

# Foray Through Architectural Journalism

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Writing for architecture as a medium to express oneself in public about various issues relevant to the profession and the people

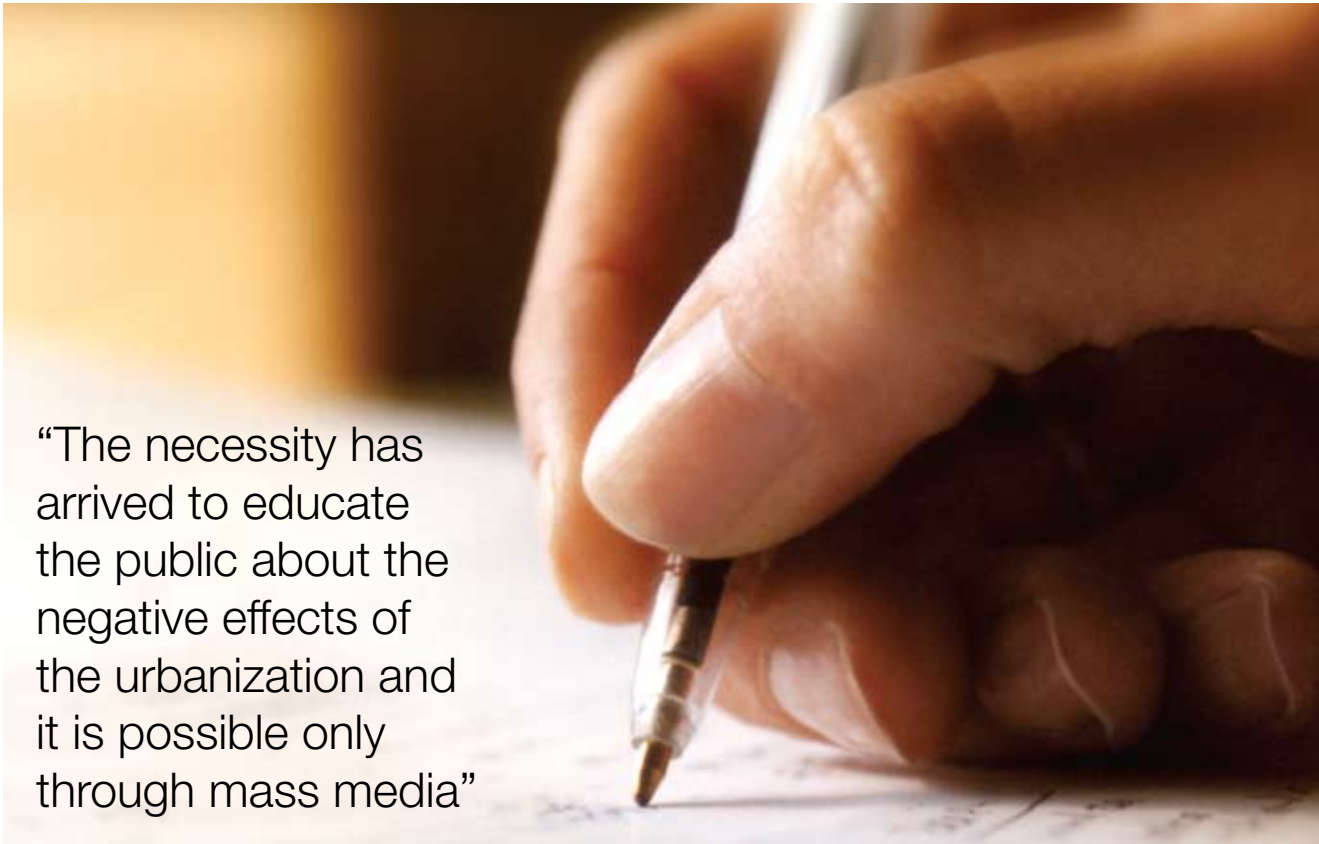
In the midst of urban development from all directions due to overcrowding, there comes misery in architectural practice. There are very few news papers who write columns on built environment, urban design and ecology. Now days, Fashion is definitely a hot topic but not architecture. Problems related to pollution, water table, infrastructure, etc. were not so concerned issues at all couple of decades ago. It is not that people does not care about architecture, but what it lacks is the language for talking about the built environment. It cannot penetrate like a fog in the surrounding; that is one source of alienization and distrust between public and the profession. Architectural criticism is a bridge between people and built environment. It is a place where cultural aspects are being preserved and future technologies are welcomed. With a big boom of more land utilization and ignorance of

environment limitations, it has created chaos with the geography.

In this rapid changing scenario, the necessity has arrived to educate the public about the negative effects of the urbanization and it is possible only through mass media. It can be addressed effectively by the journalists who are specialized in reporting the news on architecture, urban design and environment. The general practice in vogue, presently, is that papers solicit guest columns from architects and designers on selected topics. And in some cases a business or real estate columnist is drafted to write up a new building or two, usually from a leasing or development perspective.

## OVERVIEW OF URBANISATION

Some of the chief forces driving urbanization today are shifting of jobs from agriculture to industry and the concen-



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tration of economic opportunities in the urban areas. Urbanization is associated with higher incomes, improved health, higher literacy, improved quality of life and other benefits. Yet along with the benefits of urbanization come environmental and social ills. Because of urbanization, the concentration of people is increasing in cities; so is the demand for basic necessities like food, energy, drinking water and shelter. The result is slums, poor quality housing, lack of water supply and sanitation facility and proper waste disposal facility leading to spread of communicable diseases and crime.

It is observed that cities have been the driving force in economic and social development. It is a global phenomenon. As per 2001 census, approximately 307 million Indians live in nearly 3700 towns and cities spread across the country. This is 30.5% of its population, in sharp contrast to only 60 millions (15%) who lived in urban areas in 1947 when the country became Independent. During the last fifty years, the population of India has grown two and half times, but Urban India has grown by nearly five times. In numerical terms, India's urban population is second largest in the world after China and is higher than the total urban population of all countries put together barring China, USA and Russia.

In India, cities were rebuilt almost overnight and most of the people could not make head and tail of it. Architecture quickly became fashionable, trendy, and a commodity. But the fact is that it was also perceived as news, not as something abstract and remote from the concerns of ordinary people. Built environment is a public art. It concerns more with the society. Buildings mark a place and they should be grounded in an appropriate place. It is more than a material and form. It is a

social expression and reflects philosophy and mind set of society. It should be properly projected by news media.

## EFFECTS OF URBANISATION

Urbanization affects the environment in three major ways: implications due to urban poverty which is a result of migration, lack of infrastructure and management systems and finally increasing consumerism. These problems warrant major concerns on three accounts. Firstly, the prevailing pattern and trend of Urbanization is more material and energy intensive. Secondly, the discharge of pollutants and generation of solid wastes in cities is particularly harmful because it is uncontrollable and thirdly, the financial, institutional, technological and infrastructure systems available for help to control these problems are inadequate.

## WHAT IS JOURNALISM?

After the end of 20th century, the journalists in general come to a conclusion that 'the central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society'. Journalism is not just facts finding, media analyzing, opinion writing and commentary but more than that. It should be fair and balanced story. Journalism is reporting of events at local, provincial, national and international level.

Journalism is divided into many streams namely, sports journalism, science journalism, political journalism, fashion journalism, photo journalism, architectural journalism etc... Like other journalism, architectural journalism also encompasses the objective journalism and advocacy journalism.

## PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM

Over the time, the journalists have de-

veloped nine core principles which can be described as theory of principles of Journalism:

- 1. OBLIGATION TO TRUTH:** The journalistic truth is the process that begins with the professional discipline of the gathering and verifying facts. The journalist should try to convey a fair and reliable account of the facts. Journalist should be transparent as possible about the sources and methods so audience can make their own assessment of information.
- 2. LOYALTY TO CITIZEN:** The journalist must maintain larger public interest. The commitments to the citizens also mean that they should present a representative picture of all constituent groups in society.
- 3. DISCIPLINE OF VERIFICATION:** Journalist rely on professional discipline for verifying information. It is rather called consistence methods of testing information, which gives transparent evidence to their work.
- 4. INDEPENDENCE OF SPRIT AND MIND:** Independence is a prime requirement of journalism. A journalist must keep the independence of mind and spirit above all. He should avoid any tendency towards arrogance, nihilism, elitism or isolation.
- 5. INDEPENDENT MONITOR OF POWER:** The journalism has an unusual capacity to serve as watchdog over those whose power and position that affects the citizens. As journalist, the obligation to protect the freedom by not demeaning it by exploiting for commercial gain.
- 6. OVERRIDING FORUM FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM AND COMPROMISE:** The news media is the common carrier of public discussion. This discussion serves society best when it is informed by the facts without prejudice and supposition. It

should strive to represent fairly varied view points and place them in the context of the society rather than highlighting only conflicting views of the debate.

**7. SIGNIFICANT AND RELEVANT:**

Story telling with the purpose is an important parameter of journalism. This means journalist must ask what information has most value to the citizens and in what format. It should make the reader engaged and enlighten to maxim.

**8. COMPREHENSIVE AND PROPORTIONAL NEWS:**

Journalism is a form of cartography which provides a map for citizens to navigate. The map is only analogy. Keeping news in proportion without leaving important things is one of the cornerstones of it. The proportion and comprehensiveness are subjective in journalism.

**9. EXERCISE OF PERSONAL CONSCIENCE:**

Personal sense of ethics and responsibility is the guiding factor to each journalist. News or-

ganizations must encourage journalist to nurture their independence to speak their minds. This stimulates intellectual diversity to understand the diverse society in proper perspective.

### WHAT IS ARCHITECTURAL JOURNALISM?

Architectural journalism is a document that encompasses research and involvement of latest construction technique, building materials, coverage of architectural seminars, conferences, features, forms, analysis of building structure, urban design, sustainable development, restoration and lot more.

Architectural journalism dose not speak only about the built environment, but the relation with the welfare of the society. It also broadly deals with the concerns of the architectural education and professionalism and its ethics.

### BASIC APPROACH TO ARCHITECTURAL JOURNALISM

1. As novelist, H.G Wells quotes "I write straight as I can, just as I walk as straight as I can, because that is the best way to get their." It is a good advice to all architectural journalists as a guiding principle.
2. Do not write about the built environment which you have not seen. Never depend upon photographs. Visit the site to observe and study.
3. To project unbiased conclusion regarding any project, avoid talking to architect, urban designer before visiting the site.
4. Do not be afraid to talk about the experience of the project like the success of design parameters.
5. Write about the building which makes you to allow larger points that connects architecture to the culture of the society.



6. Be an advocate. Do not waffle. At the end of article, readers should know where we stand or else it is your failure.

Like in other professional journalisms, it is essential to adapt objectivity and advocacy in architectural journalism.

## OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM

Objectivity is reporting the facts and events in their true sense and is a significant principle of journalism. People often tend to identify objectivity. An objective architectural journalism is unbiased reporting of different topics on built environment and its relationship between the human beings. In the context of journalism, objectivity may be understood as synonymous with neutrality or unbiased. This must be distinguished from the goal of objectivity in philosophy, which would describe mind-independent facts which are true irrespective of human feelings, beliefs, or judgments.

Michael Bugeja, who teaches journalism at Iowa State, defines "Objectivity is seeing the world as it is, not how you wish it were." In 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists of USA acknowledged this dilemma and dropped "objectivity" from its ethics code. It also changed "the truth" to simply "truth".

As E.J. Dionne wrote in his book, "They Only Look Dead," the press operates under a number of conflicting diktats. Also he emphasizes, "Be neutral yet investigative; be disengaged but have an impact; be fair-minded but have an edge. There in lies the nut of our tortured relationship with objectivity". Few would argue that complete objectivity is possible, yet we bristle when someone suggests we aren't being objective, or fair, or balanced, as if everyone agrees on what these words all mean.

## ADVOCACY JOURNALISM

Advocacy means pleading in support of something. 'Advocacy journalism is a genre of journalism that intentionally and transparently adopts a non-objective viewpoint, usually for some social or political purpose. Because it is intended to be factual, it is distinguished from propaganda. It is also distinct from instances of media bias and failures of objectivity in media outlets, which attempt to be or which present themselves as objective or neutral.' The best newspaper critics are all advocates, as distinguished from ideologues. For example, Advocacy journalism in architecture is reporting towards protecting the natural environment from destruction or pollution. It is well known that environment rather than heredity will have primary influence on intellectual growth and cultural development.

## ACCURACY AND STANDARDS FOR FACTUAL REPORTING

- Reporters are expected to be as accurate as possible given the time allotted to story preparation and the space available, and to seek reliable sources.
- Corrections are published when errors are discovered.
- Opinion surveys and statistical information deserve special treatment to communicate in precise terms any conclusions, to contextualize the results, and to specify accuracy, including estimated error and methodological criticism or flaws.

## PERFORMING ABILITIES

While writing an article, it is expected that basic writing skills including grammar syntax should be mastered. The architectural journalist should be able to conceptualize and articulate ideas in

writing and work accurately on the related topic with writing ability.

The topic should not be confused with common standards of quality of presentation, including:

- Correctly spoken or written
- Clarity
- Brevity (or depth, depending on the niche of the publisher)

The task of the Architectural journalist is to place architectural criticism within the web of practice. The journalist must keep in mind that the newspapers are not beholden to architects and to their suppliers as the magazines and also to the audience sometimes fictive journal public which is quite different and more complex than we used to think.

## PRESENT TREND

The Internet has brought about a great number of changes since it has bursts onto the scene. Not only has it helped to open up global competition, which has resulted in a more competitive worldwide marketplace, it has also changed the face of many tried-and-true professions. A recent article in the New York Times, for example, focused on how the Internet and the popularity of blogs and social networks have changed the face of the public relations industry. Yet, beneath this story lies an equally compelling story regarding how the Internet has impacted the world of journalism as well.

In the story, the reporter follows Brooke Hammerling, publicists, as she tries to determine the best approach for spreading the word about her client's website, Wordnik. Whereas publicists in the past would have focused on creating a great press release and making an effort to put that press release in front of the faces of the most prominent journalists, her approach was far different. Rather, she relied upon the power of



social networking to spread the word about the site, and she then waited for the journalists to come to her.

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

With increase in urban sprawl, globalization, population growth, there are many challenges to the future society. The main challenge of architectural journalism is the use the existing tools like TV, internet, newspapers, mass media, etc and project the problems and demand of architectural values in society. A good architectural critic is an advocate and probably at least one incident when his or her voice seemed decisive. He has to work to make people aware of their physical surrounds and more willing to help improve them.

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