

The Nectar of Architecture: Tagore's Architectural Cognizance in Santiniketon

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss the reasons and justifications of socioeconomic, cultural, political and intellectual realm of Bengal from theoretical and critical basis. Such historical discourse will reintroduce a poet who already defined and shaped a nation's identity and also his concept reached in architectural realm which was never brought to light previously. An exposition for the findings related to the dwellings of Rabindranath Tagore, at Santiniketan could be the clue as he is considered one of the Bengal's foremost modern personalities. The methodology will involve his writings as primary confab sources as well as recent and previous renowned researchers' contextual works as secondary sources to derive comparison based interpretations and explore hypothetical scopes. Such punitive approach from historical inquiries with architectural perspective regarding Tagore's literary genius will reveal his more patriotic philosophies that were previously misguided or even isolated and conventionally known ideologies from colonial context. The paucity of Tagore's direct references are imperative sources to rely on, as in-situ analyses are also followed. Written allusions about space and architecture in his poems and dramas constructed the literature review of the study. In doing so, the paper also endeavours to comprehend the immense potential for understanding and appreciating Tagore's less-highlighted genius, like architectural creations. Placing these findings within the framework of contemporaneous accomplishments, this study will discover Bengal as pan-Asian leading position and analysis will show how regional modernism silently flourished through architecture under Tagore's prophecy.

Keywords: Bengal architecture, Bengal art, Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan, identity

1. BACKGROUND

When two-floored Bichitra was being built as his residence within the Jorasanko complex in Calcutta, over a plot donated by his grandfather Debendranath in 1897 (Chowdhury, 2013). Tagore was busy with his land-lordship at Silaidaha, Kushtia in today's Bangladesh. After completion, the poet discovered that there was no space provided for any staircase. He decided to create something for his own zest in the future. He dreamt about vivacious consolidation between music, literature, poetry and art (mainly ornamentation) in building's fenestration and interiors under a common functionality. Santiniketon was such a manifestation which eventually associated Bengal Renaissance for ever. Tagore's philosophy and deep thought over space echoed symphonically with desired architectural blueprints to plan a unique complex like Santiniketan. He spent most of his very prolific and creative adult life in the households that he constructed for nearly forty years (1901-41). This is a faultless illustration how informal space quality could become an imperative apparatus for the spontaneous educational system. It was not felt earlier, when a school or temple of thought called Bhramma Samaj or prayer hall was established on a barren property in Birbhum around 1901. Earlier, it was only a meditation epicenter inaugurated in 1863 by his grandfather Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. That was a simple building of colonial architecture, Santiniketan Griha, during the initial stage, but a glass temple with Japanese influence was erected later. These two buildings have a strong influence in our history. They might be originated from the forieng root, but lasted as Bengali ideology. From here, his family members like Gaganendranath and Abanindranath pioneered the Neo Bengal art movement for such identity search. As a consequence, Samarendranath and Rathindranath, introduced the practice of intercultural exchange and integration of inclusive philosophies at their Jorasanko house during the beginning of the 20th century (Das Gupta, 2003). Moreover, extraordinary meritorious personalities like Surendranath Kar, Rathindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Arthur Geddes, C.F Andrews, Ramkinar Baij and Birendramohan Sen, photographers like Shambhu Shaha and Raymond Burnier gathered here. In their works, they all respected Tagore's dreams and deep understanding, 'living amongst mother nature with the scheme of cohesion'. It was possible to achieve by the dint of minimum intervention over the existing landscape and avoiding exaggerations on built forms. Gradually but steadily, this intellectual base created the modern movement known as Bengal school of Art, which is still contextual. This discourse will bring the poet's motto in architecture and associated arts the lime light.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main approach to address the key discourse topic in this study was literature based discussion. The primary sources were from Tagore himself and secondary sources were gathered and examined meticulously from previous and recent sources related to the colloquy structure of this study. From those, plans and building elevations were presented as valuable illustrations. Because of the lack of all the other kind of data related to the subject, other complementary sources were not available at all. This constructs the main limitation of this study that architectural plans of each building were not included. Eventually, it was unavoidable to seek other prominent researchers' contemporary papers to drive new conceptions merely from the architectural point of view. Reconnaissance analysis and comparison were the ultimate keys to establish an architectural hypothesis based on his philosophy as conclusion. The flow of the discussion is explained in Figure 1.

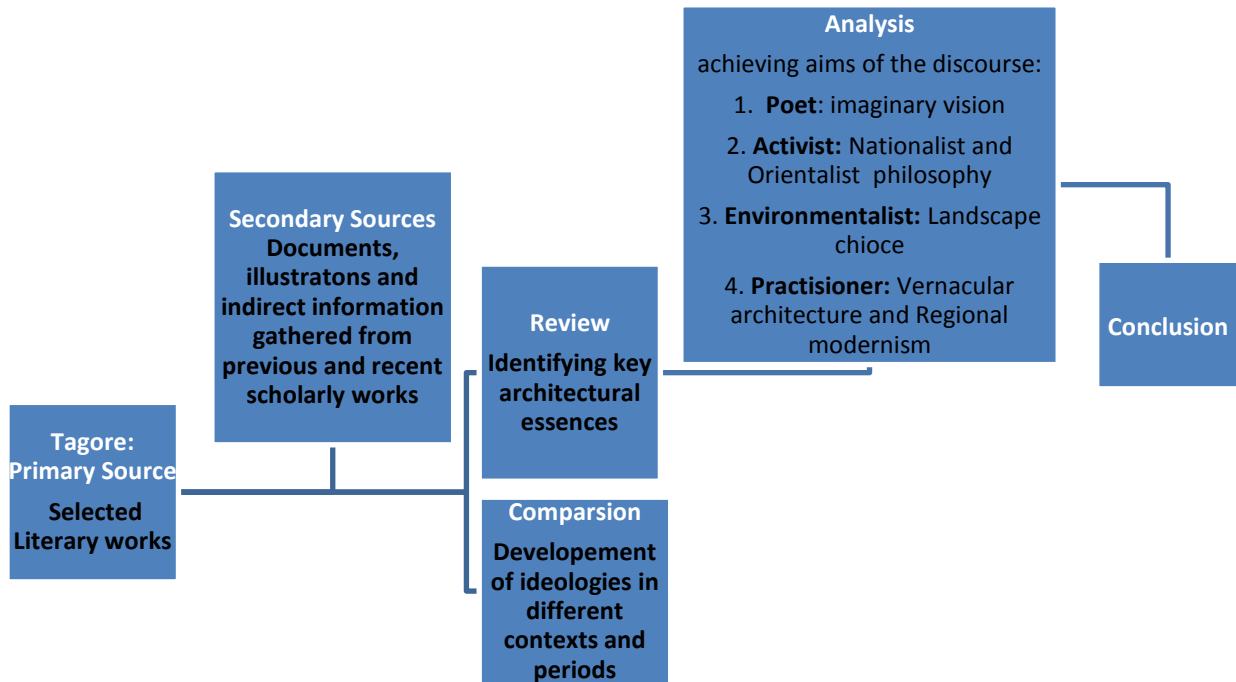


Figure 1. The discourse structure according to the methodology of the study (2020)

3. TRACES OF TAGORE IN SHANTINIKETON

3.1. Master Plan

Santiniketan grounds actually more like a township planning than any designed complex. It could be alleged as a conglomeration of building blocks organized in a particular space. Here, space is calculated as a whole, rather than any individual chunks got precedence in it (Chakravorty, 2011). Santiniketan can be separated into three main clusters of structures: the teacher's quarters, the student hostels and the institutional buildings.

Seven houses that Rabindranath Tagore built and inhabited here, the first two—Dehali in 1904 and Natun Bari in 1906, are from the simplified first phase and they are abrupt in character. Rabindranath's deep sentiments about nature, space and dwelling, are expressed in Natun Bari, a house that was simultaneously connected to the ground and the sky. Tagore's presence at this building between years 1906-18 was his most creative phase as poet, he wrote Gitanjali here and also got Noble prize for it. But the poet never appreciated to dwell in a single household for a long time. For this reason, a complex comprised of five isolated habitations was planned for him—Konarka (1918), Udayan (1919-28), Shyamoli (1935-36), Punascha (1936) and Udichi (1938-39) are built after a master plan called Uttarayan (Sanyal, 2015). Uttarayan is a Sanskrit abstraction of the action of the earth coming closest to the sun in its orbit – the cosmic and ultimate philosophical embodiment of enlightenment. This name associated with the sublime east facing Sun Temple in Orissa (Mitra, 1968). As a result, Uttarayan is the metaphorical presentation as a whole. The transition from south to north represents the transformation from frugal beginning stage of life 'Brahmacharya'. Thus initial cluster comprised of Dehali and Natun Bari, now the entire Ashram complex was extended as Uttarayan to the north to facilitate sun healing of the east in better way (Figure 2).

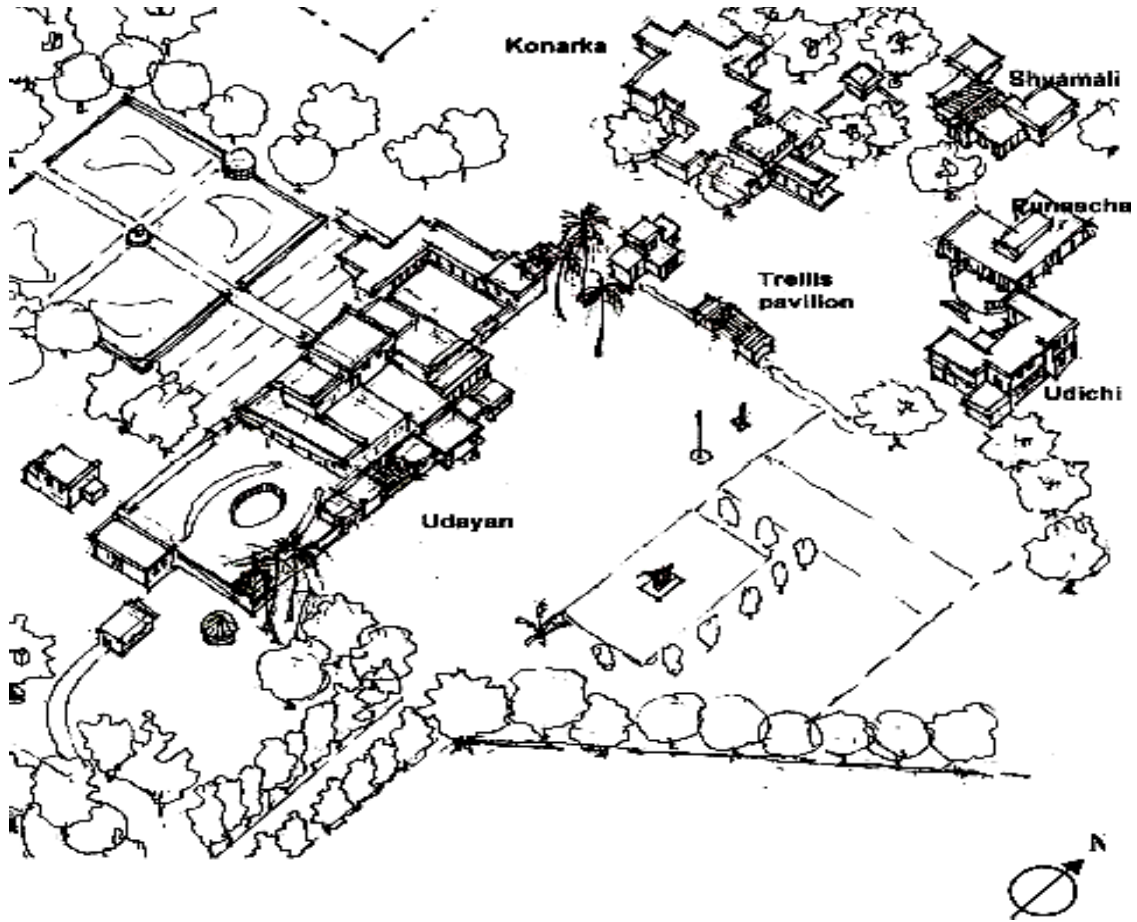


Figure 2. Master plan of Santiniketan (Sanyal, 2009: 602)



Figure 3. Udayan (Sanyal, 2009: 600)

Udayan means 'The dawning was the most elaborating architectural project completed by Tagore. Udayan, the largest house in the Uttarayan offers a feast of transforming the forms for recollecting equilibrium in space distribution with projection. Udayan stands out as a specimen of asymmetric structures also (Figure 2 and Figure 3). This cluster was constructed over a period of a decade's progress, from 1919 to 1929 (O'Connell, 2002). The building is harmonious synthesis of massing and culture-specific architectural elements integrated into its elevations. The team comprises Nandalal Bose's cousin, architect Surendranath Kar, Tagore's own son Rathindranath Tagore and Japanese wood sculptor Kintaro Kasahara, who taught at Santiniketan's art school for a while (Banerjee, 1998).

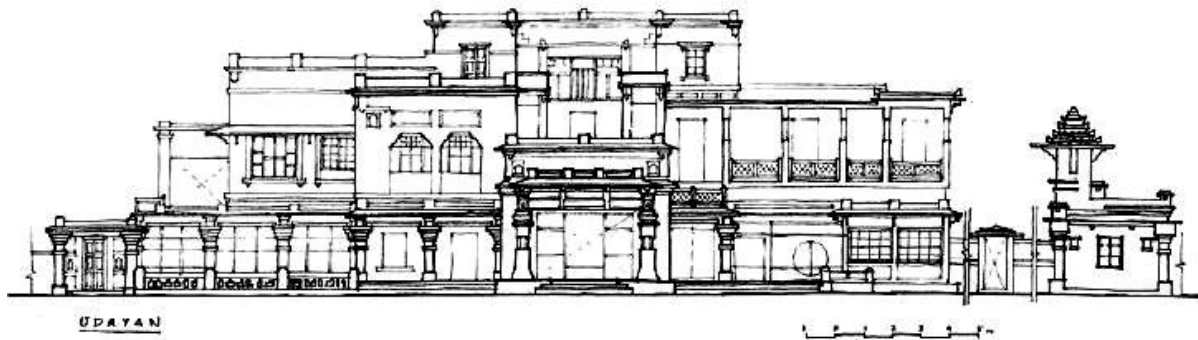


Figure 4. Elevation of Udayan (Sanyal, 2009: 606)

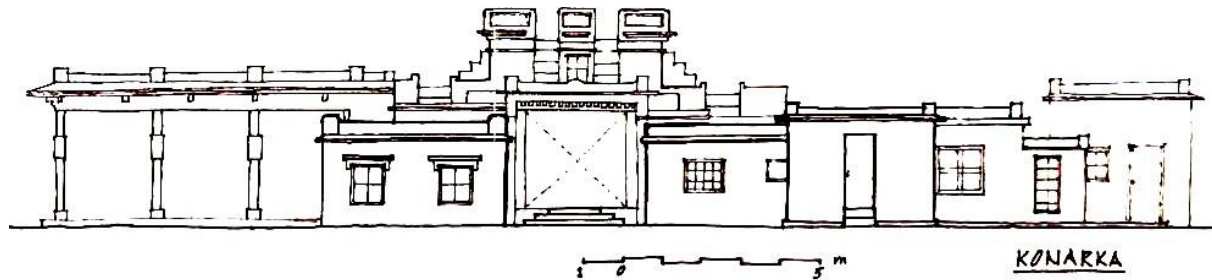


Figure 5. Elevation of Konarka (Sanyal, 2009: 599)

Konaraka was Tagore's first house outside the Ashram area. In 1934, Nandalal Bose erected an exceptional Chaitya style structure to exhibit artworks. 'Konarka' is a Sanskrit word for 'slanting ray' or the sun (arka) rays coming from the corner (kona). The building is single storied with many spaces and levels, both in roofs and floor, organized around a central living space. The house's most conspicuous feature is the long and linear verandah leading to its living space from the east, also acted as principal entrance. This verandah was built for poetry recitals or performances, but it allows only the early rays of the rising sun to enter the living space at a very acute angle for slanting (Sanyal, 2015). Konarka is distinctive in a way that its floors and roofs are not on one even plate here. There are 14 planes on the roof at the top and this stretches the emotion of launching an interaction option with the nature from all conceivable angles. Although it is a cottage similar to Dehali, but it was a double floored edifice. The upper room of this building provided a view of 'unobstructed to the verge of the horizon' (Figure 5) and faced the east for its desired orientation toward sun. The front verandah of Konarka and the raised portico of Udayan were used as dais (Mancha) to stage performances, gatherings, readings and similar activities during Tagore's lifetime.



Figure 6. Punascha was Tagore's favorite leisure building, Rabindra Bhavana, archives of Shantiniketan; a photo by Saha, taken in 1930 (Sanyal, 2015: 603)

However, Rabindranath was consequently overwhelmed with the Chaitya style impression of Karnarka that he looked forward to have a comparable mud hut as a residence, which is called Shyamoli today. In fact, Shyamoli was influenced by an ancient South Indian Buddhist cave architecture where lots of base reliefs by Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij were used as decoration. Shyamali, means 'the dark one', wholly built out of mud, unlike his previous houses, it has a closed plan and very few openings to the exterior. Due to severe illness during 1934-35 (Wasim, 2013), Tagore designed it as his last dwelling place. Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij, who were still exploring challenges of modernisms in Bengal art, decorated its external walls with numerous figurative panels. This dwelling got a frontal cave-like appearance which is actually a representation of the millennia old Buddhist Chaitya of Lomas Risi cave (Tadgell, 1995).

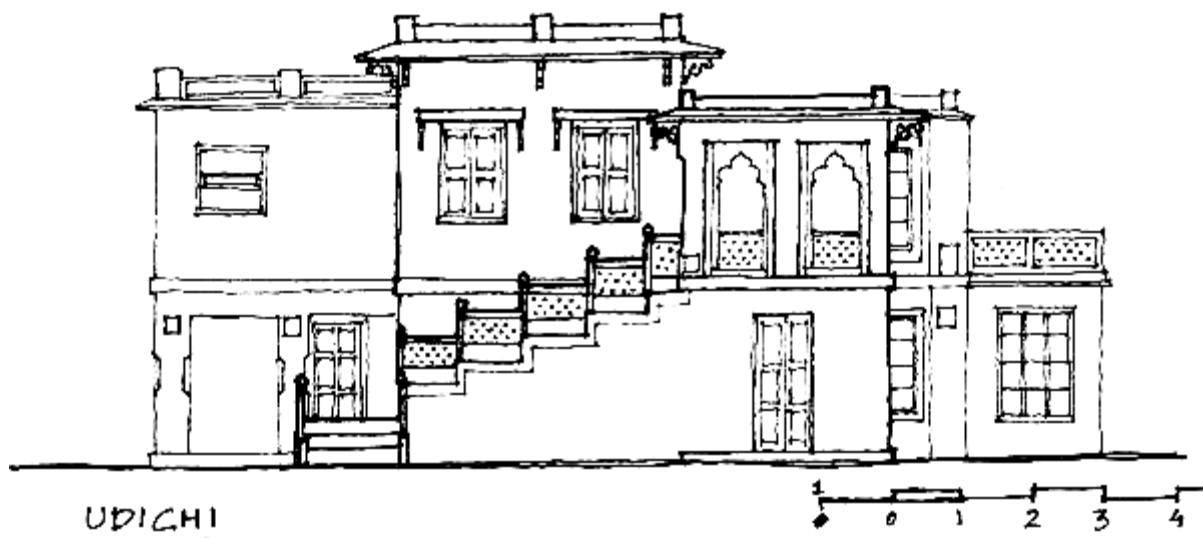


Figure 7. Elevation of Udichi (Sanyal, 2009: 601)

Punascha, means 'postscript', it is a small house comprising a central room with a raised ceiling and an enclosed verandah surrounding it. The distinctive feature of this house is a southern space that resembles a patio. Two walls complete with windows without any roof and blinds are partially enclosing it to indicate this patio's periphery. For Tagore, such architectural space was just like leisure amongst chockfull, work loaded life (Figure 6).

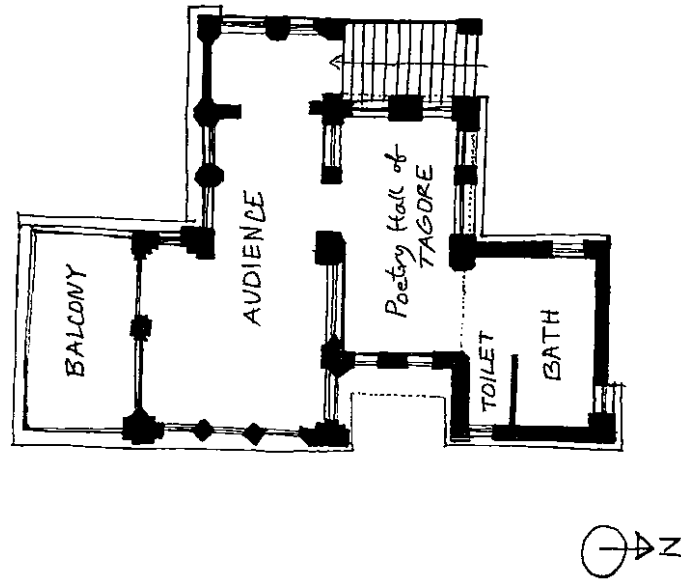


Figure 8. Plan of Udichi (Re-sketch by Author. Saha, 2015)

Udichi was originally elevated on four short columns. Its habitable space was on its first floor. The concept of 'udi' and 'chi' in Sanskrit convey the meaning of the action 'to go up to' or 'proceed to rise'. A staircase flanked by vertically offset lattice railings connects the floors. Its concrete lattice railings showed very contemporary expression with rectilinear articulation. Windows are expressed with foliated Mughal arches (Das, 2009) (Figure 7 and Figure 8).

3.2. Landscape



Figure 9. Torana, a foci or threshold over the landscape in Shantiniketon (Bishwa Varati, 2011)

The public spaces here intentionally left blurred in their margins with the unoccupied land among the structures in order to grasp the moralities of the landscape and architectural style. Tagore's notions over landscape occasioned such transformation and his countryside visits across Bangladesh helped him to imagine like this. There he was so close to nature

and comprehended the connotation of enormity in space. The boundless deepness of the sky, the hugeness of prolonged widespread horizon took him to beyond everything, indifference in mood. He felt that here one could breathe freely, living without restraints and could grasp the nature's completeness (Popli, 2018). He tried to shape each and every corner of Santiniketan from the existing infertile raw property to an ancient Ashram like place. But it should not be parallel to the antique 'Tapoban,' rather a different modern variety of it is desired. Tagore never had any fondness for man-made gardens, but interactive lawn with nature was his favorite. He wanted a subtle honesty between man's creations with the nature.

Modern movement in landscape scheme at Ashram as well as the entire Uttarayan compounds is noticeable. In both of these areas, door-less brick or concrete gateways were used (Figure 9). Frames such as these frequently obeyed geometric strategies and proportions. At the same time, they acted as allotting lines between two or more precincts in the master plan. They also embrace creepers and let them track along the length, by adding supplementary splendor to the surroundings and offer shades during the hot and humid summer days (Spaces Nepal, 2017).



Figure 10. Original landscape of Khoai, Rabindra Bhavana archives of Shantiniketan; a photo by Saha, taken in 1937 (Sanyal, 2015: 596)

Such in-between spaces adorned careful plantation of selected flora; it could be rose orchard or artificial pool with a built up isle filled with plants. European trees like weeping willows got preference to get nurtured in these islands. To cope with the unobstructed horizon line of Santiniketan landscape, the Uttarayan compound raised up slowly but surely by horizontally projection with low scale in a tune, subtle wave to imitate the undulations of the Khoai¹ all around (Figure 10) (Popli, 2018).

The Simul Tree (*Bombax ceiba*) fronting Konarka is a present for visual and experiential reasons, although it maintained careful offset from the direct line of the verandah, which is identical for that building. In addition, Mrinmoyi Chatal, a detached open space was flanked from the north side of Konarka.

Shyamoli is similarly fronted by the 'Dolon champa' or White ginger lily tree (*Hedychium coronarium*), which is also planted off-centrally to expose principal entrance, molded after Buddhist Chaitya arch. A mud path lined with a row of Shal trees, (*Shorea robusta*) was the favorite walking route of Tagore at Santiniketan and also the oldest one for the main entrance to master plan (Pearson, 1916). A small trellis pavilion marks the entrance to the remaining four dwellings provided sense of vista on axis. Shyamoli is the termination point of that axis (Figure 11). Some letters which he wrote to his friends reveals his fondness for little open spaces. Around all the institutional structures in Santiniketon, a huge span of open space was reserved for confrontation of tropical climate. There is also gardens to the west of Udayan and a lily-pool to its southwest, while an enclosed courtyard to the north.

Some small structures were also juxtaposed meticulously. From the way to Ashram, a plinth named 'Grahastha', a materially fulfilling and culturally rich middle stage through Udayan premise is situated. Finally, the detachment and resting places like 'Vanaprastha' and 'Sanyasa' delineated by buildings like Punascha, Udichi and Shyamoli at the end of complex (Joshi and Sanyal, 2015). The geographical epicenter of the Ashram consisted with a dominant open space, named Gaur Prangan, was actually indispensable from Tagore's intention to correlate the nature and here Anandamela or spring festival and fair occurs. For such reason less build forms are erected here. Other open to sky elements like convocation stage, Ghonta tola or Bell archway are also present outside of Uttarayan complex.

His contribution in landscape conveys the similar impression of present-day green movement, at least hundred years before today's ecofriendly green architecture. Rabindranath articulated his personal apprehension related to environmental issues. Essays published in a newspaper named 'Sadhana' during the year 1923 are its best exemplification, "The west seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature, as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things...but in India the point of view was different, it included the world with man as one great truth. India puts all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal." (Banerjee, 1998).



Figure 11. Shaymoli, the cave like edifice blended with vernacular architecture (Bishwa Varati, 2011)

3.3. Architectural Styles

Santiniketan architecture conveyed a new tradition derived from the vast architectural heritage of Indian subcontinent. Basic geometrical doctrines for proportioning and scale were conserved meticulously against the cultural hegemony of the Western colonization.

Eclectic fusion of art from numerous countries ranging from far away state like Japan to nearby Deccan's ancient Buddhist and Brahmanical caves of Ajanta and Ellora, from vernacular Banglow typology and Santal traditional houses to Islamic Sultanate and Mughal architecture. During 1918-19, Nandalal Bose added his own unique and heterogeneous mixture with all these distinct features. In 1928, artist Surendranath Kar supervised the Simhasadana building which endures the inspiration of Atala mosque of Jaunpur, with a dominant façade and an arched gateway (Das, 2014). The house also has two ornamental gateways with Buddhist Toranas which provided a symmetrical constancy for its central built form. Kar's architecture adapted elements straight from the native nature. He exploited numerous floral patterns as architectural designs which provided them very interesting aesthetic qualities. His design combined utility in a sound, ease and pleasing gesture.

The Old Library Building has an open south facing veranda, ornate plentifully with frescos in Jaipur style by artist Nandalal Bose and his students. The forward-facing yards of all buildings are surrounded by a low parapet like structure and could be used to sit on. It is probably an encouragement of either eastern Sun temple architecture or Mughal courtyards. Quite justifiably, Kala-Bhavan (black house) has been the playground of artistic and architectural creativity and innovations amongst all Santiniketan's institutional buildings. This black house displays an outstanding adjustment of cross cultural concepts with local construction material. Its external walls are abundantly adorned with bas-reliefs from Bhahrut, Mahabalipuram, Egyptian and Assyrian motifs created by Ramkinar Baij, Prabhas Sen and many others (Mondal, 2013).

Such spirit and assimilation of different styles have been sustaining in Santiniketan right from its beginning. For example, Greco-Roman columns and portico with an overhanging roof balcony become subsequently enclosed as a room, was an inspiration from nineteenth century British Bungalows (Figure 12). Its circular staircase was reminiscent of Dutch style and the elongated veranda linking quarters was suggestive of traditional Bengali Dalan (a brick-built home).



Figure 12. Ornamentation in different facades of Konarka, from book review of Samit Das: Architecture of Santiniketan: Tagore's Concept of Space (Spaces Nepal, 2017)

The best example of bringing together different architectural features into a single object was Udayan of Uttarayan complex. Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu styles exist in exterior while South- East Asian, Tibeto-Burmese decorative patterns in the interior (Spaces Nepal, 2017).

3.4. Material Innovation

Ramkinkar Baij's innovation in sculpture also proved beneficial for architectural elements. He had thrown cement concrete on metal armatures, with gravel and rubble. It

became fruitful for balustrade designing. Tagore's houses exploited this tactile method for using concrete as a malleable and new material that could be cast into any free form, was something unthinkable at that time (Mitter, 2007). This practice is seen in the numerous 'jalīs' or lattice screens and railings used throughout premises like Udayan, Udichi and Konarka. Unlike Islamic features of Mughals, these Jalīs were casted in molds in-situ process and installed immediately just like artist Baij's sculpture. Such pre-casting of concrete only became widespread later in independent India in works of prominent architects like Edward Durell Stone and Joseph Allen Stein in the late 1950s and early 1960s respectively (Khan, 2001). In Shaymoli, using air gaps inside the mud wall by installing earthen pots to achieve coolness was Tagore's own idea. He was inspired to do so from vernacular material practice. Its roof was also made of mud & leaves.



Figure 13. The campus area comprises a piece of huge land, approximately 20 acres (Map painted by Author. Saha, 2015).

3.5. Proportion and Scale

Tagore always emphasized that structures not to interrupt or disturb nature; rather he approved only those designs that fitted into the natural surroundings effortlessly at Shantiniketan. Thus Rabindranath Tagore had knack for small scaled constructions though he got vast area, nearly 20 acres of land (Figure 13). Shantiniketan avoided tall vertical structures always. One possible reason is, Tagore and his architects did not wanted to disrupt the expansive horizontal view with any perpendicular man-made incongruity. Again, the local material resources obtainable there did not allow them to form any massive structures. Tagore directed his followers that, the height of any building should not surplus the height of the tallest trees in the vicinity. According to a Santiniketan artist R. Siva Kumar, hierarchy in scale gives opportunity to retain human interest and enhance intimacy of engagement from various distances and levels.

3.6. Interior

Santiniketan's architecture performed as a metaphor, it described the passageway between tradition and modernity for Bengal Renaissance. Buildings like Bhavana, Patha-Bhavana and Santoshalaya shows imaginative ambience of the master plan additionally. Even a less important venue like Panthanivas or Dinantika was ornamented with frescoes to impress viewers and appreciate the students for the sake of art (Spaces Nepal, 2017). Influences from Far East (mainly Japanese) in interior design are distinct for wooden works directed by Nandalal Bose. An interference to generate fusions of Indian cultures and the Japanese stimulus ensured the diverse makeovers of Santiniketan. Bose also revived the

traditional use of natural hues in his wall paintings at Pathavaban building's facade (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Mural 'Shayma' by Artist Nandalal Bose in Pathavaban depicts Japanese influence (Mitra, 2008)

Udayan has the most distinct interior that merged Far Eastern and Indian Buddhist cave spirit into a same point. Supportive pillars of its veranda are fashioned as a synthesis between ancient Indian cave monastery and several charms of Jharokhas of Gujarat. It's a style from the hoary Havelis (palaces) of Gujarat, particularly in Sarabhai palace of Ahmedabad (Mete, 2014). The main room of ground floor comprised of wooden ceiling and its interior pillars signify the direct guidance from Ajanta and Ellora. But its timber paneling and inner wooden pillar ornamentations are fundamentally Japanese by essence. The set of wooden balustrades in front and back at ground floor contributes some hints of famous temple complex in Angkor Wat, Cambodia to some extent.

4. INTERPRETATIONS OF TAGORE'S DIFFERENT ASPECTS

4.1 Poetic Psychic

Imagination and perception of space began in his childhood but only confined within the verandas, courtyards and lavish rooms of his ancestral mansion at Jorasanko of Calcutta, his birthplace (Dutta, 2003). An essay called 'Within and without' he noted a memory, how a family servant had once drawn a circle around the spot where he stood, to engulf him in it so that it may prevent him from any possible mischief (Sanyal, 2015). Again,

Teen Pahar in Shantiniketon illustrates his installation interests, which were actually three replica hillocks of pebbles, made by Rabindranath in his early childhood (Pal, 2016).

He developed a profound understanding of architectural vocabulary, potentiality of spatial design and its cultural dimension when he was in his 30's. At that time, his brother Satyendranath was a judge in the court in Gujarat. During his stay from 1878 to 79, he used to visit Shahi Bagh built by Mughal emperor Shahjahan (Shriram, 1992). It had already been converted as official quarters for British employees in Ahmedabad. In his short story, Khudito Pashan or The Hungry Stones, he describes his feeling: *"Felt as if the whole house was like a living organism slowly and imperceptibly digesting (him) by the action of some stupefying gastric juice"* (O'Connell et al., 2002:46).

In his drama 'Grihaprabesh' or Entering the home, a character Jatin, delivered a dialogue *"A piece of architecture is not just brick and mortar, there has to be nectar in it."* (Banerjee, 1998:35). In a poem titled as Beethika or Small tree, Tagore wrote: *"The nectar that the heaven showers, is meant for the roads only, not for the rooms with all doors closed."* (Banerjee, 1998:35). Such indefinable hunt for 'nectar' was the metaphysical base of landscape planning and some Santiniketan buildings built during the poet's life span.

Each buildings in the complex got two faces, one facing inside and another outside, where architecture itself is a gateway without any front in particular. It's exactly bordering on his poetry, 'Ghore Baire;' or 'Home and the world'. For instance, at the glass temple, Upasana Griha, one is permitted to march through an assumed transparent edifice without suffering any hindrance or sense of constraint: including and excluding each other at the same time. Tagore's unambiguous concept of mutual indentation and intervention for such 'home and outer world' successfully transformed as architectural space creation as well. His last residence Shaymoli is perfect sample of an appendage of such known world. Without crossing the fences, this 'cave like' edifice actually separated the two inseparables. It remained as an acceptable case for artist Suren Kar's intellectual signature which equilibrates the ancient Mauryan architecture (Buddhist) with saw-like columns to hold the walls together (Mete, 2014).

Rabindranath Tagore sought motivation both from ancient Indian philosophy like Upanishads and from his contemporary European sources. Thus, his investigation in art and architectural idiom became predominantly thought-provoking. Also, his design innovations are subtle and, in many ways, followed the incognito: 'More lights and more space'. Its the principle motto of poet's thoughts on any spatial organization or design (Sanyal, 2009).

4.2 Vernacularity and Regional Modernism

Clustering of dwellings showed highly reminiscent like rural settings: with a small courtyard being enclosed by the built forms. This type of clustering can be noted in the tribal hamlets that exist in the area around Santiniketan, even today. Vernacular architecture, mainly from the traditional Santal tribal influence, was perfect amalgam with Tagore's innovative visual art domain (Komanduri et al., 2015). As revenue collector for his family's estates in Eastern Bengal, he dreamt of an ideal rural life of Bangladesh and pioneered experiment in rural reconstruction to eradicate their poverty of villagers (Kabir, 1961). He did not mean any infrastructural development rather he wanted to promote existing. Inspired by Tagore, artist Surendranath Kar planned all his buildings with open verandas in the fronts and placed courtyards in the rear. This is exactly how traditional Bungalows or thatched cottages permit more space and air in dwelling units.

The nomenclature of Tagore's houses is associated with their dominant architectural schema. The word 'Dehali' emerges from the Sanskrit word, 'Deha' which means 'the body'. This dwelling, built as a single storied cottage in mud and cow dung, with a thatched overhung roof and, thus, symbolized the very basic necessity of sheltering. Thus it means 'that which shelters the body' or 'serving the bodily need'. But some scholars believe that it's from Santal word, which means place of celebration or living room. This first building in Santiniketan was made of brick and mortar and the poet stayed here for 15 years continuously. Eco-friendly and available vernacular materials were used for the buildings. Moreover, he thought that a building or anything that is built should relate its own culture (Banerjee, 2017). Tagore did not favor brick-built households in the Ashram, rather he had chosen the Santal mud houses as model. Some buildings were even double floored and had thatched roofs at the beginning, later he permitted tin or corrugated sheet only to evade the annoyances of reinstalling hays every year. Even when currency was not a main limitation, he fabricated a gorgeous mud household, named Shaymoli, with tar finishing, engravings and reliefs on its peripheral walls—an exercise investigated earlier at Kalo Bari, (black house) which is now a part of Kala-Bhavan. For information, Mahatma Gandhi stayed here twice, during his visit to Santiniketan in 1940, and later in 1945 (Chowdhury, 2013). Artist Kar planned some small assimilated lodgings for the Bishwa Varati educators, clustered in an outline of a 'U' pattern to heighten the collaboration between tenants and instruct the mood being in a greater family.

4.3 Intellectual Activism



Figure 15. Two pioneers of subcontinent to lead the intellectual activism. Picture No.1670A, Rabindra Bhavana 1940 (Chowdhury, 2013: 101)

After visiting Japan in 1916, Tagore was surprised to see how Buddhism originated in India but fashioned Japanese architecture by unifying both built and open space design as one character (Subramanyan, 1989). Udayan is seen as pan-Asian identity in India's new architectural quest, a proper answer against the superiority of western classism, as the imperial New Delhi project completed in 1925 (Irving, 1981). Though this Mega project had included prominent Indian architectural features, Tagore never appreciated this dogmatic

fusion. Instead of Vitruvian ideals, his reasoning came from his own and his associates' contact with Far Eastern masters of the plastic art like Okakura Kakuzo and Arai Kanpo (Shigemi, 2009). Besides, notable scholars visited Shaymoli and stayed with him, to name some; Okakura Kakuza, Yokoyama Taikan, Sister Nivedita, Sir William Rothenstein, Neheru Gandhi etc. (Figure 15). His houses opened out to the surrounding landscapes to adopt the logic of nature's germination to form unity (Salama, 2007). Tagore's own words sum up his intentions for designing architecture most lucidly is found at the introductory lines of his essay 'Construction versus Creation' where he wrote: *"Construction is for a purpose, it expresses our wants; but creation is for itself, it expresses our very being. We make a vessel because water has to be fetched. It must answer the question why. But when we take infinite trouble to give it a beautiful form, no reason has to be assigned. It is something which is ultimate; it is for the realization of our own spirit which is free, which is glad."* (Gujarati Literature Academy, 1923).

Huxley once stated that Tagore's such approach trained his followers not to perceive art only from the *"Word using, symbol-manipulating part of the mind, but also the perceptions and imagination"* (Huxley, 1968:5). Regarding revivalism through architecture, it's true that Tagore had direct contact with the century's most vigorous Indo-art revivalists like E. B. Havel and A. K. Coomaraswamy. Specially, Coomaraswamy from Ceylon is now credited with the proper elucidation of terminology in Indian architectural history (Coomaraswamy, 1928). He also wrote several essays to connect the textual and architectural meanings of the traditional Indian houses (Kak, 2005). Tagore's distinct idea was different from later architectural revival activities like the reactionary architectural appropriation of Indian motifs by the hand of Srish Chandra Chatterjee's modern Indian Architecture Movement (Lang et al., 1997). In fact, Rabindranath's houses represent both 'aristocratic-folk' and 'primitivist-folk' idiom, arising in Indian architecture from 'Swadeshi' ideals (Chaudhuri, 2010). The exterior and interior of his paternal homestead at Jorasanko, house number 6; witnessed the dawns of 'Swadeshi' movement which later took post- Swadeshi propaganda and this wave eventually touched Santiniketon in later years (Popli, 2018).

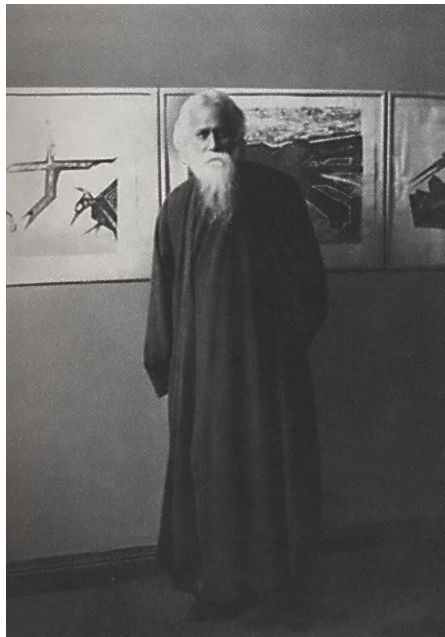


Figure 16. Tagore in Berlin, installation at Galerie Ferdinand Möller (Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, 1930)

5. DISCUSSION

Some information is very important before moving forward to the main discussion of this study. Tagore successfully organized Bauhaus's exposition in Calcutta for the first time on Asian soil, in 1922, where the Indian artisans and the avant-garde artists from Weimar were seen together. He was well ahead of his time and was so advanced by his thoughts, that he finally decided that his paintings are only for the West and his literature is dedicated to the East- a letter to friend Dilip Kumar Roy in 1931 reveals his decision (Kern, 2013) (Figure 16). Later in 1934, in an address to Calcutta Senate Hall, he urgently appealed for an escape from an obligation to produce limiting or cloistral imitations of our 'fossilized' tradition (Jamal, 2001). Tagore was worshiper of innovation but admirer Pan Asian tradition, and though he introduced modern Bauhaus art in Bengal but it was not present in his architectural style of Shantiniketon. At this point, and also from literature review; it's easy to find that why Konarka follows the projectile character of Japanese architecture as a building. It also shows a fusion of Chaitya ideas from Deccan. Besides, relation between architecture and sculpture was not unknown to the poet and material innovation was also welcomed by Tagore, but not in any alien way. Sculptor Ramkinkar Baise's invention of material, that is mixture of local coal, mud into the cement; was implemented as building element like balustrades.

How he became so collective and choosy regarding architectural decisions? As it is known that his childhood playthings, early age visit to Gujrat's Mughal palaces with his brother and exploring East Bengal (today's Bangladesh) have already developed some quest about architecture in his mind, it's really not difficult to imagine such choices at his matured stage.

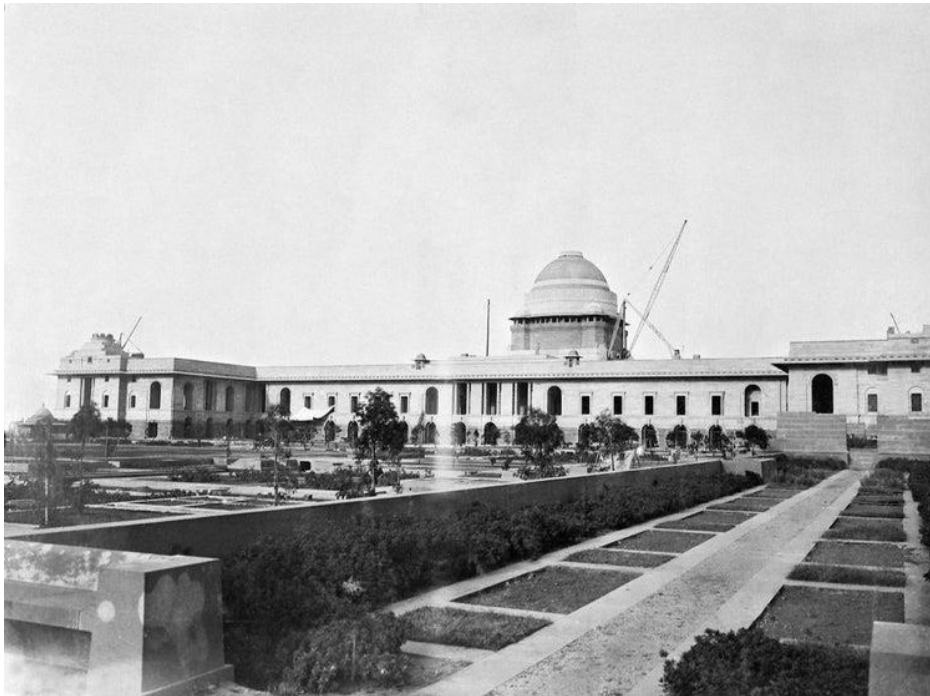


Figure 17. The capital complex of New Delhi (Rastrapativaban Secretariat, 1930)

Moreover, scholars believe that there is always a strong relationship existing between the human being, nature, society and space- called 'Ekistics'. This space may be of any scale and could start from the person itself, to room, dwelling and extending as far as to Mega metropolis (Doxiadis, 1968). For Tagore, this realization came handy as he got

influence of Sufism during his visit in Iran in 1932. He started to convert his clothing fashion according to the Sufi cult. Choosing Mughal and Sultanate elements on the façades for decoration and molding the main entrance of Shamhasadan according to Persian Ewan style, also convey his secular statement as well. Maybe he wanted to be a saint for Bengali literature, as another Bengal mystic poet Lalon Fakir and his philosophy were also influential to his personality. For instance, Shaymoli was the final resting homestead and placed at the end of the journey from his philosophical standpoint. From its dark color to its cave like entrance –it is evident that these concepts were articulated from the same mystic base, where death is ultimate focus. This cave like building was modeled after famous Lomas Rishi cave and the poet preferred it as his adobe during the last days of his life. If Shaymoli as a building is architecturally considered, it reveals some basic facts: a building could basically be condensed to an arch or tunnel, where the rooms are located on the annexes and having a run-through connecting space right at the midpoint. Combination of such arches and tunnels had innovated the maximum articulation and at the same time, proper flow of space. For such determination, all Shantiniketon buildings followed this scheming which has always been taking place with the central lounge while all the compartments propagated organically around it.

Apart from building organization, scale was also an important concern of Tagore. Elevations of each edifice were never monumental here. Thus, floors and the plinths were kept close to a level, just closer to the earth. Scale of vegetation got prioritized over built form height. After visiting Japan, Tagore come acquaintance with 'grounded and natural' architecture. A lot of framing elements in landscape were juxtaposed as performing stages amongst local vegetation or flora; these had been chosen from Indo-mythical references. Such binding and scaling elements over the master plan acting like Foci and Thresholds provided with shade and plinths, hub for rest and performance. Besides, scaling from vernacular and medieval practice was reproduced in Santiniketon. Such scale also reminds the medieval exploration of Bengal to mix of Hindu and imported Muslim style which resulted in intimate small scale and became distinct for Bengal architecture for forever.

Moreover, the admixture during medieval period was not only a sociopolitical construct, it also resulted in architectural synthesis of Islamic and Hindu culture and such style was evolved to satisfy the climatic quest, survival and durability of masonry structure against heavy monsoon. If Shantiniketon buildings were evaluated from environmental and climatic aspects, it is quite rational that lots of fins overhangs from the edges and lighter.

Shades on exterior walls were installed just to attain defense against tropical climate. It's a clear encouragement from the Santal vernacular architecture (Chakravorty, 2011). For information, Santal village organization shows 'U' pattern around a court. Their black color schemes with inspirational and traditional decorations are protected by eave like projections of thatched roof. Interrelating surrounding contexts, everything here in Shantiniketon had a common motto for searching own identity. Tagore also took inspiration from Mahabalipuram's rock cut cave architecture; probably he realized that the form was modeled after traditional Bengal huts. So, he brought it back and reestablished connection with its original birthplace. In addition, the south portico of Punascha resembles the Khona's proverb and rules to resemble vernacularism: 'Let the south be open to hail charming breeze, garden in the west and pools in the east. What a coincidence with Khona's age old maxims practiced all over Bengal region through thousand years.



Figure 18. Architect Edwin Lutyens (1869 – 1944) started his New Delhi project in 1912 (Rastrapativaban Secretariat, 1930)

From above discussions over vernacular architecture, it is now important to introduce six points for architecture of resistance (vernacular) by Kenneth Frampton. His theory was initiated in 1983 and became so influential till now to indicate a 'high level of critical consciousness' where he examined culture against nature. Those six points are culture, (intangible) topography, context, climate, (nature) light (visual) and form (tectonic) (Frampton, 1983). Besides, during the year 2000, scholars like Guy Simon and Graham Farmer introduced 'greater understanding of local culture' to adapt sustainability with Frampton's concept as well (Guy and Farmer, 2000). In fact, the question was evident by the works of third world countries' architects with vast architectural past to promote modernism, but with regional essence. They realized that modern architecture and its masters are sweeping out indigenous identity in post WW2 capitalist era. Great masters like Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn worked in subcontinent during the 60's to 80's with local architects. They brought the International Style movement but cannot omit the context. If something were imposed, that would result even failure, eventually. For example, Chandigarh project by Le Corbusier. But such masters were also credited to inspire architects like V.B. Doshi (Priztkar winner in 2018) and Charles Correa in India, Geoffrey Bawa in Srilanka and Mazharul Islam in Bangladesh. This 'Thought process' in architectural practice created an own language in this subcontinent. Regional Modernism could be seen as further advancement which was initiated by Tagore in Shantiniketon. Thus, after discussing the regional modernism, it's also decent enough why Tagore was a firm criticizer of architect Edwin Lutyens's works in Delhi for not being truly Indian, although the foreign architect used handful of Indian objects and features. Lutyens was famous in Britain, thus appointed by the British government for New Delhi's capitol complex and its surroundings to creat overall master plan (Figure 17 and Figure 18). But the way Tagore opposed this project from the very beginning, was really courageous and full of patriotism.

And finally, the way he named all the buildings in Uttarayan complex was absolutely rational and justified. Even much of today's well trained architectural scholars will not be able to reach such height. One might argue that it's Tagore's strength from literature, but nobody will doubt that he had shown mastery by deciding building orientations as well. For example, Konarka, a perfect name regarding first sun ray from east and utilization of diffused light from north. Udayan resembles sunrise while Punscha indicates sunset, from its sole functionality.

6. CONCLUSION

Rabindranath Tagore's mastermind also reflected in his architectural choice, like his appeal in lyrics and music, he was collective regarding his architectural innovations as well. All around the world, his search stretched from nearly nine architectural cultures within India and two from abroad: Far East (Japan) and Europe. It was a 'Fusion without any confusion!' For such endeavor, Tagore has derived a 'blurred line' between the new creation and imitation of tradition. Imitation is not accepted for him; again tradition detached from modernity was also not desirable. Such urgency was not felt only globally or regionally, but also theoretically and in practice by later architects during the age of Modernism in 1960's, known as beginning era for regional modernism in this subcontinent. So, the complex of Shantiniketon could be seen as cradle for 'searching our own identity'. Tagore's philosophical advances included variety: Design concept, perfect combination with overall landscape by scaled built structures, traditional Bengal scheme and ornamentation choice with new material practice, his nationalist ideology and political involvement - all these compelled us to imagine how Tagore acted as a scientist when his work is customary; again how he revealed his artist personality when he is extraordinary. By coming 'out of the box' from his only image as poetical intelligence, it is really surprising to discover his true reaches and riches. For him, art will only be successful when it's dedicated to 'create appreciation'. But for us, Tagore's unconscious courage, observation and imagination to create environment or space in an unsophisticated site, yet traditionally grounded architecture was more 'psycho-tactile' than any trained architect would have done.

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All figures and charts in the article are produced by the author in declared year in-text, unless stated otherwise.

Conflict of Interest Statement

This article complies with research and publication ethics and there is no potential conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ A denuded superlative landscape feature that forms the setting in the region where Santiniketon is located, Tagore described it as 'geography of the Lilliput.' dwarfed date palms, the scrubby wild plums and the stunted jambolans.

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