

ATAJ Journalism Trophy

**National Association of Students of Architecture 2010 Annual
Meet - Citation Entry**

Text & Photographs: Sudar Oli Gunasekaran



Do all things urban have to be ugly too?

"Urban" has always stood for the glamorous; the stylish; and most importantly, the MODERN. The argument at hand consists of two distinct yet mutually dependent phenomena- modernization and urbanization. In countries like India, modernization, and consequently urbanization, is taking place at such a rapid pace that both the processes have become intertwined with each other. Nonetheless, the distinction between these processes has to be considered in order to gain a thorough understanding of the issue.

The Traditional vs. The Modern

An ancient Greek philosopher, while describing the ideal size of the city, said that a man should be able to circumambulate the city, within a time span of two days. Today, cities have grown manifold and can no longer be circumambulated. The smooth functioning of the city and cohesiveness of the urban fabric are facilitated by transport and communication networks. Cell phone towers, electrical lines, network cables etc. are the physical manifestations of these networks. They are the lifelines of the city and hence deserve an honorable position in the city.

The rural vs. The urban

The idea of urban living is not new to India. The city is the source of all the things, which made civilized existence attractive. The diversity that exists between various ethnic groups was a key identifying feature of the urban core. The city provides multifarious opportunities for livelihood, entertainment etc. It is the city, which has made possible - the peaceful co-existence of roadside vendors and international fashion houses. Thus the advent of the city truly signifies a milestone in the history of human kind.

City - The Spirit of man

City is the embodiment of the spirit of man; the document of the evolution that human-kind has undergone. Every lamppost, railing and baluster in the cityscape is an encomium to man's ability to create them. Thus the city itself becomes a showcase of 'trophies' skillfully arrayed with due respect to the aesthetic aspect. If ever, there was a tribute to the spirit of man, nothing would be more apt than a city.

The identity of a city

The identity of a city, at any given point of time, is representative of all the evolutionary processes that the city has undergone. Therefore the identity of a city is never static. The identity of the traditional city of Ahmedabad is different from that of a colonial city like Chennai. The visual identity of cities is merely the physical manifestation of the quintessence of the soul of the city. Thus the identity of a city is something which is inherent in the urban fabric and cannot be altered by the introduction of a new transportation spline like the elevated metro. In fact, these splines serve to seamlessly weave the fabric of the city.



Urban beauty

The appreciation of beauty is complete only when it stems from the awareness and acknowledgement of its origins. The residue of urban living or the networks that facilitate urban living need not be shunned or hidden from public eye. This has been sufficiently elucidated by Richard Rogers in his Pompidou Centre.

The network of posts and lines fencing the city are the modern manifestations of semantic architecture. The high-rise buildings of the city, aspiring to touch the sky, are icons of ingenuity. They have successfully managed to accommodate vast amalgamations of people within a small footprint in adequate comfort. The beauty of the genius is exemplified here.

The large Plazas, Atriums, Public forums, the roads and all other public open spaces where crowds gather, marvelling at the spirit of fraternity, now possible after years of defying the rigid hierarchy that an archaic system had thrust upon us. The beauty of egalitarianism is celebrated here.

The silhouette of the flyovers and the skyscrapers majestically define the skyline of the city, silently but steadfastly paying tribute to mankind. The city is definitely a man-made wonder, breathtakingly beautiful. The cityscape is only a setting for nature. At the end of the day, sunset looks just as beautiful beyond a city's skyline, as it does beyond extensive green meadows.