

Structuring beauty, sequencing thoughts

The architecture of I M Kadri is a long list of intriguing projects that exhibit a vast range of work and building types spreading across six decades. A characteristic set of buildings mark and punctuate the journey of this practice, and a close view of the entire oeuvre indicates the many struggles and arguments that architectural practice would have traversed in these six decades. We focus on certain early buildings to understand the making of metropolitan architecture in India

Design

I M Kadri

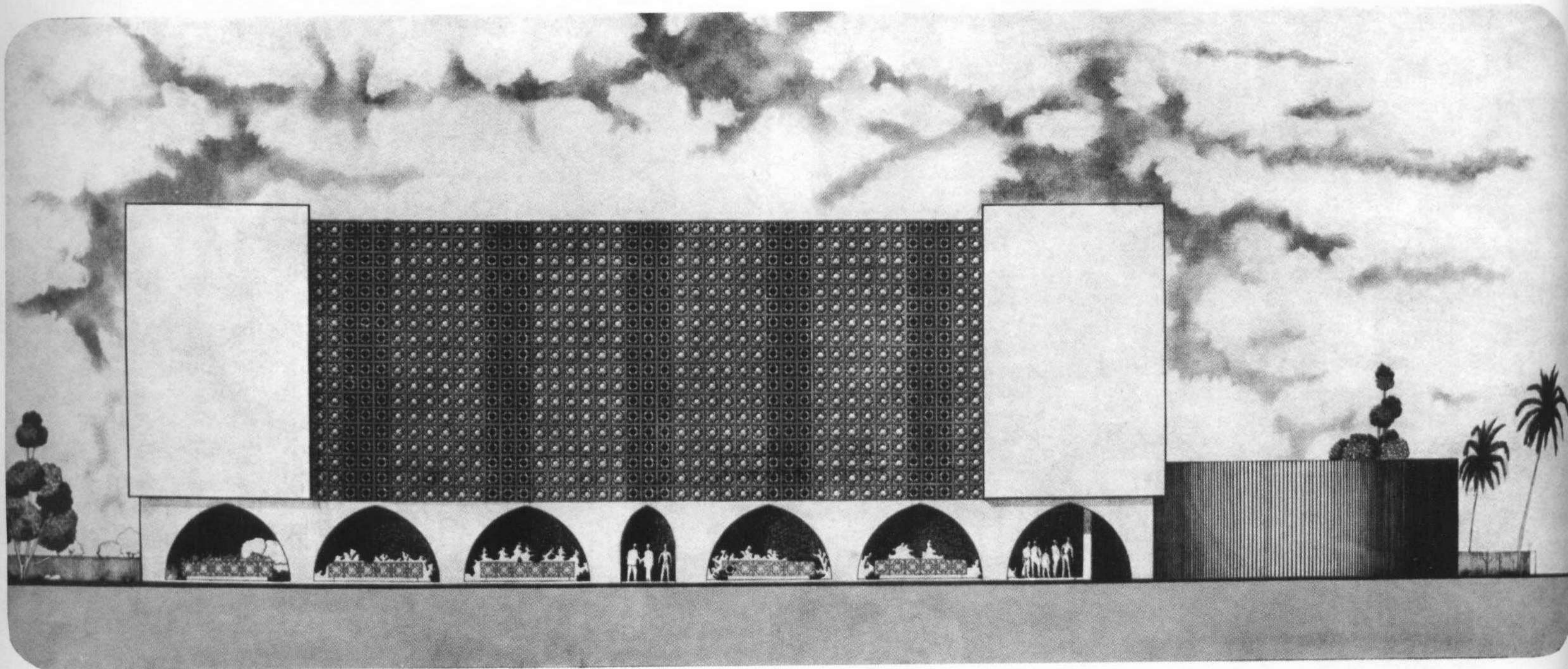
Text

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The architecture of I M Kadri spans the second half of the 20th century, in a metropolis and country that sees great changes and ideological shifts. Architecture in India is very varied, yet is often bracketed into ideological concepts like Traditional and Modern. As most histories of architecture in modern and contemporary India try to create such conceptual brackets, classifying architecture and its styles, the work by Kadri often moves across various architectural ideas and concepts. In this sense the practice and architecture of Kadri becomes a reflection of the changing times in a country like India and a metropolis like Mumbai. The entire work of Kadri spans enough number of programmes and building types for one to confidently consider its architectural development as symptomatic of practice in urban India. The architecture of Kadri takes shape in the context of an emerging modern metropolis, which in a newly-independent nation becomes a site for new ideas and new demands. Some of the early projects by Kadri in the 1950s and 60s also indicate the emergence of building typologies that are not clearly defined as yet. The typology of the apartment building develops in the 1920s and 30s especially with Art Deco and a newly-emerging middle-class, however in a cramped island-city where the bungalow or the villa are not really possible, apartments of different kinds accommodate the different classes of populations. Kadri is involved in the design of apartment buildings with the clarity of what 'home' means, as also conscious that a building sits in the

larger physical fabric of a city and hence has the responsibility of contributing to a visually-charged environment. That buildings sit as objects in an urban landscape, contributing to its fabric, is something that is very important to the designs that Kadri develops.

As much as one can engage with the biography of Kadri himself, and understanding his growth in a modernising nation, a direct engagement with the architecture he produced seems to directly reflect a passionate and very articulated understanding of architectural practice per se. It instigates a curiosity to explore what it means to engage with pure forms and textures of architecture, where a building is an articulation of form and texture, as much as it is a programmatic resolution of space. A man who clearly does not receive well the architecture of Le Corbusier but greatly appreciates Louis Kahn undoubtedly places his notion of architecture in certain values of form and spatial structuring. A few buildings from the oeuvre display clearly what it means to engage with architecture, where architecture means to build for people – his 'the fourth dimension'! And architecture here also means the pure and crystallised 'art of building'! A very modern building in Delhi designed by a German architect impresses Kadri, while the spatial and visual memory of living within a joint family in a haveli also seems to impress the core of his architectural values. His interest in modern architecture, form and structure is evident with his interest in the architecture

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Drawing of Happy Home building, designed keeping in mind the visually-impaired users of the building. The use of arches and the jaali indicate the characteristic language of Kadri buildings, structured within a very Modernist format