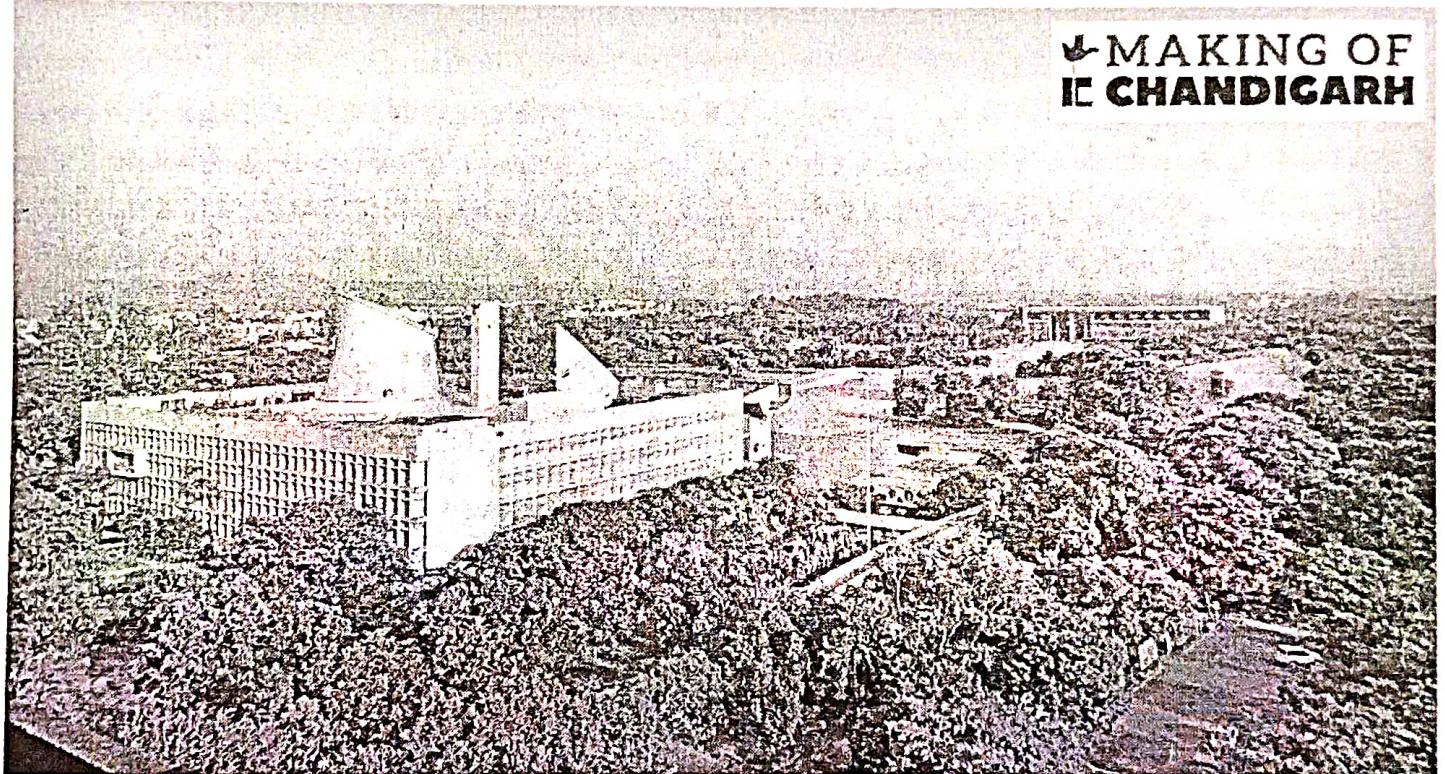


Making of Chandigarh: What does it mean to be a World Heritage Site?

By having a World Heritage Site in our midst, the residents of Chandigarh not only have a reason to be proud, but also a shared responsibility to value and protect this legacy for the future generations.

Written by Ar Saumya Sharma | Chandigarh |

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The Capitol Complex designed by Le Corbusier is inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List as a part of the transnational serial inscription 'The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement'

The city of Chandigarh has been an international topic of interest since its inception because of its immense historic as well as architectural and planning values. This unique experiment was further celebrated in 2016, when the Capitol Complex designed by Le Corbusier was inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List as a part of the transnational serial inscription namely 'The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement'.

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The idea of protecting heritage at an international level emerged mostly after World War I. But one particular event brought the world together for the first time. In 1959, UNESCO launched an international campaign to save the Abu Simbel temples from submerging due to a decision to build the Aswan High Dam in Egypt. A successful safeguarding campaign led to 50 countries donating. As a result, the temples were shifted to a higher ground and saved. This success led to few other similar campaigns and ultimately became a precursor to the creation of the Convention concerning the

Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972 – the work of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and UNESCO.

The farsightedness of this Convention can be observed by its statement: “World Heritage Sites belong to all the people of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.”

This Convention, with its regular amendments, is the guiding document that defines how a World Heritage site should be identified, protected, preserved and managed. It highlights and, more importantly, connects the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention puts forth 19 selection criteria to assess Outstanding Universal Value of a property. Out of the 10, a nomination must meet at least one, to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Only countries (State Parties) that have adhered to the World Heritage Convention can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO’s World Heritage List. A property can be an individual nomination, a cultural landscape or a serial nomination (meaning multiple properties, in different locations, highlighting same values being proposed under a single nomination). To be inscribed, the representative authority must create an inventory for the Tentative List followed by a Nomination File that is evaluated by the Advisory Bodies (IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM). The final decision of inscription is taken by the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee in an annual meeting.

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In 1994, as the inscriptions grew, it was noted in one of the UNESCO experts meeting that there was a severe imbalance in the type of properties being nominated. It was analysed that European-based heritage, religious buildings (especially related to Christianity), buildings of medieval history and elitist architecture were being over represented. This led to the creation of a Global Strategy for a Balanced and Representative World Heritage List, adopted by the World Heritage Committee in December 1994. Such deliberations helped to include indigenous settlements, cultural landscapes, examples of vernacular architecture and 20th century architecture in the World Heritage List.

Presently, there are 167 State Parties having a total of 1,154 inscribed properties. Out of these, 897 are Cultural Heritage Properties, 218 are Natural Heritage Properties and 39 are listed as Mixed Heritage Properties. India became a State Party in 1977 and hosts a total of 40 World Heritage Sites.

The Capitol Complex, Chandigarh (which includes the Secretariat Building, the Assembly Building, the High Court Building, the Open Hand Monument, the Geometric Hill Monument, the Martyrs’ Memorial Monument and the

Tower of Shadow Monument) is the largest of the 17 sites of a transnational serial nomination that is represented by Fondation Le Corbusier.

Seven State Parties – Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Japan and Switzerland – are involved in this inscription. The Outstanding Universal Value of this inscription is justified through:

- * Criteria I : To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- * Criteria II : To exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- * Criteria VI : To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

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The Nomination File states, "The integrity of the series as a whole is adequate to demonstrate the way Le Corbusier's buildings reflect not only the development and influence of the Modern Movement but the way they were part of its transmission around the world."

It is therefore important to understand that we the citizens of Chandigarh are not only the residents but also the custodians of an architectural movement that holds international importance.

UNESCO's World heritage List brings the world together and makes us a part of an international community of appreciation and concern for properties of cultural and natural significance. By having a World Heritage Site in our midst, the residents of Chandigarh not only have a reason to be proud, but also a shared responsibility to value and protect this legacy for the future generations.

Note: April 18 was established as the International Day for Monuments and Sites, also celebrated as World Heritage Day, by UNESCO's General Conference in 1982. The occasion is promoted globally by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), with an aim to spread awareness about the role and importance of heritage and its safeguard. Each year, ICOMOS proposes a theme for activities to be organised on this day; this year's theme being Heritage and Climate.

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This article is a part of the series of fortnightly articles by students and faculty of CCA on the Making of Chandigarh for the LCPJ forum. Ar Saumya Sharma is an Assistant Professor in Chandigarh College of Architecture.