Architecture as a profession has many derivatives – Interior Designing, Urban Planning, Landscape, Conservation etc. And soon, another derivative called 'Architectural Journalism' will receive its much due acknowledgment. The first elective of the subject in India was introduced way back in 1985, the first magazine in India covering architecture - 'Marg' was published way back in 1946; hence one is compelled to wonder why the subject didn't take off – was it the 'novelty' that scared people to plunge into it or was it the conventional path of 'sticking to hardcore architecture' which restrained them from diverting.

It is hard to believe that no one cares about the 'architecture' profession enough to write about it – what maybe lacking is the language for talking about the built environment, the void that is filled by the subject of 'Architectural Journalism'.

All said and done, today not only around 10-12 colleges in India offer this as an elective, simultaneously the number of architectural/interior magazines and websites have ameliorated; seminars and workshops for the subjects are being held, awards are being constituted to applaud the professionals connected to this field. The curiosity amongst students (from the architectural and media background) and professionals has increased manifolds leading people to sit up and take notice of the field. Though when all these aspects are compared to other countries in the world, one does find India lagging far behind in architectural journalism. But keeping in mind the way architecture has become a connotation of our beliefs, it is but obvious, that there is so much to write about, so much to analyse and appreciate in design. Though my profession got flagged off by being an architectural journalist, (in spite of getting advised to work in hardcore architecture for sometime), I realise it was the profession which exposed me to sections of architecture which I might not have been fortunate enough to witness had I been working in an architecture office.

A month back I was asked to deliver an oration on Architectural Journalism in one of the premium journalism institutes in India. It did take me by surprise that inspite of being from hardcore journalism backgrounds, the students wanted to know so much about the subject, felt so strongly about writing on architecture and already had so much information on this upcoming field. Then as professionals from the architectural background, I think we have an added responsibility on our shoulders - to not only be able to design projects but also be able to communicate about it for the world to know.
Architectural journalism in India is still very 'descriptive'. There is a need to incorporate a discussion from one's side and raise an opinion. The editorial voice about the experience is important and the voice needn't be for a building only, it could be for a material, for a trend in architecture, for a structure or for an architectural event. Buildings or for that matter architecture doesn't have to be appreciated always.

Writing somehow continues to feature near the bottom in the list of vocations as regards to money. I guess it remains the same with architectural journalism if you compare it to gigantic salaries fetching professions like Management, Medicine etc; but somehow it surely doesn’t feature in a list of vocations which doesn’t pay. The initial pay is always unsatisfactory but maybe what a beginner deserves. It is then left to the beginner with what passion he or she can thrust one's self into the subject – awareness of what is happening all around in terms of architecture, reading through magazines and books on design, having a sharp eye and looking around to see the new trends, a proactive attitude and good networking, a piece that is objective, the ability to interpret on paper what you see on site is what a good architectural journalist should have. Based on an architect’s concepts and one's own judgment, an architectural journalist gives birth to a piece. Architects do have lots of patience to concept out a project, see through its construction and wait for the building to spring up. Sometimes what is on paper might be different from the final output which could at times be attributed to the architect and at times not to him too. Thus while writing, it’s healthy to abstain from being cynical and too opinionated.

Architectural Journalism also becomes quite important since the vocation of architecture continues to produce so many fascinations which renders everyone incapacitated to visit these architectural delights personally. In this sense, a write up might not be able to substitute for the experience of looking at the building ourselves, but it does teach a thing or two that we ought to know that helps to keep us grounded to the field of architecture. One realises that architecture doesn’t stop on the ‘making of buildings’, but it does take other forms (as the extension of architectural practice) in the form of architectural writing, architectural research and education.

I find a major difference in the approach of students now towards the subject than what it was 5-6 years back. A lot of appreciation should also be showered on the organisations who are trying to bring back the subject. It’s nice to know that NASA itself holds an architectural journalism competition for its students. Even the Build Today Awards by the India Today Group are definitely seeking a journalism attitude in architectural students in India. I happened to attend the south leg last year here in Bengaluru and I was quite surprised to find the difference in students today – they were more enthusiastic, more knowledgeable, had a keen sense of learning - even a first year student was able to rattle off concepts which we would have taken a few semesters to understand.

“**The discipline of writing something down could be the first step towards making it happen. Writing is all about expression...about letting one’s own opinions reach everyone else.**

Lee Iacocca
Questions pour in my email inbox almost every second day - from students and seasoned architects too, not only from India but all over the world where architects who have been into practice for as long as 25 years now want to switch to architectural journalism. It's exhilarating to see people open up to this field. Even seasoned architects are of the view that it's important for people to branch out as well as much important is it to have good journalists to talk about architecture.

Is architectural journalism only for people with an architectural background? I am asked this a lot of times. Well, where at one level the correct reading of architecture and the decoding of the creative principles of the architect is very important (which I would definitely like to believe that someone with an architectural background would do better), but then what about the numerous number of critics that the world has had who are not from an architectural background – I believe the passion to learn something needs to exist and then everything else falls in place.

The purpose of architectural journalism like other journalism is a tad different. Infact, a lot of talks going on in abroad point to the fact that 'criticism' or 'journalism' should happen at the concept stage of a project which can help in making the building better, instead of talking about a building which is already built and which can't be pulled down. Through architectural journalism, one of our motto is to acquaint everyone with the kind of architecture that is happening and two, to increase the society's demand for a good design by educating and making people more critically aware, so that the next building takes into account the previous building's pros and cons. Also, the subject helps in bringing forward the voice of the common people, thus making architecture more accessible to them.

As far as topics are concerned, right from covering buildings, architectural journalism includes articles on materials, new trends in architecture, architectural photography, design related event coverage, research based articles, interviews and profiling of people related to design.

The scope of the profession doesn't stop at writing for magazines or websites directly related to architecture, construction and interiors. There are trade magazines, academic magazines, popular journals (which might not be related to architecture but feature design articles). Today you have specific journals catering to sustainability, green buildings, landscaping, energy efficiency, and construction. People are taking to blogging in a huge manner which has the advantage of being able to reach its readers faster than the monthly magazines. One can work as the in house writer for different architectural and product firms. One can venture out into book publication, think of making architectural documentaries, become an architectural editor, get involved with organisation of design events (which the exposure to the subject helps) and be able to address audiences on the research based articles one has penned down.

The need of the hour is to start a society for the architectural journalists in the country. The few handful of them, when meet will be able to voice the field in a larger and wider scope. They can definitely help in getting out more concrete design magazines and raising the bar of the existing publications. Communication is a vital part of architecture, hence writing (which is known to one of the most creative forms of communication) needs to be rethought and introduced in the syllabus. A thorough need of the day is also to get the course regularised so that no one is left groping in the dark trying to discover the contents of the subject.