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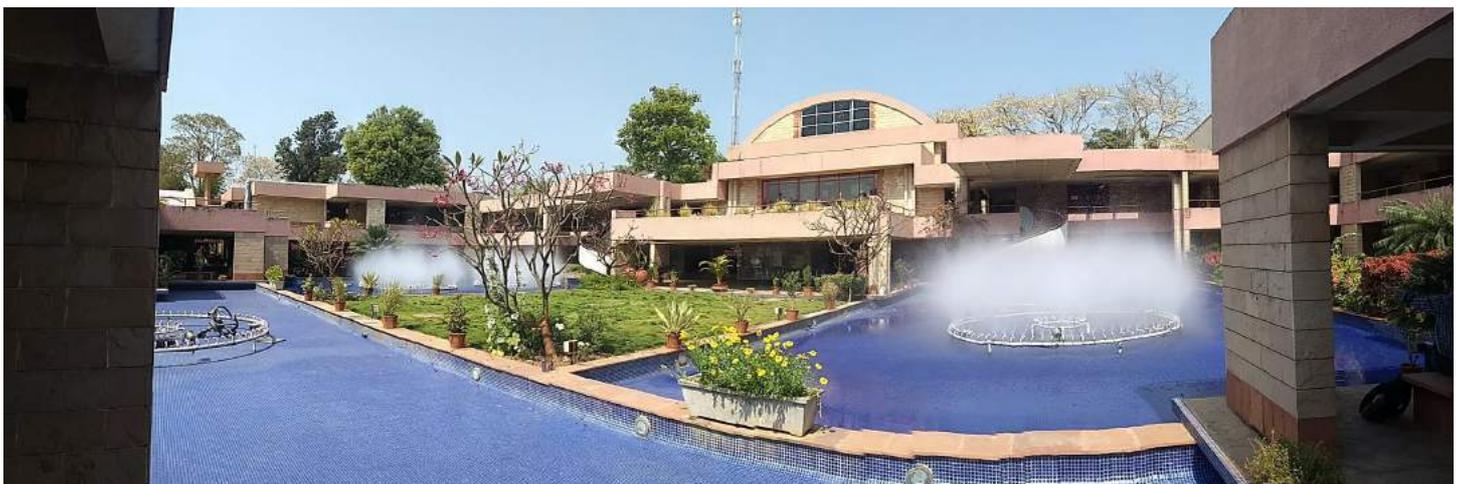
Some lessons for an old IIT from a new one

Dhruv Bhanushali   Mar 3, 2018 · 10 min read

It's hardly been three days since I returned from my third-year industrial trip, also referred to as the educational tour, to Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar, where we got to visit the Physical Research Laboratory, the Institute for Plasma Research and the renowned Indian Space Research Organisation. Over the course of the four days we spent there, our resting place for the nights was IIT Gandhinagar, one of the new ones.

No, we did *not* go to Goa like everyone else. As a teetotaller food-loving Gujarati from the shores of Mumbai, the trip to Ahmedabad, where I have never been before, was rather great in some aspects. Add to it the wonderful opportunity to spend time in an up and coming institute like IIT Gandhinagar and the trip became way better than any trip to Goa could have been for me.

This is the view from the rooftop of the Physical Research Laboratory. In the background, the tower of Gujarat University can be seen.

There are five pretty fountains at the Institute for Plasma Research, and it's a beautiful lush green campus to work in.

I made a new friend at IIT Gandhinagar, who was particularly curious about my giant red balloon after first being intimidated by it for an hour. Not a bad trip at all!

Back to the point, IIT Gandhinagar, being one of the new IITs, is vastly different from my own IIT Roorkee which is the oldest technical institute in Asia and, to be honest, has

changed very very little in the last one hundred and fifty years. Everything from the inanimate things like the architecture and the campus amenities to the animate things like the culture and the mindset of people is different here from what it is there.

Through this post, I will try to pen my views, on what I feel are the stark differences I observed, down here.

I hope that this piece makes the readers from IIT Gandhinagar proud of what they have and makes the readers from IIT Roorkee a bit aware that the shortcomings they've swallowed as facts of college life are not, in fact, facts of college life and indeed need to be rectified and improved upon.

Overall architecture

To be fair to my *alma mater*, IIT Roorkee is an old institute. Like way old. *Ancient* old. The architecture here reflects that. The main building, still standing and perfectly put to updated use, is a testament that the Raj, nevertheless a troubled time, is now a part of our history and being Indians, we take it in stride. But the aesthetics of a monument located at the dead-centre of the institute cannot excuse the fact that all our department buildings and hostels look dated too, without a reason for them to be that way except apathy. I will give credit where it's due, the new buildings in IIT Roorkee, with a little maintenance, could do very well but without this maintenance, it won't take long for them to become horrible.

Note the absence of dirt and the presence of architectural beauty, in this image and most others from IIT Gandhinagar.

Departmental diversity

This is something that cannot be compared one for one, because IIT Gandhinagar does not have the department buildings in place. But from what is in place, some very important conclusions can be drawn and extrapolated to what will be in place very soon.

Notice the difference between the EE and the HSS department signages? That sort of inconsistency occurs when every department functions independently without a unified theme. The EE department is named in four different forms. The HSS department just recently added two signs on the walls saying the same things that are painted on the wall already. And all this inconsistency is painful to say the least.

Watch how IIT Gandhinagar's unified design language avoids such a haphazard mismatch of ideologies and unifies the entire feel. Also, a random abstract art piece like many of our own, demonstrated in the Architecture department.

Hygiene

As anyone who's ever lived in a hostel will testify, hostels are not expected to be the cleanest of places. But they do not have to be the most disgusting and dirtiest of places either. This is embodied in the washrooms of the IIT Gandhinagar hostels. The washrooms were at the peak of their cleanliness, looking spic-and-span. I'll leave it to the pictures to do the rest of the comparison.

I kid you not, this is an actual washroom of a boys' hostel at IIT Gandhinagar. This is one from IIT Roorkee (warning: disturbing image).

Look at this small difference between garbage collection practices. Instead of a combined garbage bin, a small change such as keeping two, one for biodegradable

wastes and the other for others, goes a long way in solving a lot of the problems that we face in waste management and disposal.

Sorting waste into proper categories is the least to expect from students of such prestigious institutes. IIT Gandhinagar recognises that.

This is the waste collection at IIT Roorkee. Disgusted much? You should be.

Navigation

Getting around in a new place is tough. You have no idea of the lay of the land and if you are as bad at directions as I am, living in a new place begins by getting lost every time you go out for the first two to three days. Good for me, IIT Gandhinagar was surprisingly easy to navigate, unlike IIT Roorkee, which required three days of orientation and I still lost my way to the Physics department on my first day of classes.

I'll give the credit of keeping me way-wise to the plentiful signboards all the way, guiding me from point A to point B.

Note the consistency in a set of signboards following the Path of Glory signage system, explained below.

This is the sign that leads to three of the boys' hostels. Note that the arrows are non-standard, make no sense and point absolutely to the wrong places.

There is not the slightest consistency in the signboards here at IIT Roorkee. Some are Hindi only, some English only are some in both languages. Also note how archaic and dated they look. There is zero modernity.

This is a typical washed out and deteriorated signboard in IIT Roorkee. Note the peculiar speed breaker symbol. We developed it ourselves so no one recognises it and people have to read the Hindi only text before it actually hits the car. No, it doesn't, because there is none, it's just a zebra crossing. Oh wait, there is one actually. Bam!

Cohesion

This level of aesthetic planning should be an inspiration for the designers and architects.

These boards are not regular rectangles, are they? *No, they're all trapeziums if you notice carefully, all angled at a certain perspective.*

Why trapeziums? *They're following the Path of Glory signage system, a unifying design*

language developed by the architects of that place.

What's the Path of Glory signage system? *Let IIT Gandhinagar tell you itself, via one of its many informative plaques scattered around the campus.*
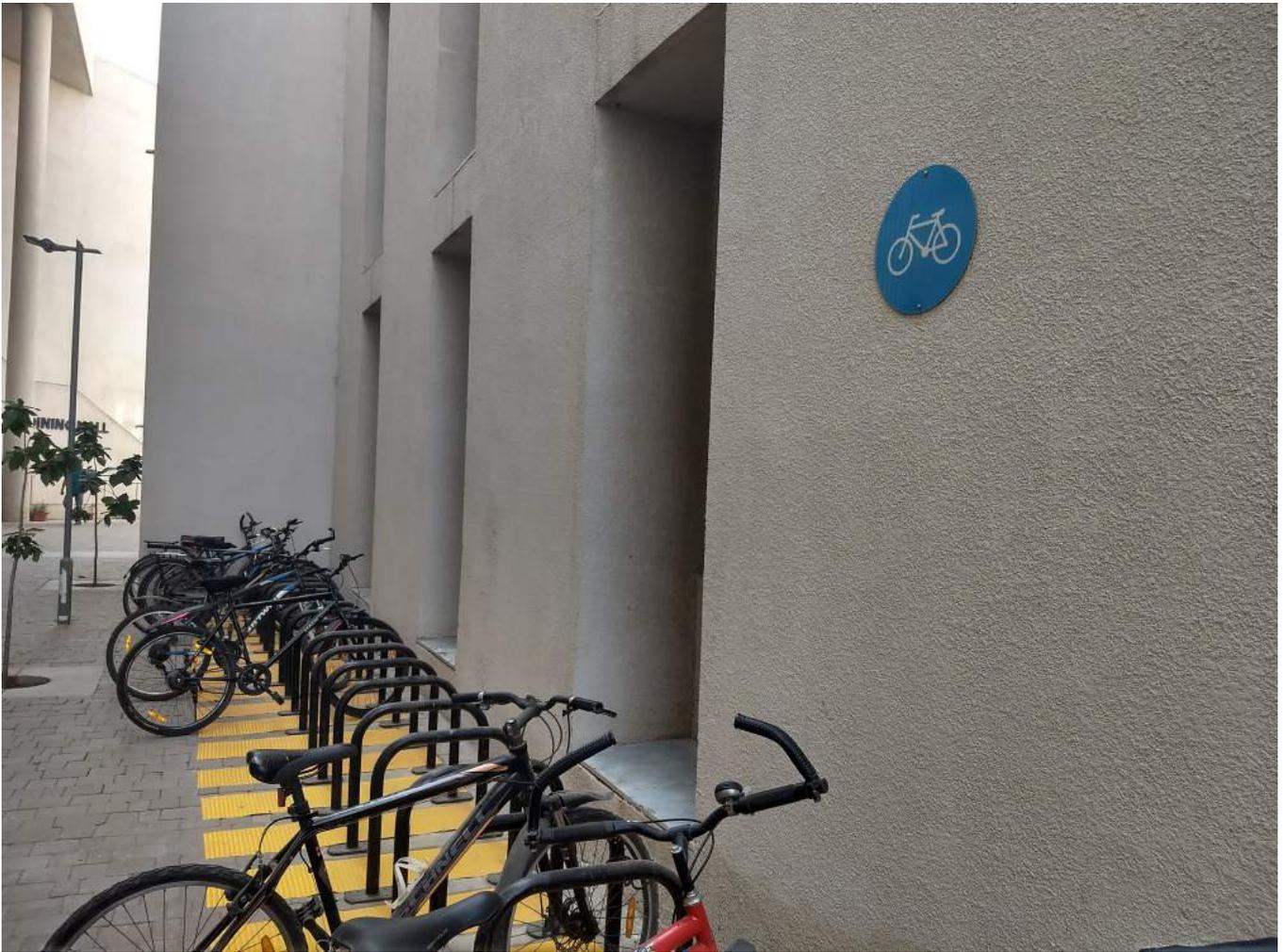
A cohesive sense of design and aesthetics can go a long way in making the campus a wholesome space. To that end, IIT Gandhinagar is far ahead of IIT Roorkee. The entire campus, from every signboard to every light pole to every turn on every road, the entire campus exudes a sense of consistency and cohesion, something that is not even remotely present in a haphazardly developed, albeit lovingly maintained, campus like that of IIT Roorkee.

These signboards also had maps where having maps made sense. There is so much uniformity and conformity.

Since the hostels had a very quirky numbering system, these boards helped. A lot. Also the hostel names at IIT Gandhinagar are really cool, like Aibaan, Beauki and Chimair. It's worth noting the iconography here.

Some things can be expressed by simple icons. Those things should be expressed by simple icons.

Back home at IIT Roorkee, notice the vandalism on the boards. Also, driving at 120 on the roads in IIT Roorkee would kill you. The administration ensures that by placing barricades everywhere.

Lights

Good lighting can make or break a beautiful campus' ability to evoke the same feelings once the sun has set. Compared to IIT Roorkee's bland and generic street lighting, IIT Gandhinagar has a beautiful assortment of pretty and functional lights. Also, they are
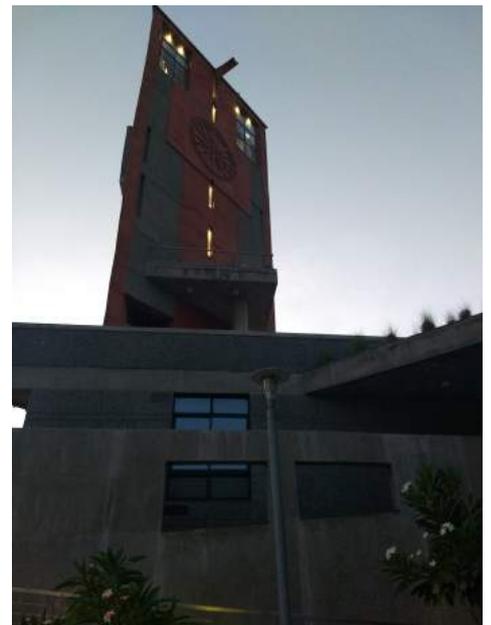
more in number too, so overall IIT Gandinagar is a more appealing campus to be in at night.

See this specimen of a UFO-ish light from IIT Gandhinagar, which has an entire promenade road along the Sabarmati river lined with lights just like this one.

Those are the only two UFO-ish lights in the IIT Roorkee campus. Also seen here is guard who will chase you if you dare set your mortal foot on the precious lawn.

Here are some more examples of beautiful lights in the IIT Gandhinagar campus.

This is an IIT Roorkee street lamp. It works, yes, but it has no personality or style or class. Meh!

Transportation

At present IIT Roorkee has a solid public transportation system in place. We have around twenty e-rickshaws circling the campus all the time, there are decently

populated hubs near the hostels and they are cost-effective too. They take a lot of the effort away of having to walk long distances and so they're in demand. There are also cycle-rickshaws pulled by friendly rickshaw drivers. It does have its flaws, nevertheless. The e-rickshaws are slow, noisy and scarce everywhere apart from the hubs. And since they will try to not budge till they have their maximum number of passengers, they are also responsible for a good deal of time wastage. Another disadvantage of e-rickshaws I personally experienced is the lack of physical effort which is bad for health. And cycle-rickshaws are just sad because that is like torturing a fellow person to pull your weight, especially given that there is a small hillock within our campus! But given the convenience provided, we live with the side-effects, I mean there is no better alternative. *Or is there?*

Introducing *ofo* and *MYBYK*, two bike-sharing systems in place at IIT Gandhinagar, which set the gold standard for in-campus efficient transportation. Anyone with the app scans the QR code on the cycle, which unlocks the bike, and then, after riding it to one's destination, locks it to automatically log the trip. Optionally one get charged for the trip depending on the campus policies. It was free in IIT Gandhinagar, so me and my friends made the most of it by cycling for hours on end. It's a fun and healthy way to move around. But a successful implementation of such a service requires a proper civilised mindset which both the aforementioned vandalism does and the below mentioned sexism will indicate the absence of.

This is one of the many fleets of free cycles for public use. Look closely on the mudguards and you might see the QR codes that unlock the cycles.

This is the cycle parking lot of Radhakrishnan Bhawan at IIT Roorkee. These are owned, not for rent.

No walls

A campus needs walls. Around it. Only. *Full stop*. There shouldn't be walls in the campus separating one part from the other. There is no need for them to even exist. Rightfully in that direction, IIT Gandhinagar has a combined hostel complex with no walls separating the girls' hostel building from the boys'. They also have a shared mess. And a shared set of canteens, diners and snack outlets. Also there is no restriction on movement of boys and girls into each other's buildings, all the way to the individual rooms. In comparison, the old mindset of IIT Roorkee was responsible for the entire year it took for the efforts like #PinjraTod to even let girls out of their hostels into the rest of the campus after 9pm in the night. Even then, they are allowed only up to the canteens in the boys' hostels and not even that in the opposite case. This is some serious sexism showing that IIT Roorkee is still stuck in the last century. One can only wonder when the people here will catch up with the rest of the world.

The left building on the back is a boys' hostel and the one on the right is a girls'. Do you see a wall?

Faculty residences

I am in no position to talk about this, but the faculty residences in IIT Gandhinagar seemed beautiful from the outside. And the parking spaces were lit up beautifully in the night. I would have loved to live in those flats there if given a chance, something that I could not say even for a lot of villas in IIT Roorkee.

Do note that a lot of the images may fit in more than one category and may prove more than one point. That's what images do. They speak a thousand words, and that many words are supposed to transcend categories and subheadings.

That's about it. I've almost said everything I had to say in favour of IIT Gandhinagar.

A balanced argument

It's not all bad in IIT Roorkee either. Our new buildings are awesome. Some of them. A few of them. Very few of them. We take pride in our beautifully trimmed and maintained lawns, our lush greenery and a campus laden with flowers at every nook and corner. We take pride in the seasons ranging from hot and humid yellow summers to freezing cold grey winters passing through auburn autumns and colourful springs, a diversity that very few IITs will ever get to experience. We take pride in the historic significance of the Thomason building and the Mahatma Gandhi Central Library. We take pride in how the campus has seamlessly blended both an old side and a modern one into one unique experience.

But all I'm asking for here is a little more effort to right a few wrongs, to cover a few shortcomings, to stretch the last mile of a marathon that rejuvenating a campus is.

Mandatory inclusion of the Thomason building at IIT Roorkee.

Rajiv Bhawan, one of the newer boys' hostels, and the Hydraulic Turbine R&D laboratory are prime examples of the neat new buildings of IIT Roorkee.

The Alaknanda unit of the Students' Club, which is a new building but in a dilapidated state because of the aforementioned apathy.

I know that all these things do not make an IIT what it is. IIT Gandhinagar is still in the works, has very few students and faculties and being new means it gets the best of the newest stuff. But if an old IIT like ours, with years of culture (including seventeen after

the official inclusion of the University of Roorkee into the league of IITs) and a powerful alumni network spanning generations and even eras, can somehow incorporate the new and cool amenities like IIT Gandhinagar, nothing can stop us from being the best technical institute in the country.

I hope

I hope that the SAC and the administration of IIT Roorkee look into these issues and do something about them, at least after I post this article there. Also I hope that the students of Architecture and the design enthusiasts of IIT Roorkee, the geeks and the technocrats can come together with the administration to develop corresponding systems here, albeit tailored to our specific needs.

I hope.

Till the next time.

Special thanks to <u>*Vineet Arora*</u> *and Pranjal Tale, both close friends, for their suggestions towards enhancing this post.*

Thanks to Vineet Arora.

Iit Roorkee   Iit Gandhinagar   Aesthetics   Architecture   Design

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