

Brijender S Dua

# SO LONG, SIR!



*Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright always knew that I wanted to get back to India and start what he described as “a hell of my own.” While he did not expect us to stay at Teliesian forever, he was never happy when someone came in and said, “Mr. Wright, I’m leaving.”<sup>1</sup>*



Born in Kantharia, Gujarat in 1922, Mansinh M Rana was a student at JJ School of Arts, Bombay when he joined Taliesin at Arizona and Wisconsin to work under Frank Lloyd Wright from 1947 to 1951. Four exciting years at the Fellowship provided direction to his thinking on architecture and landscape design.

A Padma Shree award in 1967 and in a career spanning over sixty years, Mr. Rana was Chief Architect of “Design Group”, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation and Central Public Works Department, Architect-Member Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC), Fellow at Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, and Patron of the Lutyens Trust, London. His works include some of New Delhi’s landmark

projects of their times – Bal Bhawan (1953), The Buddha Jayanti Commemoration Park (1956), ‘Shanti Vana’, Samadhi of late Shri Jawahar Lal Nehru (1964), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (1973), and The Nehru Planetarium (1980).

But for us – his students – he would always be Mr. Rana – our beloved *guru* and the Founder Dean of Sushant School of Art and Architecture. He started the school on an abandoned site office in an environment full of tall trees, a large open space to breathe freely and kick a ball.<sup>2</sup> Literally a new age *gurukul*. That was 1989. Since then, it was a continuous, an ever-exciting roller-coaster *yatra*, a *sadhna* for him.

With the school set in the greens and surrounded by the then still very undeveloped, untouched lands and open fields of Gurgaon, he ensured that this was a place where design based pursuits and idea-oriented thinking fostered a ‘learning-by-doing’ process, where ‘each-one-teach-one’ in a pretence-free environment began at the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> & <sup>5</sup> Mansinh M Rana in ‘Frank Lloyd Wright: Recollections by Those Who Knew Him’. Edited by Edgar Tafel.

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> ‘Mansinh M Rana’ – LA! Journal of Landscape Architecture, Issue 14, Summer 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Sheena Dhuria Bhasin

We – the very first group of students – the “Pioneers” as he called us, and something that we’re still known as – were the most loved, the most pampered yet required frequent ‘disciplining’ lessons from him at the same time – the last aspect being something that made us scamper for cover quite often!

With his tradition of ‘Friday morning lectures’ – more of informal discussions – with the current first year students about practically everything under the sun (and beyond), and a regular host of guests from varied backgrounds – artists, dancers, writers & academicians, film makers and architects & planners, we were introduced to a whole range of ideas and thoughts. He immersed us in the process of learning and doing things in a spirit, unfettered from routine modes of education. We were encouraged to grow wings and take off for unexplored areas of our thinking processes and pull out expressions not yet tried.<sup>3</sup> And I guess, we as his *shishyas* responded well.

For him, progress and learning from history and heritage did not mean that

one is to be a ‘moribund expressionist’. It meant finding many contemporary solutions still rich in concept and enhancement of human existence.

He pushed and prodded us and made us think. School and learning were fun and exciting because of him. He had once stated that to be with such energy (all of us – his students) was like being surrounded by sunshine, warmth, music and continuous ‘happenings’ at all levels. *Ditto*. We felt exactly the same about him. He was our teachers’ teacher and more young at heart and energetic than most around.

A strict disciplinarian, an engaging and warm personality with a genuine love and concern for his students, greatly revered and loved by all, a father figure to all of us, *he felt constant...*<sup>4</sup> Well, *he is constant*. Sushant School and Mr. Rana are inseparable. He built an institution. He made us.

Mr. Rana passed away on 26 September 2012.

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... finally, the day came when I walked into the drafting room and said, “Mr. Wright, I’ve come to say goodbye.” He looked up from his from his drawing board, put down his glasses and said, “Mansinh, we never say goodbye at Telisian, we say ‘so long’... You know, we have a rubber band attached to your feet and from time to time we snap you back. So never say goodbye.”<sup>5</sup>

A similar rubber band that he attached to our feet has kept snapping us back to Sushant, and to him, again & again. We earnestly hope that it would keep doing so...

So long then, Sir!

Thank you for everything.

Salute. Respect. Regards.