



Indian Horizons

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Indian Council for Cultural Relations

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was founded on 9th April 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India.

The objectives of the Council are to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; to establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture; and to take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

The ICCR is about a communion of cultures, a creative dialogue with other nations. To facilitate this interaction with world cultures, the Council strives to articulate and demonstrate the diversity and richness of the cultures of India, both in and with other countries of the world.

The Council prides itself on being a pre-eminent institution engaged in cultural diplomacy and the sponsor of intellectual exchanges between India and partner countries. It is the Council's resolve to continue to symbolize India's great cultural and educational efflorescence in the years to come.

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Volume 61 No. 1 January-March 2014

Editor

Subhra Mazumdar

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My regular route to work provides a study in contrasts, with half of it lying in the region of Lutyens' Capital city built after the garden city concept of the 1930s, and the latter half of my ride traversing the periphery of the old city, complete with gateways, minarets piercing the skyline, and alongside the majestic Red Fort. This daily brush with two of the most important landmarks of Indian architecture seemed a common enough experience for every commuter till...It was with the taking up of this volume, themed around our architecture, that really made me sit up and take stock.

What had been a massive expanse of red brick wall and a medley of crumb-ling turrets and gateways awakened to a new richness, when I began to noticing the minutea and fathoming the significance of architecture not just as dwelling places in different eras but as throbbing accounts of our current development, etched in solid forms.

The palimpsest nature of our cities as explained by Rahoul Singh, fell into place smugly, as I have began to look at the landmarks along my route with a new vision. That this layering of cultures and architectural 'deposits' has a meaning behind its apparent disjunction, was a valuable insight gained along the way.

On reading about the journey of architecture education in our country, the striking aspects seemed to be the contributions of our leading figures to opening our eyes to the heritage of architecture that can be found in our own past. I was also struck by the differences that have been made by just a handful

of them to the lives of so many of us. And yes, the Steinabad colony of the capital is truly unique and one that many a Delhi-ite has visited for an evening of culture or spiritual awakening at some time or other. It needed the precise coverage given by A.K. Maitra to bring home this fact to our readers.

All of our past is not sacrosanct, or all of our present flawless and laudable is subtly realized in another essay by Narayani Gupta, who in lucid fluidity journeys across our monuments both old and new, and stops at each of them, not as a tourist, but as an analyst with an unfettered vision. We begin to shed our tinted frames blurring our vision having been fed on given data and happen to grasp that architecture needs a discerning eye more than a mass opinion. The charming tale of our Mughal heritage is both scholarly and comfortable read in Anuradha Chaturvedi's piece. The details of the nooks and crannies of these monuments are seen in the right perspective so that a reader like me, begins to appreciate the architecture with a knowing nod.

Our garden heritage in recent times has been an exposure to mughal and British sources. How did one forget the garden where the Lord Buddha was born when Queen Maya went into labour in such a spot? The Mughal legacy and its glory is best enjoyed against the mountain backdrop is also a fact that needed to be brushed back, and Mohammad Shaheer's essay has done just that with élan.

Uma Shridhar's book review on Mumbai highlights city living from the opinions of the mega city's fondest

residents, its architects and admirers. The efficiency of the coverage highlights truthfully that the city has plus points despite its many drawbacks. And eulogizing the sincerity and efficacy of understanding our oldest building material, wood is ably demonstrated in the many uses it has been resurrected into, as we learn from Mridula Sharma's essay. The brilliant posse of photographic material gives the writing the advantage of a Third Eye.

With this issue, the quota of regular features has been upped with the inclusion of an initial introduction of snapshots, recording our archival memories. This time, the theme is flagged off with a look at the founding of the Azad Bhavan complex which houses the nerve centre of the ICCR's cultural activities. The art review at the end, and a series of three poems are packaged to offer you a selection of some aspects of our cultural nuggets.

Editor



Subhra Mazumdar

Foreword

Satish C. Mehta
Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations

Indian architecture in its many facets covers a wide sweep. The current issue themed on this interesting subject tries to move beyond the clichéd look of gigantic buildings or deserted mansions, or the various schools that have left iconic foot prints. Instead, this presentation is a leisurely acquaintance with the Indian architectural scene by touching upon a few of its striking aspects.

This issue also marks the beginning of an entirely new series wherein we will feature a designated collection of memorabilia from our archives. We have introduced this series with a coverage of the inauguration of the Azad Bhavan complex by the first President of India Dr Rajendra Prasad and the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. These sepia memories, I hope, will relive those historic moments when the groundwork of internationally exposing our cultural moorings were concretized, through a workplace meant for this purpose.

Befittingly, the issue carries an essay on the journey of architecture education in India, which, going by this piece, surmises that architecture as we understand it, is very much a contemporary study. On the other hand, it is a polyglot feature for it acknowledges the language of the shilpashastra as well as the vocabulary of environmental matters taking into account the practices of the ancient as well as the contemporary.

The moulding of our outdoor spaces into an architectural framework, distilling the essence of our philosophy, ethics, science and landscape features, is explored in the essay on Indian gardens. It examines a wide canvas, right from the time of Buddhist influence to the herbaceous borders of British India.

In the context of a period perspective, the issue examines the contributions of our Mughal builders which establishes the integrated growth of this practice all over the country. It is evident not just in the form of Mughal monuments but also in terms of materials used, aesthetic insights and weather restrictions.

A compact survey of the standard of architecture in terms of its utilitarian significance is given due coverage. This essay brings out the essential connectivity of this field with all other aspects of our lifestyle. Similarly the idea that our cities are the result of an evolutionary process wherein the city is founded by effacing an earlier one on the same site, is effectively brought out in another essay in this volume.

In continuance with this theme, another of the essays examines how a new generation of architects are refashioning their practices through a mandatory invocation of heritage materials, crafts, and building knowledge. These skills have been utilized in homes and resorts of our time, using the heritage inheritance of Kerala.

The book review comprises a series of essays by the country's leading architects on how Mumbai, warts and all, is a shining example of a functioning system. Their perceptions endear every city dweller to view their own mega city with a new perceptivity. A bouquet garni of exquisite poetry and the art reviews of exhibitions at the Azad Bhavan Gallery offer a varied and engaging spread for your reading pleasure.



Satish C. Mehta

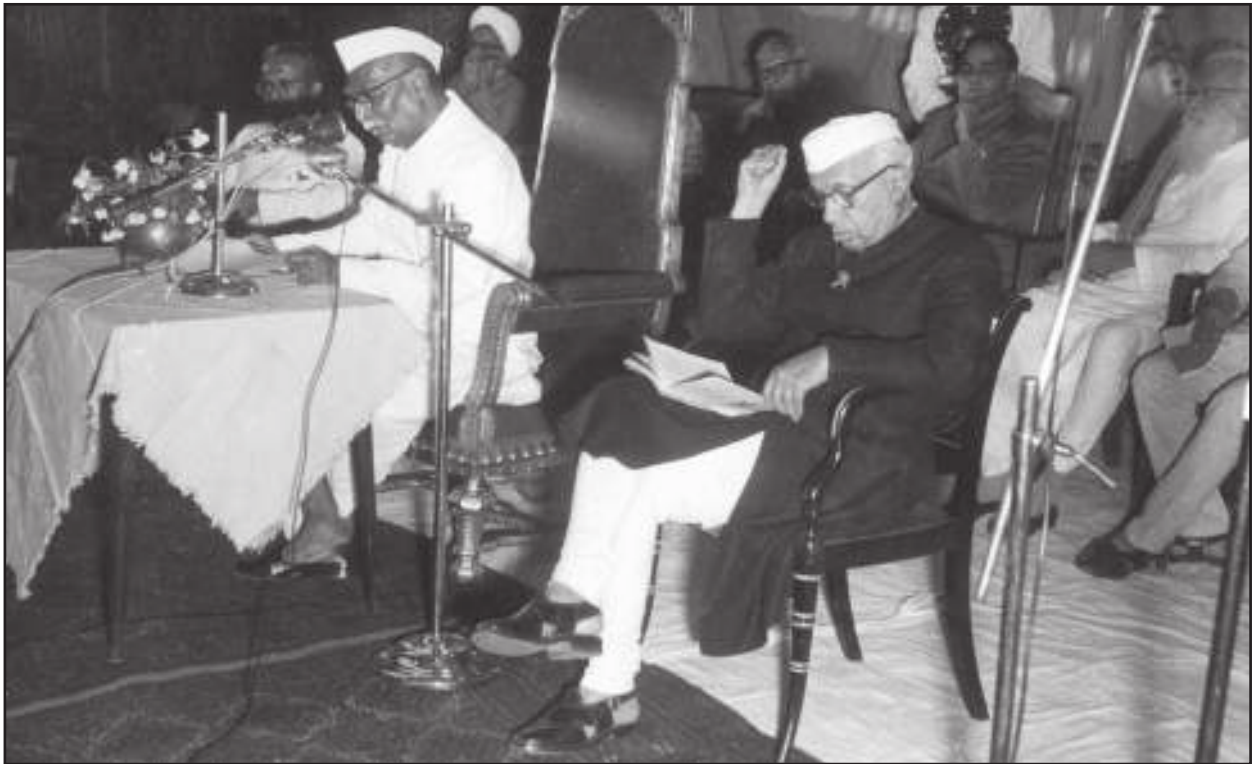
From our Archives



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



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Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960



Inauguration of Azad Bhavan, November, 1960

Architectural Education : INDIA

Prof. A. K. Maitra

Introduction

Educating an architect is different from many other professional disciplines in that there are no set rules, very few text books, and design can be learnt but not taught. Awakening of the inner mind and opening up the creative energy requires a different set of pedagogy. In a sense it has a close resemblance to the teaching of art and sculpture. A student of Architecture cannot regurgitate the same facts and formulas to prove proficiency in the subject. It is a creative discipline where no two architects may produce the same design expression on the same problem. At the same time the architect has to produce a useful product, which can

be used in daily life, which can be entered and lived in. It is an edifice of three dimensions and may live for centuries. A judicious combination of science and technology with a creative space concept is vital to its achievement. The role of the teacher is crucial in the training of the young minds. Teacher and the taught develop a close bond of intellectual fibre. The choice of the student and choice of the teacher vice versa is sine qua non for training a successful architect. In a sense it is akin to the Guru Shishya Parampara of the ancient Indian tradition of education. This, however, is counter to mass production of architects or the modern techniques of education.



Parliament library by Raj Rewal



Academic Block of IIM-Bangalore by B. V. Doshi

Modern architecture was born towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Originally it was spurred on by the discovery of new materials, particularly steel and steel reinforced cement concrete. Liberation from the limitations posed by traditional materials, such as stone, brick and timber, made it possible to break new grounds and give shape to the ideas. The steel structure by Gustave Eiffel, as the entrance gate to the World Fair in 1889, was an experiment to make tall structures in steel which demonstrated the versatility of steel as a building material. In course of time this iconic structure acted as an emblem for Paris. The combination of steel with cement to produce reinforced concrete liberated the architect from the constraints of spanning large spaces and constructing tall buildings. Louis Sullivan in USA designed and constructed multi-storeyed buildings which changed the urban landscape dramatically. He is known to have founded the Chicago School.

The discovery of electricity enabled illumination to penetrate deep into the building. Discovery of the elevator opened the possibility of access to buildings vertically. Glass, which was available from Roman times, was improved by Gobain to discover plate glass which had the possibility of spanning large openings. Integration of indoor and outdoor into the same space, thereby removing the opacity of the buildings was exploited by the architects to break away from the Beaux Art School of Architecture which clung on to the past. Frank Lloyd Wright, who was mentored by Sullivan, broke away from the Chicago School and created an architectural style taking full advantage of the materials to evolve innovative structural principles using the new materials. In this movement of new architecture, USA took the lead.

However, the Spanish architect Antonio Gaudi created a completely different kind of architecture. One of his creations the Sagrada Familia is still under



B. V. Doshi's work

construction more than a century after the building construction started, even after his death because the structural principle used by him, which he did by intuitive understanding, required complicated computer analysis. The building is already a World Heritage and planned to be completed by 2026 coinciding with Gaudi's death. The influence of Spain did not percolate to the rest of Europe and the colonial world. It was considered too eclectic to be accepted in the overall architecture practice.

On the other hand, In Germany at Weimer, a new School of Architecture was started by Walter Gropius, whose motto was to evolve architecture where the form was derived from the function of the building. He also propounded the theory which integrated the contribution of other professions of engineering, arts as well as the workers in the process of design and building. He recognised that students have to be adept and acquainted with the production of building components. This is very similar to the ancient Indian

tradition of training for an architect. This School known as Bauhaus School, attracted people who not only became famous architects but also made International Architecture the dominant style of Architecture of the twentieth century. Lake Shore Drive apartments in Chicago, designed by Mies Van der Rohe, a product of the Bauhaus School, became the iconic example of modern architecture. The Bauhaus School was closed by Hitler. The architects migrated to USA, where they introduced the new architecture which from USA travelled to the rest of the world. Many of them started teaching in US universities, such as Harvard, MIT, etc, and inculcated their philosophy of modern architecture in them. USA is always receptive to new ideas and it found empathy in their culture.

Le Corbusier, who was a part of the CIAM (Congres Internationnale deArchitecture Moderne), evolved a new urban principle based on architectural stratagem and evolved the La Ville Radieuse, a complete town at

a high density of 1000 ppha (persons per hectare) or 100,000 persons per square kilometres, where 90% of the ground is left open to sky, with only ten storey buildings all of which were on pilotis (stilts). This revolutionary idea was not found to be acceptable, but many of the principles of his theory found incorporation in many urban plans. His architecture had unique mathematical logic, which could be copied easily but adaptation was not easy. He also discovered the ancient harmonic proportion and its applicability in modern buildings and industrial products. He called it Modulor, an anthropometric scale which could be used to proportionately relate to other parts. The application can now be seen in paper sizes, which come in A1, A2, A3, A4 etc which are half of the previous one. The same proportions could be used in building components, thereby making industrial production of building components harmoniously proportional to each other.

Unfortunately, this new wave of ideas did not reach the shores of India. The colonial masters were preoccupied with creating Roman Empire-like ambience on the plains of India, much in the same way the Romans did in Africa and Middle East. The buildings had columns from the Orders of Greek and Roman Architecture, pediments and pilasters to provide a grand appearance suitable for a Caesar in power. The character of architecture and city morphology changed completely with the arrival of European invaders. They brought in their own brand of building style, adapted it to Indian conditions and left it as examples of colonial Indian architecture. In place of compact Indian cities, which not only conserved land, they were climatically suitable; the replaced colonial style had to create their own climatic ambience by contrived built form and spatial planning. The architects who built here were trained in Europe and brought the vocabulary with them, which they contrived to adapt to local conditions.

Grand opportunity to imbibe a modern idiom of architecture and city planning was presented when the colonial government decided to build a New Capital for the Empire in India. They chose Delhi to

build the capital, since it is the historic capital of India. The task was assigned to Edwin Lutyens, who planned a city in the image of Versailles, with grand boulevards, and vistas. The buildings also matched the Roman splendour by copying the Vitruvian canons of architecture and Renaissance style buildings. The Palace for the Viceroy, and two secretariat buildings did not breathe any modern air. All other buildings reflected the idiom of a bygone era. The wave of modern architecture was stifled before it reached the shores of India. Naturally, the obedient subjects of the Empire followed the master's voice. Thus the Indian Colonial Indian architecture was born.

Heritage background:

Despite the rejection of the heritage of architecture in India by the colonial masters, it goes back to more than five thousand years. Unfortunately the evidence has been largely obliterated by the passage of time. Most of the buildings were made of sun dried bricks and timber which did not survive the climate as well as wanton destruction by conquering invaders. Religious structures and palaces, on the other hand, were made of more permanent materials and some of these have survived in various states of preservation. The nature of secular structures is available only in literature. Shilpasashtras written by various sages provided detailed guidelines from choice of sites, layout, soil testing and construction etc. Land use guidelines formed a special concern in city building. We would find similar guidelines in Greece and Rome. Whereas Vitruvius's treatises were preserved and extensively utilised during the European renaissance the Shilpashastras were not easily available. The city of Jaipur is a lone example of an attempt to revive the ancient art and science of city building. The most significant contribution was in the system of measurements. All ancient measurements are based on anthropometric, e.g. The Roman foot. In the Indian system it was determined by the dimensions of the Yajman or the Sthapati. Also, the scale of a furniture varied from a building and scale of a building from a town layout. This gave a unique character to the scale

and unity of form in a settlement. Even today, a small town built by local artisans a unity and harmony in scale and composition. Obviously the knowledge was imparted, but the method of teaching is not at all available. A country which built the great temples, mosques, palaces, mausoleums etc. could not do these without a method of training architects and artisans.

Ancient India had placed Architects in an exalted position, as a creator who determined the form and disposition of settlements and all buildings, not only temples and palaces, but even the general distribution of land use and all buildings. Lord Brahma had created four architects to deliver different levels of service, where the Sthapati was the chief. He had to have knowledge of all the sciences including astronomy, literature, religious scriptures, and all arts which included painting, sculpture and the performing arts. He was a learned and respected person and the Kings would subject themselves to his command. Long years of training, development of skills separated a Sthapati from other building professionals. He was a true Master Builder – in command over the total process from conceptualization to delivery. The entire process of production was under his command.

Professional Education in Modern India

Modern Indian architecture and architects are searching for the historical and heritage connection. Contemporary education in the field is based on western models. Paucity of trained architects in the initial years after independence did not foster discovering the roots, since most of the teachers came from developed western countries. However, conscious efforts by the architects led by a few eminent ones are making Indian Architecture regain its lost glory. The role played by the Indian academic institutions is a subject of this study.

Education opens up the mind just a lamp when as lit illuminates and lights other lamps. Professional education has an additional role in that it has to deliver a service and be accountable for it.

The profession of Architecture balances between creativity and practicability. It is known as the 'art of the soluble' and the 'art of the possible'. Synthesis of scientific application through technology in order to create space and form is critical in Architecture. The education curriculum for architects, world over, attempts to achieve this difficult blend between art and science to develop a usable form.

In pre independence India, there was only one college in Bombay which used to offer an architecture course, up to the intermediate level of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Sir J. J. College of Architecture was established in Bombay in 1913. It was Asia's first school of architecture and 1913 onwards it offered a Government Diploma in Architecture. In 1936 the course was reorganised to a 5-year course still awarding a Diploma, since it was not affiliated to any University. The students had to pass the Professional Practice Examination of the RIBA to be able to call themselves professionally qualified Architects. In 1952, it was affiliated to Bombay University and the students received a Degree in Architecture giving them a professional status.

However, the Bengal Engineering College started its course in Architecture, Town and Regional Planning under the University of Calcutta in 1949. Students, seven of them, receiving the Degree, in 1954, were the first Indians to hold a University Degree in Architecture from an Indian University. Senior Professors from reputed Universities of USA, such as, MIT, came under the TCM scheme to teach. Among them Prof Stein stayed back, and started a practice. He designed many memorable buildings, such as, India International Centre, Habitat Centre, American School etc. An area of Delhi is nicknamed Steinabad, because all the buildings were designed by him. Stein attempted a blend of Indian architecture, particularly with materials and form. Students drew inspiration from his work as well as his teaching.

The School of Architecture in Delhi was started in 1941, offering a certificate course. In 1942 it developed into a full five year course in the Delhi

Polytechnic, offering a Diploma. In 1950 it was affiliated to Delhi University and the first batch to receive a Degree was in 1955. In the same year it was amalgamated to the School of Planning and renamed as School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. In 1977, it was declared as Deemed to be a University enabling it to expand with a number of courses at the post graduate and doctoral levels. It has become internationally known as SPA as a premier institution of the world. Students from this School teach in various Universities of the world. Some of the students who are now internationally known, such as, Raj Rewal, Kuldeep Singh, Ranjit Sabiki, Murad Chowdhury, et al taught in the School, on their return from abroad. This helped in improving the standard as well as bringing in new ideas and concepts to the students. These architects continued the search for discovering an Indian Identity and encouraged the students to examine alternate options.

Most probably, the first School of Architecture in the private sector was started in Ahmadabad, by

B. V. Doshi, funded by the Ahmadabad Educational Society. It was renamed as CEPT (Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology) in 1966. Doshi, who had a long association with Le Corbusier could attract many eminent western architects to come and teach. Also Luis Kahn was commissioned to build IIM at Ahmadabad. Kahn was assisted by Anant Raje who was his long time associate from their days in Philadelphia. Raje taught as a Professor throughout his life at CEPT. Similarly Kulbhusan Jain taught at the School. The School expanded and added various other streams dealing with habitat and human settlements. It has now become a full fledged University called CEPT University. CEPT has made a niche for itself as one of the best and internationally known institutions in the field of architecture and planning.

It would be unfair to single out few institutions from a country of the size of India. A large number of institutions spread all over India impart architectural education; as a result India exports a large number of



Charles Correa's design for the British Council in New Delhi is one of the architect's most well-known works

trained graduates to both developing and developed countries, where they have made a name for themselves. Architects, Suchas, Charles Correa, Raj Rewal, Late A. P. Kanvinde, B. V. Doshi. Ranjit Sabiki, are on the visiting faculty of top ranking Universities of the world. All of them have received various awards from international institutions of architecture.

Professional development

The Indian Institute of Architects was started in 1917. In 1922 the Bombay Architectural Association was formed. It was associated with the RIBA. Growth of membership was restricted to those who qualified. Since architectural education was only imparted in Bombay the IIA was relegated to a secondary position. After independence architectural education spread all over India. Consequently the membership of the Institute increased. Chapters covering all parts of India have been formed. IIA also encouraged students

who worked as Assistants in Architects' offices to pass examinations conducted by IIA allowing them to obtain membership of the IIA. This was held equivalent to a full time Degree.

In 1972, the Parliament of India passed the Architects Act, which created the Council of Architecture (CoA). This was possible due to the sustained efforts of the Late Pilloo Modi and Sri J. R. Bhalla. This particular law gave the Council of Architecture power to regulate the profession and all matters connected thereto. Only persons registered with the CoA could call themselves Architects and render professional services. The CoA also registered the Schools imparting Architectural Education after being satisfied with the standard and quality of the education being imparted. In order to do this, CoA has formulated the minimum standard of Architectural Education. Students graduating from these Schools are entitled to be registered with the CoA and carry on the practice of Architecture.



Husain-Doshi Gufa, Ahmedabad by B. V. Doshi

Expansion of architectural education

From a handful of Schools in the first decade after independence, the total number of Institutions imparting Architectural education exceeded 350 by 2013. The sanctioned intake is close to 23,000 per year. All States of the Union, barring a few, impart Architectural Education. However, the Institutions are very unevenly distributed. Unfortunately, excepting Assam, none of the north eastern States have any architecture school. Even Assam has only two Schools, both located in Guwahati. The Schools are located generally in and around major cities. For example, Delhi has 8 Schools, but the surrounding States of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have a number of institutions within easy commuting distance from Delhi.

Student participation

The National Association of Students of Architecture (NASA) was established in 1957. It is a Registered Society, of completely, non profit, non political character, designed to foster exchange among students across the country, organise annual meets and design competitions. Originally it had only seven institutions,. Now it has more than 190. All institutions the imparting architectural education are encouraged to join it. Over the years, apart from the Annual NASA meet, six Zonal NASA meets are held, which are organised by Zonal Institution students. Winning an award in NASA is considered a major achievement by the students. The roles of teachers are marginal, and generally relegated to providing logistic support. This has fostered and encouraged improvement of standards of quality of design and independent expression. The interactions expand into debates, painting, quizzes etc, allowing the students to expand their horizon of creativity.

ARCASIA is an association of Architects from Asia providing a forum for exchange of ideas and concepts across frontiers of political boundaries. Every year some country hosts it and architects and students irrespective of the political view of their country take part in this completely non-political, cultural and educational interaction.

Future challenge

Architecture today is truly international, breaking the dogma of cultural atrophy. The world is now facing a serious crisis of climate change due to global warming. Buildings and urban infrastructure are one of the major contributors in adding carbon load. Energy consumption by buildings are already under scrutiny by Energy monitors. New methods of studying the properties of building materials would require in depth knowledge of Physics, and Chemistry. Building materials would have to be studied not only for their strength and appearance but also for the inherent embodied energy. Modern materials are usually high on embodied energy. They consume large amounts of energy in the process of production. In the design of a building and choice of materials calculation of energy would be vital and consequently demand evolving energy conserving design approaches, Energy monitors would like such data to be made available. Traditional energy sources are derived from fossil fuels. Progressive replacement by renewable sources is being attempted world over. Buildings and urban infrastructure consume a major share of conventional sources of energy. A scientific approach to energy management would require the architect to be trained to apply science in architectural design.

Similarly, management of water, and waste by scientific methods resulting in recycling, reuse and renewal of vital environmental assets require a scientific approach. Environmental factors, such as, acoustics at building and settlement level, transportation modes and settlement morphology, waste disposal and management, management of water, etc would call for re-evaluation of architectural education. Revision of the syllabus and training of teachers is urgently called for. In order to ensure wide dissemination cyber technology in education would, hopefully, find a true place in the academic curriculum. The shackles of the past call for replacement. The tremendous potential of the students to lead Indian architecture in the world needs encouragement.

Architecture – Art or Political Statement

Narayani Gupta

The use of the word 'architecture' is oddly imprecise. The vast majority of buildings are anonymous. In the last 50 years a category called 'vernacular architecture' has been hived off, in much the way categories of the visual arts, dance and music, are called 'folk'. Some large public buildings, and large stately houses, are called works of architecture. The most distinctive among them are, after a period of time, called monumentsⁱ. These are admiringly seen as great works of art. Some might be or may become containers for other works of art, or for literature, for cult-objects, for assembly. When these containers are recognized as works of art, even works of genius, it is understood that they should be retained as far

as possible in their original form. Some come to be known by the name of the architect as well as by the nature of their function.

19th century Europe was the era of the encyclopaedia, the ancestor of the Google search engine. Scholars had an obsession with quantifying and classifying. In India, Europeans had been given to randomly collecting and sketching, and there are many fine monuments that survive only in their sketches or canvases. The turning-point for architecture came when James Fergussonⁱⁱ, art-enthusiast and culture-detective, launched on an ambitious encyclopaedic account of south and southeast Asian architecture. He clubbed



Safdarjung's Tomb, photo courtesy: Anson's Collection



Pondichery sea front building

them in terms of regions/dominant cults (North or South Indian, Buddhist or Hindu...), and by dynasties (Chola, Mughal...) – and then identified specific stylistic features in each. While region is useful to understand the materials used (stone in north India, brick in Bengal...), and religion to understand form (congregational worship as distinct from individual communion), dynastic divisions are misleading – ‘Khilji’ (30 years) cannot be juxtaposed with ‘Mughal’ — (over 300 years). And while it was easy to identify patrons, to attribute architects was impossible — only in very rare cases were the names of architects known. As in pre-Renaissance Europe, the Indian builders were members of a guild, not members of an architect’s team.

Initially this anonymity was true also of the work of the Europeans in India. The general term ‘colonial architecture’ also blurred specificities. These were

disaggregated on the basis of countries only in 1968, when Sten Nilsson published his definitive bookⁱⁱⁱ. While the European colonists were by the late 18th century penned up in their small ‘settlements’ (which explains their ‘period character’) the English East India Company’s officials and soldiers struck out into the heartland of India in a pincer-like movement, from Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. As their political control expanded, so did their distinctive civil stations and cantonments. Tents gave way to pucca houses; first older ones recycled, then the new invention, the ‘bungalows’ (the name and form based on homes in Bengal) and later the standard grid of colonial settlements. Till mid-19th century, British military and then civil engineers — the PWD began life in 1847 in a magnificent campus in Roorkee — had to build on the cheap because there was an overwhelming problem of keeping civil expenditure within limits.



Ripon Building, Madras

Imperial Indian Architecture

From 1850 came the major transformation, when ambitious projects became possible by getting funds not from the state but from rich Indians (these public buildings displayed prominent marble plaques with lists of donors). PWD engineers now built more ambitiously — following blueprints prepared by architects in Britain, with materials shipped out from Britain. Increasingly the form of the buildings incorporated Indian architectural elements based on drawings being prepared by students in the government Schools of Art. This intricate collaboration was the basis of a secular revolution in Indian architecture. The public monuments being created were the temples of British India — museums, libraries, universities, railway — stations, municipal offices. The majestic Writers' Building, the Bombay Municipal office, the Forest Institute in Dehra Dun were testaments to the bureaucracy that embodied British rule. What looks like a relocated section of Fatehpur Sikri is St John's College in Agra, another is the Madras Museum. This trend of building grand public works was replicated by many of the 600-odd princes (until the 1920s when many of them turned to building new palaces for themselves, this time perhaps inspired by the Viceregal Palace in New Delhi).

Historic Architecture as Trust

In the 19th century the Europeans discovered the 'ancient civilisations' of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India, and the Archaeological Survey of India was set up in 1861. Fergusson's exercise of historicising and classifying older Indian architecture for its intrinsic value (ie not because it was a sacred or a politically significant space only) was followed by a discussion on how to ensure that they were not destroyed or their material recycled, as had happened in earlier days when laying roads or constructing buildings. Following the English National Trust's policy, Curzon's government conferred on the ASI in 1904 the right to 'protect' (and thereby to *own*) 'monuments' which were more than 100 years old.

In a strangely passive fashion, the ASI till the 1980s retained the cut-off date at 1800, instead of moving ahead a year at a time (in the 2020s the President's palace, and the North and South Block will be 100 years old). There is no systematic survey to identify colonial 'monuments'. Many of them are being modified by retrofitting partitions and air-conditioning, and their integrity thoughtlessly destroyed by adding annexes. In textbooks, Chola and Mughal architecture are described in great detail, but that of the British does not figure at all. The buildings of the Emperors,

Nawabs and Nayaks are called monuments, and invite you in. That of the British are seen as workplaces, and seem to say 'Keep Out'.

Modern Architecture as Workplace

Tourists earnestly studied details of older architecture, and became familiar with terms like 'squinch' and 'double dome', but not with either the technology or the styles of colonial architecture. They never spared a look for the marvels created by the use of iron girders and cement and concrete – larger spans, higher ceilings, more floors. Or a thought for the philosophy behind 'Indo-Saracenic' (= Hindu-Islamic) – the term used to describe styles developed in the late 19th century, that were glorious amalgams of earlier Indian styles with classical European structures. The Victoria Terminus was dismissed as 'wedding-cake architecture', and for a generation after Independence the buildings of Lutyens and Baker were regarded as embarrassingly hybrid. The charming details as well as the playful elements were never noticed. Hardly any of the hundreds of civil servants who strode into

North and South Block over the decades paused to read the patronising message inscribed in English on the first or sought to understand the very different tone of that in Persian on the second. None of them strolled out on a winter afternoon to sit under the lovely chhatris overlooking Vijay Chowk, and of course anyone who did not belong to the charmed circle was shoo-ed away by the police.

As for the interiors – if the ASI properties are echoingly bare, 19th and early 20th century buildings are crowded temples full of offerings of files and steel cupboards, with shabby or over-ornate furniture (depending on the occupant's status) and indicating a lofty indifference to cleanliness and dignity (again calibrated to the status of the occupant). Signage is usually inappropriate in colour and design, decorative statuary or potted plants mechanically disposed of. One cannot but wonder whether those who pass some years of their life in these period buildings find them so totally alien that they are almost happy in seeing them fall into neglect.



Umaid Bhavan, Jodhpur



Writers' Building, Calcutta

Mille-Feuille Cities

If there is a sense of pride in Indian architecture, it is probably for the most recent examples – the monuments of the last 60 years. The 1950s and 60s saw the last of the great state-sponsored monuments – Sapru House, the Akademies, Vigyan Bhavan. In the 70s the states asserted themselves – their Bhavans in Delhi, the Vidhana Saudha, Bhopal Bhavan. From the late 80s there was a move back to asserting religious fervour, best seen in Akshardham Temple built at the expense of the Yamuna. More recently, there has been a rash of malls, the gated shopping a status-symbol that boosts the self-esteem of smaller towns.

Architects, more than people of any other profession, are Indian as well as international. They appreciate the traditions in the country that they are heir to, but have been trained to achieve scale, form and detail which makes their work not very different from those

in Hongkong or Detroit. As our cities get built up, is it possible to create a sense of harmony between different eras of building, or is it inevitable that there will be mindless clashes of different aesthetics, which assault visual harmony and create uninspiring juxtapositions. These happen for two reasons — one, an architect's brief is to design individual buildings, and she is not required to see these in the context of the area or the street. ('Context' does not mean a token nod to a historic building, as when a district centre near Teen Burji in Delhi's Mohammadpur is adorned with a similar dome.) Harmony demands not caricature, but a magic mix of appropriate access, harmonious colour, volume and height – which can be found in the artist who is buried in every engineer/ architect/planner. Two, the priority given to 'corridors' (otherwise roads) is at the cost of the balance between open and built-up spaces. In earlier centuries, the skyline and groundline were sympathetic to monumental bulk, but now it is difficult to find

elbow-room (contrast the setting of Humayun's Tomb in a proportionately designed garden, or Baker's Secretariat Blocks elegantly following the slope of Raisina Hill, with the new building of the Ministry of External Affairs, which finds itself within speaking distance of the look-alike National Museum opposite – the future talking to the past).

Architecture as Heritage

One has to find ways to resolve the dichotomy between 'monument' and 'workplace', and the most obvious way is to look at architecture in terms of 'heritage', even *potential* heritage. The last 30 years has definitely seen a change in the public sense of 'heritage'. From being vague (general references to "our glorious past") and limited (to ASI monuments) it has become more inclusive (including 'natural' and 'intangible' heritage) and wider (ranging beyond ASI properties). From the 1980s the ASI has been supplemented by INTACH^{iv} and in turn INTACH disseminates 'awareness' through 'heritage clubs' in schools.

We should acknowledge that there is a long way to go. The *widening* knowledge about architectural history has not been matched by a *deepening* understanding of the subject. This will be possible only by a quantum leap in imagination, which will trigger a bold initiative to have as many universities in the country teaching archaeology and art history as there are law-schools. Interpreting architecture calls for an interdisciplinary education. It should be shared by many specialists and enthusiasts, not left to architects or to historians only.

Apart from education, heritage interpretation at site needs collaboration between different government departments and academics – planners, the ASI, departments of architecture and art history. Every monument that should be showcased and also used for appropriate activities has to be dealt with discretely. Details like interpretation centres, visitor facilities, green surrounds, have to be worked out. One size does not fit all. In practical terms, to translate plans into action, the recent inclusion of 'Culture'



Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Mumbai



South Block



Humayun's Tomb, photo courtesy: Anson's Collection

in the options for investment under CSR should be taken full advantage of.

Heritage buildings need to be identifiable – which means they have to be notified by the local government, and the lists attractively printed and made available just as town maps and flyers about ASI monuments have become (older people will recall the ugly maps of Delhi sold in the 1960s, and happily contrast those to what we can get now).

Works of architecture were created in response to felt needs, or to make grand political statements. This can be debated on endlessly, but what we have to recognize immediately is that works of architecture can give great pleasure as works of art. They also command respect in the sense that they are incapable of being duplicated and therefore need to be conserved with care. This in turn has to become a people's project which does not remain the exclusive preserve of archaeologists, urban planners and architects.

References:

- ⁱ Except in the USA, where they *will* do things differently, and use the word 'monuments' to describe statues of American statesmen, usually unrecognizably outfitted in Roman togas
- ⁱⁱ James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London, 1876)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sten Nilsson, *European Architecture in India 1750-1850* (London, 1968)
- ^{iv} The name combines 'national trust' and 'heritage' which in England are located in 2 distinct bodies The English National Trust is a private organisation that owns and maintains extensive properties, and is therefore like the ASI. English Heritage is concerned with listing, maintenance, and outreach work, which INTACH aspires to do.

Indian Landscapes, Indian Gardens

Mohammad Shaheer

I

It's common for garden and building style to be identified by the geographical region in which it has developed. The literature on garden history makes use of widely recognised groupings: Chinese and Japanese in the Far- East, Persian, English, French and other European countries in the West, and the Persian tradition in between. Schemes of this kind don't usually accommodate the traditions of the sub-continent as examples of Indian landscape or the 'Indian Garden', but rather as a range of mostly religious-stylistic distinctions – Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and so on - associated with at least four thousand years of history from the earliest Vedic times to the couple of centuries of British rule that ended in the mid-twentieth century.

Given that gardens are supremely sophisticated expressions of cultural achievement and cultural aspiration, it's unavoidable that their making be seen within the context of these numerous, varied and distinct periods of Indian history and the cultures associated with them. But as Jawaharlal Nehru used to say, 'in India the centuries live side by side', and the shaping of the environment today, indeed of life itself, is as much the outcome of the material facts of the contemporary world as it is the consequence of age-old ways of relating to nature and society that have been held to be profoundly meaningful for millennia and continue to prevail.

Images from the remote past that give a glimpse of garden spaces centred on the ceremonial veneration

of trees (at Sanchi, Fig.1) find contemporary resonance in modern gardens. For example the one at Sanskriti Kendra¹ on the outskirts of Delhi, where a Banyan is placed auspiciously (planted, incidentally by Kumar Gandharva in 1990) at the centre of a large entrance court. Similarly at the recently completed Rajiv Gandhi Ninaivakam at Sriperumbudur² the generously spreading canopy of the Rain Tree (*Samanea saman*) provides a roof of foliage over a very large courtyard – known appropriately as the Rain Tree Court – at the entrance to this commemorative landscape.



Sanchi-Tree Worship



Sanskriti Kendra, Banyan tree



Sriperumbudur Entrance-The Rain tree Court

There is a tendency to imagine gardens as being virtually without context – as self-contained enclosures, pristine works of art if you like, representing an ideal world through the medium of water, plants, colour and scent, the play of light and shade, visual and sensory variety, all studiously arranged to a distinctive, often spectacular shape that fits a

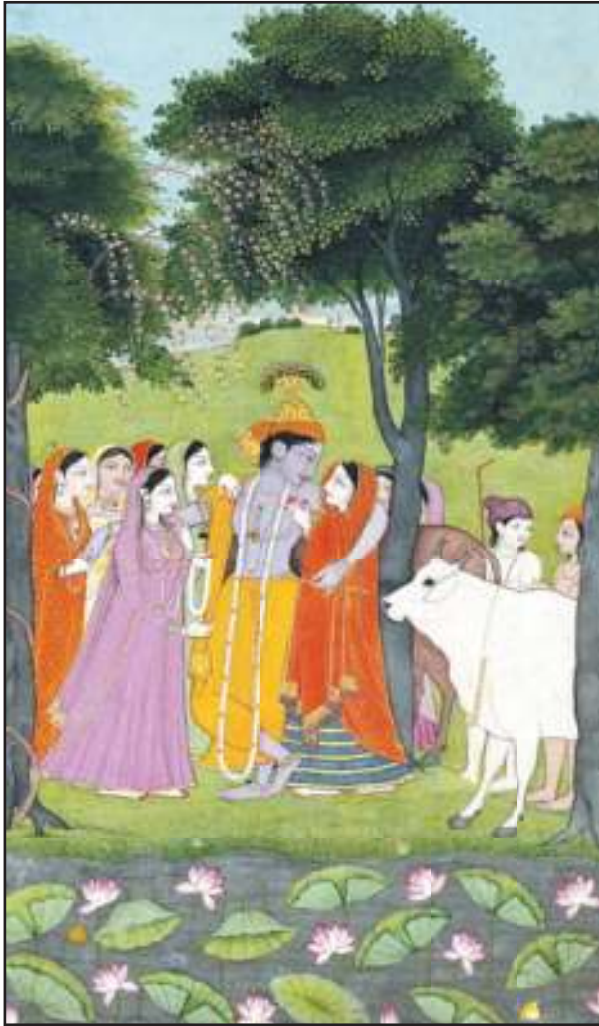
culturally specific – and therefore variable - notion of a garden. But gardens emerge from the landscape in which they are placed and can be seen to interact with it in different ways. One garden for instance may be carefully aligned to offer a prospect of a distant panorama; in complete contrast, another may set itself apart from its surroundings, and in a third hypothetical example, the division between garden and surrounding landscape may be indistinguishable:



Mughal Prospect



Landscape vista from a viihara site at Sanchi



Vrindavan, the World as a Garden

II

This is a good way of looking at gardens because this broad theme – of how a garden sits in its surroundings and how those surroundings influence the geometry of its spaces — is central to understanding the development of gardens everywhere. But especially on the Indian subcontinent, where large parts of the natural environment have always been commonly perceived to be full of metaphysical and spiritual meaning; where the journey of a river from the high Himalayas to the ocean is a traverse of sacred geography, each part of which – mountains, valleys, ghats, groves, the river itself – is in some way revered, and so imparts profound ontological significance to

the habitations and spaces that occur within it, be they gardens or cities, Vrindavan or Varanasi.

That's the landscape that moved Kalidasa – 'one of the greatest poets of world literature' - to compose a lyrical portrait of the geography of the Vindhya and the Malwa region as seen through the imagined perception of what a rain cloud (*Meghadutam*) would see and experience as it moved over this terrain. It is a description of the landscape infused with wisdom, romance and the evocation of sensory delights – 'it is the landscape that figures as the beloved of the cloud-lover which is itself the *alter ego* of the real lover'. Chandra Rajan in the introduction to her translation of his works suggests that it is Kalidasa himself revealing his own deep attachment to the land, its history, its natural landmarks, its flora and fauna, its seasons and its people 'with such loving exactitude as if the landscape lay in the palm of his hand'³.

For landscapes and gardens which have long vanished, it's only these sorts of glimpses – in literature, in the epics and in art, on the sculptural friezes in temple precincts – that provide a tantalizingly fragmented picture of what ancient India's garden heritage might actually have been; nevertheless it's an adequate basis for conjecture.

It's a fact that in the history of gardens the most remembered are those where even scattered outlines structured in stone suggest past grandeur. We relate with ease to familiar and visually robust prototypes – for example the European formal garden or the picturesque but studied informality of the English landscape style, and closer home, the geometrical mystique of Mughal gardens.

For that reason the essence of a historical garden is sometimes misread as being confined to that inferred from the disposition of its built elements. But really, when life – the plants and water – has departed, what remains are only the bare bones of the design. Sadly, the sensory qualities that flow largely from lush vegetation and birdsong, the activity of small

animals and the effect of the changing seasons leave no trace beyond the brief but vibrant period of their existence. But the classics are replete with imaginative descriptions, as this one from the *Mahabharata*:

'And Maya built in the Assembly Hall, a lotus pool peerless in beauty paved with priceless gems and studded with pearl-drops; therein bloomed lotuses with leaves of beryl and stalks of gems; a flight of crystal steps led down to brimming waters translucent in all seasons... surrounding the Hall were thick groves, beautiful, dark blue, providing cool shade with many kinds of great trees ever blooming, redolent of flower-fragrances; and dotted around with pools of blue waters haunted by wild geese, teals and red geese.'⁴

Professor Rajan attributes Kalidasa's vision of garden splendour to literary reminiscences of this sort from the epics and also the poet's own experience of the opulent 'mansions and groves, palaces and pleasure-gardens... that made Ujjayini splendid and beautiful...' of the city during his life. Its vivid detail encourages the sense of actual landscapes and gardens, in appearance as well as experience. It is a perception of the garden where the central premise is the absence of duality - the reduction in significance of the limits between inside and outside so that there is only the garden, amidst the garden-like surroundings of nature: Verse 28 of *Meghadutam*):

*Having rested, go on, sprinkling with fresh rain drops
Clusters of jasmine-buds in gardens by woodland
streams,
Enjoying a fleeting together-ness
As your gift of shade touches
The faces of flower-gathering maidens...*

It's possible to extrapolate an image of these ancient gardens that shows them to be ephemeral, incidental, nurtured – not built – dare one say, a horticultural version of the empty centre, stillness within the movement of life and the larger garden of the world, gaining their identity from their effect on the senses (for that is how they are described) rather than their physical form⁵.

This is the larger philosophy that scholars surmise from a variety of classical sources, and it is usually associated either with the leisure pursuits of royalty or the nobility, or in myth and religious literature with incarnations of the divine.

III

About the garden in everyday life, Jeannine Auboyer in her extensively researched and fascinatingly narrated account of 'Daily Life in Ancient India'⁶ writes: 'the family's private life tended to centre around the garden and its outbuildings... The garden was looked after with great care; it contained a vegetable garden which the mistress of the house supervised personally and in which she grew the medicinal plants needed for treating the family's ailments..', with trees, flowering shrubs and banana-plants featuring quite prominently. Auboyer's book covers a period approximating a thousand years, from about 200 B.C. to 700 A.D., acknowledged as the golden age. But such is the remarkable strength of traditional practice in India that gardens broadly conforming to this description can be found quite easily today. They are usually a particular kind of courtyard garden integral to large ancestral houses dating back at least to the middle of the last century, and many of greater antiquity in older parts of historic cities – Lucknow or Bhopal for example – and in smaller towns and cities too. They are simple and purposeful in their layout and content, with little in the way of extra beautification or decoration; yet if you can see them within the context of a two thousand year history they represent an eloquent expression of the honest aesthetic of one kind of Indian garden.

The courtyard garden of this type was a space that traditionally fulfilled the many needs of a usually large household: it was the central social space at the appropriate times and reasonable weather as well as an outdoor work space for numerous domestic chores; a part of it divided in an orderly rectilinear fashion with small plots set aside separately for vegetables, herbs,

seasonal flowers, together with a few large woody shrubs and climbers such as Hibiscus, Chandnee or Jasmine, and fruit trees including guava, mango, lemon or custard apple (*shareefa*) or mulberry (*shahtoot*). Areas not planted were brick-paved usually, and bare packed earth was an acceptable surface too.

One could object that these spaces are courtyards, not gardens. Actually they can be imagined as an orchard, a vegetable patch, a flower garden and also a drawing room, all in one – not to mention their use as a most suitable and pleasant outdoor sleeping place in the summer nights. But that was before India became part of the British Empire and the spatial format of indigenous architecture was turned inside out. Literally, that is, because the place traditionally occupied by an open courtyard in the centre of the dwelling, mansion or palace, now became the built space of the bungalow surrounded by an open compound. Before this became an accepted norm, a domestic garden would be a very versatile place indeed, inside the enclosed space of the courtyard.



A Garden Courtyard in a traditional house - Barabanki



Plan - Garden Courtyard

Now what's interesting is of course that this functional archetype has been virtually common throughout the country, allowing for some variations arising from climatic or cultural considerations, and it's a type of Indian garden space that scholars believe has existed almost unchanged in its basic form since the time of the Buddha.

A historical discussion of gardens in India does not usually recognise spaces of this type, perhaps because they have been so much a part of everyday life, so unchanged, so self-effacingly practical. In comparison with the exotic visions of the other great traditions - the mysterious romance in descriptions of the lost landscapes of pre-Islamic India or the grandness of a paradisiacal ideal that Mughal gardens aspired to - the aesthetic experience of these gardens is at a humbler scale, yet profound in its message if we wish to discover what is Indian about an Indian garden. But another decade or two and they will have disappeared forever, victims of a newly intensive urbanisation in which, as you might expect, these mirrors of tradition find no place.



Baghe Babur, Kabul - restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture 2006



Humayun's Tomb in its garden

IV

From the earliest gardens in Kabul and Delhi – Baghe Babur and Humayun's Tomb respectively to very late examples in the Deccan and Awadh, Mughal landscapes on the subcontinent belong to a historical tradition of formal gardens extending over three continents, and at least five centuries.

They have come to be known as "Islamic" gardens, even though the origin of this distinctive form is acknowledged by scholars to lie in a time even more remote. In other, earlier cultural contexts it is not improbable that their symbolic meaning was quite different to the one attributed during the centuries of Muslim dominance (*circa* 10th to 17th Century), when this style of landscape design was most widespread.

At a philosophical level they are said to represent an image of paradise. Now, a paradise is not of this world, it's the opposite, and the same could be said of

its imperfect interpretation on earth. So in this kind of conceptual construct the garden is not one with the world – as it might have been in early Buddhist or Hindu tradition, steeped as it was in nature-worship and the veneration of landscape – but enclosed from its surroundings, and most appropriately for a genre of gardens that originated in the arid landscapes of West Asia, a sanctuary against an environment seen as hostile.

On the ground, their origins are in cultivation and agriculture, the rectilinear four-square outline being traced to irrigation practices, the careful husbanding of water resources and the productive use of land, particularly in the cultural landscape of ancient Persia. *Baghs* or orchards and other horticultural plots in the dry plains were irrigated by open channels flowing from one to the other, the water having been brought with great difficulty and extraordinary engineering skill from the mountains to the dry plain by underground and surface canals.

The arrangement of the Mughal garden is deceptively simple and suggests an abstract representation of agricultural patterns and processes. Paths orthogonally arranged divide the space, four-fold or otherwise; the plots in between are lush with the foliage of freely growing orchard trees, the whole interlaced with a network of water-channels punctuated by pools and cascades. The garden is territorially defined and contained in a walled enclosure, accessible only through symmetrically arranged gates. Often, one side of the enclosure, usually opposite the main entry gate, opens to a view of the landscape outside⁷.

There are at least three distinct types all derived from these basic principles. The Tomb garden in its own enclosure, almost always perfectly square; the pleasure garden expansive and generously sized in a usually linear arrangement, with an independent existence outside the city or further afield in regions of scenic beauty, and gardens in the courtyards of palaces. Common to them all is the theme of balancing and combining certain dualities within the same space

- for instance, utility and ornamentation, enclosure and prospect, movement and stillness, productive and aesthetic value, all within an austere framework overlaid with unrestrained organic growth.

Usually the layout of the pleasure or palace gardens directs the eye towards a prospect or view - a river or valley panorama for instance. In contrast the funerary landscapes focus inward on the tomb itself; and even though the design does provide for a view outwards from one side – as of the fine river scenes at the Taj and at Humayun’s Tomb – in the scale of these monumental structures this seems incidental to the main theme.



From the garden to the lake



Gardens in the Kashmir Valley look outwards to the lake and hills beyond



Nishat Garden- the prospect to the Zaberwan Mountains

In the spirit of their Persian origin, these gardens are inconceivable without continuously flowing water: to maintain their health, to cool the air and to stimulate the senses. Mughal gardens are renowned for the array of water-related elements and structures that accomplish these tasks with considerable artistry and craft, enhancing in many subtle and carefully engineered ways the movement, appearance and sound of water.

But the supreme achievement that is evident from even a short time spent in these gardens is undoubtedly the deep regard that their planners had for what’s known as *‘the regional sense of place’* whilst selecting sites. They chose land with elevated topography and a strong geographical identity - river-side sites of course because of the need for water, but also for the breeze and the panorama, or a site at the head of a valley as at the late Mughal garden orchard at Pinjore. In the famed gardens of the Kashmir Valley, a very deliberate connection is made: down the hill-side from the Zaberwan mountain range to the lake - an axis of flowing water and cascades to which all other arrangements of space and tree masses (the massive *chenars*) are secondary. Each garden celebrates the beauty of its larger environment.

So though the garden is of great beauty and includes all the typical detail – fountains, cascades, pools, avenues, groves, flowering plants and so on - in a

fascinating paradox, the particular assembly of its lines and spaces directs our vision to actually look away and beyond, to the expanse of the Dal lake and the mountains beyond; a very special view of the world.

Garden imagery is intrinsic to the poetic tradition of Sufi mysticism: it's said that nature and the terrestrial garden represent God's mercy (*asar-i-rahmat*) and are worthy of contemplation, the 'real garden' lies elsewhere – in the human heart, or the inner self. The garden is a 'narrative symbol' for this conceptual symmetry – between looking outside over the beauty of the world and contemplative examination of the self⁸.

Within the forts and palaces from the Deccan to Rajasthan similar ideas can be seen in the planning



Udaipur City Palace- Garden at roof level overlooking the city



Jaigarh Fort-Elevated garden with a prospect of the valley

of gardens to look out into the countryside from an elevated viewpoint – there are numerous examples: the Forts of Agra and Delhi, Rajput palaces at Amber, Jaigarh and Udaipur, Golconda and other forts and palaces of the Deccan kingdoms; and preceding these, in the many royal structures and complexes in the historic city of Mandu.

V

Despite this long history of indigenous engagement with the art, philosophy and design of gardens the dominant idioms for landscape design for the last century and a half have come mostly from the Picturesque and related styles prevalent in 18th century Britain, the later horticultural trend during the Victorian period and partly from the formal gardens of the Italian and French baroque.

Views of palace gardens featured in old photographs and illustrations from around the mid nineteenth to the early part of the twentieth century show the trend towards planting-beds divided in imitation of the ornate parterres of European originals, departing increasingly from the strictly rectilinear geometry of the Persian precedent. Mughal power had devolved to the provinces, and the prestige of the latter in turn was in rapid decline as they ceded increased authority to the Company across the country, in Awadh, in the Deccan and elsewhere. Instances of this curious amalgamation of Mughal with Baroque is apparent in visual records of the gardens in the Nizam's palaces at Hyderabad - Chaumahalla and Falaknuma for example, and far away to the North in the later nawabi gardens at the Kaiserbagh Palace in Lucknow. There was room for exotica too, as in the quaintly named Wilaiyati Bagh (Lucknow)⁹ and a remarkable version of a Chinese garden next to a giant rock outcrop right next to the palace structure at Falaknuma, a proposed restoration of which is illustrated below.

VI

A completely new template for the arrangement of living space, particularly in cities, emerged quite swiftly



Chinese Garden Falaknuma-Existing 2001



Chinese Garden Falaknuma-restoration (not executed)

after 1857; between that tumultuous and tragic year and the turn of the century it had begun to change the shape of towns, houses, and naturally, gardens. The new pattern had very little to do with what preceded it and yet it was seen as representative of a lifestyle worth aspiring to. It consisted of the bungalow and its garden at the domestic end of a range of land-use that had at its other end, public places such as the cantonment, the university campus, city parks, civil lines, railway stations and other civic amenities. They were 'landscape' types because of the abundance of maintained open space and gardens that was an essential part of their planning, not seen before in this form in local practice.

Looking at garden books of the period, or even at pictures it's difficult to find any special character or distinctive aesthetic quality in many of these vast garden spaces. There was the lawn of course, and the flourish of colourful annuals (a staple of another new thing - the 'flower show') at the end

of the 'cold season', but these kinds of gardens only ever came even close to equalling the beauty of an English garden in summer when they were cultivated in the temperate environs of hill-stations. However, their size – a couple of acres was common, a district collector's bungalow might occupy grounds upwards of ten acres - did maintain a good distance between the rulers and the ruled.

The closest precedent to the concept of a Hill-Station as it developed in British India is probably the progress of the royal courts between summer and winter capitals or between Delhi and Kashmir in pre-British days. Here is a landscape conceived entirely to keep the governing classes (and their families) insulated from the two or three months of extreme summer temperatures in the plains, an exclusive, resort-like enclave in the image of a small English or Welsh country town. You could call it another version of 'the garden within a garden'. Ooty for example saw the making of an almost completely new landscape in the Nilgiris, with the introduction of extensive tea plantations, and afforestation with Australian species of Eucalyptus and Acacia over the natural grasslands, amidst the native Shola forests (parts of a unique grassland-rainforest ecosystem). It's an interesting case: with the addition of these new forests to the grassed slopes of the gently undulating landscape of small hills and valleys, the scenery was a good replica of the Downs landscape of Southern England (especially the grasslands), and as the literature records, much loved by the expatriate population. The ecological effect on species native to the area is another matter:

" the *Kurinji* (*Strobilanthes kunthianus*, a native shrub) blooms just once in 12 years, colouring the hillside blue with a mass of bell-shaped flowers – its from this spectacular sight that the Nilgiris (blue mountains) derive their name.. How long this amazing natural phenomenon will survive is questionable given that huge tracts have been lost to tea and coffee estates and Eucalyptus plantations..."¹⁰

The layout of public gardens and parks during a period of civic improvement in the early part of the twentieth

century showed an emphasis on horticultural display, in keeping with trends that were in vogue in the Victorian era; but transposed to India these ideas produced a strange hybrid only too familiar as a typical 'municipal style' even today: an eclectic but nondescript mix of many elements. However, there were exceptions, truer to an earlier and more widely influential style of English landscape (practiced by the legendary 18th century landscape gardeners in Britain). New Delhi's Lodi Garden (originally the Lady

VII

From ancient to modern times, this is the panorama of precedents from which the contemporary landscape architect or garden designer can perhaps draw insights to create something entirely new, and appropriate in that sense to the entirely different world that we inhabit today. Yet it's evident that the dominant image of what a landscape should



Lodi Gardens



Shakti Sthal



Mughal Garden, New Delhi

Willingdon Park) completed in the mid 1930's is an excellent example of the successful application of the 'picturesque' approach in an environment completely alien to the gentle landscape of England that was its inspiration. Completely different in style, and far more ambitious in its scope is Edwin Lutyens' design for the Mughal Garden in the President's Estate (originally the Viceregal Lodge), a deeply sensitive fusion of an English style formal garden as seen in country homes of the period with the classical simplicity and water-play of Persian tradition.



Shakti Sthal

look like still centres on the kind of pastoral scenery celebrated in 18th century English 'improvements' to country estates, and sometimes its contemporary interpretation even as far afield as India results in a work of great elegance, as at Shakti Sthala(1986)¹¹, the memorial garden for Indira Gandhi near Rajghat in Delhi. Mostly though it appears as a banal formula - a sort of aesthetic shorthand - to evade deeper exploration of what an Indian garden might be.

In a lecture about gardens Charles Correa contrasts the continuing significance of metaphysical bases

as sources of form in; the Indian tradition with the completely different objectives guiding art and architecture in post-Renaissance Europe: 'in India these Hindu and Buddhist beliefs are still very prevalent. So when we lay out a garden today, one cannot help but wonder: instead of trying to cannibalise quasi-Mughal traditions or faux-English ones could we not go back to the basic principle that Nature herself is sacred and inviolate? This is not such an arcane approach as might appear, for today it connects directly to our passionate espousal of environmental and ecological issues.'

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Architecture during the Mughal Period

Anuradha Chaturvedi

"In this tranquil reign, the art of building has reached such a point as astonishes both the widely travelled connoisseurs and the acknowledged masters of this incomparable craft" – ShahJehanNama by Inayat Khan

Introduction

The magnificence and diversity of the architectural heritage of the Mughal era in India is a tangible expression of the unparalleled cultural efflorescence, technological innovation and economic development characteristic of one of the most significant periods in our history. Among the numerous works of genius, outstanding architectural achievements and enduring memorials of Mughal India, are globally celebrated monuments, gardens, palace complexes such as the Taj Mahal and the Red Forts of Agra and Delhi. The glorious architectural heritage and urban landscape of innumerable centres (of administration, flourishing trade, intense intellectual activities and artistic production) established or developed during this period; as well as a range of utilitarian structures such as innovative water systems and public works associated with systematic improvement of the urban, trade and production infrastructure during the Mughal period are also of great significance.

Evolution of the Mughal Architectural Aesthetic

The unique architectural aesthetic, technical daring and environmental sensitivity of the Mughal period reflects the ideals, aspirations, vision and acumen of the magnificent master-builders – the 'Great Mughal' Emperors Akbar(1556-1605), Jehangir(1605-

1628), Shah Jehan (1628-1658), Aurangzeb(1658-1707). Often considered synonymous with opulence, elegance and grandeur, the Mughal architectural aesthetic was formulated, refined and transformed through conscious policies for creative synthesis and technological innovation over more than 300 years of building in, and binding together, heterogeneous cultural regions of the country.

Mughal Architecture evolved continuously and rapidly from the initial phase of establishment of the Mughal empire under Babur & Humayun, from 1526CE onwards. The following period of a little more than a century (from 1556 CE to 1658CE) saw unprecedented, sustained processes of consolidation, experimentation, innovation, confident synthesis, elaboration, and refinement of Mughal architecture during the prosperous and stable reigns of the Great Mughal Emperors Akbar and Jehangir; and reached a zenith of maturity and 'classicism' evident in the architectural accomplishments of the High Mughal period under ShahJehan. Under Aurangzeb, a phase of continuing regional assimilation followed. Although the Mughal Empire disintegrated during the period from 1707 to 1858CE, there was a continuity of the established Mughal architectural aesthetic and building related crafts traditions in the prolific building activity within the 'successor states' of



The celebrated Scales of Justice Screen symbolizing the Mughal concept of a just ruler, Red Fort, Delhi - Emphasis on balance and refined aesthetic expression

Awadh, Murshidabad, Hyderabad, the Jats, Sikhs and Marathas.

Sophisticated, pragmatic notions of authority and statecraft evolved during the reign of Akbar, based on a combination of military action, strategic political and marriage alliances, and well-defined relationships between the centre and provinces or 'Subahs'. These were intended to transcend ethnic and religious affiliations, and promote the integration and contribution of all communities in developmental activities. The economic and social benefits of these policies (such as the 'Sulh-i-kul' or Akbar's policy of universal tolerance, land settlement by Raja Todar Mal, Jehangir's 'Dastur-al-amal'), and linked cultural developments (such as the Bhakti movement, association with Sufi shrines), were reflected in sustained patronage for a diverse range

of architectural and urban development projects, and widespread building activity in both existing and newly established cities, towns and 'casbahs'.

During the reign of Akbar, more than 200 towns, trade centres and ports were established in one province alone. Timeless principles of sustainable development are still discernable, embedded within the compact, well-defined and planned settlements, and in their interrelationship with the surrounding landscape. Most of the important Mughal centres such as Agra and Shahjehanabad, regional capitals and towns such as Aurangabad and Burhanpur were described as 'a unique blend of nature and human settlement'. Significant architectural interventions in the form of the building complexes and urban ensembles within new or pre-existing settlements were distinguished by their responsiveness to the already existing urban

features or landscape setting of riverbanks, lakes, hills, and integration with the regional settlement pattern.

Policies of successive Emperors – able administrators and enlightened aesthetes — encouraged the promotion of scientific knowledge, and also provided creative stimulus and patronage to all the Arts.¹ This patronage ensured that the Architecture of Mughal India was enriched by mobilization of the expertise, innovative skills, and technical knowledge of some of the most accomplished 'mimars' and 'ustads' or master-builders, architects, technicians and designers of the age, supported by guilds of proficient and inventive 'karigars'-craftsmen. The extraordinary, sometimes idiosyncratic, architectural finesse of different phases of the Mughal period is considered to be the outcome of direct, creative involvement of the Emperors and their court with the planning, design, construction and supervision process, and their meticulous attention to detail.



Emulating Imperial or Badshahi patronage by successive Emperors and their family (an important role was played by women of the household in sponsoring building projects), the Amirs or wealthy, high ranking courtiers of different religious persuasions (Raja Man Singh, Abdul Rahim Khan-e-Khanan), multi-ethnic nobility, administrators and Governors of different provinces and trading communities also built extensively. There was a conscious effort to link inventive architectural forms and spatial configurations within modulated landscapes, with ideals of statecraft and notions of divine sanction. Buildings reflected regional and local architectural characteristics, creatively reinterpreted for a range of new functions, while remaining rooted in the distinctive Mughal idiom. Fortifications, palaces, gardens, water-systems, caravanserais, bazaars, hamams, maqbaras or mausoleum complexes, mosques, temples, madarasas, other public works, were planned and constructed in a recognisable Mughal style and were considered as tangible symbols of the presence, authority and beneficence of the Emperor.



Subtle and complex ideas and principles related to the 'links between the material world and the realm of thought' mentioned in the Akbarnama, were sought to be embodied in the excellence of architectural forms, spatial organization and hierarchies, structural daring and ornamental intricacy. Specialised knowledge and application of mathematical ordering principles - complex numerical ratios, geometric proportioning systems and grids, balancing, intersecting and symmetrical 'qarina' or axis - for the shaping, modulation and ornamental articulation of spaces according to the activities and experiences for which important structures and complexes were conceived, resulted in an architectural aesthetic of extreme geometrical sophistication, perceptual complexity and great beauty.

Significant architectural typologies and characteristics

Babur, having earlier ruled briefly over Samarkand, was profoundly influenced by the ratios and rhythms of Timurid-Khorasani models of architectural and





landscape design; among the few buildings in India that he admired for their construction quality and spatial layout were the Man Mandir palace at Gwalior, structures of the Sultanate period at Chanderi, and possibly the octagonal walled garden-tomb of Sikandar Lodhi, located along a watercourse, and the Hauz Khas tomb-madarsa- garden complex in Delhi.

Despite a short reign of five years (r.1526-1530CE), Babur is credited with the introduction of influential Timurid architectural forms, spatial conceptions,

garden and building typologies; as well as a new aesthetic linked with 'ordering of the land' and emphasis on regular, symmetrical gardens and orchards for campsites. Known for personally selecting suitable sites, in response to the hostile climate, and building upon the Sultanate period heritage of reservoirs, he developed 'charbagh' walled gardens and 'hamams' or baths, such as the rock cut, terraced Bagh-i-Niloufer at Dholpur, and the Bagh-





i-Fatehpur garden, with a baoli, bath complex and octagonal pavilion and platform in the middle of the lake at Fatehpur Sikri.

According to scholars such as Attilio Petruccioli, Babur engaged in large scale planning efforts in his arid territory " - system was constructed through environmental scale gardens connected by a welter of roads and hydraulic infrastructures which his successors ceaselessly strengthened and added to."

Although very few buildings from his period remain, Babur was influential in the evolution of Agra; building four 'Shahi' hot baths, and encouraging his nobles to develop a series of walled riverbank gardens along the Yamuna, based on the 'Charbagh' pattern with intersecting, cross-axial 'khiyabans' or walkways and 'nahrs' or water courses.



Timurid inspired structural innovation in the form of arch-netting or intersecting arched ribs in plaster relief work, on the internal, transition zone triangular pendentives supporting the domes, an important feature of later Mughal period buildings, is first seen in the Kabuli Bagh mosque constructed by Babur at Panipat. Mughal association with important Sufi Dargahs also began during this period with the restoration of the tomb of Amir Khusro at the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin by the brother-in-law of Babur.



During the turbulent 14 year reign of Humayun (r.1530-1543CE and 1555-56CE after a 10 year exile at Isfahan & Qasvin), an important development was that Timurid-Safavid architectural forms, and spatial conceptions of tombs and garden pavilions, began to be re-interpreted through local building traditions, and combined with Indian features such as chattris. Local materials such as red sandstone and marble, carving and inlay techniques, and ornamental motifs derived from early-Delhi Sultanate precedents, with Timurid innovations such as arch net pendentives were extensively used in the only surviving palace building attributed to this period, the octagonal Sher Mandal pavilion-library in Delhi. A residential building in the form of a two storey, terraced, red sandstone



pavilion on a high masonry plinth, with a central, closed chamber surrounded by pillared verandahs, from this period at Bayana, is considered to be an early example of *trabeate*, flat roofed pillared halls that came to be known as '*iwans*', an important feature of subsequent phases of Mughal architecture.

Other elegantly proportioned, early buildings, such as the Sabz Burj and Nila Gumbad (located near the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, and the city of Dinpanah founded by Humayun in Delhi) are distinguished by the introduction of an irregular octagonal plan form of a late - Timurid type. Known as a '*Baghdadi Muthamman*' or '*Hasht Bihisht*' this became a common plan configuration for tombs and garden pavilions during later periods. Important features of these buildings that could have influenced later Mughal architecture were the axial passages, monumental elongated *pishtaqs*, four-centred '*persianised*' arches, a cylindrical drum supporting a slightly bulbous double dome, glazed tilework

(*kashikari*), painted plasterwork and arch netting (*munabbatkari* and *qilbakari*).

The enlightened rule, administrative reforms and architectural achievements of Sher Shah Suri (son of a shepherd from Mewat), who defeated Humayun, and ruled North India between 1538-1555CE, were an inspiration during the early period of the 49-year-long reign of Akbar the Great. Large scale and carefully crafted building complexes such as the octagonal tomb of Sher Shah's father located within a walled water garden at Sasaram, the buildings of DinPanah in Delhi including the Qila-i-kohna Masjid, as well as buildings such as the Jamali Kamali complex, with single or multi-aisled, triple and five bay plans reflected in carefully articulated tripartite or five and seven fold facades, link Sultanate buildings with those of the Akbari phase of the Mughal period.

The distinctive character of the major building projects undertaken during the early phase of Akbar's reign

from 1556-1565CE drew upon a consolidation of Sultanate features and the Timurid - Safavid tradition. While Akbar lived in Dinpanah in Delhi, construction of the perfectly planned and spectacularly scaled tomb of Humayun, designed by Mirak Sayyid Ghiyas and Ustad Sayyid Mohammad, who had worked earlier for Babur, was commenced (1562-71CE), possibly under the patronage of Haji Begum, Humayun's widow. Other buildings constructed at the same time in Delhi include the Khair ul-manazil Mosque and madarsa (1561CE), and the Tomb of Atgah Khan, Akbar's prime minister (1562-66CE). The tomb of Hazrat Nizamuddin was rebuilt with white marblejali screens, a symbol of sanctity, in 1562, and the Jami Masjid restored in 1572CE.

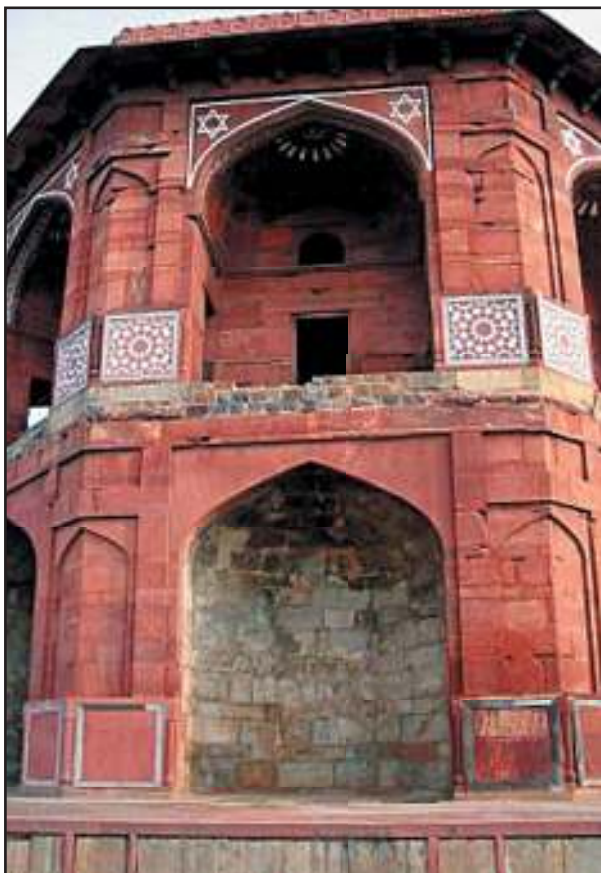
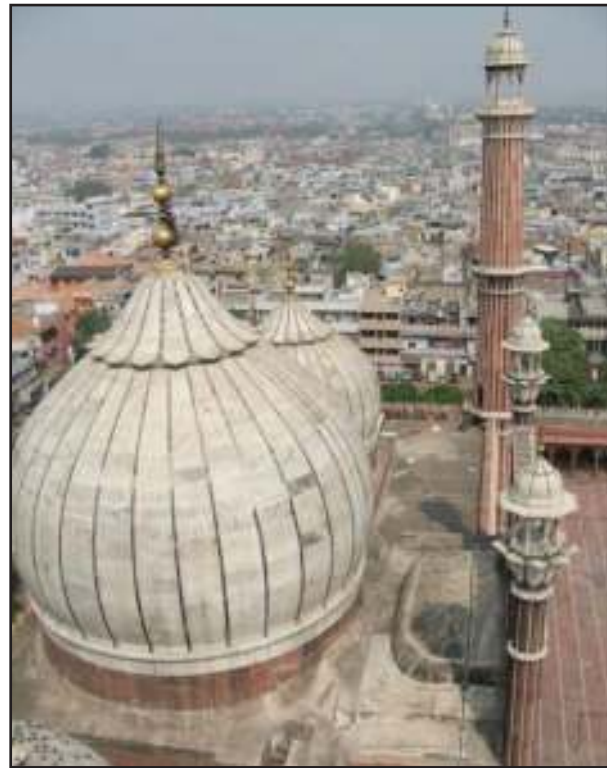
Located between the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin and Dinpanah, within the centre of a geometrically

planned paradisiacal Charbagh garden setting along the banks of the Yamuna, Humayun's tomb is a key building in the series of architectural developments that culminated in the construction of the Taj Mahal. Its ingenious plan is symmetrical along the north-south axis, with a large central octagonal chamber, interconnected axially and diagonally with eight surrounding rooms. This is considered to be a development of the 'Hasht Bihisht' or nine-fold spatial arrangement evoking the 'eight paradises' of Islamic cosmology, and enabled circumambulation of the cenotaph. The complexity of the plan is clearly articulated on the exterior by chamfered corners, higher central 'pishtaq' portals with lower wings, deeply recessed niches with four-centred arches and a double dome. The subtly bulbous outer dome, raised on a cylindrical drum, is faced with white marble – symbolic of sanctity, and flanked by



chattris. The influence of Timurid features evident in buildings constructed in Delhi during this phase, such as variations of the nine-fold 'Hasht Bihisht' plan, is discernable in later garden pavilions and small palaces such as Todar Mal's Baradari at Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's palaces at Ajmer and Allahabad, as well as mausoleums, hamams, caravansarais and smaller mosques.

After 1565 CE, Akbar initiated an extraordinary sequence of ambitious urban development and architectural projects – he constructed fort-palaces at Agra, Ajmer (1570CE), Lahore (1575) Allahabad (1583) and Srinagar (1590) that were distinguished by their scale, with fortifications of exceptional strength and aesthetic refinement, and a series of finely crafted palaces and multistoried pillared pavilions, galleries or baradaris around interconnected courtyards and gardens. In 1571CE, the building of the walled city of Fatehpur Sikri as an intellectual, imperial, artistic

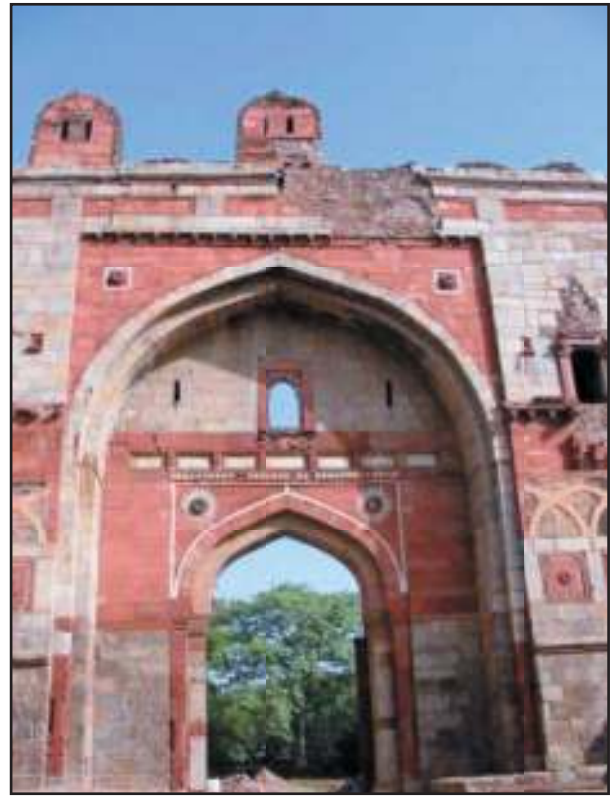


and religious centre commenced the concentration of unique structures, such as the Palace Complex, and the Jami Mosque with the tomb of the Sufi saint Salim Chishti, and the Buland Darwaza demonstrate the confident synthesis, exuberant and refined reinterpretation of indigenous, Timurid and Sultanate period plan forms, building elements, materials, construction and ornamental techniques that was a notable feature of architectural developments under both Akbar and Jehangir.

Overhanging eaves or chajjas, carved 'jali' screens, serpentine brackets and toranas, calligraphic bands and lotus medallions, projected windows, pillared verandahs, balconies and rooftop 'chattri' pavilions combining trabeated systems of columns and beams with arched panels and complex arcuate systems of vaulted and domical roofs were effectively incorporated in the evolution of the Mughal building idiom. Although Akbar did not construct much after shifting from Fatehpur Sikri to Lahore in 1585CE, architectural and urban development projects of high ranking Amirs such as Raja Man Singh, Abdul Rahim

Khan-e-Khanan who was Jehangir's ataliq, Munim Khan, Husain Quli Khan ensured that an ingenious synthesis of indigenous and Sultanate period architectural traditions, forms and materials, with Central Asian & Persian (Timurid-Safavid) spatial configurations and structural innovations was widely diffused throughout the expanding Mughal domain.

The exceptional prosperity of Jehangir's 22 year long reign resulted in extensive building activity; new typologies of sarais, hamams, shikargahs, terraced gardens, baoli's, water systems, forts, palaces with audience halls, 'Shah Burjs' and Jharoka windows, residential structures, almshouses, kosminar emerged. As Jehangir was interested in the architecture of the past, restoration of Babur's gardens at Agra, older structures and gardens constructed by Akbar and Man Singh at Srinagar & Hasan Abal, as well as the water palaces of the Malwa sultanate was undertaken. A striking feature of this period was a concern for the total environment of any building – the natural and garden setting, the role of water, light, visual linkages



were crucial elements of spatial arrangement and design of complexes.

Early projects of Jehangir were buildings and gardens in Kashmir, and the tomb garden of his wife Shah Begum at Allahabad - designed by Persian architect Aqa Reza after 1604CE as a graceful, three tiered structure with a domed chattri, and restrained ornamentation. This, as well as the Panch Mahal at Fatehpur Sikri, influenced the design of Akbar's immense, five-tiered tomb within a walled Char-bagh at Sikandra. A white marble screened courtyard enclosure on the top floor, associated earlier with the tombs of saints, was now used for the tomb of the Emperor, and white marble began to be extensively used for the construction of palace structures in addition to the red sandstone favoured by Akbar. Other important innovations of this period were the refined, yet elaborate ornamentation of the exterior facades and interiors of buildings, use of continuous inscriptional bands and intricate arch netting and vaulting systems; corner minarets at Sikandra, and

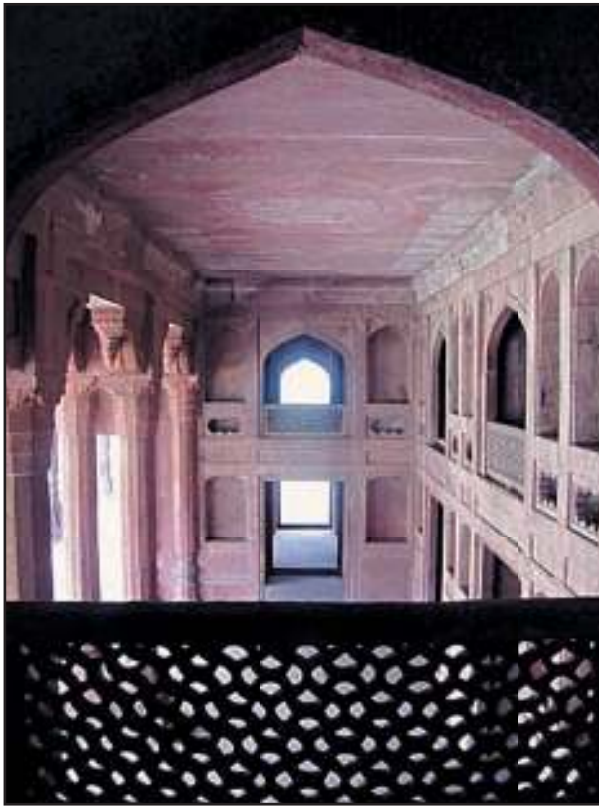


the tombs of Itmaduddaulah, Jehangir and Nur Jehan; continuation of paradisiacal and Solomonic imagery, and the nine fold 'Hasht Bihisht' plan; construction of large sarai complexes along the main routes.

Shahjehan's magnificent reign of 29 years saw construction of landmarks such the Taj Mahal complex at Agra, and the layout of the city of Shahjehanabad with the Red Fort at Delhi that are considered to be the zenith of architectural developments during the Mughal period. As mentioned by contemporary biographers, Shahjehan intended the grandeur and sublime aesthetic of these 'lofty and imposing buildings ... to speak with mute eloquence of his majesty's God-given aspiration and sublime fortune – and for ages to come will serve as memorials to his abiding love for constructiveness, ornamentation and beauty". Early projects of Shahjehan, such as the Shahi Bagh at Ahmedabad (1616-23) and the Shalimar Bagh at Srinagar, demonstrate his interest in architectural innovation, and his refined aesthetic sensibility. The harmonious balance, restrained refinement, compositional symmetry and complex

imagery of this phase of Mughal architecture is epitomized in the Taj Mahal Complex constructed for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal.

The vast Taj Mahal Complex on the banks of the Yamuna, consists of three interconnected enclosures of the Tajganj, Jilaukhana and walled Charbagh paradise garden of a distinctive design, with a raised platform known as the 'Chameli Farsh' at the river edge, on which the Mausoleum, mosque and mehman khana are located symmetrically on a central axis. The combination of geometric rigour and aesthetic perfection of elements such as the slightly bulbous central dome, triple domes, 'nim gumbads' or half domes; 'bangladar' canopies and chattris; four centred and multifoliate cusped arches; baluster or cypress columns, 'Shahjehani' columns with multifaceted shafts, stalactite capitals and cusped bases, 'mihraabi' panels; use of luminous white marble, inlaid with everlasting flowers in semiprecious stone 'parchinkari'; resulted in the establishment of an elegant and uncluttered architectural aesthetic expressed in other remarkable building typologies, palaces, sarais, bazaars, gardens of this period.



During the 49 year reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire expanded into the Deccan. Aurangzeb was concerned with upkeep of monumental structures and complexes - he inspected the Taj Mahal personally and also added the Moti Masjid to the Red Fort at Delhi. Significant building complexes and gardens

were developed during this period such as the in Bani Begum ka Bagh at Daulatabad-Khuldabad; and the Panchakki complex and Tomb of Rabia Durrani at Aurangabad.

The Late Mughals, such as Shah Alam, Bahadur Shah, Farrukhsiyar made additions to the Dargah's at Ajmer and Mehrauli, and a number of casbah towns such as Farrukhabad and Farrukhnagar were established. During Muhammad

Shah Rangila's reign of 30 years, buildings such as the Shah Burj at the Delhi Red Fort, the Talkatora Bagh, the Sunehri Masjid, the observatories or Jantar Mantars, the Tomb of Safdarjung, and the establishment of the planned town of Jaipur by the nobility testify to the vitality of continuing Mughal architectural traditions along with modifications of the scale and proportions of buildings, accompanied by an increase in ornamentation.

Between 1707CE- 1858CE, as the former provinces of the Mughal empire became autonomous and skilled craftsmen and artisans migrated from Delhi to provincial capitals, Mughal architecture continued to provide a model for prolific building activity and experimentation in the 'successor states' that were established at Awadh, Murshidabad, Hyderabad, and the Jats, Marathas and Sikhs.

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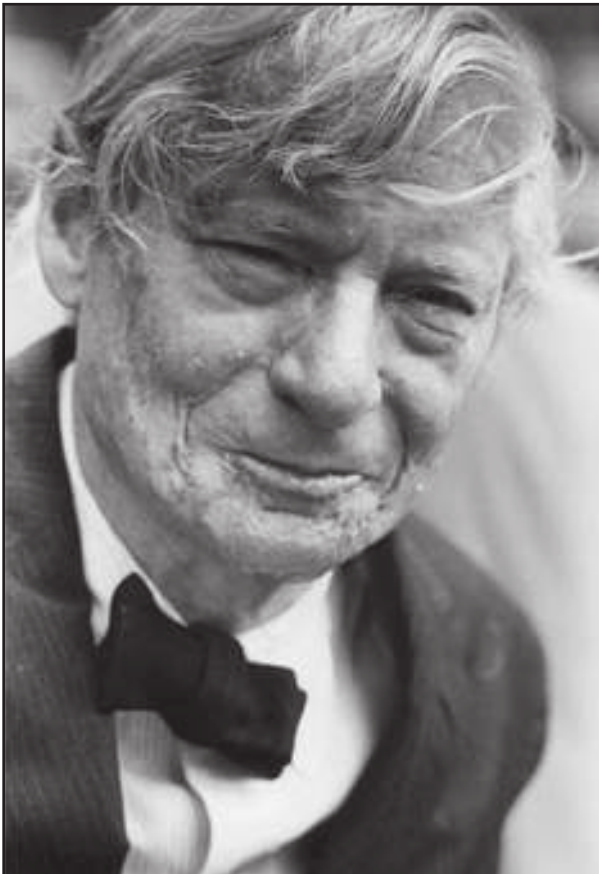
¹ painting, decorative arts, crafts, textile weaving and printing, stone and woodcarving and inlay, literature, music, mystical traditions. 100 imperial workshops or karkhanas and taswirghanas are mentioned at Fatehpur Sikri

Architecture, the Indian City and its Palimpsest

Rahoul B. Singh

Architecture's greatest contribution to civilization is undoubtedly the City.

The product of a complex web of ongoing social and cultural developments, coupled with technological innovations and artistic movements, the city as we experience it today is ultimately an expression of



Louis Kahn

the accumulative and collective will of a people. Manifested as a series of buildings, public spaces, transportation and communication networks, electricity grids, landscapes and most importantly opportunities for employment and habitat, the city as represented through its architecture is the edifice one generation leaves for the next.

By virtue of its scale, its longevity and the complexity of the process of its making, architecture is arguably the most overpowering of all cultural forms. As both an isolated artifact and part of a greater urban ensemble, it along with the city frame the way we view the world is as much as the manner in which we interact with each other. Quite simply, as Winston Churchill famously said, first "we shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

At the outset in this essay we ask ourselves the question, why do we build? This is used as a means of introducing the notion of a palimpsest as a master metaphor. Louis Kahn's buildings at the Indian Institute of Management are then visited from within this perspective and lastly by means of a conclusion we look at the making of the modern Indian palimpsest.

To understand a city is to understand its people, the geography of its place, the histories of its making, and the possibilities of its future. Historic cities like Delhi, offer us a fertile landscape to explore such narratives, but more importantly, like a palimpsest, the historic city becomes less the final product of centuries of accumulated building but rather a site of continual

inscription and erasure. The city when viewed as such can be understood in as much as a vehicle of historical transmission and documentation as of one of habitation.

Why do we build?

We build for reasons of ideology and practicality, in as much as we do to satisfy an emotional need or to fill a psychological desire. Through association and projection, architecture has historically been used at the hands of a select few to portray power and the imposition of their will on a landscape. Commonly believed to be a tool of totalitarian regimes, democratically elected governments too use architecture as an instrument of statecraft.

Affluent individuals seeking to ensure a legacy build with as much fervour as do powerful public officials intent on creating an edifice. United by a need to put forth an image of the world as they see it, architecture is intimately linked with an instinct to control, to order, and to choreograph. With both choreography and scenography being extensively used as tools to inject into their architecture a sense of cultural depth and legitimacy, architecture is often seen by the rich and the powerful as a vehicle to present themselves as part of a larger historical continuum.

However, history tends to look at those buildings favourably that are not solely a pastiche of past forms and images but rather the embodiment of an idea that captures in the built form the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. As both an impetus and a reservoir, history manifested through memory and narrative, plays as much a divisive role in architectural production as it does as a pivotal.

While to attribute specific meanings to specific historic forms would be both naïve and inevitably inaccurate, especially in a society as plural as ours, when viewed collectively, the remnants of the past, often result in unpredictable adjacencies. The remnants, represented as fragments divorced from their original social and physical contexts take on both a new identity and a

new role. Viewed through the distance of time, the historical urban landscape thus begins to reveal and exhibit palimpsestic qualities.

Yet, with the social fabric that once bound these buildings and monuments together missing, they have in effect been re-invented, appropriated for a different time, for a different purpose, and have established a different set of relations to its immediate context. Through the process of historic editing, the making of ruins, would require the conceptualization of the historical city as both a transcendent monument and simultaneously a trans-historical one. As historical markers, buildings would need to be situated within the context of their original creation as well as within the interpretive construction of their present being.

This dichotomy makes the palimpsest a particularly appropriate metaphor through which to view the historical city.

Buildings are inevitably culturally situated and situating, with historical memory today being neither as stable nor as absolute as it used to be. History as ordained by the privileged and the powerful to represent a universal past through its palaces and forts, mosques and temples, government buildings and public spaces, no longer exists.¹ Modern media and its associative means of reproduction and dissemination have ensured that the past is no longer what we thought it was.

Furthermore, globalization has with it, dispersed national traditions and historical pasts. Deprived of their geographic and political groundings, their re-organization and re-alignments have in effect created a notion of memory as being one without borders.² The ramifications of this for the palimpsest which traditionally has been defined as a, "written document, typically on vellum or parchment that has been written upon several times, remnants of this kind being a major source for the recovery of lost literary works"³ is that it would need to be conceived in terms of the physical context as represented by the historical city, a construed context as constructed

by the interpretive schema of those who engage with it and the representative context by which the urban palimpsest has been portrayed through a recordable and disseminative medium.

By virtue of it encompassing the physical, the construed and the represented the urban palimpsest acts as a meta - metaphor, through which we can understand the historic city. Its potency lies in its acknowledgement of the co-existence of multiple, simultaneous and varied recorded histories on a singular material plane i.e. on the sheet of vellum or parchment, the inhabited plane of the city or on a plane not defined by traditionally conceived geographic borders.

The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

Comprising of our built, social and cultural heritage, the palimpsest of the city reveals itself in as many ways as we choose to engage with it while tacitly implying that buildings within an urban ensemble aren't solely singular objects but are as much participants in this continuum as they are with the climatic and geographical contexts within which they reside.

The Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad was a project sponsored by the Sarabhai family who had previously commissioned Le Corbusier for other work such as their own house and the Mill Owner's Association. B.V. Doshi, who had worked with Le

Corbusier both in Paris and in India, was first offered the commission of the Institute and it was on his recommendation that Kahn in 1962, was awarded the contract while Doshi, became his associate architect and collaborator.

In 1950, Kahn spent a part of the year at the American Academy in Rome, giving him the opportunity to travel to other towns both in Italy and in Greece. He filled his sketchbooks with abstract pastel drawings of Roman ruins and urban spaces such as the Piazza del Campo in Sienna, rendering them with an almost timeless quality by, "taking out all the elements – windows, doors, people that tell you scale, time or use. Everything is dissolved in one great bath of red shadow, which then floods down over the Campo. This is exactly what he will later come to build – an architecture where all time and scale are eliminated."⁴

In both the reading and recording of his experience of the Piazza, Kahn filtered out and reduced all the elements that he considered "noise" to be able to capture what he believed were the primary agents responsible for the timelessness of these spaces. The almost reductivist approach and the decision to build essentially in a singular material — brick — at Ahmedabad allowed him to keep the individual identity of the humble and ageless building block alive without subjugating it to a supportive role in an architectural element.



Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad



Rajpath

Here the architecture characterized by its solid, basic masonry forms, made of masonry with large openings within them that at first instance appear devoid of glass are buildings that are a direct expression of their construction. Kahn was concerned with the "primeval reality of architecture as a physical mass" and in this saw his Roman ruins as a powerful precedent.⁵

While Kahn was in effect able to translate the ruins of Rome into modern buildings, he was an architect whose engagement with history was through observations and reflection. In the twelve years that it took to construct the Institute, he made approximately twenty trips to India. During these trips he visited Le Corbusier's buildings in Ahmedabad and Chandigarh, Edwin Lutyens Imperial Delhi, Jaipur and the astronomical observatory of Jantar Mantar along with visits to Mughal architectural sites as found in Lahore, Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri.

Noting the manner in which the courtyards captured the breezes and cooled the surrounding spaces, Kahn saw in the Mughal precedents an opportunity not only to root his buildings in the climatic context of

the country but also as a means of further articulating his "ruins" to read as autonomous "room buildings", stitched together by what he termed as a "society of spaces". Arranged around a central court envisioned to be not only a congregation space but also one wherein at the institute a socially driven engaged pedagogy could be enabled.

Writing about this court, Kahn even so late in his career demonstrated his lifelong engagement with the palimpsest, drawing on it both as a source for the production of the architectural object in as much as he did as a source to socially knit the spaces together — "The inner court will be shielded during certain ceremonies by a large canopy spanning eighty feet. What gave me the courage to do this were the provisions made in the courtyards of the Akbar Palace at Lahore for the same purpose.... This court is different from things I have conceived before. It gives such joy to be the one to discover a beautiful way of life that belonged to another civilization."⁶

In the design of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, Kahn drew on multiple geographically

and chronologically disparate palimpsests. As a metaphor it offered him the opportunity to establish an inextricable relationship with facets of disparate cultures separated by both geography and centuries of building tradition while rooting the work in another. Collectively, this amalgamation was possible through the conception of the historical past as a palimpsest and the subsequent abstraction, filtering and engagement of material from it.

In as much as the palimpsest helped Kahn establish an umbilical relationship to both time and place it, by drawing on varied precedents that assert an equally powerful influence in the design of the Institute, it can be said that it displaces the notion of a singular author in favour of a more encompassing "collaborative authorship". As an evolving reservoir, a living tradition, the urban palimpsest emphasizes the co existence of a multiplicity of versions and the creation of "urban moments" through adjacencies put together through a process of historical editing and circumstance.

Nowhere is this more true than in the Indian sub continent.

Modern India's Multiple Palimpsests

Modern India was born out of the historic act of the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent. It declared in one singular, tumultuous stroke that a new nation formed from an ancient civilization was both up to the challenge of self-governance in as much as it was up to the challenge of developing an idea of India that would capture within it the collective imagination of its people and to give direction to its future.

With public figures such as Pandit Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in India, Mohammed Jinnah in Pakistan and Solomon Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka, the Indian subcontinent was during the mid twentieth century a fertile plane for the development and subsequent enactment of an idea for a nation state.

Converging on the eve of independence were a host of historical events that in turn led to innumerable

number "ideas" of what a modern India should or should not be. The act of partitioning the subcontinent, the introduction of the English language prior to that, the establishment of the Central Public Works Department and the dissemination of architectural details through a document such as the Jeypore Portfolio and the development of the City were to serve in part as a bedrock for the development of modern India's palimpsest. Others factors too made important contributions as did, equally importantly the interpretative role of those engaging with it and disseminating it.

Entrusted with the division of the subcontinent, Sir Cyril Radcliffe along with the Border Commission of which he was chairman drew within the short span of a five weeks, the Radcliffe Line and served arguably the greatest blow to the Gandhian idea of a nation built on a civilizational unity. A daunting task for even the most familiar with all of India's complex nuances, Radcliffe's lack of knowledge and indifference is best captured in his letter to his step son on the day before the Union Jack was to be lowered for the last time on the subcontinent.⁷

"I thought you would like to get a letter from India with a crown on the envelope. After tomorrow evening nobody will ever again be allowed to use such stationery and after 150 years British rule will be over in India – Down comes the Union Jack on Friday morning and up goes – for the moment I rather forget what, but it has a spinning wheel or a spider's web in the middle. I am going to see Mountbatten sworn as the first Governor-General of the Indian Union at the Viceroy's House in the morning and then I station myself firmly on the Delhi airport until an aero plane from England comes along. Nobody in India will love me for the award about the Punjab and Bengal and there will be roughly 80 million people with a grievance who will begin looking for me. I do not want them to find me. I have worked and travelled and sweated – oh I have sweated the whole time."

The "Modern Project" with its secular, socialist and industrialization underpinnings were to bind an

otherwise fragile nation left behind by the colonizers and steer it through the process of Partition. The task of nation building in India saw it as an agent of change, the rejection of an old colonial order in favour of a new secular and democratic one was its charge. Free from the shackles of both its immediate colonial past and centuries of tradition and history, it filled the new nation with a heightened sense of optimism, hope and purpose. The greatest proponents of the modern project, its foot soldiers, being a generation of Indians who having been educated in the west were aware of modernism.

The genesis of this generation of people was in the nineteenth century education reforms put in place by Thomas Macaulay to create a, "class of (people) who may be interpreters between us (the English) and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions,



Architectural detail from the *Jeypore Portfolio*

in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population."

Initially conceived to aid in governance and to inflict both colonial will and vision onto the Indian subcontinent, Macaulay's children as they would come to be known would a century later spearhead the filtering of English into the lexicon of the subcontinent. With it increasingly gaining global currency as a language, English would help India absorb global ideas and decades later, integrate into the global economy.

Similarly, world the work of Samuel Swinton Jacob the chief engineer of the public works department in Jaipur, who between the years of 1890 and 1913 put together the *Jeypore Portfolio*, as a document to enable "re constructing" of the past. The choice of details to include within it, the manner in which it was organized (as building component type as against complete buildings), along with its dissemination was essentially a vehicle to establish an identity for an Indian architecture as dictated to a populace. The portfolio was an agent of statecraft divorced architecture from the context within which it was built.

Describing it, James Ransome the first consulting architect to the Government of India would state in 1929, "In India where ingenuity was required more than anything we were forcing purity of style, I was told to make Calcutta Classical, Bombay Gothic, Madras Saracenic, Rangoon was to be Renaissance and English cottages were to be dotted about all over the plains of India."⁸

However, if the criticism of the *Jeypore Portfolio* is in its carte blanche application, an architecture that is revivalist in its presentation could depending on its engagement with the palimpsest, conceivably be charged with a progressive social spirit in its engagement with the city. The use of historical

forms as a means of situating a work within the collective imagination of a people needs to be read in conjunction with not only its immediate physical context but also how successfully it integrates into the social fabric of its location within the city. Louis Kahn, after all, looked at both the ruins of Rome and the courtyards of Mughal architecture.

Simultaneously, the further development of the Indian city added another layer of complexity to the palimpsest. The establishment of the colonial cities of Bombay (Mumbai), Madras (Chennai) and Calcutta (Kolkata) in the seventeenth century as trading outposts were to serve as centres for commerce while the nineteenth century cantonment cities that culminated with the making of that monument for display of power and order, New Delhi, they kept their distance from the traditional Indian cities.

With their strict geometry, wide tree lined avenues and freshly painted buildings, the colonial city was a symbol of Imperial wealth and subjugation, a stark contrast to its Indian counterpart that had grown organically from an additive and accumulative process that gave a spatial dimension to the complex nuances that form Indian society.

From within the seemingly chaotic order of the modern Indian city, which was an amalgamation of its Colonial and traditional Indian counterparts, lay

points of convergence that transformed it into an agent of great opportunity. As a destination for social mobility from India's smaller towns and villages and with the increasing return of an affluent, western oriented and educated elite the new demographic of the city would assert often very differing ideas of spatiality within the same physical structure. This in turn gave rise to unprecedented adjacencies and juxtapositions adding to the urban palimpsest a layer of complexity that transformed it from being static text of inscription and erasure to one of continual mutual displacement and disclosure.

Through the process of displacement and disclosure the engagement of the palimpsest was increasingly being situated within the plane of everyday existence. Drawing essentially on its historical roots and regional values this was a means of asserting individuality and distinction from the homogenizing effects of globalization. The emergence of a trans cultural global aesthetic after the liberalization of the economy in the 1990s would further endorse the role of the palimpsest as a tool of engagement for producing architecture that is culturally and socially relevant to its place of being. As we increasingly become simultaneously both the producers and consumers of a culture, the palimpsest as a meta-metaphor takes on a central role in the construction of an idea of Modern India.

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The Timber Legacy in Architecture

Mridula Sharma

If there is any one single indicator of the historical and cultural heritage of its people, it is imprinted on its architecture. More than anywhere else, this can be evident in the timber architecture of Kerala and one needs to explore the surviving generations, to see and wonder how the ancient artisans here have

worked to bring alive architectural monuments that have now become heritage legacies for the nation. The design, construction and decoration of these old Kerala buildings put the craftsmen of yore on a high pedestal where they are recognized for their unmatched technical and artistic capabilities.







Perhaps the secret of their long standing legacy is their recourse to simplistic forms built in response to the local environment, climate, lifestyle and indigenous materials, sourced virtually from their doorsteps. Typically the end result has now envisioned itself into a school marked by sloping roofs with long eaves, followed by the diktat of proportion even while constructing the humblest of their buildings. While stone and clay are the most common materials utilized for building the plinth, all super structures above it, are made of timber and thatch, positioned on a timber framework.

Alongside its local flavour these structures also amalgamated influences from Jain, Buddhist, Chinese and Arab elements, sources that the state had been exposed to, long before the arrival of the Portuguese in this region in the 15th century. But at this stage one must add a rejoinder in that whatever be the outer influences creeping into the indigenous framework, it was an uncompromising respect for climatic functionality that was kept unalterable

amidst all these arrivals. Today, a respect for its climatic sensibilities continues to be relevant and has been acknowledged as a source of inspiration for the contemporary architecture of this region.

Of the old masterpieces that still take one's breath away is the Padmanabhapuram Palace built without using a single nail and been in use as a residence by the royals for more than 200 years. The 400-year old palace is a cluster of interlinked structures of which the Thai Kotturam (Mother's Palace) is believed to be oldest part. Elsewhere what is worth admiring are the huge timber columns of the Uttupura, the lattice work of the Natakshala and the precise assembly, of rafters in the Mantrasala as also the awe inspiring entrance hall. Of the other palaces that fall into this category and commands attention, is the Kallengode built for the Princess Dhatri and dubbed the 'healing palace'. This edifice reflects a further refinement of styles as also the inclusion of colonial elements proclaiming its later origin.

Beyond the purview of palaces are the public places of worship for the community and an outstanding religious centre whose fame has spread among architects far beyond the state's borders is the structure of the 1000-year-old Thazhathangadi or Taj Numa Mosque located on the banks of the Meenachal river. This triple storeyed mosque has colour on its timber, a rare distinction among buildings of the area.

As far as dwellings in this land, that have revered the tenets of its architectural formulae one must look to homes along the river banks. Their inputs have resulted in a pattern of composition where the houses run in rows, and where stone and concrete were restricted to the plinth and the roof made with a timber structure topped with clay tiles and finished with fine wood carvings.

The reason behind Kerala's preference for wood is not simply the abundance of this material available locally. It is also the variety of timber available easily.

It ranges from stately teak to slender bamboo and rosewood, jackfruit, mavu, aangli, venga and others in between. The skilful use of this abundance to create a variety appropriate for specific functions has become one of the unique characteristics of its architectural eminence and has continued to be a popular choice even today due to its minimal maintenance .

Examining the legacy of its timber architecture as it has emerged into a modern vernacular, has resulted in the creation of charming resorts, public spaces and individual homes in the region, where the existing structures have been duly preserved through a heritage philosophy which has circumvented the easier option of bringing down and rebuilding. Instead the newer inclusions have been built around the primary construct.

But the old buildings when faced with renovation and reuse had other contentious issues along the way. They were duty bound to galvanize the state's scenic constants, such as the backwaters on one side and the Arabian coast on the other, as the architectural







norms for new buildings were regulated by the Coastal Regulation Act which forbade buildings along its sea front. This was a challenge placed right in the lap of Kerala's new generation of architects who wished to showcase their heritage treasures in their pristine state to the outside world by renovating them into attractive modern-day resorts with all the stock amenities housed within a heritage nutshell.

One way the challenge has been met has been to carve out an artificial lake on the property and circumvent the restrictions by turning inwards. By scooping out a lake in the middle of the property and then trimming it with a labyrinth of corridors interwoven with connecting covered corridors, they have arrested the local imagery to the point of making it a show stealer. At the hotel located at Badel, the keeping of a strict adherence to the local architecture and local vernacular of building rules, within a slick modern interior has provided a new corollary to the heritage architecture. With the addition of garden rooms, open-air toilets covered landscaped patios

and a customised houseboat moored along the backwaters, what more can one want of an authentic Kerala lifestyle experience?

Then to ensure that this renovation and restoration does not become a hackneyed formula for future adoption, architects have shunned donning the mantle of copycat imitations. One of them has even gone to the length of acquiring remote island spaces, as in Poovar, which till the late nineties, was virgin territory linked to the mainland by a single waterway. At this resort, the entire row of ten cottages are built on ferro-cement platforms surmounting a timber superstructure. In these floatels, the architects used country wood for wall plates and treated seasoned coconut wood for rafters. On this framework came a padding of board followed by a final capping with a thatched roof. Cashing on the existing vernacular of building with wood, local carpenters were recruited to tweak their designs to build lightweight cottages which have proved their efficacy even after fifteen years of constant use. The project is therefore a

classic example of building with local eco-friendly materials, thereby keeping costs in control and utilising indigenous expertise alongside local craft knowledge.

Another of Kerala's outstanding architectural lessons has been the integration of colonial architectural elements into the older vocabulary. To supplant the two axes of respecting the general trend of heritage buildings and the positioning of details in such a duality, the architecture used a third medium, so as to result in a profuse celebration of nature. On one such hotel site, where the coastal regulatory act application had resulted in their being able to build only along the hill, initially the task had appeared insurmountable by the very nature of the hill! Hence site-specific planning was done in such a way that blasted rock came to be used as rubble to build the cottages. Over the years the weathering of that once novel circumvention, and the location of the resort's cottages along the contour of the hill, has been accepted as a fresh accent of architecture where

the recurrent imagery includes a third dimension – granite.

When the heritage makeovers had been tested for a decade or more, enthusiasts began to descend upon the Kerala architectural landscape, with a mission to recognize heritage utilization. Their studied efforts proved beneficial. In consequence, local architecture became more adaptive. Instead of aping features used in the past to create their project, this new crop of architectural conceptualisers began to actualize heritage sensibly. Consequently there have emerged one-of-a-kind architectural inputs that vigorously rubbish any attempt to rubber stamp the old world on their modern settings. Marrying up nature into this integration, the thatch roofs of the individual cottages which are built along the natural contour of the hill, do a regular peepshow with the coconut vegetation and the garden toilets, another talking point here, have added to the notion of creating an ethnic hamlet-like ambience for this modern-day hospitality property.





Later on, with the arrival of design architecture becoming more common in the state, the heritage rules were in for further modification, without sacrificing the core values. Instead of hungrily absorbing whole hog all that the local knowledge had to offer, these crop of new arrivals were selective and exploitative. While they picked one or two elements from the gamut of choices opening up before them, they exploited its potential in fresh utilization plans making for a new look to the dependable past. At Kovalam for instance, the five star holiday destination used several varieties of timber to express its structure identity and interior design making in an unparalleled experiential matrix for visitors attracted to it in search of Kerala's tourist charms as also for the privilege of spending their time at this unique property.

The cross designing of colonial and old Kerala ways has resulted in the melding of old timber styles that span the entire gamut, right from structural pillars to rafters, trusses, as well as a rice boat element

and a smattering of local craft, provides much grist by way of conversation slices for these arrivals. They seem to softly nudge the viewer to look beyond the obvious and the frontal for still more novelties to be discovered. As the region around Kumarakom nurtures the boat race culture of the state, it was an appropriate selection to make the reception area a take on the boat building craft of the region, while peacock feather fans on the walls give local crafts a much needed boost and exposure on its wall spaces. Looking up, at the roof, one notices the clerestorey element adding a functionary as well as traditional signature to the buildings. This colonial inclusion, not only profiles the shape of the roof but also accesses natural light and aids in ventilation, thus serving both utility and adherence to the profile of keeping traditional architecture within easy reach, at these places.

Yet not all of what defines Kerala traditional architecture is spelt in the colours of mellowed

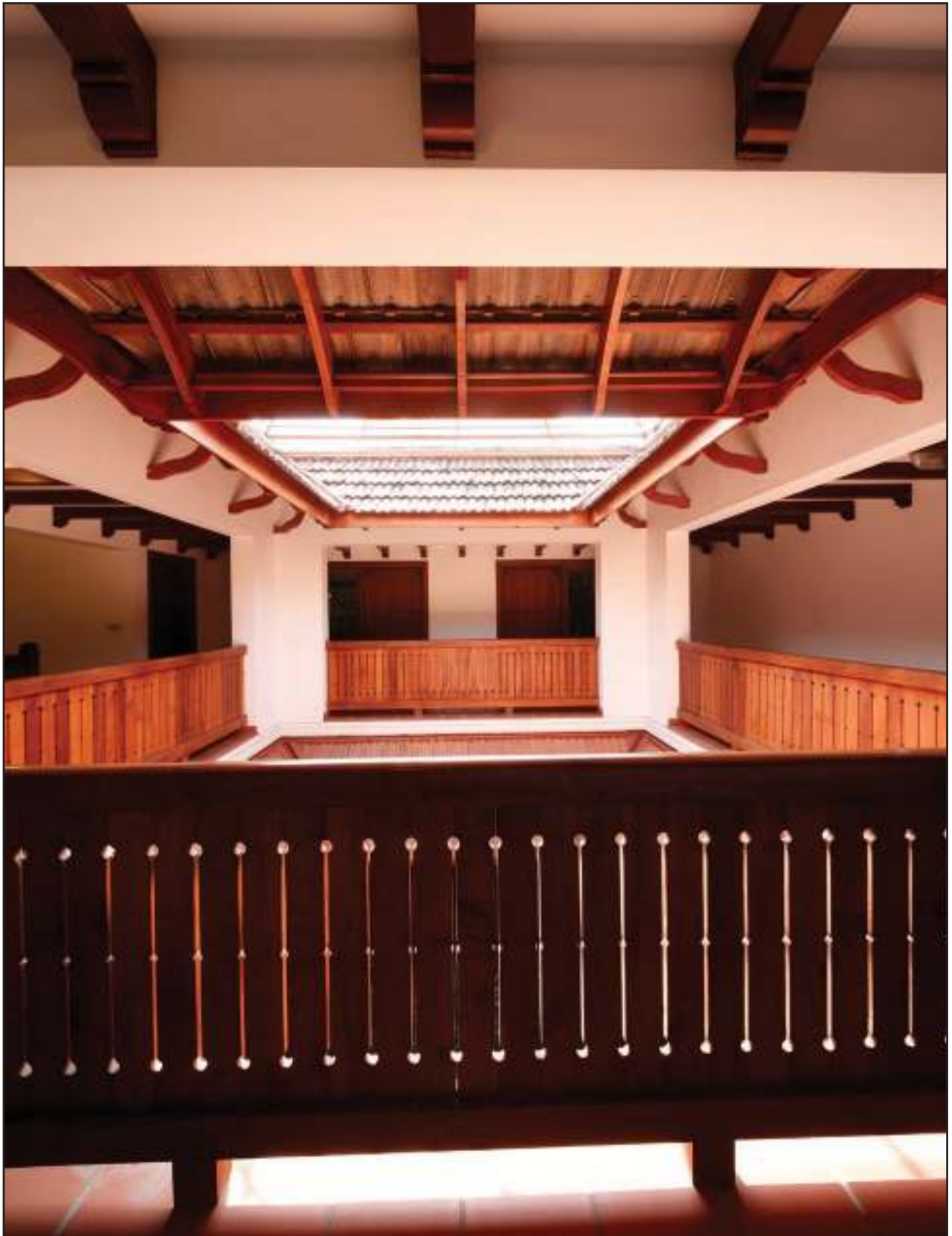




wood. Some of it is retrieved right from a paint box as was utilized in a grandiose colonial style hotel space at Kollam in Kerala. Since the grain of natural wood is too sacrosanct a material to be tampered with frivolously, it was another source that had to be tapped, and what better choice than the varied artifacts that the state abounds in? The services of the locally available traditional mural artist to exorcise modern takes of the ancient boat race in focal points, such as the wall behind the reception desk heightens the guest experience right at the doorstep. Roof patterns borrowed from designs in the ancient Padmanabha Palace and elsewhere. Embellished columns, solid wooden urns to hold floral arrangements, carved wall panels, colourful cow heads are distinct features borrowed from the region. The customized open look of the rooms with glazed walls are its colonial moorings while the higher forms of art, in smatterings, all over the interior, cater to high-end aesthetics.

A spillover of this extremely successful experimentation with design and architectural

concepts from Kerala's past into the adjoining state of Karnataka, has resulted in a one-of-a-kind resort built in the heart of the coffee country of Coorg, where the cottages are built on high stilts to provide a still closer view of the forest setting within which it nestles. Timber clad steel bridges span across local streams to make the engineering marvel nothing short of a feat from drawing board beginnings to its final execution. With the once dirt tracks now made into access roads for jeeps the resort has made a smart crossover across the span of time to reach the present era. In an almost reverential forgiveness to the forest deities for encroaching on their abode, the architects, in a virtual conciliatory mood, meticulously replanted the area along the digging that was imperative for the jeepable track. Hence the eroded forest was planted tree by tree in keeping with the local species of plantations, completing the ritual of retribution for encroaching upon such virgin views. In between, the split level ponds add interest and take the mind off ruminating too deeply on whether one should/should not take recourse to tampering with the growth of nature for jeeps to pass easily.





While such debatable issues are best left to one's quieter moments, what one surmises from these specimens of merger, is that the beauty of architecture does not lie in the completion of its ideas on paper

into a new addition to the skyline. Rather, it lies in the capacity of that structure to transcend the ravages of time and take on new avatars in the later years in part, or as a whole, by reinterpreting its soul.



Art Reviews: Azad Bhavan Gallery

Paintings and architecture can strike up a beautiful friendship. Where the bare bones are defined by the architectural component, the creative element to people those spaces is provided by art. The insight into the vision of combining the two elements is what defines great art on the walls as it does also the appreciation of charming interiors. Together they evoke special interest and hence when an issue on architecture was planned, it was but natural that the art for the issue should complement the theme with the right touch of creativity so that a surfeit of artistic and architectural riches are thrown up by this matrimony. Then just as the essays for the issues were original and specially written pieces from the experts in the field, it would have been virtual harakiri if the art were picked at random and reviewed for it. Hence, by deviating slightly from the regular practice of going by exhibitions for every quarter as is usual, this time round it is artworks that complement graphic detailing, enhance the look of interior spaces both public and private, and an overall eye for the



Buddha 3



Matsya - Kanya 10

aesthetic, that has been made the yardstick for choices made.

Just like in architecture, where romancing the glory of small spaces for living large is a much acclaimed practice, in art too, it is the meticulous composition of details, and miniature touches that receive as much attention as do the sweeping canvases that take the entire universe in the space which is three feet by three feet. But then, one must not take this toeing each other's lines too far, for then architecture will lose its character of going by the rules of engineering. At the same time, being de rigeur to the point of a fad, would make art choke at the throat and be dubbed emulative as a result. Hence there is a take off point which gives art what one might call future extensions, where imagination and technique merge the creative process into a novel outcome. In short, there is nothing that is blue printed and pre planned in the form of models of the real thing when it comes to art. Yes, a few deft lines across the white sheet that the artist terms as sketching, is permissible but then, the palette must go beyond the 'tailored' and into the adventurous in order to be termed art.

That is what comes foremost to mind when one sees the patterned forms of artist **Rajni Kiran Jha**. The clear defining outlines that are filled with earthy tones of ochre, vermilion, verdant green and earth brown, to contrast with a vivid blue background, make her works virtually customized to prove the point that it is the graphic aspect of art that strikes the eye at first when viewing it. Titled 'Madhurang' her exhibits take on the familiar motifs of stylized fish forms, decorated with an alpana-like patterning, juxtaposed with elements such as a feminine face, lotus and leaf arrangement, harking back to traditional motifs of floor décor prevalent in several parts of the country. What makes her work special is her ability to exorcise the very soul of these age old forms which through the countless years of their usage have become mechanized movements of the hand which women can draw and fill without a second thought. It is Jha's ability to make a discovery of the throbbing and integral elemental beauty of the form and to make them malleable and versatile compositions through the language of contemporary art, that is praiseworthy.

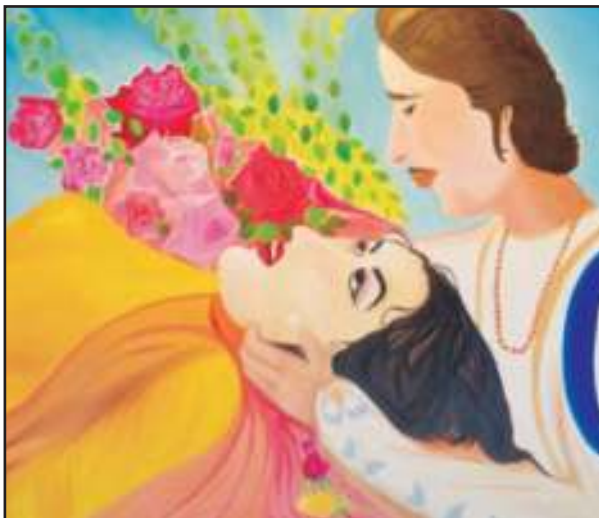
Another factor that strikes the viewer is the variety of combinations she has managed to create with the help of the motifs from Madhubani, the feminine form of modern art, and the matsya, a familiar pick of the alpana artist in eastern India. While initiating this unique interaction between craft forms and their contemporary use, she has taken colour as a leitmotif. Without resorting to a neutral palette to define her lines, she has plunged headlong into colour, but without moving away from the graphic overlay. This favoured choice has given her the freedom to incorporate the brighter tones of nature, ranging from its reds and greens to the more unusual mauve and turquoise, for a perfect connect between nature, tradition and her personal artistic temperament. What happens thereafter is a unique artistic landscaping, where one gets a window view of the traditional and the current, to see a work from the inside that reflects the outside, the ancient that merges the new with grace.



Danseuse from Deccan Valley

Another attempt at repositioning forms to advantage can be seen in the work of artist **Arifa Khan**, whose exhibition 'The Poetry of Being Woman' allocated the central positioning angle of the feminine form, be it in the human or in the avian world. According to her own assessment, her art is an extension of her own persona and thus she paints women that are an 'anamalgam of bewitching beauty, strong personality romanced, a spirit of joi de vivre and an unmistakable sensibility'. Having a flair for the dramatic makes her women on the canvas buoyant and exhilarating, expressing themselves through their gestures, their voices and their moods. They are sensitive portrayals in their natural settings and not drawing room figures dolled up for the occasion.

Having started off on her journey into art, 'to enrich people's lives with appreciation of finer things', Arifa Khan had discovered her Eureka moment after coming across the works of M F Husain. Thereafter she studied his masterpieces with intense concentration and began painting after her muse, bewitching her viewers with works titled 'girl in a sunflower field' and others. By the time she had painted her work titled 'swayamvar' she had found her feet in the realm of art and realized that the focal point of her artistic expression lay in her depiction of the eyes. Though stylized into a doe like format and with that energy well honed, she went on successfully to recreate artistic takes on great personalities like Tagore,



Romancing with Roses



Motherhood



Bharat Ratna, M. S. Subbulakshmi



Tales of a Warrior



A moon-lit Encounter

MS Subbulakshmi, Indira Gandhi and personalities from history, such as Jodha-Akbar, Salim-Anarkali. Endowed with an extraordinary sense of balance, she has deliberately been choosing subjects where the women are central to the theme.

Without resorting to the form of a doe eyed damsel yearning for a lost lover as a regular feature over the space, her women are flesh and blood forms playing active roles. Their activity is reflected in their movements which are free flowing and sinuous and yet definitive and independent, mirroring their personalities. Being women, the freedom of colour usage is a foregone conclusion and the artist has made full use of this flexibility to motivate and challenge herself in her art creations. Though the concentration is largely on the eyes and thus the facial forms, which by and large are sharp featured and aqualine in their contours, the posturing of the forms gives them a distinct vocabulary that the artist has striven to perfect and depict in her original and charming way. Whether it is the exuberance of the kathak dancer or the exactitude of the linear constructions executed by the dancers of the Deccan Valley, there is a distinct rhythm in the works that enhance the mood of the subject with increasing clarity. On the other hand the dance of freedom or the languorous flow of 'dark beauty', the artist gives the impression that whatever be the subject of the work, the essential womanly appeal of the forms cannot be divested from the subject matter. Having chosen a fluid format to express herself through her art, namely the feminine form, this artist has given herself the freedom of perspective, colour choices and movement by this decision.



Canvas - Colours of Womanhood

At other times, art can be created from amidst the most volatile and troubled situations on this planet. This was specially evident in the works of a trio of Kashmir artists, namely **Haseeb ul Nabi**, **Majid Geelani** and **Malik Mirtiza**. Their works, possessing a deep infusion of sensibility, have a largely abstract overlay and yet can be reached only through a



Flowing Devotion



Sadness

specific understanding of their ability to see beauty as a global appeal and as the capability to see things of everyday turmoil with a depth of inner feeling. In short, what these artists are trying to message through their works is that painting is capable of capturing human emotions and holding them in a way that becomes a two way communication not of a

pictorial subject but of inner feelings that they would like to share with their viewers. That is what these self-taught artists, who are professional engineers and a student at school, traverse their subject with an impressionist thoughtfulness which in turn touches the emotions of their viewers as well. In them one does not find the harshness of definite lines carving out the form, but an indefinable yet tangible mass emerging from the depths of a blurred background and then holding our attention by the solitude and forlorn emotions that centralised through their forms. In fact, the central figure is so deftly and yet so pertinently converging, remains transfixed while the mind is bathed in a gamut of emotions ranging from loneliness, helplessness to a sorrowful frustration at the passage of time and the essence of suffering and hopelessness that only a painting can capture and express through, by its execution.

What recurs with telling magnitude in these canvases is the gripping undercurrent of the history of the valley that has seen anguish and unequalled suffering in their day-to-day lives, disrupting the peaceful surroundings of their homes and leaving / raising a plethora of questions unanswered and yet persistent that are expressed not through calligraphic writing of them but through figures such a Kashmiri matron abruptly stopping the pounding of the day's paddy in the pestle in the courtyard. Navigating through the fears and the horrors experienced by these folk is the representative figure of a ghostly apparition emerging from the shadows and wringing out the element of frustration of its people, by the positioning of its arms. The then and now portrayal elsewhere in the exhibition is no scenic outlay of a representative situation, but the making of a verdant tulip that is next shown windblown and browning into an emaciated ghostly form, almost unrecognisable but for its contrasting reproduction adjacent. In its verdant glory the shadowy figures, the tonal control of the background colours and the choice of single forms to relate their plight, makes the art of this threesome a perfect way of expressing the language of Kashmir's soul.



Canvas - Weathered To Bloom



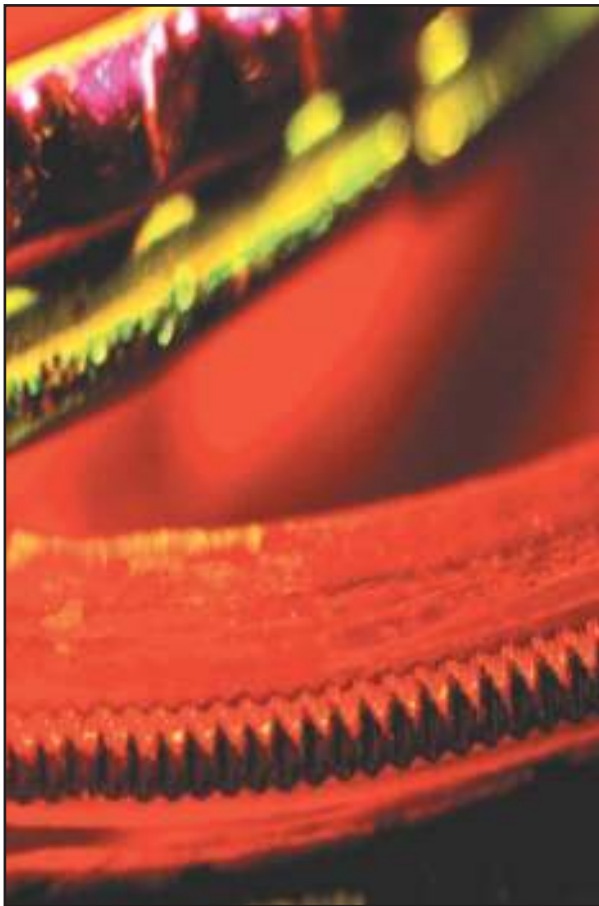
Losing Glory...



Flight of Fancy - 17*17



Petals of Passion 17*17



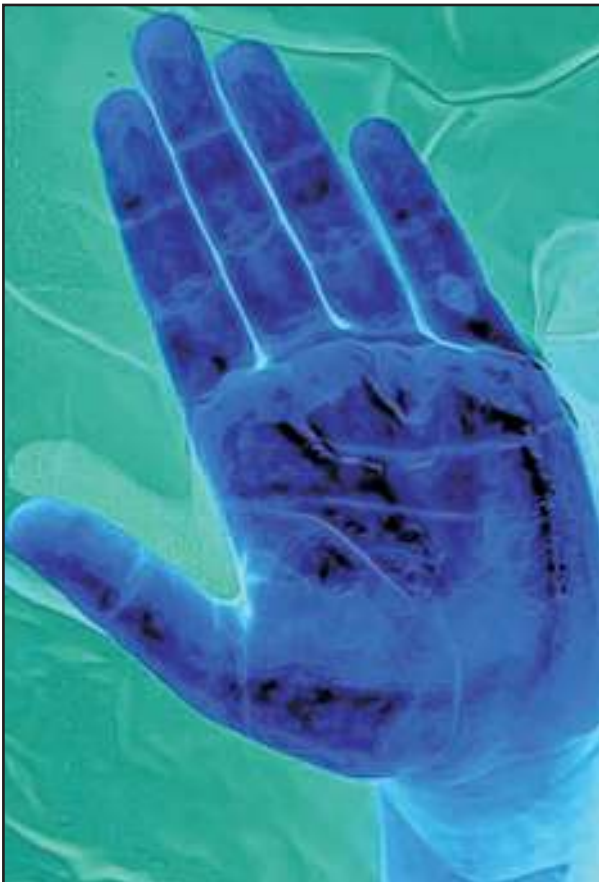
Vermillion Iridescence - 17*17

The photographic inclusion this quarter veers away from landscapes and travelogues to define a focal issue, the power of the human eye making us take a step back and contemplate on what we tend to overlook in the busy whirl of daily living. Having been a flyer and a post graduate in military science, one would have concluded that artist **Maneesh Misra's** camera shots would be replete with drill order efficiency. On the contrary they are delicate portrayals of the fleeting and elegant aptly conveyed through the movements of common city birds, the house pigeon and its young. Using the camera as his tool after a physical distress had made flying impossible for him, artist Maneesh Misra claims: 'I love the way I can communicate through my lens and capture the effervescence of the world.' Mentored by renowned photographers via the social media, he has been selected to be on the cover of the Delhi photographers volume and has more than 400 of his shots featured on facebook and flicker.

What strikes one on seeing his works is that there is beauty and mystery lying to be discovered in every mundane setting that meets the eye. Instead of clicking the house pigeon perched stiffly on the



Eye of the Storm - 17*17



Imprint of Lines - 17*17



Wings of Glory - 17*17

house balcony, Misra chooses that fleeting moment between takeoff and ascent to click the most durable image of that moment in time which refutes definition as either here or there, but definitely in-between. Similarly, his work titled 'glow of effervescence' is a streaking and blending of psychedelic colours across a gleaming metal surface as light hits it. It could also relate to an oil slick that reflects the colours of the atmosphere in an unnatural yet captivating glance, that is difficult to avoid. Thus the ordinary and even ugly and disgusting is given a sheen of respectability through his camera and its ability to go deep into the very skin of the subject before clicking. The insect on the verge of perching on a petal is also a moment of intensity that requires a perceptive eye for detail and proves that the camera has many different options to suggest and frame, provided one has the sensibility to capture it from behind the camera lens.



'Thou art the sky and thou art the nest...'



'Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens...'



'Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light...'

Poet author and artist **Jayakumar** brings to his art all the three streams of creativity that has propelled his life. His paintings are thus not merely works of artistic excellence but also spaces of the mind, where poetry could seldom reach. His works therefore prove the dictum that real art is not to be viewed through a single angle but from a multi dimensional perspective, with poetry and painting taking on complimentary roles instead of being segregated into different disciplines.

A largely abstract format, his works have a sense of relaxation and universalism because they are centralized into spaces that are recognizable or definable. They are glimpses of a universe comprising

the sun, and space, painted in his visionary colours and which on the canvas appear as spreads of yellows and reds, awash with faint tones of white depicted with brush strokes that deftly travel across the flat colours with a delicate refinement.



'Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes...'



Highway

When one is constrained to express one's entire philosophy within the restricted space of a canvas, the task calls for an efficient use of space and resources. Artist **Priyanka Nijhawan** has done herself proud by being particular about using the eyes as her main target of concentration in her works. A young painter with an excitement urging her ahead in this field, Priyanka has enjoyed the intrinsic value of her medium and has given her best into works that range from oils and acrylics to pencil sketches and colours. This makes for a lot of activity carrying along side the painting process and yet the ultimate output is not a riot of colours or unplanned experiments. It is well finished portraits of recognizable faces with which her viewers are reminded of incidents, cinema shots, and stories both familiar and 'eye catching'. Her portrait of the actor Amir Khan, in 'Lagaan' is a case in point. The ability to associate a portrait with a representative image is what gives her works an astounding maturity. Take for instance



Lagaan

her portraiture titled 'Highway'. Taking recourse to a charming flexibility and resilience she has depicted the dangers of travel along the route by resorting to a single iconic image of a truck driver, in a moment of altercation where his tensed features forbode an imminent breakdown of emotions on the brink of a demonstration of road rage.

Though she shows a preference of keeping her central form a distinct focus of concentration, in her takes on problems and situations akin to women, there is a clear division of spaces where one end is a troubled feminine feature while the other is a messy swirl of colour giving off a strong sense of the challenges that

these vulnerable women have had to encounter. Her depiction of 'Nirbhaya' vibrates with this palpability. The command she enhances through her works such as 'Chaplin' where the colour streaks on the facial form give the solidity of granite to the surface and convey to her viewers the emotions of a determined real life actor, confident of his abilities whereas the silver screen shots, who is otherwise represented as a bumbling fool more harmed than otherwise on the screen. The pristine backdrops of these images highlight the features of her portraits with expressive intent and place her works in the category of professionals rather than amateurs.



Chal chala chal II, oil on canvas, 2013: 50x60 inches



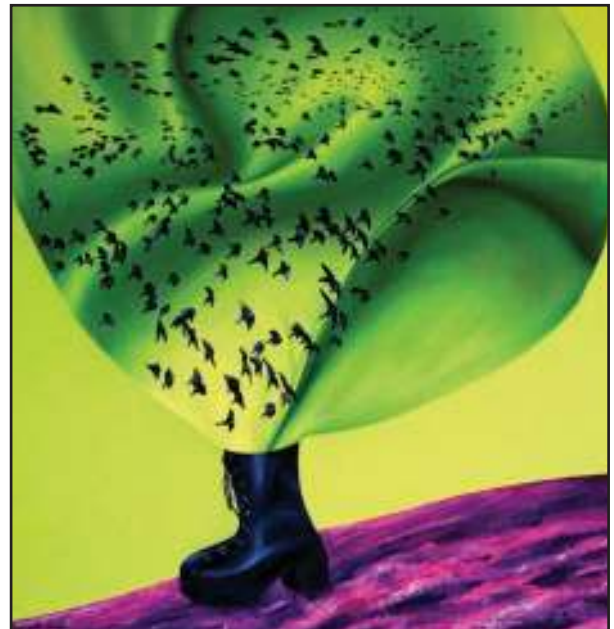
Chal chala chal IV, oil & acrylic on canvas 2013: 36x36 inches

While artist **Sangeeta Singh** chooses to depict the chiarascuro scenes of a journey in the lives of her subjects, her own journey into art has been no less varied. A graduate in chemistry, she had discovered



Chal chala chal VI, oil on canvas 2013: 48x48 inches

her artistic calling in Aiwzal, where she had worked under the famed artist R. Thansanga and later under the guidance of Rameshwar Broota in Delhi. Her works therefore reflect these moorings and what appears on the canvas is a content embellished with art and science within a boundary of geometric perceptions, These diversities of her artistic upbringing give her



Euphoria I, oil on canvas 2013: 36x36 inches



Chal chala chal VIII, oil on canvas 2013: 60x30 inches

works much interest to the discerning viewer. Most importantly, this quality training and education at the feet of great artists, helped Sangeeta cultivate one of her outstanding assets, the ability to perceive beyond what is visually upfront. She understood the subterranean layer of emotions and aspirations that underlie each visage and using her interaction with people as she plied her way through the capital using public transport, she was able to bring that resource into her art making in her unique way. It was this

intangible and yet deeply perceptive angle to art that she managed to give voice to, through her works that have been given the umbrella title of 'Chalat Musafir the right connotation.

The works interestingly have the common rickshaw puller as their centrality but reflect none of the chaos and density of their sordid lives to eke out sympathy. More importantly it is the division of her canvas space to give a dream like quality to her vision that makes her art so striking. By creating giant orbs, minute rectangles stacked on one another as window visions of their lives, the artist gives an insight into the goings-on in her subjects' minds, instead of creating a setting in the face, of the subject's life. Using limited colour palette, she depicts the centrality of her theme much like a detailed miniature within these boundaries. An interesting free play of a white and black surround beyond the strictures of the red orb, enhances a space beyond the limits of one's imagination. Another angle of her art can be gauged from her series 'Euphoria', which according to her, 'spawned to showcase the hustle bustle of city life where the birds are the metaphors of people, the musafirs, constantly on (the) move with the desire to seek freedom from confinement.' What binds the two series of works together according to the artist is their mystic appeal celebrating the moments that have inspired and triggered her imagination and which can now be evidenced on her canvases.



Chal chala chal I, oil on canvas 2013: 50x60 inches



City of Marjit, water colour on paper: 22x28 inches



Water colour on paper: 22x28 inches

Despite the long journey into artistic permeations of every category that was viewed in the exhibitions held during this quarter, the strong grounding of landscape art has never lost its place in the artistic imagination. Thus a depiction of this eternal favourite could not be overlooked and was charmingly visible in the works of artist **Parthasree Chanda**. Fortunately, this artist does not believe in thrashing out the scenic delights of just one setting but has made his art a record of his itinerant journeyings to various spots in the country, ranging from panoramic views of hill stations to the decaying and crumbling outlines of mansions in a metropolis. Instead of unnecessary experimentation, this artist has utilized the accepted norms of art and appropriately exploited them to express his originality. Thus the works do not show a wild and wide swing of viewpoints among viewers, who pondered over each of his works with a sense

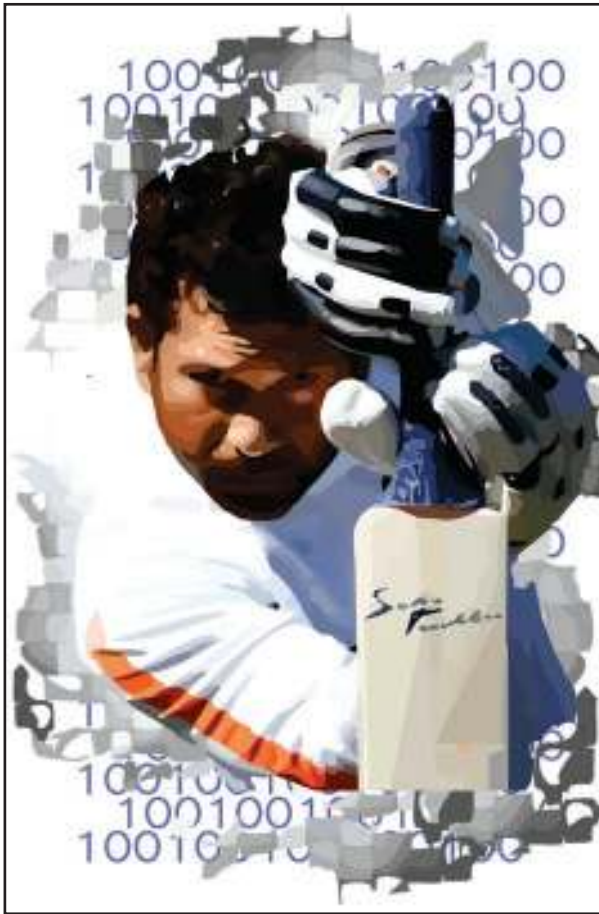


Seascape, water colour on paper: 22x28 inches

of familiarity for each one of his captive canvases recalled a sight that they had been witness to, at some time in their personal journeys. His works were thus an exhilarating touch with one's surroundings and captured moments in this scenic setting that is often overlooked by a passerby.

As is wont, there is a studied confidence in the works on display. The use of water colour to create views of the mega city complete with a tramline and pedestrians jostling for space within the frame work, is implemented with masterly grace and respect for materials and techniques. At the same time the artist's personal take is kept fresh through his organic approach to the subject matter, in which the grammar of art making has highlighted rather than stemmed

the growth and appeal factor in the work. What is charmingly different is his view of waterfronts along a river. It is the dramatic play of light peeping through a chink of glaring light that is central to the work. The universality of the scene that makes it indefinable in terms of its location, but its balanced variety of dark and light, shadow and mystery, make this tight knit work a memory recalling some portion of lost knowledge, a vision often overlooked and yet real, that the artist, through his astute sense of discernment has brought to life before our very eyes. The works therefore become a very private dialogue between viewer and artist, where each one is given a space of his own and where the tiniest detail is revered with light, colour, water and imagination, into a holistic celebration of the Muse.

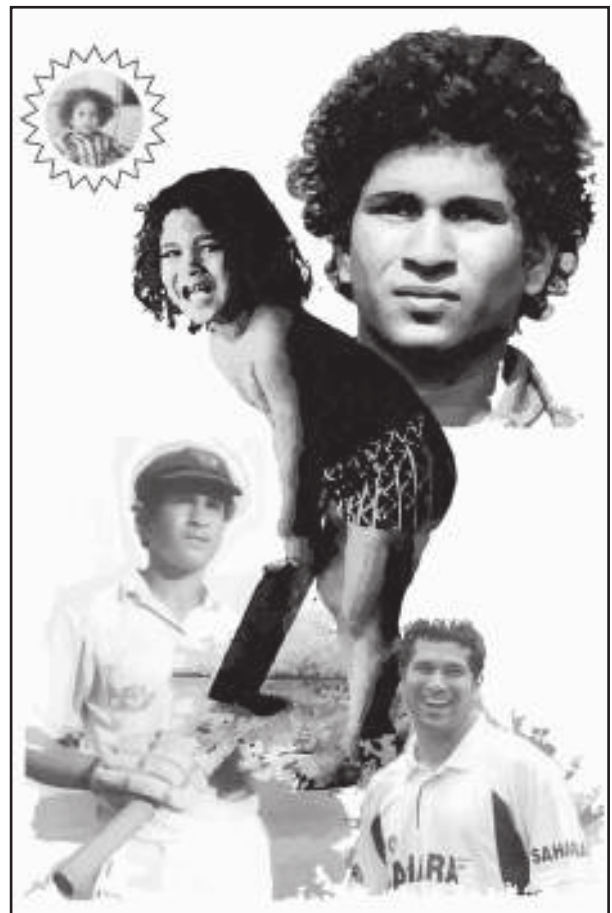


Shandaar Sachin - Mahashatak, digital paintings on mechanical paper: 12x18 inches

Manipulating the computer mouse to produce a painting was frowned upon just the other day. Yet the small band of followers of this tradition persisted in their quest driven by conviction and lo and behold, it has now been given cognisance, so an entirely new range of creativity, referred to as digital art has sprung up on the art scene. An entire generation of artists have honed their skills in video installations, which galleries vie, globally. In a more static way, artist **Sanjay Mehta** has created familiar yet iconic visions with this medium. Ranging from a dramatic attempt to relive the iconic historical moment, when at the World Cup, Sachin Tendulkar was sported across the ground on the shoulders of his team mates, fluttering the national flag to an effective capture of the Sachin stance at the crease with his straight bat stance. These works cast a spell of the elation of an

evergreen moment in public memory. Aptly dubbed 'Shaandaar Sachin' by the artist, the works had the honour of making a debut appearance at the gallery. Having concentrated his wholehearted attention to this medium has given Mehta the advantage of a polished approach to express his sensibilities. Also his uncanny eye of spotting the most endearing moments of the batsman's shots and personal journey make his images a virtual expletive on the life and times of this great sportsman. Beginning from a curly-haired shot of the child Tendulkar, overjoyed at his own self-importance, to the mature batsman carrying the nation's responsibility on the sports field, this collage down the ages is a bespoke Sachin biographically through the digital eye.

Technique wise, there is a lot that is creditable in this artist's mastery of his chosen medium. Combining



Shandaar Sachin, digital paintings on mechanical paper: 12x18 inches



Shandaar Sachin, digital paintings on mechanical paper: 12x18 inches



his aesthetic sense with his choice of colours for the forms has given his works a rare solidity. It has created a lyrical expressionism with the background

creating a surreal content with its free flowing dabbles. The determined look of the Sachin face leaps in front of the eyes through his expressionist caliber and the free flowing rhythmic forms seem to realise a life throbbing element with his capacity for bringing out various textures on the surface of the canvas. The works leave the viewer interested in analyzing each painting with a personal angle, relating one's own moments of elation that are linked to joy, achievement, exploration and the like. They are works that not only hail the master blaster's achievements in the field but also reinvent the audience relationship with his historic moments.



Harem- Bird-cage



Peacock throne - Time machine

Another show that displayed the interpretation of art from an inward and interconnected point of view was featured by artist **Ravinder Dutt**. A self-taught artist who declares that art is his life and passion, the works were a conglomerate interpretation of Indian history, art, culture, historic settings and more. In short, it is the very DNA from which the Indian character is recognized in all of us. Titled 'Mughal Treasures' these

works concentrate on one of the best known periods of our history and one in which the cultural fabric of the country had acquired a rare maturity through selective and studied patronage in the right quarters. Besides his penchant for choosing a period that is relevant, this part of Indian history and culture has been narrated to Dutt by his elders which make him



Sufism



The truth within

see the ghosts of the past with vivid reality. Also his long stay and deep association with the capital city of the Mughals, Delhi, has provided his understanding of abstract ideas such as power, potential customs and their relationship with modernity.

In terms of art practice, the works have an inviting texture, which provides a dream like element to the works through clever texturisation. Concepts too are knitted together as for instance the image of the Badshah on his Peacock Throne flying above the city in a depiction that brings out the understanding of emperorship as the seat of both benevolence and power. The idea that the frame of the court likened to a glittering bird cage, leaves much food for thought and again its technique of impressionism rather than graphic detailing, provides the right grist to



Inside - Outside - The Anatomy

the imagination. The Mughal heritage of miniature paintings is harkened in the work titled 'folklore' where postage sized cameos wear the insignia of a glorious empire on its borders while the surface within is marked by mundane images of motorcyclists, horsemen and other modes of transportation thereby reliving the notion of the influence and legacy of this great empire impacting on our lives today. Elsewhere the geometry of the dancer's drapery positioned against the spire-like column, a reminder of the monument in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, manages to link the centuries with becoming ease and grace.

The choice of art for this quarter therefore has been an attempt to bring to the fore the many ways in which a sharp imagination can ignite the sparks of creativity in the artistic 'super brain'.

I am all but dead being alive

Archana Datta

I have to withhold my tears,
smile to the world,
hold back my emotions,
I cannot let the world know the turmoil in me.

I have to withstand my sufferings,
bury them deep in my heart,
carry the burden of excruciating pain ungrudgingly,
I cannot let the world know the wound hidden in me.

I have to suppress all my longings,
sacrifice all my yearnings
at the altar of others' happiness,
I cannot let the world down asking for my happiness.

I have to weep silently,
hide my tears ,

crush all my desire,
I cannot let the world blame me for my selfishness.

I have to wipe my tears all by myself,
curb all my emotions,
keep all my desires unfulfilled,
I cannot let the world know about the pangs in my heart.

My tears have dried up,
my wound remains a deep unhealed sore,
My desires have all died prematurely,
I die hundred deaths every day,
I can neither live nor die,
I am all but dead now being alive.

I have no concern for the world passing by me.

Spring is in the air

Archana Datta

The bright sunrays, clear sky, balmy breeze
welcome the advent of spring,
the season of love!
Love is in the air!
It is in the murmurings of meandering rivulet across
the mountain,
in the blossoming flowers along the green valley,
in the careless floating of white clouds in the deep
blue sky,
in the cooing of cuckoos in the mango tree.

Spring is in the air!
An unknown pleasure fills my heart,
An unspoken word swells within me,
An unfulfilled desire torments me,
An unexpected longing brings hope for a new
beginning.

Your parting words haunt me,
the hope of living in a world of perpetual spring,
in a world of eternal love,
the hope of being intertwined in a unique bond of
love.

I could hear the footsteps behind me
feel your presence all around,
see you through my closed eyes,
I wait for your deep embrace.

A soft touch awakens me from my deep reverie,
I look back to see a small girl,
looking endearingly at me,
her deep eyes full of tears,

She has lost her way towards the mountain across
the valley,
I hold her hand in the approaching darkness,
take her back to her lost world,
lead to the warmth of her mother's bosom.

Cool evening breeze greets us,
Starry skies guide us,
Her tight grip makes me confident,
I find a new meaning of life, of love,
of spring in life, of life in love.

A light in the distance in a hut nearby in the foothill,
lights up her face,
She leaves my hand, runs towards the house,
looks back towards me for a fleeting moment,
Her smiling face lifts my soul.
A new hope rises in me,
A new love for life fills my heart.

I stand alone at the crossroads.
But sadness doesn't envelop me.
I don't bemoan my loveless life.
I don't think my spring has gone in vain.
I have found manifestations of love in new forms,
as I have seen true love in the smiling girl's face.

I now have an eternal spring in me,
and am blessed with love that never dies.

I am a lonely woman lost in the journey of Life

Archana Datta

I am as lonely as an icy mountain peak
Nippy cold breeze touches me day and night
Raindrops get frozen on my touch
bright sunrays cannot melt my icy body.

I am as lonely as an unblossomed flower
in the garden corner,
remaining unnoticed to singing bees,
darting butterflies, flying birds,
and playing children.

I am as lonely as a meadow tucked
in the mountain on its leaside
I remain rainless and barren
where nothing grows
which is bereft of footfalls.

I am as lonely as a spring on a rocky mountain
hidden in its deep folds,
away from human habitation.

I flow in my own pace in rains and in the Sun
under the open sky.

I am as lonely as a path lost in the jungle
abandoned by one and all.
I lay awake day and night
awaiting the touch of human steps,
awaiting the touch of life.

I am a lonely woman.
Lost moorings in the journey of life,
drifting away far and far from the shore.
I am as lonely as an icy peak,
as an unseen flower in a garden corner,
as a neglected meadow in the mountain shadow,
as a hidden spring in mountain bosom, and
as an abandoned path in the deep jungle.

Will there be an anchor to bring me ashore,
to bring me back to a life of joy.

Learning from Mumbai

Practising Architecture in Urban India



Publishers: Mapin Publishing

Authors: Pelle Poiesz. Gert Jan Scholte. Sanne Vanderkaaij Gandhi

Pages: 188

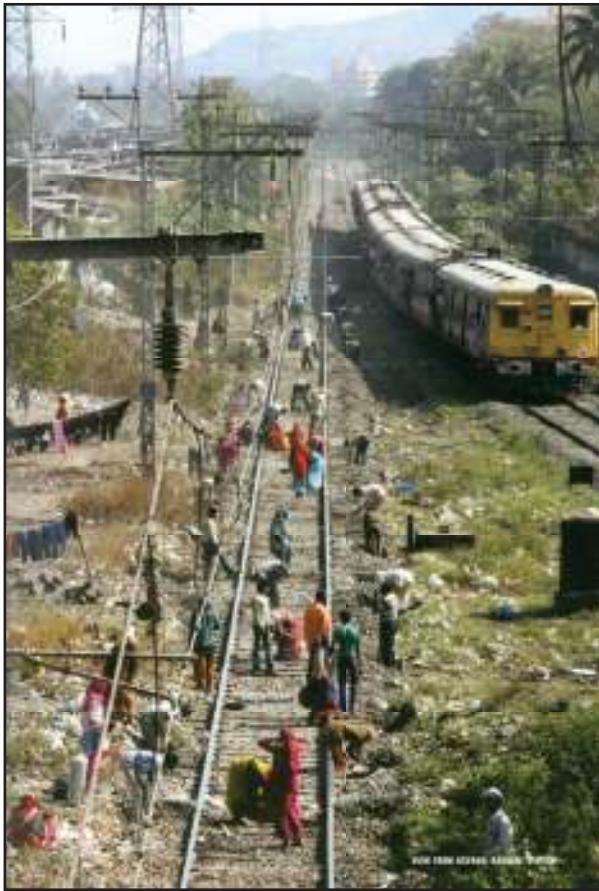
Year of publication: 2013

Review by Uma Shridhar

Does a vibrant mega city in India have a soul? A distinct relationship that gives it a structural cohesiveness? The answer is in the positive when it comes to Mumbai, according to a selection of important architects, town planners and residents, who came together to air their experiences of the city in the volume titled 'Learning from Mumbai'.

Much like the city itself, the contents of this book are not strictly conventional. Its three-part format is segregated into an opener segment of essays on the city by its iconic architects, followed by interviews with the present crop of up and coming practitioners and finally capped with a series of photographs capturing various facets of the city, ranging from landmark buildings, to chawls and of course, the human side of the city revealed through its people. For the non-architect reader, the volume entices with its opening essays by Rahul Verma, Charles Correa and Rajiv Mehrorta, where the makers of the Mumbai skyline express their familiarity with the city much





like a family member introducing his kith and kin to strangers.

Tracing its chronological evolution, Rahul Varma in his opening essay manages to lace his writing with snippets of information that one would like to cherish, about this mega metropolis. His insightful research reveals that this 'city on the water' owes its growth due to its dependence on its public transport system of buses and trains and not ferries. Taking a cue from this reference, architect Charles Correa crosses over to point of how successful mega cities like London, have remained so liveable simply because of the prioritization of the public transport system above all else. That according to the veteran architect should be a necessary component in Mumbai's DNA, in his exhilarating essay on the subject. Wrapping up the section of essays on the city, Rajiv Mehrotra makes out a case for the remaking of this city, not by tearing down structures deliberately but by opening up new

land for further growth, particularly along the eastern waterfront of the city, reusing existing infrastructure, warehouses and roads from its harbour days to recreate the metropolis back to its former vibrancy.

While one is left mulling over these ideas unearthed by the city's greatest architectural pandits, the reader is handheld and introduced to the company of its younger generation of architects, who have shared their personal journeys across this subject along a set questionnaire that queried about why the city was special to them, and their personal preferences when it came to eating joints, staying options transportation and finally, what Mumbai has taught them. A survey of the responses to this broad canvas of enquiries reveals that the city means many things to many people judging from the fact that no two



individuals have responded even remotely close to one another.

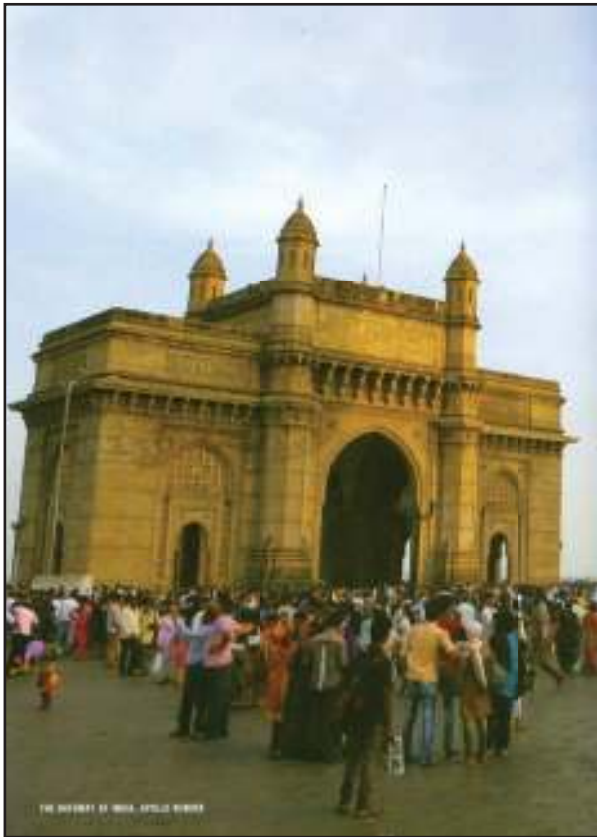
Thus while Hafeez Contractor finds his window seat at home the ideal relaxation point, for others it is the Bandra Bandstand or one of the high end clubs and restaurants of the city. Another insightful angle that the questionnaire revealed is what the city means to these young makers of the city's buildings, roads and homes. Ranging from a salute to the city's resourceful space utilization to the work opportunities available to the population, and economic complexities of the place, the city has won kudos from every one of the architects that the authors had interviewed.

Like the kaleidoscopic content of the answers and observations contained between the covers of this volume, the photographs included in the book help



to add body to the skeletal structure of this city. Ranging from stately public buildings to the faces of its inhabitants, the shots provide a narrative about the city that is impossible to express through the pen. The contrasts that the city throws up, from stately mansions to squalid slums, there is a certain frankness underlying each shot, an openness that is not judgemental and yet tinged with feeling and sympathy. Even the photographs of Mumbai's much mentioned transport network has not been romanticized but rather utilized as a frank tool that lays bare the truth and nothing but the truth.

As none of these shots are either posed or poised, they contain a natural rhythm in their sharpness thereby highlighting the very essence of this volume... to depict Mumbai as an urban learning experience.

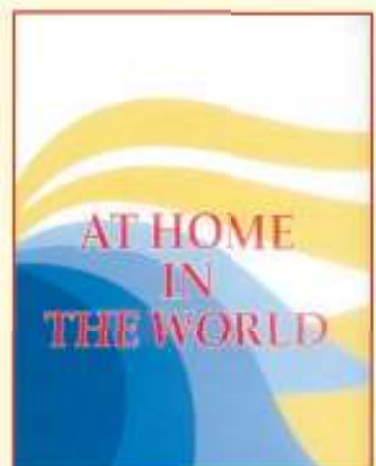
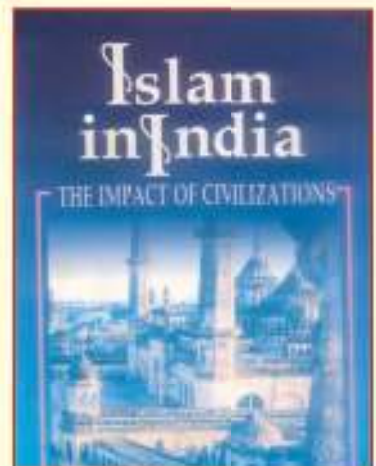
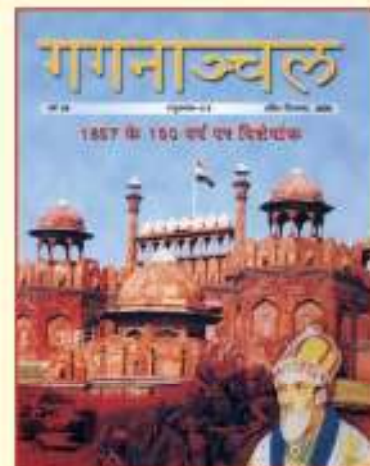
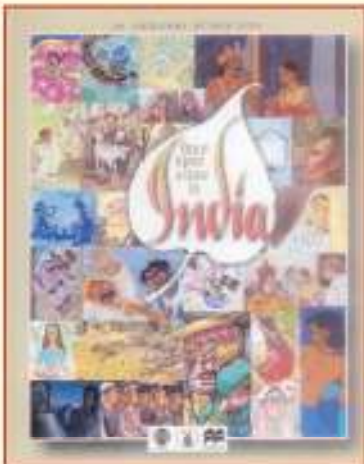


Perhaps the book could have attracted more attention had the front and back of the volume been geared to a generation of readers who are lured by the first impression when choosing a book for reading. But if they tarry to go beyond what first meets the eye, they are sure to be floored. Before one's eyes would lie a Mumbai that would be impossible to traverse physically, but with the book in hand, that journey with the book as a travelling companion alongside, the moments would fleet past and one would return



to Mumbai, a wizened and sympathetic visitor who has learnt to appreciate the city for tis entrepreneurial soul, its efficient transport system, the eagerness to deliver among it ordinary people.

With eclectic reading content, durable binding, relevant photographic illustrations, the book is bound to entice every interested architect and lay reader to understand this country's biggest metropolitan hub, and its relevance and reactions as well.



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