

The Art in The Architecture of Visva-Bharati

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is a journey through a dry, barren land that turns up to a symbolic green, ecofriendly and ecological architecture. After adopting this land from the Jaminder of Raipur for meditation, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore founded an 'Ashrama' in 1963 that gradually spread its wings and became the eternal matrix of world culture. Architecture at Santiniketan got into a rhythm when Rabindranath Tagore came to build an international school on 1901. The school was a beautiful experimentation of educational system and with the development of the school, there evolved an experimental architectural form which essentially portrayed Indian architectural ethos. As Rabindranath Tagore was an ambassador of internationalism, he made a unification of diverse cultural forms, being influenced from different canvases of world culture. One of the key components of this amalgamation was architecture with interior and furniture design. He made the architecture of Santiniketan an evidence of interrelationship of art, craft, science, technology and nature. It's a parallel journey of global brick house and a local mud house. The most important thing is that, the architecture or the constructions never possess or rule over the nature because here, the relationship between nature and architecture is like mother and child. When, now-a-days, modern architects think about ecofriendly architecture, they can surely inspiration from Gurudev's concept of ecological architecture which was far beyond the time.

1. Introduction

When Debendranath Tagore came to Santiniketan, after seeing the 'Chhatim-tala', he owes, 'She is the repose of my life, the joy of my heart, the peace of my soul.' Later, Rabindranath's dream and thought were to fulfill this very realisation of his father. So, he designed and promoted ecological architecture to spread awareness about nature and green living.

When rest of the country followed the British colonial architectural styles, Santiniketan's architecture was the symbol of an Avant-Garde architectural movement in early 20th century. Tagore and his companions drew inspirations from the rock and cave architecture of Buddhist period, Indo-Islamic architecture, Greco-Roman styles, Japanese architecture, British Colonial design, Far East architectural elements, Egyptian and Assyrian motifs and from local mud house construction. The architecture would not have been completed without the vivid plantation and open-air system of educational styles. Here, in Visva-Bharati, architecture means not only the built forms but also a simultaneous growth of art (painting, murals, and sculptures), craft, technology and science. So that, in spite of the presence of Rabindranath Tagore, we can feel the importance of Surendranath Kar, Rathindranath Tagore, Pratima Devi, Nandalal Bose, Binod Behari Mukhopadhyay, Ramkinkar Baij, Prabhas Sen, Kasahara, Kenosan and so many personalities who contributed to the completeness of the architectural harmony by their art works and ideas.

2. Objective

In 21st century, when architects think about green living and ecofriendly architecture, it's very astonishing that Tagore

thought about the same ecological balance of the nature and architecture more than 100 years ago. He also thought that architecture is not only a combination of brick and mortar but also an artistic assimilation of space, landscape, light and shade. So, in today's era, the relevance of the architectural design of Visva-Bharati is unavoidable. The use of trees and its shade, open-air sitting arrangement, gardening, artificial lily-pond, furniture and interior, different styles and forms of construction, application of colours and beautification of landscapes through art is very educative for a trained architect or an interior designer. In the modern era, the thoughts of Tagore about literature, art and architecture reflect the idea of 'Contextual Modernism'.

3. Methodology

For this study, historical research method was used. Essential Information gathered from Journals, architectural, archeological book and Web search.

4. Architecture of Visva-Bharati

4.1. Santiniketan Griho

It was the first building architecture in Santiniketan. This was founded on 1863-64 by the patronage of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. The speciality of the construction is its south-western orientation. The overall form of construction is inspired from the British colonial style but also the Greek Ionic pillars enhance beauty and load-bearing capacity of the construction. Even the circular staircases are the example of traditional Dutch architecture. The traditional wooden blinds, big windows and long verandah is reminiscent of heritage buildings of Bengal zamindars. An open rooftop is located at the backside of the building. It proves that from the

very first day, the architectural elements of Santiniketan were taken from multicultural influences.

4.2. *Upasona Griho*

Established in the year of 1890-91, Upasana Griho, is a prayer hall. It is a precast architecture because this whole construction was firstly checked in Kolkata by joining all the cast iron parts and then finally installed in Santiniketan. The construction is mainly decorated by cast iron frames, pillars and colourful Belgian glasses. As the wall is made of clear glass, the sunlight from east and west side can smoothly enter inside the hall and creates colourful patterns of red, yellow, green and blue. This is a prominent evidence of ecological architecture. The adjoining ornamented khilan with the pillars add aesthetical beauty.

4.3. *Natun Bari*

Natun Bari was built in the year of 1902. It is a thatched single storied mud house, influenced by the traditional Santhal mud house of Bengal.

4.4. *Deholi*

Deholi was built on 1904, the first brick construction after Rabindranath's arrival at Santiniketan. This being an east oriented construction; light can enter into the dalan and the rooms of Deholi in abundance. The most important element of this building is its half-sheltered verandah, where architecture and nature merge into a single point.

4.5. *Uttarayan*

The complex is situated on the northern part of the ashrama. Five different buildings -Uttarayan, Konark, Shyamali, Punascha and Udichi play a very significant role in its architectural movements.

4.5.1. Udayan : This huge construction started in 1920-21. It took almost eighteen years to complete the project. Udayan is properly an experimental replica of Indian architectural synthesis. In spite of this huge framework, it never follows a monumental shape. If we study about the elevation of this construction, we can find various steps everywhere like in pillar, building forms, ceiling, floor and kulungi. Udayan plays a major role for unifying Gujrati and Rajasthani architecture, Buddhist culture, Japanese woodwork and interiors. At the facade of the building, the iron beam is covered with the plastering. On the outside of the building, an offset from the sliding window area looks like a deck of ship that is used for sitting. The use of black and white colours as well as the vermilion red and terracotta brown, never breaks the harmony of aesthetic. The shape of circular and vertical glass windows never clash with each other. The forms of jafri and jharokhas are taken from Rajasthani haveli. The sheltered verandah and open roof also allow air and sunlight to feel the touch of nature. On the other side, the interior of Udayana is a sign of modernity. The idea of wood paneling and decorative cladding on brick wall and on step pillars was beyond the time. Furniture, by Kasahara and Konosan, in observation of Rabindranath Tagore has an essence of traditional Japanese furniture, as well as Deco furniture. In Udayan, the private bathroom, with the assimilation of Indian and Western amenities, an application

of art and utility and the kitchen courtyard follows Indian attributes. The hall room of Udayan, where rehearsals of the plays were done, is an example of cultural architecture. The floor of the hall-room is divided into two parts. The central black part, used for performing dance and plays, and the upper red part around the performing stage, are used by audience. The raised portico can also be used as a stage for the performers. Another uniqueness of this building is that, the room of first floor and second floor are different by plan, size and height of rooftop.

4.5.2. Konark : The building was founded in the year of 1921-22. A unique architectural establishment with different planes of its floor and roof. Almost fourteen planes are noticed here. A portico with red floor and eight chamfered square pillars, considered as a performing stage. This portico or the semi covered verandah is projected from the living area of the construction and the main entrance of it. The adjoining area of columns and beams at the ceiling of the portico creates a harmonic steps and brackets that also continue to the furniture and interior of this building. The eastern verandah allows entering morning sunshine to the living room at a specific direction of acute angle.

4.5.3. Shyamali : On the 75th birth anniversary, Tagore inaugurated the mud house, Shyamali. The walls are decorated with high bas relief figures, done by Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij. The relief works were inspired by the Ajanta and Bagh cave art. The facade architecture and the frontal courtyard both are half-circular to make the architecture complete. The inner wall of the room was made of stabilized earth block to keep the room cool. One another special character of the construction is the experiments with space in a small area. A harmony is created by the space, inside and outside of the wall. The earth colour and black tar, traditional technique of making rural mud house, the relief work resembles Shyamali as an earth-architecture. Parallely, the slight undulation of lands with local red pebbles (moram) and the shades of trees help her to become another evidence of ecological architecture.

4.5.3. Punascha : Punascha was built up in the year of 1936. The special architectural element of its half-circular open courtyard with the sitting arrangements, the inspiration was taken from Sultanate and Mughal courtyard. The Central living room is very small and surrounded by a verandah in the frontal side and the height of the verandah is lower than that of the living room that adds a feeling of being 'Down to Earth'. The glass windows allow natural light to enter vividly. Curve stairs, red courtyard and slanted columns impute aesthetic pleasure to the architecture. For the interior, Rabindranath Tagore specially designed all the furniture those are space saving, utilitarian as well as enjoyable.

4.5.4. Udichi : The last building of Uttarayan complex that was built on 1939. The windows of ground floor are same as Punascha house but in the first floor, window formation is similar to Islamic architecture. The bedroom of the first floor has many windows to lean the sunlight at any time in a day and the other room was used as a multipurpose room. The

extended parapet, jafri and brackets enhance the aesthetical approach of the building.

Without these five buildings, there are another four constructions are very important to know about the idea of architectural modernity like Mrinmoyee patio, pergola, Pampa lake, Chitrabhanu and Guha-ghar.

4.5.5. MrinmoyeePatio : The patio, famously known as 'Mrinmoyeechatal' is a beautiful construction without a single boundary wall. The extended floor with the sitting structures also a witness of numerous performances under the supervision and direction of Pratima Devi. The patio also points out the architecture of Sultanate courtyard. The design proves the aesthetical appetite of the architect for a small, simple cultural architecture.

4.5.6. Pergola : In the complex of Uttarayan as well as in the kunjās (gardens), door-less brick constructions are used to separate two or more zones in a single complex. Though, this kind of construction is a slight instance of gateway architecture, called as pergola. The upper part of this structure is semi opened and the creepers run along these and create a natural roof that provides shades. The seats beneath the pergola have a vibrant utility purpose.

4.5.7. Chitrabhanu and Guhaghar : The building is actually the working zone of Rathindranath Tagore and a living place cum studio of Pratima Devi. The first floor of the building is a wooden apartment. The architecture was inspired from the cave so that the ground floor was designed as a cave and artificially natural stones were used on the outside wall of the construction. The inside architecture looks like a ship's cabin. The idea of ecological architecture was reflected on the first floor, where we also find a brick construction for gardening. The round window of first floor creates a mesmerizing symbiosis of geometry and nature.

4.5.8. Pampa Lake : An artificially designed lily pond, outside Guha-ghar, Pampa Lake resembles the urges of Rathindranath Tagore to make the complex more green and add a water-body to a dry land. The natural stone slab on the lily pond to walk and the pebbles, as well as greeneries around it, has a proper smell of Japanese garden architecture.

In addition, with all this features, landscaping, gardening and sculptures all around Uttarayan Campus, are very significant to fulfill the unique taste of the architecture.

4.6. Chaitya

In 1934, Nandalal Bose designed a simple mud house, inspired by the Chaitya style from the Buddhist architecture. The room was used for displaying the artworks of students. Tar and mud colour add earthy feelings to this small room.

4.7. Talodwaj

A circular thatched mud house, with round columns, centering of a palm tree was established by a renowned tree lover, Tejaschandra Sen. It is an outstanding collaboration of

nature, architecture and human being. The Talodwaj is the ultimate symbol of ecological/Green architecture.

4.8. Dinantika

In 1939, an octagonal building was formed as a tea-house where staffs would meet in search of relaxation with a sip of tea. Though it looks like a two storied building but actually it is a single storied architecture with a simple illusion.

4.9 Singha-Sadana; Purva-Toran; Paschim-Toran

Under the surveillance of architect SurendraNathKar, on 1928, Singha-Sadana was constructed. The inspiration was taken from Atala Mosque, Jaunpur. An arched gateway with the vivid facade is the special feature of the building, though Singha-Sadana is not accurate to the facade of Atala Mosque as both the tower is asymmetrical in height. A round big clock is attached to the longest tower to inform everyone about the time. Eastern toran and Western Toran, two ornamental gateways in both the side provide symmetrical approach to the whole construction.

4.10. Ghanta-Tala

The design element of Ghanta-tala was taken from the Buddhist gate of Sanchi and the traditional Japanese gate, Torii. The gate was formed over four steps up from the ground level. A bell is hanging from the gate to play at the breaking time of the class.

4.11. GourPrangan

A south oriented verandah, almost open, ornamented by the fresco of Jaipur style. The open ground in front of the building is very close to Tagore's philosophy.

4.12. Black House

The construction begun in the year of 1936 and completed on 1938. Prominent artists like Nandalal Bose, RamkinkarBaij, Probhas Sen along with the students drew base relief on all-over the walls. The elements of reliefs like animals, birds, human figure and nature were drawn from both local and global art. Figures inspired from Mahabalipuram to Egyptian art, from Bharhut to Assyrian motifs, as well as local Santhal figures to Harappan elements were used profusely. The whole house is coloured by Tar to protect from insects. So, that, it is also an experimental mud house with the touch of earth-architecture.

4.13. Bhavana, Department and Hostels

According to Tagore's vision, plain living and high thinking is very important for a human being and simple life-style for a student was mandatory. So, the interior, as well as furniture of the departments and hostels were very minimalistic and simple but for the beautification of the architecture, numerous sculptures, frescos, murals, installation art can be experienced in the educational campuses.

4.14. Pallis

The clusters of homes considered as teachers' and staffs' quarters all around the campus follow a primary architectural rule of township. The most important character is, the area for gardening was mandatory at each quarter.

Besides all these architectural constructions, some other buildings like **Parishista, Dwija-Biram, Malancha, Havel Hall, SurulKuthibari, Natya-Ghar, Beni-Kunj, MukutGhar, SamindraSishuPathagar** and other have different forms, shape and constructional grammar to know about.

5. Common Architectural Features

- 5.1. Floors' height and plinth levels are deeply close to the ground level.
- 5.2. Constructions of the building never follow the monumental architectural design.
- 5.3. Ecological and ecofriendly designs were vividly followed.
- 5.4. Green architecture and gardening were very common to this concept.
- 5.5. Inspiration from diverse cultures across the globe was welcomed as architectural and design elements.
- 5.6. Various kinds of brackets and pillars were designed.
- 5.7. U-shaped sitting arrangements on courtyard, different porticos, patios and pergola were commonly used.
- 5.8. Colours that are used commonly, give a feeling of calmness.

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5.9. Proper nomenclature of a building/construction was mandatory.

5.10. In spite of the cultural diversity of the design elements and forms, it creates a taste of Indianness.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can feel that the architectural style of Santiniketan is a reflection of Indianness and also a revival of Indian traditional architecture from east to west and from north to south. It is a marvelous blending of Sultanate and Mughal architecture, Buddhist and Brahmanical architecture, Egyptian and Assyrian designs and art, Greco-Roman construction, British colonial design, Dutch architectural feelings, Rajasthani and Gujrati traditional architecture, Japanese essences, traditional Bengali styles and rural Santali influences that create a complete sense of Indian design ethos and give a higher value to this architecture, both aesthetically and philosophically. When the earth was tremendously damaged by the human, Santiniketan designed the green architecture. The constructions of Santiniketan is not just a bonding of brick and mortar, it's the bonding of nature and architecture and lastly a lyrical architectural poem of Tagore's philosophy.