An attack on India's Modern Heritage:

Demolition of the Hall of Nations, New Delhi

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Abstract

Modernity in India was born as a response to the practical need for infrastructure in the post-independence (1947) period. Locally produced concrete became the primary material for building, displaying India's self-sufficiency and construction prowess. Local and international architects used concrete by adopting the prevailing global trends of modernist architecture, modified to serve in the context of India.

However, in the present socio-political environment in India, the architecture of the national capital, New Delhi, is being rebranded and transformed by the current government, under the guise of creating a 'new modern identity'. This exercise, strengthened by legal loopholes and the lack of laws on conservation of contemporary architecture, has put the entire modern movement of India at risk. Several structures, which represented independent India's socio-cultural identity for decades, now face the imminent threat of demolition.

This paper analyses the unfortunate fate of the Hall of Nations of New Delhi, which was built in 1972 using locally produced concrete and intensive manual labour, a structural marvel of its time. It was imprudently demolished in 2017 to pave the way for a new 'world class exhibition centre', erasing the legacy of self-sufficient India by seeking global investments and international designs. A study of the events leading to the demolition reveals the alarming lack of organisation within decision making authorities, and their unwillingness to recognise the importance of modern heritage of the city.

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Glossary

The following abbreviations are used throughout the paper.

- **DUAC**: The Delhi Urban Arts Commission, was established by an Act of the Parliament in 1973 to "advise the Government of India in the matter of preserving, developing, and maintaining the aesthetic quality of urban and environmental design within Delhi" (DUAC | History, n.d.)

- **INTACH**: The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, is a non-profit organisation in India, whose aim is to sensitise citizens about the cultural legacy of India and make legal interventions to protect built heritage when necessary.

- **ITPO**: India Trade Promotion Organization, is the nodal agency of the Government of India under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, for promoting the country's external trade, headquartered in Pragati Maidan.

- **HCC**: The Heritage Conservation Committee of Delhi, was formed in 2004 under the Delhi Building Byelaws, to regulate development in areas of cultural and historical significance due to the rapid urbanisation in Delhi.

- **HoN Structures**: The abbreviation is used in this essay to describe the group of 6 demolished buildings in the Pragati Maidan Complex, consisting of The Hall of Nations, The Hall of Industries (4 buildings) and the Nehru Pavilion.

Introduction

On the morning of April 24, 2017, the citizens of Delhi woke up to a tragic loss of India's modern heritage. The Hall of Nations along with the Hall of Industries and the Nehru Pavilion had been bulldozed at the crack of dawn, just a few days after the High Court of Delhi rejected architect Raj Rewal's plea to save these iconic structures, a symbol of India's freedom and modernity. The Hall of Nations among these, became the largest open-span space frame structure in the world at the time, which was constructed using in-situ concrete, with local labour and technologies. Unsurprisingly, the news of its demolition was met with outrage within the architectural community of India as well as globally.

What was the reason behind this tragic act of destruction and negligence by governing authorities?

The answer to this question is a rather complex one. One needs to unravel the politically constructed chain of events and decision-making processes that led to the demolition of these globally celebrated structures. Furthermore, placing the Hall of Nations and the events leading to its demolition, within the larger framework of the modern movement in India can provide an insight into the fate of numerous other structures enduring a similar threat.

1. Modernism in India

1.1 Background

On the midnight of August 14th, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister of newly independent India, inspiring citizens to build a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation. In his inaugural speech, 'A tryst with destiny' he spoke about what the future holds and the responsibility of the nation to bring freedom and opportunity to the common man. Nehru voiced the immediate need for social and civic infrastructure in the country as the first step to becoming self-sufficient. "We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be." (A Tryst With Destiny, n.d.)

This called for a new wave of infrastructural growth, that would move away from the shadow of colonial architecture. To urgently build capital cities, municipal buildings and educational institutions, architects from both India and the world were called upon. Globally renowned architects such as Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn and Joseph Allen Stein played a major part in shaping the building language in the 1950s. They introduced a new language of 'modernist' structures into the Indian context: simple forms, minimal ornamentation and a bold use of concrete. Modern architecture hence became a sign of liberation from the colonial era- a new style of architecture was born, that combined technological knowledge from the west with local materials and historic building styles from India.

Inspired by the modern design styles of western architects, a new generation of Indian architects including Charles Correa, BV Doshi and Raj Rewal, embraced modernism while developing their own unique architectural language. The challenge these architects had to overcome was the integration of a 'modern' material like concrete, into the historical and cultural context of India which traditionally included heavy ornamentation. As architectural historian William J.R. Curtis (1987) argues, in the context of 20th century architecture in India,- "The best recent Indian work is so challenging because it is open to the tests of the future as well as the grandeur of the past."

These architects became pivotal in shaping modernism in India as they successfully combined the properties of concrete with vernacular materials like brick, stone and clay to develop architecture unique to individual regions of India, all greatly varying in culture and climate. The lack of materials like steel, advanced building technologies and computer software, demanded them to have a pragmatic approach to building and in devising new and innovative methods of construction using what was available- a variety of vernacular material and an abundance of manual labour. Hence the post-independence modernist structures of India became a testament to the country's development, integral to the identity of independent India.

1.2 Concrete: Modernity & material culture

The modern movement in India was born mainly due to circumstances of the time. After independence, the urgent need for infrastructural growth and expansion demanded a versatile raw material that could be produced locally, and in large quantities. Hence in 1948, the government adopted the Cement Expansion Scheme, and within the following decade, India successfully opened 22 operation plants and the expansion continued at a rapid pace (Ravi & Nallanavar, 2022). Concrete became India's strength, both figuratively and literally, giving architects an abundant and cheap access to the material for creating a bulk of the new infrastructure as envisioned by Nehru.

One of the first large-scale modernist projects commissioned by Nehru was the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh, designed in 1952 by Le Corbusier. This project marked the start to India's modern identity and was described by Nehru as symbolic of India's freedom that was, "unfettered by the traditions of the past, a symbol of the nation's faith in the future." (Prakash, 2002). Corbusier combined monumental exposed concrete shear walls, with *brise soleil* [1] in the facades as sun breakers, adapting to the hot climate of Chandigarh.

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[1] It is a type of shading element or facade system that reduces heat gain within a building by deflecting sunlight

Figure 1. Le Corbusier with Jawaharlal Nehru (World Architecture Community, 2019)

Figure 2. Capitol Complex Chandigarh- Palace of Assembly (Ghinitoiu, 2023)

This was followed by a wave of modernist construction in India such as Corbusier's Mill Owners' Association Building in Ahmedabad, Stein's India International Centre in New Delhi, Correa's Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad, Rewal's French Embassy staff quarters in New Delhi, Kahn's IIM Ahmedabad to name a few. Modernity, in this narrative, and the materiality of concrete, went hand in hand to become a tool in the decolonisation of the architectural identity of India. Concrete, a new industrial material supplemented with a pre-industrial labour force, highlighted two strengths of newly independent India, its abundant manual labour and the economy and politics of self-determination (Stierli, 2021).

Architects used exposed concrete as the main design language, showcasing the strength and simplicity of the material. Concrete, unlike other building materials, possess a unique characteristic, its fluidity allows it to be shaped by circumstances and by virtue of its casting technique becomes a vessel carrying traces of the construction process. The formwork inevitably imprints onto the surface of the concrete and becomes a part of the character of the surface, showcasing the quality of material used, skill of the labour and the method of casting.

The term '*béton brut*', coined by Le Corbusier emerged under similar circumstances due to the poor workmanship in the construction of the Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, leading to the harsh texture of the wooden formwork to imprint onto the building's surface as seen in Figure 3 (Legault, 2006). This inadvertent texture on the concrete lent a strong aesthetic quality to the

otherwise plain surface, leading to the birth of the 'brutalist style' in exposed concrete. Architects in America started treating concrete surfaces after casting by chiselling or pressure washing to create the 'raw concrete' texture (Stierli, 2021). In the Indian context however, in the Capitol Complex, a course texture was neither intentional nor an accident, but a representation of the available means at the time, that of unskilled labour and inferior quality of material. In the case of the Hall of Nations, the drawbacks of cheap formwork were embraced, and special patterns were built into the formwork to highlight the texture that is inevitably imprinted into the concrete. The Hall of Nations further used concrete in a unique way to create *jaali* [2] like patterns in its form for light and ventilation, which strongly differs from the typical characteristics and uses of concrete that of a solid and bulky appearance.

Such variations within the same material which arises through economic conditions, disparity in technical knowledge and the climatic context, helps us understand how history and culture are strongly embedded in the materiality of concrete, and present the circumstances under which it was used (Stierli, 2021).

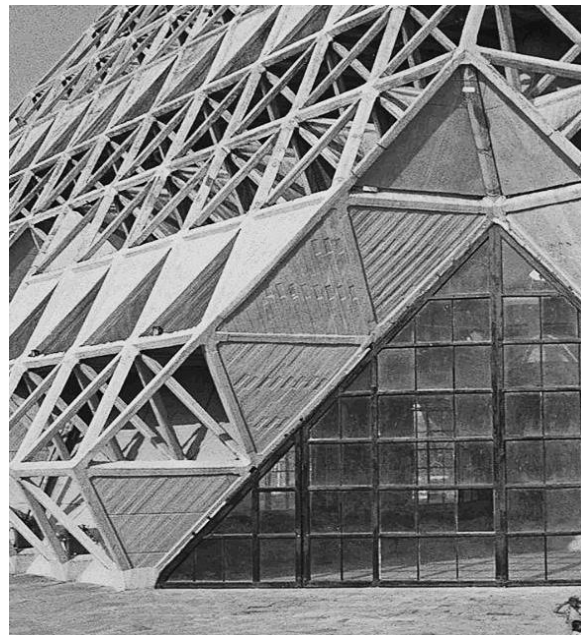*Figure 3.* Béton brut in Unité d'Habitation (Legault, 2006)
Figure 4. Textures imprinted by the formwork on the Hall of Nations (Rewal, n.d.)

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[2] Perforated screen often used as a partition, traditionally built in India using intricate patterns

2. The Hall of Nations and the Hall of Industries

The HoN Structures were a part of the Pragati Maidan Coplex in New Delhi, a large exhibition ground, under the authority of the India Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO), Government of India. This exhibition complex hosts a large number of national and international exhibitions throughout the year.
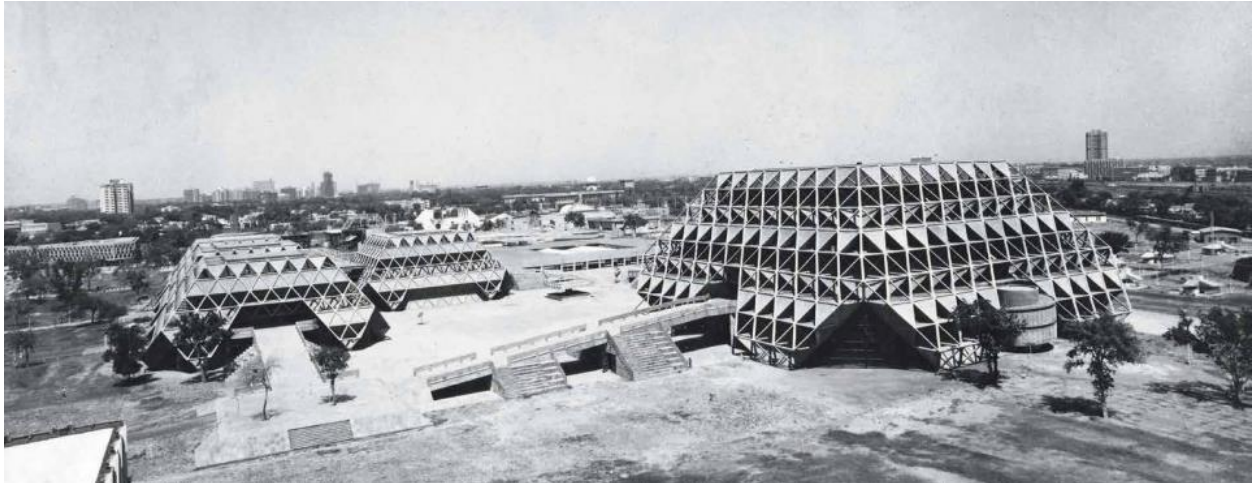

Figure 5. Hall of Nations and Halls of Industries, New Delhi, 1972 (Mahendra Raj Archives, 2020)

The Hall of Nations and the Hall of Industries were commissioned in 1972 to mark the 25th year of independence of the country and to host the International Trade Fair- Asia 72 in New Delhi. Designed by architect Raj Rewal and structural engineer Mahendra Raj, it was built on a severe budget constraint, using a labour-intensive method of construction due to lack of advanced construction equipment. The structures demanded large column-free exhibition spaces, resulting in the decision by the architect and engineer to use a space frame structure for its construction. 6700 sqm in area, this posed a great challenge, because a space frame of that size was typically built in steel anywhere else in the world. However, at the time, India did not produce such specialised steel sections and the technical knowledge for the same was lacking. Due to severe budget constraints, it was not possible to import the steel, and hence it was decided to use a labour intensive in-situ reinforced concrete for the construction.

Raj Rewal reminisces of how the site had become a second home for the labourers and their families, a group of almost a thousand people who worked tirelessly for 22 months, to get the building ready in time for the exhibition in 1972 (Saraswat, 2017). The Hall of Nation's novel

method of construction raised several eyebrows within the architecture profession globally because something like this had never been done before. In spite of doubts and critique, this ambitious project turned a new page for the Indian construction industry, achieving great success and admiration globally.

A tetrahedron-like geometry was used to make the space frame, which extended from the roof to the walls of the hall. This geometry required tireless detailing of several unique nodes, each connecting up to 6 intersecting beams. The structure itself acted as the walls of the hall, and were cleverly used to diffuse the harsh sunlight, acting as the *brise soleil,* without the need for an additional outer facade.

Figure 6, 7. Halls of Nations and Industries under construction (Mahatta, 2020).
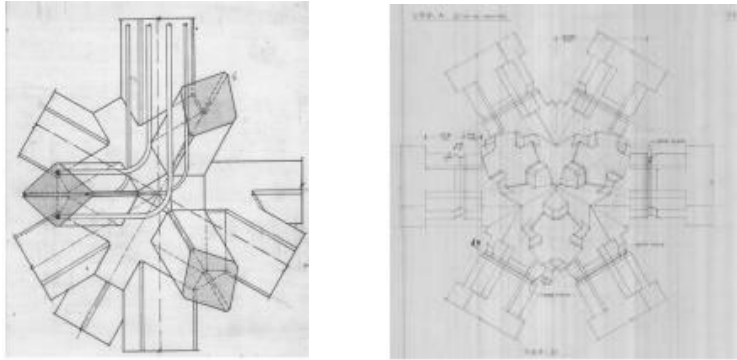

Figure 8, 9. Node detail of tetrahedron geometry of Hall of Nations (Mahendra Raj Archives, n.d.)

The construction of the Hall of Nations is an important example of the meaning and material culture of concrete, and how it was used within the context of India's political project of decolonization. It is a prime example of how the available means and resources at the time were used to create a structural marvel, a testament to the self-reliance and self-sufficiency of India. The project was seen as a novel approach to design where scarcity led to innovation. French architect and curator at the Centre Pompidou, Aurélien Lemonier, in his interview for the film *"Indian Modernity"*, claims the project to be a pragmatic approach to design, beyond the then dominant ideologies of construction techniques (Manu Rewal, 2017). After its completion, 90 ft in height and spanning 144 ft, the Hall of Nations became the largest concrete space frame structure in the world at the time, placing India on the global map of modernity.

The Hall of Nations became a link to Nehru's modernist ambition while carrying the weight of India's socio-economic reality in which an abundance of labour, however poor in technical skills, achieved a reality that nobody but India believed in.

In homage to the structure, commemorative stamps were issued in 1987 and again in 1992. It was featured in popular Bollywood films like Trishul and Tere Naam, and became an iconic location in the city. For 45 years, the Hall of Nations welcomed several thousand visitors annually until its tragic demolition in 2017.

Figure 10, 11. Commemorative stamps of the Hall of Nations (Mintage World, n.d.)

2.1 Causes leading to the demolition

Note. The following timeline of events is created by studying minutes of meetings of the concerned organisations, court transcripts from High Court of Delhi and appeal letters to the government of India. A detailed timeline can be found in the Appendix of this paper.

The plans for the redevelopment of the Pragati Maidan Complex can be found on public record as early as 2007, when a 'Proposal in respect of optimum planning of Pragati Maidan' was submitted to various organisations within the government for statutory approvals. The ITPO, in its later proposals, stated the need for an 'Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Complex' for carrying out trade promotion activities on the approximate 123.5 acres of land at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi consisting of state of the art convention centres, exhibition halls, and hotels. To give way to this new proposal, the ITPO in 2015, called for the demolition of existing buildings within the Pragati Maidan complex consisting of the HoN Structures.

How do we classify 'Heritage'?

Heritage in architecture is generally concerned with the preservation, and renewal of buildings and sites with historic, cultural, or technological value (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). However, in a city like Delhi, with its millennium long history and architecture, classifying heritage in a holistic way poses great difficulties. In India, and specifically in New Delhi, heritage sites and monuments are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 and the Delhi Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 2004. The preservation and conservation of pre-independence architecture in Delhi has received a lot of momentum, however, as the name of these laws indicate, they concentrate solely on ancient and archaeological sites of the city including forts, palaces, tombs, mainly built before the 1900s.

While the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) maintains heritage buildings which are at least 100 years old, the modern, post-independence buildings in Delhi, as discussed in the previous chapters, hold great cultural significance that also need protection. In 2013, INTACH, concerning this matter, prepared a list of 62 buildings of Delhi to be listed as 'modern heritage' and receive proper recognition and funds for preservation. The DUAC further recognised the

need to identify buildings of 'immense architectural value/character in the post-independence (1947) period'. This task was handed to the HCC, and they were advised to investigate INTACH's recommendations. This list included the HoN structures. Architect AG Krishna Menon, convenor of the INTACH Delhi Chapter, iterated how the heritage value of buildings cannot be judged using their age, or to what period in history they belong, but rather by their value in the built environment, just as DOCOMOMO[3] has brought to light internationally. He further iterates how 'classics of the past' can easily coexist with 'world class facilities' hinting at the proposed demolition of the Hall of Nations (Menon, 2013). However, the HCC did not resolve this matter, and no decisions were made regarding the submitted list or regarding the laws for classifying contemporary heritage in Delhi.

So, when in 2015, the ITPO declared its decision to demolish the HoN Structures, there was still no certainty regarding their heritage status. Several institutions and individuals within the architecture community filed lawsuits and Public Interest Litigations (PIL) with the Delhi High Court to prevent the demolition of these buildings. The HCC was now required to come up with a decision under the ruling of the court. Under pressure from the court, the committee declared that only buildings that are older than 60 years may be considered as heritage, and hence the Hall of Nations, which was 44 years old at that time, could not be classified as heritage. The reason for this as found in their meeting transcript, is based on the definition of 'heritage' from the online Oxford English Dictionary. Defined as "valued objects and qualities such as historic buildings and cultural traditions that have been passed down from previous generations", HCC states that merely considering 2 generations (where 1 generation is considered as 30 years) would lead to 60 years for granting 'heritage' status.

It is clear from this argument that the HCC had failed to carry out its responsibilities and declared a law based on nothing but a feeble definition of the word 'heritage' and 'generation'. It is shocking to see an institution established by the government, who is responsible for the fate of several modernist contemporary structures, negated the history, culture and circumstances under which these structures were built, by shirking away from their responsibility to establish relevant criteria for heritage classification. Their baseless argument for the arbitrary number of 60 years, was then passed as one of the prime criteria for defining heritage in Delhi.

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[3] DOCOMOMO International is a non-profit organisation dedicated to documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement.

An estimate of 13 cases were filed against the demolition, most lost on technicalities regarding the heritage status the structures. Since the HCC refused to give the Hall of Nations a 'heritage' status, the court dismissed all cases and pleas for the protection of the buildings. Soon after, the ITPO began its demolition process, even as appeals were pending in court and the HoN structures were razed to the ground.

Figure 12, 13. Hall of Nations demolished (News18, 2017)

The reasons for demolition that the ITPO highlights in its proposals are concerned with the dilapidated state of the buildings, lack of air-conditioning and the requirement for a larger area. The new proposal sought global investments of 2500 crore rupees (USD 300 million), insulting the legacy under which the Hall of Nations was built, that of a self-sufficient India. Architect Raj Rewal lent his assistance and expertise to the ITPO, arguing that the HoN Structures can easily be revamped and refurbished for less than 100 crores rupees (USD 12 million), a fraction of the new proposal, and a masterplan can be made to accommodate the existing structures (Sarasvat, 2017).

It is evident that the ITPO had no inclination to save these structures, despite the plethora of solutions presented. Mustansir Dalvi, a professor of architecture, notes how the inevitable future of the Pragati Maidan redevelopment will mean vast edifices of global anonymity- "It is ironic that a structure built to celebrate Indian expertise will be replaced by an architectural complex for which global bids will be sought." (Dalvi, 2017). Photographer Ram Rehman further notes the irony of the current government, who while promoting the 'Make in India'[4] campaign globally, decided to tear down the very building that put India on the global map on her road to self-sufficiency (The Wire, 2017).

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[4] Make in India is an initiative by the Government of India to encourage companies to develop, manufacture and assemble products locally in India and incentivize dedicated investments into the manufacturing and construction sector

3. Present Scenario

3.1 The New Proposal

The redevelopment plan by the ITPO called for an 'international and world class' Exhibition Cum Convention Centre (IECC) consisting of up to 100,000 sqm of exhibition spaces accompanied by amphitheatres, skywalks, hotels and expansive basement parking, within the Pragati Maidan complex (India Trade Promotion Organization, n.d.). For the development of this proposal, ITPO invited firms to participate in an international design competition, in which Hong-Kong based firm AEDAS, with ARCOP as the local consultant in Delhi were selected amongst 18 other design firms (Bhuyan, 2018). The approved proposal consisted of more than 325,000 sqm of built-up area spread across the 130-acre complex of the Pragati maidan exhibition grounds. The focus of the design is a circular convention centre, one of the largest in India with a capacity of 13,500 visitors. The new 'tech-savvy' design involves mechanised walls, audio-visual theatres, envisaged by the architects as a link between the past and the future (Bhuyan, 2018). The entire proposal is based on the premise that 'bigger is better', boasting the 18m high ceilings, vast parking lots and air-conditioned exhibition spaces.
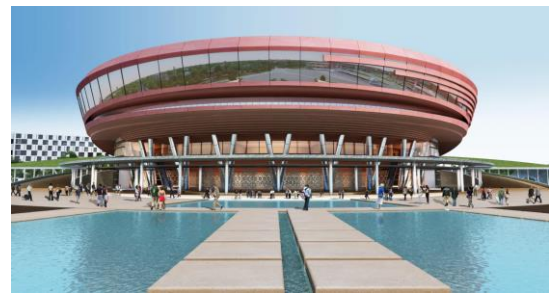

Figure 14,15,16. Digital renders of new proposal for Pragati Maidan (ACORP, 2018)

The new design team's aim to 'draw on public memory and history of the space', sounds almost like a prod at the irony of the situation, where a locally made structure, using natural light and ventilation is being replaced with an international design using vast stretches of glass and artificial air-conditioning. Simón Núñez de Arenas Fraile, India head of AEDAS comments on what makes their design 'quintessentially Indian'. "We wanted to see how India has been built in recent times, and then take it to the next level", "We have also used natural sandstone and *jaalis*, which are traditional ways of cooling" (Bhuyan, 2018). Even as the architects talk about 'traditional ways of cooling' the need for air-conditioning is one of the main criteria highlighted and advertised by ITPO in the new proposal. One cannot fail to mention the context and history that was wiped away to give way to this design. Does pasting on sandstone as an artificial facade on a glass edifice warrant a building to be local to the context of Delhi?

One can argue the need for larger spaces as the old halls may not have been able to accommodate the growth of Delhi as a coveted destination for international exhibitions. However, the question that arises here is whether or not this grand proposal could be built around the existing HoN Structures, which could be repaired and maintained for smaller exhibitions or even preserved as a monument and converted into a museum, as a symbol of Delhi's past. As architect Raj Rewal iterated, it would have been easy to add features like air conditioning to tackle the increasing summer temperatures in the HoN Structures (ArchitectureLive, 2016). Structural engineer Mahendra Raj further points out that the building, which is built on piles, could have easily accommodated the underground connecting tunnel that the new proposal contains in order to redirect traffic (Mehndiratta, 2019).

It is appalling that in today's climate, where resources are increasingly scarce, the proposal aims to build new infrastructure claiming to be a 'green design', while demolishing 6 existing structurally sound buildings. While we discuss the sustainability of materials in recent times, the immense carbon emissions of concrete and the need to build green, it is important to note that existing buildings from the past are the most important resource that a country possess. Re-purposing and re-using existing architecture has become the strength of the future, by reducing the need to build one can minimizing resource consumption.

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What emerges from this discussion is simply the unwillingness of authorities to consider solutions that involved the preservation of the HoN Structures. It is apparent that the ample space in the Pragati Maidan grounds was more than adequate to accommodate larger buildings surrounding the existing structures. The Hall of Nations, which marked the design identity of the Pragati Maidan for almost half a decade, was carelessly replaced by structures possessing no cultural identity under the guise of the need for a 'World class exhibition centre'.

The redevelopment proposal, which began in 2018, after a 2-yr delay due to the CoronaVirus Pandemic, was scheduled to be completed by September 2022, remains under construction till date. One of the exhibition halls that is completed is now open to exhibitions, while pedestrians tread through the rubble and dust of the construction site.

Figure 17,18. Present day images of the Pragati Maidan Complex (Sen, 2023)

3.2 Reform in laws

The demolition of the HoN Structures had a significantly contrasting impact on different communities within the population. On one hand there was the architecture community of India and globally, including international institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Pompidou Centre, Paris, where feelings shifted rapidly from anger, shock, disbelief and finally to grief. On the other hand, were the government institutions, and most of the common citizens of the city with an unawareness regarding the situation or complete apathy towards it. Since this event did not cause public outrage, it made it easier for the authorities to get away with the demolition. Raj Rewal in an interview a few months after the demolitions noted the importance of getting the citizens involved in the movement. He believes that only a mass movement can garner the attention and impact such decisions by governing bodies. (Sarasvat, 2017).

The demolition of the Pennsylvania station is a key example in how public involvement can create reforms within the system. The station, designed in 1910 by Charles F McKim, was one of the grandest and largest construction of its time with 150 ft tall roman columns and ornately decorated grand entryways. However, in 1961 the decision was made to demolish this iconic structure and replace it with a sports arena and hotel building due to lack of funds for upkeep by the administration of the station. This resulted in several protests, and a group of architects formed the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY), to lead the movement for saving the station (Plosky, 2000). However, by the time the residents of the area got involved it was too late, and the demolition process had begun. The uproar from the citizens however resulted in reforms within the system and the Landmarks preservation commission was established in 1965, to designate and save historic buildings and neighbourhoods of the city (Plosky, 2000). The impact of the outrage did not end here. The following year, the National Historic Preservation Act was established to ensure other landmarks in the country do not face the same fate.

This is a key example in how public outrage and a sense of loss was channelled to constructive use and resulted in legal changes within the system. Raj Rewal notes how New Delhi's modernist structures need and deserve a similar respect and protection by the law. "If we're not careful, the whole modern movement can be wiped out" he says with respect to the higher Floor

Area Ratios (FAR) that are permitted now, which is an incentive for builders to demolish old structures for a more lucrative construction (Sarasvat, 2017).

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The HCC till date has not defined the laws on the classification of heritage in the city, and even into the 21st century, Delhi's modernist structures had received no recognition or protection. The arbitrary number of 60 years has put most of India's post-independence architecture at risk. Eminent buildings of architects such as BV Doshi, Charles Corea, Achhyut Kanvide and Joseph A. Stein were all built in this period and define India's language of self-reliance that the city strived to achieve. Do all these buildings then face the same fate as the HoN Structures?

The heritage status of a building is defined by several organisations globally such as UNESCO and ICOMOS[5] using a complex matrix of criteria, including its testimony on the cultural scenario, innovation of human creation and technological advancements among several others (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). In its charter, INTACH also describes the criteria for classifications based on "Distinctive physical characteristics of design, construction or form, representing the work of a master craftsperson, have the potential to yield important information on socio-economic history" (Dalvi, 2017). The Hall of Nations fulfilled most, if not all of these criteria.

Over the last decade, it is shocking to see more and more icons of India's modern movement at risk. Le Corbusier's Mill Owners association, Charles Correa's Kala Academy in Goa and most recently the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), built in 1962 by Louis Kahn in Ahmedabad is facing the imminent threat of demolition. Protests, petitions and a global outcry, while able to deter the authorities of their decision for demolition for around 2 years, is now being reconsidered. William JR Curtis describes this scheme as a 'smash and grab capitalism' under the current political climate. "India's boom in economy is leaving its modern heritage to crumble in favour of generic glass towers and shopping malls" (Curtis, 2014). Authorities are unwilling to acknowledge the value of such built heritage, let alone preserve them. Competitions inviting architects for redevelopment plans are most often assigned to the cheapest tender, resulting in low quality and generic designs as mass of the new buildings.

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[5] International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a global non-government organisation, working for the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places.

Conclusion and Discussion

Modernist architecture in India, promoted by Jawaharlal Nehru after the country's independence in 1947, successfully worked towards decolonisation of the architectural identity of the country. It proved to the world that India could grow and thrive as an independent nation after centuries of oppression under the colonial rule. Concrete as a building material played a major role in helping achieve this aim by facilitating the creation of unique structures which would be unattainable without this construction technology. Investigating how concrete was appropriated and used in India helps to better understand the local context: the circumstances of time, struggles of a developing nation and strength of the Indian workforce.

However, in the last decade, the current government's policy of redevelopment with a 'break and make' approach, coupled with rapid urbanisation of New Delhi, puts at risk the entire modern movement in the country. This redevelopment policy for 'New India', under the guise of restoring traditions, is a mere rebranding exercise by the political powers of the country. One of the largest of such projects is the 2 billion USD Central Vista redevelopment project in the Lutyen's Delhi area to renovate and rebuild the British-era buildings and create a so-called 'modern Indian cultural identity'. The rampant demolition of structures under this redevelopment policy raises a serious alarm.

Where do we draw the line of what to preserve and what to erase?

As seen in the case of The Hall of Nations in New Delhi, under the pretence of the need for modern facilities, the buildings that were built as a part of India's self-sufficient identity, were razed to the ground in an underhanded and imprudent move by the ITPO. Sadly, while most of the population remained unbothered, the niche group of individuals and institutions fighting to save this iconic structure, were left helpless by the apathy and incompetence of the authorities in power, and the tireless bureaucracy stretching over several years. While all authorities involved had blame to take, the HCC played a key role in deciding the fate of these structures. The committee had not taken any action for almost 4 years after INTACH submitted its list for potential contemporary heritage buildings in the city, including the HoN Structures. Pressured by the lawsuits and the high court of Delhi, the committee's hasty and arbitrary decision regarding the age of 'heritage' structures to be capped at 60 years or higher, was passed as a law, based

on which all future appeals were lost. The law, which holds true till date, has put at risk most of India's modern architecture and contemporary heritage, which has received no protection or upkeep from the government.

It is ironic and disquieting how the policy of rebranding and de-colonisation in the present political climate of India is resulting in the loss of the very era of architecture that initiated the movement 76 years ago. Several years have passed since the demolition of the HoN structures and many more buildings await the same fate as the government wipes out the modern movement in India. The lack of laws defining modern heritage has made the judicial system and in-turn the architecture profession helpless and defenceless against the ruling elite.

With extremely limited resources in the present scenario, pre-existing built infrastructure is the strength of the future. A strong criterion for redevelopment must be defined, where the decision to demolish a structurally sound construction cannot be left solely to the owners of the land. There is a dire need for a framework, defining and preserving our modern heritage, building onto the classification criteria curated by international organisations such as DOCOMO and ICOMOS, for the Indian sub context. It is also in the hands of the citizens of Delhi and India to recognise and protect their built heritage and be aware of the circumstances under which post-independence Indian architecture was built. Only with mass consciousness one can strive to make a difference.

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Figure 17,18. Sen, Amrita. (2023, February 6). *Present day images of the Pragati Maidan Complex*

Appendix

This appendix provides a timeline of the chain of events that occurred which led to the demolition of the Hall of Nations, Hall of Industries and the Nehru Pavilion. This is created by analysing the minutes of the meetings (MOM) of various institutions involved along with letters from independent individuals and institutions, appealing to the court & the government heads.

2007 April

1161st Meeting of the Delhi Urban Arts Commission held on Friday the 13th April 2007. New Delhi: Delhi Urban Arts Commission, 2007
Delhi Urban Arts Commission (2007)

The idea for the redevelopment of Pragati Maidan was a long time coming. The ITPO began deliberating a concept for redevelopment as early as 2007, when the proposal was submitted to DUAC which was reviewed by them and instructed to be routed through the concerned governing bodies of the city for statutory approvals. It is unclear at this point whether the demolition of the existing structures was a part of this proposal.

2013 May

Letter sent on 14th May 2013 by A. G. Krishna Menon, Convenor, Intach Delhi Chapter to Chairman, Heritage Conservation Committee
Menon (2013)

In this letter to the HCC, architect, professor, and conservation consultant AGK Menon, brings to light to the committee that their previous focus lay mainly on historic architecture in Delhi which covered structures broadly up till the period of 1947. However, the heritage value of buildings cannot be judged on age alone and restricted to particular periods of time, hence he proposes to the HCC to extend their list and identify iconic structures, the 'modern identity' of Delhi, built after 1947.

For this purpose, INTACH submits a tentative list of post-independence buildings for purview of the HCC to classify as 'heritage'. This list consists of 62 buildings in Delhi, including the Hall of Nations, Hall of Industries, and the Nehru Pavilion.

It is important to note, that in this letter, Menon points out that some of these modern buildings are threatened to be demolished and replaced by proposed 'world class facilities'. Even though, within the scope of this paper, data could not be found which explicitly states what this 'world class facility' is a reference to, but it can be assumed that by this time, the ITPO had already made the decision to demolish the existing structures, and Menon is referring to the new redevelopment plan of Pragati maidan. He further suggests that such classics of the past can easily co-exist with said world class facilities with adequate frameworks for preservation.

2013 September

Minutes of the 35th Meeting Of The Heritage Conservation Committee held on Tuesday, September 10, 2013. No.2(1)/2004-HCC. New Delhi: Heritage Conservation Committee/विरासत संरक्षण समिति - (HCC), 2013
Heritage Conservation Committee (2013)

A note is received by the HCC from DUAC, who, along with INTACH observed that the preservation and conservation of pre-independence architecture in Delhi had received a lot of momentum, however there was a need to identify buildings of " immense architectural value/character of the contemporary period" in the post independence (1947) period.
The HCC endorses this idea and decides to take up this matter with local bodies and INTACH.

2015 April

Letter sent on 08th April 2015 by Raj Rewal, Mahendra Raj to The Hon'ble Prime Minister, India
Rewal (2015)

Architect Raj Rewal and structural engineer Mahendra Raj appeal to the chair of the Prime Minister of India to save the Hall of Nations, describing its importance as a mark of India's 25th year of independence. They further make recommendations to convert the halls into museums if their original purpose is no longer being served.

2016 May

Minutes of 49th meeting of the Heritage Conservation Committee held on May 2, 2016.
No.2(1)/2004-HCC. New Delhi: Heritage Conservation Committee/विरासत संरक्षण समिति - (HCC),
2016.
Heritage Conservation Committee (2016)

Item 1: Inclusion of modern post-Independence iconic buildings in heritage list – criteria thereof.

HCC suggests that this matter was discussed with other state authorities in India with relevant information also collected from regulations of Auckland, Ontario & Ireland. It is decided that a more in-depth examination of the matter is required and a sub-committee is constituted to review the same.

Item 2: Representations against demolition of Hall of Nation etc., Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

HCC claims that its regulations only apply to a particular list of heritage sites precincts, and the buildings in question do not figure in their list. Hence the HCC cannot examine these representations which do not fall within its purview as per the mandate of the Committee.

2016 November

Demolition of ITPO's Hall of Nations - Questions in the Parliament regarding Integrated
Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC) at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. Ministry of Commerce
& Industry (Department of Commerce), 2016.
Ministry of Commerce & Industry (2016)

This question in the parliament was raised to officiate the ITPOs "world class, state-of-the art Integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre". This is to be done by demolishing the existing structures on the site. ITPO confirms the multiple requests received from national and international organisations to save the buildings and states that after due consideration these buildings are not considered as heritage by DUAC or ASI and hence cannot be saved.

2016 February

W.P.(C) 1146/2016 & CM. No.5060/2016 THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS & ORS versus UNION OF INDIA & ORS. High Court of Delhi, 2016.
Nath and High Court of Delhi (2016)

The Indian Institute of Architects filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court, to stop the ITPO proposal to demolish the Hall of Nations & Industries and the Nehru Pavilion, where they highlight the importance of the structures.

It is found that the HCC has made no decision on the heritage status of the buildings, and they do not fall under any 'heritage' list. This case is dismissed on these grounds.

2017 February

Minutes of 53rd meeting of the Heritage Conservation Committee held on February 2, 2017.
No.2(1)/2004-HCC. New Delhi: Heritage Conservation Committee/विरासत संरक्षण समिति - (HCC), 2017.
(Heritage Conservation Committee, 2017)

In this meeting, the recommendations of the sub-committee, who agreed on INTACH's list of 62 modern heritage buildings, are scrutinised. It is stated that considering INTACH's list is procedurally incorrect, and the criteria formed for classifying modern heritage 'appears to be a cut-and-paste job'. The subcommittee also observes that buildings older than 15 years may be included in any future listing. This criterion is labelled as 'completely arbitrary' by HCC, and they go on to define 'heritage' from the Oxford English dictionary. In this meeting they decided 60 years (2 generations x 30 yrs) as the minimum time period for buildings to be classified as heritage.

2017 March

Excerpt from 1419th Meeting of the Delhi Urban Arts Commission held on Wednesday 1st March 2017. New Delhi: Delhi Urban Arts Commission, 2017
(Delhi Urban Arts Commission, 2017)

ITPO's final proposal for developing an integrated Exhibition-cum-Convention Complex is submitted to the DUAC. The complex is to be developed after the demolition of existing buildings in the Pragati Maidan complex consisting of The Hall of Nations & Hall of industries (4 building) and the Nehru pavilion. The proposal is accepted and given the go ahead by the DUAC.

2017 April

Several court cases and lawsuits are filed by Raj Rewal, INTACH and the Council of Architecture of India. All these cases are dismissed since HCC's decision to not consider buildings that are less than 60 years in age as heritage, do not give any legal right to the petitioners. In the court hearing of, Raj Rewal versus Union of India & Ors. High Court of Delhi, 2017, the court delivered its judgement and refuses Rewal's plea on 20 April 2017. Rewal filed an appeal regarding this decision. Even as this appeal was awaiting a hearing, the ITPO, on 24th april 2017, started bulldozing the structures at Pragati maidan, in the middle of the night hidden from the public eye to avoid any further protest.