

An Emancipated Place – 2000 Plus Women in Architecture

The book ‘An Emancipated Place – 2000 plus Women in Architecture’, published by HECAR Foundation, co-authored by Brinds Somaya and Urvashi Mehta, is a tribute to the work of South Asian Women Architects, S.V.IYER gives a review of the book.

This book, published by the HECAR Foundation, chronicles the proceedings of the conference – 2000 Plus Women in Architecture, held in Mumbai in February 2000. Co-authored by noted women architects, Brinda Somaya and Urvashi Mehta, Chairperson and Organising Secretary of the foundation respectively, it is a tribute to the work of South Asian Women architects. The graphic cover page is quite attractive. The book begins with a beautiful yet brief poetic tribute to the goddess of arts by Lata Ramaswamy, Brinda in her foreword, traces the origin of the HECAR Foundation. She aptly quotes the famous words of W.B.Yeats ‘In dreams begins responsibility’. Architects are known to weave dreams out of brick and mortar. Here they are at ease with words too.

Architect P.G.Raman, professor, Istanbul Technical University discusses in depth whether a conference on women in architecture was needed and if so why was it restricted to South Asian Women architects only. The essay makes interesting reading. Finally Raman concludes “the emancipated place surely will be non-masculine, non-European, a process- and performance-oriented choreography rather than a product of primadonna architects, transcending all binary oppositions.”

Women architects in South Asia have lot in common – common traditions, problems and aspirations. They also share a multiplicity of civilizations and rich cultural heritage. The book profiles leading women architects who have carved a niche for themselves. The works of the leading women architects are divided into four categories: Contemporary South Asian Architecture, Contemporary Asian Architecture, Regional and Contextual Architecture and Urban Issues and Conservation.

The architects speak passionately about themselves and their projects. Yasmeen Lari, the first women architect of Pakistan stresses the need for heritage conservation. Ashley De Vos, member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and honoured with the Vidya Jyothi by the Sri Lankan Government, pays glowing tributes to Minnette De Silva, the first Sri Lankan woman architect and the first Asian woman member of RIBA.

Indian architects occupy a place of pride in the book. There is no doubt that Indian architecture is a crowning glory on the horizon of South Asia. But the book focuses heavily on Indian women architects and gives a feeling that the contribution of India to South Asian architecture is much more than the women architects of other countries. Some of the noted architects whose works feature in the book are Namita Singh, Anupama Kundoo, Minakshi Jain, Parul Zaveri, Meena Mani, Geetha Balakrishnan, Sandhya Sawant, Abha Narain