



From: *Errol D'Souza*
Director

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Dear Alums,

Greetings from the Alma Mater. Trust you and your loved ones are well and coping with the vagaries of living through these trying times. I am writing to convey some important information that is associated with the residences you stayed in during your sojourn at IIMA. We felt it necessary to keep you informed as we are the custodians of the Louis Kahn buildings that have the potential to inspire future generations. Over the past couple of decades, the buildings have undergone dilapidation and structural deterioration. The earthquake at the beginning of the millennium and water seepage through ageing and deterioration of the exposed brick walls has resulted in large cracks in the masonry and periodical detachments of it in fragments. They are unsafe for living in without restoration and over the next few paragraphs I will attempt to share with you our experiences in this regard and the decisions we have been constrained to take.

It has not been easy to deal with the issues that have come up as we have attempted to restore the buildings and to minimize the interventions with respect to the physical and material structure of the buildings. As is well known concrete encasing was not used to protect the embedded reinforcement bars in the brickwork and that has resulted in rusting of the bars and cracks in the brickwork. The bricks used were not the best in class and had an inbuilt efflorescence. The bricks used by Kahn were what architects call second class bricks as per IS 3102-1971 with an average compressive strength of 4.89 N/sqmm and with inbuilt efflorescence. They were made from the local soil and were hand moulded and then kiln fired. Pointing that was used to hide the blunt edges of the bricks got damaged and allowed the collection of water which resulted in ingress into the masonry. The earthquake of 2001 amongst others posed challenges to the structural stability of the buildings. We have attempted to address these issues with the best team of conservation architects anyone could ask for — SNK (Somaya & Kalappa Consultants).

We had invited international restoration consultants Peter Inskip and Stephen Gee to advise us and they suggested we first restore one building and then based on our findings we could proceed to take up further work in the other buildings. We decided to restore Dorm 15 and the Library. Wherever cracks were found they were stitched with stainless steel helical bars. Where the cracks were deep, face bricks were removed and fresh brick work was done. In some cases, like the flat arches on the east façade of the library they were completely redone with stainless steel reinforcement. After completion of the complex work we were curious about the

longevity of the buildings. We appointed an independent structural consultant who opined that the compressive and tensile stresses in the walls exceed the limits as per the code requirements of IS:1905-1987 and that the buildings are unsafe. Halifax bars he opined do not provide any significant increase in compressive strength. The structural consultant of the conservation architect opined that the building codes referred to by the independent consultant came later and that the engineers who were involved in the construction of the campus were preoccupied with earthquake resistant buildings as Ahmedabad and Gujarat have had significant earthquakes. They concluded that the restored buildings have adequate resistance against design based earthquakes (DBE). D15 they stated will resist moderate earthquakes with limited damage and withstand severe earthquakes with significant damage. The Library, however, will in their opinion resist moderate earthquakes without any structural damage, and severe earthquakes with minor damage.

These issues were discussed in a number of meetings of the Building Committee and the Board of Governors. After long deliberations it was decided to commit to doing whatever it takes to restore the core of the Louis Kahn buildings – the library, the faculty wings, and the class room complex – and the dorms on the periphery of the system of buildings. For the other dorms, however, it was decided to be guided by three imperatives: (1) functional needs, (2) cultural heritage, and (3) available resources. As you will appreciate it is a complex task to have all three of the imperatives met successfully. We have grappled with questions as to why we should presume that the past is not changeable and why we should assume that future generations will value things in exactly the same way that past generations have. We wondered if it is appropriate for us to colonise future perceptions of living spaces. As we try to preserve the past to prevent loss how much are we creating our own imagination of the past.

We have had conversations as to whether we should protect the dorms from significant alterations by our current generation for future generations or whether we should treat them as a part of the life of the present community which has a say in the maintenance or alteration of the resource. With the contemporary user's need for efficient service how sensitive should we be to the vision of the past and how innovative should we be in order to be in tune with the future? Should the functional requirements of the current user be privileged over the memories of the past? Are all the buildings of Louis Kahn non-renewable or is it justifiable to have just a few – the dorms – redesigned in a new format that preserves the language of the great architect who gave us a campus we are thankful for daily. Only a fool will state that (s)he has the final answer to these issues. And yet decisions have to be taken keeping the imperatives in mind I have mentioned as the buildings become unliveable with spalling of concrete and slabs falling from the roofs with damaging consequences for the lives of the residents. There were even difficult questions around the central theme of Kahn's work at the campus which was that everything was planned around the idea of meeting. In today's world our experience is that students hardly use these shared spaces as they have gravitated to virtual modes of interacting.

After much circumspection we have decided to restore Dorms 16 to 18. Along with the restored Dorm 15 as you would recollect they constitute the periphery of the built campus and are the first buildings that persons who enter the campus see and understand along with the LKP and associated buildings as the grandeur

associated with the work of Kahn. For the other dorms that are in the inner core we will invite architects from across the world to present us options as to how we should go about making dorms that meet the design principles I outlined above. The plans they present should result in buildings that are in sync with the frontage of the existing dorms and the structure should be congruent with the grammar that Kahn visualized for the campus. We will select the best design and we hope to complete a complex of dorms that will be numbered as they are today but which will once you enter have a spatial experience that is contemporary. We believe this is the best way to deal with the circumstances we are in and to fulfil our duty to you and future generations of students.

We have been blessed with an architectural heritage that is ethereal. Our hearts have been ripped open whilst taking the call of doing all it takes to preserve the plaza of the library, the faculty wings, and the class rooms, and the dorms on the edges of the complex so that we do not lose a gift bestowed on us. For a few of the dorms, however, there will be a new history that we will strive to have in a relationship of continuity with the surrounding buildings of Kahn rather than otherwise. We seek your acceptance of this decision and your understanding especially when some of you may not agree with the steps we are taking.

My best wishes to you and your family in these difficult times and I hope you can visit us some time soon.

Yours Sincerely,

Errol

Here are some photographs of the current state of the dorms (we have done some superficial structural temporary work in few cases) :















