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# Build

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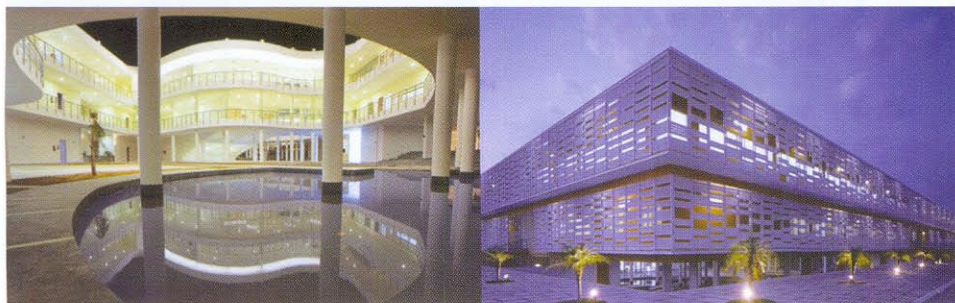
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# Indian architecture: A Paradigm shift

Manit Rastogi encourages architects, designers and urban planners to put the environment at the fore front when planning cities for the Global Indian.



The urban scape of the modern day city is little understood and a largely neglected space today. Shifting economic paradigms over the last few decades have left it a result of financial dynamics and not a response to human habitat needs. Today in many so-called boom towns, the surreal visual of inanimate cranes loom large over the city skyline and half-complete, abandoned building sites are an increasingly common sight. Whilst Dubai may be dismissed as an extreme event, in modern day India too, urban development does not seem insulated from the economic dynamics of the last decade.

Indian architecture has had radical shifts twice in the recent past; one in 1947 with the emergence of a post independence architectural language and more recently in 1991 when the economy was thrown open. Both these moments propelled a boom in building

The excesses of the last few years manifest by way of numerous failed, largely speculative, initiatives and building projects. They were ephemeral in sustainable ideology as well as intellectual content vis-a-vis architecture. To further compound the problem, this rapid supply of architecture pandered to perceived visuals of mass consumption, giving rise to a brand of 'mickey mouse' architecture.

Whilst, the recession may have brought forth the failures of these excesses, ecological disasters waiting to happen are still largely ignored. Sustainable Urbanism in India is a far fetched thought and today, India is hard-pressed to find a model of sustainable urbanism, architecture, and design. Provision of infrastructure is an issue, and yet than preservation of values, craft, and cultures becomes a challenge. Hence, a critical position needs to be established that is or will be embedded

intrinsically in contemporary Indian architecture. Indian architecture needs to reflect its socio-cultural sensibilities and regional values along with reminding us of ancient

times when Architecture of this land has been symbiotic with its environment. It must deal with all issues unique to our economics, sociology, history, diversity, and of course our "Indianness". Our cities must create an impetus to redefine the way we tend to live as modern Indians; To define that which is Indian, yet global. An architecture that embodies the Global Indian.

Crucial today is finding appropriate sustainable urban, industrial and rural models for the Indian subcontinent— not something imported from the Industrialised nations, not exclusively dependent on globalisation, but those that render themselves suitable for our lifestyles – sustainable, socially and culturally engaged, *alive!* Masterplans for the cities must be masterplans for the environment, with all our material requirements as a subset of the larger environmental vision. To progressively bring about a strategic and sustainable change within our cities, we should restore and re-amalgamate the environment as a fundamental constituent of our approach. Environmental strategy should not be a chapter, but a preamble thereby defining the spirit of all existence in the city. This needs to be the mainstay of our thinking and consciousness. The fundamental issue to be addressed instantaneously in order to bridge this gap is that of discourse. Architects, designers, urbanists and planners need to engage in order to institute a stance to consolidate our position as Global Indians today; Thoughts, methodologies, and processes need to be exchanged and discussed to generate a vision for our cities.

This need is being recognized across the thinking masses. One Initiative is "manthan" ([www.imanthan.org](http://www.imanthan.org)). Another is the 'Delhi Nullahs' project ([www.delhinullahs.org](http://www.delhinullahs.org)) instituted by Morphogenesis.

Post-globalisation, design has repositioned itself endlessly and a fundamental shift in approach is now imperative. In emergent India, social, cultural and economic values are changing at an unprecedented pace. Architecture as a design process needs to be in step with this radical shift, if not two steps ahead of it. In this context, architecture is a strategic weapon to bridge boundaries and, through discourse, sets the ground for evolution and innovation.

It is within this milieu that the practice of Morphogenesis was set up. To date, the practice works as an architectural laboratory, looking to expand the boundaries of architecture and environmental design in India. This becomes especially relevant to emergent Asian cultures in transformation. As the communication era continues to define the global Indian citizen in inextricably linked technological ways, existing and emergent technologies and systems designs are considered and integrated with the indigenous and emergent construction industry in India. It is this inclusive nature of design that, we believe, will define the new emergent Indian architecture. **RFP**

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**"Environmental strategy should not be a chapter, but a Preamble."**

activity, development of cities as socio-economic centres and have given modern India its share of contemporary building icons. The years 2008-2009 shall however serve as grim reminders of the susceptibility of the Indian architecture industry to the modern day market forces. The lessons learnt have shown us the scarcity of resources, and hence judicious utilisation of existing resources is now a given.