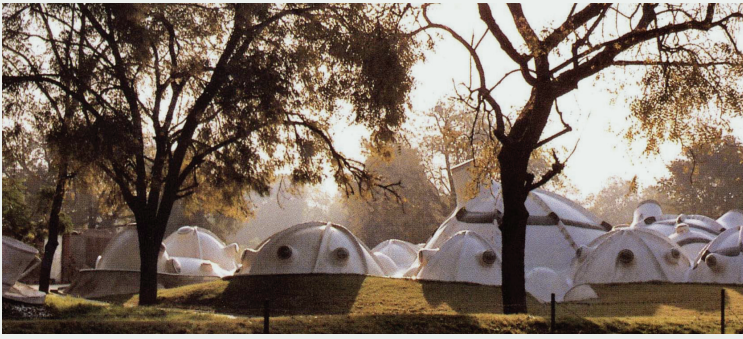


If you want freedom break away from the normal conventions. Become like a child, see things afresh, work more with your feelings than intellectual or rational

# THE REVELATION

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nothing to do with absolute reality. Because reality is also an illusion. But your education and age has made you think that way. Reality is what you and others perceive externally and similarly.



# THE REVELATION

Nearly twenty years ago when we met at Gunvantbhai's residence, Husain talked at length about underground spaces and their unique qualities. He recalled this discussion when he visited Ahmedabad two years ago looking for a small piece of land for building an art gallery to exhibit his work. After visiting several places, I took him to meet Piraji Sagara at the Ahmedabad Education Society campus, and he persuaded Husain to agree to this site for his new gallery. We then completed the necessary formalities with Shrenikbhai Kasturbhai, Chairman of the AES, and Husain asked me to design an underground building which he called the 'Gufa' [Gujarati for 'cave']. He also emphasized that this Gufa should be a demonstration of a positive collaboration between a painter and an architect.

But even after many months, I could not arrive at any clear image except that the Gufa, as the name suggests, had to be an underground structure and, perhaps, without a definite, conventional form. So I visited the site to find a clue, and that night I had a dream. A Kurma [an avatar of Vishnu] who had appeared in my dreams about eight years ago again appeared before my eyes and began to ask questions about my approach to architecture. He spoke of the deeper goals and pursuits in architecture.

Kurma reminded me of the achievements of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. He emphasized how the definition of space and form were gradually

being dissolved three-dimensionally and how the sky was becoming part of interior space. He even talked about optical illusions and how they are essential for making us realize that the space and form that we see are part of the infinite, and hence timeless and illusory. Then he reminded me of my visit to the Ronchamp Chapel and my experiences upon seeing the fluidity of the spaces and forms which so far no one has been able to either describe or photograph.

I immediately realized that in true architecture one must experience joys and celebrations. It must affect our inner self. It cannot be distinguished separately either as the modulation of light or surfaces or supporting system. On the contrary, a good design merges floors, walls, and ceilings into one contiguous whole and creates an organic space almost like a living being. What it encompasses within and without its surfaces are the voids which generate energy. This energy then reduces all the stresses within all the elements that surround this object which we call architecture. The total environment then emanates peace and tranquility. Even the air becomes calm yet vital. It then becomes a small universe, a microcosm which we can call paradise.

I saw the Kurma had a very thin skin covered with a white, shiny surface. The modulation of this skin was complex due to the intermingling of many rounded shapes of varied heights, dimensions, and inclination. On these dome-like structures, there appeared protrusions almost like apertures in a bunker aimed at tracking celestial objects. They were all pointed in different directions. There were two raised domes indicating the possible entrances. Since there was no way to enter, I searched from above and decided that the interior must be very fluid and continuous. The entire mass appeared to be almost mobile and suspended.

Kurma said, 'What this Gufa wants to be is what you see in these forms. A building which is dynamic, difficult to describe, yet a great experience. It must have places for children, for the old, for the common man as well as the elite. At the same time, it should also provide its master, Husain, an opportunity to explore all his new concepts. He is very innovative, and hence it should match his needs. In technological terms it should challenge all the usual conventions of construction, be made of simple materials, but should show how to be natural. Like timeless

legends which depict the aspirations of man, here is your chance to connect our ancient traditions of crafts with new technologies aided by computers.'

Lastly, Kurma talked about the site of the Gufa and the campus where had I designed one of my earliest buildings. He said, 'Now, after almost thirty-five years, you should demonstrate all that you have experienced and learned in life, and all that you now understand about architecture. Your design should manifest all your recent concerns and pursuits.'

What you see today is the labour of love of many colleagues, my friends who realized this vision hidden below ground. Throughout the process they have shed their prejudices and worked wholeheartedly on the concept. The protuberances on the surfaces perhaps, remind you of telescopes or the bulging eyes of chameleons, crocodiles, or frogs. As you observe it at night, they act as torches and their positions light the surrounding trees and landscape so that it appears as a moonscape. I hope you have noticed the 101 neem trees that surround this new Gufa. They protect the place as if it were a paradise. But what is unexpected is the experience inside. Are you surprised to find that it is larger than imagined and deceptive in its forms? The skylight protuberances that you saw on the roof are not immediately visible, yet the light that they let in makes the Gufa space glow, lending it an almost ethereal quality. The columns, even though they occur at random and are of varied thicknesses – some of them at an inclination – appear like the trees of a thick forest. But if you observe them carefully, they are actually the supporting elements transferring the loads very naturally.

Then there are the two large rotundas. They are meant for discourses on art and culture. And of course you can never miss the walls and the free-standing sculptures. They are Husain's real masterpieces. What he has tried here is to create a wonderful counterpoint by locating the painting on strategic surfaces so that his stories can be interpreted in many, many ways.

Before I end, I must tell you about an event that took place when the building was consecrated. The tribals who had worked to construct it were so deeply affected by the technique of construction the forms of the building, and the way changes

could be made naturally, that they felt they were reliving their own ancient ritual of *Pithora Bava* [a form of ritual painting]. So what they did was to perform a dance following a *puja* [prayer ritual] and the sprinkling of sacred colours.

These nocturnal rituals lasted for nine days. But on the first day, after hearing the chant of *Sheshanaga* (the thousand-headed cobra that is Lord Vishnu's resting place), Husain suddenly stood up and, holding a long brush, climbed up on the domes, where he feverishly painted a cobra connecting the two large rotundas. He then asked me to get this cobra glazed in black mosaic. On the ninth day, the tribals declared that *prana*, the breath of life from *Pithora Bava*, had now entered the Gufa. The Gufa has now become a place celebrating the first ever collaborative acts of painting and architecture. All those who visit this place return home with joyous memories and remember this unusual experience. They come again and again to admire this wonderful gift from Husain to the city of Ahmedabad.

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