Emergent Landscapes
India, a Crucible of Currents

In the highly pluralistic cultural milieu of India, the emergent architectural landscape is a kaleidoscopic construct of differing forms and attitudes that coexist in compressed adjacencies. This landscape is an accurate representation of the simultaneity with which numerous histories, aspirations, and cultures play themselves out in India. In fact, this cultural diversity has consistently persisted in spite of the dramatic transitions the country has witnessed over the centuries. This is especially true for the last century when the new Indian nation transitioned out of colonial rule and embraced modernism as the vehicle to construct a national identity. In the process, India both encountered modernity as well as set its people to strive towards it. This phenomenon not only generated a multiplicity of ‘alternative modernities’ in architectural expression but also widened the gamut of architectural production, thus making the question of identities far more complex than was imagined at the threshold of birth of the nation. This complexity has been further exacerbated in the decade of the 1990s with economic liberalization and the contradictions inherent in rapid economic mobility – globalization simultaneously brought glamour and marginalization as well as displacement. The resulting architectural and urban landscape in India is one where global flows simultaneously transform the local while being transformed by them. And the form this takes is a complex construct of disparate adjacencies where bizarre forms of coexistence characterize the built environment.

Indian Identity
To view the development of contemporary architecture (from 1990 to 2006) in India it is critical to map the shifting scenario of the postcolonial Indian nation-state. The first heroic modernist phase of modern Indian architecture comprises roughly the period that may be described as the Nehruvian state (from 1947 to 1975). At the threshold of Indian independence in the 1940s, men like Nehru clearly embraced modernism as being the appropriate vehicle to represent India’s future agendas. For the elite patrons (of architecture) modernism was also attractive as it was devoid of references of the past and was brimming with optimism about the future. In fact, Nehru’s orientation made India the most vibrant site of the ‘modern project’, where the east-west relationship was constantly redefined and where the modernizing experience was key to forming the identity of the nation. The culmination of this process was the invitation extended to Le Corbusier in 1951 to design Chandigarh. Here his designs became the symbol for the modern independent India of Nehru’s imagination.

India’s independence, while closing the debate on architecture and identity, did not produce the society that the nation had yearned and hoped for; instead, all efforts were directed to dealing with the splintered society the nation inherited. A society fractured by caste, class, economic disparities, rural and urban divides and a multitude of beliefs and religious affiliations that were wielded together as a nation-state. Through this process, issues of uneven social and economic mobility threw up disparate aspirations; their representation became more challenging. It was in fact in the decades after independence that the struggle for identity really played itself out, when these modern works were to confront ambiguity, anguish and the struggle to address the issues of multiple identities. Architects struggled to make modernism work, not only in relation to their existing traditions but also in the way in which they would place their modernity within a cultural context and often allow it to be subsumed by the process of creation of local identities.

The Nehruvian state came to an end not...
with Nehru’s death in 1964, but in 1975, when Indira Gandhi (then the Prime Minister of the country) abrogated democratic freedoms and imposed the emergency – more correctly, the state of emergency – arising from internal disturbances (from 1975 to 1977) to contain popular unrest against her policies and political style. In 1975 begins the next phase of Indian architecture, post-heroic and postmodernist in nearly equal measure. In the aftermath of the emergency, the Indian nation state lost a certain momentum. In architecture, this general situation was reflected through a degree of exhaustion: the civilizational vision had come under severe strain and collapsed. By the late 1970s, nationalism was less of an issue for architects than just attempting to resolve the contradiction of trying to intensify development while also preserving the best of the inherited culture and societal values. Interestingly, this, while not being inspired by nationalism, was driven by a newfound sense of national identity. As also was the first manifestation of post-independence, architectural production was limited by an obsessive drive towards fabricating a pan-Indian identity.

The decade of the 1980s saw many moves by architects to create this Indian identity or ‘architecture for India’. The festivals of architecture, an amazing spectacle of international traveling exhibitions, celebrated the coming of age of a nation and its confidence to confront the world on its (cultural) terms and reinforced this pan-Indian identity. But more than that, the festivals celebrated the ability of the arts to connect to the wellspring of tradition. An ancient tradition demonstrated its continuity in nourishing contemporary architectural and artistic production. Founded on strong modernist principles, the architecture of the decades of the 1970s and 1980s were crucial both in terms of internalizing modernism as well as setting it off on a trajectory to confront the past: to challenge, and be challenged, by tradition.

Bringing the Past to the Present
This resurrection of the dialogue with the past became manifest in the 1990s in many aspects of life in India, and the idea of asserting regional identities in the face of globalization was becoming more important than that of national identities per se. Since architecture is not identified easily according to political boundaries, the overlap between culture and nationalism is not always clear. Out of this ambiguity and resulting churning and search, a ‘regionalism’ with a play between modernity and traditional vocabulary emerged as the focus of the profession in India. This position attempted to relocate the architect within broader social processes, thereby linking the profession to a renewed sense of the past, local building traditions and the importance of a continuing dialogue with the user.

This was accelerated through the 1990s with the liberalization of the Indian economy, which has seen the rapidly disappearing role of the state in the creation or influencing of the built environment and a rapidly fading emphasis on a pan-Indian identity. The most significant shift has been that of the assertion of regional identities facilitated by the fragmentation of the political power structure to that of a coalition of regional parties versus the centralized two-party system. However, implicit in this shift is a move toward the construction of identities where the singular pan-national identity is replaced by fluid identities and where the metaphor of hybridity and pluralism becomes more significant than any kind of authoritative orthodoxy or superior singular identity. This highlights the notion of identities being dynamic and ever-shifting...
rather than static. To quote Homi Bhabha: “Each time the encounter with identity occurs at the point which something exceeds the frame of the image, it eludes the eye, evacuates the self as a site of identity and autonomy and, most important, leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance. We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being, but with a discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics.”

**Contemporary Contexts**

It is here that the notion of ‘cultural significance’ is of importance. A notion where ‘culture’ and ‘place’ seminally influence the production of architecture, especially in the face of globalization. Over the last two decades of discussion on architecture in India, popular notions such as context, sense of place, vernacularism, regionalism, and heritage conservation have all intersected in some way into this all-encompassing notion of ‘cultural significance’. When viewed from this perspective architecture is perceived to be culturally significant insofar as it embodies a definable difference – typically the product of a distinct society, history, and geographic condition. In short, representative of a particular culture. Unfortunately more often than not these trajectories between identity and culture rarely intersect, for identity is discussed in terms of ‘discovery’ rather than the potent possibilities inherent in constructing or inventing identity.

Cultural significance in a pluralistic society like India will be ever-evolving, transforming to continually encompass changing aspirations and needs. And it is only through this process of recognizing the kinetic nature of cultural significance that architecture will respond to contemporary realities and experiences and be truly put to the service of emerging aspirations. Discerning and understanding ‘identity’ in this way will broaden our perception to engage with reality beyond its formal readings through the mainstream of architectural production. This reading will be more open to other processes of architectural production and multiple identities that are emerging through varied practices. Thus, for any exploration concerned with the contemporary landscape in India it is imperative to represent the multiplicity of architectural production in that context. Perhaps it is precisely in the multifaceted nature of production processes that lie the clues for what might be the form and nature of the emergent architectural landscape in India.

It is the emerging practices that are in fact the indicators of the architectural landscapes we can anticipate in the future, for they represent the issues that society in India aspires towards, and the models of architectural practices can really be seen as a response to these needs. Whatever form these practices take, they strive for authenticity and identity while attempting to resolve the monumental complexity of dynamics in India. While the nature of these responses is numerous, there seems to be clearly four distinct patterns of practice and approaches emerging to give expression to contemporary societal aspirations in India. These are the practice of constructing ‘global identities’, the practice of ‘regionalism’, the practice which recognizes the voices of the ‘subalterns’, and finally a pattern of architectural productions based on a sort of “counter-modernism” that
In the nineties the rapid economic growth prompted an architecture carried out by developers and corporations that produced a uniform global style (exemplified well by the ICICI Bank in Mumbai), which blurs the regional identity. Even when following the same steps, other practices, both foreign and local, endeavor to provide innovative solutions that combine functional rigor and spatial articulation. Thrives on the revival of the ancient and closes the loop (on this range of practices) by its single-minded resistance to the global aspirations of the nation.

**Fluid Identities**

In India today, hyper-consumption fuelled by a fast-growing, economically mobile middle class is resulting in the construction of a new landscape of global derivates or images of globalization. In this condition, when capital arrives on a landscape it is expected to take on a particular character: freeways, shopping malls, new corporate centers and the global suburbs. The pattern of practice concerned with the construction of these global identities usually takes on the form of a corporate architectural practice and its influence is today probably the most visible one in the public realm. Assuming a sophisticated building industry, this pattern of practice communicates its design intensions through a well-detailed set of instructions and documents that are translated into buildings. The practice is usually organized in the form of a large firm with its in-house specialization and services. And while this pattern thrives on client confidence to deliver competent and predictable products, it perpetuates the rigid landscape of global architecture devoid of any responses to the local landscape and social milieu. In the recent past, with the economic liberalization in place, several Asian and American corporate architectural firms are beginning to build in India, further perpetuating this pattern of building and the images that go with it. Curtain-glazed, metal-clad facades, central air-conditioning, an emphasis on providing adequate parking, security systems and numerous such features make these implants recognizable in the Indian landscape.

This pattern is promoted by multinational corporations, developers, and builders, and was started in the 1990s by the government, usually for their financial institutions. Raja Aederie designed in Mumbai the ICICI Bank headquarters (1998), the Crompton Greaves Building (2000) and the Essar group headquarters (1992), as well as the Apeejay building in Delhi (2000). Similarly, the Hiranandani housing estate in Mumbai, the ITC housing estates in Delhi and the large DLF colonies in Gurgaon (all started in 1990) are emblematic of the emerging global suburbs that are characterizing the landscapes of the post-liberalized economy of India.

The manufacturing of global identities is also patronized by the diaspora, the non-resident Indian community (or NRI) that has become an economic force with the government’s new liberalization policies that permit the easy flow of funds as well as the purchase of property by foreign investors of Indian origin, who enjoy a special status and incentives. The NRI housing complex in Navi Mumbai (1996) is an example of these zones that are emerging through the NRI patrons. These are self-sufficient global suburbs that spread from the city. Images of Dubai, Hong Kong and Manhattan are evoked to make this complex a shining postmodern, high-rise, high-density cluster, situated in the landscape of mangroves and marshes at the edge of the city, signaling a brave new future!

**Global Production**

Similarly with the boom in software export and the outsourcing of services, the information technology industry is a large emerging patron of global architecture. Software campuses on the outlying areas of Hyderabad, New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai are becoming the sites for the
manufacturing of this imagery that is then being very quickly consumed by smaller operators across the country. The buildings on the Infosys (a leading Indian software company) campus (started in 1995) in an electronic city outside Bangalore are an example of this architectural landscape. An architectural response which is desperately trying to seek a dialogue with its client base in the United States (and elsewhere in the world) rather than establishing a dialogue with its locality. Glass-clad buildings of over-articulated forms, all held together by water-consuming manicured lawns, is the form these campuses are taking.

Simultaneously, young practitioners such as the firm Morphogenesis in Delhi and Contemporary Urban in Mumbai are attempting to bring a certain intelligence to the products of global flows. This emerging generation of practitioners (often trained in the US or the UK), while exploring the materials of global architecture, bring rigor and innovation to programmatic invention and spatial articulation. The Jewel Tech Factory (2002) by Chris Lee and Kapil Gupta in Mumbai is a glimpse of the possibilities this pattern of practice will take in the future. These practitioners take global trends in design and deal with them on their terms, often in the process pushing the envelope on technology and the construction industry.

The quantum of such architecture is increasing as globalization 'hits the ground' in India, and its impact on the profession as well as on the people's perception of architecture, perpetuated through the media, is tremendous. However, the limitations of architecture in these circumstances of global flows are only too openly in evidence: a predictability and detachment of the built form from its ambient environment, a divorce from place and community and also an indifference to the imperatives of material resources.

**Modern Regionalism**

A counterpoint to the corporate practice is posed by the regionalist approach, which has evolved from its modernist roots to respond to the locale. This form of practice today does not reject modernism but the new form of internationalism that is perpetuated by the corporate pattern of practices in the face of globalization. It seeks to resist these flows on their terms. In fact, the regionalists see the importance of modernism as a mechanism to view tradition afresh. Regionalists recognize that modernism demands a respect for the inherent qualities of building material, expressiveness of structure, functional justification for form and the subtle integration of the icons and textures of the larger landscape it is set in. They clearly see nationalism as being apart from the concerns of the region, which is their context. Their endeavor is to create a distinct identity without resulting in clichés.
or literal nemesis. So while this model of practice is organized much like the practice of global identities, its central aspiration is giving expression to the region.

The chief patrons of this approach are cultural and social institutions, both public as well as private: schools, resort hotels, cultural centers and private homes. The works of Balkrishna Doshi, Charles Correa and Raj Rewal continue to be forerunners of this mode. The Tejpal House (1998) and the Hussain-Doshi Casa Art Gallery (1992-1995) by Doshi are recent projects that extend his preoccupation with creating an appropriate intersection between tectonics, local material, the visual fluidity and plastic nature of the popular visual landscape of India. Similarly, Charles Correa’s Vidhan Bhavan (1996) or Parliament building for the State of Madhya Pradesh, while representing a Palace for Democracy, is a plastic expression that weaves into its syntax the rich array of formal as well as tribal folk visual culture in its articulation, thus representing a cross section of society and its aspirations in the building. In the Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), of 1992, Correa similarly gives expression to the emergent cutting edge research in astronomy using the deepest traditional forms and spatial configurations as a springing point in generating the design vocabulary. In the same way, Raj Rewal, in his National Center for Biological Science in Bangalore (2000) and the World Bank offices in New Delhi (1992-1994), reconcile high-tech programmatic aspirations and global programs with the local idiom of building.

At a more formal scale is Raj Rewal’s Parliament Library (2002) situated next to the Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker Parliament complex in New Delhi. The building is an attempt to relate to the existing historic structures of the complex without compromising its own aspirations towards innovation. Similarly, the Mahindra World College (1998) near Pune, by Christopher Benninger, symbolizes the quest to create localized expression for an international educational institute that represents the growing shift in the privatization of education in the country. More recently the Sonar Bangala Hotel (2003) in Calcutta (current Kolkata) by Kerry Hill, an Australian architect based in Singapore, is a refreshing example of a five star hotel that has employed a rigorous reference to material, textures and character of a place.

Aside from institutional buildings, mass scale housing was very much in the realm of the engagement of the regionalist architects till such time that the government patronized and produced social housing. Since the liberalized economy has been put in place, this area has been squarely preempted by the corporate pattern of practice – a contentious issue in the architecture profession in India, and perhaps globally. However, regionalist architects continue to build socially and climatically responsible housing projects within this model of practice. Raj Rewal’s housing project for the British High Commission (1990-1992) strives to create localized responses. The Titan Township by Charles Correa (1992) attempts to extend the local vernacular in the configuration of what is essentially a company town. Here the attempt is to create an environment, for employees of a premier watch manufacturer, that respects local resources while creating a humane habitat. And so are the recently designed apartment blocks in Kolkata’s Salt Lake City by Charles Correa (2004), which attempts to respond to climatic conditions as well as contemporary aspirations in a high-rise configuration as well as situates itself in a larger mixed-use development comprising of malls, community halls and Multiplexes. And for the urban poor, Doshi’s Aryana residential project
The best representative of the architect-craftsman figure was Laurie Baker (1917-2007). For the Fishermen’s Village he designed a group of brick houses made of sand and limestone – the more at hand and less expensive materials.

A similar process was followed in the Radrapur school: the two-story volume with a lively and colorful facade was made out of clay and bamboo, putting the pieces together with rope.

(established in the late 1980s but continuing to grow) in Indore explores the idea of sites and services where the urban and architectural pattern is generated by recognizing the incremental nature of growth especially for the urban poor who invest piecemeal overtime in the house.

While the patronage for these earlier socialist government-controlled projects shifted from the public to the private sector, the regionalist practice attempts to restate these programs within the realm of social and environmental responsibilities. These practices then become forms of local resistance that manufacture alternative modernities with the broader narrative of globalization. While their patronage has shifted, their ideals sustain. In the mainstream of the profession this model of practice has the greatest currency both among colleges of architecture as well as among the professional institutions. A new generation has also extended this powerful combination of modernist principles and aesthetics that is inspired by the locale.

Practices for the ‘Subalterns’
Extending the approach of the regionalists is the notion of the architect as the safe keeper of the vernacular traditions of the region. This is a model that became visible in India in the 1970s as a counterpoint to modernism and the perceived eraser of tradition that it implied. This model first manifested itself in the form of the architect as craftsman working directly with the builders, eliminating more or less the drawings as a media to communicate design intentions. The buildings that were being built by these practitioners were characterized by the vigorous use of local materials and vernacular construction techniques. The method of direct communication created a truly participatory process with the craftsmen and builders, left with a bulk of the decisions to be made by them directly. Laurie Baker’s work in
Kerala best represented this approach. In Baker’s approach, the flexibility in design intentions and open-endedness, where the final product is determined by the construction process, facilitates the easy incorporation of symbols and icons as a facile way to also link this architecture to the larger religious and cultural traditions of the region. NGOs, cultural institutions and intellectuals are often the chief patrons of this mode of practice.

This model of practice is one that has reengaged itself with new vigor in the 1990s with the onslaught of globalization and the marginalization and displacement that ensues from its arrival in the context of an altered economy. It now encompasses architect activists and practitioners who have consciously chosen to be more reflective, to consider the consequences of their actions and ways they can effectively counter the global flows that marginalize both tradition and people. These are practitioners that enter into a potentially more fulfilling relationship with the site, its history and the community of users whose needs they address and with the members of the work force who are their collaborators. This model of practice is viewed with great suspicion by mainstream professionals, perhaps because they challenge the more orthodox patterns of professional practice. These are in fact experiments and subversions that are carried on at the margins of conventional practice. By choosing to operate at the boundaries of the dominant structure of capital, these alternative practitioners have made explicit their moral choices in the face of globalization. This model of practice is innovative in the matter of patronage and technology; their projects are sometimes supported or commissioned by the state or the corporate sector in a compassionate mood (trusts, foundations etc.), but more usually by NGOs, charitable trusts and similar patrons. In the same spirit, these practitioners also reject certain sources of patronage such as developers or real estate speculators, and treat with suspicion technologies of mass production, such as reinforced cement concrete and steel.

The most recurring theme in this model is the exploration of alternative technologies and building methods. Whether it’s the early and seminal works of Laurie Baker in Kerala; or the house built by the architect Arupama Kundo in Auroville, near Pondicherry (2000); or the Nityagram Dance Academy near Bangalore by Gerard da Cunha (started in 1990); or the Nilaya Resort in Goa (2000), designed by Dean D’Cruz. The other clear thrust that these practitioners have is that of participation and decision-making by the users. The Barefoot College in Tilonia, Rajasthan (1991); the squatter improvement project in Indore, initiated by Himanshu Parekh in collaboration with the State of Madhya Pradesh (1989 and ongoing); and the resettlement housing project initiated by SPAARC in Mumbai (2000 onwards), are all based on community participation and restituting architecture from formal production processes squarely into the fabric of the lived experiences of their users. This form of practice also acts as an important counterpoint to the protocol-driven corporate pattern. There is an emphasis on the intimacy of scale, a direct involvement with building and an activist preoccupation with political and civic issues that impinge on architecture. These practitioners are an argument for architectural diversity and an acknowledgment of the differences that are critical to the evolution of architecture. Moreover, the recognition of human creativity acquires special meaning in the age of atomizing privatism. This access to a wider base of skills and concerns is important in the face of globalization, which has reduced the character of the built form to a thin veneer of glamour.

While often the scales it operates at are limited, this model of practice is firmly embedded in the socioeconomic milieu of the region. It facilitates the engagement of social networks in the process of building and is characterized by cost-effective solutions – often derived from the conversion of social assets into financial ones in the way labor is engaged or material procured. Not overwhelmed by issues of architectural and aesthetic concerns, these buildings are often arranged and conceived with a looseness that allows for flexibility in terms of material and the building process. While this mode of practice has seen popular support among institutions, NGOs and intellectuals, and has produced significant amount of building, it lacks the cohesion in physical articulation, emphasized by the regionalist and often reduced to caricatures of regional icons and images. Thus while this mode of practice seemingly extends traditions and attempts to express an economy of means,
its literal visual translation often subverts rather than extends vernacular traditions, and lacks the aesthetic robustness that makes the vernacular idiom timeless.

**Religious Counter-Modernism**

Simultaneously there is an emerging phenomenon which perpetuates a model or pattern of practice that is facilitating the resurfacing of ancient practices; the master craftsmen as the decipherer of ancient texts and scriptures. This resurfacing of the past is a growing phenomenon with numerous temples and an entire range of institutional buildings being built by these practitioners. Besides religion-driven fundamentalism, the quest for greater economic mobility has triggered an interest in ancient treatises, with the industrialist and business community in India seeking refuge in the security of ancient props, where pre-industrial, even primitive, images are confidently labeled as being integral to the regional identity. Besides being clear strains of resistance to the modern identity, these trends are symbolic of the collision course that religious chauvinism has taken with the integrative mechanisms of globalization. A situation in which communities are concerned about the threat to their identities as well as their autonomy and freedom to dissent. This phenomenon is questioning the basic foundations of the nation-state and its time-tested capacity to absorb influences from the world and seamlessly absorb these towards constructing, enriching and perpetuating its own identity.

This model manifests itself in two ways. The first is the raising of religious buildings often employing ancient imagery as an expression of the fundamentalism that has grown clearly to coincide with the process of globalization. These temples are built by master craftsmen (often an inherited position as in the case of the Somparas, or family of craftsmen) and skilfully combine ancient canons of building with cutting edge structural innovations. The Vallabhi Samarak in Delhi (1995) is a Jain temple that, while based on the ancient canons of temple architecture, displays brilliance in structural design in its use of an 80-foot diameter dome structure. The Akshardham temple in Delhi (2005), the ISKCON temple in Bangalore (1997) and the thousands of smaller temples and mosques appearing...
across India are examples of the fervor with which this counter-modernity is asserting itself on the landscape. These observations are based on the insights orally shared in June 2007 with professor Ravindrun Vasavada, who has been intensely engaged in discussion on mainstream traditions of the Sompura. These are unpublished discussions with Shri Amrutbhai Trivedi, one of the oldest Sompuras connected with Anandji Kalyankji Pedhi, involved in the reconstruction of Jirnodhar (and designing new buildings) of well-known temples in Delvada and Palitana and elsewhere in India.

The second way this counter-modernity is manifesting itself is the resurrection of a belief in Vastu or the sacred rules of building. Like Feng Shui, Vastu probably had its roots in geomancy and was later codified in religion. Today specialized practitioners hold the power of interpretation and have turned this into a full-blown practice. The rise of the interest in Vastu coincides with the liberalization of the Indian economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, just when global flows were sweeping across the landscape. Today, most middle-income and high-income families would follow the Vastu principles in the design of their habitat. While this has no specific physical expression, Vastu is often limiting in what it permits and does not. The practice of Vastu and its popularity is clearly bringing a new conservatism to the practice of architecture and the innovations of form, not necessarily challenging the emerging vocabulary and imagery of global identities, but setting some rules for its operation and thereby localizing its spirit.

**Indian Kaleidoscope**

Thus, what seems to be emerging are the polarities or extreme positions taken, on the one hand, by corporate aspirations and the assertion of global identities and, on the other, by the resurfacing of the past with the attitudes of regionalism and subaltern expression poised in between. These are not merely models of practice but also indications of the cauldron of the emerging built environment, of the multiplicity of identities that are emerging on the Indian landscape in the face of globalization. From this churning there seems to emerge a celebration of fluid identities rather than an assertion of the ‘pure’ and the ‘indigenous’ or the complete turnover to global flows.

Architecture in India has developed its own resistances to globalization. Creating in the process a kaleidoscopic representation of identity rather than a singular, clear and tangible representation of an Indian identity. Perhaps this process of identity-making must necessarily be accompanied by its inevitable ruptures and confusions—and in the process highlighting the notion of identities being dynamic rather than static—growing out of multiple as well as ever changing societal aspirations. In the words of Amartya Sen in *Culture Matters and How*: “Identity is not a matter of discovery—of history anymore than of the present—and has to be chosen with reasoning (…) and we have to resist an often implicitly invoked assumption that we ‘discover’ rather than choose our identity”.

Today India is at this critical crossroads and faces the challenge of choosing, inventing and constructing its identity; a process that is about questions and choices. A process that is about how to facilitate the coexistence of multiple identities, of how they relate, contradict, oppose and yet coexist and are negotiated. This opens up critical questions about the role of the architect in this condition. It is perhaps through the expression of these differences rather than subsuming them in a singular identity that we can truly read the identity of a nation and region and move closer to ways of interpreting these emergent landscapes. Landscapes where differences are no longer the source of animosity, but are instead valued as the essential ingredient for valued global and human harmony. And it is architecture and urban design that eventually codify and manifest the expression of this pluralism that represents a meaningful reading of contemporary Indian architecture.