

THE ARCHITECTURE OF HABIB FIDA ALI

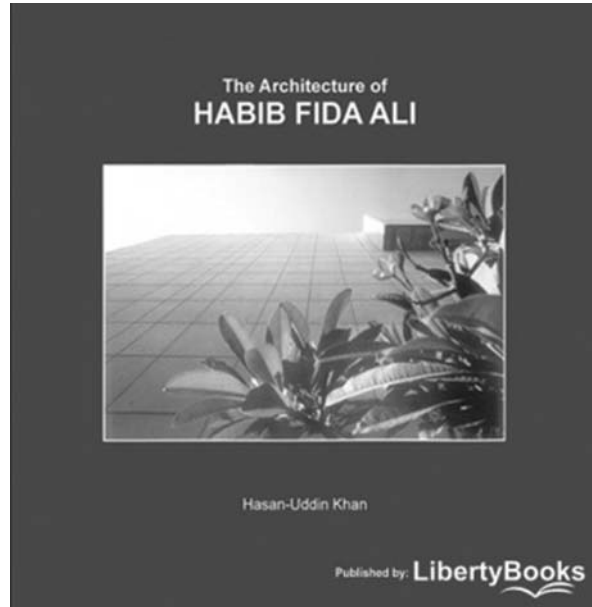
Hasan-Uddin Khan
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Reviewed by
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Karachi has been fortunate to have received creative inputs to embellish its built environment from many an outstanding architects and designers. From the talented and efficient James Strachen of the bygone British era to the young practitioners of today, there are many names that stand out prominent. But the name of Habib Fida Ali deserves a special place for many reasons. His works can be truly regarded as an emblem of simplicity enveloped in a powerful aesthetic flavor and purity of forms. Whether the erstwhile Kohsar restaurant or the more contemporary head office of Sui Southern Gas Company, the message stays loud and clear! The exhaustive monograph on the legendary architect by Prof. Hasan Uddin Khan has come as a real treat for those admirers of his work who intend to learn more about it and wish to preserve the laboriously produced compendium for ready reference.

The book defines its audience in a very clear manner. It is for every one – architects, artists, media folks, students, corporate hips, gallery managers, ordinary citizens and many others can benefit from the book with ease of absorbing each and every detail of it. In an extremely reader friendly manner, the chapters are outlined around architectural typologies practiced by HFA. The book opens up with a foreword by well known Anjalendran of Sri Lanka. In a near conversational narrative, he unveils his association with Habib Fida Ali and illustrates the finer points about his works. The long but extremely interesting narrative by Hasan Uddin Khan sheds light on various labyrinths of HFA and his works. From making of the architect to the conscious choice of practicing an uncomplicated genre of modernism, the narrative extends information and analysis in a very simple manner. Flints of facts have been collected through an open methodology. Opinions of HFA's staff and friends, small anecdotes and reflections of the architect are interlaced in an all absorbing diction that does not leave the reader before completing the book. High quality photographs, illustrations and captions have made the images of architecture come to life.

The book has created a threshold for further and deeper



exploration into the legacy of HFA. There are many dimensions which invite researchers to delve deep and derive hypotheses leading to expounded analysis. For instance, each architectural typology - which makes a separate chapter – can be considered for interpretation, focused examination or simply linking up with the three dimensional chronology of the built environment. Parallels of his work can also be drawn from followers and practitioners in the times and space where HFA dwelled. Such questions can also become moot points to be addressed by scholars, academics and critics in the form of original contribution to knowledge. Perhaps young budding academics can pick up a theme and turn it into a comprehensive academic study, as was done by Professor Norma Evenson of University of California – Berkeley in her dissertation on Chandigarh as realization of dreams by Le Corbusier some four decades ago.

Pakistani architects and their architecture is quite inadequately documented and published. In such a scenario, the book under review can be truly regarded as an invaluable addition. This will certainly not be the last book on HFA!