



Kundasale New Town-Which Replaced old Kundasale



Shops facing a courtyard.



Main Street at Dehiattakandiya

Dehiattakandiya: A Sri Lankan Experience of Developing a New Town

By Archt.Thamal Udamulla

Since the beginning of the civilization, the concept of 'Town' has not been a new idea for people, as the existence of a 'centre' as a media of expression of themselves has always been a deep - rooted need for them.

A town, initially can be defined as a community of a substantial size and population density that shelters an agricultural and non-agricultural inhabitants, including a literate elite.

Taking into account the definitions and interpretations of various scholars, a 'town' could further be defined as the ultimate artistic and creative endeavour of man in terms of built environment; an expression of himself and his aspirations. In other words, it can be identified as the physical manifestation of attitudes, values and aspirations of its inhabitants.

In this sense, the development of an existing town or creation of a new town can be seen as a major indicator of development of a country and its people.

History of Town Development reveals that there have been two basic processes, which have given rise to two types of towns, which are,

- (a) Organic Towns - happening of towns in the natural way where people simply start building, as they still do, in the emerging world,
- (b) Planned Towns - artificial way of creating towns in which master plans are prepared and urban blocks indented in which buildings are then placed according to some planner's sense or order.

However, it must be understood and remembered that, neither of these two basic categories of towns exists in its pure form. Organic towns may evolve organically but, may later be developed in a planned manner. Likewise, organic growth and development in a planned town may be a common occurrence.

Phenomena of Planned Town has become an inescapable situation, in the present day context, all around the world, wherein various practical and profitable issues, such as, easy function, easy management of environmental and economical aspects, have to be given consideration along with the social, cultural aspects of the people, geographical significance of the environment etc.

In Sri Lankan context as well, the use of the 'Planned Town, could be commonly observed from the early times. Many instances could be observed where this concept had been put into use accompanied with different sociopolitical and techno-economical ideologies under different governments. The 'Janapada' Scheme of the previous Prime Minister D.S. Senanayaka, 'Gam Udawa' Scheme of the previous President R. Premedasa and Mahaweli Towns under Mahaweli Development Project, could be identified as a few examples for such.

Out of the towns designed in the recent history, Mahaweli Towns designed by the Mahaweli Architectural Unit hold a prominent place, not only due to the nature and the magnitude of the development project, but especially for the contribution of Architects and Planners towards the design and development of them. Compared to many towns developed in Sri Lanka, these attempted at building an overall identity and character to its inhabitants while providing an organized town structure.

Mahaweli towns had originally originated to serve two purposes.

1. To serve the new agricultural settlements in down stream areas and,
2. To replace the infrastructure facilities that were inundated by the reservoirs in the upstream areas.

The town - Dehiattakandiya - is one such new town which was established nearly 18 years ago under the accelerated Mahaweli Development Project as a town to serve new irrigational settlements in down stream area.

It is situated in the dry zone, along the Kandy - Polonnaruwa highway, in close proximity to a historically and culturally significant town - Mahiyanganaya - which is important for Buddhists due to the advent of "Lord Buddha".

The town - Dehiattakandiya - has been designed as a 'service centre' for several hamlets and villages, along with Girandurukotte for the zone 'C' of the Mahaweli settlements.

Dehiattakandiya Town is built entirely on undisturbed land of vegetation. The land is almost flat, except for mild slopes, and bears no significant geographical features.

Primary occupants of the town are farmers, who have come from all over the country. There are other supportive families as well, who represent about one third of the agricultural community. Furthermore, the town receives about as much seasonal, immigrating labourers.

Majority of the population of Dehiattakandiya as a whole, are Sinhala Buddhists, who share a common interest in agriculture. Therefore, this farmer community shows cultural similarities despite their regional variations and celebrate cultural, religious and seasonal agricultural festivities together in the town.

All in all, the houses are a very low dense agricultural community and act as the 'centre' for their needs and interactions wherein their need for buying seeds, fertilizer and technical advice as well as selling their crops are satisfied.

Several thoughtful planning and agricultural contributions in design and detailing of the town could be identified on observation: Design and location and inert- relationship of,

- a. Public squares, market places, civic centre where high public gathering is intended.
- b. Public transport terminal and major waiting areas where accommodation of major transitional activities are intended.
- c. Main bazaar, recreational areas where generation of high public movements is intended.
- d. approaches, entrances and incorporation of response to significant natural or built entities where generation of attraction and attachment of people for their cultural historical, functional or geographical importance is intended,

could further be discussed in order to get a better picture of the town.

The Town Dehiattakandiya can primarily be seen as a concentration of activities along a looped road that connects the Kandy - Polonnaruwa highway. Hence, the town has two access roads from the highway focusing on two squares, namely North Square and South Square, which in turn connect the main road of the town which lies parallel to the Kandy - Polonnaruwa highway. These two squares, lying along the main street of the town, are focused on a Central Square from which another street leads away to the interior of the settlements. North and South squares are surrounded by administrative and institutional buildings, while the Central Square is surrounded by public amenities. These three squares are connected by commercial activities lying along the main street of the town, some of which are situated around their own quadrangles. The Central Square, wherein a clock tower has been put as a landmark, obviously was intended as the main area of the town. The other important activities such as the Central Bus Terminal, the 'Pola' and the future Super Market etc., are located along the road which runs to the interior of the settlements.

The Central Square situated as the converging point of internal traffic routes- the Main Street and the Street leading to the interior of the settlement - around which the town is developed is obviously the most imageable place of the town. This is further highlighted by the

- i. Strong visual and physical links established with the North and South Squares which are surrounded by the administrative and institutional activities.
- ii. Presence of the elaborately treated clock tower as a landmark,
- iii. Ground treatment and the attempt at peripheral demarcation by the layout of roads and buildings.

Pola

'Pola' is the most significant activity happening in the town, from its users' point of view. A weekly happening of 'pola' is the place where people exchange their products; and, it is on the 'pola' day that the town experiences its fullest human capacity and the highest

concentration of activities. The 'pola' is located in close proximity to only the Bus Terminal, and, is house in a 'U' shaped colonnaded structure which suggested high potential for public gathering But, the sense of continuity and interrelationship with other activities is somewhat severed due to its orient action towards the road leading to the interior of the settlement. This, it is observed, had severely hindered it becoming a meaningful place for its people.

Bus Terminal

Bus Terminal at Dehiattakandiya, or any other town of its calibre for that matter, is not merely a space of transition, or a waiting area for a short period of time. It is a space for interaction for its people as well, which has come into being, due to long waiting hours for a bus.

The bus Terminal is situated in close proximity to the Central Square and 'pola' and is a long colonnaded low-scaled structure set into large forecourt which hints the potential for interaction as well as for transition. However, being oriented away from the other main activities as well as the main access road and, with no proper establishment of continuity with them, has hindered it being realizing its full potential.



Dehiattakandiya Bus Terminal



Shops facing the main road at Dehiattakandiya

Spatial organization of Bazaar is of two kinds;

- a) Bazaar facing the main street -rows of shops arranged to face the main street directly.
- b) Bazaar facing its own courtyard clusters of shops arranged to face their own open courtyards by the side of the main street.

Such spatial arrangement of bazaar suggests both dynamic movement and points of gathering along the main street, which can be called a highly sensitive approach towards public gathering as well as creating vitality and liveliness in a town. Had the proportions between the scale of the shops of courtyards and the street was sensitive handled this could have added high significance to the town.

Although an attempt has been made to create identity to individual spaces through architectural treatment, the continuity of same scale and detailing thought the town has given rise to lack of individual identity, variety and also excitement.

It could be observed that a sensible attempt had been made at,

- i.) Creating a somewhat cohesive physical and functional environment,
- ii.) Maintaining a simple and humane scale throughout most of the built environment and
- iii.) Harmonization with the natural environment,
- iv.) Creating an identity to the town through architectural treatment etc.

The town could have become a highly significant place both as a functional as well as physical entity for its people had further consideration given to the,

- i) functional and cultural characteristics of its inhabitants in locating and interrelating various places of the town
- ii) maintenance of proper hierarchy and order in creating or treating the major, secondary and tertiary places,
- iii) ideas such as territoriality, imagability, identity variety, continuity etc., in designing, locating and treating the spaces as well as space demarcating elements,
- iv) use of composition, scale, proportions, texture, colour in treatment of spaces.

However the overall experience of designing new towns in Mahaweli areas is very fruitful, mainly because of the attempts that the designers have taken on creating 'Sri Lankan Tropical Towns.'