

Vastu Shastra: A Vedic Approach To Architecture

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Abstract - **Vastu Shastra** is an ancient system of Architecture, conceived in India that deals with the principles designed to make the specific use of climate as one of its dominant factors in designing of a building. According to a famous historian Dr. Havell, **Vastu Shastra** was developed between 6000-3000 BC, adding that cities of the Indus Valley Civilization like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were also planned on the same principles. **Vastu Shastra** is based on the knowledge of the sun movement, Earth's Magnetic field, and the Geopathic Zones considering which many rules have been elaborated in Ancient books of India. In the current scenario, some architects consider it superstitious while others recommend it as flexible guidelines for planning of spaces considering environmental aspects. The knowledge of **Vastu Shastra** is collectively understood as the concept of instrumental understanding, sense understanding, theoretical and scientific understanding elaborating its own philosophical study. Over the centuries, **Vastu Shastra** has been neglected and hasn't received enough recognition. This paper is an attempt to list down various principles used in **Vastu Shastra** along with modern techniques used in Architecture.

Keywords— *Vastu Shastra, Geopathic Zone, Energies, Directions, Resurgence, Vastu Purush Mandala*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vastu Shastra is an ancient Indian knowledge (fusion of art and science) formulated in prehistoric times. The knowledge of **Vastu Shastra** has been passed down through generations along with some modifications to make it consistent with the needs of the time. Originally, **Vastu Shastra** was conceived of as an art but in recent decades, **Vastu Shastra** is emerging as a new fashion and style in Indian Architecture. It was considered as the science of the past and in the present scenario a lot is being discussed about it, especially its scientific and validity.

II. HISTORY OF VASTU SHASTRA

The term **Vastu Shastra** means the science of architecture which describes principles of design, layout, measurements, preparation of grounds, arrangement of spaces, etc. It is an ancient Hindu practice to construct buildings that stay in harmony with the natural forces. It is the amalgamation of science, art, astronomy, astrology, and mystic doctrine, which is as old as the **Vedas**. The first textual evidence for the **Vastu Shastra** is found in the **Rig Veda**, where the protector of the house (Vasospastic) is invoked (**Rig Veda**, VII. 54.1). Most of the documents from the 6th century BC to the 6th century AD have been lost and only a deficient portion appears in the later works of the **Vastu Vidya** (Bhattacharya, 1986, pp. 129, 138). The main source of **Vastu Shastra** is found within the **Vedas** majorly in the **Sthapatya Veda** that deals majorly with Architecture in subordination to the larger **Atharva Veda**. **Vastu Shastra** can be considered as an applied science

approach that evolved continuously over the period of 2500 years, producing a number of texts like the **Kashyapa Shilpa Shastra**, **Brihat Samhita**, **Viswakarm Vastu Shastra**, **Samarangana Sutradhara**, **Matamata**, **Silparatna Vastu Shastra**, etc. Some of the great sages and preachers of **Vastu Shastra** are considered to be **Lord Brahma**, **Narada**, **Brihaspati**, **Bhrigu**, **Vasistha**, **Vishwakarma**, **Maya**, **Kumara**, **Anirudha**, **Bhoja**, **Sukra**, and others (Rao, 1995, pp. xi-xii). All the Indian temples, including the Buddhist Chaitya and Viharas, were constructed according to the knowledge of the **Vastu Shastra**. The Indus Valley Civilization is considered to be the only evidence of town planning as per the norms and guidelines suggested in the **Vastu Shastra**.

III. REAPPEARANCE OF VASTU SHASTRA

In the present era, the **Vastu Shastra** is considered a fashion in Indian Architecture, and a lot is being discussed and written about it. People are demanding the designs of their houses and buildings as per the principles and guidelines of the **Vastu Shastra** which is mainly because of the superstitions, but in reality, the **Vastu Shastra** has evidence to prove itself. Today, artworks of Indian Rishi and Munis are produced which shows them performing the rituals according to the geometry of the Solar System. Calling them scientists would not be wrong as they had knowledge of planets, stars, etc. before Copernicus explained his theory. Similar is the case in other fields like the **Ayurveda** (Medicine), **Samveda** (Music), etc.

IV. VASTU PURUSHA

Vastu Shastra goes with an ancient story that, once upon a time a man had obstructed the earth and the sky with his huge body. The **Devatas** suddenly caught the person and threw him with his face downward and every part of the body was held by different **Devatas** who became presiding deities of the same. **Lord Brahma** was given the privilege to become the God of the House, i.e. the **Vastu Purush**.

V. VASTU PURUSH MANDALA

The uses of grids on the plans have helped to frame our reality in certain spatial forms, which resembles one of the most important principles of **Vastu Shastra** known as the **Vastu Purush Mandala**. It is a diagram of square grids used for the arrangement of spaces. **Vastu Purush** is a form of a man in a calculated site which is characterized by the symbols of zodiac signs, constellations, and planets representing the entire solar system. As a rule, the shape of the **Vastu Purush Mandala** is considered a square which is the fundamental form used in Indian architecture. Once the orientation of the site is established, **Vastu Purush Mandala** is used to prepare the floor plans. It is considered as a model of

the Universe providing the basis for architectural design. It is a metaphorical expression of the plan of the Universe which bridges people, buildings, and nature.

As a concept, it extends to a village, a town, a country, or indeed the whole earth in its manifestations. When a building is in a perfect state or order, it is viewed as a Purush, the man of the universe which represents pure energy and the word Mandala means an astrological chart or a diagram that relates to the orientation as the earth is essentially demarcated by sunrise and sunset and by the cardinal directions. It has been so universal that it could be applied to an altar, a temple, a house, a city, or the entire cosmos (Kramrisch, 1976 & Shukla, 1993). It is believed that the site or the land is divided into nine parts representing the nine gods who govern the places and effects they cause considering which the orientations of rooms or spaces are determined.

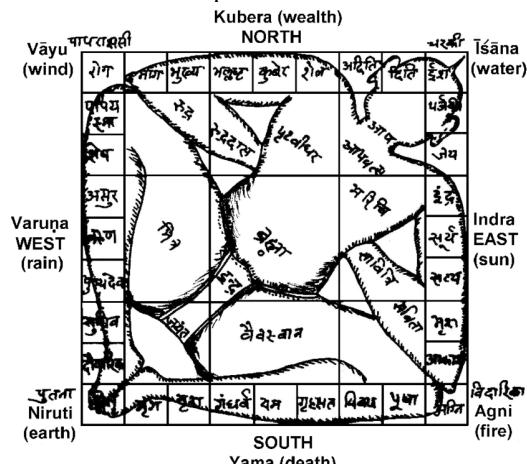


Image 1 Vastu Purush Mandala

VI. FUNDAMENTALS OF THE VASTU SHASTRA

The fundamentals of the Vastu Shastra were formed considering the effects of the cosmic forces and the forms of energies. These forces influenced the earth therefore the basis of Vastu Shastra rests on the following five elements -

1. Prithvi i.e. the earth
2. Jala i.e. the water
3. Vayu i.e. the air
4. Agni i.e. heat or the fire
5. Aakash i.e. the space

The whole universe including the earth and the human body is considered to be made out of these five elements.

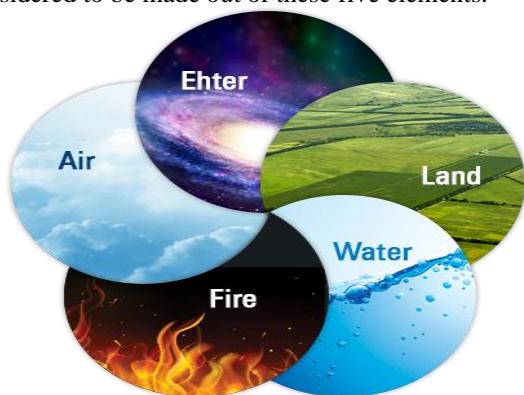


Image 2 Five elements of nature

VII. VASTU SHASTRA AND THE ENERGY

We are living in an unsteady universe that is moving continuously, for which it requires a huge amount of energy and this energy holds every material present in the universe. Similarly, a man on the earth is tied with nature, and nature is tied with different energies and forces influencing the earth. Such as -

1. Solar Radiation
2. Magnetic Field of Earth
3. Gravitational Force
4. Intensity and Wind Direction

Every material present in the universe radiates some amount of energy and these energies or forces are influenced by the earth, individually or by combining with each other forming a web of energies.

VIII. CONTENTS OF THE VASTU SHASTRA

The basic concept of Vastu Shastra is what should be placed and where it should be placed, so it deals with - site selection, the relation of open spaces with built mass, the orientation of entrances, bedroom, kitchen, puja room, storeroom, study room, etc. Vastu Shastra is a time-tested science as it provides satisfactory answers to many questions of physical, climatological, and social influence on the design of buildings that suit the contemporary situation at a time. A good Vastu is a conglomerate by correct orientation and placement of spaces for activities that relate to the cardinal directions. Due to the advancement in technologies, the natural forces can be controlled by mechanical means (eg. using Air-Conditioners to maintain indoor air quality, etc.), and therefore, a question arises whether Vastu Shastra is applicable in today's context or not?

Directions	Deity	Effect	Spaces
North	Kuber	Wealth & prosperity	Living room, seating, office, entrance
North-East	Ishwar	Religion & trinity	Puja room, well, underground water tank
East	Indra	Progress & growth	Entrance, guestroom, verandah, bathroom
South-East	Agni	Energy, vigour & strength	Kitchen, generator, power supply
South	Yama	Death	Back yard, kitchen garden
South-West	Nairut (Demon)	Purity & cleanliness	W/c, toilet, septic tank, washing area
West	Varun	Water	Overhead tank, study room
North-West	Vayu	Air/Wind	Bed room
Above	Brahma	Spiritual knowledge	Courtyard (O.T.S.)
Below	Ananta	Resources & worldly pleasures	Basement

Table 1 Deities responsible for directions, their effects and suggested spaces

A. Case 1: Directions

There are four major cardinal directions, viz. East (Purab), West (Paschim), North (Uttar) and South (Dakshin), and four minor directions viz, North-East (Ishanya), North-West (Vayavya), South-West (Nairitya) and South-East (Agneya). Along with the directions top or above (Urdhwa) and bottom or below (Adhar) is also considered.



Image 3 Suggested spaces according to direction

B. Case 2: Main Entrance

The main entrance of a building should be located primarily at East than at North, only to avoid the entry of hot and harsh rays of the sun.

C. Case 3: Diagonally Opposite Bed Room & Kitchen

In the Indian context, North-West is the main wind direction where rooms are placed while its diagonally opposite corner i.e. South-West is considered to be the best place for kitchen, reason being if any accident like fire breakout occurs, wind discourages the spread of it due to the opposite wind direction and also helps for driving odor and gases from the kitchen.

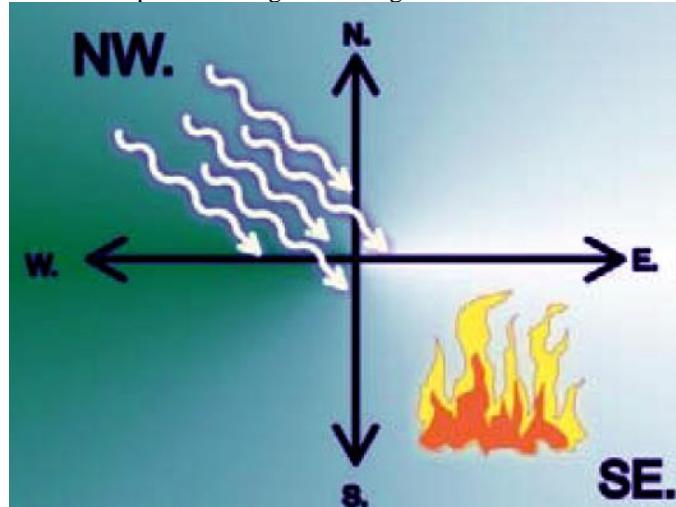


Image 4 Fire place & wind direction

D. Case 4: Gigantic West & South-West

As the sun moves from east to west via south i.e., the solar radiation during the noon is very high as it emits infrared rays, which are harmful to humans, and therefore a smaller number of openings be placed on these sides. Also, thick outer walls should be constructed to prevent the radiation to some extent. Vastu Shastra suggests keeping South-West as the topmost part of the building so that it can cast a shadow over other spaces keeping them cooler.

E. Case 5: Sleeping Positions

The basic principle of the Vastu Shastra revolves around the direction of the sun and the earth's magnetic field. The human body has blood which contains iron which gets influenced by the magnetic field of the earth so sleeping with the head facing North repels the earth's magnetic lines hindering the circulation of the blood and collection of iron into the brain which caused health issues like migraine, headaches, insomnia, etc.

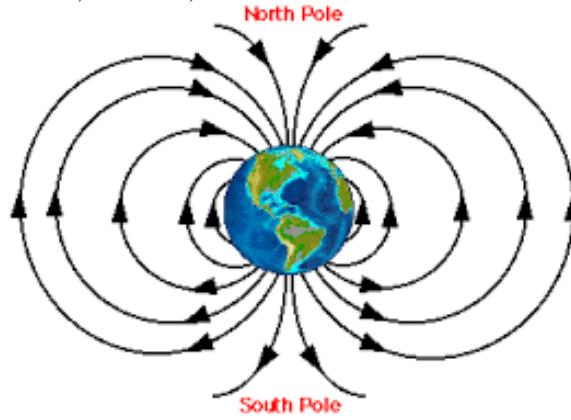


Image 5 Earth's magnetic field

F. Case 6: Plantations

Big trees should not be grown on the East and North-East sides of the plot as they prevent the morning sunrays from entering the house. Rather they should be planted on South, South-West and South-East side which prevents the harsh rays of the sun during the noon.



Image 6 Relation of trees with the building

IX. CONCLUSION

Through the outlook of an architect, it can be concluded that Vastu Shastra entangles the concept of variants of energies. It would be unfair to depend totally on it, as while designing a structure there are various factors that need to be looked upon. Vastu Shastra is an elementary approach for eco-friendly building concept, Vastu principles can be awarded some importance. Let Vastu Shastra not be passed over completely. Keeping in view, its logic and facts it can be granted its long lost importance. Vastu Shastra principles can modify one's life by synchronizing life with energies present around. Major components of Vastu principles for eg. the main entrance, master bedroom, Kitchen, etc. can be definitely taken into consideration. Vastu Shastra may not be essential for living, but it is helpful for a better and healthier living. According to Nitien Parmar of VastuPlus, "One's environment helps in building a foundation for a healthier

mind and body and Vastu Shastra offers ways to create a healthier life and if followed correctly, Vastu Shastra can help the home's residents to become physically and mentally healthy.”

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