

South Asia holds a unique place among the many regions of the world in which modern architecture has been understood as a tool for social progress. The traumatic and violent Partition of 1947, which divided British India into two dominions, also signaled the beginning of an ambitious process of nation-building across the subcontinent. In each of the newly independent countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), as well as Sri Lanka (formerly the British Crown Colony of Ceylon), modern architecture became an active agent in asserting participation in progressive global politics, forging a common regional identity, and breaking with the colonial past.

The Project of Independence showcases the remarkable contributions to a vision of decolonization and self-determination made by the first generation of post-Independence South Asian architects. The exhibition is organized in six thematic, transnational sections, which explore the region as a shared cultural space where both the idea and the historical reality of Independence spurred construction across all scales and aspects of the built environment. The emancipatory ideals of the period are evident in the creation of new cities, spaces for political representation, and institutions that embodied societal aspirations, as well as the theory and practice of low-cost, climatically and socially responsive design.

Modern architecture fundamentally altered the region's cultural and political perception of itself and provided a blueprint of action for other nations emerging from independence movements, across Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and beyond. The works exhibited here negotiate modernism's universal claims with the specific circumstances on the ground: South Asia's craft traditions, material culture, and labor conditions. With many buildings now facing demolition threats and falling into disuse, these projects mark a historical moment of unfettered optimism and stand as powerful manifestations of a collective trust in architecture's transformative potential.

Organized by Martino Stierli, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, Guest Curator Anoma Pieris, Professor, The University of Melbourne, and Sean Anderson, former Associate Curator, with Evangelos Kotsioris, Assistant Curator, Department of Architecture and Design.

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985*, which is available in the Museum Store.

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