

Charles Correa: Seeking new Identity of Indian Architecture through “Critical Regionalism”

Ar. Gaurav Gangwar¹ and Prabhjot Kaur²

¹Chandigarh College of Architecture, Chandigarh

²PIT Mohali, Constituted Campus of PTU, Jalandhar

E-mail: ¹gaurav403@rediffmail.com, ²inchargemohali.ptu@gmail.com

Abstract—Modernism movement has started in India around 1920 dominated by British trained architects and it got continued till the independence of India in 1947. After independence, the government architects in CPWD and many British architects have continued the practice in India but these were not different than International style of modernism. After so much of slavery under the Mughal and British, the Indians have lost their own identity and seeking this identity was very difficult and important at all level i.e. economic, social and cultural level.

Joseph alien stein the British architect who got settled in India has stared new era by mixing regional context of India along with Modernism. His project India International center (1959-62) clearly shows regionalism through use of courtyard, jail work along with Modernism principles of minimalism and simplicity in form.

Charles Correa has completed his M.Arch in 1955 from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and started his practice in India. He has designed Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad (1958-63) and this project has given new identity to Indian Architecture through mixing of vernacular or traditional architecture along with modernism later called “Critical Regionalism”

Charles Correa has done so many work based on this philosophy of “Critical Regionalism” in his career and this paper will explore only few project to showcase the concept of “critical regionalism” in his works.

Keywords: Charles Correa, critical regionalism, Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, identity, modernism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Critical Regionalism is an approach to encounter the lack of placelessness and lack of identity of International style, but also rejects the ornamentation approach of Postmodernism. Critical Regionalism is not just to replicate vernacular architecture or traditional architecture but it seeks answer through traditional or vernacular architecture in modern context. Critical regionalism is not only regionalism but it is an progressive approach to seek answers from global and local language of architecture.

The main problem of critical regionalism is to seek answers to the question of Paul Ricoeur³: "How to be modern and to

continue the tradition, how to revive an old dormant civilization as part of universal civilization."

Charles Correa, from the very beginning of his career was not interested in International Style of Modernism even being educated in the west. He has always given more importance to traditional or vernacular architecture over the international style due to two reasons, the firstly he was trying to set Indian identity for architecture for various state and central government, the secondly he was more inclined to set vocabulary of design elements for his own practice in architecture.

Correa had never tried to just copy the elements of vernacular architecture or traditional architecture but he has taken essence of these principles and modified these principles in the context to site, climate, social and cultural influences. He transforms these vernacular and traditional elements into new vocabulary of his own.

2. CHARLES CORREA’S APPROACH TO CRITICAL REGIONALISM :

Charles Correa’s approach to critical regionalism can be defined in site planning principles, climatic consideration, cultural context, appropriate use of local building materials. He uses ancient architecture vernacular, or traditional architecture in its essence only and every time he define new type of vocabulary of built environment.

Correa’s approach to site planning is unique, he study the elements of site in depth and most of time he is deriving the concept of project in response to the site context. He uses access and approach to building in a very interesting way and all is done with intentionally.

Correa describe in his article “The Blessing of sky” that the importance of dealing climate for buildings in this paragraph “Another equally critical parameter: Energy. In this century, architects have depended more and more on the mechanical engineer to provide light and air within the building. But in India, we cannot afford to squander resources in this manner – which is of course actually an advantage, for it means that

the building itself must, through its very form, create the "controls" which the user needs. Such a response necessitates much more than just sun angles and louvers; it must involve the section, the plan, the shape, in short, the very heart of the building."

He uses the elements such as courtyards, louvers, pergolas, local building materials, use of water bodies etc to make climatic responsive design. These climatic responsive elements are also design in such fashion to create vocabulary of aesthetics.

Correa has deep understanding of cultural values, mythological principles and also has understanding of history of Indian Architecture. He derive the concept based on these principles but at the same time he deviate so much from it that it becomes difficult to know his inspiration until and unless he himself states the inspiration .

Correa uses the local building materials but at same time he uses concrete steel and other new materials too in same complex and he uses so wonderfully of mixing of these materials that these building materials become identity of building .

3. GANDHI SMARAK SANGRAHALAYA, AHMEDABAD (1958-63):

The Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya is an excellent example of combining the Hindu architectural/cosmological idea of isotropy and Modernist functional planning. The application of the concept of isotropy (similar to fractals) can be seen in Hindu temples on their façade by applying repeated small infinitely scalable structures. In the Smarak Sangrahalaya, the modular grid is adopted for planning which is easy to repeat and can be extended easily. Correa has allocated the five distinctly functional programme such as letters, books, photographs and painting, meetings and offices by combining the same modular grid in asymmetrical manner.

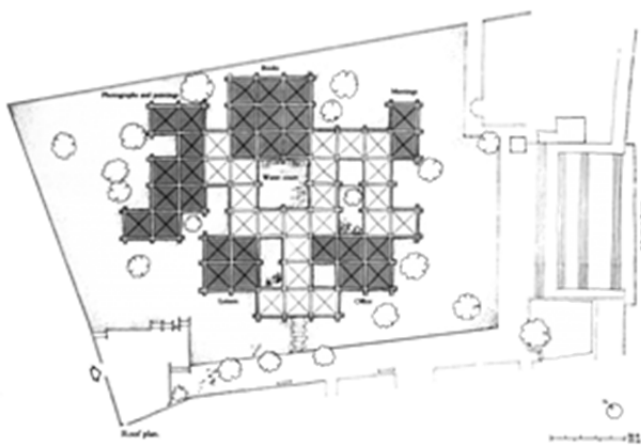


Fig. 1: Site plan of Smarak

The plan of museum can be also compared to village houses of India's Banni region, Kutch district of Gujarat. In these houses the different function of house are located in different huts and the common space is used to be circulation space to move from one hut to another.

The concept of modularity can be also seen in stone flooring, brick walls, wooden doors and louvered windows. Correa has so much influenced of Le Corbusier, even this modularity can also be infer the inspiration from Le Corbusier

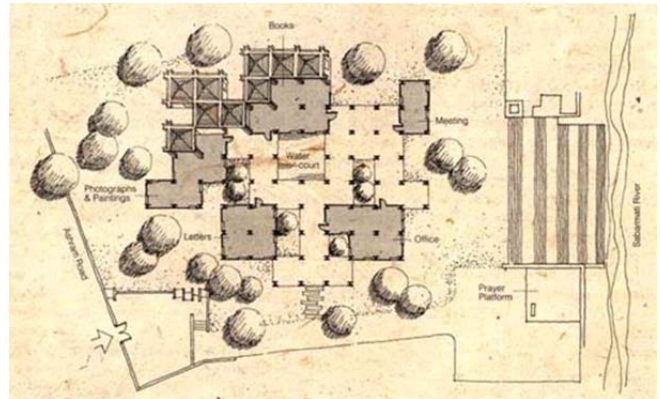


Fig. 2: Plan of Smarak



Fig. 3 : Corridors and courtyards in smarak

The courtyards, water body and the pathways are placed in very random order to give a feeling of Indian village. He is using modular grid but at the same time he is also following organic planning of village to break the rigidity of grid.

In the end it can be concluded , Charles Correa is using the modular grid refres to moderism but he is somehow also inspiring this modular grid to ancient architectrue and verncaulr architecture . It is difficult to find the source of inspiration of modular grid and the way it is used.He is having observations from history ,as well present but he knows also to deviate from all to create unique architecture .



Fig. 4: Central Water Court



Fig. 7: Courtyard in museum

4. NATIONAL CRAFTS MUSEUM (1975 -):

The concept of national crafts museum is based on open to sky central path and the courtyard have been arranged around this central path. It seems that open to sky path concept has been inspired from the great Hindu and Buddhist temples of past in which the all structure used to be arranged around the ceremonial path. The courtyards act as node for cultural interaction as well the regulating the comfort conditions in urban scenario.

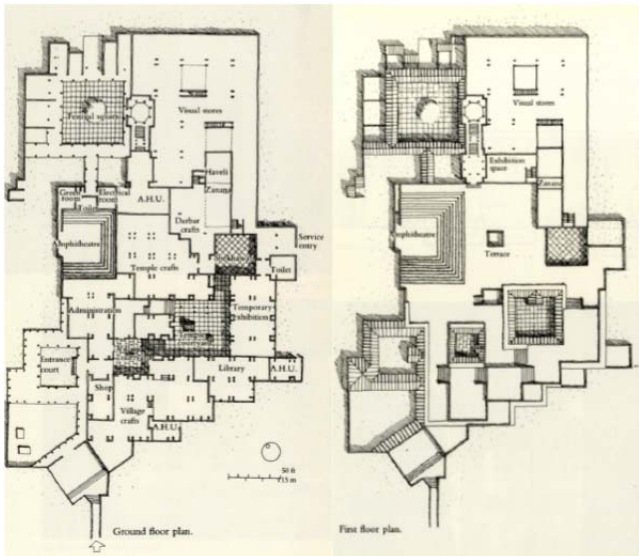


Fig. 5 & 6: Ground and First floor plan.



Fig. 8: Structure reflecting the vernacular influence



Fig. 9: Exhibits in court

The museum is being designed to provide space to artisan around the country and share their crafts with counterparts from different regions and also means to exhibit their crafts to the common people, this complex has been transformed from mere museum to node of cultural exchange and crafts promotion. It is revolutionary idea which later is being converted in more matured way in project like Delhi Hatt.

It was challenge to design spaces and structures for different regions of country but at the same time to create national identity, he has used the elements which are unifying the whole projects such as courtyards, materials etc The museum has also been built in two phases so he has planned to sandwich ancient buildings to new built forms e.g haveli house of Gujarat and stone temple from Tamilnadu.

It can be concluded that National Crafts Museum is perfect example to show case the local and national identity of crafts, the whole concept of local and national has been elaborated through architecture spaces, materials and other elements.

5. VIDHAN BHAWAN ,BHOPAL (1983-1993) :

The Bhopal city has uneven elevation and has small hills within its boundaries. The site is in almost center of capital complex and situated at the highest point of Arera Hill overlooking the city of Bhopal. The site is access through a road which is not straight but got turn on the point of site itself.



Fig. 10: Site of Vidhan bhawan

Correa has taken circular form due to site context primary so that building could be seen from all sides, on one part of site there is sudden drop so building will be visible from all lower parts of city. He has intentionally developed different elevations for view of building from different points due to site context.

The Vidhan bhawan has been design on the principles of ancient Navgraha mandal. This planning principles describe

that one big square is divide into nine square , the big square is universe and the nine division are nine planets of this universe called surya, Chandra, kuja (mangala), Buddha, curve, sukrha, shani, rahu and ketu. The five central squares forms halls and courtyard and other four square on the corners are occupied by specialized functions i.e. the Vidhan Sabha or Lower House, the Vidhan Parishad or upper House, the combined hall for joint session of both houses and any other non-Legislative function which might be organized by the Vidhan Bhavan and a cabinet room and the offices of the Chief Minister and other Ministers..

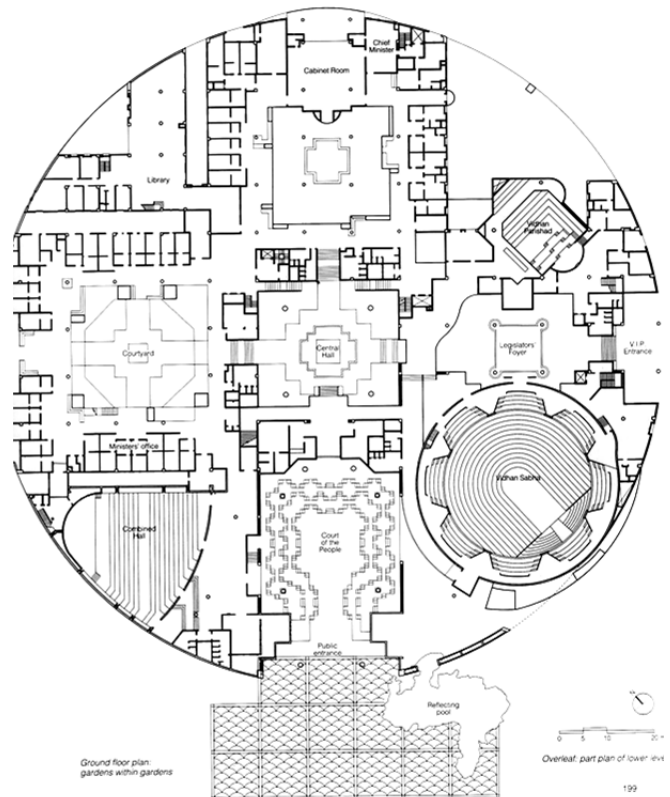


Fig. 11: Entrance level plan



Fig. 12: Entrance court

The concept of courtyard is very appropriate in humid subtropical climate of Bhopal. The courtyards are designed in such fashion to act as social interaction spaces for different users. The treatment of the courtyards are complete different, the entrance courtyard has steps inspired from the kund of the ancient architecture, the central courtyard is covered and lit by a domed skylight, the other three courtyard are partially open and partially covered

He has used magnificent tribal wall paintings of Late Shri Jangad Singh Shyam on the entrance, the art form are so well integrated in the built form that these painting never look like painting but depicts story of this state's rich culture



Fig. 13: The sculptures, paintings at main court.



Fig. 14: Assembly Hall

Access to the main assembly hall is provided through the grand entrance resembling to Sanchi gate. It is painted very colorfully representing the presence of lord Ganpati at entrance



Fig. 15: Blocking of Vidhan Bahwan

The blocking of vidhan bhawan has been done very differently; he is using all elements to show their own identity without thinking of whole. His approach is so bold in treating the blocking, it looks that he is moving towards the philosophy of De-constructivism

It can be concluded that Vidhan Bhawan is based on ancient planning of Navgraha mandal but functions of buildings are so well fitted into nine squares that one never feels that it is ancient but looks so modern idea. The building has so many symbols in the form of sculptors, paintings of history of Madhya Pradesh as well India that within building all users feels connected.

6. JAWAHAR KALA KENDRA, JAIPUR (1986 -1991):

The site is situated at the T point of two major roads. The views from building to other surrounding sites are not very significant so Correa has done introvert planning to create the environment of its own.

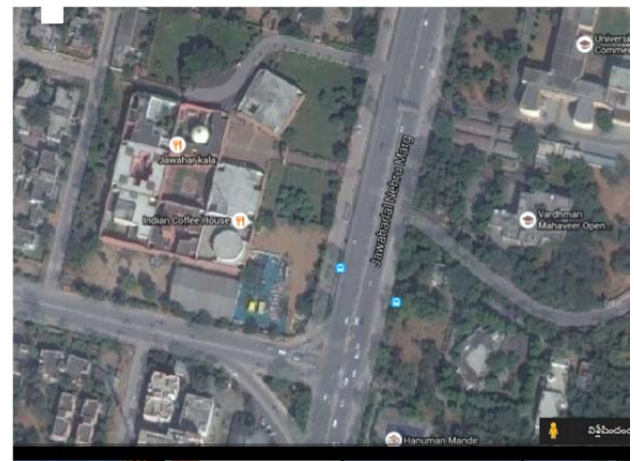


Fig. 16: Site of Jawaharlal Kala Kendra

Correa again used the concept of navagraha or nine house i.e. principles of mandala from ancient Indian architecture. But in this building it looks more contextual because he is modifying similar to the jaipur city plan in which one square is displaced due to hills and here the one square displaced to make an entrance to the Kendra. The 8 m high walls on these squares are symbolic to the fortification wall along the Jaipur Old city.

Each square was linked to the planet as per the characteristics of the particular planet and its astrological values and the functionality of the square. This Navgrah concept with its energy values their favorable colour, quality and the favourable functionality to the each planet with square kept in mind while designing and allocation of spaces.

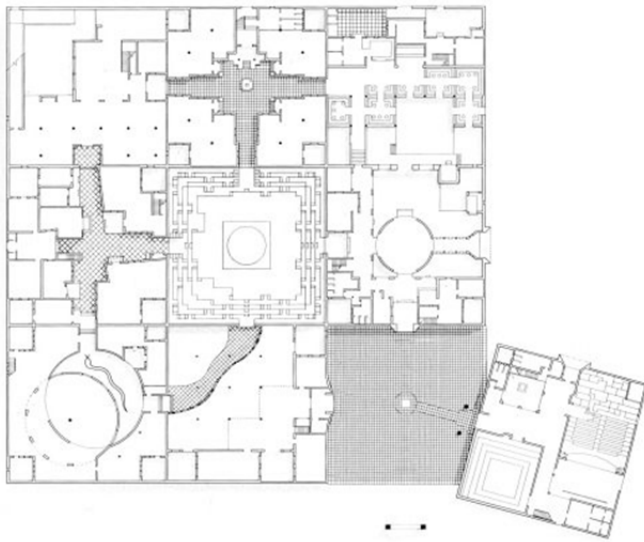


Fig. 17: Plan of Jawaharlal Kala Kendra

Partly open courtyards and the traditional design elements of Rajasthan have been incorporated in the complex. The landscaping was also done as per planets astrological values in the whole complex in each square wherever was required



Fig. 18: Painting on outer wall

The art work on walls, planning and the sitting arrangement on floor ‘baithak’ was designed to set an excellent example of our rural and cultural ethics in India. Also the painting at entrance hall and big lord Krishna painting on outer wall are bold example of cultural values.

The central courtyards acting as Open Air Theater (OAT) for sitting, interaction or performing some events. The steps of sitting are inspired by the concept of Baori i.e step well of Rajasthan in 800 A.D.

The building material mainly used as sandstone which is local material and represent the identity of city



Fig. 19: Painting on dome walls



Fig. 20: Main court

It can be concluded that Jawahar Kala Kendra has perfect example of contextualizing the ancient principles of architecture in the modern era. This has so much cohesion in its planning, building material, spaces, colours, symbols that it reflects the identity of Jaipur but at the same time it also gives the national identity.

7. CONCLUSION

Charles Correa's approach to "critical regionalism" is very natural; he effortlessly creates a built environment which reflects the traditional as well modern element together in much unified way. In Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya, he beautifully created village like atmosphere through series of courtyards, building materials like bricks etc but at the same time he had used the modular grid in plan as well in façade reflects very rational and modern approach. National crafts museum, he has taken aspiration from ancient architecture to create path (spine) and arrangement of courtyards around it but he has used in minimalistic architecture of modernism to avoid unnecessary ornamentation of ancient architecture.

His later projects such as Vidhan Bhawan and Jawahar Kala Kendra show maturity in dealing with "critical regionalism". In Vidhan Bhawan he has used large span structures, experimented with new concept in façade reflects the modernism but at the same time he brings the concept of planning form ancient architecture navagraha mandala and has also used symbols to represent the cultural of Madhya Pradesh. His approach in this building seems to be emulator but his approach in another contemporary project Jawahar Kala Kendra is more mature because he is using navagrah mandala which is contextual and symbols used are relevant to the projects requirements.

Charles Correa was not following the philosophy of "critical regionalism" "at conscious level but at subconscious level, he was naturally inclined towards the ancient, vernacular and traditional architecture from very beginning but at the same time ,he also understand the present context of buildings , the present needs and aspiration of people. He was most of time trying to link the past with present so that through architecture he can establish the lost identity or the new identity of Independent India.

REFERENCES

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_regionalism.
- [2] History of Architecture : Critical Regionalism ,
- [3] <http://www.historiasztuki.com.pl/kodowane/003-02-05-ARCHWSP-REGIONALIZM-eng.php>
- [4] Charles Correa Associates.
- [5] <<http://www.charlescorrea.net>>

- [6] Correa Charles, The blessing of Sky, 1995. <http://www.charlescorrea.net/pdfs/essay07.pdf>
- [7] Correa, Charles. "India: from a Philosophy of Ages, Architecture for Today." *Museum International* 41, no. 4 (1989): 223-229, 2009.
- [8] Prudwi Bharat, "What is special about architect Charles Correa's Design" <https://www.quora.com/What-is-special-about-architect-Charles-Correas-designs>.
- [9] Khanchandani Priya, Building in the Vernacular: Charles Correa and the idea of India, 2013, <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/artbeat/building-in-the-vernacular-charles>.
- [10] Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad 1958-1963
- [11] <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/gutschow/india/India%20Student%20Analysis.pdf>
- [12] Charles Correa, London: Thames & Hudson, 1996.
- [13] Charles Correa, Singapore: Ahimar Book, 1984.
- [14] Sreekanth P S, MP VIDHAN SABHA.
- [15] <https://thearchiblog.wordpress.com/2011/01/09/charles-correa-mp-vidhan-sabha/>
- [16] Rana Sumit , Jawahar Kala Kendra , AAYOJAN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, JAIPUR ,2011
- [17] Varshney Atisha, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, India.
- [18] <http://www.archinomy.com/casestudies/1867/jawahar-kala-kendra-jaipur-india>.
- [19] Agarwal Manish, Charles Correa. <http://www.slideshare.net/vikashsaini78/charles-correa-30333090>.
- [20] Vidhan Bhawan, Bhopal, India, Report of Aga Khan award nomination.
- [21] Varshney Atisha, Vidhan Sabha, Bhopal.
- [22] <http://www.archinomy.com/casestudies/1978/vidhan-sabha-bhopal>
- [23] Vidhan Sabha, Bhopal.
- [24] https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/index.php/Vidhan_Sabha,_Bhopal
- [25] <http://ebuild.in/gandhi-smarak-sangrahalaya-ahmedabad>