

Ar. Apurva Bose Dutta (www.apurvabose.com) is a Bengaluru-based author and award-winning architectural journalist. Her professional journey of 13 years has seen collaborations globally with multiple print and digital architecture and design publications, publishing houses, firms and organisations.

Her academic background of architecture and journalism is further explored in her additional roles, of being a professional speaker, organising workshops, curating architecture and design content and discourses for the print and digital media, and consulting for academic and professional industry initiatives.

Apurva has been a pioneer in increasing the visibility of the subject of architectural writing in India. She has been recognised for her pioneering work in architectural journalism in the country, through the awards she has received from the architecture & design industry for Excellence in Architectural Journalism (2015); Creative Excellence in Architectural Journalism (2010) and A3F award in Architectural Journalism (2009).

She has been invited by the Australian and the Finland Government to be a member of the Indian delegation for International Media Visits of Architectural Writers, in Melbourne in 2016 and Helsinki in 2018, respectively. Her first-authored book, *ARCHITECTURAL VOICES OF INDIA: A Blend of Contemporary and Traditional Ethos* has received wide acclaim and coverage.

Sakshi Singh:

Starting from the days when you wanted to be a doctor, to your taking up architecture, and then leaving the mainstream profession to pursue something that a major part of the country didn't even recognize – your journey has been nothing less than inspiring, as well as interesting. What was, however, the one constant thing on your mind all throughout. Any particular aim, a dream or will?

Apurva Bose Dutta:

I am of the belief that everyone does have a 'calling' at some point of her/his life; it's important to be able to recognise when that comes, acknowledge it, and dedicatedly work towards it and give it your best. I also believe that whatever one takes up, professionally or personally, one should strive to give her/his 100% (or even more) to it.



Ar. Apurva Bose Dutta
Architectural Journalist

Growth and circumstances lead to changes in one's thoughts and how one perceives life, and I realise that's probably why I went from wanting to become a doctor, to an architect and then to finally, an architectural journalist. All along, the one thing I probably was firm about was pursuing something that I wanted to, and not because only I was told to, or because everyone felt a 'certain' way about the professions that one should pursue.

Obviously, it was only when I stepped into the field that the realisation of the profound need of the subject of architectural journalism, especially in our country, came along, and it just made my career so much more fulfilling and stimulating.

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If you are asked to describe what exactly Architectural Journalism is, by someone from the Architectural fraternity who needs an introduction to it, what would your answer be?

To me, it is journalism, but in pure architecture. Architecture is not merely about spaces and buildings; it's about how we live life, it's about developing an attitude to life; it's reflective of our beliefs, our desires and aspirations.

Arguably the most public of arts that affects the human psychology most intensely, architecture also happens to be the least discussed. Somewhere, the lack of a common language to talk about the built environment prevents the profession of architecture and design from being a topic of daily discussion, which leads to the profession being less understood too.

Architectural Journalism has emerged as a language, which can not only help to interpret, identify and celebrate the built environment, but can also provide visions to create demand for better buildings, leading to better societies and culminating in a better living environment.

To put it simply, architectural journalism is a new way of architectural discourse that creates a platform where everything and anything related to architecture and design is discussed. It shouldn't stop at only reviewing spaces or reviewing architects; it should talk about the past, present and future of living and help in developing the society further.

Ernest Hemingway has famously said, "As a writer, you should not judge, you should understand." How far is this applicable to Architectural Journalism?

I prefer the 'objective' way of writing, and am quite intrigued by the idea of being semi-detached from what you are writing on; where you connect with something to understand it and go into deep thinking, but then when you write, you stand at a distance, analyse things and write without any bias.

Which doesn't mean that I don't judge and that I always feel forced to understand the other point of view, but I do question when there is a need. Every writer should be a researcher by heart and should not stop questioning.

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Architectural Journalism hence shouldn't be only about the art of writing, but should also incorporate research, analysis, constructive criticism and communication.

The amount of work you have done and continue to do is stupefying – the range of topics you have covered and the number of collaborations you have had. Where do you bring this energy and enthusiasm for your work from?

It has primarily to do with the fact that I have chosen a career that I connect to, that I wanted to pursue, and that I believe is going to make a great difference.

Through my profession, I have chosen to bring forth a field, architecture, which is beautifully entwined in our lives every passing moment. Hence writing about it in itself becomes an exciting and enjoyable experience.

When one's work becomes so much an extension of one's own life, it does go much beyond than just being a 9 to 5 job, where you want to contribute to make a change, and not only to earn a living.

For me, there is no fixed medium that gives me the avenues and themes which I want to explore and communicate in my writing. In this field, it is imperative that one becomes aware of what is happening around. While a lot of networking and reading (and not only material related to the field!) does contribute to this awareness, but I also like to be observant as I live each day. If there is something that I connect with, I like to analyse.

dig a bit more deeper and decide how this particular idea could make a difference to the field.

These ideas could come to me anywhere—at my desk, when I am travelling, when I am watching a movie, or even when I am on a holiday. So if you ask me, there are no real holidays and there are no real workdays for me. That is the beauty of taking up a career path that is a part of your daily life and one, that you love.

There is still a vast majority of architectural students out there who aren't convinced of Architectural Journalism as a professional stream. Whose fault do you think it is in leading up to such a scenario?

Let's first look at the positive side. There are a huge number of architectural students in India itself who are interested in the subject and are doing something about it. I have students from all over India writing to me and there have been so many who have found their own niches in the profession. This definitely needs to be applauded.

I would agree though that on some accounts, there are hesitations in taking it as a serious career choice, due to lack of support—the kind that one would expect from the central powers or from the institutions too. The absence of very good training in the subject in India, and the fact that not all architectural magazines in India consider taking only writers with architectural background in their core team, does contribute to this ambiguity around the profession.

But MOST OF ALL, I think the lack of awareness of the avenues an architectural journalist can explore makes interested students hesitant to make an unabashed leap into the profession.

Yours has been a journey that has seen the highs and lows resulting from the novelty of your practice, in the Indian context at least. You, however, took to spearheading the promotion of Architectural Journalism amongst the Indian Architectural fraternity. Any plans ahead along the same lines?

When one decides to take up a profession where there is no precedent in the same context, then one should be prepared to

face challenges to carve out a path. The 'lows' that you mention have been challenges for me, which have been converted into opportunities. I should also admit that somewhere, the novelty of a new practice gives you an added opportunity and zing to explore, discover, experiment and create things, which might not be possible in a profession that comes with its already set precincts for experimentation.

I have had two main goals all along in my career path; **one to bring forth architecture through my writings, orations, etc; and second, to try and get more people especially from the architectural background to get into architectural writing.**

Both the goals are connected somewhere. I have been involved in various capacities at the academic and professional platforms for the same, not only in India, but overseas, too.

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Keeping in mind the above two goals, I have been involved with a few things in the recent times. As regards bringing forth architecture, I launched my first-authored book, ARCHITECTURAL VOICES OF INDIA a year back. I viewed the book as a medium to document and bring forth the voices of 19 architects of India, across generations, on various themes and subjects related to architecture.

While the book becomes a platform for architectural discourse, it also highlights how in spite of the diversity there is a very strong and robust sense of synergy amongst the Indian architects when it comes to the cause for building and when it comes to seeing the hope and potential in the architecture of India. To me, the book also highlights the role and responsibility of an architectural journalist in the field of architectural communications.

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As regards my second goal, I have been conducting five-day courses and three-day masterclass in architectural writing across the country. Presently, there is a three-day master class which I am offering to architectural institutions. There are numerous interested students who want to get into the subject, and I think over these days the students can get a very good idea and a platform to hone their skills.

These are experiential workshops, which are partly knowledge-based and partly skill-based. I might also in the near future collaborate for online courses too. My efforts towards making the subject more extroverted in India through various mediums continue.

Despite the fact that Architectural Journalism needs to be stressed much more upon as one of the new faces of architectural practice, it is also undeniable that a sudden start would not be very welcoming. What initial steps can the Schools of Architecture take to promote Architectural Journalism as part of a gradual progress?

I am happy to mention here that many architectural institutions have been making great efforts to cultivate the need of architectural journalism in their students. I am equally delighted that I am a part of many of these initiatives. **There are talks, workshops, electives, webinars, and short courses introduced for the students which can give them a very good sense of the subject** and what they will be enrolling for, should they plan to pursue it.

A couple of architectural institutions in India have already introduced a separate track of writing that begins from the earlier semesters and culminates in the fourth year. Also, many institutions have introduced the subject of communications in their first year, which can take the elaborate form of written communications in the higher years.

These efforts are highly creditable and are symbolic of how the institutions are acquainting their students with the subject. However, what is lacking, as I have been conveyed, is proper faculty for teaching architectural writing. This needs to be rectified to be able to generate sustained interest as well as the right awareness about the subject in the students.

Today, the country boasts of a considerable number of architectural magazines, in comparison to the yesteryears. Do you, however, think that student opportunities and participation toward magazine content is satisfactory? Do you think something can or should be done in this direction?

If you speak about professional architectural magazines in India, then the opportunities for students to contribute towards them remain minimal. But that's fine, because for any kind of professional magazines, the participation from students is never the focus. It is only in institution journals where students can wholeheartedly participate and contribute.

However, **there are a few architectural magazines in India, which, once in a while, do give an opportunity to students to write; this could be on their thesis or any other given themes**, or they could even perhaps collaborate as co-authors with professionals and write for the magazines.

It wouldn't be right to expect professional magazines to give a lot of opportunity to students to write for them; however, where magazines should make an effort is to offer architectural writing internships to students, collaborate and support workshops and courses on the subject, and also hold more credible competitions for the students which can give them an opportunity to show their skills.

What is the scope of freelancing in the field of Architectural Journalism?

One of the highs of being a freelancer is that you decide what your definition of success is. To become successful as a freelancer, there is an incredible sense of discipline that one needs to cultivate in oneself. In India, the culture of freelancing is still in its nascent stage, as a result of which, freelancers are generally

not taken very seriously. This is however changing, and I do hope a day does come when the country would be more welcoming to freelancers and would acknowledge the tremendous hard work that goes into 'serious freelancing'.

If you want to freelance as an architectural writer, **there are pros to it—you decide what you want to write on, whom you want to write on, and for whom you want to write for/work for.** With the kind of topics/themes architecture offers, one gets to explore writing and working for different mediums, different industries, and different clients. Hence, the scope in freelancing in this field becomes immense.

Having said that, **for a freelance architectural journalist who wants to be a serious and regular writer, the path can be extremely tough because apart from the challenges of architectural writing being a new subject,** freelancing itself comes with its own cons. One, the kind of networking one needs for this is immense; second, you don't only write—you do everything that in a normal office would have been provided to you by default; third, there has to be a way out for you to become visible amongst the many established magazines or writers that are already in place.

I never suggest a fresher straight out of college to go in for freelancing. **One needs to first have a platform where one can train and build on their skills as well as their contacts.** Only when one believes that they can work independently, should they opt for freelancing.

Completely offbeat, yet something the reader would love to know. You seem to have Bengali roots. Any memories or experiences you have about Bengal?

Yes, I am a Bengali, born and brought up in Chandigarh where I spent a good 23 years of my life before moving on to different cities and different countries. I love the city and keep on going back there, not only because of my work or my parents, but because it is a city which gives me a lot of peace.

Having spent so much of time there, I could perhaps say that I am more of a Punjabi than a Bengali; however, the Bengali customs and traditions, the festivals, the language and the strong sense of culture which is so evident in

the arts and literary genres has always been an integral part of my existence.

I have visited Kolkata a couple of times, more because of personal reasons than professional, and they all happened much before I graduated as an architect. I am sure when I visit it now, my purview of viewing the city will be very different, considering whatever empirical knowledge that I have attained of architecture over the years. But from what I remember and what I can remotely make out, it is the strong sense of culture that binds the city and gives it its character. This is something that all cities must learn and try to achieve—a character that stems from their own roots and is not trying to ape anyone else.

Lastly, a little advice-seeking again. An architecture student, and especially the one from a not so sound financial background, is quite worried about stepping into the field that lies beyond the five years of college. Insecurities, competition and the poor statistics have given way to anxiety and hopelessness. What is your suggestion to this generation of students in terms of career choice?

Today with the kind of exposure, growth and fast-paced life, insecurities, competition and poor statistics become a part of all professions, at some or the other time. **While things seem to be changing for the better in the architectural field, as a professional one needs to be focussed on delivering the best and continue to understand the importance and need of good architecture.** There is a need to invest time in not only learning and honing one's crafts, but being lifelong students, and learning from anywhere one can, whether in the theory or practical field. There is no substitute for hard work and professionalism; talent can be developed, while luck does follow hard work.

One shouldn't also shy away from accepting if something is not working for them. Architecture is a vast field and it offers us tremendous scope to contribute to it in various ways. Designing is the most common medium, but there have been exemplary examples where trained architects have contributed to architecture in myriad ways. There should be an open mind to understand that the avenues are endless, and one should have the determination and perseverance to pursue them.