

# DELHI'S NERVES OF STEEL

Veteran photographer Madan Mahatta has captured the beauty of the Capital's iconic steel and concrete edifices in 65-odd works, which have been shot over four decades

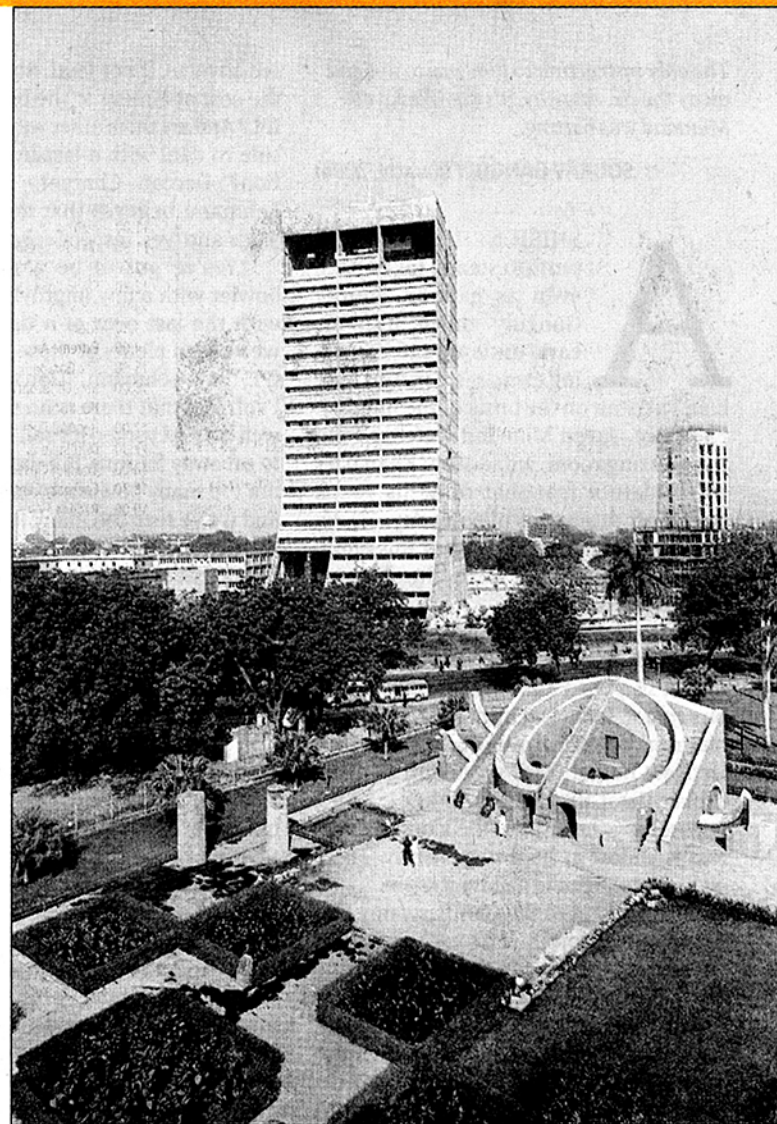


PRAJAKTA HEBBAR

THE white walls of PHOTOINK gallery look grim, covered with an array of black-and-white photographs. There are no faces that stare from these photographs, no trees that rustle and no deep valleys that tantalise. With rigid lines and simple compositions, the 65-odd photographs define the stark beauty of the

Capital's steel and concrete edifices.

The exhibition titled "Delhi Modern: The Architectural Photographs of Madan Mahatta" showcases various landmark buildings in Delhi, as captured by renowned photographer Madan Mahatta. The 80-year-old photographer was born in Srinagar and has worked across all genres, including portraiture, dance, theatre and industrial and



architectural photography.

The exhibition, curated by artist Ram Rahman, is the first such exhibition to showcase Mahatta's works from the '40s to the '80s. "It presents a remarkable record of the buildings in New Delhi at the height of Nehruvian modernism. Here, I have chosen to showcase more of Mahatta's photographs from the earlier or the classic modern period, primarily because

those are less accessible to the younger generation of architects and photographers," says Rahman.

"These projects are a vivid reminder of a time when the political class believed that architecture had a symbolic role in creating visionary dreams for a new nation. This is in stark contrast to our recent past, where not even a single structure built for the enormously expensive Com-



(From far left) Madan Mahatta's works *Inside the Escorts Factory, I, 1964*; *New Delhi Municipal Council Building/ Palika Centre (background) with Jantar Mantar in the foreground, 1983*; and *Gandhi Memorial Hall (formerly Pyare Lal Bhawan), 1962* — which are on display at PHOTOINK

monwealth Games was designed by an Indian architect. The architecture of Gurgaon — the newest of the Delhis — is probably the crassest example of the physical manifestation of corporate greed," adds Rahman.

The photograph of the New Delhi Municipal Council building designed by architect Kuldip Singh, shot in 1983, shows the empty skyline of the pre-liberalisation era in Delhi. The Jantar Mantar in the foreground also looks empty, with only a handful of people sprinkled around. "There is no congregation of lines in any of my photographs. Because when I shot these buildings, I almost always took the architects with me. They were the ones who told me about the importance of a certain design or a structure. I learnt a lot from them, and most importantly, I learnt how to look at a building from a creator's perspective," said Mahatta, in his clipped British accent. The old Patriot building sign is seen in another photograph of Achyut Kanvinde's

Pearey Lal Bhawan, which was under construction in 1962. This was also where the income-tax offices, the University Grants Commission complex (both designed by Habib Rahman), the School of Architecture and Planning and other institutions were being built.

The legendary Mahatta Studio opened in Connaught Place soon after Indian independence, and achieved fame as being one of the most reputed photographic studios of its time. Mahatta returned to Delhi from his studies in the UK in 1954 and started to work here. The timing of his return and the fact that he started photographing architecture seriously were fortuitous, as the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had embarked on a massive building project in the Capital, which was in dire need of new infrastructure.

The exhibition is on till June 21 at PHOTOINK, Jhandewalan, Faiz Road. Contact: 28755940