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Patrick Geddes and the Metropolis

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Patrick Geddes and the Metropolis*

Introduction: The beginnings of modern planning and Patrick Geddes

With the decision to shift the capital of colonial India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, urban planning became a prominent area of debate and discussion in planning societies and journals throughout the Western world. Because of this project, other urban centres in colonial India willy nilly came under the scanner of urban planners and the discourse of modern planning expanded to accommodate many Indian towns and cities.

The colonies had always attracted and provided opportunities for all kinds of technical experts from Britain. Consequently a whole band of architects, engineers and town planners (their work usually overlapped) were to make a name for themselves throughout the British empire laying down a common thread of concerns and attitudes towards urban problems in the colonies. In the words of historian R.K. Home, town planning became part of the 'currency of progressive paternalistic ideas circulating in the British Empire in the 20th century'.[1] Examples include E.P. Richards who worked in Calcutta and Singapore, A.E. Mirams in Bombay and Uganda, Herbert Baker in Delhi and Johannesburg and Patrick Geddes all over India and in Colombo and Palestine. Western planning models,

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indeed the western experience of urbanization was seen by some of these planners as the only model available for modernization. It was because of these itinerant individuals that western urbanism was extended to the colonies and in some cases got a new lease of life. The work of Geddes is particularly important because he represented a considered and very articulate dissent to this conventional planning wisdom.

Colonial metropolises by the early twentieth century presented a picture of great urban squalor, which needed urgent attention. The rapid growth of factory based industry (particularly in Bombay and Calcutta) had given a fillip to migration into the cities and the concomitant problems of overcrowding and insanitation became particularly acute during epidemics like the plague (1896). The colonial governments were particularly concerned with shielding cantonments and towns with significant European populations from disease and responded by intervening decisively in the built-up areas, demolishing old buildings and slums, quarantining the sick, setting up vigilance operations to discipline and regulate the population. Thus modern planning in India had its roots in nineteenth century pandemics.[2] One outcome of this was that the relationship between bodies and spaces came to be intensely investigated and the management of spaces in the city became an important part of urban policy.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the town planning movement gathered momentum with the emergence of the professional town planner, publication of journals, the proliferation of professional associations, pressure groups and lobbyists for town planning. In India extant urban policy married to town planning ideas soon took a concrete shape with the setting up of Improvement Trusts after the plague most prominently in Bombay (1898) and in Calcutta (1911) and in numerous other cities in the later decades. The importance of these Trusts lay in the normative standards for 'improvement' that they developed. Planning, as Christian Topalov has pointed out perceptively had a larger reformist agenda: changing cities meant changing people and this in turn meant changing society itself.[3]

In the hands of bureaucratic practitioners, 'improvement' was procrustean in nature. One objective was sanitising public places in the city. But with epidemics showing no signs of abatement, the colonial state forcibly entered the Indian home making a bid to set sanitary standards for private and domestic spaces as well. Not surprisingly the sanitary reach and goals of the state often clashed with communitarian norms: sanitation and hygiene refused to dovetail easily with traditional Indian notions of purity and pollution. Regulation of domestic practices thus remained a contentious issue and the populace refused to follow modern sanitary standards in daily life or practice it in public spaces. In colonial India the state's initiatives in this sphere was complicated by its alien status, its inherent racism and class inhibitions. Even Indian nationalists who supported planning as a progressive move were quick to point out that the colonial state openly favoured European neighbourhoods at the cost of Indian localities.

With reluctant assent from the people, spatial planning and restructuring in the city took on the character of violent coercion. Commercial and business imperatives often justified these measures as inevitable which in effect meant unleashing class violence on the poor living in slums. The slum populace were easy to attack since they were squatters with no legal title to land and at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords. Colonial town planners irrespective of needs, implemented mechanically the Haussmannian model of restructuring, which meant cutting broad swathes of roads, usually rectilinears and diagonals on the face of the city for efficient traffic circulation. The influence of nineteenth century English sanitary and bye-law regulations also played a decisive part.

However not all practitioners of town planning were mechanical and unthinking in their approach. Haussmann's model of city improvement had provoked contrary views. His work was criticised by contemporaries like Camillo Sitte (1889) whose championing of non-geometric forms, challenged mechanical conceptions of design and the tyranny of the straight line, and by Ebenezer Howard (1898) whose Garden Cities brought into question the very usefulness of sustaining expanding conglomerations with improved utilities.[4]

Similarly the influential architect Raymond Unwin (early 1900s — he had designed Hampstead Garden suburb in London) campaigned against mechanical implementation of bye-law streets.[5] These thinkers were responsible for pointing out the perils of unabashed industrialism. In India too, there were rumblings of discontent with official policy. J.M. Linton Bogle who wrote a pioneering book on town planning was making an implicit criticism of colonialism and how political power determined space when he wrote (about Allahabad):[6]

> 'is there any good reason why the occupants of Civil Lines should have enormous compounds of six to eight bighas - far more than they want - while the houses in the city are packed together like sheep in a pen?'.

Similarly another contemporary planner, H.V. Lanchester wrote retrospectively on the problems of 'cutting straight roads through the more congested areas, regardless of the groupings of those displaced'.[7]

Geddes' Method: Some details

Patrick Geddes' work threw into sharp relief some of these dilemmas of modern planning in a more sustained manner. Invited to work first in India by the Governor of Madras, Lord Pentland, Geddes stayed on as a free-lance advisor and planner for princely states and other municipal authorities. His work was backed by numerous town planning reports, by one estimate almost forty in number, which he wrote and published between 1918-24.[8] Geddes was appalled at the indifference and unthinking drives to demolish large parts of the historic core of Indian cities and was quick to appreciate the varied urban and civic traditions of pre-modern India. He had long been convinced that capitalist modernization had brought sea-changes, but had been unable to efface vital cultural symbols.[9] Geddes' only major book *Cities in Evolution* (1915), a theoretical statement on cities, published before he came to India argued that the post railway age had obscured and hidden the 'grand design' of cities in the past.[10]

Geddes' approach is generally seen as 'culturally informed'.[11] This meant that he was sensitive and empathetic to extant civic culture. He was impressed with the functional character of Indian building traditions, the adaptation to weather, the use of local material, the multiple use of public spaces, the small grain character of street life. He argued that these practices were sensitive to the ecology of the regions and therefore needed to be recovered and reinstated.[12] However unlike the West none of these practices had been theorized in the academy nor were they sanctified by modern movements for conservation. Geddes was sympathetic to Indian nationalism and hoped that Indian leaders and thinkers with their rejection of mechanical western ideas would play a vital role in encouraging his efforts. In an early celebrated essay which he published in *The Modern Review* hoping to catch the attention of Indian nationalists, he advised[13]:

> 'For present purposes, our problem, as students of cities and their planning, is to get beyond architectural studies, as commonly understood. What we need are interpretations, sociological and civic, i.e. on the one hand in terms of the social life and psychology from which buildings of each type arise, and of the movements these express; and on the other of the main types of City Development which are their fullest concrete expression, and which react in their turn, on the mental world of their inhabitants.'

Like many people of his generation, Geddes was a practicing evolutionist. He was appalled that the Industrial Revolution had unleashed economic forces without taking cognizance of the biological circumstances of human beings and in this he was truly prophetic anticipating modern environmentalism by many decades. He wanted to apply evolutionary theory to society but realized that the vast potential created by the evolutionary pattern had to be consciously seized, since evolution was not always progressive.[14] Modern town planning with its grand schemes and industrial technology exuded an utopian flavour and was unusually dismissive of the past. Only on painstaking unravelling of the social pattern of the community, Geddes argued, could the plans for a future be drawn. He was willing to be an utopian if the future was also premised on

an understanding of the past. Geddes wrote that the quest for utopian endeavours should begin right in the city itself and the way to connect the past and the present was through the observation and recording of local heritage which had persisted with local advantages through generations. Only then would 'historic appreciation and utopian anticipation ... be increasingly united to bring forth fruit in civic aspiration and endeavour'.[15] This approach was markedly different from his contemporary Ebenezer Howard, who envisaged 'Garden Cities' on an empty plain where no contingencies existed.[16] In contrast Geddes' utopia was no escape from the harsh realities of urban squalor.

Geddes had invented what he called the 'the diagnostic or civic survey' to aid the process of recovery. This survey method that Geddes patented gave him an enviable 'feel' for the organic form of the city. However this was not an intuitive response but based on an idiosyncratic reading of history, morphology, economy and cultural traditions of the city - which he put forward in his book, in his town planning reports and in his famous travelling exhibitions which showcased this approach graphically. In one of his Indian reports, Geddes warned that the enthusiastic planner who put pen on paper without survey:

> ' ... exceeds too readily the scale of his surroundings and over-reaches also the requirements of the town. The result has been that, in too many cities, imposing new streets have been laid out without survey of their surrounding quarter and constructed without reference to local needs or potentialities'.[17]

To tackle the dross and decay of urban settlements Geddes had invented the complimentary 'conservative surgery' to his civic survey. This was a way in which maximum improvement could be achieved by minimum demolition and disruption. He explained[18]:

> '…the method of Conservative Surgery .. , first it shows that the new streets prove not to be really required since, by simply enlarging the existing lanes, ample communications already exist; secondly that, with the addition of some vacant lots and the removal

> of a few of the most dilapidated and insanitary houses, these lanes can be greatly improved and every house brought within reach of fresh air as well as of material sanitation - a point on which the more pretentious method constantly fails, as is evident on every plan'.

Geddes was partial to intimate spaces: the community, the neighbourhood, the family. If custom segregated women, then he wanted exclusive 'purdah gardens',[19] if the 'chabutra' (platforms outside houses) was the focus of neighbourhood sociability then it had to be saved, if the tulsi plant symbolised the nurturing power of women then it had to become the symbol of the thriving Hindu home. For ideas such as these Geddes was dismissed as a conservative and he in his turn was contemptuous of radicals who wanted to have no truck with tradition. Geddes in fact was far from being a traditionalist as his championing of working class housing and of lower caste issues in his many reports demonstrate.[20] Geddes' belief in communitarian civic norms were firmly rooted in modernist ideas of health, beauty and sanitation.[21]

For planning historians of colonial India, Geddes is important because his work throws up larger questions. Douglas Goodfriend in his re-evaluation has written that Geddes critiqued the 'unconsidered importation of any Western planning practices into (the) different cultural milieu'[22] of India. On this theme the planning historian Anthony King has written a perceptive and pioneering essay.[23] For one, importing planning models (from the West) meant measuring indigenous society by standards set elsewhere (e.g. overcrowding, sanitation etc.) Such plans also ran the risk of being imposed on a people with totally different needs. Looming large too was the question of social and financial costs, since large planning projects called for huge investments and displacement hit citizens very hard. Even more telling — these imposed plans never questioned power relations in the colonial city. Racist distinctions like black/white were taken for granted and maintained.[24]

Geddes' critique of colonial planning anticipated many of these concerns. His work also demonstrated that the norms of Euclidean

geometry (the rectilinears, the diagonals, etc.) used in the plans were dubious since it represented all space uniformly. The biggest casualty in this method were the labouring poor. Being low down in the social hierarchy meant that they were unlikely to find representation in the plans and would therefore become victims of cartographic silence.

Barrabazar: Fantasies of Demolition

Barrabazar (literally "Big Bazaar") was central Calcutta's most congested and most important business district. It had developed into Eastern India's centre for wholesale and retail trade in the hands of Marwaris who had settled in this area in significant numbers by end of the nineteenth century. Barrabazar was an important indication that Calcutta's economy despite appearances was one that was dependent on trade not manufacturing.[25] One early account from the 1840s put an orientalist hue to this bustling mart.

> 'Few Europeans, I believe, have ever taken the trouble of exploring the inmost recesses of the Babel-like regions of the Burra Bazar.... Here above and below, may be seen the jewels of Golconda and Bundelkhand, the shawls of Cashmere, the broad cloths of England, silks of Moorshedabad and Benares, muslins of Dacca, calicoes, ginghams, chintzes, brocade of Persia, spicery and myrrh and frankincense from Ceylon, the Spice Islands and Arabia, shells from the eastern coast and straits, iron ware and cutlery in abundance, as well from Europe as Monghyr, coffee, drugs, dried fruits, and sweetmeats from Arabia and Turkey, cows' tails from Thibet, and ivory from Ceylon. A great portion of these and other such articles, are either sold or brought by natives of the countries from whence they are obtained, who together with visitors, travellers and beggars, form a diversified group of Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwarrees, Armenians, Cashmeerees, Malabars, Goorkhas, Afghans, Seiks, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmese and Bengalis.'[26]

Another European account from 1900 declared that

> 'one of the most wonderful sights in Calcutta is the Burra Bazar, yet how few Europeans ... ever visit it! …The houses are all very high, many rising to more than four storeys. They are built of stone

> or brick and, as a rule, are ornamented within and without, with rough but not unpleasing coloured frescoes. Some have balconies of wonderfully carved wood.'[27]

Barrabazar or Ward VII was the area behind Writers Buildings (seat of government) and Lalbazar (Police Headquarters) up to Cotton Street in the north. It was bounded by the river on the west and Lower Chitpur Road on the east. This area was diverse and included shops, godowns, residential buildings and *bustis* (slums) though commercialization had lent the whole ward a distinctive character. Overbuilt with narrow streets, which made it mysterious and impenetrable to government agencies, its insanitation worried administrators because of its close proximity to the centre of government. Things were compounded by the steep value of land in this area which rivalled those of commercial London. Throughout the nineteenth century official views swung from the romantic (quote above) to the denunciatory: the latter harboured fantasies of razing this commercial hub to the ground removing what was seen as an important locus of disease in the city. By restoring order in this ward the government planners wanted to create a kind of buffer between Indian neighbourhoods to the north and British ones in the south. The dilemma and prevarication of sanitary policy in Barrabazar seemed to have been resolved when search began for a suitable site for the proposed Central Railway Station. European engineers, doctors, bureaucrats in the city wanted the Central Station to replace this historic core. In 1899 when doctors Clemow and Hossack were asked to prepare a report on the area (following the plague scare), they too recommended demolition.[28] Throughout the nineteenth century the railways were seen as purveyors of sanitation and it was thought that its benefits far outweighed any disruption caused to communities.[29] Perhaps the enormous cost of demolition and rebuilding was a deterrence to the government and the railway station was never built here (it was built across the river in Howrah in 1906) and Barrabazar escaped its dreadful fate. However, concern with Barrabazar in the official mind did not diminish.

The Geddes Report on Barrabazar

Geddes was in India yet two of the plummest planning commissions slipped through his hand. New Delhi had already been given to Lutyens (and Baker). Geddes was no architect and had an idiosyncratic reputation among planners. It did not help that Geddes had criticised the New Delhi plan[30] and perhaps for this reason he was never accommodated even in an advisory role. Acolytes of Geddes like the architect and planner, H.V. Lanchester too did not get a share of the Delhi pie. The autonomous Calcutta Improvement Trust was set up in 1911 - a major project to restructure the city and even here Geddes failed to get in. His private papers reveal that he tried to get a place as an advisor through his friend the scientist Jagadis Bose who put in a word (unsuccessfully) to the Indian minister in government Surendranath Bannerjee.[31] Clearly Geddes was keen to bag a big project and he had made the appropriate noises before leaving England going to the extent of praising the published plan of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) as a 'stately volume' in his *Cities in Evolution* (1915).[32] Eventually Geddes was asked to submit his views on one ward in the city - Barrabazar - by the rival Calcutta Municipality who were miffed that the Trust had encroached on their territory. The Municipality had been deliberately kept at a distance by the Trust because the latter saw popular representation as a liability.

This was Geddes' first proper commission in a colonial metropolis - his previous reports had been on smaller towns or princely capitals none of which had the scale of problems of a Bombay or Calcutta. Planning models too valourised the big city—the restructuring of Paris (by Haussmann, c.1850-1870) and Chicago (Plan by Burnham and Bennett, 1909). Clearly Geddes had to reconcile his cautious and piecemeal approach to the large-scale.[33] In Calcutta he had to confront two major strains in modern planning at odds with each other. First the close association of business needs to urban planning: the proliferation of capital had always meant the restructuring of spaces. Secondly: the bane of modern planning — how to rehouse the displaced working classes without provoking class conflict.

Haussmann's plan was the official inspiration for restructuring Calcutta and E.P. Richards who put together the CIT's blueprint acknowledged his debt to this planning model.[34] Haussmann's emphasis on imposing a new functional order on the city with an eye to the efficient circulation of goods and services was achieved through the connection of economic nodes like docks and railway stations and creating voids for 'respiration' (boulevards, parks).[35] Richards' plan for CIT (he offered several alternative proposals) show a similar logic: a Calcutta crisscrossed with rectilinears and diagonals which reduced the city into manageable blocks: manageable i.e. for commerce and the trades. Commenting generally on the carving up of space in the modern city, Lewis Mumford (Geddes' principal disciple[36]) had written that such a move signified the rapid turnover of real estate in capitalism, a 'convertability' and 'replaceability' of space for 'possible traffic, possible commercial opportunity, possible conversion from residence into more exclusive business use'[37]. Schemes such as Richards thus implicitly acknowledged the importance of private investors in the property market in Calcutta.

Geddes had to contend with Richards as well as several other plans already in place. Clemow and Hossack's report (1899) has been mentioned above. The CIT commissioned another up-to-date report on insanitry wards by Dr. Crake.[38] Geddes also had to take as his benchmark the plans that the CIT had made specifically for Barrabazar. Albert de Bois Shrosbree, the Chief Valuer had prepared such a report in 1916, and had found that the 'fundamental evil' in Barrabazar was overbuilding. The tone of his recommendations was more cautious than the 1899 report and he suggested various solutions common to which was demolition and partial re-building of insanitary areas and the widening and construction of streets throughout the area. Shrosbreee urged that the matter could not be delayed because the cost of improvement would rise prohibitively.[39] In intent at least, it was no different from the earlier reports. The Marwari Traders Association in an early testimony to the CIT had proactively supported such proposals and had recommended more through roads and clearance of slums to facilitate commercialization.[40] To sum up: the logic of these plans indicated that the 'allocation' of streets, sewers and railway lines seemed the

only way to order the city.[41] It was at this juncture that Geddes was asked to give his opinion, and he submitted his plan in 1919.

Geddes began his investigations, literally doing a house-to-house survey. He knew there were no short-cuts, for only by painstaking investigations would he be able to get an accurate picture of the problems of Barrabazar and also expand his conclusions for a wider comparative perspective with the city as a whole.[42] He knew that extant plans followed the 'the conventional aesthetics of the rigorously straight line of the older Paris-Berlin-American school'.[43] Geddes saw no reason why a costly monotony should be the target of planning, when local traditions offered a cheaper and more aesthetic result.[44] Even though he was dealing with only one district of Calcutta, he effectively managed to critique the normative standards that the CIT had set up for itself.

Geddes' report was categorical that there was more to Barrabazar than just large blocks of insanitary and overcrowded property. Barrabazar, he pointed out, had a distinct architectural and urban form of its own, and it would reduce the trauma of demolition if this character was allowed to survive, provided some changes were made. Geddes found that Barrabazar encompassed two distinctly different areas. Big business was situated in the south and the west — it was here that abatement of traffic congestion and general improvement was most needed. He had alternative plans on the full-fledged development of this business area. The north and east he found were primarily residential. Geddes saw it as his job to try and preserve this character — to save housing stock and the dislocation of residents. He also felt that the argument of the Trust that the business quarters would 'spill' into the residential inevitably, as not very convincing.[45]

Geddes also observed that the movement of goods and traffic was across the city, west to east and vice-versa, and much less along the river (north-south) or on roads parallel to it. This was borne out by the organic growth of the city since the nineteenth century, which clearly show a majority of the city's roads take a west to east alignment.[46] Instead the Trust was of course planning north-south

cuts in total disregard to the needs of the local trades. The logic here was dictated by the British mercantile establishments which were placed along the river (still a major channel for transport) and which disregarded Indian businesses further inland. Geddes also noticed that in the business areas, the existing godowns were basically domestic buildings adapted to business use — and actually afforded less space for storing. The courtyards became dirty with constant use, and the dust raised contributed to the unhealthiness of the living quarters in the upper storeys. Most of the houses also had a narrow frontage but great depth. The space behind these houses had been overrun by the haphazard growth of stables and irregular housing for domestic servants and the working population.[47]

His recommendations for Barrabazar basically fell within three broad parameters. Firstly he insisted that street alignment be developed along the west-east axis following the natural movement of goods and traffic and not north-south as the CIT was planning. Secondly while making a plea to retain the residential character of the north-east he was keen to see the west of Barrabazar develop into a modern business district. Thirdly, even when he realized that demolition of insanitary property could not be avoided, he wanted to rebuild keeping traditional urban forms in mind so that the character of the district would remain intact.

Geddes was convinced that Barrabazar should be set up as a modern business district and nothing less. He wanted to develop the business locality along the west because of its proximity to the river and shipping. For this purpose he recommended that the Mint (1831) be shifted out, but typically for Geddes, he urged the re-use of the ancient structure as a public school for children in this area. Geddes was aware that large plots of land in Calcutta were controlled by government (the largest landowner in the city) and his suggestion was in fact a gesture towards a more creative and public use of such land, blocked by moribund structures. The grouping of business interests in different quarters, an 'old world survival' Geddes argued gave Barrabazar a familiar character of its own. Far from condemning this traditional grouping of business Geddes wanted to retain it. At the same time he urged the adoption of modern American and

German methods of goods handling for Calcutta. He envisaged a vast 'Produce Exchange' next to the railway lines of an associated goods depot, goods being lifted vertically from wagons to warehouses with great economy of handling. The upper story of this building would house offices and there would even be a roof garden for relaxation and business conversation. He wanted old residential houses being used as godowns rebuilt as modern warehouses, with offices and shops on the upper floors connected with ramps. Footbridges over lanes would be built to decongest the narrow lanes. A Barrabazar thus re-planned and concentrated would relieve the congestion from other parts and make available once again building stock for much needed housing.[48]

Geddes' penchant for conservation did not mean that he doubted the need for more lanes and streets through Barrabazar. Business sense also suggested that instead of widening existing streets, as the CIT was planning to do, it was more reasonable that new thoroughfares be opened through the back lots of the houses, which Geddes had shown to be consisting of run-down property. Thus at one stroke, new frontages would be opened up cheaply, lines for sanitation would be easier to provide and the local business traffic would also remain undisturbed. He himself suggested three alternative west-east routes and condemned the north-south system as, 'its origin appears to lie more in drawing-office routine than in City Survey'.[49] All CIT plans were made keeping the future needs of motorized transport in mind yet according to Geddes the pressing need of the hour was to improve pedestrian circulation within Barrabazar, since the evidence of mass circulation by foot was only too evident, as was the continuous use of human portage and hand driven vehicles. On the value of preserving and extending lanes he was particularly eloquent. Arguing that people like short-cuts he wrote lyrically that:

> 'a lane after all is a pavement without a road beside it, and some people value its quietness; while its narrow width and shade give coolness also'.[50]

Geddes' plans in fact show a gradation of roads — lanes for pedestrians, streets for heavier mixed traffic, and large roads for intra-

city communication. The logic behind such a move was to avoid clogging up a single large avenue, overburdened with humans, animals and vehicles, reducing mobility to crawling level. A simple separation of traffic functions would enable both speed for vehicles and faster mobility for commerce. Such a move would also help preserve existing channels of circulation and not condemn them unequivocally.

Despite his caution, Geddes was practical enough to realize that some demolition was always necessary. He knew that sanitary problems had become acute in Barrabazar and needed urgent attention and thus Dr. Crake's survey won his sympathy. 'As a life-long cobbler of old buildings and also with more respect than most for the courtyard type of house I take a less severe view than his', he wrote, 'but in a general way I am compelled to confirm and support his criticism. His figures are well worth consulting'.[51] Geddes' plans to rebuild demolished areas included innovatively designed four-storey blocks of houses which followed closely the traditional use of space. The lower two storeys would be used for business purposes while the upper two laid out like the traditional Indian courtyard home would house residents. By raising the residential quarters to the top floors, Geddes hoped to avoid the dirt and dust of lower floors. The warehouses built below would be on modern lines with enough provision for light and air.[52] In these plans for the newly built four storey houses Geddes envisaged some displacement. But it would be balanced, he hoped, by creating adequate and in most cases better places to stay.[53] In some blocks only a few insanitary houses would be removed, the space created would be converted into small open areas and parks, and provide relief to the residents locally. Knowing fully well that the creation of space for gardens would prove very expensive in so valuable a site as Barrabazar, he urged again for the conversion of roofs into small gardens. For women who were reluctant to step out for lack of recreational space outside, he suggested the ear-marking of small parks as exclusive 'purdah gardens'.[54]

Writing just after the First World War, Geddes was sensitive that large-scale demolitions would lead to losses in business and

dislocation of the labouring poor. He was no doubt aware about the rumblings of discontent among the working classes in Calcutta and its outskirts, which broke out after the War.[55] Geddes realized that it was vital for workers dependent on casual work to live close to their place of employment. In sharp contrast to Richards, he argued that the poor would not be able to travel from the suburbs to the city, a luxury that only the upper classes could afford, since only they had the means and the time to commute long distances daily.

Preserving and investing in existing housing stock was paramount for Geddes. Too often, he urged, buildings are judged on superficial grounds, 'so that dirty whitewash, broken plaster, and bad smell are enough to evoke a cry for demolition; for these only need easy cleansing and brightening, and economical repair'.[56] He understood the value that Indians placed on family homes only too well. Far from deriding this attachment as old-fashioned conservatism impeding progress, he was keen to turn it into an effective plea for their repair and sanitation. He knew that for British planners in the CIT, the notion of a family home was an alien concept. 'Family homes' in the West belonged to the aristocracy and the majority of people in cities lived in tenements and flats. He suggested that in its own way, the Calcutta Municipality could take the 'paternal' step towards granting loans to citizens for repairing their houses. Geddes felt that as yet the investment in housing was too strictly seen through the prism of financial gains and losses in the market. He wanted the governing classes to invest in housing, so that socially at least they could expect returns in the form of a satisfied and prosperous working class.[57] Implicit in this was an argument challenging Engels' famous study on the condition of the English working classes. Engels had almost suggested that the worsening housing condition would further radicalize the workers and the goal of socialist revolution was to 'occupy' the houses of the propertied. Geddes argued against such a view. The elites according to him lived in upper class super slums. A far more genuine revolution would be setting new norms for more humane and communal forms of living space.[58]

Geddes' ideas, unusual for their time met with scepticism and were resisted even before his report was published. Shrosbree, the

Chief Valuer, whose report on Barrabazar we have referred to earlier, was critical of Geddes' attempts at solving the problem of 'nuisance corners' by erecting small temples in their place. Shrosbree predicted that this would freeze in perpetuity areas which needed reconstruction work.[59] Shrosbree's criticism showcased why Geddes' ideas were mistrusted. Epidemics and overcrowding needed solutions on a war footing according to official planners, whereas Geddes seemed not only insufficiently interventionist, he was also far too sympathetic to the community. Geddes was however accustomed to such attacks. To the Calcutta Corporation's charge, that Geddes' scheme for small open spaces between houses, would come to naught, since they would rapidly turn into repositories for dumping refuse,[60] he had effective answers. Geddes argued that 'neutral' issues like that of garbage actually hid a deep-seated antipathy for common people. For the British administrators, Indians were inherently filthy and prone to desecrating public places. For Geddes the problem was the very opposite. Rubbish accumulated, he wrote, when neither the Municipality nor the local landlord made adequate arrangements for carting it away. Besides, planting of a few trees would indeed maintain the sanctity of these small areas between houses and encourage people to keep it clean.[61] In other words open spaces integrated into community life had more chance of surviving than parks, the sanitary 'voids' that modern planners tended to prefer, premised on the negative concept of a space that was just to be left empty. Consequently constant policing of such spaces had become necessary, threatening to overturn the very notion of a park made for the people.

Helen Meller, in her important revaluation of Geddes' Barrabazar report, has shown that he was often a victim of his own propaganda, totally unresponsive to any point of view other than his own.[62] He was also prone to repeating his ideas irrespective of the context, some of his pet schemes like 'purdah gardens' etc. resurfaced in all his reports. For all his enthusiasm Geddes was perhaps too sanguine about the rejuvenating effects of modern business organization in Barrabazar. He misunderstood the constraints working on a colonial economy and failed to understand the mercantilist nature of industry in Calcutta, which eager to do business on the cheap was unlikely

to support his long term plans for a modern refurbished Barrabazar. A modern produce exchange with the latest mechanical goods handling facilities meant the redundancy of casual labour. In Chicago, John Fairfield has pointed out that such a scheme was also proposed by Bennett with an eye to quell labour militancy.[63] One wonders if Geddes was aware of the implications of some of his schemes for Calcutta which had an overwhelming presence of unskilled labour. Helen Rosenau has written that Geddes lacked architectural vision. 'The form of the image seems to have eluded Geddes' she comments.[64] But this view misrepresents Geddes and is not based on any serious engagement with the range of his published reports. The question of form in cities is often reduced to the profile of monumental buildings and is a hangover from architectural history. The assumption is that since Geddes had little to offer in terms of the palpable built environment, therefore his ideas were not relevant or that he had failed. Perhaps more pertinent is Françoise Choay's comment that[65]:

> ' ... Patrick Geddes evolved the survey method at the beginning of the 20th century. But while the method acted as a corrective for urbanism by respecting the complexity of reality and rejecting the apriori, it was nevertheless used by Geddes within the context of a cultural system of values and it remained dependent on the creative intervention of a planner. Consequently it did not fundamentally alter the course of critical planning'.

But the far-reaching implications of Geddes' work has eluded these critics. Lewis Mumford has written that Geddes rejected the 'cult of the state' and central to his thought was not the planner but the citizen.[66]

The Barrabazar report shows that Geddes was willing to enter into a strategic dialogue with official planning. However those who professed sympathy with his plans in official circles often rejected his schemes on the ground that they were idealistic in nature. Anticipating such a ploy, Geddes wrote in his Barrabazar report that:

> 'every worker who ventures upon the application of science, beyond the traditional mechanical level on which the 'practical

> man' prides himself, is taken by him for 'an idealist' - a term which often conveniently dispenses him from hearing what the idealist has to say ...'.[67]

Over the years as Geddes' reputation for dissent grew, his India reports attracted a motley group of planners. In the 1920s and 1930s the library of the Calcutta Improvement Trust became a 'Mecca' for young British planners who were keen to consult the complete set of Indian reports which were kept there.[68]

Geddes' hopes of attracting Indian nationalists also failed. While the scientist Jagadis Bose (Geddes wrote his biography), Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore became his friends and supporters, they did not respond to his ideas on urbanism (the only exception was the academic Radha Kamal Mukherjee). Others like Bipin Chandra Pal despite their strident anti-colonialism were dazzled by the prospect of an Indian metropolis founded on modern European models. The response of Indian nationalists to alternative models of urbanism was therefore at best quite ambivalent.

References

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[2] This needs to be qualified. The 1857 uprising provoked a major crackdown on cities by the British. Delhi and Lucknow had to be re-occupied and were severely restructured to control recalcitrant populations. For some historians military occupation began modern town planning in India. See Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1981), Veena Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-1877* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[3] Christian Topalov, 'From the "social question" to "urban problems": Reformers and the working classes at the turn of the twentieth century', *International Social Science Journal,* No.125, August, 1990.

[4] Norma Evenson, *Paris, A Century of Change 1878-1978* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 22-23, 265, Douglas E. Goodfriend, 'The Tyranny of the Right-Angle: Colonial and Post-Colonial Urban

Development in Delhi, 1857-1957', *Design,* No.26, April-June, 1982, Carl Schroske, 'The Ringstrasse, its critics and the birth of urban modernism' in *Fin de Siecle Vienna, Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

[5] Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis, A View Toward the West* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 124.

[6] J.M. Linton Bogle, *Town Planning in India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1929), 8.

[7] H. V. Lanchester, 'Indian Cities and their Improvement', *Architecture Design and Construction,* 12 June, 1942, 119. Lanchester worked in India and published a plan on Madras, *Town Planning in Madras, A Review of the Conditions and Requirements of City Improvement and Development in the Madras Presidency* (London: Constable and Company, 1918).

[8] Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes, Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[9] I owe this insight to the late Professor Satyesh Chakrabarty, Calcutta.

[10] Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (1915, rpt. London: Williams and Norgate, 1949), 16.

[11] Douglas E. Goodfriend, 'Nagar Yoga: The Culturally Informed Town Planning of Patrick Geddes in India 1914-24', *Human Organization* 38, No.4, Winter, 1979.

[12] Ram Guha, 'Patrick Geddes and Ecological Town Planning in India' (a talk at Urban Design Research Institute, Bombay, October 5, 2001). Sekhar Krishnan made available to me a typescript of this unpublished talk.

[13] Patrick Geddes, 'The Temple Cities', *The Modern Review* 25, No.3, March 1919, 213.

[14] Helen Meller, 'Cities and Evolution: Patrick Geddes as an international prophet of town planning before 1914' in Anthony Sutcliffe ed. *The Rise of Modern Urban Planning 1800-1914* (London: Mansell, 1980). See also, Ram Guha, 'Prehistory of Indian Environmentalism, Intellectual Traditions', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXVII, 1-2, January 4-11, 1992.

[15] Dorothea Hollins (ed.), *Utopian papers, Being Addresses to The Utopians' by Professor Patrick Geddes, S.H. Swinney, Dr. J.W. Slaughter, V. V. Branford, Dr. Lionel Taylor, Sister Nivedita, F. W. Felkin and Rev. Joseph Wood* (London: Masters and Co.,1908), 6.

[16] Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Wright and Le Corbusier* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 6.

[17] Jaqueline Tyrwhitt ed. *Patrick Geddes in India* (London: Lund Humphries, 1947), 24. This is an important anthology of extracts from his Indian reports.

[18] Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, *Patrick Geddes in India,* 41.

[19] Here it was C.M.Vil1iers-Stuart's *Gardens of the Great Mughals* (1913), a pioneering feminist reading of the nurturing tradition of women in towns that had a great influence on Geddes, Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes, Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, 219.

[20] Most famously in his report on Indore city. See Patrick Geddes, *Town Planning: A Report to the Durbar of Indore*, 2 Vols, (Indore: Holkar Printing Press, 1918).

[21] Geddes did not homegenize the community, nor did he romanticise it as a perpetual bulwark against the state. Planning for Geddes was a creative way to raise the standards of civic life in general. For a view of how modern sanitation adjudicates and destroys communities, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Open Space/Public Space: Garbage, Modernity and India', *South Asia* XIV, I, 1991. But also see Nita Kumar's riposte, 'Culture and Filth', *The India Magazine* 17, November 1997.

[22] Douglas E. Goodfriend, *'Nagar Yoga',* 344.

[23] Anthony King, 'Exporting Planning: The colonial and the neo-colonial experience' in Gordon Cherry (ed.), *Shaping an Urban World* (London: Mansell, 1980).

[24] Anthony King, *'Exporting planning',* 210.

[25] H. Beverly, *Report on the Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta. Taken on the 17th February 1881* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1881), 22, 46.

[26] T.Smith, 'Daily Life of a Sahib in Calcutta', *Calcutta Review* 12, No.24, 1849.

[27] Quoted in Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis*, 130.

[28] Frank G. Clemow, M.D., and W.C. Hossack, M.D., *Report upon the Sanitary Condition of Ward VII (Burra Bazar) Calcutta* (Calcutta: Municipality, 1899).

[29] John R Kellett, *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 2; Anthony Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* (London, Edward Arnold, 1977), 39.

[30] Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes, Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, 236;

Lewis Mumford, 'The Disciple's Rebellion, A Memoir of Patrick Geddes', *Encounter* XXVII, 3, September, 1966, 11.

[31] Patrick Geddes Papers, University of Edinburgh, Ms 10576.

[32] Helen Meller, Patrick Geddes, *Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, f.n.37, 231.

[33] Ram Guha has raised the question if Geddes' penchant for the 'middle or human scale' proved to be a limitation. See Ram Guha, 'Patrick Geddes and Ecological Town Planning'.

[34] E.P. Richards, *Calcutta Improvement Trust: Report by Request of the Trust on the Condition, Improvement and Town Planning of the City of Calcutta and Contiguous Areas* (Hertfordshire: Jennings and Bewley, 1914).

[35] P.J. Smith, 'Planning as environmental improvement: Slum clearance in Victorian Edinburgh' in Anthony Sutcliffe (ed.) *The Rise of Modern Urban Planning, 1800-1914* (London: Mansell, 1980), 101, and Françoise Choay, *The Modern City, Planning in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 15-16.

[36] Though he rebelled against his mentor, Lewis Mumford, 'The Disciple's Rebellion, A Memoir of Patrick Geddes'. For the Geddessian approach to the American city as exemplified in Mumford's life-work see the excellent account by Ram Guha, 'Lewis Mumford: The Forgotten American Environmentalist: An Essay in Rehabilitation', *Culture Nature Socialism* 2, 3,1991.

[37] Lewis Mumford, *City in History, Its Origins, Its Transformations and its Prospects* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1961), 427, 438.

[38] H.M. Crake, *Report on Sanitary Condition of Northern portion of City of Calcutta* (Calcutta: CIT, 1911).

[39] Albert de Bois Shrosbree, *Calcutta Improvement Trust. Note on Barrabazar Improvements* (Calcutta: CIT, Estates and Valuation Department, 1916), 5, 14.

[40] CIT *Annual Report*, 1912-13 (Calcutta: C1T, 1913), 27-28.

[41] M.Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983, 1994), 288.

[42] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement, A Report* (Calcutta: Corporation Press, 1919), 27-28.

[43] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 5.

[44] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 5.

[45] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 6.

[46] Samita Gupta, 'Theory and Practice of town planning in Calcutta, 1817-1912', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* XXX, 1, Jan-Mar 1993, 35.

[47] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 6-7, 10-11, 13.

[48] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 16, 18-19.

[49] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 8, 11.

[50] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 12.

[51] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 22.

[52] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 14.

[53] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 15, 19, 33.

[54] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 20-22.

[55] For details see, Partho Datta, 'Strikes in the Greater Calcutta Region, 1918-24', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 30, 1, 1993.

[56] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 33.

[57] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 29-30, 34.

[58] Lewis Mumford, *City in History,* 464-465. According to Mumford, Geddes described the downward movement of building and housing in the modern city as: 'Slum, semi-slum and super slum, to this has come the Evolution of Cities'.

[59] Albert de Bois Shrosbree, *Calcutta Improvement Trust: Note on Barrabazar Improvements,* 6.

[60] *Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta,* 1919-20 (Calcutta: Corporation Press, 1920), 18.

[61] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 32.

[62] Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes, Social Evolutionist and City Planner,* 283.

[63] John D. Fairfield, *The Mysteries of the Great City, The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1917* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 121.

[64] Helen Rosenau, *The Ideal City, Its Architectural Evolution* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 150.

[65] Francoise Choay, *The Modern City, Planning in the 19th Century,* 109.

[66] Lewis Mumford, 'Introduction', *Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Patrick Geddes in India,* 12.

[67] Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement,* 35.

[68] Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes, Social Evolutionist and City Planner*, 203. For another sympathetic reading of Geddes' Barrabazar Report, see Martin Beattie, 'Sir Patrick Geddes and Barra Bazar: competing visions, ambivalence and contradiction', *The Journal of Architecture* 9, 2004. Grateful thanks to Indrani Chatterjee who drew my attention to this essay.