

The inextricable relationship between curricula, pedagogy and context: The case of TVB School of Habitat studies

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ABSTRACT

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Indian architecture education must focus on context-based curriculum and radical pedagogy to ensure that the discipline continues to serve the profession and society's needs. Influenced by colonialism, modernism, regional uprisings, and social movements, architecture education has struggled to balance tradition and modernity, global and regional forces, and the identity of architecture as a profession. This paper examines the evolution of the architecture profession and education in the Indian context. It presents a historical study of institutions' pedagogical approaches and curricular structures of the JJ School of Architecture and the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology. The paper explicitly focuses on the TVB School of Habitat Studies. It demonstrates how a regional context can foster a strong relationship between the profession, curricula, and pedagogy. A document analysis of the TVB curricula and interviews with school alums are conducted. The paper argues that there is a need to examine past school curricula and pedagogies, especially those that rallied to address regional issues and local contexts. As the building construction market and digital and technological innovations push the boundaries of the profession and the discipline, it is vital not to lose sight of 'context'. The paper emphasises the need to rethink architecture education through radical pedagogies and curricula rooted in a context that addresses the profession and society's needs. Ultimately, it contributes to similar research on radical pedagogy and curriculum that work towards making the profession and discipline inclusive and interdisciplinary.

Keywords: Context, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Architecture Schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the architecture profession in the Indian context, various forces, first colonialism and then modernism, have impacted architecture education [1], [2], [3]. These forces have shaped the development of the architectural profession and its educational framework. Initially, education was set up to establish the profession and serve the needs of the colonial state. Post Independence, the profession and the various architecture schools under the patronage of the nation-state became invested in the modern nation-building endeavour. The 1970s emergency triggered a series of regional uprisings. The decade also saw worldwide environmental and feminist movements. Leading up to the 1990s, parts of the architecture community rallied for practice to address regional issues and local contexts [4]. And for context-driven

curricula and pedagogies in education that served society's needs. However, the present landscape of architecture education reveals a shift away from context-based radical modes of praxis and learning. The building construction market and advancements in digital technologies currently shape mainstream architectural education. This paper argues that in an attempt to keep up with global changes, education should not lose sight of local issues and contexts.

The architecture discipline has struggled to balance tradition and modernity, global and regional forces and the architecture profession versus vocational identity [3], [5]. Modern architecture education framework was designed to serve the 'profession' of architecture. The profession has continuously changed, and India's architecture curriculum and pedagogy have tried to keep up.

Globally in architecture education, there has been a shift in the focus from curricula to radical pedagogy [6], [7]. Within this context and the context of National Education Policy 2020, how should Indian architecture schools envision curricula and pedagogy? This paper argues that context-based curriculum and pedagogy are central to reimagining the profession.

This paper reframes historical studies on institutions such as the JJ School of Architecture in Mumbai (1940) and the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad (1960) during critical moments in the timelines of those schools. Reframing radical curricula and pedagogy through the historical lens helps establish the relationship between the discipline, profession and society.

Garimella [1], Hosagrahar [8] & Srivathsan [9] contend that we need a greater understanding of Indian regional praxis and learning contexts, especially those that developed in the 1980-90s. This paper contributes to the body of knowledge around experiments and radical pedagogies in architecture education developed during this critical period.

The paper focuses explicitly on the TVB School of habitat studies in Delhi (1990) to illustrate how 'context' could help build a strong relationship between the profession, curricula and pedagogy.

2.0. TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND CASES:

2.1. CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND STANDARDS

Mazumdar [10] emphasises that architectural education is more than imparting knowledge and skills necessary for practice. He argues that architectural curricula must have values and philosophical positions rooted in culture and play a transformative role by addressing social and human problems. Thus curricula should not be just a list of courses and learning opportunities but should help shape learner experiences as per the needs of society at large.

Desai [11] asserts that pedagogy is 'the core matter of any education because it is here that the action takes place. Chandavarkar [12] advocates for a pedagogy-centred curriculum that does not depend on standards alone. A focus on pedagogy will keep in mind the individual engaged in the learning process. And their quest for excellence and critical engagement with the world. However, Iyer [13] argues that we should be more focused on the 'how' in education, and we must also focus on the 'what'.

Historian Garimella argues that modern architecture education has notably overlooked a large population in the building construction industry. She points out that architecture schools have been unable to address the societal biases of caste, class and gender and their impacts on the architecture profession and practice [1]. Historian Colomina highlights how

radical pedagogies developed in different parts of the world in the volatile post-WWII period as a vehicle for subversion and to question and destabilise traditions [14]. Varying pedagogical approaches emerged to question and contextualise the foundations of architecture education. Radical pedagogies help to contextualise and question the curriculum continuously.

In 1972 the Architects Act was passed. The act assigned the Council of Architecture (COA) to regulate the architecture profession through registration. Furthermore, since the criteria set for one to be called an architect was to graduate from an approved educational institution, the COA framed the 1983 minimum standards.

While the standards would help articulate the learning goals determining what a graduating architect should know, understand, and be able to do, the curriculum would contextualise the standards and arrive at a plan for learning that would help students to master the standards. While curricula help systemise learning, pedagogy determines how knowledge is accessed and engaged with and determines the long-term success of curricula. At the same time, no matter how radical the pedagogy might be, if what is taught is not substantive, then the effects of the pedagogy on the quality of education are short-lived. More importantly, curricula and pedagogy must be rooted in context yet flexible to adapt to evolving needs.

2.2. COLONIAL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AT BOMBAY SCHOOL OF ART

In the 1900s, India's first school of architecture (Bombay School of Art) became the first institution in the country to train professional architects, hence starting to define modern architecture education. In the school, students were encouraged to study Greek architecture, believing that the principles of composition, proportion and general design underlying Grecian monuments would help Indian students grasp those principles in classic works in their own country [15]. Students were taught that all the arts are one and that noble and dignified buildings are essentially problems of structural sculpture. Hence began the close relationship between art and architecture in education.

In 1920 the classically trained Claude Batley became the principal of the JJ School of Architecture. Dalvi [16] illustrates how Batley reinforced learning by drawing and documentation. The emphasis on drawing and copying to understand design and building followed the Beaux Arts tradition of education. Colonial architecture pedagogy brought technical instruction and representative drawings and illustrations to architecture education. The pedagogy at JJ was vital to how students trained to serve the profession.

2.2. POST COLONIAL CURRICULAR IMAGINATION AT CEPT

Post-colonial architecture education in India was influenced by Nehruvian ideology. Architecture schools such as the IITs and the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi focussed on development and modernisation in education through an emphasis on science and technology. Foreign-educated Indian architects and foreign architects involved in the nation-building endeavour also contributed their ideas (modern, western, progressive) to the development of architecture education. Greatly influenced by the modernist ideas that Le Corbusier brought to India in Chandigarh and the humanist approach that Patrick Geddes brought to understanding Indian, a momentum around regional modernity began to develop in the capital city of Ahmedabad in the newly formed state of Gujarat. BV Doshi and others started the Center for Environment, Planning and Technology in the 1960s. Bernard Kohn developed a curriculum that reimagined the Indian architect who understood place and its relationship with people.

The 1960s curriculum of CEPT curriculum was envisaged before national-level policies and standards were implemented for secondary and professional education. The curriculum was comprehensive in that it included arts and humanities, biology, sociology and mathematics. The 1960s curriculum of CEPT had three different categories. The first focussed on the physical world, which included the natural and built environments and the interrelationship between the sciences. The third category focussed on the human being and the man-made world, which included culture and place with a deep understanding of folk, work and tradition. The two streams brought the humanist and the scientific inputs to the main category of architecture. The curriculum was perceived as a continuous process, working back and forth from whole to part, part to whole and across fields [17].

2.3. TVB SCHOOL OF HABITAT STUDIES

Around the 1970s, Delhi grappled with housing shortages, inadequate civic services, and the preservation of its rich historical heritage. The government announced the National Housing Policy in 1989 against a climate of developing environmental crisis and rapid urbanisation. Recognizing the importance of policy, the founders of the TVB School of Habitat Studies began to collaborate with agencies such as HUDCO on the architecture and planning of the city of Delhi.

In 1990 the TVB School of Habitat studies was established. The School reimagined an architecture education based on habitat. This emphasis on habitat studies was rooted in humanist ideology and principles of sustainability. The School would offer technical courses in habitat management to engineers, diploma and training courses for contractors and masons, and an architectural program. Furthermore, the social, political, and economic context of the city of Delhi

contributed to the ideology, curriculum and pedagogy of the School.

In order to better understand how TVB tried to create a context based curricula and pedagogy the study traces individual histories of its founders, various research initiatives around the city, curriculum documents and interviews with school alumni.

2.4. DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEXT-BASED CURRICULA AND PEDAGOGY AT TVB

To better understand the differentiating factors of the TVB curricula, we look at how the topic of history and sustainability was addressed. TVB approached learning history from two perspectives. First is the history of design, and second is the history of settlements. TVB saw history as an illustration of design principles. And as a manifestation of prevailing beliefs and values which get resolved into the built form. They brought the analytical process into the fold so that students can engage with history in a way that informs their design approach. With the second approach, students can see the relevance of history on a much larger scale. Settlements were not just another subject. They were the canvas to integrate design, history, sociology and economics.

Another feature of the curriculum is the integration of sustainability into all the subjects. Topics like building construction and structures focus on the relevance of local materials and regional building and structural technologies. Material inventories are created every semester based on the rural/semi-urban, or urban contexts. Climatology, energy, water, and waste (services) are studied under the large umbrella of environmental engineering. This approach helped one reflect on how a building fits into the urban context, reinforcing the relationship between nature, culture, and the built environment.

The TVB Curriculum established a robust contextual foundation for each semester, centring around specific settlement typologies in the city of Delhi. In the first year, the focus was on pre-industrial vernacular settlements. Through the urban history course, students conducted surveys to understand the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the surrounding villages, seamlessly integrating this knowledge into the design studio. The environmental engineering coursework also introduced students to renewable and non-renewable energy sources (such as solar, wind, and biogas) within the rural context. Building construction coursework further enhanced their understanding of natural materials and indigenous construction techniques, providing a comprehensive understanding of the habitat they were studying [18].

In the second year, the focus was on planned settlements. Students were encouraged to consider building design a conscious expression of social order and focus on the relationship between built and open space in neighbourhood design. Sustainable strategies such as rainwater harvesting, solar heating principles, and photovoltaics were taught. In the third year, the

context was spontaneous settlements. Each year subjects would align around the central context of settlements in and around the city. Furthermore, as semesters progressed, public policy, public participation, and decision-making were introduced to give students an understanding of challenges beyond the built form. This contextual curriculum effectively bridged disciplinary divides within architecture education.

Dalvi [16] argues that history began as a documentation tool rather than to understand historic buildings' spatial arrangement, proportion or context, so it is now a subsidiary topic. He believes that the act of drawing and learning history through drawing has the potential to teach one how to see, analyse and understand the overall context. Garimella argues that much of what we teach as history is from the Western perspective. Moreover, it does not consider aspects specific to the Indian subcontinent: non-archaeological, sociological, and climatic. The TVB curricula and pedagogy tried to address these issues in learning history.

Historian Narayani Gupta brought her urban history and conservation expertise to the TVB School. Her presence influenced the context of the design problems proposed in the studio. Design problems went beyond the studio and were understood and analysed holistically through urban history. Perspectives on how cities ought to approach new development and heritage conservation formed the basis of this approach to learning design and history. Gupta and Menon were embedded in Delhi's history, heritage, culture, planning, and historical fabric. Using the city as a laboratory, the contexts for design problems were around Daryaganj, Mehrauli, Lajpat Nagar, meat market area in old Delhi. Students were encouraged to engage in these areas' spatial and socio-cultural analysis and understand the context for their design problems.

Built-environment specialists Suresh Rajan and Anil Laul from Anangpur building centre invested in social and environmental responsibility taught at the School. They introduced students to alternative building materials and technologies. They encouraged them to work with different building materials (mud, bamboo, concrete) to build life-scale structures in the open farmland of the TVB campus. Collaborations with organisations like Barefoot College allowed students to explore indigenous construction methods and alternative learning approaches.

TVB Students were also encouraged to seek internship opportunities that expanded their knowledge about architecture. Students worked at places and projects ranging from Tara Nirman Kendra, TERI, Down to Earth, and the Department for International Development (DFID), exposing them to diverse architecture and habitat design aspects.

The ideology that drove the TVB curriculum and pedagogy, was a result of the founders' architectural experiences and motivations. Discussing the TVB

school in an interview, Ganju said that the TVB courses are designed for an evolving technology with a humanist edge, specifically for the Indian subcontinent. Upon his return from AA School in the 1960s, Ganju began his architecture practice in Delhi. He took up various initiatives and proposals to the Delhi government to improve the quality of life for its citizens. Furthermore, advocate for community-based, participatory, locally relevant architecture for all.

Ashok Lal and Ganju met for the first time at the Seminar on Non-Conventional and Alternative Approaches to Shelter the Urban Poor in Delhi. Lal's sensibilities and interest in building construction evolved to incorporate culture and sustainability. His exploration of alternate building materials and technologies added an environmental dimension to the TVB pedagogical approach. Ganju worked with K L Nadir on an exhibition as a commentary on migration and a critique of the state of housing in Delhi. A political scientist and professor at Delhi University, Nadir had collaborated with Ganju on many such initiatives. They had envisaged an exhibition to document the life of the migrant poor in Delhi [19]. They championed the integration of humanities into architecture/planning/urban design programs.

AGK Menon and Ganju had first met at IIT Kharagpur. They continued meeting each other as Menon went to the US to study architecture and urban planning. Like Ganju, Menon came back to Delhi and set up his practice. With the pressures of rapid growth on the city, Menon got involved in conservation works around old Delhi through Intach. Regarding TVB, Menon [20] believed that habitat schools would build a new generation of architects to engage in complex local histories. Moreover, respect autonomy and heterogeneity and address issues of the marginalised, the environment and the complex heritage of Delhi.

The TVB school aimed to produce a humanist and thinking architect to advocate for habitat. The School was closed in 2007, but its ideas were carried forward by its alums, faculty, and founders. Some spread across the country, and others embedded in Delhi continue to provide a rich knowledge network of architectural culture in Delhi [21].

The drawback of the TVB curriculum was that it did not leave any room for experimentation and change to include newer ideas and approaches.

3. METHODOLOGY

The central argument of the research is that context-based curriculum and pedagogy are central to improving the quality of architecture education. The study began with understanding the challenges of architecture education in the Indian context. Since the intent was to specifically focus on curriculum and pedagogy, a historical literature study of architecture schools was undertaken. The schools explicitly chosen

used to represent critical moments in the evolution of architecture education in India.

The TVB school was first selected as the central case study because it represented a period of alternative and radical modes of praxis and pedagogy. Since the school was closed, most data was collected from secondary sources. Interviews with alum from different graduating classes were interviewed to understand the pedagogical approaches at the school. The interviews were later analysed to arrive at recurring themes. The curriculum document of TVB was interpreted and compared against the COA standards. The unique backgrounds and careers of the founders were studied to understand what motivations and philosophical approaches they brought to the curricula and pedagogy. To build a better understanding of 'context', texts describing the larger context of the three schools were studied.

4. DISCUSSION

The JJ School of Architecture, established in Bombay in the 1900s, embraced a pedagogical approach that effectively catered to the architectural profession envisioned by the nation-state. The need was for skilled labour that could help develop the city of Bombay. The emphasis on English as a medium of instruction and a positivist (scientific and rational) approach to learning excluded the traditional modes of practice and native practitioners from participating in the modern profession and discipline of architecture. Graduates of the school went on to serve the needs of the British-led public works department and commercial and native elites who invested money in real estate in the growing city of Bombay.

In the 1960s, the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad devised a curriculum that served the needs of society. The curriculum reflected on what architecture was intended to do and how it should develop along with urbanism to address the challenges of building a capital city for the newly formed state of Gujarat. The curriculum is a reaction to the universalisation of modernism and an emphasis on place and placemaking. It brought the tenets of critical regionalism, such as topography, climate, light and tectonics, to curricula. The pedagogy at the school was influenced by the Bauhaus school, emphasising learning through making. Graduates of the school would be equipped to design and build for diverse local contexts with a deep understanding of the relationship between climate and material. This approach, however, did not integrate aspects of gender, class, demography and other aspects that make us human [22].

In the 1990s, the TVB School of Habitat Studies in Delhi further exemplified the interplay between curricula, pedagogy, and the architectural profession. The curriculum of the TVB School of Habitat studies was shaped to address the problems faced by the city of Delhi. It aimed to reflect the unique needs of Delhi, considering its status as the capital city and its role as a

destination for a burgeoning migrant population. The curriculum emphasises the city as a site where design is understood, the understanding of societal issues and ecological sustainability. The school involved faculty from humanities; the school brought a humanist approach to its pedagogy. The pedagogy emphasised learning through experience and from different knowledge resources.

These three instances highlight the dynamic relationship between curricula, pedagogy, and the profession's and society's evolving demands. The TVB School of Habitat Studies demonstrates how context can shape curricula and pedagogical practices. And how one can use context effectively to make a program interdisciplinary.

Roaf [22] proposed new architecture education as a frame supported by pillars of technology, sustainability, and innovation in pedagogy. As the chair of the 2008 Oxford Conference on the re-evaluation of teaching, she argues that we cannot follow in the footsteps of the industrial revolution and must move into the era of conservation and protection. To address the growth of cities and the impact on climate, schools should integrate aspects of sustainability and technology into their curriculum.

Standards and curricula globally have moved towards the learning objectives model, mainly depending on pedagogy to contextualise learning. However, some schools rely on curricula to create the framework for learning. Irrespective, curriculum and pedagogy should continuously look for ideas, consume those questioning the status quo, and integrate the relevant ones. Spiller [23] defines radical schools, curriculum and pedagogy as those that can introspect and take action outside the normative systems. In the end curricula and pedagogy should reflect the changing society, evolve, grow and take different shapes based on place conditions, people, time, and institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

While architecture education in India reacts to various outside forces, such as the reimagination of the profession and the increased emphasis on digital tools, context is key. As architecture schools move forward to implement the NEP 2020 and change curricula and pedagogy, schools must remember the vital role of context. We need a better understanding of the alternative modes of praxis and pedagogy developed between the 1980s-1990s.

Curricula and pedagogy have frequently disregarded critical aspects that allow for a holistic perception of context as a dynamic milieu [24]. Context is a society with all its biases of caste, class and gender. Context is also climate change, pollution and dependence on fossil fuels. Context is not a sentimental tokenism or a simplistic application of sustainability concepts but a deeper understanding of the forces that shape context and the unexpected opportunities they offer.

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