

Corbusier contribution to Chandigarh

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In news-The Supreme Court recently directed the Centre and the Chandigarh administration to take a number of steps to preserve Le Corbusier's Chandigarh.

Le Corbusier's vision for Chandigarh-

- Corbusier's Chandigarh wasn't built in a day. Conceived at the time of Partition, it came from a need to create a new city for Punjab that would hold the potent promise of creativity and potential.
- Its scale and site were decided at the national level, not at the local administrative level.
- In 1949, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru brought in American architect-planner Albert Mayer and Polish architect Matthew Nowicki to plan a modern city.
- Mayer and Nowicki envisioned superblocks with green spaces, while being sensitive to the natural gradient of the land and scope for drainage and water.
- However, after Nowicki's death in a plane crash in 1950, **Swiss-French architect-planner Le Corbusier was commissioned for the project.**
- While Corbusier stayed close to their early plans, **he turned their curving road network into a rectangular grid,** with straight lines that would privilege the automobile.
- However, he was keen on keeping to the **"Garden City" idea,** where high-rise buildings were unacceptable in commercial areas.
- He employed a grid street pattern, European-style boulevards and raw concrete buildings – a distillation of ideas formed across his lifetime.
- **Corbusier's plan would have a heart and a head, where**

the “head” would contain the Capital Complex and the “heart” the commercial area.

- The “hands” would host recreational spaces and academic institutions. His rectangular grid encouraged self-sufficient units, dividing the city into different sectors.
- **This urban idea of a city would fulfill four functions – living, working, movement and recreation**, or “care for the body and spirit”.
- It was an idea presented at the 1933 Athens Charter, formulated by Congress International d’Architecture Modern (CIAM), an organisation that spearheaded the Modern Movement in the world.

The Indians who contributed to the making of Chandigarh-

- The then-chief engineer of Punjab, Mr PL Varma (Parmeshwari Lal Varma), is one the most important figures in the history of the making of Chandigarh.
- He not only served as a direct associate to Le Corbusier during the making of Chandigarh’s iconic structures but also was instrumental, along with Mr. P.N. Thapar, the chief administrator of the Chandigarh project, in the selection of the team appointed for this monumental task of creating a new capital under the patronage of the then prime minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru.
- The team of engineers working with him on the designs of Le Corbusier went on to be instrumental in the making of the image of a post-Independence Indian architecture genre.
- One of such pioneers was Mr. Mahendra Raj Mehndiratta who was responsible for the structural design of Corbusier’s Secretariat Building in the Capitol Complex.
- M.N. Sharma, the first Indian chief architect of Chandigarh, had worked directly under Corbusier and Jeanerette.

About Le Corbusier-

- He was an influential architect and city planner whose designs combined functionalism with bold sculptural expressionism.
- He belonged to the first generation of the so-called International school of architecture, which promoted such characteristics as clean geometric forms and open efficient spaces.
- Le Corbusier was also a recognized writer and artist.
- Some of Le Corbusier's most well-known projects were the buildings Villa Savoye, Colline Notre Dame du Haut, and the Unité d'Habitation at Marseille, France; the unbuilt prototype for mass housing, Maison Dom-ino; the master plan for Chandigarh, India; and the book *Toward a New Architecture* (1923) wherein he famously declared "a house is a machine for living in."