

"thoughts: geometry of educating architecture"

Mehbuba Tune Uzra, Monday 06 September 2010 - 18:30:00

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 discussion on Architecture Education orgnized by the 'Mongolbarer Shabha' held on July 6th
 2010.]

Finely cut colorful papers metamorphosizing playful flowers, fruits, cats and rabbits, sketched by some young innocent hands with tiny nibbling fingers, hanging from the ceiling of our very well-known room, where we all gather... the mongolbarer shobha amidst a swarm of students and some enlightened people, Mr. Khalid Ashraf delightfully breaks open the isolation of silent thoughts and the limits of our visual aperture by pondering upon a worm and a donkey's horn, hung loosely from above our eye-sight, and gives each the intellectual essence of critical clarity and visual clarity respectively, while the crowd prepares themselves for the topic... Architecture Education . Bangladesh nurtured BUET as her oldest institution for the study of Engineering and Architecture. The history of this institution dates back to the days of Dhaka Survey School which was established at Nalgola, in Old Dhaka in 1876 and as the years passed, the school became the Ahsanullah School of Engineering which moved to its present premises in 1912. After the war of Liberation in 1971, Bangladesh became an independent state and the then turned university was renamed as the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Industrialization and urbanization in the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the 1950s led to developments which suffered from lack of technological support. In view of the challenging situation, the Department of Architecture was established, alongside the existing engineering education, in 1964. For long, the Department has imparted architectural education in the country, with the partial support of Texas A&M University.

Muzharul Islam also played an important role in physically transforming the style and mode of architecture in our country and it, undoubtedly, conveyed a new outlook towards architecture education. Yet, our place in this part of the world is a matter that can be decided in another twenty to thirty years of time span. On to more serious current issues, the country saw the inception of several private universities indulging themselves into teaching architecture to more and more students with progressive and flourishing departments, namely the architecture departments in Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, The University of Asia Pacific, BRAC University, State University of Bangladesh, North South University and recently few others. Although it is to be taken in the spirit of societal benefit in view of today's degenerating environment, it is still counted by some elite minds as a problem. As

Professor Abu Sayeed shares his glance about the issue that it is necessary to have a common platform to be able to work efficiently. The concerned issue toils under the pressure that while one university promotes a 210 credits degree and another 190, a university based upon the system of Virginia Tech has allowed 170 credits degree program, and in light of this context, teachers often tend to think in different directions which may or may not be very fruitful for learning environment.

Then again, apparently it is just way too early to conclude to a decision regarding a school and its system. What the students from different universities have perpetually qualified in is a point to be noted and understood after a period of ten to fifteen years. As a matter of fact, it will be unjust to pull down the blinds and not allow the rays of space and time for growth and steady maturity of the schools. Enlightening and pushing beyond the threshold, Kazi Khalid Ashraf pulls up a more positive approach by unfolding the idea that a society with, for instance, fourteen schools of architecture should have fourteen different schools of thought and philosophy, and ideally this would add larger, clearer and vital facets to the nation. Now, coming to terms with the question - Is architecture a profession or a discipline? And in view of the thought where as architects do we stand? So, there are two terms, profession and discipline .

Bangladesh and its architecture existed way before the 60 s; even this is an understatement to capture the vast age. The rural part of Bangladesh, our graam-bangla was and is architecture itself and we accepted the very serene and timeless rural architecture to be a framework for architectural discipline, as one can get lost in the depth of intricate plaits of vernacularity. It has only been possible for ages due to great degree of discipline merging with the route of time. Having said that, discipline actually leads to challenges where architecture overflows itself. If we look at the large-scale historical perspective, then we will see that Classical Greek architects were once made from disciplinary materials unlike today when there is an international discipline that originated from Bauhaus. The world itself by nature is inter-disciplinary and the Greeks were trained in accordance. Beauty to Greeks was to a far extent mathematics; the Greeks were taught in mathematics, music and medicine, giving them an idea about the proportional system and at the same time informing them subtly that what appears in front of oneself is not all; there are complex issues that lie beneath. Eventually, there were two considerable factors, the latent and the fluctuating world, one that is apparent, in front of your eyes, and the fixed, permanent and platonic world, the external and internal geometry of beings.

Again Renaissance was an era that moved with ethics, a rare achievement today. The era of Beaux Art believed in practiced understanding and practiced production that is involved with the Romantic Movement, and demonstrated among the architects three landmark ideas - architecture of visual experience, aesthetic experience, and ethical experience. Experience of a building should be such that one will be edified and enlightened, and a human walk will trail the right path. Edifying architecture is a phenomenon that is almost beyond comprehension today. Once, a 19th century post industrial German architect and theorist from England started a curriculum called Bauhaus and here, among the many things that were taught, high and meticulous priority was considerably given to craftsmanship . The pupils were enlightened with hands-on training on ceramics, carpentry, pottery, and weaving, and hence, architecture generating from these men spoke of ingenuity and honesty. Why do we breathe air today that forgot or renounced the very basic ingredients of a life of architecture?

Can we speak about text as a building or building as text? It is difficult... But what if we take a step forward to try to see things analogically, try to use one discipline into another. It will be another interesting moment to see the structure of a book taking a new stand if built architecturally.

Stepping back into education... Paradox as it may sound but have we pondered upon asking an architect to study medicine? Taking a journey as inter-disciplinary as possible, as far as the plight

of architecture could be, may just turn into the favor of a healthy life, an all-rounded well-being.

Architecture education, to a nation's dismay, has now almost become a vocational training where one is simply looking for a professional training in school, may be a somewhat short escape to unlock the key into the realm. Optimistic as I may sound, many sure do seek a masters level for a more enlightening experience. Apart from this heavy-handed approach of technical professional proficiency, there are several deep layers of wisdom or learning spree needed in the system, those that of social, political and environmental responsibilities which often... actually...always go unnoticed. Architecture education has been an obedient servant; fraudulently less to do with history and more to do with a base for practice.

Practice of art and practice of architecture can sweetly and mystically overlap and constitute a spiritual education of the environment, design and science and can consequently raise the boundaries to an indefinite limit. It may not be possible to the eyes and senses that were blind to many intertwined analogical understanding and reading, to transformation of one relationship into another. Ask a man to think like a farmer. Yet does an architect

stoop himself to the grounds of a farmer, a man who is by far inherently intelligible than a trained personnel. This man resides in a *kuure ghor* (thatched hut) and sustains himself with his very basic needs; his intermittent toil and every droplet of perspiration witnesses the emergence of the vast landscapes of our golden paddy fields. It is his architecture and he knows how to maintain it to a knowledge that knows no limits. Making of a hut, harvesting grains, raising cattle, designing and building all the instruments out of the available materials, knowing the climate and nature like nobody else and, last but not the least, being a true leader of the nature with full of optimism - that's what a farmer does, shouldn't an architect also do the same? It would be a ridicule to think that *Vastu Shastra* is magic, it is undeniably pure science and is an art of using science itself - the color, the texture and the scent of soil, the slopes, wind and its elusive directions, rhythm and pulsating vibrancy of the seasons; all are deeply rooted seeds of knowledge in a farmer's mind. Understanding a space as a place ...It is important

to understand why a space makes you feel cool and at ease, while another makes you feel agitated or may be gives you an adrenaline rush that totally pushes your threshold of ease. The trained mind of an architect is well on gear to grasp the idea of well-being for the human lives and at the same time the health of their minds, but it is not an easy job. Phenomenon such as feelings is the symbol of our very existence, but we more than once forget to nurture our feelings in moulds of design but never cease to encircle the thinking. Thinking and feeling are two entities that just can walk together in the intricate layers of architecture and wisdom. Coming on to a

level-up note, we know sustainability and leadership are today's hot global issues. There are schools in many states where a subject as management is being taught to students of architecture. However, what is inevitably deficient in our system is that the grounds of accountability and answerability are missing and it is here that the managerial pillars crack and collapse. There is an interesting tension amidst the American academicians and practitioners who make internal criticisms of one another not in denial but to modify the current system for betterment in future. On the other hand, societal leadership is what a human being requires to set up his grounds as an architect. Hard to say, and even harder to perform on our part, we as architects often fail to convey the message to the society that we do not do beauty makeovers but our responsibilities go far beyond the boundaries. And, truly, as Kahn says,

Beauty will evolve. Can we go bold and push the threshold wider? & We as architects can take the initiative to be policy makers with articulate knowledge about the society and create social reforms, stemming from just setting up a primary school in a village to endless possibilities of development, with undeniable selfless approach & Schools of architecture! Should I make it the bull's-eye for all noshter mul or treat it as the pin-wheel that runs at the core of

our journey? All schools of architecture are geared for making practitioners and a practitioner only excels with the managerial senses that act as the catalyst in their practice. But in this regard there is always a sense of dearth that prevails due to one simple yet immensely complicated entity: Vision. A school cannot provide visionary training to a student or in other words, one cannot train a student to have a vision, to build a vision & to dream vision.

In countries like ours, certain social conditions and social inequalities have been stabilized, and still many yet to be evened out, building codes have been made, then if we think hard, we can understand that our own scope is a lot more than any other nation; our resources are scarce, and this is what makes the challenge & opportunity & to do new things & to create new things. We have been trained to ensure how to use less resources, material and design. How can we afford to forget the very basics? Can we take a step back and start thinking like a planner again? Perhaps there is no need to be a superstar. Perhaps it pays a lot more to be a better thinker. Can we try and stop our conscience; our resources from trickling down the drain? Architecture is seen as isolation; it all resides in a box, but it is actually of much greater definition. It is an art to place five sandesh on a plate; we can think and act like an architect for any place 24/7. & conversing among people & to...focusing on analogy of things, criticism of things & a good architect must be innately educated to be a part of every end of things; and as one of our mentors, Salauddin Ahmed points out, One must not focus on red, but should see magenta, pink, green, yellow and every other colors. Kahn words, It is impossible to anticipate the future, but it is possible to anticipate the lasting quality in what you do today. Young students during their 2nd or 3rd year or right after internship tend to involve themselves into professions outside of academia. It is surprisingly a huge number who claims that they are so into what they do that they may as well just get a certificate for the sake of one. Whereas this is apparently the time when the young minds should be immensely involved in theory, books, interpretation of society, politics, philosophies, psychologies, anthropology and a wide variety of aspects of life. Is it a lot to expect that those who are in super power, managerial power can be able to break this traffic and lead the student body, to aspire them to make the right choice? We do not slap one at their age, but we can decide how to channel a student mind into a project; we don't want a stark mind, but a criticized mind, that runs even nocturnal. And as Salauddin Ahmed would like to draw a beautiful rural landscape, make hundreds of sketches on his table trying to frame the solidity, the proportion and distance, the amazingly manicured nature and still think that he is not closing in yet & Can we also feel the rhythm and the cognitive dissonance and harmony of education and architecture?

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