

Decolonisation of Architectural History Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Architectural education in India is largely envisioned as a technical-vocational course, leading to humanities-related courses like history, to remain alienated from students as well as practitioners. History of Architecture is a core subject in Bachelor of Architecture as per regulatory guidelines, but the program level outcomes are often limited to stylistic study of standard sets of examples of monumental structures from the past. This trend can be traced back to the colonial episteme started during the British programme of instruction and is ingrained in the educational system. This study enquires into the current state of history education at the undergraduate level in architectural schools in India and examines the continuing impact of colonisation on our production of knowledge. This is done by analysing the content of the architectural history curricula of colleges in India and discussions with academic practitioners who have been teaching the subject in those institutions. Unpacking the curricula and their influences on teaching, brought out the perpetuation of colonial biases embedded in architectural history education. The study argues that a well-designed history curriculum has the potential to contextualise design education and create critically aware architects, and thus take a step towards decolonising the practice itself.

Introduction

The Orient, the East, still continues to visit its past, present and future through an imperialist or colonial lens.

– Edward W Said, *Orientalism*

Charles Correa, in his lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 2013, points out that while European cultures were able to develop the Palladian geometries from the Parthenon and subsequently Corbusier's five points from Palladio, Indian architects were not able to develop anything meaningful from our past. Kirtee Shah (2009) takes a jab at the profession in the country with thought-provoking questions:

Isn't it true that most practicing architects understand little – and care even less – for the external environmental factors such as climate, energy, water, etc. while designing buildings? Aren't they victims of external – mostly western – influences and practitioners of unsuited, inappropriate 'styles'?

One of the key reasons for these perceptions may be the insufficient discussion regarding Indian architecture in the academy.

Architectural education in India is largely envisioned as a technical-vocational course. As a result, humanities-related courses like history – which are expected to provide the theoretical and moral underpinnings for architectural practice – remain alienated from students as well as practitioners. History of Architecture is a core subject in the Bachelor of Architecture as per Council of Architecture (CoA) guidelines, but the program-level outcomes are often limited to stylistic study of standard sets of examples, typically monumental structures, from the past. This predisposition can be traced back to the colonial episteme started during the British programme of architectural instruction that trained Indians as draftsmen and surveyors to execute designs from European pattern books, and has since been ingrained in the educational structure. Ideological positions borrowed from western traditions of thinking have guided curricular (and consequently, pedagogical) practices.

In the article, 'The Museum will not be Decolonised', Kassim (2018) talks about the exhibition 'The Past is Now'. When objects taken from the colonies are placed in British museums without the history of how they were created, found or stolen, it only glorifies their possession by white communities, without questioning the inherent, imbalanced power structures. Their histories are taken out of context. Through their project, Sumaya Kassim along with her team, added what each object was used for, what context it was from and how it was brought there, into the exhibition text, allowing the objects to be properly contextualized as souvenirs of the traumatic histories of the

colonised. There can be similar parallels drawn from within the curriculum of architectural history in India where narratives seem to glorify Western structural traditions without questioning their legitimacy, and buildings are treated as artefacts taken out of context.

Various student movements like 'Rhodes Must Fall' in South Africa and 'Why is my curriculum white?' in the UK are already questioning the curricula of various fields in postcolonial countries. Through this study, I attempt to contextualise this movement to India, by calling attention to the need for an epistemic reconstitution of architectural history education. This paper aims to examine the internalised biases as a result of the continuing impact of colonisation on our production of architectural history knowledge. This is done by analysing the content of the undergraduate history curricula of some architectural colleges in India and interviews with academic practitioners who have been teaching the subject in these institutions. I make a case for decolonising architectural history education by arguing that a well-designed history curriculum has the potential to contextualise design education and create critically aware architects, and thus take a step towards decolonising the practice itself.

Colonial Precedents in Architectural Education in India

Until the 17th century, all buildings in India were supervised and constructed by local 'mistris' (carpenters) and craftsmen, skilled in millennia-old traditional crafts. With the arrival of European colonists, the construction industry was taken over by architects and engineers "who designed on drawing boards" (Gast, 2007: ii). With the increasing demand for assistants for British engineers of the Public Works Department (PWD), a Draftsman Course was started in 1896 at the Sir J J College of Art, Bombay, with a syllabus so framed as to "[produce] men with a 'practical and really useful' knowledge, fit to be employed in an architect's office" (Mehta, 2020). Subsequent revisions were made to raise it to the standards of the RIBA examination, bringing architecture to par with engineering. In this way, the architectural discourse, which was related to the arts and crafts tradition of each region, started becoming a homogenised technical-vocational course, to produce labour for empire building under the colonial regime.

The study of history was making "analytical compositions" of classical details by copying from a portfolio of architectural details called 'The Orders' by the American School of Correspondence, Chicago, in 1906 and reproducing drawings from Banister Fletcher's 'A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method' (Dalvi, 2016: 12). It is clear that proficiency in architectural history, both

Indian and Western, was considered as the skill of measured drawings and the ability to render architectural details rather than a critical analysis of the past.

Along with the profession and its teaching, architectural historiography in India also stemmed from the colonial archaeological surveys – imaginations of the British idea of an Indian architecture. These texts have shaped the architectural history discourse in India and are still regarded as canonical references. The documentation, representation and recording of the architectural history of India began as a colonial enterprise in the 19th century when the British historian James Fergusson published the *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* in 1876. Though his writings have since been widely criticised for creating a “framework based upon race, religion, and region” (Sinha, 2014: 34), being the first comprehensive publication on the history of Indian architecture, his stylistic classification system had far-reaching influences on later historians. Architectural historiography post-colonisation has not escaped its influences. Indian historian Satish Grover’s two-volume survey of Indian architecture published a century later, covering the Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic periods is very much on the same lines as Percy Brown’s, published in the early 1940s - both relying heavily on Fergusson’s stylistic nomenclature like ‘Indo-Aryan’, ‘Dravidian’ style and ‘Buddhist Architecture’ – a classification still prevalent in all Indian architectural history books and most curricula across the country.

Political decolonisation – the retreat of the British, leaving India independent – left a vacuum which had to be immediately filled to create the engineers and architects required to build the nation. Numerous schools of architecture sprouted across India in the immediate years that followed. These programs “modelled themselves after those in Britain and the United States” (Mehta, 2020), which had already formed a strong foothold in the country. Although, after independence, the course at J.J School of Arts was renamed and taken over by the Bombay University in 1952, “the basic format of the program remained essentially similar with few minor modifications” (Mehta, 2020).

With very few training institutions in the country pre-independence, those who could afford it studied abroad, mostly in the USA. Thus, the first generation of ‘Indian’ architects were those who returned from America with a new optimism, eager to offer their urgently needed services to a free country. While they became the pioneers of modern architecture in India, they also became educators, professing the trade as they learnt it in the West. Even when architectural history was introduced in this borrowed curriculum, it focused “more on an architectural history of the West with minimal attention given to the Indian sub-continent. The inclusion of extensive portions of

South Asian architectural history in the course offerings was a later postcolonial phenomenon” (Hosagrahar, 2002: 356) that happened in the 1980s.

Contextualising Epistemic Decolonisation of Architectural Education in India

Scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Adnan Morshed and Aditya Nigam have provided ample evidence of the ways in which epistemologies, knowledge systems, theories, research and history continue to be controlled by Northern and Western autonomy. This study draws upon decolonial theory to trace the relationship between the production of historical knowledge and colonisation. Though the term ‘decolonisation’ was coined primarily as a political term, it soon started extending into the cultural field too, “with questions of the lasting effects of colonial dominance” (Bogaerts & Raben, 2012: 2) put forward by scholars in various fields, ranging from ‘Decolonising the Mind’ by Ngũgĩ to ‘Decolonising Theory’ by Aditya Nigam. By the dictionary definition, India was decolonised 73 years ago. Yet, the postcolonial state was created, quite consciously, based on Western modern state forms (Bogaerts & Raben, 2012: 34). To decolonise practice, the mind has to be decolonised first.

Through ‘Provincializing Europe’, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 29) calls for the need to pluralise global history by pointing out that “the dominance of ‘Europe’ as the subject of all histories is a part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world”. In Aditya Nigam’s (2020) book, decolonisation is used in the sense of “epistemic reconstitution”, borrowed from Mignolo’s (2002) definition, aiming to restructure the way knowledge is produced. Nigam advocates for a change in the way we do theory by breaking out of the “colonial mode of knowledge production” (Nigam, 2020: 16) by which Western theoretical frameworks are blindly applied to non-Western societies; and by this are led to believe that they are ‘wrong’ or inferior and have to be raised to the “proper Western standard” (Nigam, 2020: 31). At the same time, he also warns against falling into the ‘nativist’ or ‘nationalist pride’ that aims at an idealised “indigenous self” (Nigam, 2020: 31) by totally disregarding these theories.

A colonial curriculum is characterised by its unrepresentative and biased nature. Student movements like ‘Rhodes must Fall’ in South Africa and ‘Why is my curriculum white?’ in the UK have long sought to decolonise education by questioning the curricula of various fields that still preserve the Western monopoly on knowledge through a colonial lens. As a response to the student

movement (tagged 'Rhodes must Fall') that demanded the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from Oriel College in Oxford University, the college issued a statement that:

the continuing presence of these historical artefacts is an important reminder of the complexity of history and of the legacies of colonialism still felt today. By adding context, we can help draw attention to this history, do justice to the complexity of the debate, and be true to our educational mission (Chandavarkar, 2017).

But, to what extent is this justification acceptable without continued conversation, reflection and debate within the curricular or educational framework itself?

In the case of the teaching of architectural education, Adnan Morshed (2020) writes about the challenges of teaching history from a global perspective due to the unopposed autonomy of Eurocentrism in the discipline. While postmodernism led to the rise of many "revisionist, alternative, and canon-debunking historiographies" (Morshed, 2020: 198), there are still very few architectural history textbooks that challenge "the canonical autonomy of the West" or that offer alternative readings "de-centering Rome" as the foundation of the "Western Civilisation" (Morshed, 2020: 199).

Similarly, in the time of globalisation, the "sheer volume of literature on architecture and architectural education produced in Europe and North America" (Menon, 1998) acts to their advantage, marginalising the voices of the rest. "To change the terms of reference, the historical imperatives must be foregrounded by describing the context within which architectural education takes place in other parts of the world" (Menon, 1998). This study attempts to address this necessity with reference to architectural education in India.

While decolonisation can be interpreted in various ways, I align my perception of 'decolonisation of education' with other scholars like Aditya Nigam and Jamini Mehta where it "does not involve a wholesale rejection of the university system and returning to a romanticized 'pristine' and 'unpolluted' past" (Mehta, 2020), but call for an "epistemic reconstitution" to break out of the "colonial mode of knowledge production" (Nigam, 2020: 16). It is "directed not at rejecting Western theory or philosophy but at treating it as one among the many sources of our thinking" (Nigam, 2020: 29).

Thus, this study does not advocate for an ideal mode of knowledge production, but a range of possible strategies that might act as preliminary steps towards epistemic reconstitution.

Decolonisation, as referred to in this paper, is a continuous process of identification and subsequent unlearning of models and frameworks on the bases of which certain biases have developed,

questioning the relationships between the narrative and the author with respect to context and challenging the hegemony of the dominant narrative. Recognition of these biases through this study is the first step to addressing these issues.

Regulatory Context of Architectural Education in India

Due to the steady rise in the number of architectural institutions, the government of India sought to regulate architectural education through the setting up of supervisory bodies. In terms of content, architecture colleges in India are controlled by a threefold system: at regional level, by affiliation to universities that set the curriculum; at the national level, by the Council of Architecture (CoA) controlling the minimum standard of architectural education; and by the premier body, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) regulating and controlling technical education as a whole.

The AICTE was set up in 1945, and on locating architecture as a 'technical' subject, one of the boards on the council formed the syllabus and conducted examinations that were "followed by principal universities and the prominent schools in India" (Chakraborty, 2015: 27). Though the authoritative power for the control of educational content was shifted to the CoA, most schools in India still follow the basic structure that was set in place by AICTE in the formative years. AICTE still releases a 'Model Curriculum for Bachelor of Architecture' document, the most recent one in 2019, which is not a mandate to be followed, but acts as a referent for many universities during curriculum design.

With the setting up of the CoA under The Architects Act of 1972, the government of India sought to standardise architectural education across the country, converting it to a uniform five-year course divided into ten semesters. The CoA's document on 'Minimum Standards of Architectural Education' lists the weightage, subjects, and basic requirements of the content of each subject "to be maintained by all institutions imparting architectural education, leading to recognised qualification" (Chakraborty, 2015: 30). Since the document was released in 1983, no major revisions took place until 2017. The major criticism against this framework is the absence of any achievable goals, while a lack of adherence is penalised. Though only the minimum standards are laid out, many institutions follow it as it is, and the minimum often becomes the maximum (Mehta, 2020).

An architectural institution in India can function either autonomously as a Deemed University or with an affiliation to regional or state universities. The preparation of detailed curricula (structure, content, assessment) while adhering to the minimum standards by the CoA and technical standards

by AICTE, is the responsibility of the universities. Thus, in terms of content, the regional universities have an upper hand in determining the character of the curriculum.

Yet, the curricula – and thus the pattern of architectural education – across the country are alarmingly uniform, disregarding the diverse architectural requirements and realities of the different regions. From her comparative study of undergraduate architecture courses in India, Dr Manjari Chakraborty (2015: 106) observes that “the extant situation of non-standard subject weightage distribution arises more out of compulsion and reluctance for revision/reform than part of a distinct policy”. Though the last five years have seen a growth in many institutions making claims of experimenting with their pedagogic approaches, the main subjects remain those started in the first traceable syllabus (Chakraborty, 2015) with almost the same content, barring some minor changes.

Locating History within the Architectural Discourse

“The question of the role of history in architectural education is one of the most vital and controversial questions within debates about architecture” (Swenarton, 1987: 14). The second part of the 19th century was a turning point in these debates, with Manfredo Tafuri proclaiming history as an autonomous discipline within architecture, by dismissing the hitherto influential ideas of Bruno Zevi which insisted that history’s task was to guide design (Keyvanian, 2011). Regardless of this, it is largely accepted that history provides students with architectural literacy and basic vocabulary, a reference point and orientation for the profession, a context for design, and a chance to establish a dialogue with the present to lead to more responsible practice.

Yet, architectural history has still not been accepted as a “recognised field of scholarship in and of itself” (Hosagrahar, 2002: 355) in South Asia. While there are postgraduate programs in archaeology and architectural conservation, there is only one institution in India that provides a master’s in architectural history and theory, which is a recent offering. Though history is a mandatory subject which is required to be taught by all accredited schools of architecture at the undergraduate level, they tend to be limited to stylistic characterisation and detailed renderings of monuments.

The mapping of subjects in various semesters in AICTE’s ‘Model Syllabus 2019’ (Table 1) makes clear the fundamental notion that the design studio occupies a central place in the architectural curriculum while all the other allied subjects act as feeders and plug-ins across individual semesters. Though the CoA enlists History of Architecture as a professional course, which should be studied as a

mandatory subject, only 5 to 11% of the total weightage is given to the subject, with almost 48% for design and 36% allotted to technology and building sciences. In all, architectural education in India is designed to be, and continues to be taught as, a technical-vocational course.

Table 1: Mapping of subjects within Architectural Design and sequencing of subjects in various semesters (All India Council for Technical Education, 2019)

| Year | Sem | Architectural Design No. | Intent of architectural design | Direct input from other subjects | Intent of the subject | Indirect input from other subjects | Intent of the subject | Remarks |
|--------|--------|--------------------------|--|---|---|------------------------------------|--|---------|
| First | First | 1 | Ergonomics and Design of small room such as hostel room, exhibition stall, information kiosk, food stall etc. | Architectural drawing – 1 | Orthographic projections | History of art and culture | Study of art and culture | |
| | | | | | | Introduction to principles of arch | Understanding elements of arch | |
| | Second | 2 | Residential building design and building such as dispensary, Guesthouse etc. for a given small social group. | BMC -1 | Brick and stone construction, foundation and plinth, arches | History of arch -1 | Western history | |
| | | | | Arch Drawing – 2 | Perspective and sciography | Structural mechanics | Structural behavior | |
| | | | Sketching and model making | Sketching and model making in various materials | | | | |
| Second | Third | 3 | Design (form and space) for multi-unit cluster like primary school, health center, SOS village, old-age homes, small resort etc. | Climatology | Climatic analysis | History of arch -2 | Indian Architecture | |
| | | | | Computer application Structure– 1 | Presentation techniques | BMC -2 | Timber its joinery, doors and windows in all materials | |

Investigating the Current State of Architectural History Education in India

Methodology

What is being taught in architectural history in the country was studied through a content and discourse analysis of the current architectural history curricula of several universities in India. With the aim to cover a large geographical area, the colleges discussed in this study were selected based on availability and willingness of the history faculty to participate in qualitative interviews. Hence, the collection is a sample, with colleges of different ages and university affiliations, which represent a breadth of narratives of history education in the country.



Figure 1: Locating the colleges/universities studied on the map of India

An interpretative analysis of interviews with academic practitioners who have been teaching the subject in those institutions for at least 2 years was done to understand how the curriculum directs teaching choices. A semi-structured interview format was used, where open-ended questions were asked, to understand how much the curriculum influences the content being taught in the classroom and the role of institutional and governmental bodies in determining the character of history education being imparted. The responses were coded and categorised to extract emergent themes. Only the extracts from the interviews which corresponded to the advantages or limitations caused in teaching architectural history due to the particular structure of the curriculum have been included as part of this study.

The undergraduate ‘history of architecture’ courses of the six selected colleges are studied by referring to the official curriculum documents being currently followed (thus the latest versions, being used as of March 2021), either prescribed by the affiliated university or developed by the individual institute in the case of deemed universities. Since each of these curricula are followed by 20 to 30 colleges under each university, a large region of the sub-continent is represented. Previous versions of the curriculum, whenever available, have been taken into account to check for changes

in structure or content. The objectives, structure, content (syllabus), nomenclature, references suggested, assignments and assessment mentioned for the history course in the current curriculum being followed are compared. A content analysis of the curricula brings out some latent patterns in the dissemination of architectural history knowledge through the presence of certain words, themes or concepts. Reading these against decolonial theories brought out the perpetuation of colonial biases embedded in architectural history education, as well as ways in which some institutions and teachers are addressing these issues.

Observations

At the undergraduate level, the number of semesters in which history is taught varies - from four to six at most. Yet, the content remains more or less the same in most schools of architecture in the country, with a strict adherence to a chronological linear narrative. The students are introduced to architectural history through ancient civilisations of the West and India, followed by medieval European architecture categorised into stylistic periods (Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance etc.), medieval Indian architecture categorised by religion (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic) and Indo-Saracenic architecture during British colonial rule. This is followed by a study of characteristics of Modern architecture through examples of master-architects of the West and a brief account of their influence in India, leading to post-modernism and contemporary architecture. A clear distinction between European (not 'Global') and Indian architecture can also be noticed, often divided into separate semesters.

Colleges affiliated to universities that conduct centralised semester examinations are forced to follow the curricula verbatim. Such curricula are also relatively detailed and prescriptive, with specific architects and examples mentioned for every architectural style and period. This leaves no agency for the student or faculty to question multiple narratives about the architecture, relationship between the location and bias of the writer. The examples recommended across curricula are alarmingly similar and a gender bias is glaring with the exhaustive list of architects being all male, except for Zaha Hadid.

| | 1 st Sem | 2 nd Sem | 3 rd Sem | 4 th Sem | 5 th Sem | 6 th Sem |
|------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| Curriculum Casestudy 1 | | Ancient Civilisation of India, Egypt, West Asia China, Pre-Columbian America, Greece and Rome Buddhist architecture in India , South East Asia, Japan, China and the Silk Route. | Hindu temple architecture in India, and South East Asia Christian Architecture of Europe Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic periods Islamic Architecture of Iran, Central Asia, Egypttill 1200 AD | Islamic Architecture and regional styles in India Renaissance and Baroque Europe. Islamic Architecture of Iran, Central Asia, Egypt and Turkey from 1200-1500 AD Religious architecture of China, Japan and Korea from 1200-1500 | Colonial Architecture in India; Modern architecture, Post-Modern Movement and Critical Regionalism in Europe | Modern, post-modern Architecture and Critical Regionalism in India. |
| Curriculum Casestudy 2 | | Ancient civilisations in Indus Valley and Europe Classical Greece and Rome Buddhism and Jainism in India | Medieval Europe: Renaissance, Baroque, Neo Classical etc | Medieval to Colonial India | Modern and Postmodern movements in art and architecture in Eupore and India | |
| Curriculum Casestudy 3 | | Ancient civilizations in Indus valley, Egypt and Mesopotamia, Classical to Medieval Europe | Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Islamic Architecture in India | Characteristic styles of modern architecture in Europe with prescribed architects as examples | Contemporary architecture of India with prescribed architects as examples | |
| Curriculum Casestudy 4 | Ancient civilisations of Europe, Egypt, China, Japan and India | Classical Europe - greek, roman, byzantine, medieval and gothic architecture through critical analysis of appropriate examples. | Medieval to Modern architecture of Europe - Renaissance, Baroque, Neo Classical and Modern periods. | Classical (Buddhist), Jain, Hindu temple, architecture of India with prescribed examples | Islamic and Colonial periods in India- Early Phase, Provincial style, Moghul Architecture, Colonial Architecture with prescribed examples | Contemporary architecture of Europe and India with prescribed architects |
| Curriculum Casestudy 5 | | Ancient civilisations of Europe, Indus valley. Classical period: Greece and Rome in Europe, Buddhist in India | Hindu Architecture in India forms, Kerala temple Architecture with prescribed examples | Christian architecture of Europe - Byzantine, Romensque, Gothic, Renaissance and their influence on Church Architecture of Kerala with prescribed examples | Islamic architecture in India, Kerala masjids with prescribed examples | Contemporary architecture of Europe and India with prescribed architects |

Table 2: Comparative analysis of curricula highlighting the taxonomy and chronological linear narrative perpetuated in architectural history education (data collected from respective curricular documents)

This means that almost two-thirds of the history being taught is occupied by Western architecture, with a concentration of European examples. Most of the architectural history of India focuses on the distant past, with an overwhelming number of temples, mosques and tombs contributing to the large set of monuments that students learn. Even the chosen examples under each classification remains uniform, largely informed and influenced by Fergusson's survey. By contrast, after the 19th century and the rise of modern architecture, examples from the country are almost absent, barring those of the works of a few celebrated architects, again usually from the West – like that of Louis Khan and Le Corbusier. A glaring gender bias can again be identified, with the exhaustive list of architects being all male, except once more for Zaha Hadid.

Most academicians from the colleges studied, feel that the curriculum is “outdated” with content that has not changed in over two decades. While the chronological outlook towards history is not wrong, academicians feel that the format has not kept up with the current debates around historiography and no other methods are explored. A general lethargy can be observed from the side of universities and individual colleges to introduce changes. Even when revisions are made, there has been little or no changes in the content or structure of the history curricula barring the addition or subtraction of a module or examples of a few architects. In most colleges, the assessment is based on written examinations and sketchbook submissions in which students are required to reproduce plans, sections and elevations of the monuments studied.

Recognisable Colonial Biases and their Implications on Architectural Historiography

British historians during the colonial era produced important works and initiated a dialogue about Indian historiography, which has shaped the discourse. However, even post colonisation, few initiatives were taken at a national level to break out of this mould. Curricula perpetuate this bias by presenting only one interpretation of an account by omitting different perspectives. Deconstructing underlying ideological presuppositions in the curricula brings forward some biases that are implicitly embedded in architectural history education in the country.

The teleological understanding of history was prolific in Europe and beyond, throughout the 19th and into the 20th century. British historians during colonisation wrote what they did, with the filter of what their society thought of history: as a linear and unidirectional progression of time moving towards a rational utopia with chronologically-rooted taxonomies. This called for an evolutionary narrative that 'explained' the contemporary European styles – “a definition according to which the

medievalist Indian architecture was inherently marginalized as is evident in the Comparative History of Architecture of Banister Fletcher” (Bafna, 1993: 75). This brings out another familiar binary categorization of the architectural discipline – structure versus the ornament – by which ‘ornamentation’ attains an inferior status, stemming from the western intellect since Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*.

Architectural education in India is still seen to endorse this linear teleological narrative of history and west/non-west dichotomy. The idea of ‘progressive architecture’ developing from simple to complex from one style to another, along with the perceived superiority of Western visual standards (Morshed, 2020) – implicit in the tree metaphor by Banister Fletcher – is internalised by the curriculum. European and Indian architecture is still implied to have developed separately (but linearly), while architecture from the rest of the world finds little or no space in the curriculum. Continuing the use of this colonial classification in the classroom fails to present critical analytical of the intertwined, simultaneous developments across continents.

Though the rising nation-centric approach of the identitarian episteme in the 1980s (Jarzombek, 2018) introduced emphasis on Indian architecture in the curriculum, architectural history still relies heavily on Western Europe as the referent. Despite the progress in post-colonial and gender studies, the prescriptive curricula remain unrepresentative, focusing on monuments as characteristic of a ‘style’ and master-architects, almost all of whom are male. The reliance on authorship establishes a “genealogy of architectural production where the importance of the building is determined by its designer, rather than by its own intrinsic qualities” (Arnold, Ergut & Ozkaya 2006: 230). The monument-centred approach further isolates the building from its context, the formalist analysis being limited to the study of its elements and composition, without a systematic interrogation of space, its relationship with society and its politics (Shetty, 2020). Such approaches remain the norm, as against being the exception, in many architectural curricula across the country.

The impact of coloniality is not only seen in the examples that are chosen, but also in the manner in which they are expected to be taught. Writing about the historiography of South Asia, Jyoti Hosagrahar’s research (2002: 355) reveals how the “architectural history in the classroom is removed from culture, mythology, politics, and society, filtered through the ‘scientific’ lens of the nineteenth-century British, and sorted into tidy periods with distinct styles”. The earliest scholarships of Indian monuments “were not concerned with their architectural character” (Bafna, 1993: 92) and was studied on the basis of the cultural and historical [mis]understanding of India. The

idea of scientific objectivity was promoted by British historians by separating the objective documentation of a building from its interpretation through faithful documentation using plans, sections and details.

Texts such as those of Fergusson have been reprinted multiple times, and along with Fletcher's and Grover's volumes, are still used as legitimate references, having found their place among the canonical books that have shaped architectural history of India and invariably suggested as references in every prescriptive curriculum. The structure and nomenclature used in the curriculum to detail the content refer back to the taxonomy put in place by these British historians. This legitimizing of linear histories is crucial in the continuance of oral history's inadmissibility in academia, a major source of indigenous knowledge. While postmodernism has led to the rise of many "alternative and canon-debunking historiographies" (Morshed, 2020: 198), these rarely find space in academic curricula, possibly due to the general lack of recognition of architectural history as a field of scholarship in itself, and thus the shortage of specialised academicians. A major gap that is observed in the history curricula is the absence of the complexities that introduced and shaped Modernism in India throughout the 19th and 20th century, which is outside this canon of history surveys. The singular narrative of its import through Le Corbusier and Louis Khan (the great men, great monument approach) omits the various regional diversities and adaptations, creating a disconnect from the immediate present.

More than a hundred schools of architecture in India impart very similar narratives of architectural developments. Like the colonial machinery assumed smooth functioning by creating and imposing a syllabus of compliance and encouraging a certain conformity of opinion, a standardised narrative created by the above biases, along with centralised university examinations, disregard historical subjectivity. Hosagrahar (2002: 365) indicates that this is a larger problem faced in many South Asian postcolonial geographies: "in the tangle of ethnic identities and communal differences that is South Asia, architectural history is homogenized as a 'neutral' terrain, and an official story is sanctioned and sanitized to rid it of messy complexity and overt politics". The focus is on disseminating certain historical narratives, and not on the processes and methods through which these historical narratives are constructed.

Efforts at an Epistemic Reconstitution

While the prescriptive curriculum of most universities is restrictive, during interviews and over my experience of teaching and learning History of Architecture in 3 universities across India, some ways in which institutions and teachers are addressing these issues are also noted.

The lack of focus and importance for history within the curriculum leaves the responsibility with the faculty to “connect things to the present” and make it relevant to the present socio-political context. Professor Parul Roy, from the School of Planning and Technology, in Delhi, tackles this by encouraging drawing and documentation assignments during site visits to the architecturally-significant cities of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. This allows the students to “engage with the architectural object, not only as a built form, but also how people inhabit that object”, bringing in a spatial aspect which is largely missing when they blindly reproduce drawings (Personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Monumental and ‘far-off’ examples often question the relevance of learning this history. Faculty from Rachna Sansad’s Academy of Architecture (AoA) in Mumbai and Wadiyar Centre For Architecture (WCFA) in Mysore introduce assignments like ‘historiography of self’ to instil the impact of day-to-day socio-political factors in the evolution of architecture. Technological advancements like Google Earth are utilised to do virtual site visits. At WCFA, a lens like ‘trade’, ‘war’ etc are brought in as a common thread across some semesters to look at developments of a time from different regions in parallel. Though regional history is almost non-existent in the syllabus, due to his strong personal interest in the subject, Sharat Sunder tries to lace his history classes with local experiences and examples.

Autonomous institutions like CEPT in Ahmedabad, have the advantage of flexibility in content as they are not affiliated to any university that enforces a standardised syllabus. During my tenure as a teaching assistant at CEPT, I witnessed first-hand how this has been utilised by faculties specialised in history to deliver a curated, context-specific architectural history education. As the classes were being taken online due to the pandemic situation, for the fourth semester History of Architecture course, Dr Gauri Bharat decided to concentrate on how diseases, sanitation and pandemics through time had influenced the evolution of residential, healthcare and urban ideologies and infrastructure. This exercise instigated the students to think of the long-lasting effects of events in the past and the need to be sensitive to existing socio-political conditions. Increasing non-institutional platforms like

ACEDGE by Ethos, Epistle, Karwaan etc are also putting out courses that provide a fresh perspective on architectural history through web series, group tours and alternative pedagogies.

Making a Case for Decolonisation

History is not exploited to its full potential in current architectural education. The blame for this shortcoming should be put on the purely narrative approach and the emphasis on objective facts and events used by many historians... The drawback of traditional history education is that it does not teach us what to do with the facts and events (Morgenthaler, 1995: 220).

Institutionalised architectural education in India is a colonial transplant. Analysing the history curricula of some architectural colleges in India against a reading of the works of historians, theorists, architects and academicians on decolonisation, highlights the insufficiencies of present architectural thinking. Various post-colonial theorists have stressed the need for historians to break out of the colonial mode of knowledge production and accept contradictions, ambiguities and discontinuities (Nigam, 2020; Asif, 2020; Hosagrahar, 2002; Morgenthaler, 1995; Morshed, 2020; Arnold et al, 2006). An epistemic reconstitution is not possible without recognising the origins of the bias or the problems it creates. "An awareness of the implications of the master narratives of the discipline is essential [to enable] us to begin to rethink architectural historiography, as well as how we formulate new histories" (Arnold et al, 2006: 242). This study is an attempt to do just that, and as a result, make a case for decolonisation of architectural history education.

This study used the lens of decolonisation as a provocation to understand why history is taught the way it is, in turn exposing the implications of internalised biases in a colonial curriculum. Ideological positions borrowed from western traditions of thinking, appear to have guided curricular (and consequently, pedagogical) practices. The hegemony of the linear teleological narrative, borrowed from West-centric canonical texts, make the study of architectural history in India non-contextual, exclusionary and objective, using reproduced orthographic drawings to illustrate stylistic categories. "Despite the historical significance of many regional buildings and landscapes" (Hosagrahar, 2002: 364), 'traditional' or 'vernacular' architecture is hardly a part of the mainstream history course, and when it is offered, this is usually as elective courses. With a lack of specialised faculty and inadequate accessible information, tutors teaching them have to rely on their own experience and rigor. Such approaches remain the norm, as against being the exception, in many architectural curricula across the country. The implications of a colonised curriculum are reflected in architectural

practice in the form of non-conscious and insensitive designs. One of the key reasons for this may be insufficient discussion regarding Indian architecture in academia.

An inquiry into the teaching of architectural history in India brings into focus the issues of teaching architectural history anywhere. The colonial legacies of the British empire permeate our collective histories. The present study can be taken forward by a comparative perspective on how the subject is conceptualised in other postcolonial nations. The increased discussions on pedagogy and the sudden shift to online teaching during the COVID pandemic have forced many academic practitioners to question the conventional practices of teaching. However, efforts to restructure the production of architectural historical knowledge still tend to remain largely at the level of individual reflection of academics of very few schools. Should it be the task of the academician to manoeuvre around the curriculum - which is supposed to be the guiding framework - to rethink architectural history education? Regulatory bodies like the CoA and AICTE need to take their cue from these individual attempts to push the agenda further to bridge the gap between the building and the context, and make architectural history courses more relevant to design, and connected to the local experiences of a region.

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