



Manit Rastogi of Morphogenesis offers a take on the emergence of 'Brand India' in architecture, through the lens of his practice's 20-year journey.

Manit Rastogi is Founder Partner of Morphogenesis, alongside Sonali Rastogi. The firm achieves a significant milestone this year, of having completing two decades of sustainability-led design, and of having contributed greatly to the understanding of sustainable design of the region. In recognition of this, Images Publishing Australia are publishing a monograph of the firm's works, under their Master Architect Series. Named *Morphogenesis: The Indian Perspective, The Global Context*, will be out in January 2017.

In our 20 years of existence as a practice, we find ourselves still seeking to answer through our work, the larger question of 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? 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 localised 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 '60s, with availability of cheap energy, there was an evolution of equipment-centric, hermetically sealed glass buildings, which were 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 can result in limited application owing to the prescribed narrow definition of human comfort level.

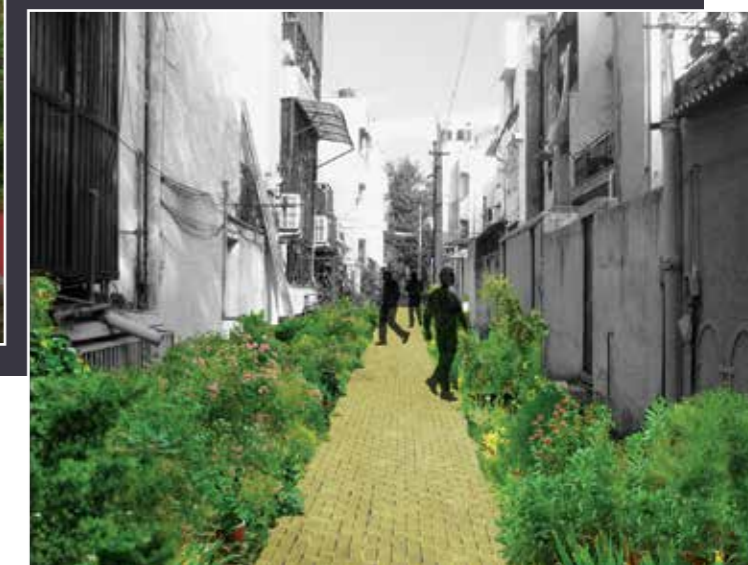
Today, developments across India are designed with a layer of sustainability or 'green' superimposed. However, there should be a conscious attempt to step away from this system and incorporate passive approaches to design, right from conceptual and planning stages. Optimisation of all services is a pre-requisite 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 like 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 stake



Left *The Fractal Metropolitan* installation

Below The black & white photos depict the present state of Delhi's nullahs, while the renderings show Morphogenesis' vision of the transformed spaces.



MORPHOGENESIS X10



This page The Uttarayan township, which went from a series of sketches to a fully realised sustainable township with a focus on socio-cultural engagement

holders; thereby collapsing the boundaries of decades of non-systemic thinking which have generated unsustainable urban growth.

Looking at the Delhi Nullahs project, the aim of this initiative was to tap into the latent infrastructural network that city provided. In this case, it was the 350km long continuous network of nullahs, built over 700 years ago by the Tughlaqs. The current state of this network system is dilapidated. However, with a relatively small investment, these nullahs could be turned into a valuable asset. With a detailed proposal on how to revive this network, Morphogenesis hopes to bring to life an alternate transportation network, an environmental corridor and a cultural web that attempts to hold the whole national capital together. This project seeks to

establish a 'green and sustainable' network as an alternative and democratic source of engagement within the city of Delhi. In some sense, this exercise has the potential to turn the whole city inside out: It deprioritises the automobile and restores the nullahs as a major interface of the city.

Morphogenesis works towards implementing the idea of moving away from statistical methods of creating cities, to one that relies on multi-dimensional interconnected networks around which urbanism can organically evolve. One such example is Uttarayan, this master-planning model addresses issues unique to Indian economics, sociology, history, diversity within the larger philosophy of environmental protection and rejuvenation. The project

aims to be an exemplar for sustainable development of upcoming towns and cities with an embedded agenda for enhancing socio-cultural engagement. The cluster organisation is designed to respond to changing social demands and this as a system, has successfully fostered a close immediate community. Resources available have been equitably distributed.

At Morphogenesis, all our projects are examined through the lens of Passive Design, Resource Optimisation and Contextual Sustainability. These parameters define the enquiry process that shapes our architecture. It is this all-inclusive nature of design with a unique focus on passive and low energy architecture that we believe in being the new emergent Indian architecture. ■