

Visionary Ideas for Modern Architecture of India: Cultural Renaissance, Revivalism, and Returning to the Past Traditions in the Works of Sris Chandra Chatterjee

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Abstract

Before the turn of the 20th century, under the British Empire, architects in India rarely assumed a substantial part in institutional projects dominated by engineers. Sris Chandra Chatterjee was an Indian architect within this colonial modern paradigm who advocated that the Western practices did not represent the 'Soul of India'. While Chatterjee's ideas materialized through a few built projects, his written works provide a wealth of content for analysis. This study documents Chatterjee's immaterial or discursive practice, including his books, travelogues, and lectures, which remain largely undocumented.

To document Chatterjee's immaterial practice, data was collected through mixed methods research, using archival literature and drawings of his proposed projects. This was supported by diagrammatic redrawing and semi-structured interviews with historians. A timeline of Chatterjee's life was developed to fill the gaps in the documentation of his life.

The findings indicate that Chatterjee strove to develop an architectural language for India throughout his life. He explained his architectural ideas against glorified ancient ideals and wrote about the life and culture of those times. He lectured extensively on the revival of Indian architecture and on establishing a school of Indian architecture. In conclusion, this study demonstrates the significance of Chatterjee's advocacy of a cultural renaissance, revivalism, and returning to the past through shedding light on his verbal and written documentation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Swadeshi, Revivalism, Nationalist architecture, Cultural heritage, Journals, Archival research

Introduction

During India's colonial encounter with the West, Bengal emerged as the nucleus of British occupation and a cradle for cultural and socio-political awakening. From the late 18th century, it became a vibrant hub of intellectual and artistic activity, giving rise to the 'Bengal Renaissance.' This period saw a flourishing of literature, art, spiritualism, and political activism, which sought to redefine Indian identity. During this dynamic time, Bengal also endured significant political upheavals, including two major partitions. The first, in 1905, was reversed six years later due to the rise of the 'Swadeshi Movement', which Gandhi described as the essence of 'swaraj' (self-rule). While the movement began as an economic initiative, it soon engulfed every aspect of cultural life, including art and architecture.

In this context, this research examines the life and practice of a lesser-known proponent of the Swadeshi Movement, Sris Chandra Chatterjee. He was a civil engineer, architect, and 'Sthapatya-Visarad' (master builder) who belonged to Bengal and worked across India to give a nationalist turn to modern Indian architecture. Chatterjee's contributions to modern Indian architecture remain largely undocumented and overlooked. He was an avid writer, but many of his works remain hidden from public knowledge. This research explores and records Chatterjee's written works and visionary ideas, filling the gaps in the historical record of his life and contributions. Unfortunately, they have been grossly neglected.

The key themes that are addressed in this research are nationalism, revivalism, and a search for modernity. The significance of studying Sris Chandra Chatterjee is to fill a gap in the historical understanding of Indian architecture. The paper highlights his role in redefining architectural identity in post-independence India, offering valuable lessons on the adaptation of traditional design to contemporary needs.

The research follows a chronological order as per the publications of Chatterjee's written works. It highlights the context in which the book or journal was published, along with a summary of its contents. It sheds light on Chatterjee's advocacy for progress, which drew inspiration from the past.

Chatterjee's Biographical Overview

Sris Chandra Chatterjee (1890 - 1966), C.E. (Civil Engineer), 'Sthapatya-Visarad' 1, was an Indian architect and builder who assumed multiple roles throughout his life. He was also a politician, an academic, and an author as well and an artist. In these different roles across various parts of India, he made efforts to give a nationalistic turn to architecture. During the 1930s and 40s, he was the principal proponent of the 'Modern Indian Architecture Movement' (Lang, 2002).

Sris Chandra Chatterjee wrote and lectured extensively about his ideas and programmes on the revival of Indian architecture and establishing a school of Indian architecture. A Revivalist (Lang et al., 1997), he advocated that modern architecture did not represent the 'soul of India' (Chatterjee, 1931). Instead, he drew inspiration from the past and explained his architectural ideas against glorified ancient ideals. Through his books, he developed a handbook of building typologies for India. His aspiration for India also came across through the many lectures he delivered in Calcutta, Madras, Patna, Benaras, and even the United States.

Chatterjee travelled widely across India and abroad, studying architectural sites and buildings of repute. Through his travels and experiences, he established that India's uniqueness must be cherished through the revival of its ancient architecture and believed that his ideas represented the spirit of 'Renaissance' (Chatterjee, 1931) in Indian architecture.

Early Life and Family Background

Born in 1890 in Calcutta, the capital of British India, Sris Chandra Chatterjee, belonged to a middle-class Bengali household and was the only engineer-architect in his family. Sris was the eldest son of Rakhhal Chandra Chatterjee and resided with his parents and two younger brothers at 49, Malanga Lane, Bowbazaar, Calcutta (National Planning Committee No.2., 1940, Gupta 1991). After his training, he was married to Beenapani Chatterjee. They had a son who

died at the early age of 15. Chatterjee's daughter, Bashunti, was his second child. At present, his only granddaughter lives in London.

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Fig. 1: Chatterjee's Residence in Calcutta, traced from NPC Report of 1940
 Source: Author, 2023

Due to archival absence, there was no information available on Sris Chandra's early life. His former residence in Calcutta was traced from a report of the National Planning Committee of 1940 and verified through a visit to Calcutta. His family members were interviewed, and though we now know of his family background, there remains an absence of even a single photograph of Sris Chandra Chatterjee.



Fig. 2: Chatterjee's Residence in Calcutta, courtyard and the entrance to his room
 Source: Author, 2023

Chatterjee's house was located in an old neighbourhood in Central Calcutta and opened into a courtyard. There is a temple to the left of this courtyard, which still contains tiles and sculptures designed by him. The motifs of these tiles have been found in his books as well. His room was on the upper floor, and as per his nephew's recollections, he used to spend most of his time reading and writing there.



FIG. 9. Elephants run amuck



FIG. 46. Trampling of Lotus: Fresco Border (Modern)

Fig. 3: Tiles designed by Chatterjee(left), similar references found in his book *Magadha* (1942)
Source: Author, 2023; *Magadha*, 1942

Sris C. Chatterjee was a product of the 19th-century colonial education system. He trained as a civil engineer in the Government College near Calcutta (Chatterjee, 1931). This Government College originated in November 1856 in British India and was known as the Calcutta Civil Engineering College (Our History | IEST, n.d.).

The British needed to create centres of technical instruction for those in charge of developing and maintaining public structures, including highways, canals, and ports. Hence, these centres such as the Indian Institute of Technology (I.I.T Roorkee), Pune College of Engineering, and also the Bengal Engineering College (B.E. Shibpur) came into existence. Chatterjee belonged to the third Engineering College in British India.

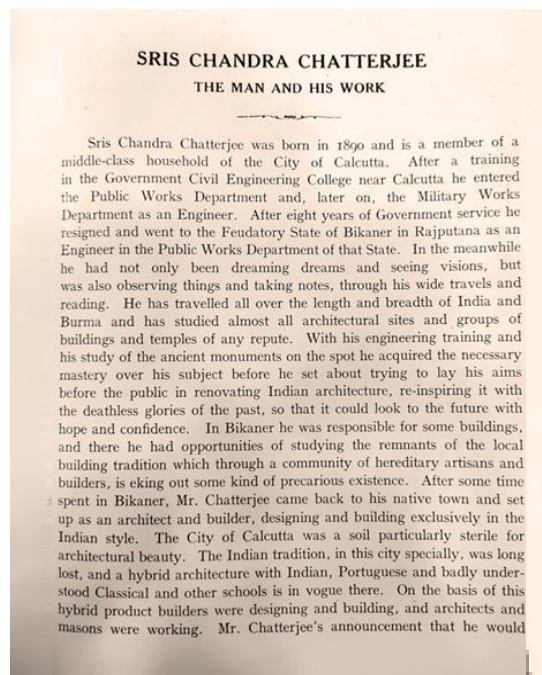


Fig. 4: Self-description found in Chatterjee's earliest book, published in 1931
Source: Author, 2023

Chatterjee's educational background was also discovered at the National Library of India during the visit to Kolkata. This helps us know that he studied around the same time when technical training centres were being set up in India, and the Bombay School of Art established the first School of Architecture in 1910 (Gupta, 1991). In his publication, 'Architecture and Architects: An Essay on Human Planning', published later in 1948, Chatterjee expressed his criticism of the Indian Institute of Architects (I.I.A.) and the Bombay School (now Sir J.J. School of Architecture) chartered by British architects.

Chatterjee's advocacy for Revivalism aligned with the intellectual climate of the 'Bengal School', dedicated to restoring native aesthetics. His work reflects the broader cultural movements of the time, positioning him within a larger effort to reconnect with India's artistic heritage.

This paper aims to identify and examine the values that animated the written works of Sris Chandra Chatterjee.

Its objectives are as follows.

1. To study Chatterjee's early life, background, and education in Calcutta
2. To study the influence of Chatterjee's practice through an understanding of the cultural context of Bengal.
3. To study Chatterjee's practice through the different roles he assumed as a:
 - a) Civil Engineer - Architect - Planner
 - b) As an Author - Academic
 - c) As a Politician
4. To study Chatterjee's aspects of designs through their:
 - a) Design Explanations
 - b) Guiding Principles and Purpose
 - c) Stylistic Preferences

The scope of the research includes the study of Chatterjee's:

1. Education as a Civil Engineer at the Calcutta Civil Engineering College.
2. Influence of Art, Nationalism and the Bengal School in Calcutta, along with parallel developments in Delhi.
3. Role as a civil engineer in the P.W.D. of Bengal and Bikaner until the 1920s.
4. Teachings as the founder of Chatterjee's School of Indian Architecture and his drawn up syllabus for Calcutta University.
6. Ideas for the Modern Indian Architecture Movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, this research has its limitations, which are as follows:

1. The gaps in the timeline exist due to the archival absence of data.
2. The study of drawings considers only the immediate physical context.
3. The information obtained by the interviewees was considered as oral histories.

Literature Review

Although there is not much written about the works of Chatterjee, there exist some literature relevant to this study. For example, Dasgupta (2011) talks of the intellectual awakening in the 19th-century Bengal and recognises the efforts made by different individuals for emancipation from traditional notions. This emancipation was what led to the emergence of new scientific thought. Overall, his book establishes a chronological narrative of the different stages of the 'Bengal Renaissance', which forms the background of this research paper.

The most comprehensive discussion of Sris Chandra Chatterjee as the central figure appears in an article by Samita Gupta in 1991. This remains one of the few detailed studies on Chatterjee, capturing his position in the history of modern architecture in India. In 1995, Nilay Oza also briefly mentioned him in his thesis but limited Chatterjee's role to that of a revivalist, without delving deeply into his life or works.

Chatterjee was also referenced in the seminal work by Lang, Desai, and Desai (1997). The authors offer a detailed overview of the evolution of modern architecture in India, spanning over a century. In their discussion of the development of the architectural profession and the Public Works Department's contributions toward Indian independence, they highlight the diversity of styles, the relationship between modern architecture and the Independence movement, and Chatterjee's role in this broader narrative. Lang (2002) again provides a concise summary of Chatterjee's contributions in the context of modern Indian architecture. More recently, Scriver and Srivastava (2015) explored the political and architectural developments during the onset of modernity in India. In all these works, there are a few paragraphs or pages dedicated to Chatterjee, analysing how colonial public works and patronage spurred new design practices that challenged traditional architectural ideals and social orders.

The gaps or debates in the existing scholarship that the paper addresses are addressed through a detailed archival study of Chatterjee's life and works. While previous works like Gupta's article and Lang et al.'s comprehensive book provide valuable insights into Chatterjee's role and the broader context of modern architecture in India, they tend to offer only cursory mentions of his contributions. Chatterjee's influence on the architectural landscape, particularly in the interplay between colonial and national identities, requires further exploration because the revivalist cause has continued to have a significant influence on Indian architectural debate and production.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research focuses on the interrelated themes of nationalism, revivalism, traditional Indian architecture, and modernity. They are presented along with the findings as being applied for analysis. The framework explores how Chatterjee's work embodies nationalist sentiments during India's colonial period, particularly through his advocacy for the Swadeshi Movement, which sought to assert cultural identity against colonial influences. The framework examined his revivalist efforts to reinstate traditional architectural practices, blending historical aesthetics with contemporary needs. Additionally, it analyses the characteristics of traditional Indian architecture and how Chatterjee incorporated these elements into his designs while navigating the challenges posed by Western modernity. Ultimately, this framework illuminates Chatterjee's impact on post-independence architectural discourse, highlighting his contributions to a hybrid identity that respects Indian heritage while embracing modernity.

Research Methodology

This research follows a mixed-methods approach, using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, such as:

1. Case Study on Sris Chandra Chatterjee
2. Developing a timeline through the data collected on Chatterjee's life and works
3. Diagrammatic identification/highlighting of elements derived from ancient and medieval architecture in elevations of buildings designed by Chatterjee.
4. Document Survey

Through a visit to Calcutta to obtain and analyse archival writings by Chatterjee as primary research material. His works are strictly for reference only, and no copies of them were produced, or found in the National Library of India in Kolkata. In addition, resources were accessed at the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Resource Centre, Netaji Research Bureau at Kolkata, and also virtually through the University of Edinburgh Archives, to collect the scattered information on Sris Chandra Chatterjee, namely the works:

- a) Modern Indian Architecture, 1931
- b) National Value of Indian Architecture, 1933
- c) Draft Manifesto for All India League of Indian Architecture, 1940
- d) Glory of Banarasi, (n.d) post 1940

- e) Magadha, 1942
- f) Architect and Architecture was published, 1948
- g) India and New Order, 1949
- h) Debayatan o Bharat Sabhyata, 1957

5. Semi-structured interviews with:

- a) Saptarshi Sanyal (Professor, SPA Delhi)
- b) Shubhrajit Das (Professor, Jadavpur University, Calcutta)
- c) Mahua Sarkar (Professor, Dept. of History, Jadavpur University)
- d) Neeta Das (Architectural Historian and Conservation Architect)
- e) Tridip Suvrud (Writer and Historian)

Findings

The findings of this research are presented chronologically, and each stage of Chatterjee's life brings a new revelation. His written works during these various periods bring about his visionary ideas for the modern architecture of India.

The Beginnings: A Revivalist's Imagination

Having trained as an engineer at B.E. Shibpur, Sris Chandra Chatterjee went on to work with the Public Works Department (P.W.D) of Bengal and later on, in the Military Works Department of Bengal (Chatterjee, 1931). After working eight years in government service, he resigned and went to the feudatory state of Bikaner in Rajputana. Through the 1920s, Chatterjee worked, travelled, and discovered a revivalist's imagination in Rajasthan. Further, this imagination is reflected in the study of his proposals

Princely States, Patronage and the PWD

Chatterjee spent a large part of his early professional life in Rajasthan. He worked as an assistant civil engineer in the Public Works Department (P.W.D) of Bikaner, a princely state (Chatterjee, 1931). He also became acquainted with the 'Indo-Saracenic style' and the projects of Samuel Jacob at Bikaner. Here, he interacted with master craftsmen and learnt about their traditional method of working, patronised by the ruler, Maharaja Ganga Singh. Chatterjee's knowledge of working with traditional methods deepened with his frequent travels from Bikaner to Mount Abu to renovate the Dilwara shrine there.



Note. Laxmi Niwas Palace, Bikaner. Built 1896–1902 (left) and then extended from 1902 until 1926 into the Lalgarh Palace (right) designed by Swinton Jacob.

Fig. 5: Works of Swinton Jacob in Bikaner

Source: Google Images

Notably, Sris Chandra Chatterjee has visited Ujjain and Vijayanagar as well as the nearby Princely States. He has learnt that in some regions of the nation, the old master craftsmen were still in demand and structures were still constructed using the 'old way'. Thus, he has discovered similarities between ancient procedures and those used in Ujjain, Vijayanagar, and Bikaner in the 20th century. (Chatterjee, 1942). His inspiration is evident in the following statement,

“My researches in Udaipur where I spent about six months, as a State guest, with all facilities for scrutinising the mediaeval Indian monuments as well as the present fairly unsophisticated life in Mewar, and my study of the palaces and towns in Jaiselmer, Kailawara, Indraprastha, Ujjayini, Vijayanagar, Mandalay, Pagan, Angkor Thom and elsewhere In India and Further India enabled me to pick up some idea about the plans and designs of ancient Indian towns and palaces, the traditions of which (as recorded in ancient literature regarding descriptions of the same) were more or less followed at Bikaner, Vijayanagar and Ujjain. Certain aspects of the social life prevailing in those places attracted my special attention.”

Sris Chandra Chatterjee, 1931.

Archaeological and Academic Discoveries

Along with working under the influence of Swinton Jacob, Chatterjee's strong beliefs were also driven by numerous archaeological discoveries made in the Indian subcontinent in the 1920s (Scriver & Srivastava, 2015). The renowned Indus Valley excavations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa offered empirical proof for the claim that ancient India had also been one of the major centres of early civilisation. The archaeological data demonstrated that original architectural practices had endured for ages before the contemporary age of colonisation. This continuity in building construction was Chatterjee's central argument in his book 'Magadha's favour of building according to the traditions. Around this time, a lot of books on ancient architecture were also released. These publications gave him a vision of ancient India, and his excursions to the landmarks "excited his imagination" and "enchanted his soul." (Chatterjee, 1942).

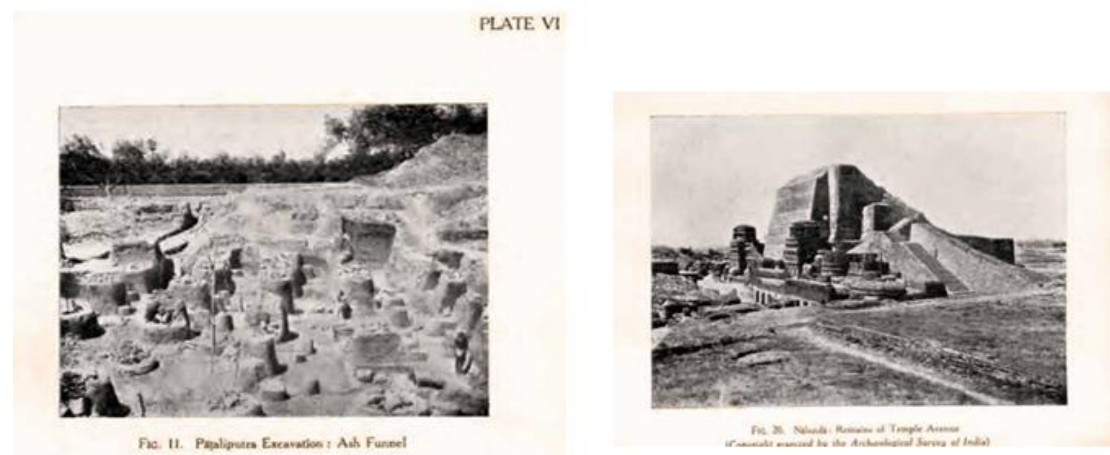


Fig. 6: Archaeological Discoveries in Pataliputra and Nalanda
Source: Magadha, 1942

After having spent some time in Rajasthan, Chatterjee came back to his native town, Calcutta, and set up as an architect and builder, designing and building exclusively in the 'Indian' style. He proclaimed that he would be building not merely for utility but also for beauty, that too along national lines (Chatterjee, 1931).

The Case of Kashi

There was a shift in Chatterjee's focus from Bengal to Rajasthan to the land of Banaras. Chatterjee received commissions for work from the landed aristocracy of the country. He designed a proposal for Shiva Temple at Dashashwamedh Ghat in Banaras for a Bengali landlord, P.N. Tagore (also a patron of Abanindranath's art: Guha Thakurta, 1992), who selected Chatterjee's proposal out of several architects from Calcutta and the United Provinces (Chatterjee, 1930). As per the records in Chatterjee's book on Modern Indian Architecture (1931), the temple's construction had already started in 1931.

According to Chatterjee, his design was a synthesis of Chalukyan and Gupta styles of architecture. It appeared to be a single Siva 'lingam' image with a Visnu 'chakra' at the crest. At the top, a figure of a lion-dragon, or 'kirtimukha', can be seen. Chatterjee said that Siva's specific request, this "paurinic" animal, was always connected to all Siva temples in the past as a protective deity. It dominated the 'Saivite' and 'Vaisnavite' auras of the Palas and Senas (Chatterjee, 1942). It even seems to have been connected to previous cave temples of the solely Buddhist kind. In the end, Chatterjee stated that though the pattern appeared ornately intricate, it was neither expensive nor challenging to work with. An interesting observation of the design of this temple was that Chatterjee used the same illustration for his proposal of a Memorial Temple at Agartala, Tippera State, Bengal.

Banaras Hindu University

In Banaras, as a nationalistic endeavour, similar to Shantiniketan, the Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U) was considered an alternative to the British-founded universities in India. The unique plan of the University was drawn out by Frank Lishman and amended by Rai Ganaga Ram Bahadur. Many proposals for the buildings were first made by Sris Chandra Chatterjee. Nonetheless, the first buildings were designed by Lishman (Lang et al., 1997). The early buildings of the Banaras Hindu University, a hotbed of Indian nationalism, exemplified the search of the Modern Indian Architectural Movement (Lang, 2002). The Modern Indian Architectural Movement emerged as a response to Art Deco and Modernism in Europe.

Chatterjee's description of his proposal for the Hindu University can be found in his book Magadha. "An artistic combination of all Classical styles of ancient Indian architecture, dominated by that of the Imperial Guptas, in evolving a neo-Indian style of strength, simplicity, dignity and character is a thing necessary today for effecting an Indian architectural renaissance with an international outlook. The design of the Hindu University is an attempt at such an all-India Hindu style of architecture. It bears clear traces of the successive developments of Indian architecture in the land of Magadha from the age of Ajanta down to the Moslem period. It also attempts at a harmonious blending of congenial elements From Dravidian architecture and culture."

Even Sher Shah period bastions were included in the design of the Hindu University in Varanasi to promote communal harmony, despite the fact that Chatterjee's references typically transport readers back to the pre-Muhammadan era (Gupta, 1991).

Chatterjee's School of Architecture

After Chatterjee's return from Rajasthan, he established his own school of architecture to train students on the subject of Indian architecture in Calcutta. Several well-known individuals from both India and outside sent Chatterjee messages of goodwill on the occasion of the launch of his school. John Begg, Sylvia Levi, Sten Konow, E.B. Havell, and Jawaharlal Nehru were among them (Gupta, 1991). Rai Bahadur A.N. Das, Chief Engineer of P.W.D. Bengal visited Chatterjee's school with a group of distinguished engineers, builders and art critics and was extremely pleased with the workings of the institution (Chatterjee, 1931).



Fig. 7: Chatterjee's School of Indian Architecture and Human Planning
Source: *Architect and Architecture*, 1948

A large number of designs and photographs of buildings of various types of Indian architecture, both cheap and expensive, beautified the studio (Chatterjee, 1931). Through this school, Chatterjee was single-handedly training his students to produce decorative panels and figures in terracotta and cement. As a specimen of their work, he carried the tiles produced by his students on his visit to America

Visit to America, 1931

In 1931, Sris Chandra Chatterjee visited the United States, where his arguments for the Renaissance of Indian architecture appear to have been well received (Lang et al., 1997). When he landed in New York, he was amazed at the grandeur of the city (Chatterjee, 1931). In an interview with the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, he said that he considered the skyscraper to be an embodiment of the spiritual, artistic and material achievements of the 'New World'. Not only did he appreciate the 'modern methods' of steel and reinforced concrete construction, but he also expressed strong appreciation towards the "high level of culture" among civil engineers and architects.

Chatterjee delivered a lecture to a gathering of students at the Master's Institute at the Roerich Museum in New York City. The lecture focused on the development of Indian architecture from the prehistoric days of Mohenjo-daro. He also discussed Ajanta, Elephanta and the stupas and the temple monasteries of Sanchi, Ellora, Madhura and Orissa. The essence of the lecture was to propagate that India, in mediaeval times, was the very centre of Hindu life in all its religious, social and educational aspects. Francis Grant, Vice President, Roerich Museum, New York, in a letter to Chatterjee, wrote:

"Before your departure from the United States, I want to tell you how happy we all are at the success you have enjoyed in this country, the extent to which you have interested this country in Hindu architecture and Hindu creative expression. I was glad indeed to know that Mr Harvey Wiley Corbett, one of our most prominent architects, has been so splendidly impressed with your work and your enthusiasm for your native art, gratifying to know that he is hoping to leave your efforts represented in the Chicago Exhibition. It is interesting as you also impressed Dr. Coomaraswamy, Dr. Offer as well as Claude Bragdon. You have touched some of our best people in these fields and it is fine to hear that Mr. Saylor, Editor of *Architecture* as well as Miss Helen Comstock of the International Studio are to use your drawings. The exhibition at the Architectural League this spring, planned by Mr. Raymond Hood and your lecture before the league will do much toward bringing your point of view before architects of this country."

Francis Grant, 1931:45

Modern Indian Architecture, 1931

Sris Chandra Chatterjee's book on Modern Indian Architecture was published in 1931 in Calcutta. He presented it to the Imperial Library as a record of his ideas on Indian culture and civilisation. He took it upon himself to arouse the consciousness of Indians in this matter. The book is replete with testimonials and letters of support from eminent personalities who showed support to Chatterjee, especially after his return from the United States.

National Value of Indian Architecture, 1933

In the wave of establishment of 'Swaraj' or 'self-rule' over the length and breadth of India, Sris Chandra Chatterjee published his second piece of writing. It was titled 'National Value of Indian Architecture' and was released in 1933. Printed at the Art Press, 20, British Indian Street, and published from 4, Wellington Lane, Calcutta, by Swami Vireswarananda, it was originally presented to the Imperial Library.

Draft Manifesto for All India League of Indian Architecture, 1940

Following the session of the National Planning Committee, on 1st June, 1940, Sris Chandra Chatterjee published a draft manifesto for the 'All India League of Indian Architecture' in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette Vol. 32, No.2. He believed that the establishment of this League was the easiest and surest means for the rescue of India's art and architecture. The manifesto stated the aim of the League to "prepare and publish typical designs for various types of civic structures. These typical designs would take the fullest advantage of modern materials and modern methods of construction yet not disregard the study and application of old Indian materials and specifications." (Chatterjee, 1940).

Glory of Banarasi, (n.d) post 1940

Sris Chandra Chatterjee published an article on the Glory of Banarasi. He titled it as an 'Appeal for Restoring its Aesthetic Grandeur and Spiritual Harmony: A Constructive Scheme'. The year of its publication is not traceable. However, we do know that it came out after he served on the National Planning Committee in 1940. It was an appeal to preserve the historic character of Kashi, being destroyed by the haphazard construction of buildings. Chatterjee considered this preservation as a way of 'Hindu cultural regeneration' (Chatterjee, n.d.).

Magadha, 1942

In 1942, Chatterjee published his most accessible and widely known book, 'Magadha: Architecture and Culture' through Calcutta University. He glorified the Empire of Magadha and attempted to establish a positive self-identity among the Indian architects (Lang et al., 1997). To him, ancient Magadha was the fountainhead of Indian Arts and Crafts and believed that Magadha had a 2000-year history of uninterrupted development and an original building culture of its own (Chatterjee, 1942). He had the conviction that the architectural inspiration and customs in the various Magadhan capitals could be applied to modern times as well.

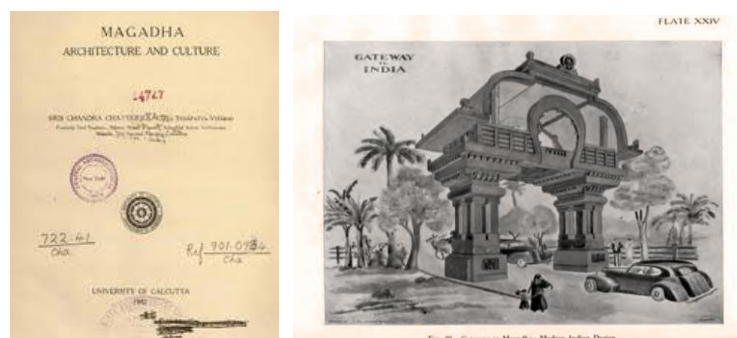


Fig. 8: Cover of Chatterjee's book 'Magadha' and Gateway to Magadha
Source: Author, 2023 and Magadha, 1942

Architect and Architecture, 1948

Sris Chandra Chatterjee published the book 'Architect and Architecture Then and Now: An Essay on Human Planning' in 1948 under the Calcutta University Press. Published a year after Indian Independence, this book highlighted his perspective on the current state and the future of Indian architecture, and the central theme of the book was the glorification of ancient ideals over modern ideals.

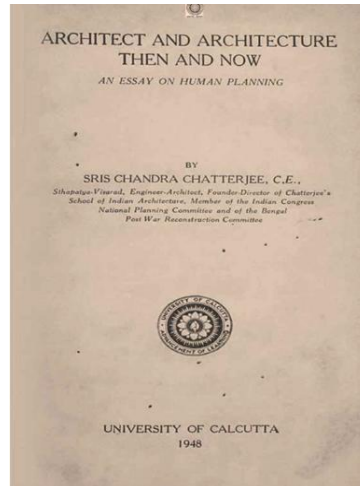


Fig. 9: Architect and Architecture
Source: Author, 2023

India and New Order, 1949

Chatterjee's ideas for national architecture and planning can also be traced in his book, 'India and New Order: An Essay on Human Planning', published in 1949. He believed that India needed a new order, distinct from the West. This book was a record of the age-old traditions and his imagination of the improved life of Indian people.

Chatterjee's Debayatan o Bharat Sabhyata, 1957

In 1957, Sris Chandra's Chatterjee published his last traceable book, 'Debayatan o bharat sabhyata' (roughly translated to 'A development made by God and Indian Civilization') under the Calcutta University Press. This book was a compilation of almost all his past design proposals. Unlike his previous publications, he wrote this book in Bengali and not in English.

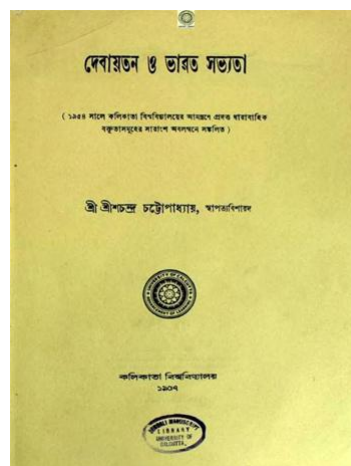


Fig. 10: Debayatan b Bharat Sabhyata
Source: Author, 2023

Analysis and Conclusion

Sris Chandra Chatterjee stands as one of the absent yet profoundly significant voices in the history of Indian architecture. A passionate advocate for an India free from foreign influence, he sought to reignite the spirit of the golden age of Magadha in his architectural vision. Chatterjee's written works are a testament to his mission, embodying his belief that India's architectural identity must be rooted in its rich traditions, even as it embraced the advances of modern technology and global design practices. His ambition for a renaissance in national architecture was unwavering, driven by a deep conviction that India's future must be shaped by its past.

Nationalism

Chatterjee's architectural thought was fundamentally shaped by the politics of nationalism and the cultural ethos of the Swadeshi movement. For him, architecture was not merely a physical act of building but a political and cultural instrument through which India could reclaim its civilisational dignity after centuries of colonial domination. His repeated insistence that Western architectural models did not embody the "soul of India" reflects a deeper desire to construct a built environment that could symbolically and materially participate in the project of nation-building. In this sense, Chatterjee treated architecture as a form of cultural resistance, where the revival of indigenous forms, materials, and construction practices became an assertion of self-rule in the cultural realm.

Through his writings such as *Modern Indian Architecture* (1931) and *National Value of Indian Architecture* (1933), Chatterjee articulated architecture as a collective national responsibility rather than an individual artistic pursuit. His proposals for civic institutions, universities, temples, and urban spaces were conceived as spatial embodiments of a unified Indian identity. By advocating for an All-India architectural language rooted in shared civilisational values, he sought to transcend regional, religious, and colonial divisions, imagining architecture as a unifying force in the making of the modern Indian nation.

Revivalism

Revivalism, in Chatterjee's work, was not a nostalgic return to a frozen past but a conscious and critical reactivation of India's architectural traditions as living knowledge systems. He viewed ancient Indian architecture as a repository of scientific, spatial, symbolic, and ethical principles that remained relevant to contemporary life. His fascination with Magadha, Gupta, Chalukyan, and temple traditions was grounded in the belief that these historical periods represented a harmonious integration of society, spirituality, and built form. Rather than copying historical styles, Chatterjee sought to extract their underlying principles, proportion, symbolism, cosmology, craftsmanship, and climatic responsiveness.

His revivalism also extended to construction practices and pedagogy. Through his School of Indian Architecture in Calcutta, he attempted to institutionalise traditional knowledge by training students in indigenous decorative arts, terracotta work, and symbolic design systems. In projects such as the proposed temples at Kashi and Agartala, and in his vision for Banaras Hindu University, revivalism functioned as a design methodology that blended multiple historical vocabularies into new architectural expressions. This approach positioned revivalism not as an anti-modern stance, but as an alternative modernity—one in which progress was achieved through continuity with cultural memory rather than rupture from it.

Search for Modernity: Redefining Architectural Identity in Post-Independence India

Chatterjee's quest for a uniquely Indian architectural expression resonates with broader historical debates around nationalism and identity in Indian architecture. His work reflects a tension between revivalism and modernisation, a conversation that has emerged repeatedly throughout India's architectural history, as Lang (2002) suggests. While Chatterjee himself may have been overshadowed in the annals of Indian architecture, his ideas persist, echoing through contemporary discussions on how to reconcile the country's architectural heritage with its modern aspirations.

At the core of Chatterjee's vision was the belief that architects must not only be technically proficient but also be grounded in the broader intellectual and spiritual traditions of India. He asserted that future architects must be versed in "Religion, Science, Mathematics, and Fine Arts", disciplines that elevate the human spirit and, by extension, the built environment (Chatterjee, 1948). His emphasis on regionalism, vernacular traditions, and cultural identity provided a framework for a distinctly Indian architectural identity—one that continues to influence the architectural discourse in India today.

Sris Chandra Chatterjee's writings provide invaluable insight for architects and scholars alike, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between tradition and modernity. His work serves as a guiding light for those seeking to craft an architecture that honours India's past while responding to contemporary challenges. Though his name may have faded from popular recognition, his legacy endures, shaping the trajectory of Indian architecture and continuing to inspire a balance between innovation and cultural heritage in the built environment.

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