Can we ignore our surroundings? – A Pedagogical Question
Niranjan Garde

Padmabhushan Vasantdada Patil College of Architecture, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author: Niranjan Garde, niranjan.garde@pvpcoapune.edu.in

Article Information	ABSTRACT
	The paper is focused on explaining prominent themes that explain the challenges of architectural education in our immediate environment. It is the argument of the author that post Covid times, the challenges in architectural education seem to have been escalated and it is time to relook at the purpose for which academic learning is placed in the society. The thoughts portrayed in the themes stem from personal academic experiences and personal upbringing as a whole. The attempt of this paper is to bring about several connected issues in academics and beyond that shape the nature of our mind and hence its reflection on learning process and the quality of architectural spaces. The challenge of creating effective learning environment are stated under importance of "making", role of Artificial Intelligence in our lives, place of memory and perception of change. All themes have a prominent factor of intangibility and hence do not necessarily get featured in the academic environment unless consciously decided. It is the argument of this paper that unless these themes are not decoded to sufficient depth, effective learning for the student will not be assured. The paper suggests that the themes ought to be decoded particular to the pedagogical focus of the Institute since to translate an idea into a method and a product requires several amounts of details that are beyond the scope of the present paper.

1. INTRODUCTION AND ARGUMENT

The paper is focused on explaining prominent themes that explain the challenges of architectural education in our immediate environment.

The thoughts portrayed in the themes stem from personal academic experiences and personal upbringing as a whole. The attempt of this paper is to bring about several connected issues in academics and beyond that shape the nature of our mind and hence its reflection on learning process and the quality of architectural spaces. The themes are indicative, in that they share substantial overlap with each other and cannot be strictly compartmentalized.

How does one learn and how can an institute offer the best learning experience in architecture has been a burning issue from the beginning. Such critical analysis of the environment that is required to be created in an institute is deliberated by Design Chairs under Academic Reviews which try to debate on the 'focus' that an institute ought to nurture and implement as a learning experience among faculty members and students. In this process the discussions may range from themes, subjects, faculty members' perceptions, students' concerns and what the immediate environment offers. Such debates and discussions extend on studio working, publications, research priorities, academic wok exhibitions and collaborations.

Above mechanism is required to be seen as an opportunity to grapple with realities of living and the role of architecture that is in the process of getting rediscovered and interpreted. In short, it is a lifelong process.

However it is the argument of the author that post Covid times, the challenges in architectural education seem to have been escalated and it is time to relook at the purpose for which academic learning is placed in the society. The concern stems from students'

compromised performances, lack of initiative or drive to focus on a theme and conceive a product, lack of focus in general towards life, accelerated rate of change brought about by social media, increasing influences of Virtual Spaces and Times, inability to decipher what is right or wrong, corrosion of values, loss of connect with the environment and so on. Some of the issues stated above also baffle faculty members and hence the author suggests a collaborative effort on the part of faculty members and students together to deal with the current challenge.

Broadly these themes are suggested as:

a) Importance and precedence of making over data analysis

Emotions cannot be perceived and expressed or empathized so easily and perhaps this is the price that we pay for giving too much priority for intellect. It is beyond the scope of this paper to illustrate points of departure when intellect took precedence over other modes of learning but what we seem to experience is the flip side of giving too much emphasis on one dimension of the thought. The first theme starts on a philosophical note.

Existence should take precedence over motion (regarded as manifestation or tangible factors) or what is already there - as a record or data. In "making" or (which is what creation is supposed to become), the struggle for suitable product is inherent. The struggle is an indication of ego and need to become free and connect universally - (transcendence). This struggle calls for many dimensions of the mind and the end result of this process is "synthesis" of emotions or feelings and intellect. If the process makes one realizes the universal dimension that exists then one has come to the layers of feelings shared by all. This obviously raises dilemma, contradictions, challenges the notion of individuality, raises doubts, causes trust to materialize and probably consolidates everything as hope or love. This process is required for any authentic creativity or synthesis to occur and for this, time, space and methods become important. We indicate "making" as an indicator of above process. We do not know where we go, we do not know what to expect, we do not evaluate what we get - this is the mental zone we are required to handle. Hence maybe any "process" in the studio that can generate this mindscape may become crucial. There are several attempts that acknowledge an underlying "common layer" of feelings that can guide design principles or quality of spaces mentioned in *A Pattern Language* (Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., & Silverstein, M., 1977) or *Places of the Soul* (Day, C., 2014) or say *A Place in Shade: The New Landscape and Other Essays* (Correa, C., 2010). If fundamentally we are required to realize that all is One (consciousness), such experiences, feelings,

analysis, explorations should reinforce this value system.

However, in contemporary urban times, by going faster and getting involved with a lot of unnecessary multitasking activities, what is compromised is the generic encountering of above process and effectively synthesizing the conflicts one is required to deal within and the universal dimension that one is required to "feel". The short circuiting of above process is detrimental to us - as species. What is at stake is ego, which exaggerates itself, creates isolation, avoids difficult questions, tries to fix a problem, continuously evaluates or judges and cannot enjoy suspension of time or space and tries to "standardize" all responses regardless of any context it encounters! Therefore the image of standardized apartments and office towers all over the world and the imitation of imagery that gets circulated in magazines and social media. Further, the intellect used in this way then compartmentalizes things, slots it into sequences and believes that the problem is well defined and hence solvable. Alas it ends up getting disappointed. And the vicious cycle continues. The concern behind "copy and pasting" is exactly this. Why does a student and teacher be tempted to copy and paste anything? Can anything really be copied or pasted - as if plucking something from a slice of time and space and putting it in a different time and space?

Hence we are referring to time and space as a construct or something created contextually from the mind itself. There is diversity of space and time across India which has resulted in diversity of livelihood patterns and the manner of imagining space. In this, one is referring to collective consciousness, collective notions of community, shared spaces, role of climate, idea diagrams and architecture contained somewhere in this matrix. Thus architecture cannot be seen in isolation and this is a crucial learning in times where all things and images on social media (wherein students seem to spend substantial time) appear stale and rubber stamped. The copy and pasting technique forgets the role of synthesis. And by forgetting the process of synthesis, we do not "create" memories or anchor appropriately with a sense of being. then sadly all imagination becomes dated, sterile, out of spirit and that is how people then behave in such a sterile environment.

Therefore culture can be seen as a phenomenon of synthesis. Traditions can also come under it. Any architecture that demonstrates synthesis in a comprehensive manner, it can be understood as being value ridden and such examples are present all over the world – but the question is - does our curriculum or our ways of perception and efforts decode and recognize these subtle dimensions of architecture? And if they are not seen, then will they be "forgotten" from memory? And if they are forgotten, will such built environments be destroyed? Thus it is not only a matter of theoretical exploration, but a very clear concern of imagination creating environments that

mean much deeper to human beings. In the race against time, competition, production, standardization, marks, jobs, systems – do we ever consider whether an academic space can be made available to understand above concerns?

Can modern architecture be seen from above intent? When Louis Kahn says that all programs can be synthesized as mood for delight, learning and connecting - is this what is being meant? And is this is what got created even in pre modern times? And is this what is compromised severely now?

And if this is compromised, the question is how can academics then respond to the current crisis? Does it mean again going slow with what one intends to do? Does it mean suspension of high expectations of competitive spirit? Does it mean talking out the confusion of emotions that one feels inside and the fears one tries to digest? Does it mean discussing anything without evaluating the topic of discussion? Does it mean to dance, sing, and meet people beyond immediate concerns of architecture? Does it mean enjoying the seasons? Does it mean simple observations of looking at the sun, its movement, feeling the breeze, conversing on the dining table and so on? Does it mean cooking and serving? Does it mean to rediscover the deeper meanings behind transitional spaces, multi functional spaces, and flexible spaces? To create, it should be understood that one has to become calm to start with. The question raised herein is what sort of mind are we handling? Is it chaotic, aggressive, disconnected, isolated and so on? Does it mean that a more integrated or interdisciplinary psychological, cultural, historical, architectural approach is necessary now? Would it mean reinventing methods of teaching and learning? Would it mean breaking the hierarchical barriers between faculty members and students? Would it mean starting with a general or an intimate discussion and then moving onto themes of architecture?

2. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TOOL OF IMAGINATION

Another important issue is about Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool of imagination and how it can change the pace and nature of imagination. Herein, the concern is to analyze the tool having repercussions on feelings or our mind instead of only seeing it as an efficient and faster method of production of things. To me it seems symbolically AI influences our mind in terms of faster pace of thought (hence compromised considerations to feelings, slowness, deliberation and empathy); reducing imagination of spaces to individually defined nuclear spaces disconnected from community's participation or the role of climate or culture or history; fascination for the visual rather than structural or psychological logic; too much emphasis on relegation of maintenance, refinement, data generation, subletting of responsibility, emphasis on surveillance

and so on. What sort of mind are we creating by the use of AI? What sort of society and cities get generated through application of AI? India being a land of socio-cultural and geographical diversity having as much as diverse approaches of imagining, making of spaces in architecture, academic institutions should be a place to ensure that the pulse of inclusion and diversity is not lost by embracing the AI systems. Bottom line is that AI cannot subsume the purpose of existence and hence its role in altering imagination, application of methods, products is to be seen highly critically. Thus, should hand drawn and hands on be brought back or reinforced in curriculum? Should installations be reinforced? Should idea diagrams, interdisciplinary approached by sought for? In what manner does a contextual mind think, analyze, generate time and connect – and how should this capacity be used through AI? As an extension of AI, there is a huge impact of social media and what it portrays as architecture or lifestyle or social relationships or mental constructs. I place an argument here that the mind cannot be separated from the "tool" it uses to do things. The tool also *shapes* the mind in turn. The nature of social media (whatsapp, facebook, twitter etc.) is highly superficial, non authentic, fluid or changing and disconnected with real space and time. By constantly interacting with such a platform, the mind tends to become superfluous, distracted, unfocussed and stale. I feel the loss is about unable to concentrate and sustain a line of inquiry or a concept to create good architectural solutions. The loss is also about unable to decode and analyze appropriate architecture from fashionable architecture. The loss is also about taking decisions, facing dilemmas, facing the inner struggle to synthesize solutions – in a nutshell complete reluctance to create meaningful architecture by being "lazy". It should be acknowledged by Institutes that it may take a longer time for students to realize what is an appropriate decision making process and how does one discover good architecture? It may also mean that faculty members may be required to intensely engage with the students and assist them in clearing the confusions of their minds. This calls for discussions, debates, conversations, collaborations, doing mock ups at a far greater allotment of time - more than what the current academic system is allowing. The core issue is of "connecting" with the student's mind and finding the common ground or value systems or intents or the larger picture that seems appropriate to pursue by students and faculty members. Let us not forget that we are responsible for creating a generation who will practice architecture for next forty years.

3. PLACE OF MEMORY

Another area of concern is about "memory". How does one remember architecture? How does one feel a sense of place? And how does memory construct a place? Is

memory individual or collective or comprehensive or isolated - these become important issues to deliberate on while dealing with creating architectural spaces. Architectural concerns and projects are rarely individually based - they include the imprint of public or community, environment, values, safety, comfort, belongingness and most of these aspects are not mentioned in the brief for design. If these are inherent aspects of human existence, how can these again continue to find a way to express themselves through the process of making architecture and how can they be felt, visualized, constructed and experienced? We are again talking about methods of observation, analysis, conceptualizing and synthesis. We are saying here that the "form" is a product of nature of memory – either collective or individual. Hence by analyzing or understanding a form, what is realized is the cultural imprint. And perhaps there might be a different way of understanding History of Architecture where the intent or memory or tendencies of people become the backbone of spatial experiences rather than "styles" or "high culture" or "technologically advanced" and many other such misconceptions. Herein we have an opportunity to understand who we are and what we intend to do and why architecture? We are also trying to understand scales, proportions, textures, ideas of continuance and change, resources, climate from the perspective of memory and not something as a to-do-list of things to accommodate in a design. Thus can design become collective or universal or multifunctional in approach? Can such methods of learning become a part of academic environment? Pressing is the issue of memory since most of our memory is becoming fragmented, individualized and cluttered with the influx of social media leading to a lot of disconnect with core values of existence causing stress and aggression. Hence in academic times, how should social media be responded and how should AI be used as an effective tool for imagination become integral issues of contemporary architectural education.

4. LEARNING FOR RECEIVING "CHANGE"

Perhaps what is encountered is the scale of change that seems to surround us, wherein the place of architectural education becomes a subset of dealing with the magnitude of change. One should patiently understand that change happens at a psychological level years before one comes to architectural degree course. Aspirations, values of living, relationships, idea of space and time are deeply set in a person through his/her environment. One's maneuvering in the city and language of negotiation with families, relatives, friends, community, and people has a deep impact on forming one's values about life and aspirations and how should architecture be seen. It all starts from nature of family systems, upbringing,

discussions with parents, shared time for shared activities, time given for pursuing hobbies or art, manner of communication, going for long walks, schooling and so on. Life should be seen as giving nourishment for people and hence we are asking this question of how can architecture continue this need of nourishment? The need for nourishment is a lifelong engagement with people and not only a five year degree stint. We need to be humble about how we are engaging ourselves with kids and people around us. That is also an important learning to be generated in a student. A student is previously a son or a daughter or a friend or a colleague or a person. These dimensions, if sensitized, make for a better person and better environments that the student will conceive and build for people.

5. CONCLUSION

As stated in the beginning, there are no clear cut answers for the concerns voiced above. Each institution should ideally try to shape a focus of academic environment through reviews, juries, workshops, studio work, research work and publication. This is acknowledged as an intense and hard work considering diversity of temperaments of faculty members and students and other stakeholders as a part of academic institution. In the future more requirements of documentation by NAAC and NEP or CoA and other platforms may increase putting additional challenges of imparting quality learning experiences to the students. It is under such diverse challenges of systems, changing environments, changing technologies and their infiltration into the minds of students that effective pedagogy of architecture needs to be "discovered".

6. REFERENCES

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