



Quaid Doongerwala heads the design practise **DCOOP** along with Shilpa Ranade and the firm has been involved with architecture and design projects for more than 15 years now. Their projects have been published in many magazines over the years.

He has been the founding program director for the interior design program at ISDI, Parsons Mumbai from 2014 to 2016. He has also been a visiting faculty in design at the Academy of Architecture and at the KRVIA college of Architecture in Mumbai. Quaid has also been an associate with PUKAR, an organization dealing with research at the urban level.

He has also worked on an installation which was exhibited in the exhibition "What Makes India Urban" at the Aedes Gallery in 2009 and was co-curator on the exhibition "Building India" in Amsterdam at the Arcam Gallery in 2008.



† With such fantastic advancement on the technological front why do we still have such discontentment?

The Choice is ours: Capitalism, consumption and its impact on the environment

Author: Quaid Doongerwala

In Amitav Ghosh's "The great Derangement" climate change is not viewed just as a crisis of 'nature', but also as "a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination". This lack of imagining and thus managing the world has led us to a point where rising water levels, undrinkable water and stark climate change are becoming the reality of life. As Mr Ghosh points out this is a "cultural" phenomenon.

Technology, growth and progress are the pursuit of most countries in the world. Capitalism and its success as a phenomenon has deeply impacted the world and we are now beginning to see the impact this is having on the way the world is transforming. India is a great example to note the impact of capitalism in recent times. Post 1990, with liberalization and the opening of the economy, the country has fast metamorphized into a giant rolling ball of construction, growth and infrastructure which is largely made of concrete and steel. Voices beckoning for gentler interventions, environmental degradation caution are not only being ignored but are all also berated as being backward looking. All political parties are talking about making India a "superpower" and want to match the west in its developed status. There is a state of hyper energy and everybody seems to be on a mission to reach somewhere though most don't know what that is. Costs on education, health, entertainment have multiplied exponentially (education costs have risen by more than 150 times !!) in the last 25 years. Capitalism has put everybody on a fast treadmill. In this fast-paced frenzied state, we need to ask some critical questions. When living in such a fast state of existence can one experience things fully?

In the age of social media can one connect deeply? What is the state of progress we are going through? With such fantastic advancement on the technological front why do we still have such discontentment?

Architecture is a strongly experiential medium and can have a powerful impact on people and their lives. The built environment shapes us as we move forward in our march as humanity. Architects, policy makers, environmentalists and all those who are involved with creating the built environment have a strong role in deciding the future of earth. It is here that Architecture can play a strong role and shape the future.

Architecture can have the potential of creating a meaningful reality. Architects, planners, policy makers must take a critical look at the way the world is growing. Do we need such large highways? Do people need to have such constant states of accessibility and mobility? Do we need such large structures with such intense climate-controlled environments?

Any act of building harms the earth and takes something away. Keeping this in mind architects and designers need to think harder about what kind of architecture constitutes better living?

Malls, multiplexes, large corporate houses, mega airports and tall skyscrapers can be very exciting, exhilarating and offer a momentary high. However, is that the kind of hyper-intensity we need to have in our lives constantly? Large structures have a major impact on the earth consuming very large quantities of resources and energy and



[†] We are resilient and inventive and will find ways to deal with climate change, lack of basic resources and so forth. Does this mean we will slowly wipe out all other living creatures that are of no use to us? Do we want to eliminate plants, trees, animals and live on an earth which is fully artificial?

creating environmental imbalance. People are now consuming at a never before quantity, are travelling all across the world at a hectic pace, are living in more intensive climate-controlled buildings and ironically are consuming more meditative and detoxing practices than ever before in history.

This way of living is a choice and architecture plays a role within this. Buildings which are gentle on the earth and are in sync with nature and other living things must come to the fore front. With the advancement of technology and the rush of capitalism in the world we are now living in a very different state as compared to 60 or 70 years ago. Silicon Valley in the US has been the front leader on the way the direction of the world has taken in the last 3 decades. All physical visions of technology, artificial intelligence and the future seem to be made of an artificial construct. Most visual imaginations in movies, representations which are talking of the future have space age vehicles zipping across, people living in environments which are very intensive on use of gadgets and other such tech intensive manifestations. The conversation on environment and living in relationship with nature seems to have already been lost. There are counter viewpoints which say that human beings will adapt to the changes which earth will go through. We are resilient and inventive and will find ways to deal with climate change, lack of basic resources and so forth. Does this mean we will slowly wipe out all other living creatures who are of no use to us? Do we want to eliminate plants, trees, animals and live on an earth which is fully artificial? One does not hear or talk about how the future will integrate nature and other living beings in our development trajectory. It's a conversation which needs to be done urgently.

Living in sync with nature means an attitude of "give and take" in a responsible manner. To be able to do this we need to live with less and need to calm down from the hyper active state of development the world is going through. Architecture can play a key role in achieving this. Meaningful architecture would be based on creating strong and powerful experiences which help people to connect with themselves and build better relationships with other living creatures. An architecture for the senses would naturally lead one to that state of existence. Natural materials which are easy to replenish should play an important role in the way architecture is imagined. The built environment should be responsive to climate and location. This again helps to have a sensitive approach to the existing environment.

However, to do this the world needs to stop, think and make a very large shift in the way things are being done. To achieve a balance with ecology and nature some fundamental lifestyle changes will have to be accepted by the world. This would mean re looking at the way one is living.

At DCOOP we are creating projects which are trying to embody some of these principles. Our buildings are not ostentatious and don't consume high quantities of materials or energy. Programmatically they try to remain as small as possible. As an approach to people we follow an inclusive approach that allows people to interact and reach out to each other. The example of a housing project called "Sublime Ordinarity" illustrates this very well. This is a housing project located 60 km to the north of Mumbai and is designed such to create better connections and an inclusive environment for the inhabitants. ■



[†] Projects by DCOOP architects are not ostentatious and don't consume high quantities of materials or energy. Programmatically they try to remain as small as possible. As an approach to people we follow an inclusive approach that allows people to interact and reach out to each other. The example of a housing project called "Sublime Ordinarity"