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CONTENTS

THE PROCESS OF COALESCENCE IN THE ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA

SAURABH TEWARI, AJAY KHARE

Abstract

The paper explores how in different phases of architecture in India the process of coalescence was integral to the form making. Also, how this logic of coalescence transformed itself to provide new meanings to the design decisions in the making of architecture in India. The attempt here is to not just explore the physical traces and manifestations of knowledge and technology as architecture but also instigating ideas like belief systems and ideology that facilitated the transformation of architecture in India.

With a focus on different phases in the objectives of the research is to understand:

a. Coalescence in different eras in the architecture of India

b. The process of coalescence making

c. Role of ideology (political), if any, in coalescence making

To understand this nature of Indian Architecture, a phase wise paradigm defining ideology is taken to illustrate architecture and coalescence making further. With a supposition that ideology is the predecessor of architecture, a timeline review from the evolution of religions to the current lifestyle from India has been taken here from the rise of Buddhism to the post-liberalization mutations that the society is witnessing.

The paper is primarily a secondary study that is based on scholarly studies in architecture of India. The examples, architectural buildings, taken in the studies do not represent a consistent 'type' of buildings and are generally elitist in nature. Otherwise, they are era or region defining examples.

1. Prologue: The concept of coalescence

'It is in the emergence of the interstices--the overlap and displacement of domains of difference--that the inter-subjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.' (Bhabha, 1994)

One has to consider the work of Homi K. Bhabha, in South-Asian cultural studies, while exploring the process of coalescence and emergence of new forms. His work, the Location of Culture, discusses the concept of coalescence as not just coming together and summation but also as 'emergence of the interstices' (Bhabha, 1994) with an identity development through these 'interstitial spaces'. Johnston and Richardson (2012) suggest that this process is beyond the 'traditional dialectic'. In a way, they suggest that this third space was beyond the traditional dialectic product, synthesis. Though, Bhabha's work is explored by the scholars in the light of Postcolonial studies, the study here will assess its relevance on different eras of architecture in India. It will be interesting to locate these ever emerging and transforming forms within the process of coalescence.

2. Why Architecture?

In case of India, of all the cultural products available to present the idea of an identity, the architecture is one of the most tangible and obvious manifestations. With this, there are also traditions, which live along, like music, arts, craft etc. However, a permanence of an idea as a static form representing a time span, its political shade and its public motive can only be seen in something physical, like architecture. In a nation of multi-cultural amalgamation, India, it can be also seen as a physical apparatus to decode tinctures of faith, ideology and lifestyle.

3. Architecture in India

India, a country which has seen a pattern of continuous arrival of outsiders, Turks, Mongols, Afghans, British etc., governing Indian geographies and creating new identities, in the last millennium, the concept of coalescence forms the basic aspect of the culture? Is it the synthesis of new ideologies with the existing systems, which creates consistently new identities through hybrids? Is the architecture it houses, is a part of the same identity system? Is this facilitation of coalescence is due to the 'accommodating' (Varma, 2005) and open nature towards the foreign knowledge?

India has been a country of mystery to not just to foreigners but also to its own residents. The ever-updating customs and unending threads of tradition present a perplexing image to its admirers. The contrasting and contradicting images ranging from meandering cows to globalized glazed facades define its open but negligible brackets of urbanity and lifestyle. At the same time, it is also a system, which is still rooted to its traditions.

In his work on Temple Architecture of India, Khare (2005) suggests that 'traditional Indian Architecture is product of the soil'. This vernacular character of buildings in India is essentially a product of locally available resource. With this, he states that *'whatever touched it in the long course of its development grew into it giving it new form and colour in each successive phase'*. One has to understand that this development was distinctly and transparently visible only in phases.

4. Nitty-gritty

The paper here explores the concept, forms and process of coalescence on two pivotal planes, India and Architecture. India here is seen as a geographical region, a culture and a society. A chronological view has been taken to understand how coalescence development has always been present in India and how it has transformed itself to provide new meanings to the design decisions in the making of architecture in India. The attempt here is to not just explore the physical traces and manifestations of knowledge and technology as architecture but also instigating ideas like belief systems and ideology that facilitated the transformation of coalescence making in architecture of India.

With a focus on different phases in the objectives of the research is to understand:
a. Coalescence in different eras in the architecture of India
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To understand a nature of Indian Architecture, a phase wise paradigm defining ideologies is taken to illustrate architecture and coalescence further. With a

supposition that ideology is the predecessor of architecture, a timeline review from the evolution of religions to the current lifestyle from India has been taken here.

The scope and limitations involves,

a. The examples, architectural buildings, taken in the studies do not represent a consistent 'type' of buildings and are generally elitist in nature.

b. Otherwise, they are era / region defining examples.

c. The study is secondary in nature and is based on scholarly studies in architecture.

5. Timeline

5.1. Coalescence as a Middle Path: Buddhism, a middle path between Hinduism and Jainism?

Beginning with the idea of the faith, one has to look at the concept of Hinduism, which is one of the most prominent religions in India for centuries now. The word religion would be little harsh for its accurate description, so it can also be seen as a way of life of then residents of India. Similarly, with Hinduism, Kamiya (2013) suggests, '*the difference lies in its practices and interpretation in comparison to western concepts of religions*'. Also, it is not something, which was founded, preached by individual or follows a particular text. All the texts, including the *Vedas*, the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the controversial *Manu Smriti* are suggestive in nature*.* It has always been 'open source' religion (Schrei, 2013). Through the years, many fractions have diverged from it like Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism to restrain against its any fundamental or extreme position.

Out of all the fractions from Hinduism, Buddhism, which talks about a middle path, can be seen as a form of coalescence. It followed a similar path of Jainism by revolting against the existing ill systems of then practiced *Brahmanical* (elitist) Hinduism. Interestingly, Jainism's doctrines, based on 'belief of the asceticism' (Kamiya*)* and non-violence*,* were difficult to follow and required a higher level of disciplined life, while Buddhism, based on middle path of pain and pleasure, in a way was a more pragmatic alternate solution, as a religion or way of life.

The point here to start with religion is to showcase a pattern that coalescence development is also finding a consensus. In this case, Buddhism became a middle path of then ill practiced hierarchical Hinduism and difficult to follow Jainism. It found the consensual middle path and later created another space for itself. It answered many spiritual questions and provided a new balanced philosophy towards life. It was not able to benefit those in power, so through various political mechanisms it vanished from India. However, it travelled to the Southeast and later to the East via Sri Lanka. It exhibited the signs of accommodation. This particular quality can be one of the reasons of why it spread and became so popular outside India, though, various political systems driven by the fundamental *Brahmanism* were able to marginalize this new thought of Middle Path, Buddhism, within India. This example shows that the forms of coalescence can sustain in newer domains too. They may further contextualize in other spaces to offer more accommodation to their users.

5.2 Quwwat-ul-Islam: The beginning of Indian Islamic Coalescence

The coalescence starts whenever new elements announce its arrival. In case of India, the bigger scale coalescence process in architecture can be visualized through

the arrival of Islamic culture in 11th century. The principles of Islam assimilated with the local knowledge and resource to create new forms of coalescence.

Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque in the National capitol's Qutub Complex can be seen as a major manifestation of coalescence of Islamic Architecture in India. The oldest surviving mosque in India was initiated by the ruler Qutub-ud-din Aibak in the late 12th century and later completed by his successor Iltutmish. The building material including the columns belonging to existing structures around and was used to create a new typology for the region, a Mosque. The whole building process employed an Islamic framework with local human resource and knowledge of construction. To describe the process of creation of the prayer hall in the mosque, architectural historian Thapar (2004) writes, '*The Hindu workmen who constructed this screen used the method of corbelling to create the arched form, supported by pilasters, and combined calligraphy and depicted verses from the Koran with the lotus motif to create the first monument in the Indo-Islamic style.*'

The obvious elements of its original architecture are still visible in the Mosque complex including the reinstalled columns from Hindu and Jain temples. The typical floral details of Hindu Architecture are intelligently placed within the columns to create a new vocabulary of a unique Islamic style in the world. This process of architecture here can be seen as a bricolage, with the beginning of Islamic coalescence with Indian architecture.

5.3 Din-e-Ilahi: Coalescence as a Bridge between Two Faiths

The 13th and 14th century saw turmoil in the Indian subcontinent as the rulers were seeing the land and resources to consume. It was only Mughals who adapted and adopted India as their new homeland. This shift in ideology towards acceptance and tolerance created its impact in the evolution of new forms of coalescence of Islamic Architecture in India. It started with the first Mughal King, Babur, as he brought the concept of *char-bagh*, a landscaping feature, from his homeland. The taste of integrating features like water channels and fountains to the building complexes was also his initiation, which was later, continued by his Mughal successors.

Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun, but it was only his grandson Akbar, who created impact as a major builder and hence as a ruler. The commissioning of Humayun's Tomb by Haji Begum to the Persian architect, Mirak Mirza Ghiyas, at Delhi was during this time only. It was the first time when a Persian dome was brought to India to create a new vocabulary using the red sandstone and white marble (Thapar, 2004). The landscape concepts and framework of Mughals and an evolved Indian vocabulary on inlay work was the first architectural coalescence at this large scale. The subsequent impact was not just a mere continuation of the existing heritage, but a new philosophy for the new age of Indian Architecture.

King Mohammad Jallaluddin Akbar, 16th century ruler of India, was also one of the tolerant and secular rulers in the history of India. Though illiterate, his special interest in arts, music and philosophy was peerless. This open mind and attitude only created a space for the development of new forms in this golden Mughal era

Before focusing on the architecture created under Akbar's patronage, it is important to understand the political stand taken by him. The initiation of a new bridge faith, *Din-e-Ilahi* or the Path of Almighty, was an attempt to bring tolerance

between Hindus and Muslims. This hybrid faith included the best elements not only from Islam and Hinduism, but also other religions like Jainism and Christianity. The major architectural concept emerged out of this faith was *Ibadat Khana* (Smith, 1917), House of Worship, which became an important space for the scholars of the era.

King Akbar had personal admiration for the mystical thought of Sufism, a belief evolved from Islam, and the Sufi saint Salim Chishti. As a noble gesture, he created a Tomb for Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri near Agra. The secular policies of Akbar and magical tendencies of the Sufi tomb, which soon became a shrine, made the combination popular in the region. The mystical aspect of Sufism attracted not only the Muslims but also the people belonging to other faiths like Hinduism. The Muslims saw it as a tomb whereas Hindus started idolizing it as one of the million gods. Here, the belief of Sufism found common manifestation as a shrine, where people with differences could practice the contrasting religions in their own way. This evolution of a tomb transforming itself to a shrine can be seen as a process of coalescence. The plural Sufi shrines, across the nation, now typologically incorporate the similar design principles, to offer a novel spiritual space. Here, coalescence was not just limited to styles and physical aspects of architecture; it was now exploring the levels of faith and ideological meanings.

5.4 Provincial coalescence: The contextualization of new forms

The architecture of the provincial regions like in Kashmir and Punjab in North, Jaunpur in Northern Gangetic Plains, Malwa in Central part, Gujarat in West, Deccan in Southern Plateaus and Bengal in East was also flourishing with influences from Islamic principles and requirements. The local cultural, patronage and treasury played important role in shaping the vocabulary of architecture. However, the influences of either climate or construction knowledge not just created new styles, but also new typologies.

Focusing on to the East, the mosques at Gaur and Pandua in Bengal built during 14th-16th century presented a new typology for a Mosque. After making structures in an alien (Khare, 2005) style initially, the courtyards were covered (Thapar, 2004) to make it more habitable and usable in the rainy climate. This modification was new to the typology of Mosque, as the source came from dry and arid areas of the Middle East. Even the structural system, domes and vaults (Brown, 1956), were new to Bengal.

The Eklakhi Tomb, built by Jallaluddin Mohammad Shah, in Pandua is one of the clear examples of coalescence of Hindu and Islamic Architecture elements and principles. The mosque has visible Hindu icons as Thapar describes, '*The entrance archway of the inner octagonal chamber (of Mausoleum) surprisingly has carved image of the Hindu God Ganesh'*. The covering of courtyard and reflection of local Hindu elements created a new coalescence towards Islamic Architecture for the functions like Mosque and Tombs. Here, a contextualization, climatic and social, can be realized in this coalescence.

5.5 Indo-Saracenic – Eclecticism and coalescence

To convey a sense of power, architecture has always been used as a major device in India. The colonizers in India too came with their own root architectural

style to manifest their identity as a perceived superior and evolved culture. With administrative offices, civic buildings and coastal forts they brought in religious functions like churches, cathedral and basilicas.

The Portuguese designed the Architecture at Goa as an extension of their home. The British thought their Christian Architecture as civilized and the native as barbaric (Thapar, 2004). This thought followed the implementations of copies from the West. The British copied few structures, like Dilkusha Palace in Lucknow, to recreate a sense of home away from home. Soon, both the colonizers realized the challenges lying within the climatic and cultural domain.

Later, British acknowledged the Mughals for synthesizing the Islamic and Indian Architecture but had no idea towards its practicing knowledge. The appointment of Swinton Jacob to document the rich traditions of architecture in Western India was a step towards the understanding and standardization of Indian Architecture. With the help of the students at Jaipur Art School, Jacob compiled the meticulous elements and ornaments of Hindu and Muslim Architecture- mosques and tombs, forts and temples- of twelfth to the eighteenth century (Metcalfe, 1982) as '*Jeypore Portfolio of Architecture Details*' (Mehrotra, 2010). This was disseminated within the professionals for an organized reference to existing architecture of India. A new revivalist architecture emerged, and was named as Indo-Saracenic Architecture, referring to as Mehrotra says, Saracenic Tribes of Mughal lineage.

The new Indo-Saracenic Style was employed at public scale buildings like government offices, railways stations, banks and insurance building, educational institutes, clubs and museums (Irwin). The large-scale building like Madras museum in Chennai and Daly College in Indore are two prominent examples. Here, coalescence can be seen in the mixing of existing elements of Indian architecture with the new formal functions.

5.6 The Capital of New Delhi: Coalescence from two traditions

The first quarter of the 20th century saw the shifting of the Indian capital to the northern settlement of Delhi. Surrounded by the historic cities, most prominently Shahjahanabad, it was an architectural challenge to contextualize the architecture of the power center with the expectations of London. Like his predecessors, the principal Architect of the New Delhi project, Sir Edwin Lutyens had strong notions towards the architecture for Delhi. For him, the use of Indo-Saracenic proved to be a weak architectural style, as it never addressed the architectural issues of forms and identity. His ideas lied in the traditions of both the worlds, Native and Western Classical. Despite, Swinton Jacob being the principal consultant, Lutyens attempted to create forms from within sources instead of merely limiting himself to refer the documented elements.

For the Viceroy's House, now Rashtrapati Bhawan, at New Delhi, Lutyens referred to the *stupa* at Sanchi as an Indian Form. He skillfully designed a reminiscent dome to create a sense of new identity rooted in region. As Mehrotra elaborates, '*… through abstractions, he invented details that he then integrated with his classical language. Recognizing chhatris, chajjas and jaalis… …he naturally tied them to his classical features through functional uses, thereby achieving a balance between the requirements of harsh climate and the symbolism demanded by politics*.'

Lutyens' love for the classical architecture as neo-classical proportions and a respect for the local architectural tradition are visible here. In this phase, the coalescence graduated from eclectics of assembling the Indian elements to the greater attempts of form making through merging of two established traditions.

5.7 The post-independent coalescence: Architecture after Indian Independence

'In a colonial territory, hybridity in architecture was regarded as an indispensable measure for both the colonizer and the colonized. The duality of such hybridity was strong, not only representing social status but also the negative face of colonial identity.' (Fu and Tsai, 2004)

This apprehension could be one of the reasons of the India's quest for a newer version of Indian Identity after its independence from the British in 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru's, then Prime Minister of Independent India, vision of India was based on Modernist foundations.

Modernism in a root sense conveys a thought that challenges the mundane practices, an idea, which brings inventiveness to the approaches reacting to the contemporary challenges, an approach with the au current resources to create newer products and astonishments. Nehru was convinced and confirmed about the employment of Modernism as Modern Architecture to project a fresh Identity of Independent India. He also believed that only Modernism could bring about a social change in a caste and religion bound Indian society. With this belief, the government also brought physical activities like industrialization, opening of new Indian Institutes of Technology at/near five metropolitans. A new dam, Bhakra Nangal, was exhibition of impulse (Khilnani, 1999) to the rival country. This was the time as Khilnani explains '*India fell in love with the idea of concrete*'. The idea of concrete is the idea of modernity here.

The early post-independent buildings at the capital, New Delhi, too had a modernist intent in their design and making. The U.S. educated architects like Habib Rahman and Achyut Kanvinde, also the Indian students of Walter Gropius, became the perfect translators for the Nehruvian modernist vision. However, their own ethos and the availability of resources and materials diluted the chased Modernism of the early Public Architecture of the Capital. The evident use of elements like *jaalis* and the Indo-Saracenic elements with a Colonial hangover from the nearby Lutyens' Delhi provided the further context based compulsions. Perhaps, western Post-modernists too can qualify this architecture within their definitions if they ignore the time of constructions.

This whole process of bringing in Modernity within local context, resource and knowledge can be seen as a process of coalescence. The ideas towards a secular nation and the confusion towards the form of economy, Socialist or Capitalist, further coalesced the intent of a perceived Modernism.

5.8 Critical Regionalism: The postmodern coalescence

Architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton has explored Alexander Tzonis' coined term Critical Regionalism by citing various examples from the 'other' (third world) countries. In India, Frampton has further illustrated the works of B.V. Doshi and Charles Correa under this term. If we closely look at its spirit, it is nothing but a call, '*arriere-garde*' (Frampton, 1983), for coalescence. Through this process,

Critical Regionalism should adopt modern architecture critically for its universal progressive qualities but at the same time should value responses particular to the context (Frampton).

In India, Architect Charles Correa has explored the idea of critical regionalism in Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur. He combines the mythical aspect of tradition, *Hindu* elements like *vastu-purush mandala*, with a modernist vision. The process of coalescence here deals with cultural and semiotic dimensions of architecture with a present day architecture function, cultural centre. So, the essence of critical regionalism as coalescence can be seen here in universal progressive approach with deep-rooted myths of tradition.

5.9 Electronics and Information Technology based Space – The Ever Updating coalescence

Architecture of people's shelter (houses) has traditionally been very architectonic. The technology has explored the physical, climatic and cultural challenges to arrive at some type at each phase. In case of the Indian homes, the traditional open courtyard has now transformed into an air-conditioned common room with the television as 'focus' (Jain, 2004). The ever-updating technology is becoming ultimate ideology to create ever-mutating forms. In the next phase, we are already realising the new forms are decentralising, becoming personal and customizable. The personalisation of information providing gadgets is just one example of liquefaction of technology and coalescence in this direction.

6. Epilogue

One can see that it is only India's accommodating and plural culture, which has allowed so many forms of coalescence to sustain in Bhabha's interstitial spaces. New forms of coalescence evolve with time and technological up gradation in these interstitial spaces. With this, the culture has consistently transformed and updated itself to accommodate greater thoughts and disciplines.

Previously various political situations, now the constitution of independent India provide a level playing field to all its sub-cultures to manifest themselves in their true sense. It allows them to be as ebulliently vivid as possible; yet, a coalescence approach emerges out of them to show an inclusive inclination of mutual respect. It accommodates differences and construct over commonalities to respond to the bigger dilemmas of identity. Overall, many cultures have been able to survive in India due to its ability to coalesce.

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Saurabh Tewari *is a PhD Scholar and Assistant Professor at School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, India. He is researching on Design History in India. He teaches Basic Design, Graphics, and Modern Architecture and Indian Urbanism at the institution. He is trained as an Architect (Sushant School, Gurgaon) and as a Visual Communication Designer (IDC IIT Bombay). His interest lies in learning through travelling and knowing more about cultures through talking to people. He is also interested in creating music, chatting politics and playing cricket.*

Dr. Ajay Khare, *Founder-Director of School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal* is a scholar in the field of architecture and conservation planning, and remained a Fulbright Fellow at USA and Charles Wallace Fellow at UK. An architect and conservationist, educated at Lucknow and Delhi, he studied heritage conservation at York University and later he earned his doctorate from De Montfort University, Leicester on his work about early temples of Bengal. He is author of the award-winning book 'Temple Architecture of Eastern India' published in 2005. He edits two international journals called 'CONTEXT' as member of the board of editors, and 'SPANDREL' as Chief Editor and was the founder-editor of 'ABACUS'. He serves on many National committees and Missions in India.