

Vernacular Architecture

Lecture 3

Approaches to Vernacular Architecture

The approaches to Vernacular architecture, we will just talk about the basic approaches that are available; Aesthetic approach - relates to quality, value, etc. Anthropological approach - relationship between family and social structure. This is an important aspect for studying vernacular architecture. Then we will move on to, Archaeological approach. Reveals indication of architectural elements and also various artefacts or anything that is very archaeologically relevant to the present day. Behavioural - relates to the behavioural pattern in relation to the built-up structures and their personal community. Eg: urban and rural community. The behaviour of a particular community in a settlement is an important study for us to approach. Conservationist - to evaluate the potential of traditional, historical buildings for reuse. There are various approaches to the study. Things that can be learnt or derived from vernacular architecture. It differs based on what a person wants to particularly learn. Furthermore types are Developmental. To relate archaeological and organizational principles and brings technology and analysis in vernacular buildings. From the various things that you can learn, the principles and technology that can be adapted or reused can be an important approach study. Ecological approach focuses on habitat as part of total environmental system. Folkloristic, we are talking about the folks, the folklores that happen to be important part of vernacular architecture. We will learn about the folk and the folklores from these things. Compares folk artifacts with the craft skill, custom and benefits. Historical approaches - examines various influencing forces using documentary records. The various political and racial things that happen during that particular era can be derived from vernacular architecture. Meso-logical relates to history, similar to historical approach documentation of drawings and verbal documentation. This is more specific physically. Spatial approaches - behavioral and anthropological organization - articulation of spaces and volumes. Structuralism - theories disclosing the functions and meaning of structures. You can adapt or adopt the direct study of structures through vernacular architecture. We can also have the approach of Generating transformation. We talk about transformation of a settlement, the evolution from one form to another form. All these can be studied from approaching vernacular architecture. We will talk about these approaches in detail and we will talk about that is specifically related to vernacular architecture. First we will talk about aesthetic approach. When we talk about vernacular architecture, there are so many things we studied. The visual impacts that are a direct influence on the vernacular architecture of the people or of the region. There are two distinct approaches; Ethnographic and Responsive - to understand the aesthetic dimension in the culture of the building and the appreciation of the structure. So, a structure can be a different thing but appreciation of the structure is essentially an aesthetic approach in the vernacular

aspect. Aesthetic approach is the effective aspect of communication. When you study about vernacular architecture, the aesthetics are a direct way of communicating what happened or with the factors that affected vernacular architecture.

Utilitarian - something that useful or something that was with a purpose was also meant to be aesthetically pleasing. That is utilitarian. Historical, religious, social relations etc. There are religious aspects, they are aspects that talk about the seasons, the aspects that talk about the traditions of a particular tribe or set of people. These are directly affecting the utilitarian aesthetic aspects. Furthermore, the appearance and occupation contain aesthetic potential. When a particular vernacular architecture or the element has an occupation or a purpose, it can also translate to being aesthetic. Furthermore, the building explains architectural creation, technology and Form. Initially these were crude forms that began to evolve. This was able to explain to us or give us a direct example or a study of the architectural creation that was possible through the way we are built. The technology and form, these were all the coded languages which were there in the vernacular architecture, from which we can adapt and learn. Examples of that would be Gujarat, decoration in the interiors and exteriors are often Utilitarian. Utility is an important aspect of a building or a shelter but it being decorative is a very good example both in interiors and exteriors in the case of Gujarat, with respect to the Bohra Muslims. You must have heard of the Bohra Muslims, they are people of 10,000 across the world but they have a very unique and distinct approach to architecture which is not just a response to design but also a very direct response to the community in which they were brought up, in which they shaped up. Another example would be the English architecture or the British architecture. The finishes reveal the use of structural materials. The British had a way of having structural elements depict their aesthetic approaches. We all heard of columns which are important part of the building but the English had a very unique way of making the columns distinctive. Different types of columns; Corinthian columns, Doric columns as such a structural element but they have been decorated and made aesthetically appealing. That is an example from the British architecture.

Japanese on the other hand have art dominating the decorative elements. On one side we had community and social elements which are a direct influence on the utilitarian and the aesthetic aspects. From the British architecture we had them directly refer the structural aspects to an aesthetic elements. Now we have the Japanese have the art as an important and dominating factor in the decorative elements of the aesthetics of vernacular architecture.

A comparative study of tradition reveals a rich diversity owing to culture and aesthetic dimensions. This is the unique Bora Muslim housing. If you looked at the aesthetic appealing aspects in this particular building, we will understand a lot of things. These buildings have common walls which mean they wanted to live together as a community or they have families

together. They stayed together. They stuck to each other. That directly impacts the common wall system and they all have very close or very systematic set of windows which are again a direct response to the street in which they were. The utilitarian aspects establish their aesthetic appeal in terms of colors or in the architectural carvings or in the decorative aspects present in these buildings. That was the aesthetic approach.

Now we will move on to Archaeological approach, this might not be very relevant to architecture but nevertheless we will go through it. The date of the buildings, the chronological order of the development, documentation of changing architectural style overtime. When you talk about vernacular architecture, when you take it up for study. You can understand various things from it, for example, it being archaeological. The date of the buildings, the era in which it shaped and developed, the chronological order of development. A building usually developed is first single dwelling unit and it developed into a group of houses and further into a settlement. This happened over a period of time which also affected the shaping up of vernacular architecture, that is an important example in the archaeological approach, the documentation of changing architectural style overtime. As much as a building evolves over time in terms of material, the architectural features and the architectural elements develop overtime. This is a very direct documentation of the archeology. Excavation and recording of ruined structures to collect sufficient detail to allow for accurate reconstruction. There have been architecture types, settlement patterns which were there long before documentation ever began, these were ruined and can be excavated to study further. A big example of this would be; Mohenjodaro and the Harappa civilization and the settlement patterns that were on Earth. The archaeological approach helps study these things. Changes or evolution occurred due to human behaviour and spatial changes. Let's say there is a settlement pattern or a town, a particular invasion, or a particular natural calamity, as such either destroys or makes the vernacular architecture or the people move. This makes the architecture change, it makes it evolve, it also makes it diverse. These can all be approached and studied in the archaeological approaches. This image is actually a bungalow. We have a very different understanding of what a bungalow is, but this is the evolution of the Bungalow. Bungalows are nothing but huge mansions that have evolved during the British era especially in the Bangladesh area, hence the term 'bangla'. This is nothing but a huge space with thatched roof. That's all a Bungalow is but when you go through this archaeologically, you can derive what or where the particular building type or architecture came from. One had to relate it with today's Bungalow and the the thatched roof, I don't think they will be able to. An Archaeological approach is very important for such studies.

Anthropological Approach

Next, we move on to Anthropological. Anthropological is nothing but with relation to human scale or with relation to human beings or the way people behave and communicate. Prior to

1960, only documentation of different residence styles were done which remained as artifacts of tradition and culture. Yes, there was documentation and a lot of traditional architecture and vernacular architecture buildings, but that was just the documentation of the traditional building type as such, it was preserved and was able to be applied. Only after 1960 was it found to be prominent that anthropological studies are important. Also, socio cultural aspects that came about after 1960s play an important role in vernacular architecture. Only documentation of different residence styles were done which remained as artifacts of tradition and culture. Only that was done initially. Late 20th Century, the approach changed towards functionalism leading to paradigm study of social organization. As much as we study architecture, as much as we studied building materials or as much as we studied their techniques, social organization or social study was an important aspect. Amos Rapoport, was an important person with respect to Anthropological studies that affected vernacular architecture. If you get to study his works, you'd get a clearer picture incase you want to pursue further research in the areas of vernacular architecture, in general or of a particular area. According to him, climate, ecology, material, technology and local economy determine the settlement pattern pertaining to regional level. Unlike today where we use these factors, climate, ecology to come up with design solution, those days these solutions constrained or restricted us from shaping vernacular architecture. These are two different things, that is what he discovered and made an elaborate study out of it.

Furthermore about the study, factors such as; climate, ecology, material, technology and local economy act as constraints rather than determinants that act as modifiers of form. These aspects modify the form, not exactly solve the form for us but modify it as a constraint. Built forms are closely inter-related to behavioural patterns and cultural values, that was the crux of his study and of his conclusions. We will always relate built forms to climate, materials available as such but as far as social, the behavioural aspects of people occupying these buildings were an important thing was something he initiated. Cultural influence in the form is originated through symbolic conception i.e notions of the right order of relationship can play an active role in the building of the house. The influence originated through symbolic conception. The behavioural or the social aspect becomes a symbolic or conceptual thing beyond a point and then become solutions to this architecture which has shaped up overtime. When you look at it, these factors simply lay out what vernacular architecture shapes up to. An objective - a place to live. That is the first thing, that is actually a social aspect rather than anything else. Subjective, the climate and materials, etc. Once a person decides that he wants to build a shelter, it becomes subjective as to what goes on next into making a building. Then, come the aesthetics, the social and cultural aspect which applies to the aesthetics. He introduced vernacular architecture as a folk tradition. He looked directly at vernacular architecture as a relation to folk or folk tradition. He called it 'direct and unselfconscious translation into physical

form of a culture, its need and values - as well as the desires, dreams and passions of the people.' He made it very visible that it was directly related to the people, he talked about the dreams and passions of the people which directly related to vernacular architecture. Furthermore, he categorizes the folk tradition into two different types of architecture. One is the pre-industrial vernacular architecture and the modern or post-industrial vernacular. Pre-industrial means people were simpler they didn't go into extensive techniques, extensive settlement patterns, they just stuck to what was available, what was necessary. Modern or post industrial, after the post industrial or the industrial revolution, people chose occupations and had things to do individually. There was a separate person to build, there was a designated person to provide, there was a separate person to cater the food. For vernacular architecture with respect to folk tradition, differs drastically with pre-industrial and post-industrial.

Pre-industrial architecture refers to buildings built by the community and involves no specialized trades. Basically, people and their trades did not matter, whether or not, whether you were a wood cutter or not, a stone mason or not, you would build your own house. A trade or a particular occupation did not matter, a direct response of the community that understands its own needs and requirements, and are handed down through verbal transfer of knowledge through generations. The knowledge was transferred from generation to generation verbally, not necessarily as a document, a technique or in a building form. The outcome of response tends to be very tradition oriented and the houses follow a uniform model. The construction is clear and simple, adhering to the rules drafted by ancestors. Now, we will talk about the Post-industrial Vernacular; post-industrial vernacular architecture differs considerably in its conception, design and construction. The occupants of these kinds of houses, provide input to the design and construction of the house. We take it to the next level, there are conceptions, they are design solutions and construction involved in making vernacular architecture and its not as simple as it was. The occupants of these kind of houses, provide input to the design and construction of the house. Before they were just a part of building the house or they just built their own houses, now they provided input to people who build their houses, so they were part of the design and conception rather than the construction. Individual variability, is thus witnessed. An individual or individual taste is only developed and that's how design became more prominent, this is the start of individual variability, the lack of flamboyant aesthetic display as they try to solve problems in the simplest possible manner, working with the site and microclimate, respecting other members of the community and the environment. This is the part where it is really vernacular to the core because they didn't concentrate as much on aesthetic display as it is done in today's architecture. As much as it was an individual variability, they still answered to what was the variability or what was the solution or the problem that needs to be solved. They respected other members of the community and the environment.

Those were the approaches to Anthropological. Now, we will move on to the Behavioural Approach. The human behavioural patterns of the community, In particular, the behaviour pattern of a human, not just as a social community or as community of people but the behavioural aspect of a particular person or a particular group of people. The human behavioural patterns of the community, act as a constraint or as a supportive element in defining the house typologies. For example in India, house typologies are huge as they adopt a joint family system. Naturally when a group of people stay together, their housing is bigger. Houses are grouped together in large numbers in clusters reflecting their behavioural pattern. This again, the Bora Muslims and their Havelis were a direct impact of the joint family systems that were very much prevalent in India. Now we will talk about the Architectural approach that is very irrelevant to what we need to study and adapt. Manifestations of vernacular architecture, in architectural practices over centuries are many and diverse. Experiencing them and interpreting them in modern context is the job of an architect. What we do is, we study vernacular architecture, we learn from it, adapt and use it in present day situation. This is what we do in architectural approach.

Furthermore, we can talk about architectural approach, how it can be further classified to be studied and applied. Architecture as pictorial or picturesque suggestion of symbolic identities. We take symbols, so if there is an element of architecture, we don't take up the element as such, it isn't necessary, we take up the symbol, what it represents, the concept involved. We can take the concept and not necessarily the whole structure of the element. Architecture as determined by climate, nature or function. We learn that climate, nature or function are important aspects to architecture. Architecture as an embodiment of experience emotion, spiritual and ceremonial qualities. Iconic suggestion or symbolic identity, this is where it has evolved. Architecture is not just something that is a direct answer to the purpose, utility, the climate or nature but it is also an embodiment of experience, emotion, spiritual and ceremonial qualities and Iconic suggestion or symbolic identity. Identity is an important part of architecture in the later phase. Architecture as a tool to restore and discover the local technology. The architectural approach of vernacular architecture helped us to make sure we restored or discovered local techniques or local methods of architecture that we can apply today. The pure form of architecture was without change by external influences which we could adapt. The design to recreate/ restore these unadulterated forms, something neo-vernacular. We tried to recreate or reuse these techniques such that they never fade away. Architecture approach methods, further. To categorize few aspects of buildings that re dominating for documentation and reuse, for example- plan, decoration, shape of openings, etc. When we talk about buildings, we document it and use various forms of it in various studies of architecture and various buildings of architecture. Unlike vernacular architecture which was just passed on from generation to generation, this gave room for documentation to be reused in various ways.

Traditional materials and building methods to blend authenticity. We tried to further push and make a blend between the traditional methods and the architectural concepts that were revolving. Creation of a local identity through the architectural traces of the vernacular, at times served a variety of social goals. Local identity was an important aspect back then in vernacular architecture, it also was studied to be found in the architectural traces of today. An example of this is; Hassan Fathy's architecture. Hassan Fathy was an important architect during the time of Wright and Le Corbusier but he did not participate in the design revolution as such. He stuck to the vernacular architecture or the local architecture of Egypt especially. You can look at the structure he built for Thieves. Thieves when they were looking for a rehab or a new kind of life, Hassan Fathy built them a new structure that did not make them feel alienated or detached from their roots but something that truly connected to their roots. This is an example of how architecture was directly adapted to keep to the roots of vernacular architecture. It aimed to preserve the national identity. Identity was an important aspect of it.

Here is another simple direct approach. In Egypt, pigeon is a part of the daily diet in many parts. Pigeon was an important source of food in Egypt. Pigeon houses or dovecotes are constructed from mud brick to create an artificial mountainous topography. Pigeon kind of housing that housed the pigeons, worked as a trap and for various other aspects of their livelihood became an important form of the architecture approach. That image is something of a pigeon house. Furthermore, the droppings are also a valuable source of fertilizer and the houses are so universal that they are also part of the Egyptian national identity. You see something of a daily diet actually resulted in them building such a form and is an important part of the identity of Egypt. That's how the architectural approach has evolved and shaped it.

Now, we will talk about the Modern approach. We have studied architecture, anthropological, aesthetic, what is different about modern approach, is something we are going to see. Modern approach is something that constantly emphasis on something about timelessness or timeless architecture. When you look at a building, you are able to put time on it and say this is from a particular era and such but modern approach or modern architecture that studies vernacular architecture or adapts it, looks to make architecture timeless such that it is relevant to any part of the future or the past. When we look at vernacular architecture it belongs to a particular region, it belongs to a particular era, it may or may not exist or may or may not adapt to present day situation but that is the crux of vernacular architecture. Modern approach wants to go beyond this and make it timeless. Alternative to aesthetic approach is modern approach. Modern architecture aims to free from those stylistic traditions and to create a timeless version of architecture. Modern approach adopts the following. Complexity of various forms. Expressions could be modern and need not be traditional, material, construction and technology. It could be a combination of all of these made timeless or detached from a

particular time. Recreating complicated hybrid forms that occur in spite of constraints of climate. They tend to create hybrid forms which may or may not be a direct response of the climate but still able to be an answer to the solution. Materials and forms produce sensory delight and are spiritually uplifting. As much as need and utility were an important aspect, what was important was sensory delight and it being a spiritual upliftment. When you look at a building, you don't just simply step in and do your work, you also need to be enriched emotionally. That is something that modern approaches seem to tap into regularly.

Modern architects felt that vernacular architecture affirm the following modern ideologies. As much as modern approach wants to keep it timeless or wants to make it beyond the processes that have come through, it also accepts certain factors from Vernacular architecture such as - Severely utilitarian in use. It affirms the fact a building needs to be severely utilitarian. Functional, material and technology need to adapt to climate needs, so they answer that. Beautiful on the sculptural expression, mass and volume as a result of manipulating the plan and section to accommodate the user's need. They made sure as much as sensory delight was necessary, they also had to answer to the utilitarian and the needs of the building inhabitants. Here, I have two examples for you of something that is termed timeless. This is Ramchamp that was built by Le Corbusier. If you look at it, you can't really say it was vernacular or fix a time to it, it rises above all these to become a timeless thing such that it isn't attached or pulled down by an root as such. This is also a building of a sculptural concrete. It was built by Robert Lewis and this is called the second Goetheanum, this is a complete sculptural and also rises above style and traditions to be timeless.

Another aspect that helps us further understand the modern approach is that it doesn't necessarily stick to architecture and moves on to various other levels. A direct exhibition of that would be the exhibition of the 'Architecture without the architects', it was done by Bernard, he had an exhibition of built spaces of architecture without architects. You can understand from the term that there have been buildings that have not been built by architects but are still relevant and pleasing to the eye. This went beyond picturesque and conveyed the following. The factors it showed us were not necessarily produced by architects are; Qualities induced, human scale, Great views, visual richness and features which heightened social interaction. Social interaction, visual richness were something's that were done, not with respect to architecture necessarily.