The story of our logo

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Think of IIMA and one of the first images to zoom into your consciousness will be our much-loved logo. The Institute's brand guidelines document, *Our Visual Identity* (November 2016), has the following to say about the logo: "It incorporates three elements: at the top is a stylized representation of an exquisitely crafted sandstone lattice window in the Sidi Saiyad Mosque of Ahmedabad, completed around 1573 CE. It is symbolic of the roots of the Institute in the western Indian medieval city of Ahmedabad, and of excellence in our craft. In the middle, in Sanskrit, and anchored by a keyline, is our motto Vidyaviniyogaadvikasah, interpreted to mean 'Application (or distribution) of knowledge for development'. At the bottom, anchored by a keyline, is the name of the Institute." How did we come to have the logo that we are so proud of today? What is the 'story' behind the logo?

Imagine our logo without the motto—that is what the first version of the logo looked like. Work on this version was initiated by Vikram Sarabhai (1919-1971), the first director (Honorary) and Kamla Chowdhry (1920-2006), professor of Organization Behaviour, with a brief to Lintas, the advertising arm of Hindustan Lever, which specified that the Sidi Saiyad jali should be the focus of the logo. (The jali in question occupies the window space to the left of the middle blind space as we face the rear wall of the mosque from the west.) This brief was given in late 1963. Prakash Tandon (1911-2004) was the chairperson of both IIMA and Hindustan Lever at that time. Prof. Sreenivas Rao, who retired in 1996 and whom many of you may remember from your WAC days, was our representative dealing with Lintas. He says that the brief had the blessings of both Kasturbhai Lalbhai, and Dr. Jivraj Mehta (1887-1978), our founder-Chairperson and the first chief minister of Gujarat from 1960 to September 1963. Why the jali? Prof. K. Balakrishnan, who was in the F&A Area from August 1966 till his retirement in 2001, notes that Kamla Chowdhry "gave full credit to Vikram for choosing the [jali]. She also had an elaborate logic for [the choice], most of which I don't remember, except, perhaps the most insignificant part—the location of the mosque was the centre of Ahmedabad, the 'marma' as she put it!" The design proposed by Lintas was adopted in a Board meeting held on July 1, 1964. The logo had only two elements—the jali and the 'IIM Ahmedabad'—at that time. At Lintas, Hasan Taj was the Chief Art Director, and it was under his guidance that a team from Lintas developed the logo.

Prof. Ravi Matthai joined the Institute in August 1965. He wanted to add a motto. Prof. Rao comments, "He, being a marketing man and a product of Oxford, wanted the logo to reflect our conception of learning, business and products, just as the logos of premium educational institutions like Oxford did. Without the conceptual underpinning, he felt the logo merely represented Ahmedabad and the jali, more suited to a tourist attraction." Prof. Matthai organized a 'competition'—the winner of the competition would receive a prize of 100 rupees. Some of you may remember Prof. Hrishikesh N. Pathak (1923-1999), who was in the Economics Area from 1963 till his retirement in 1983. His contribution, *vidyaviniyogaadvikasah*, was the winner. Prof. V.L. Mote—I am sure many of you have fond memories of Prof. Mote's acerbic wit—recalls the following: "Since both Professor Pathak and I were interested in

Sanskrit we wanted the motto to be in Sanskrit. We both worked on it and Pathak came up with *vidyaviniyogaadvikasah*. We both liked it and I suggested [to Prof. Matthai] that the prize of hundred rupees should be given to Professor Pathak. The motto means 'it is the (viniyog) application of knowledge that leads to (vikasah), all-around development'." Mr. Chandramouli Pathak, Prof. Pathak's son, recalls that Prof. Pathak was very happy that his contribution had been accepted. And that is why perhaps he would not have been upset when Prof. Matthai 'forgot' to give him the prize.

Prof. Sreenivas Rao went back to Lintas and to Hasan Taj with the motto. He recalls that there was a lot of discussion on whether to "put the slogan around the existing monogram, or above the jali, or below the Ahmedabad lettering, or between the IIM and Ahmedabad, and so on. Finally, after some brain storming and doing thumb nail sketches, the present design emerged. During the discussion the art director [Hasan Taj] explained to me that the jali, even though based on the Sidi Saiyad jali, was not a replica…. He had visualized a living tree of learning, ever expanding [with] ever flowing branches and ever dreaming and aspiring stars. We had to make sure the design as a whole looked like one piece, not a disjointed patchwork, because we were mixing free-flowing floral designs like the jali, Sanskrit lettering, and the Roman pillar structure of the IIM and Ahmedabad. We also had to make sure that the design could be reproduced on any kind of paper or card (our PGP Diploma was printed on special Khadi paper), or cloth (silk cloth covering and thick flannel were used for the convocation table), or metal (our convocation gold medals and farewell presentation items demanded different textures). Finally, the logo had to be accepted by people who mattered back on the campus."

After more than a year of design and redesign, by February 1967, the logo that we have today was finalized. The convocation that year displayed the full logo, though the diplomas of 1967 carried the first version, without the motto.

The jali in the Sidi Saiyad mosque which was the inspiration for our logo's design (left); the second version of the IIMA logo, February 1967 (right)

Why did Vikram Sarabhai and Kamla Chowdhry make the Sidi Saiyad mosque's jali the central element of our logo? The mosque, completed around 1572/73 CE, just before Akbar conquered Gujarat, is the last major example of the Gujarat Sultanate style of architecture—a style that flourished for about a century and a half. It is notable for the sandstone tracery work that fills up its window spaces. There are ten windows, three each on the northern and the southern sides; and four on the western wall—two on either side of a middle window space which is blind. Our logo is based on the window immediately north

of the middle window space, that is, as one looks at the western wall from the outside, the window to the left of the middle space. This window is dominated by a “tree-of-life”-and-parasite motif. There is a single palm tree with the fronds spreading out at the top. And then there is a vine—its tendrils and leaves and flowers filling up the rest of the space. The vine seems to emerge from the mouth of a makara, a mythical aquatic creature, which is the emblem of Kamadeva and is used to anchor toranas or archways in Hindu iconography. The creeper pattern in this window is the rati-kera, one of the eleven vallibhis or creeper patterns used in Hindu and Buddhist iconography. Scholars have demonstrated how many inherited iconographic principles have been adapted in this window to create an exquisite tapestry of fine tendrils, leaves and flowers—an arabesque design so popular by that time in the Middle East. Look at our representation, and you will notice Hasan Taj’s “ever-dreaming and aspiring stars”—five of them on the right and four on the left, in place of the flowers of the original.

Who was Sidi Saiyad? He was a Habshi—Habshi in Arabic refers to an Abyssinian or an Ethiopian, and Sidi, possibly derived from Sayyidi for “my lord,” is a term used to denote Habshis, especially in Gujarat. Long before the “discovery” of the sea route to India, trade between the African east coast and India was significant. Many Africans came to India as traders, but many were brought in as slaves, usually for military purposes. Slave trading, which was well established by the ninth century, was possibly at its strongest in the 15th and 16th centuries. Some Habshis, like Malik Ambar of the Deccan who was Jehangir’s implacable enemy, achieved military fame; others rose to rule princely states, such as Janjira, off the coast south of Mumbai and Sachin, near Surat, in Gujarat. In the 16th century, the Gujarat Sultanate relied fairly heavily on Africans to staff its army. Sidi Saiyad was in the service of Sultan Mahmud Shah (1537-1554 CE). After 1554, there was chaos when the Habshis and the other factions fought for power. Sidi Saiyad joined Amir Jhujhar Khan, another Habshi, and distinguished himself militarily. Mahmud Shah’s son restored order in 1560 and rebuilt the Habshi contingent in his army. Sidi Saiyad continued serving the new sultan, but some time before the Mughal invasion, he settled down to a quiet life near the mosque. He converted an old brick mosque into the structure that stands today, possibly between 1570 and 1573. He built a public kitchen known as al-nakar for feeding the poor and spent his last years as a pious man. He died on the third of Shawwal, AH 984, corresponding to December 24, 1576, and was buried in the mosque.

Vikram Sarabhai and Kamla Chowdhry certainly understood the syncretic values that the jali communicated, the multiple traditions that defined India, the pluralism implied by the commemoration of a Habshi-commissioned work, and the resulting synthesis symbolic of excellence. However, the story of our logo also illustrates a curious feature of our legacy—the absence of the contribution of the design team at Lintas from our records. Thanks to Prof. Sreenivas Rao’s memories and Prof. Ashoke Chatterjee’s efforts to talk to people who were at Lintas in the 1960s, we now know that the IIMA logo team was headed by Hasan Taj. Raj Arjungi was the Chief Visualizer, and Puthran did much of the art work. People at Lintas like B. C. Dutt, and Sanat Lahiri who was the contact person for the IIMA project, played important supportive roles. I am sure there are many others who must have worked on the logo over the three years that it took to emerge in its present form.

This story of the making of the logo itself, therefore, echoes—in academic and occupational terms—the cultural syncretism embedded in the originally sculpted jali, a syncretism that the Institute proudly acknowledges as an extremely crucial inheritance both for itself and for any educational institution.