

Seminar on Urban Development Programs in Karnataka by Dr. Ashwin Mahesh

The department of social work conducted a seminar on Urban Community Development Programs in Karnataka on 26th July 2013. The keynote speaker for this seminar was Dr. Ashwin Mahesh. Dr Mahesh is a truly multitalented individual as he plays the role of urban affairs strategists for Karnataka Government, consultant to Bangalore transport authority, faculty at



eminent universities such as IIT and IIM, and also an editor of web magazine. With much passion and enthusiasm, Dr Mahesh addressed the audience as the topic on urban community development was very dear to him. He provided immense knowledge not only about the macro level functioning of the governing system, but delved into every unit of microcosmic understanding about our society and the system that is prevailing in the society.

Dr. Mahesh began his speech with introducing “democracy” as a prominent subject mostly concerned with its functioning. Here, he emphasized on peoples’ participation and its effectiveness. Participation in terms of being able to express views, opinions and concerns and what changes can they apply in order to attain democracy in an equitable way. He stressed on a very basic fact that if people gather in masses, the work can be achieved in a more profound manner.

The theme of the speech was more inclined toward the urban aspect of Karnataka keeping Bangalore as the centre of discussion. He addressed the issues of scams happening in urban housing schemes where the people with knowledge encroach the public land and later construct the houses at the payment cost of BBMP. As a result of this scam, BBMP is having loss of 1500 crores per year. He also spoke about the hierarchy of services from the central government to the municipality level where the government is concerned only about the policies and the procedures regardless of the geographical differences and needs emerging out of it. As a consequence, whenever a particular governmental department faces problems and crisis in implementing the programs and projects, they focus on managerial and technical arena, not the participation of the citizens in governance.

Dr. Mahesh threw light on the problem of huge influx of migrants coming into the cities. There are 850 people per day migrating to the cities towards which the government is not able to take sufficient measures to address the issues of these people in terms of housing and their transportation. The focus of the administration is only on the permanent residents of the area as per their record. Therefore they design the program based on the data of their record, hence the migrants are deprived of various schemes and programs. The sad reality is that, the central government does not want to empower the states and the state government ensures that the cities are not as powerful as the states and the city does not want its citizens to be empowered, he added.

Speaking about the practical difficulties that the government is facing regarding the administration of the Bangalore city, he cited the earlier practice of functioning of the city by dividing them into 9 cities and managing them individually would be a plausible idea but the earlier implementation had conflicting contradictions regarding the same due to loosing the significance of village Panchayat as it might be replaced by a municipal bodies and corporations.



Introducing the concept of change, Dr Mahesh spoke about his own Theory of Change, which has two dimensions.(A) Increase the number of problem solving people, (B) increase the number of personnel who the solutions to the problems. Based on this theory he talked about number of interventions, he introduced to different fields like, transportation, traffic system, metro footpath zones and lake management. For example the initiative of the community people's participation and the utilization of the resources from the community together with the limited financial assistance received from the BBMP led to a successful management of the lake which was later handed over to the community by the administration for its maintenance and management. The successful completion of this participatory effort of community and the administration soon led to adoption of the same methodology for 28 other lakes in the city.

From the urban perspective of development, he addressed the problems and introduced the solutions to the areas like modified transportation facilities, traffic system, intervention of

advanced technology and convergence of various social networks into single unit, initiative of innovative concept like the Praja Factory.

He concluded by saying that there are number of problems existing, but then it need not be always with the system and the administration. Undoubtly there are problems with the system and the administration but a responsible response from the citizens in the form of participation in the governance can solve or track number of public concerns. One need not always constitute a forum to address the issues but there are existing forums already, hence one need to join hands with the people with common interest. Speaking on a problem is easy but working towards a solution to the problem is difficult, therefore as a responsible citizen one needs to ensure his participation in local governance to find a relatively permanent solution for the problems existing.