



## **Guest Editorial**

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At the age of eight, my parents took me to the ancient Nalanda University in Bihar. I think it was perhaps after visiting the ruins of Nalanda that I decided I wanted to be an archaeologist. That was not to be, but perhaps led to my becoming an architect and instilled in me the love for history and conservation.

Every architect should aim to be a conservationist so that thousands of monuments and heritage buildings we have, will be saved, as well as to ensure the protection of our natural heritage. It taught to me to understand the complexity of handling multiple buildings and situations and enhanced my belief that conservation does not encompass only historic buildings which need reverential treatment but also includes recycling of ordinary buildings to make them usable in an emergent nation like ours. The old and the new, and changing use and user needs, need to be amalgamated, for nothing is sadder than an abandoned building which is of no use to the protagonist of its space-Man.

Over the years, my studio has worked on various projects that included conserving, restoring, retrofitting and building anew which included The Cathedral and John Connon Schools, St.Thomas Cathedral, The Rajabai clock tower and University Library building, TCS House, Bombay House and The Old Yacht Club, all in the historic centre of Mumbai. Many of our projects involve “living” buildings and not monuments. The challenge was to balance continuity and change and to ensure that the buildings worked and functioned in today’s context.

In urban India, and particularly in Mumbai, I feel that the real issue is effective recycling of the vast stock of underutilized buildings, both distinguished and plain, that have tremendous potential. The preservation of landmarks is now becoming an accepted norm, but the focus must now shift to upgrading and finding new uses for the bulk of our ordinary buildings. However, there can be a future for buildings from the past if the conservation movement works in tandem with planning and development strategies. The situation is desperate in India- with the Urban Land Ceiling Act and land being a scarce resource, a burgeoning population, pressure from builders lobbies, increase in the Floor Space Index and removal of height restrictions on the one hand and expecting owners to save their heritage buildings on the other. In today’s world, sentiment cannot overshadow economics and so a conservation policy of finding new uses for old buildings must run parallel with planning policy. Only then can the prevention of deterioration be followed by the final step of restoration and rehabilitation.

The sense of place that we, who are so privileged to live in India have, cannot be destroyed. Revitalizing the older parts of our cities rather than knocking them down brings huge benefits. It retains our sense of place and history. If we don't preserve the past, we have no future. So the role of the architect has to go beyond buildings; he or she is the guardian of the built and un-built environment.

Awareness also needs to be created amongst the masses. To celebrate Mumbai's traditions I established the HECAR Foundation in 2000. HECAR is the acronym for heritage, education, conservation, architecture and restoration. Through the foundation we try to educate the people about architecture, heritage and urban issues by means of talks, publications, exhibitions, scholarships and seminars. Nowadays even movements like heritage walks are taken up to educate the people about their city and the place they live in.

Speaking about the architects of this generation, they are indeed doing great work and I have full faith that they will protect our environment and our heritage and yet contemporize design and take it forward into our new tech-savvy world. As an Architect you need to understand people's needs and anticipate changes. One needs to focus on the aspirations of young people and the changes happening in technology and their lives.

I also believe that the architectural heritage of India is unique. Not only can India boast off an incredibly rich architectural legacy, but there are also a number of well done "ordinary" buildings that form the core of our urban landscape. There is a huge body of good contemporary work, and I feel confident that it reflects both traditionalism and modernity. We rightly need both of them.

Conservation is not an elitist, fashionable or luxurious obsession. Prof. Alan Rodger has said *"The transformation towards a society driven by the need to achieve particular qualities in its performance and efficiency in its use of materials and energy is rich with opportunities for those who can reshape their vision & work practices"*.

Waste must disappear as in idea. Hence materials, buildings and infrastructure of our built environment must be used, reused & recycled. Where can there be a better beginning than with our existing built heritage!