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# SITUATING INDIAN ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF LATE MODERNISM

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## ABSTRACT.

Following independence, India's architectural development was fostered through transnational professional collaborations and international aid. MARG, established in 1946 (Modern Architectural Research Group) inspired by the contemporary MARS (1933-1957) group, published an eponymous magazine which engaged in dialogues with CIAM and later TEAM 10 through the contributions of Minnette di Silva, Otto Koenigsberger, B.V Doshi in the 1950s. At the same time, internationally educated Indian architects such as Achyut Kanvinde, Habib Rehman, and Charles Correa held positions of power in the government as well as on the editorial boards of other publications formulating a modern vocabulary for public infrastructure.

While the existing literature on Indian architecture highlights the contributions of notable architects, it overlooks the deliberations that occurred within the architectural community. Publications such as the *Journal of Indian Institute of Architects (JIIA)* and *MARG* were instrumental in advancing architectural discourse, highlighting the relationship between indigenous techniques and the incorporation of "modernism" in India. Publications such as *Design* and *The Indian Architect* were established later to address the technical aspects of the construction industry while connecting international design debates to the Indian context.

The 1959 Seminar of Architecture in Delhi marked a significant turning point for Indian architectural discourse because it challenged the validity of the modern movement in India. This shift in architectural vocabulary was driven by the discourse revived by the publications to mark the shift of Indian modernism while challenging the notion of critical regionalism. This paper delves into the discourse regarding "modernisation" in India through the lens of the specialised press, highlighting the institutional and professional collaborations which shaped it post-CIAM i.e. 1957-1969. This research connects discourses across publications to present the transnational exchanges that impacted the development of identity in post-colonial India. The paper also examines the Indian publications as a critical space for discourse building upon Beatriz Colomina's "Little Magazines: Small Utopia."

## 1. INTRODUCTION

20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in India bore witness to several movements and figurative transitions, comparable to that of Western countries, particularly from 1947, i.e. post-independence. This period saw the proliferation of the International Style, brought about by Nehru's vision of a "modern" India defined by science and technology and ethics of secular humanism. The inheritance of centralised policy making and technocratic paternalism from the British along with the European socialist democratic model for industrial modernisation, combined with American funding and co-operation<sup>1</sup> led to an adaptation of a different notion of modernity in India.

The adaptation of the International Style in India resulted in a nationwide construction process discussed through multiple channels such as the radio, exhibitions, and seminars. The dynamic flows of knowledge were driven by the dual nature of exchanges originating from the architects trained in the West and the presence of foreign investors and industries in India. This exchange is visible through the study of architectural periodicals such as *MARG* (1946 - to date), *Journal of the Indian Institute of Architecture* 1932- to date, published in Bombay and *Design* (1957-88), *The Indian Architect* (1959 – 1986) based in Delhi. These publications were entirely in English, including the advertisements, showcasing the influence of Anglophone countries.

In 1959, a significant shift occurred in the world of architecture and history. The death of CIAM marked the end of an era and the move towards a more "contemporary" style to address the failures of "modernism".<sup>2</sup> This shift in global politics with the advent of the Cold war, and India's involvement in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) in 1961 also led to distancing itself from the western ideology of modernism, which was accompanied by the rise of regionalist tendencies and adaptation of a more historical and contextual approach to the built environment. Although 'post-modernism' is not a term directly applied to Indian architecture in the 1960s, the influences of the global debate can be seen through the reassessment of the printed media and exhibitions of that period.

This study of India's discourse on modernism and the international influences through architectural periodicals highlights the intertwined relationship between architecture and media from 1957-1969. The research attempts to unravel the discourse behind the development of 'post-modern' or 'critical regionalism' in India and its connection to the search for an 'Indian Identity' of post-colonial India. Other questions also arise such as what the nature of the international exchanges during the chosen period signify and can these publications be classified amongst the Little Magazines framework proposed by Beatriz Colomina in "Little Magazines: Small Utopia."

## 2. FRAMEWORK

The little magazine was defined as "a space for new ideas, led by a guiding spirit, trying to make one point, and usually representing an institution at its most iconoclastic",<sup>3</sup> by Denise Scott Brown in "Little magazines in Architecture and Urbanism." A critical analysis of Indian publications

1. Scriver, Peter, and Amit Srivastava. *India: Modern Architectures in History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2015.

2. Laurence, Peter. "Modern (or Contemporary) Architecture circa 1959." In *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture*. Farnham, Surrey : Ashgate Publishing, 2014

3. Denise Scott Brown, "Little Magazines in Architecture and Urbanism," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 34, 4 1968: 223–233. 40.

in the mid-1960s shows a period of littleness, through the nature of its communication and discourse. This research builds upon Beatriz Colombia and Craig Buckley's *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 196X to 197X*, and Veronique Patteeuw's *Architecture, Writing and Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s* to re-examine the sites of architectural production in India in the period 1959-1969.

The existing literature mainly focuses on architectural publications and spaces in Europe, America, and Australia. The representation of Southeast Asian publications is non-existent in the discourse, and only recently has the role of architectural periodicals in the development of modernity in the Global South been brought to the fore through articles such as Maristella Casciato's "Scienza e arte dell'architettura: due riviste nell'india di Nehru," 2012 and Devika Singh's "Architecture and Media" in the 2022 exhibition and eponymous publication *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947-1985*. While publications such as *MARG* and *Design* are highlighted, the oldest and singular institutional journal, *JIA*, is ignored. Similarly, *The Indian Architect* receives no attention even though it had global subscriptions and contributors.

This research<sup>4</sup> has a two-fold approach. The first part involves investigating the biography and anatomy of the selected periodicals to delineate the thematic and diachronic spaces of discourse. The second step examines the periodicals and their interconnections as a system of knowledge, constructed through the textual and visual content. For discourse analysis, Grieg Chrysler's *Writing Spaces - Discourses of Architecture, Urbanism and the Built Environment* is taken as a reference to build the framework for understanding the nature of the publications. The analysis of the discourse places the magazines as a space of knowledge, each with its own politics of writing and expression of built form. The hypothesis to be tested is the eligibility of the periodicals to be classified as "little magazines" and if the space provided for dissent and provocation through them was significant.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature of transnational architectural exchange and discourse post-CIAM in India, three publications *The Indian Architect*, *Design*, *Journal of Indian Institute of Architects*, from the period of 1957-1969. Are selected. These three magazines are significant as they allow for a cross-sectional interlink between theoretical discourses of institutional publications, trade publications and the "little" magazine. The editorial board, contributing authors and the content of the magazines are analysed to identify the connections established through the journals.

### 3. THE PERIODICALS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS

*The Journal of Indian Institute of Architects* is an institutional publication issued by the Indian Institute of Architects and has been in circulation since the 1934. As it was an institutional journal, it mainly reported on the internal occurrences and events of the IIA, publishing reports of its annual meetings,

4. This paper is a continuation of my master's thesis supervised by Prof. Paolo Scrivano and Gaia Caramellino at Politecnico di Milano.

and the various talks given by its members on other platforms. The Journal had positioned itself as the only direct link between the Institute and its readers, differentiating itself from the other publications present during that period. This journal was subscription-based only for the members of the association. This periodical was closely associated with the *RIBA Journal* and its impact could be seen through its structure and contents.

*The Indian Architect* was first published with the intention of sharing technical knowledge on the Indian sub-continent, and to function as a forum where architects and engineers could exchange notes. This magazine could be termed as a “little magazine” due to the critical nature of its editorials, and the self-publication nature. This magazine catered to architects, town planners and construction engineers, as stated on its title page.

*Design* which was later rebranded as *Design: incorporating Indian Builder* was launched in Delhi in 1957 by Patwant Singh, to combine the fields of architecture, urban planning, visual arts, graphics, and industrial design. This magazine, as a successor to *Indian Builder*, had a clear ambition to bridge the reputed gap between the artistic and the mundane. This magazine is highly regarded because of the editorial board, the diverse nature of its contributors, and its critical stance against the political and institutional stances of that period.

#### **4. SITUATING THE DISCOURSE IN THE “POST-MODERN” TIME**

The 1953 CIAM IX meeting marked a split in the ideals of the group, which came to the fore in 1959 with the disbandment of the same. The notions of identity and association with physical form propagated by Allison and Peter Smithson, later TEAM X, also had an impact in the Indian subcontinent, with the discourse shifting away from the “modernist” trope followed by Corbusier. The deliberations occurring worldwide were also broadcast in India through various seminars and radio talks, which were then reported in the periodicals. Some of the essays and speeches presented by prominent architects were also published through collaboration with other institutions. This paper studies the nature of the deliberations of the articles along with the editorials to present a comprehensive discussion.

A quantitative analysis of the contents of the magazines shows that urban planning, modernism and its identity in India and international articles made up the largest volume of discourse in each magazine, followed by education and profession. Mapping reveals the networks through which knowledge was exchanged and established.

##### **4.1 TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGES AND EXPOSURE**

From an editorial standpoint, *Design* was the most international in its character by virtue of its editorial *board* which consisted of prominent figures such as Nobuya Abe, Marcel Breuer, Charles Fabri, Seigfried Gideon, Walter Gropius, A.P Kanvinde, Richard Neutra, Gio Ponti amongst others. The content of the magazine, as well as its contributors, had an equally international outlook, with commentary on events such as the World Fair

1967 (Montreal). The section on Art was also significant in this aspect as it reported multiple international exhibitions and an association of MoMA through the articles of Bernard Rudofsky, Allen S. Weller. The influence of art in architecture was also a focus of the magazine as it called for a reevaluation of the current strategies of urban development.

The *JIIA* on the other hand was affiliated with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) thus influencing its publishing style and content. The Journal, as the only direct link between the Institute and its readers, was quite vocal about its relation and the importance of counterpart institutions such as RIBA and the IUA (International Union of Architects) in Indian architectural education and practice. The organisation had an insular nature, as it only published articles by its members,<sup>5</sup> thus limiting itself. The major theme of the international articles was European examples of town planning and industrialisation, gradually shifting to an introverted stance in the mid-1960s. A vocal protagonist of this publication was L.M Chithale, who reported on the preview of the film *The New Age of Architecture* by the editors of the Architectural Forum, New York, in an effort to broaden the American influence on Indian architecture. The contribution of the USSR can also be observed through multiple articles on architectural education, but it failed to change the mainstream education system.

*The Indian Architect* had a large international presence, both in its circulation as well as the content it published. The magazine took on a more nuanced perspective towards the contribution of foreign architects in India, particularly through built projects such as embassies in Delhi (January 1960), through the review and role of exhibitions such as the World Agricultural Fair (February 1960), etc. The magazine also published articles from other international sources such as the A.I.A journals, RIBA lectures, and articles by eminent architects like Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph, Juhani Pallasma. The magazine, in July 1963, dedicated an entire edition to international innovative schemes, highlighting the current mindset on contemporary architecture in Europe to inspire Indian architects. Additionally, the magazine featured reference sheets of construction details and global standards, international book reviews, and news about exhibitions and conferences worldwide to keep the audience informed of events around the world.

A major intention of the publication of the international articles in the periodicals was two-fold: first, to inspire the search for appropriate design techniques and technologies in India, moving beyond aesthetic requirements and towards a more contextual approach towards implementation of modernism in India. Second, it sought to create a platform for discussion amongst the fraternity and link Indian architectural discourse to a broader audience. Mapping the places referred to in the articles highlights the close connection of *JIIA* with the U.K., *The Indian Architect* and *Design* was very international in its publication, publishing articles from both the first and second-world power blocs.

5. The IIA had over 600 members in 1959, growing to 1750 members in 1965. Currently, there are nearly 29,000 affiliated members of IIA, and 127,202 registered.

#### 4.2 POST-MODERNISM / CRITICAL REGIONALISM OR SIMPLY APPROPRIATE ARCHITECTURE

The revivalist stance of the *JIIA* was expressed through its editorials and articles by L.M Chithale and M.K Jadhav in 1958, where they called for the need for a coherent architectural policy and the need for technical education to include critical thinking. The editorial board took a critical stance against the adaptation of Western stylistic influences and argued for a nuanced solution to building in India. These deliberations came to the fore in the 1959 Seminar for Architecture, where multiple topics including national policy for architectural expression, the role of architect in society, the effect of climate on building strategies, art and architecture, and the role of civic design and urban aesthetics were discussed highlighting the shift of the intellectual discourse away from the “modernist” trope followed in the last decade.

The impact of the seminar was also reflected in the editorials of the periodicals in the 1960s. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand in *The Indian Architect* stressed the need to rethink the relationship of architecture and its context, its discovery and situatedness, leading to new forms. Multiple editorials touched upon the topic of designing according to climate and weather, especially in India bemoaning the current unsuitable styles adapted in the name of “modernity” continuing onto the section “Designing for the Tropics”. *Design* also reflected on the outcomes of the 1959 Seminar proposing “identifying the problem areas in India and directing the limited resources to them”<sup>6</sup> and to develop organisational patterns which respond to the needs of the times and self-correcting based on operations. The editorial also noted that there was little that India could borrow from other countries, except the experience of what to avoid in urban development and architecture.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the discourse had shifted towards low-cost housing typologies and domestic architecture such as residences from across India and the world. The shift from the search for appropriate tectonics and form towards fulfilling the basic need of housing was also driven by the two periods of war and recession which India faced in the 1960s, along with the curtailment of American aid. In the early 1970s, an article on contemporary Indian architecture was published by *The Indian Architect*, which highlighted the new language of robustness and functionalism along with the use of new materials in erstwhile cities of Bhopal, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Bombay which heralded the direction contemporary Indian architecture was taking. *Design* was very active in representing the dynamic nature that Indian architecture was taking in the 1960s. They published the work of young upcoming architects such as the Design Group, Uttam Jain, Jeet Malhotra and important projects across the country to provide a forum for discussion and to showcase the diverse production across the country.

A major topic of discourse was the proposed Masterplan for Delhi, which was derided for its lack of coherent vision, resulting in a “neurotic, nervous and scarred city”.<sup>7</sup> The discourse on urban planning revolved around the recent exercises in urban planning carried out in Chandigarh, Durgapur, Bhubanaeshwar, while referencing historical cases such as Jaipur and

6. Singh, Patwant. “Editorial: How to Succeed in Destroying Beautiful Cities without Really Trying.” *Design*, 1963.

7. Singh, Patwant. “Editorial: How to Succeed...”

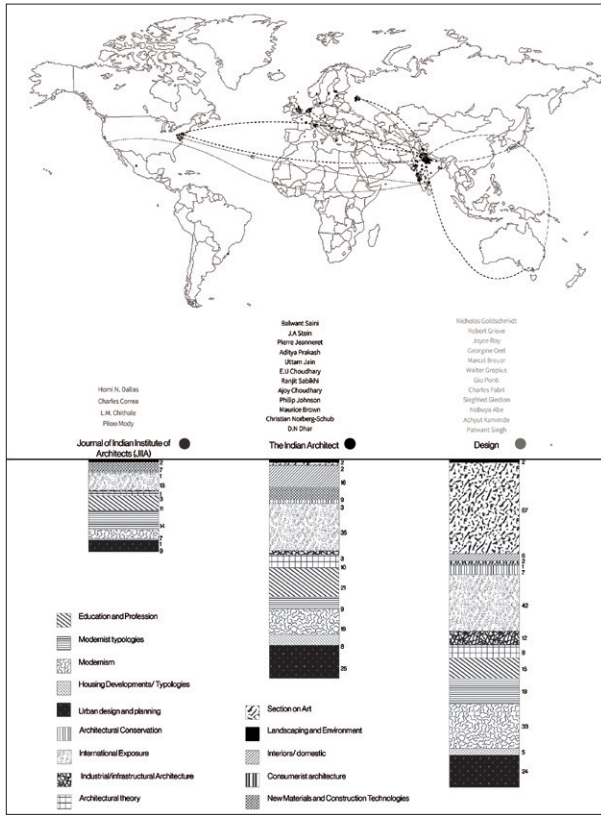


Fig 1: Chart showing thematic analysis of articles and their mapping.

Fig 2: Selection of articles highlighting international exchange and discourse related to search for appropriate form.

Fig 3: Positioning as “Little Magazines.”



Fatehpur Sikhri. The aspect of climate and town planning was also addressed through a series of articles “Shopping centres in the Tropics”, “Street pattern and orientation of Housing estates in the Tropics,” by *Interim Plan*.

The shift towards a more contextually appropriate architecture and urban planning for India could be observed in all the periodicals, albeit focusing on different aspects. The outcome would later be considered as post-modern or critical regionalism by Western academics, a stance which is contested.

## 5. CONCLUSION: POSITIONING THE PERIODICALS AS “LITTLE MAGAZINES”

“Little magazines were defined as something that functioned as a networked, interactive and international platform for experimental design and discourse”.<sup>8</sup> This, along with the self-publication, small circulation and ephemeral nature of the selected periodicals would justify its inclusion in the framework.

The importance of *JIIA* was strengthened in the 1960s during which it had become a monthly publication. However, the content of the magazine had been

8. Colomina, Beatriz. “Little Magazines: Small Utopia.” In *Las Revistas de Arquitectura (1900-1975): Crónicas, Manifiestos, Propaganda*, 13–20. Pamplona: Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura Universidad de Navarra, 2012

reduced to just a mouthpiece of the institute, rather than that of professional information due to the limitation of contributors to only members of IIA, restricting the variety of content it could publish. Additionally, the reluctance of the editorial board to acknowledge the views expressed in the journal as that of the Institute was quite contradictory to their role as the link between the Institute and its members pushes this journal to its current non-existential importance and cannot be positioned as a “little magazine.”

Although a technical magazine, the articles and reviews published in *The Indian Architect* took on a critical stance. The magazine also published reviews of the preceding years, addressing topics such as housing, architectural profession and education regulations, and political shifts and complimented them with articles looking towards the future, such as “industrialisation” and “moving forward”. While it was supported by subscriptions and advertisements, it was a monthly publication with reporting on technical advancements and news across the world through its reference sheets.

*Design* shifted towards a stronger critical stance in the mid-1960s as opposition to the political scenario and unrest of students, the ineffectiveness and “tunnel vision” of policy makers, the expression of architectural elements and design, and the rudderless direction of architectural education. It also published a vibrant discourse on art and architecture from across the world. The covers presented a bold visual character compared to the other publications of that period. The content published in *The Indian Architect* and *Design*, with its diverse nature of contributors and editorials, positioned it as a platform for discourse and debate, justifying its position as an infrastructure for hosting change. ■

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