

JASPAL BHOGAL

A Tale of Passion and Perseverance

By Sudipta Gupta

Jaspal Bhogal is a well-known architect in the beautiful country of Trinidad and Tobago. The man of high repute holds the distinction of being the first and only non-Trinidadian to be elected as the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Architects, a rare recognition befitting his lifelong dedication to his profession. NRI Achievers takes a trip with the extraordinary Achiever.

Jaspal Bhogal is one of the most respected and sought after architects of Trinidad and Tobago. A graduate of the University of Bristol UK, he did his post graduate studies from the Polytechnic of Regent Street, London, Jaspal Bhogal is credited with the creation of some of the most magnificent edifices that adorn the skyline of the beautiful island country. The gifted architect went to Trinidad more than three decades back for a project and instantly fell in love with its natural splendour and friendly people. After spending few years, Bhogal had to decide whether to go back to Canada where he lived earlier or to make Trinidad his new home. He and his family chose the latter as it became difficult to snap the cord and desert their new found home. The extent of work he has done for Trinidad & Tobago would make anybody believe that his connection to the land is since

birth. But before reaching the much loved destination of Trinidad, Jaspal Bhogal toured almost half the perimeter of the globe until he reached a place that took him in its fold.

Starting from the beginning, Bhogal adds, "I was not born in Trinidad and Tobago, but in a small town in Kenya called Eldoret. I came to Trinidad as a young man through a very circuitous route. From Kenya I went to the U.K. to study Architecture at Bristol University. After I graduated and got married, my wife and I settled in London." The city of dreams became an ideal training ground for the aspiring and hardworking architect. He gained valuable experience by working with leading architectural firms. Bhogal's exceptional prowess as an architect came to the fore as an Associate Partner of Alun Jones and Partners in London where he was associated as a Project Architect in charge of Design and Production drawings, Site Supervision and Contract Administration from 1965 to 1973. After spending valuable eight years with Alun Jones and Partners, Bhogal moved to Carl Fisher and Partners, London as a Senior Architect in charge of several projects ranging in size and complexity from minor works of alterations to complete new projects up to 2 and half million pounds contract value. With time and fame Jaspal Bhogal became a Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1972.

Although as an architect Bhogal gained a lot of exposure and good will for the living environment for Asians during the seventies became increasingly hostile. Finally, he decided to give up his promising career as an architect for a safer haven that

ensured the security and happiness of his family. Recalling the valuable years spent in London, the dynamic architect adds, "At first we found life very satisfying there and I gained a lot of experience from the firms with which I worked. However, from the mid 1970s, Indians started facing a lot of discrimination and by then we had two sons and felt that we did not want them to grow up in such an environment. Even though I was doing well in my profession and already an Associate in my firm, we decided to migrate to Canada." During his short span in Canada, Bhogal worked with Alex Skourides & Associates in Ontario. From Canada, Bhogal's work and to a great extent his destiny took him to the faraway Caribbean paradise of Trinidad and Tobago. "We were in Toronto for a short time when I was sent on a project to Trinidad. From the beginning, we fell in love with this country; the friendliness of the people of various races living in harmony was very special to Trinidad. We came here on a two year contract, which was extended by another two years, and then I was offered a partnership with the firm. In the mid 1980s, Trinidad went through a recession, and the company I worked with decided to close down as the senior partners had decided to retire. I had the choice to go back to Canada, or stay and start my own practice. We decided to stay," says Jaspal Bhogal.

Aware of the challenges that lay ahead, Bhogal family's deep connection with the country motivated them to stay back and start afresh. The affinity to the place and the excitement to settle down in the chosen country worked as an inspiration for the architect to bring out his best. "At first it was a struggle to get work but I did not give up and slowly my reputation grew and as the years went by more and more projects came my way." In due course, with tremendous hard work and with his unflinching faith as an experienced and versatile architect, Jaspal Bhogal proved his potential and his prestigious projects

The Colosseum in Rome stands the test of time - Jaspal Bhogal