The paper discusses how methodologies in History of Architecture need to be restructured for a better understanding of what architecture means in the context of culture and cities. The notion of looking at monuments or iconic buildings in architectural studies has resulted in an understanding of architecture that is disconnected from our understanding of the everyday life and culture. Architecture and its nature of developing the physical fabric and space of a city need a specific structure of study so that the production of space and its dialectics of form and culture is understood in a way that not only makes us better citizens but also introduces a structural change in which architectural studies and urban planning understand space, form and the everyday life.

The paper focuses on the development of colonial Bombay’s native town. The area today continues to thrive as a commercial, residential as well as a community hub. The architectural formats that continue to exist in these neighbourhoods are important registers of the city’s cultural and political history.

Neighbourhoods in a city are organizational structures created by multiple conditions of histories - histories of migrations, social geographies, terrain and the changing phenomenology in the metropolis. Neighbourhoods are compiled of clear physical structures; however they may not be bounded by physical space or geography. Urban neighbourhoods develop as classes and communities structure themselves in a physical terrain, within which social geographies and culture are created, and also spatialised. The spatial structures - architecture in a locality, contain the narratives of this development and are a material archive of aesthetics, iconographies and building patterns that emerge from these histories.
Of the various materials and objects that comprise cities and neighbourhoods, architecture is the most lasting and also very tangible; architecture has a structure, form and a technology of its practice. It would be required to reach an understanding of the architectural objects and what happens to them ‘by virtue of their being produced and consumed, possessed and personalized.’ Here it would be specifically required to understand the socio-cultural scope of architecture; and how ‘the discourse of psychology or sociology’ would refer us to this object. Architecture is available as an object with a design that is surviving as maps/documents of a historical and physical space.

With some of these questions and ideas in place, one would can now go on to present some case studies of buildings in the Bhuleshwar-Kalbadevi area.

To focus in detail on the housing complex of Bhatia Wadi on Kalbadevi road, one cannot miss its Renaissance gateway, with a circular arch and a pediment above it. The entrance is marked with a wall plate of rules for strict discipline inside the complex. These rules make the gateway a point of transition from the outside to the inside. The privatisation of this public space—the housing complex, via the code of conduct observed by the community, defines how ‘public’
are defined varyingly in different urban pockets. Through the marquee-like Renaissance gateway of Bhatia Wadi one would enter a courtyard in two parts. The inner phase of the courtyard has a Palladian façade of windows with alternating circular arches and pediments. It has a marriage hall on the ground floor, just off the courtyard. The circular arches along the ground floor carry heads of men at key point of all arches. Imaginatively crafted heads of men with markedly different moustaches and pagadis (cloth headgear) mark the courtyard distinctly.

Nearly 600 people reside in the 175-yearold (or more) Halai Bhatia Mahajanwadi, which is run by the Bombay Halai Bhatia Mahajan Trust. In keeping with the primary characteristic of wadis, this complex too has an exclusive character as far as its residents are concerned; it allows only Bhatias to reside here, except for a Maharashtrian doctor who also runs his clinic in the building premises and serves well the residents of this building.

The two buildings, immediately after the gateway which has been declared a heritage structure, are residential structures. Once upon a time no commercial structures were allowed here but today
some ground floor rooms are used for commercial purposes. The older of the two residential buildings houses the trust office today. The third building that completes the courtyard is the community building, with its central ornament of the clock. The interiors of this building are marked by grand staircases and splendid halls. The gymnasium which is locked and rusting today was once throbbing with life.

Cast into the railings of the staircase, the cameo of Queen Victoria is the ornament that sharply defines the trade and social aspirations of this community hall and its community. Large hall spaces here bear life-size portraits of the many shetias who must have brought wealth to their community and city, and surely marked it in plaster and iron. But there are ante-rooms that contain records and files of the many transactions that were a part of the narrative of this city. The common store room here is also of interest, as it stores large sized cooking vessels, crutches, wheel chairs, cradles for the community to use as and when required, as shared property.

The residential buildings show a common house typology. There are about 14 to 20 rooms on each floor and they all share a common bathroom, toilet and washing area. Each building has two entrances; one at both ends and the ground floor is nearly all shops. The houses are rooms of
approximately 10 feet by 18 feet and a floor-to-floor height of 12 feet, which allows for storage space above the door height. Today, many residents have bought adjoining rooms and converted them into single apartment-like residences. Initially all rooms were connected to each other by a door, but during renovation in 1996 most tenants opted to have these internally connecting doors removed, and with that, this nineteenth-century urban migrant community redefined itself in the post-liberalisation city.

The physical existence of such concepts (community) and forms (chawl/wadi) has to be understood with the question - what impression such socializing has on understanding a city or its localities. If at one point these are seen as extended urban families, again as Hansen or Chandavarkar point out these were also sites associated with riff-raff activities or the hang out spots for hooligans (Chandavarkar, 1998: 115). Chandavarkar goes into a detailed discussion of how the akhadas were seen as spots not for ‘respectable’ men and at times produced the local leaders and later politicians, popular in the area. So if these sites are at one point a meeting place for the new urban social networks, they are also locations for older ethnic or caste ties to be strengthened, but at the same time they are also sites imagined to be brewing local politics like strikes, and associating its occupants on a scale of legality.

The neighbourhood is often indicated as some collective operating under stress and duress rather than an entity or a body that is defined via a varied set of urban geographical conditions\(^2\). The incidents where residents in a chawl either collectively hide a plague victim to avoid ‘cleansing’ of all homes, or report plague victims to avoid the disease from spreading and hence avoid the ‘cleansing’ of all homes in the post death situation, focuses on an understanding of the architectural type only within the particular situation of the plague.

It does not contrast or consider otherwise, any understanding of the architectural type in a context outside the plague.

\(^2\) The reference here is to a discussion the author has provided in another version of this essay, discussing 2 essays by Jim Masselos - in his recent book *The City in Action: Bombay Struggles for Power* (Oxford 2007) - *The Outside Inside: Incursions into the Marathi Household at the End of the Nineteenth Century* and *Appropriating Urban Space: Social Constructs of Bombay in the Time of the Raj*
Hence living spaces are understood only in the condition where homes were intruded upon by the police and the soldiers. It is important to realize how an architectural type, like the chawl, itself borders between the private space, what the author calls ‘inside’, and the public or neighbourhood space, what the author calls ‘outside’. In which case the rendering of the home as an ‘individual’s castle’, a space for managing gender customs and caste segregations, and the simplistic reading of the home as ‘a residence (were) demarcated by walls, doors, and gates, and by locks, bolts, and padlocks and – for very rich – by guards’, is complicated with the understanding of the complexity of pressurized urban living where spaces are often not defined as either public or private, and also operate differently at different times. A reading of Kiran Nagarkar’s Ravan and Eddie will easily explain how the notions of privacy and family are not bound by walls in a typology like the chawl. The simplistic reading of doors and windows as association of privacy is best explained by Jane Jacobs in The Death and Life of American Cities (Vintage, New York. 1961) ...

Architecture and planning literature deals with privacy in terms of windows, overlooks, sight lines. The idea is that if no one from the outside can peek into where you live – behold privacy. This is simple-minded. Window privacy is the easiest commodity in the world to get. You just pull down the shades or adjust the blinds. The privacy of keeping ones personal affairs to those selected to know them, and the privacy of having reasonable control over who shall make inroads on your time and when, are rare
The ‘dwelling’ or ‘home’ on which Martin Heidegger first raised questions in 1951 with his lecture entitled “Bauen Wohnen Denken” (“Building Dwelling Thinking”), in the context of the housing crisis since the days of post-Industrial Revolution he associated human beings to a “fourfold – that is, they are part of the oneness of the four components of their world – insofar as they dwell.” What is the fourfold? “Earth, sky, divinities, and mortals together form the world of human beings.” (Lefas; 2009) This lecture was crucial for it indicated the essential and structural difference between ‘housing’ as in mass housing, as a problem of population rise and city planning, and the question of ‘dwelling’ as in ‘living’. The change from pre-industrial housing forms in villages and small towns to the ‘stacked housing’ of post-industrial cities has been pointed out by some architectural historians like Frans Sturkenboom as the essential dislocation of the sky and earth. In a simple comparison of a **wada** or **haveli** to a chawl, one can see that the earth (the courtyard, the verandah on the street) and the sky (the roof, the terrace) are dislocated; the only relationship one now has with the space of the world outside is probably the single window in the room, or the shared verandah at every floor level. The shared verandah at every floor level, the shared water tap in some cases, the shared light-well/courtyard, or the default space on the ground between two parallel **chawls** (where you may dump garbage, and the children

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3 He also discusses the concept of “chest of drawers” to describe post-industrial housing in his essay “Tectonics and Housing Construction” in *Dwelling as a Figure of Thought* (ed) Hans Cornelissen; (SUN Publishers, Amsterdam. 2005)
will play cricket, and you may set-up the *pandal* for the Ganesh festival), the staircases, and in some cases the gateway leading to the complex network or cluster of many *chawls* – are the new geography where home and community is being structured/re-structured. The various incidents described with astute details in *Ravan and Eddie* by Kiran Nagarkar are all enacted in these spaces; the sites for most of the action is detailed in spaces of the verandah, staircases and the shared courtyard.

What also emerges in narratives like this one, and in a short story like *Phoren Soap* by Bhupen Khakkar, is the intense relationships, the intra-personal overlaps between neighbours – the space of the family is overlapped with the space of the neighbours – within the landscape of the building.

One could also discuss here Krishna Baug located at C. P. Tank. The complex is a mini-city with many courtyards, internal lanes, *chawls* that are residential along with wholesale godowns and workshops dealing in paper, etc. including a boy’s hostel. One of the courtyards has a shrine under a large *Peepal* tree. The innermost courtyard has a residential *chawl* and the front of the
boy’s hostel faces this courtyard. The hostel houses Gujarati boys only, when they visit the city to study. The residential chawl was built to house old ladies only; however today whole families have moved in and occupy the houses here. In the middle of this third chowk is a bird-feeder; a house and platform perched on a pole to feed the birds. The bird-feeder maintains the ritual and cosmic order for the residents of Krishna Baug. Residents entrust the bird-feeder with the rather weighty responsibility of maintaining luck and goodness in the Baug. It is believed that any damage to the bird-feeder will bring bad luck and ill-will to the residents of the complex. The health and stability of the bird-feeder, it is believed, will maintain good luck and good days for the people living here. This bird-feeder is in some senses the axis-mundi of Krishna Baug.

This complex geography of the constructed spaces, is negotiated through memory and other such references to living like happiness, safety, hatred, angst, fear, apparitions and so on. Some oral history workshops revealed how memory and imagination played an important role in the way space had transited from being new and ‘alien’ to the ‘always familiar’ landscape. Residents who had now been living for more than 70-90 years in these buildings
imagined the courtyards once being clean and bigger, the air being fresher, allowing people to be healthy and tall (!) An old resident feels safe in this building, although she lives alone, since once when she was attacked by a robber her neighbours ran to her rescue, and also when she is ill, her neighbours take care of her – for which purpose she keeps the door between the neighbouring tenements open always. The construction of the space in certain geography – where besides main doors to rooms, you also have a door direct between you and your neighbours indicates a living pattern of shared intimacy within a certain public-ness. On the other hand a resident narrated how during eclipses, it was mandatory for all residents to follow the rules of purification, etc. Such instances make it clear that the room is not the home only, the whole building is one home – or if one can stretch the argument, the home has limits and extensions. The building as home, and the building as a neighbourhood. The collapse between neighbours, joint-family-type ties, and community members is very versatile and amorphous. The stacked drawers imagined in the construction of a certain building-type has now transformed into city-object. What is this city-object? The gateways and courtyards, interconnecting alleys, shared wells and toilets, overlap a city area – a block, a neighbourhood and the imagined structure of a building. How far do these geographies extend beyond the physical confines of the building, the boundary of facades, or the gateway?

One could conclude this essay here with these set of questions. Especially when vast areas are under the scanner for development, it is important to note some of these aspects of city-areas (neighbourhoods) and their building-objects. It is not the style of construction method that is essential to preserve, it is not about the ideal-imagined community, but it is all about the complex mechanism of space-form where architecture, place and historical processes have collaborated to create city landscapes (buildings and urban fabrics) that need to be understood and encouraged, or at least preserved, even within development programmes, as long as they continue to play a role in the cultural life of cities, societies and histories.
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This text borrows from the essay “The Terrain of Home and-within Urban Neighbourhoods

Endnotes


3. Cornelissen, Hans (ed). *Dwelling as a Figure of Thought*. Amsterdam: Sun Publishers, 2005.


