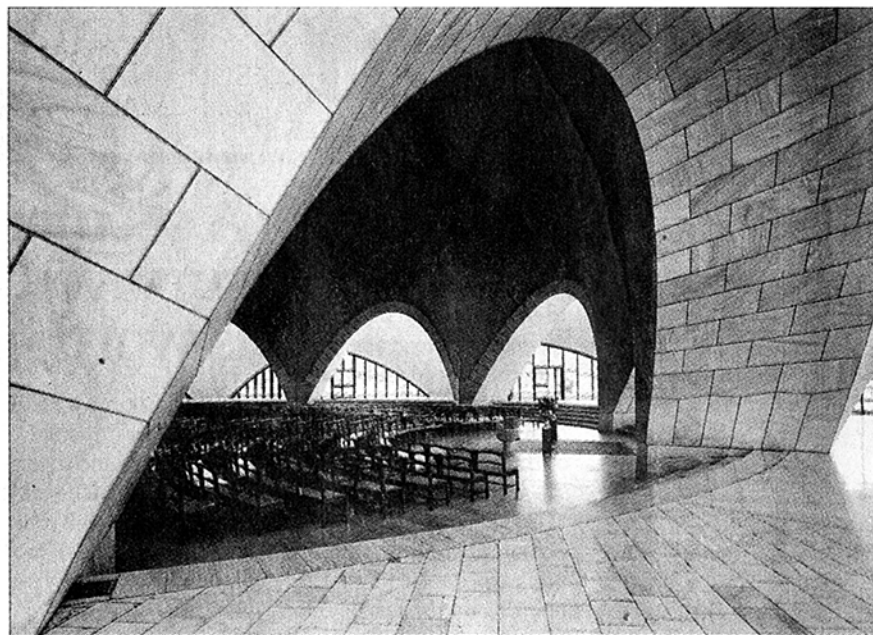


Capital city captured in monochrome

PAWANPREET KAUR

Erupting like a giant wave of concrete, the New Delhi Municipal Council building, facing the Jantar Mantar, freezes half way up to the sky. A close-up of the building reveals vertical, horizontal and diagonal streaks on stone slabs, like lines creasing a weather-beaten beauty's face. In lesser hands, the splendour of this architectural marvel, designed by Kuldeep Singh, would be lost under the weight of bricks and mortar but the perceptive lens of renowned photographer Madan Mahatta captures its beauty with a rare stoicism.

Currently on display at the Photoink gallery in Jhandewalan, this photograph is part of an exhibition titled *Delhi Modern: The Architectural Photographs of Madan Mahatta*. Curated by photographer Ram Rahman, the exhibition strings together some of Mahatta's finest architectural photographs, taken between '50s and '80s. Having worked closely with the architects of the era, including Achyut Kan-



Bahai Temple, 1987

vinde, Joseph Allen Stein, Charles Correa, Raj Rewal and Habib Rahman, Mahatta succeeds in recording the creative endeavours of an entire generation of architects who gave modern-day Delhi its distinct shape and character.

Mahatta's genius is not the breathtaking kind. His is a quiet

brilliance, one that sneaks upon the viewer in an unexpected moment. Take for instance, his almost-ethereal rendition of the Baha'i House of Worship (designed by Iranian architect Fariborz Sahba in 1986), its depth heightened by multiple frames within a frame and muted reflec-

tions. Perhaps no other photographer has been able to capture the hushed silence of this place as beautifully as Mahatta, who accentuates the game of light and shadows playing out below its arches and in its windy hall. Says the 80-year-old shutterbug humbly, "It is a matter of having



Joseph Allen Stein walking up the staircase, Ford Foundation office, 1968

the right equipment, the right knowledge and being at the right place at the right time."

Surely, the maestro gives himself far less credit than he deserves. The photographs, all in monochrome, seem like abstract renditions of reality. His photos appeal to the viewer at an inner level of

consciousness, just as music or painting, like the evocative photograph of renowned American architect Joseph Allen Stein, climbing the stairs of the Ford Foundation building (which he himself designed). The top angle shot, taken from a landing, captures the play of shadows against

a few lamps dangling in the well. Or like the spectacular shot of the *Hindustan Times* building, which appears like a white monolith against a grey sky, dwarfing its neighbours with its grace and grandeur.

Like a music conductor, Mahatta brings out the unique symphony of each element in the frame with a deceptive simplicity. His 1985 shot of the LIC building is a good example of this. At the centre of the frame stands Charles Correa's masterpiece, knotted in a maze of scaffoldings, but it is

Venue: Photoink

Date: Until 2nd July

Timing: 11am -7pm

Mahatta's positioning of other, seemingly non-consequential, elements such as a wild cluster of *neem* whirls that add a feeling of a bright sunny day to the frame. One can almost hear low rumble of a car's engine as it drives round the corner or voices of the labourers as they mill around the site. The city, truly, never seemed this beautiful.