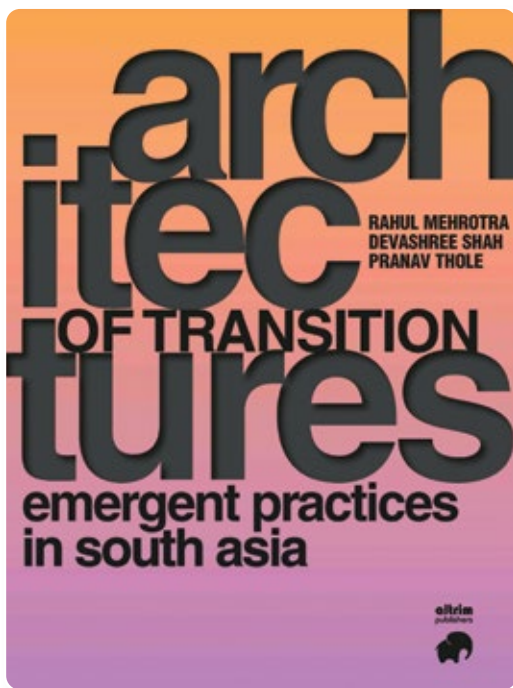


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# RE-THINKING PRACTICE AND PUBLIC SPACE IN SOUTH ASIA



## ARCHITECTURES OF TRANSITION: EMERGENT PRACTICES IN SOUTH ASIA

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and Pranav Thole

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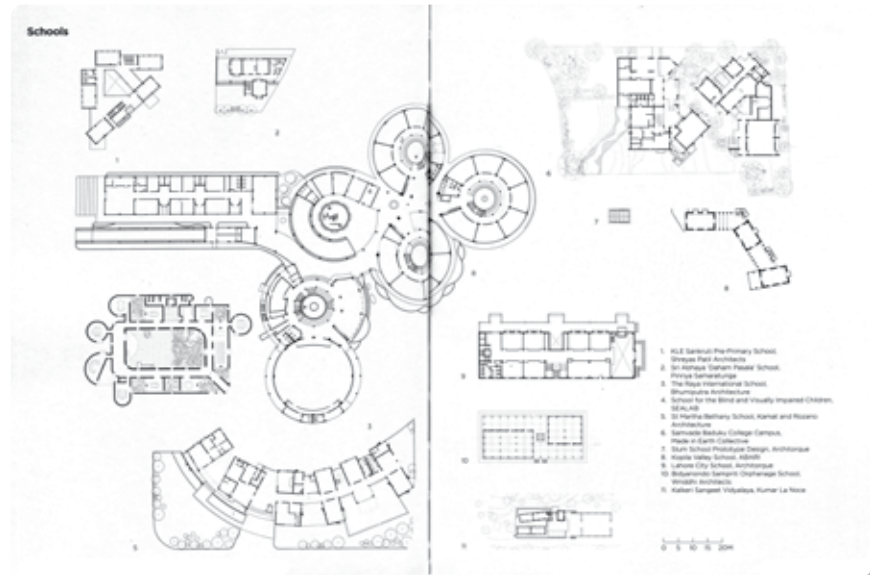
The book chronicles emergent South Asian practices, exploring shifts from private to public architectural focuses amidst socio-economic and environmental changes, presenting a vital perspective on contemporary architectural practice.

The book is one of the chronicles from a three-year research and outreach project focused on architecture in South Asia. Apart from this book, the project includes a lecture series, a conference, and a traveling exhibition amongst other initiatives and research. In India, in the 1990s, economic liberalization brought ample private capital catapulting practices to have established this time into energetic two decades of new work. Much of this work focused on the private domains and the popular discussion on architecture remained anchored to the latest residential architecture (and residential interiors). These indulgent domains of practice fetishized wealth creating images that travelled fast and filled pages of magazines and books, the then preferred media for discussion on architecture. This lifestyle-driven work focused on servicing a very small class of patrons at the very top of the economic pyramid in a context where large proportions of the citizenry were made to contend with substandard quality of personal and public space.

The liberalization also diminished the role of the state in the production of civic or urban space. However, in the past two decades, the discussion on the architecture of South Asia has split in two distinct directions. The popular press, now dominated by commercial behemoths, focuses on the market-led private domain with lenses zooming in, with increasing detail, on what money can and should buy. However, a few initiatives, of the likes of this book and project, present refreshing new work “laboring” as Rahul Mehrotra would perhaps articulate, to make quality space more accessible.

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While this publication uses the lecture series and the conference as a point of departure, the works published in the book present practices that operate in a plural world often venturing beyond the traditional boundaries of the office to make an impact, however small, in the civic space. In this attempt, they question the model of architectural practice through an implicit response in engagement with the domains they wish to influence. This research is, of course, not limited by geographies. It extends into contexts that confront similar challenges and development inequalities engaging with a large region that houses more population than all of China.

The opening essay authored by Devashree Shah, Rahul Mehrotra, and Pranav Thole, the curators of the project, starts by articulating the focus on South Asia as a place where the challenges of the “contemporary global condition” that include climate change, transforming political landscapes, and socio-economic shifts are observed in their extreme manifestations. “The architecture of South Asia is deeply rooted in the specificities of its local context” reads a line in the essay as the book goes on to document ideas and works from seven nations – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

With the shift in the contextual forces that shape practices, the essay outlines the simultaneous shift in patterns of patronage highlighting the role of non-state actors that include the private sector and a range of civic organizations instrumental in commissioning and production of quality architecture in the public realm. The project, as outlined in this essay, attempts to decode the “architecture of practice” that enables these emerging firms to refocus energies and advocacy towards moving the needle in the mainstream. This perhaps is the most critical aspect of this curatorial endeavor. Curatorial projects of this nature often emphasize the ‘niche’ trying, in the process, to articulate an ‘alternative’ mode of practice. However, the Architectures of Transition project rejects this notion of the alternative and discusses the work as central to understanding the consequential future models of practice and production of architecture in South Asia.

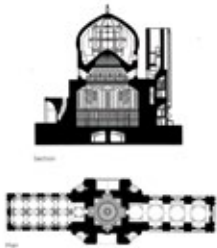
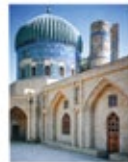
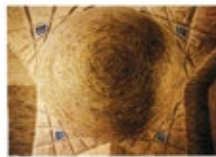
**Khwaja Parsa Mosque**  
Balkh, Afghanistan

Programme Mosque  
Year of Completion 2016  
Project Area 1,200 sqm

The original Khwaja Parsa Mosque, dating back to the late Timurid era, is an octagonal masonry structure featuring a square internal space topped by a double-tiered 'ribbed dome'. Archaeological evidence and photographic information served as the foundation for reconstructing the traditional masonry structure that once stood adjacent to the mosque. This reconstruction utilized materi-

als compatible with those of the mosque and provided structural support by buttressing weakened areas of the existing masonry. Subsequently, the consolidation and conservation of the ribbed dome was carried out. A blend of newly produced traditional tiles and recycled older tiles from the 1970s was employed in the restoration process.

The project retains the entire spectrum of construction materials, from masonry to structural systems, ensuring the use of traditional craftsmanship, thereby creating a high-quality community space.

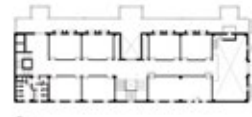


**Lahore City School**  
Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Programme School  
Year of Completion Ongoing  
Project Area 12,000 sqm

The design concept for Lahore City School seeks to create an educational facility deeply inspired by and integrated with nature, allowing students to learn and grow within their natural surroundings. The proposed school building spans with varied levels to generate engaging spaces for interaction and learning. In addition to formal learning areas such as classrooms, multipurpose halls, libraries, and laboratories, spaces have been carved for informal learning, including open-

air zones, corridors, and spacious foyers. Amenities to accommodate extracurricular activities, such as a swimming pool and sports grounds, are also part of the design. Drawing inspiration from its environment, the school's form is constructed from local materials, specifically brick. The earthy tones and textures of the brick enable the building to blend seamlessly with the natural landscape, making the facility an intrinsic component of the surrounding landscape.



Adding the scale and form of the building's exterior, the school's structure is designed to blend with the natural landscape.



The lead essay is followed by eight sharp texts from invited authors that have a regional focus. These texts further contextualize the work and ideas discussed through the project creating an argument for regional specificities as forces that influence architectures rather than national identities. The essays form a broad framework of issues and challenges that locate the works that follow as intimate inquiries into the immediate and the most urgent questions that need addressing. This perhaps limits the individual scale of projects chronicled in this book but collectively, these works and the practices that enabled them present an optimistic direction in which offices can focus energies to remain relevant in a state of continuous and unpredictable flux.

A bulk of the core of the book presents 41 practices with brief profiling texts and a few works each enriching the arguments presented in the opening and validating the significance of the curatorial effort. The projects range from small public interventions, local institutions, civic buildings, infrastructure projects as well as religious buildings made in an attempt to articulate an architecture of the new public realm. This large portfolio forms an intra-generational compendium of work with the bulk of represented practices having established their offices in the past decade. "Comprehending the Catalogue", the closing essay by Sanjeev Vidyarthi that book-ends the publication, reflects critically on the works chronicled through this project and published in this book all the while contextualizing the discipline and the domain of architecture in South Asia.

### Sri Abhaya 'Daham Pasala'

Athurugiriya, Colombo, Sri Lanka  
 Programme: School  
 Year of Completion: 2010  
 Project Area: 452 sq.m.

This project is a delicately designed building with optimum comfort levels for the purpose of educating children. It aims to elevate, add character, and establish a unique identity in the local community. Despite its condensed footprint of just 18.8 perches, the structure efficiently accommodates two upper floors, housing a total of ten classrooms. The classrooms are thoughtfully partitioned with collapsible, timber-framed glass dividers on each level, allowing for the seamless transformation of individual

rooms into larger multi-purpose spaces as needed. This versatile design enables the facility to serve as a concert hall, a venue for award ceremonies, as well as a serene hall for dance and overnight pitch for the neighbouring temple.

To ensure a welcoming learning environment, each space is bathed in abundant natural light and benefits from cross-ventilation. Accessibility and safety were important considerations in the building's design, given its primary role in nurturing and accommodating young children.



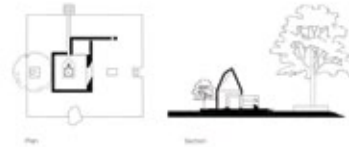
### Tajoring Radiance Temple

Pune, Maharashtra, India  
 Programme: Temple  
 Year of Completion: 2018  
 Project Area: 32 sq.m.

Dedicated to the deity Mahadev, the temple is located in an orchard of chikoo trees, and is built for evening worshipping for farmers living around the site. Taking reference from the region's history and existing Hindu temple architecture, the project is a contemporary reimagination of a temple. The sculptural design is derived using the golden ratio. It is a careful exhibition of traditional forms, put together in a simpler way so that the users can identify with it.

Built using reddish-orange concrete, the temple is in stark contrast with the surround-

ing greenery, generating visual curiosity for passersby and encouraging them to explore it. Breaking from tradition, the inner sanctum opens directly onto the outdoor space, creating an interactive experience for the user. The two openings are connected at the top, one acts as the entry while another allows the holy water to flow out. The volume culminates in a roof, which is a distinct freestanding pyramid.



The carefully designed compact temple structure demonstrates how well design can blend in with, embracing the opportunities of its location while also carrying out its primary purpose of religious significance and worship.

Perhaps the most revealing segment of the book is the part sandwiched between the closing essay and the portfolios. The 'Taxonomy of Plans' arranges building plans typologically at the same scale revealing the enormous diversity of architectural languages and approaches within the project. This section is followed by the 'Patterns of Practice in South Asia' section — a set of infographics that map data to decipher 'Geography, Demography, Types and Patronage'. An interesting map within documents the number of years each principal architect took to initiate practice overlaying the educational qualification with a good segment of practices having been initiated by architects who did not pursue further education after completing the bachelor; data open to interpretation!

In the last decade, the models of architectural practice that depended heavily on private patronage in the post-liberalization context of India have come under scrutiny. This project, a timely intervention in a landscape where design discourse needs a re-articulation of priorities, brings to the fore works and ideological positions (although not clearly defined yet) of practices and individuals that have attempted to resist the allure of the capital-rich and indulgent private domain to focus the intensity on the larger role of architecture in the South Asian society and as a thin slice of this very important history-in-making, the publication is a wonderful addition to our library!

