

TTK Auditorium: Re Architecture

P.T. Krishnan, Managing Partner, PTK Architects, who has designed and managed the whole upgradation programme since its commencement in the year 2006, describes with the help of vivid photographs, the architectural and conservation concepts involved.

Buildings become obsolete or fall into a state of decay due to technological advances and changing socio economic conditions. Through a process of rehabilitation and restoration the process of obsolescence can be reversed and buildings can be brought back into the mainstream of social and economic activity so that they become an asset and not a liability.

Conservation is the process of managing this change with appropriate interventions based on the heritage value of a building which take into account its historicity, cultural relevance and architectural character. While authentic restoration may be a high priority for buildings which are of historic value and also display great architectural and cultural traditions, other lesser buildings which may have fallen into disuse, but which still lend an identity to the neighbourhood could



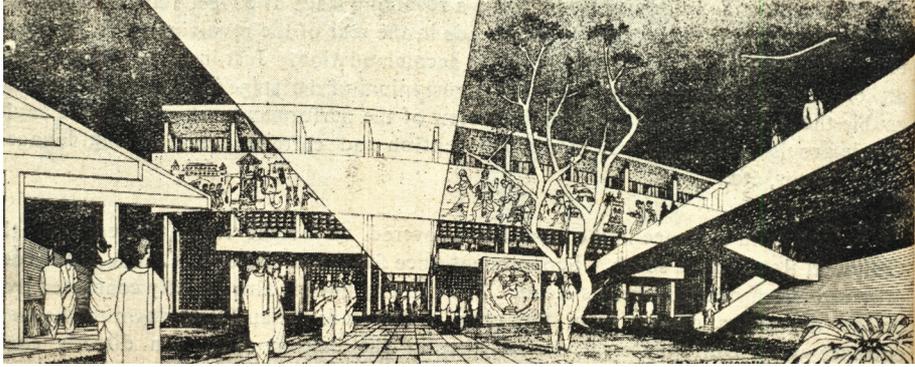
View of lobby on ground floor



View from ground floor lobby

be rehabilitated and put to economic use without changing its character. In this manner conservation can serve as a link between our past and the future and preserve the diversity that one witnesses in our cities.

The Music Academy, Madras is an eighty odd year old institution devoted to the cause of Carnatic Music. In 1957 it commissioned G.M.Bhuta and Associates, a Bombay based firm of architects and engineers to design a ‘large auditorium to seat 1500 people’ which would pay special attention to the acoustics of the hall so that ‘the real voice of the musician could be heard by all without the use of microphones’. Modern architecture in India was undergoing a sea change during this period influenced by Corbusier and his designs for Chandigarh and other iconic buildings in Ahmedabad. Architects like Kanvinde and Bhuta had broken out of the Art – Deco mould which was the prevailing architectural style of the early fifties in India and embraced the tenets of Modern Architecture. The Music Academy’s new building on Cathedral Road is a



Architect GM Bhuta's original rendering

classic example of this revolution. That an institution so steeped in tradition would agree to such a revolutionary design in its quest for 'good acoustics' speaks volumes about its rational and forward looking attitude. The design of the building is clearly influenced by Corbusier's works. It is a bell shaped reinforced concrete structure and sports a beautiful split level lobby with suspended concrete walkways – a rare example of concrete elements used as tension members. As was the practice then, the building was designed for natural ventilation and the lobby in true Corbusian style was open to the elements with only concrete 'jalies' affording some protection from sun and rain. Madras was a quiet small town then and a very conservative and austere one at that. Cathedral Road and Mowbrays road were quiet tree – lined avenues and had little or no traffic.

While the building suited this ethos, things were not to remain static for long. Changing values and more prosperity brought about a change in people's expectations. Further Mylapore area and Cathedral Road in particular grew to become a major commercial centre by the eighties. A hall with open windows and fans could no longer keep the traffic noises and pollution out – it had to be air conditioned! Somewhere along the line a sound system had been installed in the auditorium in violation of its original intent. Wooden windows were erected behind the beautiful jalies whose shapes were derived from musical instruments. Other sections were partitioned off to create much needed space and so on, slowly whittling away the architectural form and substance of this landmark. A further addition of a lift well right in front destroyed the flowing lines of the building. In the seventies a small



View from TTK Road Before Upgradation



View from TTK Road After Upgradation



**Lobby (upper level)
Before upgradation**



**Lobby (upper level)
After upgradation**

hall with a capacity of 200 persons and a library was constructed on the Mowbrays road side and the entry for cars shifted to the front facing Cathedral Road. The area that was planned as a walled in garden became a car park instead.

In 2006 when we were asked to evaluate the facilities, it was close to being totally dysfunctional and in need of major up-gradation starting from the interior of the hall, lighting and sound systems right down to the stage facilities and public areas. Toilets were inadequate and in woeful condition and fire safety systems were non-existent.

Retrofitting work started with the addition of a new set of toilets to serve the balcony and upgrading the existing toilets to current standards. The makeshift cafeteria which used to be put up in the front car park during the music festival was shifted to a space on the side of the hall in an area created by demolishing a variety of defunct

structures and made permanent. The traffic flow and parking area were rationalised and a wide pedestrian space was created in front to handle the over flow from the lobby. Internally, the auditorium seating, air conditioning and sound system and consoles were upgraded and relocated. Subsequently, the stage itself was enlarged by removing redundant utility spaces and other facilities including the stage lighting were renewed.

Visually the most important task undertaken was the redesign of the main lobby. The large and airy two storey lobby with circulation spaces at various levels was an exciting transition from the inside to the outside especially if one could imagine the walled in garden it was intended to open into. However, this imaginative dovetailing of spaces, while being typical feature of Corbusier's designs, had its own practical limitations in that it was inadequate in shielding



**Lobby view from stairs
before upgradation**



**Lobby view from stairs
after upgradation**

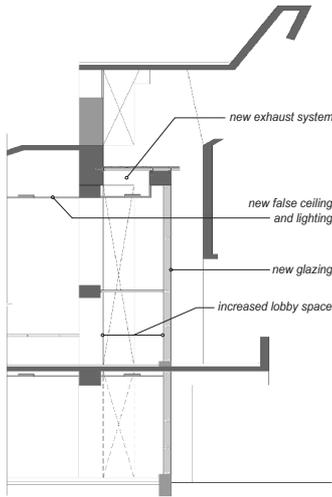
the lobby from wind and rain. The obvious choice was to cover the spaces between the columns unobtrusively with glass while retaining the original character and friendliness of a transparent lobby visible from the street. The original panels of jalis which remained in structurally sound condition were restored and retained in two locations. The lobby interior, once austere, had a beautiful Cudappah stone floor which needed only minor repairs and re-polishing to recover its old quality. The walls which had been covered by miscellaneous signs and defunct wiring and piping was stripped bare and panelled with rough sawn timber to match the natural stone floor. Corbusier was also an accomplished artist of the modern school and was known to introduce colour and his own works of art in his designs. That Bhuta was under his influence could be clearly seen by the fact that his original drawings show a long mural running all the way across the facade on a fascia that now bears the name of the hall. To make up for this it was sought to bring in some colour into the lobby. The reds and yellows that Corbusier was wont to use would have distanced the building



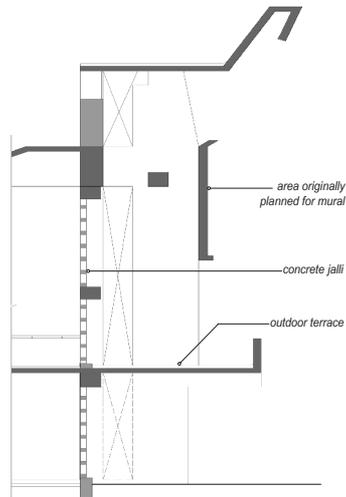
View of mezzanine

from its South Indian moorings. The search for appropriate colours ended with the purple and golden yellow shades of the famed Kanchipuram sarees which share a common tradition with Carnatic music.

With the up gradation of the Mini Hall, renovation of the office and the installation of fire safety systems this landmark of Madras is ‘future ready’.



Cross section of facade showing modification



Facade cross section as originally constructed