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# The Architect and the Changing Environment

## Session V

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In this particular session we are getting into the more practical, you might like to say, the more real problems facing the profession and the more technical aspects of design. Before we get on to these more earthly matters I would like to, very briefly, give a few of my thoughts about the preceding two days and some of the issues that have arisen.

Two of the main issues which have generated quite a lot of interest and perhaps have not yet been fully resolved are regionalism and colonialism. Some of the problems have arisen because of the use of certain definitions. Regionalism, has, by a number of speakers tended to be defined or equated with anti-development. Somehow regionalism is equated with ruralism, but a romantic notion of ruralism, a kind of primitivism or Rousseau-esque Romanticism. There has been another current where regionalism or the heritage, has tended to be appreciated purely in terms of architectural motifs and forms, motifs like courtyard and arch, or the use of a particular material. This I think has been caused by some of the presentations of our regions' architecture and architectural traditions. Some presenters have actually shown one aspect of our very varied and wide spectrum of traditions, that is, the rural building traditions, which have been presented as the regional heritage and tradition of architecture. I would like to suggest that this kind of confusion might be overcome if we were to look at the totality of the architecture of any cultural entity, not as a single homogeneous unit or category but rather as a number of coexisting areas of activity, each valid in its own right. I find in my own region or area in my own country that it's very convenient to divide up our architecture into the rural craft base or the regional, local building traditions of the countryside as quite distinct, from at the other end of the spectrum; the monumental, the mainstream and official or the kind of architecture which enjoys state patronage or the patronage of the ruling elite. In the middle there is yet another distinct category, which forms perhaps the bulk of our urban buildings and I don't know what would be an appropriate term for it.

I call it urban vernacular. It's the kind of buildings which are designed and built by a whole kind of underworld which often remains invisible to us, but is made up of professionals in their own right, who are not recognised. We have been talking about the recognition of our profession but let me tell you there's a whole substratum of the building and arts related professions which have received even less recognition, and yet they account for a very large proportion of buildings, particularly in our urban environments. If we were to recognise that there are these discrete and independent categories then we would be able to appreciate each by the criterias which are applicable within those domains. The problems arise when we are schooled in one tradition or one level of activity. Most of us being professional or recognised architects, come with a certain training, a certain schooling, a certain background set of values and ways of evaluating buildings. We bring these values to an area of building and design where the builders themselves or the designers themselves did not design or build them with the same intentions. This often leads to a lot of mis-appreciation and taking the rural building tradition and stretching it to claim that this is the regional or national heritage of architecture. It is just one aspect of the region's heritage or building traditions. That was one thing I thought I would discuss or, rather, I leave for further discussion.

The other, which I wanted to talk a little bit about is colonialism. I am sure a lot of you will have noticed that this term is like a red rag which seems to immediately excite reactions and responses from both ends. I agree very much with what Romi Khosla was saying earlier, "there is a difference between the experience of the European colonialism and the other histories of invasion by another culture or people". Romi Khosla mentioned, the question of assimilation. All of our histories are full of alien invasions but the difference is that in most of the other examples the invading or alien people have adopted the invaded country. The invading Turkish tribes, the Mughals, Pathans, or Afghans became Indian or they become

Bengali. There is that very basic difference. The Europeans did that too, in other places. They become Australians or New Zealanders or Canadians, but they did not become Indian or Bengali or Pakistani. There's that very big difference. The other aspect of course which is equally important, and it's related, is the transfer of resources. If the home base remains outside the country in question or the region in question there is inevitably this massive resource transfer and this continues to happen, as somebody mentioned with neo-colonialism. There is a common characteristic between this and current manifestations of colonialism where resources continue to be transferred in a number of ways. The invasions of course are much softer nowadays but the effect is the same.

A third very basic difference, I believe, between previous historical examples of cultural upheavals as a result of invasions and the colonialism we are talking about is that this happened at a period when Europe was undergoing a very fundamental transformation itself, that is the transformation from the medieval or traditional world view into the modern, materialistic philosophies connected with the whole question of scientific, technological and industrial development. This experience was different because it affected our traditional cultures which up until that point were not all that different from European traditional culture and exposed them for the first time to a fundamentally different world-view and that is something which is, I believe, very basic and important to understand. What it has created in our situations are little islands. It started a process of change, of fundamental transformations for us too, but whereas the process in the other country, France or England, had already become total or thorough or complete, it introduced in our cultures, little islands of modernisation. By and large our cultures and societies remained actually very traditional and linked up with our own traditional concepts. So we in our societies have a kind of dual culture. In Pakistan we refer to them as the Urdu-medium and the English-medium. These are really two worlds apart. So there is for us also this difference and we are at a crossroad. We are in a position which is very different from our western friends. We have to make a choice and I think this question underlies a lot of the discussions and debates that we have been hearing. This is why a lot of the basic questions are being asked at all. This is why we are concerned about the survival of traditional values in our culture.

Then coming to the more immediate issues, that is the architect in our changing environments; while there are these more philosophical or more abstract issues that quite understandably we are concerned with, we have at the same time to address ourselves to the more immediate, very real problems. These include maxi-

imum utilisation of very limited resources, the changing rural and urban patterns in our countries, the very large, ambitious, unprecedented programmes related to education, school buildings, health and hospitals, facilities of housing and infrastructure development. We have also to consider what our roles will be under these new and changing circumstances. Can we continue to practise, work and think in the ways that we have been doing in the past, or do we need to re-think our own attitudes towards our profession. You will find a common concern as we face these very real and pressing problems. The intention is to predict or forecast what may happen and to try to be prepared in advance of actually having to deal with a problem. Now this is something which other professions are very good at doing already, the medical profession for example! Doctors don't wait for a patient to come, for them to start designing a cure for him. They have, very sensibly for a long time decided what kind of possible ailments you could suffer from and then before hand worked out the cures. We need to do some kind of preparation too. There are a whole range of problems which can be predicted and we can be prepared for them. We can at least have tentative solutions and not have to wait for the client to appear before we start thinking about the solutions. Incidentally this has always been an aspect of our traditional ways of designing and building, that the designer and the builders worked within largely preconceived or agreed, predetermined conventions, and this is something which is also done by industry all the time. Consumer products are designed by trying to predict what kind of demands will be made and you design a commodity not for a particular user, who asked you for it but you do your own forecasting as a designer. Do we continue to see ourselves as technicians in a new environment or is there still a valid role for the architect as an artist or interpreter and a thinker?