



Squatter Settlements: The Urban Vernacular?

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Squatter settlements are among those housing patterns which have the most visible reciprocal interactions between user groups and their needs. Their idea of housing is essentially an activity or a process - it's not a static physical object. For them housing is a verb. But, there exists a very little qualitative understanding of these people made places, despite them being the single largest way of housing in urban areas.

On the other hand, the constraints of rigid social structures, climate & limited resources have been identified as key factors of vernacular environments. They have been widely admired for the distinct expression of these forces in their built environments. But urban squatter environments have equally rigid constraints of poverty, so why there has been so little interest in studying the forms of these settlements.

Squatter settlements are often assumed to be the opposite of vernacular environments as vernacular architecture is largely associated with traditional practices and forms. The paper attempts to demonstrate that far from inhabiting separate universes there are many points of commonality between them, and if our definitions are appropriately framed, we may regard much contemporary construction to be a continuation of existing vernacular traditions.

In the paper, rural villages are studied as examples of traditional vernacular while spontaneous settlements in the city represent the modified vernacular. Instead of trying to describe or classify the house forms or materials of both the settlements, the attempt is to find out the similarities in the factors they can be attributed to. These factors are then related to their way of life, social organization, concepts of territoriality, way of handling basic needs, the link between the dwelling and the settlement pattern. Thereby, core elements of vernacular architecture in the frame of reference of the causative factors are identified. Similarly, the aspects resulting in the built environment of squatter settlements are studied. These are then compared, so as to argue the inclusion of slums within the category of vernacular architecture.

KEY WORDS: Squatter settlements, vernacular architecture, slums.