singularity of this form contrasts with its deliberate ambiguity of meaning; it cradles the sky, simultaneously suggesting a crested mountain, and hones of the sacred ox, yet also refers to Le Corbusier’s favourite symbol of Chandigarh, the Open Hand.54

The context is steeped in a monumental tradition common to East and West. The garden, a haven from the hostile forces of nature, commonly symbolises the creative potential of life and the reconciliation of man with the profusion of nature. The form of the Mughal garden, derived from the mythological structure of the world, connotes the universe in microcosm. The crossing of the two major axes, concealed by a fourth subdivision, is a cosmic form associated with the Buddhist mandalas; it is related to the ritually conceived pattern of ancient Indian towns as well as to the founding sites of the Roman town. In India the crossing of the major streets traditionally marked the elders’ meeting place and the quarters of the highest consulate, while in Chandigarh it was the site of the Forum.55 At Chandigarh Le Corbusier transformed this paradigmatic structure to relate three distinct scales of landscape: the garden of the Governor’s Palace, the pedestrian plaza of the Capitol complex, and the organisation of the city.

By fusing Mughal symbols with postmodernist, imperialistic, and socialistic space and with Classical architectural principles, Le Corbusier sought to inflate the traditional Indian concept of the sacred with a modern metaphysic, thus the cultural with the universal. He noted the congruence of his ideal with the aims of Hindu philosophy: ‘fraternity between the cosmos and living beings. . . . In addressing fundamental human concerns—the relationship of man to nature, and of architecture to landscape—he employed a degree of abstraction that transcends the iconographic roots of any particular element.56 The discursive practice of the Capitol city rests not on its formal iconography, but on ‘the highly structured, ambiguous union of form and content’57 that renders its meaning universal.

The significance of the Governor’s Palace garden is both universal and particular: the garden unfolds as a microcosm of the Indian landscape. The juxtaposition of the garden with the natural terrain—via the landscape of the Capitol complex—reinforces the dialogue between man-made and natural, microcosm and macrocosm. By separating out a discrete landscape from the general spatial continuum, Le Corbusier rendered meanings more intensively, while in the vast landscape of the Capitol city, such symbolism is diffused. The effect is reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s description of the Acropolis: the architecture extends its influence to the horizon.

In a fitting final tribute, at his last rites the Greek architects deposited a portion of earth from the Acropolis on his grave, while those from India offered water from the Ganges.59


56 The Villa Shodan (1915), nominally commissioned by Sutrumal Birlennan, was built over the site without modifications. Le Corbusier Opusculum Completa: 1952-1967 (Zurich: Girard, 1967, p.134. In Finsbury, due to confusion, the municipal authorities had been required to shift the Maison des Jeunes (1900-65) to the opposite side of the sports stadium, which he already disliked without altering its design. Le Corbusier Opusculum Completa: 1952-1967 (Zurich: Girard, 1967, p.135. In 1961, when realisation of the Firminy Chapel was in doubt, he was requested to build the project in Bologna, subject to selection of a building site; although none was ever agreed upon.


60 Idem.

61 Idem.

62 An example of Le Corbusier’s Monuments and Openness in the modernist church, he had little effect on the design; the form was an answer to a psycho-physiology of the feelings. 161.

63 The proposal of the government complex was written in 1951 by Albert Daniel for his 1950 master plan for the city. Le Corbusier retained the discrete functional areas of his predecessor’s plan, which had affiliations with his Open City and transformed Mayor’s original layout into a more conventional, geometrical composition. For critical analyses of the buildings at Chandigarh, see Peter Sorlin, ‘Timeless best of Time’, Le Corbusier and the City: India, Singapore, and India (2005), pp115-118 and William J. R. Curtis, Authenticity, and the Ancient Semi-Legal, and Louis Kahn’s Ideas of Parliament. Ibid, pp181-194.

64 See Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, Volume 3, 1954-1967 (New York: The Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982, H34, No. 193—‘the site united with the inexpressible the incomparable, the inexplicable’. Finally, I was able to erect an architecture which fulfilled the day-to-day functions but which led to jubilation: See Tafuri, op cit. for a different interpretation of the phenomenon of isolation in Le Corbusier’s work.

65 In Modular II, p21. Le Corbusier announced the dimension of 60m with the mind rather than the eye; the eye does not encompass a distance of 400 metres, the mind does conceivably double, 60m and 120m, 200 metres, then the multiples of 800, 1200, etc., which automatically impose concepts of time. Modular II, p21. The residential sectors at Chandigarh measure 600 x 1200 m.

66 Since the Club House on Laté Sultana (1958-64) violated this principle, Le Corbusier denounced the building, and the guides to maintain an unimpeded view of the mountains from the Capitol complex. See Le Corbusier, Le Corbusier, p37.

67 The dimension of 900m is from the distance from the Loneo to the Place de la Chandigarh and from the Place de la Chandigarh to the Place de la Chandigarh, Le Corbusier 1946-1952, p117.

68 See the Capitol complex plan dated May 1951, Le Corbusier 1946-1952, p119.


71 In Modular II, pp.114-125, (New York: Architectural Book Publishers, 1958). The topographic view of Chandigarh’s public buildings, the site of the Assembly building, and the site of the capital are, respectively, the themes of the Great Court, and the Great Court of the High Court.


73 Le Corbusier, Last Works, p74.


75 Le Corbusier, Last Works, p188.

Footnotes


3 In 1912 Le Corbusier, an architect of the Atelier d’art en Events de la Chaux-de-Fonds, included ‘architectes des jardins’ among the services on his letterhead. See Selhub, op cit. p3.


6 Towards A New Architecture, p70.

7 See Durrett, op cit.

8 The plan of the Ville Contemporaine (1922), for example, is organised in a Beaux Arts Manner, with cultural facilities isolated in a ‘jeuic Asylums’. The entire ground plan of the city, an idea influenced by Turner Garney’s City Industrielle, and the masses of residential buildings (residk house), borrowed from Irian, and elaborated through traditional courtyard blocks, open to a communal landscape of Classical French parterres.


10 Towards A New Architecture, p189.

11 Ibid, p204.


13 In the Five Points of a New Architecture, originally published in 1927, Le Corbusier also proposed the horizontal strip window to express the independence of the facade from the structural grid, a free plane, wherein the (vertical) window is related architeconically to the human body, the strip window is analogous to the landscape itself.

14 For a brilliant analysis of the de Beauvoir penhouse see Mauro Futer, op. cit, pp150-300.

15 He compares the Marseilles Block to an Iconic temple... ‘The Marseilles Block is concrete, the Iconic fashion—sinister grace of mathematics, grace of proportion to the human scale, Le Corbusier, Modular II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp360-320.

16 In her seminal article Mary McLeod relates this shift to Le Corbusier’s plans for Algiers of the 1930s and his growing involvement with Syndicalism. See McLeod, op cit.