



Academic block, Sylhet Polytechnic Institute



Additional space between classroom and corridor for meeting place, Sylhet Polytechnic Institute



Use of ramp for vertical movement, Sylhet Polytechnic Institute



Class room, Sylhet Polytechnic Institute

PHOTOS: FATIHA POLIN

WEST MEETS EAST

Stanley Tigerman and his architectural projects in Bangladesh

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On June 3, 2019, the world of architecture lost one of its greatest designers and theorists, Stanley Tigerman. It is difficult to label the celebrated architect as a modernist or an early postmodernist; his works were wonderful fusion of modernism, technology, playfulness and pragmatic inventions. He was one of those optimistic architects, who strive for the special quality in architecture that transforms the spirit of place and character of people into a uniquely liveable form. Interestingly, the architectural genius has left a glorious legacy for Bangladeshis. He closely worked with the pioneer Bengali Architect Muzharul Islam in a construction scheme of educational institutions of substantial size and importance in Bangladesh.

Born on September 20 in 1930, Stanley Tigerman grew up in his paternal grandparents' boarding house in Edgewater, Chicago. He got into the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for his technical degree, but left after just one year. He started his architectural career as an apprentice for architect George Fred Keck who was also from Chicago, a friend of the dean of MIT. He joined the US Navy, when his first attempt to start his own practice failed.

He then returned to Chicago and worked at AJ Del Bianco doing suburban architecture for two years. He also worked with Milton Schwartz on the Executive House; and then as junior de-

signer in the United States. The Ryerson and Burnham Libraries in the Art Institute of Chicago holds a collection of his papers. He was the former director of the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Besides, Tigerman and the designer Eva L Maddox co-founded Archeworks in 1994, a non-profit organisation in Chicago, in a way, echoing the philosophy of Muzharul Islam, "Design shapes the way we live. The fewer resources communities and individuals have, the more they need great design solutions to enhance their quality of life."

During his early career, Tigerman extensively borrowed from an eclectic blend of styles. He was one of the key figures of the Chicago Seven, a group which emerged in 1976 in opposition to the doctrinal application of modernism.

Tigerman has built over 175 projects and credited for over 390 projects. He has worked with Muzharul Islam in Bangladesh. His significant works include design of five polytechnic institutes in Bangladesh, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, Illinois, the Illinois Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in Springfield, Illinois, and POWERHOUSE Energy Museum in Zion, Illinois. His broad ranging collaborations included projects such as mixed use high-rise and low-rise housing, installations for museums, high density mixed use urban plan etc in the United States, Germany and Japan.

The Chicago Seven was a first-generation postmodern group of architects who rebelled against the institutionalised predominance of the doctrine of modernism, represented by the followers of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The original Seven were Stanley Tigerman, Larry Booth, Stuart Cohen, Ben Weese, James Ingo Freed, Tom Beeby and James L Nagle. They were looking for new forms, a semantic content and historical references in their buildings.

In 1976, the travelling exhibition (One Hundred Years of Architecture) in Chicago was about to be shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. The organisers seemed to put an exclusive emphasis on the role played by Mies, his predecessors and followers, which aroused the criticism of Tigerman, Cohen, Booth and Weese. Thus the nucleus of the group formed for a protest. They simultaneously mounted a counter-show in the Time-Life Building which drew nationwide attention.

They were quickly dubbed as the Chicago Four. With the addition of Freed, Beeby and Nagle, the group soon expanded into the famous Chicago Seven. They actually embraced the title as it paid homage to the anti-Vietnam war protesters known as the Chicago Seven who stood trial in the city in between 1969-1970. The Seven brought their ideas to a broader audience through their teaching, exhibitions and symposia.

Architect Muzharul Islam started his post-graduation at Yale School of Architecture after practicing in Bangladesh as an architect for the government for a substantial period of time. At the same time, just after finishing his bachelor thesis, Stanley Tigerman also joined in the same class. Eventually they became very good friends; in Stanley's

word "it was more than a friendship but finding a soulmate". Their friendship transformed into a successful professional relationship and a lifelong bond, when they partnered for a World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD) Project in the mid-sixties undertaken by the Pakistani government.

components: the academic block, housing for staff and students. The prototype buildings were configured accordingly considering the specific site and local conditions.

All the buildings were oriented north-south to ensure ventilation. The full height windows, almost flanked between shifting parallel walls maximised natural

In his words, "The polytechnic project had perhaps its greatest effect on me as a consequence of Muzharul Islam's insisting that I live with the Bengalis and spend as little time as possible with the American community in Dhaka. I ate the Bengali food and drank their water, got dysentery and was cured and became acclimated to the local conditions. Islam also made sure that I approached the problem of designing for his people in a way that would bring lessons of western logic to the young architects of East Pakistan well beyond those inherent in the buildings themselves. This in turn prompted me to become aware of the needs of my own people and the way architecture is practiced in America, where a generally high level of sophistication in the discipline is taken for granted."

It was indeed difficult to bear all those for a project in an unknown land and very different culture; but it was heartbreaking for him to leave such a dear project. It was a critical time for both the project and Bangladesh. When the people of Bangladesh were struggling for their independence, his office had to notify that if the work on the polytechnics did not resume, the foreign employees stuck there would be ultimately considered as enemies. In the end, he resigned; only to return after the Liberation War ended with the new government reinitiating the project.

It was very unlikely, and quite difficult for an American architect to travel, live or work in a tropical location like Bengal in a developing economy. He actually made 16 trips in conjunction to this project. In September 1971, he terminated his contract with the World Bank for the project; for the sake of the people of Bangladesh. In his words, "I have no intention of working for a military government with its attached implications. Moreover, I will never again travel to East Pakistan. Lastly, when the country is free and self-determining I would wish to visit and hopefully work in Bangladesh for I have come to love these people and their country very much. I am an architect. I am also a human being."

In 2017, Tigerman announced that he was retiring from active practice, but his wife, Margaret McCurry, carried on the work of the firm, Tigerman McCurry Architects. In his more than 50 years of practicing architecture, his diverse design style progressively achieved more sensual and dramatic qualities. He developed his personal styles by incorporating organic shapes, bright colour, topiary, and allegory with his early skills with curves and perspective. He spoke fondly of architecture's next generations, to whom he offered his advice: "Go slow. Don't copy. Stand firm. Work Hard". He always stated his ideas clearly along with his different aspirations, ambitions, and conceits. From a designer of heterogeneous style, Tigerman advanced his journey towards an idiosyncratic theorist.

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Residential block and overhead water tank, Rangpur Polytechnic Institute

PHOTO: FATIHA POLIN

signer for Skidmore Owings and Merrill on the Air Force Academy. In 1961, he finally graduated from the Yale School of Architecture. It was in Yale, where he met Architect Muzharul Islam.

He had been the Principal of Stanley Tigerman and Associates Ltd (now Tigerman McCurry Architects), in Chicago from 1964 until his retirement in 2017. He also taught at numerous universities



Stanley Tigerman

SOURCE: ARCHINECT.COM

The then East Pakistan Government and the IBRD; envisioned and collaborated for an extensive technical education programme that resulted in construction of five Polytechnic Institutes in Barisal, Bogra, Pabna, Rangpur and Sylhet. These technical schools were much needed for an agrarian country like Bangladesh, to master technological expertise for development. According to Stanley, it was Muzharul Islam who recommended him for this project.

After few discussions, the World Bank commissioned both Muzharul Islam and Stanley Tigerman for the polytechnic project which finally started in 1964. It should be mentioned here, the person who played a pivotal role in the selection process was "Mr Sergei Kadleigh, the World Bank official who's concern for the people of Bangladesh is far more intense than what one might expect from a World Bank bureaucrat" as observed by Stanley Tigerman himself. Back then, world renowned architect Louis I Kahn was also working on the National Parliament Building in Dhaka. Paul Rudolph (who was a Professor at the Yale School of Architecture and used to teach Stanley Tigerman and Muzharul Islam) was designing an extension to the Agriculture School at Mymensingh (actually, that project was initiated by the Austrian born, California based architect Richard Neutra); when the works for the polytechnic institutes were about to start.

It was a long collaborative work by Stanley Tigerman in association with Muzharul Islam and his architectural establishment *Vastukalabid*. They worked together for 10 years in the project to produce a separate master plan for each of the five sites (Barisal, Bogra, Pabna, Rangpur and Sylhet); with three main

light inside the buildings. The long narrow buildings of each institute were carefully crafted with local craftsmen and thus the exposed bricks were not very polished, but kept as it is which provided a beautiful rustic texture. There were places of surprise, between classrooms and at junctions between corridors, as gathering spaces for students. While in many projects, the overhead water tank becomes an object of negligence, here it became a landmark; rising on four inverted corner brick walls with a concrete box of tank on top of it. Extensive landscaping was also done for all of the sites.

The design and construction of the buildings were the result of a panoptic study of the site, climate, local materials and techniques; a perfect example for designing in the tropics. It was not just an opportunity to provide expertise of an international architect, but as recalled by Stanley in his book *Versus*, it was a place to learn new ways of looking at things. He was exposed to an architectural practice, where the architect was the one who is responsible for designing almost everything from windows and their mechanisms to chairs (Graphic Standards and Knoll International did not exist back then. As a result, all the classroom furniture of polytechnics were also designed by the architects). Architects had to be aware of not only the environmental factors like orientation or direction of wind, but also the micro and macro climatic conditions which generates fungus, algae, moulds and the effects of rain forest in an alluvial plane.

He was deeply motivated by the way of thinking and work of Muzharul Islam which he also admitted. It is most likely that his concept of social responsibility was developed from this collaboration.