural counterpart. Its people given a choice would surely cling to the already urbanized areas unless and until their new workplace is shifted to the suburbs and better transport and house for rent facilities are offered. Dickinson (1947) did not hide his concern regarding this. He was of opinion that the inner city dominates popular imagination as the area generative of urban planning related problems. But he remarked that as far as the problems are concerned, peripheries pose significant challenges [12]. One of many challenges that the fringe areas suffer from, is the feel of isolation from the city with respect to the facilities and services that the latter provides to its people. Also, there are psychological differentiations that the periphery dwellers undergo. Dickinson pointed out that there remains a tension which is created by the impact of city extension upon the open countryside. This becomes indeed relevant as far as the environmental impacts are concerned [17].

3.2. Haphazard growth of suburbs - several examples

As long as a city continues to grow, there must be constant planning in regard to all these phases of civic growth if congestion is to be kept within reasonable bounds. It is now generally recognized that, when congestion reaches certain points it makes the transaction of business difficult and brings serious economic disadvantages to a city. When growth is rapid of any city, there is always a tendency to think in and plan for an alternative way that is to decentralize its population in its fringe areas more haphazardly. A study was made for the City of Chicago by Lewis, H. in 1949 for the simplification of the plan for city and its periphery [20]. He suggested for new roads and railway undertaking to be done through routing principles. It may be argued that as early as in 1914 he remarked that wonderful growth was only possible by making provision for the city and its periphery. For instance in the same context he found New York suffering. Through

its rapid policy execution, it established rapid transit system outward to the city into under developed green peripheries with the expectation that with a flat rate of fare and population the growing city would evenly spread. This policy had led to what has been called a vicious cycle [26]. New radial lines promoted intensive residential development along their outer borders and increased the concentration of business in the downtown areas-in other words caused greater congestion. This had led to a demand for new lines, which again has led to congestion and demand for still more parallel lines focussing on the same central areas and so on.

Thomas Sharp (1968) in his book Town and Townscape mentioned this situation to be critical for the towns [28]. The ever increasing motor traffic system along theses transport lines makes the magnetic attraction of the town centre more widespread and at the same time diminishes the quality of attractiveness of the city and what emerge are the haphazard suburbs. In 1968, Berry, B. J. L. and Rao, P. while discussing the Urban-Rural Duality in the urban structure of Andhra Pradesh, identified the fact that it is the duality of the traditional geography and modernism that pose deep challenge in regional planning [5]. To come closer to an understanding of sustainable planning for the modern cities, some conceptual background of traditionally developed existing rural settlements demands application. Essentially, urban planning gives direction to the human habitation and thus its basic characteristics are directional and transformational [19]

3.3. Emergence of urban village

The crux of country planning in fact resolves itself into the question where to build and where not to build or perhaps better to say where to build and where to farm [1]. The plan of 'building' suburb has to be efficient aesthetically, sanitarily and economically and of course environmentally. From this perhaps, the conscious aim of creating a concept called Urban Village has been attempted to realize. It is of course an application or recovery of the oldest sign of social intercourse that maintains through a balanced relation between the city and its periphery. This also demands for determining a satisfactory neighbourhood unit, the size and complexity and what shall form the nucleus of its centre. The new urban village might be the area served by a primary school, several of these might make up a neighbourhood unit which would support a community centre and also a secondary school with a population size of may be 10,000 people. In the Western countries for example, the oldest of its many (over 140) New Towns pre-dates the British experience and exist in free standing locations that may be termed as *Towns within Towns*. As highlighted in the abstract part, the negative impact that the city region experiences can be arrested through maintaining its

shape, structure and sustainability with major improvements of its environmental qualities and balanced cohesion of its communities. This is what the urban geographers think to be more ideological than real but for combating urban congestions this is perhaps the most desired alternative. This model of sustained periphery or the emergence of urban village is adopted from the concept of compact city of the European Unions and the Urban Village forum and the urban task force through *urban renaissance*.

4. URBAN VILLAGE IN DEVELOPING NATIONS?

In most instances, the recognition of crisis in the Third World Cities is a post colonial phenomenon, argues Breese in 1969 [6]. He was of opinion that the recent emphasis on the complexities of development of urban community has led to considerable soul-searching. There has been a growing concern among the urban planners over the neglect of social and environment consequences of planning activities in an urban area.

Typically, an urban village is an urban planning and urban design concept. It refers to an urban form typically characterized by moderate density development, mixed use zoning and adequate provision of good public transit. It also emphasises on urban design – particularly pedestrianization and public space reducing overdependence on car and promoting cycling, walking and use of transit. The concept of urban villages was formally born in Britain in the latter half of decade 1980 with the rise of yet another concept that is the Urban Villages Group (UVG) [11]. However what seems to be manageable for the developed nations might not be the same for any developing country. The chief characteristic of an Urban Village remains typically its moderate number of persons residing there, which indeed becomes a constraining factor for the realization of such concept here in India. The big question remains whether the brainchild of modern urban planning can be suitably induced in places where any new areas or towns around the Metropolitan City designed exclusively to decongest the latter, becomes itself 'space less' in no time. Actually, there remains a dilemma in urban growth context for the developing nations, categorically the Third World Nations. Urban growth in developing areas is proceeding in a different cultural and economic milieu than that of experienced by the developed world. Urbanization in most of these cases is given by the demographic force that is rural to urban migration rather than by dynamic economic and industrial forces as in European and North American countries. On the other hand, as the bricks and mortar remains in the cities, they become jumble of unplanned housing and industries, places and spaces, new and old. The local people struggle for territory and security, rising affluence continues to spread away in the country-side. A two-fold dilemma of urban behaviour

probably poses biggest challenge to the developing world to make urban village a reality. Many privately owned builders promise urban village concept in India in spreading and sprawling Gurgaon near Delhi, Rajarhat near Calcutta etc. but ends up in property selling strategies.

4.1. Conceptualizing urban village in India

Fitting the relatively new concept of Urban Village in India has scope especially in those areas where city planning is under action. Bangalore, unlike the colonial Indian cities like Calcutta (now Kolkata), Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai inherits deal of vibrancy with new job opportunities in relation to major off shoring and thus makes places for the high earned citizens' of it. The city grows outward mostly in radial pattern with ever rising demand for spaces for housing, infrastructure and industries. With a view to de-congest Bangalore Metropolitan Area (Bruhat (Greater) Bangalore Mahanagara (city) Palike (Authority) & Bangalore Development Authority Area) and direct further growth into its City Region by way of comprehensive development of new human settlements in an integrated manner, and hence proposes to develop five New Integrated Townships with modern amenities and facilities at Bidadi, Ramanagaram, Sathanur, Solur and Nandagudi [3], [14], [15]. The project is aimed at creating self-contained new integrated townships with work-live-play concept by integrating select economic activities in manufacturing/service/business categories. They are expected to offer the same or even better comforts or facilities as available in the city proper with least congestion, traffic bottlenecks in a serene and environmentally rejuvenating atmosphere [16]. Bangalore strongly recommends its new areas to be Urban Villages that would promote simple community living.

4.1.1. Urban village in Delhi actually

Urban Village as it has been already stated, remains still as a remotely heard concept in a developing nation like India. The country where space inadequacy is a foretold issue already, demarcating an area for a sustainable cause, giving it a village status while promoting walking to the market places, using environment friendly transport modes like cycles and maintaining good neighbourhood relation is an utopia. But in Delhi this has been altered to a reality. That's what 20 local businesses are showcasing tomorrow's Urban Village at the *Shahpur Jat* region located in Southern part of Delhi. It is considered as the poor man's Hauz Khas village that houses weavers, artisans, studios, publishers and boutiques, many of them run by expatriates. It indeed offers a place of belonging that installs a sense of pride in the community to both residential and business occupants. Initially the urban

village group focuses on creating villages that had similar physical attributes of a modern day neo-traditional development [10].

4.1.2. Urban village in making in Bangalore

In order to preserve and improve the quality of life actually for the citizens within the Bangalore Metropolitan Area and at the same time to cater to the needs of the rapidly expanding population of the same, it is urgently felt the necessity to take up the development strategies for the new locations or settlements in its peripheries. Here development is not in the cliché form of course but in a dynamic way by finding out a series of Integrated Townships focussed on one more economic activity, providing for complete work-home relationship involving not only the departments of urban affairs and revenues but also ecology and environment, pollution control boards and the concerned local planning authorities. The major thrust areas of these urban villages (see fig. 1) of Bangalore are aimed at:

- least displacement of human habitations;
- least disturbances to forests and water bodies;
- least acquisition of valuable agricultural lands;
- least cost for lands;
- far from the existing already developed locations;
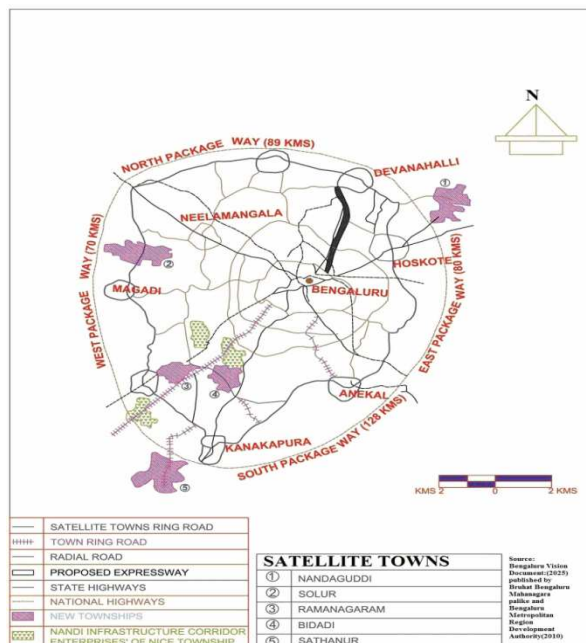- good connectivity particularly in the wake of the proposed Townships.

Fig. 1. Expanding peripheral limits of Bangalore City.

The new areas are planned to be developed with proper infrastructural facilities and amenities that ensure environmental sustainability. This can be perhaps stated as first small step of the country to a bigger target of sustainable urban settlements in the future [2].

5. SUMMING UP

Problem of the urban community multiply with the increasing complexity through ages. The physical expansion of cities is running out of control, and the economy as well as social consequences necessarily commands the attention of civic leadership in government, business and industries. The practical limitations of the pyramidal form of the city have forced decentralization. Gallion, A. & Eisner, S. in their book The Urban Planning Pattern-City Planning and Design mentioned that *as people, buildings, and traffic pile higher, the upper crust slides down the sides and outward to the suburbs* [13]. When the weight of congestion at the core becomes unbearable, the inner layers slip out from under to spread out and beyond. As appropriate and most sustainable form of the Future City has not year emerged, there has to be given a serious attention to the nature of the same in two major areas: the internal urban structure that has to be redeveloped and renewed and of course secondly the planned decentralization of city activities into the urban villages. Since there is always a search for new space for city living, perhaps the most ideal alternative is the establishment of new areas and townships or what we call 'The City beautiful'[2]. It has its promising characteristics that will suit not only the present urban crisis but also pave the pathway for future towards sustainable city region in developed as well as developing areas.

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2 Swan song of Victorian Grandeur.