

THE INDIRA GANDHI INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

BOMBAY

Ranjit Sabikhi

Project Data

Location: Goregoan, Bombay

Architect: Uttam C. Jain

Sponsor: The Reserve Bank of India

Client: The Government of India

Consultants: Sharad R. Shah

(Structural Engineers)

M/S Tech (Consultants Services)

Kishore D. Pradhan (Landscape)

R.L. Parmar (Approvals)

Suri & Suri (Acoustics)

Uttam C. Jain (Interiors of Auditorium
and Seminar Rooms)

Professor Salve (Main Door Muralist)

Unik Engineering Services (Electrical)

Site Area: 14 acres

Cost: Rs. 80 million

Completion: December 1987

Situated on a hillside on the outskirts of Bombay, the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research is an impressive complex. It is flanked on one side by a large shanty town settlement – an indigenous collection of self-help squatter huts – and on the other sides by the Borivili National Park – a sizeable nature reserve. The complex was commissioned and built in a short time-span and therefore reflects considerable spontaneity and freshness. For Indian architect Uttam Jain it is a culmination of ideas that he has been exploring over the years and the project provided an excellent opportunity to apply them on a reasonable scale and to produce a strong and well-articulated statement.

While the form is clear and easily readable, it is the layers of meaning that lend subtlety and interest to the complex.

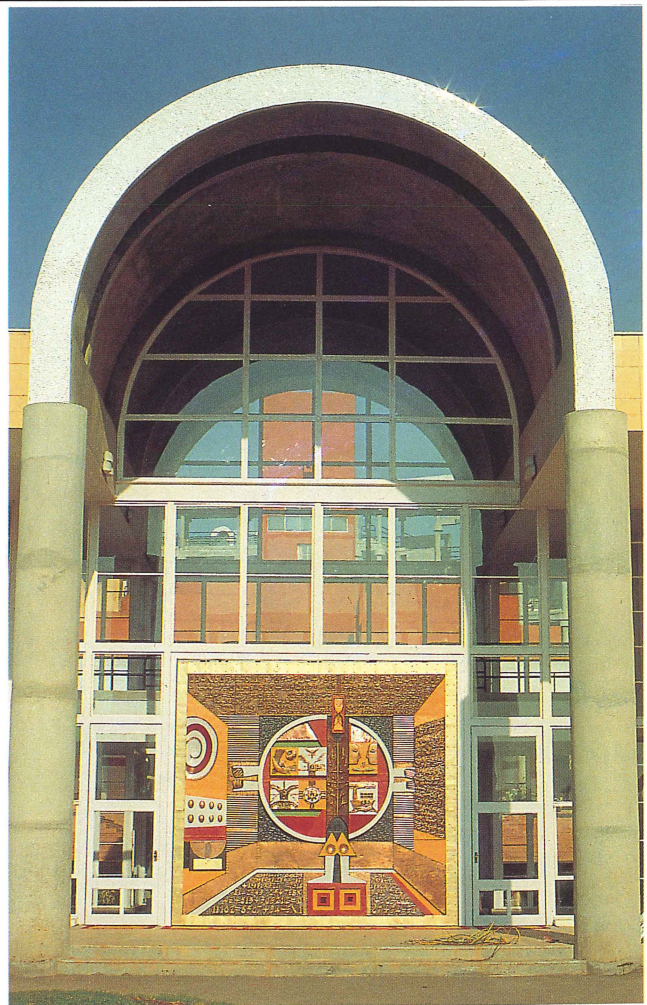
1. *View of the Institute campus from the west, set in the green rolling acres of Goregoan – a suburb of Bombay.*

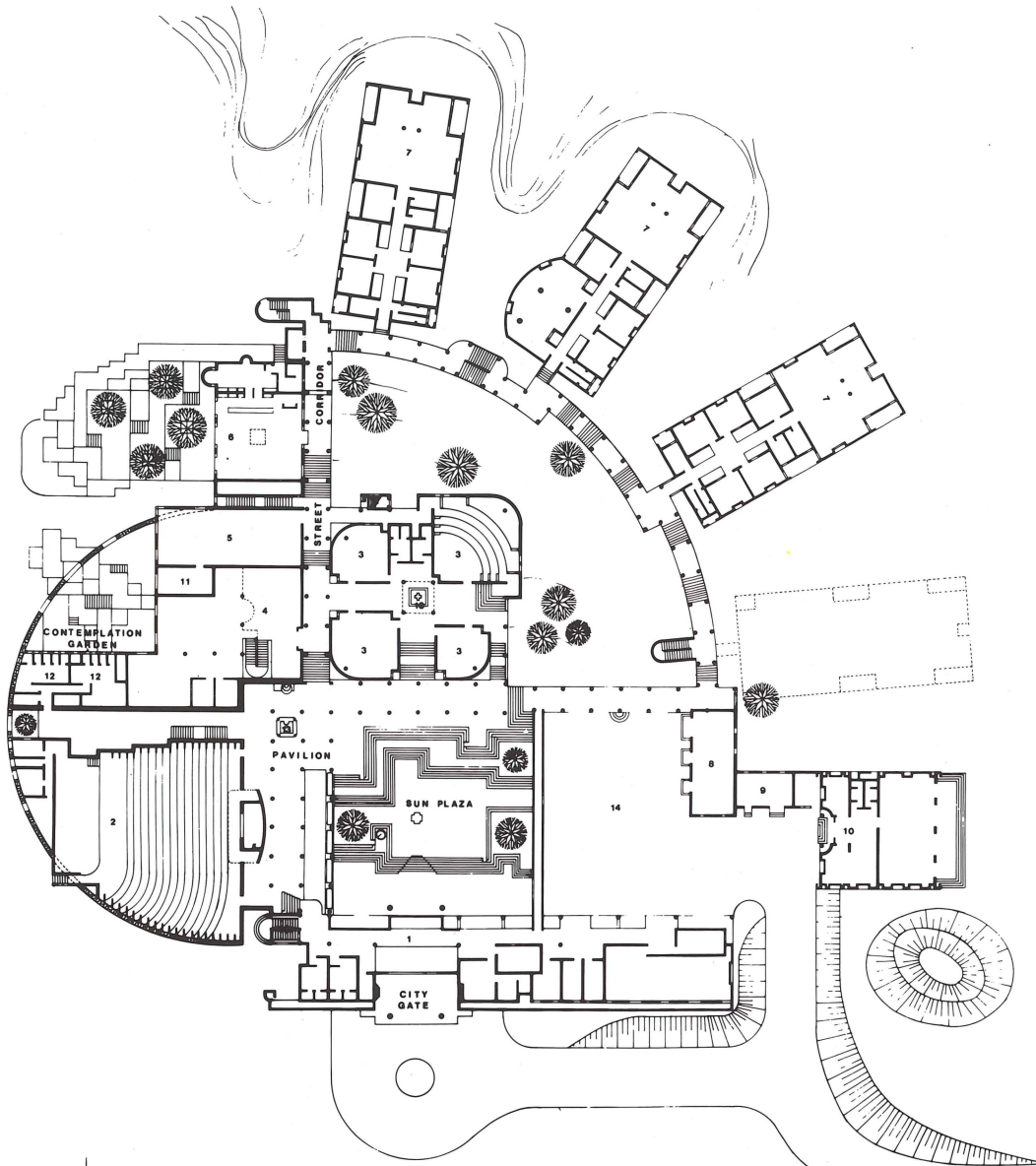
2. *The seminar rooms, rising above the steps of the plaza, evoke Mount Meru.*

3. *The entrance, conceived as the 'City Gate'. The mural, based on a theme of man's potential for self-development, sets the mood for the building.*

4. *The sunlit central plaza. The steps are intended to echo the stepped river fronts of Gujarat.*



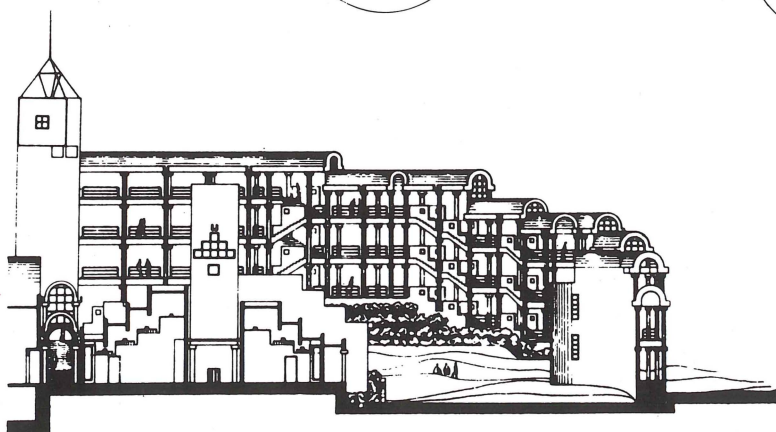




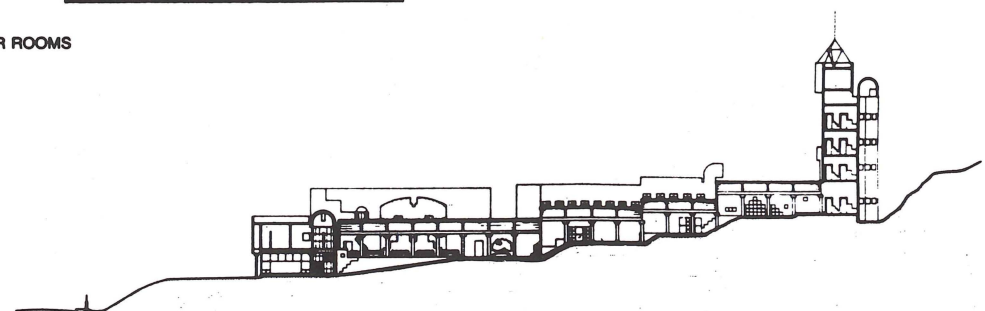
1. ADMINISTRATION
2. AUDITORIUM
3. SEMINAR ROOM
4. LIBRARY
5. COMPUTER
6. CAFETERIA
7. RESEARCH
8. L.T. PANEL
9. TRANSFORMER
10. RECREATION
11. A.H.U.
12. TOILET
13. WATER BODY
14. PARKING



1:10 2 4 8m SCALE



SECTION THROUGH THE SEMINAR ROOMS



SECTION THROUGH THE STREET CORRIDOR

BUILDINGS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

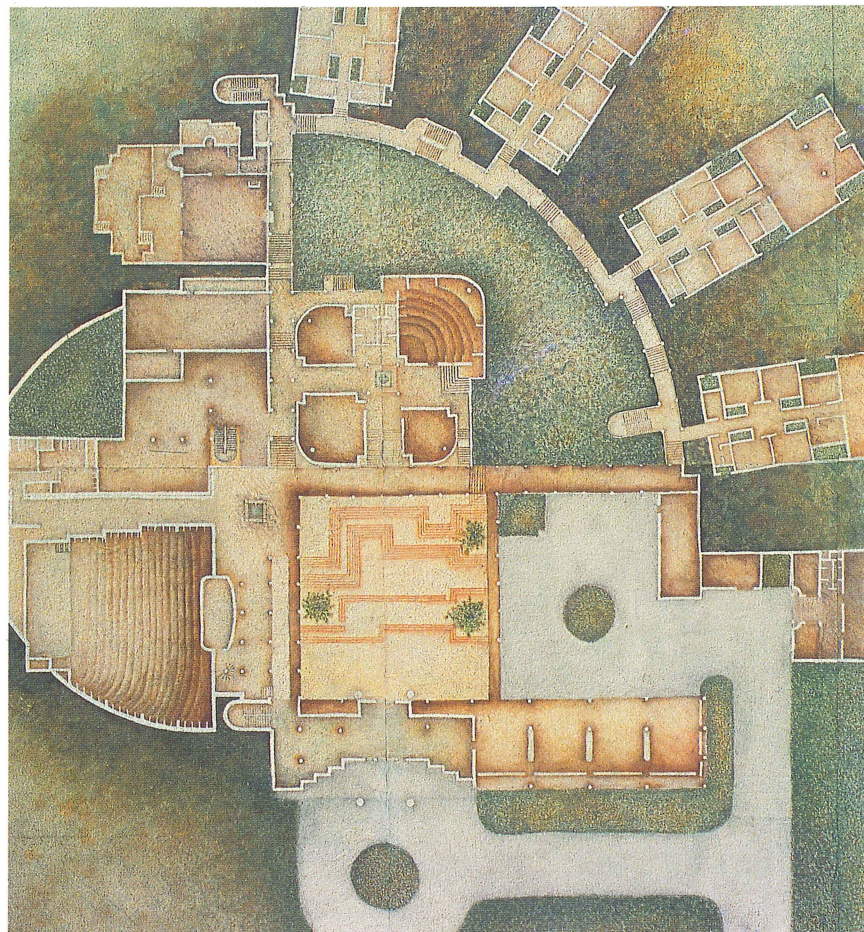
5. & 6. Floor plans coloured as miniature paintings by Uttam Jain. The design layout echoes the configuration of navagraha or 'nine building masses', referred to in the tenets of city planning in ancient India.

People may read the complex in various ways and interpret it in their own terms. Uttam Jain himself talks of symbolism and the complex as a city with its city gate, its 'sun-soaked plaza' and its network of sequentially-linked spaces leading from light-filled areas to semi-dark and dark private spaces. He refers also to the use of water recalling Mughal monuments, the flights of steps resembling the stepped wells of Gujarat, and to the section of seminar rooms as a model of the cosmic Mount Meru – significant in Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. This intellectual posturing, however, tends to obscure and detract from the simple delight of a well-integrated complex superbly related to the steep topography of its site.

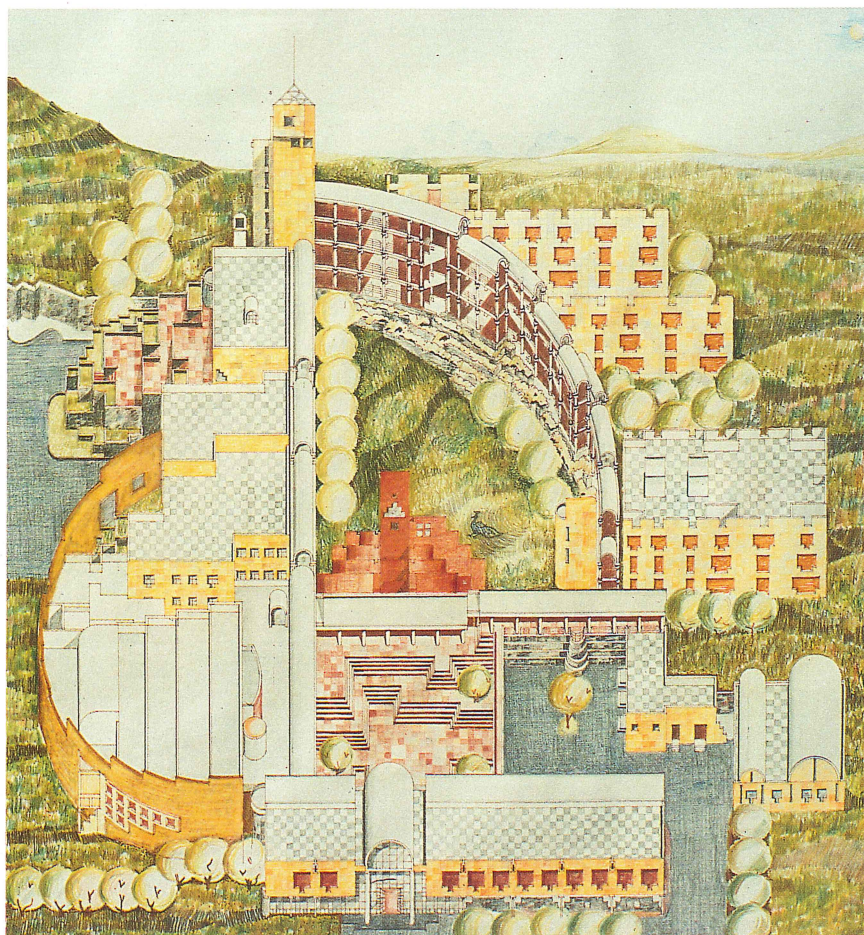
The institution complex is entered via an administration building that is completely transparent at lower level, establishing direct contact with the stepped plaza beyond. The entrance is further emphasized by a giant glazed arch set within a barrel vault with a ceremonial entrance door surmounted by a mural reminiscent of Le Corbusier's monumental door to the Assembly building at Chandigarh. The entrance lobby itself is a vast sunlit glazed space with all the administration facilities accommodated in offices at the second floor level. Immediately in front is the sandstone-paved, open-to-sky, stepped plaza. This is a masterful handling of levels which, despite recalling traditional temple tanks, has resulted in the most attractive space in the whole complex. All the academic facilities of the Institute are organized concentrically around this central open space.

The sequence of movement goes clockwise up the slope of the hill from the entrance hall to the auditorium and then further up to the cluster of seminar rooms placed at the very heart of the complex. Further up, on the left, are the library, the computer building and the cafeteria with the passage terminating at the top of the hill beside the lift tower. From this point, a system of quarter-circle passages on different levels connects to the three separate research blocks which span out in radial fashion. The passages connect with the seminar rooms and a link in the form of a bridge defines the fourth side of the central plaza, connecting with the administration block at second floor level.

The formal organization of the academic complex revolves around the



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7. Terraced passages connect different segments of the campus and allow unrestricted view and breezes.

8. A 'street corridor' with barrel vaulted roof, looking west.

9. The main auditorium. The ceiling carries a series of jumbo-sized wooden arches, echoing the elemental form of the Buddhist Chaitya Caves.



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BUILDINGS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH



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central space in the middle of the arrangement of seminar rooms – a space defined by the skylight tower above a small square water fountain. This tower, at the centre of the seminar complex which Uttam Jain refers to as the model of Mount Meru, is the pivot around which the entire complex is organized. It serves as the *axis mundi* or cosmic pillar around which the world revolves. It is not only the geometric centre of the organizing order; it is also symbolically the heart of the entire complex. It is essentially a simple square tower lit by windows from all the four sides above, highlighting a structural cross that seems to be suspended in the empty space within. The tower itself holds an ambiguous position as the central feature at the heart of the complex. It is largely subdued by the lift tower, located to one side at a higher point of the site which is the more dominant element. The duality of the two vertical features is partially resolved by placing an open pyramidal steel structure with a central vertical spire above the lift tower, thus defining its pre-eminence.

The form of the auditorium, the library and the computer centre, is defined externally by a semi-circular stone wall

that echoes the arch of the quarter-circle passages connecting the research blocks. Landscaped spaces adjoining the library penetrate the curved wall and visually connect it with space beyond.

A system of barrel vaults provides a dominant image that is characteristic of this project. A massive barrel vault defines the entrance to the institute and another flanks the administration complex covering the access passage to the offices. A further system of barrel vaults is stepped up the hill and curves along the corridors at several levels linking the research blocks. The form of the barrel vaults recalls the rock-cut Chaitya Caves of Buddhist architecture. The form of the columns with their circular capitals and arched beams provides a definitive image to the complex.

The form of the buildings themselves with their many different external treatments is rich and varied, but despite the strong central order which pervades the complex, the architect's penchant for post-modernist effects tends to distract. The fragmented facades and the conglomeration of materials tend to both deconstruct and destroy the abiding overall image. The walls, covered with glazed tiles, rough plastered stucco in

different colours, and made of Malad stone – while recalling Jain's earlier works in Rajasthan – do not successfully hold together and tend to break down the strongly integrated fabric of the complex.

The same tendency to fragmentation is also evident in the planning and organization of the various residential blocks and hostel units. The residential buildings, by their sheer bulk, dominate the hillside and overshadow the central complex, while having no real relationship with it. These buildings do not have the same clarity of expression; nor do they really seem an integral part of the Institute complex.

The central complex of the Institute, however, has about it a rare vibrancy as well as a casual spontaneity that makes it particularly impressive.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY UTTAM JAIN

RANJIT SABIKHI RECEIVED A BARCH. AND MASTERS IN CIVIC DESIGN FROM LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY, UK IN 1959. HE TAUGHT FOR 16 YEARS AT THE S.P.A., NEW DELHI, WHERE HE WAS HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN DESIGN. HE HAS HIS OWN PRACTICE IN NEW DELHI AND IS ACTIVE IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL JOURNALISM. 