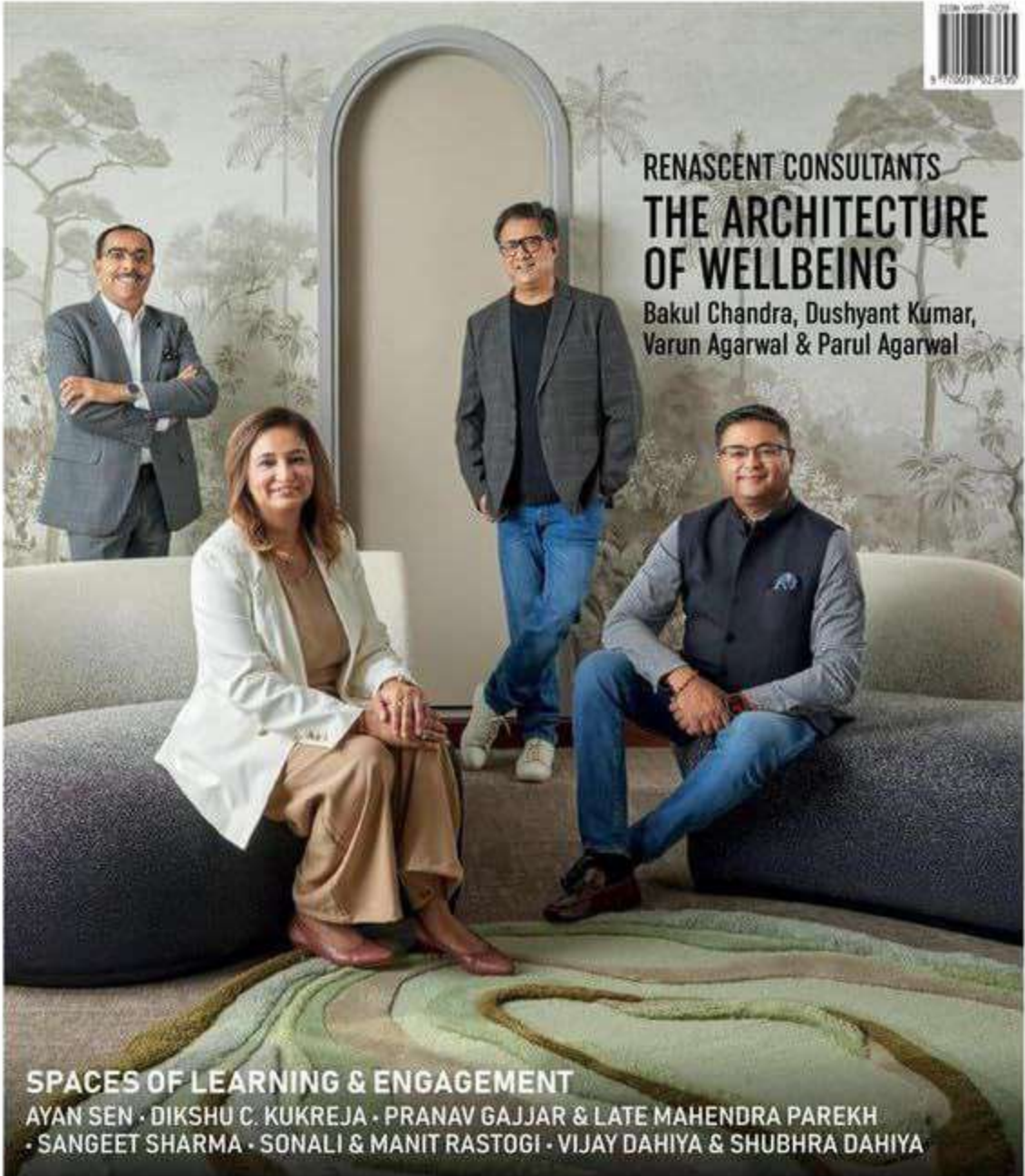


# ARCHITECTURE+DESIGN

AN INDIAN JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE



## RENASCENT CONSULTANTS THE ARCHITECTURE OF WELLBEING

Bakul Chandra, Dushyant Kumar,  
Varun Agarwal & Parul Agarwal

## SPACES OF LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

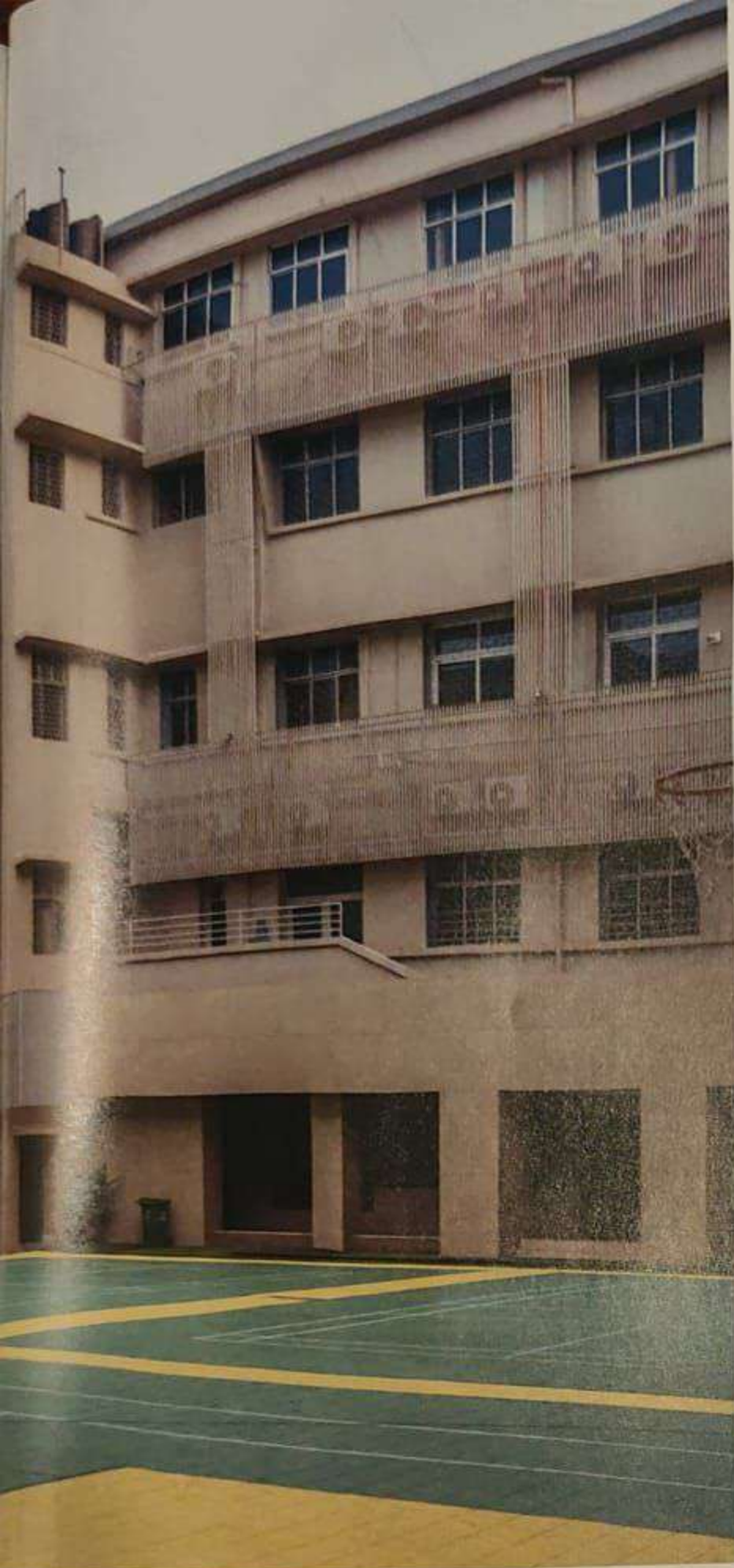
AYAN SEN • DIKSHU C. KUKREJA • PRANAV GAJJAR & LATE MAHENDRA PAREKH  
• SANGEET SHARMA • SONALI & MANIT RASTOGI • VIJAY DAHIYA & SHUBHRA DAHIYA



# REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

**PROJECT:** Birla High School, Kolkata; **ARCHITECTS:** Ayan Sen Architects, Urban Designers & Planners

Birla High School's transformation embodies the evolving landscape of educational architecture, where functionality meets inspiration. The bold redesign prioritises student well-being, sustainability and community engagement



particularly eager to take on this school. Birla High School has been a part of Kolkata for many years, but when I received the opportunity, its infrastructure and design felt quite dated. I saw this not just as a renovation but as a chance to make a bold statement right in the heart of the city. The challenge with transformation is always about preserving the best of what exists while completely rethinking the rest. There's a strong sense of nostalgia attached to school life, and that emotional layer made this project even more special," explains the architect.

The architect, with the use of modern design principles and technology, brought in more openness, introduced ample greenery, and created spaces that offer a sense of freedom and flow. The design includes a beautiful courtyard, open corridors and a tropical palette that complements the environment. What makes this project truly fulfilling is that the students, alumni, teachers and the school management—all of them—are genuinely happy with the result. That, for him, is the greatest success of this transformation.

### CREATING COLLABORATIVE SPACES

There are conventional classrooms where structured learning happens, but the real learning—the kind that shapes personalities and memories—often takes place outside of them. Whether it's the corridor, the courtyard, the green patches, or even the canteen, these informal spaces play a huge role in a student's life. The canteen, for instance, is where friendships are built and stories are shared. These non-programmed, recreational areas are not just add-ons; they are essential parts of a school's design. "For me, it was important that the architecture celebrated these in-between spaces. That's why the corridors and courtyards were treated with as much care and attention as the classrooms. They form the true language of the school, connecting people and encouraging a sense of openness and interaction," informs Ayan.



**T**he architecture of educational institutions has seen a shift from utilitarian structures to dynamic, student-centric environments that prioritise pedagogy, well-being and community engagement. The design emphasises the interplay between space, learning and human experience. This paradigm shift in design thinking reflects a growing recognition of the profound impact of the physical environment on not just students but everyone who inhabits the space. With its thoughtful blend of modern design principles and contextual sensitivity, the Birla High School's transformation, led by Architect Ayan Sen, embodies this shift towards student-centric architecture. By prioritising openness, sustainability and community engagement, the design has created a vibrant learning environment that inspires students, teachers and alumni alike. This is more than just a building—it's a lively and comfortable place to learn, built with heart and a strong belief in improving the future of education in Kolkata.

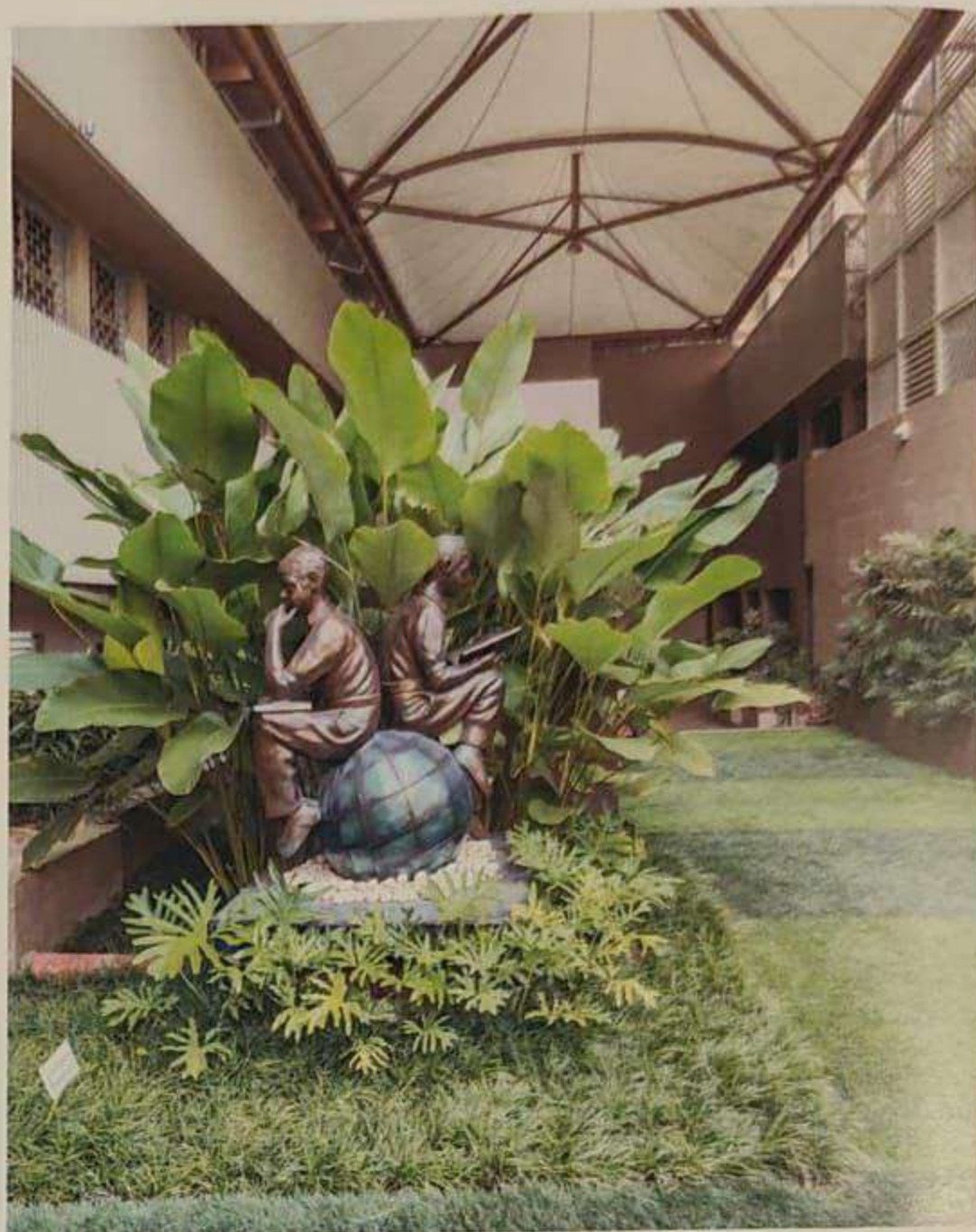
"We hadn't done many school projects before, just a small one in the past, but having worked across a wide range of typologies like housing, resorts, convention centres and institutional buildings, I was



# **AYAN SEN**

Founder, Ayan Sen Architects,  
Urban Designers & Planners

*Ayan Sen is a graduate of School of Architecture, CEPT, India and has done his Masters in Urban Design from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. He provides specialized expertise in the areas of master planning for waterfronts and campuses including residential and mixed-use projects and professionally been involved in several architectural projects in India that include resorts, institutions, commercial and health care and residential projects.*





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—AYAN SEN, *Founder, Ayan Sen Architects, Urban Designers & Planners*

Another unique element the architect introduced was on the façade—the integration of subtle typographic elements in Hindi, the national language. This included Sanskrit shlokas that resonate with the values and ethos of the institution. It wasn’t overt or loud, but delicately done to create a sense of cultural grounding and identity. The aim was to honour tradition while designing a space that feels contemporary and inclusive.

#### THE UNDERLYING DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

“I’ve always felt that most schools have a rather harsh and rigid feel. The idea was to soften that—both visually and experientially. We introduced a palette of soft tones and worked on improving permeability throughout the space, allowing light and air to move more freely. Thoughtfully placed graphics were added to create a positive mood and energise the environment,” emphasises the architect. “The combination of natural elements like grass in the courtyard, carefully chosen flooring materials, and the overall spatial layout came together to define what the school should feel like—welcoming, calm and sensorially rich. We focused on using the right materials and fabrics to create a warm, tactile

experience. Soft tensile structures were introduced for shade and visual interest, while the canteen was deliberately made colourful because that’s where the joy and vibrancy of student life truly come alive.”

In many parts of the school, the design is intentionally grounded and sombre, not in a dull way, but in a way that reflects the deeper value systems we carry through life. Elements like the Sanskrit shlokas and meaningful punchlines subtly reinforce these values. They aren’t overt or didactic, but they leave a lasting impression. At the end of the day, it’s the memories that students take with them, and those memories are shaped by the environment and its messages, often absorbed subconsciously.

“While some classrooms and play areas are deliberately playful and vibrant, my intent was always to create a space that nurtures and cares, while also instilling core values. Nature plays a big role in this narrative. The presence of greenery, leaves, plants and earth-like textures symbolising softness, sustainability and care, much like Mother Earth herself. A school shouldn’t feel harsh or sterile; it should offer an environment that is warm, gentle and rooted in meaningful experiences,” concludes the architect. ✚