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Community Centre Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh



Revathi Kamath

received her Master's degree in architecture from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, where she teaches today, in 1981. Going into practice with husband, Vasant, she soon established her own distinctive style and clientele, emerging as one of Delhi's leading protagonists of mud architecture. The tourist village at Mandawa is recognized as one of her earliest successes from which she has gone from strength to strength, with each project underlining the validity of building in the age old idiom.



Nain House, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi

Some years ago, in a bid to revitalize the virtually deserted and degenerating fort of Maheshwar, a weaving centre for the now well-known Maheshwar sarees was set up within its confines. The Community Centre was an extension of this process of revitalization. While it was meant primarily for the weavers, the activities generated were to provide an incentive to the townspeople to brave the steep slope up to the fort, participate in activities and so rejuvenate the space.

The design brief called for multi-functional spaces, as the Centre had to incorporate a small library, a creche, a television room, a space for the doctor, cooking space, an open-air theatre for drama, lectures, discussions, meetings, film shows, etc., and occasional use of the whole space as a *baarat ghar*.

Situated adjacent to the main gateway of the fort, with two of its edges bounded by the fort walls, the site has a legacy of *neem* trees at least a

hundred years old. The architectural cues came from the historical urban fabric, the syntax and patterns of the built forms and the rhythms of the building elements of Maheshwar town.

The plan was drawn directly on the ground and later transferred to the drawing board at Delhi, to work out details. This reversal of the usual process has been fruitful in that the building fits well into the context.

A multi-functional veranda connecting that rooms the accommodate the library and creche, forms two sides of a courtyard. The other two are formed by the fort walls. The existing slope of the land has been used to create the stepped seating platforms of the open-air theatre. The spread of the *neem* trees forms a natural canopy.

The building bulk is minimal, and its brick piers are finely articulated to echo the scale of the timber frame structures of the adjoining *raj-wada*. The large openings, creating a

transparency at eye-level, are corbelled down to the size of the locally available sandstone lintels. Corbelled brick brackets replace the traditional carved timber ones. Semi-circular arches that are new to Maheshwar have been used only within the building. The half-round terracotta tiles used for roofing are a development of the Development Alternatives type. No timber has been used in the building except for door and window frames and stiles. The support structure for the roof is in steel, while the door and window panels are of Dalda tins.

Introduced with its appropriate modernism, the building technology has attempted to intercept the soulless and spiritless trend towards 'modern concrete technology' that has filtered into the small town from nearby Indore, producing an ill fitting and inappropriate modern architecture in the historical precincts of Maheshwar.

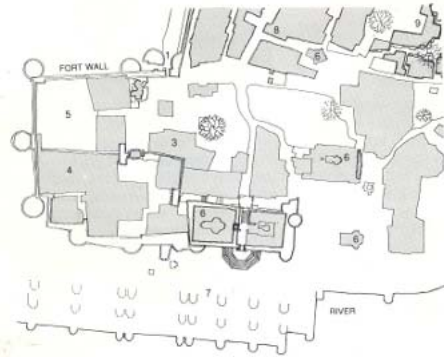


Tourist Village, Mandawa



Photos: Mitchell Criticos, Vasant Kamath

❖ WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

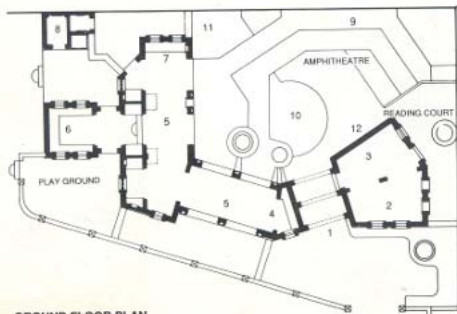


SITE PLAN

- 1 ENTRANCE GATE
- 2 COMMUNITY CENTRE
- 3 WEAVERS CENTRE
- 4 RAJWADA
- 5 GARDEN
- 6 TEMPLE
- 7 GHATS
- 8 RESIDENTIAL AREA
- 9 PROPOSED WEAVERS HOUSING



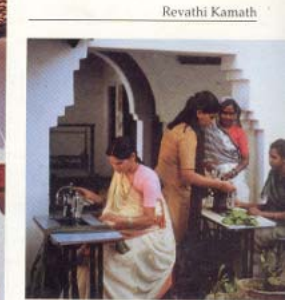
ELEVATION



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



- 1 COURT
- 2 DOCTOR
- 3 LIBRARY
- 4 TELEVISION
- 5 VERANDA
- 6 CRECHE
- 7 KITCHEN
- 8 TOILET
- 9 STEPPED PLATFORMS
- 10 STAGE
- 11 PROJECTOR
- 12 SCREEN



Revathi Kamath

Client *Rehwa Society and BORDA (Bremen Overseas Development Association, Germany)*
 Architect *Revathi Kamath*
 Plinth area *120 sq m*
 Cost of project *Rs 1,90,000*
 Contractor *Built by local masons*
 Year of completion *1991*

"The gender bias is certainly not a myth—it is strong and exists all the time. But the way to deal with it, is to recognize it, work with it, and change it."

"In India, women architects are not part of the Indian tradition. The Vastu Shastras allowed only men to be architects. However, the indigenous traditions have always had women builders participating in the actual creation and production of architectural images through the use of their skills in construction, preparation of materials, rendering and decoration. They have been integral to the architecture and embellishment of their traditional homes—making rangolis and wall paintings that are symbolic representations and an abstract codification of knowledge and memories of the life of a community."

"In indigenous traditions, where technologies are based on local resources, much of the effort that goes into building and maintaining the home—quite often a mud structure, is usually the woman's. I think that is why this material is very special to me; besides its obvious ecological implications it provides the message that women are part of the environment and possess the skills to work with it. A traditional rural woman is always confident of building a shelter for herself. It is a modern, urban phenomenon that women have lost control of the buildings they live in; it is only in the contemporary world that women tend to be excluded from participating in the creation of their environment."

"Women architects should not be mere clones of their male counterparts. A woman's consciousness equips her to deal with space in a holistic way. A woman's psyche is more sensitized to the finer aspects of living, sustaining and maintaining habitat. She has the potential, through formal

education, to perceive and understand the larger dimension and disciplines that govern space, and still be aware of the finer aspects and activities within the space. If women are true to their being, they stand a chance of bringing in a new and much needed dimension into the profession."

"Architecture deals with intuition—it is much more than a sum total of its parts. When I put a building together in all its complexities, or create an environment, I feel exhilarated. Only if women realize their potential, can they play a major role in architecture. Rather than building bigger and bigger structures and being part of the mainstream, I feel we should concentrate on designing buildings through which the quality of life can be improved. Unfortunately, the latest trend in architects, the world over, is towards creating show-pieces of self-indulgence rather than building as a response to social needs or even reflecting the aesthetic perceptions of society."

"The mainstream of architecture today is crassly commercial. There are a few 'luminaries' who are producing relevant architecture and are thinking and creating as human beings. But what I have noticed is that sensitive men who are able to perceive the finer aspects of living in space do not think the same way as other men in mainstream society—they have more of the feminine intuitiveness."

"A woman's creativity must flow freely and spontaneously and unless that happens a woman cannot be recognized or create forms which people are going to notice. To achieve this a woman must have self-confidence and believe in what she is doing, and not be burdened by social restrictions and household responsibilities and chores of day-to-day existence. It will take some time for women to fully realize themselves in this profession."