

NEWSLETTER Vaastuyogam

Connecting Vaastu to the 21st Century



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CONTENTS



- **Architect's Voice**
Prof. Utpal Sharma

1



- **Corporate Logos**
Motorola

6

ṣaptapurī
&
the char dhams

- **Bhimashankar**
Jyotirlinga Temple, Pune, Maharashtra.

9

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EDITORIAL



Welcome to 2014!

Welcome to the January 2014 edition of Vaastuyogam.

You all will be excited to learn that Vaastuyogam is embarking on a long journey to the ancient pilgrimage sites of India. These include the Saptapuris and the Char Dhams, the 12 Jyotirlingam and the holy rivers. Last year we visited all of the 12 Jyotirling temples and it is the thumping response received from you readers that has enthused us to start this next pilgrimage exercise.

This month's article is by way of introduction to the subject of the Hindu idea of pilgrimage and the ancient sanctified holy places and rivers. It denotes the individual pilgrim sites and briefly introduces the reader to them.

Every month we shall delve in depth on one pilgrim site, giving its historical, political, and religious significance. As usual, there shall be pictures aplenty that shall give eyewitness account of the beauty, grandeur, and popularity of the sites. We shall be beginning with Haridwar from next month.

All of us spend our lives busy with our family obligations, our business projects and on our holiday travels. Yet, we somehow seem to neglect pilgrimages.

Our series is for all of you who wish to go and visit our ancient holy places. I welcome all you readers on this pious journey!

Happy travels! Happy reading!

"Urban Planing has not worked for the poor in India" Part-2

This is the second and concluding portion of the 2-installment interview with Prof. Utpal Sharma of CEPT. The first installment was published last month.

Not Small but Big is beautiful

As job opportunities are available only in large cities, there is going to be migration form the rural areas to the big cities, we have to have large cities. Whether you like it or not, we cannot say any more that small is beautiful. That is all old-times talk. We have to learn to create and manage large cities like Mumbai, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chennai etc.

It happens sometimes in cities, that poor people squatting illegally are rounded up and sent back to their villages. Nevertheless, these people stay in their villages for a short time and return to the city, because there are no jobs in the villages. Poverty is disguised in the idyllic greenery of Indian villages but shows in its nakedness in the urban areas.

Rural-Urban Interface

Over the years, what we are realizing is that we cannot only plan for an urban area. There is a rural-urban interface. We have to plan for Metropolitan regions that provide for the inter-dependence between a large city and its rural hinterland. In the absence of such metro politan planning, we will see illegal and haphazard construction in the outlying areas of the city. The mushrooming construction of Bopal, in Ahmedabad, is a good example.

What is happening now, especially in cities like Ahmedabad is that we still want to have a limited area under an Urban Development Authority and what happens to the outlying regions we do not want to care because it does not fall under our jurisdiction.

What is now happening is that whereas in Ahmedabad the industries planning department is squeezing Ahmedabad, what is happening elsewhere is the concern of elsewhere. The outside areas say that you do not worry about us. We will plan our industrial areas, as we like! Therefore, we have every area announcing mega-

Dr. Ravi Rao ■

continued on page 2 ►



“Urban Planing has not worked for the poor in India” - Part-2 - Prof. Utpal Sharma



ARCHITECT'S VOICE

◀ continued from page 1

industrial parks over which the Urban Authority has no control. The argument is that “we want to generate employment; we want to improve our economy”. Therefore, they are having a free hand and throwing the urban planning rulebooks out of the window. This will lead to an urbanization pattern that we neither know nor can control. We need industrialization, but we must see to it that it grows in an orderly and regulated way.



When you do housing for the poor, it is not the price of the construction but the price of the land that is the inhibiting factor. A poor person cannot buy 30 square meters of land in Mumbai or Hyderabad or Ahmedabad or any city for that matter. Therefore, it is the issue of land and not of construction.



Prof. Utpal Sharma of CEPT

Dean, Faculty of Planning & Public Policy, CEPT,
Architect - Urban and Regional Planner

Prof. Utpal Sharma, Professor and Director at School of Planning CEPT Ahmedabad is an eminent professional in the fields of Urban & Regional Planning and Architecture. He is an Architect and Urban Planner with 28 years of experience in the field of Architecture, Urban Planning, Transportation, Urban Design and Housing. He was also a Senior Associate with Vastu-Shilpa Foundation for Studies and Research in Environmental Design, Ahmedabad, India.

Prof. Sharma has worked extensively throughout the country and has undertaken several prestigious urban projects that involve preparation of Master Plans, Landuse Plans, Zonal Plans and formulation of vision statements and urban design guidelines for towns and cities. His profound understanding of the urban scenario shall provide valuable inputs to the study in terms of assessing the future growth and articulating the spatial plan. Prof. Sharma has received many prestigious awards including the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Urban Planning and Design. He has numerous lectures and papers on Urban Planning to his credit that have been presented in several workshops all over the world.

Let us look at Ahmedabad as of now. We have Dholera SIR, we have Sanad SIR, we have a GIFT project, we have another mega industrial region coming up in Becharaji, and there is a pharmaceutical hub on the way to Dholera. Many of these places are proposing cities and townships of 40 to 50 lakhs population. If you add all this you will have a population of three and a half crore! This is very un-realistic. Ahmedabad, the way it is growing, will not cross one crore population in next twenty years.

What is going to happen is that some of

these projects will work whilst the others will fail. Alternatively, it may happen that all will work but only 25%. Nobody knows, or wants to know the overall reality. They live with the gut feeling that their plan will work, and the others will fail.

How to plan, so that we do not end up with a mess is the crucial context. Other things are peripheral and crowded with small issues. What the TP scheme will be? Where we should create a garden - will it be here or there? Where the CBD (Central Business District) be? The professionals -

continued on page 3 ▶▶



ARCHITECT'S VOICE

◀ continued from page 2

of whom there is no dearth - can tackle these questions well enough. *But, what about the major decisions?*

Public Participation in the Planning Process

As of now, public participation that we have legally is that once we formally publish a development plan for a city, there is something called public objections and solutions.

Earlier, maps were pinned at public places; comments came in; some were incorporated - some were not. Now, the system is more complicated. I did a plan for Hyderabad city. There were more than 30,000 comments by the public and I had to reply officially to each one, explaining why the suggestion has or has not been incorporated! It has taken me over one and half years to do this!

In the case of Ulhasnagar - a refugee colony for Sindhi people is near Kalyan, Maharashtra. The place is very congested and all the people liked the new plan proposing broader roads and open spaces. However, there are about 20,000 families and I have got over 20,000 comments. Therefore, almost every family has made a comment.

Nobody wants to change the place where he/she is living. What they are saying is that your plan is very good but we do not want it, because we do not want our houses broken to make way. They are saying that if you want to broaden the roads, do so but without breaking my house!

Participation comes in from builders, politicians, and owners of large land parcels. The common people cannot understand the city you are designing.

When you design a city for 10 million people and then ask an illiterate person coming from a small village to understand the underlying issues, what kind of participation are you expecting? What kind of a road network Ahmedabad should have? Where will the CBD (Central Business District) be located?

The town planning problem of India cannot be solved, merely by urban design.

This is a long and sophisticated process and beyond the common person. What the common person wants to know is what is

continued on page 4 ▶

Concept of Development

Macro Level Planning (City Level)

Development Plan

- New growth areas
- Land Use Zoning
- Development Control regulations
- Road network
- City level infrastructure

- Provision of city level infrastructure

First Tier

Macro Level Planning (Area level)

T.P. Schemes

- Neighborhood level road network
- Land reconstitution
- Neighborhood level social and physical infrastructure
- Financing of neighborhood level infrastructure

- Provision of neighborhood level infrastructure
- Reconstitution of land holdings
- Provision of land for public uses

- Permission to private building as per GDCR

Second Tier



ARCHITECT'S VOICE

◀ continued from page 3

going to happen to his house, his street, his area? If his area is declared a commercial zone (resulting in windfall shooting up of his property value, he is very happy and pronounces the plan as an excellent one, otherwise he is not bothered so long as he remains undisturbed.

Guided Growth

Is planning undemocratic? Does it not superimpose its will on the organic and market driven growth of realty? Does it not rob Peter to pay Paul? These and many other questions cloud the mind of the citizenry.

The truth is that growth has to be guided. I will take the case of Hyderabad city. I have recently prepared a plan for Hyderabad with an anticipated 1.8 crore population, 7000 square kilometers area. One thing we do is look at the land in terms of its

can be developed, land that should not be developed because it is very fertile, or it is very dangerous. Then a map was made with this data and we worked out the concept for the plan within that framework. Everyone wants their piece of land to be a

The first thing that planning must do is protect the environmentally sensitive areas and the other is to somehow protect the interests of the poor people

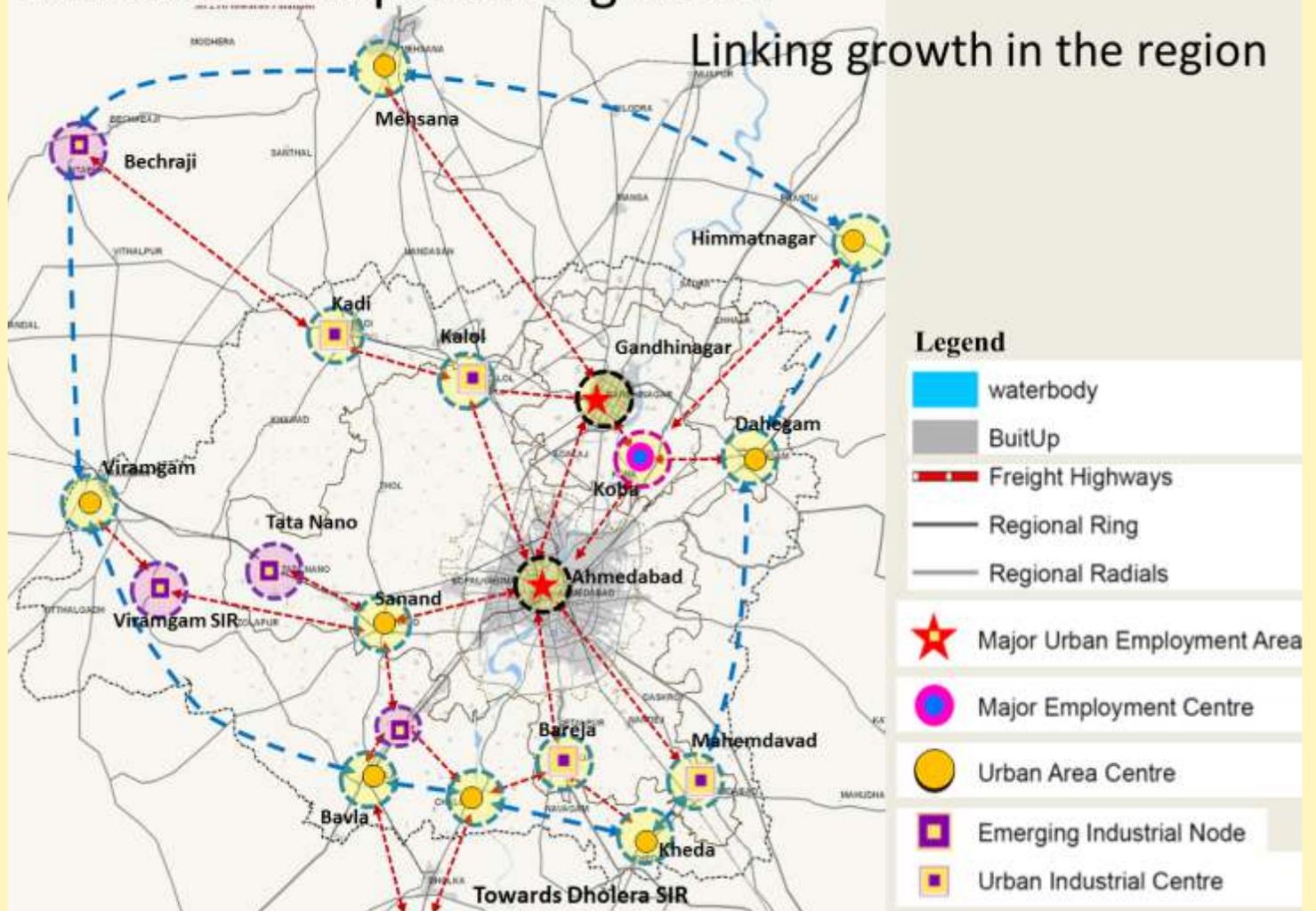
commercial center and have arguments to support their view. But it is not a free-for-all. An MLA of Hyderabad wanted his land to have use zone for commercial center. I told him your land is irrigated fertile land with double cropping; forget commercial

water level, salinity ingress, topography, vegetation cover, agricultural fertile land. This is called environment land suitability analysis by which we identify the land that

center, your land will not be even put to urban use.

continued on page 5 ▶

Landuse Transport Integration



**ARCHITECT'S VOICE**

◀ continued from page 4

Borrowed Bye-laws - Case of England

Historically, unprecedented urbanization with the resultant migration from villages to the city and the workers living in slums and squatter settlements and proliferation of hawkers etc... all this has happened in the Western countries about a hundred years ago. Before we solve our problem, we need to know how they solved their problem.

To begin with, there were no building byelaws in England. Everybody made his or her bungalow, or his or her little house on his or her own plot of land. About 120 years ago, during the beginning of the industrialization phase, London was flooded with workers in search of homes. This gave rise to row houses, houses with common toilets, shared facilities etc. That was the beginning of building regulations.

Then, London was burnt twice and that resulted in the broadening of the roads and another important change. As the buildings were made from wood, it was ruled that there should be sufficient space between buildings. (This would prevent the fire from spreading) If they all were together choc-a-bloc then all would burn down together, as in fact happened twice over. Now, we inherited this bye law in India, and are following it blindly without examining the reasons.

The British logic is very different from what suits us, here. We made homes from stones and these do not burn; our climate is very hot and so it makes sense to share each other's walls rather than be apart. Therefore, a built form that is low-rise, medium to high density is more appropriate for the climate and lifestyle of Indians.

However, we are following bylaws that dictate bigger plots with buildings in the middle and with private lawns etc. But, this model is appropriate where there is plenty of land, population is less, and climate is not as hot as ours.

The tragedy is that we are aware of the faulty logic of the byelaw but are trapped in it, as we will not shirk it away! We have forgotten what the objectives to be achieved are and that the bye laws are

merely the tools to achieve those objectives.

Now the tools are governing the objectives and the goals long forgotten. It is truly said, that nothing is worse than to be governed by bad laws!

Conclusion

The town planning problem of India cannot be solved, merely by Urban design. We are stuck with a very dense urban landscape with extremely poor and overburdened infrastructure. We must be high-density with good infrastructure because we cannot afford a low-density, good infrastructure and car oriented society.

We have enough land for our cities. A fear psychosis that all land will go away in buildings is baseless. In India, 30% of the population is in urban areas. However, urban areas occupy only 2% of the land in India. It will happen that, slowly, this 30% will grow to 50%. Can't India give 5% of its land to 50% of its people? There is no need to worry that agricultural lands will be exhausted.

The moment adequate land resources are opened up for cities, land prices will flatten out. Right now land prices are astronomical because supply of land is artificially controlled. At one spot, you have land at Rs. 5 lac per square meter and just 2 to 3 kilometers away it is, maybe, Rs. 5000 per square meter, and this is because you are not allowed to build anything there.

When you do housing for the poor, it is not the price of the construction but the price of the land that is the inhibiting factor. A poor person cannot buy 30 square meters of land in Mumbai or Hyderabad or Ahmedabad or any city for that matter.

Therefore, it is the issue of land and not of construction. In cities, over 30% to 40% of the people live in slums. In Mumbai, 55% of the people live in slums. These 55% occupy only 6% of the land in Mumbai!

The only one person who can rescue them is the government. Just like we earmark 20% of the city for roads, another 15% of the area for open spaces, can't we leave just 5% of the land free of cost for the poor? A city can do it and only this will

solve the urban India's housing problem. When half the city lives in slums, what kind of urban planning are we talking about?

The planning process is a scientific one that must stay away from commercial interests of influential landowners, politicians, and builders. Briefly, there are two things that planning must take care of; everything else can be left to the market forces. The first thing that planning must do is protect the environmentally sensitive areas and the other is to somehow protect the interests of the poor people because no one will take up their cause as there is no money in it. ■

Some portions of this article have appeared in an article published in the December 2013 issue of GCEA, Nirman.

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