THROUGH THE EYES OF THE LEARNER:
A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF AN URBAN INDIAN SCHOOL

Smita Khan and Rajashree Kotharkar

Abstract
India, being the second most populated country in the world, a sizable school going population is the result of a positive and proactive response to the governmental efforts on basic education. This has catapulted the responsibility of schools and their environs in shaping young impressionable minds due to their sheer number. This study aims at exploring and investigating qualities and characteristics of an urban Indian school through critical post occupancy evaluation of the school environs through the eyes of the children. To initiate this study, a premier school of Nagpur city, exemplifying a typical urban school, was identified for a pilot study. The methodology encompassed interviewing the Principal, observation by the researchers and interaction with students to understand and critically analyze usage pattern by principal users of the school. The design of the tools for user response was devised keeping in mind the age of the students and their ability to communicate spatial experiences. The paper served as a fact-finding mission and in its outcomes led to an identification of the major variables of the spatial environs of schools. It brought to fore an understanding, which the mandatory prerequisites of school infrastructure lack in a humane vision that is so imperative to educational environments. It facilitated in pinpointing the lacunae existing in the National Curriculum Framework, which is a governmental guideline for all schools in India. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the urgency in the necessary ‘humanization’ of the schools to the happiness and contentment of the young who are nurtured within its spaces.

Keywords
Urban school environment, spatial attributes, student’s assessment, behavioral response, post occupancy evaluation.

Introduction: The Urban Indian School as a Pertinent Typology for an Evaluation Study
In the new millennium government efforts towards literacy has had a positive and proactive response especially in urban centers. India being the second most populated nation with a population of 1.2 billion, the responsibility of schools and their environs assumes great significance in the light of the sheer number of young impressionable minds that are being shaped by them. This paper aims at understanding such an impact through a study of school environs in India. Such an immensely potent study is lacking in the urban Indian context given the physical and spatial circumstances of majority of our schools; private as well as aided.
This study initiated in response to a felt need for a fact-finding mission to acquaint with the ground situation of typical urban schools in India. With this aim, a premier school of Nagpur city, exemplifying the above was identified. A critical post occupancy evaluation of school environs through the eyes of the principal users - the student - was devised and carried out as pilot survey.

It helped achieve an understanding of the vital issues of Indian schools; the process of education they adopt and the nature of teaching-learning activity. It assisted in acquainting with the essentials of a typical urban school environment such as its spatial pattern, the environment within and its architectural manifestation. Further more, this preliminary investigation aided in the identification of the many user related issues of school design and the problems faced in the discharge of its primary function, despite of the recommendations by the National Curriculum Framework of the Government of India. This ‘warm up’ exercise served as a springboard for a wide based inquiry to be initiated by the authors as part of a doctoral research on urban school environs in the Indian context.

To contextualize this issue of learning environs it is felt necessary to first acquaint with the evolution of the Indian education system: its underlying concepts, its mutation through the ages to times contemporary. This shall clarify the current thoughts on the issue of basic education and put into focus factors influencing contemporary school education.

The Context of School Education in India

India, an ancient land and a geographically vast country, is home to a multitude of cultural variations. A deep rooted spiritual orientation continues to be a living tradition with its teeming billions despite globalization and the ‘flattening effect’ (Friedman, 2006) of a shrinking world. Essentially then contradictions are writ large in all spheres of human activity and one that concerns this paper: the essential basic school education and learning environs are also not spared the dichotomy of the traditional confronting the modern.

A Brief Historic Recall

The ancient Indians equated knowledge with ‘that which liberated’ (Joshi, 2005, pp. 27) The flowering of the great Indian civilization and its spiritual legacy is the fruit of a system of teaching and learning by oral traditions of recitations and rigorous practice under the watchful eyes of the Guru in his hermitage situated in the midst of Nature.

The coming of the colonial rule disrupted this indigenous method of knowledge transfer. The British exploited the system of education to serve their need to produce indigenous interpreters. Western science and logic, through English was the focus of colonial education (Halsall, 1998). The classroom oriented towards the teacher became an essential learning environment.

Independence after 200 years of servitude saw India as an economically devastated nation, making self-reliance, austerity and a return to values Indian a dire necessity. ‘The Indian conception of Education’ can be summarized in the challenges that lay before the newly independent nation.

- The need for creation of a capable human resource leading to an advocacy for vocational training in one’s own mother tongue; this was the concept of ‘Buniyadi Shiksha’ or basic
education proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, the proponent of the non-violent struggle for freedom (Education as per Mahatma Gandhi).

- India’s cultural, linguistic and religious diversity coupled with its vast geographic extent made it imperative to weave this complexity into a consistent fabric by making necessary the habit of respecting others feelings so that people of different religions, faiths, occupations and attainments who constituted the society may live in peace and amity observed Dr. C. Rajagopalachari (Panda, 1987).

- The many visionaries; philosophers and thinkers, envisaged the goal of education to be a holistic development of an individual. Vivekananda (as cited in Roy, 2001, para 5), J.Krishnamurti (Forbes,1997) and Tagore (Tagore, 1985) viewed the central concern of education as ‘flowering’ of the human mind so as to make human life capable of the immeasurable rather than limit it to the mundane measurable. The dynamism and the scientific attitude of the West had to be combined with the spirituality of India for the development of a balanced nation.

- Schools established by Krishnamurti and Tagore placed great emphasis on the physical environments. The warm and sunny climate of tropical India made it possible to hold classes in the open air under the trees encouraging a spontaneous appreciation of the fluidity of the plant and animal kingdom and seasonal changes. Tagore argued for a humane educational system that was inclusive and non-authoritative (O’Connell, 2003).

### The Current Scenario of Indian School Education: The Policy End

With all good intentions, the Government of India, in order to realize a well balanced, integrated and adequate system of national education capable of making a powerful contribution to all aspects of national life, set up an Education Commission and the NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) came into as the apex resource organization (www.ncert.nic). It constituted the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) with guidelines for school education throughout India. It makes reference to the thoughts of Gandhi and Tagore on education (Education Commission 1964-66).

Dr. Kothari acknowledging the contribution of education in enriching the material quality of life, emphasised its concern with the ‘inner content’ of one’s life. The educational process needs to be enjoyable, exciting and inspiring adventure (as cited by Mahanti, para 11).

In its ‘aims of education’, the NCF 2005 addresses many soft issues such as sensitivity to others, learning to learn, willingness to unlearn and relearn, flexibility and creativity, democratic participation, school as a social space, respect for dignity and human rights, processes of constructing knowledge, appreciation of beauty as an integral part of life and enhancement of creative expressions of the children. While weaving through these most acknowledged issues of school education, the recommendations on nature of physical environs seem inadequate, as they are restricted to merely recommending a flexible arrangement of the classroom furniture and adopting region specific architecture instead of standardized systems!

A study of the learning environs of schools shows the understated importance of physical environs.
Contemporary Urban Indian School: The Physical Environs End

Indian schools face some special challenges in terms of their environments:

1- Schools are large in size, since rules do not restrict the total intake of students if physical infrastructure is commensurate with prescribed norms.

2- For concise accommodation, most often the spatial configuration is tightly fitted together. Although most Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools are on city outskirts, a closely fitted plan makes economic building. Most urban schools have no option, but to be crammed up.

3- This configuration despoils the most crucial space of the school: the classroom. Designed to accommodate the precise intake, they have no breathing space. Thus, flexibility of furniture arrangement is ruled out in most cases.

4- Pedagogy in most schools is a one-way system. Teacher speaks; students listen. Although, curriculum, especially of science is encouraged through small practical experiments, use of laboratories or self-exploration is seldom encouraged.

5- Classrooms crammed with students, make a claustrophobic atmosphere especially as children grow in older classes. These are the most matter-of-fact spaces in the entire school.

6- Norms making mandatory co-curricular and physical activities help diffuse tension. The activity is carried out without any sensitivity towards the nature of informal activity; the regimental environments do not change even if it is a music or arts and crafts space.

7- Worst still many state government affiliated schools do not even possess a playground; that most essential of school spaces.

8- Most school buildings, even of the most successful schools, are very institutionalized and sterile in their visual feel. “The way a school is designed to work reflects social ideas about institutions and the education these institutions are creating to further” stated Grosvenor, Lawn and Rousmaniere, (as cited in Sanoff, 2009, pp.10). This statement is a close reflection of the Indian school system.

The Changing Ground Situation in India: Wrongly Headed?

In sixty years since independence, the magnanimous view of education that tradition withheld is undergoing a sea change. The aspirations of the fast prospering middle class in India are centered on acquisition of ‘appropriate’ education for their children. To succeed at all costs is the parental thrust on the child; the single-track agenda is academic excellence.

The contemporary culture of extreme materialism encourages and demands that the student be oriented towards a job and physical security. The educational effort is now directed towards a standardized, time bound program of study with too much emphasis on examinations and procuring of degrees. Globalization and the need to connect has once again catapulted English as the most favored medium of instruction.

The schools are astute in their response. The billboards and hoardings advertising new schools that are mushrooming around the city are a pointer towards this tendency and tell...
some compelling facts:
i) Contemporary schools advertise e-facilities as the premium plank.
ii) To make an all rounder ‘winner’ is the coveted goal of most schools. The pressure to excel in all that he/she lays his hands on is thus tremendous (see figure 1).
iii) Tuitions are an accepted norm. Tuitions leave little or no time for anything except studies, making stress the mainstay of the child’s life.

Therefore, all consuming is this passion that society seems notoriously blind to all other aspects of education discussed so far. And, in addition, this trend is not without drawbacks. Efforts of the NCF 2005 to ‘unburden’ the child seem only cursory given the societal pressures to always be the ‘winner.’ There seems to be no respite to this unenviable situation.

Packaging Educational Spaces: A Market Strategy
It is not that no thought is being given to the school buildings. The sterility of the older schools is being met with some very ‘innovative’ and ‘amusing’ responses. Contemporary school buildings have reacted by ‘packaging’ the school buildings in the latest fashionable trends. The following pictures illustrate the misconception or guile with which the schools
operate:

“The way in which we approach the planning, design, and ultimately our overall perception of learning environs makes powerful statements about how we view education. How school buildings are designed tells us much about how teaching and learning occur” (Salama, 2009, pp.35).

These ‘fashion statements’ follow the same routine pattern of education. Nothing has transformed in terms of a conducive teaching learning environ.

“Widespread misconceptions reinforce the view that the quality of the school building has no impact on the academic performance. Consequently, a gap exists between the educator’s view of improving quality and the process of planning schools” (Sanoff, 2009, pp.9).

Brophy argues that, “if students experience the classroom as a supportive place where there is a sense of belonging, they will tend to participate more fully in the process of learning' (as cited in Sanoff, 2009, pp.11).

The Understated Importance of School Built Spaces in the Indian Context

“Much of architecture affects people from beyond the focus of awareness. People are not sure what it is about a building or room that affects them, nor are they able to express how they feel in different surroundings” (Sommer, 2007, pp.212).

This is the precise reason for the underlying apathy towards buildings. As long as they satisfy the functional aspect, even in the barest minimum manner.

“In education, as in other institutional systems decisions about school facilities tend to be made by a few people who are not direct building users, often ignoring the direct involvement of teachers and students” (Sanoff, 2009, pp.9).
Through the Eyes of the Learner: A Critical Evaluation of an Urban Indian School

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The Pilot Study: Aim and Methodology

The aim of this research paper is to explore and investigate qualities and characteristics of the built environments of a typical urban Indian school. It aims at critically evaluating the educational environments through the eyes of the learners, who are the major users of the school environs. This study also helped identify various design parameters of the school environs that affect student’s behavior.

The methodology initiated by the selection of a well-established school with a reputation for academic excellence in Nagpur city for a pilot survey. ‘Modern School’ is CBSE affiliated, co-educational and with a student strength of 2233 in academic year 2010-11 for standards I to X. Boys exceed in number: 1302 against 931 girls. The school has 98 teachers on roll. The school occupies approximately 18200 m2 /4.5 acres of land on the northern outskirts of the city. Students and faculty commute by school buses. A regular school day is 6 hours long with two recess breaks of 10 and 20 minutes each.

The methodology adopted a multipronged approach to assess the quality of environments and their impact on the students. The tools used are personal interviews, analysis of the architectural design, direct observation, photo documentation and assessment of the environments by the students. The sample size for this study was 250 students in the age group of 13-17 years. In addition, the interview with the Principal and the architect were discussion oriented.

Analysis and Observation

The analysis and observation focused on psychological factors and physical design while critically analyzing the student’s responses. Following is a sequential discussion on the same:

Psychological Consequences of the Current Scenario of School Education.

The Principal, in a personal interview, acknowledged the changing behavioral trends that are very obvious. Students are getting very aggressive and tend towards being destructive. Reasoning points to the bottling up of excess energies, which get no respite due to the school-tuition-homework routine. The innocent mischief of the past is fast converting into wanton vandalism. There is no sense of a quiet
fore bearing or sensitivity towards the romantic. Along with this is the tendency to reject what they understand as ‘authority.’ This leads to disrespect towards teachers. The ‘consumerist culture of plenty’, the single child syndrome, reduced parental attention due to increase in working mothers and the tremendous pressure to excel is taking its toll on the young minds. In conclusion, she mentioned the installation of CCTV cameras across the school spaces: “When the students were informed about this, it called for restrain from vandalism. Since then there is reduced violent and unnecessary harm to the property.”

**Identification and Analysis of the Core Design Attributes:**
This was done through architects drawings and photo documentation of the built spaces (see Table 1).

**Figurative Spatial Pattern of the School**
The school sits on a site of approximately 4.5 acres. Its spatial pattern is introvert and consists of a semi enclosed rectilinear space onto which the school spaces overlook. Picture 4 shows the distribution of positive-negative spaces and activity areas. Its consistent three floors give the school building a massive and monotonous character. The section addresses graphically

Table 1: Analysis of built environments of sample school (Source: Authors).
the issue of scale.

**Critical Analysis of Learning Environments based on Student Responses**

Student responses to questions regarding their use of identified school spaces yielded an insight into the use and perception of their learning environments. The following critique is based on a critical analysis of students’ responses and their co-relation with the above identified ‘core design attributes’.

Critique:

1. It is mandatory for a school to have a playground for a CBSE affiliation.
2- Playing out of doors is listed as one of the most liked activity.

3- Located at the outer end of the school building, the playground is a huge space with matter-of-fact facilities for various sports (see Figure 6).

4- The only play equipment for the primary school kids occupies linear space at one extreme end. It has no sense of place. It almost feels as if it is there because of compulsion rather than out of concern for the small kids. There is need for a cozy casual and friendly enclosure for this activity.

5- There is need for plantation at the periphery of the playfields. This shall add a sense of scale to the otherwise untended look of the space. It shall also humanize and visually soften the ground scape. This is one space that can give the healing touch of natural green, as, in the overall scheme of the school, there is no other place for its incorporation.

Critique:
1- Students' responses point out the canteen as one of the features that seemingly brightened their day at school but the much-loved experience has been marred due to planning apathy. The pleasure of the activity is negated due to physical discomfort.

2- The presence of a drain flowing close by spoils the atmosphere and makes it unhygienic.
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3- There is no thought given to using of the same space by big and small children. The space for queuing up is less limited, resulting in near stampede conditions that the students have so well depicted in their sketches (see figure 8).

4- Located in the outer margin of the school premises, it has no visual connectivity with the rest of the school.

Critique:
1- In its spatial pattern, it is a rectilinear space, enclosed on all 4 sides by the 3 storey tall school building. It is connected to the outer open space by several small/narrow exits. Its liberal dimensions make it feel ‘open’ and visually non-claustrophobic, when occupancy is at a minimum. This plan pattern also provides for visual connectivity to all corners of the large school. Students have remarked that they like standing in the corridors as there is feeling of inclusiveness and security.

2- This is the central space around which all activities of the school revolve., it is a multiuse space. The major activity is the daily prayer assembly. When attendance is full (approximately 2500 students) on regular school days, it becomes congested, as is reported by many students. Long duration and exposure to the hot sun add to the physical discomfort. This makes assembly a cumbersome activity, disliked by many students. Children have reported bad acoustics and inability to be part of the going on-s on the stage at the far end. The year round warm climate and harsh sun makes some students to faint, indicating that proper air circulation may be an issue.

Activities such as drills, yoga sessions, debate and elocution etc. are part of the usage of this ground. It has 2 basketball courts and the entire space is used by students to play in the recess. In multiuse, the basketball court has a nuisance value as the ball hits others in the crowded ground during the recess.

3- The character of spatial environment is

This space is also host to the biannual concert. The problem of stage visibility is solved by erecting projection screens intermittently. Large schools have large number of guests, so such a large flexible use space becomes a necessity.

3- The character of spatial environment is
largely shaped by the nature of the form that defines it. The school building is very severe in its presentation. Arches articulate each floor. They are repetitive without any respite leading to a visual monotony and sterility. Made as a flimsy screen in RCC, the presentation of the arch, which is a fundamental building component, seems false. The plastered and coloured arcades appear regimented and the ambience is devoid of any warmth since the entire ground is cemented and plantations almost nil. A sense of scale that is an important design prerequisite for a school design is completely missing.

Visual relief and a sense of comfort is denied in this most vital and central space of the school: the one that students have overwhelmingly expressed their love for because it is here that they ‘can play and be free’. Day (2004, pp.218) stated that, “hardness has a hardening effect. Aggressive or dishonest surroundings do them harm. Rigid forms and spaces have an entrapping, sterilizing effect on development, fostering rigid-category thinking in place of mobile openness.”

Critique:
1- These connecting spatial elements are the most happening spaces in a school (see figure 11). Opening up strategically for interactions could enhance and soften the linearity of corridors.

2- The visual feel is too stark; needs enlivening.

3- By virtue of the plan configuration, visual connectivity has been achieved. A greatly appreciated feature of the design!
Critique:
1- The students go out of their way to give credit to their teachers but reiterate that classes are boring. Book based learning needs supplementation with a visual appeal. Classroom layouts need to be flexible and students need to feel ‘connected’ to the process of teaching and learning. (see figure 13).

2- The classroom spaces need enlivening so that the element of ‘pride’ of one’s space of learning can bring about the need to ‘care’ for it. Presently the anonymity and sterility of the classroom atmosphere makes it game for venting out excess energies.

3- A ‘sense of belonging’ needs nurturing; CCTV cameras antagonize. Some vandalism has definitely been curbed; but the tendency to vandalize shall dissolve only if a sense of belonging is nurtured.

4- Physical comfort is a prerequisite for concentration. Thermal comfort in the year round warm and dry climate of Nagpur necessitates artificial ventilation by fans. Vandalism as well as regular maintenance is a major issue, leading to the very vocal response on part of the students. Ergonomics is most neglected. Furniture is in a constant state of disrepair. Supporting facilities like lockers etc., is not provided. It is bare minimum at which the school functions.

Critique:
1- Without exception, all responses on the school washrooms were strongly in the negative direction: lack of maintenance, broken equipment, unhygienic and worst still the unavailability of water.

This has resulted in many students stating that they have ‘learnt’ the ‘art of control’. In a 6 hour school day plus 2 hours of commuting time this is a highly undesirable practice.

2- Maintenance and frequent replacement of equipment due to wanton vandalism are causes behind this pathetic situation.

3- The essential attitude on the sharing and caring for a public facility is a major learning.
The school being the primary imparter of basic education needs to face this challenge and make it an essential part of the learning process.

4- The washroom facility is not commensurate in its size to the number of users, also given the restricted time of the two recesses. Sketch in Figure 15 humorously portrays the situation.

Critical Analysis of Behavioral Aspects and Space Design:
This study includes the aspects of gender and vandalism.

Gender issue and spaces:
Question: If you are a boy, express your observation of how girls spend their recess time and vice versa.

Critique:
Co-educational schools are very popular in India. However, the student’s responses indicate how the design for such schools is far from being inclusive. In response to the question asked, the girls expressed dissatisfaction at the way boys conduct themselves, “they eat each others lunch very horribly, make too much noise, constantly fight and play with water bottles, broken furniture and sticks even when equipment is available.” The common open space is the bone of contention. Mostly declared ‘boy’s territory’ the girls use classrooms for their activities. The boys observation is that, “girls sit and sing boring songs, mess up furniture arrangement, never re-arrange and spill food all over the place.” Corridors are declared by both girls and boys as a ‘rocking space’.

Architects need to be more sensitive in allocation of spaces for gender specific inclinations. It is not that girls do not want to play, it is just that the chaos on the single space grounds is overwhelming, resulting in classrooms being their recluse. This issue is pertinent from point of view of the ratio of boys to girls.
There is a need to break the current undesirable behavioral pattern, of girls tending to sit around and gossiping, through design of spaces, rather than accommodating the behavior.

It is also an economic compulsion. High cost of land in urban centers makes large multi-use outdoor spaces more practical. The fallout is a compromise. Nevertheless, innovative design solutions can resolve this issue.

Wanton vandalism issue:
Question: What activities take place in the corridors and the classrooms during recess time?
Critique:
With specific reference to the interview with the Principal, students’ responses are alarming. They point to the growing instances of indiscipline and wanton vandalism. Dis-satisfaction at the ‘clandestine’ monitoring by CCTV cameras is reflected in their sketches and writings.

A boy writes, “do you know that our classroom is very bad, it is very dusty, benches are half broken and nails are coming out... we broke tables, chairs and regulators of fans etc.... our class has only one colour - white.” Many describe classroom learning as boring and want to get ‘punishment’ so that they get to stand outside in the corridor and this gets still better when many are punished!! There is a general dislike of ‘discipline’ (see figure 17).

Figure 17: A satirical sketch by a student enjoying punishment in the corridor (Source: Authors).
This is a manifestation of the bottling up of their immense energies.

1. The classroom learning that is mostly single dimensioned: teacher speak: child listen makes punishment to stand in corridor more enticing.

2. The school recesses not having enough time to eat lunch and play.

3. Standards 8th through 12th are heavily stressed due to impending school leaving exams. Thus after school hours are engaged by tuitions, and then homework takes over. The trauma these children undergo is unjustified.

According to Christopher Day, “Young people specially, need buildings and places welcoming to the soul: places that aren’t exploitive, places that, in the way they are conceived, planned and built show love-that most needed and least supplied quality-that can transform the social delinquent into a crusading rebel....Easy? Obvious ? Then why doesn’t it happen more often?” (Day C, 2004, pp.224).

With research pointing to environments playing a role in the behavior of the users and the students expressing dis-satisfaction of the school ambience in whichever manner was possible for them to express. It is evident that the sterile, uninspiring atmosphere of the school environs do not embrace the students with warmth and a sense of belonging is missing towards school and its built environments. The school environs themselves could proactively contribute to an informal involved learning by becoming a 3-D learning space. This would go a long way in instilling a sense of belonging towards ‘their own’ live working model! (Newton C, et al 2009).

To the already tight cumbersome school schedule, the restless, exploratory nature of the years under study and the excess surge of energy they are experiencing are only magnified by the harshness of the insensitive built surroundings. To de-stress the students, environments need to provide succor, be inclusive and promote compassion and warmth within oneself while providing an opportunity for exploratory learning.

**Discussion**

- The response of students exercise to this creative was overwhelming indicating the strong need to communicate on such issues.
- That the environs lack on many essential fronts is acknowledged by the ‘cleanliness and beautification’ activities that overtake just before the school inspection day. Students have succinctly summarized this queer happening in their sketches!!
- Discussing on the critical issue of a responsive educational environment, Dr. Salama writes,

“While it was said several decades ago that a good teacher can teach anywhere, a growing body of knowledge- derived from knowledge on ‘evidence based design’ suggests a direct correlation between the physical aspects of the learning environment, teaching process and learning outcomes” (Salama, 2009, pp.5).

This evaluation study points out much the same. The environments are a ‘matter-of-fact’ creation at the school authorities end; humanizing at the student’s end is missing due to lack of adequate encouragement and infrastructural support. It is bare minimum at
which the school functions. It is a very Indian concept that to achieve one’s goal in life one must excel despite circumstances, physical environs thus are not given due importance. This comparison to the ‘class under the tree’ where the most profound spiritual knowledge was acquired at the feet of the Guru in ‘bare’ conditions is misconstrued at best.

At most times this is passed of as the function of economics of running a large school. The subtle influence exerted by the school surrounds on the growing minds is over simplified and ignored at best. The pertinence of sensitive environs for fostering humaneness in the growing minds is thus overlooked. Yet, the harm in the long run is detrimental.

“teenagers, though few admit it, crave inspiration...” (Day, 2004, pp.227)

Despite their frank assessment of the many lacunae of their school environ, many students are very magnanimous and loving in their outlook towards their school ‘of many years’. “The school is irresponsible in many matters but it is one of the finest schools in Nagpur” signs off a 15 year old boy. Many more students have concluded similarly!!

The affection the students shower on their alma mater makes the issue of the rather non-responsive environments even more pertinent. It is an urgent need to transform them for they house within their walls such sensitive souls. The situation does hurt them, but they have no control. The authorities guiding the process of education in India, the school managements and the community of architects have to be more sensitive and proactive in their approach to the built environs. Children are the principal users of the educational spaces and their psychological needs must get a rightful place in the National Educational Framework. (NCF2005)

“there is a meaningful coincidence between the aesthetically satisfying and the physically healthy. What nourishes the soul nourishes the body”. (Day, 2004, pp.21)

The spiritually inclined Indian society shows capability of deep reflection on issues of pertinence. Education being an important one, one would expect then the same prudence in matters concerning the built environs within which such magnanimous thoughts shall be nourished and inculcated into tender young minds. The lack of understanding of and the inability to acknowledge the relationship between the quality of built environs and the subtle yet powerful influence it exerts on the growing minds thus seem a strange missing link!

This research shall endeavor to bridge the schism between ‘academic performance’ and ‘flowering’ of the humane sensitivities through the essential medium of the built environment.

**Conclusion**

This research served positively its intention as a fact-finding mission for acquainting the authors with the ground situation of a typical urban Indian school. Alongside the investigations, many pertinent concerns also came to fore.

The correct and successful discharge of basic education is essential to the enrichment of the national human resource. The stakeholders in this endeavor include not only the government,
but also the society at large including the schools, the instruments impinging education, the parents who can be the major pressure group, the architects designing and defining the crucibles and the researchers whose insights can assist in defining the essentials of a conducive and humane setting for the worthy activity of educating the young. For reforms regarding environs for learning to initiate, there is need to enlighten the stakeholders at large to the role of built environs and their deep influence in shaping the young minds holistically.

The key role that built environments play on the developing minds has been underestimated given the brief and cursory nature of directions given by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) to the schools. The policy framework needs inclusive and well-integrated inputs from researchers and architectural practitioners to ensure positive and emphatic recommendations on the nature of physical environs of the school. These should translate into prerequisites for affiliation to ensure implementation.

In the quest for academic excellence, schools are lopsided and indifferent to the issue of conducive environs and parents unaware of the long-term harm. The pilot study conducted in the school exposed the gap between the user’s evaluation of their learning environs and the physical design of the school. It revealed the absence of the many child centric aspects that make the environs inclusive, comfortable and nurture a sense of belonging in the students. The result is the users having to negotiate with their environs while resolving their needs.

The study brought forth the lack of communication on this vital issue. It highlighted how the evaluation of spaces by the major users, the students, is never a matter of consideration at all levels: from policy planning to actual design. There is a total absence of design guidelines; both at the academic level as well as at the practitioner’s end.

The paper highlights the urgency of the matter and emphasizes the necessary humanization of the schools to the happiness and contentment of the young who are nurtured within its spaces. It opened up an unexplored direction and created grounds for doctoral research by the authors on school environs in the Indian context.

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