

ROLL OUT THE 'MUD' CARPET

Architect and Padma Shri recipient G Shankar has a long history of guiding Kerala towards sustainable architecture



• Steni Simon

For over 30 years, architect and Padma Shri recipient G Shankar has made remarkable achievements in the field of sustainable architecture, not just in India but also abroad. The founder of Habitat Technology Group, which is committed to eco-friendly cost-effective and people-centric designs, he has completed over 1.5 lakh residential building constructions so far.

Shankar is on a mission to encourage the masses to choose a sustainable lifestyle and start building quality homes with materials that can be sourced locally, including wood, bamboo and mud. "My focus is to develop a platform where organic materials can be used to build contemporary homes. The mould you choose should easily blend with the surroundings. While building houses in Kerala, I chose bamboo and mud as they are cost-effective, eco-friendly and easily available. They are a very good replacement for steel because of its tensile strength," he says.

Shankar is concerned about climate change and global warming as much as the rest of us. "Natural disasters are clear indicators of climate change and panic has already gripped those residing in coastal areas. Architectural engineers are primarily responsible for climate change because of the use of unsustainable raw materials and technologies," he says.

He also points out that we use 5 billion litres of water a day in the shower and toilet and most of this is potable. About 32 per cent of energy produced in India is used either in the post-construction or pre-construction phase. Misuse and exploitation of natural resources are quite rampant too.

"For the last 30 years, I have been advocating cost-effective, eco-sensitive and energy-sufficient designs that are people-centric and culturally rooted," says the architect, adding that he chooses his raw materials based on such factors. Disaster resistance is an important component too.



However, the architect doesn't find brickwork ideal for an eco-sensitive building as they are made by burning down a lot of wood and cause atmospheric pollution. Shankar has been avoiding the use of bricks for many years now.

Mud is Shankar's most comfortable medium. One of his most spectacular works—the mud house in Mudavanmugal—is built in perfect sync with nature. It has a parabolic design and has beautiful creepers and bamboo growing on its premises.

His Habitat Technology Group has also been at the forefront of building new homes for the state's flood victims. The group has also won four national awards for green buildings.

Shankar is also involved with Un-Union mission across the world in disaster-prone areas.