

Contribution of Patrick Geddes

Anannya Talukder

Research Scholar, Department of Humanities, Anna Malai University

ABSTRACT

PATRICK GEDDES

“*BY
LIVING WE LEARN*”

Patrick Geddes was a man of diverse interests and talents. Today he is probably best known as a town planner. However, he has also been described as biologist, sociologist, conservationist, educationist and ecologist.

Geddes did much to improve the living conditions in this local environment and was also a figure of international importance. He travelled widely and corresponded with the key thinkers and writers of the time such as Charles Darwin, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

Above all, his aim was “to see life whole”, and to achieve a better understanding of human beings in their natural, built and social environment. His ideas and concerns about the environment, education, and conservation are still as relevant today as they were in his own time.

KEYWORDS

Town planner, Geddisian Triad, Geddes valley section, Conurbation theory, Constellation concept

INTRODUCTION

Patrick Geddes is correctly described as one of the founders of modern town and regional planning. His theoretical ideas have influenced much subsequent planning practice, regional economic development and environmental management. In particular, his focus on the triad "Place - Work - Folk" is fundamental to contemporary debates and research into regionalism and locality, economic and community regeneration, environmental quality and sustainable development and social inclusion.

Patrick Geddes was born in Ballater but spent his early childhood in Perth. He started his professional life as a Geologist and, in 1879, discovered chlorophyll. Unfortunately, ill health prevented him pursuing what would have likely been a glittering career as a natural scientist. He turned instead to social analysis and applied his scientific methodology to the processes of economic, social and environmental change. In 1888, he took up the post of Professor of Botany at University College, Dundee and held this part time position until 1918. Geddes was based principally in Edinburgh during this time and in parallel to his academic interests became interested in urban and regional planning and urban renewal issues.

In light of the connection to Dundee and Patrick Geddes' research interests in planning and environmental management, Town and Regional Planning has established him as representative of its own research interests, professional practice and teaching activities. To this end, the Geddes identity is now an integral part of the School.

Geddes was the founder of the College des Ecosaise (Scots College) an international teaching establishment in Montpellier, France. He studied at the

Royal College of Mines in London under Thomas Henry Huxley between 1874 and 1878, and lectured in Zoology at Edinburgh University from 1880 to 1888. From 1920-23 he was working as a professor of Civics and Sociology in University of Bombay. Patrick Geddes -Also known as **“Father of Modern Town Planning”** and First to link sociological concepts into town planning .

PATRICK GEDDES

Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) was a ‘polymath’— a man of many parts. He was a biologist by training, a pioneering town planner who influenced various generations of urban planners, a sociologist and an educator throughout his life. A powerhouse of intellect and energy, Geddes blazed his course from project to project at home in Scotland and around the world for half a century. Instead of becoming a specialist, he was happy being a ‘generalist’, who held a holistic view that in order to live we must be able to see the intertwined link between the natural and social sciences.

Geddes had a lifelong contempt for examinations and never took a

university degree. Yet, he held the position of Chair of Botany at University of Dundee (1888 to 1919), and Chair of Sociology at the University of Bombay (1919 to 1924). His teaching style was conversational and involved out of class learning through regular excursions and observational visits. He urged his students to practice this world view where life was a learning process and one could learn more by doing.

Geddes' work was based on his fundamental principle of 'Place, Work and People' as he believed that geography; economics and anthropology were related, yielding a single chord of social life. He saw sociology as a quintessentially interdisciplinary subject that was essentially the science of man's interaction with a natural environment, and improved urban planning was one of the key applications of sociology. Geddes revived the Old Town of Edinburgh using his ground breaking concepts of 'diagnostic surveys' and 'conservative surgery', which he went on to implement in town planning projects across Scotland, India and the Middle East. In fact, Tel Aviv is a city whose core was entirely built around Geddes' plan. He also introduced the concept of 'region' to architecture and planning and coined the term 'conurbation'.

Many have been influenced by his work, including urban theorists such as Lewis Mumford. Geddes also set the foundation for future urban thinkers such as Jane Jacobs and the New Urbanism movement which focuses on walkable neighbourhoods, variety of housing and occupation types.

Yet very few people know of the name Patrick Geddes, including in the University where I obtained my master's degree in Sociology, located in the city of Bombay (now called Mumbai) which desperately needs massive amounts of urban planning to make it hospitable for man and nature alike. At first I thought it was sad that almost no one from my own department knew of this man. Yet, on further reflection I saw this as a refreshing change from the celebrity academic culture of today where many academics brandish their publications, yet have very little substance or no effect on the world.

A true learner, Geddes believed that one learned not by sitting in ivory towers but by being in the world, by walking in the world, by observing and asking and listening to people and incorporating their ways of life and their natural environment into the design of sustainable solutions.

Early life and influences:

Born in October 1854 at Ballater in West Aberdeen, Scotland, Patrick Geddes was raised and educated in the countryside of Perth. His was a childhood spent gardening with his father, conducting science experiments in the shed, exploring the nearby woods and cliffs; and these experiences taught Geddes deep lessons in ecology, inspiring his personality and career. As mentioned earlier Geddes had a lifelong contempt for examinations and never took a university degree. After a period of private study, he chose to study Botany at the University of Edinburgh (1874), but left after one week. He then went on to study Botany and Zoology with individual teachers and mentors in London and Paris. In London, he trained at the Royal College of Mines, under the great biologist and evolutionist of the time, Thomas Huxley, whose influence on Geddes is said to have been profound. Being a student of Huxley opened doors for him to study in France, and he subsequently trained at the Sorbonne University. From then on and for the rest of his life, he was an ardent Francophile, enjoying an empathy with France and French intellectual ideas which greatly influenced his thinking. It was during this time that Geddes came into contact with some of

Europe's progressive and radical thinkers.

CONCEPTS

Patrick Geddes explained an organism's relationship to its environment as follows:

“The environment acts, through function, upon the organism and conversely the organism acts, through function, upon the environment.” (Cities in Evolution, 1915)

In human terms this can be understood as a place acting through climatic and geographic processes upon people and thus shaping them. At the same time people act, through economic processes such as farming and construction, on a place and thus shape it. Thus both place and folk are linked and through work are in constant transition.

Geddes and the valley section

- Geddes first published his idea of the valley section in 1909 to illustrate his idea of the 'region-city'.

- The region is expressed in the city and the city spreads influence of the highest level into the region.
- To put it another way, Geddes said that "it takes a whole region to make the city".
- The valley section illustrated the application of Geddes's trilogy of 'folk/work/place' to analysis of the region.
- The valley section is a complex model, which combines physical condition- geology and geomorphology and their biological associations - with so-called natural or basic occupations such as miner, hunter, shepherd or fisher, and with the human settlements that arise from them.

Geddes and the constellation concept

- This CONSTELLATION THEORY was also coined by Sir Patrick Geddes, "4 or more cities, which are not economically, politically, socially equal come together in developing a whole region"
- This theory is mostly used for administrative purpose in all countries worldwide.

- Such theory is most prominently used because planning cities in a particular shape pattern is not possible in Today's times.

Geddes and the Conurbation Theory

- The term "conurbation" was coined in 1915 by Patrick Geddes in his book *Cities In Evolution*.
- Internationally, the term "urban agglomeration" is often used to convey a similar meaning to "conurbation".
- **Conurbation” -waves of population inflow to large cities, followed by overcrowding and slum formation, and then the wave of backflow – the whole process resulting in amorphous sprawl, waste, and unnecessary obsolescence.**

A conurbation is a region comprising a number of cities, large towns, and other urban areas that, through population growth and physical expansion, have merged to form one continuous urban and industrially developed area.

LEARNING BY DOING

Patrick Geddes believed that education was a catalyst for social change and active citizenship. He explored the ways in which people learn more effectively. He developed an educational philosophy which emphasized the combination of 'hand, heart and head', in that order of priority.

He believed learning should engage the emotions, and include physical activity. This included 'learning by doing', as well as more traditional methods of learning from books and lectures. Geddes also promoted an interdisciplinary approach to learning, highlighting the useful connections and synergies between different subject areas and disciplines.

REFERENCE:

Geddes, P. (1949). *Cities in evolution* (Vol. 27, pp. 109-123). London: Williams & Norgate.

Geddes, S. P. (1915). *Cities in evolution: An introduction to the town planning movement and to the study of civics*. London: Williams & Norgate.

Mumford, L., Geddes, P., & Novak, F. G. (1995). *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence*. Psychology Press.

Geddes, P. (1920). *The Life and Work of Sir Jagadis C. Bose: An Indian Pioneer of Science: with Portrait and Illustrations*. Asian Educational Services.

Geddes, S. P. (1979). *Civics: as applied sociology* (pp. 75-97). Leicester: Leicester University Press.