



The Bungalow in Twentieth-Century India

The Cultural Expression of Changing Ways of Life and Aspirations
in the Domestic Architecture of Colonial and Post-colonial Society

Madhavi Desai, Miki Desai and Jon Lang



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and Aspirations in the Domestic Architecture of
Colonial and Post-colonial Society

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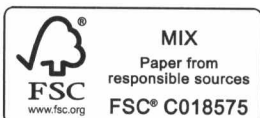
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Preface

India is a vast country. It stretches from its northern mountain chain – the Himalayas – to Cape Comorin in the south. The regions within it are diverse in character. There are two coasts to the peninsula, the presence of an extensive alluvial plain in the north and a plateau in the south which is savannah in parts and humid forests in others. The plateau is interspersed with rivers that have created a number of deltas that flow into the Bay of Bengal. The eastern edge contrasts with the coastal plain on the west – the Arabian Sea side – which is only 60 kilometers (40 miles) wide before the steep rise of the Western Ghats. The people of India are equally diverse as are the house forms that have evolved within the different cultural regions of the country.

A broad range of studies have been conducted on housing types in India. That is not surprising because there is an extraordinary variety and complexity to the housing stock in the country. This book sets out to build on and extend our understanding of this diversity but, in particular, it sets out to analyse how one type – the bungalow – has shaped and been shaped to meet the needs and aspirations of middle-class people. Indeed the very label ‘bungalow’ is now applied in India to a variety of single family homes that hardly resemble what is generally understood to be a bungalow in the outside world. The objective here is to describe the assortment of house forms and their regional variants that were derived from the bungalow as a much-favoured house type for those who could afford it.

The time period that is the primary focus of this study – the twentieth century – covers the peak of colonial rule and its total decline as well as the rise of the new nation state of India. Several dominant social and architectural ideologies that affected the built environment came and went during the period. The social processes that have been variously labelled ‘globalization’, ‘westernization’ and ‘modernization’ reshaped middle-income Indian life. This book attempts to shed light on the various technological, political and social developments that re-formed the bungalow contemporaneously to

the development of modern Indian history during the period of British rule and its post-colonial aftermath. In tracing this modern history there are often references to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because twentieth-century changes were rooted in the past.

Any new book on the architecture of the bungalow and its urban design implications builds on the work of prior scholars. This book, in particular, owes a debt to the scholarship and writings on the bungalow by Anthony King (1974, 1976, 1995 and 2004). His work was inspirational for us and it led to our curiosity about how the bungalow developed after middle-class Indian society adopted it as an ideal house type and adapted it to meet its own ends.

We have drawn on the work of many, many scholars who have written about the bungalow. For instance, much of our description of the bungalows in Bengaluru comes from the work of Janet Pott (1977) and the erstwhile Bangalore Arts Commission. We have also relied on older publications such as those by A.V.T. Iyer (1926) and by V.C. Mehta (1937). This work partially parallels Gautam Bhatia's study of houses, *Punjabi Baroque and Other Memories of Architecture*, but our focus of attention is quite different. We have endeavoured to follow the changing cultural use of space in houses through much of the turbulent social and political history of twentieth-century India. In addition, primary data, through the physical and photographic documentation of houses and settlement patterns and through interviews with many scholars, were collected in the main urban areas of India. These centres included Ahmedabad, Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), Chennai (formerly Madras), Delhi, Kanpur (formerly Cawnpore), Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), Lucknow, Mumbai (formerly Bombay) and Pune (formerly Poona).

The goal of the book is to show how changing ways of life and aesthetic attitudes based on changing aspirations, have shaped the architecture of the detached house in India. In doing so we are heavily indebted to the work of Amos Rapoport on house form and culture (1969, 1977, 1984). Other influences on our arguments are made clear in the body of our text. Our debt to these studies should be obvious to the most casual reader of this work.

In addition to the debt that we owe others, the story we present here is founded on our own previous studies. In particular it applies the arguments on the symbolic nature of the built environment presented in our jointly authored book, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity – India, 1880–1980* published in 1997, to the aesthetics of house form. That study was funded by the Australian Research Council. This work also continues the thrust of the studies of house forms in Gujarat conducted by Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai and, more specifically, Miki's exhibition catalogue titled *Architektur in Gujarat, Indien* (1990). His extensive measured drawings and photographs of the vernacular architecture of India have provided the basis for much of this work. The Desais' joint study of the adaptation and growth of the bungalow (2005) and Madhavi's book *Traditional Architecture: House Form of the Islamic Community of the Bohras in Gujarat* (2008) have been major sources of data for our current endeavor. Finally, this endeavour also

builds on a study on culture and housing form in India funded by the Indo-US Sub-Commission on Culture and Education and by the American Institute of Indian Studies at the University of Chicago conducted by Jon Lang during the 1980s.

As can be seen from the list of references our research drew on many unpublished studies conducted by students at a number of schools of architecture in India, but particularly at the Faculty of Architecture, of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) University in Ahmedabad, where students have been documenting indigenous/regional traditional architecture in various Indian cultural contexts over the past forty years. We thank CEPT University and all the other schools for permission to use the results of their students' labours. Words of thanks must be offered to the sponsors of this work. The study *The Cultural Expression of the Bungalow in India: The Colonial Legacy and its Post-Colonial Manifestation*, on which this book is based, was funded by the Getty Foundation of Los Angeles. We are grateful to CEPT University for providing institutional support for the research project and for the development of our work. This book was partially prepared at the University of New South Wales. The indirect financial support of the Faculty of the Built Environment in its production is very much appreciated.

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in conducting fieldwork, producing measured drawings and in redrawing many illustrations from published and unpublished sources. Lorraine Sexton, an anthropologist, assisted Jon Lang in his fieldwork in India in the 1980s. We are thankful to Pratyush Shankar of CEPT University for accompanying and helping Miki Desai on a trip to Uttar Pradesh and for using his contacts to enrich this study. Mahesh Panchal, Shreya Pandya and Sonal Trajker and the library staff of CEPT University were very helpful throughout the period of the research. Catrinel Dunca copy-edited the final report to the Getty Foundation on which this book is based. Caroline Nute read through drafts of this book and her observation helped to improve it. We must acknowledge with gratitude the continued interest in our work shown by Anthony King including his critical comments on the report that was submitted to the Getty Foundation. We acknowledge with many thanks the review of the report to Getty that we solicited from Amos Rapoport. It was of great assistance in shaping this book. Finally, we are very grateful to Lakshmi Sasikumar for diligently correcting the proofs of this book.

The Illustrations

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The Outline of the Book

The book begins with a general introduction to the evolving nature of the bungalow in India. It then moves on to Part I in which a description of the variety of housing types that existed in India at the beginning of the twentieth century is presented. It covers the indigenous and colonial, particularly British, housing types that served as precedents for what were to come in the twentieth century. The immense variety of vernacular Indian house forms makes possible only an introduction to the topic compatible with the scope of this work. The historical development of the bungalow around the world has been widely documented so is only mentioned in a cursory manner here. Its nature in India at the beginning of the twentieth century is what is of concern here.

The central arguments of the book are presented in Part II of the book. The bungalow, while still existing in its 'pure form' as a single storey detached building with a verandah, has evolved into a number of new types that are still called bungalows in India. It will come as a surprise to international readers that even three-storey single family homes are called 'bungalows' in the country. These types are an adaption of many aspects of the standard bungalow form as it existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The changes have been brought about (or have come about) in response to changing cultural patterns, social meanings and the evolving aspirations of middle-class Indians. International architectural fashions have also had an impact on the work of both architects and *mistris*, traditional contractors and builders. The fashions have, however, been sifted through a web of indigenous ways of life and aesthetic attitudes to form a particular form of modernism (see Hosagrahar 2005).

The climate varies considerably across India so variants of house form were developed, consciously and unconsciously, to respond to comfort needs within the country's different climatic regions. As Amos Rapoport (1969), however, pointed out, local cultural patterns and aesthetic values often override what might be regarded a sensible response to local temperature, wind, rainfall and humidity patterns. There is thus today both a unity and a diversity of house forms in India. This unity and diversity can be explained; that is this book's argument. The unity comes from the idea of the bungalow as a point of departure; the diversity results from the need to adapt the form to meet a variety of individual requirements within the resources, financial and psychological, available to do so. The influences shaping house forms are political and cultural as well as local and regional.

Part III of the book is short. Its goal is to provide a sense of the array of house types today that have an ancestry, sometimes obvious but often remote, in the colonial bungalow. That is where our story ends.

A Final Note

We three authors have had memorable experiences of growing up or spending part of our childhoods in bungalows – Madhavi and Miki Desai in Gujarat and Jon Lang in Bengal and Punjab. Those memories may well be the root of our fascination!

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