

Housing for Employees of Government and Private Companies

Whether it contributes towards adequate urban development in Bangladesh

Muhammad Najmus Saquib

Architect, Bangladesh

Introduction

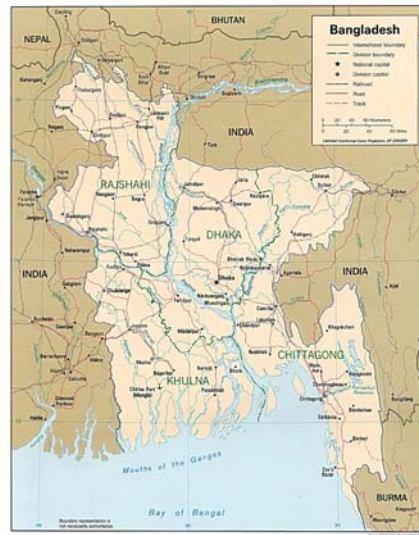


Fig. Political map of Bangladesh

There are millions of people working for the government all over Bangladesh. The idea of providing housing to the employees finds its roots in the colonial past of India as Bangladesh was part of India during that period. When capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, an immediate need was felt for housing all the employees as British wanted their administrative machinery in India to be manned by people strongly committed to British rule and dedicated to their ideology, uninfluenced by local native populace. Many residential colonies were built in New Delhi (new city planned by Lutyen) for the officers and staff. This trend continued even after independence and till today. Government continue to provide rental housing

to their employees posted in various partsof the country during the service period. The house provided by the government is to be vacated by the employee after retirement which is 58 years of age.

These housing are always built on a huge land which is detached from the other part of the neighbourhood by putting a boundary wall. It is a very common idea in the country to build such enclave in and out side of the the town. The country is over populated and the law and order situation is not up to the mark. May be this why the housing areas are built within a boundary wall which separates them physically and socially from the rest. According to my opinion this system has a negative impact on the development process of the town, on the habitans and as a whole on the urbanization process.

There are many different type of such enclaves within and outside of the town. Many institutions were once built on the periphery of the town but due to urban development those are now within the town. Following are the types of such enclaves:

- Many different housings.
- Dhaka residential Model College (with housing for its employees)
- Cantonments etc.

This paper will review the rapid urbanization in Bangladesh and focus on certain aspects of housing for government and private employees.

Background

Bangladesh is a developing country, based on poor economy and lack of national resources. The problem of housing in the country is of serious magnitude. There is an acute shortage of adequate housing, particularly for lower income groups..

Bangladesh, being located in a tropical region has an average temperature of 24 degree to 38 degree centigrade but rain with dusty wind is common and also presence of high humidity, which is almost 80%.

The country is divided into six divisions and each one contains several districts and at present there 64 districts and 460 thanas (police station) for administrative purpose. These are urban centres, which are controlled by municipalities. The capital city Dhaka and the port city Chittagong are main attention for urbanization.

Urban Population Growth & Density

Bangladesh has become most densely settled countries of the world excepting some city states. The population dramatically increased from 55.2 million in 1961 to 111.45 million in 1991. In 1995 the national population was 119.7 million of which 49.44 percent were females and 50.56 percent were males. The gross density of population increased from 345 persons per sq.km to 720 during the period. Excluding 5,890 sq.km of the Sunderban mangrove forest land which are uninhabited and standing water bodies of 1,922 sq.km, the actual land area under prominently human habitation is 139,758 sq.km. The levels of gross density by the habitable land are increased from 395 persons per sq. km in 1961 to 547 in 1974, 643 in 1981, 797 in 1991 and 806 in 1993.

Urbanization

The global trend towards an increasingly urban population seems to be inevitable and will probably continue until the urban population has reached 70-80% in all countries. External factors and internal policies may temporarily speed up or slow down the pace of urbanization, but in the long run they will not make much difference. It is true that the rapid urbanization in poor countries is associated with serious problems. The municipalities are not capable of managing the rapid growth. Planning, land allocation, often illegal, shanty-towns with limited access to basic needs and with environmental conditions that threaten life and health but there must be valid reasons why hundreds of million of people voluntarily move to the urban areas and stay there in spite of all the difficulties. It can be assumed that their reasons are rational.

Over last four decades, a substantial urban population increase has taken place in Bangladesh, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total population. In 1961, the urban population was 2.6 million people, or only 4.8 percent of the total population; at the 1991 population census, the figure reached 22.5 million people or 20.15 percent of the total national population and 14 percent of all females of the country were found living in urban areas. In 1993 projected national population was 23 million. By the year 2001, the urban areas are likely to account for about 25 percent of the national population. As this is the condition of urbanization, the urban designers, town planners, architects and engineers have to be extra watchful towards their responsibilities.

Case Study: Housing for the Staff of Sylhet Gas Fields Limited

General Context

Sylhet Gas Fields Limited is a company of Petrobangla – the government department dealing with the natural gas and petroleum in Bangladesh. There are many such companies of Petrobangla and all these limited companies are governed by Petrobangla.

There are quite a number of gas fields belong to Sylhet Gas Fields Limited. Each field get land by taking lease and establishes the plant.

Every gas field has its own set up near the plant. The department which is responsible for all kind of construction work is called Planning and Development. They are responsible building a campus of their own comprising the office and the housing of its employees. Sylhet Gas Fields Limited at Rashidpur is a very prospective one. It will keep distributing gas for many years to come. As such it was quite evident to have its office and build housing complex for its employees and there by the said project was taken up by the authority.

The site is located ten kilometres away from the nearest small town called Srimangal – a hilly region. The basic services are provided to the employees like school, mosque, club and guest house etc. As the residences are concerned, top ranked officers are provided with bungalows and all other officers and staffs are provided with multistoried i.e 4-5-storied, double loaded flats. As Bangladesh is one of the most densely settled country, people have long accepted the idea of residing in a multistoried building. Though there was a time when people would hesitate to find themselves in flat buildings but due to the prevailing situation in the country people are tuned in a practical way and ever since the sense of comfort, possession and ownership have appeared to the people in different fashion.

Strategy

In Bangladesh housing is never supplied by the state but the government and its agency's employees have an access to housing during the tenure of the service period and the rent of the houses are adjusted with their salary. They build housing units which are let out to them with subsidised rent. The main reasons for providing housing to them in a subsidised rent are:

- Low pay structure which does not allow them to rent house as per their status.
- Service package.
- Incentive
- In remote areas where it is difficult to find houses for the employees.

These are the factors which initiated these agencies to build their own housing.

Generally in Bangladesh the area of the quarters do not depend on the family members. There are employees of different grades like 1st class, 2nd class, 3rd class and so on. The lower the grade gets, the smaller the areas become. So in reality the lower grade employees have bigger families but they are the ones allotted with the smaller units and naturally their living conditions remain very poor but the only consolation is they have the houses. There are some staff quarters in Dhaka where it is very difficult to live. The biggest room size is 8'-6" x 9'-6" which is no way in conformity with the minimum standard. But in our case we have tried to make it more convenient.

Actors

In Bangladesh the biggest construction agency is a government department called Public Works Department (PWD). Most of the government projects are built by them while the only government architectural body called Department of Architecture designs these projects. Other projects are often designed by the private consultants and constructed by the private contractors which is applied to our project. Along with these contractors many sub-contractors are also get involved in these type of projects. In Sylhet Gas Fields Limited the department involved in

dealing with any kind of project is called Planning and Development. This department comprises with engineers, draught persons and quantity surveyors.

In capital the authority which approves the design is called RAJUK (Capital Improvement Authority) and in most other towns it is approved by the municipalities. These are the authorities responsible for inspecting the construction whether they are in conformity with the design. Their responsibilities are of great importance as violation of by laws are very often observed.

The most painful part of the process is the residents have no say about their requirement. The residents seldom have any role in the whole process of the housing. Different types of houses are designed depending on the grade of the employees and the people just move in.

Design Consideration

Our concept of master plan and architectural design has been arrived after the study of the following:

1. SGFL's requirement.
2. Site (Surrounding, topography)
3. Circulation
4. Space requirement
5. Function and activities pattern
6. Services and utilities
7. Structural system
8. Electrical and mechanical system
9. Environmental and climatic control
10. Cost estimate

Which finally led to the preparation of the master plan and architectural design.

Keeping in view the above goals and all other relevant requirement the master plan of the of housing complex and the architectural design-drawing of different buildings and the landscape design have been prepared.

Master Plan

An organized housing contributes significantly to the town development. In our case the housing is almost 10 km. away from the nearest small town Srimangal which suffers from different problems related to urbanization. It is quite evident that a housing expedites the infrastructure development process thereby the whole area enjoys the benefit of this such as the road, sewerage, electricity, water and gas etc. On the contrary in our case the campus is far away from the town and it has all the infrastructural support but it is meant for number of people.

In preparing the master plan the site has been developed to conceptual areas as basically recommended for the preparation of master plan. The site has been conceived as two distinct areas having different character and activities:

- General recreational area
- Residential area

These areas have been designed to ensure the optimum and compatible use of land available in the site.

The recreational area and residential areas have been arranged in the master plan in such a manner so that the proposed arrangement in no way violates the space requirements, optimum land use and general safety regulations.

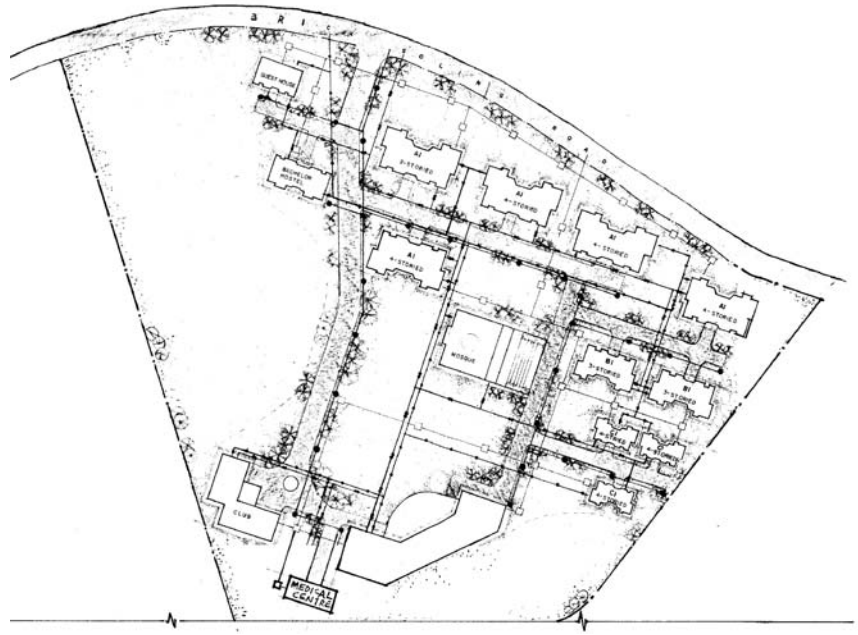


Fig. 2 Master plan

According to JFC Turner, the value of a house is what it does for the people, rather than what it is. So no matter how well the house is built and equipped, it has to contribute significantly to meet its users needs. In our case study the housing area is in a remote area which is far away from the urban life. In Bangladesh problem of transport and traffic is of serious magnitude which is going to cause immense trouble to its habitants.

Architectural Design

Architecture is a balance of function, aesthetic and economy. The concept of architecture is based on attaining this balance at a higher level of use of function, aesthetic and economy.

Planning and designing of any project involves the accurate and proper understanding of functional interdependence, the aesthetic and the financial implications.

The architectural design of various structures of Housing Complex had been conceived with the identification of the following goals:

1. To ensure the optimum and compatible use of land,
2. To provide logical and efficient accommodation for housing complex .
3. To develop and attain a unique compatible environment in the whole of the complex.
4. To achieve the operational aims of Housing complex and suit financial limitation of the company.

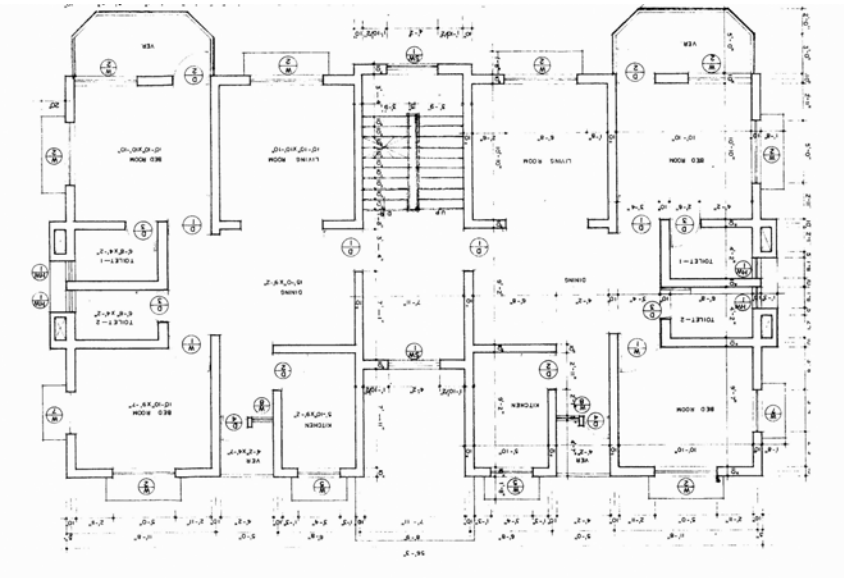


Fig. 3 Typical floor plan of a staff quarter.

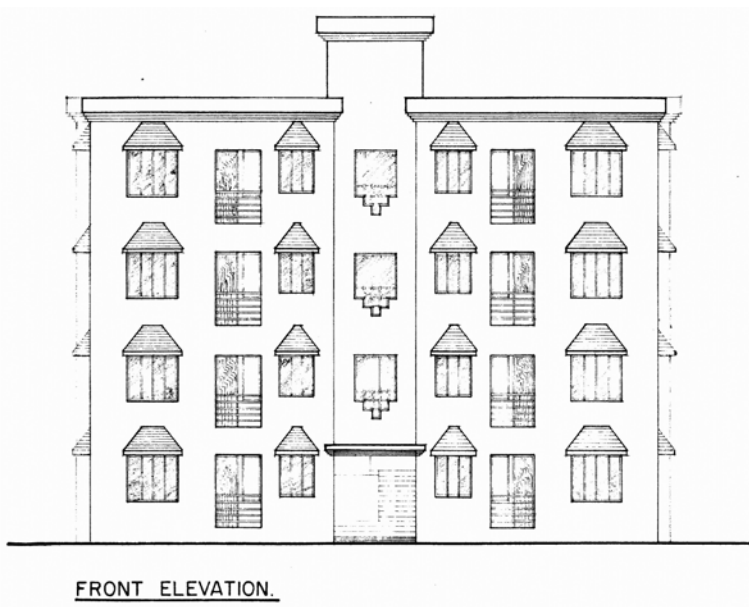


fig. 4 Elevation of a staff quarter.

Social and Economic Aspects

People living in a housing of this kind are segregated from the general people of the country. The real essence of urban life is always missing in a campus life. In Bangladesh the biggest problem in ones life is a job and the house. Since the employees have both, they seldom think about the consequences and keep existing rather than living. Children growing up within these often fail to cope up with the outside world, which is the usual and the real picture of the country. The office and housing enclave looks very tidy, without crowd and fumes from the vehicles while the outside world is full of hue and cry, so these two different scenarios create a psychological gap between these two groups creating a social imbalance. Campuses far away from a town make its occupants feel very much isolated which bears a psychological impact on them.

It is a pity that the employees have to vacate the house on their retirement where they lived most of their lifetime. As we know house is not mere a shelter, it is an integral part of one's life as we no longer consider house as noun but as verb. This is quite evident that one takes more care of the house when it is owned than the one which is not. Without sense of ownership it is difficult to do whole heartedly.

The low income group of people are fortunate to have a job in an organization where the housing is guaranteed. Naturally these employees along with their family members get accustomed with a better life condition. But the misery starts when these people retire from service. Most of the people from the low-income group hail from the rural areas. So once they retire from their services they have to go back to the villages. This return is never expected because over the years they get accustomed to the urban life attaining a certain level of living standard. Very often their children remain students during their retirement so they may have to give up their studies as the family moves to the village. Living all their lives in a well-built campus with many kinds of amenities, it becomes very difficult for them to accept the reality.

Problems

Infrastructure

Had the housing been constructed in the town, the over all infrastructure development would take place or at least it would initiate the process. There by many other would be benefited out of that and it would help in the process of urban development.

Transport And Traffic

There are other traffic problem in case of such housing and other institutions which are built within the town. As these enclaves are often built on a huge area of land in the centre of the town, the roads need to be constructed by passing the enclave as it is prohibited to pass through, thus the traffic problem emerges. Due to this by pass distance from one place to other gets more and the traffic gets tougher.

Problem of Low Income Group

As discussed before these people face difficulties to find a suitable house soon after they retire from their services, as there is no such system to ensure their housing after they retire from their services.

Social and Psychological Impact

The people living in this housing are isolated from rest of the locality. As such their social life is limited within the compound. Most of them spend the prime time of their lives in a place like this away from their relatives, friends and so.

There are other problems as their settlement is protected from the rest, which separates them from the general people and there by draws a line between the citizens. As such these people bear a psychological impact both for living an isolated life and for being separated from the general people of the country.

Sense of Ownership

As we know house is one of the most precious belongings in ones life. House is no longer a cover on the head but housing is a process. As such possession of house in ones life is of much importance. The lower income group enjoy housing facility during their service time, which would never belong to them. As such the sense of ownership never grows in them and all their life they suffer from disparity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Housing for government and private organizations should be constructed on such a location so that it becomes an integral part of the town sharing the infrastructure support with the people around the housing. It is not necessary to accommodate a large number of employees at the same place; they could be distributed according to the availability of land so as to avoid all the adversities of such type of settlements as stated above.

While dealing with a housing project one has to bear a lesson in mind that housing cannot and should not be treated as an isolated problem, but rather as part of all aspects of society as a whole.

As it is explained that the low income government and private staffs enjoy housing facility during their service period and on the retirement they simply vacate the house and most of them go back to the villages. But a real help would be if the organization would give them loan so that they could have their own house. This would be a real incentive against their life-time service. Though there exists a provision of giving loan to the employees against their provident fund. But in practical it is not in large practice, as the lower income group does not even possess land. The government sometimes took schemes to targeted people could not get the land. It can be mentioned that in Bangladesh 30% that the targeted people get the land. Moreover the allotted plots are not sufficient enough to meet the need so this has to be increased substantially to ensure more balanced distribution. These low cost plots can be developed in the suburban areas along with the development of the transport system. The only state run financial institution House Building Finance Corporation which is good for upper middle income and above group should take up some policies to facilitate this under privileged group by keeping the interest rate within the reach of these people.

References

- Government of Bangladesh
1996 Bangladesh National Report on UN Conference on Human Settlements(Habitat II) Istanbul, Turkey.
- S. Chattopadhyay
2000 The Turner/ Burgess *et al* Debate on The Concept of Housing, lecture at HDM, Lund University, Sweden
- Indu Choudhury
1998 Housing Strategy for Central Government Employees in India. Architecture and Development Compendium, LCHS, Lund University, Sweden.
- Landaeta Graciela
1994 Strategies for Low-income Housing.
- Sida
1995 Towards an Urban World.