

Lecture Abstract
RETHINKING COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA:
1800 TO 1950

By: Miki Desai

School of Architecture
Centre for environment Planning and Technology
Ahmedabad, INDIA.
Fulbright Fellow



The colonial architecture spanning about 150 to 200 years, representing an important phase in the modernization of the country, modification of a stark medieval life style got to ultimately become a democratic one at the dawn of Independence in 1947. The modern Indian life style, the physical environments and the very urbanity experienced today cannot be understood without recognizing the happenings of this historical period. Imposed, emulative and resisted changes as manifested in the physicality of living environments have far reaching implications, as can be seen from the study of the Indian case. The penetration of colonial ideas/policies and their impact on local institutions, ways of life and building processes created situations of confrontation between the foreign and indigenous values and ultimately between tradition and modernity. This lecture attempts to decipher the underlying thought in this conflict and trace the architectural developments.

Historical, Political and Cultural Background, colonialism in the international and Asian context- a brief history of colonization of India, various colonial powers: the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese- general social dynamics, existing Indian regionalism in political and cultural terms- Indian architecture: classical and vernacular, architectural antecedents and precedents, important concepts and images in pre-colonial India- a cursory look at the French and Portuguese colonial impact.

Indian Society and Early Colonial Architecture, British colonial as traders- mundane and functional nature of early architecture without much response to the Indian context- shift in attitude as the crown takes over in 1858, expressions of identity, power and superiority, building for permanence- social and philosophical disparities between the ruler and the masses- imposition of life style and behavior of self on the others, the idea of inclusion and exclusion- Indian progressive thought, the freedom movement, the influence of Gandhi and Nehru on architecture

Urban Design and Architecture/Approach to Planning, introduction of new institutions (railway stations, law courts, colleges, hospitals, post offices, etc.)- Emergence of a new urbanity, modernizing forces, industrial and structural functionalism, urban inserts and a new sense of urban design, overlaying of the new on the old, attitude to planning, extension of cities and development of suburbs, hill stations, cantonments- new urbanity in princely states- the cities of colonial origin: Bombay, Calcutta, Madras- expression of culmination – New Delhi, the imperial city- impact of modernist urban design ideology

Building Methods, initial role of military engineers, followed by the setting up of Public Works Department (1862)- introduction of new building practices affecting rural as well as urban scales, -superimposition, modification and replacement of existing building practices, introduction of new materials and building techniques, their impact on architectural form.

Architectural Styles, politico-cultural meaning through built environment- purposeful stylistic changes in architecture, from neoclassical to Indo-Sarcenic and Art Deco to modern- influence of arts and crafts movement- important architects and their contributions- the emergence of architectural profession, debates on arch.

Society and Impact on Life-style, new behavioral patterns, popular preferences, emulation and retention of sociocultural nuances- colonial life-style of the high society, modification of old typology to suite new sought after life style-development of new building types (clubs, gymkhana, hotels, parks and gardens, etc.)

Changes in Dwelling Type, development of the bungalow typology, the most remarkable departure with its visible impact to date and the resultant suburban expression- evolvement of the type from a simple dwelling to an elaborate mansion- reflection of sociocultural patterns, regional expression all over the country.