

Architectural Education : Ends and Means

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INTRODUCTION

Architecture is an art, but not in the same sense as painting or sculpture. The purpose of painting and sculpture do not project beyond their intrinsic, aesthetic or emotional spirituality. Architecture has an additional dimension. It must serve the needs of its users. The failure or success of architecture may be measured by the degree of user satisfaction, both physical and emotional.

Architectural Education and National Objectives

If we accept that architecture is the exploration of the aesthetic, social and humanistic dimensions of technology, then it has to advance towards the goals of National Development whose main objective is the welfare of the society at large. Therefore, in the formal training of architects, technical and professional competence remain a latent and active objective, but a long-term perspective of issues such as self-reliance, economic and social independence also remains in demand. The increasing potential of the modern man to alter the environment devolves a greater responsibility on those concerned with the built environment. Architecture defined as exploiting of available resources to provide the environment to serve the need of Man, clearly implies an increasing involvement of the profession in national development. As architecture is an integral part of a larger discipline of environmental design, the professionals have to work with a clear understanding of human needs and resources. Rapid increase in supply of new building and finish materials, newer techniques and accelerating rate of change in the international scene, are continuously influencing our socio-cultural pattern. It is inevitable that the cultural domination of the

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the course curriculum of the Department of Architecture, BUET and traces its course development from its start to the present day. Architecture is a subjective discipline. There is no absolute right or wrong in it and consequently there cannot be a 'perfect or ideal' curriculum valid across time and place. Various forces continually condition the concept and the teaching of architecture as a discipline. Perhaps the best an architecture school can do is maintain a balanced curricula that will be subject to continual review, monitoring, evaluation and revision to keep to the changing demands of time.

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economically developed nations over the less developed ones shall have positive as well as negative impacts in architecture as in all other spheres of life. Under such circumstances mere knowledge of the finite solutions is not enough. Architectural education must be broad based and must deal essentially with the fundamentals whereby one can effectively tackle present problems and those yet to come.

Architectural Education and Changing Concepts

Architecture being a subjective discipline incorporates within it both the intuitive and analytical processes. Design is an intuitive process, while it is analytical in the use of technology. There is of course some elements of creativity in technology too, but not in the same sense of the term as applied to artistic pursuits. For a subjective discipline, no single concept can define the spirit of the discipline in its totality. This truth is reflected in the varying emphasis on aesthetics, function, cost and other determinist of architecture in different schools of design. On a subjective level there is no absolute right or wrong. One is right or wrong only within the limits of ones own convictions. An idea is not necessarily better than the other, they are just different. In the words of Michael Graves, there is room for everyone.

The advent of Modern Movement in Architecture brought with it an unprecedented break between past and the present way of designing and building. The modernists rejected past architecture on the grounds that its use as model for the present could only result in uninspiring imitations. Thus it was believed that architectural expressions could only be deduced from the study of the available advancement in technologies. This was what came to be known as the 'International Style'. International Style emphasized the universality of design principles and over reliance on technology. There was little room for influence of culture, people and place—a proposition dissociated from reality. Thus modernists eventually gave way to 'post modernism' or 'historic eclecticism', which did not find wide acceptance. General discontentment with the prevalent stream of the thoughts stimulated a move for the appreciation of the tradition and culture. The mid seventies were marked by a commitment for cultural identity and national consciousness. The International Style has diminished in influence, and post modernism has disconcerted professional and critics alike, but regional architecture - one that is contemporary yet reflective of tradition, has found favour and substance. Thus architectural education yielding to changing concepts, differed from region to region, country to country and also from school to school. (Fig 1 and 2)

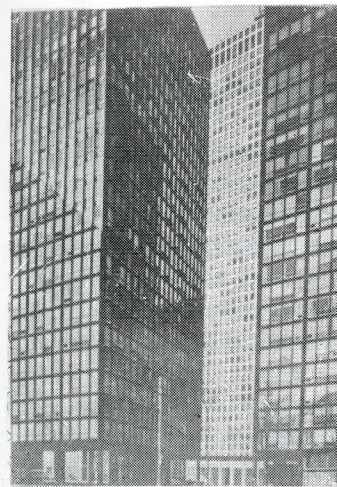


Fig: 1a International Style, Architect Mies Vander Rohe

Fig: 2a Contemporary Building Representing Regionalism, Architect Gcoffery Bawa

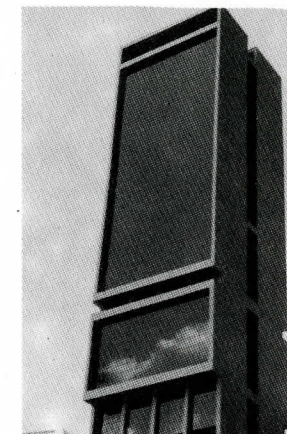


Fig: 1b Thesis Project by Azizur Rahim Final year B. Arch Programme.

Fig: 2b Class Project (Third Year) by Nasreen Hussain, B. Arch Programme

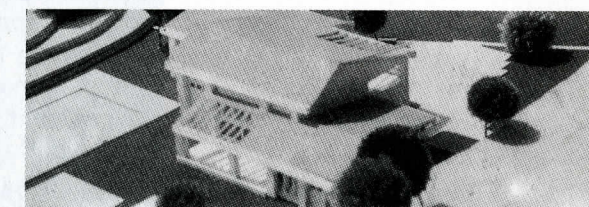


Fig 1 to 2 Changing Concepts in Architecture and the reflections in Student's project.

Architectural Education in Bangladesh

The Department of Architecture of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Dhaka, was established in 1961 to fill a vacuum in the design field in the then East Pakistan. The curriculum was drawn in line with that of the Texas A & M University, USA.

Till 1990, this was the only school for training architects. Consequently, it shouldered a great responsibility. In its initial stage, the curriculum aimed at producing graduate architects who would be able to design buildings independently. Both the curricula and the teaching methodology were based on universally valid principles and practices of architecture.

The debate between architecture born of philosophical concepts and solutions based on technology alone is of fundamental importance. Too much emphasis on technology may produce architects who may be oriented towards solving only technical problems and satisfying functional needs. But a multi-disciplinary broad-based curricula may produce architects equipped with problem solving techniques rather than attempting finite solutions. As such, the courses in the Department have changed from time to time in response to the changing concepts and needs. Courses like planning, housing, health facility, urban design, climate and design, visual and sonic environment and analytical methods were incorporated in the eighties. These changes are in line with promoting objectives of the general welfare. With the introduction of the course system at the undergraduate level from 1990-91 academic session, a search was initiated for a vocabulary and style of architecture of Bangladesh emphasizing tradition and regionalism. As such the existing curriculum was thoroughly scrutinized and courses like Society and Architecture of Bengal, Architectural Conservation, Urban Anthropology were incorporated.

In a variety of perceptual understanding, values or intellect, concepts of aesthetics are at odds with one another. As is often said, design cannot be taught, but students can be exposed to theories of architecture, basic principles of design, its vocabularies and idioms to help students bring out their latent, inherent design talents. Basic courses are usually propagated as being applicable world wide. Gradually more specific historical knowledge on building and build environment, is given. Courses on social sciences attempt a socio-psychological understanding of the cultural phenomena, while technical sources deal with implication of technology on architectural designs. After thirty years of the inception of the school, greater social involvement of the architects is not only expected but desirable. The objectives of the architectural education should be based on an appropriately balanced curriculum, which will enable every graduate to develop individual aptitude, skill and interest for a role in society. Hence the question remains: Does architectural programme of the Department of Architecture, BUET, equip graduate architects with knowledge and skill to:

- advance national objectives, i.e. to contribute to the welfare of the society;
- design buildings that make appropriate and correct use of technology; and
- design that are traditional yet capable of satisfying present day needs.

Despite good intentions an 'ideal' mix of courses that will make an 'ideal' architect is perhaps difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Department of Architecture, BUET is confronting similar dilemma.

Recommendations

The recommendations here do not attempt a definitive solution to all problems of architectural education. The recommendations are a logical outcome of the dynamism of the environment, where architects should be able to adjust and readjust to the possible changes.

No profession should ignore the national goal or disregard international trends. When the virtues of 'regional' and 'traditional' or 'contextual' architecture are being extolled everywhere, the school has to capture the spirit. The policy, should be encouragement and emphasis on contextual or regional architecture. More exposure to the potentials and shortcomings of local, traditional building materials and building techniques; and exploitation of relevant resources should be sought. A questionnaire survey in 1990 reveals that both the professionals and the final year architecture students of BUET feel that exposure to traditional building materials and techniques in architectural courses in the Department, is lacking. (Fig 3)

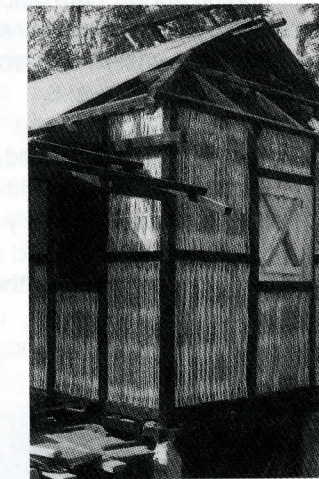


Fig 3 House built of especial type of reeds, eventually to be plastered with mud or cement, extensively used in Sylhet region, Popularly known as Ekra wall, is hardly known to students even professionals.

To promote growth responsive to the built environment that accommodates change and diverse human activities, users participation in the design process should be incorporated.

Even in class projects students should be encouraged to incorporate user perceptions and inputs at different stages of the design. The Fourth Year architecture students of 1989-90 sessions interaction with the inhabitants of East Islambagh neighborhood in connection with their class project, 'The Urban Regeneration of a portion of Islambagh, Old Dhaka'

Was particularly helpful in understanding vital community issues. It is not self evident that users should get what they want. What is, however, important is that they must be given the necessary information and choice.

- In addition to the theory classes, examples from local context with proper analysis may create a profound impact. Majority of the student respondents felt that they have learnt more about traditions, society, culture, climate and other determinants from discussions in the design studios, than from theories.
- While it is said that design cannot be taught, it is also true that examples are better than precepts. Exposure to local architecture-both traditional and modern, through field visits and slides will enhance sensitivity and concern about the architects' role in society and imbibe in the students a sense of history and tradition. Both the professional and student respondents in the survey were enthusiastic about practical training prior to graduation. Though there are problems in finding appropriate placement for training, possibilities should be explored. The revised curriculum under course system have provision for compulsory professional training for students of Level 5.
- Due to lack of knowledge, concern and sensitivity many fine old structures of significant cultural and architectural value are in ruins and many more have been torn down without proper evaluation and analysis. To create a consciousness among the public and the professionals, the school, in addition to offering courses, can also encourage and facilitate discussions, workshops, lectures and short term block courses.(Fig 4)

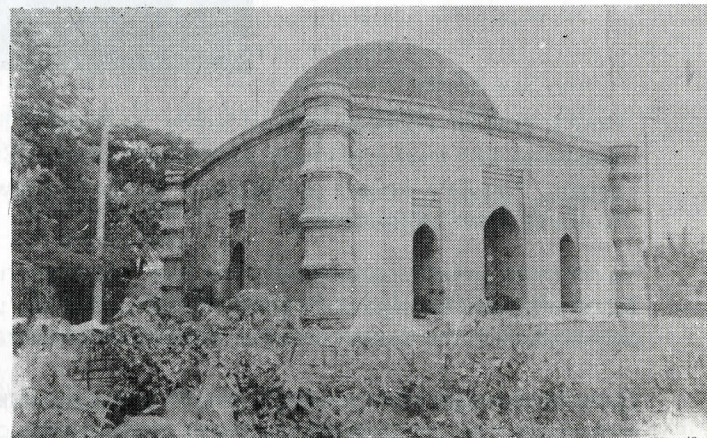


Fig 4 An ancient mosque situated a few miles from "Shat Gumbad Mosque, Bagerhat. This beautiful proportionate structure is seldom referred and is gradually under decaygoing.

- Reorganization of some of the courses and course contents may be worthwhile. The survey reveals that the senior students and young professionals value the importance of psychology, sociology and other social sciences, but the way the courses are structured has little relevance to architecture. Some of the courses have been restructured to make them more relevant. The impact of such changes should be closely monitored and evaluated, with a view to keeping the curriculum dynamic and responsive to changes
- Architects should have a clear idea of the technical implications of architectural design solutions. Perhaps the engineering courses should be recast to give the students a better understanding of technologies in architecture.
- The school should initiate and sustain a programme of continuing research on various aspects of man's built environment.

Conclusion

There is no 'perfect or ideal' curriculum valid across time and space. Knowledge, value and culture consciously and subconsciously condition concepts. Notwithstanding the subjective nature of judgment, the curriculum of the Department of Architecture attempts to give a comprehensive view of architecture, its determinants and the required tools required of an architect. The Department has produced more than 500 graduates who are making worthwhile contributions to the development of architecture in the country. In recent years young architects and students of this school have won honours both at home and abroad.

There is perhaps no school that fully equips the graduates to practice architecture. Academic education invariably has to be supplemented on the job training. It is not the intent of the school to produce architects of excellence, but to train young minds in the art and science of architecture. Perhaps through perseverance and dedication to learning and the profession some of these young men and women will achieve the mark of excellence.

