

# Appraising the Real Beauty in Architecture

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**Abstract** - Architecture is the art of designing a building making it more aesthetically pleasant, adding functionality to the building, most importantly developing a sense of space in the building. While beauty is defined as a thing which we can not only see or touch but can also feel. Perception can make beautiful things more beautiful. A building can be ten times more attractive if it is aesthetically pleasant, construction wise, stable, functional, environment friendly and most importantly, creates a sense of space. In today's world, human perception is restricted only to two points, i.e., see and touch and same is applicable to architecture. As a result, the aesthetic part is appreciated and the functional part somewhere gets ignored, which indirectly loses the actual beauty by losing the sense of space of the building. Thus, the research will reflect new understanding and process of perception towards architectural beauty by comparing buildings under three criteria that are aesthetic, function, and sense of space. Hence, the concept of forms following function can be related to this perception of beauty and can be better understood through this research.

**Index Terms** - Human Perception, Beauty, Sense of space, Architecture.

## INTRODUCTION

“Beauty is the promise of happiness”

As Stendhal, the 19th century French writer, wrote, “Beauty is the promise of happiness.” And happiness is one of our fundamental human needs. (AAMODT, 2017) Every building is unique with its own impact on people. You may find some buildings welcoming in nature while others aren't. It's related to the building design and its beauty. How to define one is beautiful and the other is ugly. Alison Lurie explains in her book: *The Language of Houses: How Buildings Speak to Us*. She writes about how architecture has its emotional influence on human beings. Beauty of the building can give us the feeling of happiness at one point and at the other point it can be miserable or depressing if it is not constructed properly. (Siltanen, 2017) The first sight when viewing a building makes us analyze the building's façade beauty more with its aesthetic factors like material, shape, color and texture and sometimes by the function it performs when the walking distance is less as compared to others. The most important factor which we usually forget is the sense of space which we could recognize but it has a strong impact on human beings as the space is positive, friendly, sad, boring, exciting, etc. But the definition of these factors and beauty can change with time. For example in the early era, buildings with decorative elements and multi-color might seem to be beautiful somewhere but nowadays Simplicity with minimum color and texture is termed as beautiful. The balcony at some place might look as dead while at next building it might feel exciting. The style and beauty changes with time, but there are some buildings whose beauty remains constant and valuable Example: Taj mahal, Wada's, forts and lastly the chawls. Its irony to say chawls as beautiful as it is mostly terms as ugly with lot of density trying to fit into a single room, with common bathroom and toilet majorly made for the migrants. So how chawls can be beautiful and if not how can it be converted to beautiful. Hence the paper is trying to set a different lenses through which beauty of the building can be measure and for that traditional Wada's, modern apartments and chawl will be compare under three parameters that are Function, aesthetic and sense of space.

## STUDY OF SPACE:

### A. *Function*

Functionalism is the architecture principle based on the purpose and function of the building and its design. It's very important to have an understanding about the functional requirement of the project and design accordingly to make it a workable design. There are different functions of the building. For example, houses are for living, offices are for working, Institutes are for getting educated, shops are for selling goods, etc. There are buildings designs for multiple functions. For example, malls have restaurants, offices, shops, etc. When the project satisfies all the needs along with aesthetically and emotionally (sense of space) the project can be said to be a functionally successful project. When the building functionally works well for the purpose it is made there won't be any issue recognized, but if the building doesn't satisfy the functionality for which it was created then it will be hard in terms of economy to correct the functionality of the building. It is beautiful when a building performs the function for which it is made for but it is more beautiful when a building gets transformed into several functions as per the requirement. For example; if a person living in a Wada or modern apartment has each space dedicated for a particular function, while in case of chawl, a single 10 x 10 room a single space can perform several functions of different rooms. Same goes with the passage which connects various houses together, but how about the same passage getting converted into social interactive space, relaxing space, studying space, etc. So the real beauty lies in satisfying or adding the function to the place for which it is created; otherwise if the building fails in performing the function for which it is made it can be termed as ugly though it may look aesthetically pleasant. Also it's amazing to see the comparison in terms of functional performance of SRA buildings with chawl. We can find the floor area and the occupant density is the same in both the patterns. But the chawl performs more cross ventilation by the presence of large openings as compared to the SRA building (figure 1). Lack of buffer or transitional spaces in the SRA restrict the growth of urban community and its interaction. Thus for low cost functional housing chawls typology can work successfully.



Figure 2: Difference between (a) chawl, (b) wad, and (c) apartment plans

## B. Aesthetics:

Aesthetics is the other principle which is considered in architecture. It is derived from the Greek word 'aisthetikos', which refers to sensory perception and understanding or sensuous knowledge (Aesthetics and architecture, 2020). As aesthetics concerns an appreciation of beauty, it is influenced by the subjective taste of an individual and it can change with time. There are few buildings whose beauty amongst the people remains constant and this is possible due to the application of proper material and principles of architecture on the building. Some of the architectural principles which help in enhancing the aesthetic of the building are shape, size, texture, color, balance, unity, movement, emphasis, contrast, symmetry, proportion, space, alignment, pattern, decoration, culture and context. It also depends on the building design and material used for the same (Sandak, n.d.). Also there might be the possibility of getting decay or attack of fungi on it or on any other building element which is not made of the suitable material according to the climate. Glass façade occupies the major elevation part of the building to enhance the beauty of the building. But what about the negative impact it is loading on the environment by adding AC, Lights and many other gadgets to the building to control the light and ventilation of the building. Also there is less scope to interact with nature in such a type of façade. On the other hand if we provide locally available material and design according to the climate with more interactive spaces and nature friendly then the building will automatically look beautiful, it doesn't need to have a costly material façade to enhance the beauty. Hence as we learn that the beauty lies in being natural the same applies with the building. In case of chawls, during any festivals people come together and celebrate each festival in harmony, which is very uncommon to see in today's world. Example: uniformly lined with lanterns during Diwali; Christmas trees are set up in the courtyards and decorated every Christmas; during Eid, the Islamic residents distribute sweets and delicious biryani to all, etc.

## C. Sense of space

The sense of space within the reality of any building is a new concept wherever architecture is concerned. But it is essentially an ancient principle just the same and is not only necessary now but implied by the ideal of democracy itself. F. L. Wright. It is the most important principle of architecture but it generally gets ignored in the modern era as people are more focusing on the aesthetical and functional value but somewhere forget the emotional value of the space. The sense of space is related to the emotional value and attachment of the human being with that space. We get peace in the religious building when we visit them as the space is created in such a manner that it gives the positive vibes to the devotee. Similarly, if we go to the hospital or police station, a sense of negativity is observed there. It's not important for a house to be big to get a good sense of space; even a small house can be beautiful or happy if the spaces are carved out in an efficient way. We can observe that some buildings are welcoming while others are not. Every building and architecture can have its own positive or negative impact. You can feel on the first visit that some of the buildings look happy, terrified, or angry. Architecture expresses the emotion present within us.

**Chawl-** In case of chawl, they have strong influence of colonial and Marathi *Wada* style of architecture that's evident in the design of these chawl. Chawls boasted a very high density, almost 500 people per acre, thus becoming synonymous with high density social housing (shiva, 2017). These even today stand as the most viable form of social housing in the city. The chawl mainly consists of three factors : the Room, courtyard and the corridor. Most chawls ran around a modest courtyard, which was a communal space used to clean and dry clothes and vessels, celebrate festivals, and hold wedding functions or get-togethers for the amicable residents. The courtyard became extremely important social enablers, where festivals, religious functions as well as daily activities of kids such as playing cricket; discussion of women's takes place.

Due to its placement and availability in various sizes, it has created interest in environmental performance. The characteristic features of a chawl could easily be their long corridors that serve as key access points for the opening, where the main stairwell occurs and common sanitary facilities are located. It can sometimes act as an extension of the living room. The corridor precedes the flats and forms the façade of the structure. The gallery is also a social space and has witnessed people of all castes, creeds, religions, and races interact in utter harmony. These all act as transitional spaces as they are neither outdoors or indoors, serving as a bridge from the outside environment to the inside. Through the course of history, transition spaces have found themselves existing in plurality, where their functions have been adaptable due to their ability to mediate between a relatively more controlled interior with less controllable outdoor space. Chawl typology is universally followed all over the world in the form of the same social ethos, others demonstrating the similar usage of open spaces. The pedregulho in Rio resembles the chawl greatly with its winding corridors that aim to provide workers with a communal space. (Shiva, 2017)



Figure 3: Façade of Chawl

**Apartments:** It is a modern concept building in which many flats form an apartment. It mostly formed in a self-centered manner. People in the urban area, busy in their life, don't even know the neighbors, just come home for rest and continue the same routine, prefer to live in a flat. Social bonding is lacking in the apartment. What will we experience in a house with prison-like windows, stained carpet tiles and plastic curtains?" asks de Botton. (Siltanen, 2017) Obviously, we would feel disgust and repulsion. Depression and despair starts to take control. Or at least with people who are sensitive and perceptive towards their surroundings. This is how we may feel in the apartment. Also in apartments, builder profit planning is usually done and more focus is given to the aesthetic part of the building. As a result, Most of the people cannot afford to live in the most beautiful buildings. An average house always has something mistaken: the kitchen is too small, there are not enough closets, the floor is the wrong material, and the tiles in the bathroom are the wrong color. It is important to have some blindness to our environment. We can feel the passages connecting to various places are just dead space leading towards the shut doors. No interaction or interesting activities take place in this passage. Same goes with the staircase as people usually prefer the lift to go upstairs.



Figure: Façade of Apartments

**Wadas:** The 18th century heralded the creation of beautifully designed and decorated mansions known as Wadas, which reflected the aesthetic achievements of Maratha architecture. (Sovani, 2011) Their creative use of functional spaces set them apart, giving them a Spartan yet elaborate structural elegance. The main intention of providing a central courtyard was to provide light and ventilation to the inner parts of buildings, which had thick walls with very few openings. Accordingly, each compartment of any Wada was positioned according to importance, used for a specific purpose and suitably named. Usually, the Phadacha Chowk, which was the front or entrance courtyard, was used for official administrative purposes whereas Khasgicha Chowk, which was the inner or rear courtyard, was a private, domestic space. Usually, the visitors of a respected status were seated in this space. Verandas on either side of the courtyard were known as sopa. Around the main courtyard they were called 'Kacheriche Sope' and used by the clerks, accountants, and office assistants. (Sovani, 2011) Sopa spaces around the inner or rear courtyard were for the purposes of household activities, such as dining, storing, milling, etc. Thus the spaces in the courtyard, verandas and passages were the one where the family members or outsiders used to have interaction and the same spaces were acting as transitional spaces at various occasions.





Figure: Façade of Wada

#### Comparative study:

	Chawl	Wada	Apartment
<b>Size</b>	120-150 ft.	3000-5000 ft.	600-1200 ft.
<b>Activities</b>	Cooking, relaxing, studying, and sleeping.	cooking, relaxing, studying, sleeping, bathing, office, social interaction	cooking, Relaxing, studying, sleeping, bathing.
<b>No. of Family Members</b>	6 to 8	10 to 30	2 to 5
<b>Connecting Passage</b>	Have multiple functions.	Have multiple functions.	Has a single function.
<b>Staircase</b>	Act as a medium to connect the floor	Act as a medium to connect the floor	Act as a medium to connect the floor
<b>Courtyard</b>	Used for social interaction	Used for private and public gathering, fountains are usually present	Used for social gathering
<b>Façade analysis</b>			
<b>Number of floors</b>	2 to 5 floors	2 to 5 floors	more than 2 floor
<b>Connecting Passage</b>	caters only from one side	caters only from one side and some both side	caters from both side
<b>Staircase</b>	usually semi open and usually become the part of the elevation	It's not the part of the elevation	It's not the part of elevation
<b>Material used</b>	Locally available and affordable materials are preferred. Wood, stone and brick are mostly used	Locally available high quality materials are preferred. Wood, stone, marble and brick are mostly used	Focus is given on modern and heavy material .Affordability is not the criteria, neither is the grandness. Based on builders profit and something different from other projects. Mostly used glass is preferred.
<b>Aesthetical features</b>	Overall exposure of building material adds beauty to the building. Example: The canopy, railing, columns, door, windows, staircase, etc. It has a rusty but appealing look.	The grand façade and entrance. The decorative elements like pillar, wall niches, decorative windows, brackets, lanterns, etc. More focus is given to make it look grand.	It changes from building to building, somewhere a balcony adds beauty, somewhere windows, chajjas, projections, etc.

#### Findings and Conclusion:

The paper was an attempt to look over the beauty of the building with different angles. It corresponds to a complex set of relationships between building function, aesthetic and sense of space. This correspondence between the relationships will lead towards achieving the real beauty of a building. As the beauty of a building cannot be independently defined only through function or aesthetic or sense of space but it needs to have balance between these three factors, which will create harmony in the building. The result of the same can be seen in the below table where the three typologies are compared under these three factors and the result was expected in the form of balance and beauty of the building.

Table 1 Comparing Building with factors

Typology	functional		aesthetic		Sense of space		Beauty of the building	
	Affordability	Activities performed	Material affordability	Overall appearance	Feeling emotional bond	Focus on natural Sources.	Total	Real Beauty
Wada	1	2	2	3	3	3	14	Medium
Chawl	3	3	3	2	3	2	16	More
Modern apart.	2	1	2	3	1	1	10	Less

Hence, from the table we can conclude that, Chawl planning with some upgrades such as personal toilets to each house and lift; if the chawl is increasing in height can become one of the best examples in today's world to be followed. As efficiently working on the requirement and providing more facilities within the same area is possible in such typology. Also the other benefit of Chawls which are acting as highly communal spaces has resulted in the conception of a very unique and robust chawl culture, and hence these habitats have witnessed an assortment of festivals being celebrated. It's unbelievable that chawls are inhabited with a large number of nuclear families- it's actually one massive joint family that lights up these extraordinary dwellings and that's the main thing which makes the building and its environment happier and beautiful and that's where the real beauty of the building is achieved.

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