

## OTHER MODERNISMS TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF DIFFERENT MODERNISMS

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Images : Courtesy the author

### A PLURALITY OF MODERNISMS

Until now, Western Europe and North America have been seen as the main centres of Modernism. However, this exclusive history of modern architecture and the presumed internal consistency of Modernism are no longer taken for granted. Architectural history is no longer considered as a grand-narrative, but rather as a multiplicity of political conditions of identity. Mainstream construction of 20th-century Modernism through its canonical texts and buildings, has marginalised some recent trajectories, which are now gaining unprecedented new legitimacy. Today, 'non-Western European' and 'non-North American' contexts from Asia, Africa, Australia and South-America, are increasingly being studied to broaden the limits of modernist production and this is revising the previous singular view. Instead of 'early classical modern architecture', we now talk about a 'plurality of Modernisms', both within the global context, and within regional or individual societies.

At the same time - identity constructs, such as 'the own and the foreign' - or 'the self and the other' - imply a range of readings, for instance, the national, regional or local otherness of 'International Style', or the anonymous vernacular otherness of the canonical Modernism. Colonial architecture, for example, was the outcome of a process whereby people quite literally recreated familiar environments in alien locations, thus retaining part of their identity in their local architecture. After independence, the post-colonial search for 'national expression' within 20th-century Modernism led to constructing the identities of young nations. With the end of Colonialism, similarities in terms of how Modernism was adapted can be seen in countries as far apart as:

- Mexico, 1821 independent from Spain,
- Brazil, 1822 independent from Portugal,
- Australia, 1901 independent from Great Britain,
- India, 1947 independent from Great Britain.

Colonialism transplants culture and introduces the spatial practices, urban patterns and building typologies of the coloniser to the colony even if these did not make sense in the colony's climate. Eventually, the very different climatic conditions of the colonies led to modification, adoption and the emergence of hybrid architecture; e. in India, the British colonisation continued for so long that a particular architectural style evolved.

### THE DISMANTLING OF COLONIAL STRUCTURES

The colonies had already operated with "constructed" architectural traditions based on classical European examples. However, the young independent nations rejected this colonial heritage. The modernisation process and the expression of national identity through modern culture was part of the political agenda of extremely popular leaders, like Nehru, Vargas, Kubitschek and Barton, emerging in these countries. In this new environment, nations began to consider developing a new architecture for a '*brave new world*' ... '*giving new symbols to the people*' (Kubitschek).

Independence and nation building are obviously closely connected. Their aim in this context is to develop an architectural language that reflects the optimistic future of the newly formed nations. Governments accepted and adapted Modernism as the official architectural language for public buildings, and even for new capital cities, to show their technological and cultural advancement. Creating something new meant avoiding the aesthetics of the old world. The mottos were: "L 'Esprit Nouveau" (Le Corbusier), "O 'Estado Novo" (Vargas), "50 years in 5" (Kubitschek), "Project for Modernity" (Nehru). The discipline of architecture has, for most of its history, been at the service of those in power. To reshape themselves, countries designed and built modern capitals, expressing the new nation or regional identity (e.g. Punjab). Striking similarities in regard to the arrival and introduction of European Modernism can be identified in:

- Canberra (1913 - Walter Burley Griffin, still based on the Garden City concept and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts)
- Chandigarh (1951- Le Corbusier)
- Brasilia (1956 - Lucio Costa)
- Dacca (1962 - Louis Kahn)

Ironically, those capitals of the 1950s were built far away from Europe, but strictly to the European principles of CIAM and the Charter of Athens.

### A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

The British had already tried to define an 'Indian Architecture', reflecting the kind of style that would be most appropriate for local culture. During this process, the search for identity in areas of differing cultural groups frequently portrayed a single vision of history, either through a focus on regional architecture or through the full adaptation of Modernism as the 'official' style. At the same time, particular periods of history

1. Brasilia, the new Brazilian capital built 1956-60. Master plan by Lucio Costa.
2. Formative years (1952): Balkrishna Doshi worked at Le Corbusier's atelier at Rue de Sevres in Paris for four years, before he returned to Ahmedabad.
3. Doshi and others watching Le Corbusier sketch. Chandigarh, 1958.



were selected to represent the regional identity and certain periods or groups were excluded in order to construct a consensus of what constitutes a regional style. Such a process of "nation building" used architecture to present itself as modern, international and technologically up-to-date, in opposition to the former colonial period. During this time, there was also a lack of resistance to the new, the imported.

However, the imported was also open to some local influences. The identity question is therefore closely connected with the Regionalism debate and offers three categories:

- the Own
- the Foreign
- the "adapted Foreign"

The author believes that the category of the 'adapted Foreign' is very much a part of India. We can see this in Charles Correa's essay 'How Chandigarh became Indian', in which the artificial city, step-by-step, derived its lifestyle from the region and the abstract diagram of the Cartesian grid, and the monumentality of the city slowly transformed into a reflection of the local way of life. It is interesting to observe how the modernist paradigm of 'classical, heroic Modernism' in architecture (as it was defined by the Bauhaus and CIAM) shifted to Regionalism and multiple expressions of Modernism especially within the Indian context. Obviously, in the regions, people live meaningful lives.

The first generation of modern architects in India, with influential figures like the so-called 'Group of Three', Balkrishna Doshi (\*1927) in Ahmedabad, Charles Correa (\*1930) in Mumbai, and Raj Rewal (\*1934) in Delhi - defined their work pretty much with what Modernism in India after Independence looked like. Yet, their architectural language is overlaid with powerful, yet superbly sensitive, local cultural references. However, what about the second generation? Many creative Indian architects, such as Hasmukh Patel, Uttam C. Jain, Atmaram Gajjar, R.K. Choksi, Habib Rahman, Achyut Kanvinde, Shivnath Prasad, J.C. Malhotra, M.S. Sharma, Aditya Prakash, Anant Raje, Abhikram, Kiran Pandya, Gira Sarabhai, B.P. Mathur, K.T. Kavindran, Mathew & Ghosh - The Architecture Alliance, Rahul J. Mehrotra - to name just a few - are unknown outside India. Their contribution is still in need of research and proper description. So what is the meaning of Modernism in India's architecture today?

Modernism was at first understood to mean a break with tradition and the region, as it aimed for social utopianism and to influence the process of social change. Now we understand that a plurality of Modernisms was active all along, and we can now more clearly identify regional 'Schools of Modernism' and local differences, such as those between Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

#### ARCHITECTURE SHAPED BY THE TROPICAL CLIMATE

The initial, direct import of European models did not work well with the harsh Indian climate, the humidity and the extreme heat and glare. Otto H. Koenigsberger (1908-1999), the German architect who became chief planner for Mysore (1939-41), Director of Housing in Delhi (1948-51), who later founded the Department of Tropical Architecture at the Architectural Association in London, was one of the very few architects who were seriously interested in the problem of building in a tropical climate. His research is documented in the pivotal book 'Manual for Building in the Tropics' (1974).

Koenigsberger was one of the founders of modern urban development planning in the rapidly growing cities, and his contributions ranged from the physics of building and design in tropical climates to the formulation of self-help policies for the improvement of urban slums. Education was one of his most important concerns, and during his work in India he became aware of the importance of training Indian architects, to stake claim in a profession, then dominated by expatriates. On returning to Europe, he became increasingly aware of the perils and challenges of exporting Western building and planning methods to a tropical environment, and of the need to establish a body of knowledge for professionals in these countries. The changing political and economic opportunities at the end of the colonial period prompted architects to develop a post-colonial identity for architecture, one that could transcend national boundaries. The study 'Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zones' by Fry and Drew, explicitly offered support for an imaginary architect who came from a generic tropical zone.

Hannah le Roux (Johannesburg) defined the term 'tropical architecture' and emphasised on climatic conditions when she wrote: 'The concept of tropical architecture is one that was constructed in the 1950s to link the work of modernist practitioners in a number of locations outside the West. Tropical architecture has been represented as a form of 'Critical Regionalism', in which it offers a language based on the conditions of the non-Western world. Tropical architecture was located within the networks of modernist and colonial culture as much as it was place bound. Tropical Architecture was always seen as something other than colonial architecture.

#### TRANSFER OF IDEAS

Throughout the 1930s, we find the import of the avant-garde ideas of the Bauhaus and the principles of Le Corbusier, to other countries, in a post-colonial context, as well as to Japan. At this time, all these countries experienced:

- High immigration, leading to cultural transfer,
- Rapid population growth, city growth, new public housing programs,
- Strong building boom, with introduction of modern construction techniques (e.g. building with concrete),
- Search for a new 'constructed identity'.

In India, more than anywhere else, architecture has always played a fundamental role in supplying basic accommodation in the form of affordable housing for the masses. Such architecture of constraints can often be a healthy development. In India, an important role has been played by technological conditions, that is, the availability of materials and the need to build larger structures in concrete; modern buildings based on abstract geometry, not on traditional methods, were only possible through the availability of an army of unskilled labour.

The other huge influence on Indian Modernism came from students returning from Europe and North America. Numerous overseas-trained Indian architects returned in the 1930s to 1950s and brought with them the idea of "International Style" and the cultural models to which they were exposed during their years at Harvard, MIT and the AA. Raj Rewal (who studied in London and worked in Paris before he returned to India) and Balkrishna Doshi (who worked for four years with Le Corbusier in Paris), architects such as Achyut Kanvinde and Habib Rahman (both were strongly influenced by Gropius), and Joseph Allen Stein (who worked with Richard Neutra, and later became head of the architecture school in Calcutta), were all architects

patronised directly by Nehru. In the same way, Brazilian president Kubitschek patronised the architects Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa. Most of these architects remained faithful to their European or American education and training, even to typologies and concepts that were not appropriate to the local climate, their later work strongly reflecting this.

The master himself, Le Corbusier, was invited perchance to India (1950) and was subsequently commissioned to design the new capital for Punjab, where he worked in association with Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew. The driving force was the government's strong desire to be 'modern'.

#### THE ARRIVAL OF THE MASTERS

Both architects, Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, were already in the later years of their career when they built in India. Both had based their design concepts on Fatehpur Sikri and the traditional 'parasol' idea, and both were influenced by a shift that occurred in CIAM around 1956.

Chandigarh was (just as Brasilia was for the new Brazil) the symbol of the new India: 'The evident intent was to represent a modern Indian identity that would be free from any association with its colonial past', as Kenneth Frampton points out (1985). The development of new capitals such as Chandigarh, Brasilia and Dacca cannot be separated from the political aspirations of the country at the time of their independence. Chandigarh epitomised Nehru's utopian destiny, the idea of a modern industrialised state with strong economic growth. Tragically, with Chandigarh and Brasilia, the emerging crisis of Western Enlightenment became obvious, and Modernism's inability to nurture any existing rich cultures such as the Indian culture.

Le Corbusier - the travelling, publishing and lecturing architect - was the first global architect, spreading his theories around the world: 1929 and 1936 in South America; 1951, 1952 and 1954 in India; 1957 in Japan; and numerous travels to North Africa. His design principles (*Curtain Wall*; *Brise Soleil*; *Pilotis*; *Roof Terrace*; *Plan Libre*) had a strong impact on the young architects in the countries where they appeared.

His collaborators on these projects were:

- in Brasil (Rio): Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer
- in Japan (Tokyo): Kunio Mayekawa
- in India (Ahmedabad): Balkrishna Doshi

Following the collaboration with the master, each of them pursued a career in their home country, where they became the first generation of modern architects. However, it was up to the second generation to adapt Modernism to the region and to fully embrace 'Regionalism' as a concept.

Corbusier's work is clearly rooted in the "Mediterranean Vernacular" (cubic form, white walls), with its essentially simple architectural language of the Cycladic islands. His interest in "*L'art paysan*" is interesting in this regard. The 'roughness' of the '*Les Maisons Jaoul*' project (1952) marked a clear paradigm shift from Corbusier's work, towards 'Primitivism'. During this period of Brutalism, he used mainly rough concrete and exposed brick.

A modernistic motif like that of the Catalan vault, which Corbusier used for the *Maisons Jaoul*, was elegantly reused at the Kimbell Art Gallery (Louis Kahn, 1974) and Doshi's work at *Sangath* (Doshi's studio, 1979). With Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn we can find two different interpretations of Indian architecture. Kahn used the native brick and load bearing arches. Doshi and Stein's Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore (1977-85) is composed as a network of streets with open spaces, similar to those found in Fatehpur Sikri, with a maze of courtyards, of varying sizes and linked pavilions - a metaphor that Kahn had used for the IIM in Bangalore.

Today, Indian cities such as Mumbai and Calcutta, with their particularly high density living, are "cities assembled", that challenge our understanding of the European *polis* and requires a re-definition of what urbanism and urban design mean. A new language for 'Indian Modernism' has developed - shifting away from the abstract, heroic Modernism by embracing local and regional aspects. The quest for a more regional architecture has led to this move away from Modernism. Architects have increasingly questioned the 'International Style' and its appropriateness for the climatic and cultural context of the region. Team X, a group of young architects, demanded at CIAM (1956): "more ethics, less aesthetics". They were interested in the questions like "What are regional architectural features? How are they characterised? How can architecture be based on these characteristics?"

#### REGIONALISM - AN AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION

Alan Colquhoun points out "There is a case for saying that the 1930s was not just the sole triumph of abstract Rationalism that it often seems but, at the same time, also of Regionalism" (1997).

Regionalism provides a sense of continuity and tradition that relates to the history and culture of a particular region, in contrast to the globalising forces of International Modernism that are believed to eliminate such differences and lead to homogeneous architectural forms. The search for authentic regional expression started to become a main interest around the late 1950s, when architects witnessed the final dissolution of the International Style. This search for a more substantial and more robust vocabulary, with the aim of building in harmony with the climate, culture and tradition of the region, and in the local context, has brought an end to the early classical Modernism.

The second generation of modern architects, who carried out the shift towards a 'dynamic Regionalism', consisted of architects such as:

- in Brazil :Vilanova Artigas and Lina Bo Bardi,
- in Mexico :Juan O'Gorman and Luis Barragan,
- in Australia :Glenn Murcutt (whereas, for instance, Harry Seidler had not abandoned the principles of functionalism).

With Independence, the major question for India was: how should the nation be developed and how can poverty be removed? In this regard, Gandhi's exchange of letters with Nehru is significant. In Gandhi's idealist 'autonomous village unit' we can see early ideas of sustainable development. The village that only produces for its own consumption and the concept of reduced consumption or non-possession, expresses a counterpoint to Nehru's 'Project for Modernity', which was a bold, rational push towards industrialisation. Nehru's Government was keen to build public buildings for the citizens that would express the impetus towards a modern India, however, at the same time it frequently maintained the British style (as introduced by Herbert Baker, Edward Lutyens, and Claude Batley).



4. The 'Mediterranean Vernacular': The white, cubic architecture of the Greek islands were a strong influence on Le Corbusier's early work.  
 5. Maisons Jaoul, 1955: Exposed brick work, rough concrete, and the motif of the Catalan vault - a shift in Le Corbusier's work.  
 6. Louis Kahn's elegant interpretation of the long, extruded vault motif at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (Texas), 1974.



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7. Sangath, Doshi's studio in Ahmedabad (1979). The vault motif reused in a similar way, creating a poetic lighting.
8. Louis Kahn (1963): IIM Institute in Ahmedabad. Kahn quotes the network of open spaces, courtyards and linked pavilions as he had seen in Fatehpur Sikri.
9. Glenn Murcutt (1974): a Regionalistic approach. Two simple sheds in the idealistic Australian tradition of the barn within the landscape, using timber and corrugated iron.
10. The Indian city: a complex structure of houses and patios open to the sky. Jodhpur in Rajasthan.

### 'DYNAMIC REGIONALISM'

In the Mumbai of today, we can find many traces of regional mixing, for instance, in the fusion of cuisines; if you eat Chinese food in Mumbai, it is made with *masalas* and Indian spices, which you normally would not get in Chinese food in London or elsewhere. Mumbai is a bustling, expanding city, where 'not even five per cent of the architecture is produced by university-trained architects, but is mainly the work of engineers, for whom Modernism is merely a role model reduced to formalism (Rahul J. Mehrotra, 2006). Despite 30 years of modernist doctrine, modernist planning has not managed to destroy public space in Mumbai. It seems that Modernism in Mumbai is still an ongoing process, fuelled by the need for social transformation.

Ahmedabad, on the other hand, clearly established itself as the second centre of Indian architecture. In Ahmedabad, Modernism is very much alive, with architects re-invigorating Modernism as one of several possible directions, like Bimal Patel, Anant Raje, and Abhikram.

In the past, Regionalism was often seen as a foil to abstract International Modernism. However, depicting the debate as merely "Regionalism vs. International Modernism" oversimplifies the issues. Today, we challenge this sort of dichotomy and attempt to understand Regionalism - not in opposition to Globalisation or International Modernism, but rather as an integral part of an overall system. Both movements have always worked simultaneously, with equal dynamism and in a complex interplay. "Dynamic Regionalism" is identified as being responsive to climate and topography, site specific, using locally available materials, local craftsmanship, traditional building technology and local typologies. Balkrishna Doshi defined "Regionality" in 1960 as 'the culture of a people living in a particular area with certain specific qualities of their own'. 'Regionalism' as a doctrine has helped to reaffirm local or national identity. Examples of this are found in Finland, Brazil, Mexico, India, Australia or in the architecture of some Islamic countries (as illustrated by the Aga Khan Awards). The boundaries of such a region need not be precise, but must be broadly definable, like the range of an animal species. Within this geographic area, the regional architectural character exists in the repetition of buildings with certain features, not all of which need to be present in every case (e.g., facade materials, decorative elements).

'Limitations on choice, such as those which create the regional character of a particular architecture, are cultural'. says George Kubler (1962). According to Kenneth Frampton, the criteria for 'Critical Regionalism' were defined as:

- *Topos*: local building tradition, how to respond to the site-specific topography (e.g., buildings on stilts);
  - *Tectos*: availability of local materials, and building know-how in craftsmanship and tectonics (e.g., certain construction methods or materials like Azulejos);
  - *Typos*: regional practice how to integrate buildings in the context, typologies based on the local climate (e.g., particular roof shapes, traditional shutters, or courtyard houses).
- Today, we describe the work of the following architects as Regionalist: Alvar Aalto, Luis Barragan, Glenn

Murcutt, Lina Bo Bardi, Carlo Scarpa, Sverre Fehn, Louis Kahn, John Utzon, Giancarlo de Carlo, Alvaro Siza, Luigi Snozzi and Peter Zumthor.

The work of all these architects is connected to particular regions, like Ticino (Italy), Catalonia (Spain) or Vorarlberg (Austria), and can only be seen in the context of redefining their own regional culture because of their distance from major European or American centres.

It is important to understand that the potential of a region resides more than in just using the materials of the place, it's also about particular ideas and forms of expression. This author has arrived at the simple proposition that architecture is inevitably regional and that regions can be defined through their architecture.

Further, the author suggests that the term 'Dynamic Regionalism' is an appropriate description because:

- Regional architecture is the result of dynamic forces. It is the outcome of a process of integration of diverse cultural, technological and environmental influences, and is, therefore, ever developing.

- It is a dynamic, rather than a static phenomenon.

- Regional architecture is a dynamic manifestation of new and developing ideas, and the creation of new forms through such processes as transformation, hybridisation and integration.

- Since the late 19th century we can observe a dynamic power play between regional architectural influences and abstract, rational beliefs, what Anthony King (2004) describes as "Parallel Phenomena".

We can call the late 20th century the "century of travel and tourism". However, does this mean the end of authentic Regionalism, the end of ideologies and traditions, and the end of the nation state? Dynamic Regionalism still creates meaningful expressions of place for the increasingly placeless culture of the globalised world. Architecture has the potential to balance the conflict between local and global.

The Dilemma of Globalisation is that it facilitates:

- The consumption of traditions (e.g., new urbanism),
- The manufacturing of fake heritage, and
- The "world as a collection of postcards" (as coined by Nezar Alsayyad, 2005).

#### SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

In India, there is not "one" definition of Modernism; there are many. It is predicted that the city of Mumbai will have up to 30 million people by 2020. Perhaps the most crucial question in times of such rapid urbanisation is: How can Modernism be adapted to the contemporary needs of sustainability?

The author suggests as conclusion:

1. Everybody lives in a region. Region is not an option. (for instance, there are regions of particular food or dialects).
2. There is a certain paradox in the fact that an anti-globalist movement like Regionalism seeks to extend itself worldwide.
3. Identity is always constructed; it never evolves naturally.
4. There is no identity outside its context, as the local and global exist side-by-side, intertwined with each other.
5. Regional identities are dynamic and still remain evident, even in times of globalisation. "Dynamic Regionalism" appears to be the appropriate term to describe this. ■

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