



‘International exposure is changing the dimension of Architecture’

With a work experience in vivid typologies, Shashi Prabhu & Associates (SPA) is constantly trying to explore and concurrently balances their portfolio. **Amol Prabhu** takes us on an interesting ride through the journey of SPA and shares his opinions about the current architecture guild in an interaction with **Ambarin Chougale**

Tell us about your journey in architecture.

We were founded 50 years ago, my father, Shashi Prabhu, started the company in 1967. He is the director of the company. He is our mentor. My younger brother, Atul Prabhu, joined company almost 15 years ago. He graduated from J.J. College of Architecture. He leads the design for many projects. I was away and spent most of my time in America. My background is Project Management. I came to India in 2005 and joined the company as a partner. Since then, we have changed the face of the company. We don't do only architecture anymore. We do architecture, interior design, engineering, services. We do everything because it is important for an architect to be able to complete the project rather than just do the planning. Because the project has to be complete

in all sense and our clients like it better that way. So barring construction, we do entire turnkey design. From landscape to services, to lighting design, to acoustics, to various engineering, we do it. We also have a separate vertical for healthcare. We predominantly do complete healthcare planning. We have in-house people from healthcare field like equipment, making standing operating procedures. We have various people doing healthcare planning from the beginning to the end. We work all over India. We have offices in Mumbai, Pune, Indore, Nagpur, Goa. So this has been the journey of the company by far.

What type of projects do you work on?

The first noteworthy project we did was Wankhede stadium and then the journey started. Once you do a stadium, you





are referred as sports architect. We did multiple cricket stadiums which include Wankhede stadium, Mumbai; Indira Gandhi stadium, Delhi; Thane stadium; Rajiv Gandhi stadium, Hyderabad; etc. We also did sports cities for national games like Pune sports city, Hyderabad Sports city, Goa sports city, etc. Then in 1970, my father thought to do something other than sports so he ceased his first opportunity to do a hospital. He did multiple public hospitals like PCMC, Thane municipal hospital, both of 750 beds followed by various private hospitals like Leelavati, Harkisandas, which is being done currently. So far we have done almost 40 hospitals and 100 stadiums. Then we tried to broaden our horizon. So after stadiums, we did clubhouses like Garware Club House, Wellington, CCI, NSCI dome, etc. We are doing Bombay Gymkhana. Since people contact you for a similar type of project once you successfully complete one, we were approached for most sports club in Mumbai.

What are the strategies and philosophies you generally follow while designing a project?

We try to balance our portfolio. There is no strategy as such which works because it changes over time, changes with the circumstances. So we have a balance of public and private projects. We have a balance of fields like sports, healthcare, hospitality, housing. We typically are less focused on private builder segment. That's out of choice. Sometimes we do get large builders who we work with, who are known to us, who

are trusted. For example, we are doing a residential township in Hyderabad, the police township is a private venture. We try to get projects which are going to not necessarily make money for the company but make a mark. We try to secure projects that are iconic where we can make a difference. Like Wankhede stadium which is known to everyone.

Most of our projects are time bound. Like when Wankhede was being constructed, it had to be completed for the world cup. There was not one day where we could afford. On a similar note was Balewadi Sports city. We take up projects which make a difference to the city. We understand the importance of management of large crowd projects, time-bound projects. There are no strategies as such.

What are the challenges that you face?

Finding skilled people is a challenge. Trying to balance the ever-changing norms of the government is a challenge. Projects delay has been a big issue. Projects get delayed a lot. Of what I see abroad and then India, projects are delayed because of external factors which are not in anybody's control. Those are some of the challenges we face.

Where do you think is the architecture industry leading?

People are travelling a lot. Builders are travelling, architects are travelling, clients are travelling, young people are travelling, elderly people are travelling. Everyone is travelling around, all over the world. Many years ago, our land was very

contained so people didn't have much of an exposure and people were content with an idea of architecture. So with the people travelling, the exposure has widened a lot. People are seeing different things and they want better things. A lot of requirements is coming from the clients themselves. Something that they have seen somewhere. So I think, the international exposure is changing the dimension of our architecture. The needs are changing, people's demands are changing which is changing the direction of architecture as we go through.

How is digital technology helping architecture to progress?

Very well. First of all, massive amounts of software have come in the market which is enabling the architecture. We, ourselves, 13 years ago, everyone had a drawing board, then came the era of Autocad where all of us had to switch to Autocad and now even Autocad has ruled out and BIM has taken over. Where software like Revit is helping architects conceive a building in 3-dimension and even coordinate the building in 3-dimension. Technology is going at a fast pace and is enabling architects to imagine and also construct in 3-dimension. In a certain way, the translation of ideas has become easier because earlier clients never understood 2-dimensional plans but it is easier to understand a 3-dimensional plan, which is also given out to the contractors; which means there is no difference of opinion or any confusion in the minds of anybody.

Another thing that is trending is



parametric technology which is present but not prominently taking a huge leap in our country at least. Parametric technology allows us to have a free thinking mind where the bounded shapes like a square and a rectangle are broken into curved spaces. Software programming enables you to have a limitless freedom of architecture, movement or surfaces but we realise that until the construction tools change in India, it is not possible. It is great for somebody to draw a building which has no form but how do you translate that effectively into reality is an issue because unfortunately, the engineering and the construction has not kept pace with that kind of technology. So its a matter of time, and very soon we might see the infusion of that into our lives but not yet.

Your portfolio states that you create sustainable properties. How has your experience been with societal acceptance for this concept?

We strongly believe that whatever we do, it's for not us but our next generation. And if we do not think of sustainability, not much is going to be left for the next gen. Every project we do we try to infuse green aspects into it. There are many government norms like LEED, GRIHA, etc and they have done a fantastic job,

but not all clients are keen to get those certifications. It is not mandatory and there is no law and also some these certifications are very pro-international obviously because they were designed in those countries. So it is very difficult for them and very expensive to bring them here and incorporate them at face value; unless you're an MNC' which is required to comply with those norms. GRIHA did come into the picture but it did not emanate as it was hoped to. At one point, the government had made it mandatory to make all government buildings to be GRIHA but that was not achieved in Maharashtra especially, I am not aware of anywhere else. Nevertheless, whether our client decides to go green or not,

we focus on convincing the clients to incorporate green elements in the design because it will benefit them in the long term and I believe one should be looking after our environment.

What is your ultimate goal when designing a structure? What do you want to be remembered for?

Architecture is an interesting field which touches human beings on an intrinsic level. Our goal is to be able to make human life better, make it convenient for them to survive and make a living and do whatever they are supposed to do, facilitate ease of doing so. That is what we aspire to do. We want to create better structures for human beings. That is our ultimate goal.

Which are your upcoming projects?

We are doing a lot of work with the municipal corporation. We are doing 3 major hospitals, each one almost 600 beds. Bhagvati hospital, Borivali, one in Govandi called Shatabdi, and one in Bhandup. These are large tertiary care hospitals. We are doing the memorial for Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in Shivaji Park. That's going to be a mammoth project with almost 350ft tall bronze statue of Dr Ambedkar. It will be completed in 2 years. The contractor is already on board, construction has already started. We are also doing various mass housing projects. We are going to build ten thousand houses for police constables and their widows in Panvel over 115 acres of land. This is probably one of the largest townships for police anywhere ever done. We are doing a Cricket Stadium in Guwahati which is almost at the stage of completion. So this is what keeps us busy. ▲

ambarin.chougale@saffronsynergies.in

Shashi Prabhu & Associates was founded as a sole proprietorship firm in 1967 and later expanded into a multi-disciplinary private partnership company in 1981 and is today one of the leading multi – Architecture, Engineering and Project Management company & disciplinary design firms in India. The firm has, to date, delivered numerous high-profile projects in the country which have acclaimed local, national and international accolade.

The firm is led by 3 active partners who run daily operations of the company. The largest asset of the firm are the 100 some qualified professionals who support these company in creating fabulous projects that aspire to heighten expectations, strengthen relationships, and broaden appreciation of the clients.

The firm is headquartered in Mumbai and has offices in Pune, Hyderabad, Goa, Amravati, Delhi & Dubai. This multi-disciplinary private partnership company is independent of any contracting or manufacturing organization and offers a comprehensive range of services right from design concepts all the way through construction management. The firm has a wide range of expertise in Sports, Healthcare, Education, Residential, Hospitality, and Infrastructure sector.