

Making Architecture relevant for India: The need to create Social Leaders

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to find answers in the architectural curriculum for problems of society by re-orienting the existing pedagogy to reinforce in students a sense of self-belief for having the desired traits to become social leaders by addressing the concerns of larger society than a select few. The paper starts by taking a dip into the ancient education system of India and analyzing the shift in the focus of education from defining personal traits on the basis of value system to making employability whole sole motto of education. Often in the paper, it is argued that the need of the hour is to produce a workforce for the society rather than the market. Architecture, being referred as the science of living, has to live up-to the expectations of making a society developed by taking the existing as well as future challenges of the new world order and system. The paper makes an honest proposal by analyzing various on-going government schemes which contributes to the development of Rural Areas/ Infrastructure and finding out the gap areas which should be explored and included in architecture curriculum by re-orienting the pedagogy to establish the relevance of Architecture and give its due importance in the Nation Development.

Keywords: ancient education, personality traits, education system, relevant, society ready, rural infrastructure, nation building

Introduction

By the end of August 2016 came the news of seventeen year old girl named Malvika Raj Joshi, a resident of Mumbai, for making into prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) without having class 10th and 12th certificate. For many Indian it came as a surprise, but it was purely a mother's conviction to break stereotypes and the self-belief of her teenage daughter, who showed why "merit" has more weightage than "marks". The story starts about four years ago when her mother Supriya took an unbelievably tough decision to pull her out of school and decided to 'home school' her. It was during her association with an NGO, which took care of the Cancer Patients, she witnessed children

studying in class 8th and 9th suffering from cancer. This affected her to a great extent. In order to keep her daughters (she has two daughters) happy she took a revolutionary decision of taking them out of school and educate them at home. She was declined admission into prestigious institutes of the country like IIT's as passing 12th Standard is a pre-requisite of getting into most of them. Eventually, her computer programming talent which had made her a three-time medal winner (two silver and a bronze) at International Olympiad of Informatics or commonly known as Programming Olympiad.

The authors of this paper took the above story as an opportunity to introspect the present education system by taking a dip in the education system of India from ancient time to the present time. This was felt necessary so as to find basic answers like what made the mother feel that students would be happier if they are educated at home instead of school? Is the pattern in which we are imparting knowledge a borrowed one or our own? Are we making students live the knowledge or are only training them to pass the eligibility criterion system for gaining higher education or for that matter jobs? Is this (the current pedagogy) has an answer in itself for promoting happiness for many than to a few? Does Architecture have the power to live up to its reputation of being referred as the science of living? An honest attempt has been made in this paper to deal with these dilemmas and finding the answers in and through Architecture by bringing focus on developing the personality traits to make them social leaders.

Indian Education System- Past and Present

In the ancient Indian education system, the most significant feature is the absence of the government's hand. The 'Education' was a subject of only two classes of people- the teaching and the taught. There was no class of the so called 'educationist'. The field of education was occupied by free teachers and voluntary students. In the absence of any compelling forces, the seeker of education was not only free to choose the teacher. Neither was any rules imposed on the freedom of the individuals to be educated nor on the freedom of the teacher to teach. Learning was available as the water in

river. In a vast country like India, the seeker of learning enjoyed full freedom to reach out to any distant place in search of learning. [1]

Starting with the Vedas and the related Shastra like Vyakarana and Nirukta which are, of course, confined to the eligible upper-caste, all other sciences were open to all obviously therefore scholars in these vedic sciences did not count for more than one in a lakh. This has resulted in an unlimited growth of all sciences, subjects and general learning throughout the length and breadth of the country. As regard to Vedas, let us not forget that there is nothing like growth, discovery, innovation or research into them. This is because; the Vedas have been treated as the limit of knowledge. In the case of an individual (the depth of his understanding), the essence of Vedas could always reach new levels of excellence. It was the growth of an individual, but not growth of the subject.

In regard to the other subjects, like physical sciences, medicines or mathematics, these sciences which have a scope of growth in content, in refinement, innovations are spread among people to whom they belonged. They found absolute freedom to grow purely on the volition of people who taught or learnt them. Thus, the literature on these subjects also found no limit to its growth. While the literature went on growing from generation to generation from century to century, India became a repository of the valuable contribution of hundreds of scholars in each subject. The available learning was so vast and wide that no man could ever think of completing the study of any subject, in a lifetime. [2]

From the late 18th century up to the early 20th century when British rule was consolidating its rule in India, the promotion of education in India saw a varied approach. The second half of the 18th century was a significant time when the attention of the Western scholars was drawn to the existence of great treasure of knowledge and high standards of literature in India. Warren Hasting is often being given the credit of pioneering the promotion and making some progress in understanding true India without any prejudice against the Hindus who were considered by his predecessors as wicked and superstitious. Hasting must be a great visionary to be able to see that such superior culture as India could never be ruled or absorbed and digested into the European civilization. But to the later century administrators, this sounded more like a threat to their superior presence in India. There were some more foreigners who are given credit for promoting the real knowledge of India on to the Global level. Charles Wilkins, who made the first attempt to translate Bhagawad Gita into English; Sir William Jones, who founded the Bengal Asiatic Society; were some of them. Although from late 18th Century up to the late 19th century it was often argued that the vernacular studies of India should not be replaced, but in order to establish their supremacy and to have greater control on the administration of the country, our ancient approach to education has been overrun by a systematic and planned replacement of our culture and character by what is today called 'Educational System'. True education was replaced by an educational system chalked out to make the alien cultures more acceptable and the foreigner's presence more welcome.

Even after achieving Independence, we have failed to revisit our ancient education motives and have not been able to frame out a robust mechanism which promotes students to become social leaders. Had that not be the case, then, why have we not been able to solve the critical issues of air and water? Why do we find it difficult to find a house in a city despite huge pile up of the unsold inventory? Why are we still struggling to provide basic infrastructure needs for living? Architecture being referred as the science of living is to be questioned. Its relevance to the Indian society and set-up has to be investigated.

Finding answers in and through Architecture

Great thinkers like Aurobindo, Tilak, Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi anxiously awaited the political independence of India, not merely for a self-rule, but to protect the great tradition, culture and values of our ancient land. Aurobindo has said on National Education: "National Education is next to Self-Government along with it, the deepest and most immediate need of the country. Home rule and National Education are two inseparable ideas and none who follows the one can fail the other unless he is entirely wanting either in sincerity or in vision. We want not only a free India but a great India, India taking worthily her place among the Nations and giving to the life of humanity what she alone can give." [3]

Almost after 70 years of our Independence, we have failed to provide social solutions through the profession of architecture. The argument can be clearly said to be relevant as the basic demands of electricity, water, house, etc. are still forming the major portion of every contesting party during various elections. The challenges instead of being resolved are now manifold. Not only we have been unable to solve the existing problems, we have also not been able to live up to the expectations of the society. Architecture in our country has failed to lead the society in the right direction by giving significant examples to the benefit a larger segment of the society. The reasons for this are many. Studying the development of architecture education in India, we find that the initial school set up in early 20th century was majorly to fulfill the requirement of draftsmen for the establishment of colonial structures all across the country.

The mindset, the values, the soul of architecture which was getting built was not Indian, it was borrowed. And since then till recent times we have not been able to fully exploit the subject to suit our contextual needs because we are busy competing with contemporary architectural styles of foreign countries like US, UK, Middle East, etc. This have although to some extent have managed to keep the demands for our professionals intact in the market but have not been able to give unique identity to our society. In order to make Architecture relevant to our society, it's time now that we take the centre stage and orient our curriculum whose main aim should be doing justice to many not to few. The need of the hour is to create a National Workforce of Architects who can be social leaders and guide the society on the basis of our cultural and ethical values. The time has come when Architects of the country gives an answer to the rising challenges of a developing economy.

Studying the Gap Areas

Due to increasing trend of globalization and in order to define our own identity; vernacular architecture has been the prominent area of study. This paper tries to analyze the various schemes undertaken by the Government of India to improve the status and living of rural population. This is mainly done to find out the gap areas where architecture, if properly exploited, could provide substantial support to the overall implementation of the scheme and thus can help realize the full potential of the schemes for larger benefit of the society.

The highlights of 'Right to Education (2009)' also suggest the measure to cope up declining trends of education system. It formulated the measure for enrollment ratio, learning experience and imparting knowledge. It aims towards to consolidate democracy, develop social and national unity, modernize the country and develop social, moral and spiritual values in larger section of society. J V Vilánilam (2012) in her article 'Development of Education in India: 1947-2012' gave glimpse of development of education sector and related policies. The paper highlighted the colonial policies and their worst impact to Indian society at large. It also projected the gap area of higher education in its infrastructure facilities, affiliation and new method of teaching and evaluation and suggested the measure for gap area in higher education. Sushanta kumar Kashyap (2013) in his research paper 'rural development programs in India a brief survey down the ages' wrote about programs of government since independence and effectiveness. The paper highlighted the role of government scheme and aim of each scheme to encourage local leadership and install into them a philosophy of self-help. Suresh Prabhu (2014) in his article titled 'seven steps to an economic rebalancing' highlighted the various parameters like energy management, employment generation on which current government is working. Dr. Kavita Kalkoti (2015) in her paper 'need to strengthen rural- urban linkage' wrote about the importance of linkages and government policy Rurban. She suggested the measures for efficiency and effectiveness of existing infrastructure. She also highlighted the need to reduce institutional burden, institution design and development of non-farm activities. Prof P.R. Choudhary (2015) in his paper 'rural urban connectivity' highlighted government policies and their effective implementation. He concluded that government policies are not effective because of functioning and awareness. [4, 5, 6, 7, 8]

The above study suggests that various government policies and programs are there in place to improve the status and living of rural population but there effective implementation is still missing. These studies further helps in highlighting the gap areas which can be incorporated in architecture education and higher education pedagogy so that graduates are more social ready rather than market ready.

The current curriculum followed all across the country and the pedagogy adopted gives little emphasis on the following existing as well as future challenges of the new world order and system. These emphasis area highlighted below are being classified and compared with the on-going government scheme and gap areas are being identified

1. Use of vernacular construction techniques, building materials and local building planning techniques.

Government program: Integrated Approach for Handicraft Development

Gap area: Awareness

2. Mode of skill development of society and employability generation.

Government program: MGNREGA, Skill Development Scheme

Gap Area: Effectiveness of organization structure

3. Dissemination of traditional architectural knowledge and how can they help the society to provide shelter for all.

Government program: Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

Gap Area: Awareness and Coverage

4. Translation of local architecture in global platform rather than vice a versa.

Government program: Unnat Bharat Abhiyan

Gap Area: Coverage

5. Helping system to find out the weakness of planning and judicious utilization of local resources.

Government program: Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojna

Gap Area: Planning and Implementation

6. To minimize the social divide and promote harmony.

Government program: CSR, MGNREGA and Self help Group

Gap Area: Planning

7. To cater the basic requirements of personal and social living of society.

Government program: Smart village program, PURA and Rurban Mission

Gap Area: Planning

8. To cater the basic requirements of personal and social living of household.

Government program: PM Awas Yojna

Gap Area: Awareness, Planning and Implementation

There exist many more areas which could listed down for overall development of the society, but, in order to start the above points should be molded in the curriculum of architecture with the whole sole mission of providing solutions to the existing challenges; thus justifying the relevance of the profession in Indian context. Modifications in the curriculum could actually start the chain reaction of innovation and knowledge exchange. The more we expose the students to the present problems of the society, the more they become aware of the challenges. The more they are aware to the challenges, the more efforts they put to make it relevant. The more they make it relevant, the more we have indigenous solutions. The more indigenous solutions we have, the more sustainable it becomes.

Often it is argued that we as a country have no shortage of schemes. What actually lack are the gaps in the policy making and its implementation. If at this point, we re-orient our curriculum in such a way that it gives real time solutions to the problem of the society; we could proudly claim the discovery of our own architecture based on the strong pillars of values imparted through the core philosophy of our ancient education; which was living the knowledge.

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