



REPORT

The 8th Annual Conference of The Indian Society of Landscape Architects (ISOLA) was held this year on 31st August and 1st September 2012 at the Noor-Us-Sabah Palace, Bhopal.

The previous conferences have been held annually over the last six years at Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Delhi, Goa and Ahmedabad with significant international participation. For this conference, ISOLA was supported by the Department of Architecture, Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology and School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal.

There was participation of about 350 people from India and overseas.

The theme this year **“THE PLACE OF NATURE IN TOMORROW’S CITY”** sought to address the value of natural elements in urban and rural environments, and the economic, social and environmental benefits they provide. The conference aimed to focus on the issues and processes of integrating the natural environment into healthy sustainable urban centres from cultural, socio-political, and planning perspectives with examples from our past and present.

Being the Honorary Secretary of ISOLA, I got the privilege to commence the proceedings by welcoming everyone at the Inaugural session. Rohit Marol, ISOLA President, then introduced the theme and welcomed the Chief Guest, Sh. Jayany Mallaiya, Hon’ble Minister for Water Resources and Environment, Government of MP and all delegates and guests. Following the symbolic lighting of the lamp, the Minister commended the relevance of the theme in his address. He also mentioned that the MP Govt. was working on a Master plan for the waterbodies of Bhopal with the help of SAP, Ahmedabad and assured that the govt will not allow any encroachment on the catchment of the lakes and sought the help of citizens in saving the environment besides the Madhya Pradesh government.



This was followed by the giving away of the 2nd Annual ISOLA Awards by the Hon’ble Minister. ISOLA medal, the highest honour, given to a landscape architect by Indian Society of Landscape Architects, whose lifetime achievement and contribution to the profession has had the unique and lasting impact on the welfare of public and the environment was bestowed upon Prof. Mohd. Shaheer, one of the greatest landscape architects and teachers of the country.

ISOLA landmark award for a distinguished landscape architecture project completed at least 10 years ago that retains its original design integrity and contributes significantly to



the public dreams of the community in which it is located was awarded unanimously to Sanskriti Kendra – a distinctive landscape architecture project on the outskirts of Delhi and completed 20 years ago, which provides a platform for crafts persons to live and work in a creative environment in addition to hosting a number of other activities. The jury recognized the original design intent of the created landscape and the significant contribution of the Kendra to the cultural landscape of Delhi. This award included felicitations for the design team, architect Mr Uppal Ghosh and landscape architect Prof Shaheer.



The next category of awards was ISOLA general design awards for excellence in landscape design. This year though no award was given by the jury, three commendations were given in the category to Anuradha Rathore for Eco-space Rajarhaat, Kolkata, Shilpa Chandavarkar from Mumbai for Sant Gyaneshwar Udhyan and Baji Prabhu Udhyan Mumbaia and to Sujata Hingorani for Bhairon Marg Urban Redevelopment.

The ISOLA Students award for the best landscape thesis for 2011 was given to Harsh Mittal from SPA Delhi for his project redevelopment of Ram Niwas Bagh Jaipur. The award for the year 2012 was given to Anupama Bapat from BNCA Pune for her project redevelopment of Abandoned Quarryscape at Wagholi, Pune.

Dr. Appu Kuttan, Director, MANIT spoke about MANIT's association with ISOLA for the conference and then, Dr. Ajay Khare, Director, SPA welcomed all delegates and mentioned that for national institutes, in the absence of any regulator, any form of licensing could be done away with while introducing any new programme and help should be taken from professional bodies like ISOLA in structuring the programme. ISOLA conference will provide an impetus to the profession in the region of Madhya Pradesh and SPA Bhopal would communicate with ISOLA in the near future to introduce new landscape programmes, even at undergraduate level.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Neelkanth Chhaya, eminent academician and professional. In his presentation titled "Cultivating the City of the Future", he highlighted "the arrogant illusion" by the claim of technology as a rational control over nature and that "what can be controlled is never truly real, what is real can never be completely controlled and we all hoped to be in the realm of the real."

He said that "Until the hiatus of age of reason upturned all relations between weak humans and awesome nature. This was how we did whatever we did." Chhaya mentioned that "Nature never throws out any ideal. Any form that has evolved, even the simplest organ has evolved over simple forms. Not to mention the highly complex



organism that are before us, at first crude, but subjected to multiple challenges & hundreds of tiny interactions, refinement occurs; and change is integrated without violence. Wonderful simplicity emerges. Continue to use the known and well loved cultural practices and forms wherever they are basically healthy. At a small scale continue known typologies and let them evolve. These are the things that we have already.

The thinking in recent science has moved towards affirmation of that unity. Art and poetry are gradually returning to their home in the house of wonder. Only politics and economics lag behind. Here is where the role of the profession, he urges "is most serious. We open minds and hearts with our creations, towards what shall be, open them towards continual unlimited progress" and "let the earth rise in us through us and flower and spread the fragrance of gentle human participation in its vicinity.

His allegory of the mythical story of the churning of the oceans by the Devas and the Asuras to illustrate his point of view and set the tone of the conference was a highlight of the keynote.

He ended by saying "Perhaps some of us in our small ways will have to take up Shiva's task and contain and hold safely the Hala halak poison. Others amongst us may be little Vishnus or Mohinis, seducing away the evil by our creative powers. The rest of us can be Mandarad mountain or Kurma, the tortoise or Vasuki, the divine serpent to churn the ocean of milk offered to us by the future. "



After the Inaugral session, Varsha Gavandi, ISOLA Vice Prseident, introduced and called upon Prof. James L. Wescoat, Aga Khan professor at the School of Architecture and Planning, MIT to chair the *Session I : City in Nature / Nature in city: Past and Present*.

The first speaker architect Narendra Denge, from Pune, with a broad range of accomplishments in practice, in film making, and as a design educator spoke on the subject, *Nature – Before And After the Consumerist Phase*, with the case study of the ideas being illustrated from Pune.

Yatin Pandya, second speaker of the session, an author, activist, academician and a practising architect opined the idea of sustainability was that technology was not an undue hyped symbol of progress, it was simply a matter of convenience.

He said "In India we are lucky to learn from DNA set in and perfected and actually evolved over time. We still have a creative role to interpret it for the present and with our adaptation and innovation to that DNA we could make it more nourishing for the time to come and for the immensity of variation that we have."



The second session : City – People–Water, post lunch was chaired by Mr Ravindra Punde, an urban planner and cofounder of Design Cell – a multi-disciplinary practice, and former principal of Academy of Architecture in Mumbai.

The first speaker, Prof. James Wescoat illustrated two cases one in Boston near and the other in Barapullah nallah and the last part of his presentation looked at these two projects, critically and in a constructive way to examine future ways of thinking. In West Philadelphia, the two ideas of rainwater harvesting and self help storm water management & sewerage with low income community. In Barapulla Nalla, what are the kind of riparian quarter types of approaches that can be taken in terms of land forms ecology that would really be fundamental importance for the success of any local improvements.

His presentation tried to explore combination of approaches that are being pioneered in Nallah restoration and could lead to new approach to urban streams through the contributions of our profession, landscape architecture.

Farhad Contractor, the second speaker of the session, works with the NGO Sambhaav in arid regions of North India. He spoke on his experience of coordinating with voluntary community labour and providing the know-how for rejuvenating and restoring traditional water-harvesting structures and techniques on specific projects in Rajasthan.

In the evening, after the sessions, there was a performance of the Amritashya Narmada Ballet by the troupe of Dr. Suchitra Harmalkar at the auditorium of the magnificent Bharat Bhawan. It described the biography of the holy river, Narmada, which includes its origin, its arrival on earth, its flow etc. This dance drama was given a contemporary touch by raising the issue of pollution amongst the rivers, which was so relevant to the theme of the conference.



The third session that began on the second day, namely, *Sustainable Cities - Safeguarding Resources for tomorrow* was chaired by Prof. Neelkanth Chhaya.

The first presentation by Dr. Vikram Soni, professor of Physics at the National Physical Laboratory in New Delhi dealt with the use of science by non-invasive techniques to find solutions to contemporary problems specially in the area of water resources. He talked about the potential of river flood plains towards solving the problem of water scarcity with particular references to Rive Yamuna.

Romi Khosla, well known for his research, writings and practice in architecture and urbanism, made the second presentation He proposed a model of a sustainable city, with a maximum population for about a million. He proposed to rather have may be



2000 cities of 1 million each to cope with new urbanization and not the proposal of the behemoth mega city. It includes besides all the urban components and functions, urban agriculture build on the edge of flood plain or edge of water source that you one does not invade. Most importantly, it has a defined ecological footprint which enables it to get 80% of its food from there itself to bring the price of food down, besides a score of other environmental advantages.



The third speaker Dr Mahesh Buch, the Chairman of the National Centre for Human Settlements and Environment at Bhopal and a former beareaucrat spoke of his experiences while he was involved in planning of Madhya Pradesh, which is still primarily a rural state and the varior opportunities when he started at Bhopal. He ended by saying that as people who are required to look at nature, to look at the built environment, and to look at the requirements of people in terms of shelter and work places and then harmonize them, a good architect has to be a landscape architect.

The final presentation of the session was by Bimal Patel, the eminent architect from Ahmedabad. He spoke about Sabarmati river development project. As is the case with most Indain rivers, Sabarmati has also been badly abused and treated like a sewage nallah. River front project had many different ambitions. It was multi dimensional - environmental improvement, social upliftment and urban rejuvenation projec were the various objectives besides the primary objective to make the river front accessible to the people and provide Ahmedabad with many new cultural, trade and social facilities.

After the lunch break, the fourth and the concluding sesiion of the conference, Indian Panorama was chaired by Prof. M. Shaheer. This session had been introduced in the conference from this year, where as an endeavour to make our sessions more interactive a series of very brief presentations from ISOLA members ranging from 8-10 minutes on different cities of India were made by Ravi Kumar Narayan and Rukkumany (Chennai), Dr Meenakshi Jain (Simla), Sriganesh Rajendran (Jeewan Beema Nagar, Mumbai), Swati Sahastrabuddhe (Pune), Suchandra Bardhan and Madhup Mazumder (Kolkata), Dr. Sridevi Rao (Hyderabad), Savita Raje (Bhopal) and Dr Priyaleen Singh (Gardens of Delhi).



The conference concluded with the Valedictory Session. Again as the secretary, I got the privilege to deliver the vote of thanks to all the delegates, speakers, chairs and my colleagues in the Executive Council of ISOLA. Mementos were then, presented to all the panelists by ISOLA Vice President, Varsha Gavandi. Certificates of Appreciation were presented to all the people who were involved in the organization of the conference besides the core committee members and to all the student volunteers of SPA, Bhopal and MANIT.