

Landscape Architecture in India

A R E A D E R

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BOOK RELEASE

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BOOK INTRODUCTION

**BOOK RELEASE
& PANEL DISCUSSION**

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Landscape Architecture in India, A Reader was released at Alliance Francaise, New Delhi on 1st October 2013. On the occasion, co-editor *Geeta Wahidua* shares a few thoughts about the creation of this publication.

It started off as an idea back in December 2010, while sitting in the canteen of Jamia Millia Islamia with my friend and colleague Ayla Khan. After a day-long review of students' design work, the idea came as a flash, a comprehensive book on the subject of landscape architecture in India, of about 100+ pages, and to be completed in a year's time... little did we know! Looking back after three years and 250+ pages later, we can say for sure that it turned out to be far more complex than we had ever imagined.

Being the first reference of its kind in India, there were many challenges, the main ones being,

- How would we address the meaning of the word *landscape architecture* as a multi-disciplinary subject as the core thought of a book?
- How would we formulate an Indian context for the book, for a country which is geographically and culturally so diverse?
- What would be the relevant content and limits of scope for each chapter?
- How would we establish a link between the theory and practice?
- How would we achieve a balance in the vocabulary – too technical and too general?

As we all know that Landscape Architecture is a diverse field based on the scientific knowledge of natural science, knowledge about cultural history and the relationship between the two. The structure and format of the Reader addresses this very basic idea about the definition of Landscape Architecture, a stewardship of nature in the context of culture. With these basic thoughts in mind, we started with a broad structure of four sections—*Natural Processes*, *Culture*, *Landscape Architecture* and *Indian Regions*. This structure guided us to create content by inviting authors from varied backgrounds. We compiled and referred various knowledge bases already existing in academia and practice about these subjects.

The section on *Natural Processes* was primarily written by scientists, while the section on *Culture*, had as its authors, a conservation architect and an archaeologist. The section on *Landscape Architecture* had landscape architects as its main contributors, while the all-important section on *Indian Regions* tapped the resources of organizations and ministries working in the fields of environment and conservation in different parts of the country, along with the working experiences of professionals in these areas.

We also found that we needed to address many more aspects than what were originally thought of. Sections in various chapters were added to make it relevant in context of "*landscape architecture*". Maps, historical accounts, and regional traditional knowledge place the content in a strong "*Indian*" context. As noted earlier, the Reader very clearly underlines the idea of "*India*" as a mosaic of different geographical regions with distinctive cultures and histories, each with an identity of its own. One of the main intents of the book, right from the start, has been to explore an "*Indian*" context in all its narratives.

Over a period of now more than three years, the Reader has grown thrice, for the better, not only in appearance but also in its con-

tent, like a ripening fruit, transforming with each stage, in colour and form.

Every chapter in the Reader is a book in itself. So the Reader is not the end, it is just a beginning, a base, to start a knowledge bank about the diverse country like ours in the realm of landscape architecture.

There is a new awareness and knowledge that has emerged after this long project. It has re-emphasized the need to look within our own physical, economic and social networks of Indian society rather than only look outside for solutions, inspirations and experiences. With a history of knowledge and wisdom of our civilization, spreading over four millennia, there is a need to be much more self confident and self assured in our thinking and our actions.

There are many tasks that are unfulfilled, many works that are incomplete. We have a long way to go, knowledge wise, in understanding/ discovering the unexplored meaning and forms of the world of landscape architecture and practice wise to bring the meaning of the word "*landscape architecture*" much closer to public perception and understanding. We do hope the Reader points the way to many more, much detailed books on the fascinating subject of landscape architecture in future.

