



Regenerative Development for Resilience

Poonam Verma Mascarenhas

B. Arch, M.A. Conservation (U.K.); Director Archinova Environs, Senate Member, SPAV (2020-2022)

The word ‘resilience’ perhaps is the most popular term of this year. My recent reflections suggest that the capacity to overcome adversity is directly proportional to adaptability. And so is the case with our surviving unprotected built heritage. Adapt as a term is often used in conservation community. We have developed a neat Venn diagram-with several nomenclature- value- systems to box the heritage. But let us examine, from our learnings of our own passage through life- isn’t it a linear progression wherein inputs were periodic to ensure the continuous evolution of the cultural entity? Based on the experienced discomfort, success and failure of solutions for identified problems was perhaps then further resolved, and thus what we see today is sum total of many interventions?

Further, the generated solutions were then adopted by the masses to in turn become a defined practice in an era and today we call them as ‘style’- regional vernacular or Mughal, Rajputana, Colonial and so on and so forth. However, when we characterize the ‘Values’ in 21st century- of any cultural entity, they are an account of the end product but not a synthesis of its process of arrival through time. While we have been viewing us and our heritage from the lens of ‘survival of the fittest’; it occurred to me – and specially in these last few months - it actually is ‘survival of the most adaptable’. The only constant in our lives is ‘change’. Managing and adapting with the changes has also been a constant. So why are we in such an existential crisis?

Analysis of human progression suggests that the Industrial revolution increased the rate of change, with no mindfulness on continuum of the resources! In Indian context- post liberation economy in the nineties ushered an era of high consumption propelled by economic interest to position India out of the developing third- world nation category to the arrived developed. But what was or is the bench mark for such a notion? What are the problems that have been brilliantly resolved by the developed nations that merit reproduction?

To my mind, reflecting on ushered Anthropocene era and almost 30 years of dilly dallying on the environmental impact of high resource consumption for greater economic growth is the biggest collective failure of humans. Positioning the ‘modern’ as a goal and treating the centuries old tangible and intangible- cultural continuities- as ephemeral, perhaps has been our most prominent error! So, what is resilience? Dictionary tells us: resilience as a noun is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness; resilience as an adjective is the ability of a substance or object to spring back

into shape; elasticity and, resiliently is an adverb- in a way that shows the ability to resist being badly affected after something unpleasant such as shock, injury, etc. So, our cultural collective is all of the above? Or is it something more? Can one ever go back to a former state after an experience of stress? Should one? Is resilience an appropriate goal? Or can there be another system- one of cumulative resiliency- on the lines of build back better?

Be it Pune, Panaji, Mumbai, Chennai or Hyderabad last month: urban floods are symptomatic of planning blight, failure of governance and privatisation of public lands for commercial gains. Our historic cities and settlements from the pre- industrial era inform us of symbiotic relationship between people and nature. Post-industrial revolution, Green revolution and the Information Technology revolution have cumulatively generated a development model of supremacy of human need overriding carrying capacity of nature- for maximum financial gains! And now- the Nature is exhausted of its inherent power to renew itself. Air, water, land of Planet Earth –are saturated with man-made-pollutants.

It is the last hour –or so to speak- for humans to adapt their living and revive the symbiotic relationship with our planet and its life-cycle. Myriad solutions exist. Same IT has connected us across the planet, and beyond to have the information in real time and also of the various research and outcomes.

We can still redeem ourselves. But even this window of mindful existence – to walk lightly on the planet Earth- is closing fast. Soon it may not matter- if we continue with our early 21st- century acquired-throw-away culture and chalta hai attitude. We have the knowledge, we have the structure, we have the resources. All that is missing is the will – of the people- because this adaptation will have to be done- by the people, and even despite the governments; irrespective of the nationality, caste, class, faith or the politics- for at stake is the survival of all life and living beings.

To now survive- as a human race- it is time for Regenerative Development strategies because in it resides the resilience. The art of Regenerative Development is really the art of developing strategies wherein:

- The relationship between care-taking and commodification is explicitly balanced.
- Land, rivers, fields, forests and built fabric are all valuable resources and not commodities.
- Carbon neutrality is a compulsion and not a choice and the symbiotic relationships need to be understood and valued and enhanced through scholarly engagements of all branches of settlement studies in unison and not in silos or isolation.
- Citizens in a democracy are co-participants in shaping the future of the country. And we professionals are citizens first- and need to take-on more ownership.

Thus, this initiative of curating thoughts and practices on an open platform by SPA Vijayawada- a built environment education institute, is of immense value to the society. I look forward to its success in generating important informed dialogues across the professional departments towards shaping of an equitable regenerative resilient model of development.