

Chawls: Analysis of a Building Type for Middle Income Group

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Abstract: Due to a sudden increase in population of Mumbai after the construction of mills and industries during late 19th century British rule in India, chawls were introduced. This research paper describes a building type called chawl in Mumbai. Access to range of several services promotes the settlement of people of middle income group in chawls. The compact design of chawls result in a social support system which makes it easier to live there.

Keywords: Chawls, Urbanization, cluster, structure

1. Introduction

In Mumbai, there is a vast culture of unorthodox living conditions that evolve out of necessity. Chawl is an example of such accommodation which gives a flexible living condition in the city. The urbanization ranges in housing conditions that are observed in the city from tents to one room structures, then to chawls and high rises. The form of the building refers to the well-organized social life that the residents lead. Chawls also offer affordable housing to the residents of middle income group.

2. Related work

A. Literature review

1. *Towards a design methodology- a case of chawls in Bombay (Shubhankar Sanyal); 1983.*

Due to rent control and heavy construction cost, it is advisable to not build this kind of building anymore. These buildings are left to die under such dilapidated conditions but they are the one's accommodating enormous amount of population density in a developing city like Mumbai. This research tends to withdraw some serious misconceptions about chawls as a recommended housing type for Mumbai. The chawls presents itself as a positive aspect of its viability as a sustainable house type. The dwellings are small. It is therefore extremely difficult in this condition to make sure all the spaces are utilized properly. The major reason that makes chawls the most feasible form of housing is that it still falls within the affordable range of lower income group. On the design aspect, it is true that in this current times, this philosophy must be used in coming housing strategies as it is proved to be useful for enormous housing, which was the starting point of this entire goal.

2. *The chawls of Mumbai: Galleries of life (Maura Finkelstein); 2011.*

The chawls undoubtedly have several problems. These chawls are basically designed for male society and ignored mentality of a women. They also continued to serve caste divides. In fact, their form and social organization played a crucial role in the reconstitution of caste and patriarchy in an urban industrial character. Chawls provided some dwelling units that were served for basic functions and corridors were used as a multi-purpose common area. Privacy was a concern as not many things could remain protected. While there was diversity open to all aspects, the chawls accepted a range of relative homogeneity within a specific group, whether of class, religion and caste cluster or language.

B. Case study

1. *A case study of BDD chawls in Mumbai*

'Bombay Development Department' was constructed in 1920 which results in the accommodation facility for 50,000 people out there. Out of 195 BDD chawls, the maximum 121 chawls are in worli. Electricity and Maintenance of building is taken care by PWD. The PWD have been unsuccessful in maintaining these chawls as residents pay Rs.100 monthly in rent. These dilapidated chawls are highly unsafe for occupancy. Also, BDD chawls are surrounded by different 'maidans' and temples acting as common public areas. People use public toilets. Each house is of 360 sq. ft area. Many residents have extended balconies because of congestion of spaces. Drainage pipes were broken. Corridors were dark although lights were provided in the corridors. Ground or paved surface is not maintained. Garbage dumping was done at the entry.



Fig. 1. BDD chawls

3. Scope of study

The main objective of the study is to take a step towards the comfortable accommodation of people of middle income group. The chawls that are currently occupied for several years have not been renovated for a long time which made it very risky to live there. These dilapidated chawls are to be processed under several redevelopment projects. In a city like Mumbai with enormous population density, chawls provide an option for an affordable accommodation for people of middle income group. This building type provides a basis for future housing projects.

4. Establishment of chawls

The developments made at initial stage of construction were basically single floor or one room type with a common sanitary facility. Every single dwelling was made to accommodate a single person but then the families of the residents moved in, deteriorating the structural condition of chawls severely, putting much more load on the infra structure. The chawls became the most economical form of housing as rents were low and within affordable limits of people of middle income group and even the lower income group.

A. Urbanization in Mumbai

The condition of housing has completely changed in Bombay for worse since then. An extraordinary increase in population resulted in total changes in the land-use pattern, which was forming an entirely new trend for developments to come in decades. This unmethodical urbanization phenomenon had some very adverse effects on chawls, the well settled residents of chawl found it no longer fit to stay there, due to heavy traffic schedules in the nearby area. Today, in spite of all the severe affects of urbanization and dilapidation of buildings, chawls still comprise Bombay's 61% housing stock.

B. Clustering on the basis of caste and class

The distribution of crowd in Mumbai was greatly inspired by caste system. However, during the economical development during 19th century, distribution of people on the basis of class overtook caste clustering. People from different places and communities come along and arrange themselves according to the spatial distribution which helps to study the social fabric of the place.

C. Structural issues

The major issue is overcrowding. The dwellings were made for a single person use but then their families of 5 to 6 persons moved in, leading to severe load on the infra structure. Lack of maintenance with growing age of the building results in worsening the dilapidation of structure. Steel members replaced the original timber ceiling joists. Steel W-sections are considered the replacement of additional columns. Undoubtedly, chawls have a very serious problem today, the extent of which can make someone reject the idea of development of such structure in their first instant. The lack of timely made technical inspections made the condition worse

and risky for life, for the residents.

D. Growth and change

This issue of growth and change is of greater importance to understand because it drastically affects the nature of support elements. This issue helps us to better understand the factors that provoked the change in use of dwellings, changes that comes in family tree through the aspects of time and the nature of growth and change. Change occurs in the terms of dwelling development initially due to:

Increase in criteria of affordability – Without any growth in the family tree, this could happen when affordability increases and there is growth in the development of the infra structure. This could probably happen when the number of earning members increases in the family.

Family growth - members in a family then the need for living space increases.

Increase in affordability with simultaneous growth of family - Change in this case might be increase in the living space and growth of infra structure.

When a joint family converts into a nuclear family - possible conditions might be increase in privacy conditions.

5. Redevelopment of chawls in Mumbai

MHADA-Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority of Maharashtra state, is an organization providing affordable housing in the state. The board repairs and reconstructs the old and dilapidated buildings of Mumbai and also rehabilitates the tenants.

For transformation of major zones of Mumbai, chawl redevelopment is one of the initiatives, that has been continuously under spotlight, taken by several government authorities. The redevelopment of chawls is a process which can open up gradually to greater amount of areas in Mumbai. MHADA (Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority) had already announced redevelopment for structures situated at Worli, Naigaum and N M Joshi Marg. According to surveys, more than 16,000 families are staying in those structures now.

Cluster redevelopment project updates in Mumbai-Two cluster redevelopment projects, located in Parel, have already been finalized. The first one is the Haji Qasim Chawl. It is located at Curry Road. Tenants have already been relocated from there. Area encompasses 7 acres of land. The second project is the Bhandi Bazaar redevelopment project which covers a large area of 16.5 acres. The two redevelopment projects in Parel were initially doing some basic redevelopment of structures which are old and mainly dilapidated although they are now being converted into cluster redevelopment initiatives.

6. Conclusion

Approachable location, affordable prices and socially bloomed community are some of the prior reasons why people

want to continue staying there. Despite structurally ill conditions of chawls, people do not want to relocate themselves. The socially equipped community found here are very rare to point in busy cities like Mumbai. For a middle income group, chawls provide with security, affordable range, socially bloomed surrounding where neighbors treat each other like families. The amount of rent people pay for their living is much less and found very economical, hence they continue to live there. Another reason why people don't move out is because they were born and brought up there so moving out leads to decline of a comfortable living and escaping chawl culture. More housing like that of chawl needs to developed in a developing city like Mumbai keeping in mind the housing density and maintenance of a socially knit environment evolved

within.

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