



## **Land for the New Campus at IIMA**

**Jahar Saha**

In 1997, when I took over the directorship of IIMA, I discovered that IIMA had not grown for many years. The intake in the PGP had remained the same for many years. The MDP [Management Development Programmes] participation had not increased significantly. I realized the stagnation was mainly because of the constraints on physical infrastructure. I asked our architect whether we had prepared any plans for utilizing the adjacent land [the land on which the New Campus was later built.] He told me that we did not have any because the entire land, although allotted to us, was yet to be handed over to us. Only about half or a little more than half of the allotted land was with us; the rest was under litigation and the Government could not hand it over to us. The original landowners were very unhappy with the compensation they got for their land, and they had filed a series of cases against the Government. These had remained unresolved for more than 20 years. The architect told me we should not make any land utilization plans before we were in possession of the entire land. I also learnt that the Government was planning to denotify the unallotted part because we had not yet used the land that had already been allotted.

I went to the Secretary in charge. He directed me to the senior officer, urban land. She looked into the matter and told me she was unaware of any plan to denotify the plot. She promised me that she would ensure that the Government did not denotify the land allotted to us. She advised me to do whatever was needed to get the land transferred to us at the earliest. The Secretary assigned one IAS officer to help me with this process. The first thing the officer asked me was whether I was serious about getting the land for the Institute or not. He told me that there would be pressure on me to back out. Under pressure, would I back out? I said I was serious. Unless I had the land, how could I plan for the growth of the Institute, which was the primary task before me at that point of time? He said he would help me. He advised me not to share what we planned with anyone.

His first advice was to inform the Chief Minister that although the Gujarat Government had allotted the land to the Institute more than 20 years earlier, it was yet to be handed over to us. I thought it would be better if Dr I G Patel, Chairperson of our Board of Governors were to meet the CM. Accordingly, I had an appointment fixed for Dr Patel to meet the CM. The evening before the meeting, the CM's Personal Secretary, an IAS officer whom I knew well, called me to say that the CM wanted to understand why Dr Patel wished to meet him. I shared the reason with him. In a few minutes, the Secretary called back to say that the CM had cancelled the meeting. I understood that the CM had noted that though the Gujarat Government had allotted the land it had failed to hand over the land for 20 years, and had wondered why a person like Dr I G Patel should come to meet him! He had suggested that I should meet him instead.

Along with Bakul [Prof. Bakul Dholakia], the then Dean and the CAO, I went to see the CM. The officer who was helping me also came along. It was a brief meeting. I told him that unless we got the land, we could not plan for the growth of the Institute. He listened to me patiently.

He instructed the officer to ensure IIMA got the plot as soon as possible. That meeting was crucial in initiating the process of getting possession of the allotted land.

We soon discovered that it was not easy. Any time a case was thrown out by the court in favour of the Government, there would be a similar case after a few days, and things continued as before. I was advised to meet the Government's Attorney General. I met him, and he promised to look into the matter. After a few weeks, he told me he could not do anything. The Institute had filed a case against the Government, and the court had not heard the case yet. He said he could not do anything unless the court resolved that case.

I remembered that this case dated back to the time when Prof N R Sheth was director, and I was Dean. Someone from the Town Planner's office had visited us and told us that the Government was likely to withdraw the land under litigation and not give it to us. He advised us to file a case against the Government, and I believe he had also mentioned to the director the grounds on which we could file the lawsuit. Prof Sheth consulted our advocate, and as per his advice, I filed the case (as Dean). I now realized the Attorney General would move further only if I withdrew our case against the Government. So we withdrew the case.

The Attorney General moved against the pending litigation, and one day the court gave its verdict in favour of the Government. I got the news late in the afternoon. Before the office could close, I met the District Collector with a request to hand over the land to us the following morning. He called his assistant to find out whether they could do so. The assistant said they could not. As per the legal process, they were supposed to inform the persons who had filed the suit before handing over the plot to us. I said he would have been correct if it were the first litigation case. I emphasized that they could hand over the land to us the following day under the current situation. The District Collector asked the assistant to scrutinize the issue and advise him. After 15 minutes, he said they could hand over the land to us the following morning.

I came back and asked the CAO to be ready to take it over. He was reluctant. I then asked Mr N V Pillai to take charge, who agreed. Incidentally, I must state that I had felt that the Dean and the CAO believed I was fighting a losing battle. That is why, after we met with the CM, I did not involve them in any of the subsequent activities of the land acquisition. Later on, the CAO, of course, came forward to help. I said he could join Mr Pillai.

Anticipating some trouble during the handing over, I requested the Police Commissioner to help us with police help. He made the arrangements. We took possession of the land. We then selected Bimal Patel as the architect, and he prepared the plan for the new campus as per our academic projections for the future. We then selected a contractor. All these had the Board's approval. We shared our plans with the Government. We did not ask the Government for any funds for the new campus. We were confident that we would be able to fund the construction from our reserves and surpluses. One day Dr I G Patel did the 'Bhumi Pujan', and construction began after that.

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