



नेहरू स्मारक संग्रहालय एवं पुस्तकालय
Nehru Memorial Museum & Library



[Home](#) [News](#) 'The Missing Modernist Histories of Otto Koenigsberger's Architecture in India, 1939–1951', 9th December, 2014.

News

'The Missing Modernist Histories of Otto Koenigsberger's Architecture in India, 1939–1951', 9th December, 2014.

'The Missing Modernist Histories of Otto Koenigsberger's Architecture in India, 1939–1951'

by

Dr. Vandana Baweja,
Ambedkar University,
Delhi.

Abstract:

Otto H. Koenigsberger (1908–99) a German émigré architect, arrived in India in 1939 in princely Mysore in South India—a state under indirect British rule then governed by Maharajah Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1884–1940). Koenigsberger worked as an architect for the Mysore Government's Public Works Department (PWD). During his tenure in Mysore, from 1939 to 1948, Koenigsberger designed hundreds of buildings for princely Mysore. In 1948 Koenigsberger moved to Delhi and became the Federal Director of Housing (1948–1951) for the ministry of health in Nehru's government. His work for Nehru involved both planning and architecture projects to resettle partition refugees. To solve the massive housing demand posed by partition refugees, Koenigsberger proposed a pre-fabricated housing module for resettling the refugees. The housing units did not succeed, and Koenigsberger subsequently resigned from his position as the Federal Director of Housing and moved to London, where he later founded the department of tropical architecture (1954–1971) at the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture. Koenigsberger headed the department of tropical architecture from 1957 until it closed in 1971. The fact that Koenigsberger designed several hundred buildings in India is largely unknown in the architectural histories of South Asia. The speaker in this talk examines the reasons for the erasure of Koenigsberger's architectural work from South Asian architectural histories. The speaker proposes that unearthing Koenigsberger's architectural work in princely Mysore and its impact on the tropical architecture in London can offer new ways of looking at the global circulation of Modernism. Koenigsberger's career challenges the Euro-centric modernist canon that perpetuates a diffusionist narrative of the spread of Modernism.

Speaker:

Dr. Vandana Baweja is an assistant professor in the School of Architecture and the Sustainability Program at the University of Florida, Gainesville. She got her PhD in history and theory of architecture at the University of Michigan in 2008. She was trained as architect in New Delhi and has a masters in history and theory of architecture at the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London. Dr. Baweja's doctoral research focused on the history of Tropical Architecture along the networks of the British Empire. She has presented her work in several conferences nationally and internationally. She was awarded the Oberlin-Michigan Exchange Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2008.