

The Indian contributors to the making of Chandigarh

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Chandigarh |

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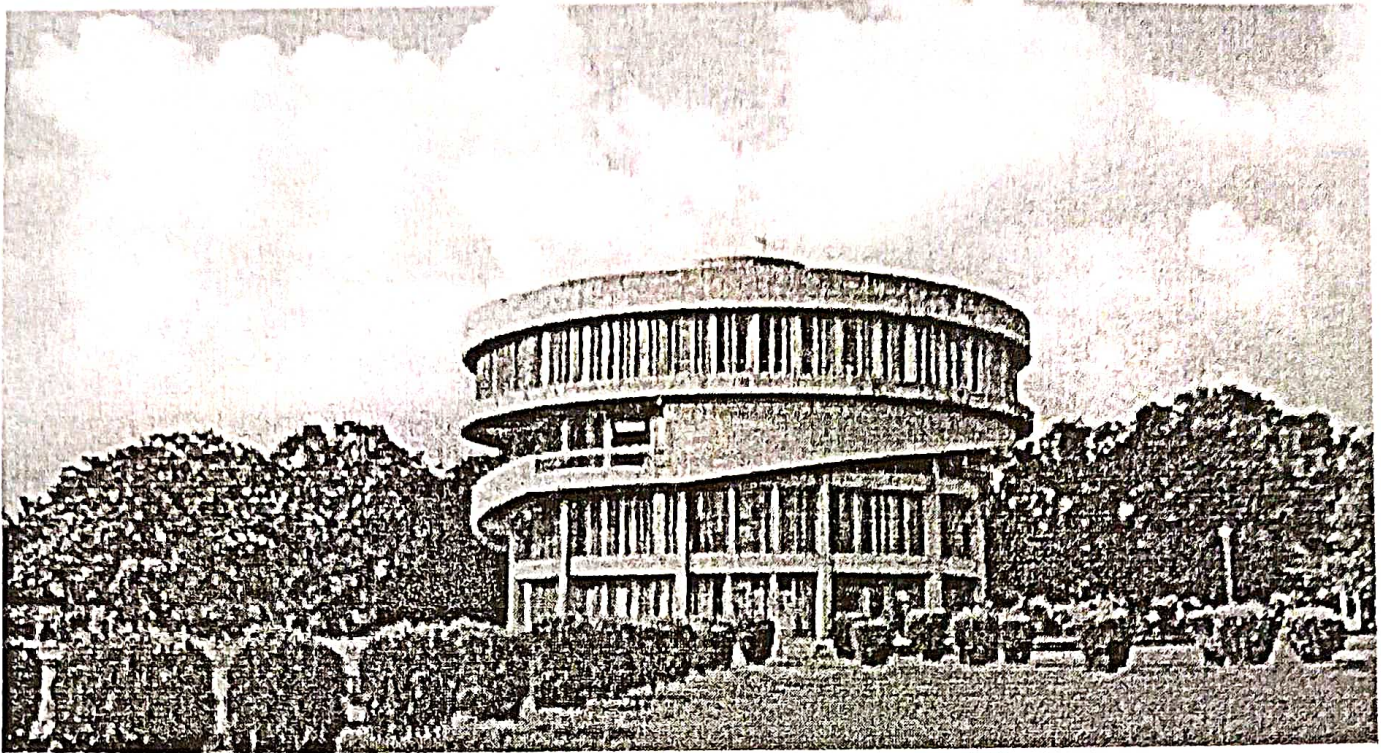
Written by Shweta Sharma, Saumya Sharma

Le Corbusier and his team of experts, namely Pierre Jeanerette, Maxwell Fry, and Jane Drew, have been celebrated time and again for their vision for the Capital Project of Chandigarh. Very seldom do we appreciate the large team of Indian architects and engineers who not only were a part of Le Corbusier's team and worked directly or indirectly under his guidance but also were responsible for the development of the city's architectural character once Le Corbusier and his associates concluded their active association with Chandigarh.

The then-chief engineer of Punjab, Mr PL Varma (Parmeshwari Lal Varma), is one of the most important figures in the history of the making of Chandigarh. He not only served as a direct associate to Le Corbusier during the making of Chandigarh's iconic structures but also was instrumental, along with Mr. P.N. Thapar, the chief administrator of the Chandigarh project, in the selection of the team appointed for this monumental task of creating a new capital under the patronage of the then prime minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru. The Sukhna Lake owes its existence to Mr. P.L. Varma, who realised the potential of building a dam over Sukhna Choe. His idea was then further developed and detailed by Le Corbusier. The team of engineers working with him on the designs of Le Corbusier went on to be instrumental in the making of the image of a post-Independence Indian architecture genre. One of such pioneers was Mr. Mahendra Raj Mehndiratta who was responsible for the structural design of Corbusier's Secretariat Building in the Capitol Complex.

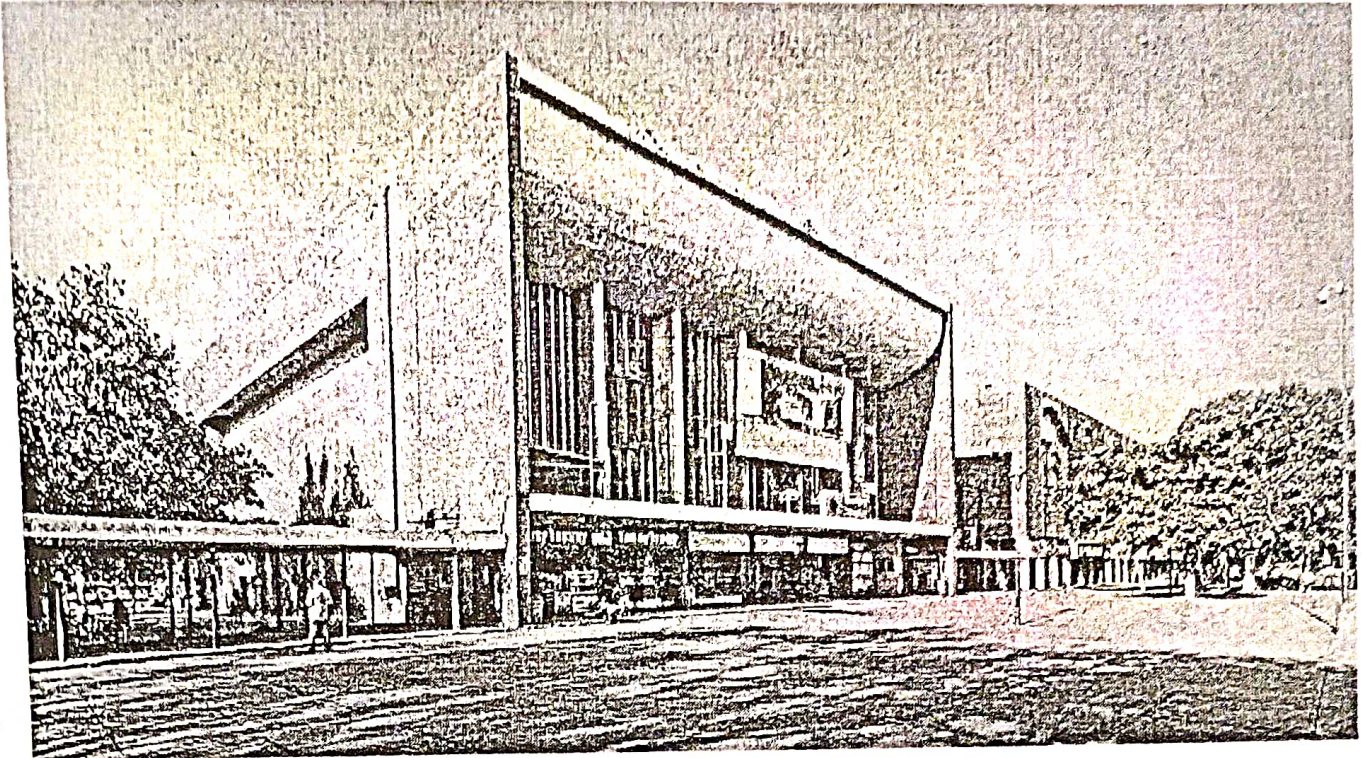
M.N. Sharma, the first Indian chief architect of Chandigarh, had worked directly under Corbusier and Jeanerette. It is safe to say that till his last day, Ar. M.N. Sharma was actively involved in keeping intact the legacy and promoting the architectural and urban values held in Chandigarh. He was also a sculptor and artist. Some of his noteworthy independent projects are the Bird Fountain in Sector 17, Roller Skating Rink in Sector 10, and the most recent Tourist Information Centre for the Capitol Complex, Sector 1.

Mrs. U.E. Choudhary, the first woman to become the chief architect of Chandigarh, was also a part of the core team of architects who worked in collaboration with Le Corbusier. She worked on the extension of the high court and the proposals for the Museum of Knowledge with him. She also assisted Jeanneret with his furniture designs and the designing of types of government housing and schools. She was the architect of the Home Science College and Hostel and Women's Polytechnic, Sector 10. As the chief architect, she was instrumental in the planning of the second phase of Chandigarh's development.



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Many prominent Indian architects who were associated with Pierre Jeannerette were responsible for the creation of the health and education district and multiple cultural centres of the city. The Post Graduate Medical Education and Research Institute (PGIMER), Chandigarh was designed by Pierre with Ar. Jeet Malhotra. The PGIMER Research Blocks and the Auditorium were solely designed by Jeet Malhotra. The education hub, which is the Panjab University Campus, was designed by Pierre Jeanneret and Ar. B.P. Mathur. A versatile architect in his own capacity, Ar. B.P. Mathur designed some of the prominent landmarks of the city, namely, the Fine Arts Department of the University and the Fine Arts Museum, the Student Centre at Panjab University and the Main Market Block, Sector 17. The Punjab Engineering College, Sector 12 is another renowned institution that was shifted to Chandigarh from Lahore after the Partition. A new campus was then designed in its entirety by Ar. Jugal Kishore Chowdhury. The Chandigarh College of Architecture was located within this campus with the aim to enable a constant dialogue between the disciplines of design and technology. Ar. Aditya Prakash designed the building of the architecture college as a reflection of Corbusier's Government College of Art, Sector 10, on which he had previously assisted the master architect.



Neelam KC Theatre

Ar. Aditya Prakash was also an artist, sculptor, academician and writer par excellence. Apart from many public and private buildings, he was the man responsible for the creation of cultural centres in the city. Some of such important buildings are the Tagore Theatre, Sector 18, Neelam, K.C. (now demolished) and Jagat Theatre, Sector 17, and Janj Ghar, Sector 23.

Ar. S.D. Sharma is another important contributor to the Chandigarh urbanscape. To date, he is contributing to the city by being a proponent of the architectural understanding and theory that Chandigarh represents. Some of his noteworthy projects are the Sri Guru Gurdwara in Sector 19, Chandigarh Architecture and Natural History Museum in Sector 10, and the New OPD Block PGIMER.

Apart from the architects and engineers, there are two more people who were responsible for creating a unique environment within the city. They were Mr. M.S. Randhawa and Mr. Nek Chand. Chandigarh owes its dynamic landscaping to Mr. M.S. Randhawa. Thanks to him, one can experience the solace of nature in the Leisure Valley, the Rose Garden and also along the arterial roads of Chandigarh. Mr. Nek Chand did something very similar in terms of creating a space of leisure and solace for the city residents. His Rock Garden is a unique space representing the merger of art and function.

Each one of these visionaries has contributed immensely to creating the city that we take pride in. The future of this city is now in the hands of the residents who are using and being inspired by the spaces created by them. Let's see where the new generation of architects, engineers, artists and entrepreneurs take the city.