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Architectural Education in India

History of architectural education

India has a rich architectural heritage. The hundreds of monuments, palaces, temples and mosques speak of architect's contribution to the past. The architects or the master builders were very much regarded at that time, and the training was given in their studios for a number of years, like the ancient Indian educational system in the ashram of a Guru. It was practised in the Medieval and Renaissance Europe and even in modern times, as found in the studio of Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, the great masters.

But regular education and training in architecture is a recent story in India. In 1896, the Government of Bombay founded a two-years' 'Draughtsmanship Course' at Sir J. J. School of Arts, which was organized in 1913 into a regular school of architecture. The Kalabhawan, Boroda was, however, conducting architectural courses from little earlier.

A number of private architectural schools grew up in Bombay in the twenties and the thirties, and training facilities were developed at Hyderabad and Lucknow and at a later period at Delhi. In 1920, the Bombay School of Architecture was granted recognition by the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The All-India Council of Technical Education was set up in 1945 but no work was done till the independence of the country in 1947. Seven boards of technical studies in special subjects were created. The Board of Architecture and Regional Planning introduced a national diploma in architecture at Delhi enabling the part-time students and draughtsmen to take further education and full-time degree courses at various universities leading to the degree Bachelor of Architecture.

Today Bachelor of Architecture degrees are offered at Bombay, Baroda, Delhi, Roorkee, Calcutta (Howrah), Kharagpur, Madras, Jadavpur (Calcutta), Nagpur and Chandigarh and diploma courses at about a dozen schools. There is no postgraduate course, but some schools offer a postgraduate degree or diploma in town and regional planning.

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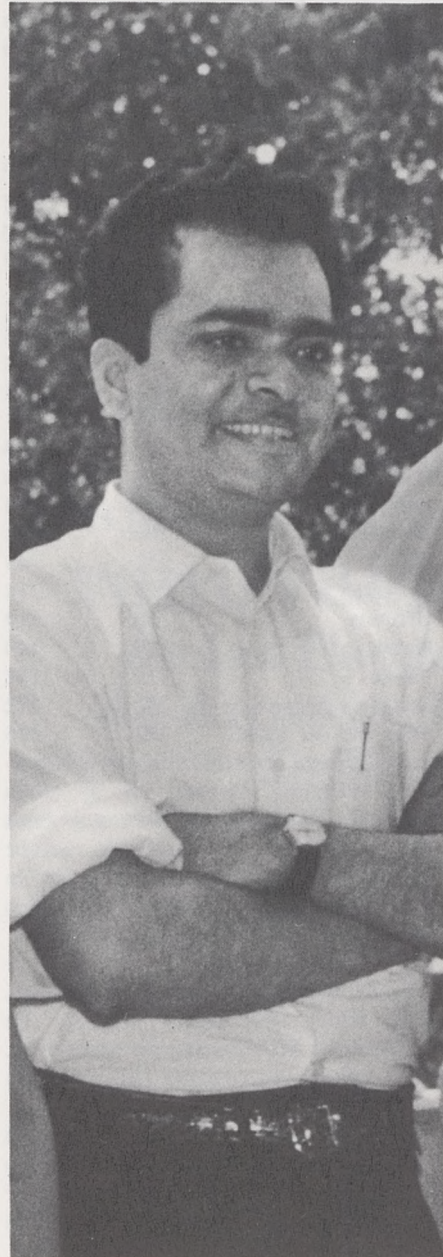


Photo Maud Krafft

The State of Education and training

An analysis shows that there are three types of schools:

1. Schools attached to engineering institutions such as Kharagpur, Calcutta, Roorkee, etc., where study of technology is more stressed than the design aspect.
2. Independent schools such as Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, etc., developing a style of their own.
3. The rest of the schools.

Most of the syllabus was adopted from UK and US Universities and the courses are generally rigid. There is a lack of coordination between theory and practice, climate, housing method of achieving economy are less taught. The rigid syllabus and system of written and oral examinations are such that a student has less chance to show his creativity. But he can be a good technician; as a result no team spirit is developed and so also the aptitude for allied professions.

Some recent schools are, however, fortunate in introducing new orientation. They have also incorporated a few months' practical training in architectural offices. This depends on the availability of such positions, and often it is found that such student-trainees are given all kinds of odd jobs rather than actual professional training. There is no facility of specific training or research after graduation.

During the British rule, architectural training and education were oriented to the British system. The European architects like Claude Batley, George Wittet, Herbert Baker, Edward Lutens had an impact on Indian architects. On the other hand, a number of architects developed a style with Indian motifs. This trend continued even after independence. The influence of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret was immense on Chandigarh architects.

A number of young Indian architects went abroad, took further education and training. Some of them returned, but there is a slow 'brain drain'.

Architects in India

Despite drawbacks Indian architects have shown their talents in recent years, and there is originality and Indian flavour in the vocabulary of modern architecture. There are about 3,000 qualified architects in India with a population of 500 millions. There are a few more who are not recorded, giving the figure: one architect per 150,000 persons. There is much abuse of the title of architect. There may be 2,000 engineers, diploma holders, etc., who are practising as architects. The Indian Institute of Architects has promoted a bill for introduction in the Parliament for registration and protection of title.

In India, the Government is a big employer but the standard of architectural work is low and the architect plays an ineffective role. He continues to play a subordinate role in the administrative and technical control of projects. The small private architectural offices produce better examples. In big architectural offices, the opportunity for a young architect is less good, but he can learn a lot of things, and, as an architect has pointed out, 'Sometimes a junior is a blunt subordinate to an idiot superior'.

The Profession

The highest professional institute is the Indian Institute of Architects which was founded in 1917 and which is allied to the Royal Institute of British Architects. Recently Commonwealth Associations of Architects have been formed, and a major activity besides conference is the establishment of The Commonwealth Board of Architectural Education which is focusing the need for a firmer requirement for practical training and professional experience and for a closer association of the Indian Institute of Architects, with national and state plans for controlling and promoting architectural education. There is a student organization: National Association of Students of Architecture.

But architects have little organizational activities, exhibitions and publications are rarer, and there is no salesmanship and as such there is public consciousness. In India, few competitions are held, fees for professional services are still fixed on bargaining, and the Government is still inclined to call tender for architects.

The future

The architects in India are yet to take a leading part in the society like doctors and lawyers. The architects are slowly taking the professions of interior decorators and town planners, but we are yet to see an architect practising as quantity surveyor or structural designer. In conclusion, the profession of architect is in a transition stage in India.

