

Independence And Indian Architecture

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Abstract- *Style of many styles can be defined as Indian Architectural style. A nation with multiple varieties is beautifully structured with its very own architectural style. Though in India Pre-independence era was under influence of British, Portugal and many other colonial powers, the country developed its own identity with various forms of art. Architecture was one of the ways to express and educate the independent India with its own culture and heritage. Today we can see many such architectural marvels which are vocal and contributing in conservation of art and culture. Looking at some examples we have Lotus Temple in Delhi, Gandhi Ashram in Gujarat, Palace of assembly in Chandigarh, IIT and IIM buildings etc.*

Independence, whether political, cultural, or intellectual, plays a crucial role in shaping the development of architecture. In history, when countries or regions gained independence, they often experienced a surge in the desire to reflect their newfound status through architecture. A country's architecture can be a powerful symbol of its autonomy, serving as both a physical manifestation of independence and a means of asserting cultural identity. Similar struggle can be seen in creating India's architectural identity. From the grand palaces of monarchies to the minimalist design of new nations, architecture often conveys a message of national pride, unity, and self-determination.

Keywords- Post-Independence, Culture, Architecture, Context, Influence, Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

India was highly under influence of great leaders who played major role in Independence. The lifestyle and path showed by them was interpreted in art forms. In architecture, the conceptual development was either ideology based or material and contextual. India always had a strong geographical contexts and wide range of natural materials available. Dated from Second century BCE Ajanta Caves are representing the same philosophy. This is not only limited to caves and forts, as we can see many institutes, commercial buildings have followed all these principles and concepts. Such Natural heritage also makes India its own kind off style.

Another vital expression of independence in architecture is the creation of monuments, memorials, and national landmarks. These structures often commemorate key moments in a nation's struggle for independence and serve as physical reminders of the sacrifices made by previous generations. Examples include the India Gate and War memorial in New Delhi, commemorating the lives lost in the fight for independence. Apart from establishing government and developing urban infrastructure, India also got freedom to practice and develop their spiritual spaces resulting in conservation and recreation of temples, meditation centers. Such monumental works are not just grand in scale, but they also encapsulate deep emotional and historical significance.

1.1 Research Question

How India developed its own Indian Architectural style Post-Independence (1947-1977)?

1.2 Aim

To determine the key elements that contributed to the development of Indian architecture after independence and to comprehend the results and impacts of this development on Indian residents.

Objectives

- To study the immediate influences on culture and art after independence.
- To observe the impact of independence resulting in behavior of an individual or group.
- To identify the Indian context, philosophy and ideology for constructing buildings after independence.

Limitations

- This research study will be limited to only monumental, inspirational and culturally vocal architectural buildings of post independence era.
- The study is limited to post independence art, culture and architecture of India only.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The cultural impact and political movements in India are very well documented and discussed all over world. Just when we relate to the memories of Independence in India we are guided with many visual metaphors depicting the idea of architecture and culture. We are blessed with all great activists, personalities who have treasured this data and photographs which we can access today to understand the depth of reality. Below noted is the summary of available literature explaining the Pre and Post independent era of India and History of architecture of India.

Architecture & Independence, The search for Identity- India 1880 to 1980, Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, Miki Desai This book guide us through different functions of architecture namely the symbolic Nature of Architecture, attitudes towards Architectural meanings and creating symbolic expressions in built form. Buildings and urban patterns also have a fourth dimension that is Time. This dimension has two aspects to it. In the first place, to understand the daily behavior pattern of a person and therefore the sequential experience of one space after another. The second aspect is the built environment comprises the changes made in it over time. The built environment serves many purposes; it provides shelter to individual or group, it provides privacy, security and space for social interaction. It also carries the symbolic message at national level. The symbol can serve political, religion or individual purposes.

This book suggests influence of various architectural styles which were active worldwide in that period. Also the influence of renowned artist, designers and architects can be seen in some stated examples.

History of Indian Architecture, James Fergusson,(1910) History of Indian Architecture, as the name suggests term “Indian Architecture” exists with great qualities and long lasting impressions. Author has elaborated the uniqueness of India compared to other ruling countries, such as Greek, Rome, etc. India is blessed with grand and luxurious natural features and pleasing conditions. India is a complete cosmos by itself, bounded by Himalayas in the North and sea in the South. The East is bounded with Jungles inhabited by tribes and the only one window for communication across the Indus open for outer world is west. Such geographical conditions are inspiration for many artist and architects.

This book guides us through the period of civilization in India along with development of Buddhist architecture, Architecture in the Himalayas, Dravidian Style and Chalukyan Style. Objective for referring this book is to understand the roots of built environment in India and also to understand the

constant impression and its conceptualization of caves, shelters, structures for developing the architecture.

III. METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study includes the immediate influences on culture and art after independence, for which we are using literature and expert review as a tool. Second objective is to understand the impact of independence resulting in behavior of a individual or group as it is directly connected with the built environment they are using. To satisfy this objective we are conducting interviews of people who were present at the era of independence. Another objective is to identify the Indian context, philosophy and ideology for constructing buildings after independence. To understand this we are referring documentaries of architects and designers who were working in India for the period of 1947-1977 (for the period of 30 years as initial development of India was in rapid progress).

3.1 Study of Literature review

The immediate influence on culture and art, architecture is studied from book titled *Architecture & Independence, The search for Identity- India 1880 to 1980* by author *Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai*. The roots of civilization, architecture and influences of built environments are studied from book titled *History of Indian Architecture*, by author *James Fergusson, 1910*.

3.2 Interview of people

To understand the impact of independence resulting in behavior of a individual or group we conducted the sample study of interviewing people aging between 85 to 90 years and above. The total sample interview conducted of 5 people who worked in different sectors. Identities of those people are not revealed but their outputs are listed by naming them as a Identity 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Identity 1 is of 87 years who worked in government office as administrative. Identity 2 is of 92 years who worked with renowned architect Charles correa as a acoustic consultant. Identity 3 is of 89 years who worked in the field of education. Identity 4 is a homemaker and Identity 5 is also worked in the field of education as a organization driver. These interviews helped us to understand the change in routine behavioral activities resulting in the change of built environment.

3.3 Study of Documentaries

Documentaries of renowned artists, architects who worked in the post-independence era are studied to identify the Indian context, philosophy and ideology for constructing buildings after independence. Documentaries include *volume zero* by Charles Correa, *My Architect: A Son's Journey* by Nathaniel Kahn, *The Promise* by B V Doshi.

Study of above mentioned documentaries shows various conceptual structures and philosophy of individual architect behind designing the long lasting monumental buildings.

IV. ROLE OF KEY ARCHITECTS

After independence, several visionary architects played a pivotal role in shaping the architectural identity of modern India.

- Le Corbusier designed Chandigarh, the first planned modern city of independent India. His use of concrete forms, open layouts, and geometric organization represented a new vision of modernity and progressive urban order.
- Charles Correa emphasized the importance of regional culture, climate-responsive design, and human-scale architecture. His projects, such as the Gandhi Memorial Museum and Navi Mumbai plan, reflected a deep connection between modernism and Indian tradition.
- Balkrishna Vitthal Das Doshi (B.V. Doshi) integrated modernist principles with traditional Indian spatial patterns. His works, like the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore and Aranya Housing Project, demonstrated harmony between social needs, environment, and aesthetics.
- Raj Rewal, Achyut Kanvinde, and Laurie Baker contributed through context-sensitive and sustainable approaches. They focused on material efficiency, climatic adaptation, and affordability, promoting a human-centered design philosophy.

V. THEMES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of post-independence India reflects a dialogue between modern aspirations and traditional wisdom. Several key themes shaped its evolution and continue to influence contemporary design practices.

- Modernism vs. Tradition:

After independence, architects sought to establish a national architectural identity that balanced international modernist ideals with indigenous sensibilities. The adaptation of modernist forms was not merely aesthetic but also symbolic of progress and democracy. Yet, designers retained traditional spatial hierarchies, courtyards, and cultural motifs to preserve Indian context.

- Regionalism:

Regionalism became a vital approach in reconciling diverse climates, cultures, and building materials. Architects emphasized local craftsmanship and vernacular techniques to ensure functional and cultural relevance. This approach allowed buildings to resonate with their geographical and social settings.

- Social Purpose:

Architecture after 1947 was deeply linked to social reform. The design of low-cost housing, educational institutions, and public infrastructure reflected the state's commitment to equity and modernization. Architecture thus became an instrument for social transformation and inclusive development.

- Institutional Identity:

The creation of institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and government complexes symbolized India's vision for knowledge, self-reliance, and administrative strength. Their architectural language reflected transparency, openness, and democratic values.

- Sustainability:

From the late 20th century onward, there was growing awareness of ecological responsibility. Architects began to integrate passive cooling systems, natural ventilation, and local materials, aligning modern architecture with sustainability and vernacular traditions.

VI. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND PLANNING

Following independence, the Government of India recognized architecture and urban planning as essential instruments for nation-building. Various institutions and initiatives were established to address the country's diverse developmental and infrastructural needs.

- Institutional Framework:

The establishment of key organizations such as the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), the Town and Country Planning Organization (TCPO), and the National Institute of Design (NID) marked a decisive step toward systematic architectural and design development. These institutions played a crucial role in formulating design standards, promoting professional education, and implementing large-scale public projects.

- **Planned Cities:**

The creation of new towns like Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar, and Gandhinagar reflected the government's vision for modernization and administrative efficiency. These cities were conceived as symbols of progress and rational planning—Chandigarh represented modernism and order; Bhubaneswar integrated regional tradition with urban design; and Gandhinagar emphasized civic harmony and greenery.

- **Urbanization and Rural Development:**

Post-independence planning focused not only on urban expansion but also on addressing rural housing and infrastructural challenges. Government initiatives promoted low-cost housing schemes, community centers, and rural development programs, aiming to reduce inequality between urban and rural environments.

These policies encouraged architects and planners to design socially responsive and sustainable environments.

VII. CULTURAL IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

Post-independence Indian architecture became a canvas for expressing the nation's cultural diversity and evolving identity. As India sought to redefine itself beyond colonial narratives, architects began incorporating indigenous forms, materials, and spatial traditions into modern frameworks.

- **Integration of Traditional Elements:**

Modern Indian architecture often blended Indian motifs, courtyards, jaalis (latticed screens), and temple or tomb influences within contemporary structures. These design strategies created a visual and cultural continuity between the past and present, maintaining climatic suitability while reflecting regional aesthetics.

- **Pluralism and Secular Expression:**

Architectural forms came to embody India's pluralistic and secular ethos. Public buildings, educational campuses, and cultural centers were designed to represent openness, inclusivity, and community engagement—values fundamental to the democratic vision of independent India.

- **From Colonial to Indigenous Design Language:**

The post-1947 period marked a deliberate departure from colonial symbolism toward an architectural vocabulary rooted in local traditions and participatory design. This shift was not only stylistic but ideological—reflecting independence, self-determination, and cultural authenticity.

VIII. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data collected using above mentioned methods is segregated in four main criteria. The architecture and Identity, architecture of Indian villages, traditional and physical context, the Indian urban and architectural precedents. In detail we will understand these all aspects and come up with the conclusion.

Indian culture is a composition of variety in religion, symbols, landscapes, languages and individualism. Architecture is also an important non verbal language used to communicate about ways of life, aesthetic aspiration and cultural ideologies. Using symbols, materials, colors, forms and scale architecture is communicating with us from the beginning of civilization.



Fig. 3 Supreme court of India, Delhi



Fig. 2 Ellora Temple, cave 16, Maharashtra

The great Stupa is said to be the first and oldest Buddhist site in India, which also has the oldest stone structures constructed in it. Under King Ashoka's reign, Sanchi Stupa was constructed in the 3rd Century BC. And on other hand we have the Ellora, with its uninterrupted sequence of monuments dating from A.D. 600 to 1000, brings the civilization of ancient India to life. These two structures have a huge difference in their construction period but still we can observe the influence of religion and symbols from these structures. Use of materials also suggests the natural sites of India and verity in color palette of Indian landscapes.

Continuing the understanding and implementation of symbols, materials, scale and colors in architecture post independence we have listed few examples below. These examples suggest the interpretation of Indian history and heritage for constructing the buildings of Independent India. As we have limited this period to 30 years post independence, the examples we will be looking at will also be from the same period of time. Below we have image of Supreme Court of India. The building designed by architect Ganesh Bhikaji Deollikar in 1958 as a symbol of "the national ideal of justice in the highest sphere of activity." Here we can see the use of forms, symbols and materials representing national identity. Another example is of IIM, Ahmedabad designed by architect Louis Kahn in 1962. The massive brick framework suggests us the ways of life of Mahatma Gandhi as a simple structure without ornamentation is standing still timeless. The use of arches, circles suggests the inspiration from traditional Indian symbols.



Fig. 3 Supreme court of India, Delhi



Fig. 4 IIM, Ahmednabad

The below image gives us the idea of diversity in India and symbols representing the same.

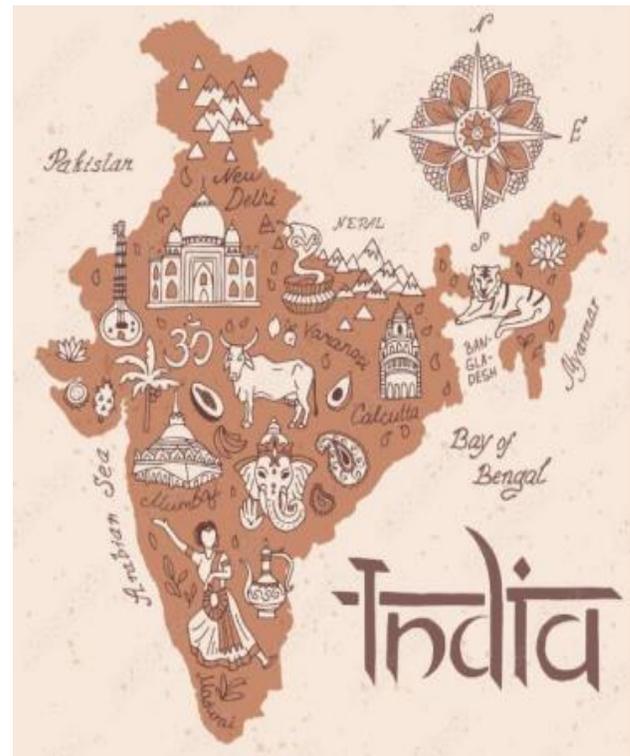


Fig.5 Map of India (Internet)

In the era of Independence, there was a collective sense of engagement amongst architects in creating the future. Many young architects had been caught up with the spirit of the fight for independence. With Independence came a euphoria which infused architects with the belief that many social and physical ends could now be met. Most of their thinking was deterministic; they believed that social goals could be met through physical design. This line of thought reflected the modern movements in architecture and urban design. Architect Joseph Stein was practicing in New Delhi by then stated that "We were all impregnated with the opportunities that lay ahead, and with the idea that not only

could you shape the form of the physical environment, but also influence social life."

Mahatma Gandhi's impact on architectural thought has been subtle but long lasting. His philosophy and way of living has been a reference for many architects. Below added images of Gandhi Memorial Museum in Ahmadabad was designed by Charles Correa in 1963. This is classic example of portraying life of Mahatma Gandhi through architecture. Gandhi was convinced that peace, prosperity and independence could only be achieved in India if every village was a self-governing, non-violent, casteless entity. Each village would produce its own grain, fruit and khadi, have its own industries and its own educational institutes. Village would be designed to have good sanitation and its houses would be cottages with sufficient ventilation, light.



Fig. 6 Sabarmati Ashram, Gujarat

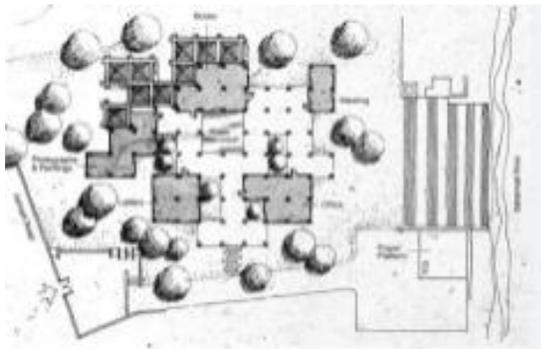


Fig.7 Plan of Sabarmati Ashram, Gujarat

IX. CONCLUSION

India struggled for many years to cherish the independence. The strong natural conditions, availability of natural materials in abundance and rich heritage of art and culture are the great aspects that make India stand unique in comparison with other ruling countries. Such assets were the base of inspirations and cultural growth. As we have seen there was a routine behavioral change in person's life post independence resulted in large requirement of buildings and shelters.

The way ahead to deal with new challenges, particularly the new identity created by Independence in India, presented architects with major question regarding the appropriate symbolic aesthetic attitude to adopt in shaping their work. Many architects, artist and communities found their inspiration in heritage, symbols, colors, nature and ideologies. Thus we can see there is unity in Indian Architecture after Independence along with diversity.

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