

# The Illustrated Weekly of India

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## Give Us More Rice



Also: The Houses We Build



**RBI MODEL.** The proposed office building for the Reserve Bank of India at Ahmedabad. The designer is Hasmukh Patel. The architect must have an integrated vision of housing for a community—people, trees, parks, streets and buildings forming an organic unity.

**HIGH BUREAUCRACY.** The New Secretariat, Calcutta. It was designed by Habib Rahman, Chief Architect, Central PWD, New Delhi, who has pioneered many improvements in official architecture.



investigation in a small part of Northern India. His book, *The Archaeological Survey of India*, notes that local artisans had retained their hereditary skill in designing, in the handling of materials and in the high standard workmanship; but they were incapable of evolving new methods of construction. In short, their constructional experience had not progressed with the times.

So-called modern architecture came to India after the depression of 1930. The Government of India and the Bombay Municipal Corporation started the Improvement Trust of Dadar, Matunga, Shivaji Park Estate and the Queen's Road Reclamation Scheme. At that time, most of the practising architects were Britishers. Notable among them were Gregson, Batley, McKnight and Ditchburn.

### Cities Are For Human Beings

Reinforced cement concrete was discovered in the early 1920s. It changed the trend of architecture everywhere and young Indian architects returning from England, inspired by the Western trend, introduced RCC in India. G. P. Mhatre, Y. C. Merchant, Bhutta, Devoiné and the Bhedwar Brothers were the first few to design RCC buildings in Bombay.

Notable among them was Bhutta, who blended Indian features in the Bombay Mutual Building and the New India Assurance Building.

In the year 1934, Bombay's Eros Cinema, designed by the Bhedwar Brothers, with non-traditional proportions, made almost the beginning of RCC structures in the country. Professor Batley, who was then the Principal of the J. J. School of

### Fire Control In Skyscrapers

The recent spate of fires in multi-storied buildings has focused attention on the question of fire control and prevention. At present, skyscrapers are virtual concrete furnaces, furnished in combustible material, and devoid of proper fire-extinguishing systems. The dangers are increased by the Fire Department's inability to combat fires above 100 ft or 8-10 storeys from the ground.

A major reason why tall buildings are ill equipped with fire-protection facilities is that their installation would increase the cost of construction by 6 to 8 per cent. The problem is sufficiently grave for Government to enact safety regulations and to ensure observance. The onus is also on Government to finance research projects to evolve effective low-cost devices.

An inflexible standard cannot, however, be laid down, since it is for the architect to choose a system of fire protection that is most appropriate, in terms of effectiveness and economy, in each individual construction.

The following are the general requisites of a system of fire detection and containment: smoke and fire-detecting alarms; a public address system; automatic sprinkler systems; a ventilated lobby for firemen to assemble; a device that would return all lifts to the ground floor for use by firemen; water hoses on each floor; and fire-resisting doors.

—R. S.



**B. V. DOSHI** (b 1927) was senior designer with Corbusier's team consisting of Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. Doshi now practises in Ahmedabad. He was the first Indian to become an Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. Closely associated with architectural education in India, he is also an annual Visiting Professor at five American Universities, including M.I.T. His papers have been published in several international journals.



**HASMUKH C. PATEL** (b 1934) was educated at Cornell (USA). He now practises in Ahmedabad, where he has designed various administrative and commercial buildings, as well as an industrial campus for the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation. Patel is Honorary Architectural Consultant to the Government of Gujarat for Sachivalaya and the Vidhan Sabha Complex Capital Project at Gandhinagar. He is also associated with low-cost housing and slum reconstruction.



**JAI RATTAN BHALLA** (b 1922) practised for eight years in Kenya before joining Joseph Allen Stein and Associates, Delhi. He is a past President of the Indian Institute of Architects and is President of the Commonwealth Association Architects and Vice-President of the International Union of Architects. Bhalla was Chairman of the Meeting of Experts convened by UNESCO on Architectural Education and is closely associated with Indian colleges of architecture.



**UTTAM C. JAIN** (b 1935) studied at I.I.T., Kharagpur, and in Argentina and has been practising in Bombay since 1961. He has designed residential, commercial and educational edifices and is currently working on the University of Jodhpur and the Agricultural University of Udaipur. He has travelled extensively in the Americas, Europe and the UK. He has lectured at various Indian Universities.

## No Room For Young Architects

**We spend Rs 30,000 on training an architect. Yet two out of five architects are forced to seek their fortunes abroad. Why?**

by **RAMAN SWAMY**

**A**RCHITECTS can be divided into two categories: the disciples of Le Corbusier, "who believe that even a village should be a skyscraper-on-stilts", and the disciples of Frank Lloyd Wright, "who believe that cities should be abolished and that everyone should have at least an acre of land to live on". A third category are Indian architects, sons of the builders of the Taj trying to make terms with Corbusier and Wright—between the ornamental and the functional.

Indian architects admit their failings. According to Habib Rahman, "the standard of contemporary Indian architecture compares poorly with the architecture of advanced countries and even other developing countries. It is hybrid, confused and aesthetically appalling. There is no clear thinking and no definite ideology."

And Charles Correa has this to say: "Most of the architects and planners in this country are making more and more decisions which ignore the realities—economic, political and social—of this land... all around us the Indian urban environment is sliding into chaos."

The economic and social "realities" of today are increasing congestion in our cities. By the year 2000 A.D., India will have to provide additional accommodation for 200 million people. This means building a home for one family every second for the next 27 years. We do not have the means to accomplish this.

Low-cost housing on a mass scale is, of course, the only solution. Yet the existing low-cost schemes hardly meet our needs. Since Government agencies initiate such schemes, bureaucratic delays impede progress in an area where time is of the essence. For instance, a note must be signed by six officers before any action can be taken.

Considerable research is required to evolve reasonably priced prefabricated material. Unfortunately, not even our professional architects, engineers and builders are aware of what research is being carried out in the building industry.

"The Indian architect," says J. R. Bhalla, "is denied the opportunity to play his rightful role in the physical development of the country. Architects have little influence on public opinion or governmental action."



**BENNETT PITHAVADIAN**

**BENNETT PITHAVADIAN** (b 1923) studied Civil Engineering in Madras and Architecture at McGill University, Montreal. He now practises in Madras and is also a Director of the School of Architecture and Planning there. He is a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Architects and an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Two of his current projects are a township for 3,000 families for the Space Research Centre at Sriharikota and a temple in New York. He was awarded the President's Medal at an international competition for low-cost housing held in New Delhi in 1953.

J. K.

Members of the profession point out that the increase in the Fourth Plan outlay on housing and urban development to Rs 242.92 crores has not multiplied the opportunities for architects. Results of the Rs 134.05 crores (i.e. 55.18%) spent and the 68,430 houses built, during the first three years (1969-72) of the Plan period, have been far from satisfactory.

There is a widespread feeling that Government has confined the architect to the drawing board and made him subordinate to an army of civil engineers who handle all the subsequent stages of construction, such as estimating, structural design and supervision. Government contracts are given to the lowest bidder. The competence and experience of architects are of secondary consideration. There are few opportunities for our younger architects; 2 out of 5 of our trained architects are forced to seek their fortunes abroad. The Government agencies, with their vast building programmes, have scope for absorbing many ambitious architects. But they have become "a haven for those seeking a dull safe job with a pension at the end of it". We spend Rs. 30,000 on training an architect. But he is not well equipped to tackle practical problems with his essentially theoretical knowledge. According to Bhalla, "architectural education in India is isolated from the live environmental problems of the community".

The Indian Institute of Architecture has for its objects: raising the standard of architectural practice and promoting the interests of members of the profession. How far is it effective as a professional body? "The IIA does function after a fashion. But financial problems and lack of cooperation from leading architects have severely restricted its role." So feel a representative section of the profession.

Architects must be given an opportunity to design the housing of a whole community in its natural surroundings—not building in isolation but building in relation to trees, parks, streets and the people for whom they are meant. This would create an organic unity. P. G. Patki feels that "Government should encourage architectural competitions for all projects estimated at Rs 1 crore and above. This will not only result in elevating standards but will bring the young architect into the limelight."