

Aachen, March 2019; Reported by: Lucca Fischer; Proofread by: Zhen ZHANG)

The lecture series „Monday Evening Talks“ (Montagabendgespräche) took place in the winter semester of 2019/20. The topic of the 2019/20 „Monday Evening Talks“ was „Indian modernism“, covering topics from architecture to urban planning practice, featuring 6 lectures from invited guests including Anupama Kundoo, Revathi Kamath, Rahul Srivastava, Ambrish Arora, Samira Rathod and Samuel Barclay. The lectures were organized by Prof. Axel Sowa, Zhen ZHANG, Vanessa Köpper and Lucca Fischer, at the Chair of Architectural Theory at the faculty of Architecture, RWTH Aachen, Germany.

4.11.2019 - Revathi Kamath - Kamath Design Studio

The Monday Evening talk with Ms Revathi Kamath, one of the founders of Kamath Design Studio, took place on the 4th of November 2019. The Delhi-based studio looks back on its 40 year tradition with some hundred projects to its credit.

Revathi Kamath has been a pioneer when it comes to clay architecture, the engagement of female architects, socially sustainable design approaches, ecological buildings and the appreciation of crafts in modern architecture. One of their guiding principles is, that every architectural construction is an event in an ecological, historical and philosophical continuance and they strive that the labour component in a project should always be more than the cost of the material. This is a reaction to the current underpayment of many workers in India. In this respect the studio tries to make a difference by ensuring fair working conditions and commitment for the poor.

Another principle is to “do more with less”. Especially when it comes to ecological buildings, the studio tries to minimize the effect on the environment through a conscious choice of materials and techniques.

The various projects starting from the 1980s to the present day demonstrate the richness in architectural quality and the effectiveness of Kamath Design Studio. Three of her projects (the Akshay Pratishthan School in Delhi, Community Centre at Maheshwar and Nalin Tomar House at Hauz Khas, Delhi) have been nominated for the Aga Khan Award. The projects put an emphasize on social and ecological factors and interpreted traditional architecture in a unique modern way. Here a selection of the projects discussed in detail during her lecture:

- a crèches for children, Delhi

With this project, designed by her husband - the architect Vasanth Kamath, Ms. Kamath opened up her lecture. Made of common bricks in a Delhi Slum in the 1980s, this project - a crèches for children - inspired her to engage in social building construction and planning while putting an emphasis on crafts and design. Another inspiration in this context was a quote of Gandhi who said that a project is evaluated with regard to its use for the poorest and weakest.

- the Anandgram Community Resettlement, Shadipur

This resettlement project - one of her first social projects - was for a slum inhabited by traditional performing artists and craftspeople who lived together in simple tents. In the project Ms Kamath designed simple houses in close cooperation with the future inhabitants. In each house there was place for one whole family. The project was finally realized by the local craftsmen.

- Kamath House, Anangpur

Kamath House is the house of the architects themselves. The design cares a lot about the ecosystem and therefore not only gives home to human-beings but to many natural species, especially as taking care of animals is a big issue in India, i.a. due to religious reasons. The materials of Kamath house are predominantly native: mud blocks used for the walls constructed on the foundation of regional stones, a green roof, the trees on the site that stayed almost untouched, considering the self-healing capacities of nature.

- the Museum of Tribal Heritage, Bhopal

The tribal population in India takes up about one third of the overall population, making the museum an important public institution presenting a variety of traditions in India. Representing all of the 42 tribes and their architecture, the museum includes traditional elements while staging several columns in the building symbolizing trees, which makes the museum appear like a forest.