

India



modern architectures in history

This international series examines the forms and consequences of modern architecture. Modernist visions and revisions are explored in their national context against a backdrop of aesthetic currents, economic developments, political trends and social movements. Written by experts in the architectures of the respective countries, the series provides a fresh, critical reassessment of Modernism's positive and negative effects, as well as the place of architectural design in twentieth-century history and culture.

Series editor: Vivian Constantinopoulos

Already published:

Brazil

Richard J. Williams

India

Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava

Britain

Alan Powers

Italy

Diane Ghirardo

Finland

Roger Connah

Russia

Richard Anderson

France

Jean-Louis Cohen

Turkey

Sibel Bozdoğan and Esra Akcan

Greece

Alexander Tzonis and Alcestis P. Rodi

USA

Gwendolyn Wright

India

modern architectures in history

Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava

REAKTION BOOKS

For Stefanie and Nicola
For Valerie, Chris and Smriti

Published by Reaktion Books Ltd
Unit 32, Waterside
44-48 Wharf Road
London N1 7UX, UK

www.reaktionbooks.co.uk

First published 2015
Copyright © Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava 2015

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Bell & Bain, Glasgow

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 78023 437 3

Contents

- 7 Introduction
 - one
- 23 Rationalization: The Call to Order, 1855–1900
 - two
- 71 Complicity and Contradiction in the Colonial Twilight, 1901–1947
 - three
- 127 Nation Building: Architecture in the Service of the Postcolonial State, 1947–1960s
 - four
- 171 Regionalism, Institution Building and the Modern Indian Elite, 1950s–1970s
 - five
- 223 Development and Dissent: The Critical Turn, 1960s–1980s
 - six
- 271 Identity and Difference: The Cultural Turn, 1980s–1990s
 - seven
- 311 Towards the ‘Non-modern’: Architecture and Global India since 1990

- 340 References
- 368 Select Bibliography
- 370 Acknowledgements
- 372 Photo Acknowledgements
- 374 Index



Introduction

‘India’ is a word that invokes a host of clichés: a timeless civilization of living traditions, great spiritual wisdom and artistic riches; a subcontinent of astonishingly diverse yet harmonious regional, religious and linguistic differences; a crucible of cultural synthesis. Architecture is central to the supporting imagery, the forms and textures of iconic buildings such as the Taj Mahal dominating the phantasmagorical images of exotic splendour and ‘difference’ that tourism, the media and popular culture readily propagate. For the urban middle classes and elites of modern India, no less than the desiring foreign tourist, these are some of the decidedly romantic idealizations of India that increasingly must be distinguished, if not salvaged, from the invading sameness of global urbanity.

The idea of ‘Modern India’ therefore invokes rather more equivocal clichés: a world of contrasts and contradictions, rich and poor, extravagance and destitution, space-age know-how but medieval means – an incomplete project. It is construction sites in this case, more so than finished buildings, that furnish some of the most telling imagery. As the four-year-old daughter of one of the authors asked with innocent fascination upon arriving in Bombay (Mumbai) for the first time: ‘Daddy, why are all the buildings falling down?’ Indistinguishable to her uninitiated eyes were the gangling new structures that clambered for presence in the cluttered skyline and the ramshackle *bustees* (slums) at their feet. They were still girdled in rough-hewn wooden scaffolding and ragged shrouds of hemp, and she could not discern the difference between the rising apartment towers and luxury condos intended for the upwardly mobile new middle classes and elites of metropolitan India, and the provisional accommodation that the low-paid migrant construction workers from the impoverished countryside had cobbled together from waste materials to shelter themselves during their seasonal employment in the big city.

It was a similar but almost wilfully naive sense of fascination with both the prospects and the paradoxes of India’s architectural engagement with modernity that began to be captured by architectural photographers in the 1950s as the newly independent, self-consciously ‘modern’ India began to build. Particularly telling are some of the early construction

Harbour-front view of modern Calcutta, c. 1960. The New Secretariat Building, visible in the distance, was designed by Habib Rahman of the West Bengal Public Works Department. It was the tallest steel-framed building in India when it was completed in 1954.



Hafeez Contractor,
The Imperial
residential
condominium towers
under construction in
Mumbai in early 2008.

photos of Chandigarh. This, the stridently modern and progressive new capital city that was being built from scratch for the Indian state of Punjab, had been boldly projected by the prime minister of the new-born Indian republic as an architectural and urban ‘symbol of the nation’s faith in the future.’¹ Now free from the imposed tastes and paternalistic expertise of British colonial technocrats, however, it was more than a little paradoxical that the commission for the planning and design of this icon of change had ultimately been awarded to a non-Indian team of senior consultants dominated, famously, by the Swiss-French ‘starchitect’ of the day, Le Corbusier, but still officially led by yet another Englishman, Maxwell Fry, in collaboration with his wife, Jane Drew. More paradoxical still was the gulf between symbol and reality from the point of view of technical development. Le Corbusier’s designs for the monumental capitol complex at Chandigarh were some of the most audacious masterworks of modernism the world had yet witnessed. Yet here they were in these canonical photographs emerging virtually handmade, as the picturesque compositions typically emphasized, from the rude materials and sweat of a still largely pre-industrial society.

For members of India's young architectural profession who first viewed such images in the pages of progressive international journals like the *Architectural Review* and its aspiring Indian counterparts, *Marg* and *Design*, among other local professional and trade magazines, if not through their own cameras on pilgrimages to the new city itself, the iconic building works at Chandigarh were an almost sacred site of encounter with the cutting edge of modern architecture, as well as the gaze of the international architectural community.

Through the lens of Chandigarh, by the mid-1950s architects and planners abroad had begun to watch modern India with increasing interest. For both the advocates of high modernism and its emerging critics, the conspicuous roles that progressive architecture, design and town planning were being called to play in India's nation-building efforts were test cases for the global extension of the Modern Movement and its claims of universal validity and utility beyond simply an 'international style'.² More than just an invigorating shock of the new, therefore, Chandigarh was the confidence-inspiring evidence that radically new architecture was conceivable in India and, moreover, that it could actually be built.³ This at least was the hope of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's erudite and charismatic first prime minister, who was the principal political patron of the project and its most articulate advocate to both his national audience and the world.⁴

In Nehru's strategic vision for India's modernization, Chandigarh was of 'enormous importance'. 'It hits you on the head, and makes you think', he famously argued. 'You may squirm at the impact but it has made you think and imbibe new ideas, and one thing which India requires is being hit on the head so that it may think.'⁵ Chandigarh was, thus, more than just a symbol of the modernity and associated democratic institutions of the new India. It was to be a catalyst for the real changes in thinking that would enable India's own professional experts to re-conceive the physical and institutional forms of a modern nation 'unfettered by the traditions of the past'. From Nehru's viewpoint, it was not the particular idiosyncratic templates for modern architecture and urbanism that Le Corbusier had exported to India that Indian architects were expected to emulate, but the free-thinking approach they might derive from a master modernist's creative response to the particular challenges and opportunities encountered in India. A new cast of mind, not shapes, was the key to the genuinely modern Indian architecture they would develop in the course of time and in which 'Modern India' would be at home.⁶

This book is an attempt at a longer critical history of this elusive notion of modernity in the changing architectural ideals and building cultures of modern India. While the growing body of literature on the



Philip Johnson gazing upon Le Corbusier's recently completed Legislative Assembly building in Chandigarh, photographed by Habib Rahman, c. 1965.

architectures of colonial and contemporary India now includes several relatively comprehensive surveys as well as more focused critical studies of different facets of the topic, this is a consciously less synoptic, more interpretive account than has previously been attempted.⁷ Such a history is needed not only to cross-examine and interpret the wealth of architectural discourse and related historical material that remains, in many cases, only footnotes to the established narrative. It is also needed to provoke and hopefully deepen critical assessments of architectural developments in India's recent past, and the debates that shaped them. Such a critical appreciation of previous modernities offers crucial historical perspective to address the huge new challenges and possibilities for the architectural and urban futures that the 'new India' of the twenty-first century is already beginning to build as it aspires to play a leading role in the increasingly Asia-centric world of the global present.

In taking on the challenge posed by the series in which this book is framed (*Modern Architectures in History*), our aim has been, first, to give closer and more extended attention to the multiple story lines that are interwoven in this history of architecture in the construction and conception of modern India. To do this it also necessarily attempts to

address some largely unexplored gaps between the dominant foci of the existing literature. These include the everyday buildings and infrastructure that comprised the ubiquitous background architecture and urbanism of modern India, much of which was produced by architects, engineers and teams of skilled subordinates working largely unacknowledged in government departments and corporate architectural firms. Resisting the temptation to counter 'global' trends and generalities with reductive and equally generalizing notions of a singular modern 'Indian' alterity, the present account has also attempted consciously to articulate the more contextually specific 'local' modernities of the many distinct regions and metropolitan centres that comprise modern India as the geographical, political and cultural constellation that it remains, despite more than a century of aspiration towards a more coherent ideal of modern nationhood.

A second and equally important aim is to exploit the opportunity that is afforded by the growing distance from the developments and ideas in question, to interpret these more thoroughly and richly in their historical contexts and interrelationships. As dispassionately as these interested authors are able to approach their topic, we have tried to stand outside the ideological space of the original issues, as well as the postmodern polemics and postcolonial critiques that the architectural discourse on modern India has taken on board, at least partially, in the intervening years. Our clear, though not necessarily easily accomplished, objective has been to reframe that evolving discourse in its own history; to confront the notion of a transcendent universal modernity with its inevitable historicity in this (as in any other) history of changing ideals and contexts.

To begin, as we have, with Chandigarh is not to start at the beginning of the story, but to address up front the relatively huge but equally problematic impact this singular project has had, not only on the existing discourse about the architecture and urbanism of modern India, but also on the larger canonical story of modern architecture and its global diffusion as well. Tendencies inherent in previous readings of Chandigarh foreground a more general problem of interpretation that we wish to articulate clearly at the outset since it underpins the basic argument of this book and the critical re-examination of these intertwining histories that it seeks to provide. From either point of view, the important connections between this local history and the global history of modern architecture are undoubted. But until recently, neither of these established narratives had been cross-examined closely enough to interpret the longer history and richer texture of their particular relationship.

Concisely stated, the tendency to romanticize the paradoxical contradictions of the encounter between high modernism and traditional India,

and the heroic creative struggle this entailed in high-profile projects such as Chandigarh, has underplayed the significance of the middle ground of 'colonial-modern' development on which post-independence India was actually built. In its public works and buildings as in its social policies, colonial India under the British was a test-bed not only for some of the most radical ideas about social and spatial engineering in the history of modern European thought, but some of the most reactionary policies and practices as well. To understand fully the 'differential' nature of architectural modernity in India's modern history, it is therefore imperative to appreciate the role that architecture played in the intrinsically intertwined history of India's colonization and, hence, the inherent postcoloniality of the architectural production and discourses that followed.⁸ The modern nation-state of India that came into being as a secular democracy in 1947 was among the first and by far the largest of the new nations to emerge from the rapid unwinding of the European colonial empires in the years following the Second World War. The progress of this unlikely new country – in many ways a radically optimistic federation of differences rather than a unified nation-state – was therefore closely watched from birth. In the eyes of a war-weary international community that was (at least temporarily) attempting to reconstitute itself through new forward-looking diplomatic frameworks such as the United Nations, 'Modern India' was regarded as a paradigm case of postcolonial nation building.

But naive perceptions of India from a distance, as a tradition-bound non-Western society poised for 'take-off' on a sky-rocketing course of modernization, belied ignorance of a much longer engagement with modernity. The new democracy was the product of more than a century and a half of social and cultural change within the framework of an inherently modernizing colonial state. This colonial-modern India was distinguished by a set of distinctly non-traditional cultural spaces and practices, and a rule of law founded upon the modern Enlightenment values of reason, justice and individual freedom in which, paradoxically, the very idea of the independent nation-state of modern India had also been framed.

India's long but politically sophisticated freedom struggle had ultimately succeeded through some of the most original and radical tactics that the world of modern politics had yet conceived, not least the practice of non-violence. Behind the apparent solidarity of the movement, however, the emergent idea of 'Modern India' reflected a plurality of different and even contradictory visions of the society's future form and place in the modern world.

These contradictions were most famously represented by the diverging modernities of the two extraordinary individuals who emerged on the world stage as the political architects of modern India and the postcolonial

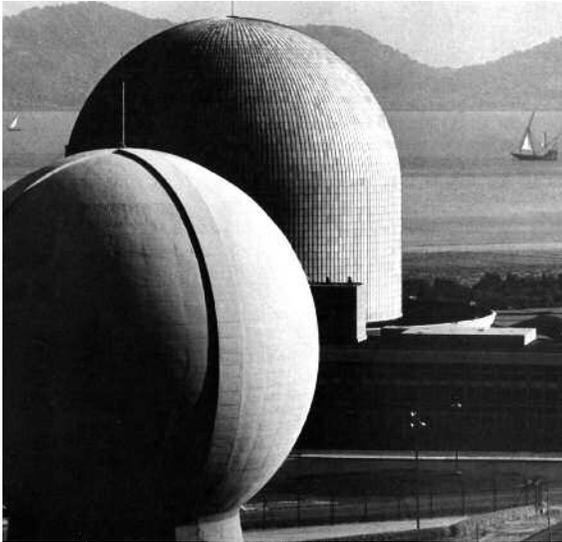
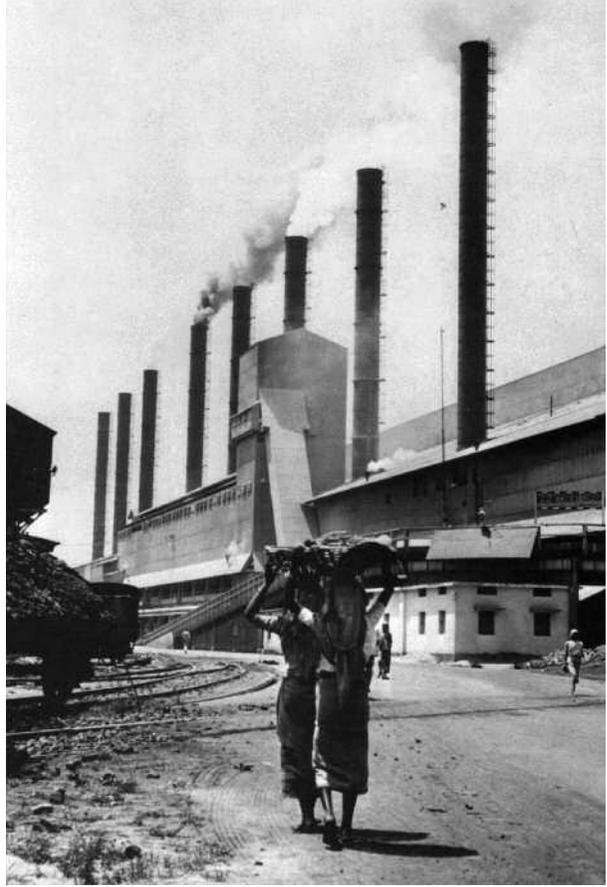
order it would pioneer. Jawaharlal Nehru's rationalist vision of a modernity defined by science and the ethics of secular humanism was the more overtly progressive of the two, although still relatively close to the mainstream of modern Western social and political thought. For Nehru the future lay in scientific application to the development of the new industries, technologies and associated infrastructure on which the independent nation would be built. Rationally planned new cities and the modernist buildings that would create them would not only be symbolic of modern India, but also the spatial and material framework in which this self-consciously 'new' and rapidly urbanizing modern society would find its true form and meaning.

Mohandas Gandhi's vision was seemingly much more pragmatic and conservative if not reactionary by comparison to Nehru's. But the modern India that Gandhi envisioned, in which the holistic coherence of its traditional village communities would be sustained against the insidious forces of industrialization and the city, was in many ways the more radical proposition. As the *Mahatma* (great soul) of the freedom struggle, as he came to be revered, Gandhi had an exceptional capacity to communicate effectively with the common people of India and transform the closeted nationalist project of an urbanized intellectual elite into a mass movement.

Metaphorical notions of 'building' were useful rhetorical devices for thinking through the compromises and contradictions of the freedom struggle, and for projecting the possible forms that the future Indian nation might take. Gandhi described modernizing India like a house in a storm: 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed,' he wrote. 'I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.'⁹ Brute and ignorant resistance to the wider world was futile, but the modern India he envisaged would emerge wiser and stronger from the encounter if it fortified the deeper core structures that gave coherence and value to its own ways of life. In Gandhi's view, 'the blood of the villages [was] the cement by which the edifice of the cities is built.'¹⁰ Industrialization and its corollary, urbanization, were precisely the yokes of economic and social servitude to the modern world system of Western domination that India's village-based civilization needed to throw off. Building on and reinforcing the core ideology of self-reliance and pride in indigenous cultural and economic production with which a previous generation of freedom fighters had launched the cause, the long final struggle for political independence was to be marked by Gandhi's extraordinarily original and successful strategic focus on non-violent non-cooperation with colonial authority.



'Temples of modern India'
as documented by Time-
Life photographers in the
1950s and '60s: the Bhakra
Nangal Dam, Punjab;
the Tata Steel Plant,
Jamshedpur; and the
CIRUS reactor in Trombay.



While ideological debates seeded by the original Gandhi–Nehru opposition have continued to temper subsequent politics and practice, it was Nehru’s more conventional vision of progress for modern India that took the lead after Independence, with the death of Gandhi shortly thereafter, in 1948. Nehru’s subsequent advocacy for the cleansing rationalism and aesthetic challenges of Chandigarh’s architecture must therefore be interpreted in the context of the ongoing debate about the virtues and functions of tradition, not only with the Gandhians, but also with the colonial-modern regime they had jointly expelled. Under colonial rule the historical building traditions and cultural differences of India had often been exploited both as a source of formal and technical ideas for building regionally appropriate architectures and as a politically useful form of symbolism to represent differences and thereby to ‘divide and rule’. By contrast, the abstract new forms and socialist ideals associated with high modernist architecture offered an alternative emphasis on the universality of basic human needs and aspirations.

The quest for new form, the creative struggles of the form-givers, and associated mythologies and realities of the actual means of production on the building site are intriguing threads of the story that followed. But the problem with subsequent assessments of the heroic late works of Le Corbusier in the crucible of the Indian sub-continent – and again with those of Louis Kahn a decade later, as will be seen – has been the tendency to emphasize the poetic inspiration and technological paradoxes of India as an ostensibly ‘timeless’ traditional society, at the expense of a more historically contextualized reading of the actual traditions in question.¹¹ Indeed, as the underlying question might be re-framed: ‘what was the modern India of the mid-twentieth century (not the imagined India) that these masters of high modernist architecture and their acolytes actually encountered?’

As we have now begun to discern, the architectural production of postcolonial India and its cultural politics were still intimately related to those of the preceding colonial era, and no less complex. Separated from any imagined India of pure traditional practices and values by centuries of colonial intercourse with Europe, the modernity of this new architecture was defined by its responses to the dwelling practices and building traditions of the immediate colonial-modern past. Indeed, the degree to which the new architecture of the 1950s was so successfully received and widely diffused throughout the country had possibly more to do with the peculiarly modern predisposition of a previously colonized society than with any spatial or symbolic emancipation that the new shapes and textures may have offered. Along with the institutional legacies of British India, independent India inherited the extensive body of institutional and

associated residential architecture in which these had been accommodated and supported. Together with the institutionalized modes of production through which such official buildings and the ubiquitous works and utilities of the more mundane public realm continued to be produced, this colonial-modern infrastructure was perhaps a pre-existing foundation of functionalist architecture and planning patterns on which postcolonial India would build.¹²

Furthering this point, one of the threads that the present account seeks to trace more explicitly in the weave of this history is the story of the particular social classes and their associated social spaces for which the new architecture of modern India was effectively, if not specifically designed. In large part these were the administrative and professional elite, their support staff and servants – the middling modernist strata of the ex-colonial society – to whom the banal rationalism of the planned environments of colonial ‘cantonments’ and ‘civil lines’ was normal. This urbane citizenry of the modern Indian state was predisposed to receive and embrace the alienating spatial logic of modernist architecture and planning because they already had a feel for the game.

Iconic ‘new towns’ like Chandigarh, and the heavy infrastructure of big dams, power plants and factories that would serve them, were what Nehru regarded as the new ‘temples’ of the politically and ideologically liberated modern India that he and his technocratic administration began to build in earnest in the 1950s.¹³ But like the fledgling nation itself, the building projects of the postcolonial state remained entangled with the spatial and cognitive legacies of the colonial past, even as they aspired to engage with their wider geopolitical present and the new dependencies that entailed.

From the early 1950s through the 1970s India became a test-bed for the competing theoretical models through which the new superpowers of the Cold War world vied to influence the social and economic development of the so-called third world of emerging postcolonial nations. Among India’s keenest observers were competing proponents of modernization theory on the one hand, and central economic planning on the other, the contrasting mantras of economic development in the mid-twentieth century that the new Indian state was attempting to apply simultaneously in its own characteristically hybrid fashion.

In the development of massive hydroelectric schemes, steel plants and their supporting townships, institutes of technology and scientific research, infrastructure redevelopment and slum-upgrading projects in major cities, Indian architects and planners continued to work closely with foreign consultants. Under the sponsorship of agencies such as the (American) Ford Foundation, the (British) Building Research Station and

the United Nations, other luminaries of the modernist design pantheon – including Charles Eames, Richard Neutra, Buckminster Fuller, Isamu Noguchi and Louis Kahn – found their way to India in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Apart from the interventions of some of these individuals, the wider role of these agencies in the exchange of design knowledge and models has been little examined, but is crucial to the richer and more critical understanding of the story of modern architecture and planning in the history of India that this book attempts to frame.

Integral to this story is also the regional political context and history in which it is nested. In the complex and often violent geopolitics of the Cold War that were played out across Asia between the 1950s and the 1980s, ideological commitment to democracy, and the inertial values and practices embodied in India's legacy of colonial-modern institutions, enabled the fledgling state to maintain a sometimes difficult middle course between the revolutionary peasant-based communism that swept its northern (Chinese) and eastern (Indochinese) hinterland, and the reactionary military dictatorships that soon consumed the other nascent democracies of India's smaller neighbouring states, Pakistan and Burma (Myanmar).

Under Nehru, modern India coveted the representational democratic system and associated judicial and bureaucratic institutions of a secular state that it had inherited from its former British rulers. But it was also a founding member of the organization of Non-Aligned States that strove brazenly to maintain an independent status in international affairs, opting out of unilateral, neo-colonial relations with either side of the capitalist/communist divide.

Challenged by often fractious regional, ethnic and political differences within its own extensive geographical territory – not least the democratically mandated rule of communist governments in two of its regional states – the postcolonial Indian polity continued for decades to be characterized by the strong centralizing tendencies and technocratic paternalism inherited from the former colonial administration of British India. But committed to a dramatically expanded scope and accelerated pace of development, by contrast to its colonial managers, the new nation also looked cautiously but openly to the Soviet Union and the socialist democracies of Europe as models for a centrally planned, top-down approach to social and, specifically, industrial modernization.¹⁴ Through its first two decades of independence India had therefore pursued a policy of integrated social and economic development predicated on the over-arching quasi-socialist institution of 'Five-Year Plans'. Overall, the economy remained a hybrid mix of public and private sector interests, but had become increasingly constrained towards the end of this initial planning era by insular policies of protectionism and self-sufficiency.

India's economic isolation was effectively reversed by a strategic shift to neo-liberal economic policies, beginning in the mid-1980s, which have enabled reintegration into the rapidly globalizing world economy in the years since. This most recent period has witnessed dynamic growth in specific new sectors of the economy such as information technology, and the IT-linked industry of 'offshore' professional service providers – increasingly monopolized worldwide by English-speaking Indian 'call centres' – with a comparable increase in the size and wealth of India's educated urban middle classes. But the benefits of these developments have not been universally shared because the socio-economic gap between the upwardly mobile new white-collar/consumer elite and the far greater numbers of relatively unskilled low-waged labour – on which India's internal and still largely informal economy continues to rely massively – has widened rather than closed. In the meantime, the government sector has substantially withdrawn, in keeping with neo-liberal principles, from its prior commitment to direct technocratic investment in social planning and development.

These socio-economic rifts and tensions in the 'New India' of the twenty-first century are registered graphically, in built environment terms, in the persistent but increasingly complex reality of parallel 'places' within the same rapidly expanding 'space' of the contemporary Indian city. Between the surviving urban villages and gentrifying colonial urban fabric, on one hand, and the contemporary gated housing, shopping malls and software parks of the new rich, on the other, lie not only the vast matrix of so-called informal settlements that define and support what has been described as the 'kinetic city' of essential urban services and industry, but the almost equally vast urban landscapes of now mouldering government-built housing and infrastructure in which the emerging middle classes of an earlier era once framed their modernist ideals and aspirations.¹⁵

To discern and describe these multiple facets of modern India's architecture and urbanism, and to draw together the many threads of their story – familiar, less familiar and, in some cases, previously untold – is the challenge of the critical narrative that follows. The seven chapters articulate a series of recurring oppositions, but with inevitable evolution as well as the story progresses. Chapters One and Two encompass the colonial-modern stages of our account, describing and illustrating a shift from a 'rationalizing' paradigm in the architectural thinking and building of the second half of the nineteenth century, to a more 'rhetorical' ideal about the purposes of architecture in the final decades of colonial rule. Architecture in the proto-modern India discussed in chapter One was addressed as 'building', that is, as a physical phenomenon of nature amenable to scientific

and technical improvement. To conquer the technical problems of building a modern India was the primary aim. By contrast, chapter Two explores how 'Architecture', as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon, was the predominant focus of critical debate and practice in India in the early twentieth century, when imperial rhetoric reached its apex, countered by the increasingly sophisticated oppositional figures of Indian nationalism and its artistic avant-garde. The complex and contradictory dialectic of modernisms and atavisms explored in the public and private architectures of this era describe a struggle for political and cultural control over the future course of modern India, and the question of modernity itself.

Later chapters map the imprint and implications of this colonial tension between issues of 'becoming' and 'being' on the postcolonial architectural history of India. The 1950s under Nehru, the focus of chapter Three, marked a return to an overtly rationalizing, techno-scientific paradigm of modernity as 'progress.' But chapter Four articulates a shift already evident by the 1960s to a new rhetoric of modernity in which modern architecture was exploited by ambitious institution-building clients predominantly for its symbolic function in a struggle with the centralized nation-state for individual and emerging new regional stakes in the power and prestige of Indian modernity.

The pendulum swings back again in the 1970s, the focus of chapter Five, to more emphatically rational, systemic and universal concerns regarding the role of architecture in social development and modernity. By the close of the 1960s, however, the centralized-industrialization model of the Nehruvian era was under question. Although closely allied, on the global scene, with the critical turn of the late 1960s, the emerging ecologism of the 1970s and increasing exposure to political and technological alternatives through engagement with the outside world, a new focus within the architecture and planning disciplines of India on the basic human shelter issues of the country, as a context of postcolonial 'underdevelopment', also reflected a parallel political revival of Gandhi's ideal of *sarvodaya* (progress of all) – a mission that his assassination two decades earlier had interrupted abruptly. Beyond relatively uncritical previous accounts of alternative technology and housing activism in India in the 1970s, we attempt to interpret these developments with particular attention to the national context of the 'party-less democracy' that briefly defined the transitional political scene of the later 1970s, and its impact on the ensuing decentralization and regional resolution of what nevertheless was still a unified concern for the social development of the entire nation.

The distinct cultural turn in architecture that coincided with the sea change in political and economic perspectives in India between the 1980s

and the early 1990s is explored in chapter Six. In our reading, this rhetorical return to regionalism and historicism, and their various romantic and critical applications, is interpreted as a renewed struggle to redefine and affirm a distinctive architectural identity for modern India that arose primarily from the Indian socio-political context of the late 1970s. We offer thereby a more situated historical explanation of a shift that has previously been inadequately scrutinized if not simply subsumed in a broader critique as a local reflection of contemporary 'postmodern' debates and propositions in America and Europe. The new-found rhetoric of established modernist practitioners renouncing both the 'duck' and the 'decorated shed' to find solace in *ragas* and *mandalas* is seen as a reflection of the penchant for contemporary mythologies that also coloured the political rhetoric of the rising Hindu right during the 1980s in the wake of the waning Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and the original postcolonial project of a secular modern state.

While the new generation of architectural leaders and students that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, invigorated by the burgeoning of new architectural schools and publications, anticipated a decisive battle for indigenous roots and inspiration over the rote clichés of universal modernism, the game was suddenly changing once again as the final gates of latent Nehruvian fiscal policy were opened to the forces of globalization. In the seventh and final chapter we attempt a brief and necessarily more conjectural, rather than historical, assessment of the range of new trends and developments in the Indian building and design worlds since the advent of neo-liberal market economics in the 1990s, and the ensuing contest between cosmopolitan and neo-conservative tendencies in the globalized cultural politics of India today. In a contemporary cultural landscape that simultaneously accommodates all states – pre-, post- and modern – of a society that continues to transform, headlong on its journey of becoming, recent architectural developments in India are interpreted as some of the more telling evidence of what has been posited as the potential 'non-modern' world of the future.¹⁶ Here both Reason and Rhetoric are seen to be thriving in equal measure.