

The relationship between modernism and nature has often been constructed within a polarised prism, that emphasising the rise of the individual and his freedom through rational thought in modernism – sees the natural world as other, almost threat, an abstract chaos upon which human order must be imposed.

In the recent past, there has been a growing interest in the reassessment of this relationship, and one of the discursive strains within which this has been significantly mapped, is that of architectural history. Different strains of modernism in architecture show a variety of ways in which the relationship between social, human existence and nature may be navigated – and yet, until recently, it was only Ebenezer Howard's model of the Garden City that was seen as predominantly favouring their coexistence.

An examination of the writings of popular modernist architects and their work, however, show us that this is both a simplistic and unfair reading of the philosophies that bound modernist architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright first coined the term 'organic architecture' in 1954, writing in *The Natural House* that it ought to be the modern ideal, since it exalted the „simple laws of common sense or of super-sense if you prefer determining form by way of the nature of material“ rather than working with any notions of preconceived form. Form, within such a theorisation, does not take the backseat – rather it still forms the central paradigm within which modernist architecture is realised – the approach to designing form however, takes into account the existent natural world, rather than work outside of it.

In the Indian scenario, a study of modernist architecture has long focused on architects from the West, who at the turn of Indian independence helped forged a new infrastructure for India, with a special emphasis on Corbusier. Recent scholarship has questioned this idea of modernism as a predominantly Euro-centric construct and attempted to look at the organic evolution of modernism in non-European contexts; however, a singular offshoot within the context of Indian modernism in architecture, often little recognised outside of academic circles, is the adaptation of the Western principles of modernism by Indian architects through a certain kind of blended vision that drew from both traditions.

B V Doshi, one of the most prominent architects in this regard, was a recipient of many national and international awards. His most well known work: the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Bangalore is an exemplar of both Wright's formulation of organic architecture, as also this syncretic vision of Indian Modernism. In his essay on the building, William Curtis points out that from the beginning, Doshi conceptualised of IIM Bangalore „as a pattern of indoor and outdoor spaces.“ Unpacking the manner in which the building was realised in early plans to later ones, Curtis points out the influences and debts of Indian architectural traditions that play out in Doshi's executed building complex, and notes that these were adapted to the „construction using in situ concrete posts, lattices, frames, etc.“ Aside from Doshi's use of local material and masonry, nature forms an essential component of space in his work, which Curtis describes as „a vital vegetal ornament,“ going on to state that it, „might also be right to speak of light and shade as a texture integral to the building's main ideas.“

Annette Kisling is a German artist, in India for the Goethe Institut's Bangalore Residency and the resident hosted by Tasveer for this season of the residency programme. Kisling's sustained interest in architecture for over a decade, led her to focus her main project as part of this residency on the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore building. This is an ongoing project, and the selected edit reflects a certain strand that hopes to focus on the close existence of nature and architecture within the space of IIM, Bangalore. Attempting to build on the idea that the natural world is a precondition in the experience of the place and its architecture, the photographs here demonstrate its relevance to a certain atmosphere of contemplation and leisure, amidst the bustle of campus life.

Of her experience, Kisling writes, „I spent two intense weeks working on campus, getting absorbed by the architecture and examining it photographically in diverse conditions. This length of time, and twenty four hour access, allowed me to experience the place in sunlight, during cloudy and rainy days, early in the morning and during the night.“ Speaking of the complexity that appears in an examination of the

building complex, she elucidates that this has enabled her to follow not a singular strand, but merely take images while being guided by the environment and its moods.

Emphasising that her photographs are descriptive, rather than documentary, Kisling iterates that they function through the centrality of perspective, building fictional vantage points of view to describe an idea and are essentially more therefore, about representation than the unfolding of narratives. Layers of surfaces and a unique compositional combination of forms in her photographs, emphasise the ways in which architecture is represented in photography to produce a certain world that is made more significant than the reality of its physical spatial experience.

„I discovered a fair number of characteristic features of modernist architecture exhibited at IIM, that I had encountered in other buildings, elsewhere – and in the beginning this prompted a feeling of familiarity. As if the entire complex could be lifted and placed in a different setting,“ Annette remarked, a feeling that speaks to the aim of modernist architecture to be universal. „However,“ she expanded, „the more time I spent there, the more I began to realise the ways in which the execution of this structure that was influenced by the climate and the garden trend in Bangalore at the time, differed from German modernist architecture for instance, where glass is what distinguishes between the boundaries of inside/warmth and outside/cold.“ Positing that, in contrast, the boundaries between the inside and outside at IIM are porous or soft, Kisling’s work unpeels the ways in which the reconciliation of the purported dichotomy between nature and architecture is resolved through the existence of threshold spaces that blend and shape a fluid idea of habitat.

Shilpa Vijayakrishnan, Tasveer Magazine, 2014