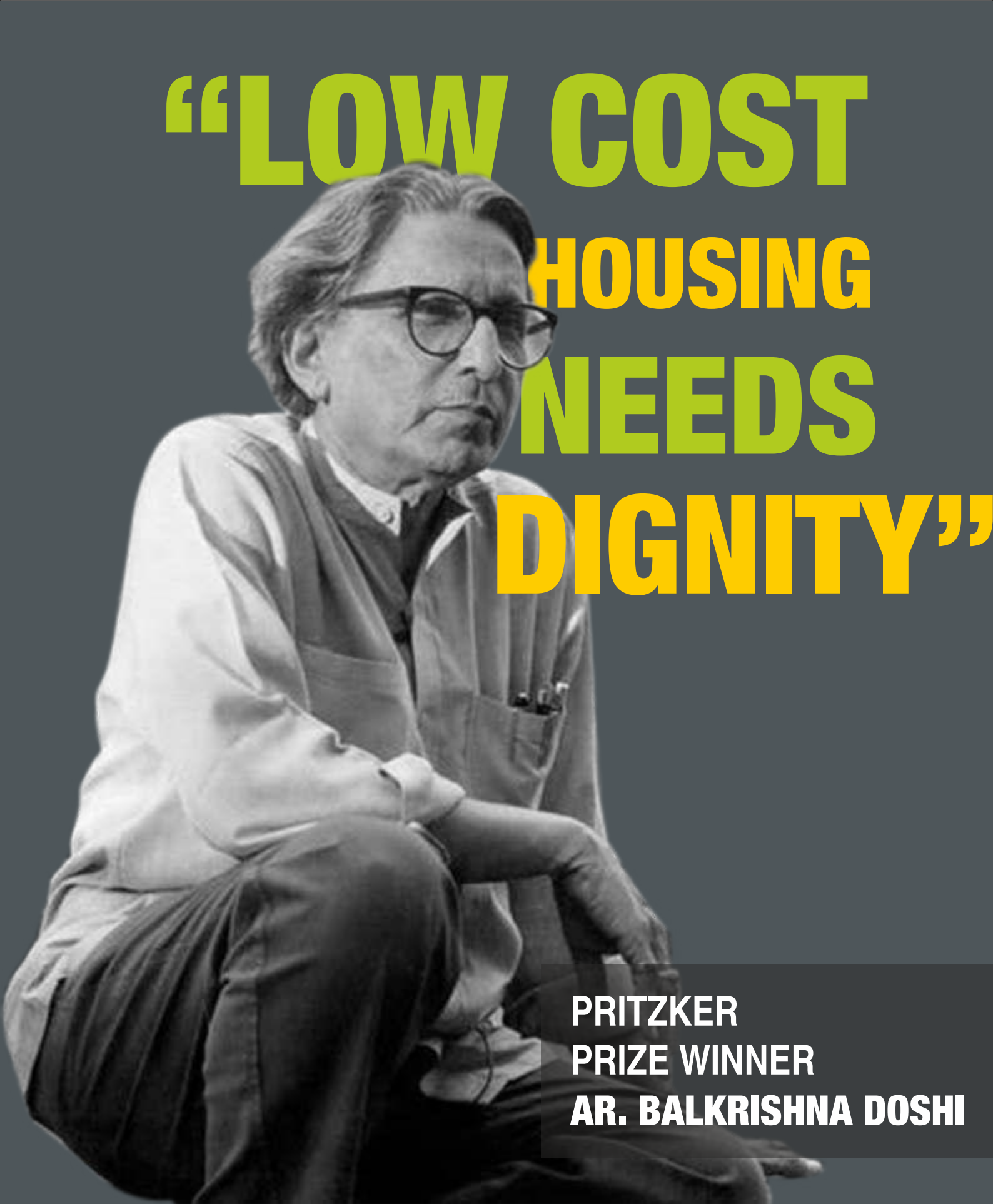




# “LOW COST HOUSING NEEDS DIGNITY”

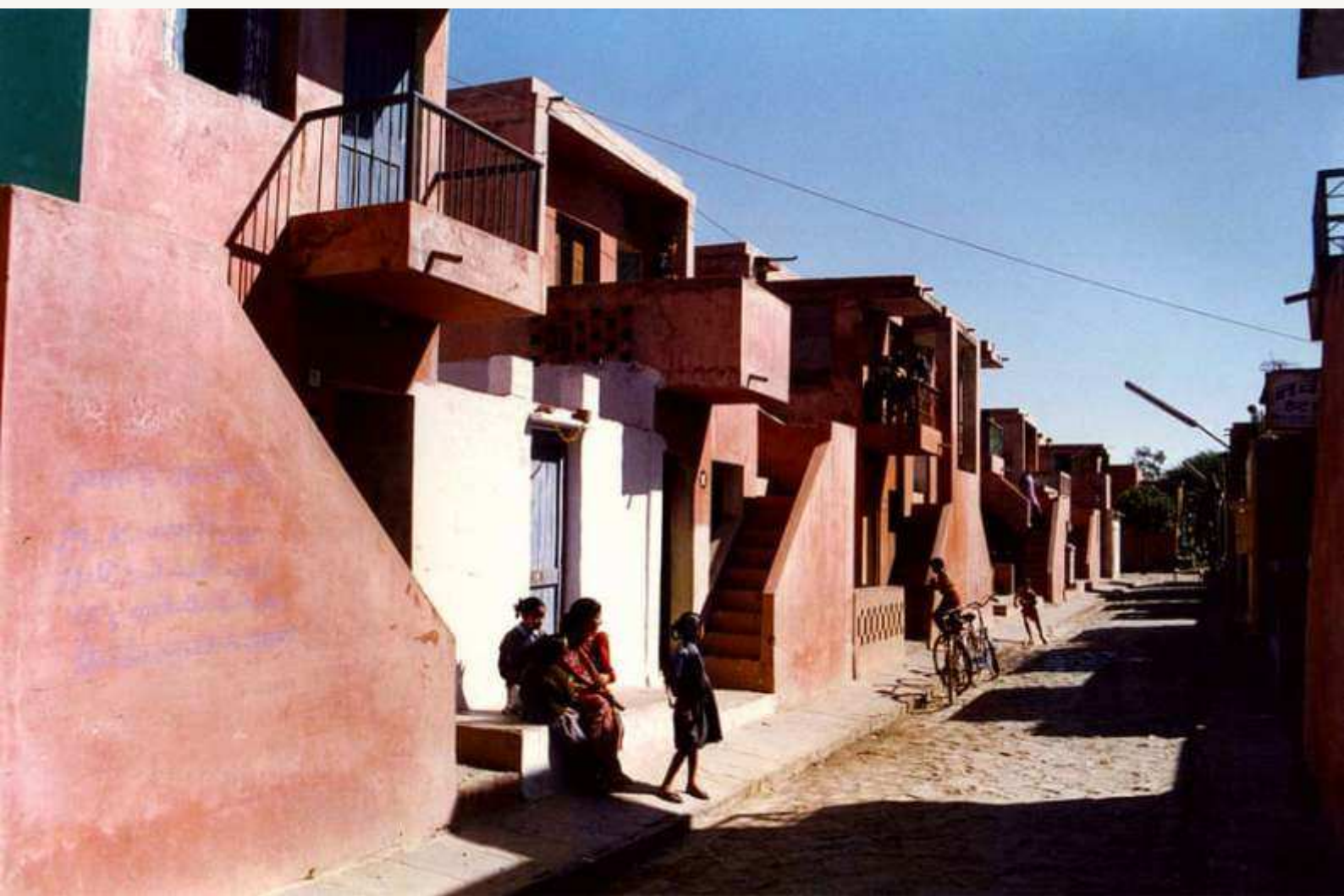
**PRITZKER  
PRIZE WINNER  
AR. BALKRISHNA DOSHI**

The winner of architecture's “**Nobel prize**”, **Balkrishna Doshi**, has called on his profession to rethink the way it approaches building for the most impoverished communities.

The internationally noted champion of housing for India's poor, Doshi was awarded the Pritzker prize this year, in large part for the Aranya low-cost housing project. It accommodates 80,000 people with houses and courtyards linked by a maze of pathways in the city of Indore.

A celebrity in India where he speaks to packed lectures, 90-year-old Doshi, who studied under Le Corbusier, has worked on other projects – including mixed-income housing for a life insurance corporation in Ahmedabad and the underground Amdavad ni Gufa art gallery – but it is Aranya for which he is best known.

Speaking to the Guardian after the announcement of his award, Doshi said that architects and urban planners involved in low-income housing projects – as well as architectural education – needed to move away from their focus on the designer as individual to being far



And in the chequered history of slum clearance and relocation – including in the US after , and in countries like France and the – Doshi's Aranya stands out as a success story in a country with substantial and persisting housing issues for its poorest citizens.

“They are not houses but homes where a happy community lives. That is what finally matters,” Doshi has said in the past of the organising credo for this project.

Doshi believes that a large part of Aranya's success has been because instead of presenting those who would live there – often in a purpose-built house for the first time – with a ready-made design, the development allows residents the space and opportunity to adapt and improve their homes.

Built around a central spine to accommodate businesses, Doshi's brick houses – in sizes from a single room to larger homes for wealthier families – were designed around parks and courtyards, with groups of ten houses forming inward-looking clusters.

Beyond aesthetics, Doshi argued that architecture and urban design – done right – can and self-generated. The promise of a home is not a limited hope, but the sky becomes the limit.”



If at times Doshi speaks more like a humanist philosopher than a designer, it is an outlook that was explicitly recognised by the prize committee that “projects must go beyond the functional to connect with the human spirit through poetic and philosophical underpinnings”. “Housing as shelter is but one aspect of these projects,” the Pritzker jury added in its citation.

“The entire planning of the community, the scale, the creation of public, semi-public and private spaces are a testament to his understanding of how cities work and the importance of the urban design.”

Echoing that theme, Doshi added: “As architects we are supposed to be social, economic and cultural designers. But really we are exclusive when we need to be inclusive.”

“If I as an architect am not able to do something for my people and provide them with what they need, then I should say my job is incomplete.”

For Doshi that has not only meant designing places like Aranya to replace slum housing but to have the curiosity and humility to learn from slums, not least how and why a successful sense of community coalesces, even in situations of extreme hardship.

“I used take students to slum areas. When you talk to the people living there they are lot more open and willing to share and modify because the human being is basically a compassionate animal.

“In Bombay,” he added, “we have a large slum near the airport. When we were studying you could see that besides the situation of living there in

absolute misery, people were also willing to challenge themselves to find a better way of life, and seeking to overcome the problems.”

The balance, for Doshi, is a subtle combination of factors including access to the “essentials” of life – shops, cafes and places to do business – with the housing maintaining crucial “privacies” while leaving room for cooperative communities to develop through their own negotiations.

“That means borders that are diffuse. What you need to find is how to create not separations but buffer zones, places where there is room for variation.” Doshi said he found such models in Indian temples and old cities.

“You want slight shifts – to create gaps – because architecture is not mechanical.”

Instead Doshi sees communities and the physical places that they live as “organic” and “messy” and inevitably adapting what the architect has designed.

What stands out about his work is that it is for all strata of society ... not only for the elite but also for the middle- and low-income groups.”

**“MY WORKS  
ARE AN EXTENSION  
OF MY LIFE”**



# 9 ICONIC BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY AR. B V DOSHI

1



## ARANYA LOW COST HOUSING, INDORE

Completed in 1989, this Township was designed to establish a sense of community and facilitate harmony between the built environment and its inhabitants. It was also the recipient of the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1996.

2



## ATIRA HOUSING, AHMEDABAD

One of Doshi's older projects, construction on this complex began in 1956 and was completed in 1960. The ATIRA factory and its homes are located in a green front area at the Indian Institute of Management. It is a small complex that reveals many similarities to Le Corbusier's projects.

# 9 ICONIC BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY AR. B V DOSHI

3



## ECIL, HYDERABAD

The ECIL township was built by Doshi between 1969 and 1971, and was part of a planned expansion of the Hyderabad electronics industry. The settlement is about 15 km from the centre of Hyderabad. Doshi designed the structure specifically for Hyderabad's climate, by using charts to establish sun angles and wind direction so that it can best exploit it through openings and shorts.

4

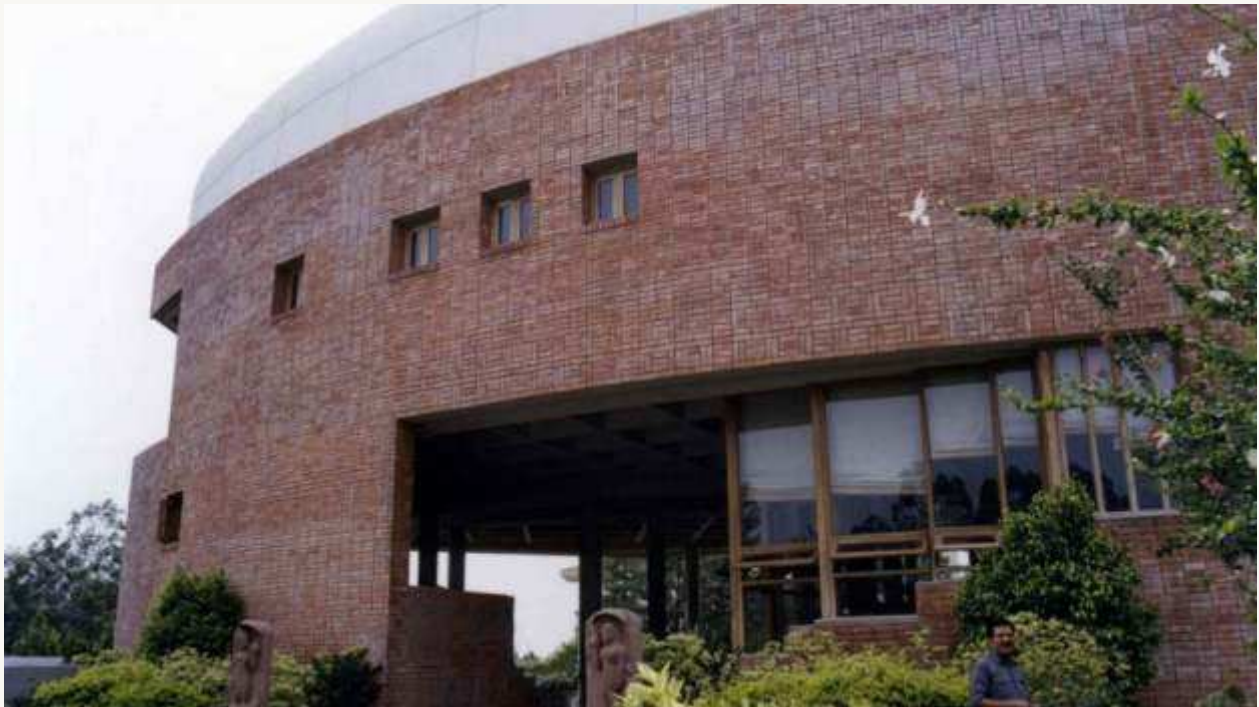


## IFFCO TOWNSHIP, KALOL

Another economically driven housing project, this eco-friendly township was designed as part of the expansion of the Indian Farmers Fertilizer Co-operative Ltd.

# 9 ICONIC BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY AR. B V DOSHI

5



## JNANA-PRAVAH CENTRE FOR CULTURAL STUDIES, VARANASI

Inaugurated in 2001, the new building of Jnana-Pravaha, was christened Pratchi, by then Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Professor Vishnu Kant Shastri. The building houses a multi-purpose hall, seminar and classrooms, an exhibition area, a library, museum, and an entire block dedicated to the administration.

6



## SAWAI GANDHARVA, PUNE

Built in his hometown of Pune, this performance art centre took more than 10 years to complete, starting in 1990 to 2001

# 9 ICONIC BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY AR. B V DOSHI

7



## **TAGORE HALL, AHMEDABAD**

A truly Brutalist building, a series of rigid concrete folded plates frame the outer shell to this hall. The hall, located on the banks of Sabarmati River, was designed by Doshi in 1966. Inside the hall is a 'seating bowl' with a capacity of 700.

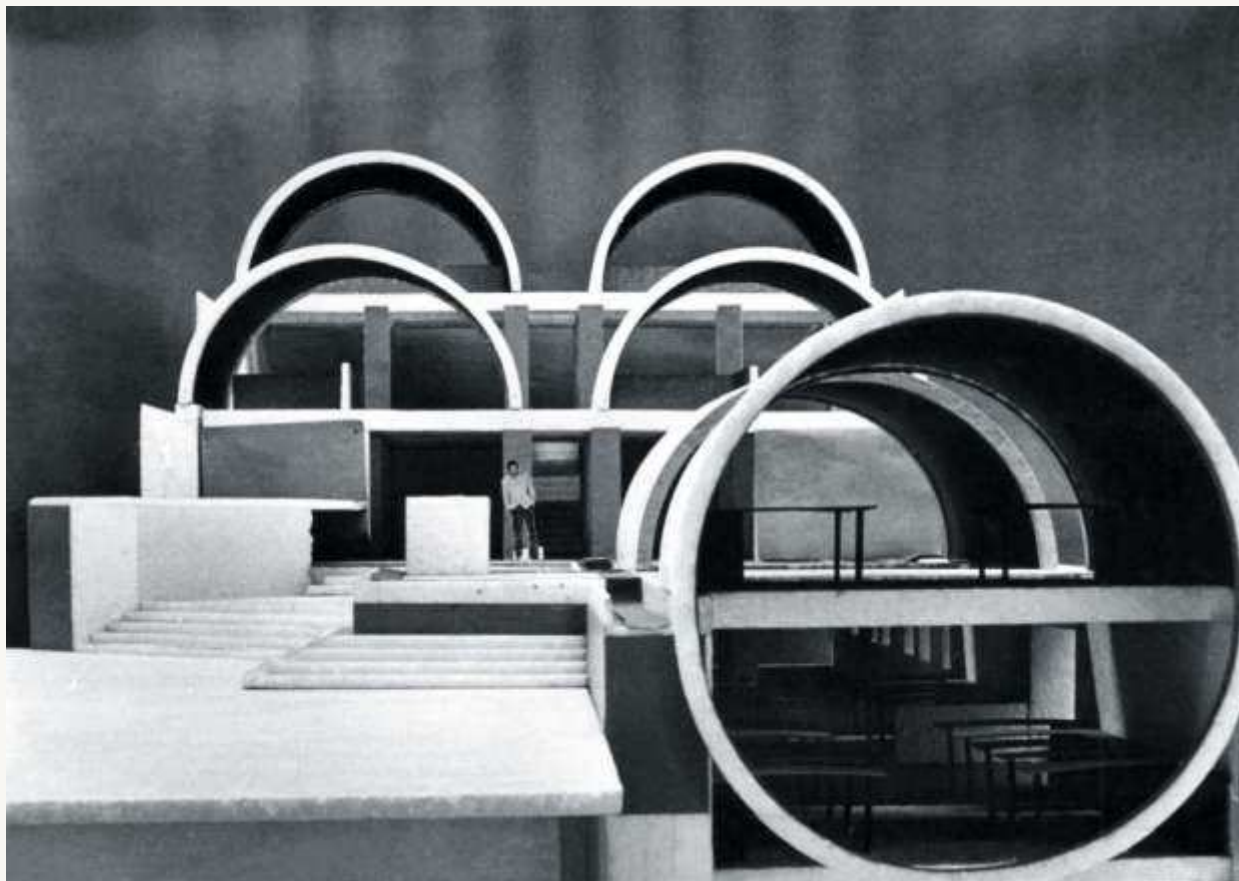
8



## **LIC HOUSING, AHMEDABAD**

Designed in 1973 for the Life Insurance Corporation in Ahmedabad, this complex was locally called Bima Nagar. It consists of 324 units arranged in a duplex terraced unit scheme on 54 plots. The initial development was focused on efficient provision of sites and services with a phased plan for growth.

## 9 ICONIC BUILDINGS DESIGNED BY AR. B V DOSHI



9

### **SANGATH, BV DOSHI'S OFFICE, AHMEDABAD**

The iconic roofscape of Sangath is easy to recognise. The space features a series of sunken vaults sheathed in China mosaic, a small terraced amphitheatre with intricate water details.

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