Details Matter: A Pavilion for India in Venice

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DETAILS MATTER
A PAVILION FOR INDIA IN VENICE

RAJKUMAR KADAM

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The persistent cultural identity of Indian architecture resides in the assembly of its components and the specific functions they are intended to perform. As Charles Correa mentions in the book “Vistara”, Indian architecture has historically evolved through time and space, shaping itself through India’s global discourse – a dichotomy of established building traditions and foreign cultural influences. The evolution of this architecture can be understood through traditional Hindu temples, Buddhist stupas, Mughal Islamic structures, British colonial influences, and post-colonial modernist architecture.

Over the years, new myths have come into being, been absorbed, ingested, internalized – and finally transformed into a new architecture1. However, even as the centuries have passed, Indian architecture has been classified as a product of certain elements that have persisted through the ages. These key elements are: relationship to immediate context, relationship to natural elements – earth, water and sky, plan-based organizational tools (mandala), constantly changing intimacy of spaces, emphasis through repetition, garden spaces and rising plinths. Each of these elements perform a specific function. For instance, the mandala is a reflection of man’s relationship to the cosmos and increasingly intimate spaces express movement towards the sacred. Hence, Indian architecture is understood as the product of an assembly of such details.

To explore the spatial conditions these details could produce, this thesis proposes a national pavilion for India at the Venetian Arsenal, one of the sites for the Venice Biennale. The design of a pavilion for India at the Venice Biennale is an opportunity to understand architecture as a vehicle that illustrates values that are simultaneously universal, and culturally specific. While the proposed Indian pavilion incorporates the details that define Indian architecture, they are appropriated to the highly articulate Venetian context because principally, Indian architecture is malleable and fits within its local environment. This cross-cultural representation is accomplished through symbolic relationships to natural elements and site, abstract architectonic form and space, and in particular construction detailing. In this regard, it becomes important to consider the details and material palette of Carlo Scarpa’s work in Northern Italy. Scarpa produces coherent details that exude the culturally rooted architecture of Venice. Improvising the functional components of Indian architecture to fit into the context of Venice would expand India’s global discourse, giving rise to new myths and metamorphosing architecture in India.

ELEMENTS OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE
REPETITION OF MODULES
SPATIAL INTIMACY
MANDALA (9 SQUARE GRID)
FRACTAL GEOMETRY
INCORPORATION OF GARDEN SPACES
ASCENDING PEAKS: RELATIONSHIP TO SKY
STEPWELL: RELATIONSHIP TO EARTH AND WATER
ELABORATION THROUGH REPETITION
LIGHT VS DARK
EMPHASIS ON LOCAL MATERIALITY
PROCESS MODELS
CARLO SCARPA MATERIAL PALETTE
GAVINA SHOWROOM
EXISTING NATIONAL PAVILIONS
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