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ARCHITECTURE, GEOBIOLOGY & VASTU

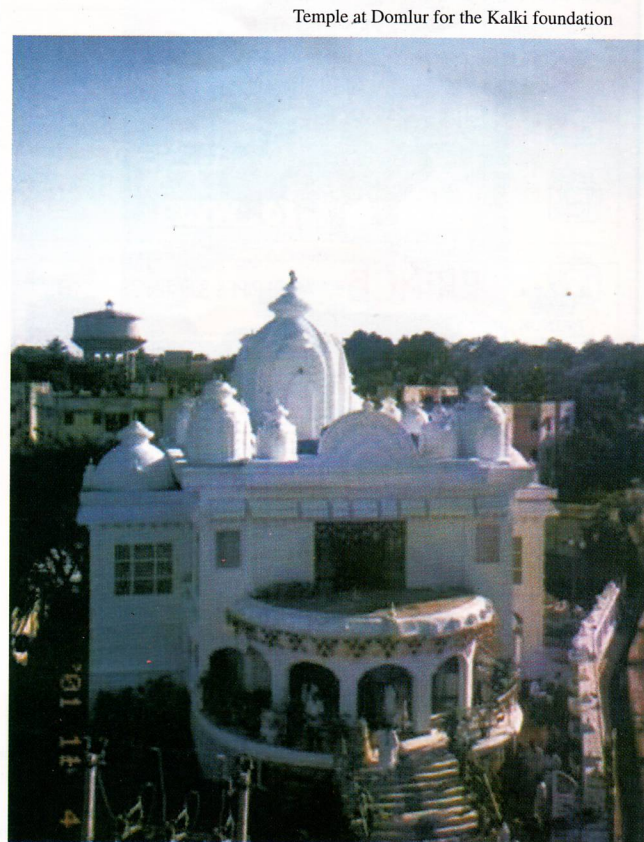
An interview with Architect and Vastu consultant Prabhat Poddar

"I have to spend five to six times more energy than other architects."

Prabhat Poddar, architect and vastu consultant, has spent the entire day with engineers of Larsen & Toubro, checking on the progress of his latest project. Tomorrow he meets traditional craftsmen who are making embossed silver plates for doors he has designed. The day after he leaves for Nigeria to do a vastu reading of two factories being bought by his clients in London. When I finally ask him for an interview, all he can spare for the interview is the three hours drive from Chennai to Pondicherry.

Poddar's busy schedule is not only proof of his very successful consultancy but is also a sign of Vastu's growing popularity and new found credibility. Although most people still seek out vastu for cures to their ailing homes or business, according to Poddar '**vastu is all about preventive care**'. And people are beginning to appreciate this. For many, vastu consultancy is a small price for some insurance of future welfare, both material and spiritual. For others it makes business sense. It was an expectation from buyers that pressurised real estate players to adopt vastu but they, Poddar assures you, have recognized its advantages. **"We worked with the Rahejas on some of their projects. Once these corrections have been done we have found that they have had 100% sales even during recession,"** he claims.

It's not just homes, vastu is changing fortunes of manufacturing businesses too. Ispat hired him once to work on a huge underground tank, 200metres by 200 metres, that they had built, south of Bombay. **"The location of the tank, in the factory premises,"** he recounts, **"was a disastrous choice of place. For a company like Ispat, it was difficult to sell even a shipload of the iron granules they were producing**



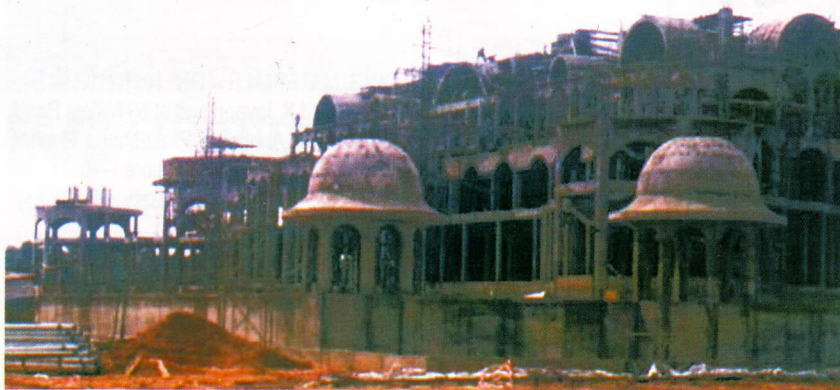
Temple at Domlur for the Kalki foundation

there. After Vastu corrections the mountain of granules that had piled just disappeared in matter of days."

I've decided that from tomorrow, my table will look northward for a successful career. And I'll sleep with my head to the south and await sweet dreams. But before I can imagine the new arrangement I am warned that stray advice picked from handbooks and magazines do not always apply to every situation and can sometimes even

have a negative effect. Vastu principles, I'm told, are specific not only to the geography of the particular place but are also influenced by various other factors which are thus often confusing and contradictory. For example, Poddar explains **"People in Kerala have a vastu different from the rest of the country. Since Kerala has mountains to its east and the sea to its west, the radiations are reversed. So a kitchen in Kerala should be in the north east as opposed to the South east in most of India."**

Golden City in progress for the Kalki Foundation



So how does a consultant convince prospective clients that it's not all humbug?

Prabhat Poddar claims he has never felt the need to convert anyone and believes his scientific approach is proof enough. He combines Geobiology with vastu. He uses a lecher antenna to map the grid of energy radiations emanating from the earth, known as Hartman lines. These lines create a spin of negative energy within the zones of these lines that create "Stress" on most forms of life that come in contact with these energies. The effects these radiations have been well documented. In Poddar's words, "Geobiology in a way is complimentary of vastu and provides the basis on which vastu works."

He also believes that his consultancy is more considerate of the investment already incurred by his clients. **"So far all vastu suggestions are 'break'. Ninety percent of the time its not possible. I am just back from Kanpur, where a factory kiln was built in a wrong place and work is just not taking off. They have spent some 200 crores, and can't possibly rebuild one."**

Prabhat Poddar's career seems to have had an energy that has charted its own path. Architecture happened when he was still in school, at Pondicherry. The Mother, of the Aurobindo Ashram asked him to assist Roger Anger, the architect designing the international township of Auroville. He started out making models but as the city grew he learnt everything he would have learnt at architecture school. One thing has led to another. "In the last twenty five years of practice I have never advertised" he says. "People have come to my lectures and then approached or heard about my work from others." Prabhat Poddar is also a member of the New York Academy of Sciences and doesn't know how that happened either. **"I just got an invitation one day"**, he explains.

His interest in Vastu began, he says, when he was about thirteen with a book lent to him titled, 'Behind the Iron curtain'. The ideas, he discovered in the book, fascinated him and he experimented with insects in cardboard pyramids. He is still as passionate about the wonders of his field, but today his research work is far more serious. He has aimed his lecher antennae at ancient sites across the world, from Europe, Mexico to the Far East. He is especially amazed by the wealth of knowledge that existed in ancient India, although unexplained to the uninitiated, its complexity, he warns you is not to be underestimated. **"There is a very interesting research done by Prof Keerti Trivedi of IIT Powai. Where he has shown that Indian temples are based on fractals. Can you imagine! The more we go into our tradition we realize that the knowledge base is unbelievable."**

The Akash Foundation, he has established, has taken on the onus of rediscovering this very knowledge base.

Part of their research deals in translating ancient texts and illustrating each of their shlokas. The task is not easy, when for example synonyms for 'Lotus' like 'Kamal' and 'Pankaj' interpret themselves differently. While one represents an upward looking lotus, the other faces down. To do justice to the text, they cannot ignore the oral tradition and have to work with the traditional artists. Currently, the Foundation is working on a lesser-known text Sakladhikari'. The text written in granti, belongs to a traditional family of sculptors in Kumbakonam.

The artists are also working with him on the doors of his current project, the Golden City. One feet square silver plates are being embossed with the 'Dasha avatar'. Dr. Poddar feels strongly about regenerating these traditions. **"Its not that very expensive when we are doing something of this kind we can make use of our knowledge and tradition and give it a new expression. For example, for the kurma avatar, some text described that there should be 12 kurmas. So we have come up with a new depiction, but within the confines of the shastras."**

The Golden City for the Kalki Foundation, is his biggest project to date. The city consists of residential areas, a Dhyamandir, laundry and kitchen and is planned to accommodate thousands. Yet the whole city was drawn out in two hours to the amazement of the L & T engineers. **"Every time I look at this design I cannot say I have done it, its just happened. I have incorporated so many things vaults, doors. People would balk at it normally, but here its all come together in such harmony"** The design has taken some engineering guts, according to Poddar. Eight box beams, fifty meters long and three metres wide, support a load of six and a half tones per meter. Each of these crisscrossing beams, 6 boxes with cables in each section. To Dr. Poddar's best knowledge, this is the first structure where beams of this size are being crisscrossed and stressed at the same time. Since every detail of the entire city has been designed according to vastu, the smallest of changes arising from engineering constraint had to be adjusted according to vastu principles again.

Dr. Poddar believes that it's harder for an architect who chooses to work with Vastu. **"I have to spend five to six times more energy than other architect."** He may choose to build within grid lines, and follow all the dictates of vastu, "but what about design?" I ask him. Poddar does not think that he is compromising on design in any way. **"Its not that if you follow vastu you have to build gopurams. How come the Viharas are different from the temples in Orissa, which are again different from those of Mahabalipuram. It all depends on your creativity and how you use it, is up to you. You have to know the basics though. Let me give you an example, unless you are trained in the ragas, you will not be able to compose anything."**