

Unreconcilable contradictions: the poetry of Aditya Prakash

William McCrory

This article will explore two volumes of poetry by architect Aditya Prakash devoted entirely to Chandigarh, India, titled *Chandigarh, a Presentation in Free Verse* (1978) and *Reflections on Chandigarh* (1983). These volumes represent two distinct, but interconnected themes related to Chandigarh. First, Prakash presents the issue of Indian agency, through considering both how Le Corbusier related with his co-workers and with the project itself.

The second theme being Prakash's apparent intrigue in the paradoxical interplay between Chandigarh's secular modernity and what could be described as an underlying spirituality. Prakash articulates how secular forms of spirituality relate to the structures erected in Chandigarh, specifically in the Capitol Complex. This is a complex discursive gesture since the term secular implies the separation of religion and the state. Ostensibly, the secular and the spiritual could appear contradictory, especially in Chandigarh, which was built primarily to serve as the Punjab region's capital and to host the state's governmental buildings. Indeed, this article will argue that Prakash's creative and complex analysis of Chandigarh's authorship that critically interrogates the cities' divergent impulses, enables a productive and original interpretation of Chandigarh's creation.

The decision to analyse the poetry of Aditya Prakash relates to the broader research objective to present a better understanding of Chandigarh's architectural history. What is meant by a better understanding in this context? In this case 'better' would pertain to an understanding of the city's creation that goes beyond the polarised critique of the city characterised by either idealisation or scathing critique of the Swiss French architect, Le Corbusier, who is synonymous with the city in canonical terms. Broadly speaking, this research objective relates to the notion of collaborative modernism. This concept involves viewing Chandigarh as having been created by an extended network of administrators, architects, town-planners, and engineers. The ultimate objective being to excavate the Indian contribution to the city and augment previously overlooked figures- such as Aditya Prakash- in discussions on the architectural history of Chandigarh.

Such research should be interesting to the developing cohort of researchers- Jackson, Chalana, Sprague, and Prakash- currently writing about the architectural history of Chandigarh, from what could be coined as a Post-Le Corbusier perspective. Additionally, such research might concomitantly be valuable to a wider discourse that problematises the lack of recognition for modernist artists

and architects from what pioneering art historian Partha Mitter might refer to as the 'periphery'.¹

It is equally plausible that such research considerations might converge with art historians such as Michaud (2019),² who are critically investigating the epistemological foundations of the discipline and its apparent inbuilt bias. In short, this article could potentially interest architectural historians of Chandigarh motivated to investigate the contributions of Indian architects to the city, and to scholars of art historiography.

Now, it is essential to provide some historical context. Chandigarh is the state capital of Punjab and Haryana and sits close to the Himalayan Foothills. It was commissioned in the late 1940s after the partition of India, which saw Lahore, the former state capital of the region, fall within the national boundaries of Pakistan. The city's design was initially headed by an American team, with architects Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki at the helm.³ Mayer had served with the U.S. army in India during World War Two and knew the country well. However, following Nowicki's death in a plane crash in the Libyan desert in 1950, it is understood that Mayer withdrew from the project. Subsequently, the project fell under the leadership of Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew.

There are two important aspects of Chandigarh's historical context, the first of which is Partition. In June 1947, Sir Cyril Radcliffe was tasked with creating the line that would divide India and Pakistan, which resulted in Lahore, the previous state capital of Punjab, ending up in Pakistan, and the Indian East Punjab, in need of a new state capital. Refugees travelling in both directions were murdered by mobs in acts of reciprocal violence, with two million dead and seventeen million displaced.⁴ The government of Indian East Punjab faced a colossal refugee problem which was compounded because the government was functioning without an administrative or state capital.⁵ Short-term arrangements were made to host the local government in the hill station of Shimla (in what would become Himachal Pradesh), the previous summer residence of the British colonial government.

However, the search for a new state capital became a profoundly important project to the newly independent Indian state. Various pre-existing cities in the region were considered, such as Simla, Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Ambala, but the decision was made to build a new city.⁶ As Vikramaditya Prakash highlights,

¹ Partha Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 90 (2008): 531-548.

² Éric Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions: A Genealogy of the History of Art*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019.

³ Manish Chalana, and Tyler S. Sprague. 'Beyond Le Corbusier and the Modernist City: Reframing Chandigarh's 'World Heritage' Legacy.' *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 28 (2013): 201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2013.737709>.

⁴ Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava, *India*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 127-128.

⁵ Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India*, Singapore: University of Washington Press, 2002, 2.

⁶ Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, 4.

according to P. L. Verma, the chief engineer of Punjab, the critical reason for building a new city was not practical but symbolic. 'None of the existing cities of Punjab,' he recalled, 'possessed sufficient magnificence and glamour to make up for the psychological loss of Lahore suffered by the strife-stricken but proud Punjabis'.⁷ Therefore, Chandigarh's inception can be profoundly associated with the partition of India since this catastrophic historical event presented the necessity for its creation.

Within the context of Chandigarh's historical context, it is important to note how the city's inception overlaps with the development ideology of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. As Chalana and Sprague observe, Nehru pursued the loss of Lahore as a political opening to create a contemporary, secular city that would reflect the aims and objectives of the newly formed nation state.⁸ Therefore, we can conclude that Chandigarh's modernist architecture and planning represented the city's secular modernity. In short, the use of the modernist architectural language was as much ideological as it was aesthetic.

In a corporeal way of seeing, Chandigarh was not the development of a pre-existing city or urban settlement, as Lahore had been under the British in the nineteenth century. Ostensibly, or perhaps superficially, Chandigarh was a bespoke city constructed anew as a symbol of secular modernity. Despite the grand decision to split with the past and wield the confluence of architecture and urban planning to make a dramatic aspirational statement for the newly formed Indian state, it is still possible to view the city as a palimpsest. The intention of the city's creators might well have been to transcend the controlling influence of the past, with secular modernity transplanted over the pre-existing social order, yet inevitably it failed to obscure what had existed previously. This is because, while the city served as a symbol of secular modernity, it would be almost impossible to overlook the fact that the city's very name refers to the Indian goddess Chandi. As Jackson quips, Chandigarh's name could be construed 'literally Goddess of power town'.⁹ Even if the cumbersome concept of literalness in translation is acknowledged, it must be conceded that Jackson undoubtedly has a point. This at the very least complicates the rhetoric surrounding the city, not least the idea of religious neutrality, since Chandi is, of course a Hindu deity. Therefore, whilst the city materialised anew on the Punjabi Plains, the city's ideological and spiritual elements retain vestiges of the past.

The vestiges of the past exerting an influence on the present seem salient in Chandigarh's short yet undoubtedly significant history. How the religious associations of the city effervesce and complicate the neat narrative of Chandigarh as an expression of secular modernity connects metaphorically to other aspects of the city's history. A similar mechanism is at work with how the emerging awareness of Chandigarh's Indian contribution will inevitably challenge and complicate the role of Le Corbusier in the design process of the city. Consequently, it should be

⁷ Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, 7.

⁸ Chalana and Sprague. 'Beyond Le Corbusier and the Modernist City,' 200.

⁹ Iain Jackson, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth Century Architecture, Pioneer Modernism, and the Tropics*, London: Routledge, 2016), 217.

apparent that various interpretations and articulations of Chandigarh's history exist, as will be subsequently expanded in the research context section.

While there is significant scope for original research on the architectural output of Aditya Prakash, this article suggests that the architect's poetry can be viewed as a dynamic yet fragmented sketch that advances scholarly engagement with the city. Furthermore, it is suggested that this poetry can assist in critiquing the Le Corbusier dominated narratives that surround the city. Aditya Prakash creates an intervention into writings on Chandigarh that give significant emphasis to Le Corbusier, who overshadows not only Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry, and Jane Drew, but also the team of resolute young Indian architects that worked on the design of Chandigarh. While confidently determining the precise list of Indian architects that worked in the city remains a work in progress, there is a clear trajectory of research committed to demonstrating the extent to which such architects contributed to the design of the city. This article will therefore be contributing to this emerging body of research by focus entirely on the creative dialogue between Aditya Prakash- one of the architects that worked on the city- and Chandigarh itself, and the process that led to the creation of the city.

Research context

Scholarship on Chandigarh often focuses on the relationship between Le Corbusier and whether the architect benevolently or else problematically imposed his architectural vision on the Punjabi Plains. It is worth briefly explaining these broad trends before explaining the research trajectory with which my research aligns. Strikingly, in the late 1970s architect and Chandigarh resident Madhu Sarin (1977) delivered a robust critique of Le Corbusier and Chandigarh, with the city being presented as the selfish imposition of one man's vision.¹⁰ However, Von Moos (1977) suggested that if a blueprint for a city is accepted by a commissioning body, then it ceases to be only the indulgence of the architect in question.¹¹ Furthermore, Von Moos, suggested that Chandigarh could be perceived as the emanating from a convergence of ideologies between Le Corbusier and Nehru. Importantly, while this evidences an attempt to engage with the Indian contribution to Chandigarh, this is eclipsed by the tendency to render Le Corbusier as a lone genius, and this is epitomised by the writings of William Curtis (1997).¹² Overall, there is a failure to accurately present not only the individual architectural contributions of Indian architects such as Aditya Prakash, but also the Indian team's various collaborations with both Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry and Drew.

This article adds to the research trajectory established by Vikramaditya Prakash with *The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India* (2002) and Sarbjit and Surinder Bahga *Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret: Footprints in the Sands of Indian Architecture* (2000). Both texts offer a clear focus on Le Corbusier. However, in

¹⁰ Madhu Sarin, 'Chandigarh as a Place to Live,' in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. Russell Walden, London: MIT Press, 1977.

¹¹ Stanislaus Von Moos, 'The Politics of the Open Hand,' in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. Russell Walden, London: MIT Press, 1977.

¹² William J.R. Curtis. *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, London: Phaidon, 1997.

addition, both take the step of exploring the Indian contribution to Chandigarh. Such publications made the original gesture of incorporating accounts from the Indian architects involved, facilitated by personal connections. It is important to note that Vikramaditya Prakash is the son of Aditya Prakash, the architect and poet whose work forms the focus of the article. Similarly, Sarbjit and Surinder worked in dialogue with Jeet Malhotra, one of the nine architects that worked on Chandigarh, and included a witness account from the architect towards the end of the book. Such publications represented the emergence of a discourse about Chandigarh that prioritised the inclusion of accounts from those who were directly involved in the city's creation. Scholarship from architectural historians like Iain Jackson (2013), Manish Chalana and Tyler S. Sprague (2013) developed this research trajectory. This article contributes to this emerging discourse by throwing a spotlight on Aditya Prakash and his poetic critique of a city that he helped design.

Methodology

Methodologically, this article will refer to *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*, and *Reflections on Chandigarh*- accessed at both the Aditya Prakash Foundation archive and the British Library- to help form an understanding of Prakash's perspectives on the design of the city, Le Corbusier and Modernism. Both texts include introductions from Mulk Raj Anand, a modernist writer, who was associated with notable literary and artistic groups and individuals, such as the Bloomsbury Set, André Malraux, and Pablo Picasso. Furthermore, Anand's association with leading European modernists, demonstrates the transcultural spirit of modernism and of relevance to the concept of collaborative modernism, is suggestive of the fact that not all modernists were from the perceived 'centre' otherwise known as Europe. While these poetry books are not conventionally 'academic' they provide a critical lens through which to consider both Prakash's output and Chandigarh as a city. It hoped that these poetic texts might assist in re-aligning the distorted narratives of academia on the city.

This consideration of Prakash's poetry holds a profound resonance within the broader context of my research which explores Chandigarh through the lens of collaborative modernism. Accordingly, this article seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the Indian agency in Chandigarh's creation and simultaneously, disrupt the centrality of Le Corbusier in dominant Anglophone Euro-American scholarship on the city.

To this end, Prakash's poetry has been selected since it offers a gateway to understanding the inner world of- Aditya Prakash- one the architects that has hitherto been overlooked in the story of Chandigarh. Additionally, it is significant that Prakash wrote and published these poetry publications in English and in collaboration with the most famous Anglophone Indian writer of the mid-twentieth century. It is intriguing that Prakash produced both volumes collaboratively, which he felt to be consummate with the working spirit of Chandigarh, who had somehow been eclipsed by dominant Le Corbusier base narratives. Prakash and Anand intended to contribute to existing knowledge on the city, based on their respective involvement in Chandigarh and modernism.

Whilst the use of English shows a certain coloniality, it also suggests that Prakash and Anand wanted their ideas, critiques, and analysis of Chandigarh, to be accessed by an international audience. It could be suggested-via reference to Bill Ashcroft's article 'Postcolonial Modernities' (2014)¹³ that the authors wanted to create a dialogue between 'local' experience and dominant Anglophone Euro-American narratives about the city; therefore, deploying a subversive position in relation to discourse on the city.

To expand this point, it is worth making a detour to the recent novel by Poet Ocean Vuong *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), which takes the form of a letter from the son to his mother. The following extract is illuminating:

That night I promised myself I'd never be wordless when you need me to speak for you. So, I began my career as our family's official interpreter. From then on, I would fill in our blanks, our silences, stutters, whenever I could. I code switched. I took off our language and wore my English like a mask so that others would see my face, and therefore yours.¹⁴

It could be opined that Aditya Prakash's use of English was a mask, or a necessary device deployed to ensure that his ideas, critiques, and experiences would be seen and permeate Anglophone Euro-American scholarship. This is highly significant within the context of collaborative modernism. This article proposes that Prakash's poetic intervention into the fabric of existing fabric of Chandigarh's architectural history offers a greater understanding of Chandigarh's creation and those involved with it.

Theoretical framework

This research embellishes Chandigarh's architectural history through the lens of collaborative modernism. Accordingly, this theoretical concept seeks to unpack how Chandigarh was created and aims to bring previously overlooked individuals into a wider discussion of the city's architectural history. It will hence spotlight on Indian architects, engineers and administrators who are not typically included or given prominence in historical accounts of the city. Moreover, the analysis of Aditya Prakash's poetry to understand his relationship with the design of the city and other figures involved, plays a crucial role in this overall research objective.

The analysis of Prakash's poetry aims to show that Chandigarh emerged from a mutual flow of ideas, collaboration, and emotive interactions. The notion of collaborative modernism does not suggest that the working relations that facilitated Chandigarh's creation neutralised or went beyond the postcolonial situation in which the project developed. It is likely that there would have been a hierarchy between the white Western 'experts' and their Indian counterparts. Yet, it seems plausible that as the different working relationships developed, that various exchanges, interactions, and contributions, disrupted or complicated this probable hierarchy.

¹³ Bill Ashcroft, 'Postcolonial Modernities,' *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, Vol.1 (2014): 3-26.

¹⁴ Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2019, 32.

Collaborative modernism borrows transnational modernism's reframing of the 'archive.' The concept of collaborative modernism can be distinguished from transnational modernism, since the latter implies a network of firmly established nation states through which modernism circulated¹⁵. However, importantly, art historians connected with transnational modernism offer innovative ways of thinking about what can be considered an archive. Crucially, within the writings of art historians such as Rowe, it is possible to understand the archive as de-spatialised, meaning not necessarily a body of documents contained within a physical structure. Furthermore, that archives can become dynamic and evolving systems of self-representation or what Rowe describes as an 'active system of enunciation'¹⁶. This is especially pertinent, since archives devoted to the preservation of artefacts related to artists and architects from Partha Mitter's periphery remain underdeveloped. Indeed, this innovative gesture means that unexpected materials such as volumes of poetry might be considered a valuable resource when attempting to better understand previously marginalised figures. This theoretical insight holds the potential to create art historical methodologies that could disrupt the implicit bias contained within the epistemological foundations underpinning the discipline of art history.

Multifaceted tensions: Indian agency, Le Corbusier, and his collaborators

The opening piece of writing found in *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*, is a piece by Mulk Raj Anand, Indian Anglophone writer and modernist. Within the context of collaborative modernism and Chandigarh, it is striking that Anand inserts a more pluralistic version of what could be referred to as the Chandigarh foundation myth. Strikingly, Anand offers a romantic, pastoral, immensely evocative, almost sensory rendition of the early discussions that led to Chandigarh's creation:

In the little clearing in the jungle, by the barn-like refugee style hut, where Le Corbusier and his associate architects worked, the heavy perfume of the vegetation came into our nostrils. The mosquitoes buzzed in a conference as though to pass a resolution against the building of Chandigarh, and a few of us crowded around the pale sage with the big-black-framed glasses on his furtive eye.

Jane Drew passed around a tray of small wine glasses, saying:
'Jeannert's [sic] Devil Brew!'

P.N Thapar raised his glass in a toast. He did not say who the toast was to.

¹⁵ Transnational Modernisms Research Cluster, 'Transnational Research Cluster: About,' Bristol University Department of History of Art, n.d, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arthistory/research/tmrc/>

¹⁶ Dorothy Rowe, 'Retrieving, Remapping and Rewriting Histories of British Art: Lubaina Himid's "Revenge"', in *A Companion to British Art: 1600-Present*, ed. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2013, 290.

All smiles, the company sipped wine made by Jeannert [sic], while the brewer said: 'Not bad, eh'.

Maxwell Fry twisted his lips and gave grudging approval.¹⁷

Anand recounts that Le Corbusier recited the poetry of Rimbaud to the group, translated by Jane Drew. From Anand's writing, we find a sense of the collective and with ebullient optimism, although the malcontent of Fry and his apparent feigned cooperation with the group, offers a shred of realism in this otherwise idyllic scene. Anand goes on to state:

I knew on this evening that, from the craters and the ravines, below the Shivaliks, out of the woods, would arise the apotheosis of a city, to advance Mandu, Sikri and Jaipur, with shelter for men and women of the city. Today, that city is a reality, lived in, coveted, loved, and sung about by Aditya Prakash, a challenge to future generations to evolve it into the finest city of humanism in the whole world'.¹⁸

So, what does this scene add to an understanding of Le Corbusier's relationship with his Indian colleagues? Importantly, Anand's narrative not only includes the usual suspects, Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Jane Drew, and Maxwell Fry, but also Thapar, Verma, Malhotra and intriguingly Anand himself. As it transpires, Anand was a friend of the Chief administrator Thapar and had been (or so the author claimed) been involved in some of the early conversations during Chandigarh's conception. Although Le Corbusier is clearly signified as the creative genius behind the project, he appears firmly integrated within the team, rather than an isolated lone male genius. Anand's narrative places Chandigarh alongside the great cities of Fatehpur Sikri and Jaipur, he begins to weave Chandigarh into India's architectural history.

To elaborate further, the reference to Mandu evokes the great architectural accomplishments of the pre-Mughal dynasties in India. Equally, Fatehpur Sikri was the city built by Akbar the prolific and highly esteemed Mughal ruler. Whereas Jaipur or the Pink City, was established by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, a contemporary to Aurangzeb, a Mughal ruler and descendent to Akbar. Consequently, these sites hold a special place in India's architectural history and reference to them is both strategic and symbolic. As such, the opening with its allusion to a multiplicity of different contributing actors and diverse references to Indian architectural traditions, seems intended to reclaim Chandigarh from the grips of an exclusively Le Corbusier dominated narrative.

The opening scene is both multifaceted and complex, since while it demonstrates the esteem held for Le Corbusier and camaraderie shared by the team, there are potential signs of critique. The image of the cohort huddled around the pale sage and his subsequent poetry performance shows the existence of adulation amongst the cohort towards Le Corbusier. Nevertheless, there is an intriguing

¹⁷ Mulk Raj Anand, 'A Conversation with Le Corbusier' in Aditya Prakash, *Chandigarh, A Presentation In Free Verse*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1978, 3.

¹⁸ Anand, 'A Conversation,' 6.

reference to the French poet Rimbaud, who supposedly worked as an arms-dealer whilst in Ethiopia and thereby profiting from the coloniality of the period. Could this be an indirect allusion to Le Corbusier and the way in which the architect treated the Chandigarh commission? Such questions are still both open and unresolved.

However, this reference to a flawed lone white male-in Rimbaud- reminds the reader that Le Corbusier was both respected and fallible. By generous extension to the previous point, the importance given to his works could also be seen as worthy of critique. Consequently, even within this pastoral idyll in which the central protagonists are presented, there are potential signs of discord. This could be reduced acknowledgement of the architectural merits of the Capitol Complex, but also deep misgivings about the coloniality of relations which facilitated their creation.

Prakash and Anand: critiquing the idea of Chandigarh as an imposition.

An ongoing concern within both of Mulk Raj Anand's contributions to both *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*, and *Reflections on Chandigarh*, not to mention Prakash's poetry within these publications, is an exploration of whether Chandigarh can be perceived as an imposition. This is conceptually pivotal to the underpinning aim of collaborative modernism, which is to advance an understanding of Chandigarh which avoids a neo-colonial logic, simultaneously refutes the notion of Chandigarh as an imposition. One of the primary drawbacks of Anglophone Euro-American scholarship is that it presents Le Corbusier and his cohort as benevolently gifting an urban space that would not otherwise have existed. Before proceeding to the more critical latter poetry volume, the next few paragraphs will consider both Aditya Prakash's *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse* and Mulk Raj Anand's corresponding introduction.

One of the ways that Anand nuances the idea of Chandigarh as an imposition, is through the poetic consideration of housing in the city:

'Housing

Undoubtedly a Western Imposition
On the Indian way of life;
Yes, an imposition,
But consciously done,
In the spirit of experiment
An experiment which succeeded
Albeit modified by experience.

Standing to work is a way of life
In each Chandigarh household
Irrespective of status, origin or religion
A way of life which has
Imperceptibly crept into
The lives of neighbouring areas

And made people erect, alert and efficient'.¹⁹

From Prakash we find the notion of Chandigarh as a knowing imposition, which was subject to modification by local experience. This modification based on local experience, is incredibly important to the idea of collaborative modernism, since it implies that the architecture of Chandigarh was in fact the result of a back-and-forth exchange. Such observations further critique Curtis' conception of this modification emanating from the genius of the plan (1998). As Sarbjit and Surinder Bahga (2000)²⁰ and SD Sharma (2017)²¹ have indicated, the process of this modification was carried out by individuals such as Pierre Jeanneret (Le Corbusier's cousin) and P.L. Verma and has little to do with Le Corbusier. This notion of a conscious or considered imposition, is referenced by Anand in *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*. Le Corbusier's well-known habit of drawing as a means of apprehending the local context is given emphasis:

Le Corbusier said, 'You look, my sketch book.'

We all eagerly scanned, as he turned the pages: Open Hand, camels, donkeys, village belles, turbaned peasant, snakes, doorways, corners, verandas, trees, pipal leaves, all drawn with the free hand, in great profusion.

Pierre Jeannert [sic] commented in French what I understood him to mean: 'Corb believes in precise drawing for his pupils. Himself, he is for something more than drawing. He did not go to ecole or college. He has mastered his craft. So that he can forget it. He is a creative artist'.

'Bricklaying,' added Le Corbusier. 'There are many ways of bricklaying... Straight... Triangle... curved- dancing wall, eh?'

'Our mistris know that' said Verma. 'In many havelis they have shown great skill. And in the palaces of Udaipur.'

'Once upon a time,' I said.

'I will make a plan which is simple,' said Le Corbusier. 'A big village. In burnt brick. I will bring in air. Keep Sun-God in control. Garden in every house. Not Paris, London, New York- Chandigarh, new city.'²²

This literary evocation of Chandigarh's creative conception shows Le Corbusier used sketching to investigate the local context. Anand's description of Le Corbusier's sketchbook suggests the architect immersed himself in the Punjabi countryside, in a manner akin to an artist observing the various elements of their surroundings. Furthermore, it seems that this knowledge, gained through empirical

¹⁹ Aditya Prakash, *Chandigarh, A Presentation In Free Verse* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1978), 19.

²⁰ Sarbjit and Surinder Bahga, *Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret: Footprints in the Sands of Indian Architecture*, (New Delhi: Galgotia Press, 2000).

²¹ S.D Sharma, *Pierre Jeanneret: Apostle of Creative Humility* (lecture), (Chandigarh: Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2017).

²² Aditya Prakash, *Chandigarh, A Presentation In Free Verse* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1978), 5.

observation, would be woven into the urban planning of Chandigarh. Perhaps then, Le Corbusier was developing an awareness of local building techniques with a view to both adopting and adapting them. Anand is clearly preoccupied with presenting Le Corbusier as diligently absorbing his new surroundings.

Anand appears keen to create a sense of the collective, which is evoked using the pronoun 'We.' Furthermore, this dialogue clearly portrays a conversation with Le Corbusier and Verma, which focuses on an explorative conversation about bricklaying techniques. Indeed, one could suggest that one of the reasons for the basic nature of Le Corbusier's drawing sent from Paris to Chandigarh, is that Le Corbusier has established an intuitive rapport which meant that hugely embellished plans were not necessary. Importantly, this passage presents Le Corbusier as possessing the grand vision, but at the same time, Verma is positioned as providing the technical expertise necessary to make it a reality.

Chandigarh as an imposition, where nuance ends, and critique begins.

However, Anand's celebratory tone vanishes from the presentation of the city found in *Reflections on Chandigarh*. Indeed, within a striking passage Anand attempts to outline the historical context in which Le Corbusier started to work on the Chandigarh project. The narrative encompasses the demise of the rural working life facilitated by industrialisation in India.

The impact of western machine civilisation destroyed the fabric of stagnant village society. The factories in the towns and cities began to absorb the peasants, who lost their lands, through the rigours of the cash nexus economy. And every settlement became a slum in which people with rural habits crowded into narrow spaces, in hells reminiscent of the kingdom of the god of death-Yama [...] So he tried to cover the neglect of human interests of the current industrial order of the west with the professed love of 'man.' He had not read Marx, nor Gandhi, nor even Nehru, and the Fabians. And while his Chandigarh plan became acceptable, because India had just initiated a planned agro-industrial order, neither he, nor his hosts in our country, thought out the consequences of the city, divided into classes for residence, in what was intended to be a 'socialistic pattern of society'.²³

As Anand observes, factories in urban conurbations absorbed the displaced agricultural workers, who had lost their land because of the unforgiving and competitive nature of the incumbent capitalist system. Anand suggests that the industrialised age had overwhelmed the social bonds of rural Indian communities. Accordingly, workers became detached from familiar agricultural modalities and congregated in compact spaces to create slum dwellings. However, Chandigarh would eventually house the politicians, bureaucrats, administrators, and the workers essential to the day to day running of the city. The city would not be an attempt to resolve the urban housing crisis, nor would it deal with the myriad of

²³ Mulk RajAnand, 'Afterword to Reflections on Chandigarh' in Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, New Delhi: Sheetal Press, 1983, vi.

social issues faced by the newly independent India. Anand implies that Le Corbusier, with the support of Nehru and others, created a personal utopia, while huge sections of the newly displaced population remained living in slums. Chandigarh was not about providing a comprehensive solution to the post-partition urban housing crisis. The dynamic nature of Anand's analysis explicates why this was so problematic, given the extent of human suffering following partition.

Anand's Marxist style critique has implications for both the newly independent India and collaborative modernism. Colonialism, as Ania Loomba notes, was the seizure of land and economy, and with European colonialism, the re-alignment of non-capitalist economies to facilitate the ongoing expansion of European capitalism²⁴. The act of situating colonialism within the ongoing development of capitalism, reflects the belief of many Marxist thinkers that colonialism and capitalism were unfortunate but essential phases in the development of human social relations. Marx himself had the following to say about colonialism in India:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest of interest, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia. If not, whatever may have been crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution²⁵.

In the post-independence context, Anand accepted the process of colonialism as unavoidable, regarding Chandigarh as an opening in the fabric of history onto which a socialist, if not Marxist urban vision could be woven. Anand's reservations about the city suggest a partial or even outright failure of this endeavour. Of significance to collaborative modernism, Anand's critique reveals the transcultural flow of ideas that underpinned the conceptual and political horizons for Indian modernity. It also reveals the paradoxical drawing on the European tradition of critique-to-critique Europe and its legacies.

Critique or adulation? Secular modernity and the spiritual: *Chandigarh A Presentation in Free Verse*.

Thus far, this analysis has witnessed two competing and contradictory strands of analysis. With the pastoral scene presented by Anand in the earlier volume of poetry, there is a sense of the collaborative collective- in which Le Corbusier is firmly integrated- and this creates a new and dynamic way of understanding Chandigarh's architectural history. This is reinforced by Prakash's notion that Le Corbusier's vision was an imposition modified via local experience. Both readings present a significant Indian agency in the conception and design of the city. However, Anand's critique of Le Corbusier and his elite patrons found in *Reflections*, appears to resume the logic of earlier writing on the city, evoking Von Moos' idea of Chandigarh as resulting from a confluence from Le Corbusier and Nehru. In a

²⁴ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London: Routledge, 2005, 23.

²⁵ Loomba, *Colonialism*, 23.

dramatic reversal of earlier representations, Anand creates the sense of an ignorant imposition, without sensitivity to the local context.

The rest of this article will be given to the articulation of Chandigarh's secular spirituality within these texts. There is an apparent discord between the naming of the city and the aspirations underpinning it. Chandigarh was to be an embodiment of post-independence secularism, but the city's name derived from Chandi, an ancient Hindu deity. Such stark religious connotations undermined the proposed religious neutrality of this new urban experiment. It also demonstrates the tension between supposed secularism and modernity *and* its role in Indian independence. As the naming of Chandigarh exemplifies, the slate is seldom wiped truly clean. Aditya's poetry serves as a fascinating and dynamic consideration of such dichotomies, as will be demonstrated now.

There is limited scholarship on the critical evaluation of Prakash's poetry. However, Vikramaditya Prakash's *One Continuous Line: Art, Architecture and Urbanism of Aditya Prakash*, notes that the first volume of poetry- *Chandigarh A Presentation in Free Verse*- appears remarkably complimentary towards Chandigarh and its design concepts²⁶. However, Prakash was clearly overtly aware of the need for a more critical appraisal of the city, even when concluding the far more celebratory *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*. Prakash reflected:

Even before I had completed composing 'Chandigarh- A Presentation in Free Verse' during the Silver Jubilee year of the city, it had become clear to me that the booklet had to be followed by a 'critique' on the City Beautiful. This city had either been over praised or over criticised, but no one had reflected on its concepts²⁷.

Importantly, this section of text conveys the author's realisation that it was important to create a critical consideration of Chandigarh that went beyond the inevitable celebration of Le Corbusier. Simultaneously, it is important to note that while the later *Reflections on Chandigarh* was more overtly critical, this does not suggest that the earlier book was bereft of criticality or insight.

In *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse*, Prakash begins to articulate his version of a secular spirituality, that he purports Chandigarh to imbibe:

Homage to Concrete, Homage to Mountains
Monumental in Concept, Spiritual by Design.
It is a new concept of worship
It is a new idea of temples,
With Temple Cities we, in India, are familiar
Detached, forlorn, uninhabited
A world of Gods alone
To which 'Man' is admitted on occasion
In physical concept similar

²⁶ Vikramaditya Prakash, *One Continuous Line: Art, Architecture and Urbanism of Aditya Prakash*, (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2020), 185.

²⁷ Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, (New Delhi: Sheetal Press, 1983), viiiiii

In usage entirely dissimilar.²⁸

The scare quotes over man appear significant, since it acknowledges a European political history, but at the same times adds it to 'in usage entirely dissimilar.' This could be perceived as a gentle nod to the importance of not perceiving European conceptions as a universalising force. Prakash suggests Chandigarh is a democratised incarnation of earlier Indian temple cities that served the purpose of facilitating the functioning of the state. It is possible to view the capitol project as a reiteration of earlier temples, however, the structures in question now serve a political function.

It is worth noting, however, within certain South and Southeast Asia Hindu traditions, there is no neat separation between religion and politics. As Kossak and Lerner observe, in Southeast Asia, Khmer kings who ruled over what is now Cambodia and parts of Thailand and Vietnam were deified.²⁹ Accordingly, kings were worshipped as an incarnation of gods from the Hindu pantheon, typically Shiva or Vishnu. As such, Khmer Temple Mountains, exemplified by the iconic Angkor Wat, were also grandiose and divine centres of both power and worship. Intriguingly, the deification of kings practised by what Kossak describes as the Devaraja (God-king) cult, arrived in Southeast Asia via India.³⁰ Whether Prakash's deliberate blurring of the boundaries between the spiritual and the secular intentionally refers to longstanding Hindu traditions is a matter of debate. Yet, we could suggest that stressing these divergent aspects of the secular and spiritual was perhaps a tactic to further situate the buildings within Indian architectural traditions.

However, despite this allusion to Hindu traditions, there is undoubtedly a paradoxical debt to the European Enlightenment, which demonstrates Prakash's poetic evocation of Chandigarh hold a transcultural flow of mutually significant influences. This is reminiscent of Anand's paradoxical drawing on the European tradition of critique, yet in this instance Prakash appears to be using this reference to create an interesting duality between Eastern and Western traditions to reveal the transcultural influences underpinning Chandigarh. This becomes apparent in the following passage:

The new temples are the institutions of man
Man dedicating himself to Man,
Man giving himself to a constitution,
Man himself executing the constitution
And again himself giving interpretation.
Making, executing, interpreting, the will of Man³¹

These concerns reflect the Enlightenment's questioning of traditional hierarchies and monarchical authority, supported by the demand for clearly defined

²⁸ Prakash, *Chandigarh, A Presentation*, 45.

²⁹ Steven Kossak and Martin Lerner. 'The Arts of South and Southeast Asia.' *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 51, (1994): 8.

³⁰ Steven Kossak and Edith Watts (eds), *The Art of South and Southeast Asia: A Resource for Educators*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001, 41.

³¹ Prakash, *Chandigarh, A Presentation*, 45.

agreements between governments and their subjects. As we will see in the subsequent section, these European Enlightenment sentiments are given more pronounced expression in *Reflections on Chandigarh*. This is especially the case with Prakash's poetic exploration of the Capitol Complex.

Critique or adulation? Secular modernity and the spiritual: *Reflections on Chandigarh*

Reflections on Chandigarh, published just a few years after the first poetry volume, displays a more critical attitude towards Chandigarh and Le Corbusier's role in the city's creation. However, strong thematic links connect these two volumes, notably, the exploration of Chandigarh's simultaneous connection between the secular and the spiritual. In both cases, Prakash orchestrates a dramatic interplay between an Enlightenment questioning of authority and Indian spiritual traditions that might blur the boundaries between the sacred and the secular. However, this trajectory is pronounced with the second volume.

This is in part stressed by the formatting of the verse, which is entirely capitalised. As such, the poetry style can be regarded as oration, suggesting that this poem was intended to be performed. This evokes the Homeric tradition of performing grand epics- such as the Iliad and the Odyssey- in public spaces. This association is pertinent since such epics involve narratives in which mere mortals interact and co-exist with deities from the godly realm. Oddly enough, this sense of the overlapping of the material and spiritual world is perpetuated by the content of the poetry. Indeed, Prakash still regards these new concrete forms in Chandigarh as retaining a spiritual dimension, due to the grandiosity of the structures.

THE CAPITOL
FIRST THE CAPITOL OR
THE CAPITOL COMPLEX
THE 'PIECE-DE-RESISTANCE,'
THE MONUMENTS OF MODERN CIVILISATION
OR HOMAGE TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS,
FOR THEIR ONLY JUSTIFICATION
TO MONUMENTALITY
IN A POOR COUNTRY LIKE INDIA
RENDERED POORER BY
THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION
IS IN CONCEIVING OF THE BUILDINGS AND THE
PRECINCT
AS 'SACRED' - LIKE THE ABODE OF GODS³²

³² Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, 35.

Prakash's polemic, which traverses political, religious, and spiritual concerns, appears complex. Initially, one can perceive an anti-religious appeal to a humanistic discourse of man. However, as the scare quotes over 'man' indicate, we also encounter an appeal to spirituality, which serves to counteract class inequalities. Prakash goes on to state further:

THUS IN IMAGINATION THEY EMERGE
LIKE TEMPLES
WHICH, NOTWITHSTANDING THE POVERTY,
THE 'POOR' ERECT
WITH 'DEDICATION'
GIVING THEIR ALL-WEALTH, TIME, AND SKILL,
TO CREATE A SYMBOL OF FAITH
DEARER THAN THEIR VERY LIVES.
INDEED THEY LIVE
BUT FOR THE SYMBOL-THE TEMPLE
THIS AND THIS ALONE
IS THE JUSTIFICATION
OF THE CAPITOL'S MONUMENTALITY.
AND IN MY ASSESSMENT,
IS A JUST JUSTIFICATION³³

Prakash's earlier secular humanism underpinned by a sense of religiosity transforms into a preoccupation with the divine, not only in terms of the functionality of the buildings, but with regards to Le Corbusier, the designer. In apparent contradiction to the humanistic account of man, these sentiments are reversed through a religious justification for the type of exploitative labour required for Chandigarh's construction. This is evocative of the logic that accepted the toil and hardship for the labourers and craftsman that constructed European cathedrals.

I ACCEPT THE CAPITOL
AS A SACRED PRECINCT
AND AS A WORK OF ART
TO BE JUDGED SOLELY BY THESE CRITERIA
AND NOT JUDGED BY MUNDANE FUNCTION AND
EFFICIENCY³⁴

³³ Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, 35.

³⁴ Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, 36.

This suggested departure is an intriguing insight from mundane function and efficiency, since although there is nuance and complexity regarding Modernism's relationship with functionality, the relationship between function and form was important to modernist designers and architects. Prakash would appear to be suggesting a departure from this design ethos and at the same time, referencing the homogeneity of modernism. This depends on how functionality is perceived, and this poetry appears to be exposing the concept to a cross-cultural flow. For some, the critique of modernism would be that it can be reduced to a utility serviceable to Industrial capitalism. However, if the notion of 'function' is considered in a transcultural context, there is a chance that different ideas of function and functionality might emerge. It is self-evident, but it is also worth noting here that cultural difference influences perceptions of what might be considered 'functional.' Prakash writes further:

NO MATTER WHAT I THINK
OR WHAT ANY-BODY THINKS
WE HUMANS HAVE NO RIGHT
TO JUDGE THIS PLACE FROM OUR DIMINUTIVE
POINT OF VIEW
WE HAVE TO RAISE OURSELVES
TO THE STATURE OF GODS³⁵

This passage idealises Le Corbusier to a staggering extent, deifying the architect. The earlier discourse surrounding the humanistic discourse of 'man,' seems completely abandoned in favour of a quasi-religious neutralising of critique on Le Corbusier and Chandigarh. This makes the poem one of the most complex and nuanced pieces of 'critical' writing on the city encountered when creating this body of research process.

Conclusion

Based on this close textual analysis of both poetry volumes-including the contributions of Mulk Raj Anand- it seems entirely acceptable to suggest that this literature functions as a fascinating insight into Chandigarh, Aditya Prakash, and his relationship with Le Corbusier. Furthermore, that such material has the potential to disrupt conventional understanding of Chandigarh's architectural history. Simultaneously, it seems self-evident that these poetry volumes offer a profoundly relevant intervention on the Le Corbusier dominated narratives that surround the city. This is apparent in the way that Le Corbusier is integrated into a sense of a wider and collaborative collective, determined to create a new capital on the plains of Punjab. In addition, Anand, and Prakash both at different points present the creative process as sensitive to the architectural traditions of India and local experience. Furthermore, the poetry volumes are not merely insightful on Chandigarh's Indian agency. Indeed, both volumes problematise the notion of Chandigarh as an expression of Nehruvian secular modernity, by exploring the

³⁵ Aditya Prakash, *Reflections on Chandigarh*, 38.

different religious underpinnings and justifications for the large governmental structures designed by Le Corbusier.

While it is possible to perceive a shift in mood between the two publications, with *Chandigarh, A Presentation in Free Verse* being more celebratory than the subsequent *Reflections on Chandigarh*, both offer religious justifications for the monumental nature of Le Corbusier and the exploitative labour required to create them in the later publication. The tone of this justification seems ambiguous, but overall, it seems that Prakash is still trying to defend his colleague. This suggests that these poetry volumes offer a bricolage of differing and sometimes contradictory perspectives. However, this contributes to the critical dynamism of the poetry. Nonetheless, given the differing perspectives towards the grandiosity of Le Corbusier's governmental buildings, it is possible to suggest that Prakash was ambivalent about these structures. Indeed, it would be intriguing to pose the question: To what extent did this ambivalence influence Prakash's own architectural output in the city? Indeed, such a question intersects poignantly with the issue of Indian agency in the design of Chandigarh, and it would be profoundly relevant should Prakash be regarded as rejecting aspects of Le Corbusier's approach. As such, the next stage of this research will be to apply this analysis of Prakash's poetry to the spatial sensibilities encountered in buildings such as Tagore Theatre (1961). Indeed, such research would resonate with those interested in developing a Post-Le Corbusier perspective in relation to Chandigarh.

William McCrory is a lecturer based in Jakarta, Indonesia. He holds degrees from the University of Nottingham, including a PhD in Critical Theory (2021). His thesis entitled *Chandigarh's Collaborative Modernism: Departing From Le Corbusier Dominated Narratives*, focused on the architectural history of Chandigarh, India. McCrory's recent publications include the article 'Chandigarh's Institutional and Emerging Counter-Narratives,' in the *Journal of Languages, Texts and Society*.

William.mccrory@unisadhuguna.org



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