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BUILDING BRAND INDIA FOR ARCHITECTURE

Graduated from the School of Planning and Architecture (New Delhi) and the Architectural Association (London), **Manit Rastogi** and **Sonali Rastogi** are the Founder of **Morphogenesis**, one of India's leading award-winning Architecture and Urban Design practices based out of New Delhi. They have recently been awarded Laureate of the SIA Getz Award for Emergent Architecture in Asia, Singapore 2014.

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Their works are very much rooted into the culture, climatic, social and economic conditions of India. They are true to themselves and stand steadfast against the force of trend by not following the glitzy skin and forms pervasive in the architectural scene

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-An extract from the Jury's citation

The practice of Indian Architecture is probably in the worst state of crisis today. There is a lot of discussion within the profession on foreign architects- WTO, Reciprocity agreements, Company structures and unlimited liability (Pvt Ltd, LLP being illegal under the Architects Act), Professional Indemnity, Intellectual Property, Fee Structures, the role of the Council of Architecture under MHRD or MOUD, Education, the growing disconnect between practice and academia, Capacity building, Examination for licensing, Certificate of Practice, Continuing Professional Development, etc. etc.

Although all these are issues that need to be addressed urgently for the sake of the profession, there is a larger issue - what really is Contemporary Indian Architecture? What is Brand India when it comes to Architecture? Is there a need to develop a discourse, a global discourse, on Indian Architecture? And if yes, then what is it that Indian architects are especially good at? In my opinion, what we are (or were) good at for a very long time is creating architecture that is not only highly sustainable but is also adaptive, affordable, imageable, liveable, socially and culturally responsive, and above all, built with very limited resources. In a world on the brink of environmental collapse, this is a highly valuable skill, and this is where we must focus all our issues related to the profession and education. The real question is how can we take what we were really good at and create a model for the future based on the present; where finance, globalisation and pre-conceived imageability currently take centre stage.

Traditional Indian Architecture in today's paradigm has always been green, as interventions have always been built within a localized context – usually in response to not having access to abundant resources of water and energy. This attitude towards green building has inherently been different from the western model which is equipment centric, responding to a completely different climatic condition. Post the oil boom in the 60's, with availability of cheap energy, there was an evolution of equipment centric, hermetically sealed glass buildings, disconnected from the environment. Today this problem has been further compounded by green rating systems which by and large tend to have lower environmental standards, presumably as a means of trying to address a larger audience. Although they aim to provide better environments, the methodology adopted by these systems is generally equipment centric, restricted and

highly prescriptive, leading to higher costs of construction. This results in limited application owing to the prescribed narrow definition of human comfort level.

Today, developments across India are designed with a layer of sustainability or 'green' superimposed on. However, there should be a conscious attempt to step away from this system and incorporate passive approaches to design, right from conceptual and planning stages. Optimization of all services is a pre-requisite to responsible architecture today. Unlike other nations, local resources, materials and methods of construction are still easily available to us. The most effective approach is to build with local materials in a manner that responds to the climatic needs of the region while remaining economically viable.

The idea of sustainability should now move on from buildings to our cities as well. An assortment of problems of migration, traffic, pollution, water, electricity, sewage, public health, safety, governance and global warming issues are prevalent in most of our cities. There is a hidden opportunity that lies within our organically evolved cities – one of establishing a green and sustainable network as an alternative source of engagement with the city, for the common man. The aim should be to reclaim the derelict, the forgotten, the recyclable and the toxic by involving all stakeholders; thereby collapsing the boundaries of decades of non-systemic thinking which have generated unsustainable urban growth.

For example, the Nullah project is a proposal for the rehabilitation and rejuvenation of the 350kms of contiguous natural drains into fresh water streams with walking and cycling tracks throughout the city of Delhi. Similarly, in the 500 acre township we completed for Bengal Ambuja in Siliguri, the entire masterplan is based around an intricate interconnected water network that sustainably harvests 3000mm of rainfall a year without the use of stormwater drains. The idea is to move away from statistical methods of creating cities to one that relies on multi-dimensional interconnected networks around which Urbanism can organically evolve.

At Morphogenesis today, we have become architectural activists in an attempt to affect change in our Architecture and our Cities. Our belief is that the new urban blueprint needs to be derived from the opportunity that lies within. The approach has to be systemic. Architecturally we celebrate identity and diversity versus visual homogeneity. We think of our buildings and cities as Bazaars, places of human interaction along with being places of human habitation. It is this all-inclusive nature of design with a unique focus on passive and low energy architecture that we believe in as being the new emergent Indian architecture.