

## **The Philosophy of Historical Narrative in Architectural Heritage**

**Gunjan Gangey**

*School of Architecture and Planning, G.D. Goenka University  
Gurgaon, India*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Stories and Historical narration have not only inspired the different art and design movement but have also played a major role in shaping Architecture and conserving the tangible and in tangible heritage. In this research paper, qualitative research is done to establish the relationship between the historical narrative and the architecture. The architectural masterpiece of prominent architects are discussed to express their philosophy and narration. The historical narrative is discussed concerning the 4Ps (People, Place, Purpose, Period) of architecture. There is also an effort to establish a relationship between Historical narrative and contemporary architectural heritage, adding the layer of iconography and expression, connecting these with the past, present and the future.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Historical narrative, philosophy of architecture, 4Ps (People, Place, Purpose, Period), Iconography, expression.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

There is a very famous quote by an American poet Muriel Rukeyser which states “The Universe is made of stories, not of atoms”. ([1] Rukeyser, Muriel, n.d.) The metaphor portrays the role of narration. Human civilization at every age and each stage narrated stories through paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, and their indigenous architecture. These were the communication tools and instructions passed on from generation to generation.

Historical Narrative is the technique and the practice of writing historical story-based narrative format ([2]), reconstructing series of a long term or short-term events mainly focusing on the chronology of history. It can be a series of narration which allows the user to ignite multiple sensations and numerous imaginations.

India has always been a country of folklore stories, magic, and myths. These historic narratives have shaped the socio-cultural aspect of our society and quite remarkably managed to shape, evolve nurture and influence our Architecture. The historical narrative is a story; it can be related to events or sagas that have already happened. These events have been happening in and around us in our day to day life or somewhere in the past. It has been observed that narrative in architecture allows the people to assemble the community's collective memory in a building frame adding to multi-sensory experiences. These memories enable the designer to create the content or the brief, guiding the homogeneous and meaningful spatial organization based on narrative.

The objective of the study:

1. To establish a relationship between the historical narrative and its influence on architecture
2. To examine 4Ps of design in context to Historical narrative

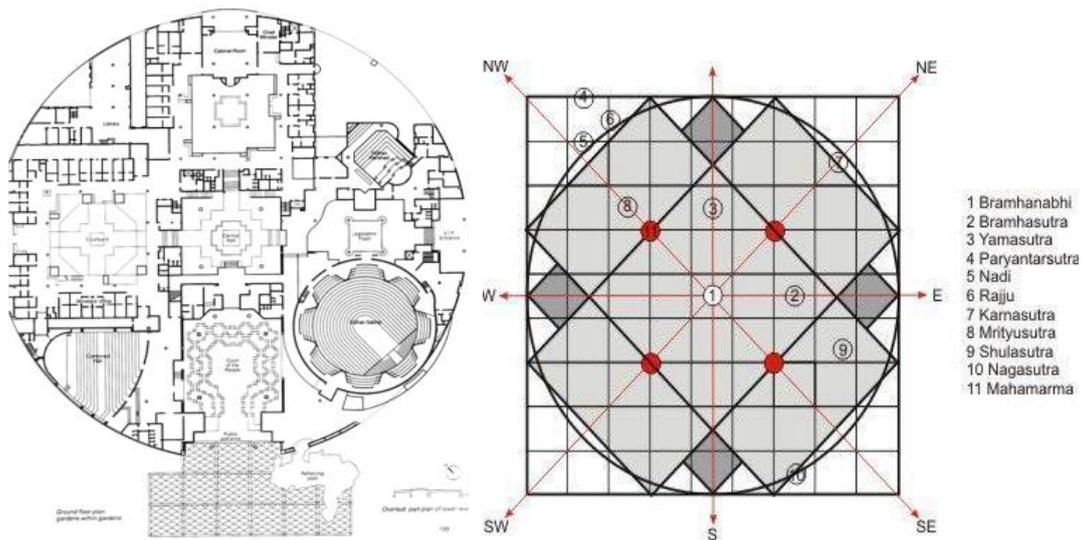
### **II. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AND ITS INFLUENCE IN ARCHITECTURE**

A Narrative based architecture or pure geometrical & global architecture without any influence and expression has been debated for centuries. A Designer might accept the historical narrative for his design or outrageously deny it. This conflict has been for age's weather the design should have a contextual narrative background or it should be modern, global without any context, narrative or attachment. Few of the great architect like Robert Venturi believed that regular middle-class people, the masses rather than classes, preferred homes and designs “that [were] nostalgic echoes of the past, rather than those dwellings that [were] ‘pure’ and austere statements of orthodox Modernism” ([3]Correa, Charles) .He argued that Architecture should have a style that involved tradition and history, the best way to fill with culture emotions and values in a building.

Prominent architects of India Charles Correa believed that “indeed it is not possible to build in Asia without acknowledging, in one way or another, the presence of the traditional, the potent ideograms that underlie these narrative traditions ([4] William S.W. Lim) and its glorious history. He truly believed the importance of historical narrative in architecture which later on started reflecting in his architecture style. He

celebrated the traditional architecture infusing it with modern technology. The concept of Mandalas and Vastu principles followed in ancient temples of India was later seen in his master projects like Jaipur Kala Kendra and Vidhan Bhawan. These are the constant reminder of the rich intangible heritage an architecture masterpiece holds with layers of multiple narration attached to it.

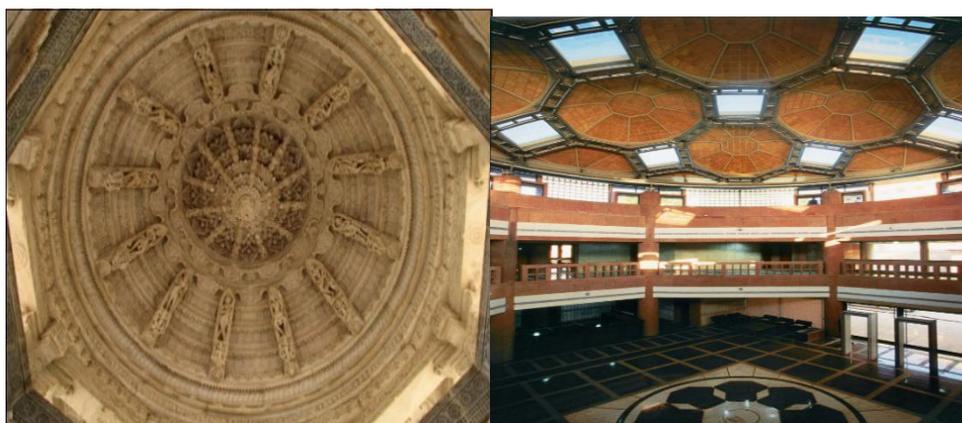
The Vidhan Bhawan in Bhopal has been designed on the principles of ancient old tradition followed in the temples called “Navgraha Mandal (Vastu-purusha, [5], n.d.)” focusing on the relationship of the cosmos with the humans. This principle divides the geometrical plan into nine equal square, the big square is the supreme center of the universe and the subdivided nine are the planets. This type of planning intends to allow all the positive energy of the cosmos into the perfectly balanced plan. This technique has massively been translated into his many designs including the “Vidhan Bhawan” in Bhopal balancing it with regional characteristics like climate, culture, skills, and availability of materials. The Historical narrative is not only adopted in the planning but also the various visual representation inside the building which represents the legacy of rich Indian heritage.



**Figure 1**Source: [hiddenarchitecture.net/vidhan-bhava-state-assembly](http://hiddenarchitecture.net/vidhan-bhava-state-assembly), **Figure 2**,Source:[sreenivasaraos.com](http://sreenivasaraos.com)

Architect Raj Rewal describes this endeavor, as to how his “generation has been trying to discover the common thread in which the fabric of Indian Architecture has been woven in the past; and its significance for our times ([6], Charles Correa). He got inspired by the beautiful Ranakpur Jain temple which glorified and narrated the past. The parliament library roof was the example of inspiration turning into execution by the great architect.

The mandala roof corbelled into a beautiful Hindu dome was translated into a modern context to cover the central atrium of the library building. The later building pays homage to the historical narrative of ancient buildings. This was one of the unique styles of Raj Rewal’s architecture philosophy in which he paid his due respect to the heritage and the legacy of the country.

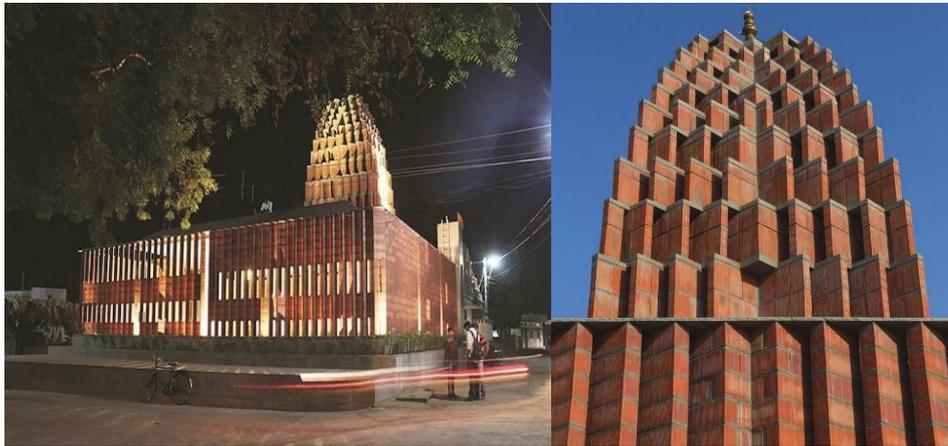


**Figure 3**, Source:Author, Ranakpur temple, Rajasthan, **Fig 4** Klaus –Peter [thearchiblog.wordpress.com](http://thearchiblog.wordpress.com)

### III. HISTORICAL NARRATIVE TRANSITION FROM LATERAL TO ABSTRACT ARCHITECTURE:

All these building had lateral narration in their architecture style, the contemporary architects have started using abstract narration to define the architecture design. The two examples are of a temple design in which the cultural and historical narrative has been invoked shaving out the ornamentation. The symbol connects the present with the past narrative.

These examples can be seen in the “Sai Mandir” Temple by “SEA” ([7] Sea Design Studio, n.d.)architects in Hyderabad which is straddling the world of memory and history’. The humble temple perfectly fits into contemporary architecture yet following the historical narrative of Shakira Style of the North Indian temple.



**Figure 5**, Source: [www.gosmartbricks.com/sai-mandir-vennached-made-out-of-porotherm-bricks-by-sea-design-studio](http://www.gosmartbricks.com/sai-mandir-vennached-made-out-of-porotherm-bricks-by-sea-design-studio)

The other one goes as the temple in the outskirts of Pune by Sameep Padora & Associates architect ([8] Dezeen, n.d.) . The beauty of the design not only produced a perfectly balanced sanctum with sacred Garb Griyha and a utilitarian Mandapa but also a holy skylight decorating the inner sanctum. Thus the historical narrative shaped the architecture whereas the architect managed to produce less is more in his design expression by simplifying a traditional Indian temple design and omitting the usual decoration but maintaining symbolic elements that continue the narration of the place.

These young architects were able to capture the mesmerizing heritage of the past into their own ways and transform it into a unique heritage experience for the users.



**Figure 6**, Source: [www.dezeen.com/2010/11/01/shiv-temple-by-sameep-padora-associate](http://www.dezeen.com/2010/11/01/shiv-temple-by-sameep-padora-associate)

We as the designers have been longing for the humanistic approach in the design process and the outcome product for a long time. If the narration has to continue from the building, the elements of the narration has to be identified. Architecture for the people, place, and purpose has been holding the center of narration in

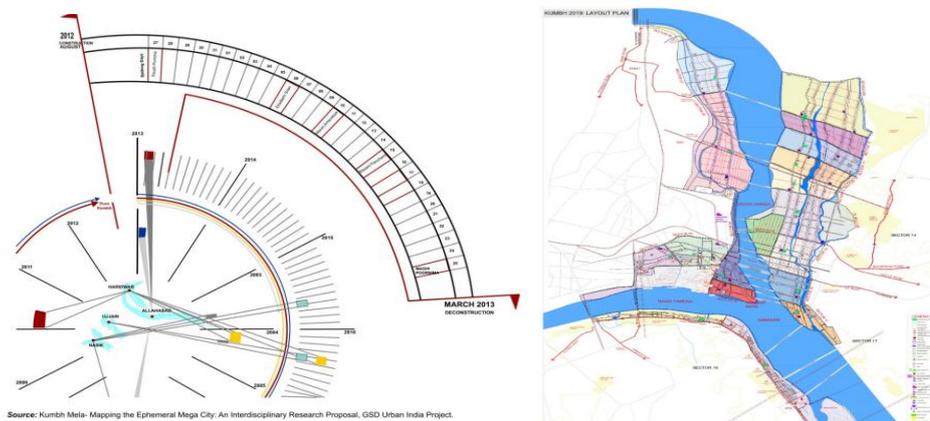
all the above examples. The fourth element of Historical narrative in architecture can be the period which will connect the narrative thread of the design. The 4p of design with historical narrative can add the missing dimension in the global expression allowing the design stories to continue from generation to generation.

#### **IV. THE 4PS OF DESIGN IN CONTEXT TO HISTORICAL NARRATIVE-PEOPLE, PLACE, PURPOSE AND PERIOD.**

**Historical narrative and People:** Of Architecture started with the people, for the people, by the people. The universal man representing mankind can be seen in many historical contexts right from Vastu Purusha Mandala to the Vitruvius Man by Leonardo da Vinci and later on the Modular Man by Le Corbusier. The constant obsession to balance the scale and proportion in Architecture leads to the division of Monumental scale and the Human Scale.

There has been always an urge to create a relationship between man and nature and reflect that in the architecture. The architecture of the mighty temples, mosques, cathedrals or the public buildings like Museum & war memorials narrate this story. The great patron's or the common class's story, their emotion has inspired the art movement, architecture style for ages and will continue to create humanistic design for the people.

The Kumbh mela, the mega ephemeral city is the example of historical narrative setting architecture for the people. Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', the festival has many myths and lore associated both with its origins and the endless rituals performed there for many days [ ([9])] ([10], Lochtefeld, James G. God's Gateway) allowing congregation of millions of people ([11], Rahul Mehrotra, 2017)].



**Figure 7:** [mahakumbhfestival.com/kumbh-mela-map-on-google-maps/](http://mahakumbhfestival.com/kumbh-mela-map-on-google-maps/)

This mega city holds religious, socio & cultural importance related to spiritual and physical healing. These briefs have shaped the temporary town planning of the massive city which results to the question like what are physical boundaries of the festival, spatial zoning of the city and the foremost being construction for the deconstruction, aligning with the cosmic life cycle philosophy. The various engineering element and technical aspect like services, safety, amenities and facilities allows interdisciplinary management coinciding with the historical narrative.

**Historical narrative and Place:** Design according to place and region has always been a guiding element in Indian architecture. Place narration with climatic consideration allowed flexible architecture style to flourish, provoking architects to provide thermal comfort to the users. The construction technology in ancient building narrates the importance of Place, identifying a unique architecture style for each zone.

The huge bird sculpture in Kerala is designed based on the historical narrative of place aligning with "Ramayana". The design promotes ecotourism acting as a public place for the people, resting on the exact place (location) mentioned in the narrative. It is said that the injured Jatayu and his lost wing landed on top of a rock. In time, the rock got the name Jatayupara. This is where the monumental statue of Jatayu is now built [ ([12], Jatayuearthcenter., 2019).

Sure the elements of Architecture enhances the narrative but somewhere to start and deliver the story, this legend sculpture building will connect the community for generations.

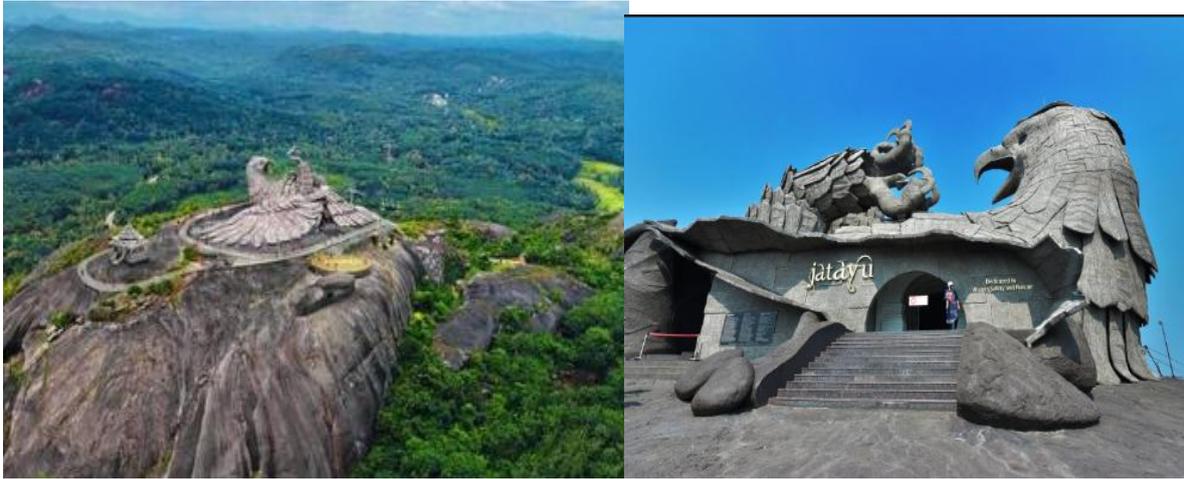


Figure 7 ,8-Source: *Jatayu Earth's Centre:*

**Historical narrative and Purpose:** The genesis, the purpose of Architecture has always been improve the man kind. It is to create infinite, free, joyous places for all the purposes. This notion of purpose of design has led to so many conflicts and disagreement. The philosophy of function (purpose) or form has been clashing for ages. The historical narrative of ancient buildings provides insight to the designers, supporting the ideology that design should identify the purpose and resolve the purpose.

The architecture of the Adalaj Step well in Gujrat, the truly inverted temples strongly connects with the historical narrative. The purpose of the step well was to provide drinking water, resting place and community gathering. This later turned out into socio cultural and utilitarian space transforming into a Spiritual refuge. The determination of a widow queen and the inclination of another ruler towards her set up the narrative of fusion. This fusion of Indo Islamic sultanate architecture can be seen through the motifs of flowers and graphics of Islamic architecture which blends very well with the symbols of Hindu and Jain gods carved at various levels of the well.

An interesting depiction carved from a single block of stone is of the Ami Khumbor (symbolic pot of the water of life) and the Kalp Vriksha (a tree of life) ([13] The Adalaj Stepwell, 2019). Also seen is a fresco of navagraha or nine planets. These depictions are said to attract villagers for worship during marriage and other ritualistic ceremonies making it a spiritual paradise [10 ([14], Klaus-Peter, n.d.).

This is the perfect example of historical narrative shaping architecture. This fusion was also seen in later part of Gujarat's Sultanate architecture. The practices attached to the inverted well has helped to restore and conserve the heritage building adding a portal to gaze into the past.



Figure 8,9: Source [www.gujarattourism.com/destination/details/6/32](http://www.gujarattourism.com/destination/details/6/32)

**Historical narrative and Period:** The period architecture either ancient, medieval, modern or postmodern have different historical context, construction technology and architecture style to narrate. Some places have the shadows of many period together, holding multiple fabric and connecting different eras.

One such example in the old city of Jodhpur stitching the medieval India fabric to the contemporary one by Adaptive Reuse. The historic core of the city along the the Pichola lake front is a result of evolution layered by different socio, economical hierarchical structure, political and religious factors, climatic zone and local material availability shaping the architecture.

The city stands as a testimony of Indo Islamic architecture and later on the Indo-saracenic style, constituting of historic forts and palaces, museums, galleries and the lake side ghats. These traditional buildings have been reshaped into hotels, restaurants and museums. The adaptive reuse has allowed to preserve the period narrative of the old city engaging the local into economical ventures. The historical narrative and the rich architecture paint a canvas favoring the cultural tourism. The architecture of the new buildings popping up in the core of the city is still being borrowed from the period narrative. The picture below is a frame, capturing the different architecture style emerging in the city core with the city palace at the backdrop guarding the historical narrative of the period.

The city stands still reflecting the shadow of the wonderful glory and delightful past. Maintaining the old fabric of the city has helped to restore the past heritage of the city.

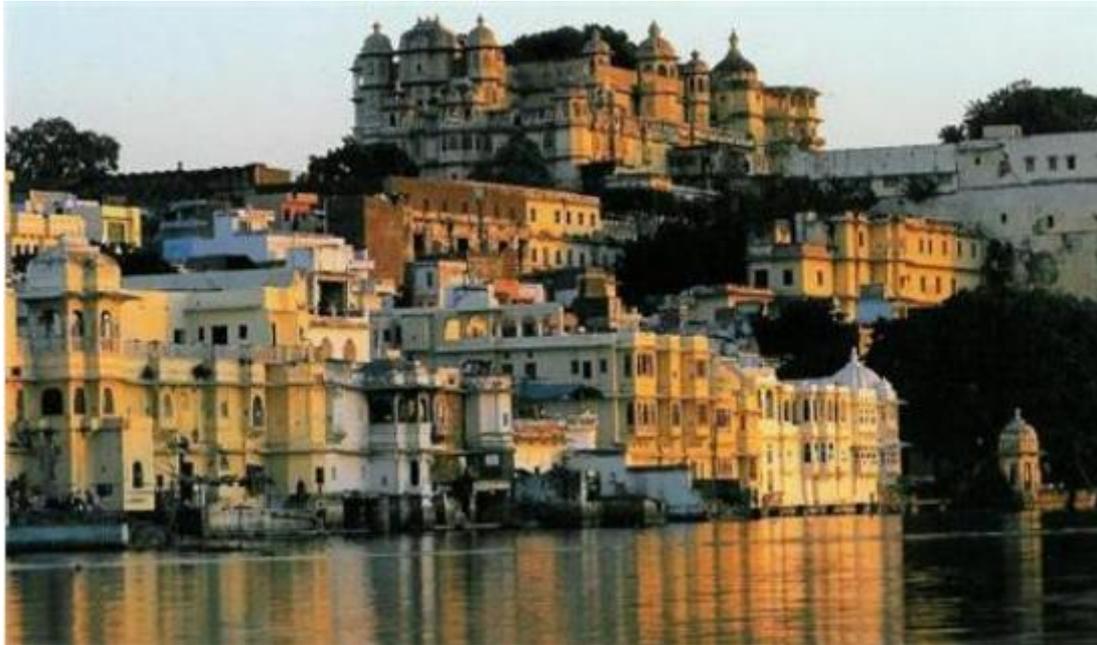


Figure 10, Source: [www.udaipuronline.in/city-guide/udaipur-tourism](http://www.udaipuronline.in/city-guide/udaipur-tourism), Udaipur lake shore

**Historical narrative reviving the Architectural Heritage:** The term cultural heritage was first recognized in 1972 Paris convention which had concern to protect the world culture and natural heritage. It defined masterpieces with exceptional history, extraordinary value, art, sculpture, science and many more to be conserved, safeguarded and restored for the future because of their unique characteristic and irreplaceable value.

Historical narrative attached to the art, culture, sculpture or a building of any kind adds to this uniqueness. Conservation of such architecture, artesian style or the practices of the community becomes more necessary.

## V. CONCLUSION

There is a famous saying by Architect “Norman Foster” that quotes: As an architect you design for the present, with an awareness of the past, for a future which is essentially unknown. ([15], n.d.]. Architects do believe that they design primarily for People, construct spaces that are relevant to Place, and forge connections that give a building Purpose. Designing with historical narration connects the three important dots, present past and future. It acts as a frame to discover the past and inspire the future. The 4Ps combined with narrative can lead to emphatically driven design having a humanitarian approach connecting the community and conserving the tangible and intangible heritage.

Historical narrative allows an architect to design, conceptualize, formalize and materialize in a way that gives a sense of place and identity to a new building, connecting it with the past fabric. These buildings serve as focal point, land marking and providing reference point in the built landscape. Therefore it creates a local environment with the immediate setting for the lives of community, who reside or work there in historical landscape. Historical narrative also gives a monumental scale to a building based on human psychology, portraying the ideology of cosmos within the built space. One cannot deny that there is a great scope of learning from historical narrative and its exploration in the coordinates of Architecture to conserve the heritage of past, present and the future to come.

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