

Lecture Abstract

The Traditional Dwellings of the Bohras: Architectural Response to Cultural Ethos

By: Madhavi Desai

The history of architecture in India has a rich and diversified legacy, not only in the classical examples but also as seen in the display of vernacular traditions of building. They are spread in several regional environments in the form of a variety of settlement patterns, institutions and dwelling types. Compared to modern Indian cities, traditional urban or semi-urban settlements display a degree of homogeneity and an overall order achieved through certain rules of thumb and controls. They express the totality of a relationship between man and society. The vernacular design process is one of typological models and of modifications and variations therein, where the individual unit and not the house type is adjusted, adapted or personalized. The vernacular urbanity has an underlying structure within its overall organic attitude that leaves room for human expression and creativity. This lecture presents one such traditional urban house form (built between the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries) of the Islamic community of the Bohras in Gujarat in western India.

The Bohra dwellings - excellent examples rooted in the regional landscape - house form represents the multiplicity of architectural responses to diverse cultural influences through the process of eclectic adoption - converted from Hinduism centuries ago, the Bohras still follow many Hindu social customs - also heavy influence of the colonial ambience of the cities on their architecture - a close symbiosis between the community's culture and physical environment - emergence of a mature architectural language expressed through distinct ethos of the built environment, vibrancy and complexity of facades, rich elemental variations and a high level of aesthetics in the interiors.

Religious background - Islam's spread across the world - many cultural as well as regional influences in its physical manifestations - certain common concepts such as separation between the public and private, the male/female divide, seclusion of women, the intense need for privacy, etc. - Islam's code defines human relationships: the belief system, rituals, practices, public and personal law includes dress, personal appearance and modes of behavior in social intercourse - Bohras with a distinct identity within Islam while subscribing to the fundamental doctrines of the Ismaili Shia faith - religion serves as the repository for traditional culture in times of profound social change - influence of religion found on public and private spatial expression of the Bohras.

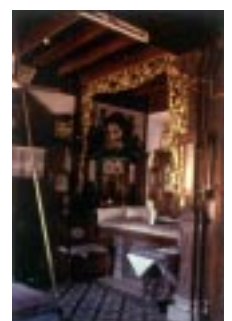
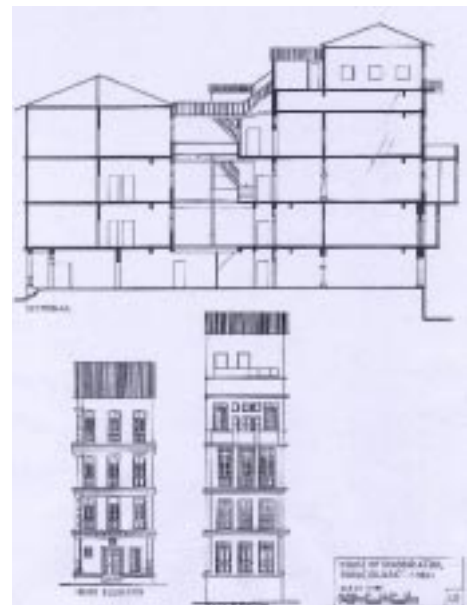
Morphology and public buildings - two broad categories - organic as well as strictly geometrical - in organic the layout freely responds to the site conditions and context with modifications - the other has a rationalized street pattern of standard sizes with regularized planning - typical structure of a Bohrwad inwardly oriented - houses in a Bohrwad typically grouped around a street that form a *mohalla*; several *mohallas* form a Bohrwad - a large Bohrwad generally interwoven with religious/social edifices such as a mosque, a *Madressa*, a *Jamat Khana*, and other buildings for collective functions - community institutions as strong physical/symbolic nodes - strong cohesiveness maintained through a system of community gatherings.

Streets - used as a structuring device - a notion of urbanism crystallized in street form - uniformity and harmony through the additive nature of houses - vibrancy as a result of variations in color, elements, fenestrations and ornamentation of facades - a sense of order, scale and visual surprise.

Plan organization - a deep and narrow house with three (or four) sequential rooms between two parallel walls with hierarchical spaces - an introverted dwelling that has a multifunctional core in the form of a courtyard - an increasing sense of privacy from the outside to inside - a separation between public and private spaces - flexibility in spatial use - screens and other devices for Islamic lifestyle.

Facades - elaborate ornamentation as per the regional norms in contrast to most of Muslim world - order imposed through standardization and a system of proportions - unified characteristics as a result of building materials/techniques and elements - personalization of details, variety in ornamentation, complexity of elements and colors used to avoid monotony - a well articulated language perceived - also response to stylistic developments in the region.

Interiors - special significance attached due to the Bohras urge for display and decoration - an expression of social status - an extension of their religious belief for cleanliness - personalization through intricate detailing, decorative elements, rich carpets, furnishings and display objects - strife for an inner beauty through the house - the dwelling: a product of the Indo-Islamic/Gujarati tradition - exemplifies an example of Indian urbanity where near-perfection is achieved in terms of plan organization, facades, interiors and the overall form.



Lecture Abstract

Gender and Architecture of the Colonial Bungalow Form in Gujarat, India: 1900 to 1970

By: Madhavi Desai

Urbanism can be termed as one of the most lasting legacies of the British Empire in India. Of this legacy, the 'bungalow' remains an important symbol of the British Raj, a building type that spread almost all over the world. Towards the turn of the twentieth century, the bungalow emerged as a new urban dwelling form on the domestic landscape as an alternative to the medieval system of wall-to-wall housing in the dense and over-crowded inner cities of India. It was adopted first by the elite of the society and later by the middle classes. From 1900 to the 1970s several structural changes took place in the social set-up. Families began to move away from the tradition of a joint family by being increasingly nuclear. The role of a woman underwent a slow but definite transformation during this period. The bungalow, as it grew popular, also went through spatial and stylistic changes. This lecture attempts to study this critical relationship using the construct of gender by examining the evolution of the bungalow typology from the simple one-story structure to the colonial mansion and finally to the modernist house within the specific cultural milieu in the state of Gujarat in western India.

Gender and architecture in the Indian context - reflection and reinforcement of gender, race and class relations in spatial arrangements in society - women closely associated with domestic architecture/environment - the notion of a 'home' intricately intertwined with the self-image of the woman of the house - the creation of a myth that women control domestic space - in reality men own and control space as a means of maintaining their own power - women lack spatial/psychological space of their own.

Development of a bungalow typology - pre-modern urban settlements dense and compact - social division of the population reflected in the morphology of the town - settlement segregated into micro-neighborhoods based on well-defined, cohesive communities - typologically most houses deep with a narrow frontage that opens onto a street - an introvert spatial organization with a courtyard in the center - the bungalow: an object in a defined compound - a historical revolution in plan, form and structure of the dwelling unit - gradually more sophisticated and opulent, coming closer to the European villa - variations in size, style, variety and ornamentation - eventually a mainstream housing type - a favorite option during the heyday of the Modern Movement till the 1970s, in the state of Gujarat as well as the rest of India.

The early bungalow (up to 1900) - simple and utilitarian in military cantonments as well as civil lines - single-storeyed structure with a symmetrical layout, having a wide, multi-functional and extensive verandah around - the kitchen and servants' quarters located at the rear of the house - spatial organization reflecting the colonial attitude of the British including gender biases.

The Indian/colonial vernacular bungalow (1900 to 1925) - A later/wealthier version of the original type - often a two-storied building with a clerestory, dormers, etc. - symmetrical layout - introduction of a courtyard as a response to Indian climate and lifestyle - separate kitchen area behind the bungalow - joint family - central hall and front verandah as the male domain - the inclusion of a designated "women's room" - within the house - clear gender segregation in social interaction.

Art deco/streamline moderne bungalow (1925 to 1950) - middle class embraces the type - housing societies - western influences in terms of art deco and streamline moderne styles - also revivalist trends as a result of the national freedom struggle (Indo-deco) - changing women's role as a result of participation in the struggle and increasing levels of education - impact of Gandhian thoughts - asymmetry in spatial organization - compactness - kitchen still at the back but a part of the main house - courtyard as a buffer zone for protection of the privacy of the women - often an additional stairs at the back for them - joint families beginning to break up - living and dining as separate spaces - the living room and front verandah still a male domain.

Modernist houses (1950 to 1970 onwards) - yet another metamorphosis in the form of the bungalow - modern Indian architects develop a new vocabulary and explore expressions in western styles based on the principles of the Modern Movement - use of new materials - preference for nuclear family structure and limitations in family size - fewer servants - some women work outside of home - radical transformations in the notions of privacy as well as personal space - more open floor plans - living/dining a combined space - integration of the kitchen into the living-dining configuration - however, through out the bungalow remains a symbolic representation of the place of the woman in the patriarchal order that governs the household.



Lecture Abstract

RETHINKING COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE OF INDIA: 1800 TO 1950

By: Madhavi Desai

The colonial architecture spanning about 150 to 200 years, representing an important phase in the modernization of the country, modification of a stark medieval life style got to ultimately become a democratic one at the dawn of Independence in 1947. The modern Indian life style, the physical environments and the very urbanity experienced today cannot be understood without recognizing the happenings of this historical period. Imposed, emulative and resisted changes as manifested in the physicality of living environments have far reaching implications, as can be seen from the study of the Indian case. The penetration of colonial ideas/policies and their impact on local institutions, ways of life and building processes created situations of confrontation between the foreign and indigenous values and ultimately between tradition and modernity. This lecture attempts to decipher the underlying thought in this conflict and trace the architectural developments.

Historical, political and cultural background - colonialism in the international and Asian context - a brief history of colonization of India, various colonial powers: the British, Dutch, French and Portuguese - general social dynamics, existing Indian regionalism in political and cultural terms - Indian architecture: classical and vernacular, architectural antecedents and precedents, important concepts and images in pre-colonial India - a cursory look at the French and Portuguese colonial impact.

Indian society and early colonial architecture - British colonial as traders - mundane and functional nature of early architecture without much response to the Indian context - shift in attitude as the crown takes over in 1858, expressions of identity, power and superiority, building for permanence - social and philosophical disparities between the ruler and the masses- imposition of life style and behavior of self on the others, the idea of inclusion and exclusion - Indian progressive thought, the freedom movement, the influence of Gandhi and Nehru on architecture

Urban design and architecture/approach to planning - introduction of new institutions (railway stations, law courts, colleges, hospitals, post offices, etc.) - emergence of a new urbanity - modernizing forces - industrial and structural functionalism - urban inserts and a new sense of urban design - overlaying of the new on the old – a change in the attitude to planning, extension of cities and development of suburbs - hill stations and cantonments - new urbanity in princely states- the cities of colonial origin: Bombay, Calcutta, Madras - expression of culmination - New Delhi, the imperial city - impact of modernist urban design ideology.

Building methods - initial role of military engineers, followed by the setting up of Public Works Department (1862) - introduction of new building practices affecting rural as well as urban scales - superimposition, modification and replacement of existing building practices, introduction of new materials and building techniques - their impact on architectural form.

Architectural styles - politico-cultural meaning through built environment- purposeful stylistic changes in architecture, from neoclassical to Indo-Saracenic and Art Deco to modern - influence of arts and crafts movement- important architects and their contributions - the emergence of architectural profession, debates on arch.

Society and impact on life-style - new behavioral patterns, popular preferences, emulation and retention of socio-cultural nuances - colonial life-style of the high society, modification of old typology to suite new sought after life style - development of new building types (clubs, gymkhana, hotels, parks and gardens, etc.).

Changes in dwelling type - emergence of the bungalow typology - the most remarkable departure with its visible impact to date and the resultant suburban expression - evolution of the type from a simple dwelling to an elaborate mansion - reflection of socio-cultural patterns - regional expression all over the country.



Lecture Abstract

INDIAN ARCHITECTURE 1880 TO 1980:

A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

By: Madhavi Desai

This comprehensive lecture will give a broad overview of a hundred years of the history of Indian architecture as it emerged from the British colonial expression to the democratic manifestation in an Independence India post 1947. It will examine Indian architecture in the context of the fight for and attainment of Independence. It will trace the patterns of architecture since the founding of the Indian National Congress in the 1880s while exploring the impact of political ideology on the built environment. It will analyze the various influences on architecture such as imperialism, nationalism and revivalism. It also looks at the impact of the international movements and the development of the modernist expression in the later half of the twentieth century.

Indian architecture - tradition v/s modernity, the iconography of the signs and symbols of a culture - symbolic meanings in architecture - the definitions of imperialism, nationalism and regionalism - the idea of revivalism, popular taste and the avant-garde.

The antecedents and precedents - an overview of classical architecture and urban developments in India - the traditional physical and socio-cultural context - the Hindu and Islamic heritage - the European interventions: French, Portuguese, Dutch and British, colonials as predominantly traders.

The imperial heyday - India as the brightest jewel in the crown - British institutions - neo-classical and the imperial expression - Gothic revival in Bombay - the architectural and urban design contributions of Princely States in India - the emergence of the Indo-Sarcenic style as a hybrid of the Indian and European architecture - increasing concern with nationalism and its manifestation in the arts - also influences of western styles such as Art Deco - the introduction of many new building types - new cities and urban design interventions - the making of New Delhi by Edwin Lutyens.

Independence-1947 - the search for a suitable architecture, the choice between revivalism and modernism - the conflicting ideologies of Gandhi and Nehru - the leaning towards science and technology - the housing challenge - the coming of Le Corbusier and the making of Chandigarh - the arrival of Louis Kahn - western educated Indian architects: Kanvinde, Correa, Doshi and their creative force - the populist and the high architecture.

Contemporary architecture - the emerging search for identity - a new, mature generation of architects – attempting towards the essence of an Indian architecture - collective confidence of contemporary architects - looking forward to the creation of a new future.

