

**Searching For Identity:  
The Approaches of Three Pakistani Architects**

by

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June 1987

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ARCHITECTURE STUDIES  
AT THE  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
June 1990

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts to deal with some of the major issues relating to Pakistani architecture today as well as the consequent development of an architectural identity. In order to establish the framework for the study various discourses that reflect on the notion of identity have been examined. Due to the lack of an indigenous architectural discourse, and the consequent absence of critically rigorous information on the subject, this work is devoted to augmenting the very limited material available on the state of the architectural profession in Pakistan and to increasing an awareness of the directions that this architecture is presently taking. As a means of furthering an understanding of architecture in Pakistan the first part of this thesis provides some information on the development of architecture in Pakistan both in terms of historical evolution as well as through the development of educational institutions such as The National College of Arts.

The rest of the work deals with the existing and emerging 'directions' (in Pakistani architecture) as they are manifested in the projects of several influential architects. The three architects chosen for this study and whose work best represents the current range of architecture in Pakistan are;

Habib Fida Ali, one of the most experienced and respected architects in Karachi, who having studied at the Architectural Association is a strong proponent of the modern aesthetic. Habib Fida Ali represents the 'modern' current that runs through Pakistani architecture.

Nayyar Ali Dada, an N.C.A. trained architect who has had the opportunity to do a great deal of important work both in Lahore and Islamabad. Nayyar Dada embodies in his work and approach the majority of architecture in Pakistan, which while aspiring towards modernism is affected not only by the living vernacular traditions but also by the fast developing rejectionist attitude towards modernism.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz, as he makes quite clear in his book *Architecture in Pakistan* is a supporter of the "vernacular tradition". Kamil Khan is an architectural practitioner and a noted academic, who was the head of the department of architecture at the National College of Arts, Lahore between the years 1966-1975.

An evaluation of these architects' work is to be undertaken on two levels – a critical analysis of their built work and an understanding of their own attitudes and approaches towards architecture, especially their evaluations of Pakistani architecture. This thesis can only be viewed as an introduction to their work and aims to get others interested in the multifaceted architecture being carried out in Pakistan today. I conclude with some thoughts on the notion of a Pakistani architectural identity and on the question of 'revivalism' which is gaining considerable prominence among influential circles in Pakistan.

**Thesis supervisor:** Professor William Porter.

**Title:** Norman B. and Muriel Leventhal Professor of Architecture and Planning and Head, Department of Architecture (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For making this thesis possible I would especially like to thank the three architects, Habib Fida Ali, Nayyar Ali Dada and Kamil Khan Mumtaz who took the time to talk to me about their work and their 'approaches' towards architecture in Pakistan.

I would also like to thank;

Professor William Porter, for his valuable advice and criticism which helped to set a direction to this work and greatly facilitated the development of my own view points.

Masood Khan, for his extremely helpful insights and advice on the question of Pakistani architecture, and for correcting the many weaknesses in the historical context.

Larry Vale, for his time and patience in going over the many drafts and his criticism at critical junctures regarding the direction of this thesis.

Ajaz Hussain, for his very helpful and coherent proof reading of the final text.

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Introduction

## **Understanding the Context**

THE FRAMEWORK.

This thesis which was originally conceived with a much greater scope and ambition in mind i.e., 'Contemporary Pakistani Architecture', has, under the subsequent realization of practical limitations, been scaled down to a more manageable level; an introduction to the work of three Pakistani architects, Habib Fida Ali, Nayyar Ali Dada and Kamil Khan Mumtaz, and a look at how their work is helping to define and develop the notion of a Pakistani identity.

By a Pakistani 'identity' I mean that set of characteristics by which a nation or people are recognizable – architecture is one of these characteristics, albeit among the most visible. There are endless, subtle variations on the concept of identity, i.e. understanding how a group of people perceive themselves and how they are viewed by others. The question of identity is closely tied to the "principal ideas or beliefs that characterize a particular class, group or movement"<sup>1</sup> i.e. an ideology.

Clifford Geertz in his book, *The Interpretation of Cultures* writes: "where science is the diagnostic, the critical dimension of culture,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford American Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, 1980. P. 435



ideology is the justificatory, the apologetic one – it refers ‘to that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defence of patterns of belief and value’ “. <sup>1</sup> Geertz also talks of the “nationalisms within nationalisms” in virtually all newly independent states, like Pakistan, which contain more than one ideological axis. Pakistan like most other developing Muslim countries suffers from a case of a ‘split-personality’. This is most obvious in the conflict between Islam and nationalism, the two ideologies that bind Pakistan together. “The effect of this development (the existence of the duality between Islam and the State) has been to cause political debate and religious propitiation to be carried out in the same vocabulary. A Koranic chant becomes an affirmation of political allegiance as well as a paeon to God; the burning of incense expresses one’s secular ideology as well as one’s sacred beliefs”. <sup>2</sup> In the case of architecture in Pakistan this ‘vocabulary’ has tended to be quite distinct; in most cases indigenous architectural expression is identified with Islamic values while *national* development is considered to be synonymous with international and hence ‘modern’, architecture. In order to better understand this duality I will be giving a brief background to the emergence of Pakistan and its architectural profession, as well as the development of the first Pakistani architectural institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers. New York, 1973. P. 231

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 166

The notion of a Pakistani identity can not be separated from the historical baggage which is tied to the issue, especially as it relates to pre-colonial days. In dealing with the past, one inevitably confronts the notion of 'historicism' and its application to the contemporary context. I shall attempt here to develop a framework for better understanding this notion and how it relates to a Pakistani identity, particularly in terms of architecture, by building on the ideas of global thinkers who have dealt with issues of historicism. In the Pakistani situation however, and with the introduction of Islam into the equation, one must go beyond to the polemics of Muslim intellectuals faced with similar questions. Here I will resort to the work done by the Aga Khan Foundation in rekindling debate on identifying an 'Islamic architecture'. It is only with the development of such a context that the work of a Pakistani architect attempting to address issues of identity can be best understood. Finally, I will state my own thoughts on the issues raised based on the previously developed framework.

It is particularly in the realm of architecture that a hybrid identity is most visible. According to young Pakistani architects who studied contemporary Pakistani architectural production, "The architectural idiom currently being applied and perpetuated in Pakistan is producing designs that are easily identifiable with, and mistakable for, those being produced internationally. They have little sense of place, or uniqueness to the locale, or peculiarity to the distinct set of conditions within

which they evolve".<sup>1</sup> The work and thinking of the first generation of Pakistani architects has been largely lost to posterity due to the lack of importance given and attention paid to architectural development at the time. This must not be allowed to happen to the next generation after them. It is my desire in this thesis to highlight and critically approach the work of three important Pakistani architects who grew up in the post-independence era. I feel that the architects whose work I shall be dealing with are attempting to break out of their received tradition of modernism and generate an appropriate language, an identity, for the place where they reside and practice.

Before going any further it is essential to state the need for, and importance of, furthering an understanding of the Pakistani architectural profession. While it becomes quite evident to even the casual observer that most building activity in Pakistan falls within the 'informal' category, this thesis is devoted towards developing an understanding of the architectural profession in Pakistan and in particular the work of three notable members of that profession. There are several reasons for taking this approach: the first stems from a desire to augment in some form the very limited material available on the state of architecture within the country. There is, I feel, a lack of an architectural discourse in Pakistan today. This state of affairs has a

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<sup>1</sup> Arshad, Shahnaz. *Reassessing the Role of Tradition in Architecture*. S.M.Arch.S Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. June 1988. P.1

detrimental effect on the development of architecture in the country as a whole and particularly on students and young architects joining the field. It is essential to first create an awareness of the significance of the built environment among designers and subsequently among the general population. Such an awareness is at present quite absent. Another reason why a study of the Pakistani architectural profession needs to be carried out is because 'institutionalized' architectural development can further one's comprehension of the notion of Pakistan, since over the years 'officially' sponsored architecture has been used to create and perpetuate an image of a Pakistani national identity. The third, and to me the more immediate, reason for studying 'formal' architecture as it is manifested in the works of trained architectural professionals is the current emphasis on, and a revival of, *historicism*. Historicism, as it is commonly understood deals with notions of regionalism and vernacular traditions. It is this aspect as manifested in the individual approaches towards developing a Pakistani architectural identity taken by several Pakistani architects that I shall be primarily concerned with in my thesis.

#### THE BACKGROUND.

Volumes have been written about great architectural movements and their development. Theories and counter theories have been proposed about the most recent and far reaching, the so called "modern"

movement of architecture. "That the creation of modern architecture constituted a major development must be beyond doubt."<sup>1</sup> The greatest impact of this modern architecture has been in its' superseding most indigenous architectural expressions both in the regions where it originated and in others where it was subsequently introduced. The development and growth of this movement ostensibly transcending national, cultural and ideological boundaries has been widely accepted by critics and architects. Yet apart from a passing mention practically no attention has been paid to the implications and effects of an international style on regions apart from those where the new ideas or currents originated. Thus Pakistani architecture stands as a back-water of the modern movement, where much has been affected but little is understood about the flood that overtook and swept away long standing architectural beliefs and traditions.

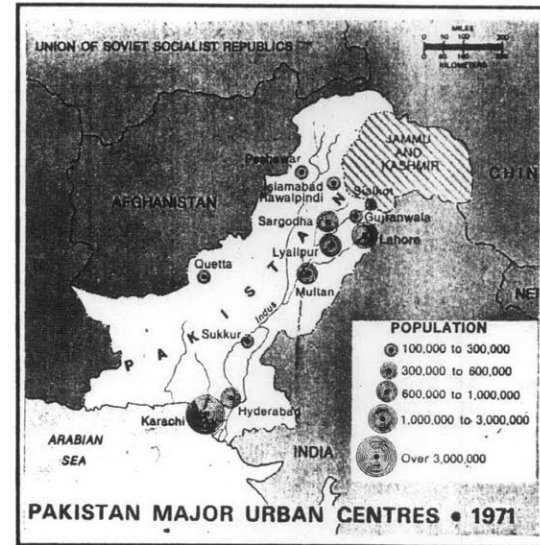
Pakistan became an independent nation after the partition of pre-independence 'British' India, in 1947, into Pakistan and *Bharat*, commonly referred to as India. Over two hundred years of British colonial rule had left a deep and lingering impression on the psyche of the two countries. The introduction of Europeans to the sub-continent and the eventual British control of much of what was once Mughal India was responsible for the decisive break in the chain of building

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<sup>1</sup> Curtis, William. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 1983. P. 386

tradition that had evolved to great heights under the Mughals (*figure 2*). Today, in Pakistan and India the most visible remnant of the colonial legacy is English architecture. At times used with sympathy and sincerity and at others condescendingly and with little understanding, the structures of colonialism are now as much a part of the urban landscape of the sub-continent as are the earlier Mughal and Hindu buildings. Imperial British architecture has gradually been accepted by the once colonized peoples of the sub-continent, and like the constructions of earlier empires is itself regarded by many less as an alien imposition than as an inheritance to be protected.

In Pakistan the search for an appropriate national architectural expression began soon after independence. Not surprisingly those most in favor of such an expression were the bureaucrats and politicians in power on whose shoulders lay the task of creating a national identity. Since Pakistan was created as an independent state for the Muslims of India they sought inspiration from the Muslim Mughal Empire, and the two centuries of British rule were explicitly ignored. Pakistan's ideology was based on Islam and yet at the same time the notion of a Pakistani nationalism was also espoused. The resulting conflict between the essentially secular concept of nationalism and Islam has still to be resolved.

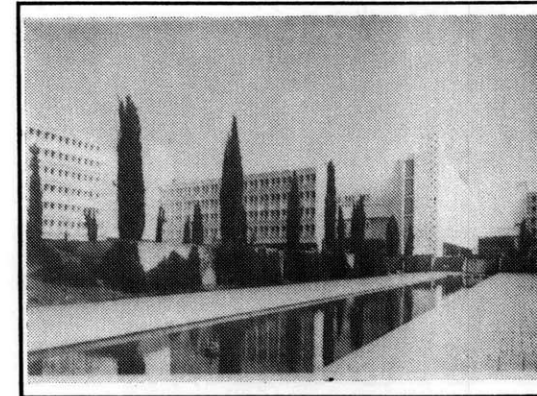


1. Map, major urban centers of Pakistan



2. The Mughal Heritage. Lahore Fort

The place where the desire to convey a Pakistani identity was first expressly stated was in the creation of a new capital city Islamabad, "The City of Islam". Islamabad was conceived in the late fifties by the then ruler Ayub Khan to be both a center of the governmental machinery and a symbol of the newly independent state (*figure 3*). "Though a new country we, as a people, are an old nation, with a rich heritage. Inspired by a historical past... (we are) eager to build a new city which, in addition to being an adequate and ideal seat of government, should also reflect our cultural identity and national aspirations".<sup>1</sup>



3. Secretariat, Islamabad.

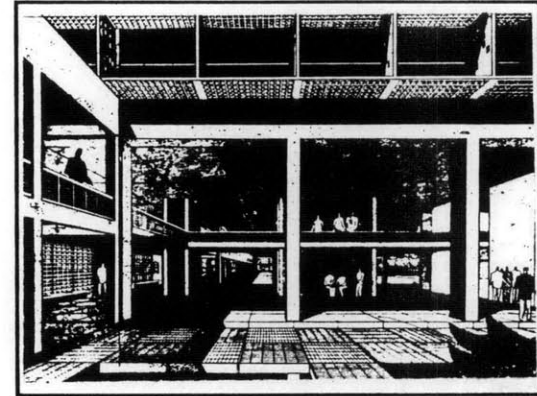
At the time having recourse to very few qualified architects and fewer still with recognized talent, Pakistani planners searched abroad for designers who were supposed to realize the national identity into architecture. Prominent international architects like, Edward Durrell Stone, Gio Ponti, Doxiadis (*figure 4*) and Louis Kahn, among others, were hired with the hope that they could rival and surpass the work that Lutyens and Corbusier had carried out in India. They were additionally asked to guide and teach the local architects and building industry the finer points of modern architecture.<sup>2</sup> The structures that

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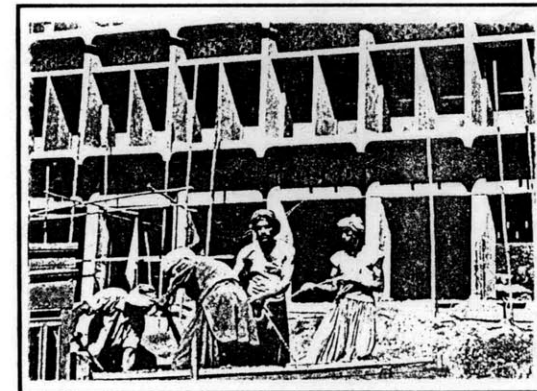
<sup>1</sup> N. A. Faruqi. Chairman, Capital Development Authority. Quoted in, **Kamil Khan Mumtaz's, *Architecture in Pakistan***. Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 184

<sup>2</sup> Alberto Rosseli, the designer for the Secretariat buildings at Islamabad admits however that, "...the technology adopted betrayed its

these architects were directed to design were supposed to reflect 'Islam'; in fact Louis Kahn's designs for the Presidential Palace and Parliament Building were rejected for not being Islamic enough, "...in that extraordinary style with holes punched in it",<sup>1</sup> while Edward Stone's scheme for the Presidency was accepted "...flattering Islamic grandeur in the crudest way",<sup>2</sup> with its geometric motifs, courtyards and arcaded spaces incorporated onto an essentially classical form. Most of the resulting institutional buildings in Islamabad convey a sense of the dilemmas faced by their respective architects; how can one design contemporary buildings which also reflect a particular national ideology? Greater success has been achieved with the designs for the residential sectors where a departure from poorly understood 'Islamic' elements was possible. In Pakistan the construction of national monuments was greatly facilitated by the development of Islamabad, the latest of these projects of national significance being the massive and ostentatious Faisal mosque (*figure 6*) and the soon to be built Supreme Court building, by Kenzo Tange, both located in Islamabad.



4. Doxiadis. Preliminary design for govt. offices, Islamabad.



5. Govt. Secretariat, Islamabad.

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origins and was difficult to graft onto the country with its particular climate; technology and cultural heritage".

(*Figure 5*)

'Islamabad. Progress review on Pakistan's new capital city.'

*The Architectural Review*. March 1967. P. 211-216

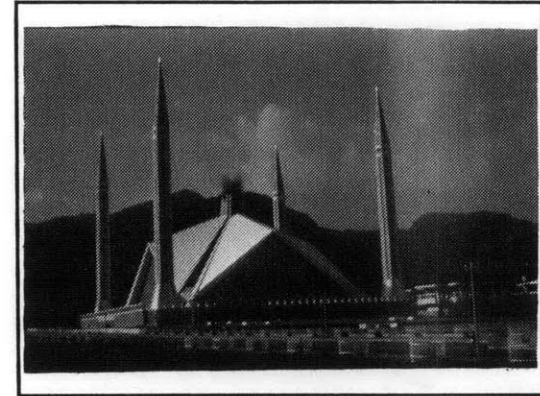
<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



THE PROFESSION.

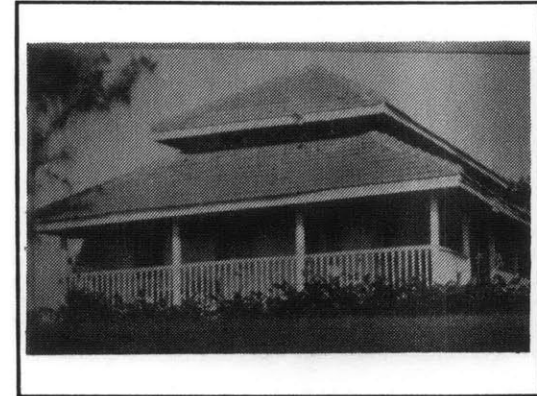
Architecture in Pakistan and the attitudes of most architects towards their work have been molded by the socio-political conditions that led to the creation of the country and thereafter by influences from abroad. Most architects have had to tread a thin line between the requirements and demands of official patronage and the need for self expression. In Pakistan this conflict has been exacerbated by frequent changes in policy and redefinitions of Pakistani selfhood that accompany changes in the ruling regime and power structure. Pakistan is a country torn between two powerful historical attractions. On one hand its religious ties bind it to the Arab world to the west and on the other there remains a strong affinity with the past glories of the Mughal Empire. The problem is that Pakistan is neither and both of these at the same time, since the Arab world's immense oil wealth separates it from the impoverished condition of Pakistan and the lingering hostility of partition separates Pakistanis from the main centers and symbols of Mughal empire in India. Also, as has been noted, contemporary notions of progress and development are at variance with these religiously inspired ideals. As it stands, the foundations of architecture in Pakistan are based not on an 'Islamic' ideal or even the vernacular, but on the remnants of a colonially inspired system.



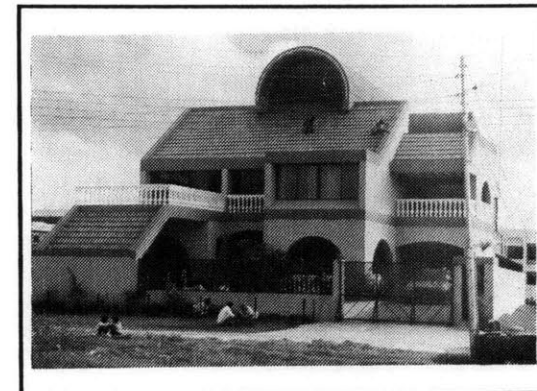
6. Faisal Mosque, Islamabad.

On the urban scale, the Anglo-Indian idea of a *bungalow* continues to dominate residential planning. The bungalow, (figures 7 & 8) set in the center of a large plot of land, epitomized the concept of social distinction in India, and hence the superiority, between the rulers over the ruled. After independence the bungalow was quickly adopted by the local elite, who had similar ideas of differentiating between them and the majority of the urban population living in close quarters in 'traditional' areas of cities. Today the bungalow has largely degenerated into a small house, on a little plot with strips of the required few feet of land all around, including an obligatory 'garden' in front, and a boundary wall surrounding the house for privacy and security from the street and neighbors. This state of affairs has been perpetuated by building codes and by-laws that make it very difficult to deviate from a residential form not based on the bungalow model, however inappropriate that model may be to social needs.

Post-independence architecture is based on colonial prototypes, which many local architects find difficult to reconcile with current socioeconomic needs&with the modernist indoctrination of their training. These attitudes have been particularly strengthened by the impact of 'modernism' with its claims of being a panacea for the architectural ills facing contemporary society. Many architects espoused the modernist view point reasoning that since Pakistan's architectural traditions have been dead since the days of the Mughals why not be



7. The bungalow then...



8. .... and now.

inspired by modern architecture instead? Soon local architectural schools were saying the same thing. In order to better understand contemporary architecture in Pakistan, and in particular prevalent attitudes towards architecture, it is important to recognize the forces that helped develop and shape Pakistani architecture. Acknowledging the impact of external influences, culture, history and the local clientele on attitudes towards architecture, one must also look to indigenous educational institutions.

Pakistan at present has three established centers of architectural education, one in Karachi and two in Lahore. Another school has recently been opened at Hyderabad in Sindh. The oldest of these, and arguably the most influential, is the National College of Arts at Lahore. It was from the N.C.A., as it is widely known, that the first batch of locally trained architects graduated, who continue to have a considerable impact in the shaping of contemporary architecture in Pakistan. Following the development of the various stages of architectural thinking that the N.C.A. has gone through provides a solid base from which to understand architectural development in the country.

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ARTS.

Only after the British had secured control of much of the Indian sub-continent and after a hundred years or so of the proliferation of officially accepted architecture, primarily neoclassical and Gothic styles, did some concerned observers begin to realize that the rich local architectural heritage was being destroyed. Not only were the colonial administrators and English citizens using European forms for their architecture, but soon the local elite also began to adopt colonial architecture along with the foreign way of life in order to gain favor with the new rulers of India. A considerably vocal and influential group of people eventually banded together in order to 'save' Indian architecture.<sup>1</sup> People like; James Fergusson, the noted architectural historian, Lockwood Kipling and wealthy Indians like Sir Jamsetji Jijibhoy. These were the 'revivalists'. The revivalists argued that an uninterrupted living tradition existed in India, connecting the past and the present, and consequently British policy should shun imported forms and ideas and foster this tradition by sustaining the Indian craftsman or *mistri*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, Philip. *Splendors of the Raj. British Architecture in India, 1660 to 1947*. John Murray (Publishers) Ltd. London, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Richards: "Their (Indian) architecture, though peculiar, is of a superior order and in the construction of great buildings, they have exerted powers of moving and

By the middle of the nineteenth century enough supporters had been collected to petition the government to set up schools across India for the sole purpose of preserving and teaching the local arts and crafts of British India. There were however quite possibly other, baser motives to this venture, as Kamil Khan Mumtaz writes in his book; "British policies in the 18th century, designed to eliminate competition against its own growing industry, reduced Indian manufacturers to the extent that there was nothing left of value to the 'home market' with which India could pay for an increasing volume of imports... A solution was devised, which, while leaving the Indian home market to the mercies of Western competition, might slowly increase the competitive power of Indian goods. The solution adopted was ludicrous. It was nothing less than the establishment of a college of art".<sup>1</sup>

As a continuation of the policy to set up industrial design and art schools across India, the Mayo School of Arts was established in Lahore in 1875, honoring the late Earl of Mayo, "...with the object of improving the taste of the native public as regards beauty of form and finish in the

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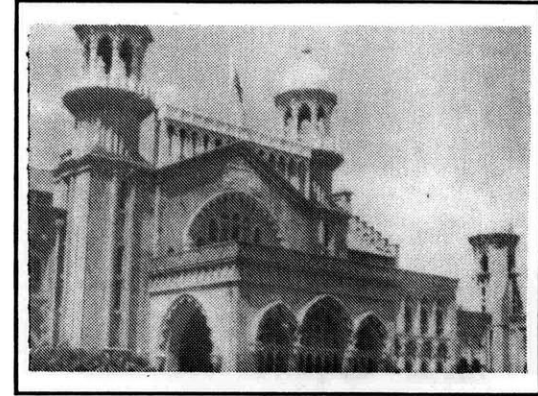
elevating large masses which are unknown to European architects".

Ananthawar, M.A. and Rea, Alexander. *Indian Architecture (Vol. III)*. Indian Book Gallery, Delhi 1981. P. 101

<sup>1</sup> Kamil Khan Mumtaz. *Architecture in Pakistan*. Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 112

articles of daily use among them".<sup>1</sup> Lockwood Kipling was the first principal and his son, the famous Rudyard Kipling, spent a part of his early years living in the old Mayo school campus. Designed in a neo-Mughul style (*figure 9*), an extension of the accepted and official Anglo-Indian styles, the old campus buildings now form the core of the present National College of Arts. Although a part of the Mayo School teaching program included basic courses for draftsmen, it was primarily a center for the teaching of industrial art based on Mughal prototypes. Even the "architectural classes" that were announced by the school in 1919 were in fact "founded to give students a through training in architectural draftsmanship in order to qualify them to become architectural assistants".<sup>2</sup>

At the time of independence Pakistan had no credible architectural institution. The Mayo School of Arts was still teaching drafting and the link with the rest of pre-partition India was now broken. The first generation of formally trained and officially recognized architects to practice in Pakistan had largely been taught in sister schools of the Mayo School, like the Jamsetji Jijibhoy school of Art in Bombay, now a part of India, before they opted to come to Pakistan. It was architects like Tajuddin Bhamani, M.A. Ahed, M.A. Mirza, Bloomfield and Zaheeruddin Khawaja, who formed the Institute of Architects



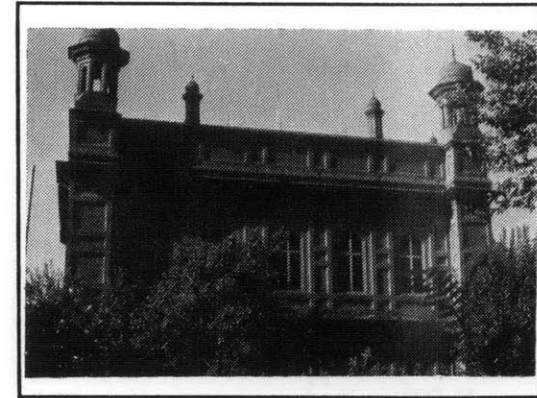
9. Lahore High Court, the neo-Mughal style.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 114

Pakistan, which started out as an informal, semi-official organization and is today the foremost representative body for Pakistani architects. It took more than a decade, from 1947 to 1958, for the first architectural degree course to be initiated in Pakistan at the Mayo School of Arts, now renamed the National College of Arts (*figure 10*). The National College of Arts was to be a center not only for architectural education but also for fine arts and design. It was and still is the only such 'national' institution in the country. The five year architectural course, due to a lack of qualified Pakistani teachers, depended on resident or visiting foreign professors and architects. Professor Mark Sponenberg who was the principal at the time was instrumental in putting together the architectural degree program at the N.C.A. Professor Sponenberg and other foreign teachers, like the art historian Baldinger, came from America in the late 50's when the Bauhaus influences were very strong. The existence of workshops and master craftsmen at the Mayo School further helped to consolidate the 'functional aesthetic' tendencies of their Bauhaus background. It was this training that was imparted to their students. The prevailing ideas and attitudes (of modernism) both from Europe and America also influenced their teaching considerably. As a small department of a small college the N.C.A. architecture department suffered from a lack of resources and teachers. At any given time there were not more than a couple of qualified architects. As Kamil Khan Mumtaz (who joined the N.C.A. in 1965) recalls, "...they compensated by drawing upon the resources of the



10. The Mayo School (National College of Arts).

fine arts and design (departments)". This meant that the final products of the students were very strong on aesthetics, "design in the abstract, form, space, color, texture, particularly based on the Bauhaus theories".<sup>1</sup>

Javed Najam, at present a teacher at the N.C.A. and among the first students to enter the architectural degree program at the National College (he left for the A.A. after two years), agrees with this assessment, "at the N.C.A. the first years were spent together with students of fine arts and design... developing an aesthetic sensibility. During these first two years the students learnt about two dimensional forms, shapes, colors, there was no (architectural) designing".<sup>2</sup> The students learned superior manual skills and a rather elementary version of the architectural academic tradition, both of England and the U.S. This training is reflected in the work of the first batch of graduating architects. The National College of Arts and consequently its graduates however lacked proficiency over technical subjects. Despite the importance given to building construction, a legacy of the Mayo School, subjects like economics and climate control were not emphasized, primarily due to the limited human and financial resources available.

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<sup>1</sup> **Kamil Khan Mumtaz.** (Interview conducted by Author).

<sup>2</sup> **Javed Najam.** (Interview conducted by Author).



To his credit Professor Sponenberg did a valuable service to the architecture department when he initiated a pioneering summer program. The summer program essentially involved a series of field trips, going to remote parts of Pakistan, collecting and documenting traditional patterns and designs and incorporating them into architecture. For example; the use of previously unknown, northern Pakistani, Swati patterns was introduced into architectural woodwork for the first time as a result of these expeditions. Thus the ground work was laid for the development and growth of an indigenous architectural sensibility.

The first experimentation with a full fledged five year architectural program at the N.C.A. proved to be short lived, only three years after the course was initiated (1958) the fourth and last batch of architectural students were admitted (1961). The architecture department of the National College of Arts was downgraded to a polytechnic when in the same year the Mughalpura Engineering College, also in Lahore, was upgraded to the University of Engineering and Technology. The reasons for this move are not very clear but it appears that the government did not feel the need to have two architectural departments in the same city. National policy was heavily biased towards technical/industrial development, and an engineering university was the obvious choice to benefit from the limited funding available over an arts college which could not demonstrate adequate

reasons for its existence. The consequent system at the N.C.A. was based on a three year course after which the students received a diploma of architecture rather than the Bachelor of Architecture degree that students at the University of Engineering and Technology received.

After Kamil Khan Mumtaz returned to Lahore in 1965, he in cooperation with Shakir Ali, a noted artist and art critic, and other concerned individuals initiated a concerted effort to reinstate the full five year architectural program at the National College of Arts. It was due to the dedicated efforts of these individuals and the growing prominence of the N.C.A. in a much changed political environment that led to the eventual reinstatement of the five year course. In 1962 the National College of Arts was taken over from the Department of Industry and turned over to the Punjab Department of Technical Education, its status became that of a polytechnic institution. What the architecture department consequently lost was the right to award degrees – they were only able to give architectural diplomas to their students, and because of this the five year program was in jeopardy. Kamil Mumtaz fought to get the diploma awarded at the N.C.A. equivalent to an architectural degree. In 1961 the five year curriculum was reestablished and in 1972 the N.C.A. was under the control of the central government, once again an important national institution. The National College of Arts since 1962 has been run by a board of

governors, under the auspices of the University Grants Commission, who decide policy and are often selected for their commitment to the college and its continued well being.

The natural choice for the head of the architectural department of the newly reinstated program was Kamil Khan Mumtaz who along with senior graduates of the first architectural course set about to rejuvenate and overhaul the curricula. Among the people who joined him then were; Javed Najam, a fellow student from the A.A., Nayyar Ali Dada and Masood Khan, both N.C.A. graduates, as well as some present teachers at the National College of Arts like Abdul Rehman Khan and Tanveer Hussain. The architectural curriculum that evolved over time, while essentially being based on the Architectural Association (London) model, incorporated various points of view. Ex-students like Masood Khan, Nayyar Ali Dada and Javed Najam<sup>who</sup> were among the most active during their student days had already formulated viewpoints about the directions which architectural education should follow in Pakistan. As Javed Najam recalls, their opinions varied considerably, "...for example, some said that since we are Muslims 'Islamic' architecture should be very important, also we should be inspired by our own folk heritage and get inspiration from there... (others argued that) our architectural traditions have been dead for some time so why worry about this, why not study 'modern' architecture and be inspired by that instead. I felt that Pakistan is like a

'tabula rasa' or alternately we are everything, e.g., Muslim, sub-continental, modern and must employ all aspects that inspire us, develop all avenues of thought".<sup>1</sup>

One of the factors influencing the decision, to use the A.A. model, apart from its greater familiarity, could have been the existence of the Tropical Architecture department at the Architectural Association. In those days the idea that architecture in 'tropical' countries should develop along lines dissimilar from that in the West was just beginning to take hold. The Architecture of Tropical Countries department aimed to study the ecological and climactic considerations that governed architecture in the tropical belt, dealing primarily with underdeveloped and recently independent countries. Despite the desire to tackle issues in the 'third' world the tendency was still to lump together all underdeveloped countries into a single category, i.e. "the tropical belt". One doesn't have to point out however the problem with such an approach, especially the difficulty of classifying a place like Pakistan into any one climate type, let alone 'tropical'. The courses that were taught at the N.C.A. nevertheless reflected these influences, the teaching of classes in tropical architecture, mass production technology and environmental control was supposed to eventually

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<sup>1</sup> Javed Najam. (Interview conducted by Author).

lead to the adaptation of these subjects to the unique situation of Pakistan.

The years of change and development that characterized architectural education at the N.C.A. were short lived as the polarities between people with incompatible intellectual positions broke to the surface and led to a rift that in hindsight appears to have been fatal to the enthusiastic, pioneering spirit that had helped rejuvenate the college. Over its 115 years the N.C.A. has grown from an arts school to a national institution, reappraisals of thinking and shifts in direction have accompanied this growth. Architectural thinking has evolved from colonial policies of "...improving the taste of the natives...", and teaching them to draft for English architects to independence, the 1950's and the Bauhaus years into the reductivist, purist, modern themes of the sixties and early seventies. Today it embraces the 'vernacular' and looks for solutions to the complex problems facing contemporary society in traditional philosophies and methods of construction. The N.C.A. of today is a curious product of old and new ideas. Many courses have the same titles as they did during Kamil Mumtaz's time but without any apparent reason for their existence in a system that appears to be only tenuously kept together. Although some of the old teachers are still there the greatly attenuated spirit which presently exists prevents them from instilling much enthusiasm for architecture amongst the majority of the students. New attitudes develop with the

growth of new trends outside the country, yet the feeling of a 'time lag', with regard to external developments, persists. The link with the outside world only allows distorted, out of date images to filter through. While it may be argued that, "You can't blame the institutions for what is a more general malaise (in Pakistani education)",<sup>1</sup> schools like the National College of Arts must not shirk the responsibility, as they appear to be doing, of engaging in debate and enquiry relating to the values and attitudes they pass on to their students.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kamil Khan Mumtaz.  
*Architecture & Design*. Vol. III, no.1, Nov-Dec, 1986. P. 87

Chapter I

**The Polemics of Identity**

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT.

“When examining the international picture it is crucial to understand at what stage of maturity and with what depth of content, modern form first entered a local scene; then to try and gauge how the foreign body was received, rejected, or made amenable to pre-existing cultural matter”.<sup>1</sup>

Has modern architecture really entered Pakistan? The question is, I feel, quite relevant. Most people, especially architects, assume that since Pakistan is a member of the world community it must naturally be a participant of international movements and consequently the architecture of Pakistan cannot but be a reflection of an international style. This is true to an extent, but those who believe in such a position are guilty of considerable naivety. For a developing, ‘backward’ country like Pakistan modernity is variously linked with, science and technology, material prosperity and the West, and in most cases any personification of these characteristics is inevitably considered ‘modern’. The complexities of the modern movement have no place in

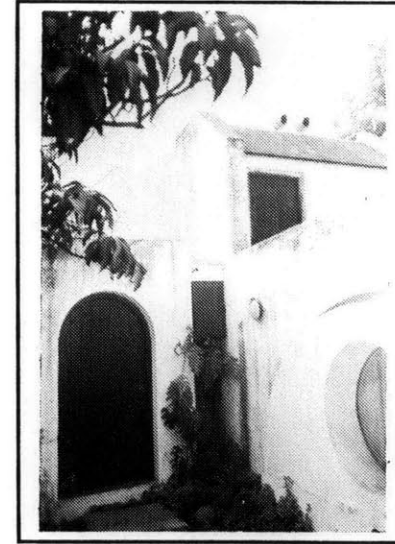
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<sup>1</sup> Curtis, W. J. R. *Modern Architecture since 1900*.  
Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1983. P. 258-259

the minds of most Pakistani architects, the terms “international style” and “modern movement” are interchangeable, it is primarily the visual characteristics of this architecture that has captured the imagination of local designers.

Realizing that this is the case with a majority of architects and most clients, and furthermore that for most Pakistanis, architecture itself, let alone concepts of modernity, is a luxury, one begins to understand the irrelevance of picking on details of theory. This of course does not mean that architecture is irrelevant; on the contrary, the multiplicity of contemporary society demands the existence of a medium that addresses itself to urban issues and the development of a visible social expression. The importance of the architectural profession, in the absence of any viable alternative, cannot be denied. In order to further the development of the architectural medium in Pakistan one must ‘know’ the state of society and architecture in Pakistan today. As I have already stated there are a handful of architects who are attempting to carry out this process of understanding.

To an extent the received tradition of most Pakistani architects practicing today is the modern movement (*figure 11*). The three architects that I shall deal with here have all been immersed in the polemics of this movement. Both Kamil Khan Mumtaz and Habib Fida Ali were educated at the Architectural Association in the early 1960’s –



11. The introduction of modernism to Pakistan. Residence, Javed Najam.



a time, incidentally, when the validity of the modern movement was being questioned.<sup>1</sup> Thus while they were being taught the 'myth' of a rationalist, functionalist architecture, the theoretical foundations of the very same architecture was gradually eroded away by critics and practitioners alike. Nayyar Ali Dada, who was educated at the National College of Arts around the same time also imbibed the modernist tradition. In the case of the N.C.A. however, the training imparted was more at the level of developing an aesthetic vocabulary rather than inculcating any sort of critical attitude towards architecture. The early works of all three architects reflect their formal training – how their work has evolved over time and how each of them approaches the pressing issues and conflicts of 'traditionalism' vs 'modernism' I will discuss later.

Modern architecture is commonly understood as being a-historical, probably due to the seminal developments and the resulting architecture of the 1920's – a radically new, orthogonal architecture devoid of ornamentation or overt historical references. The early work of Gropius and Mies which was variously called *Neue Sachlichkeit* or 'functionalism' was finally given the name "The International Style"

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<sup>1</sup> "That style was rigorously exclusive and puristically hermetic and, it must be admitted, rather paranoid in its conceptual stance".

Vincent Scully. *The Presence of the Past*.

Edited by La Biennale di Venezia. Electra Editrice. Milan, 1980. P.15

by Johnson and Hitchcock which, for better or worse, it is known by today. The somewhat pretentious use of the name alone added to the popularity of this new architecture in countries and regions of the world for which, it later turned out, it was eminently unsuited. The break from the 'classical' forms of Western tradition, as well as the (theoretically) expressed logic of its constructions, certainly endeared this architecture to and helped its eventual propagation in the non-Western, developing world.

#### THE CONCEPT OF HISTORICISM.

The agglomeration of styles known as 'post-modernism' are today gaining increasing prominence over modernism in the West and in many developing countries like Pakistan the notion of 'traditionalism' is gradually growing to fill the vacuum left by the 'demise' of modern architecture. Both these concepts are rooted in a longing to tie back the thread of continuity with traditions of the past that was consciously cut by the advent of modernism. Over the years various writers and critics have dealt with and expanded upon this theme. As Stanford Anderson writes, "The making or the interpretation of a contemporary architecture involves not only current conventions and empirical knowledge but also an attempt to recall and reexamine the intellectual

and formal conventions internal to architecture throughout history".<sup>1</sup> According to Michael Hollander, "One of architectural understanding's most important subjects is 'historical understanding', by which I mean the full, imaginative reconstruction of past reality".<sup>2</sup> This desire to 'reconstruct' past reality based on the contemporary situation is what, I believe, gives rise to what is called *historicism*. "...Their are two opposite uses of the word 'historicism'. The one which Karl Popper attacks, as opposed to the one Pevsner attacks (which is revivalism), is out to find The Path on which mankind is destined to walk; it is out to discover The Clue to history".<sup>3</sup> Thus we have here, albeit in a somewhat negative sense, two approaches towards a reconstruction of the past. Another unique form of historicism is articulated by Philip Johnson.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Stanford. *Types & Conventions in Time: Toward a history for the Duration and Change of Artifacts*. P.117

<sup>2</sup> Hollander, Michael. *Comments on the Study of Historical Understanding*. P. 119

<sup>3</sup> Jencks, Charles A. *Late-Modern Architecture & Other Essays*. Rizzoli Publications, Inc. New York, 1980. P. 175

<sup>4</sup> "Mies is such a genius! But I grow old! And bored! My direction is clear; eclectic tradition this is not academic revivalism. Their are no Classic orders or Gothic finials. I try to pick up what I like throughout history. We cannot not know history".

(Philip Johnson). Jencks, Charles. *Late-Modern Architecture & Other Essays*. Rizzoli Publications, Inc. New York, 1980. P.154

MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES.

The polemics generated around the notion of historicism have gained considerable attention in intellectual circles of the Muslim world recently, and debates on 'Islamic' architecture have in particular been facilitated by the setting up of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. To know the contemporary Muslim point of view regarding architectural historicism it would be best to refer to the considerable material collected on the topic under the auspices of the Aga Khan Award.

A seminar entitled "Toward an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam"<sup>1</sup> brought to light the important differences of opinion present among participants. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The change of sensibility due to modernization has caused many Muslims to lose the inner sense of beauty, dignity, harmony, and nobility, which characterizes all authentic manifestations of the Islamic spirit, including of course, Islamic art (and architecture)".<sup>2</sup> Seyyed Nasr is against the "secularizing tendencies" of the West. For him, the basis of his 'Islam' like that of Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, is *sufism*. Sufism, which occasionally comes in conflict with orthodox Islam,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Aga Khan Award for Architecture*. Proceedings, Seminar One. Philadelphia, Pa. 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Aga Khan Award for Architecture*. Proceedings, Seminar One. Edited by Renata Holod. Philadelphia, Pa. 1978. P. 2

appears to be the favored medium for many Muslims and non-Muslims alike who have turned away from the confines of their 'rationalist' backgrounds and find solace in its metaphysical concepts. For Nasr, the solution to the "crisis within Islamic architecture and the modern Islamic cities" lies in a return to, as he calls it, the "traditional Islamic architecture" which is still alive in villages and small towns. He advocates "the revival of Islamic arts and sciences, and the rediscovery of the spiritual and metaphysical principles of these arts and sciences".<sup>1</sup> His advocacy of revivalism is close to the approach of Hassan Fathy, who called for the scientific evaluation of Islamic town planning and house design to better incorporate it into the contemporary context.

The antithesis of Seyyed Nasr and Hassan Fathy's posture is that of Dogan Kuban, who claims that the modernization which Nasr is opposed to was not imposed on Muslims but was instead a result of a disrupted Muslim world. According to Dogan, Professor Nasr's explanations "...remain on the level of philosophical abstractions that are not very convincing and cannot bring a concrete solution to our problems".<sup>2</sup> Kuban is a secularist who is against the "imitation" of traditional forms, yet he believes in the myth of an 'Islamic' architecture without Islam. Largely though, emerging from the secular,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 4

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 6

nationalist based approaches of the post-independence era, Muslim architectural communities are now turning to revivalism as a salvation from the perceived excesses and mistakes of the past, based as they were on a modernist utopia.

This attitude towards the past is largely based on the present context, such a posture is transitory at best and does not necessarily take into account the conditions or the particular context of the past in developing a historical outlook for the present. In Pakistan, the task and urgency facing architects today is so great that understandably many opt for the easy way out, i.e. adopting readymade ideas or simplistic concepts from the past in order to borrow an 'appropriate' language for the present.

The people whose work I am looking at here are, I feel, among the few who have explored various options and are presently engaged, through their work, in developing approaches that could eventually point the way ahead for the next generation. The work of all three is at present undergoing transformation not only regarding their particular approaches towards the notion of 'identity' but also in the internal logic of the architecture itself. It must be kept in mind that the architect as a creative person is constantly evaluating and reevaluating his own work and adapting it to his own changing concepts of reality. The present approaches of these three designers are just that: their 'present'

approaches. The observer can only put forward interpretations or extrapolate future responses based on the existing circumstances and their inherent limitations.

Chapter II

**Habib Fida Ali - Modernism Reconsidered**

BACKGROUND.

Habib Fida Ali is very much the modernist's modernist. His work in its clear expression of structure, coherent understanding of the function and modernist aesthetics, incorporates and recalls the images fostered by the pioneers of the modern movement. And yet he states that he is, "not an ideological architect".<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that, "I try to keep the didactic value of my buildings limited to solutions that are pertinent to their own contextual requirements... I believe that if a design solution meets immediate cultural, socioeconomic, technical and climatic considerations, the resulting building will in itself be exemplary and educative because of its honesty and contextual validity".<sup>2</sup> Habib Fida Ali joined the Pakistani architectural profession during its formative years and, like Kamil Khan Mumtaz, studied at the Architectural Association in London, the city of first choice for most Pakistanis seeking further education abroad due to the still close ties between England and the intellectuals of its former colony. He returned to Karachi in 1963 after some years of practice in London and

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<sup>1</sup> Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar* 6. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 12

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



joined the architectural firm of William Perry and Associates. In 1965 he established his own office and has been working in Karachi since.

In the Karachi Context.

Fida Ali, along with a few others, must be given credit for helping to set a course for architectural development in Karachi. His training, ostensibly the development of an architecture free from a restraining tradition, finds its best expression in Karachi (*figure 12*), a city with no overwhelming local tradition, and no readily and economically available building materials apart from sand and aggregate, the primary constituents of concrete. Karachi along with Lahore, and a quickly emerging but still largely undeveloped Islamabad, is the Pakistani city with the greatest significance in terms of architecture.<sup>1</sup> While Lahore



12. Karachi. The urban context.

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<sup>1</sup> It must be mentioned at the outset however, that the architecture of Lahore and Karachi is separated by more than the seven hundred or so miles between them, and that local conditions and history also play a part in the evolution of increasingly distinct local architectural expressions. At the same time there exists an obvious lack of homogeneity within the respective emerging urban environments. The observer can only make out nascent shapes and patterns that are struggling to develop and extrapolate the future from such admittedly muted expressions. Karachi, the first capital of the nation, a colonially modeled port city, with its origins in a humble fishing village situated at the edge of the Sindh desert has exploded out of all recognition into the ever growing, turbulent metropolis it is today and is sharply contrasted with the ancient history, lush greenery and provincial feel that characterizes Lahore. Karachi is certainly the more dynamic of the two

and Karachi are by no means the only important cities of the country, it is through a combination of history, situation and sheer numbers that they hold center stage. And it is through looking at these two cities that one will find any indication of a collective Pakistani architectural identity.

The work of Habib Fida Ali is largely consistent, he is honest to his own discourse, i.e. he's been trained to do 'modern' buildings, he does them and does them well. Fida Ali rationalizes that the most appropriate material for Karachi is concrete since, "...concrete provides a surface that is virtually maintenance free, something that many clients don't have the finances and inclination for anyway".<sup>1</sup> Also, the local soil is of a quality too poor for brick manufacture while stone the only natural alternative is prohibitively expensive. Looking at the peeling paint and crumbling plaster of most of Karachi's buildings it is not difficult to be convinced of the viability of concrete. He states that his buildings evolve from the "contextual requirements", and in the context of Karachi his work fits in admirably. However, can such a

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even though this dynamism is heightened by the sense of insecurity and a 'teetering on the brink' feeling that one can get in an unmanageably large Third World city. The fact that many experienced and promising Pakistani architects have made Karachi their home has helped to develop a greater maturity in the architecture of the city, especially when unlike in Lahore, there is no readymade vernacular to fall back upon.

<sup>1</sup> Habib Fida Ali. (Interview conducted by Author).

rationalization, a perpetuation of the "Fiction of Function",<sup>1</sup> hold true for the future as well? Apart from the physical context, is there no place for the manifestation of a people's aspirations? It may be argued that there is no such place and that all architecture evolves from essentially 'functional' considerations, or one may be asked to define such an abstract statement as a "people's aspirations". Yet the question persists and Habib Fida Ali is, I feel, in his most recent work attempting to address it.

#### SEARCH FOR APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS.

Habib Fida Ali is clearly not among the ranks of those who blame modern architecture for most of the ills facing the urban environment and architecture of the developing world,<sup>2</sup> but while acknowledging

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<sup>1</sup> "...'functionalism' is a weak concept, inadequate for the characterization or analysis of *any* architecture. In its recurrent use as the purportedly defining principle of modern architecture, functionalism has dulled our understanding of both the theories and practice of modern architecture... This fiction (of function) is used to define modernism narrowly and in indefensible terms...".

Anderson, Stanford. *The Fiction of Function. Assemblage 2*. P. 19

<sup>2</sup> "I feel that it is essential for us to synthesize hybrid forms incorporating a new aesthetic, indeed a new architectural vocabulary that also includes forms and types for situations for which traditional models are not available".

Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar 6*.

Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 12

the 'modernist aesthetic' background of his education he is also pursuing the development of an appropriate local language. He is greatly impressed by the work of Geoffrey Bawa of Sri Lanka, who is attempting to reconcile and reinterpret history with contemporaneity in Sri Lanka, and who, along with Habib Fida Ali, was a member of the jury for the Aga Khan awards of 1983. Bawa writes that, "... Although the past gives us lessons it does not give the whole answer to what must be done now... with these (local Sri Lankan materials) and other new materials we must now design for a society living in a framework of a different economy, a much faster life – sometimes a much freer one – new conventions and a greater liberality of belief to all the dictates of ever changing needs... it is rational to give presence to both function and form, to admit beauty and pleasure as well as purpose".<sup>1</sup>

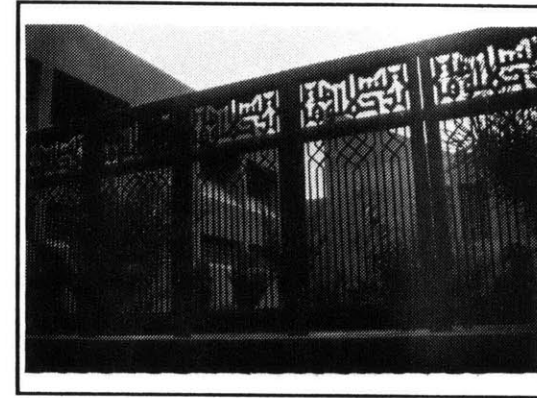
Belief in an appropriate architecture must not however, be confused as a blessing for the 'instant vernacular' which is springing up all over the country and largely unchallenged proclaims itself as an extension of the nation's history. This notion is apparent in the Aga Khan Hospital in Karachi, designed by an American and having received probably the most attention given to a building in Pakistan, the hospital essentially incorporates preconceived concepts of Islamic architecture that may well be used in any area of the Muslim world.

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Bawa. Quoted in, Taylor, Brian Brace's, *Geoffrey Bawa*. Concept Media Pte. Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 16

While considering themselves to be "cultural innovators",<sup>1</sup> Tom Payette (the architect) and his design team make such absurdly generic and unsubstantiated claims like, "In the Islamic world the entrance is both physical and metaphysical...",<sup>2</sup> and justifies the costly and extensive use of ornamental detailing by saying that, "while we Westerners might view this kind of decoration as surface ornamentation, the Muslims see it as the spiritual values of their culture integrated into the design" (*figure 13*), and "Westerners conceptualize a building by standing on the outside and viewing it from a distance – a piece of sculpture in space. Muslims perceive the identity of a building in the arrangement of interior spaces".<sup>3</sup> Which Muslims is he talking about? Almost all architects in the 'Muslim' world are trained according to Western traditions while the general population does not have a monolithic, independently developed sense of architectural perception that can be pointed to with any degree of certainty.

It is through such statements that both students and architects in a country like Pakistan, with little or no critical architectural discourse of



13. The Aga Khan hospital, Karachi. Tom Payette.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Payette. 'Designing the Aga Khan Medical Complex'. *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*. P. 162-163

A symposium held at Harvard University and M.I.T. Nov. 1987

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

its own, get any insight into their architectural traditions, leading eventually to a distorted perception and understanding of their own heritage. Habib Fida Ali comments, "I both love it and hate it"<sup>1</sup>. According to him the hospital is a well designed functional building with a very eclectic language, quite unsuitable however to Karachi as a whole. He cites the large amount of carved woodwork that would be more at home in old Mughal centers like Lahore than in the humid and very dusty climate of a city like Karachi. "It would work very well as a hotel rather than a hospital",<sup>2</sup> as evidenced by the intricate ornamental detailing and the long circulation corridors that wind around the generic 'Islamic' courtyards and fountains.

While he doesn't state it explicitly, Fida Ali's approach towards architecture and the development of his work appears to suggest a search for solutions that go beyond the imposed pastiche of the Aga Khan hospital, which fails in a city without much history to fall back on, and the 'vernacular' impositions of the newly built Serina hotels at Peshawar and Quetta. In Habib Fida Ali's office a great deal of time and attention is devoted to architectural planning, in contrast to the work of many contemporaries who appear to rely on sculptural effects and aesthetics to promote their work. He and his design team pride themselves on their plans which are very clear and straightforward,

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<sup>1</sup> Habib Fida Ali. (Interview conducted by Author).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

with little guesswork for first time visitors and appropriate functionality for the users. There is an awareness of the need for economical, maintenance free materials and planning that works for its particular situation while taking into account the aspirations of the users. He is however against the "forcing" of architecture to be in tune with, or to "extol", national values, he says that "Regional and vernacular identities in architecture develop slowly and organically and thus any architecture given cesarian birth by such codes (perceived national or Islamic identities) could only be an architecture of the academic...".<sup>1</sup>

#### P.B.S. Headquarters

Habib Fida Ali is also one of the very few Pakistani architects whose work has had any sort of exposure beyond the limited national scene. Despite his long standing practice (approximately 25 years) Fida Ali has only in the last decade or so gained recognition for his work. Like many Pakistani architects he started work as a residential designer and eventually worked towards commercial and governmental commissions. Habib Fida Ali's opportunity came in 1976, when he was asked to design, after winning a limited competition, the headquarters for Pakistan Burmah Shell, a multinational oil company in Karachi.

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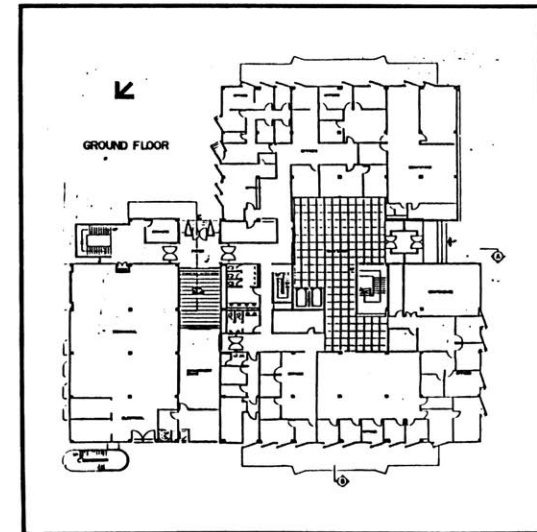
<sup>1</sup> Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar 6*. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 8

The end result is still considered to be one of Fida Ali's best works. Among the few local architects who go beyond cliché's when designing a 'modern' building, his training and inspiration are reflected in the P.B.S. headquarters. Habib Fida Ali cites Kahn and Corbusier as his inspiration and yet unlike many others in the region he has been able to progress beyond the mere imitation of 'styles' towards an individualism that attempts to fit a formal vocabulary into a local, and in particular the Karachi, context.

The building is built on a difficult site, along a side street, flanked on both sides by multistory apartment blocks of the characterless, cramped sort that infest most of Karachi's urban landscape (*figure 14*). The design, at its main facade, responds to its situation by acting as a unifying element, a visual bridge between the two structures of disparate size and scale on either side. The P.B.S. head office is essentially a complex with two major divisions – the main office block and the service block (*figure 15*) – which are connected on the ground floor by a common entrance. Apart from a physical differentiation, a visual dichotomy has also been established by the attempt to develop a formal vocabulary for the main block the public facade (*figure 16*), while the various elements of the service entrance are treated in a more sculptural manner (*figure 17*), ironically, detracting from the main block itself. The main structure possesses a remarkable simplicity and strength in its low-rise facade and its receding lines of windows



14. Pakistan Burma Shell Headquarters. The context.

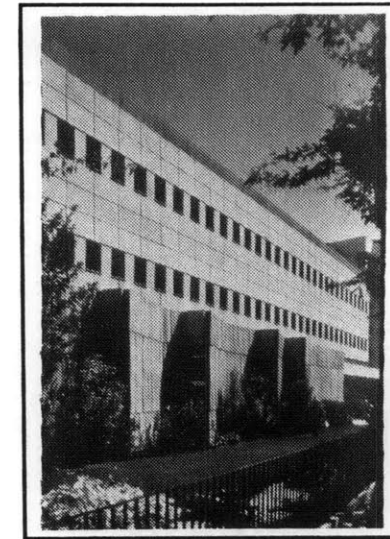


15. Ground floor plan.

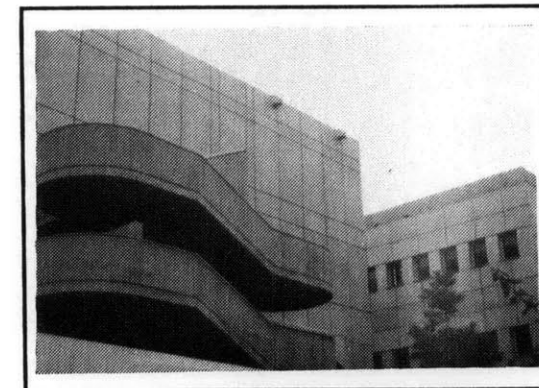


overlaid with the grids of the fair face concrete construction. The formal severity of this facade is softened by a low, ribbed parapet and a one story 'base' consisting of angled, projecting windows that give the entrance its "floating block" appearance. A great deal of care has been lavished on the exterior, the quality of the concrete work is excellent as is the attention to detail, largely absent in Pakistani construction.

One may actually argue that too much care has gone into the exterior, for example it appears that the rhythm of the projecting windows of the facade has been setup somewhat independently of the internal situation and planning. Responding to such criticism Fida Ali admits that, "When I design, I am very conscious of the exterior... in its simplicity I try to create interest... I do concentrate on an idea, a look... but I try to combine this initial idea with its function".<sup>1</sup> In this building, his first major commission, Habib Fida Ali uses his training to great advantage. His influences, Corbusier and Kahn, can clearly be seen and he is certainly not apologetic about his position towards modernism. In the words of his own office publication, "it was the first building thus finished (of exposed concrete) in Pakistan ...because of this, it was the setter of a trend still headed by Fida Ali, but much emulated by others".<sup>2</sup>



16. Main block facade.



17. Service block.

<sup>1</sup> Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar* 6. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. Pg. 8

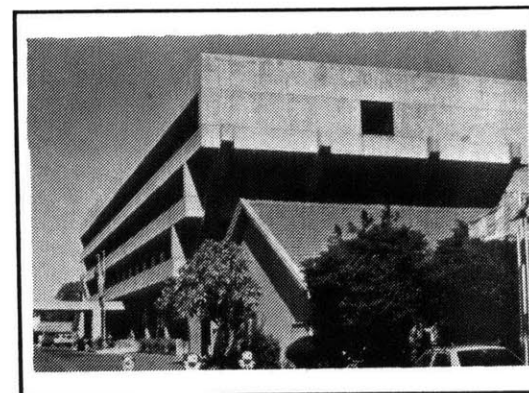
<sup>2</sup> Habib Fida Ali & Associates.

### The Midway House.

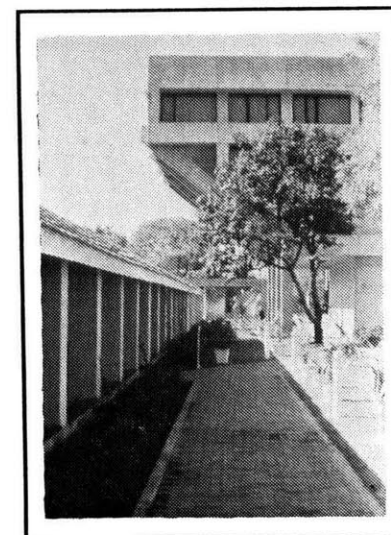
The Midway House, a hotel designed by Habib Fida Ali in 1985, is situated within the Karachi airport perimeter and provides accommodation to transit passengers (*figure 18*). While his design is proposed as an extension to the earlier colonial buildings of the Midway Hotel, it is a self contained structure in itself. The use of exposed concrete belies Fida Ali's work, yet this building has a sculptural element that is missing in most of his later works. The structural, as opposed to the surface application, qualities of the concrete are clearly expressed in the diagonal beams that support the top floor's projecting sides (*figure 20*). Within the obvious limitations of a 'hotel' program the end result manages to be distinctive and does make a statement about the architectural preferences of its designer. The hotel is projected over the existing colonial, single story structures on either side, thus proclaiming both its visual and ideological dominance over the past (*figure 19*).

### Interiors.

Fida Ali has designed over two hundred residences during his career. His work also includes the interior designs for; The American Center, Karachi (1969), the Shehzan Kosar restaurant (1971), I.B.M. offices,



18. Midway house.

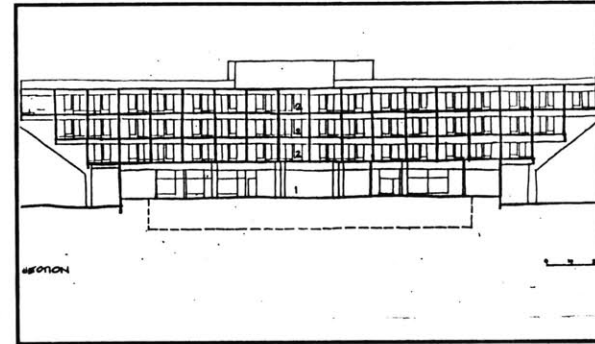


19. The new and the old.

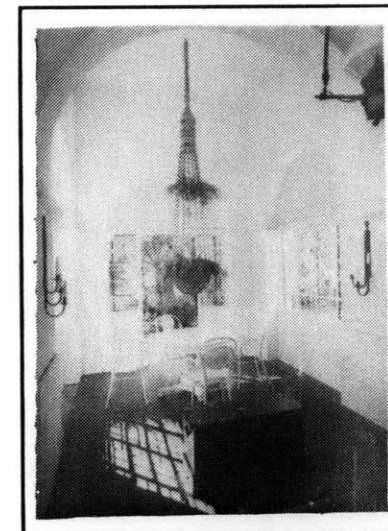
Karachi (1974), the Hotel Intercontinental and Midway House, Karachi, as well as a large number of corporate head offices and international banks. His style is characterized by the controlled use of contrasting colors and materials. In the Chase Manhattan bank in Karachi, the 'corporate green' carpet and borders of dark Burma teak frame and accent the furniture against the white background. The office is essentially open plan, divided by wooden partitions at eye level. One of his best early interiors is for the Midway House restaurant. The restaurant interior presents a dramatic display of Habib Fida Ali's favorite Burma teak, the dark strips of wood used in a latticework as screens, contrast with and compliment the white painted planks of the ceiling. In his rich yet essentially subdued interiors, Fida Ali has set a precedent for many designers and potential clients whose idea of a prestigious interior is synonymous with highly decorated, ostentatious and extravagant settings and furniture (*figure 21*).

#### EMERGING DIRECTIONS.

After a decade or so of high quality yet fairly restrained designs of the sort that were to be found in most upper class Karachi neighborhoods the direction of Habib Fida Ali's work began to shift. The first evidence of this shift is to be found in the P.B.S. building<sup>1</sup> and subsequently was



20. Midway house elevation.

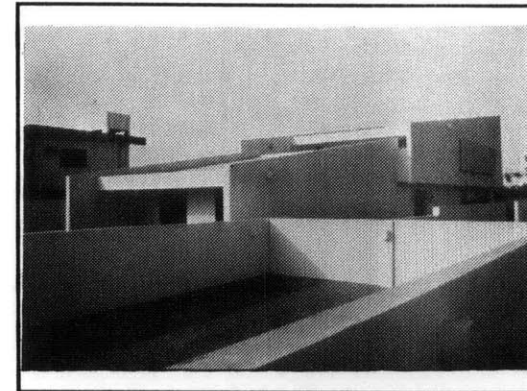


21. Interior. Habib Fida Ali's residence.

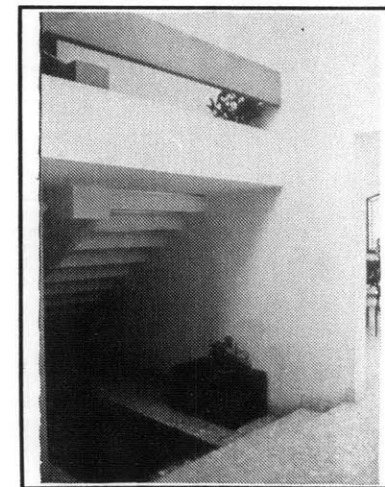
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<sup>1</sup> "The Pakistan Burmah Shell building was the turning-point in my career. It made me realize that clients were ready to

reflected in his residential projects, in particular the design for his own "17th street" house (figure 22) in Defence Society (1979). What sets apart this design is its 'purity' of expression, in a city full of buildings and particularly houses with fussy, excessive decoration – where in any given street there is an unavoidable clash of tastes and styles, the simplicity of his design is refreshing (figure 23). In this house he also internalizes the common side garden into a semi-covered courtyard, an element that is getting more and more necessary as plot sizes get smaller and the colonial inspired 'garden' inevitably shrinks. The house gets its rather unique look through the sloping roof of the living room which extends past the courtyard opening and becomes the second floor roof, creating a wedge-like appearance. It was this 'return' to earlier inspiration as opposed to becoming a "fashionable" architect catering to the client's whimsy that, I believe, has led to a reappraisal by Habib Fida Ali of his own work. "I am going through a cleansing process."<sup>1</sup> While he now says that he has a greater maturity and strength to carry forward his earlier ideas, he is also exploring, in the light of experience, other more novel ideas that have yet to be given the wider attention they deserve.



22. 17th House.



23. Interior.

**explore new ideas with the architect – be it in actual layouts or the uses of materials. This building helped me reevaluate my own ideas”.**

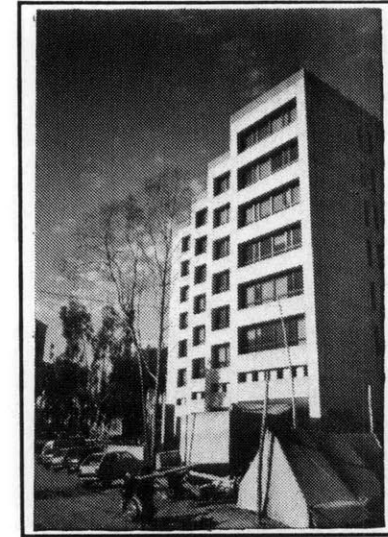
Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar 6*. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 10

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 10

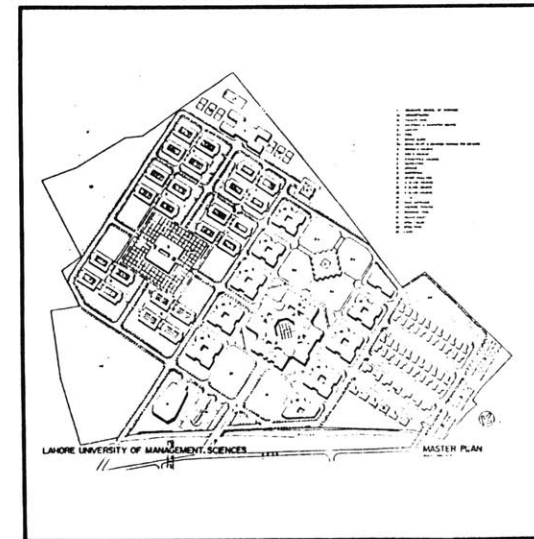
Recently Fida Ali, after getting commissions in Lahore and opening an office there has had to deal with issues that are quite distinct from those of Karachi. Lahore boasts an enduring building tradition greatly enhanced by the Mughals and the British after them, and any architect designing in the context of Lahore cannot but be affected by this architectural legacy. Lahore is both a challenging and rewarding environment and it would be interesting to see how Habib Fida Ali develops a vocabulary in that city drawing upon its history and his own notions of contemporary architecture.

#### University of Management Sciences.

The Lahore Business School (University of Management Sciences) still in the design stage is the first large building of Habib Fida Ali's that utilizes brick and attempts to incorporate some of the local Lahori building traditions. The Business School, unlike the recently completed Sui Gas Corporation head office (*figure 24*) also in Lahore which only uses exposed concrete, is going to utilize both concrete and brick. The school is essentially a group of semi-independent units arranged around central courtyards. In developing the highly irregular site, an axially based layout has been created which helps to regulate, in a very formalized manner, the growth of the University (*figure 25*). It appears that the regulating mechanism for the master plan has been the orientation of the Mosque which faces west. The Business School



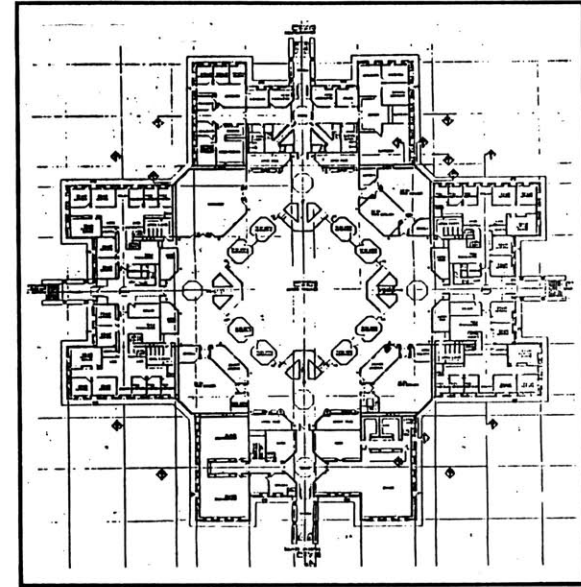
24. Sui Gas Head Office, Lahore.



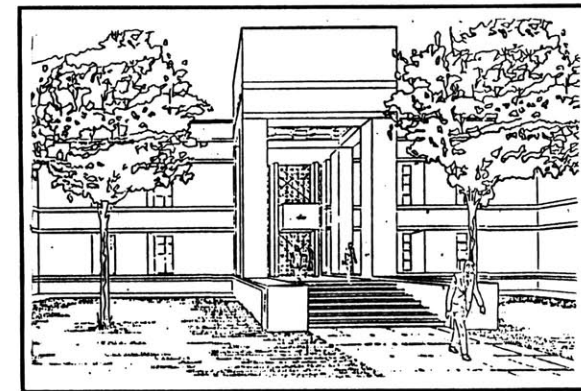
25. U. M. S. Master plan.

itself, including administration, classrooms and offices, is the focus for the plan. It is the largest block and occupies a central place (*figure 26*) surrounded first by formal 'lawns' and the buildings of other faculty and schools and peripherally by the housing blocks of both students and support staff. The left over areas in the site have been turned into athletic fields and parks, to be used for future expansion when needed.

The strict symmetry of the main block (along both axes) and its location immediately in front of the main entrance, as well as the formality of the layout appears to suggest a desire to monumentalize the space. In this manner the school differs from Fida Ali's other projects which are largely characterized by a low-key, understated approach. On the exterior he responds to the local history by the use of brick facing, alternated with exposed concrete slabs that help to differentiate visually between the various levels of the building and also establish a rhythm along the facade (*figure 27*). Skylights spaced around a central courtyard are located in potential high traffic zones and are also the main source of natural light within the public areas of the building. With little surface decoration or ornamentation and a simple use of materials (*figure 28*) and covered, semi-covered and open-to-sky spaces Fida Ali manages to create an environment that is visually uncomplicated and yet spatially interesting (*figure 29*). One feels however that the Lahore University of Management Sciences is just a step in a new direction, the further and bolder development of an architectural vocabulary that



26. Ground floor plan. U.M.S.

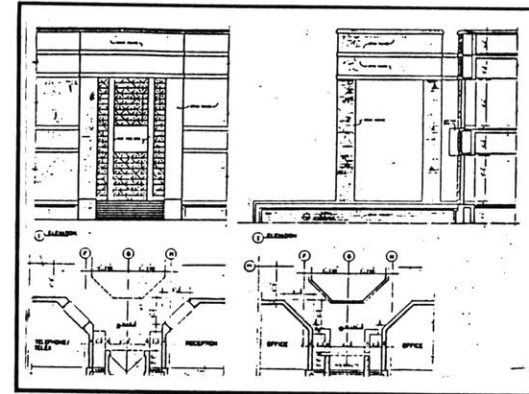


27. Perspective. U.M.S.

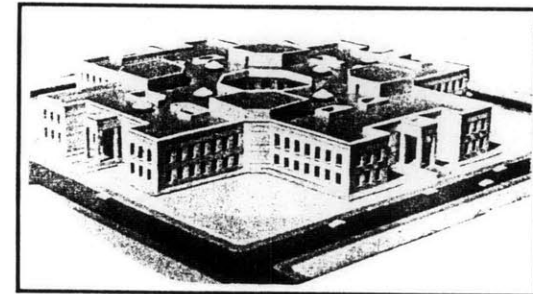
incorporates Habib Fida Ali's multifaceted backgrounds has yet to emerge.

What one notices in some of Habib Fida Ali's current projects is a desire to break out of the 'mold' of modernism, there is a perception that his work had become too similar, too much of the 'box' approach. Some of his new projects clearly manifest this desire to change direction. While some work may be the result of a compromise with the demands of a particular program or competition requirement, e.g. alluding in a very abstract manner to 'Islamic' precedents, semicircular arches on the facade of a governmental project (*figure 30*), other designs seem too literalist in borrowing such references. There is an emphasis on symmetry or the creation of courtyards (*figure 31*) that appears to be in conflict with the 'form follows function' ideology he professes to adhere to.

One can say that Habib Fida Ali's individuality, his 'trademark', is design which is restrained, meticulously detailed and, in a majority of cases, responsive to its' environment. These are also the reasons why he easily stands out among the majority of professionals working in Karachi today, and why I feel it is important to highlight his work in relation to the excessively 'designed' but poorly detailed work that crowds most of the city. The criticism that has been made about Habib Fida Ali's work is that it is too 'object' oriented, the structures appear to



28. Details, University of Management Sciences, Lahore.



29. Views of model. U.M.S.

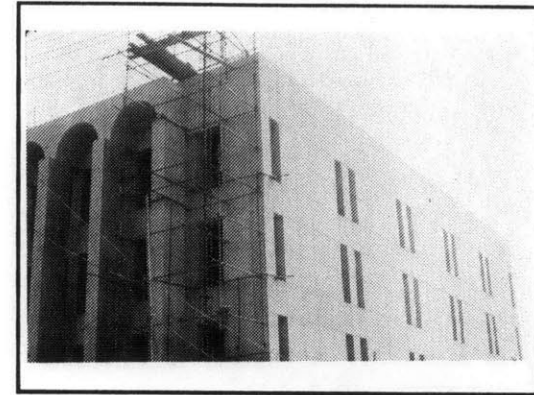
have been considered largely in isolation to the urban environment. In reply he states that he is not an urban planner and that to learn on-the-job would be playing with the quality of life of a great many people, in this respect his thinking differs considerably from the modernist concept of the architect as 'heroic visionary', who in the manner of Corbusier considered himself competent to create and guide the development of entire cities.<sup>1</sup> To Habib Fida Ali an "appropriate architecture", the development of an identity, involves freeing oneself from the architect's ego and rhetoric, projected as the 'truth' to be followed by all, be this the rhetoric of modernism, of revivalism, of socialism or nationalism. He believes that the contemporary situation has created new forms and heretofore unknown types for which traditional models are not available and that to force such models into an alien condition is a form of hypocrisy. In his work Fida Ali is searching for an expression that synthesizes hybrid forms into "a new aesthetic, indeed a new vocabulary"<sup>2</sup>, using the available Western technology and materials so that an unprecedented architecture with its own innate design possibilities may evolve.

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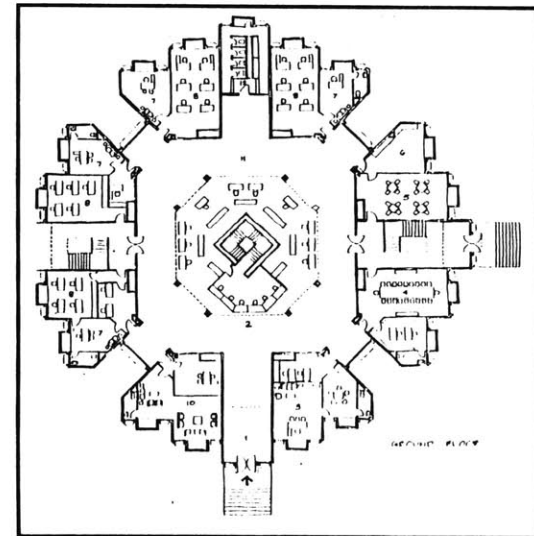
<sup>1</sup> "Unfortunately, both architects and government planners in our countries are still victims of their visions... we have to learn that we can't solve everything and recreate entire functioning human environments that would be acceptable to the people for whom they were designed".

Ibid. P. 10

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 12



30. Appropriate directions?



31. Ground floor plan. National Bank of Pakistan, Quetta.



Chapter III

**Nayyar Ali Dada - Reconciling With Tradition**

BACKGROUND.

One of the first graduates of the newly formed architecture department at the National College of Arts at Lahore,<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada is a pioneer among Pakistani architects. Even before he graduated in the early sixties, Nayyar Dada was practising architecture. He had started a partnership ( H. Khan and Associates ) while still a student, working mainly on residential projects. Nayyar Dada agrees that being among the first architectural professionals in Pakistan he and his contemporaries had the advantage of “an empty field... there was a vacuum in the profession at that period (when he began practicing)”,<sup>2</sup> but there was at the same time the problem of a lack of awareness among the Pakistani public about architects and their work.

Nayyar Ali Dada’s architecture is characterized by bold sculptural effects, “...capitalizing on a remarkably sensitive design sense”.<sup>3</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup> He joined the three year Mayo School course, earning an architectural diploma, and continued his studies as an advanced placement student when the five year degree program was established and the Mayo School became the National College of Arts.

<sup>2</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

<sup>3</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. *Architecture in Pakistan*. Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 169

continuous experimentation with new forms, materials and techniques is admired by many younger architects and contemporaries who, probably inadvertently, express their admiration in their emulation of much of his work. The fact that Nayyar Dada continues to enjoy official patronage and gets many of the most prestigious commissions in Lahore is due in part to his excellent public relations and a support staff of experienced architects and young graduates who continuously bring new ideas and an inventive spirit to his office.

While Nayyar Ali Dada's success in his profession is remarkable considering that he has never studied abroad at a time and place where a foreign degree was, and is, considered a mark of distinction, his training was greatly affected and dictated by foreign professors, mainly from the U.S. and Canada, who were teaching in the reductivist, purist, modern themes of the day. As he recalls, "the philosophy imparted to us was the production of the architecture of the machine age... form followed function... Corbusier and Mies were the ideals (to be followed)".<sup>1</sup> The kind of training imparted to students who were ultimately to practice in an environment and society decades behind the 'developed' world created a "contradiction between what was required of us and how we were trained... there was no treating of architecture as part of culture rather than industry".<sup>2</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

contradictions emerged in the designs of the earliest N.C.A graduates. Clean, crisp lines a la Mies were impossible where bamboo scaffolding was the available technology, and open plan houses, perceived 'western' symbols of progress, never gained the expected popularity due to an inherently conservative society following rules of privacy and segregation.

Changing attitudes and an awareness of deep seated cultural values prompted a rethinking, "you can not talk about your own culture like a foreigner, this should be done unconsciously, it should be a part of the person himself".<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Dada's architecture rapidly evolved from the early modernist responses, as are evident in the N.C.A auditorium to a more conscious use of local elements, partially in a reaction to the increasing awareness of 'ethnicity'. According to Nayyar Ali Dada himself, "the architecture I started with was very Westernized, almost copied from magazine cliches... in my own work somehow much before this 'popular slogan' of regionalism about fifteen to twenty years back, I carried this spirit of using the local language without consciously borrowing from Fathy or (the approaches of) the Aga Khan (Award)".<sup>2</sup>

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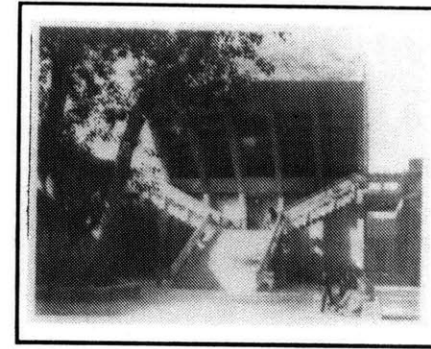
<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

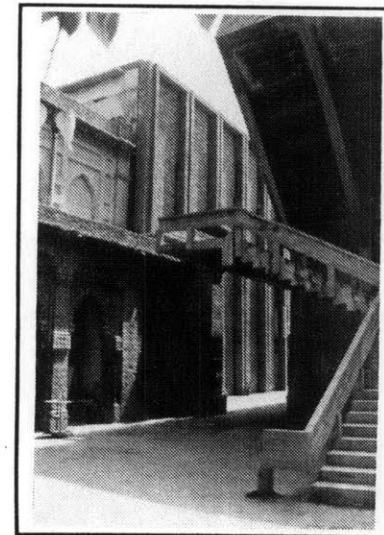
N.C.A. AUDITORIUM.

It was during a period of expansion at the N.C.A., a time when the policy aimed to try to encourage and promote some of the talented graduates and teachers of the National College by soliciting designs from them, that Nayyar Dada's first recognition came. Since the N.C.A. was occupying the original Mayo School campus, new and expanded facilities were urgently required. The only earlier additions had been made under the guidance of the previous architectural faculty, the noticeable thing about these additions was a respect for the scale, material and even the decoration employed on the older structures. Later additions displayed a freedom and desire to explore the potentials of new forms and materials as is evident in Nayyar's Shakir Ali Auditorium (built 1970-'71) and new studio block (1972-'73). The auditorium as Kamil Mumtaz later described it, exploits "...the plastic quality of poured concrete and the shapes of the raked seating and staircases which provide the elements of his composition on a very restricted site"<sup>1</sup> (figure 32).

The N.C.A. auditorium is the first building to break away from the self imposed boundaries created by the pseudo-Mughal architecture of the



32. A sculptural presence.  
The N.C.A. auditorium.



33. The auditorium in its  
context.

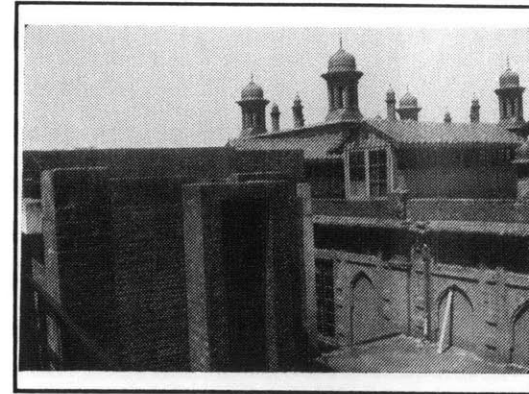
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<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. *Architecture in Pakistan*.  
Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 171

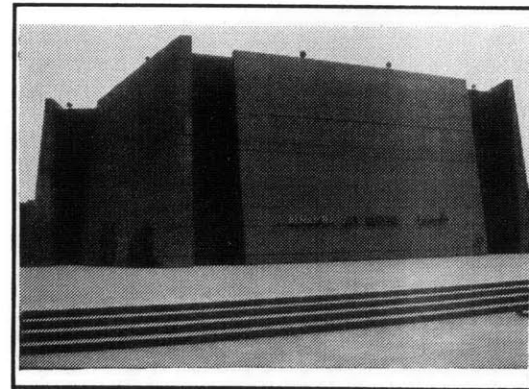
campus. In doing so Nayyar breaks the tightly regulated scale of the site as well. The auditorium unlike the previously existing structures is not 'porous', it is a barrier to the pedestrian and loudly proclaims itself as a latter day artifact, apart from the 'shelters' that preceded it (*figure 33*) and which went out of their way to identify with the past. This tendency is considerably muted however in his later studio block which integrates and sympathizes with its environment through the use of brick cladding and vertical planes that employ the rhythm of the surrounding structures (*figure 34*).

#### THE ALHAMBRA ARTS COUNCIL.

Nayyar Ali Dada's big break came when he was awarded the commission to design the Lahore Arts Council building in 1980, a prestigious art academy comprising auditoriums, venues for the performing arts and art galleries in the center of Lahore, which was to be built in two phases. The resulting design pushed him to the forefront of the Pakistani architectural profession. In the Alhambra auditorium, the 'purist' tendency of his earlier auditorium at the N.C.A. is broken. No longer is the material 'expressed' internally and externally, here brick cladding is used extensively to cover the walls on the outside, and internally the spaces are defined by concrete columns, plastered walls and the negative spaces of the auditorium seating. The Alhambra Arts Center in Nayyar's own words is still essentially a



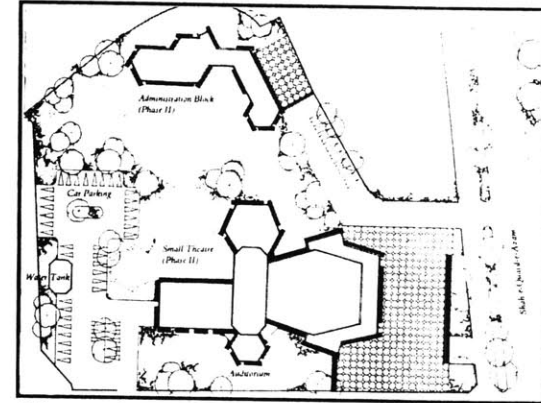
34. The N.C.A. Nayyar Dada's design block in the foreground.



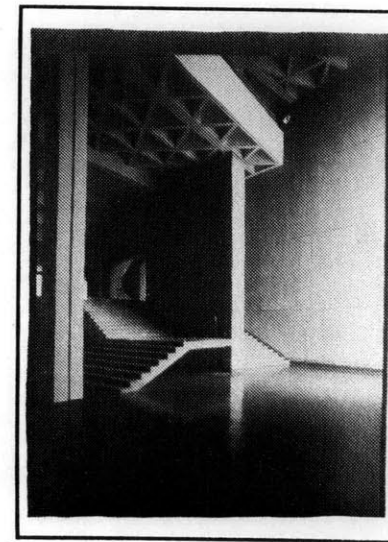
35. Alhambra Arts Council. Reflections of history.

complex where “form follows function... it is a breaking up of circular forms (of the auditorium) into polygons”.<sup>1</sup> The end result, massive buttress like walls, is reminiscent of an endearing monument of Lahore, the imperial Mughal fort (*figure 35*). Other structures that the tapered, brick walls bring to mind are the tombs of the Multan region, which Nayyar Dada admits were a source of inspiration. His formal training is evident in the free standing, sculptural masses of the exterior, and in the interior one can clearly see shades of Louis Kahn in the borrowed aesthetics of the concrete waffle slabs of the ceiling (*figure 37*). It is in the Alhambra Arts Center that the first explicit references to the past, to vernacular forms is evidenced in Nayyar Ali Dada’s work.

While the center does not follow the scale, set back or grain of most buildings along the main Mall road where it is located, Nayyar Ali Dada does attempt to involve the passerby with the building by leaving a large open space, a podium, in front of the entrance (*figure 36*). Although not entirely successful in the Alhambra Arts Council, this desire to ‘give to the urban environment’, to the pedestrian is better utilized in his later works. The second phase of the project, completed several years later, does not follow the consistency of the earlier building. Here Nayyar Dada uses two languages; modernism and the vernacular, simultaneously. This is especially clear in the use of brick



36. The Arts Council. Site planning.



37. Alhambra Arts Council. Interior.

<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author)

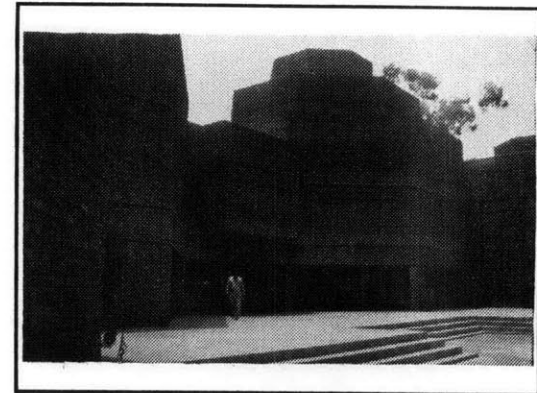
cladding, which while relating to local building tradition is, through the use of cantilevers and large span openings, utilized in a manner that appears to negate its inherent structural expression and potential (figure 38).

#### RECENT WORKS.

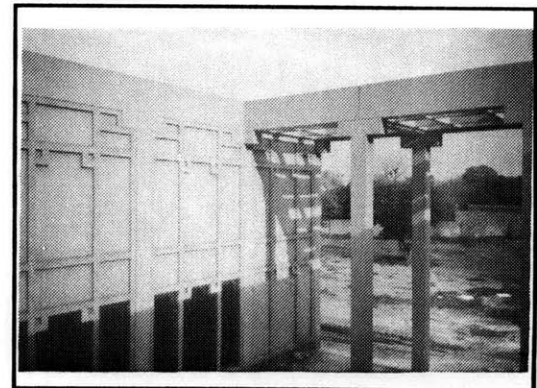
In his most recent works this use of various sources of inspiration to develop the design has led to the formulation of a form of Post-Modernism, in the sense that Nayyar Ali Dada is not employing a special vocabulary. He utilizes the structure and some times the aesthetic of a modernist and yet contradicts and even negates modernist dogmas. In both the Children's Library and the Open-Air Theater at Lahore, Nayyar Dada loosens the strict relationship between the image, form and function (as advocated by most modernists) of the buildings. He seems to be very comfortable in being eclectic, using a collage of aesthetic languages in a manner that can quite justifiably be called Post-Modernist.

#### Children's Library.

The Children's Public Library at Lahore was a commission for the Punjab Government and is the only such library in the city. Located along an old residential street, the library manages to set itself apart as



38. Alhambra Arts Council (Phase 2). Contradicting vocabularies.

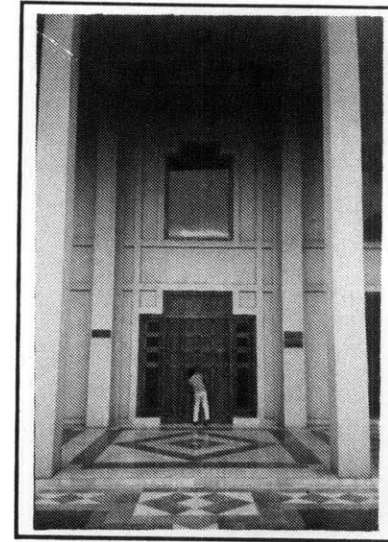


39. Children's Library. Exterior Panels.

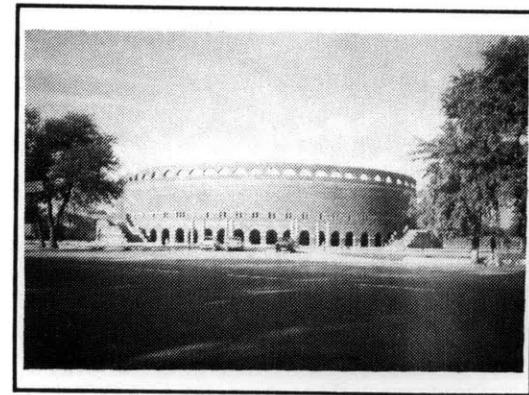
an institutional building with out being obtrusive in the established context. Set back into the site considerably it is a complex of three buildings, housing separate functions, that create a U-shaped courtyard open towards a large lawn and the road beyond. The arrangement is quite formal, even monumental for a relatively modest program such as this. The buildings have each got a colonnade in front, the lack of depth of which indicates that it is present more for aesthetic considerations than to provide shelter. The interesting aspect about this structure is the decoration of a highly stylized sort that that has been applied on the surface. This 'ornamentation' is essentially created by the application of stucco reliefs to break the monotony of the large wall surfaces (*figure 39*). While following the inherent 'style' of the building itself, this decoration also alludes to similar paneling done on Mughal buildings which are the most cherished legacy of architecture in the region. At the same time Nayyar Dada takes inspiration from other diverse sources, the capitals of internal columns (which are reminiscent of Venturi) and the geometric floor patterns develop a setting which seeks to differentiate between the various elements within the established relationship of the structure (*figure 40*).

#### Open-Air Theater.

In most of Nayyar Ali Dada's work 'form' is the most important element, his forms appear to dislocate the 'image' of the building from



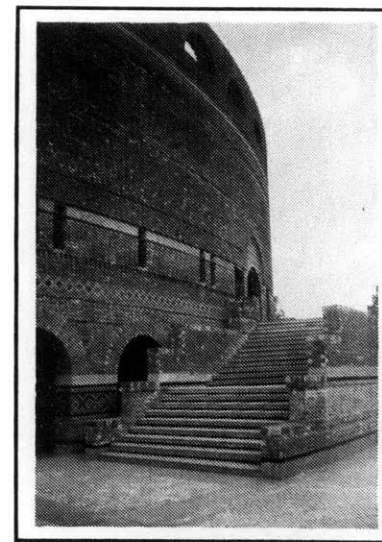
40. Children's Library.  
Entrance.



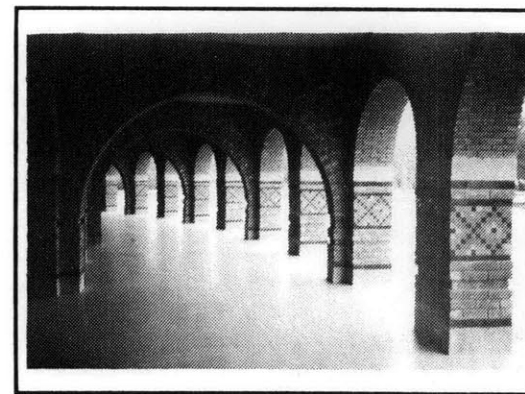
41. The Lahore Open-Air Theater.



its function. The Open-Air Theater, completed in 1989, is a structure where form dominates. The building in its sculptural presence and physical isolation (it is located along with other stadiums in a 'sports' zone within the city) stands out quite considerably among its largely nondescript neighbors (*figure 41*). Here one has the contemporary notion of a theater, in both function and form, localized by the use of imagery that is tied to the context where it has been built. The extensive use of brick and its detailing covers the entire surface in such a manner that it appears that brick is the structural element itself. On closer examination, one sees that the exterior is a veneer, the reality shows through within, where the seating and structure is of concrete. The brick in its rigorous detailing and relationship to human scale is very well used, details are not copied from historic models but are abstracted to only allude to the sources of inspiration (*figure 42*). Homage is paid to a venerable building material, the 'ornamental tile', which in its rich details and bright colors can be found in many historical structures. Nayyar Dada uses the unmistakable indigo of the tiles in his building in order to emphasize particular elements, like the entrances and the colonnade. On the ground floor runs an arcade defined by semi-circular arches (*figure 43*), the same arches also encircle the top of the 'drum', breaking the mass of the building, allowing the sky to be seen through and establishing a continuity with the lower half of the structure.



42. The Open-Air Theater.  
Entrance.

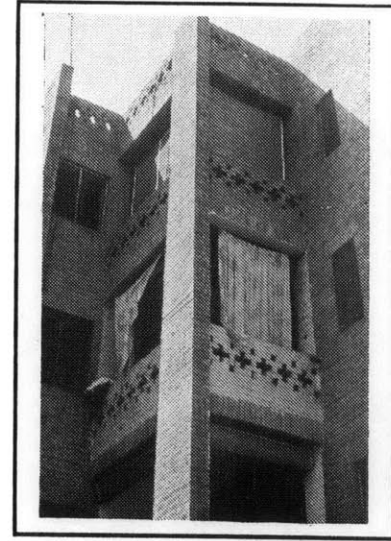


43. Interior colonnade.

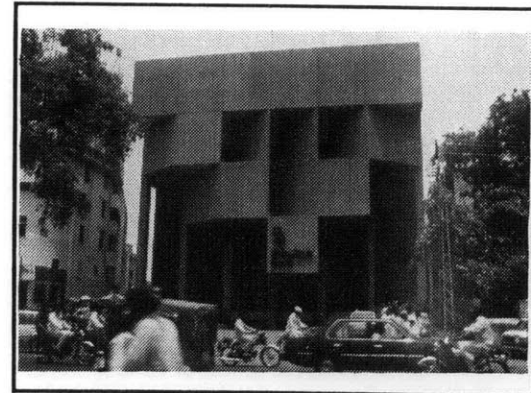
Apart from regional sources of inspiration one can also see reflections of Louis Kahn's work and even the Roman Colosseum in this building. Nayyar Ali Dada has taken an entirely contemporary concept, i.e. the open-air theater, and in it he is emulating tradition. Tradition which is abstracted to the point of simulacra, through the use of brick, which is only applied onto another structural material concrete, that forms the core of the building. Despite these inherent contradictions, the Open-Air Theater is essentially a visually coherent building, Nayyar Dada is able to mask his contradictions convincingly, the resulting design is another attempt, a means, towards tying together conflicting approaches towards architecture.

#### THOUGHTS ON ARCHITECTURE IN PAKISTAN

In spite of his personal success and a bright future Nayyar Ali Dada does not appear very optimistic about architectural development in Pakistan. "When one talks about Pakistani architecture one must look at the general scene, typical (Pakistani) architecture is a product of a rush of building, the pressures of urban expansion where people want quick results, glamorous results".<sup>1</sup> The effect of this attitude is the 'House and Garden' phenomenon, where many architects are forced to



44. Nayyar Ali Dada. Rivas Garden Apartments. Early use of indigenous details over modernist massing.



45. Nayyar Ali Dada. Grindlay's Bank, Lahore. The emergence of the received tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

look for inspiration in foreign architectural magazines. The content and particular context of much of this inspiration is poorly if at all understood by a large number of the 'home grown' architects who mainly wish to satisfy the clients desire for some thing different and in many cases a desire to make personal statements about themselves their background or their wealth.

Architecture cannot evolve in isolation, the good building is a product of cooperation between the client and the architect. According to Nayyar Dada Pakistani architecture has a three fold problem;

- A lack of awareness among the decision makers (the government), towards the architectural profession. The concept of an architect as distinct from the civil engineer or the contractor has not yet been understood.
- A huge amount of work ( approximately 70%) is carried out in the public sector, under bureaucratic control, leaving the architect very little leeway to depart from inflexible programs and rigid preconceived approaches towards design that go up to and include planning and even aesthetics.
- No sympathy towards an urban design philosophy. Each project is viewed in complete isolation, the impact on the city is completely neglected or poorly understood.



46. Contractor built architecture, Karachi. Popular modernism.



47. Beyond modernism? Arshad & Shahid Abdullah's emerging post-modernism in Karachi.

These attitudes lead to the promotion of shallow forms where the architect is required to do very little work apart from implementing the dictates of the client. Naturally this approach is not conducive to the development of a responsible, rational architecture, and many architects either give up in disillusionment or adopt a servile attitude towards authority. The result is a "pretty horrendous architectural scene... the bureaucrats make all the decisions and even the architects are not pushed with the minimum commissions they get. One must choose between practising architecture or running a shop".<sup>1</sup> Many practicing architects believe that one can not survive in Pakistan or for that matter in most third world/developing countries with the same approach towards the architectural profession that has evolved and prevails in the developed world. New attitudes and approaches are needed. Nayyar Ali Dada's own approach seeks to search for and to develop, a contemporary architectural expression through the use of very eclectic sources of inspiration. He is attempting to be contextual without completely letting go of his 'modernist' background, producing work that recognizes the reality of today and seeks to keep alive the 'memory' of yesterday.

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<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

Chapter IV

**Kamil Khan Mumtaz - The indigenous alternative**

BACKGROUND.

“Architecture... when used with such prefixes as Pakistani, Muslim and contemporary, suggests a single, identifiable, homogeneous entity, capable of being identified by certain characteristics which are typical or common to all buildings in that culture”.<sup>1</sup>

Thus writes Kamil Khan Mumtaz in his book *Architecture in Pakistan*. He says that this approach creates confusion and misunderstanding among those trying to understand the architecture of a religious community, Muslims, or a national community. “It would be more accurate to consider architecture, as much as any other aspect of a given culture, as a matrix of several sub-categories”.<sup>2</sup> Kamil Mumtaz differentiates between these categories. There are, as he explains, “...three horizontal or hierarchic layers and two distinct vertical streams”.<sup>3</sup> The horizontal layers range from the mainstream, elitist, ‘formal’ architecture, to the productions of vernacular traditions. The vertical streams, or currents, which run through these layers are the

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<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. *Architecture in Pakistan*.  
Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 192

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

secular, materialist on one hand, and the spiritual, metaphysical on the other.

As a result of such analysis Kamil Khan Mumtaz stands out among Pakistani architects as the only one to have systematically approached and attempted to answer the question of a Pakistani architectural identity. Not only has his architecture reflected the search for an appropriate vocabulary but he is also among the very few Pakistani architects who have put their ideas to paper. His book *Architecture in Pakistan* is the first, and till now only, work dealing with an “historical overview”<sup>1</sup> of architectural development in the areas that today comprise Pakistan. The book in its wide scope only briefly mentions the contemporary period, gives ‘snap-shot’ images of architecture in various regions and during various time periods of the nation’s history. He provides the base from which further work can and should develop. Of the three architects whose work I have looked at in this thesis, Kamil Mumtaz is the strongest opponent of ‘modernist’ philosophy. Both his most recent designs and writing reflect his advocacy of an “indigenous” architectural development.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz stepped into the Pakistani architectural scene when disillusionment was just beginning to take hold among many

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<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. (Preface) *Architecture in Pakistan*. Concept Media. Singapore, 1985. P. 1

local practitioners who found their training incompatible with the situation they faced in the 'real' world. Having returned to Lahore in 1965 after a year of teaching in Ghana and with a degree from the Architectural Association, Kamil Mumtaz was deeply imbued with the 'liberal', 'progressive' ideals of the time, tinged with a touch of the leftist, that many encountered in the charged and turbulent atmosphere in many elitist English institutions. He returned to a conservative, insular city which was largely untouched by the ideas sweeping the West.

#### AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ARTS

Kamil Mumtaz's return to Lahore coincided with a turbulent period in the history of the architecture department of the National College of Arts, which was in the process of being phased out due to the creation of an architectural department at the Engineering University of Lahore, a much larger institution vested with considerable influence and prestige. By 1964, the last of the foreign professors had left and teaching was in a state of disarray. Undaunted, Kamil Khan Mumtaz set about reforming architectural education at the National College of Arts, the only recognized architectural institution in the nation at the time. In 1969, after the five year program was reinstated and the foundation for a new institution was developed, Kamil Mumtaz initiated the process that eventually changed the N.C.A.

Kamil Mumtaz's years at the National College of Arts are important not only in that they provide further insight into the development of this important architectural institution but also because they culminate in the evolution of entirely new intellectual positions in his own mind, positions through the understanding of which the critic may be better able to evaluate his current approaches towards architecture. The most obvious change that took place in the National College during Kamil Khan Mumtaz's tenure was in the attitude towards modernism that had heretofore existed in the school, and in particular towards the largely unquestioned acceptance of the foreign ideas that accompanied the notions of progress and modernization. These ideas, under Kamil Mumtaz's influence at the N.C.A., were believed to be undermining the very existence of the indigenous heritage of the nation, a heritage that the Western trained Pakistani intellectuals were only beginning to discover.

While he was at the N.C.A. his ideas had an enormous capacity to mould thinking and develop compatible opinions among his students, one of whom recalls that he was almost a 'demigod'. As a means of emphasizing a 'social science' based definition of architecture, sociology was taught along with architectural design and the indigenous aspects of Pakistani culture were greatly emphasized at the expense of 'foreign' doctrines. There are, however, some N.C.A. graduates taught by Kamil Mumtaz who express reservations about



their education. They say that the radicalism and constant attacks upon the establishment of the time became ingrained and, as a result, an ex student laments that, "we can not break out of this mould".

The 'rejectionist' posture towards the modern movement, which many of his contemporaries had been taught to venerate, as well as the non-conformist, 'liberal' approach led to Kamil Mumtaz's eventual break from the N.C.A in 1977, eight years after he began teaching, and towards what appears to be a fundamental reappraisal of his thinking about formal architectural education: "My own work has taken a long time, between the first questioning of my own training, rejecting it, rediscovering the theoretical basis of our own culture, and then understanding it at an intellectual level".<sup>1</sup> Today Kamil Khan Mumtaz is attempting to apply this 'understanding' to the solution of questions facing architectural practitioners in Pakistan.

#### SEARCHING FOR ROOTS.

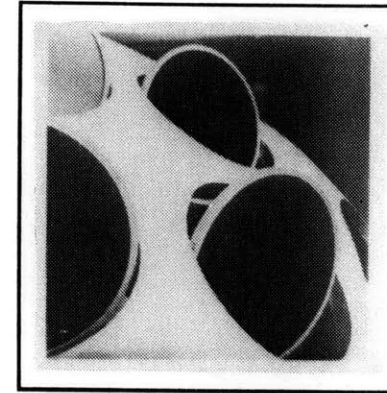
In many of his articles and essays and in his book, Kamil Khan Mumtaz talks about the need to "rediscover the deeper basis of our own traditions," in order to "see if we can't develop a contemporary architecture which is rooted in a more profound sense in our

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kamil Khan Mumtaz.  
*Architecture & Design*. Vol. III, no. 1, Nov-Dec 1986. P. 83

culture".<sup>1</sup> He keeps returning to his own training, to its inappropriateness in the Pakistani context, to its questionable proclamations regarding the rejection of all "...preconceived forms, precedents and traditions"<sup>2</sup> and the subsequent development of its own rigid "symbols" and "style." To Kamil Mumtaz the "crisis" facing architecture in Pakistan, and by extension the developing world, lies in this rejection of the past fostered by the polemics of the 'West' and their adoption by local schools of architecture, accelerating "the process of alienation and isolation from the architecture of our own regions".<sup>3</sup>

During the early sixties when he left architecture school Kamil Mumtaz went to Kumasi, Ghana where he worked with Buckminster Fuller and Keith Critchlow, and as he says "both of them had a very strong influence on my work".<sup>4</sup> The influence of Fuller in particular, probably the first 'universal designer', who disavowed overt cultural references in favor of solutions that went to the core of the architectural issues of shelter and technology, can be seen in Kamil



48.K.K.M. Refreshment Shelter,  
1964. Influences from Fuller.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'A Case for Indigenous Development.' *Regionalism in Architecture*. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1985. P. 55

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. 56

<sup>4</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'A Search for Architecture Based on Appropriate Technology'. *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*. The Aga Khan Program for Architecture. Cambridge, MA. 1988. P. 125

Mumtaz's earliest designs, as is apparent in his *refreshment shelter*, in Karachi, 1964 (*figure 48*).

Fuller, the truly modern architect, broke free from all traditional forms<sup>1</sup> in his innovative space frames and concepts and it is probable that Kamil Mumtaz was attracted to his work for this very reason, for, as he writes at the time, "I was critical of the aberrations of the International Style which reduced the modern movement to a set of cliches and symbols of Westernization and modernity. I therefore deliberately sought to evolve in my work a form of expression which would not be derivative of Western forms, but would rather be based on available materials, appropriate technologies, and a specific climate".<sup>2</sup> Thus Fuller's work can be seen both as an attraction and eventually a counter point for Kamil Khan Mumtaz.

Kamil Mumtaz goes on to say that he was convinced that his buildings, if they followed the above requirements, were "necessarily regional". He also talks about his own justifications for the rejection of his early work, experiments in low cost housing systems, by the villagers for



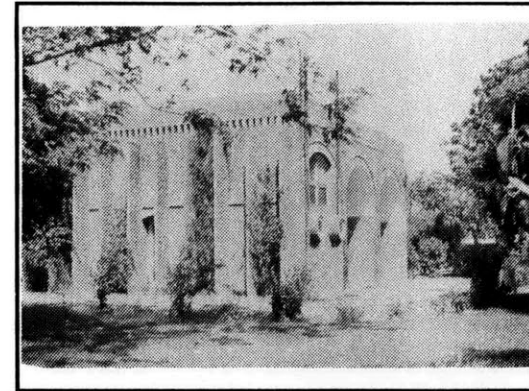
49. Kot Karamet rural housing, 1969.

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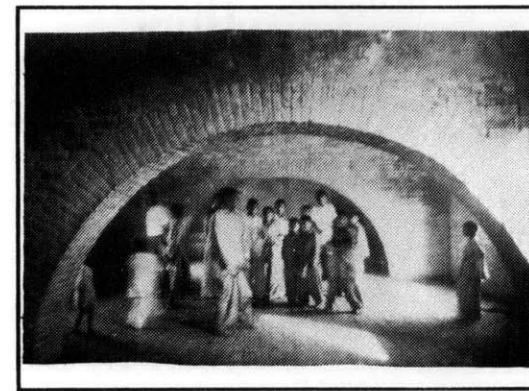
<sup>1</sup> Not from all tradition however, as evidenced by his use of South East Asian basket weaving techniques to develop his space frame designs.

<sup>2</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'A Search for Architecture Based on Appropriate Technology'. *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*. The Aga Khan Program for Architecture. Cambridge, MA. 1988. P. 126

whom the work was intended without considering the inappropriateness of the technologically 'appropriate' and aesthetically pleasing brick vaults (*figure 49*) in an area where flat roofs had always been used as usable floor space. And he cites a poignant incident which helps to illustrate one of the reasons for a reappraisal of his own approach towards the perception of architecture, especially the categorization of a work as either 'Western' or 'indigenous'. "In 1980 some architecture students, assigned to study current trends among the architects practicing in Lahore, came to interview me. 'Do you work in the Western or indigenous style?', they asked. I was amused by their naivete. 'Why don't you go and look at some of my buildings', I replied, 'and then you tell me'. So they did, and they came back beaming. It was clear they had seen the light. 'Yes sir', they said, 'it's quite clear. You design in the Western style'. I was shattered. Obviously something other than form and function immediately identified a building in the popular mind as either 'indigenous' or 'Western'. Buildings could communicate on a level of which I had been unaware". Learning that his designs, which he considered to be patently indigenous, were not looked at the same way by the 'popular' mind led to a search for the 'essence' of indigenous architecture. This search has continued in his later work, both in theory and design.



50. Kot Karamet rural housing. Development of an architectural vocabulary.

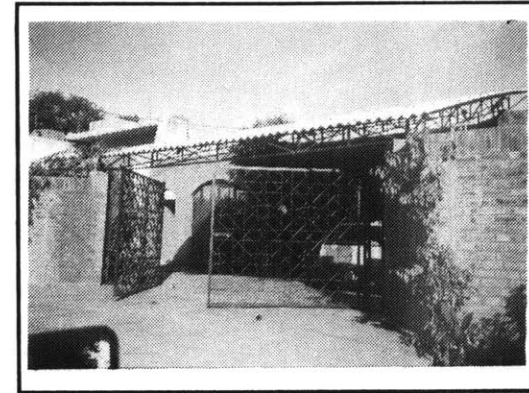


51. Kot Karamet. School Interior.

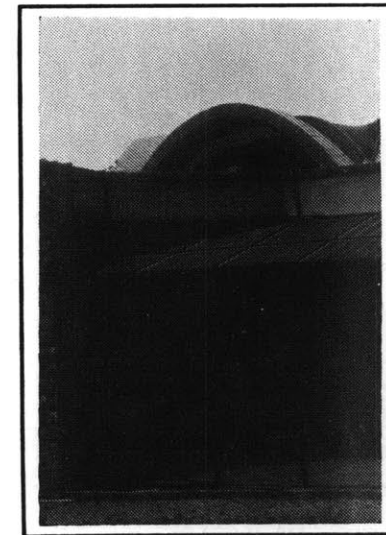
ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS.

Kamil Khan Mumtaz, apart from being an educator, is also a practising architect whose philosophy towards architecture is manifested in his designs. Upon returning to Pakistan he worked as a partner in the firm B.K.M. till 1984 after which he has been working on his own. Not being a prolific designer, his work, most of which has consisted of residences in and around Lahore, shows the care and thought that goes into its creation. Although Kamil Mumtaz's current work and approach towards architecture has been called "seminal", for his incorporation of traditional building methods and approaches into design, he appears to disavow such praise, "...who cares... the real trends (in Pakistan) show similarities with other third world countries, an aping and mimicking of the West... post-modernism, regionalism etc."<sup>1</sup>

Apart from his formal training and early association with the work of Buckminster Fuller and Keith Critchlow, what has had a profound influence on Kamil Mumtaz's work are Sufic notions and their application in architecture. He writes, "The first book I read (regarding Islamic Architecture) was Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar's *Sense of Unity*. It was a revelation. Next, I read Laleh Bakhtiar's *Sufi*. I was



52. Rashid Rahman house, Lahore 1986.



53. Rahman house. Skylight over courtyard..

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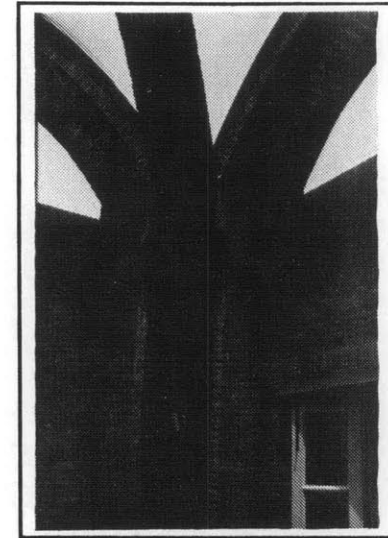
<sup>1</sup> Kamil Khan Mumtaz. (Interview conducted by Author).

converted."<sup>1</sup> Ever since then his own explanations of his work have included Sufic interpretations. This search for 'truth'<sup>2</sup> in architecture culminates in the notion of unity, inherent in Islam, as interpreted by Sufism. The next step was to give these "abstract ideas" form and a viable, functioning presence. The development of Kamil Mumtaz's work over the years does not however accurately reflect the considerable changes that took place in his intellectual position, in fact his architecture has followed the path of a subtle and continuing maturity. The Kot Karamet, rural housing of 1969 (*figure 50*) is not radically different from his more recent residential designs. What is apparent is the refinement of certain earlier ideas and the denial of other tendencies, "I have been able to explore new possibilities in familiar materials, using patterns and surface decoration as the grounds for contemplation, which help the viewer to become aware of a reality beyond the immediate materiality of a brick wall, a marble floor, or a steel grille"*(figure 57)*.<sup>3</sup>

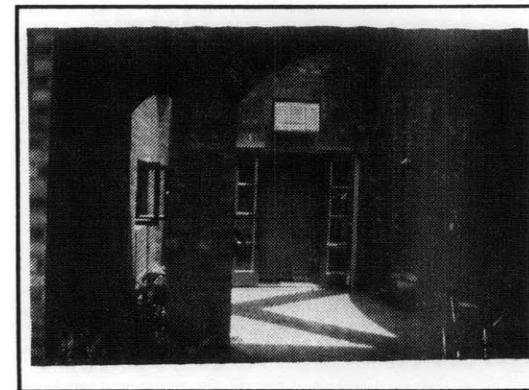
<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'A Search for Architecture Based on Appropriate Technology'. *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*. The Aga Khan Program for Architecture. Cambridge, MA. 1988. P. 127

<sup>2</sup> "... ideas about man and his relationship to the cosmos are essentially the same in all cultures: all of them find their origins in a single source to which everything must ultimately return, and all of them believe that beyond the apparent reality is a metaphysical reality...". *Ibid.* P. 127

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* P. 130



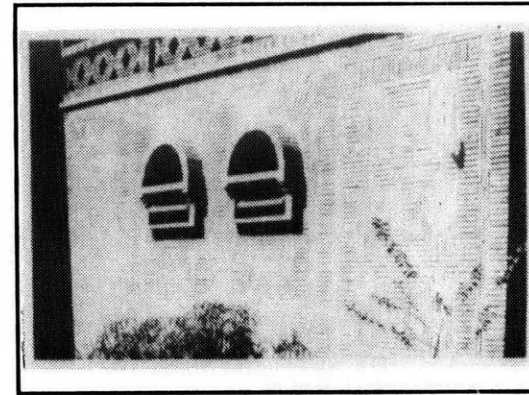
54. Rahman house. Skylight detail.



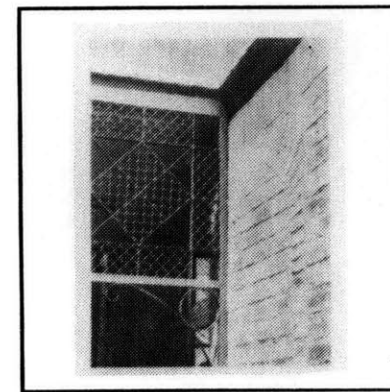
55. Rahman residence. Interior courtyard.

The search for the "cosmic order" and "perfect balance" of an 'Islamic' architecture, as reflected in indigenous materials and building techniques, must not be confused with the condoning of the unthinking Islamic revival that is apparent in much of the urban environment today. Kamil Mumtaz makes it very clear that the "concern for what is sometimes called 'national' and sometimes 'indigenous' or 'Islamic' architecture, is not well informed. It's a very shallow concept, as is apparent in the... slapping on of arches, domes and *jalis* etc., which is unfortunate". He says that "This confusion (of understanding only one aspect of the traditional, regional heritage, e.g. motifs and forms) might be overcome if we were to look at the totality of the architecture of any given cultural entity, not as a single homogeneous unit or category but rather as a number of co existing areas of activity, each valid in its own right".<sup>1</sup>

Kamil Mumtaz has given back to the local construction material, brick, a dignity and respect it had lost after independence and the pervasive impact of modernism, with its accompanying concrete and cement. Brick, the material most widely used by Kamil Mumtaz possesses more than just structural and economic value, it is largely used in a manner that enhances its inherent ornamental qualities (*figure 56*). This



56. Sani house, Lahore 1982.

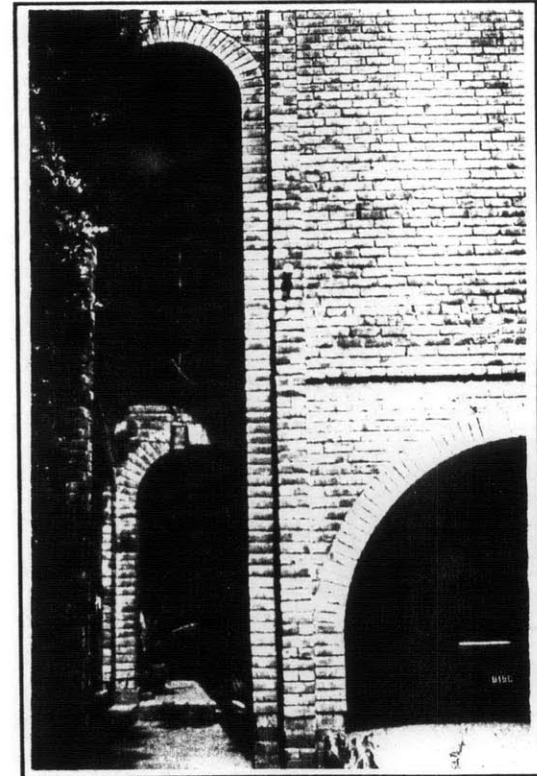


57. Nusrat Affendi house, Lahore 1986.

<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'The Architect and the Changing Environment'. Session V. *Regionalism in Architecture*. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1985. P. 151

approach can be contrasted with that of Nayyar Ali Dada who uses brick as a surface applique in an aesthetic, 'symbolic' manner that alludes to the past but doesn't associate with tradition in a deeper more substantial sense. This use of material (brick) as ornament is something that plastered walls, currently the most commonly employed exterior finish in Pakistan, just can not recreate despite attempts by residents and plasterers to bring back elements of ornamentation into their lives.

Despite his advocacy of a return to the 'essence', as it were, of indigenous architecture, the work of Kamil Khan Mumtaz does not necessarily reflect a negation of modern architecture. There is an order to his work which appears to be consciously or unconsciously related to his design training. This is apparent not only in the complex of houses that he designed for himself and his family (*figure 59*) but also in other designs as well, notably in the Rashid Rahman House, 1986 (*figures 52-55*). His expression of the structural elements, e.g. concrete slabs, and the innovative juxtaposition of new technology with the old as well as the hierarchy of architectural forms and volumes, their formal relationships, proportions and composition (*figure 58*), all lead one to look beyond the surface detailing and to a degree even beyond his own words.

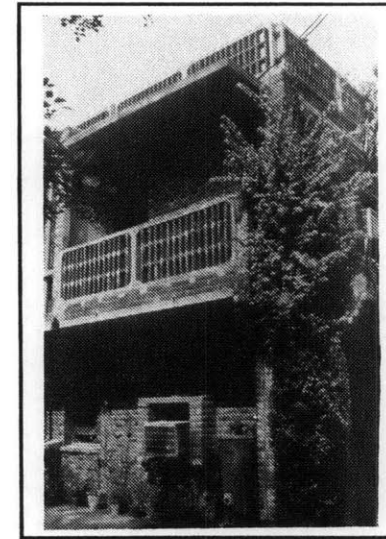


58. Mumtaz residence. An underlying modernism.

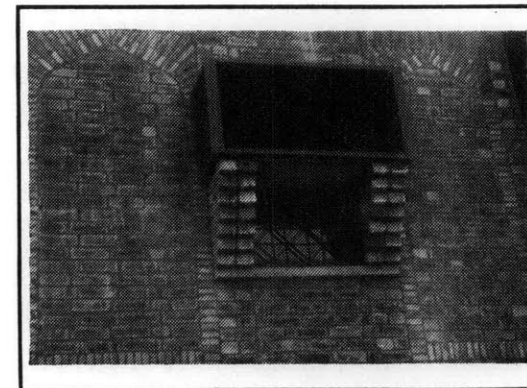


One is led to believe that Kamil Khan Mumtaz is not advocating a total revival or return to the past, rather he is trying to incorporate contemporary materials and technology in his own work. He is building upon tradition and bringing to it modern attitudes and design aesthetics. A small detail can better illustrate this point: in the hot summers of much of Pakistan air-conditioners are beginning to play an increasingly important and visible role; however no one has been able to design an opening for air-conditioners that goes beyond the usual breaking a hole in the wall (*figure 60*). Kamil Mumtaz takes this element (the air-conditioner) and incorporates it into his design in a manner whereby it becomes more than an intrusive appendage on a wall, it is almost made a part of the ornamental detailing, and thus a liability can be turned to one's advantage. His residential designs show the sensitivity of being able to improve on details that are not traditional. They incorporate new elements in a better, more 'rational' manner. They are of today.

While Kamil Mumtaz has till now seen very few of his larger projects built, he has had numerous opportunities to work on the designs for prestigious architectural competitions at the national level. These include entries for the Data Durbar Mosque (Lahore, 1977), the Quaid-e-Azam Memorial Mosque and Library (Karachi, 1982), and the National Memorial (Islamabad, 1983). The entries submitted for these competitions clearly show the influence of the Sufic view point, "My

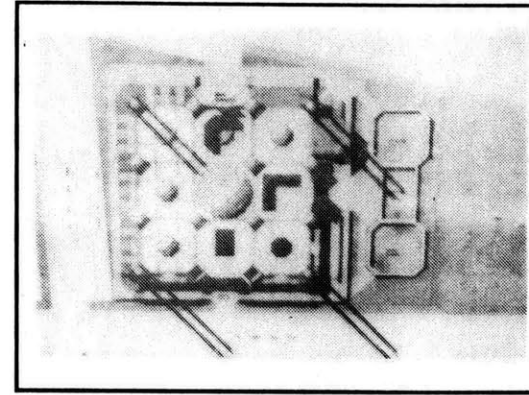


59. Mumtaz residence.

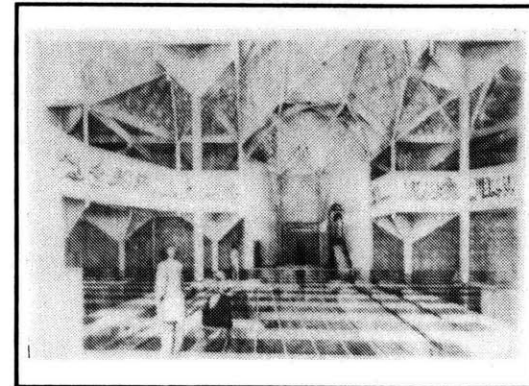


60. Air conditioner detail.

design (for the National Memorial) had been based on the traditional paradise garden"<sup>1</sup>(figure 63). He talks about using the fundamental principles of 'Islamic' architecture and applying them to contemporary design problems, exploiting new materials and techniques without "being enslaved" by 'cliches' such as arches, domes and minarets. For one of his earlier competition designs, the Data Durbar Mosque (figure 61), the interior perspective does indeed show an extensive use of concrete structural members in combination with an overlay of geometric patterns and an inscription from the Quran (figure 62). One could however criticize the ornamentation as being too literally a borrowed concept, a 'standard' detail. It does not seem to evolve from the inherent harmony of the design itself, rather the patterns are discontinuous on the various elements where they are applied and appear to have been picked almost at random. One incident which shows the difficulty Pakistani architects have in convincing governmental clients of the viability of their work, even when this work is ostensibly in line with the wishes of governmental policy, is the reaction of the then President of Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq (the chairman of the Jury) to the entries for the Data Durbar competition:



61. Data Durbar Mosque. Site plan.



62. Data Durbar Mosque. Interior perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kamil Khan Mumtaz. *Architecture & Design*. Vol. III, no.1, Nov-Dec 1986. P. 83

"he rejected all the entries, including ours, with the remark that his three-year-old daughter could draw better".<sup>1</sup>

Despite these setbacks, and in spite of the presence of his elegant residential designs, I feel that it is only through projects of national prominence, something that other designers can relate to in a more tangible and easily perceived manner, that Kamil Khan Mumtaz and others like him will be able to have the kind of impact they deserve on the Pakistani architectural scene.

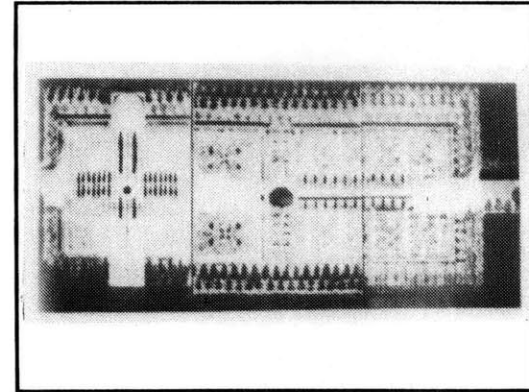
#### THE ANJUMAN-E-MAIMARAN.

To Kamil Khan Mumtaz the state of architectural design in Pakistan is very similar to that of many, if not most, other Third World countries, the unique conditions of the Third World are responsible for the development of a particular identity, but beyond this he says that the differences between the architecture of these countries arise essentially from three main sources.<sup>2</sup> These are:

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<sup>1</sup> Mumtaz, Kamil Khan. 'A Search for Architecture Based on Appropriate Technology'. *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*. The Aga Khan Program for Architecture. Cambridge, MA. 1988. P. 127

<sup>2</sup> Kamil Khan Mumtaz. (Interview conducted by Author).



63. National Memorial, Islamabad. Concept drawing.

- The prevailing ideological system. Simplistically stated, e.g. in Pakistan during the Zia regime Islam was the dominant theme and 'Islam' was in the eyes of the clientele (especially the government) and even many professionals, represented by the generic arch and dome.
- The type and availability of materials, existing levels of industry and technology, (e.g., brick in Punjab and concrete blocks in Karachi).
- Finally, the deeper cultural values of a people. The differences between cultures do exist and they determine distinctive qualities about local architecture including aesthetics and technical values. A history of building or certain ways of doing things that develop in various regions sink into the psyche and become a part of that culture's approach towards architecture.

All these criteria must be considered in defining an appropriate architectural identity, problems arise when one is given prominence over the others. To these sources of inspiration must also be added a means of disseminating information and the development of a critical mental faculty. This is provided through architectural education. After his disillusionment with and break from the architectural education system, of which he was once an integral part, Kamil Mumtaz set out to search for the theoretical basis of "our own culture" and then to apply the gained understanding towards the development of an indigenous architectural institution.

Today Kamil Khan Mumtaz is engaged in the creation of just such an institution, the *Anjuman-e-Maimaran* (School/Institution for Architects) which aspires to train builders and architects (maimaran) who will be more in touch with their past and their culture than those coming out of the existing Western oriented schools. The *Anjuman-e-Maimaran* has grown out of Kamil Mumtaz's conviction that the existing schools of architecture in Pakistan are not willing or able to depart from their predetermined paths. The *Anjuman* shall essentially "bypass formal education and go to the source",<sup>1</sup> which Kamil Mumtaz feels is the need of the hour, "there is still a lack of dirtying your hands with bricks and mortar".<sup>2</sup> As he explains the *Anjuman* idea grew out of concerns that are comparable with but "slightly different"<sup>3</sup> from those of Hassan Fathy. The *Anjuman-e-Maimaran* aims to:

- try and bring a sense of 'reality' to the student, in terms of fostering an understanding of building technology and aesthetics, through working with craftsmen and artisans.
- build a strong theoretical base of one's own roots.
- carry out some basic research related to indigenous building materials and techniques.

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<sup>1</sup> Kamil Khan Mumtaz. (Interview conducted by Author).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

These aims are being carried steadily forward by considerable input and assistance from architects and others sharing similar concerns. Colloquiums, seminars, field trips and documentation are also used to create an awareness among architects and the general public about their heritage. There appears to be participation at many levels from students and teachers to craftsmen and builders.

Conclusion

## **Thoughts on 'Revivalism vs. Modernism'**

### **REVERTING TO THE PAST?**

"Societies have been built variously on custom, convention, and history. A society based on custom knows its past through the societal structure of the present. A society that adopts historical reconstructions, ironically, distances itself from the past, just as it comes to know that past".<sup>1</sup>

If one were to accept this eminently plausible statement as one way of approaching and a means of understanding a society's attitude towards its artifacts then at least some of the present problems facing architecture in a country like Pakistan become clearer. Many concerned observers have been pointing out recently that architectural development in Pakistan is on a path which is taking it away from the customs and inventions that have acted as the 'glue' of its existence. Changes that have taken place since the coming of the British to the sub-continent and after the independence of Pakistan loosened this bond, through the introduction of attitudes and conventions that ran counter to most established norms. Today it appears that large segments of the intellectual community as well as influential architects

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<sup>1</sup> **Anderson, Stanford.** *Types and Conventions in Time: Toward a history for the Duration and Change of Artifacts.*

are strongly advocating a 'return' to the values of the past, to a 'historical reconstruction' of sorts. Such a reconstruction has already been carried out in the West and, as Stanford Anderson points out, this approach can lead to a distancing from and ultimately a distortion of the essential values that led to the evolution of the architectural heritage in the first place. To expect to have an 'objective', 'unbiased' point of view when evaluating history is entirely unrealistic, the 'lenses' that accumulate over a historians vision incorporate not only personal biases but also generations of intellectual view points which distort the observations ultimately into a form that is most palatable to the particular observer.

Some typical attitudes in Pakistan today regarding a Pakistani architectural identity are illustrated through the following excerpts from the architectural magazine *Habitat Pakistan*:

"Even after winning independence, we did not get rid of the mental embargo put on our minds by the colonizers. The term indigenous was buried deep and no collective effort was made to spade it out... It is because of our sheer negligence that the indigenous arts and crafts are dying and there is no one to take care of the long practiced local techniques of craftsmanship... We cannot now afford to react lethargically towards the situation which faces us today. If we do, we



might soon be drowned in the flood of a philosophy which has no bearing to our real identity".<sup>1</sup>

"The problem that is now (in the late 1980's) beginning to be confronted by our architects is that of identity. There is general concern that the new architecture being produced does not relate to our history and culture, and is heavily influenced by the West... the demand from outside and the concern from within is always there to think vernacular, and to produce a local architecture".<sup>2</sup>

Very few actually confront 'indigenous' architecture on the practical level of criticism and implementation. Architect Sikander Ajam commenting on the recently completed Serina Hotel in Quetta asks, "Is the Serina Hotel a forerunner of more *mudpacked* buildings on sophisticated plan forms and services in the major centers of Pakistan? Will it become a forerunner of a typology of form which can be easily adapted by less gifted Pakistani designers, to any building programme required by a sponsor, whether it is a school, hospital or a residential complex? Will such built form be let loose by Pakistani architects in the

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<sup>1</sup> **Ahmed, Noman.** 'Trends in Modern Housing: An Affair With Illusions? (A lamentation on the loss of indigenous style)'. *Habitat Pakistan*. Issue No: 13. P. 15-17

<sup>2</sup> **Abdullah, Arshad.** 'The State of Architecture in Pakistan'. *Habitat Pakistan*. ACA-3 Special Issue: 10-11. P. 97

future on an unsuspecting and unwary population?"<sup>1</sup> Asking such questions, very few and far between at present, is essential to the generation of a healthy, productive debate.

#### REVIEWING THE THREE APPROACHES.

In this thesis it has been my desire to increase an awareness and advance an understanding of the directions which architecture in Pakistan is taking. These directions and approaches are manifested in the work of the three influential architects I have dealt with in the preceding chapters. While these three do not represent the spectrum of Pakistani architecture they, however, through their work and understanding of the architectural profession in Pakistan embody a range of approaches that exemplify current attitudes towards architecture in Pakistan.

The first of these architects, Habib Fida Ali, represents the powerful 'modern' current that runs through Pakistani architecture. Kamil Khan Mumtaz, on the other hand, as he makes it quite clear in his writings is a supporter of the "vernacular traditions" and espouses a reappraisal of modernism in Pakistan. Finally we have the vast majority of

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<sup>1</sup> Khan, Sikander Ajam. 'Serina Hotel, Quetta. Pastiche or a serious attempt at generating a regional typology?' *Habitat Pakistan*. Issue No: 9. P. 77

architecture which, while aspiring towards modernism, is affected not only by the indigenous architectural traditions but also by the fast developing rejectionist attitude towards modernism. The architect who I feel effectively demonstrates this third state in his work and approach is Nayyar Ali Dada. While acknowledging that modernism is a substantial part of their received tradition, what is important to know is how they have adapted their training to the particular conditions of Pakistan, the environment where they must ultimately practice. Thus, in order to better articulate the question of identity in their work, one must be aware not only of this received – modernist – tradition and the particular environment in which they operate but, one must also be able to formulate a means of looking at their work which can make apparent the issue of identity.

In the case of Habib Fida Ali, his training has been absorbed and internalized to such an extent that the question of consciously asserting and proclaiming a particular ideology does not appear to arise. His work follows naturally from the dictates of his modernist background and has till recently been largely unincumbered by the debate regarding contextualism. Only lately has a reappraisal become evident. A conscious need to be historical appears to be permeating much of his newer work however it appears that this is acting more as a hindrance to the growth of his creative energies than as a source of inspiration.

To Habib Fida Ali architecture is primarily an exercise in “design” – design understood as a creative, aesthetic endeavor. “Architects should have the courage to build according to their convictions. To place every project in a macro-social context, relating the creative consideration a project merits to some calculus of national need, may be commendable for its idealism but is a dangerous exercise. Such an attitude could lead to an architecture colored by polemics and circumscribed by the architect’s personal understanding of the hierarchy of social need. It could also create rather convenient rationalizations for bad architecture”.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that Habib Fida Ali’s work is not contextual. One must instead adapt the commonly understood definition of contextualism, i.e., a relationship with perceived notions of culture and tradition, to another context, that of contemporary Pakistani society as it is today. Fida Ali goes on to say that “The demise of an organic design consensus, the lack of standards for the quality of the environment and the unholy mess of kitsch and nouveau rich ostentatiousness that typifies most of our urban architecture, all testify to the existence of wide-ranging cultural influences as well as the changing socioeconomic ground-rules”.<sup>2</sup> This “cultural incoherence” is what Fida Ali appears to be addressing in his own designs. In these terms a cohesive, rational external influence, i.e., modernism, can act

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<sup>1</sup> Architects Profile; Habib Fida Ali. *Mimar* 6. Concept Media Pte Ltd. Singapore, 1986. P. 7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 8

as a unifying element, a means of tying together the diverse and divisive elements of society. He reasons that as long as the architecture accommodates climatic, institutional and socioeconomic considerations, given time, it will evolve “slowly and organically” an architectural expression, an ‘identity’ of its own suited to its particular situation.

Nayyar Ali Dada, as a result of the large number of innovative projects he has designed, has earned himself the distinction of being called an architectural pioneer in post-independence Lahore. “Eventually we (Nayyar and his colleagues) did make a bit of a reputation for ourselves and produced some good buildings... we helped to establish the dignity of the profession in Lahore and brought some importance to architecture by working professionally”.<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada’s work best represents the dilemma faced by most architects in Pakistan: an intellectual affinity towards the dictates of modernism along with a nagging need to be ‘true’ to their own culture. This dilemma is manifested in the work of many Pakistani architects who attempt to be contextual in the extremely confusing urban situation that exists in much of Pakistan. Unlike Habib Fida Ali, Nayyar Dada does not rigorously adhere to the modernist vocabulary, he is able and willing to incorporate emerging concerns regarding a local architectural

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<sup>1</sup> Nayyar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

expression quite easily into, or to be more precise 'onto', his work. Nayyar Dada's architecture shows a concern primarily for aesthetic eloquence, the use of traditional 'symbols' does not detract from the importance given to the underlying form. The concept of an 'appropriate' architecture for a specific situation is not static, the designer adjusts the notion of perceived needs in order to better accommodate them into his or her own repertoire of responses.

Which of the two approaches, i.e. Habib Fida Ali's 'honesty' to his received tradition or Nayyar Ali Dada's willingness to experiment and modify in the light of changed circumstances, the same tradition, is valid for the Pakistani situation? There is of course no clear cut answer. Being consistent to a particular discourse can lead to the growth of a coherent architectural expression and yet this expression must not alienate those people for whom it is intended. On the other hand notions of contextuality are commendable as long as these notions are not adopted without recourse to a fundamental understanding of the particular environment where one is being contextual. Here an evaluation of Kamil Mumtaz's approach to the same problems would be in order. Kamil Mumtaz has taken the somewhat extreme step of rejecting modernism, at least as an intellectually viable proposition, and has turned his attention to a search for the "roots" of indigenous architecture. By denying the preeminence of the 'foreign' idea of modernism he is giving to the emerging generation of Pakistani

architects a belief in their own traditions and, through this belief a sense of confidence in facing the formidable architectural institutions of the West which threaten to engulf them. Kamil Khan's work however does not and cannot, if it is to remain valid in the existing situation, give up all external influences altogether. These influences have to be internalized to a degree and with the better understanding of indigenous architectural principles possibly a fusion or a compromise between the two can be aimed for. The alternative is to reject the past and start anew, which despite its apparent extremism is not an entirely implausible approach, but is one which few are willing to adopt in the reality which is Pakistan today.

#### REVIVALISM RECONSIDERED.

This thesis has essentially revolved around the polemics of 'modernism vs. revivalism' as a means of approaching the question of identity. The conflict between the two viewpoints, as they are commonly understood, has helped to define and continues to influence the debate regarding an 'appropriate' architecture. What has been left out of the debate, which is rapidly shifting towards revivalism<sup>1</sup>, is a critical attitude towards these positions. An attitude

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<sup>1</sup> I realize that this term incorporates diverse attitudes towards the past, I am however using it in a more generic sense to contrast it with the other set of viewpoints (modernism) which also tends towards social

generated out of indigenous concerns rather than as a reaction to external influences. Here I am putting forward a viewpoint which is more general in nature and does not necessarily reflect on the work of the three architects studied, but rather on the situation existing in Pakistan as a whole.

In order for a Pakistani architectural identity to develop the ideology of the country has to be clearly established and understood first. Herein lies the the inherent confusion: as in the 'national' identity so to in the 'architectural' identity, the conflict and contradiction between an indigenous expression and 'Western' (popularly translated as modern) influences permeates virtually all aspects of society to a greater or lesser degree. To develop individual responses isolated from the 'greater reality' of the culture is an endeavor doomed to failure. This is becoming quite evident in the desperate need to reevaluate modernism, and other 'foreign' symbols, that appears to be gaining ground. However jumping on the 'indigenous' bandwagon and expecting appropriate solutions to miraculously emerge is itself a dangerous and shortsighted proposition. The works of the Hasan Fathys and the Kamil Mumtazs of the Muslim world in their diversity of views must not be lumped together as a myopic, insular reaction to 'progress', nor should it be quickly accepted as the final answer to very

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progress but largely exclude overt historical premises from their arguments.



complex problems. A tradition, in such work, appears to be developing that may eventually prove viable for societies such as Pakistan. At present however only the first few steps on this road have been taken.

I believe that when a nation, or a people, gain confidence and strength they begin to stop imitating others and concurrently stop drawing on previous glories for inspiration, and can begin to develop a language of architecture of their own. I am referring here to the 'imitation' of the past and drawing on 'previous glories' in the negative sense where little is understood and is much is unthinkingly copied. Today Pakistanis are slowly turning away from copying others (outside the culture) but appear to be embracing the other extreme – that of reverting to the past. This pendulum (of reactions) may take time to stop but time is something that is not always available.

What needs to be seriously examined is whether the emerging revivalist (drawing on the past for inspiration for the present) tendencies are an appropriate product of a genuinely felt need, or whether they too are being fostered from without and are just being adopted in Pakistan. To architects like Nayyar Ali Dada this is a worrisome problem: "I remember when Swati shawls and Sindhi *ajraks* (hand printed cloth) were promoted by foreigners. It shouldn't be like that, trends and fashions make people lose the spirit... you can't develop a valid architecture by being inspired by foreign doctrines..."

even though (architectural magazines such as) *Mimar* purportedly shows us Third World architecture it still comes from Geneva and the U.S.”<sup>1</sup>

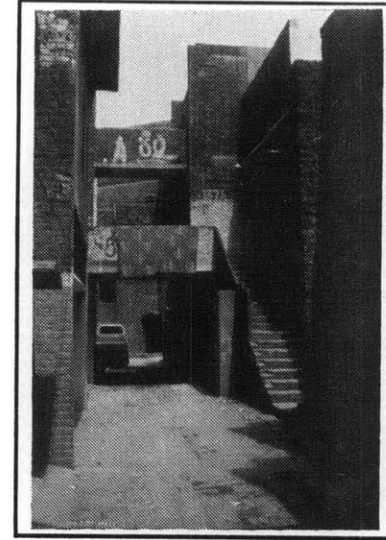
The advocates of the ‘reverting to the past’ viewpoint would do well to heed the warnings of such critics as Kenneth Frampton, who have enunciated its pitfalls: “Given the inroads of this modern reductionist tradition, we are now being urged once again to return to traditional forms and to render our new buildings – almost without regard for their status – in the iconography of a kitsch vernacular. We are told that popular will demands the reassuring image of homely, hand-crafted comfort and that ‘Classical’ (modernist) references, however abstract, are as incomprehensible as they are patronizing. Only rarely does this critical opinion extend the scope of its advice beyond the surface issue of style to demand that architectural practice should readdress itself to the issue of place creation...”<sup>2</sup>

Revivalism, as opposed to the critical, historical *reconstruction* advocated by Kenneth Frampton, is manifested not only in new buildings but also in a trend towards conservation and preservation in

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<sup>1</sup> Nayar Ali Dada. (Interview conducted by Author).

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Frampton. *Modern Architecture, A Critical History*. Thames and Hudson, Ltd. London, 1985. P.10



64. Multiple identities/shifting loyalties?  
Yasmin Lari; Angoori Bagh Housing, Lahore 1977.  
Contextualism...



65. ...and modernism. The Taj Mahal Hotel, Karachi.

major urban centers. To me the danger in 'preserving' the past lies in the disengagement from context that such an attitude promotes, leaving the artifacts open to 'creative' interpretations – interpretations which ultimately tend to perpetuate popular (mis)conceptions. I see in preservation the 'museumification', an 'embalming' of history, by which I mean the freezing of artifacts in both space and time, again facilitating the *construction* of history to suit existing needs. Hence my desire to reinforce and restate the need for a critical historical reconstruction in architecture which goes beyond kitsch and the aping of the past, and towards reconstructing and understanding the social values which generated historical artifacts, as opposed to only studying the artifacts themselves, in extrapolating to the present and ultimately to the future.

Obviously the above, i.e., modernism and revivalism, are not the only 'trends' taking place in Pakistani architecture. I have emphasized these because they appear to be originating from the prevailing centers of influence, both from the practitioners as well as through the educational institutions. Eventually these ideas filter down to the rest of society whereupon even when they lose their original meaning they still retain the power to alter the physical and ultimately the social superstructure. It may be argued that such generalizations (on the question of modernity vs. tradition) are the result of an unfocused approach to the problem. It may alternately be argued that in order to

be specific one must first deal with the wider issues. I feel that in the situation that exists in Pakistan, i.e., the lack of a debate on architectural problems, an initiation has to take place by accommodating a broad spectrum of views before the process of narrowing down to the most appropriate can take place. In this thesis I have provided an introduction to the different approaches of three architects who I feel represent the wide spectrum of views regarding the 'search for identity' and who illustrate, through their work, the range of architecture existing in Pakistan today. I can only hope that an initiation of the much needed debate on the state of architecture in Pakistan is carried out soon.

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