

A STUDY ON HOUSING APPROACHES  
 FOR THE "LOW - INCOME"  
 IN SRI LANKA  
 WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THEIR  
 "SOCIO-SPATIAL" ORGANIZATIONS



A DISSERTATION

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BY  
 D.D. BOGAHAWATTA  
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## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this university or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signed D. D. Bohogawatta (Student's Signature) D. D. Bohogawatta

(Name of the student: D.D.Bohogawatta)



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## Abstract

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House is a medium through which a person gives an expression to himself. The house; a person builds embodies certain features of the owner's character, initially fashioned by the inherent views and attitudes of the community, which he belongs to. The environment in which he is nurtured, the social group to which he belongs too, plays a significant part of moulding his out look and ambition in life.

The past housing endeavours have mostly been recognized as concepts of actualising the dwellers quantitative requirements. Thus may have been mere provision of tangible human comfort and lacked the perceptual stimulation of home. It could be said, therefore that many housing schemes have not provided the stipulation for dwellers psychological, physical social and cultural manifestation that are essential for their existence. The approach of providing housings for urban low income is one such strategy, which lacked in qualitative aspects and coherently, has been a snatch in the recent past. They provided a different built environment where occupants were used to. Hence inevitable changes began to occur, when they moved into these housing schemes. The built environment provided, rapidly modified and personalized according to the needs and life style of occupants, to fulfil their psychological, physical social and cultural aspects and to create intimate perception of home beyond the parameters of mere housing.

But no doubt that there is no "profit" factor to the government by providing housing for low-income people. Therefore every strategy has to be economical to make such projects viable. It was identified by previous scholars, that the socio-spatial organization is vital among the low-income community unlike high or middle-income categories. They are being socialized or forced to socialize due to several factors. These factors have multiple effects on space and sociability of these community groups. The attempt of this thesis would be to analyse those prevailing socio-spatial organisation to go for the "rational" implication to provide better life for the low-income community.

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Introduction

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## The Premise

The story of housing begins before the days of written history. Early man was poorly equipped to survive the rigors of his world. He had no natural protection in the form of fur or feathers. His bare skin was subjected to stinging blizzards, chilling rains freezes threw and searing sun.

With the rapid growth of population and the limited number of natural resources the modern world is faced with many critical issues. Among those, provision of houses forever increasing demand has always been and continues to be one of the highest personal and social problems in any country. Sri Lanka being or Developing country has taken different measures to over come the housing problems. The economic, social, cultural and environment are the key dimensions of a particular society. Therefore the house is shaped and moulded with those elements in various levels according to the prevailing requirements of a particular time period. Thus the final product of "the house" is the integration of those different elements in various amounts.

But unfortunately like in many other countries, Sri Lanka too has a national policy for housing, mainly based on the economic conditions (Low income, middle income, high income). This clarification based on economic conditions has failed to address the "human" quality that plays a role in human habitats.

The nature of a certain social settlement varies due to the arrangement of the physical order. It is evident that the life style and the social behaviour of the people govern this arrangement. In this case, the living habits, value systems, rituals, etc. According these facts, the life style and the human behaviour of its occupants shape the pattern of a certain settlement and give an identity to certain communities.

## The problem

Most of us spend our lives in a totally man made environment, which we some times repudiate or hate to live. Lionel Brett explains the rigidity of the man made environment, which is appreciated and experienced by the contemporary urban dwellers. Built environment becomes more successful or tolerable by fulfilling both physical and psychological aspects. Such a built environment is identified as a good product of art.

The problem happening in present situation is, housing the occupants have adjusted according to their mental, social, economical and political requirements. In most cases the requirements are not according to Anthropometrix.

When designing large scale housing, some quantitative aspect that involve here which can be defined as the characteristics that man expects through the house to make his life comfortable. Therefore, these aspects are very important to design on mass housing to full filling the user satisfaction.

## Need of study

When studying housing for the poor, it is apparent that mostly the quantitative needs of people are considered often and forgetting their socio- economic and psychological needs, due to political and economic reasons. But behaviour pattern and specific lifestyle of the people give identity to a certain community, to achieve there lacking requirements.

As a result, the real sense of the "home" has been lost due to unplanned changes and modifications done to those houses and its spatial organization.

In mass housing this becomes more crucial due to the rigid type plans and the lack of space. But it cannot be denied that the need for such additional income is more pressing than preserving the homely environment.

Main reason for this situation can be explained when designing housing for the poor by many designers not properly handle with socio – cultural practices and related spatial design concepts. This problem can be over come; fresh thinking is urgently required to propose and effective approach, for the much needed housing environment to come up. So there is a need to study the socio- spatial organizations for providing housing for the poor.

### Observation

Housing in the context of society can be defined as the particular socio –spatial setting for their well being and to which they creatively respond.



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The house is an organism in direct relationship to man. The houses are mere enclosures of human bodies. Housing goes beyond the mere provision of housing units. At the most rudimentary level, housing is the process enabling the act of dwelling establishing one's existence as appropriate for his living earth in the form of making homes. Architecture is a reflection of a Social, Cultural, Economic and environmental dimensions of a particular society. Therefore, the lifestyle and the aspirations of the particular society are reflected in their houses.

In the past when an agriculture based social system was in existence, community based method. Therefore people depended on each other and their lifestyles were fairly simple, content and satisfying.

As people became more independent, more interrogated lifestyles came in to existence among them. They started concerning about privacy, identity and individuality more seriously with the vast variety of to demarcate the personal space, identify and individual territory.

As a result of clear segregation of income levels various type of housing such as upper, middle, lower came in to existence. They are not simple and similar types of housing any more.

The house is one component of the social structure, which possesses the social hierarchies identities, communities etc. They are referred to as "support structure" for the main structures. "The family living house"

The prevalence of these support structures to a greater or lesser degree has an impact on the housing situation and on the quality of it.

The first attempt, which the designers (architect, technical personal, user) must cultivate an attitude of humble respect for the aspirations and hopes of the people for whom the houses are designed. User requires that house be made in to "homes" and it is the prime expectation of them. All financial policies, technological brilliance and business processes, which are used for the making of houses, must primitive and ultimate need of man for a "home"

A home is warm secure personal domain as opposed to a house, which is merely an impersonal objective word. And it is place where people eat, sleep, family making love to each other, relax, entertain and express their individual behaviour.

The large scale housing projects up to now one of the major drawbacks to the fulfilment of the primary need is that the designer never meets the ultimate occupants of the proposed housing units.

### Criticality

When the support structures are unfairly concentrated, there will be congested housing and an imbalance within the environment it's created. This is the problem in

towns and cities where the housing problem is mounted with the social and economical problems.

When it occurs desperate attempts are made to house the overspill of families in habitation, which because of hasty planning and design, do not fit their social context.

When it comes to low income housing emphasis is weighting more on quantity than on quality. Solutions for low income housing seems to be moving towards economic aspects more than the flexible, quality and standardized designs.

### Causes

People migrate to cities for jobs and not for housing. So they have to locate in places near to jobs or have access to public transport system, which can take them to those jobs. Due to this people live on the pavement, along railway lines or illegal squatter settlements, right around the place of employment. This is the situation in towns and cities arise with housing problem, which compound with socio- economic problems.

In low cost housing we try to pile up as many boxes (units) as possible on a given site, without any concern about the other spaces involved in the system. This will result the poor trying to live in hardware totally unrelated to their needs.

Implications are profound for low – income can be built with much cheaper and more readily available materials, and with the participation of the built themselves. Today the builders in our cities are turning out a product that only the middle income and upper income groups can afford. Which lead the crowd to go back to their previous settlements.

The problem of housing in our urban population is not of building technology, it is a primarily a matter of optimising densities, of re- adjusting land-use allocations.

## Remedies

For centuries, every society has produced housing it needs naturally and indigenously. Houses are the product of process, which are organic to each society, like flowers that bloom in meadow. So if the flower doesn't appear, then it's a sign that something is wrong with the system. As architects we should understand what is malfunctioning and set right.

Steps to be taken to co-ordinate, Housing Central planning and public administration to initiate the distribution of employment.

Emphasis is weighing more heavily on the demand for quality of design and planning of the houses, than on quantity alone.

The housing policy, to move towards it must consider economic, standardized and flexible but with quality design to enrich the life quality of the inhabitants.



## Intention of study

This study would evaluate those drawbacks in low – income housing and means of integrating real low – income communal needs and social characteristics of these social groups. The designers are all along meets official who are really committed to only objective impersonal statistics and achievement of that sort but not to the really individual needs of the people who will ultimately occupy the designed house. This failing must be rectified and ultimate occupants of the house must be brought in to the picture as early as possible in the design process if any success could be had in the fulfilment of the essential aims for decent for low income people.

The official brief for housing will categorize the user as low income, middle income etc. It should be the aim of the designer to enlarge on his own knowledge and understanding of the categorized average. He must then establish the standards

and bridge the gap between his concepts of average with the ultimate individual user the low-income people.

### Scope and Limitations

It has to be accepted that 'housing' is a broad issue as it involves so many sectors of the economy. It is difficult to evaluate all those factors in a thesis of this nature. Therefore this issue has to be sectorized before analysing. In this study the social factor within the limits of the economy will be analysed for the improvements in spatial quality.

The qualitative findings from the literature will be analysed with few (limited) case studies, which author has familiar with. Therefore some aspects, which are discussed in the theoretical analysis, would not met in those case studies.

### Methodology



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This study will commence with expressing the character of a house in terms of social, physical and psychological factors. It will evaluate the basic characteristics of a house to arrive at the concept of "Home".

Even though housing schemes have much complex issues than that of ordinary house, the needs of the end user would be the same. Therefore that evaluation of single house would expand the scope of vision to reach the big issue of 'housing scheme'. Here the prime concern would be on spatial quality of housing for poor.

This spatial analysis with special reference to their socio-spatial organization would be much theoretical and would refer the existing literature on spatial coexistence with social behaviour.

The second chapter of this thesis would focus on the issues of mass housing which would be rather complicated opposed to the individual dwellings. But the scholars have accepted that it is the best solution for the increasing demand for housing in the urban context. But it has to be accepted that thorough understanding of theoretical and practical background of the mass housing is necessary before an evaluation of existing housing schemes to began. Several aspects such as structure, background, and the degree of government intervention and architects contribution for such attempts would be discussed in this chapter.

The behavioural and social- spatial factors such as psychological, social and cultural, physical and economic factors are vital in relation to the mass housing intended to low-income people. Therefore the third chapter of this thesis would illustrate those factors in detail, allowing case studies to be the partial prudence of such factors in practical world. Here special attempt was made to observe the practical behaviour of socio-spatial organization.

The next step would be to apply those qualitative data to few existing housing projects and evaluate how successful those project in full filling user demands This will pinpoint some important issues that have to be considered to make better living environment for urban poor. At the same time this process would identify the hierarchy of those pinpointed issues and will compare with mass of issue in existing projects.