

MOUEZ KHALFAOUI

Indian Architecture: Social and Political Challenges

Abstrakt (Architektura indyjska – problematyka społeczna i polityczna). Niniejszy artykuł stanowi krytyczne spojrzenie na dotychczasowe postrzeganie czynników kształtujących architekturę indyjską. Jej różnorodność przedstawiona jest zgodnie z zachodnią tradycją historii sztuki. Autor udowadnia jednak, że największy wpływ na kształt architektury indyjskiej miała nie religia, a sytuacja społeczno-ekonomiczna południowej Azji. Przedstawia on również hinduski system kastowy i jego wpływ na tamtejszą architekturę.

Abstract. The objective of this paper is to reassess the central factors which have shaped the Indian architecture. The author puts forward the concept of plurality introduced by Western art historians and argues that the diversity of the Indian architecture should not be explained in terms of religious differences, but in terms of the socio-economical situation in South Asia. He also elaborates on the Hindu caste system and its impact on the Indian architecture.

“La maison que l’on habite est l’un des signes les plus visibles du rang social”¹

Ever since the writings of James Fergusson (1808–1886), conventional wisdom has held that Indian architecture is one of the most famous in the world.² To bring this idea to light, Western art historians have presented different architectural styles in India, including several kinds of buildings, and based their interpretations on the concept of religious plurality. Following their interpretations, one might notice that there is a sharp distinction between Hindu,³ Buddhist, Islamic and Colonial, or Indo-Saracenic,⁴ architecture. According to these distinctions, the four architectural

¹ Translation: “The house that we live in is one of the most significant items of our social hierarchy.” (Ghislaine, Fargues 1998).

² In the introduction to his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Fergusson bases his interpretation of Indian architecture on its divergences from Western architecture. See: Fergusson 1967 (1910), vol. 1, 3–4.

³ Hindu architecture is mostly known as a religious and spiritual architecture. See: www.earchinfo.com/different_types.htm; Fergusson, vol. 1, Book III (Dravidian Style).

⁴ “Indo-Saracenic” is the term created to reduce the difference between colonial and Indian archi-

styles correspond to four historical eras in the history of Indian architecture; they, in turn, correspond to different aspects of identity-construction: the ancient Indian, pre-Islamic, Islamic,⁵ and Colonial periods. It is quite surprising that art historians refer to this last model as “colonial” rather than “Christian.” Nevertheless, it seems that describing Indian architecture using religious criteria, albeit still with regard to its pluralistic aspects, does not portray the reality. Limiting Indian architecture to temples, mosques and stupas seems to be a very selective method that contributes to immediately sharpening the differences between the components of Indian architecture. Furthermore, such a selective interpretation based on institutional architecture,⁶ which ignores other types of Indian architecture in addition to ignoring other historical periods, could not be representative of the whole of Indian architecture.

This paper seeks to reassess the general perception of Indian architecture and its relation to the formation of Indian identities. It focuses in particular on the interpretation of the concept of plurality as presented in the academic world by Western art historians. In this paper, I would like to argue that socio-economic factors play a determining role in defining the architectural styles of South Asia. In the second part of the paper, I will present how the Hindu caste system can be used as a key criterion for understanding Indian architecture in all its diversity and plurality.

1. Indian architecture

Indian architecture as a field of research has been examined by South Asian Studies scholars in the West since the second half of the 19th century. In around 1876, James Fergusson⁷ wrote his famous *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*. His interpretation of Indian architecture seems to be the starting point for the critical history of the subject. His method is presented as follows:

What I have attempted to do during the last forty years has been to apply to Indian Architecture the same principles of archaeological science which are universally adopted not only in England, but in every country in Europe [...] Owing to its perfect originality and freedom from all foreign admixture or influence, I believe these principles, so universally adopted in this country, are even more applicable to the Indian styles than to the European.⁸

This method of applying universal notions of architecture to local styles of con-

textual styles. Fergusson reserves Book VII of his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, vol. 2 to “Indian Saracenic” architecture. He comments on the existence of “twelve or fifteen different styles of Muhammadan architecture” (Fergusson 1910, vol. II, 188).

⁵ Islamic architecture is usually divided into the sub-categories of religious and secular architecture. It used to be divided into three historical periods: the Delhi style from 1191 to 1557 AD; the provincial style, and the Mughal style, from Babur to Aurangzeb. See: www.earchinfo.com/architecture/islamic.htm (consulted on January the 18th 2006).

⁶ With institutional architecture I mean here architecture used for institutional purposes such as houses of worship, administrative buildings, etc.

⁷ Fergusson 1910, vol. II, 188.

⁸ Burgess 1967 (1910), xii.

struction appears to be different from that of other historians such as Cunningham of whom it is stated that “[his] archaeological investigations also preceded within much the same framework. However, the dominant paradigm for his work was not that of artistic progress and decline, but that of emphasising the greater value of antiquities over religious texts as sources for India’s ancient history.”⁹ It should be noted here that both Fergusson and Cunningham represent the shift in Western interpretation of Indian architecture from philology to archaeology, from “simply admiring the architecture” to scientific approaches to architecture. Therefore, as Tillotson observed in his *Paradigms of Indian Architecture*¹⁰, one should insist that Fergusson’s goal in his writing about Indian architecture was to inspire admiration for Indian architecture. This aim had a significant impact on the majority of architectural historians who succeeded him. In fact, the history of scholarly writing about Indian architecture could be divided into two eras: pre- and post-Fergusson. Scholars in this field could also be divided into two groups: those in support of and those opposed to Fergusson’s interpretation.

In order to classify the history of Indian architecture, art historians usually regard it as a portrait of two, divergent from each other, representations of the world and base their distinction on differences in cultural and spiritual identities. Islamic era is taken here as a key point in understanding styles and models of the Indian architecture. Thus, they usually classify Indian architecture into the pre-Islamic period, the Islamic period and the post-Islamic (colonial) period.¹¹ These periods are also divided into sub-periods/categories: The first period is divided into two sub-styles of architecture: the Buddhist and the Hindu styles. The Buddhist period coincides with the earliest period in Indian History.¹² The importance of king Ashoka (d. 233 AC), with regard to the political unification of India and the emergence of Buddhism as a religion there, is undeniable. With respect to architecture, the Buddhist period, which resulted from religious stratification, is also known as the first distinctive architectural model of Indian architecture. As part of an ancient architectural inheritance, Buddhism has left many ruins throughout the country; the relics of Jainism are scarce. What is more interesting is that there are only a few Brahman relics left.¹³ Thus stating that the

⁹ Guha-Thakurta 1998, 26–58.

¹⁰ Tillotson 1998, 4.

¹¹ This trilogy represents the attempt of a western historian to understand Indian History as a part of European history. J. Mills is usually regarded as the leading figure of this approach. This idea has been challenged in modern scholarly discourse. J. Mill’s efforts in annexing Indian history to British history is regarded by contemporary scholars as a critical attempt. In this respect it seems that Mills’ critique of Indian history is nothing but a critique of British history, as a critique of the other is a critique of the self. On this, see: Majeed 1992, 195–200.

¹² Although the history of Indian architecture predates the Buddhist period, it is difficult to identify many monuments from this period. Hence South Asian Studies historians present the Buddhist period as the first definable epoch of the Indian civilisation. Fergusson argues that “it is a far more difficult task to ascertain whether we shall ever recover the History of India before the time of the advent of Buddha. Here we certainly will find no coins or inscriptions to guide us, and no buildings to illustrate the arts, or to mark the position of cities.” (Fergusson 1910, vol. I, 9).

¹³ Such as those in Konark and Somnath.

ancient architecture of India is a Buddhist architecture is not a fallacy.¹⁴ Three building types characterize most Buddhist architecture: the Chaitya Hall (place of worship), the Vihara (monastery) and the Stupa (a dome shaped monument for worship and remembrance).¹⁵ The earliest surviving Stupa is the Great Stupa, which still exists in Sanchi and dates back to the first century BC.

The second historical period within Indian architecture is usually stated to be the Hindu period.¹⁶ This period continues until the Muslim conquests of the entire northern part of India in the 13th century. Art historians concentrate their interpretations concerning this period on the Hindu temples, which have their beginnings in Karnataka. Kamiya states that:

Later, as more differentiation took place, the Dravidian/Southern style and or the Indo-Aryan [...] emerged as dominant modes [...] The pyramid formed an essential architectonic element in any temple composition – stepped in the Dravidian style, stepped and slightly curved in the northern style [...] The principles of temple architecture were codified in treatises and canons such as Manasara, Mayamatam and Vaastu Shastra.¹⁷

The Kanchipuram, a cluster of over a hundred religious Hindu shrines built from the 7th to 9th centuries AD by the Pallava kings in the Tamil area is an example of Hindu architecture.

Meanwhile, the Islamic period is regarded as the commencement of a new style of construction known as the Islamic style, although it was not purely Islamic. In fact, Islamic architecture is mostly recognizable by the arches and domes that mark its distinctive style. Thus the similarities between the mosque, the fort and the Mausoleums, as the representations of Indian Islamic architecture, should be noted. The Red Fort in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra should be mentioned as examples of this style.

Percy Brown states about the colonial style that

From the time that the country [India] came under British rule in the eighteenth century, buildings designed and executed in an occidental style, but adapted to suit the climatic conditions began to be erected at some of the larger centres [...] this phase was succeeding during the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by the construction of a considerable number of important buildings designed by British engineers, and based mainly on the style of architecture that was being practised in England[!].¹⁸

However, one should make a sharp distinction between its starting point, during which the focus was on creating authority through classical prototypes, and the later period, which produced “a supposedly more responsive image through what is now termed Indo-Saracenic architecture – a mixture of Hindu, Islamic and Western elements.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Kamiya, Takeo, an Introduction to Indian Architecture: www.ne.jp/asahi/arc/ind/introduction/intro_ing.htm.

¹⁵ www.encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Indian%20architecture.

¹⁶ The Hindu and Buddhist styles were quite intertwined until the 5th century AD.

¹⁷ Kamiya, op. cit.

¹⁸ Brown 1964, 125–126.

¹⁹ See: <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Indian%20architecture> (accessed July 18, 2004).

2. How is Indian architecture presented?

Indian architecture is usually presented through different paradigms. The first and main paradigm is that of divergence, controversy and opposition. By these three terms I mean the intention of scholars to sharpen the differences between the above-mentioned styles of architecture. Among the four evoked styles and époques of Indian architecture, scholars focused mainly on the gap between Muslim and Hindu architecture. In his book *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, Tara Chand presents Muslim and Hindu architecture as portraits of two distinct representations of the world and bases his distinction on differences in cultural and spiritual identities: “The Hindu is a spiritual anarchist. his worship consists in ardent self-communion [...] Hindu architecture is the objectification of this consciousness in solid mass. It is a twofold symbol of the mystery and splendour of the deity [...] The character of Muslim consciousness is as different from that of the Hindu as possible.”²⁰

Considering the gap between Islam and Hinduism, Chand continues his distinction to present the impact of Islam on the Hindu architecture: “The mihrabs [niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction that Muslims should face when praying] made to stimulate Hindu shrine; the arches Hinduised often in construction, in form nearly always.”²¹ To push the interpretation concerning the influence of Islam on Indian architecture as far as possible, Chand insists on the fact that this impact consequently leads to the birth of the Hindu-Muslim style which bloomed in the 17th century when Northern India “saw the erection of a number of noble edifices [...] apparently the new style had now become universal and architecturally it was henceforward impossible to distinguish a building erected by the Hindus or the Muslims. Another effect of this cultural synthesis was the construction of tombs among the Hindus.”²²

Meanwhile, Chand argues that the first contacts between these two different styles was a collision of sorts: “The clash of the two divergent mentalities and their cultures resulted in the creation of a new culture [...] The simple severity of the Muslim architecture was toned down, and the plastic exuberance of the Hindu was restrained.”²³ The consequence of this “clash” was that “the artistic quality of the buildings erected since the thirteenth century whether by Hindus or by Muslims is the same, although differences are introduced by considerations of purpose and use, and styles are varied according to differences of local tradition and regional peculiarities.”²⁴ According to Chand’s interpretation, the Hindu-Muslim architectural style is the most recent and thus, the over governing style in India through to the modern era. Nevertheless, towards the end of his investigation, Chand admits the impact of the modern Western style on Indian architecture and argues that “almost every building of architectural

²⁰ Chand 1954, 234–242.

²¹ Ibid, 245.

²² Ibid, 252.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

importance erected in modern times, except of course those of the Western style, follows the Hindu-Muslim style.”²⁵

A possible conclusion, concerning the general character of Chand’s investigation, can be drawn from the above-mentioned facts. Chand, following Fergusson in many of his main points, was interested mostly in the impact of religious factors on Indian architecture. Yet his distinction between Hindu architecture and Muslim architecture reduced architecture to a simple reflection of religious faith. In fact, Chand, like a number of South Asia historians, ignores not only the majority of Indian architecture (which consists of not only the religious but also the secular), but also the type of architecture that was referred to in the introduction as “architecture of the common people.” Percy Brown briefly alluded to this point saying: “From the palatial halls of the ruling princes to the humble habitations of the majority of their subjects is a considerable step [...] in the main street of the towns within the stone-building region, houses of the better class people will be found alternating with lovely temple facades and the palatial residences of noblemen [...] But in the quieter side alleys of such towns as Bikanir, Jodhpur, Lashkar (Gwalior), and Ajmir, typical²⁶ houses are to be found.”²⁷

In the same category of investigation with Chand, we can classify Percy Brown’s approach who went further than Tara Chand and exposed where and how Muslim and Hindu architecture diverged. In his often reprinted *Indian Architecture*, he argues that:

Of the various civilisations with which the Mohammedans came into contact in the course of their world-conquest, none could have been more diametrically opposed to their ideals than that of the people of India. [the author considers this opposition as an opposition of realism with idealism, of the material with the visionary, of the concern with the abstract] [...] nothing could illustrate more graphically the religious and racial diversity, or emphasize more decisively the principles underlying the consciousness of each community, than the contrast between their perspective of worship, as represented by the mosque on the one hand, and the temple on the other. [...] compared with the clarity of the mosque, the temple is an abode of mystery; the courts of the former are open to light and air, with many doorways inviting publicity, the latter encloses “a phantasm of massive darkness,” having sombre passages leading to dim cells, jealousy guarded and remote. The mosque has no need of a central shrine, it is sufficient for the devotee to turn in the direction of Mecca, but the focal point of the temple is sacred chamber often deep within the labyrinth of its endless corridors. Architecturally the mosque is wholly visible and intelligible, while the temple is not infrequently introspective, complex, and indeterminate.²⁸

3. Beyond religious criterion

Aside from the religious criterion of classification, which dominates the interpretation of Indian architecture, there are some other criteria for classification, which were often applied in order to show the plurality within Indian architecture. Reading

²⁵ Ibid, 256.

²⁶ By using the term “typical” he renders this kind of architecture as that of the common people.

²⁷ Brown 1964, 122.

²⁸ Brown 1964, 1.

the majority of Western investigations written in the last few decades on the above mentioned periods of the Indian architecture, one easily notices that great efforts have been exerted on the part of art historians, anthropologists and South Asian Studies scholars to combine religious criteria with other criteria such as geographical or historical considerations, in order to produce an equilibrium between religious and secular factors.²⁹ In the first paragraph of this paper, I listed the four epochs within the history of Indian architecture. Historically, these epochs, although presented as distinct by historians, have many points in common. The Buddhist style, for example, has influenced the Hindu architectural style;³⁰ Muslim architecture, although believed to have its origins outside of India (in particular from the Iranian and central Asian styles), was nevertheless, adopted by Hindus in building their forts and tombs.

This assumption is not limited to Muslim architectural style however, historians of Indian architecture faced the same problem with divergence regarding the colonial style: Although they were supposed to assist in the adoption of the Western style, the British tried to adopt the Indian style for their buildings. Percy Brown argues, “It was, however, towards the latter part of the nineteenth century that a movement began having as its object the utilization of the indigenous style of the country in preference to the foreign styles hitherto almost invariably employed.”³¹ The purpose of such a process was not purely aesthetic. The British were aware of the fact that the best way to let the indigenous people feel familiar with the new governors was to use indigenous models for their buildings. Albert Hall in Jaipur, which was built from 1881–1886 by Lt. Swinton Jacob, an officer in the British army, is an example of this idea. Although built by the British, this building married Indian architecture with British architecture.³²

4. The geographical interpretation of Indian architecture

In addition to historical criteria, other interpretations of Indian architecture are based on geographical criteria. According to this, Indian architecture depends on climate changes that affect the use of different materials of construction. Thus the differences between buildings in northern and southern India appear reasonable. This distinction includes the difference between wood, rock and stone architecture. “In Rajputana and as far east Agra the material used in house-building was stone, while towards the west as in Gujarat and Kathiawar, and north in the Punjab and Kashmir, wood or wood and brick were commonly employed.”³³ With respect to this issue,

²⁹ This tendency in the New Cambridge History of India insists on the variety of styles in the Indian architecture.

³⁰ And vice versa.

³¹ Brown 1964, 125.

³² Another example of this attempt is that of Lord Curzon who tried to reproduce the Mughal style in the Taj Mahal. See Metcalf 1998, 12–25.

³³ Brown 1964, 122.

art historians insist on the large role Muslims played concerning the introduction of stone as a building material into the whole of the Indian subcontinent. Thanks to this, the buildings of the Islamic period are well conserved. It is regrettable that the use of wood and mud for construction prevented certain types of architecture from surviving over time, therefore depriving us from useful information about the architectural style of ancient India, especially that of common people.³⁴

At this point, it should be remarked that the common point between the different interpretations of Indian architecture previously discussed in this paper is the paradigm of plurality. Despite the differences of ideologies, purposes and backgrounds, the majority of writings about Indian architecture insist, albeit in different ways, on the importance of plurality as a leading concept of interpretation. However, the problem that still persists is the interpretation given this paradigm of plurality. As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, though scholars have taken plurality as a “given” in the history of Indian architecture, art historians approach this plurality in a manner that places emphasis only on differences. Nonetheless, there are historians who have opted for unity within their interpretations. For these historians, the harmony and hybridism of Indian architecture are mostly the results of an initial phase of clash and struggle, as presented by Tara Chand. Furthermore, these interpretations, based on religious, historical and geographical criteria, do not encompass the entire reality of Indian architecture, as their interpretations do not cover the architecture of common people and their building concepts.

It is evident so far that the concept of contrast, which constitutes the main concept of interpretation, seems to be a manifest aspect of Indian architecture that conceals an internal mechanism of harmony. To put it differently, the history of Indian architecture is not the result of divergences between different styles. On the contrary, it is the result of acculturation and mixing of all styles and paradigms since the beginning of its history. “According to Havell, all buildings are a continuation of Indian architecture and classification according to religion is but marginal. His opinion is that if Buddhism had survived much longer if it would have built temples in almost the same style as the Hindu temples.”³⁵

Be that as it may, it seems now that the division into religious and secular, Muslim and non-Muslim, colonial and pre-colonial do not do justice to the reality of Indian architecture. The criteria that I suggest for the interpretation of the Indian architecture are the socio-economic situation of the people and era in which the buildings were constructed. The background I use in order to combine these criteria is the Hindu caste system. This system combines social and religious factors and can be applied not only to understanding the social hierarchy of the Indian society but also to other aspects of the society. In order to apply this criterion to Indian architecture, one needs to overcome an epistemological difficulty first. Due to the dominance of the egalitarian ideology in the Islamic religious discourse and its impact on Muslim

³⁴ See: Kamiya, *op. cit.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

social concepts, Muslims do not easily accept the existence of any kind of social stratification among themselves and, if they do, they explain it as a religious fact. Second, it seems that Max Weber's assertion that the "caste" is a Hindu construction *per se* and cannot be applied to other societies stopped any attempts to use the Hindu caste system to understand the Muslim society in South Asia. It was not until the 1960s that South Asian Studies scholars comparing the Muslim society with the Hindu society, came to the turning point and recognized social stratification. They were confronted with the differences between the Muslim egalitarian theory on the one hand and the Hindu caste system, which considers inequality as the center of any kind of hierarchy, on the other hand.³⁶

In fact, since the 1960s, many scholars have attempted to study the supposed divergence of the two systems from various points of view. The evolution of approaches concerning this matter (if one could speak of it as an evolution) can historically be traced from Max Weber to Marc Gaborieau. This could also be described as an evolution from the divergences between these two concepts of social stratification into a synthesis of them. According to Louis Dumont, who belongs to the first wave of anthropologists attempting to understand the Hindu caste system from a new perspective, there is a resemblance between the caste system in Hindu and Muslim social stratifications that could lead to their similarity. Although he could not go further into his interpretation, the ultimate point of Dumont's approach was his assertion of the existence of such a similarity between these forms of stratification.³⁷

Even though he could not change the research paradigm, Dumont had the privilege of bringing the problem of the caste system application to light. Recently, Dumont's thesis concerning the Muslim social stratification system has been heavily criticized and completely changed by his follower Marc Gaborieau,³⁸ according to whom the Hindu caste system not only has a close similarity to the Muslim societal concept in South Asia, but actually a total conformity.³⁹ Rather than searching for points of resemblance, Gaborieau took the conformity between the two systems as a given fact and tried to support this through arguments from his fieldwork in Nepal. I support this opinion in this paper and will subsequently use it as a basis for the following analysis of Indian architecture.⁴⁰ As, according to Gaborieau, the Hindu caste system can be applied to both Muslim and Hindu societies in South Asia, we can interpret Indian architecture on the basis of the caste system in order to understand how it was constructed.

³⁶ Fuchs 1988, 38.

³⁷ Dumont 1966, 254–267.

³⁸ Gaborieau 1993.

³⁹ Imtiaz Ahmad shares the same idea with Gaborieau concerning the similarity of the Muslim and Hindu societies. See: Ahmad 1973, 1983.

⁴⁰ In a paper presented to the Summer Institute Berlin 2005, I came to the same conclusion using the Muslim Legal theory as presented in the Fatawa -i- Alamgiri.

5. The Hindu caste system and Indian architecture

The Hindu caste system has four castes: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra.⁴¹ The following Muslim “rankings” in the Muslim legal theory in India are equivalents to these Hindu castes: Ashraf al-Ashraf (the most noble), Ashraf (the nobles), Souqiyya (the market people) and Safila (the lower/immoral people).⁴² Although the correspondence between the Muslim and Hindu caste systems is as of yet not definitively defined, one could still attribute an approximate correspondance of architectural style and buildings to each of these social ranks. This typology could be identified in four main types of buildings. First, temples, stupas, and mosques are attributed to the Hindu Brahman and Muslim ashraf al-Ashraf or religious authorities. Second, palaces, forts and government related buildings are recognized for the Ashraf and Kshatriya; third, markets and places of commerce for the Souqiyya and Vaishyas; and fourth, we attribute the buildings of the poor people to the Safila and Sudra.

The advantage of this interpretation is that it can be applied in conjunction with the historical, geographical or religious interpretations of the Indian architecture. According to this criterion, different categories of architecture are considered: the famous, strong and resistant buildings, which are mostly religious or political buildings on the one hand and the buildings of the poor, which are mostly represented by houses of the common people on the other hand. While the former belong to the rich and powerful, the latter are constructed by the lower classes. It is quite regrettable that only the former kinds of buildings have been primarily studied, while the latter have attracted only sporadic attention.⁴³

In fact, the socio-economical interpretation of Indian architecture shows just how sharp the difference between these architectural styles is. Unfortunately, art historians have concerned themselves with the most famous among these styles and have not tried to bring the others to light yet. Following this interpretation, the Western, as well as the Indian reader is fascinated by Indian architecture as represented by the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, famous Hindu or Sikhs temples. Another side of Indian architecture is hidden. Taken by these majestic buildings he or she does not consider any other type of architecture.⁴⁴

Once again, the consequence of applying the Hindu caste system to understanding Indian architecture requires the understanding of the plurality of Indian architecture.

⁴¹ Zinkin 1963.

⁴² Nizam 1991, 160.

⁴³ Due to the former distinction where the emphasis is essentially on the material of construction, only the initial kind of buildings made mostly of stones and cut rock, resisted and survived while the second kind, built primarily of wood, could resist neither the geographical nor the political conditions.

⁴⁴ In a brief chapter, Fergusson deals with wood architecture in Kashmir. He remarks that the quasi-wooden style is “only an indication of decadence and decrepitude.” He remarks that the mosque built in Srinagar of wood is not a fashionable building, and the 1001 tourists who visit the valley do not mention it. Fergusson 1910 (1967), vol. I, 333–335.

According to this, all religious buildings such as mosques, temples and stupas, can be classified in one and the same category.⁴⁵ This classification is based on the fact that architecture inspired by all religions obviously has the same goals; religious buildings are prestigious in order to reflect the splendor of the religious thought existing behind it. The famous religious buildings in South Asia were built in an era of religious plurality. In this regard, mosques and mausoleums can be compared to temples and stupas. This opposition exists due to rivalry between religious authorities who tried to present themselves in a more perfect and authoritative way than the other. The best example of this tendency is that given by Fergusson about Aurangzib's attitude regarding the Temple of Kesava:

The great temple of Kesava Deva or Krishna at Mathura was the most sacred in Hindustan. It had been erected, or rebuilt, by the famous Bir-Singh Bundela during the reign of Jahangir at the cost of thirty-three Lakhs of rupees; and immediately after the destruction of the Visvesvar temple in 1669, his religious majesty ordered this also to be levelled to the ground and a vast mosque about 170 ft. in length, to be erected on the platform. It was not, however, from any love of architectural magnificence that this was done, but to insult his Hindu subjects and mark the triumph of Islam over Hinduism.⁴⁶

The benefit of using the caste system as a criterion for the classification of architectural models is that it does not insist on wonder and fascination with regard to the architecture. This criterion insists on the role that social and financial circumstances played in the establishment of architectural models. Applying this criterion means recognizing an architectural "style" for each caste. To prove the availability and the efficiency of criterion, one can refer neither to the ancient nor to medieval Indian architecture as the majority of buildings from these periods did not survive because the buildings of poor people were built from weak materials, which were unable to resist to actually external factors such as weather etc. This does not mean, however, that this criterion is not applicable to the above-mentioned periods (the ancient and medieval periods) of architecture. I will apply this criterion to modern Indian architecture in which contrasts between the Indian social castes can be seen clearly. That is to say, the notion of the caste system will be applied to all religious groupings within modern India – Muslim as well as non-Muslim.

In his article *A tale of two cities: house and town in India today*, Sunand Prasad presents two types of Indian city: "In many old north Indian cities one can see evidence of two distinct paradigms of urban fabric. One could be called 'traditional' and the other 'modern', or one Indian and the other 'western'."⁴⁷ According to Sunand, this differentiation is also applicable to Indian 'old' and 'new' cities. Sunand continues:

⁴⁵ This kind of distinction between different places and functions goes back to Varro, a Greek philosopher who, in the first century A.C, distinguished between three places: the theatre for the poet, the school for the philosopher and the Forum for the priest. The same can be said concerning the buildings in this paper: religious for religious people, secular for the politicians, the market for commerce and the others for the rest of the population. This distinction doesn't take into account any negative consideration. See: Kippenberg, Stuckrad 2003, 145–162.

⁴⁶ Fergusson 1910, vol. II, 321.

⁴⁷ Prasad 1998, 176–199.

“Contemporary urban Indian culture accords a low status to the traditional paradigms. Those people who have the economic freedom to choose are deciding, on the whole overwhelmingly, against living in the old or traditional parts of the city and prefer the new areas.”⁴⁸ In fact, the people who are moving from the old to the new areas of the same city are those who can change their economical and social status.⁴⁹ Those who could not might stay in the old city forever. According to Sunand’s interpretation, the change from one area to another in the same city leads to a comparison of the two parts of the city. This comparison is represented in Sunand’s study by the contrast existing between two types of buildings, namely the haveli, as a representation of the old city and the villa as a symbol of the modern western architectural style. The first is walled in, while the second seems to be open. The first depends on time, space and place, the second has specific meanings; the first is urban while the second is suburban. This divergence leads Sunand to a second comparison in which he demonstrates that the first (haveli) is dirty, regressive, and communal, while the second (the villa) is clean, progressive, and individual.⁵⁰

The distinction between the haveli and the villa shows the importance of the financial factor in the determination of the characteristics of one building or another. This factor includes the nature of construction material and the lifestyles of people living there, as the mutation from poverty to richness automatically leads to a change of social status. It is quite common that people who move from the old part of the city to its modern section also change their social identity. They identify themselves with the colonial, western or local bourgeoisie – they give up their old lower caste to acquire a new identity.

Dealing with these two types of cities in the above-mentioned paper, Sunand does not consider religious factors concerning the differences between the old and the new cities. The architectural model of new cities does not reserve any role for religious criteria. Moreover, due to the similarity of their social condition, people living in different parts of the city, even though of different religious backgrounds, think in the same way whether Muslim or Hindu. When people from less prestigious social groups are able to change their economic situation, they immediately build a house in the new part of the city and change their social status. The proof of the similarity of the old city buildings can be found in the fact that owners of houses in old Delhi put distinguishing symbols on their doors: a Ganesh symbol for the Hindus and the number 786 for the Muslims in order to distinguish their religious affiliations. Sunand’s argumentation shows that religious factors do not play any considerable role in the architectural style of the Indian architecture. This remark is true not only with regard to contemporary periods, but also and essentially with regard to ancient and medieval India. In fact, Indian architecture depends more on social and financial circumstances than on other

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Sometimes they keep contact with their havelis in the old city in order to maintain a kind of relationship with their relatives and for other rituals.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Actually they find that a lot of havelis belong to rich businessmen who use them for trade and other activities.

religious criteria. Hindu and Muslim religious buildings can be distinguished by their form though they obviously had the same purpose and materials for construction.

Summing up, it could be said that Indian architecture, as presented by art historians, is too often presented by famous visages of its majestic and monumental buildings. Moreover, historians were more fascinated by the impact of religious factors on the architectural scene than by any other factors involved in the construction and design process. Due to their mostly one-dimensional investigations, their research findings could not be representative of the Indian architecture. Furthermore, these representations show plurality as a leading concept of interpretation in question. However, art historians have mostly limited this concept to religious plurality and failed to notice other aspects.

I also argued that the socio-economic criterion could be efficient in describing Indian architecture. The investigation based on this criterion shows how important it is to consider people not on the basis of their religion, but rather on their socio-economic situation. Such an approach could facilitate the understanding of Indian architecture as it reflects the plurality based on socio-economic criteria that can be used in every location and era and because it is applicable to all types of buildings in India.

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