

MODERN SOUTH ASIA



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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT  
BANGALORE

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## The Campus as a Garden: Doshi's Indian Institute of Management Bangalore

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf

Speaking to a group of students at the campus in 2014, Balkrishna Doshi characterised the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (1983) as *not a building*. "Can you 'see' IIMB as a building?" he asked.<sup>1</sup> In saying this, Doshi was emphasising that not only is IIMB *not a building*, but the typical components of a building had also receded from view. "It is not visible because nature has taken over — so you see a wall here, a pillar there". The project at IIMB sits against the predominant practices of producing spectacular or robust buildings, and ushers in the principles of what I describe as an architecture of complexity.

At IIMB, Doshi has disaggregated the volumetric potential of a singular building into its components, rearranging them to generate new values and complexity, and overcoming the monolithic presence as demonstrated by Tagore Hall (Ahmedabad, 1961), a counter-example from his own work. This disaggregative approach was demonstrated earlier in Charles Correa's Gandhi Ashram (Ahmedabad, 1964). Correa would continue with that organisational trope in a rambling manner at the National Craft Museum (New Delhi, 1975) and in a compact and mandalic geometry at the Jawahar Kala Kendra (Jaipur, 1986). In one stroke, the Gandhi Ashram evoked an Indianness that was irrefutable, heralding a new proposition and finding alignment with Gandhi's oracular pronouncement: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all

lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any".<sup>2</sup> The rawness of the construction, the typology of its pitched roof, the modularity of the grid, the degree of enclosure and porosity, and an inevitable concord with the surroundings, created a sprawled-out character where ambulation was not a necessity, but a virtue.

What I see in Correa and Doshi's disaggregated building *parti* as a new proposition in Indian architecture, has been critiqued by others as evidence of a "postmodern architectural orientation", a paradigm of regionalist architecture, or, in a nationalistic rhetoric, as "essentially Indian". The diversity of the critique or claim is, in any case, evidence of a new pathway in Indian architecture.

While the disaggregated *parti* resolved better with the requirements of site, environment and habitability, its evolution and application had more to do with post-war debates amongst modern architects in Europe, and a growing predilection for what came to be known from the 1970s as "mat-building".<sup>3</sup> I want to discuss IIMB within the discourse of mat-building and also argue how it is distinctive within that typology.

It is important to recall the new values that were being debated in the post-war period, particularly

<sup>2</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, June 1, 1921.

<sup>3</sup> Alison Smithson, *How to Recognise and Read Mat-Building, Mainstream Architecture as it has Developed Towards the Mat-Building*, Architectural Design, September 1974.

in the conferences of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM).<sup>4</sup> Modern architects of the time were exploring ways to wean themselves away from the regime of singular, sculptural structures, towards a family or complex of buildings. This shift in thinking came about as architects searched for ways to bring about greater social and communitarian relevance to their work. While the singular volumes provided opportunities to architects for displays of artistic brilliance, complexes enabled community organisation, along with novel spatial relationships and connections. The nature of complexes was a natural ground, so to speak, to define, articulate, and heighten relationships with the landscape.

In her 1974 essay, Alison Smithson emphasised the value of mat-buildings as they provided "new freedoms of action" made possible through "interconnections, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution, and change".<sup>5</sup> In their 2002 case study of mat-buildings, Hashim Sarkis and colleagues described them as a field, ground, carpet or matrix. They note the following aspects of mat-buildings: close-knit formation, play on scale, efficiency in land use (although there is the question of sprawl), indeterminacy in size and shape, flexibility in building use, and a precursor to landscape urbanism.<sup>6</sup> To that, I would add, a fluid exchange between building and landscape.

Smithson discussed both traditional and modern examples. Among the former, she included the Meenakshi temple complex in Madurai, Akbar's palace complex in Fatehpur Sikri, and the Katsura Palace in Kyoto.<sup>7</sup> Among the modern buildings that invoked the mat were the Orphanage in Amsterdam

<sup>4</sup> *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*. Active from 1928 to 1959, this organisation was influential in spreading the principles of the Modern Movement with a focus on architecture.

<sup>5</sup> Smithson, pg. 573.

<sup>6</sup> Hasim Sarkis, Pablo Allard and Timothy Hyde, *Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital and the Mat Building Revival*, Prestel, 2002.

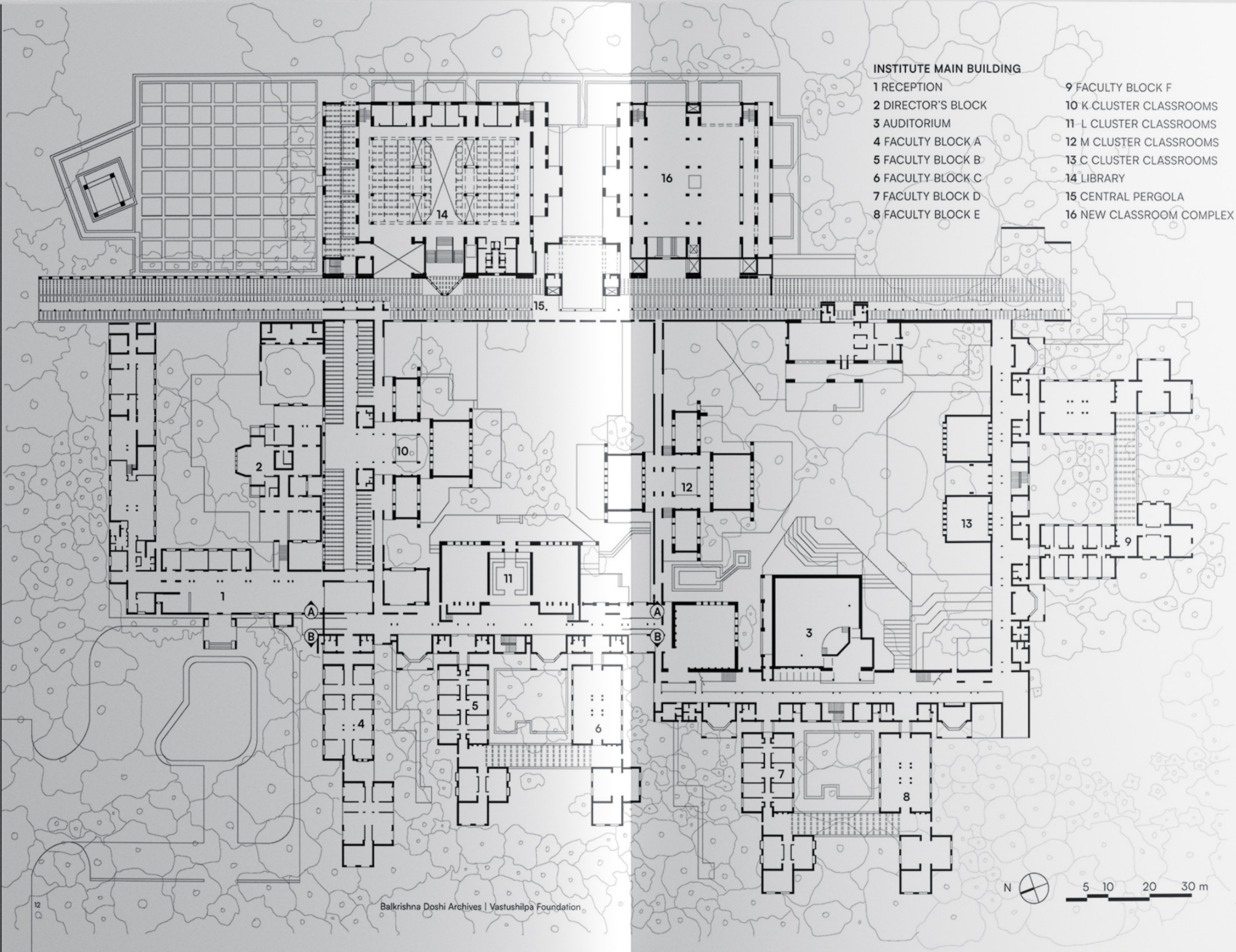
by Aldo van Eyck, buildings by Jaap Bakema, the Berlin Open University by Candilis, Josic and Woods, the Pestalozzi Village by Piet Blom, and the Venice Hospital by Le Corbusier.

Despite being unbuilt, plans for Corbusier's Venice Hospital (1964) attained an iconic status among mat-buildings and captured the imaginations of architects searching for new values. The Hospital is a classic case in the modernist oeuvre in which Le Corbusier himself deviates from his own stand-out volumes in favour of a low-profile dispersed formation. Designed earlier than the Venice Hospital, the monastery at La Tourette (Éveux, 1960) conveyed a model of interconnected volumes organised through the decisive use of a corridor as more than a connector. These new ideas of a modern building as a ground-scraper, or a reified movement system, would not have been lost on Doshi in his years working closely with the Swiss-French master.

In the early 1960s, two projects - the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) by Achyut Kanvinde and the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) by Louis Kahn<sup>8</sup> - invited new possibilities in Indian architecture in the arrangement of complexes. These two projects represented the national policy on advancing higher education and emphasised the building up of a robust nation, both in the technological and managerial areas, as India prepared to take off as a sovereign nation. While the practices and spaces of education are an ancient topic in India, starting from the 1950s, the

<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps relevant to note Smithson's familiarity with India because of her, and her partner Peter's, association with Le Corbusier in Chandigarh.

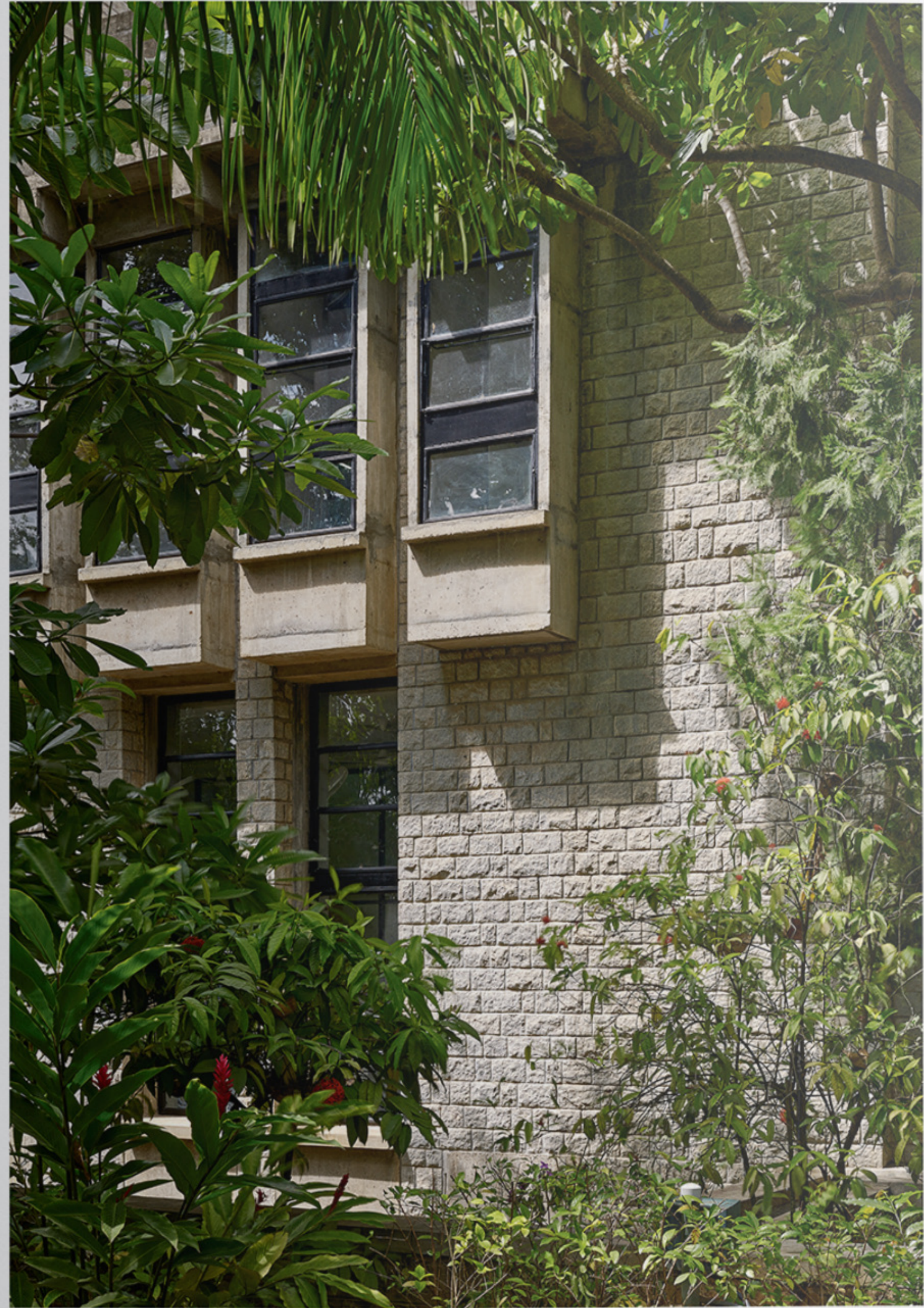
<sup>8</sup> Doshi worked with Kahn, as an associate, on the design and construction of IIMA, eventually collaborating with him for a decade.



**INSTITUTE MAIN BUILDING**

- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 DIRECTOR'S BLOCK
- 3 AUDITORIUM
- 4 FACULTY BLOCK A
- 5 FACULTY BLOCK B
- 6 FACULTY BLOCK C
- 7 FACULTY BLOCK D
- 8 FACULTY BLOCK E
- 9 FACULTY BLOCK F
- 10 K CLUSTER CLASSROOMS
- 11 L CLUSTER CLASSROOMS
- 12 M CLUSTER CLASSROOMS
- 13 C CLUSTER CLASSROOMS
- 14 LIBRARY
- 15 CENTRAL PERGOLA
- 16 NEW CLASSROOM COMPLEX















"Campus must be a place of discovery," Doshi implores. "A place of not knowing and then knowing". In such a campus, one "must have pauses", as in moments of resolution in a process of dialogue and reaction. It is not ensured that such epiphanies will happen inside the disciplined classroom or the hermetically organised building. Such experiences are more likely in the liminality of "outside" spaces nestling along the hard edges of architecture. Doshi's bet is on his street, the super-corridor, or the unmoored veranda, as the venue for such experiences. IIMB eschews the controlled knowability emblematised by a panopticon. It instead presents a landscape of spontaneity and spread, in which openings and light change in each corridor. All views are partial and, as in a Japanese garden walk, pathways shift to reveal new contours.

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