The Role Of Architecture In Nation Building

The world we live in today, what we call ‘home’, is a result of the lives of billions of people and the triumphs and tribulations they had to endure, to survive and create a sense of security with the resources that were on hand.

We’re all familiar with the saying, ‘Necessity is the mother of invention’. Everything that was ever made, was created out of need. The three primal needs for food, clothing and shelter were the only motivators for man to survive. Three basic needs, the attainment of which, would basically pave the way to the modern world.

The idea of “shelter” has been revamped and improved upon throughout the centuries. What started out as caves, quickly turned into humble dwellings made out of the mud and other readily available materials. Man had used all the resources that were at his disposal, to create better living conditions. The constant innovation and need to progress has ultimately guided us to the world we live in today, which is home to cities with towering skylines, well planned cities with necessities such as water and electricity being brought to homes with ease, emerging cities that blend seamlessly with the surrounding environment, which are just a few examples, giving a glimpse into the world we live in today. It is in our nature as humans, to never settle and to always innovate, to create the best possible version of things, and this characteristic that we all share is what will guide us to a future that wouldn’t be possible if we had all just settled to dwell in caves and the like.

Somewhere in the timeline from caves to skyscrapers, the concept of architecture came into existence. Consciously or not people have been making contributions to architecture, history and culture, thereby shaping a place into a nation, generation after generation. In this essay I will cite a few examples of how people have molded their very essence into their habitats, which ultimately leads to the birth of a nation.

Some of the most ancient recorded discoveries of people living and working together, along with nature are river valley civilizations. There were many such civilizations that were situated along the banks of rivers, so as to take advantage of the rivers, because they provided a steady supply of drinking water, made the land fertile for growing crops and also allowed for easy transportation. The most noteworthy examples are the Ancient Egyptians, who were settled on the banks of river Nile, the Mesopotamians along banks of the Tigris/Euphrates river, and the Ancient Indians on the river Indus.

The architecture in such civilizations proves to be well ahead of it’s time, based on the findings of archaeologists. The civilizations were city like and noted for their urban planning, baked brick houses and their efficient drainage and water supply systems.

The downfall of such civilizations, is the very thing that brought life to it in the first place. The rivers. The unpredictable nature of the river, sometimes working to their favor and other times wreaking havoc on their crops due to flooding was a problem faced by the people residing in those civilizations. However, the people did not lose heart, and the cities were rebuilt, if destroyed. Therefore, according to their needs, their way of living also changed, paving way to

more temporary means of dwelling, in case of a disaster. Ultimately, climate change and the drying up of the rivers is what lead to the demise of such civilizations, and an important era in history.

Another such empire with prominent architecture that has survived the test of time is the Incan empire, specifically the site of Machu Picchu. It is the only Inca site in Peru to survive the Spanish invasion in the fifteenth century and has remained almost untouched in the last five hundred years.

Machu Picchu was a fortified city, built around 1450 A.D. What is most notable about this site is that the Incas followed the terrain, rather than apply their conventional layout, which is seen in most other Inca cities. In Machu Picchu, all the buildings follow more or less the same design, creating consistency and order through the city. The Inca were religious and regarded the surrounding environment with utmost respect and reverence and this was well apparent in their architecture. The Temple of the Sun was built on a large, rocky mountain. It was semi-circular in shape and made of granite, with a large door and two windows one facing north and the other facing east. The remains of the temple show the impeccable skill of the Inca masons, who used the technique of fitting stones together without the use of mortar. This was done because the loose fitting of the stones proved to be more resistant to earthquakes, which were quite frequent at the time. It is evident from this that the Inca people were well aware of their surroundings and were mindful to construct accordingly.

The lost city of Machu Picchu is proof that when the people are sensible of their surroundings, working with nature and not against it, what results is something magnificent and transcends time, serving as a model example for mankind, that a city is not defined by the materials that hold it together, but rather the people who reside in it.

Another example is the city-state of Dubai, which was built solely on decades of intense labor. In the early stages of it’s conception, the flourishing economy of Dubai, made it a hub for all things architecture. This made it possible for a variety of different ideas to be implemented and brought to life. The city quickly made it’s mark on the map, acquiring attention from all over the world. The city, as it is today, is a joint effort between local and foreign architects, working together to create what’s best for the city. The architecture literally shaped state into what it is today. Looking at the Dubai skyline now, you would never believe that the whole place was barren and basically a desert, just three decades ago.

Architecture is never constant. It is always undergoing dramatic changes to keep up with the times.

A building is no longer viewed as ‘just a building’. It is considered to be a reflection of an individual’s identity, be it the designer or the client. This interpretation of architecture is what leads to the formation of a nation that is not robotic and monotonous, but rather one that nurtures creativity and individuality. That is the sort of nation I would like to live in.

Bibliography

1. Machu Picchu Architecture explained- Norman https://www.annees-de-pelerinage.com/machu-picchu-architecture-explained/

2. The Evolution of Dubai’s Design District-Erin Donnelly
https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/the-evolution-of-dubais-design-district/