



Urban Renewal by Citizens – A framework for sustainable urban development

In the introduction to *Patrick Geddes in India*, Lewis Mumford writing in September 1946, states towards the end:

“Geddes’s thoughts on political decentralization, on civic responsibility, on voluntary co-operation, and on personal development, all of which are expressed or implied in these Indian reports, sound an even fresher and saner note today than they did at the moment they were uttered¹.”

Today only a few experts in urban development may be aware of the path breaking work done by Patrick Geddes in India. Even fewer would know that in 1919 he was appointed the first Professor of Civics and Sociology in the Department of Sociology, started that year, in the University of Bombay.

Geddes had been invited to India by Lord Pentland (then Governor of Madras) in 1914 “to advise on the problems involved in the relationship between public improvement and the recognized social standards, which often appeared at the first sight to be in conflict².” During the ten years he spent in India, Geddes produced 50 reports on Indian towns, the best known among these being his reports on Indore and Patiala. It was in these reports about civic improvement and city planning that Geddes elaborated his key concepts of ‘diagnostic survey’ and ‘conservative surgery’, which are fundamental to his ideas of urban renewal.

One of the significant policy initiatives of the Indian government in recent years is the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), undertaken as a flagship project of the government led by the noted economist Dr. Manmohan Singh. However, the formulation of the objectives and guidelines for this project are based upon a ‘top-down’ approach that is resulting in

¹ Mumford, Lewis. (1947) ‘Introduction,’ in Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (ed.) *Patrick Geddes in India*, London: Lund Humphries, p. 12

² Lanchester, H.V. (1947) ‘Preface,’ in Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (ed.) *Patrick Geddes in India*, London: Lund Humphries, p. 16

huge capital expenditure with minimum benefit to common people who form the majority citizens of urban settlements. In order to find a new balance and test the validity of an alternative holistic approach, inspired to a large extent by the Geddesian view, a project was launched in an urbanizing village on the edge of New Delhi to demonstrate the possibility of 'urban renewal by citizens'.

This village called Aya Nagar, is a typical example of the rapid urbanization taking place on the fringes of all Indian cities. Urban planning authorities have not been able to regulate the huge influx of rural migrants who have settled on the outskirts of built up area to form 'unauthorised colonies' – as they are referred to in bureaucratic parlance. The remarkable fact is that today the population of those living in 'unauthorised' settlement is becoming a majority in most large cities, including Delhi and Mumbai. This leads one to wonder whether there is something seriously amiss with the current policy framework for urban planning.

The Aya Nagar Development Project (ANDP) was formulated to address urban development issues by first principles and at first hand, by living in an 'unauthorised colony' in a manner somewhat similar to Patrick Geddes and his wife living in late-nineteenth century in a slum in Edinburgh to clean and renew the neighbourhood. The ANDP was started in the year 2000. The same year, an association of Aya Nagar citizens, registered as a charitable society, was founded to represent the different socio-economic and cultural interests of the inhabitants, and to work in partnership with government agencies to formulate and implement an urban renewal programme for the whole settlement, which included the original village and its 'unauthorised' extensions. The citizen's association, named the Aya Nagar Vikas Samiti, was advised by a group of environmental designers and planners working under the aegis of a registered non-profit voluntary organization called GREHA, with some financial assistance from the Chief Minister of Delhi.

In 2007 CE the ANDP was approved for assistance by the RSA in India (Society for Encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce) and through their efforts a research grant was awarded by the Delhi Government to GREHA for developing the design and implementation methodology. The project report submitted to the Delhi Government is attached herewith. It may be noted that presently the first phase of the project is in progress. In order to strengthen the theoretical basis of the project and to extend its reach to become a model for similar settlements in Delhi and other cities, GREHA is seeking partnerships with agencies that will contribute, in terms of human and financial resources, to progress the project through its next two phases, starting in July 2009 and extending upto January 2014.

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