

**MODERN SOUTH ASIA**



**CHARLES CORREA**

KALA ACADEMY, GOA

ESSAY BY ROHAN SHIVKUMAR

EDITED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY RANDHIR SINGH



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**03**

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1973 - 1983

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## THE STREET AS STAGE

### CHARLES CORREA'S KALA ACADEMY GOA

Rohan Shivkumar

#### A Moonlight Sonata on the River

This could be a sequence from a Buster Keaton silent-era comedy. One summer evening, a man is sitting on the edge of the river, sipping his coffee. There is a warm breeze drifting over the water as the sun sets. He hears the gentle strains of a piano playing Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' over the sound of the waves lapping the shore. Caught in its spell, he walks towards the music. He must find out who is playing. In a daze, humming to himself, he climbs the steps of an amphitheatre to a blue-tiled terrace. In one of the rooms, he sees a woman playing the piano. A student stands over her shoulder watching her hands. The man wants to get as close as he can to the music. He walks straight towards her and collides directly into a pane of glass. The glass shatters. He falls. Everyone rushes to help him – the piano teacher, the watchmen of the building and other people enjoying the evening breeze off the river. Befuddled, he sits up. Luckily, he is not injured. Only his nose is a little bruised, and so is his pride.

After the flurry of worry and nervous laughter, this becomes a standing joke with him and the watchmen every time he returns to the building in later years. There is a smile exchanged between them – an acknowledgement of that moment when the beauty of art, of human error and of care between strangers came alive and became apparent. This story, or at least the basic form of it, was told to me by a friend of an evening he remembered at the Kala Academy.

I am sure the story transformed as he narrated it. This narration was probably designed for my ears. Certain aspects were highlighted and others discarded or played down. He chose the words carefully and structured his thoughts into language to express to me the ludicrousness of the situation. There was an embarrassed laugh inserted at the moment when the glass broke. As I recount his story, I too transform it. I render it in my tongue. I exaggerate and extrapolate – I hope to delight in my narration, even though I might fail.

Today, my friend probably remembers the event more as a story and not as an experience. In the story, he plays the eccentric befuddled man enamoured by music – a character that he performs for us and for himself. This is what art or *kala* can do. It allows us to 'become'. We find ourselves reflected in the mirror of art. It shows us what we are and what we want to be. Architecture is also such an art. This essay explores this desire for transformation as expressed in the architecture of the Kala Academy.

#### Kala Academy as a Cultural Centre

The Kala Academy is a Cultural Centre – a unique institution in the history

of modernity – perhaps even more specifically a postcolonial modernity, where an identity needed to be forged after the humiliations of colonialism. This is a building that meant to construct and distil in its programme and architecture that ambiguous and contested term – Culture. According to the dictionary, this word has two meanings. One is more broad-based – "the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society"<sup>1</sup>; while the other, at least at first glance, seems rather more specific – "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively". To collapse both of these in the same word 'culture' seems to presume that in the latter definition, we can find the former, or in the arts of a particular society we can discover its ideals and customs. Consequently, a building to house these arts must be able to express those ideals.

What did this mean for the making of a Cultural Centre in the state of Goa in 1973 – the year in which the Kala Academy was initiated? This was a state with a unique history. It had been attached to the larger Indian nation only 12 years earlier, while the Indian state itself was also very young. It had been a mere 26 years since Indian independence from British rule. The aspirations of making a new democratic nation had still not faded into the cynicism that followed after the national emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that suspended civil and political rights for 21 months from 1975 to 1977. The conception of the Kala Academy preceded this period and had to express the desires and hopes of a democratic nation. It had to exemplify the aspirations of a community with a shared desire for freedom, equality and justice – where difference in religion, language, custom, and belief was celebrated. It is important to acknowledge that this was an aspiration – a desire – it was what India was meant to be, not what it was. The role of 'culture' was to inspire us towards becoming citizens of what Benedict Anderson has called the 'Imagined Community' of the nation-state. This didactic desire propelled artists in the visual arts, literature and cinema to join in this 'nation-building' project.

#### Architecture and Indian Identity

Architecture had also been enlisted to shape the physical landscape in which the modern Indian citizen would live, perhaps nowhere as vividly as in the design of Chandigarh, the new capital of Punjab designed by Le Corbusier. In his famous quotation about the design of Chandigarh, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "It is totally immaterial whether you like it or not, it is the biggest thing because it makes you think. You may squirm at the impact, but it makes you imbibe new ideas. And one thing India requires in so many fields is to be hit on the head, so you may think".<sup>2</sup>

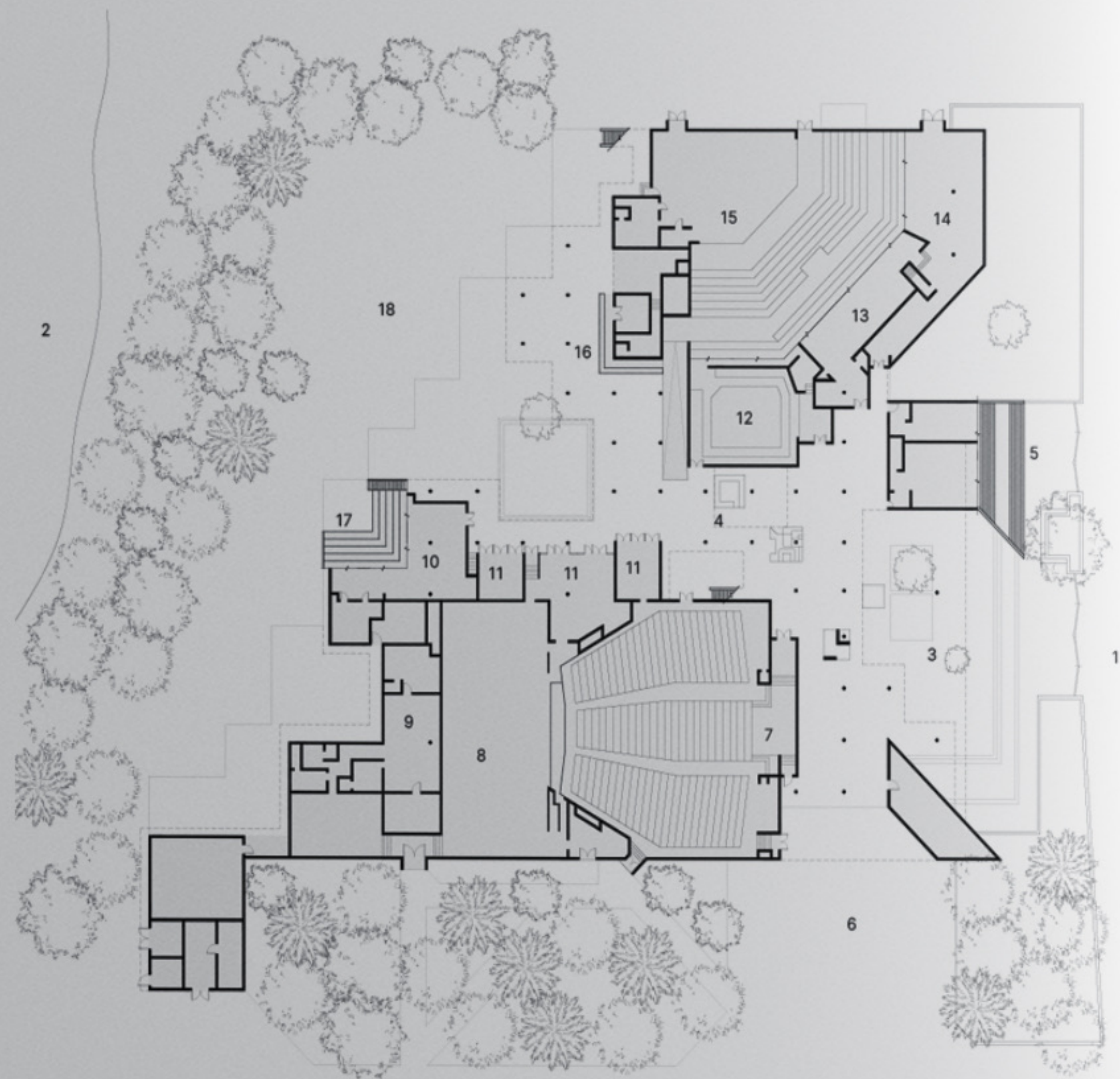
The plaza of the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh is a space representative of this desire. Here architecture is meant to celebrate the ideologies upon which the newly independent nation was being built through built form and spatial experience. The monuments here are not to public figures or gods, but rather the relationship between man and nature, between the ground and the sky, and the movement of celestial bodies – the Monument to the Open Hand, the Geometric Hill, and the Tower of Shadows. In this space, specific histories and identities dissolve. A new citizenship is imagined unmoored from the trappings of the past. This was an architecture that was supposed to shock us to rise from our stupor and wake up in a new world. A future citizenry was being forged that could inhabit the relentless grid, the brutal concrete and the stark horizons of the city – in its streets and squares. Many architects of the



- 1 Dayanand Bandodkar Marg
- 2 Mandovi River
- 3 Entrance Plaza
- 4 Foyer
- 5 Steps to Main Amphitheatre
- 6 Car Porch
- 7 Main Auditorium
- 8 Stage
- 9 Makeup Room

- 10 Library
- 11 Rehearsal Room
- 12 Black Box Theatre
- 13 Art Gallery
- 14 Workshop
- 15 Main Amphitheatre
- 16 Cafe
- 17 Amphitheatre
- 18 River side garden

Ground Floor Plan



6 12 18m

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- 1 Administration
- 2 Terrace
- 3 Practice Rooms

First Floor Plan



6 12 18m

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Pages 32 to 57: East facade and entry plaza along Dayanand Bandodkar Marg



















