The Indian City

Written by Prashant Mahajan

An Architect's Refelection on Sustainable Urban Development through the Cultural Lens of Past, Present & Future
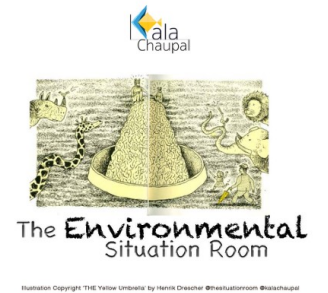
Kala Chaupal

The Environmental Situation Room

Illustration Copyright 'THE Yellow Umbrella' by Henrik Drescher @thesituationroom @kalachaupal

A special mid week feature

uroparch@gmail.com

A special mid week feature

The **Environmental** Situation Room

Defining a new paradigm shift
The Indian City

Prashant's sketch from his dissertation study, School of Planning & Architecture, Circa 1994

An analysis of form & values

In 1994, as a fourth-year student of architecture, I had prepared a dissertation to study and analyze the Indian city, its forms & values. It was an attempt at understanding the key principles & forms of the Indian city.

Urban towns and cities in India have developed organically over the past few decades, representing the building blocks of our urbanity, our need to succeed, and achieve our dreams and aspirations.

From the ancient to the present age, there are not many examples of planned towns in this country incorporating in its matrix the aspirations of human living in the context of its struggle, fulfillment or order. Far rarer is the town planned with the concept of total design, consistently and consciously shaping the living environment and achieving many qualities of urban design. Again, there are not many planned towns considered to be epoch making for the evolution of planning thought.

In today's context, and with India's global outreach, extensive development and rapid growth of our cities and urban districts, this study attempts to gain a better understanding of the building blocks of our cities.

Change & renewal

In our search for answers to these pertinent questions, we can also dwell upon the quest for seeking the truth.

The visible structure of our cities is based on their social foundations.

Delhi, our National capital, is a perfect example illustrating organic growth. The city is a collage of the largest population density in the country. It is spread over 32,785 square kms. encompassing 15 districts and 4 languages are spoken in the region. It is the second largest urban sprawl in the world, second only to Shanghai in China.

Today, Delhi has grown far and beyond the confines of the outer ring road, its principal peripheral road transportation link. The green belt which was shifted in the master plan MPD-62 has been invaded by private land developers.

Gurugram, Faridabad & Ghaziabad are contiguous urban sprawls & the arterial roads and highways are the most congested across NCR and perhaps in the country.

Delhi and its myriad history of "seven cities" representing its past empires, must draw lessons learnt over the past centuries as we begin to look towards the future to create a connected, green and liveable city for a

rapidly growing population. Over the years, cities in India have embraced transformation as central agenda to achieve aspirational global standards such as in cities like Shanghai in China and Singapore. However, the reality in India suggests vast numbers of urban poor in our large cities like Mumbai and Delhi have been relocated to outlying fringe areas thereby denying the working populace proximity to their workplace for which they migrated to these cities in the first instance.

The economic liberalization of 1990's led to fundamental changes in the role of the state in the development of urban housing across several cities in the country, largely left to private sector real estate developers with the state merely playing the role of a facilitator.

The urban poor however have been left to accommodate themselves in whatever undeveloped spaces they can find. Due to this, large number of informal settlements have filled the gaps of undeveloped land within our urban towns and cities across the country.

Gated communities for the affluent as well as for the working class of the city have become a reality in all our cities. These guarded and self-contained residential complexes have grown into creating their own sheltered worlds, whilst remaining totally insulated from the growing urban poor

New Delhi City Development 2011-2021

The Environmental Situation Room
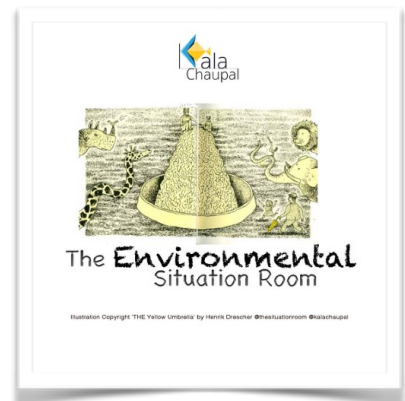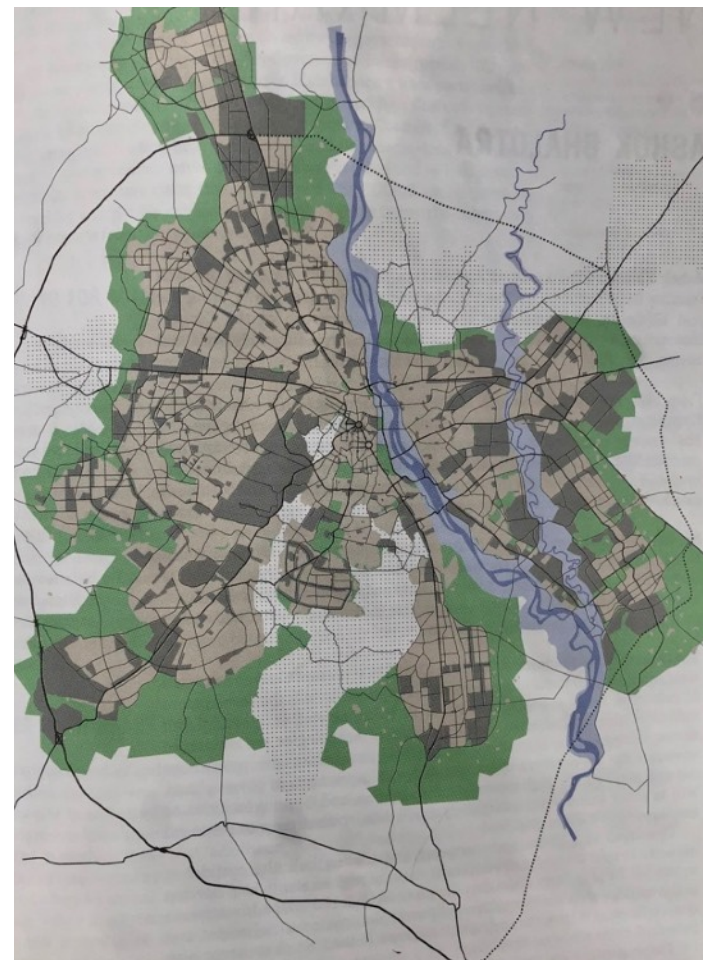
A special mid week feature

- **We can start by asking questions like who makes cities?**

- **And how do cities grow and evolve?**

- **Do cities go through phases of change and renewal?**

Prashant Mahajan- Gurgaon, India- Architect & Urban Designer for **@theenvironmentalsituationroom @kalachaupal @thechaupalspeaks** @copyright **www.kalachaupal.org** April 2020

"A view from my window.
Peaceful quiet, birdsong abound, while the world hides from your glory...the creator, our work behold."

"Azure oblivion, underneath the sheltering skies as the world awaits awakening."

A special mid week feature

Prashant's sketches as he looks out of the window of his high-rise condominium during the COVID lockdown and reminiscences:

"We lost Spring this Season."

Truer words were never spoken and the distance between nature and our existence never felt so far.
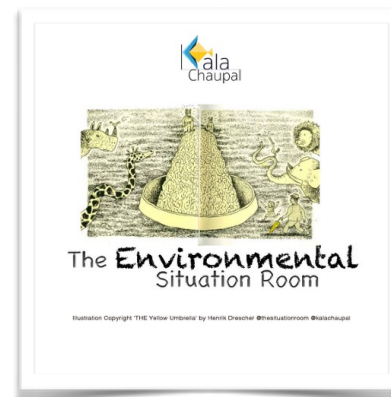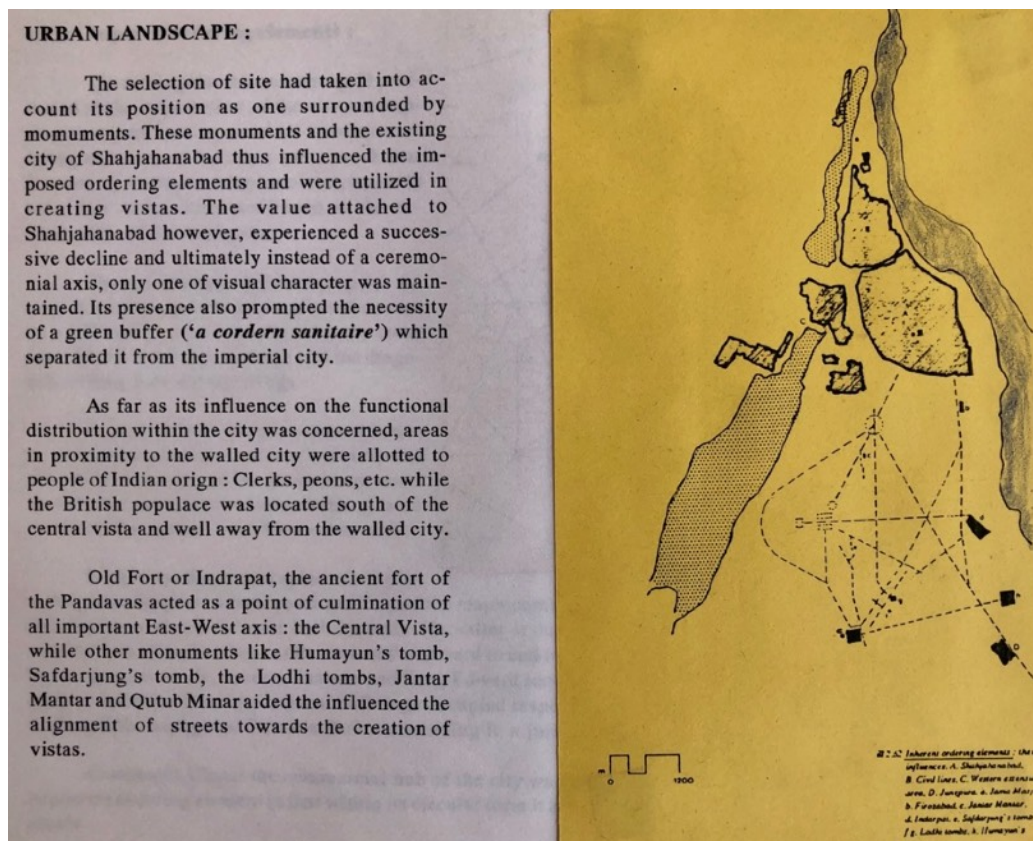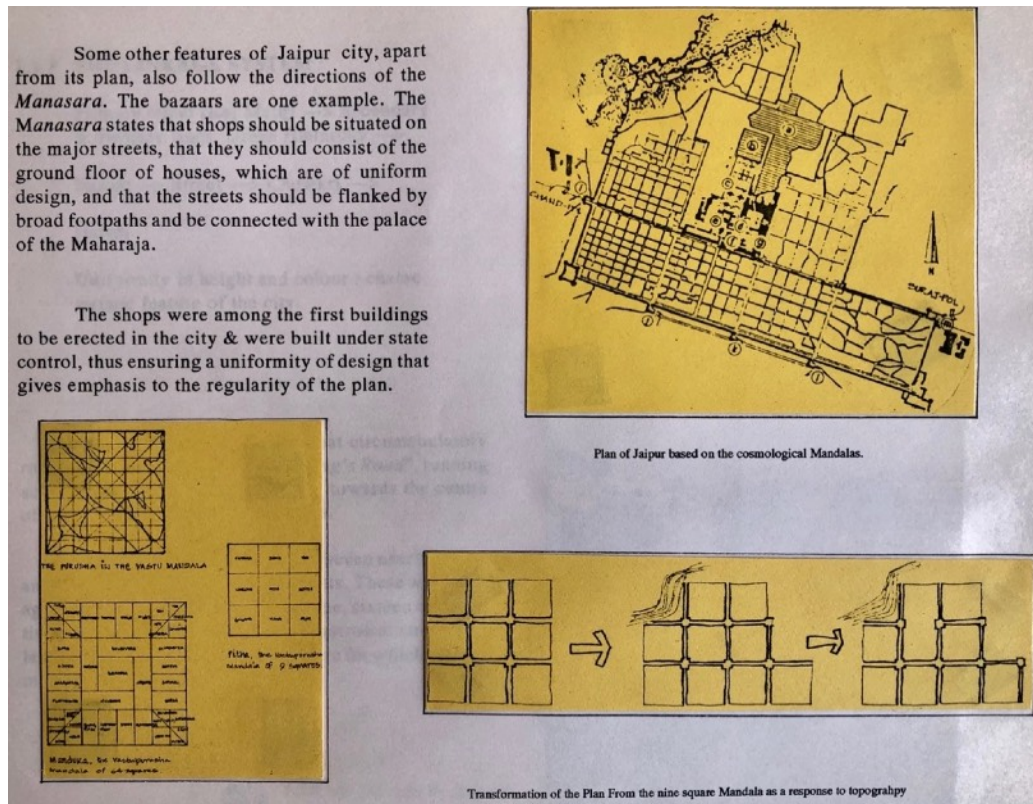
The Essential Paradigm Shift

There is an urgent need at a national level to look at our cities and increase absorptive capacity for the population, create better opportunities and make better use of our cities in the current urbanization process while simultaneously balancing growth by focused development of smaller towns and cities. In doing so, a lot of pressure could be diverted from large urban cities such as Mumbai and Delhi.

As we move rapidly towards creating larger "Megapolises" with millions of additional people, the success of the future Indian city shall rely on the ability to achieve a balance between the old and the new, the formal and the informal, the global and the local.

Instead of emulating and blindly adopting western models of development, India must learn & build on its uniqueness and diversity of its cities like Mumbai and Delhi. India has much to teach the world from its own history and traditions and its unique tapestry of embracing change while remaining deeply rooted in its own culture and core values.

Some other features of Jaipur city, apart from its plan, also follow the directions of the *Manasara*. The bazaars are one example. The *Manasara* states that shops should be situated on the major streets, that they should consist of the ground floor of houses, which are of uniform design, and that the streets should be flanked by broad footpaths and be connected with the palace of the Maharaja.

The shops were among the first buildings to be erected in the city & were built under state control, thus ensuring a uniformity of design that gives emphasis to the regularity of the plan.

Plan of Jaipur based on the cosmological Mandalas.

Transformation of the Plan From the nine square Mandala as a response to topograhpy

URBAN LANDSCAPE :

The selection of site had taken into account its position as one surrounded by momuments. These monuments and the existing city of Shahjahanabad thus influenced the imposed ordering elements and were utilized in creating vistas. The value attached to Shahjahanabad however, experienced a successive decline and ultimately instead of a ceremonial axis, only one of visual character was maintained. Its presence also prompted the necessity of a green buffer ('a cordern sanitaire') which separated it from the imperial city.

As far as its influence on the functional distribution within the city was concerned, areas in proximity to the walled city were allotted to people of Indian origin : Clerks, peons, etc. while the British populace was located south of the central vista and well away from the walled city.

Old Fort or Indrapat, the ancient fort of the Pandavas acted as a point of culmination of all important East-West axis : the Central Vista, while other monuments like Humayun's tomb, Safdarjung's tomb, the Lodhi tombs, Jantar Mantar and Qutub Minar aided the influenced the alignment of streets towards the creation of vistas.

# Learnings from Jaipur, New Delhi & Chandigarh

Three key cities were analyzed in my dissertation, which still remain relevant in the current context of the urban development cycles witnessed in our cities over the past three decades. Jaipur, New Delhi & Chandigarh stand out other than Mohenjo-Daro (Now in Pakistan)

Jaipur is one example of an Indian city totally planned based on traditional Indian concepts of town planning, conservation and Astronomy.

The planning for the city relied on traditional Indian concepts of town planning, consecration and astronomy. The planning for the city relied on the use of traditional mandalas, Shilpa shastras, astronomy and mathematics. These were the framework of the concepts used in the planning of the city.

New Delhi designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens is an outstanding example of a city fabric based on colonial thought & classical principles & orders of architecture to form a new fabric of a city within an existing old city fabric. Lutyens understood & responded to the notions of traditional elements used in the planning of the city based on the
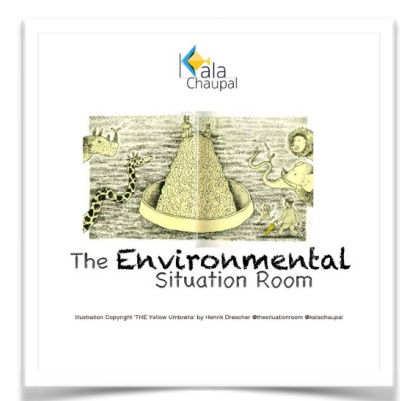
concepts of Axiality & Vistas perfected over centuries by French and European Architects & planners.

Chandigarh remains the French master architect Le Corbusier's most notable work in India & is perhaps the primary source of development of modern architecture and town planning in the country. The architect's own approach to modern architecture & his theory on modulor were balanced in the relationship to Indian principles of architecture & town planning.

Chandigarh photographs – Rock Garden by Nek Chand, Assembly building ceremonial door by Le Corbusier

Each of these different cities evolved from a specific thought & time period in India's rich history, and it is essential to understand the relevance and adoption of these concepts today. All three cities are designed attempts in history in different periods of time in different areas by different individuals responding to different needs and requirements.
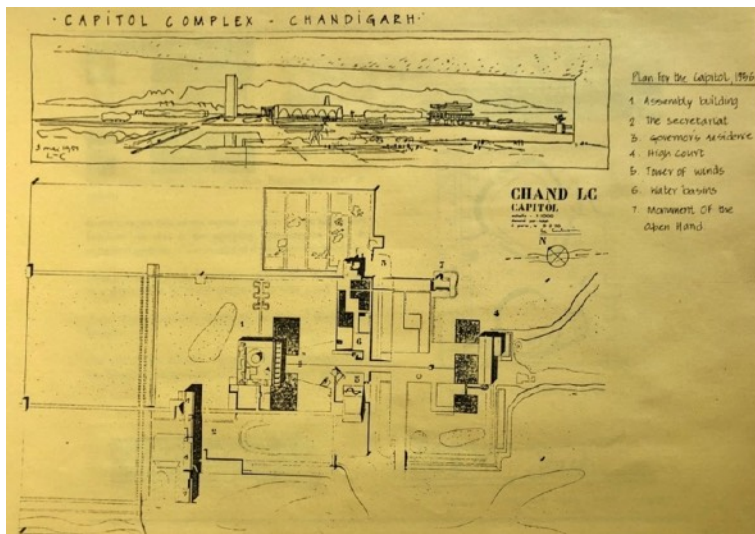
Chandigarh photographs – Rock Garden by Nek Chand, Assembly building ceremonial door by Le
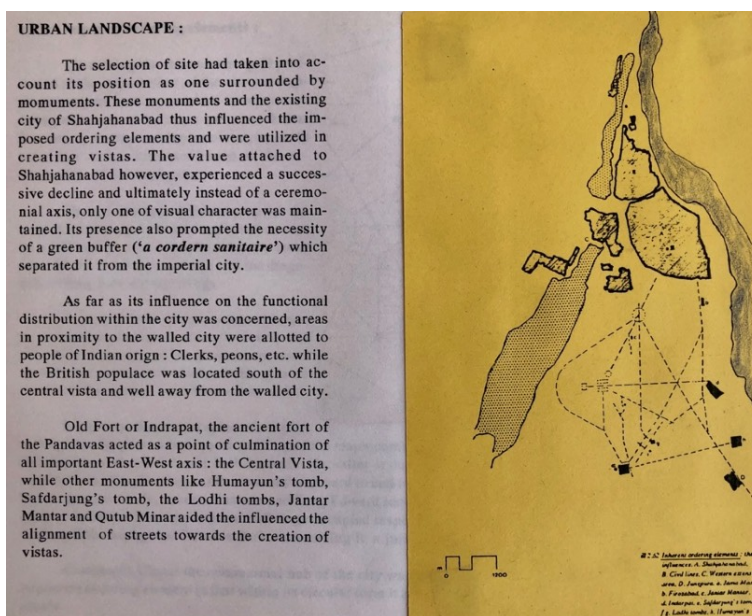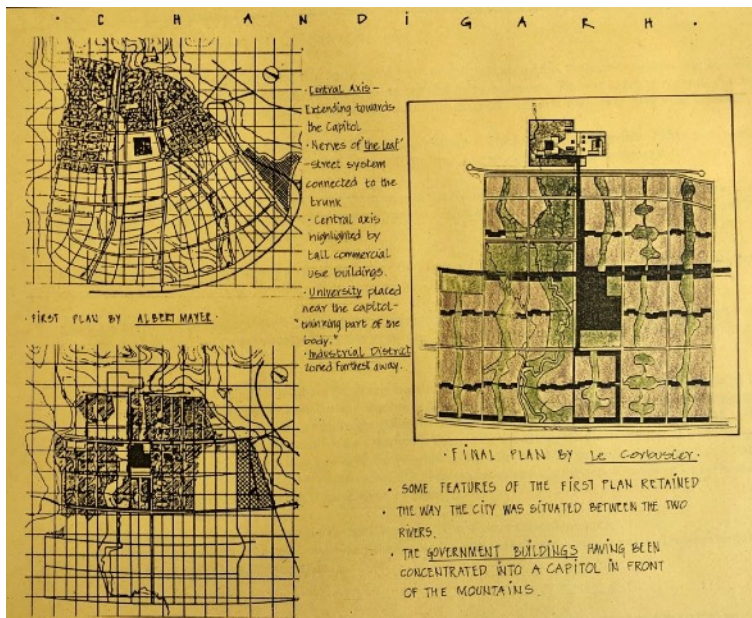
For architects, the response to a set of values of a social setup is perhaps of great importance as it is the values of people which define what shape the system should take, it is the social setup at a particular time which is interpreted and a suitable architecture is made as a response. Creating an architectural form is freezing an idea as a response to a particular set of values, as interpreted by the designer.

The city of Jaipur represents an order created by the singular & monarchic structure of power headed by the King. The social idea which transcends the making of the city fabric were those of a ruler exercising control over an ordered system of hierarchy. The symbolism of the king in the center, as the highest position & various zones of the city structured around him, in order of rank in the social hierarchy.

Chandigarh is a city fabric representing an attitude of transplanting purely western notion of planning in our local Indian context. At the level of the fabric, its structuring is still not as cohesive and complete as compared with Jaipur or even for that matter with New Delhi. The city lacks visual interest & spatial variety of a traditional Indian town. But then, the idea was not to follow the old traditions – Chandigarh was not an evolution,

It was a revolution – a break with the process of evolution and history.

In all three of these unique Indian cities, the resulting forms are not distinct but rather an outcome of very different organizational principles. It was therefore worth observing that the eventual expression of society at a given point in time and that a change in this condition simultaneously affects the transformation in the fabric of the city.

The end result is the creation of a series of reactions which give rise to layers of forms that over a period of time come to co-exist within the confines of the city. These varied layers may not follow any fixed pattern in their disposition, nevertheless each constitutes a part of the mosaic that is the city.

About the Author

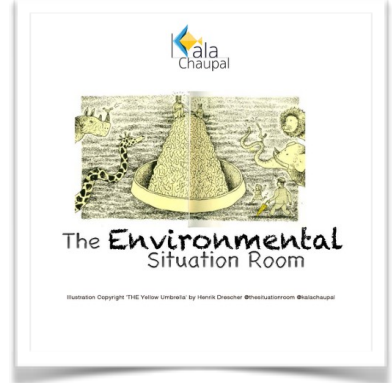Prashant is a passionate architect determined to create high quality bespoke architecture & master planning concepts. 11 years of overseas design and design management experience in several culturally diverse countries. His work experience has been with premier architectural design firms, multi-disciplinary engineering design companies and real estate organisations in South-East Asia, Middle-East and India.

He has designed, coordinated and delivered projects across various built typologies including mixed use retail, commercial, institutional and residential sectors. Possesses a design flair with a commercial awareness to build real value for stakeholders by finding creative solutions to complex design briefs. Hands-on team player, works within teams and leads critical design development and coordination efforts collaboratively with clear and effective communication skills.

He currently works as Head of Design Management for Risland holdings limited,

A leading the design management department for China based real estate company in North India.

He is leading design efforts for new residential and master planning projects in New Delhi, Thane (Mumbai) and Chennai

Email uroparch@gmail.com
Portfolio: https://pmahajan.portfoliobox.net
https://pmahajan.crevado.com

Bibliography & References

1. Social structure of a planned city – Chandigarh, Victor D'Souza
2. Chandigarh – Sneh Pandit
3. Architectural review – Le Corbusier in the sun, August 1988, 1971-74
4. Le Corbusier – Oeuvre' complete, 1946-57,57-65
5. Space time & architecture – Siegfried Giedion, 740-45
6. Cities of India – G.W Forrest, 119
7. Town planning in ancient India – B.B Dutt
8. An Imperial Vision – Thomas Metcaffe
9. Splendors of the Raj – Philip Davies
10. Colonial Architecture & Urban development – Anthony D. King
11. Indian Summer – Robert Grant Irwing
12. Jaipur: The last destination – Aman Nath
13. Unpublished Thesis 1990 – Rajiv Narayan, CEPT Ahmedabad
14. Learning from Delhi – Pelle Poiesz, Gert Jan Scholte, Sanne Vanderkaaij Gandhi
15. Learning from Mumbai - Pelle Poiesz, Gert Jan Scholte, Sanne Vanderkaaij Gandhi

Note: All illustrations, sketches, photographs and views are by the author, Copyright 1994-2020

Key project experience IT Parks / Commercial projects
Changi Business Park, Singapore - 1 Million sft. (Concept)
Office for Great Eastern Life insurance company, Penang Malaysia - 0.3 Million sft. (Built project 2007)
Office building, Gurugram Delhi NCR India - 0.5 Million sft. commercial office development for Tishman Speyer
(Project on hold)
Residential projects
Sky Mansion, Delhi India - 0.8 Million sft. Luxury residential condominium with 100 m tall exclusive towers featuring 160 dwelling units including penthouses (under construction)
Grand Hyatt Residences, Gurugram Delhi NCR India - High rise tower development with bespoke branded 250
serviced apartments designed by Foster & Partners from U.K (Under construction)
M3M Merlin, Gurugram Delhi NCR India - Designed by DP Architects and Belt Collins from Singapore (Completed 2017)
Bridge apartments, Bahrain - Concept for 1000 apartment residential towers on water front reclaimed island land
(Project on hold)
Dennis Lee residence, Singapore - Private residence at Ford Avenue site (Completed 2001)
Jackson Lee residence, Singapore - Private residence at Jalan pelangi (Completed 2004)
Retail Mall / Entertainment theme park projects
Ferrari world, Abu Dhabi UAE - 5 Million sft. (Completed 2010)
Retail Mall Qaryat Qurum, Muscat Oman - 0.5 Million sft. (Project on hold)
IREO City mixed use, Gurugram Delhi NCR India - Luxury boutique retail, F&B and Cinemas designed by Foster & partners from U.K (Under construction)
Hospitality projects
Ritz Carlton, Kuwait - 50 storey hotel development (Concept for private client)
Four seasons, Bahrain Bay - 350 keys high rise hotel designed by Skidmore Owings & Merrill (Completed 2015)
Institutional projects
Australian International School, Singapore - International school with full facilities (Completed 2004)
Supreme Education Council, Doha Qatar - 0.75 million sft. head quarters for SEC (Completed 2011)
Gems Modern Academy, Kochi, Kerala India - 3,400 Student capacity full facility International curriculum school
(Phase-1 completed 2017)
Master planning projects
Durrat Al Bahrain Marina, Bahrain - Mixed use development on 68 h.a reclaimed land site yielding 1 million sft.
saleable area, won best marina development at 2008 CNBC property awards held in Dubai (Completed 2012)
Umm Lafina Island, Abu Dhabi UAE - 55 million sft. mixed use master plan including retail, 4&5 star hotels,
marinas, schools, residential apartments and luxury villas with private golf course setting (Development on hold)
Residential apartments & villas master plan for Gaursons, Noida Delhi NCR India (Completed 2015)
Competitions & Awards National Architecture Student Association, India - Design Competition, first prize (1993)
A+D Akaar, India - Design competition, certificate of merit (1994)
Architectural design thesis, India - Sushant School of Art & Architecture (1995)
Verona Fiere', Italy - Design competition, first prize (1996)
Duxton plain international housing competition, Singapore - Design entry (2002)
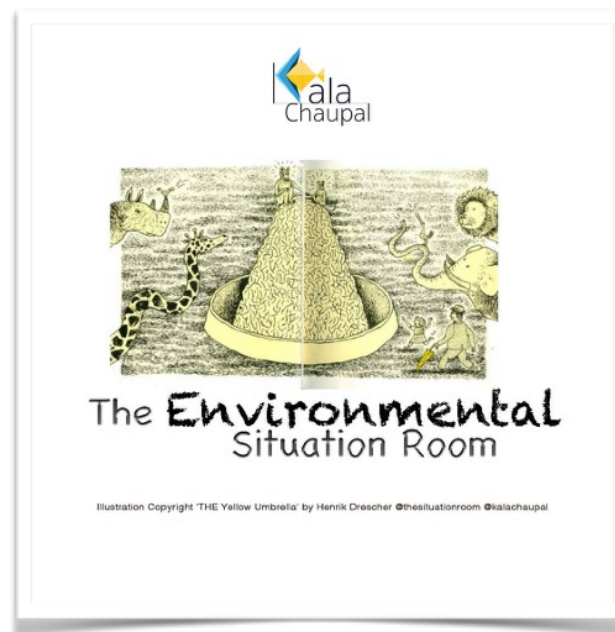*Publications &* D+A Magazine, Singapore - Jackson Lee residence at Jalan Pelangi (2003)
Certification D+A Magazine, Singapore - Australian International School (2004)
ISO 9001:2001 Training, Singapore (2002)
Leadership throughout Training, Bahrain (2007), Understanding passive fire protection, UAE (2009)
Council of Architecture - Professional registration, India (1996)

Illustration Copyright 'THE Yellow Umbrella' by Henrik Drescher @thesituationroom @kalachaupal

#theenvironmentalsituationroom@kalachaupal