

# Architectural Voices of India



# Architectural Voices of India:

*A Blend of Contemporary and Traditional Ethos*

By

Apurva Bose Dutta

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Cover Theme Description (conceptualised by Apurva Bose Dutta)

The metaphorical use of birds and their nests on the cover depicts architects and man-made architecture and buildings. Birds are one of the most skilled species at building dwellings. The most natural architects on the earth, their nests are borne out of nature using different materials, such as mud, twigs, leaves, faeces, volcanic sand, etc. These dwellings are created to adapt to the surroundings in the most effective and efficient manner. Even by creating and living in different types of abodes, these diverse species of birds (adults as well as fledglings) communicate within themselves, live in harmony, and seamlessly blend into the changing environment.



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## FOREWORD

### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARCHITECTURAL CONVERSATION

DR VIKRAMĀDITYA PRAKĀSH

PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE

From twelve thousand miles, and almost half a lifetime, away from India, it is fascinating for me to try to bring into focus the picture of architectural practice in India that this book has collaged. As a collection of interviews with architects, this book belongs to that rare species known in academic circles as “oral history”—a faithful recording of a conversation, meant to document the living voice of a person that, one hopes, conveys something of an impression of his or her lived life. By talking to architects about their lives and loves, families and philosophies, this book offers an insight into something of an alternative universe, i.e. a world of words and ideas, a world whose relationship with the actual built work remains indirect; the work is probably expected to illustrate the word, but that relationship is perforce tangential and evocative rather than illustrative.

The illustrations show that a rich and diverse body of work is being produced by this representative body of contemporary Indian architects. The text of this book suggests that in India today, the profession is not only alive and well, but is also working hard to step up to the requirements of the times, cognisant of its own historical lineage, mindful of its responsibility to the present and desirous of a better, brighter future.

But for me, the fascinating thing about this book is not that it offers architectural voices that should be measured against their built work; rather, the voices assembled in this book together weave a narrative that is so much larger, so much more subtle, and uncertain, than the rigid certainties of the work that they purport to explain. Yes, this book has a strong biographical quality, as if the lives and loves of architects are somehow explanatory of their work. To a certain extent, they are, but they tell other stories too.

Like what? Like the fact that the profession feels it must execute its responsibility to its clients, whether it is the paying client, or the public, or the nation or the environment; that, in spite of the mounting commercialization and uncertainties of our times, it remains committed to the search for a certain idealism in the act of practice; that Sri Lanka and Japan seem to be important reference points, not so much Singapore and Dubai; that after Le Corbusier and Kahn, Correa and Doshi still seem to retain the mantle of masters; and that spirituality and architecture as a “way of living”—and not just the marketing job of making things “world-class”—still appears to be one of the core values of an architectural life.

So, that bodes well and is evidenced by the continuing strength of this profession, which is now seventy-odd years old, and the seeds of which were firmly planted, and early on by the aspirations of the Nehruvian nation-state. That the profession still dines off the legacy of its Nehruvian seedling is evident from the fact that with its strengths, the old anxieties of the Nehruvian age are also still at play. The profession continues to be anxious about its relationship with a mythical “West”, it still feels like it is in a mode of “catching up” (with sustainability being the latest standard set by the West), and even when it disavows this, it tries to discover the roots of its sense of self in—what is from my perspective—the trap of false oppositions, such as tradition versus modernity, history versus the future, the spiritual versus the material, and so on.

It is, of course, not easy to or obvious how one could step out of and beyond these foundational concepts of modern Indian architecture. It requires a DNA-level transformation in thinking, a change in the terms and tones of conversation, which is bound to be a slow and evolutionary process. Often such changes are difficult to discern; they become evident only after they are normalized.

Changes in conversation require a culture of questioning and critique that is traditionally the responsibility of academics and publishers. It is usually in the schools of architecture and in the print media that the conversation of architecture, as in this book, takes place. But, if the architects interviewed in this book are to be believed, architectural education in India today is woefully unprepared to execute its basic responsibility to provide professional training, far less to foster the culture of architectural critique and criticism. Amazingly, one of the architects interviewed in this book has started his own six-week internship programme. I presume this is a nuts and bolts practice education programme. That’s great. But, I wonder, who is shouldering the responsibility of the conversation?

In the last two decades, I have observed the spectacular ballooning of schools of architecture in India. When I went to architecture school in India, there were a handful of schools and NASA was an intimate affair. Today, with the much greater range and variety, the possibilities of a rich conversation on the architecture of India are endless. After all, the frontiers of architecture today, in terms of sheer numbers if not criticality, are in places like China and India. Over the last few years, I have been invited to several conferences and lectures in schools of architecture in India. Most of these discussions are closely practice-oriented, generally focusing on big issues such as sustainability and urbanization.

As far as I know, there are few, if any, conferences on the discourse of Indian architecture. What are the changing concepts with which we are describing, and might describe, architecture in India today? What are the ways in which we could relearn from our history and culture? What are the intellectual openings that might lead the Indian architect of the future to as yet unknown futures? What are the new terms of debate that can be fielded to help us not only sidestep the usual western framing of issues, but also “talk back” to the West, and help the global architectural community rethink the core issue of architecture?

Specifically, from my own narrow academic perspective as an architectural historian and theorist, it seems to me that we need to seed a series of new undergraduate and postgraduate architectural history-theory programmes in India, which currently has none. I know that there are some good courses on preservation, but somehow, architectural history-theory has never taken off as a discipline in India. Even a new basic text on the history of architecture of India has not been written for decades.

Amartya Sen has argued that one of the things that defines India is its critical tradition—what he terms the ethos of the “argumentative Indian”. I tend to agree. Architectural history and theory are not a particularly “American” or western thing. Brahmins were writing and advocating the *Vaastu Shastras* over a millennium ago, long before any western Renaissance architect put pen to paper. In 1834, Ram Raz was one of first architectural theorists of the modern world to write an Enlightenment text on architecture. Ananda Coomaraswamy, with Stella Kramrisch, sought to redefine the meaning of architectural pleasure itself, not just for Indian architecture, but for architecture in general.

Admitting the biases of my own profession, I offer the following observation. A strong culture of architectural history-theory—i.e. the culture of thinking about and discussing what architecture is and isn’t, which is to say what it was, is and could be—is necessary for a strong and vibrant architectural profession. History-theory is the datum, the benchmark, that architectural practice refers to and measures itself against, even if in opposition or difference. This is certainly the case in Europe and Japan, and to a lesser extent, in the United States, where I live and teach.

For a vibrant profession, Indian architectural history and theory must move beyond an “explanatory” role for architectural practice. It must become the framework for “argument”. Apurva Bose Dutta’s interviews, in the pages that follow, offer a potential opening.

*Seattle, 2017*

## PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

Architecture builds and frames the environment, influences the way the society develops, and caters to the need for better living. Working as an agent of change, it gives rise to a discourse that endeavours to enhance our lifestyles. Thus, it is a profession that is cherished, needed and respected. As individuals interact with built-up spaces, whether as designers or as those who inhabit these spaces, they are impacted by architecture, the impact being all-pervasive.

Architecture as a profession has undergone major transformation in India. Contemporary Indian architecture has been commended for its accomplishments at the two extremes of the spectrum of requirements—luxury living and affordable accommodation. The spirit of Indian culture, the biggest strength of Indian architecture, has been innovatively adapted to suit modern needs by a fair number of architects in the country.

### **Indian Architecture Today**

Indian architecture and design have been grappling with several meta-issues—finding an identity, finding solutions to the dearth of land to house the increasing population, combating concerns related to global warming and syncing with technological advancements. Retaining our traditions and shunning the trap of copying western buildings, and overcoming the problems of depleting resources, shortage of manpower and poor infrastructure (in most parts of the country) are some of the other challenges.

Indian architecture is also facing the dilemma of non-contextual architecture. It is burdened by the lack of integrated urban planning and by the propensity to use glass and steel facades. It is in the process of finding suitable definitions for “sustainable” and “green architecture”, and is preoccupied with debates over outsourcing work, the invasion of the market by foreign architects, and the diminishing control of architects over buildings. The fast pace of commercialisation of the profession which has been eroding its purity, issues with construction, a need to create developments which focus on functions and durability and don’t end up looking the same, are other important factors to be considered in Indian architecture today.

Other aspects that need consideration are education, and licensing and other laws related to the profession. There must be an emphasis on quality education, which may be achieved by setting basic standards and evaluation parameters for it. Encouraging the study of the sub-disciplines of architecture (landscape/architectural journalism/ lighting/ restoration/ architectural photography) and publishing research-oriented and good quality architectural journals could also be helpful. The procedure related to the granting of licence must be reviewed to protect the profession from declining standards. Effective regulatory bodies must be set up to monitor the profession, ensure minimum standards of design and work towards the creation of functionally designed cities. Building laws must be made simpler to remove roadblocks and discourage corrupt practices.

### **The Catalysts**

To understand any field in its entirety, it is essential to study the catalysts responsible for its genesis and growth. Thus, to understand architecture, it becomes vital to recognize the creators, the interpreters and the translators of this field, that is, the architects. Living in the midst of changing urban landscapes and the growth of assorted building forms, one needs to pause and reflect on these "architects" who make all this happen, and to understand their theories, philosophies, and visions to appreciate their designs and experience the true essence of architecture.

My foray into architectural journalism 12 years ago was imbued with a certain extent of uncertainty due to the novelty of the field back then. If the five years I spent in pursuit of my architectural degree gave me a basic understanding of the various aspects of the profession, my interactions with the architecture and building industry during my journey as an architectural journalist, taught me the practical side of architecture, and familiarized me with its role and its functions. Over the years, I started admiring the missionaries (architects) who manage to give a concrete shape to someone else's dreams and weave their own dreams into them.

I believe that the motivation to write this book existed in my subconscious even before I started interviewing India's distinguished architects on a regular basis for an international magazine, nine years ago. As the international correspondent of the publication, I intended to conduct comprehensive interviews that would probe on subjects that demanded attention. Each of these interviews left an indelible impact on me and led me to discover many facets of the field that I had been unaware of. It would have been unfair to have let these experiences stay with me. Every experience was collecting at the tips of my fingers, waiting to get disseminated.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAJJA	Alumni Association of Sir JJ College of Architecture
AMC	Amdavad Municipal Corporation
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ASID	American Society of Interior Designers
BIM	Building Information Modelling
BIS	Bureau of Indian Standards
CAD	Computer-Aided Design
CDSA	Centre for Development Studies and Activities
CEPT	Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology
CII	Confederation of Indian Industry
COA	Council of Architecture
CPWD	Central Public Works Department
CSIO	Central Scientific Instruments Organization
CSMVS	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DUAC	Delhi Urban Arts Commission
FAR	Floor Area Ratio
FSI	Floor Space Index
GIFT	Gujarat International Finance Tec-City
GRIHA	Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment
HECAR	Heritage Education Conservation Architecture and Restoration
HUDCO	Housing and Urban Development Corporation
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IGBC	Indian Green Building Council
IIA	Indian Institute of Architects
IIID	Indian Institute of Interior Designers
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
IIMA	Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad
IIMB	Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
INTACH	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
IPANA	Indian People's Association in North America
ISOLA	Indian Society of Landscape Architects
ITES	Information Technology Enabled Service
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NASA	National Association of Students of Architecture
NDRAC	New Delhi Redevelopment Advisory Committee
NIPGR	National Institute of Plant Genome Research
NBC	National Building Code
NCR	National Capital Region
PDEC	Passive Draught Evaporative Cooling
PGIMER	Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SPA	School of Planning and Architecture
TERI	The Energy and Resource Institute
TRC	Torrent Research Centre
UCP Trophy	Unknown Craftspersons' Trophy
UP	Uttar Pradesh
USGBC	US Green Building Council
UTTIPEC	The Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning and Engineering) Centre
WAF	World Architecture Festival



Chapter One

# In Pursuit of Nirvana

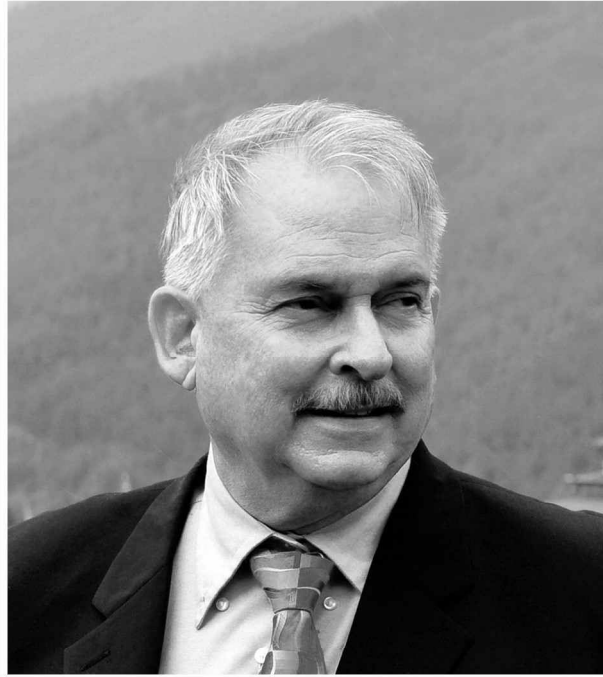
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**Christopher Charles Benninger**

*“I see architecture as a long journey of self-realization. It is through creation and through the realization of my works that I reach a state of transcendental ecstasy; maybe a brush with nirvana.”*



## PROFILE



Prof **Christopher Charles Benninger** enjoys an enviable position in the world of architecture today. This can be attributed to his intellectual approach to design, as evident in his architectural theories and efficient solutions for contemporary urban issues. While his designs speak of a strong commitment to values and principles rooted in tradition and ideologies of sustainability, a core feature of his work are his attempts to associate himself with projects that warrant a detailed study, analysis and exploration of architecture. Born in the US, Benninger, an alumnus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard, settled in India in 1971.

Benninger is convincing, inspirational, spiritual and honest, be it in the matter of his buildings, literary pieces, lectures or opinions on architecture. His narratives, whether those in the form of spaces that unfold in his designs or those that you discover as you read and reread his writings, are engaging and possess the power to make one ponder, unlearn and relearn! He has given the country some serious lessons in urban development through his principles of “intelligent urbanism” and efforts to reclaim cities. His projects straddle capital cities and new towns, and educational campuses, corporate headquarters, housing estates and complexes, hotels resorts, and hospitals, besides his individual product pieces and art works. His thoughts on architecture carry equal weight as his projects and have found a prominent place in architectural journals. The same may be said about the many insightful books authored by him. It is the candid and mesmerizing quality of each of his writings and designs that remains with the reader/viewer.

Benninger's journey in architecture has been impressive. One for building institutions, he set up the School of Urban Planning at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University (CEPT University) in Ahmedabad and the Centre for Development Studies and Activities (CDSA) in Pune. Much later, in 1999, he along with Ramprasad Akkisetti, established Christopher Charles Benninger Architects (CCBA). Though this was viewed as a retirement plan, in the past two decades, CCBA has become a much sought-after “design house” in the country, with studios in Pune and Thimphu, and is well respected in design circles globally. The design of the India House, CCBA’s head office in Pune, is iconic in itself and has acquired international acclaim.

way. On my adventure from London to Mumbai over-land in 1971, I crossed Europe, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. I came down the Khyber Pass into Pakistan. India and Pakistan are united in terms of the people seeking a simple, good life. The people of Iran and Afghanistan are warm and loving, and make the best of friends. Nothing except bad governance separates us all.

When I travel, I am more interested in meeting people; all kinds of people. The way people build and the way they use spaces tells me a lot about their culture. Architecture is an elemental thread that unites all people everywhere. Our common human needs are a binding factor. It is only the interests of a few powerful entities that create hostility. We have to begin with the starting point that there is only one “architecture”, and that there is only one human race. Fortunately, most of us are simple people with simple ideas and needs. I learned from my travels to like simple buildings, satisfying simple needs.



Academic Building,  
Samundra Institute of Maritime Studies, Mumbai



Centre for Development Studies and Activities, Pune

### *Architecture in India*

**ABD:** “We cannot have smart cities created by dumb administrators”<sup>2</sup>—you have made a powerful statement on Indian cities. Multiple efforts are being made to discuss Indian cities, and several platforms and media are being utilized to do this. However, there have been no positive outcomes, which implies that something is going tremendously wrong. What do you think is wrong—our analysis of the physical environment or our efforts to find apt solutions and implement them?

**CCB:** At the most fundamental level, urban development, as it is known internationally, is unknown in India. Urban development must be for the benefit of the people and by the people.

Political leaders see cities as milch cows from which huge funds can be skimmed off from contractors of large infrastructure projects and developers. Corruption flows from the top down and from the bottom up. At the bottom, urban planning offices are more involved in taking bribes than imagining beautiful cities. Every rule is cleverly written to leave room for loopholes and discretionary powers, and an official can change the meaning of a rule designed for public safety or public hygiene.

Unless the problem of corruption is discussed and strategies to erase it are evolved, there is no real meaning in all our laments about the inability to create “smart cities”. The only statutory plans we have are Development Plans, which have no vision, and no provisions for the improvement of urban lifestyles and comfort. Even metropolitan transport stations, which could generate planned, pedestrian growth, are out-of-scale, and are pedestrian nightmares. Bengaluru is an excellent example of how out of scale and over-designed the stations are. Where are the new pedestrian plazas, new cycle lanes, quaint sidewalk cafes and arcades for pedestrians? I see these emerging all over China, Europe and America, but not in India.

We have no plan to house our people. Seventy-five per cent of the people of the Mumbai metropolitan region cannot afford the equated monthly instalments required to buy any type of house on the market. Is this smart?

Our seminars and conferences are dominated by people who have never studied urban planning, urban design or the sociology of cities. These meetings are filled with management jargon, data on the future, new IT<sup>3</sup> interventions, and

<sup>2</sup> Panel discussion, Z-Axis Conference, Goa, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Information Technology

## LET'S TALK

### *Of Inspirations, Ideologies and Determination*

**ABD: Please familiarize us with your education and professional background. What inspired you to take up architecture and specialize in landscape architecture?**

**Ravindra Bhan (RB):** My interest in nature is deep-rooted because of my upbringing in the picturesque surroundings of Kashmir. My school days were spent in the midst of immense natural beauty, which led me to appreciate the various facets of nature and played a role in influencing and guiding my career. My parents, who had an abiding interest in the arts, encouraged me to pursue painting, photography and music as my hobbies. I became interested in Indian classical music and started learning a few musical instruments. In fact, later while I was pursuing my studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, USA, I collaborated with my friend Sumit Ghosh, who played the sitar. We would often perform at a local cafe and earn some pocket money.

During my college days in Srinagar, I devoted a considerable amount of time to painting and photography, participating in various competitions and exhibitions. One of my painting and photographic exhibition was inaugurated in Srinagar by Percy Brown, the well-known painter and architectural historian. I also contributed photographs regularly to leading publications of the country. After finishing college, I decided to pursue photography as a career and joined a three-year course on cinematography in Bengaluru. However, after studying for only a year, I was disillusioned with the method of teaching and decided to give up the course.

It took me a while to decide my future course of action; I finally decided to join SPA Delhi in 1952. The faculty was headed by Elizabeth Ghuman, a British lady. She was a sensitive architect and was instrumental in giving my thoughts a direction. She encouraged and helped me to develop an interest in landscape and a sensitivity towards the inherent natural order.

As a student, I was fascinated with the architectural developments in the European countries. I thought working abroad and pursuing my studies there would be a good learning experience. I left my architecture studies midway and joined the office of AP Kanvinde for whose work I had great admiration. After working there for about a year, I was introduced to Shivnath Prasad, who showed interest in my academic work. At that time Shivnath Prasad was heading the Department of Town and Country Planning Organization, which was set up to work on the Delhi master plan, which was being formulated for the first time post-Independence, with the help of experts from the Ford Foundation. I received an offer to join the team, and I readily accepted. The working environment was exciting and new ideas were encouraged. I got involved in many interesting assignments and later worked on the first Yamuna riverfront development plan. I stayed with the organization for two years.

In 1958, I left for England and joined Architects Co-Partnership in London. The firm had been set up by seven young talented architects who had graduated together from the Architectural Association School, London. I worked with them for seven years while pursuing my architectural studies part-time. A casual meeting with Reima Pietila, the famous architect from Finland, through a mutual friend in London had a great influence on my career. On his invitation, I shifted to Finland to join his office and stayed with him. This was to be the greatest experience of my life. Pietila was one of the finest human beings I have met and a great architect to work with. Working with him gave me a new insight into the profession of design and architecture. His non-conventional methods, design ideas and ways of developing design were unconventional. Among other things, I worked closely with him on the design of the Kaleva church in Tampere.

My stay in Finland was extremely rewarding. The discussions and frequent interactions with friends of Reima and his wife, Ralli, and many renowned architects, painters, industrial designers and textile designers were a great experience. I left Finland after a year-and-a-half and joined Minoru Yamasaki's office at Michigan, USA. During that time I worked on the World Trade Centre project in New York.

Through all those years, somewhere at the back of my mind was the desire to complete my formal education. Eventually, I did so at Washington University, St Louis Missouri, USA. My prolonged interaction with a visiting faculty from Japan, Shuko Monakata, a world-renowned woodcutter, and my experience of teaching graphic design to undergraduates were very helpful and immensely rewarding.

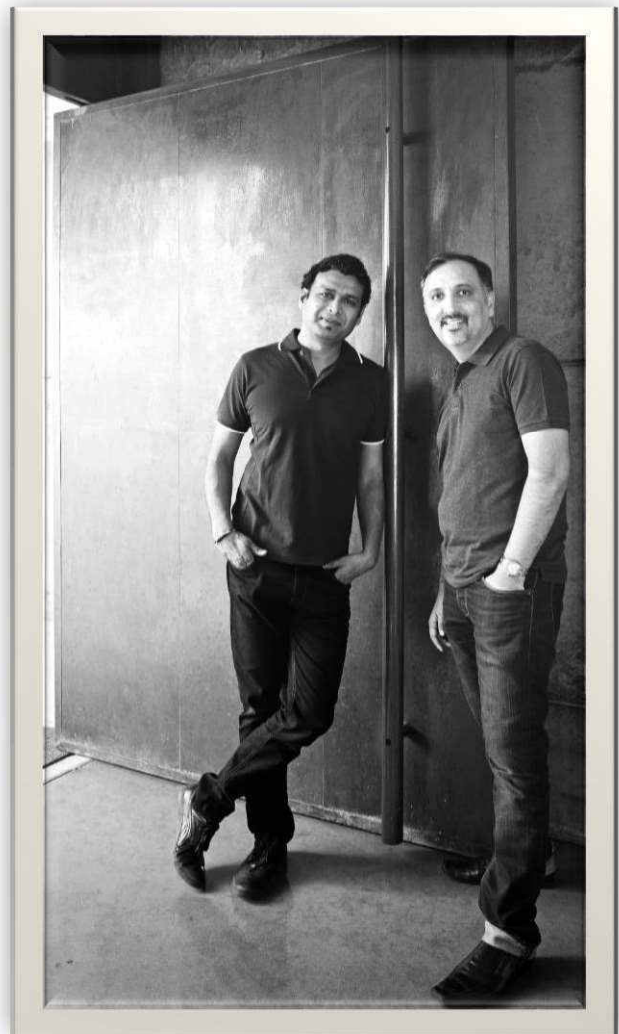
After graduation, I worked briefly for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in New York. Later I met Ian McHarg in New York who helped me to pursue my postgraduate studies in landscape at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. I joined his office and worked with him as a senior designer for more than seven years and participated in the teaching programmes at the university.

## THE SUCCESSFUL TRIO

I have had a very rewarding 18-year association with the partner of Khosla Associates, Amaresh Anand. Amaresh joined as an architect three years after I had established the firm, and became an associate very soon. Five years ago, he became a partner and now he has become the principal. Amaresh has been my sounding board for the past 18 years, and we have managed to define our roles in the organization quite well. We share a similar mindset, a passion for design and a thirst to innovate. We have a hands-on approach to work, and we enjoy looking into every detail of our projects. There is also a great friendship that has developed over the years, and we spend time together outside the workspace. Apart from design, we talk about our families and our lives.

We have also had an exciting association with my wife, Tania, and her graphic design firm (tsk Design) for our interior projects. Tania and I met while we were students in our formative years in the States and have watched each other grow as designers over the years. Off and on, we have worked on hospitality projects together, culminating in the design of our own home and our new office space. She is still my worst critic!

*Sandeep Khosla*



Sandeep with Amaresh

## THE PROJECT THAT REDEFINED ARCHITECTURE FOR ME

### Lupin Research Park, Pune



The Lupin Research Park in Pune was the first opportunity afforded to me to create a project of that scale and sensibility. It also represented an entirely different genre of work for the practice and me. It was a distillation of my thoughts and ideas thus far.

The act of research and discovery is essentially an intuitive function. This complex, therefore, explored those elements that, to my mind, foster and inspire intuitive thought, which is the core of the creative process.

Nature has, therefore, become the nucleus both at the macro and micro levels and serves as a backdrop for two almost paradoxical elements—eastern philosophy and western technology. The inspiration for the complex is the timeless *mandala*,<sup>1</sup> with the administration complex representing the “head” (at the highest point of the hill) and the main research park flowing south to north, wrapped around a central courtyard. From the simple “earth” wall that vanishes into the hill, the gushing spout of water that heralds the entrance, the tilted aluminium cube floating in the water and silhouetted against the sky, the play of light and shade in the myriad pergola-covered streets and courts, the sculptured vault of the cafeteria sitting on the tranquil *kund*<sup>2</sup> to the ageless amphitheatre set into the hillock, the complex is intended to provide a multitude of spaces that both inspire a scientist and serve as a meeting point for groups to interact and jointly explore and discover.

To conclude, I have attempted to bring together two parallel streams of thought—that of the scientist who measures that which exists, and that of the artist whose realm is the immeasurable.

*Kamal S Malik*

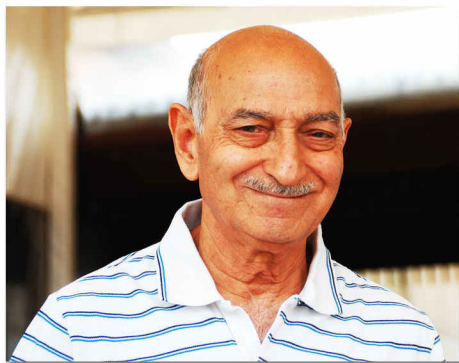
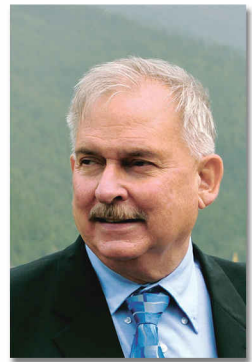
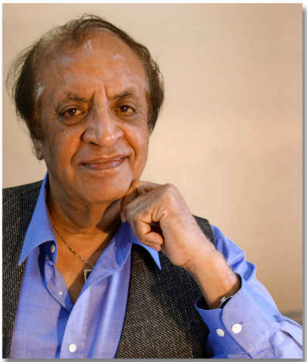
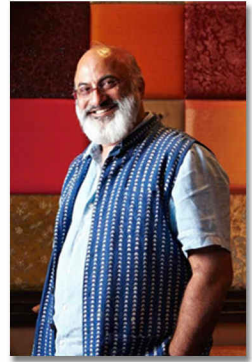
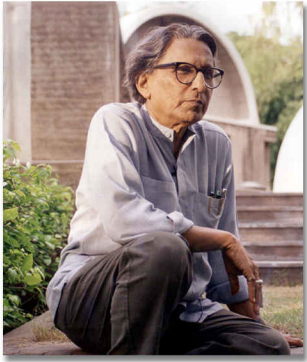
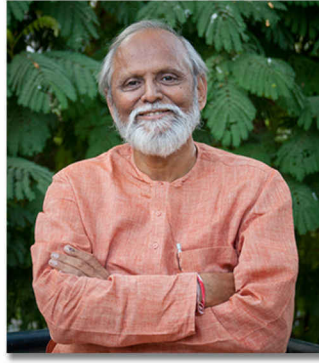
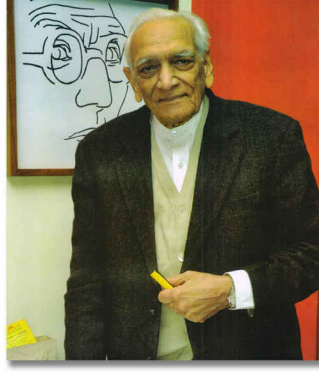
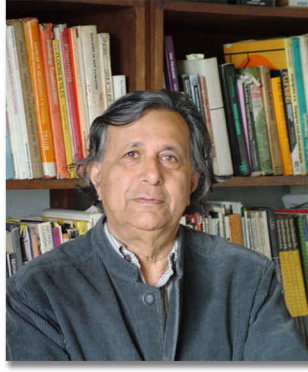
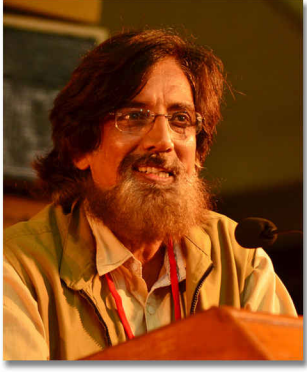


(Top) A central courtyard forms the hub of the complex.  
(Left) The terracotta colour imparts a vernacular language to the complex.

<sup>1</sup> A spiritual symbol signifying the universe, used primarily in Hinduism and Buddhism

<sup>2</sup> A reservoir used for collecting rainwater for drinking purposes





G L I M P S E S  
O F  
P R O J E C T S

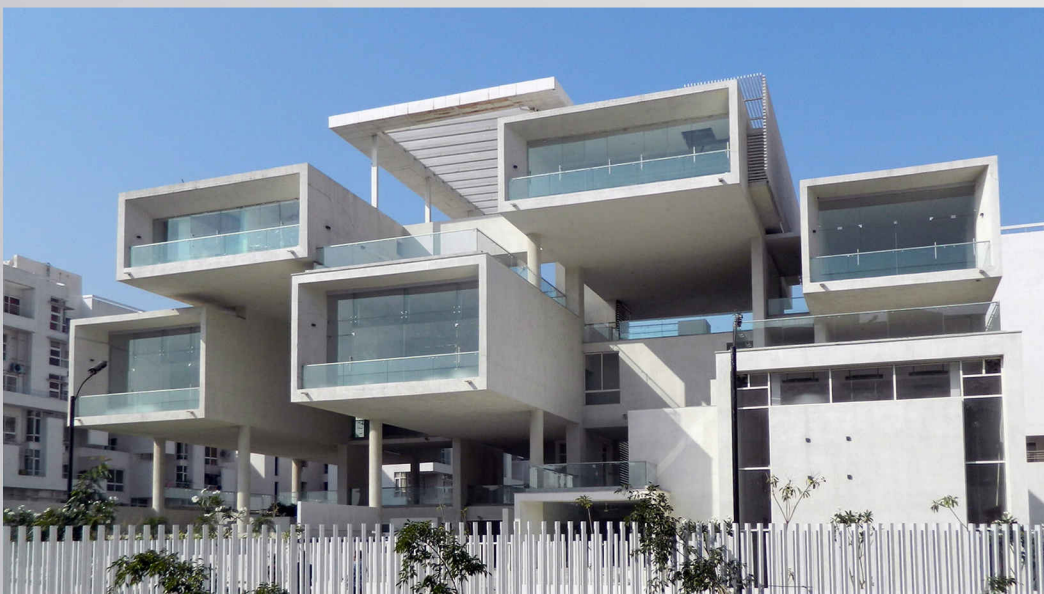
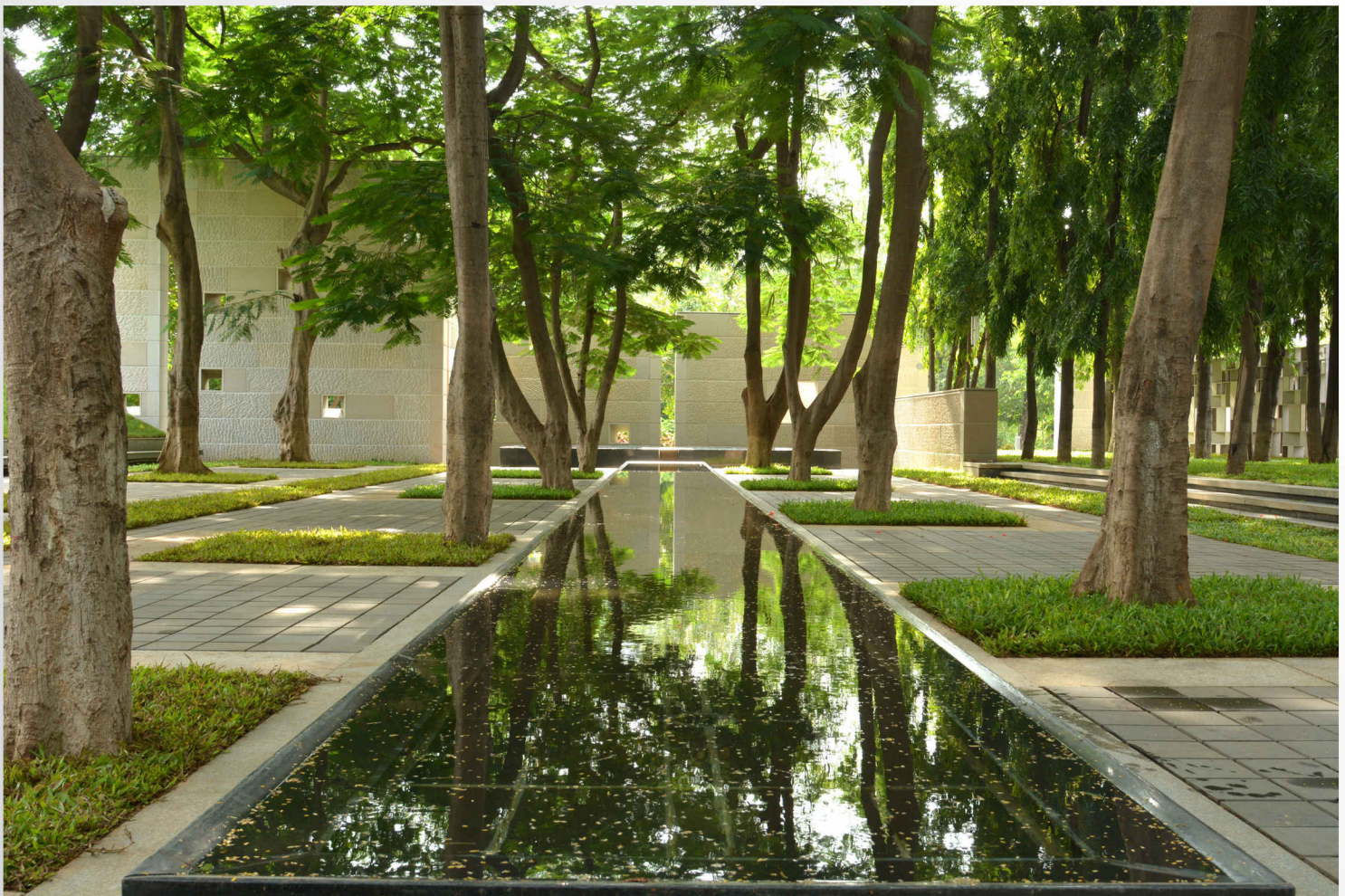


# Glimpses of projects by *Hafeez Contractor*



(Top) Infosys – BPO and ECC Block, Pune; (Centre) A rendering of the township of Navi Mumbai; (Above Left) Tata Hospital, Mumbai; (Above Right) A rendered view of the corporate office of ONGC in Dehradun





(Top) Dr Anji Reddy Memorial, Hyderabad;  
(Centre Left) EOBU BLOCK, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru;  
(Centre Right) Residence in Hyderabad;  
(Left) Rohan Mithila Club House, Pune

Pictures:  
Courtesy **Mindspace**





Anticlockwise, starting from Top:

Layout of the Golden Palms Resort and Health Spa, Bengaluru;

Rendered view of a villa in Delhi (ongoing project);

Corporate Interiors for Jones Lang LaSalle Meghraj (JLLM), Mumbai;

Rendered view of The Bhakti Park- A high end residential complex in Mumbai (ongoing project)

Pictures and Drawings: Courtesy  
**M/s Prem Nath and Associates**



# Glimpses of projects by *Raj Rewal*



(Top) Front View, Coal India Limited Office Complex, Kolkata;  
(Above Left) Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Headquarter (DMRC), New Delhi;  
(Above Right) State Trading Corporation, New Delhi  
(Courtesy for all the above: Architectural Research Cell, Raj Rewal Associates)



To be honest, today there is a severe shortage of water, electricity, public transportation and other basic infrastructure, and healthcare, drainage and solid waste management facilities. It makes us think, “Where are we actually heading?” Fatehpur Sikri, we believe, was vacated due to shortage of water. Gurugram seems to be going the same way. We are just building glass buildings, which increases the ingress of heat and guzzles excessive energy. There is a fire burning just behind us and we don't seem to take cognisance of it. These questions are also raised by many sensitive architects, thinkers, environmentalists, etc., whom we meet during our travels.

Sadly, the pursuit of double-digit economic growth and a linear economy has to be blamed for this. The trend of sustainability and a circular economy has to start somewhere. TERI and the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) need to make course corrections since architects, engineers and other consultants follow their standards. The Council of Architecture (COA) also needs to incorporate these course corrections in the educational curriculum that it recommends. The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) must encourage such sustainable buildings, and we should start educating laymen to break the hype of “green” buildings. Laymen need to see the light of the day and demand more functional buildings, and not merely aesthetical ones. Dialogues should be started at the corporate as well as government levels. Unfortunately, we are being sold images, and we seem to believe them.

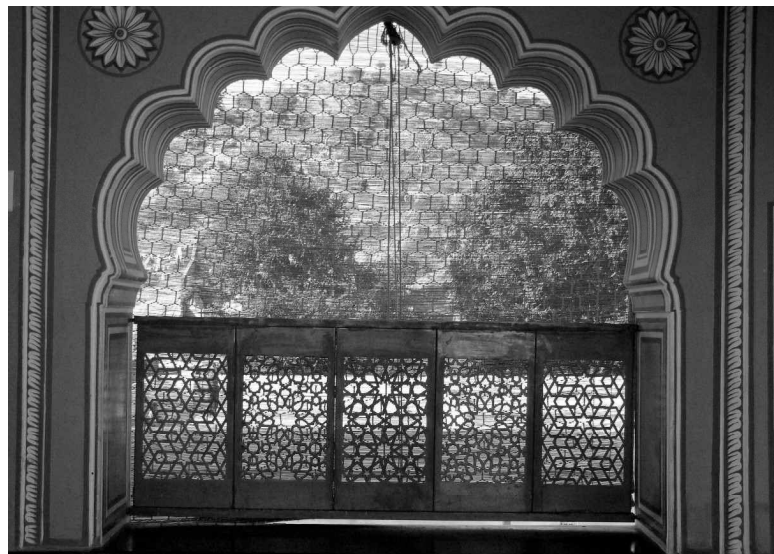
The other area of concern for us is that due to the paucity of facilities, people are moving from the rural areas to the cities and crowding them, leaving their houses in the villages vacant. At present, the extent of urbanization is 38%, and we are getting ready for 50% urbanization by 2020. But why? Why don't we provide opportunities and employment to people in the rural areas to curb urban migration and maybe help to reverse this flow?

We hope we can see people stop migrating to the cities and find more opportunities in rural areas and witness sustainability at all levels soon.

### *Architectural Education: In Need of an Overhaul?*

**ABD:** You instituted the “Unknown Craftspersons’ Trophy” (UCP Trophy) at the Annual National Association of Students of Architecture (NASA) Convention. Did you establish it because you found that architectural education scarcely focuses on the traditional craftsmanship of the country? What kind of interest have architectural students shown in this trophy?

**Parul & Nimish:** This trophy was instituted in 2012 by our trust, the Virasat Foundation. The principle objective of this foundation is to re-establish the use and relevance of traditional decision-making processes, materials, technologies and craftspersons in the contemporary context and building construction.



Restoration of Amber Haveli, Rajasthan

For many decades prior to that, we made isolated efforts to bring the traditional wisdom and knowledge into our academic institutions, but were unsuccessful. NASA is a body of close to 200 institutions of architectural education and meets frequently at the zonal scale and once annually during its convention. We have always believed that it is the students’ body that can play an instrumental role in the course correction of the curricula, if it feels that the subject is relevant to their education. To motivate students, we decided to institute the UCP trophy.

The response has been extremely encouraging. Up to the fifth cycle, over 175 entries have been received that implies an involvement of about a thousand students. Most of the submitted entries have the required depth as well as breadth, and are well-documented. Every year, a minimum of seven to ten exemplary, well-documented entries are submitted. We now intend to put them online with the names of the students and, wherever possible, their contact details, to serve as a bridge between the profession and the student.

**ABD:** Apart from pursuing your education in reputed architectural institutions, both of you have also been involved in teaching architecture. How does architectural education in India measure up to the global standards?

**SP:** The older generation of architects created buildings which were a lot more traditional, as well as contextual. For example, if you look at Charles Correa's works, he imbibed the principle of traditional architecture completely, but interpreted it in a totally new language of his own, which has given birth to the very many interesting buildings he has done. Whether you consider Kala Academy or Cidade de Goa, no one can say they are traditional, but at the same time, the projects have taken the colour and graphics of Goa and infused them so beautifully into the flowing spaces.

Unfortunately, the younger generation of architects is creating very new and radically different buildings that are not so contextual, in general. We need to learn from the senior architects to create a new vocabulary without forgetting the importance of the context of the designs.

**ABD:** You have been on various platforms, speaking on several topics concerning architecture. Architecture in India has seen rapid strides. What according to you is its biggest drawback and biggest strength?

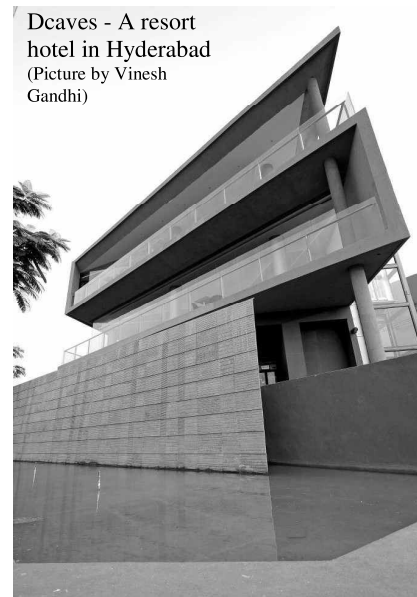
**SP:** The biggest drawback is the lack of awareness of good design, in general. The general media does not provide any platform for debates and discussions on architectural design, as is the case in many parts of the world. As an example, the newspapers in London, Amsterdam and Berlin discuss design on a daily basis; the discussion could range from a building to a sculpture to a product design. On the other hand, Indian newspapers rarely have columns or articles on design. In such a scenario, how can one expect the general public to distinguish between the good and the bad?

Apart from this, you hardly find any public architecture in India. Once in three or four years, we see the government come up with something. Ninety-five per cent to 97% of the architecture is being managed by private developers and corporate firms. Corporate firms are more inclined towards completing their projects within their stipulated budgets. And if you think of the past 15–20 years, all kinds of people have become developers who cannot ascertain what is good or bad in design. They neither have the faith, nor the inclination to do good design.

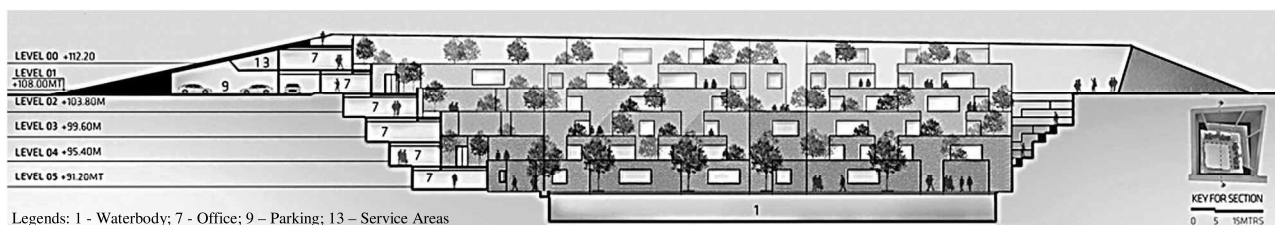
The biggest strength of Indian architecture stems from the growing economy, as an outcome of which the extent of architectural work available has grown dramatically. The population and the kind of housing needs in India are enormous. The next 20 years will see much more built architecture than what has been seen in the past 40 years. There will be a huge amount of work, which will create many opportunities.

**ABD:** Delving further into the importance of the media in design, yours is one of the few firms in the country to bring out a monthly newsletter apprising the architectural fraternity of your thoughts and works. How important is it for you to take your architecture to the masses, and how do you go about achieving it?

**SP:** Since the media in India in general does not create awareness of design, we have to try to create this awareness. The newsletter that our firm brings out is a very small step in this direction. With the intention of taking architecture forward on various platforms, I am now also the knowledge partner of a biannual event called Dialogues, conceptualized by me. This brings together 30 different design firms from various Indian cities for two days to share presentations, discuss how architecture can play a role in improving society, and debate upon issues faced by the profession. We had two events in 2016, and even more are expected in 2017.



Dcaves - A resort hotel in Hyderabad  
(Picture by Vinesh Gandhi)



Section through Reservoir - An office complex in Rajasthan (under construction)

### *Architectural Education: In Need of an Overhaul?*

**ABD:** To reduce the gap between the knowledge gained in design schools and the professional world, you have recently launched SPADES, an architectural training programme for fresher architects/architectural trainees—

### *Architecture in Changing Times*

**ABD:** As one of the forerunners of sustainability and the green movement in India, and as the chairperson of the Chennai chapter of the CII-IGBC<sup>2</sup> and of the CII-LEED<sup>3</sup> India, how do you incorporate the principles of sustainability in your own practice?



**CNR:** Conservation of resources became a design goal long before the formation of the IGBC, GRIHA, etc. Though we kept this principle in mind in several small projects, it was actually demonstrated in the first mega-IT park, the Tidel Park, in Chennai almost 17 years ago. While there were several restrictive factors, such as severe constraints in land area, the water and power infrastructure, and odd orientation of the site, they also gave us an opportunity to demonstrate processes for achieving the goals of sustainability effectively and economically. Every aspect of the rating parameters now in vogue formed a part of the design initiative, years before the identification of the criteria for determining whether a building is sustainable. We believe that getting a rating from an external agency is fine, but what is of primary importance is that high performance levels must become a default part of design.

**ABD:** What is your opinion on the work of the architects of the generation succeeding yours? As an architect whose experience spans almost five decades, do you have any specific advice to give them?

**CNR:** Architecture is tied intimately with the human endeavour for growth and development. The future generation of architects have an unprecedented opportunity to break the rules, deviate and innovate, adopt and be agents of change. They can globalize while relating to the context of the place and people—the best ideas come from reflection within, and not from “hand-me-downs” from the West. The rapid march of design, culture and technology

can only give rise to a vision of the future that is wholly unexpected. The challenges will be bigger but the opportunities, too, will be greater. In these matters, nothing is timeless. It is presumptuous to think that one possesses the wisdom to advise architects beyond one generation, except that one can perhaps say, “Be prepared without knowing how.”

The process of imparting soul/purpose into built forms through design is a fundamental part of the knowledge instilled in architects from their student days. That is what most seniors today have also learnt in their outstanding careers and have exemplified it too, both internationally and nationally. However, the spread of knowledge through the electronic media, travel, etc. has created new sets of demands on the part of clients, who are no longer willing to look to architects for their creative and problem-solving approach for delivering solutions. Hence, architects today need to be better trained and more competent not only in the understanding of design scales, but also in terms of design philosophies and convictions so that they can impart the lasting metaphysical aspects that a good design brings to a project.

#### *“Building” Emotional Ties*

**ABD:** Are there any unrealized projects that you would like to revive today?

**CNR:** As a fresh graduate, I participated in the design competition for the Indian pavilion at Expo 1970 in Japan. I was considered too young and inexperienced, though my design got a commendation. They were perhaps right, but if one could be given a chance to indulge in wishful thinking, I would like to build the project today.



(Top) Software Campus for CA India Technologies Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad;  
(Above) Kalakshetra - Centre for Performing Arts, Chennai

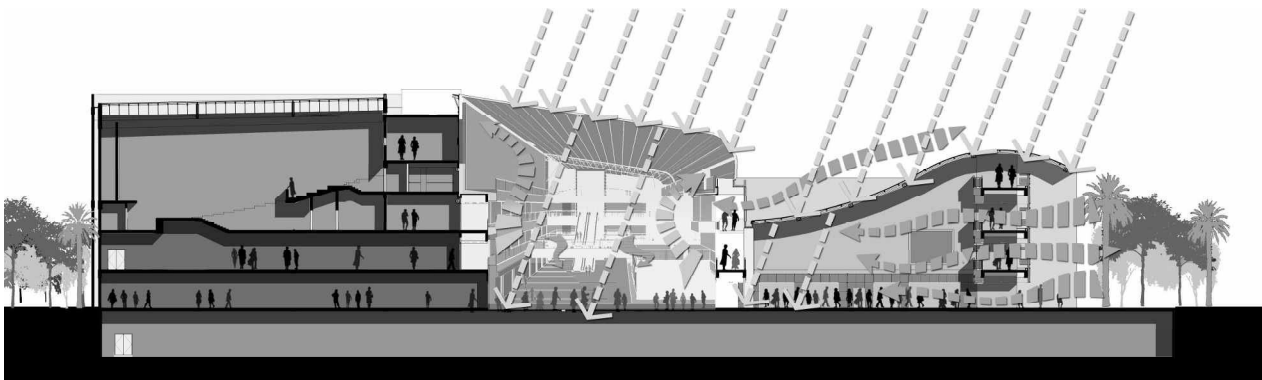
<sup>2</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry - Indian Green Building Council

<sup>3</sup> Confederation of Indian Industry - Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

*Architectural Education: In Need of an Overhaul?*

**ABD:** With your experience of having led an architectural institution in India and served as visiting faculty in various architectural schools in the country and overseas, which schools of architecture in India would you laud for having made an effort to progress in the right direction?

**Manit:** India has a great legacy of excellent schools of architecture: SPA, CEPT, JJ School of Architecture, etc. They continue to do an exemplary job, despite numerous challenges. There has been an exponential increase in the number of schools of architecture, but these have yet to update their curriculum and discourse. There is an urgent need to revamp and modify the architectural educational system, as it is education that provides the milieu for discourse to begin and it is education that will spawn the architects of modern India. Over the last 20 years, buildings have become far more complex and require an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach. We believe that there is an urgent need to bridge the widening gap between academia and practice, between research and application. Also, it is of critical importance that sustainability, which was intrinsic to the architecture of our past, must be intrinsic to the architecture of our future, but not as a layer of “green” superimposed on it. It must be taught as such.

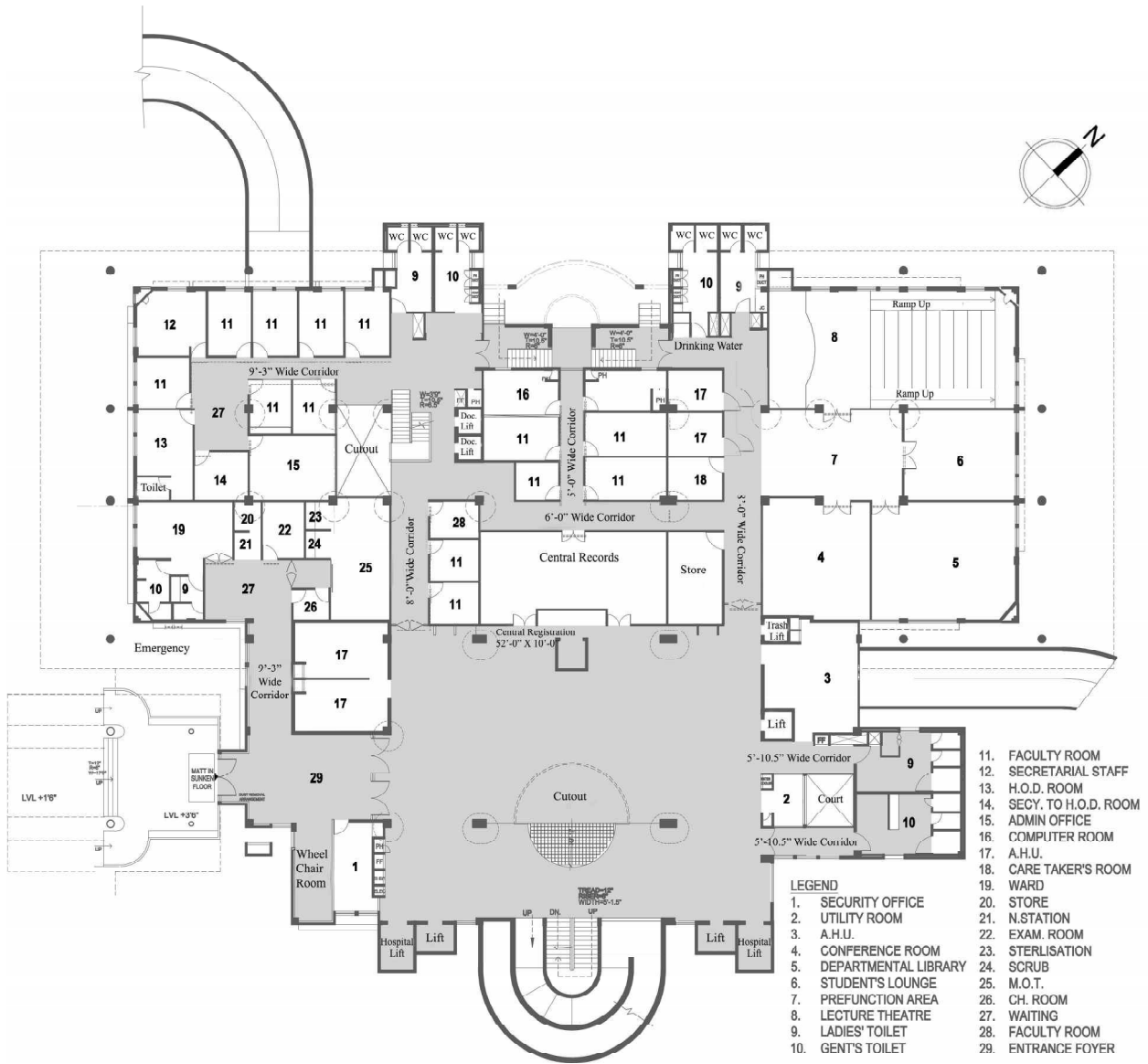


City Centre Mall, Siliguri – Image (Picture by André J Fanthome), and Sectional Elevation

*Architecture in Changing Times*

**ABD:** Your architecture has redefined “modern” and “contemporary” architecture. How would you define these terms, which are either overrated or underrated in our profession today?

**Sonali & Manit:** Modernity should reflect the socio-cultural and intellectual discourse of a time, and the output generated appropriately will be contemporary. Accordingly, every project at Morphogenesis is an opportunity to investigate the programme from a current perspective and to challenge the orthodoxies and notional responses. Emergent modern architecture should be culturally appropriate, while addressing global and local issues, besides borrowing from time-tested and successful architectural heritage. Above all, to us, modern architecture is not a context-less response aimed at creating an “architecture of nowhere”. It is our attempt to create an architecture which is, at the least, an “architecture of almost somewhere”.



(Top) Ground Floor Plan;  
(Left) Waiting area with skylights (Picture by Uttam Chand)

*For more images/drawings of projects designed by Shiv Datt Sharma, please refer Centrefold – “Glimpses of Projects”*

**BS:** This has to be seen in the context of my work and is not for me to elaborate. Change is continuous in any practice and, of course, while changes occur, the basic philosophy of my firm and its beliefs remain firmly grounded. I must admit, though, that living and working as an architect in the India of the eighties, nineties and now, the 21st century has involved challenges much more varied in nature than conventional architectural projects in most parts of the world. In the olden days, we thought of man when cities were being built. Today, we think of floor space index, building codes, budgets and so on, but often leave out the protagonist of the space: man.

**ABD:** You follow certain definitions of traditional idioms in your designs, such as courtyards, *jaalis*, high ceilings, pergolas and corridors. In your opinion, what kind of role could traditional architecture play in the evolution of contemporary architecture?

**BS:** In India, art, craft and design are evident in every part of our lives and our culture. But we are still struggling to find effective ways of coming together as a design community and creating a platform to enable the world to view and appreciate the wealth of knowledge and skill of centuries of design. Instead of just concentrating on “iconic” architecture, countries like India should be building “relevant and appropriate” architecture. We need to always move forward with new technology and other good changes that we are seeing in our country, but we do not have to forget the past for this to happen. The past is our link with everything that has gone before and thus helps us to understand who we are.

In any subject, be it medicine, law or philosophy, one does not have to “reinvent the wheel”; accumulated knowledge and experience are respected. Likewise, in architecture, while not negating the importance of creativity and the needs of the 21st century, we must understand the reasons for various architectural vocabularies of the past. The same should not be incorporated into one’s work in a superficial manner, but by understanding the reasons why and where those particular vocabularies were used. A building built in the 21st century must reflect these times, but the wealth of our ancient heritage can also be understood and used, whether in methods of construction, materials and climate sensitivity, or any other aspect.

**ABD:** You believe that “architecture has the capacity to tell us about history and all that has gone before, as no other discipline can”.<sup>3</sup> When you work on restoration projects, such as your ongoing work on the Louis Kahn buildings of IIMA, how do you go about making it suit the changing times, while preserving the history that it represents?

**BS:** There are different aspects to be considered during restoration projects, most importantly, the use of the building. What is the building you are restoring? Are you restoring it to serve its original purpose or making it serve some other function? Is it still being used as a public building, or is it going to be a monument? So essentially, restoration projects cannot be clubbed together and hence, there cannot be a single answer.

While there can be a restoration project that is merely going to be viewed by tourists, such as the Taj Mahal or Eiffel Tower, there could be a project like the VT Station in Mumbai that needs some added functions, or a project such as the IIMA that needs to facilitate work of a specific nature. IIMA is an active institute, crowded with students and people, and the restoration work there is moving forward on a continuous basis. The campus was built in the sixties and times have changed over these 50 years. So, while we have to respect the original buildings when restoring them, we also need to consider whether the functions that the original structure catered to are relevant today.

In the past five decades, there has been tremendous change—students have changed the way they study due to technology. With the availability of the Internet/Wi-Fi today, students study in corridors and other interactive spaces too, so one needs to cater to that aspect. Even libraries are going online. Students today expect different standards, whether in dormitories, pantries or toilets, or in services like lighting, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, fire detection and security, so everything has to be viewed with that in mind.

We need to consider the way we live and use things today, but yes, when we are restoring a historical building, there are certain elements which we cannot disturb. So it is all the more difficult, unlike the restoration of maybe a Taj Mahal or Humayun’s tomb, where people are coming just to see the monuments. Here, the building is alive and is being used around the clock, which is a challenge. Though we might not be able to please everybody, given our experience in working on restoration projects and our desire to follow our conscience, I am sure that in the case of the IIMA buildings, we will be able to restore them to the best of our ability.

**ABD:** “Women in architecture” has now become a raging topic worldwide. You established your firm way back in the 1970s, when there were very few women architects in the country. You have been actively involved in supporting the work of women architects throughout South Asia. Over the past four decades, what changes have you noticed in the level of respect that women architects expect and receive?

<sup>3</sup> Panel Discussion, SICI 2014, Bengaluru