



LEGEND OF THE LIVING ROCK

WRITING FOR BHARAT DIAMOND BOURSE,
BALKRISHNA DOSHI – MUMBAI, INDIA



WRIGHTWOOD
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to constantly express awe and wonder about something at the site. He even sounded frightened.

All of us arrived within a few hours, and even today I cannot believe what we saw. The location and forms of the buildings, the peculiar spaces, and the materials that you now see and experience in the new Bourse were powerfully shaped by what we witnessed on that night. I do not know about others who were present, but I at least would call it the greatest miracle in my life.

We saw the site excavated to a depth of about ten metres, and the bed rock which now lay exposed appeared like a giant crystal on that dark night. I had never before seen the patterns and textures which I saw on this 350-metre-long and 250-metre-wide rock.

Apart from these, two features made this rock unique. Almost in the centre of this rather flat eight-hectare rock there was a glowing outcrop resembling a stub. It was rather large for its height, but in its transparency and formation it had the character of a beautiful uncut diamond. It appeared that its glow was generated from its efforts to pull the whole land mass up, almost like the mythological story of the churning of the ocean of milk in the *Samudra Manthan*. Upon close observation, we found that this central stub was indeed raising the eight-hectare bedrock, slowly yet surely. It was an astounding experience, much like the eruption of lava from Mount Etna which I had witnessed.

Because of this unusual phenomenon we had no recourse but to immediately summon all the scientists, scholars, and pandits we knew to the site. After studying this phenomenon each had his story to tell. However, one elderly pandit casually wondered if this site perhaps could be the lost fragment of land and jewel which emerged during the *Samudra Manthan*, when the great jewel with Goddess Laxmi appeared on the earth. We asked the scientists from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Atomic Energy Commission, and other national laboratories to tell us what should we do so that we could continue the construction.

We took extensive photographs of this moving land mass from several angles so that we could unravel the hidden meanings behind the peculiarities of this whole phenomenon. We then began to rethink our project with the help of the photographs and the hidden messages the site conveyed. Being a religious person, I took this

event as a God-sent opportunity to integrate the complex into the site.

Upon overlaying the enlarged photographs over our final design drawings, it became clear to us that this site must be an ancient quarry from where the last *ratna* [Sanskrit for 'jewel'] had emerged. We also felt that this quarry must have been a major trading centre for precious stones in the ancient past. These thoughts came to most of us after observing the features at the site. We wondered how there were ten-metre-wide leveled surfaces along the periphery like roads for transporting goods. How come there were ramp-like slopes going up and down? Were they perhaps connecting different levels for vehicles which were either parked or moved for loading operations? Apart from this peripheral road-like strip, there was another sunken strip, very straight, like our present-day service roads leading to parking areas. Strangely, the spacing between the first strip and this one was almost the same as what we had provided in our plans. The distance between these strips was exactly the same as the ones we used for double-loaded parking areas.

We also noticed large chunks of (almost two-storey-high) blocks located at a different level. The blocks were oriented south-west and open spaces between these were again of the same size that we find in our ancient towns. It seemed like we were seeing a model of either the city of Mohenjo-daro or an electronic circuit, because the orientation of most of these blocks were precisely the same.

We wondered whether this discipline in orientation was suggestive of any value. Perhaps this was a hint for us to plan the offices for natural breezes and to protect major areas from incident radiation? Next to these two-storeyed, nearly forty-metre-wide blocks, there was yet another rather irregular strip encircling the last stretch of two-storeyed land mass. The surface of this stretch had slight undulations and was punctured with holes of about three metres in diameter as if to allow light and ventilation to a lower level of the quarry. Perhaps the lower level was also used for purposes similar to our proposal of using the basement for parking and other services.

But what fascinated all of us the most was the central stub. It was relatively small but very powerful like a grip that could pull the entire rock. Its location, glow, and form appeared to attract all the three strips of streets. Surrounding this hub, if we can call it so, lay several fissures. They were all running in south-west directions except that they converged near the edge in the form of a slab at an angle. Its

angle reminded us of the amphitheatres that we usually provide in a small towns [sic] for gatherings. The area between the amphitheatre and the hub had shallow but distinct levels, as if to allow people to gather and celebrate life or to attend special functions located near this powerful column. It was like a great pivot.

Beyond this space there was another large area which was rather flat. It had no distinct character except its location in the north-east corner. This is, incidentally, the most auspicious place for entrances prescribed in our ancient treatises, and I was pleasantly surprised to note that this is the same location for which our scheme had provided the main entrance. Having discovered these clues from the living rock mass, we came to believe that there is a hidden reason for locating the Diamond Bourse on this site. Rather than worrying over this unusual phenomenon, we accepted this situation with grace and decided to integrate our buildings with this land mass in an appropriate manner. Along with the clients, we consulted scientists, technocrats, and *pundits* to find ways and means to somehow freeze this land mass in its position to suit our basement, ground, and upper level proposals. This way our parking, services, and the peripheral accesses to the site could become part of the ancient land mass and our upper-levels could be suitably adjusted to the higher land formations.

In order to realize this God-sent gift to the fullest potential we summoned the best technologists in the world. Finally we contacted the agency which had with great faith, devotion, and skill worked on the relocation of the Abu Simbel temple in Egypt. With their help we managed to freeze this land mass such that the Bourse complex acquires unique character with the base in the form of the undulating terraced earth and the towers as our additions.

What you see here as the main entrance to the Bourse is the original rock, and the central crystal shaped building, the trading hall, that you notice in the second larger court is our addition to the original stub which we now call our *ratna*. The amphitheatre to the west of this hall is the original slope partially modified by us. We have added underneath it all the public facilities for visitors. The six-metre-high wall encircling this main space is the original quarry wall. We have punctured it to provide some light and ventilation to some of our offices which we have located in its thickness.

The fissures emanating from the stub or the central pillar of the trading hall have

been slightly changed. Some are widened to create several inter linked water pools where you also see fountains of various sizes and shapes. These fountains have now become [sic] a part of our festivals. During summer they help to keep the area cool.

As you know, the Bourse is now a major tourist attraction. Beyond this point, admissions are restricted only to members of our Bourse. However, visitors are not totally cut off from the rest of the complex. Over the six-metre-high wall one can see lots of plants as well as people strolling. They are our Bourse members meeting their colleagues on the promenade. Located along this route are facilities such as Bourse offices, banks, stores, restaurants, etc. This rampart-like terrace also overlooks the other green area and trees we planted. You can also see the terraces of smaller office blocks where terraced gardens have appeared. These trees and shrubs in the green area are another wonder. These were not planted by us but grew out of the seeds that were lying dormant in the crevices for centuries. If you get up close, you will notice that their colours, textures, and forms are very different from the ones you find in this region.

During the monsoon with its torrential rains, these crevices become water channels. The rain water from the terraces converges at the main thick wall that you can see from here. If [sic] flows in cascades out of the gargoyles that you see. These cascades remind one of Italian gardens, particularly the garden at the Villa d'Este. During festivals and on holidays in other seasons, we create these cascades by recycling water from fountains on the terraces.

You must have noticed by now that there are three major elements that dominate the form of the Bourse. First, the granite base and the six-metre-high stone wall, second, the water channels and the fountains, and third, the green valleys formed on the lower terraces. All this is our homage to the moving land mass which we froze in place to remind us of the sites of our ancient cities like Babylon or Mohenjo-daro, where love for earth, water, sky, light, and air was paramount. By now you must be anxious, I am sure, to ask me about the towers that rise above this ancient base. Yes, they were added by us to create space for our members' offices. They are our high-tech additions in contemporary style. The towers' northern faces are covered with mirrored curtain walls to create a fragile and transparent environment. But if you look up you will notice that all the alternate panels sparkle and reflect the sun's rays like a diamond's facets sparkling in the light. These diamond-shaped

pyramids are provided in each of the offices' glass panels to give the merchants a multi-dimensional view of Bombay's skyline. This way their visions are broadened, and they also provide them relief from constantly looking at diamonds through magnifying lenses.

On the southern side of these towers, we have small windows to protect the offices from direct sunlight. However, to give them a sense of wide expanses, we have provided projections with coloured mirror glass over the windows so that the view of the sky is softer, and, when seen from the lower level, they can observe the lush green terraces or trees planted around and within the site. With such a sacred ancient rock as a site, you must be wondering how we were able to construct such large crystal-shaped tower slabs. Well, we have tried to minimize the supporting structure of these towers, and we have established their angles and locations on the basis of punctures which exist in the ancient rock.

There are a total of nine towers, and as you may notice we have provided bridges on alternate floors to interlink them. These are clad in mirrored glass and, depending upon the sky and sun conditions, they are sometimes visible, sometimes not. From here you can only see two bridges, but there are actually five of them.

We felt that the 'living' base can only be complimented without disturbing its tortoise-like character if our towers were thin, oriented towards the north and south, and had no regular shape. With minimum supports they also give an impression of hovering in the sky.

Lastly, I want to show you the jewel of our Bourse, the trading hall located on the third floor which almost appears to float. It has the most magnificent interior. Its ceiling is made of shining metal sheets punctured at selected spots to allow glimpses of the sky, the sun, and the stars. But its orientation and cover made of special lenses cut out the glare during the day and offer a clear view of the stars at night. The structure of the ceiling is totally concealed to make the roof of the trading hall a part of the sky. We feel that this way the merchants will experience greater freedom.

The walls and the floors of the trading hall are a combination of hard and soft, shiny and dull surfaces. This way the space looks relaxed, which is of vital importance for the diamond merchants constantly operating under stress. The original stub at

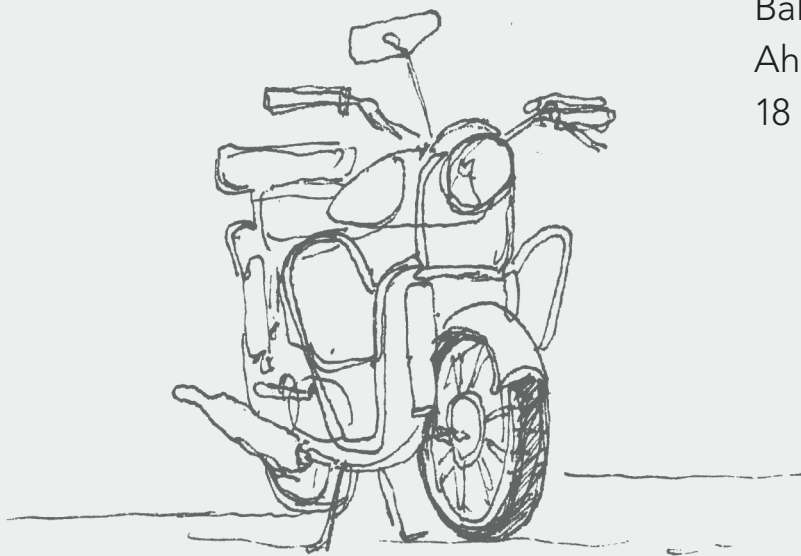
ground level is now part of our central focus. It is related to the diamond museum, and its reflecting surfaces are a part of our daily tourist attraction.

Even though there are many things that I can show you and talk about, time is short. Perhaps you may call on me again. But before we part, I want to narrate something to you which may interest you and you may like to ponder over.

Because of the ancient rock which has been made a part of our design, this place has now become the most sacred place in India. All those who come here feel elated, and as we have heard from many that their lives have become peaceful and also successful. Here there is constant breeze, and we experience the sea. Here the fountains, the walls, and the gardens make people forget the Hanging Gardens. Here the sky seems bluer and cleaner than it perhaps is, because here silence can be heard.

This place has now become a true sanctuary in spite of the presence of 20,000 people and 3,000 cars. All this could happen because of the magical and ancient quarry-like site, its integration in the design, and the respect that we have given to the union of the two.

To me it is a miracle that modern Bombay with all its big-city characteristics is so near, and yet the environment of the Bourse is as peaceful and vital as when it was 'Mumbai.'



Balkrishna Doshi
Ahmedabad
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