



Vaastu & Town Planning - Part two

The Vaastu way

This essay is a three part series on the role of Vaastu in town planning both in Ancient India and today. It draws generously from 'Mayamatam', Vaastu Shastra's most venerated treatise, as well as research papers (published and unpublished) on the subject.

In the earlier, Vaastu and Town Planning – Part One (read the June 2009 Issue of Vaastuyogam) we saw the importance of the Vaastu Purusha Mandala and the various diagrams that are based on it that were the basis of town planning.

We had elaborated upon the diagrams quoting from Bruno Dagen's introduction to his famous English translation of the Mayamatam where he says that each of the squares (padas) of the Mandala is attributed to a protecting deity by whose name the square is designated. There are thirty-two such diagrams, from the single square diagram to the one thousand and twenty-two squares (32 x 32).... All the diagrams may be used for rites as well as for building operations.

We also introduced the city of Jaipur and discussed the Vaastu underpinning of its town planning adding further that almost all Northern Indian towns of that period presented a chaotic picture of narrow twisting lanes, a confusion of run-down forts, temples, palaces, and temporary shacks that bore no resemblance at all to the principles set out in Hindu architectural manuals which call for strict geometric planning.

Villages and towns in ancient India were usually located on the banks of rivers and their tributaries. This facilitated the ritualistic and sanitary functions and fostered trade and commerce by virtue of easy access to the waterways. This concept ultimately favored the establishment of townships particularly on the right banks of the rivers which answers the geographical positioning of many of the temple cities across India.

This essay now takes a look at the planning of Chandigarh - unarguably one of India's better designed cities with a population that on per capita basis is richer than any Indian city.

Chandigarh - Introduction

The write up on Chandigarh is based on

The Chandigarh Master-plan overlaid by the Vaastu Purusha Mandala:



- (1) Capital Complex symbolizes head; (2) Sukhna Lake occupies the E/NE corner; (3 & 4) The PGI and Punjab University located in the north; (5) The City Center, sector-17, occupies the heart of the city; (6) The cremation ground placed in the N-W direction; (7) Industrial are located in the south-east; (8) South-west, south and west zones for living purposes.

pictures and materials from the following sources:- 1) The "LE CORBUSIER'S CHANDIGARH" series published in the New York Times 2) The "Urban and Architectural Work of Le Corbusier in Chandigarh" series published by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre 3) The "Chandigarh Vision and Reality" series published in the Architecture Week.

Chandigarh is situated at the base of the Shiwalik Range of the Himalayas, at 333m above sea level, approximately 260 km northwest of India's capital, New Delhi. The site is a gently sloping plain, with two seasonal rivulets - Patiali-ki-Rao and Sukhna Choe.

Le Corbusier maintained almost all of Albert Mayer's original plan for the city. However, he did replace the curvy roads with a rectangular grid based on the metaphor of a human body but totally divorced from ideas about complex, vibrant Indian cities. He placed the Capitol Complex at the top resembling the head, the intellectual base, reflecting his (and Nehru's) conviction that government should rule a city as the head rules the body. The industrial and educational belts on either side of the city symbolized the limbs. The city center with banks, commercial buildings, shopping, and offices represented the heart.

The city was separated into inward-looking sectors each considered to be a self-sufficient neighbourhood. A hierarchy of roads separated pedestrian and vehicular traffic into seven different road types, from V1 for the fast-moving inter-city traffic to V7 for pedestrians within the sectors.

Chandigarh - Vaastu angle

Although Le Corbusier followed his own architectural philosophy of "Five Points

Architecture", and although he did not hold Indian traditions in high esteem his Chandigarh master-plan follows several Vaastu principles and conforms to some of functional zoning precepts of the Vaastu Purusha Mandala. (See map above.)

The Capital Complex symbolizes the head, which is in the north-eastern direction. According to Vaastu, the water-place should be in the north or east direction. The Sukhna Lake occupies the east, north-east corner. As per Vaastu, places of studies should be in the northern direction. Accordingly the PGI hospital and the Punjab University are located in the north where the causative planet is Mercury (treasure of health and knowledge)

According to Vaastu, Lord Brahma occupies the centre of the place. Thus the City Centre is the heart of the city. It is a recognized place for administrative assembly and in olden days a temple of Lord Brahma existed here. Vaastu lays down that the north-west is the darker side of the plot. Accordingly the cremation ground is placed in the north-west part of the city, which was marked for the same purpose in the ancient city. Unfortunately the industrial area is in the south-east belt, which would have been better off on the western side. Another unfortunate Vaastu anomaly is that the city is not aligned to the cardinal directions. However, be that as it may, Chandigarh is without doubt one of India's better designed and prosperous cities.

What needs to be underscored here is that Indian architects and town planners have made a career of running down ancient Indian building solutions yet the foreign architects have gone out of their way to not only understand these solutions but have also embraced them without hesitation.



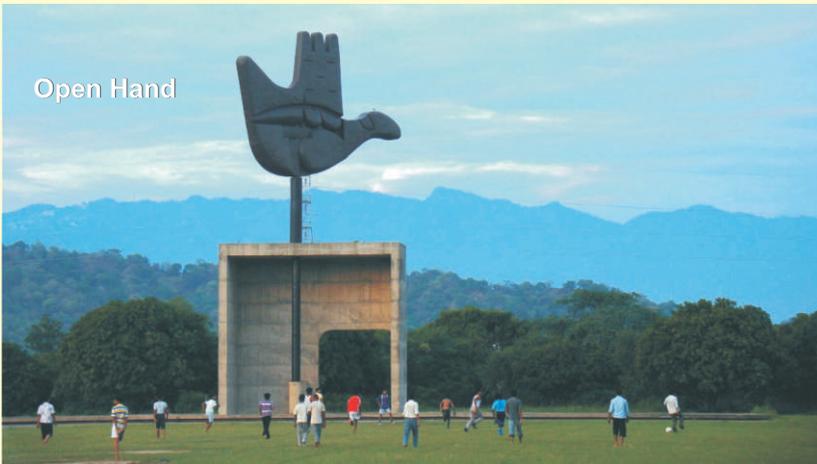
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Chandigarh : Birth of a Nation - Birth of a City

The idea of building Chandigarh was conceived soon after India's independence in 1947, when the partition of India resulted in the state of Punjab being divided into two, with Pakistan getting West Punjab along with the capital Lahore whilst India retained East Punjab. The state of Punjab in India had no capital city so Shimla which had the infrastructure was selected as the temporary capital of Punjab. Beginning in early 1951, most of Phase One of Chandigarh had been completed by 1965. The city was named after the mother goddess of power, Chandi, whose temple Chandimandu is a feature of the new city.

The job of planning the new capital was first allocated to the American Albert Mayer and the design of the buildings to the young Polish architect Matthew Novicki. However, following Novicki's sudden death and Mayer's subsequent hesitation, the project fell in the hands of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret who planned the city and the Capitol Complex. The Swiss-born architect and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, other than realizing Chandigarh's urban plan, also designed its public offices, furnishing them to the smallest detail. However questionable the planning and architecture of the city, it did succeed in providing clean hygienic environments, ample green open space, and the basic amenities of civic life — schools, hospitals, and parks. Such amenities are lacking in many Indian cities even today. Chandigarh and the area surrounding it were constituted as a union territory on 1st November, 1966. It serves as the joint capital of both, Punjab and Haryana states.

Total area of the union territory is 114Sq.Km. The Union Territory of Chandigarh along with its two satellite cities - Panchkula (Haryana) and Mohali (Punjab) and the cantonment of Chandimandir (in Panchkula district) is collectively called the Chandigarh Tricity.



The Open Hand is one of the most significant monuments of Chandigarh. This giant hand in metal sheet rises 85 feet high from a sunken trench and rotates freely in the wind like a weather cock to indicate the direction of wind. The Open Hand is the official emblem of the Chandigarh city. The significance of open hand is that it conveys the symbolic message of peace and unity that is "open to give, open to receive".



Le Corbusier's contribution to regulating the built mass of the new city includes an extensive range of architectural controls covering volumes, façades, textures -Especially for the major commercial and civic hubs such as the V2s. Recognizing the crucial role of trees as elements of urban design he also devised a comprehensive plantation scheme, specifying the shape of trees for each category of avenues, also keeping in view their potential for cutting off the harsh summer sun.



Pandit Nehru, conceived Chandigarh to be "a new city of free India, totally fresh and wholly responsive to the aspirations of the future generations of this great country."

Beginning in 1951, Le Corbusier remained the principal 'architectural and planning advisor' to the Chandigarh Project till his death in 1965. As it turned out, there was none else who could have matched Prime Minister Nehru's lofty optimism and his progressive, modernist vision for a, newly independent nation.