



The quote above from the Shakespearean tragedy *Coriolanus* aptly sums the problem in envisioning the future of Panjim today. While hectic activity is afloat to garner ‘opinions’ of what needs to be done to make the capital a Smart City, one wonders if we have forgotten the meaning of ‘smart’ today, or for that matter what is meant by a ‘city’ itself.

The biggest problem of the ‘smart city movement,’ is that the promoters of such an approach tend to repackage the city in a generic global form without understanding the historical significance of the existing city (both the form and the people). The Smart City concept largely harps on using digital technologies to supposedly improve the quality and the performance of urban services. The issue is really which services? They normally mean roads, flyovers, parking, digital communication, etc, while what we in Panjim actually need are services like mass housing, wider pavements, barrier-free designs, shaded pedestrian pathways, reliable public transportation, and so forth.

Speaking at the event of a high level meeting on smart cities, organized by the European Union in Brussels in September 2014, architect and professor Rem Koolhaas pointed that in the projection of the smart city concept, values of liberty, equality, and fraternity have been replaced by comfort, security, and sustainability. These values that the Smart City movement promotes are clearly of contemporary upwardly mobile and elite groups today. Reinforcing these values will have serious consequences for the poor who do not have access to ‘smart’ resources. As I have reflected in earlier columns, Goa is already facing the onslaught of the demands of elite groups that use Goa as a pleasure periphery and a getaway from the problems of India. It should not be that rather than addressing the livelihood issues of locals, the Smart City concept with its pro-elite values becomes just one more vehicle for appropriation of the city from the locals. In her article *Is India’s 100 smart cities project a recipe for social apartheid?* (*The Guardian*, 7 May 2015), Shruti Ravindran highlighted similar concerns. Ravindran questions whether the emergence of hi-tech prototype cities in India will override local laws and use surveillance to “keep out” the poor. One of the first designated smart cities in India is the Gujarat International Financial Tec-city (GIFT), in Gandhinagar. Ravindran notes that the beating heart of GIFT is its “command and control centre”, which keeps traffic moving smoothly and monitors every building through a network of CCTVs. She observes that in the country where more than 300 million people live without electricity, and

twice as many don't have access to toilets, GIFT city's towers are like hypertrophic castles



“What is the City but the People?”

The entrepreneurs of digital technologies have made the city their domain especially by referring these designated cities as 'smart.' Often unnoticed is the fact that the metaphor of 'smart' in the concept of the smart city evokes the smart phone as a comparison for the development of the city. Such an approach is problematic, for it renders the city as a commodity, and a 'generational' one at that. This is how one thinks of technological developments, where preference is given to new generations of phones and computers, and the trashing of older generations. Rather than working with something, the existing object is rendered obsolete even before its time in favour of something shinier and newer. Following this logic, just because Panjim is designated as 'smart', are the rest of the cities in Goa condemned to being stupid?!

What is the need of the hour is the concept of 'good city'. The good city is the ultimate memorial of our struggles and glories: where the pride of the past is set on display (Kostof:1991, p.16). The pride of Panjim as in other cities of Goa lies in the architecture of the city: in terms of the scale, the extrovert forms of the buildings, their unique architectural styles, and the sheltered spaces for pedestrians. We therefore must show extreme sensitivity in managing these assets and initiating pro-public and egalitarian infrastructural development. The city of cannot be designated as smart global city merely to push newer developments that do not pay respect to the historical context. Instead what we need is to build on Panjim's past to make it even more open, accessible and friendly to its people.

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