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MATTERS OF THE HEART

*"Every virtue is a mean between two extremes,
each of which is a vice."*

- ARISTOTLE

Design is the cohesive culmination of creative responses to a specific design brief, created for a particular context. These responses are often product of the knowledge and wisdom that a designer acquires through his/her formal or informal education, and at times solely by experience, training and exposure. Emotions also form an intangible component at work that forms part of the ultimate design solution, and one would argue, represent the expression of the designer which makes his/her design effort distinctive. It is due to this intangible expression, that the designer is able to establish a deeper connection with those that experience it, and heighten its memory for them after they leave. As designers, we grow, evolve, and change intellectually with every new experience and every design completed. On this journey, we seldom get time to think about the value of evoking emotions, concentrating largely on the pragmatic and tangible issues and concerns in a design process. In our designs, visual imagery often plays a role that is even more important than the intangible but invaluable experience.

The question to ask ourselves as landscape designers is – does our design generate the kind of emotions that matter – of serenity, of calmness, of belonging, of security? Our contemporary landscapes across India in general hardly have any value in terms of remembrance and memory. At a certain level of perception, they

all look the same – aesthetically appealing, functional and efficient. They may generate certain emotions of comfort, convenience and order, but are hardly able to touch that emotional chord within us. They are unable to enter the realm of the mind beyond the obvious and mundane.

Landscapes of Emotion

How does one create a design that forms a deep personal connection with the user? A serene village pond with steps, groves of trees in a cultural space and a majestic banyan tree in an institutional area, beautifully carved human sculptures in a courtyard, the enhanced view of an adjacent heritage structure, an undulating textured wall painted in the colour of *sindoor* (vermilion) with traditional motifs of a saree in a marriage venue are but some of the examples that come to mind where designers have been able to evoke a strong emotional response. I would argue that these elements, in the form of cultural references – in this case in the Indian context – are embedded in our psyche and allow us to connect with the place instantaneously. In each situation, the designer has given an emotional expression to the design which goes beyond the programme. It instils a sense of remembrance and allowing us to enjoy and cherish it over a long period

of time. In contemporary landscapes, driven by image-making, technology, and money, it is an uphill task for designers to generate such idioms which relate to new and changed contexts as well as to our embedded cultural psyches. The way forward is to cultivate a consciousness towards and record memorable experiences that we have in places of living, working, playing and travelling. These mental tags will help us create new landscapes that are remembered not for their aesthetic quality or functionality but for the kind of feelings that they evoke, making them absolute and complete.

Do our designs generate the kind of emotions that matter? As designers, do we get time to think about the value of evoking emotions? Photo: The Thinker by Auguste Rodin. Photo source: 2.bp.blogspot.com

