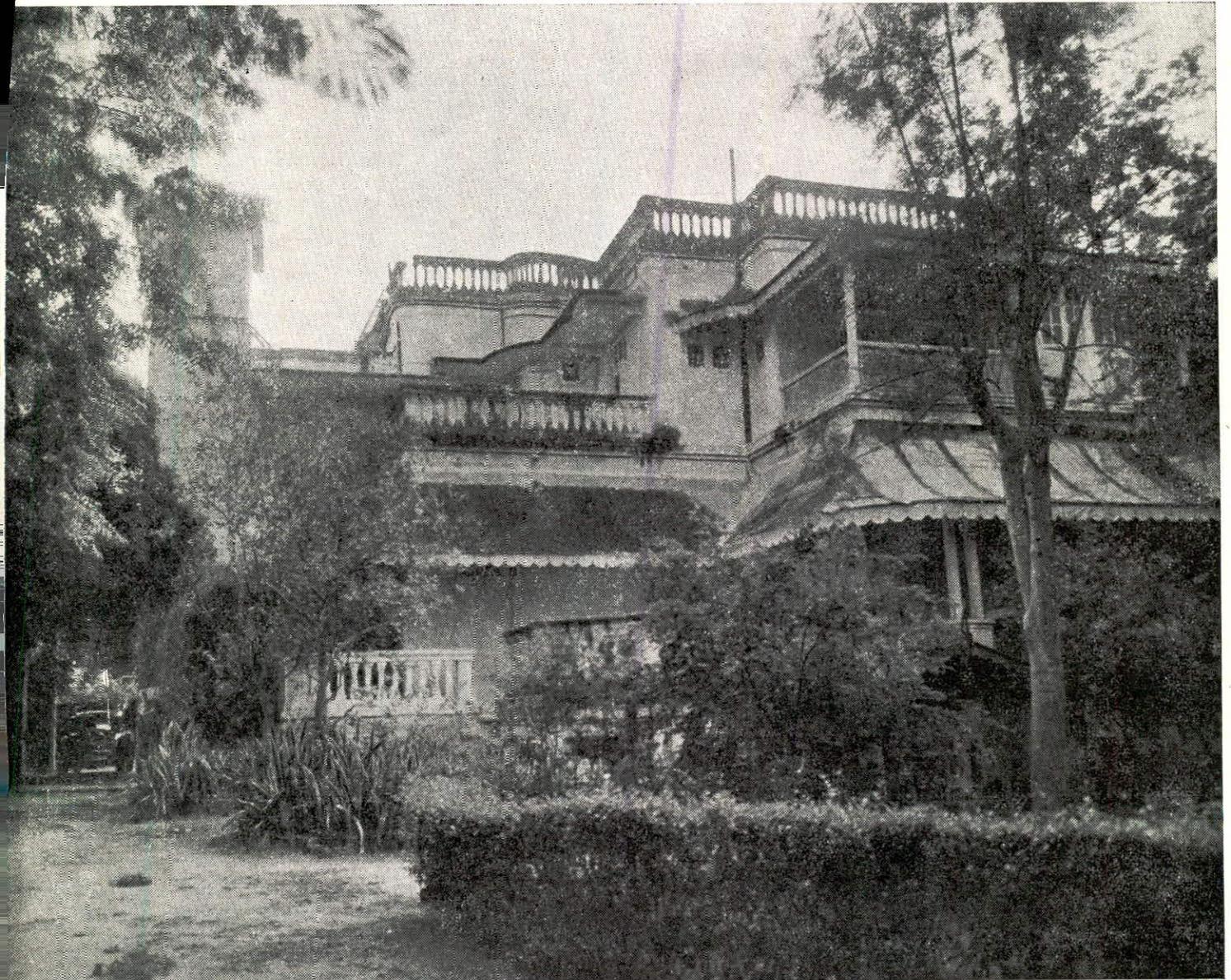


For private circulation.

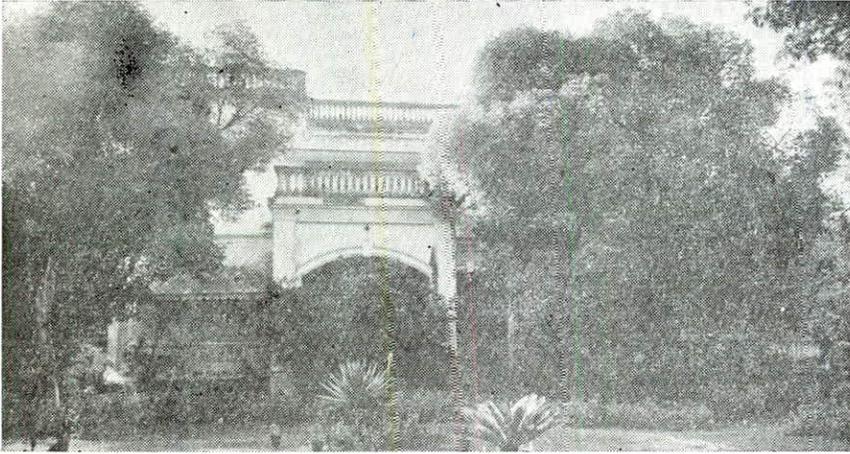
Contact

The Magazine for IIMA Community

January 1980



The Shahibaug days



The Shahibaug days

P.K. VARKEY takes you down the memory lane

The Institute started its activities in a two-story residential bungalow with a large compound at Shahibaug in July, 1961. The bungalow looked more like a Club Room than an Institute of Management. Some of the faculty members at that time were Professors Kamla Chowdhry, V. L. Mote, S. Paul, S. C. Kuchhal, M. N. Vora, H.N. Pathak, and B. C. Dalal.

Miyajan was hired to cook breakfast and lunch and make tea for the faculty and staff. A large room on the first floor was *improvised* as the Dining Hall. There was not much choice for food—what Miyajan cooked, we all ate. Everyone, irrespective of his position, sat around the same table and ate from the same kitchen. Only on occasions like the Board meetings, Kwaliti Restaurant was requisitioned to serve food. Miyajan did not take kindly to criticism of his food: so we all ate what he served but criticized him behind his back.

The functions of the Institute like library, accounts, case & duplicating units, and the like were all with me to start with. One day, Dr. Sarabhai saw my table piled with files. I then complained to him that I was loaded with three times

more work than I could handle. He smiled and said, "Varkey, everyone should have more work than he can cope with. Then only one can be happy. Also, one becomes indispensable then." This was his philosophy of work. He was a terribly busy man but he had all the time in the world to listen to your problems patiently.

At Shahibaug, the Institute had a small 3+9 Switch Board and we had a very charming receptionist to operate the Board—wife of the ADC to the then Governor!

The Gujarat Government transferred the land it acquired to the Institute for its Campus at Vastrapur. We had to look after the land from Shahibaug. For this purpose Hasamia, who recently retired from the Institute, was appointed as the Chowkidar-cum-peon of the Institute. During office hours, he came to Shahibaug and served tea and carried papers for us and in the evenings he kept the cattle and pilferers out of the campus.

Every activity of the Institute was meticulously planned and Dr. Sarabhai got himself involved in these. Nothing was too small for him. I distinctly remember an instance. Cots and tables for

the first batch of students were to be designed. After due deliberations, the Institute appointed Mr. Bernard Kohn, a German Architect. He had a small workshop in Navrangpura. Dr. Kamla Chowdhry and I went at least six times to Mr. Kohn's workshop to see and approve of the various stages of design and development of furniture. Finally, they were approved with the consent of Dr. Sarabhai.

The first 3-Tier Management Programme of the Institute was to begin at Jaipur in February, 1964. A programme of this nature was new to the IIM faculty. Harvard University sent Prof. Harry Hansen for this programme as a Visiting Faculty. Everything was ready but the case material had not arrived from Harvard. It had been airlifted sufficiently in advance but had not shown up at Santacruz. No cases. No programme. Dr. Kamla Chowdhry sent me to Bombay to trace the material. I went from pillar to post in search of the material and drew a blank. Finally, I went to the IA parcel godown near Santacruz Airport before calling off the search. A chap in IA uniform was at the counter. I showed him the papers. He looked through and said, "Sorry, this hasn't arrived." Another chap was sitting nearby on an upturned cardboard carton. I casually looked at the man and the box he was sitting on. Presto! he was sitting on the carton I was searching for. I retrieved it and got it airlifted to Jaipur. The programme could go on, I phoned Dr. Kamla Chowdhry.

While we were at Shahibaug, advertisements went round in all the leading newspapers of India for the post of Director. Applications poured in. There were all sorts of candidates, including fresh postgraduates. They were scrutinised carefully by the top bosses but found every one wanting in some respect or other and that chapter was closed. An army general who was due to retire was finally tipped for the post. He came, saw the Institute and its faculty and went back. Till today, I do not know whether he found the Institute too 'free and open' for his military discipline or the top bosses found his discipline too stifling for the Institute. Many in the Institute

may not know that the words "subordinate staff" were deleted from the Rules of the Institute as it was illustrative of structure which would be prejudicial to the growth of a sound faculty.

We were still at Shahibaug, when Professor Matthai became its first Director. I remember one of his first demands was a portable typewriter. He tap-tapped on that machine till late in the night and smoked off cigarette after cigarette and the future programmes of the Institute

started taking shape. Prof. Matthai was ably assisted by Dr. Kamla Chowdhry in all his activities.

The Institute was getting impatient to start its first Post-Graduate Programme in Business Administration. The first batch of 62 PGP students lived in 18 Gujarat Housing Board flats near Ambawadi and the classes were held in ATIRA. The students walked from Ambawadi to ATIRA. There were three girls and 59 boys in the first batch. One girl left the course—the

case method proved to be the last straw on the back of the proverbial camel!

D-12 was the first Dormitory built on the campus. The faculty and administrative offices shifted to the campus from Shahibaug in 1965. From that nucleus, we now see the sprawling campus and an Institute acclaimed as one of the best in management education both in India and abroad.

Home away from home . . .

or, 310 Camp Road so looked

310 Camp Road never presented the look of an office. The atmosphere inside was even less so. One always felt one was visiting a relative. From the place I worked I could see an outhouse where the children played around all day and the housewife was engaged in household chores.

Mr. K. G. Varghese was entrusted with the responsibility of my orientation. He introduced me to Prof. CNS Nambudiri, my first boss, who sat in one corner of a big hall while there other faculty members shared the other three corners. Mr. Varghese explained to me what the Institute was all about: "The Institute was established in collaboration with the Harvard Business School for training young men and women . . ." He seemed to know so much about so many things. As a sort of a tip, he asked me to remain in the good books of Dr. Kamla Chowdhry. I took it quite seriously and every time a lady passed by desk, I made it a point to stand up as a sign of respect. After two days the lady came and introduced herself as Miss Sayyed, an upper division clerk working in Mr. Varkey's office on the ground floor!

My "office" was located in the rear verandah of the building on the first floor. Mr. RPS Yadav and I sat facing each other. Profs. Mel Copen and Michael Halse would storm in and in an interestingly alternating fashion shower a host of instructions on him in a language which, from what little I could gather resembled English!

When one thinks of Shahibaug, the memory which lingers on most is the taste of Miyajan's dishes. The aroma of his cooking always filled the air. Miyajan was a fatherly figure who took pleasure in feeding people and scolded them

if they didn't eat properly. He took pride in his spotless white uniform, how he managed to keep it spotless was a surprise. Later on, Miyajan's dishes were supplemented by packets of masala dosas and bondas which Sankaranarayanan and Kannan brought with great enthusiasm from the Iyer's Mess at the New Mental Hospital. They collected money from the faculty and staff in the mornings and brought the packets during lunch break, peddling all the way.

U. K. Harindran

Sense of belonging

It was a pleasure to ride to the office, then. The mansion-like houses, trees bedecked with flowers either way, made the ride enjoyable. And as we stepped into the then campus, we were greeted by the chirping of birds. It was only the bird songs that "disturbed" the solitude. In fact, we felt more like working out in the open under the trees. Oh! Yes. In the monsoon, the approach road did not get flooded!

The Institute then had a skeleton staff, of about 40/50 including faculty, administrative and research staff. We were overloaded with work but we never felt the pinch because of the environment then prevalent. The faculty, research and administrative staff were always together—on way to the office, at work, at the lunch table, or on way home. We were all, very attached to the Institute.

A. Ganapathy