

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA PRESENTS *THE PROJECT OF INDEPENDENCE: ARCHITECTURES OF DECOLONIZATION IN SOUTH ASIA, 1947–1985*

Exhibition Explores the Culture of Modern Architecture in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka After Independence from Colonial Rule

The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985

February 20, 2022–July 2, 2022
Floor 3

NEW YORK, October 28, 2021— The Museum of Modern Art presents *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985*, an exhibition exploring the ways modern architecture in the region gave shape and expression to idealistic societal visions and emancipatory politics of the post-independence period. On view from February 20, 2022, through July 2, 2022, this exhibition comprises over 200 works, including original sketches, drawings, photographs, films, audiovisual components, and architectural models, sourced primarily from prominent lenders and institutions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The featured projects—by key figures such as Balkrishna V. Doshi (India), the only South Asian winner of the Pritzker Prize in Architecture; Minnette de Silva, the first woman to become a licensed architect in Sri Lanka; and Yasmeen Lari, the first woman to qualify as architect in Pakistan, to name a few—address how architecture mediated the process of decolonization and modernization for these emerging nation-states. *The Project of Independence* is organized by Martino Stierli, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, Anoma Pieris, guest curator and Professor, The University of Melbourne, and Sean Anderson, former Associate Curator, with Evangelos Kotsioris, Assistant Curator, Department of Architecture and Design. The curatorial team consulted with leading scholars of modern architecture from the region, many of whom also contributed to the accompanying exhibition catalogue.

This exhibition casts a new light on the culture of modern architecture in South Asia—focusing on India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—in the first decades after independence from colonial rule in 1947/48, in which modern architecture was a significant agent of progressive societal transformation. By focusing on the prolific and diverse work conceived and realized by local, rather than international, architects, designers, and planners, *The Project of Independence* considers the region's architectural production as an active force in the drive for independence and self-determination.

The Project of Independence is organized around thematic sections that both exemplify the transnational, shared conditions of decolonization and call attention to the expression of a

modernist architectural idiom in response to specific conditions, such as materials available, craft traditions, or the organization of labor:

- In a large section on **Institution Building**, Charles Correa and Mahendra Raj's Sardar Vallabhai Patel Municipal Stadium in Ahmedabad (1959–66) demonstrates the ways in which structures such as government institutions, theaters, places of worship, and stadiums underlie the social, political, and cultural forces at work transforming South Asian societies post-independence.
- A section on **Education** includes seminal examples, such as Muzharul Islam's College of Arts and Crafts (Institute of Fine Arts) at Dhaka University, Bangladesh (1953–55), that explore the ways in which governments' significant investment in building institutions of higher education were directed toward creating self-reliant societies.
- **Political Spaces** includes key projects such as Raj Rewal and Mahendra Raj's Hall of Nations in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi (1970–72), which was built on the 25th anniversary of India's independence and served as a symbol of industrial progress and an embrace of innovative engineering and design.
- **Industry and Infrastructure** features the Ceylon Steel Corporation Office Building at Oruwela (1966–69), by the seminal Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, as well as Achyut Kanvinde's Dudhsagar Dairy in Mehsana, India (1970–73), one of the iconic structures representing India's push toward the industrialization of agricultural production.

A common thread across all sections is how material cultures shaped an experimental expression of modern architecture in the region, leveraging localized conditions of largely pre-industrial labor.

A newly commissioned photographic portfolio by architectural photographer Randhir Singh punctuates these thematic sections, presenting some of the region's most impactful projects through a contemporary lens. In addition, the curatorial team collaborated with a group of students at the Cooper Union who will be constructing a number of new models of particularly inventive projects, such as Valentine Gunasekara's Tangalle Bay Hotel in Sri Lanka (1968–1972) and Anwar Said's "C" Type Mosque (Ahle Hadith Mosque) in Islamabad (1969–73/1975–77).

The Project of Independence is accompanied by a scholarly catalogue—one of the few publications to offer a transnational discussion of modern architecture in South Asia. The catalogue includes essays by a group of leading scholars in the field—including Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, Nonica Datta, Prajna Desai, Da Hyung Jeong, Farhan Karim, Evangelos Kotsioris, Saloni Mathur, Rahul Mehrotra, Mrinalini Rajagopalan, Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava, and Devika Singh—Singh's commissioned photography, and archival reproductions.

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