

1982 BATCH REUNION: RANDOM THOUGHTS AND MUSINGS

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A RICKSHAW AND A STORYTELLER

Muhammad drives a rickshaw in Ahmedabad. For forty years, he said. For 1500 rupees, he offered a day-long architectural tour of the city. As a sample, he named those who designed buildings on the way to the campus. Doshi, Patel, Doshi, Patel. I paid attention because they were interesting structures and he knew more than I expected. We rattled along, he kept speaking and at some point, he asked me what does one do in an MBA. And he asked if I had done well in life.

He was distracted, we went over a flyover we shouldn't have, and we found another Doshi. At the IIMA campus, the security guard greeted him warmly. He asked about his leg. "Sab jaante hain mujhko", said Muhammad. Clearly, Vastrapur was his ilaaka more than mine.

If you stay at House of MG, and you should stay there instead of vanilla business hostelries, you will find Muhammad outside on most mornings. 1500 rupees will get you a rickshaw and a storyteller. I can't think of a better way to spend a day.

I shifted to a haveli for a couple of nights. Mangaldas Ni Haveli is a small three-storey edifice, quaint more than ethnic. Getting there is half the fun. Only by rickshaw because the lanes are narrow and theas intrude. We weaved our merry way miraculously avoiding accidents, it was late at night, yet street life was buzzing. The Haveli had a single custodian who gave his mobile number. The room was huge with a terrace attached. I said bloody hell because the flush wasn't working, and neither was the TV. The plumber will take an hour, said the custodian. We shifted down to a small room. I sat in its quaint balcony on a jhoola and fumed uselessly. The place had no kitchen. What? I stepped out into the street and walked around till midnight. I was hungry. When I returned the custodian was asleep, his mobile was blinking. I called him at five am and asked for coffee which he brought with some ceremony. He gave me half an hour and called at 5.30 am. "Kya?", I growled. "Sir, flush is working?", he asked.

NAYA AND PURANA

The bricks had weathered for half a century, they looked like they were rusting. The walls held a roof. I don't remember the ceiling. The room was smaller than I expected. I stood for a while in my dorm and waited for the flood. Be patient, I said, give memories time, they too have waited. For some reason, I remembered most the music I listened to while reading cases. Eagles, Nazia Hasan, Dire Straits, Doors, and apdo Freddie Mercury.

Somewhere in the complex, I needed directions. Naya and Purana were two neat halves with a subway in between. In Kahn's section, you have imaarats, darwazas, jharokas - it is an aaina into time, to a lost aesthetic. Doshi's section is an IIMA - IIMB crossover. In Bimal's section, I suffered in the grey somnolence in the company of his concrete blobs, each an ode to the cement mixer that made them.

I think my aesthetic journey began with Louis Kahn. If I am a writer and gallerist, I have only him to blame. What will the new campus produce, what kind of MBA will emerge, and will they merge into the sameness that the campus represents?

SOME ARCHITECTURE - QUITE INSPIRING

We had a three-day extension program. Modhera and Rani ki Vav were spectacular. Champaner had nothing much to offer. There was the Jami Masjid with its many pillars, too many, enough for theorists to sniff around looking for a lost temple. In Patan, there was the unfulfilled promise of Patan Patola. It was lunchtime and the patola saree shops were closed. "You are lucky", said the van driver, a man of experience, "Those sarees are very expensive".

We stepped into two wells in the trip. We climbed down to levels that water had seen. It was like a Greek theatre, quite inspiring. We took photographs, everyone was posing, in alcoves and cornices so were the ancient friezes. A useless question came to mind. Would monuments get privatized at some point? Would Rani ki Vaav be sponsored by Bisleri?