

Paths Uncharted:

Notes from my diaries



Looking back, I have come to believe that, over the years, my life has been a rather unusual journey. A series of events that have coalesced like drops of water to gradually become a spring, then a river, and then joined many other rivers towards the oceans.

In the process, these drops of water have traversed many lands, some open, some confined. There were times when the flow ebbed, even stopped, but those pauses gave rise to lakes, small and big. Then there came floods that rose above the lake banks, broke free, flowing once again.

Over the years, I have been to many lands, forests and gardens in all the seasons. In the process, like a river, I have gathered waters from a multitude of regions, climates and cultures enriched by the wisdom and traditions of wise men.

These travels have helped to answer innumerable questions. Just as the muddy water of a river clears up as it flows on, I have gained insight and clarity about the world around me. I now know what it means when one says everything is interrelated. In my field, it can signify the interconnectedness between the design of a pin to a design of a city and everything in between. All that one needs to understand is the differences in the scales and their sphere of impacts.

I realize that even though each object should have its own identity, it cannot be conceived in isolation since identity is a mere comparison. What is immediately around is often our short-sighted perception: 'the disenchantment of the one who believes the truth is what he sees.'

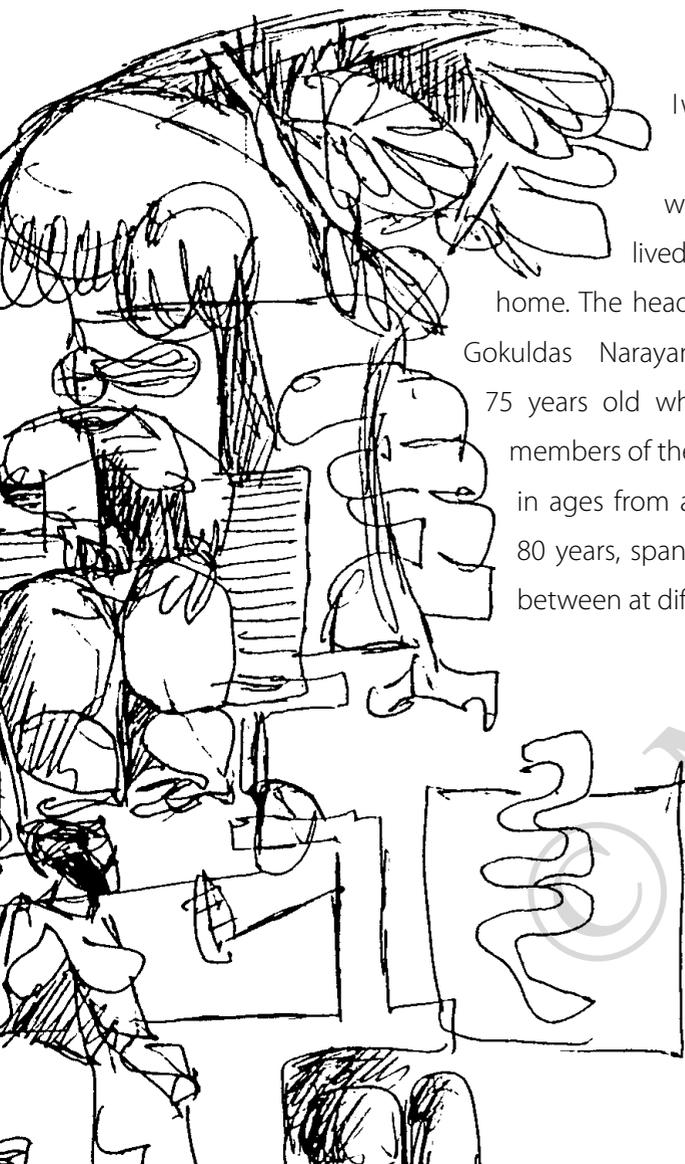
All the choices of technologies or materials are born out of the people's own nature and needs. Their own evolution gives it a character and demonstrates to us its purpose or use. Hence, what we need to do is to allow the goal of existence to clarify its meaning and application.

Time or style is a limited notion. It can easily be set aside if we realize that all that we perceive is viewed through our memories and the present. There are layers that must be seen together and not as fragmented issues—irrespective of whether they are of art, architecture, or life itself. It is essential that we look at these from a distance with eternity or timelessness.

I have memories of living in villages and small towns, the daily life, traditional houses, local customs, religious values and an economy based on agriculture. I also have memories of life in Paris, and of working at 35 Rue de Sevres, and very different impressions of the artistic attitudes to urban life and the world of tomorrow.

Between these two realms—searching for the constants between these two worlds, rural and metropolitan—lies my architectural career. In my life and my work, the effort has been to combine the virtues of both and to find a balance between these two worlds.





I was born into an extended Hindu family in Pune where several generations lived together in our ancestral home. The head of the family, my Dada, Gokuldas Narayandas, was more than 75 years old when I was a child. Thus, members of the extended family ranged in ages from a few days to more than 80 years, spanning the whole range in between at different stages of life.

So, there were widowers, middle-aged parents, newlyweds, and adolescents—all living under one roof and interacting closely on a daily basis. It was natural in such circumstances that one frequently witnessed life events such as birth, marriage and death. These events made one constantly conscious of the transitory nature of life.

Celebration of festivals, ceremonies and rituals connected to various life events, daily trips to temples, and annual pilgrimages were a constant feature of life and all of us—young and old—were actively involved in these activities. Days, months and seasons passed, so also good times and bad times.

The character and form of the house too changed over time, in an organic process of growth. Initially, there were just a few rooms; more were added as the need arose. It grew from one storey to several. Uses of old rooms were changed too, forcing changes in the movement patterns; it all felt a bit strange to begin with but, eventually, the changes were absorbed to our daily lives and became the 'new old'. Thus, the house offered spatial and aesthetic surprises all the time. At any point of time, there was something new, something different about it.

I have often wondered what gave it a lasting identity amidst all these changes, and come to believe that it was the kitchen, dining and prayer rooms—which remained unchanged—that dominated the domestic ambience, like a hearth in earlier times. From these experiences, constant evolution and transformation have become an integral part of my perception of life and my aesthetic experience.

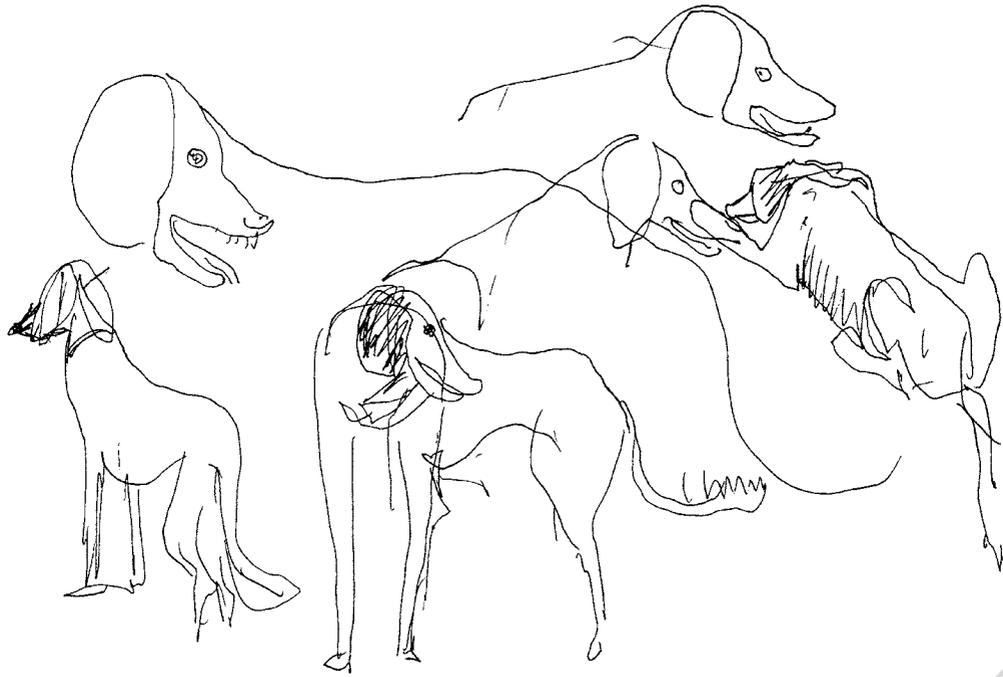
During those years, I often went to nearby villages and temples to attend certain ceremonies with other members of the family. The rituals always appeared to be similar but their purpose, their manner of performance and scale, and sometimes their location, differed.

They occurred in all kinds of locations such as on a riverbank, or in the courtyard of our home, or within the precinct of a local shrine. These events, scattered as they were all over, did not seem odd at all. In fact, they offered opportunities to understand the uncertainties and constant flux of life better.

When I look back and reflect on these things now, I realize the whys and wherefores of the acceptance of life. That it stems from constant sharing life and living space with many. Actually, I have realized that sharing multiplies the joys of celebrations and diminishes those of sad events.



There is a secret reality
a divine reality which
is present in all things
and manifest at appropriate
time



Frequent occurrence of the life's events in a large family helps us better understand the uncertainties in life, and notions of success and failure. This shapes one's world view, makes one more accepting, more patient, and shifts life's focus from material to spiritual values.

The constant reference to life after death and reincarnation also brings hope. It is believed that, in the process of reincarnation, every being continues to carry certain memories and experiences of past lives. The present is then seen only as a transitional phase.

I now realize that life is full of surprises and paradoxes. Everything that occurred in the past can happen again in another time, place, and form. Once past, events become memories.

Such experiences of the world around and beyond, of good, bad, then and now make us acutely conscious of the meaning and purpose of the vast world around us. The immense diversity of the flora and fauna makes us more sensitive to our surroundings.

Such are the contexts and circumstances in which I grew up, and which formed the bedrock of my beliefs and outlook. This is where my roots lie.

I am constantly fascinated, almost like a child, by the ways in which the world around me works. I see a river and think of its journey from its point of origin all the way to the point where it meets the ocean; or the way in which mighty trees grow from a small seed. I see an ant, a snake, or a giraffe, and think about how perfectly its form is suited to life in its particular habitat. That surely is a very valuable lesson in design.

