



LOOK AGAIN gender binaries in architecture

In 2013, Lord Peter Palumbo, as the Chair on behalf of the Jury of the 2013 Pritzker Architecture Prize addressed a letter to Arielle Assouline-Lichten and Caroline James in response to a petition they had raised to honour the notable contribution of Denise Scott Brown to the field of architecture, to the acclaimed practice of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, and a joint awarding of the prestigious prize that Robert Venturi alone was conferred with in 1991. Denise Scott Brown had been a partner at the couple's practice, Venturi Scott Brown and Associates for twenty-two years and co-authored the seminal 1977 book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, when Venturi was awarded the prize. The petition for a retro-active award led by a group of women from Harvard Graduate School of Design gathered over 20,000 signatures including from Zaha Hadid, Farshid Moussavi, Hani Rashid and Robert Venturi himself.

Whilst the proposition was rejected by The Pritzker Committee in this letter, it marked a seminal point in the discussions for gender parity in the discipline and profession of architecture. The letter went on record to note that The Pritzker Committee 'should like to thank them for calling directly to their attention a more general problem, namely that of assuring women a fair and equal place within the profession.'

If one were to evaluate the acknowledgement of many women in the profession by these standards, it has resided historically in a shadowy background. Women such as Anne Tyng, a collaborator of twenty-nine years in Louis I Kahn's practice, others such as Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich are often grouped together, as whose accomplishments have been often eclipsed. The emancipation of these overlooked influences has been a progressively evolving phenomenon, and still stands as a significant debate today. Many research studies elaborate on the marginalisation of minorities, women in particular and maintain that the profession has been paradigmatically remained dominated by an attitude favouring masculinity.

Not more than six years ago, in 2013, Zaha Hadid vehemently criticised UK's "misogynist" attitude towards women architects after a survey of women in the profession found nearly a third knew they were paid less than their male counterparts for the same job. Hadid's remarks were prompted by a research carried out by the Architects' Journal into the status of women in the profession. Nearly 61% of women participating in this survey thought clients in the building industry did not fully accept the authority of female architects (Architectural Journal, 2013).

An op-ed piece by Allison Arieff in December 2018, titled, 'Where Are All the Female Architects?' stated that in America, the last major survey of the field found that while women account for half of graduates from architecture programmes in this country, they make up about 20 percent of licensed architects and 17 percent of partners or principals in architecture firms (Arieff, 2018).

Even in India, to an extent, the gender gap in colleges has diminished considerably, a statistical win. Madhavi Desai in her extensive work on this subject, has observed that the intake of women in architectural programmes has increased substantially – 'from two/four women students in the 1940s – in the 280 odd colleges of architecture for the past 25 years.' She says that, 'the women students' percentage of admission ranges from 50 per cent to 80 per cent today. Despite this fact, the number of women in professional practice drops substantially to about 15 per cent to 17 per cent. Most of the time, this decline is attributed to a larger societal problem or an individual choice. 'The absence of women from the profession of architecture remains,' she says, 'despite various theories, very difficult to explain and very slow to change. It demarcates a failure the profession has become adept at turning a blind eye to... If we consider architecture a cultural construct, both vessel and residue, we can but wonder what this symptomatic absence suggests about our culture and the orders that govern the production of its architecture. One thing is clear however... The absence of women points to a profound gender-related crisis at the base of architecture' (Desai, 2014).

The facts in her research are startling; Out of the total architects registered with the COA, 27 per cent are females. Women form 6.6 per cent of the members in the (governing) Council and 6.25 per cent of the members of All India Board of Architecture and Town Planning Education of All India Council of Technical Education. (As per the Handbook of Professional Documents (2002), Council of Architecture, New Delhi). To examine this lack of gender diversity, she assigns a need for a new, intellectual-academic sensibility and a pedagogical shift (Desai, 2014).

The debate is no longer about a feminist proclivity - The Dean of Architecture at Yale, and a practising architect herself, Deborah Burke observes that "Every single woman architect I know would, I think, say the same thing; I want to be a good architect who has a meaningful impact. I don't want to be known for being a good woman architect. Architecture needs to look like the world it serves — and that's everybody" (Arieff, 2018). The operational commonality between all these examples is an emphasis on the under-representation of women, in all levels of practice.

The Writing Architecture Trophy 2019 anticipates a response to look closely again at the construction of these gender binaries, and bring this focus as a discussion on and a reflection of the realities of the pedagogy and practice of architecture in India.

It urges the participants to look at: What is gender equity? Symbolically and substantially, how does the function of our academia, practice and industry express preferences and create markers of gender? Does the demographic and structural character of this issue reflect in the context of India? What does it suggest then about the discipline, its practice and future? Are these distinctions born as devices of control, imagination, forgotten places and how are they instrumentalising the identity of an architect in India? In what ways at the level of educational conduct, does this play out in any exclusionary manner? Is it systemically cyclic, of concern, and cultural dissonance? Most importantly, what does it mean to a discipline that functions with the boundaries of traditional frameworks and cultural particularities in India?

The essay can use these questions as prompters for its point of departure. It can choose to offer deeper knowledge of how the dichotomous narrative of gender was constructed, maintained, and if it is being challenged (how), within the present-day inequities in the profession. It invites reading of gender in relation across works – architectural sites, projects and ideas, contemporary practices, educational systems, and constituted hierarchies to stake out an extended space for dialogue on this issue.

The participants can also choose to include their own definitions and priorities with relevant data/analyses, implicit to this debate. The essay must investigate beyond the reductive and rudimentary scales of man, woman, gender-fluid, and it can profile aspects of society as an active contributor to the enquiry. It can be discursive, polemic or analytical.

Look Again suggests that it is important that the role of the essay is not just to construct certitudes, to clarify through research and case-studies, but challenge the more nuanced realities that exist.

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While this brief contextualises the gendered nature of the profession from the perspective of women practitioners and students, and the issues of sexism and complexities of collaborative practices, the participant is free to explore an ideological and editorial position related to any gender, provided it is tangible, objective and can be assessed in terms of the social and political context that the author wishes to identify and underline - specifically in the education and practice of architecture and its peripheries in India.

General Guidelines

- Each Unit can send in a total of three (3) entries.
- A maximum of three students can work on each entry.
- The entry should be submitted in the format specified so that the identity of the team members, the team or the institution they belong to is not revealed to the Judges.
- The essay must be the sole creation and original work of the team. No previously published work will be accepted. Any form of plagiarism will result in immediate disqualification. All essays submitted will be closely checked for plagiarism.
- In case matter is sourced from anywhere due credit to the original writer should be given
- **The essay shall be approximately 1000 words.**
- Submissions should be done by the Unit Secretary in NASA India website before the deadline.
- In any manner at any time, during or after the NASA WRITING ARCHITECTURE TROPHY competition period the original author will have no claim on the same after the entry is sent for the said competition.
- All entries will be the property of NASA INDIA, which will be free to utilize the same.
- The shortlisted Entries will be published in NASA India's annual magazine and Think Matter magazine with the author(s) name.
- The Decision of the jury shall be final and binding.

Submission Format

- The entry code should be used as per the entry code list provided. The entry code should be placed in bottom left of all pages of the entry.
- **The file name, for online submission, should be specified as the entry code for all files followed by name of document. (eg: WAT-62-000A_Authentication.pdf)**
- All submissions automated and drafted in word processing software only.
- The entry should be accompanied by a letter from the HOD / Principal on the college letterhead with the name(s) of the authors and the institution.
- Margins: 10mm on top, bottom, right and left.
- Font: Any simple and readable sans serif typeface. Font size 12, spacing between the lines 1.5
- A template will be provided with NASA logo, header and footer which should not be hindered in anyway.

Submission Requirement

- Authenticating letter from college HoD for each entry the work submitted is genuine and they have endorsed copyrights for the same and with the name of Participant(s) and stating the unit shall abide by whatever may be the final results and also agree that this entry is property of both the institute and NASA India.

- Declaration by the participant(s) stating the work submitted is genuine and they have endorsed copyrights for the same and to adhere by all the rules and regulations, Jury process and the results.
 - The author(s) must also state in the declaration that the work is the original Intellectual property of the respective author(s) and will be solely responsible and liable in case the work has violated any copyrighted material, and if any matter is sourced from anywhere, and credit has not been given.
 - **The number of words should be indicated in the declaration by the author(s).**
- Authenticating letter from college HoD/Principal/Director (on College Letterhead with Sign and Stamp of HoD/Principal/Director of the college), specifying the Account Details (Account Name, Account Number, Bank Name, ISFC Code) in which the Prize Money is to be awarded.

Prize Money

Prize money of 1 lakh Rupees is allotted to the trophy and it will be divided according to the number of the Citations and Special Mentions

Important Dates

- The release of brief – 27th September 2019
- Queries – 25th October 2019
- Submission deadline – 15th November 2019

Any Kind of Queries need to be submitted through website at

<https://nasaindia.co/trophy/writingarchitecture>

To

Lochan Aradhya M

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