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Reviving the Hindu science of sacred space

Deva Rajan, California

From January 25 to 29 more than 300 delegates and observers participated in the World Meet on Vastu in Kerala, South India, convened under the direction of the renowned Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati, whose family lineage goes back more than a thousand years. Other traditional architects and builders mingled with modern architects and research professionals from India, USA, Australia, Hungary, Finland and England. The Vastu Shastra, also called Sthapatya Veda, is a class of ancient writings on architecture, and classified as supplementary Vedic texts. Vastu has enjoyed an unbroken history of practice in Kerala for thousands of years.

The most prevalent use of Vastu is for Hindu temple architecture. No one in India would commence construction of a sacred structure without consulting a Vastu Shastri for site selection, building orientation, size, layout, doorways, wall thickness and locations, size of icons, etc. Even outside India, sthapatias (architects) are invariably brought in from India as consultants for new temple construction projects.

But Vastu Shastras deal with much more than temple construction. Said Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam, "It is an ever-relevant and fruitful science capable of revealing the inner structure and inherent nature of a substance. It is the science of space and time, of number and numerical order, of letters and orthography, of proportions and proportionate limbs/parts/constituents. Vastu aims not only at creation, but also at meticulous preservation and maintenance. And by overcoming the possibility of destruction, it leads us to the point of eternal existence."

Many attending the seminar are practicing architects, eager to nurture professional associations and learn about the Vastu their clients are beginning to request. Ganapati Sthapati noted, "The science lay unnoticed and uninterpreted during alien rule, which stifled its growth and prevented it all along from joining the mainstream of nation-building activities." Now, he said, Vastu is freely finding its rightful place in India as a design consciousness that provides wholesome environments, peaceful interiors and balanced energies within home or office structures.

Chennai architect C. Ravindran testified that he designed a factory which proved unsuccessful. Adopting Vastu, he went back and implemented design changes that reversed the flow of products through the factory, altered door entrances, etc. The business now enjoys growth and larger profits.

Australian delegate Ms. Kerry Press explained her application of the Chinese science of Feng Shui which, like Vastu, deals with the subtle energy flows of buildings, and is having a

worldwide resurgence. Fellow Aussie architect Alan Crocker reported significant interest in Vastu residential design among Australians. American Michael Peter Cain of Maharishi International University in Iowa, described the school's program for Sthapatya Veda.

Dr. Prabhat Kumar Poddar's research into biomagnetic fields revealed Vastu's inner working. He demonstrated with an instrument that subtle energy fields exist around us at all times and that our bodies react to these energies by the way we are oriented to them, facing one way, then another--just as Vastu predicts.

And the future of Vastu? A third of the delegates were young computer-smart architects and engineers who need little or no mental adjustments to see and utilize the benefits of Vastu as a superior approach for designing residences and office environments. I foresee a new diaspora of design consciousness flooding the world.

Building by the Book

Lifetime of research by V. Ganapati Sthapati is embodied in the Science and Technology of Vastu Shastra, released at the January seminar. This work emphasizes the theoretical or science side of Vastu, rather than its technical building aspects. Still, Vastu Shastra is abundantly illustrated with schematics, drawings and architectural plans to make the application of the principles evident through practical examples.

The science of Vastu is rooted in the Hindu cosmology of the origin, structure and space-time relationships of the universe. The little material previously available on the subject failed to penetrate its depths. Sthapati adroitly presents the occult knowledge of the silpis. They were the master builders who created the great temples of India, the splendorous palaces of kings and dynasties, and the scientific layout of towns and villages that remained in balance and in harmony with their environment for centuries.

A second book released at the seminar was the modern Tamil and English version of Mayan's Aintiram by Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam. This translation from the ancient Tamil gives critical access to the earliest exposition of Hindu cosmological science in terms of primal space source, time, rhythm, form/structure and matter.

Both books are available from Vastu Vedic Research Foundation, Plot A1, H.I.G. Colony, New Beach Road, Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Chennai, 600041, Tamil Nadu, India.

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