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With diverse experience and expertise in designing structures ranging from the School of Engineering Design at IIT Madras to the Muziris Heritage Project in Ernakulam, a complex of museums that celebrates the rich culture of Kerala, Dr Benny Kuriakose has emerged as one of the finest minds in the country who applies universal principles of architecture with a strong understanding of local realities. Having trained under the legendary British-born architect Padma Shri Laurie Baker, Dr Kuriakose has extended his philosophy of conservation architecture across residential and commercial projects in south India, with a significant contribution towards rehabilitating and rebuilding disaster sites at Nagapattinam, Bhuj and Latur.



THE MUZIRIS MUSEUM COMPLEX CELEBRATES KERALA'S DIVERSE CULTURAL ROOTS AS A TRADE CENTRE

architecture, we are blindly following the West. This has to undergo a substantial change. The kind of buildings coming up in our cities do not win any architectural awards. When we build 100 houses, 20 houses are being demolished. How are we going to solve the problem of housing for masses in such a case? The

Unfortunately, the present generation of architects and engineers do not learn about indigenous architectural methods. They hardly learn about timber roofs or earth as a building material. We have to reconstruct our educational curriculum as well.

Your work with the Muziris Project has received much appreciation both, from an aesthetic and a cultural perspective.

At present, I am preparing the proposals for conserving Alleppey as a heritage town. We are trying to show that heritage and conservation can lead to

"Our urban architecture needs surgery, not medicine"

Practicing concepts such as cost-effectiveness, conservation, and sustainable architecture for over three decades, acclaimed architect Dr Benny Kuriakose shares his diagnosis about affordable housing in the country

What is the key difference between sustainable and vernacular architecture?

The world has come to realise that there are limits to growth because of resource scarcity. Hence, the role of architects and planners has become crucial for the survival of mankind. It is therefore their duty to employ sustainable practices to slow down global warming. So we need to change existing methods of construction, use more local materials and energy-efficient methods to achieve this.

Vernacular architecture has developed over many centuries depending on the climate, local materials, social and cultural aspects of the people. In India, we should not look towards the West, but into our traditional methods of building.

How can sustainable architecture help build affordable homes?

Affordable housing is a fundamental requirement. In India, we have solved the problem of food and clothing to a large extent. But housing is still a distant dream. When I

started my career in 1984, there were 25 million families in India without their own house. Now that figure is somewhere near 50 million. It is quite sad that these figures keep growing, despite the country's development. All the governments have seen it more like a technical or financial problem, but affordable housing has many more dimensions such as economic, social, political, etc.

One thing is sure, we cannot solve the problem of building a roof for the 50 million families using the conventional techniques. It is not only about environmental sustainability, but also social, cultural and economic sustainability.

What are the key challenges faced by our architects today?

There are some key fundamental issues concerning the profession of architecture such as a lack of quality construction, building volumes in affordable housing and creating cities, which are liveable for the future



MANGALA HERITAGE HOME, SITUATED IN A QUIANT VILLAGE IN TAMIL NADU, HAS BEEN RESTORED BY DR KURIAKOSE IN ITS TRADITIONAL CHETTINAD STYLE

generations. These areas need to be addressed on an urgency basis.

Do you think sustainable architecture will have any impact on the rising cost of urban homes?

Our urban architecture needs surgery, not medicine. When it comes to sustainable

quality of construction, which determines the durability of buildings has come down drastically over the last two-three decades. We need a renewed focus on quality and quantity simultaneously.

What kind of change in approach do we need from both, planners as well as citizens?

development. Muziris' site is mostly a rural area, while Alleppey is an urban area. The principles are the same, but there are slight variations in application. We have to identify local strengths and assets and convert them into successful products, thereby improving the overall quality of life of the residents.