

PROTECTING MODERN MASTERPIECES IN INDIA

A Conversation between William J.R. Curtis and an Unknown Indian

Copyright: William J.R. Curtis 21/06/2014 1030 hrs Edited again 23/07/2014 1300hrs

(First published in *Architecture + Design*, India, September 2014 issue)

UI You are known around the world as a historian and critic of architecture who defends quality against mediocrity, and who maintains a long view of events. In a recent article, 'Nothing is Sacred: Threats to Modern Masterpieces in India', (*Architectural Review*, April 2014)*, you have sounded the alert about the vulnerability of major works in India such as those by Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn in Ahmedabad, and of course those by Le Corbusier in Chandigarh. Subsequently in the *Times of India* you have argued in favour of the legal definition and defence of modern architectural heritage. What are these threats and what can be done to protect these universal masterpieces of modern architecture?

WJRC There are several dangers and these run from neglect and lack of proper maintenance, to the threat of demolition by voracious property developers who have no interest in architectural quality or the cultural enrichments of fine modern buildings. In the Indian context one used to worry about deterioration and neglect due to poverty, but in the current circumstances of uncontrolled profiteering and land speculation there are threats of another kind to both ancient and modern works of quality, arising from astronomical increases in the price of land, political corruption and thoughtless modernisation. The economic model of rapid, laissez-faire capitalism, which is currently dominant in India, poses risks where the preservation of such examples is concerned. Spiritual, aesthetic and cultural values do not count for much in an increasingly consumerist and materialist society where it is 'the price of everything and the value of nothing'.

UI But surely outstanding historical sites are defined as part of heritage and are protected to some degree?

WJRC Less than you might think: I was shocked during a recent trip to Ahmedabad to notice the degree of deterioration of prime historical sites such as the 15th century Tomb, Tank and Mosque Complex at Sarkej, for example. When you come to the 20th century, the concept of 'architectural heritage' scarcely exists in a formal sense in Indian mentalities or legislation. Buildings and sites have to be over a century old to be considered 'heritage' at all. But it so happens that India has within its boundaries some of the absolute masterpieces of modern architecture world wide, I refer for example to Le Corbusier's buildings on the Capitol in Chandigarh, the Assembly (or Parliament) Building, the High Court and the Secretariat, to his Millowner's Association Building in Ahmedabad, or to Louis Kahn's Indian Institute of Management also in Ahmedabad. But look at the state and situation of these buildings today! The Assembly building has been badly knocked about and vulgarised, for example by the addition of polished stone floors and wooden skirtings

on columns which are worthy of a two star hotel. The landscape concept of the Capitol as a whole (which is not completed) risks being undermined by the construction of thirty storey towers to the north of the site, so ruining the connection to the foothills.

In Ahmedabad the situation is even more vulnerable. The Millowner's Association Building needs restoration and is on a prime site next to the River Sabarmati. There have already been developers who want to knock it down and build a tower. The Indian Institute of Management by Louis Kahn is in a scandalous state of neglect and disrepair: there were even rumours that parts of it would be pulled down. Recent proposals for repairing damage to the fabric were let out with the lowest bidders in mind, hardly an encouraging approach to modern architectural patrimony of such universal value when the aim should be a high level restoration of all Kahn's works on the campus. The pressure on land in Ahmedabad is so great that sites once considered inviolate such as the CEPT Campus with its fine buildings designed from the mid 1960s onwards by Balkrishna Doshi, may also be under threat. It is an ominous sign that the aspiring programme in Conservation at CEPT has just been closed down. Murky, under the table deals between corrupt politicians, land grab developers and unscrupulous architects are more prevalent than one might hope. Such are the dangers of a neo-liberal ideology which emphasises private profit at the expense of professional probity and long term public interest.

UI So what can be done?

WJRC One could begin with a redefinition of the very notion of architectural heritage in India so that it is made to include outstanding works of the twentieth century. New or revised laws need to be defined to enforce their maintenance and protection. I have been coming to this country for thirty five years, admiring and studying the great buildings of all eras from the most ancient to the most recent. The Buddhist stupa at Sanchi, the Hindu temples at Khajuraho, the Jain temple at Ranakpur, the Taj Mahal – these are considered unhesitatingly by everybody to be part of both national and universal heritage. They are among the greatest creations in the history of humanity and they are of course protected by both national laws of patrimony, and international decrees proclaiming their world wide value.

Urban ensembles such as the desert city of Jaisalmer are treasures at another scale. Even so, there are numerous historical sites which remain unprotected. India possesses a vast artistic and architectural patrimony but nothing like enough is being done to look after it. Many of the museums in the country are in a disgraceful state. Now that there is considerable wealth in some sectors of the society there is no excuse for such neglect. In a situation where masterpieces of tenth century sculpture are left languishing in underfunded and semi abandoned provincial museums, it is scarcely surprising that public consciousness is so little attuned to the long term value of recent buildings of quality.

UI Social attitudes are part of the problem?

WJRC Attitudes certainly, but also lack of values: ignorance in turn contributes to this dire situation. One of the first threats to modern architectural patrimony is the refusal to admit that the category exist at all! In the course of time the best of the modern becomes the best

of the past. But to become part of the patrimony it has to survive. Short term thinking may lead to mindless demolition whereas the preservation of key works of recent and twentieth century architecture may add aesthetic and cultural value to the society in the long term. What a tragedy it was for Chicago when Louis Sullivan's superb Stock Exchange skyscraper was pulled down in the 1970s. And now everybody regrets it. The same was true for Pennsylvania Station in New York by McKim Mead and White. The same was true of Baltard's superb iron market sheds at Les Halles in Paris which were demolished over forty years ago.

If rapid economic development prevails over all else, the public realm suffers and decisions are made only with short term profit in mind. Cities launch us into the future but they also conserve the past and contribute to collective memory. I understand full well that tastes can differ, but in India today urbanisation leads to a third rate Americanisation of tacky office towers and glitzy shopping malls. In my recent article 'Nothing is Sacred', I referred to the squalor of the rich as well as the squalor of the poor. In these circumstances there is not much concern for the past, still less the recent past. This sort of unbalanced 'modernisation' does not have time for good modern architecture let alone any intelligent form of modern planning serving the interests of the larger population. I am a historian and I try to maintain the long view.

UI So what can be done to raise consciousness?

WJRC It would be useful if leaders of the architectural profession would take a stand and explain the dire situation to those who ought to have the long term interests of India in mind, such as elected politicians and members of state bureaucracies. More education in architecture is also needed for the general public, and not just the elites: recently I was in the National Museum in New Delhi and I ran into a group of one hundred and twenty young people being trained in the cultural heritage of India so that they could relay the message to schools all up and down the country. An excellent initiative! But needless to say any notion of the modern was completely missing from this programme.

Almost thirty years ago I was involved in the formulation and planning of two exhibitions which considered the layers of Indian architectural tradition from the ancient to the modern, both of them conceived in the context of Festivals of India abroad (USA and France). One, called *Vistara*, was curated by Charles Correa; the other, called *Architecture in India*, was curated by Raj Rewal. Each exhibit presented a panorama of past architecture and of modern architecture, while also considering ways in which lessons from the past have been integrated in some relatively recent examples.

India desperately needs a Centre of Architecture in which ideas like these should be on permanent show and accompanied by temporary exhibitions, seminars, debates and the like. There is also place for a basic educational manual to be used in all secondary schools in India. This should provide an introduction to fundamentals of architecture in the Indian sub-continent. I would be willing to write such a text book and it should be in English, Hindi and several of the main Indian languages! Architecture, both modest and monumental, has an impact upon the lives of everybody.

UI You are saying that architecture helps to form the social fabric and cultural identity of a nation?

WJRC Yes of course it does, but always with the hope that buildings are not subject to ideological manipulation by communitarian politics. One does not want repeat performances of the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque for example. India is supposed in principle to be a secular nation with an inclusive vision of its cultures and religions past and present. Remarkable modern buildings sometimes contribute to the identity of a nation as have Utzon's Sydney Opera House to that of Australia, Kahn's magisterial Assembly Complex in Dhaka to that of Bangladesh, or Costa's and Niemeyer's Brasilia to that of modern Brazil.

The Capitol in Chandigarh is a rare example of modern democratic monumentality. It is one of the foundation documents of the modern Republic of India embodying the idea of a secular society with its institutions of representative government and an independent judiciary. It is like a constructed constitution which illustrates the balance and separation of powers. It corresponds to Nehru's vision of a modern nation unfettered by tired traditions yet it also echoes ancient concepts of monumental architecture such as the hall of columns, the parasol and the cosmic treatment of light. It is a symbolic landscape addressing the notion of harmony with nature. In the circumstances it deserves more respect.

UI Le Corbusier and Kahn were invited in to India precisely as part of the post colonial nation building process. What does one say about British imperial architecture that was largely imposed?

WJRC Here a word should be said about the architectural inheritance of the British Raj. The former residence of the British Viceroy in New Delhi designed by Edwin Lutyens was transformed overnight at Independence to become the official residence of Indian Presidents, the Rashtrapati Bhawan. It could have been rejected as a symbol of past Imperialist oppression, but instead it was absorbed as an effective national symbol. So of course it is protected. But other fine examples of the same period are less lucky. I think of remarkable buildings such as St Thomas's Church in New Delhi designed by Walter George in 1932, which when I last saw it was falling apart. Then there are masterpieces such as Arthur Shoosmith's stark brick Garrison Church, also in Delhi, which also require protection.

The Moghuls imposed themselves too but in the course of time their architectural impositions of power were absorbed into a longer stream. Without retreating into myths such as that of 'Eternal India' one can say that it is the business of a secular Republic to look after and maintain major and sometimes minor examples of all periods and all religious denominations. At stake here is the larger notion of 'res publica', literally 'the public thing'. Similarly 'patrimony' should be a broad concept referring to the collective goods and the collective good of society.

UI But who decides what is worthy of protection and restoration?

WJRC 'What is barbarism but an incapacity to distinguish excellence' said Goethe. But of course the question of selection and ranking is far from simple, nor is the answer. There are

several sorts of reasons for preserving sites, from aesthetic excellence to societal significance. In India the cultures of tribals are expressed in fabrics and tools and they are an integral part of patrimony that requires respect. And what is one to say of the thousands of Indian villages which are economically poor but spatially so rich and enriched by local crafts? Here one has to salute the activities of INTACH (the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage, founded in 1984) in assembling both lists of vast numbers of examples and intelligible criteria.

For ancient sites there are the interventions and studies of the Archaeological Survey of India, but these do not apply to twentieth century examples. The notion of architectural patrimony has been developed internationally by organisations such as ICOMOS (International Council on Museums and Sites) and of modern architectural patrimony in particular by DOCOMOMO (Documents and Conservation of the Modern Movement). DOCOMOMO has sections in several countries including India and had a meeting in Chandigarh in October 2013 on the very subject of preserving modern architecture. Then of course there is UNESCO with its definitions of 'World Patrimony' which can include natural landscapes as well as human creations.

UI All this sounds quite impressive but would these frameworks of recognition constitute automatic safeguards for the protection of modern masterpieces in India?

WJRC Alas no! Needed are fuller legal protections 'on the ground' in India itself at State and National levels. For further details I ask you to go over to the High Court in Chandigarh and consult with the Judges and barristers! It is possible that they would refer to the Gazette of India, the Ministry of Law and Justice, New Delhi for an Act of Parliament of March 2010 referred to as 'The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains, Amended and Validated Act of 2010' which makes fascinating reading but again does not apply to modern examples. So there definitely needs to be an updated equivalent for key twentieth and twenty first century sites and their surroundings, an Act of Parliament for the Protection of Modern Architecture in India. Patrimony is in part a matter of state, in part a matter of justice, in part a matter of the people, especially in a democracy.

UI What about the numerous individuals and groups which continue to militate in favour of the protection of remarkable modern buildings in India?

WJRC Of course one can only salute their efforts and initiatives. I realize full well that there are many in Chandigarh at official and unofficial levels who care about the Corbusian heritage and are upset by the gradual degradation that they see. This concern extends all the way from the office of the Adviser of the Administrator, to the office and team of the City Architect, to the College of Architecture, to the City Museum and Le Corbusier Museum and beyond. There is even a committee dedicated to conservation but one cannot see concrete results for the moment. Years ago I had a conversation with a rickshaw driver who to my astonishment proclaimed the virtues of the architecture of Chandigarh! Many citizens are concerned because in fact in a most basic sense Chandigarh the 'garden city' is an economic success and a pleasant place to live. The principles on which it was founded have born fruit and have largely made sense. Not bad for such a young city!!

In Ahmedabad too there have been individuals and pressure groups such as the Secretary General of the Millowner's Association who continue to defend Le Corbusier's masterpieces. But there are some limits to such personal and even professional resistance, however dedicated, especially at a time of boom development in which there are many Machiavellian machinations to destroy buildings and construct new ones. The so called 'Gujurati model of development' is hardly favourable to preservation of any kind. What is needed is a coherent idea of modern architectural heritage at a national level with an appropriate and enforceable legal protection.

UI Surely the uses and requirements of buildings change over time?

WJRC Of course they do, but changes of use should not result in the massacring of aesthetic masterpieces. Back to the Capitol in Chandigarh. What does it mean to ruin one of the most extraordinary spaces of modern architecture, the hall of columns in the Assembly, by changing the material of the floor and messing up the colour scheme? What does it mean to alter the Senate Chamber in clumsy ways (now the Chamber for Haryana)? What does it mean to paint the tank in front of the building a vulgar swimming pool blue? As for Le Corbusier's façades, they have been punctuated by ugly ventilating machines whereas these days one can easily have recourse to small air conditioning units inside. As everybody knows, part of the tragedy of the Assembly is that it is divided in two between the States of Punjab and Haryana. In turn the Capitol space itself is bisected by a fence in the name of security.

The High Court is in slightly better shape although the giant portico has been painted in gaudy and incorrect colours and the water basins have been drained. The area in front has become a massive car park. Several of Le Corbusier's giant tapestries have been ruined or left to deteriorate. Then there was the scandal some years back of bits and pieces of original furniture from Chandigarh, including street furniture apparently, being sold off for profit in foreign auction rooms. Overall the Capitol gives the sensation of abandon because in fact it is an under-used space.

UI The Governor's Palace at the head of the Capitol was never built. What should be done to complete the Capitol or should it be left incomplete?

WJRC I do not have a complete answer to this question! But let me run through some of the options. Option number one would be not to build anything at all, but at least develop the landscaping, including in a buffer zone to the north, by the judicious planting of trees. Option number two would be to invite in a contemporary star architect to build something, a terrible idea as it would undoubtedly wreck things still further. Option number three would be to construct a late project which Le Corbusier made for the site when the one for the Governor's Palace was cancelled, a so called Museum of Knowledge. This would be a very bad idea as it is certainly among the clumsiest buildings he ever designed!

Option number four would be to go ahead and realize the Governor's Palace but put some other institutional, educational or cultural functions in it, such as a centre for conferences and exhibitions on architecture and urbanism, in the hope that this would reanimate the site of the Capitol as a whole. In any event, more thought should be given to the landscaping in,

around and beyond the buildings themselves. The Capitol is like a piece of 'land art' before its time and it resonates with the hills, the sky, even the sun, the rain and the wind. Even incomplete it is an extraordinary space which draws in the surroundings, but it is also a contested and divided space with visible and invisible barriers running through it.

UI What are the drawbacks with option number four?

WJRC It is always risky to construct a building after the death of an architect. This was done with Le Corbusier's Church in Firminy which ended up being an inauthentic, ersatz version. The project for the Governor's Palace is a magnificent scheme with its upturned crescent roof gesturing to the planets and responding to the Open Hand, its powerful silhouette, its processional routes and four-square geometry. I have always thought of it as Le Corbusier's answer to the Diwan-I-Khas at Fatehpur Sikri, an amazing symbolic structure of political representation. In fact Nehru thought it was a bit too much of a good thing for a State Governor. If built it could well become a World Centre for the study of Nature and Technology for example....great themes which concern modernisation and tradition all around the globe. Or maybe it could be home to the sort of Centre for Architecture suggested earlier. The insertion of an active institution could help to bring much needed public life to the Capitol.

The landscaping envisaged by Le Corbusier included a series of sunken terraces and water basins in front and a formal garden to the rear. Planting and landscaping could create shaded social areas and would help to cap the composition of the Capitol which was always conceived of as a harmonious whole. I have referred elsewhere to the ensemble as a 'political and cosmic landscape' embodying Le Corbusier's utopian vision of a post colonial order aspiring to harmony between man, mechanisation and nature.....such at least was the ideal. But how to realize it? If this is attempted it would be in close collaboration with the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris which is the guardian of Corbusian patrimony world wide and which has many of the drawings in its archives. But there are several different sized versions of the scheme so which is the correct one? Do any of these drawings go into sufficient detail to permit construction? Is there really anyone around capable of realising this project correctly? The risks are considerable.

UI Chandigarh has been seeking UNESCO Heritage status for the buildings designed by Le Corbusier. There is even a faction that would hope to have Heritage status extended to the city as a whole. What is your view of these initiatives?

WJRC The first is more likely to succeed than the second, as Le Corbusier's works are a more easily identifiable collection than a city as a whole which is in constant change in many of its parts. The initiative would hook up with that of the Fondation Le Corbusier which has been seeking a broader recognition from UNESCO for Le Corbusier's oeuvre as a whole. Where this ambitious overall dossier is concerned it would possibly be wisest to proceed step by step rather than going for everything at once. 'Parfois le mieux est l'ennemi du bien' say the French: sometimes the desire for the best gets in the way of the merely good solution.

I notice a tendency to imagine that UNESCO recognition is some miracle cure that can guarantee the architectural safety of Le Corbusier's buildings. But in reality it may be best to restore them and protect them legally first. If the buildings in Chandigarh are left in their current mess or allowed to be knocked about further, UNESCO recognition is surely unlikely. What would their inspectors say confronted by the mess on the Capitol? In fact it would be well to restore the buildings NOW so as to accord with Le Corbusier's original intentions.

I believe that since I was in Chandigarh four months ago, the Roorkee Central Building Research Institute has commenced studies of the buildings on the Capitol to assess damage to the concrete fabric of the Secretariat. This is a first step. A proper restoration of the Chandigarh buildings would improve the chances of UNESCO recognition on condition that the overall dossier of Le Corbusier's oeuvre is clear in its intentions and limited in scope to outstanding works. But it needs to be said that UNESCO recognition does not guarantee protection to Le Corbusier's buildings and urban spaces in Chandigarh, so one is back to the problem of changing, redefining and inventing laws in the Indian context.

Nor, for the moment, is anything been done to protect Le Corbusier's, Kahn's, Doshi's, Correa's and Raje's works in Ahmedabad. Given their orientation towards big business and their links with real estate developers, the political party now in power does not look likely to put much emphasis upon questions of modern architectural heritage. But perhaps elected politicians should be asked to consider the matter as part of the larger national interest. After all, the institutions on the Capitol were built to advance a certain notion of the State. So it would be normal if the State were now to guarantee the long term integrity and existence of these monuments and their surrounding spaces.

UI And the city of Chandigarh as a whole?

WJRC In 1999 I was privileged to be one of the speakers at the remarkable event 'Chandigarh, Fifty Years of the Idea'. The event was launched by the then President of India, K. R. Narayanan. It was the most intelligent speech I have ever heard by a politician upon the role of good architecture and urbanism in the development of a sane, healthy and democratic society. There were speeches by notable architects from all over the world. But there was also talk about breaking the zoning laws and building taller buildings. At the very end I addressed the audience and the Adviser to the Administrator Jagdish Sagar by suggesting the avoidance of 'the three D's' – Densification, Developers, Dollars'. I made a public plea for the protection of the Capitol and the landscape extending some distance beyond it. The whole assembly stood up and clapped while the shameful and shamed schemers looked at the floor in embarrassment!

Well here we are fifteen years later and all the same dilemmas are still there. To be brief, a city cannot be fossilised but it should not be surrendered to the forces of market economics either. Some parts and sectors should be preserved, others regulated closely, others again allowed some degree of change. In fact at the time, I suggested that we think of Chandigarh as a sort of central park, a landscape of greenery and open space, in the centre of a belt of unregulated development. It should keep its special character as a species of Garden City with a monumental head and a clear overall hierarchy. Of course there are massive

increases in population, but surely this should not be used as a reason to undermine Chandigarh's quality of life. Let the planners get to work and establish other garden cities along the belt of fast economic growth which is extending from Agra through Delhi to Chandigarh and beyond in a linear fashion. Perhaps some of the urban and landscaping principles of Chandigarh can be cross bred with contemporary notions of sustainable development and with ancient spatial principles for dealing with climate and community?

UI We have been talking about the exceptional buildings of so called great modern masters. What about buildings of lower intensity?

WJRC Absolutely: Chandigarh is full of fine housing and schools by Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew, M. N. Sharma, Aditya Prakash and other members of the Indian team. It would be a great mistake to think in terms of isolated monuments alone or in terms which ignored the spaces between, such as gardens and parks. But this gets to another point: the extension of the primary lessons of modern architecture in response to Indian conditions. Back to Ahmedabad which is in effect a museum of modern architecture. In addition to the four works by Le Corbusier and IIM by Kahn, there are works of international quality by Balkrishna Doshi, Charles Correa, Anant Raje and others. Take the CEPT School of Architecture by Doshi, a fine work of the mid sixties which still functions marvellously by integrating inside and outside. Even the CEPT Campus may be in the sights of the developers if nothing is done to protect it!!

In Delhi there are parallel problems. There has just been at the Museum of Modern Art in New Delhi an exhibition devoted to the work of Raj Rewal, author of outstanding buildings such as the National Institute of Immunology or the Parliamentary Library, which combine the modern with time worn principles of courtyard planning. This exhibition, the first of its kind, can only be good for furthering the idea of modern architectural patrimony. But in the recent past there was serious discussion, at a Ministerial level I believe, about pulling down Rewal's magisterial Hall of Nations!! A wake up call is needed. Let me return to the recommendation that India found a Centre of Architecture where discussions and exhibitions can take place and where the archives of major modern Indian architects may be stored and studied. Otherwise all this rich material will trickle abroad, which is already happening. Why does it take foreign recognition for India to realise what it has in its own territory?

UI It sounds as if you are saying that there is no time to be lost?

WJRC Yes absolutely: the red light is flashing, especially in Ahmedabad and especially with this notion of neoliberal development that consists in privatising everything and letting the public realm, including collective patronage, go to hell!!! Wake up India, there is work to be done and there is certainly enough money around to halt what is in effect a process of cultural impoverishment. Where has the idealism of the founding fathers gone? The matter is well represented by the Museum in Ahmedabad, yet one more work by Le Corbusier suffering from abandon and neglect - a scandal in fact, with some of the exhibits literally falling apart. Only days ago I saw pictures of an extension being built that is completely out of sympathy with the original. Who allowed this to happen?

The period of the millowning philanthropists of Ahmedabad is in the past. Maybe it is time for the new rich of the city to step into the role and develop more sense of civic and societal responsibility? There has been a lot of loose talk about making Ahmedabad a sort of 'model' of modernisation but the criteria fit the dubious interests of national property developers, international investors and the International Monetary Fund, rather than those of the citizens and the populace as a whole. Without going into detail, Ahmedabad has become a violently fragmented city and society in recent years. In the new India of the economic boom will it be plutocracy versus democracy? Or will there be philanthropy for the common good? Meanwhile a younger generation is emerging which is full of talent and seeking opportunities to build, but in an expanding economy without coherent planning ideas to enhance the quality of life. Money without a larger vision for society does not add up to much. Remember that Chandigarh was achieved with big ideas and relatively small sums of money.

UI Are these problems unique to India?

WJRC All over the world the forces of rapid development and hectic urbanisation are creating conflicts of this kind. The obsession with iconic buildings for marketing and for the promotion of cities as 'brands', does not help. At this very minute there is an intense public reaction against a monstrous stadium proposed for Tokyo by Zaha Hadid which will involve the destruction of an earlier Olympic Stadium of quality. Le Corbusier's masterpiece the Chapel at Ronchamp has been undermined by an inappropriate addition of a money making visitor's centre by Renzo Piano, while Mackintosh's masterpiece, the Glasgow School of Art is overwhelmed by a clumsy new addition by Stephen Holl, another marketing ploy.

That said, there are few equivalents to the near abandonment of some of the key modern buildings in Ahmedabad such as the Museum designed by Le Corbusier or IIM by Louis Kahn. The dangers to the Millowner's Association Building are very real, especially on account of the new riverside embankment walkways which are discussed as public amenities but which in fact enhance the land values for the speculative construction of high rise luxury apartments. An emerging *nouveau riche* class wants to cash in with flashy goods, speculative ventures and shopping malls, and does not necessarily appreciate sobre masterpieces in bare concrete and naked brick!

In Europe, there are also stronger legal protections and clearly formulated policies by pressure groups but one has to remain vigilant. I have written several articles in the *Architectural Review* with titles such as 'Vandalism in the Land of Patrimony' in defence of modern buildings in France which risked being tampered with. In France there is even the legal notion of the 'protection of author's rights' which also applies to architects and their creations. In India it is crucial to develop a much stronger sense of the public importance of key modern buildings and their contribution to a wider culture. But I keep coming back to the question of appropriate laws. On this issue it is also up to the architectural profession, the academics and the press to rise to the occasion: to be masters rather than slaves of the current deteriorating situation.

UI Evidently you have more than a merely academic interest in India?

WJRC So it seems!! Without exaggerating, I have always felt a special connection with the place and this has been combined with in depth investigations of Indian architecture of several periods. Le Corbusier brought me to India in the first place, but so did Fatehpur Sikri and the caves at Ajanta. My wife Catherine and I trekked all over the sub-continent in the 1980s in search of some of the primary statements of past architecture. These wonderful adventures took us to lost places in the middle of nowhere such as Aihole because we wished to understand the origins and constituent parts of the Hindu temple. We crossed the Thar Desert where the thatched houses thorn enclosures and mud granary bins reveal archetypal forms.

But there was a parallel investigation of modernity and it is no accident that I have published so much on Le Corbusier's and Kahn's works on the Indian sub-continent taking into account their profound transformation of lessons from history. Later it was the turn of my monographs on major Indian architects such as Balkrishna Doshi and Raj Rewal. These figures have contributed to a substantial modern architectural tradition which has in turn added to the stock of world architecture. My general book *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (Phaidon, 3rd edition, 1996) contains numerous examples of modern Indian architecture.

UI And Chandigarh?

WJRC I first visited the place during my first visit to India in May 1980. I took a bus from North Delhi bus station and found a modest hotel. I had but one contact in all of India, Aditya Prakash who was then Principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture. He opened all of the doors and I was able to spend a whole day clambering around on the roofs of the main buildings on the Capitol in the extreme heat. At the end I was exhausted and found my way to the lake and the yacht club for a cold drink. The direct experience of the Assembly was one of the most profound that I have had, and there I include the architecture of all cultures and all periods – it is a work 'timeless but of its time'. However, the recent degradations of this building show how vulnerable even a masterpiece can be to bad treatment.

Over the following years we were often back in India and gradually got to know P.L. Varma, former Chief Engineer of the Punjab, who was in effect Le Corbusier's main client. He was the animating spirit of Chandigarh and it was at his insistence that the Sukhna Lake was built. We often went to dinner with Varma and his wife and he would recount his discussions with Le Corbusier, as when the latter referred to his idea of the High Court as embodying 'the majesty, strength and shelter of the law'. We also spoke of Indian Independence, of the horrors following from Partition, and of Nehru's vision of a New India, of which Chandigarh was representative.

In spring 1988 we were in New Delhi for an extensive period and the very night that we were due to part for the airport to fly back to France there was a call from Varma. He said: 'Curtis, you recall all of our marvellous discussions about the philosophy behind Chandigarh. I am very old now but I trust in you to do all you can to protect this marvellous place and the perennial architecture of Le Corbusier'. It was the last time we spoke. At the event 'Chandigarh, 50 Years of the Idea' (1999), I dedicated my talk to the memory of Varma. So you see that, in addition to my commitments as a historian and critic, there is a personal

side to this desire to see these great buildings protected and handed on to future generations.

END 21/06/2014 1030 hrs Edited 23/07/2014 1300hrs

*

PS Rajnish and Suneet...we should include references to the web versions of my articles in the Architectural Review, the Times of India, even Architectural Record (News Section)..
<http://www.architectural-review.com/comment-and-opinion/nothing-is-sacred-threats-to-modern-masterpieces-in-india/8660672.article?blocktitle=View&contentID=11445> etc etc etc