



THE SACRED SPRING

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In order to build a unique architectural complex for the institute, a concept was conceived around a story. This fictional narration may help understand the architecture's intent.

Long ago there was a small village of mud and white walls where the National Institute of Fashion Technology campus now stands. Though small, this settlement was very beautiful. They had cattle, a few trees, and a central place. This central place had a small water body surrounded by steps. This very small body of water appeared to be a very sacred place, perhaps due to the scarcity of water. When asked, the villagers said that they had to dig deep to get to this water, and that they found it only at this spot. Because of this hard effort and the fear the water could eventually disappear, the villagers made this spot a place of pilgrimage.

Several times a year at this spot, many other persons from other villages gathered to meet, sing, and even select their future companions, i.e. their brides or husbands. In order to create a place for their rituals, they built steps out of mud bricks, and the whole configuration these steps took on the shape of an irregular hill with several platforms. Perhaps these platforms served the different groups for simultaneous activities.

Over the decades word spread about sanctity of this place, and this increased its importance. Consequently, other rather well-to-do persons built houses in wood

and stone in the area. They were very similar to the ones built near Jaisalmer and Jaipur and the character of the place was similar to that of Rajasthan. These houses had beautiful *jharokhas* [enclosed, overhanging balconies], balconies, *jallis* [latticework], verandahs, and several blank walls carved with scenes from residents' daily lives.

With a growing population and expanding economy came a boom in houses and activities in the area. As a result, a handful of rich merchants built their *havelis* [mansions] in the village's remaining empty spots. However, they all ensured the central sacred body of water was maintained. In order to propitiate the Gods and increase their prosperity, the rich people built some partitions around the steps, improved the steps' finishes, and helped the original inhabitants of the villages in improving their quality of life.

This concern for the community's welfare as well as the sacred water's growing popularity led to the addition of a few food stalls for pilgrims around the tank. A small *ashram*-like complex with a few rooms was also built to enable the pilgrims to visit the place all year round.

During the last century the building was upgraded many times, but to retain a sense of continuity with the past a few parts of the building were kept intact. Any new material or treatment that was added to the building added to its collage-like nature. New large windows seemed to juxtapose with the small carved windows of the older structure.

Over the years the village was totally engulfed by large-scale development, and the place became a miniscule part of the new twentieth-century urban scene. Soon the local municipality enforced the new hygiene laws and provided the settlement with a drainage system and water supply. Of course these upgrades to the building separated parts of it from one another, and as a result the continuous structure of the earlier complex was fragmented.

As I gather, many corporate bodies desirous of spiritual support from this sacred place have purchased some of these properties in the recent past and changed their interiors to accommodate their contemporary needs. These corporations are now thriving in their enterprises thanks to the holy atmosphere!

How the buildings stand as a complex today reflects the changes which have occurred over the last few centuries as well as the value the human mind has for such places. In addition to the nostalgia, there is also an undercurrent of superstition.

However, in light of the increasing demands on this land and the rapid social and structural changes affecting the old families, many have sold their properties. They have moved away with their fortunes to live their own lives, for the place is gradually acquiring an altogether different meaning that is rather different from the quiet life of the past.

As a result of these changes and in order to preserve the sanctity of this place, the Archaeological Survey of India has decided to acquire this property and pass it on to an institute which could not only simulate the old way of life but also add a new, modern day dimension to it. The Archaeological Survey believes that this is perhaps the only place where we can trace our history over five or six centuries.

Luckily, the National Institute of Fashion Technology discovered this place, and they have convinced the Archaeological Survey that the Institute will not only retain the location's unique character but will also provide sufficient impetus in the form of certain modification that can ensure the history of our times will continue to provide a link to the past.

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