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the landscape of hospitality in india

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The landscape associated with hospitality has its own flavour to offer. A mix of structures developed over time, in varied historic, social, cultural context and in different climatic zones lends character to the Indian hospitality landscape both in urban and rural settings.

The 'dak bungalows' or the guesthouse or some of the cottages built during the colonial period served as early reverences. These had an innate understanding of 'siting the buildings in the landscape'. Often designed with minimal intervention to the natural landscape they 'borrowed the landscape' and opened onto breath taking views. The views of the Himalayas from Narkanda and Khajjiar in Himachal remain firm in the travelers' memory. Some of the adventurous rulers built their dwelling units for camping in game reserves either in the forest or on the lake edge or in the wetlands like in Bharatpur. The placement of the buildings in the landscape is something to take home still.

Many of the urban dwellings, bungalows, *havelis*, summer camps or palaces have undergone transformation and now function as hotels or resorts. The buildings have been readapted often successfully, though the landscape poses a lot of challenge and potential to designers. The issues of locating the building in landscape, site planning, climatic control and integrating the hydraulic or irrigation system into landscape design are inspiring in these works.

This notion of integrating site planning, climate control and creating poetics through water can be experienced in contemporary landscape in the early works of Ravindra

Bhan for the landscape design of Mughal Sheraton. The landscape architect convincingly sank the building to reduce its scale and create shaded sunk courtyards. The landscape derives its narrative from the Mughal Gardens of Kashmir. The planting and the water features assist in climate control in the semi-arid landscape of Agra. Water was effectively used as white noise in the urban landscape designed for the Ashok Yatri Niwas and Kanishka Hotel in New Delhi.

We grew up looking at these as landmark projects in landscape. However, many opportunities have come to landscape architects since then in form of resorts, spas, luxury hotels, mid-level hotels, business hotels, guest houses and heritage hotels. Each project because of its size, budget and clientele offers unique potential to express our biases in landscape that needs to be fully explored as the profession matures slowly.

The variety in 'landscape types' and regional biotic-diversity, stylistic preferences from eclectic to minimal or avant-garde or deconstructive, expression in new materials and technology, innovativeness in expressing the narrative (whether ecological or artistic) are idioms that have the potential for individual exploration and expression. Today, there is suspected undercurrent of 'themes' that are similar in expression and a marginal variety in exploring the wide

range of plant palette that a varied ecological diversity like our offers.

The landscape and architecture inputs continue to pour from across the borders as the hospitality industry expands bringing in a breath of fresh air like at the Trident Hotel, Gurgaon. Simple, serene, stylized with abstracted references to historic landscapes it has added yet another dimension to contemporary Indian landscape.



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FACING PAGE: AT MUGHAL SHERATON, AGRA, THE LANDSCAPE AND BUILT FORM RECALL THE GRANDEUR OF MUGHAL GARDENS. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: RAVINDRA BHAN.

THIS PAGE: SHREYAS SPIRITUAL RETREAT, BANGALORE. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: AKSHAY KAUL.