A “Global” History of South Asia (3000 BCE – 2000 CE)

**Lecture 1**: Historiographic Challenges in South Asian Architectural History

**Quiz**:

**What is *itihasa*?**

The word for “history” in Sanskrit is itihasa, which has traditionally meant “that what happened” or “so indeed it was.”

**What does bibechana mean?**

The word *bibechana* derives from the Sanskrit root verb bich, literally meaning “to separate, judge” (for instance, separate fact from fiction and judge the veracity of the narrative). *Bibechana* implies “investigation,” “judgement,” or “ascertainment after consideration.”

**How many architectural schools were there in India at the time of Indian Partition?**

In 1947, the year of the Indian Partition, there were 3 schools of architecture in India and one in (West) Pakistan. None in East Pakistan.

**The founding of which colonial institutions helped document buildings of the past in India?**

The establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1870 and the Asiatic Society in 1784.

**Who is James Fergusson?**

Born in Scotland, James Fergusson (1808-86) was the first author to write comprehensively on Indian architecture. He was a self-taught “architectural historian.” He spent ten years as an indigo planter in India before embarking upon a second career as an architectural historian. His illustrated *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* was first published in 1876 and set a colonial framework for studying the architecture of the Subcontinent.

**Who is Percy Brown?**

Percy Brown (1872–1955) was a British scholar, artist, art critic, historian and archaeologist. He authored *Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Period)* and *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, both in 1942.

**How were the books of Fergusson and Brown significant?**

They created the canon of architectural history in colonial India.

**Who was Banister Fletcher?**

Banister Flight Fletcher (1866 - 1953) was an English architect and architectural historian. His father, also an architect and architectural historian, was too called Banister Fletcher. The father-son team co-wrote the first edition of A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method (1894). This book became a standard reference work. It was revised and updated throughout the 20th century. The book was praised for offering a robustly illustrated history of “world architecture” and for its “antiquarian” values. In many ways, the book became a “veritable student's bible” across architectural schools in the Subcontinent, at least until the 1980s. Even today many schools use this book as the main architectural history textbook.

**What did Fletcher’s “Tree of Architecture” seek to demonstrate?**

Based on a Hegelian model of teleology (*telos* means end), Fletcher’s “Tree of Architecture” sought to demonstrate the evolution of architecture toward a final perfect condition.

**What is the key criticism of Fletcher’s “Tree of Architecture”?**

According to many, it is essentially a reflection of Western notion of a world divided into “civilized” and “barbarian” societies. It shows Western architecture as “historical style” and non-Western architecture as “non-historical style.”

**What is *Vastu Purusha Mandala*?**

The *Vastu Purusha Mandala* is an indispensable part of *vastu shastra* and constitutes the mathematical and diagrammatic basis for generating design. It is the metaphysical plan of a building that supposedly incorporates the course of the heavenly bodies and supernatural forces.

**Who was Rabindranath Tagore?**

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) was a Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter who introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of early 20th-century India. In 1913 he became the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

**When did the British divide India into two countries?**

1947