

LESSON SERIES: EQUALITY AND UNIVERSALISM

Chandigarh – A City Both Modern and Traditional



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Official Buildings and Public Parks



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Compare the following four images and note:

What do you notice about their shapes, colours, sizes?

What do they think the buildings are for?

Which country – or continent - do you think the buildings are in?



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Image A



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Image B



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Image C



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Image D



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All of them are in Chandigarh, a city in north-west India on the border of two states – Punjab and Haryana.

India is a huge country – as you can see from the map here it covers all of the UK and some of Europe too.



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Who Were the Architects?

Le Corbusier designed:

A = the Secretariat Building

C = City Museum

Nek Chand designed:

B = a pavilion in the Rock Gardens

D = a bridge in the Rock Gardens



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More About Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier's real name was Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (b.1887 & d. 1965). He was a world-famous Swiss French architect, urban planner and writer. He was one of the main advocates of Modernism in architecture in the 1920s and 1930s. It was also known as the International Style because they aimed to create new forms of buildings using modern materials such as concrete, metal grid structures rather than bricks, and glass) which they thought were more honest and universal than traditional buildings. He worked in cities across the world, including India in the 1950s.



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More About Nek Chand

Nek Chand's full name was Nek Chand Saini (b.1924 & d. 2015). He was born in a part of India that became part of Pakistan after 1947 when British colonial rule ended and India was partitioned to create a new country – Pakistan. He was a roads inspector who was also a self-taught artist. In 1955 he moved to Chandigarh and worked for the public works department as the buildings were being rebuilt according to the designs of Le Corbusier. In 1958 he started collecting the unwanted materials from the rebuilding project and collected them until he had enough to start building the Rock Garden in 1965.



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What Do You Think This Wall In The Rock Garden Is Made From?



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Compare both architects

What Are The Main Differences Between Le Corbusier's and Nek Chand's Buildings?

Think about:

Shapes

Colours

Lines

Surface decoration

Materials used

Use/function



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Writing Task

Which building do you prefer – try and give more than one reason (i.e. not just ‘I like parks best’!)



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Some History...

Why did the prime minister of India appoint Le Corbusier as government architectural advisor for rebuilding Chandigarh in 1950?

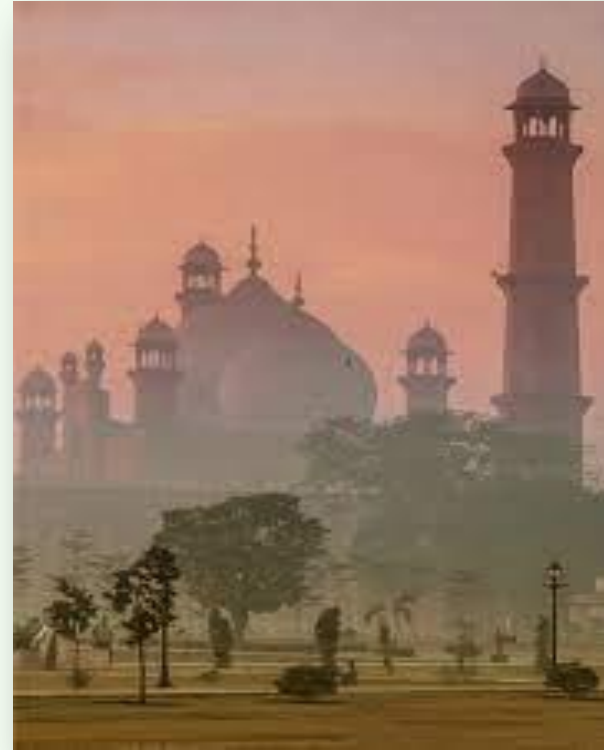


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An Effect of Partition

In 1950 the Congress Party, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, was in power. This was the main party involved in the fight for, and transition to, India's independence from Britain. The 1947 partition meant that Lahore, the capital of the Punjab – a major Indian state – was now in Pakistan. Lahore is a culturally rich city and important city – it was the capital of the Punjab region and full of beautiful Mughal architecture. The loss of such city was felt by some to be a humiliating loss for both India and the Punjab.



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A Hopeful Compromise

Partly to compensate for this loss Nehru chose Chandigarh for the site of the new capital. It was on the border of both the Punjab and Haryana – both large, economically and politically important states – but the place itself was pretty boring – mainly rural with no important architecture.



Rurki Village, which is now Sector 17
Chandigarh



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A Project of National Hope

Nehru hoped that a famous Modern architect like Le Corbusier would create a new capital for the Punjab that would be very different to the traditional architecture of Lahore, but would be just as admired and loved. He saw the project as symbolizing the hopes of a newly independent country. Nehru himself had been educated at Cambridge and was familiar with Western culture and art, so although the Congress Party was against British colonial rule, its political leadership was able to appreciate parts of Western, and even British culture.

The rebuilding project expressed both hope for peace locally, and hope for a better future nationally – but it was done in the Modernist International style of Le Corbusier.



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Modern or Traditional?

The buildings of Le Corbusier and Nek Chand are very different – they could be seen as symbolising the modern West and the traditional India – these are common cultural stereotypes. Nek Chand's style seems closer to the architecture of Lahore with its colour and curved lines.

But let's look again – Le Corbusier was not the only Modernist in town!

Compare Rock Garden to Parc Guell in Barcelona, Spain, by Antoni Gaudi (b.1852 & d. 1926). He was an architect famous for his distinctive style of Catalan Modernism, which is very different to the Modernism of Le Corbusier. Parc Guell was built between 1900-1926, which covered the same period that Le Corbusier was beginning to develop his International Modernist style.



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Indian Traditionalist & Catalan Modernist – are they so different?



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Some Questions to Think About

- 1) What do these examples suggest about people's imagination? Do we imagine differently depending on where we live, how rich we are, our skin colour, or our education?
- 2) What do these examples tell you about Modernism in architecture and the arts?
- 3) Do you think Nehru was right to commission Le Corbusier to rebuild Chandigarh? Or was this, as some argue, a sign that he favoured the West over Indian culture?
- 4) Do you think the Rock Garden would exist if Chandigarh had not been redesigned by Le Corbusier?



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Suggested Task

Draw a design for a park or public building their area in the style of either Le Corbusier or Chand/Gaudi.



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Some Architectural Vocabulary

Arches = a curved structure that is an opening and supports a load from above.

Colonnade = a long sequence of columns.

Pilotis = columns or pillars that lift a building off the ground.

Domes = a structure that is in the shape of the upper half of a sphere.

Pavilions = a building used as a shelter or entertainment in a park or garden.



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