

Parallel in Ekistics & Vedic Philosophy towards Ideal Human Settlement

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Abstract: *Man, since he has set foot on the earth, has always strived to maximize his potential contacts with nature, with his fellow human beings, with other works of man while expending minimum possible energy and efforts for optimization of man's protective space so that he can fulfill his aspirations for a better life without compromising with his own personal space. This paper is based on a doctoral thesis which discusses the idea of ideal human settlements in the light of the Ekistics and the Vedic philosophies towards the common goal of welfare of mankind in totality. The paper aims to look back at these two theories and establish their greatness and relevance in addressing the common issues of human settlements in totality. It is an attempt to rediscover the gems that these two theories are but does not represent either of the two philosophies fully. This study, hence, looks at the philosophies of Ekistics and the Vedas parallel to each other based on an assumption that the ultimate aim of humanity remains one—saving time and energy for the well-being of mankind—though different pathways might exist and different approaches might be adopted.*

Keywords: Optimization, Ekistics, Vedic, Human settlements, parallel

1. Introduction

The philosophy of Ekistics, since it paved way for the contemporary planning philosophies pertaining to sustainability, is extremely relevant to develop an understanding of the holistic approach required for finding solutions to solve various issues of the human settlements covered under five main categories of Ekistics elements—Nature, Man, Society, Shell, and Network. The major and fundamental goal of Ekistics is to assist and equip Man to find solutions to his problems and to find ways to be happy and feel safe within and outside the confines of his settlements by creating conditions that bring about a balance between the five elements of the human settlements, so that man can adapt easily to the requirements of settlements which will further help him to develop according to his own intentions. So, Ekistics is all about excellence in settlements' system's approach for the benefit of Man.

Similarly, the Vedic philosophy is said to address all the matters of human lives and their habitation. It solves the issues of human societies and is believed to be enshrined with a wealth of an endless knowledge, a vast sea of wisdom. It is ratifying to note that the culture that developed based on the Vedas has evolved into a vast expanse of reservoir for humane approach and humanistic culture. The Vedas, in terms of concept, structure, intention, discourse, dialogue, content and application, are extremely distinct from other religious literature available to the world. The Vedic knowledge was not just religious, in the sense of exalting the divine, but also philosophical, in the sense of asking metaphysical questions and determining the limitations of what can be known. Religion is so closely associated with philosophy that sometimes the boundaries are blurred.

2. Objectives of the Research

The objective of this research is to check and establish whether the Ekistics and the Vedas are parallel to each other at the philosophical level in striving towards ideal human

settlements. It shall be established that the philosophy of the Vedas and the Ekistics Philosophy are both holistic in nature. The ultimate objective of the research shall be to establish the greatness and universal nature of both the philosophies pertaining to human settlements.

Though both the philosophies are set in entirely different contexts and in different time zones, there are certain striking overlaps in their ideas that show that no matter what the contexts and epochs of time are, the intention to make conditions liveable for harmonious development is of prime importance for any philosopher and school of thought. This thesis situates both the philosophies as universal and parallel to each other. The massiveness, expanse, variety and contradictions of both the philosophies have offered windows to the complexities of both the subjects separately. The inherent intertwinings have been simplified and compared to each other in this paper.

3. Research Question and Methodology

The first question underlining this research work is whether there is a convergence or any relationship between the theory of Ekistics and the Vedas at the philosophical level. And if there is a connection, how it can be established and proved shall remain the central idea of this discussion. Moreover, it will also be investigated whether both these theories aim to bring human settlements to 'ideal' situations by guiding their growth and transformations as a comprehensive system, and if it is the case then how these philosophies differ in their approaches to achieve the same. The aim of this research work is to identify the parallelism that the Ekistics and the Vedic philosophies traverse towards the realization of ideal human settlements.

The elements of Ekistics and their components and subdivisions provided by Doxiadis are of prime importance as they form the backbone of this research and it is around these elements only that this entire work is woven and entwined.

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And these sub- divisions form the basis of convergence for comparing the philosophies of Ekistics and the Vedas.

The component of the Vedic philosophy is very vast. After much reflection, deliberation, discussion and careful thought, the Vedic Samhita edited by Pandit Sri Ram Sharma Acharya and Bhagwati Sharma and published by Yug Nirman Yojana Vistar Trust Gayatri Tapo Bhumi Mathura (Revised edition 2013) has been read, hymn by hymn and their meaning been derived in context to this study.

The comparison of the idea behind the elements of Ekistics and hymns selected in the specific category has been contained in the analysis. The similarity or the difference in the philosophy has been discussed in reference to the hymns that have been selected in this study.

In this way we aim to establish the parallel in both the philosophies to prove the hypothesis of this research.

4. Ideal Human Settlements

According to Khambatta (1995), there is no better example of ideal settlements in the realms of built- form than the caves of Shanidar in Iraq, occupied by Kurdish tribes since Neolithic times. Archaeologists discovered a skeleton of a Neanderthal child at a depth of twenty six feet from the present cave floor [1]. Every successive century that followed, deposited layers and layers of debris which, when pieced and studied together tell us tales of a continued occupation of the cave for thousands of centuries. The start of Christian era is hence ironically only eight inches below the present level of the floor if we look at the whole picture in this way of evolution. People have preferred lived at one particular place close to a hundred thousand years, without abandoning it.

Our settlements come a long way from Shanidar, both in physical and intrinsic characteristics; but from the earliest recorded village built on piles in the lakes of Switzerland [2], agglomerations have grown tremendously in size and physical features from villages to towns, to cities, metropolises and lately to megalopolises. The charm of cities and the unprecedented opportunities they provide have made the urbanization process irreversible. Placido Domingo would sing at the Opera House at Rome and not on the plains of Sicily. Yanni enthralled thousands by giving a performance at the foothills of Acropolis in Athens. This is what the city is all about—a throbbing dynamic receptacle of spontaneous activity; a place of opportunity; a place where things happen [3]. This is the reason why small and beautiful towns that had been built earlier, are wiped out and rebuilt to achieve greater heights and meet greater demands and expectations of the inhabitants.

The vulnerability of our urban areas and the massive pressure they face are but results of lack of infrastructure, absence of basic amenities that are needed for everybody irrespective of

the economic or social structure, unsafe and outlived structures, and ill- planned distribution of the basic physical and social infrastructure. And these things establish that the present conditions and congestion in cities are results of mismanagement of resources.

Human beings have resorted to many innovative techniques and ingenious ways of expanding the limited resources on earth. We build our habitat to provide more and more people the basic accommodation and shelter to enable our sustenance and equity of the physical area per person occupant. We improve our means of communication like transport and audio- visual, motor cars, television sets, telephones and fax machines, computers and internet systems to establish better connectivity with each other and to save the very precious time. There has been an unprecedented level of innovation in production, architectural expression and general layout of settlements to ensure a better quality of life for the inhabitants. And we are becoming more consumerist in our outlook than ever before. We are living in a paradox; a situation which cannot pinpoint where it all started [4]. The onus is on us to change our attitude and structure from an over- consumptive and wasteful society to a rational, sustainable society.

The ideal human settlement shall be the one which provides happiness and satisfaction to its people and reduces the exploitation and wastage of resources, natural and man-made, to an extent that it is ensured that consumption does not happen at the cost of one's present counterparts and future generations. The inhabitants should feel proud of their settlements. It should provide them to them a sense of security and all means to achieve dignified livelihood. It should be holistic in nature. It should take care of all their biological, physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs. They should be fearless, free and find no threat to their own future or to the future of their coming generations and are free to work to achieve their aspirations in a fair and healthy manner. Their health and their relationship with nature should never be compromised and they should live like a part of nature itself, while constantly striving to achieve balance and attempting to make things easier for them.

5. Ekistics

Ekistics is sometimes referred to as the science of human settlements but there are numerous dimensions associated with the subject. Ekistics approaches the problems of human settlements through the study of interactions among these various elements with the help of a well-defined Ekistics matrix. Importance was gained in the inclusive, coherent and relational functions of these elements, which later influenced the development of emergent green urban philosophies and ecological design strategies that chiefly talk of holistic planning which is nevertheless intrinsic and inseparable to the discipline of Ekistics. The theory of Ekistics of Human Settlements is a prescriptive theory that emphasizes on regional connections and the ability of a settlement to expand while ensuring that the essential balance of forces that come into play between man, his environment, and technology remains intact and in place and is not lost at any instance.

Ekistics is a scientific study in which the research object is every form and every scale of human settlement including the buildings, the housing areas, the neighborhoods, the communities, the villages, the towns, the districts, the sub-zones, the zones, the cities, the conurbations, the metropolises, the megalopolises and all other scales possible in the future (for example, the Ecumenopolis). It focuses on the interrelationships between human beings, their societies and the environment that envelops and surrounds them, and emphasizes study of human settlements in totality, as a whole by carrying out a comprehensive, systematic and synthetic research of political, social, cultural, technological, and economical and all other aspects relevant to the study of human settlements. In detail, Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis [5], who is regarded as the “father of Ekistics”, tried to include each and every discipline concerning human settlements, which had been previously researched separately, into the framework of Ekistics, so as to overcome the segmentation and the confusion of the relevant disciplines that are studied separately for a diagnosis of the city's illness and problems to make settlements that bring humans happiness.

The major and fundamental goal of Ekistics is to assist and equip Man to find solutions to his problems and to find ways to be happy and feel safe within and outside the confines of his settlements by creating conditions that bring about a balance between the five elements of the human settlements namely Nature, Man, Society, Shell and Network, so that man can adapt easily to the requirements of settlements which will further help him to develop according to his own intentions. So, Ekistics is all about excellence in settlements' system's approach for the benefit of Man. Moreover, the term 'human settlement' is repeatedly being used instead of 'city, town or village' because the theory of Ekistics looks at all possible human systems in totality, and in continuum with each other.

6. The Vedic Philosophy

The Vedas are the scriptures on material as well as spiritual knowledge. The language of the Vedas is very ancient and not very well-known now, there are differences that have been found among scholars of the Vedas and the ancient Sanskrit language, and the learned persons regarding the interpretation of the Vedas, but there is absolutely no suspicion that the spiritual principles of very high-level, learning as expansive as oceans, the very beautiful and methodical arts and practical knowledge and approaches are contained in them. All this knowledge has been contained very concisely in the form of 'sutras' or axioms in one or two lines and very small stanzas, and this poses difficulty for readers most of whom are not able to understand their aims and objectives immediately. But on the basis of 'richas', the learned people have been providing inspiration and guidance for thousands of years to the spiritual seekers, the seekers of the Vedic knowledge who want progress on the path of excellence in all spheres of life and who are looking for peace in their lives. The uniqueness of the Vedas is in their commonality because their knowledge is not limited to any particular race, sect or sub- sect with differences of opinions

but all persons in the world have the same right to it, because the Vedas are universal in their approach and message [6]. Hence the Vedas are useful at any point of time to the civilized societies and they provide guidance, upliftment and benefit to spiritually minded people, young and old, men and women in any nation. The differences in interpretation of the Vedas have been the phenomena since ancient times but it is totally natural and acceptable that when more than one explanation is provided for the same composition by a number of experts, one may express and put forward a completely different understanding from the other.

The term “Veda” represents the vast expanse of reserves and repository of knowledge handed down from one generation to the next generation, from times immemorial. These Vedas stood the tests of time and of scrutiny by the knowledgeable authorities and learned people. Despite all political conquerings, economic upheavals, social transformations and cultural deviations, the Vedas have survived hitherto, for the simple reason that there has all along been humanistic culture engendered by them [7]. It is ratifying to note that the culture that developed based on the Vedas has evolved into a vast expanse of reservoir for humane approach and humanistic culture. The Vedas, in terms of concept, structure, intention, discourse, dialogue, content and application, are extremely distinct from other religious literature available to the world. Non-availability of the original form of the Vedas and the paucity of reliable and available books on the Vedas have been an inhibiting factor in the acquisition of knowledge for the masses in general and in having a keen insight into the hymns on right directions for correct interpretation in the course of their dissemination in particular.

7. Establishing Relationship between the Two Philosophies—Results and Discussion

We find that the Ekistics philosophy deals with all the traits of an ideal human settlement. Its five elements namely Nature, Man, Society, Shell and Network and their subdivisions cover all the traits required for ideal human settlements. They need a coherent balance and there is a complex matrix that comes into play behind it. It is not imperative to give importance to a specific element and ignore or lessen the importance of other elements. The ideal situation seeks a holistic vision and a balanced holistic approach.

Same is the case of Vedic philosophy. It covers a vast arena of human life and spirituality. Those hymns were selected only for study which related, directly or indirectly, to the elements of Nature, Man, Society, Shells as well as Network. They cover many components under these elements and this presents a striking resemblance to the theory of Ekistics and hence forms the basis of this study. We can compare both the philosophies on the basis of five elements of Ekistics as follows.

7.1 Nature

Geologic resources, topographical resources, soil resources, water resources, plant life, animal life, climate are the

components that can be placed under this element. However, this is not an exhaustive list. These are the prescriptive subdivisions in the elements of Ekistics. In Vedic philosophy the Sun, earth, wind, water, climate, animals, plants, celestial bodies, environment, metals, natural energies, etc. have been discussed. In all the fields, the Vedas strive for excellence and welfare of humanity. Both the philosophies emphasize the need to protect the natural system in order to retain the natural balance as nature is the ultimate resource provider for all the requirements of life on earth. It has the potential to profoundly affect the life on earth. And it can harm the living creatures if we try to administer unduly changes to it.

7.2 Man

Biological needs (space, air, temperature, etc.), sensation and perception (the 'five senses'), emotional needs (human relations, security, beauty, etc.), moral values are the constituents of 'man'. These are the subdivisions discussed in Ekistics philosophy whereas the Vedas discuss about spirituality of men and how they should behave and what their conduct should be for liveable, peaceful and harmonious communities. Many a times the context changes but the basic intention to achieve the best possible situation remains the same. They want all in excellent shape, in abundance and in ideal form. And since man is the smallest unit of any settlement, this component becomes crucial. If a right approach is followed at the grassroot level only, it would definitely lead to ideal situations for all. However, men should focus on their overall development (at physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels) to realize it.

7.3 Society

Population composition and density, social stratification, cultural patterns, economic development, education, health and welfare, law and administration are the some of the constituents of society. These are the sub division of elements as per Ekistics philosophy whereas as per shortlisted hymns from Vedas, they encompass society, regarding wealth, education and health (lot of Atharved is regarding health only) among other things. They also talk about laws and provide men the guidelines in the field of administration and political system. Again the intention is to provide a system which shall form guidelines for people and help in overall well- being of all. And both the theories clearly establish that there are multiple dimensions that need to be looked at when any society is dealt with in totality.

7.4 Shells

Housing, community services (schools, hospitals, etc.), shopping centers and markets, recreational facilities (theatre, museum, stadium, etc.), civic and business centers (town hall, law- courts, etc.), industry, transportation centers are the sub division of elements as per Ekistics philosophy. In Vedas there is less coverage of shells but at many places they have referred to nagaras (cities), forts, houses etc. They also discussed about houses for cows for the professional gaupalaks (who did business of cow milk). They always seek an excellence in comfort, human dignity and grandeur in

them. Both the philosophies acknowledge the importance of adequate and suitable housing and social infrastructure for the overall development of the society.

7.5 Networks

Water supply systems, power supply systems, transportation systems (water, road, rail, air), communication systems (telephone, radio, TV, etc.), sewerage and drainage, physical layout (Ekistics plan) are the sub division of elements of Network as per the Ekistics philosophy. In Vedas there are references of the main highways and smaller road system. There is also reference of chariots and travel through horses. Travel mode is also with boats in rivers and sea. There has always a want for speed and excellence in the network system in the hymns. Both the philosophies aim to maximise speed and reduce time but not at the cost of quality of life in settlements.

As Ekistics Philosophy says that these elements cannot be referred in isolation but a complex matrix works in this. As per Ekistics philosophy any ideal human settlement is outcome of a complex matrix between these elements. For ideal situation, if we say in a simplified manner, a unique balance in the elements is required. Same is the case with the Vedas. They believe in holistic philosophy and always seek to achieve balance in the system.

8. Conclusion

We find that both the philosophies have entirely different contexts and are propagated in different time zones but there are many basic principles and basic aims of well- being of humanity which are common in nature. Both are holistic in nature, seeking excellence and well- being for humanity. Both are great philosophies and a boon to humanity. If followed by their true spirits, we can achieve great human settlements which shall be ideal. In short they are both parallel in spirit and nature.

9. Future Scope

The contribution that this research makes to the vast expanse of knowledge is the realization that the spirit of the Vedas and the theory of Doxiadis lead to the contemporary concept of sustainability. New research of sustainability and the Vedas should be a next step in this field. Hence, this study paves a path for this another study.

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