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Searching for reasons, and possible solutions for the above, led us to interact with various experts – practicing professionals and academicians in the fields of landscape, planning and architecture. These included Prof. Ram Sharma, Prof. Ravindra Bhan, Prof. Prabhakar Bhagwat, Prof. K. T. Ravindran, Prof. Rajnish Wattas, Harshad Bhatia, S. K. Sharma, Dr. Ashok Khosla and V. K. Bugga. They discussed the role of the landscape profession, its recognition, landmark stages as well as issues of integrated approach in planning processes and role of multiple agencies. Here is Prof. M. Shaheer’s foreword to these discussions...

Yesterday

About fifteen years ago, in the middle eighties, it is very likely that the review of landscape architecture would have hardly been possible. There was very little work on the ground; less than a handful of established professionals and not enough material or experience to develop a critique, or to effectively learn from. At that time, fifteen years of professional education in landscape architecture had already been available. Yet the total number of graduate landscape architects then would have been about a hundred or so (at an average of about seven or so candidates per year). And even of these, roughly a third would have been people sponsored by Government, who would return to their various departments, with very little opportunity to practice landscape design.

This was the real infancy of the profession. There was hardly any contemporary designed landscape to look at, apart from the notable examples of Ram Sharma and Ravindra Bhan; not to miss the masterly elegance of the work of the late Joseph Stein. Landscape architects were far more misunderstood then - excluding a numericaly small but professionally significant number of noble souls, most architects would look upon the struggling young landscape architect with polite condescension, as a person of lesser ability than an architect, who could name a few trees, for whatever that was worth. Which was ironical really, considering that landscape architecture is a specialization acquired after completing the professional architecture degree.

Today

I don’t think anyone would disagree with the view that the situation is quite different now. One has only to look around to become aware of the relative proliferation of landscape architecture, certainly in Delhi and many other metropolitan cities. In the last fifteen years the graduates of the eighties, and even of the early to middle nineties have been able to establish successful and busy landscape practices, and have certainly contributed to recognition of the profession by important client groups such as Industry, Developers and Corporate bodies. There are a far greater number of landscape architects; two masters’ level courses, and a demand for new postgraduate programmes. One could look upon these as market indicators I suppose, suggesting increasing recognition of future potential.

That a review like this is possible today suggests very substantial evolution of the landscape profession. But one is tempted to raise (quite honestly, without any sarcasm) the interesting, and not altogether irrelevant, question asking whether in general, at the broadest level, the planning and architecture professions have chosen an evolutionary direction which would enable them to make use of the expertise landscape architects offer?

An Integrated Approach?

Enough people realise that landscape architecture is integral to the planning and development process. Planners and architects are educated in what landscape architecture is all about. Site analysis and site planning are basic to any educational programme in the design, planning and development field. Environmental studies form part of the school curriculum from Class 4 to Class 12, and remain with us everyday in newspaper headlines. So how come environmental benefits accruing from designed public open space still have to be marketed? Everyone desires an “integrated approach”, so why doesn’t it happen?

These questions are not rhetorical; urban development decisions seem to proceed from the assumption that city environments can function effectively without having to be either environmentally pleasant or to possess even a minimal aesthetic quality; that the positive stimulation of visual, olfactory and...
whether planners and urban designers, in their own creative interest, will at some time be able to overcome or manage those extraneous forces which usually sideline the technical aspects of the planning process and which ultimately distort, if not destroy, planning and urban design objectives

The establishment of credibility is the challenge every profession has to meet: in the work it embodies, and also the individual credibility of each member of the profession.

Tomorrow

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