

## Indian Architectural Skills

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“It is better to Build Castles in the Air than to build on the Ground”

The monuments of architectural skill, the symbols of human ingenuity – the Taj in India, Pyramids of Egypt, hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Leaning Tower of Pisa – are subject to decay. Either the inevitable and inexorable time writes their epitaphs or man, blinded by the halo of his glory or consumed by the fiery passion for power, spells doom for them. For them, there is an impending catastrophe, may be slow, smoldering and withering into Hades or may sweep like an avalanche, or molten lava to drag to the shores of Lethe. Building with stone is not enough if man becomes stony, no use fabricating steel structures if it goes into our heart. Till man learns, as Ruskin opines, too build well, not with stone but with flesh, not with cold white marble but with the warm and crimson blood, till he learns that temples are not made with bricks but are riveted with hearts, his magnificence will be will be meaningless. Are the ‘castles in the air’ eternal? Will not one, while blundering in the smoke-screen of vague visions, be lost? Moreover, if earthly castles are destroyed once in centuries, visions can be demolished any time. T.S. Eliot’s Prufrock with a sense of satisfaction considers a single moment sufficient to undo his decision.

Such ‘castles’ can be raised to the highest and razed to the lowest in no time. Till these visions are the props of human progress, the bulwark for mental, emotional, moral and spiritual life will serve as buttress for man’s superiority over other creations of God.

Man struggles and strives not because he considers it his duty to struggle or his aim to strive. Generally there are two motives behind man’s effort that is personal and impersonal. As far as personal motivation is concerned one is generally guided by one’s progress in life and one’s personal gains. Impersonal motivation may fall beyond the pale of personal prejudices and emotions but they do guide the activities. Sometimes ideals persuade the people to make an effort, at other times some emotional reactions are released by external impersonal influences. Out of these are born ideals, which are tempting because they raise us higher from the earthly, narrow and mundane life. These haunt us and like divinity shape our ends. Ideals in their budding state may be mere imaginative conceptions divorced from reality, but as man’s thoughts gather round it ideals become the dynamo of human effort. They nibble away the foundations of worn-out beliefs and erect new supports for them. If old customary thoughts do not undergo any change, man is stuck up in the mire of times.

By building castles in the air one can give direction to one's thinking. It is wrong to think that imagination takes us beyond the orbit of reason. As man's mind works within the limitations of senses and physical existence it cannot be completely separated from the realities and the facts of life. Imaginative reality is purged of grossness, it does not cater to momentary wishes and transitory urgencies. Take the case of the artistic presentation of the tragic incidents of life. We may be depressed by the latter but are always elevated by a tragedy upon the stage. Tragedy in life has a debilitating effect on thinking, may clog action but dramatic presentation makes us wiser and spiritually enlightened. It can cover the ordinary things with a celestial light.

When we build castles in the air our imagination works at white heat. Imagination is a purer form of mental activity. It needs detachment from personal emotions and personal prejudices. Imagination widens outlook and endows us with the faculty to judge correctly. Intuition is perhaps the purest form of imagination that is spiritual imagination. We can include even prophecy and spiritual enlightenment within its fold. They colour the feelings, which serve as the driving force in life. Visions, when they get relevance in the context of life, become thoughts and thoughts and feelings cannot recognise a common frontier – as

One discovers no common frontier between an ugly, fashionable woman and the scent that she has used. These 'castles' help us in balancing intuition and reason into a technique by which we can evaluate the world of facts. A purely ideational culture like the Medieval European, threatened by a militant philosophy and Muslim religious feelings, produced an Aquinas who could combine the claims of reason and intuition. Modern man is tense, uncertain, adrift and needs the help of these 'castles' to reconcile with the innate desire to live. Utilitarianism has brought depravity in Man's nature; to us evil is nothing worse than simple bad cold, to us cruelty is nothing more than a cat's play with a rat. Our thinking will have to rise above the earthly level-imagination can help us.

Science is supposed to be at war with our dreams. It discounts the importance of imagination as it cannot be measured, it cannot be seen or grasped. Can we say that science does not build castles in the air? The very act of conceiving an idea is building castles. Coleridge's Kubla Khan conceived of "sunny domes" with 'caves of ice'; Organic Chemistry is the product of a dream. Einstein before giving his Theory of Relativity used to dream of harmony discoverable in the movements of the planets. We come to reality only through our dreams. No activity of human thought can be complete without the touch of imagination. Political theories, economic laws are based upon assumptions which make them nothing but castles. Ideals and ideologies are the synthetic fold of spirit. Though

science is analytical, objective and exploratory yet without having some vague notions, science can neither be analytical nor exploratory.

Imagination is generally considered a help to escape the bitterness of life. Keats in one of his poems calls it a deceiving "elf". Still it cannot be called bad in any sense of the word. Many a time we want to be deceived because we are too weak to stand realities, we want to escape because life becomes dull and mechanical routine. Imagination can make us to forget the worries of life and to smile at the crushing cares. It takes us into the regions where we feel comfortable, happy and satisfied. Getting happiness in life has been one of the greatest enigmas for the philosophers. The Buddha may recommend spiritual meditation for getting happiness. Stoics may think it necessary to kill all desires and passions whereas Epicure may ask you 'Drink and be merry'. When imagination can afford a solution for such an enigmatic problem, we should consider it one of the best activities of mind.

Imagination is the basis of all the activities serious and trifling. Without imagination no one can be inventive in thinking, and powerful in action. By imagination we do not mean only dreams because dream can be considered idle imagination. Dreams may be useless but they give rise to artistic activity.

It is wrong to say that imagination has no logic behind it; there may not be logic as science would like to have, but there is logic of a higher type in all imaginative conceptions. There might not be any cause and effect but there is bound to be a conclusion that is based upon certain assumptions that have been absorbed through the imagination of the individuals. The logic of imagination is the logic of probability and it is always more powerful than the logic of reasoning.

If we take purely fatalistic view we will have to say that there are some impersonal forces which are working against human beings. Man's hopes are frustrated and aspirations cheated. Happiness becomes an occasional episode in the general drama of life. Man is hunted down by the hounds of fate. That is why Keats wanted to "fade far way, dissolve and quite forget", "the wearings, the fever and the fret" of this world. This is the world "where men sit and hear each other's groan", and "where but to think is to be full of sorrow." But we can blink over the worries of life through enchanting dreams and "castles in the air". Man's intelligence has been probing mysteries of life since the dawn of human civilisation and he has come to the conclusion that life itself is as unsubstantial as 'castles in the air'. Life is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" but it is only imagination that gives significance and direction to life. If we are to live and live a better life, castles will have to be built, not on earth, but in air.

