HISTORY VERSUS TRADITION
PRESENT AS THE LIVING PAST

India! The land of antiquity. Its heritage is not confined to historic accounts of events and objects frozen in their own time and space, but is perpetuated as cultural and architectural traditions, which have transcended time and space to remain alive and appropriate even in the present. In India, history stays alive as living tradition. History and tradition both have their roots in the past; but history, for its inability to adapt to the changed time, is rendered obsolete as fossilized remains of a bygone era. Tradition, on the other hand, consistently adapts and suitably transforms to changed circumstances. This process of constant updation makes tradition survive and renders it timeless. It survived the past and promises to prevail in the future as it rests on collective concurrence, shared values and deep-rooted conditioning. Thus, tradition—as living heritage—retains its contemporariness and relevance even for the present times. In India, the people simultaneously live in three time zones: the legacies of the past and aspirations for the future effectively combine with the realities of the present.

SPATIAL NARRATIVES IN TRADITIONAL INDIAN ARCHITECTURE—
AN INTERPRETATION OF A CONCEPT FOR CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

1. Cultural associations and shared values keep monuments alive as living history, as at the Taj Mahal.
2. Tradition stays alive as the living past, as signified by a tajia procession during the Moharram festival.
3. Chimneys, historically the symbols of industrial prosperity but now obsolete in a changed time, lose their significance and are eliminated.
4. Traditionalism does not imply turning the clock backward. On the contrary, it is a progressive and consistent process of updation that subtly combines the ‘old’ with the ‘new.’ Seen here is a creative fusion of day-to-day utensils in the form of a deity, Ganesha.
Dynamics of Existence
The Alchemy of Time Over Space

Time, in the Indian psyche, is a cyclic phenomenon. The faith in reincarnation, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, the unending chain of construction, destruction and reconstruction, all reenact the belief in the recurrence of time. This assurance of recurrence instills a sense of equality as well as hope, much needed qualities in the pluralistic context with diverse value systems. However, although cyclic, time is not static. It is helical, evolving continuously. The concept of change is inexorably tied to the concept of time. The past and future are distinct domains in the continuum of time within which change occurs as a sequential series of events. The processes of evolution, involution and devolution go on constantly. What is of importance is that the progression is not as a linear continuity but as a helix or a spiral with a still centre and a dynamic periphery.

1: Nataraja, a classical form of the Lord Shiva immersed in Tandava Nritya, literally, the furious dance of destruction grieving the death of his wife Sati. It depicts a dynamic balance between creation, destruction and reconstruction, as symbolised here by the presence of the damru, a sort of drum, the ring of fire, the demon below, and the reassuring blessing open hand gesture respectively.

2: The cyclic process is also depicted in the Dashavatara, the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, where even the supreme divine is not spared the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

3: Time through the ages has been conceptualized as a cyclic phenomenon. The Puranas, ancient scriptures, have personified time in the form of a Kalapurusha, whose form in itself symbolises its cyclic nature.

While time may recur, the alchemy of time with space renders the resolute always unique. For example, at any given time different spaces render themselves differently for an obvious reason-three physicality. Likewise the same physical space transforms drastically through its interaction with time. Therefore, having invested in time, the spaces change, rendering them vital, vibrant and dynamic. This constant juxtaposition of time over space is the essential premise of Indian architecture. This is a creative resolution under scarce resource conditions. A builtform, however complex, once realised, remains static. However, if made to interact with nature, the interface is always dynamic. The sun is not the same from morning to evening or from one season to another. Thus, direction, light intensity and shadow patterns changing all the time constantly redefine the builtform making it feel different and thereby alive. Thus, in the space-time dynamics, time also interacts actively to condition the mind and create a familiarity with the built object.

This aspect of time in architecture is introduced through structured movement. Movement ouths to become the key to spatial perception. Traditional Indian architecture is the story of movement and pauses where the kinethetics of a space is fundamental to its experience and perception. The layering, movement corridors, thresholds and circumambulatory are aspects of this phenomenon in Indian architecture.

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DYNAMICS OF EXISTENCE

THE ALCHEMY OF TIME OVER SPACE

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DUALITY OF EXISTENCE
WORLD WITHIN A WORLD

The Indian notion of existence rests on dualities. Atman, the infinitesimal building blocks of the human spirit, and Brahman, the overall schema of the universe, are the fundamental basis of any existence. This schema of dual existence simultaneously accepts the part as a whole and the whole as a part and gives rise to the concept of the ‘world within a world.’ Each entity is complete in itself at one plane and yet, at the other, is part of a larger system. This ensures freedom of individual expression, yet within the collective consensus. An identity within conformity. An effective tool to accommodate diversity while respecting the common bond of unity. This is critically required in a pluralistic society with multiple value systems. Individual belief systems must be accommodated, while the common code of understanding also needs to be maintained. This balance is finely arrived at through this notion of centres and sub-centres. Courtyards creating a world within a world and the schema of structure and infill, which bring out subtle variations within unified expressions, are obvious translations of these notions in architecture.

The courtyard is a characteristic device of Indian architecture that is most effective in creating a world within a world. The courtyard surrounded by the built mass creates an introverted response. Becoming a focus in itself, it allows for activities to spill into it and thrive without being disturbed by external conditions. This element has been effectively used in designing royal campuses, palaces or even residences with different activities conforming to functions in multiple courtyards, where varying privacy gradients are respected in the form of a clearly delineated hierarchy of courts.

1. A biological cell, like an atom, believed to be the building block of the body, is still a complex, complete entity in itself.
2. India has a pantheon of around 330 million gods. This concept of many gods accepts the notion of many truths, each right for its believer, rather than a dictatorial structure that imposes a single truth. This concept of many gods has been translated into many courtyards, each one dedicated to a different deity.
3. A miniature style painting depicts the Ras-lila, a dance form adoring Lord Krishna, where each gopi, a devotee of the Lord, is under the illusion that she is dancing with him. Each one reaches out to the ultimate centre through one’s own locus. Source: courtesy, Arind Barmah
4. Contained yet open to nature, courtyards are a complete world in themselves supporting varied forms of human activity. A haveli or large residential mansion at Muli, Gujarat.
5. The ‘world within a world’ concept is manifested through yet another typology with a non-centric approach as seen in the Jagnivas Palace in Udaipur. Here courtyards are interlinked by corridors to form a flexible structure and each courtyard retains its individuality through its own scale and shape, yet complementing the overall schema of the space organization.
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7. The Udai Bilas palace at Dungarpur creates different moods through its multiple court structure such as the vegetated garden-like forecourt, harem court with free standing revered pavilion and the sacred innermost court with a shrine. A miniature painting style impression.
8. The Jambukeshwara temple in the temple town of Srirangam, in southern India, quite aptly demonstrates the concept of a world within a world through concentric layering of walls and gates, whose each subsequent layer gets more and more sacred, sacred and withdrawn from worldly affairs, thus achieving a gradual transition from the corporeal to the celestial.