

*As evidence of the quality of each culture, architecture must rank as an art. In contrasting styles, above, the bush-buts of the Cameroons and at left, a modern town in Arizona, USA, where these upper class dwellings are linked to a big central square, prove that at either end of the economic spectrum, the ways in which people adapt their buildings to climate and available materials can be aesthetically pleasing.*

## HOUSING

A U.N. study entitled 'World Housing Survey' shows that 51% of the world's population will be in urban areas within the next two decades. In contrast today only 39% of the world's population are in urban areas whilst in 1920 only 19% lived in towns and cities.

According to the survey more than one billion people live in sub-standard housing and this situation is going to worsen in the years to come specially in the developing world. The basic difficulties in housing for the poor are in providing sanitary facilities and sufficient space. This will be aggravated when during this decade for the first time more cities with a population over a million will be located in developing countries than those of developed countries.

Thus in 1950 over 50 cities with a million inhabitants, having a population of 130 million, existed in the developed regions whilst 25 cities with a population of 50 million existed in the developing world. In contrast by 1985 there will be 126 "million population cities" with 340 million inhabitants in the developed regions, whilst 147 "million population cities" with 465 million people will exist in the developing areas.

Despite several efforts by their governments, squatter settlements have continued to grow in size and number in the developing countries. The dimensions of this problem in Sri Lanka and some possible solutions are highlighted in the review on the pages that follow.

# Housing in Sri Lanka

Housing, like food and clothing is one of man's basic needs. Like most developing countries Sri Lanka has a housing problem, the solution of which, must be compatible with conditions that exist due to a lack of resources both local and foreign, and the high level of unemployment.

In Sri Lanka, as in most of the developing world, the problem of housing manifests itself in its most acute form in the emergence of squatter settlements or slums in the urban centres. In these Third World cities many residents live in substandard houses, among heavily congested dwelling units, lacking in water supplies and elementary sanitary conditions. Several of these cities today also reflect the grossly unequal distribution of the world's wealth. Within the very shadow of "ideal" homes with all the comforts and gadgetry of twentieth century upper class living dwell hapless families in primitive hovels deprived of even their most basic needs of food and clothing. One UN estimate places about half the total population

of Asia, Africa and Latin America as either homeless or living in accommodation that constitutes health hazards.

## The Housing Problem

Till recently not only the public, even the experts thought of housing as the housing unit. However, this view has now changed and housing is more broadly defined as the living environment. Hence, housing consists not only of the living units, but includes also the support facilities, which comprise community, commercial, and recreational facilities.

It is possible to define a "Housing Problem" as a physical problem measured in some quantitative form based on a given set of standards, together with a social problem that results due to incompatibility of the chosen set of standards in relation to the socio economic status and cultural background of the population.

Based on the above concept we are faced with the problem of setting realistic norms for the urban, rural

and estate sectors of Sri Lanka, in order to assess the problem in some quantitative form.

Briefly therefore *problem identification* in a purely physical form lies in choosing a set of standards that are socio-economically and culturally acceptable to the majority of the people and not to the planners, as a norm, thus eliminating the social component of the problem.

## Urban Housing

From an overall look at urban housing in Sri Lanka, reasonable norms would include:

- (1) An owned housing unit per household,
- (2) The acceptance of permanent houses less than 50 years old,
- (3) An average occupancy rate of not more than three persons per habitable room,
- (4) Portable water supply and pipe-borne sewage disposal and
- (5) The provision of basic community, commercial and recreational facilities.

TABLE I  
HOUSING REQUIREMENTS IN SRI LANKA 1976—2001

Description	URBAN			RURAL			SRI LANKA (Total)		
	1976 (23%)	1986 (26%)	2001 (30%)	1976	1986	2001	1976	1986	2001
1. a) Population (in '000) ...	3,174	4,164	5,760	10,626	11,851	13,230	13,800	16,015	18,900
b) Household size ...	6.2	6.0	5.6	5.6	5.55	5.5	(5.73)	(5.66)	(5.53)
c) Housing requirements = (a)/ (b) (in '000) ...	512	694	1013	1898	2135	2405	2410	2829	3418
2. Less present stock ('000) ...	314	314	314	2100	2100	2414	2414	2414	2414
Urban: Permanent Rural: Perm. + Semi-perm.									
3. Balance required ('000) ...	198	380	699	-202	35	305	-4	415	1004
4. Add obsolete houses ('000) ...	46	82	136	394	456	1533	440	538	1669
Urban: Perm., 50 yrs. old Rural: Perm., 50 yrs. old Semi-perm., 30 yrs. old									
5. Total Req. (in '000) ...	244	462	835	192	491	1838	436	953	2673
6. Rate of construction Reqd. per annum, 1976-2001 Rate per 1000		33,400			73,500			106,900	
7. Rate from 1963 - 1971/a.m. ...		(3.16)			(7.53)			(6.62)	
Urban-Perm. Rural - Perm. and Semi-perm. per 1000									
8. Shortfall to be bridged/annum/ 1000 population		(4.32)			-(0.37)			-(0.08)	

The lack of community, commercial and recreational facilities are represented clearly by the social problems emanating from the slums and shanties in the urban sector. One cannot measure these facilities by input-oriented indicators, but one can measure them in terms of output-oriented indicators, such as crime rate, juvenile delinquency, education levels etc. These represent a social segregation of the depressed sector of the urban population.

In qualitative terms, the urban housing problem is one of slums, shanties, social problems and segregation as described in the Boxes on pages 5, 6 and 8.

### Rural Housing

Rural housing has to be viewed in an entirely different context to urban housing, due to the contrasting physical conditions of the sectors, socio-economic status and cultural background of the people. Hence, the norms applicable will be entirely different.

A set of acceptable norms may be:

- (1) A house owned by every household,
- (2) (a) The acceptance of permanent houses less than 50 years old, and  
(b) The acceptance of semi-permanent houses less than 30 years old,
- (3) Due to the low densities in the rural areas, water supply may be from wells, tanks, streams etc.
- (4) Again due to the low densities some simple form of sewage disposal may be acceptable. One may even consider the use of surrounding jungle as an acceptable form, when one considers the fact that the Chinese divert raw sewage to fertilize their fields and,
- (5) The provision of community, commercial, and recreational facilities need be simple and located only in villages, since the pressures of high density urban living are totally absent in the rural areas.

Based on the above norms and data from the 1971 housing census, we

find that hardly any house consists of more than one household.

Accepting semi-permanent housing, there appears to be an excess in 1976 rather than a backlog. Taking into consideration the growth of rural population from 10,626,000 in 1976 to 13,230,000 in 2001, with a corresponding size of 5.6 in 1976 and 5.5 in 2001, the present rate of construction appears to be more than adequate. (See Table 1 for details).

Even if 3 persons per habitable room is considered as a norm for the

rural sector only 34.4% of housing units are overcrowded. This norm is however not meaningful, since life in the rural sector is more outside the house, and the room is mainly meant for safeguarding ones possessions. Hence even 4 or 5 persons per habitable room may be acceptable.

From the census (1971) we see that the rural sector has no serious problem as regards water supply, since over 93% obtain water within the norms specified.

### THE SLUMS OF COLOMBO CITY

Slave Island is situated within half a mile of the heart of the City of Colombo and it contains some of the worst slums in the whole of the island. The occupants of the slums have meagre incomes and live in highly congested, insanitary conditions, made worse by industrial pollution and heavy traffic on roads through the area. They live a day-to-day existence with households here having to spend nearly 80% of their income on food, the balance being spent on fuel for cooking and lighting and clothing, with little left for other essential items.

Nevertheless, the majority of the people live in the area by choice. Any suggestion of alternative housing, outside the city, however attractive it may be, is rejected by the average slum dweller. The main reason is that the city provides a means of livelihood for the slum dweller, with its need for casual workers and service em-

ployees of all kinds, and opportunities for making a living in so many different ways.

The intolerable living conditions under which most families live are illustrated by this example taken from a recent survey in the area. The dwelling is part of a row of similar houses constructed of masonry and with a tiled roof. Lack of maintenance and intensive use over the long life of the building have resulted in it falling into a dilapidated condition. The total area is 240 square feet and this is divided into two rooms, each room is occupied by one family. Light and ventilation are only obtained through the doors and the lattice work in the front wall. Five people live in one of the rooms. The eldest person in the household is a grandmother of 68. She has two unmarried sons, aged 20 and 28 and two grandchildren living with her. The two sons are employed as servants and earn a total of Rs. 120 per month, out of which the family spends Rs. 90 on food. The grandmother has been living in the same room for the last 28 years.



*In Sri Lanka, as in most developing countries, the problems of housing manifest themselves in their most acute form, as shown here, in the emergence of slums in the overcrowded cities*

Though 41.5% of rural households have no toilets, if we accept use of the surrounding jungle areas, then there is no problem, since the norm suggested, is what the people have developed. After all if they needed a toilet, a pit latrine could have been built at very little cost.

The housing census of 1971 revealed that 90% of urban households lived in a separate housing unit, while

the balance 10% constituted two or more households. This indicates that if we assume that 5% live in annexes with no separate assessment number, and that all housing units are of an acceptable standard, then the present stock must be increased by 5% to relieve involuntary overcrowding.

An estimate of Sri Lanka's population in 1976 of 13,800,000 growing to 18,900,000 in 2001, of which the

urban population is estimated at 23% in 1976 increasing to 30% in 2001, leads to an urban population of 3,174,000 in 1976 increasing to 5,760,000 in 2001. Household size is estimated at 6.2 in 1976 and estimated to decrease slowly to 5.6 in 2001. Based on the above data Sri Lanka's urban housing requirements increase from 512,000 in 1976 to 1,013,000 in 2001.

### A POSITIVE LOOK AT THE SHANTY PROBLEM

What value judgements do we use to identify an area as a 'shanty town'? How do these values influence us when seeking a solution to the problem?

In the eyes of most people, 'shanty towns' are areas where temporary shacks provide minimal shelter for the poorest of the city. They are characterised by overcrowded, insanitary conditions and are inhabited by 'bad' characters. This negative attitude towards the shanties is essentially due to our western influence. We judge housing by imported standards, and condemn shanty towns altogether, deciding that the only 'solution' is complete eradication. Projects and programmes are launched with the fashionable phrase, 'shanty clearance'. The proposals are often for houses based on western standards which are not in keeping with the socio-economic and cultural patterns of the people and are far too expensive. In contrast, shanty dwellers consider their shanty their home and the area an integrated community.

Some people hold the view that the shanty dwellers are an unwanted group in the city who do not contribute to the economy but consume a large share of its services and the best solution is re-location in the rural areas. Can one imagine Colombo without any vegetable vendors, gram sellers, betel sellers, cobblers or casual labourers? These people have to be in the city for their employment and the city needs them to run its services.

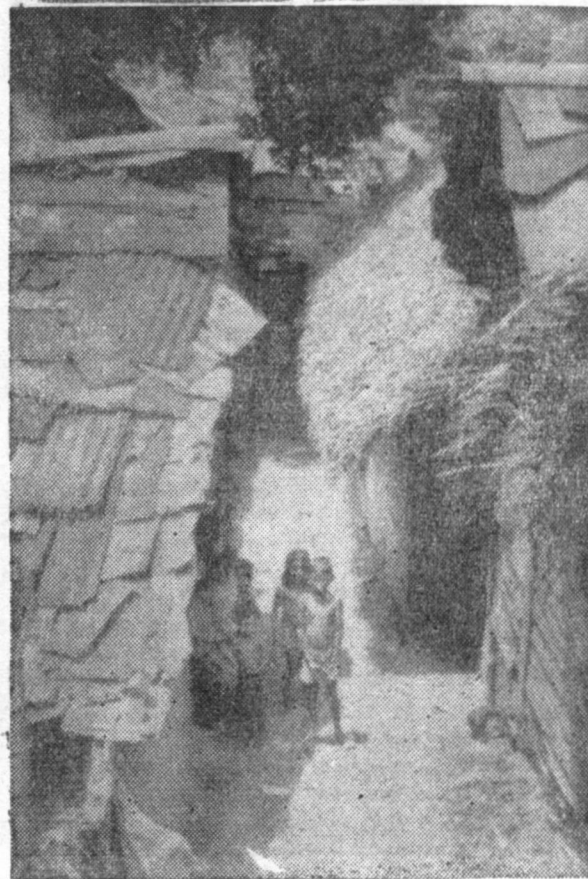
The above observations are based on the results of a study carried out in Henamulla Camp, a well established shanty town. The original families came from burnt-out houses at Ratnam Park who took refuge in the buildings of the abandoned army camp in 1951. They were joined by families whose homes had been flooded-out and later the camp became a general settlement place for families who had nowhere else to go. Today there are approximately 3200 people in 530 households living on the 7.7 acres of land. This represents a density of over 400 persons per acre, with people housed in single storey buildings.

Approximately 90% of the households living on the camp had previously lived in

or near Colombo. About 40% of the households are earning less than Rs. 200 per month and 45% earn between Rs. 200 and Rs. 400 per month. The households in the lowest income group can only afford to pay up to Rs. 15 per month for housing, those earning between Rs. 200 and Rs. 400 per month can pay up to Rs. 25 per month and those in the higher income group can pay up to Rs. 35 per month. The study also showed that as household income rose, so did household size and therefore per capita incomes only increased marginally. 60% of the wage earners were either self employed or

were casual labourers and therefore formed part of the huge 'informal sector' of employment. For the self-employed, the shanty is their place of work. They prepare food to sell on the streets, wrap 'beedi', make papadam or are engaged in various forms of small industry. In order to supplement their income and diet they also rear chickens and goats.

We now need to take a second look at the shanty problem, forget shanty clearance programmes and look at positive, realistic and user-orientated ways of improving these areas.



*Typical shanties. In the eyes of most people, 'shanty towns' are characterised by overcrowded, insanitary conditions and are inhabited by 'bad' characters. They are made up of people who migrated to the cities in the hope of finding work, and who were ashamed to return to their villages when they could not find it. This is a negative view of the 'shanty town'. There is a need to look at this problem in a more positive and realistic way.*

*The common factors in most shanty dwellings are overcrowding, general dilapidation, any available building material and make-shift construction. Urban renewal schemes often miss the point that the poor can only afford to live in such conditions, as this family in the picture.*

Taking into account the present usable stock and the past rate of construction, it appears that housing construction must be doubled between 1976 and 2001 if a solution to the urban housing problem is to be found. (See Table 1 for details).

In addition the 1971 census revealed that 41.8% of households had an occupancy rate of over 3 persons per habitable room, indicating the need to increase the number of rooms in about half the existing stock.

Pipe borne water supply is available to only 45.3% of urban households while about 19% have no toilet facilities at all be it flush, water-seal, bucket or pit.

The 1971 census also indicated that 63.1% of houses were rented, these were mainly tenements. This indicates that two-thirds of the population are socially segregated from the third who live in their own houses, while the ideal state would be one where every household owned its own house.

### Some Facts on Estate Housing

Estate housing has come to the forefront in recent times. Special investigations have been done and many reports written.

However, from a broad point of view the physical concept of estate housing is like a typical urban slum in a rural setting.

Occupancy is at the average rate of one housing unit per household while the occupancy rate of about 54% of the households are over 3 persons per habitable room. This is expected since the typical estate line has only one room for a house.

Water supply is not a serious problem, since most estates have adequate water supply. Sewage disposal on the other hand is better than the rural sector as only 13% of households have no toilet facilities. (See Box 3 for a qualitative description of Estate Housing).

### An Overall View of Sri Lanka's Housing Problem

The foregoing facts lead us to conclude broadly that:

- (1) Sri Lanka's housing problem is mainly an urban one, depicted in the form of shanties and slums

from a physical point of view, and segregation from a socio-economic point of view.

- (2) The rural housing problem is not as serious as commonly made out to be, in fact estate housing is worse.
- (3) Accepting the norms specified, if a significant breakthrough is to be made between 1976 and 2001, then investment in urban

housing must be doubled, while investment in rural housing appears to be sufficient if it is channelled into an improved version of the traditional rural house.

### Probable Reasons for Sri Lanka's Housing Problem

A housing problem does not appear overnight: it builds up over a long

## ESTATE HOUSING

The rigid class division that exists in this country can be seen on estates, in its most dramatic form, in the glaring disparities in housing provided to the estate management, the staff and the workers. The pattern is identical on all estates even today, and conforms to the traditional 19th century class stratification which was introduced by the British. This pattern of "bungalows" for the management, "quarters" for the staff and "lines" for the workers has been preserved in all estates, and most of the private sector management agencies have not made much attempt to alter this traditional policy with regard to housing.

Today there are *three* types of housing for estate workers:—

- (i) the old back-to-back lines,
- (ii) the single row lines,
- (iii) the cottage type separate houses.

The vast majority of estate houses belongs to the old back-to-back line type consisting of blocks of 16 to 20 rooms, back-to-back 10 by 12 feet each, occupied by one or two families which means that often there are 8 - 10 persons in a room of just 100 - 500 square feet. Even on estates which are very well run and where high standards of order and cleanliness are rigidly maintained, the "line" rooms which are uncleaned, unrepaired and overcrowded, present a dismal picture of degradation and squalor. A visitor to any estate is immediately struck by the contrast between high standards in the bungalows of the management and the miserable conditions of those living in the "lines".

#### Housing Conditions in the Estate Sector

There were 258,897 housing units (1971) in the estate sector of Sri Lanka—from among 2,382,001 units all over the country. There were 1,150,263 living in these housing units in the estates. The vacancy rate in housing in the estate sector was 5.1% (12,889 housing units) due to seasonal occupation. The occupancy rate in the estate sector was 4.8%. In the estate sector 88.6% of the families had single housing units compared to the urban (80.4%) and rural (85.8%) sectors.

#### Types of Housing Units

In the estates 12.11% of the housing units are of the permanent type made of

materials like cement, brick, tile etc; 85.19% were of semi-permanent units made of non-durable materials and 2.76% temporary units. In the estates line rooms comprised nearly 83.5% of all housing units.

#### Size of Housing Unit

Nearly 70.9% of the total housing units on estates consists of one-room houses. Overcrowding is a feature in the housing units in the estates. Nearly 64.3% of estate houses are with the floor space 100-250 square feet. Only 0.6% of housing units in estates are over 2000 square feet in area. Nearly 53.1% of the estate houses are overcrowded above minimum and 46.9% below minimum with an average number of occupants of 4.0. The highest percentage of overcrowding in Sri Lanka is in the estate sector.

#### Amenities

**Water Supply**—In the estates nearly 21.6% has piped water on tap outside their homes, 48% on the outside unit but within premises and only 5.2% has piped water on tap inside the unit. In the estate sector 15.4% of houses got water from wells and 7.3% from other water sources like rivers.

**Toilet facilities**—The highest percentage (33.9%) of water-seal toilets are found in the estate sector. Nearly 13.4% of the housing units in the estates do not have toilet facilities of any sort.

**Lighting facilities**—In the estate sector 94% used kerosene for lighting and only 4.1% had electricity. In a country full of waterfalls and excess electricity a large foreign exchange earning sector is yet without electricity.

**Cooking facilities**—Nearly 25% of all housing units in Sri Lanka do not have separate kitchens. The estate sector is worse off with more than half (49.8%) having no separate kitchens.

#### Tenure

Nearly 63.3% of the housing units in Sri Lanka are owner occupied, 12.4% rented and 15.1% free of rent. In the estate sector rent free houses contributes as much as 89% of the total and only 1.7% are rented.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH HOUSING

The ideal concept of social integration is seen in the slums and shanties where physical distance between housing units is at a minimum. Community interaction is further developed in the shanties, especially in congested areas where shanties are built haphazardly and open doors face each others housing units. If the housing unit is very small, and dingy inside, without windows for ventilation the doors at the entrances are kept open. Psychologically such practices assist the people in the community to enter a house without much hesitation, and therefore neighbours are in and out of the house or meet frequently at the entrances to the housing units.

Privacy is at a minimum and social interaction is at its height in such living conditions. In a congested area the narrow corridors and alley ways that separate the houses from each other, shanty dwellers constantly confronting each other in this narrow space, the open door practices, sleeping in the open spaces by the men and the boys and living outside the housing unit most part of the day allow frequent social contact and interpersonal relations. Very few shanty units in congested areas have verandahs for social meetings as in the rural areas. This informal system has led to this ideal concept of community integration which cuts across ethnic, age, religious, and regional differences. Cross ethnic marriages are, however, very rare, apart from this, social integration of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese and other minority groups takes place with ease. It brings with it a happy feeling of oneness, each sharing the fortunes and misfortunes of the other and when necessary they come to each others assistance. The men folk are brought together by sharing their common social habits of gambling and drinking together or simply meeting and talking. Young people, such as teenage boys are happy visiting their teenage peer group to plan their leisure. Little children meet around the house wherever there is open space to play. The bigger children gang up together to plan their next move in their exploits of the city to earn a few cents. The delinquents gang up together with their leader (who is often a Muslim lad state J. E. Jayasuriya and Sundari Kariyawasam in an article "*Juvenile Delinquency as a Gang Activity in the City of Colombo*" in the *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, 1958) to plan their next mode of action.

All these forms of close group interaction would also mean frequent conflicts over common incidents such as through children's games, street incidents, teasing of a teenage girl, or an unsavoury piece of gossip. But a conflict within the community will split them into two camps which would mean the cohesive spirit of each will be further strengthened (conflicts are settled by the informal leaders of the community). Therefore their conflicts do not create disunity but revives group bonds.

In contrast, the middle classes of the urban high rise apartments seek seclusion from the neighbourhood. The closer the physical distance the larger is the social distance. In times of need of the "piris balaya" (crowd strength) such as a funeral, help comes often from outside, that is, friends and relations living outside the community. In the slums and shanties on such occasions personal differences are at a minimum and cohesive feeling is at its height and therefore closer to the rural social behaviour patterns.

### Middle Class Attitudes

The type of housing design further enhances urban middle class attitudes. The door at the entrance is meant to be closed at all times. It is necessary to knock or ring a bell to enter, and not all who turn up at the door are admitted. Social integration is built up on a selective pattern, strictly limited to those friends and relations one chooses to associate with. They are often not part of the high rise complex. The social contact in the high rise complex is often limited to smiles and nods and sometimes an exchange of words on general topics, such as rising prices etc. "It is better that way" is their attitude. Peace, existence and individuality is preserved through privacy. In the shanties the concept of privacy is strange to the dwellers and there is no urge for it. For success in the urban environment and maximum use of urban facilities such as through education and the competitive nature of such processes demands privacy to the individual. He needs privacy to develop his mental and physical faculties to their maximum. This is the basic middle-class behaviour pattern—controlled, regulated and organized to make the most of a dynamic environment. The socializing processes of the middle classes are such that from the time of birth they assimilate norms and values which prepare them to work towards goals that are laid down by society. Very often these goals can be achieved only in their adult life. Thus they can postpone immediate needs for future gains. Shanty dwellers on the other hand, require immediate "knowledge of results". It makes up for their harsh physical environment. When they see immediate gains such as a few basic material goods, they are satisfied. The small gains they get from their environment is a large reward in terms of huge physical and mental challenges they have to face daily. Even for a basic need such as water they have to wait their turn at the street tap. Nearly 50 families depend on one water tap on the street. To achieve middle-class goals such as higher status or income jobs through education is not easy for the shanty dwellers given the poor physical and material environment, dingy, dark, small huts, with no proper corner as a study, no privacy for study, no regular meals, not enough clean clothes and school facilities. Very few can compete with the well fed, well clothed, well tutored middle-class child, without psychological stress and survive the challenges and be successful in the educational system. As such it is an achievement to acquire primary education: 47% have primary levels of education

in the shanties, 24% mid-school and only 3% have proceeded upto G.C.E. (O.L.) according to N. B. Perera in a *Report on the Shanties*, Colombo Municipal Council, 1973. In spite of the free education system and equal access to schools through the "area rule" in Sri Lanka, the shanty physical environment, their norms and values and their community life do not facilitate the maximum use of urban facilities and success within the urban mainstream. As the shanty dwellers do not try to master their environment and plan for their future in the way the middle-classes attempt, this type of social integration is closely related to their spontaneous behaviour responses. Therefore their type of social interaction is unique. The few shanty dwellers with a slightly better life than others, such as having a regular job or pension to depend on do not isolate themselves from the rest, even though it is easy to distinguish them because they imitate the middle-classes by accumulating status symbol material goods. Here we see close proximity of living and constant interaction and the type of housing designs removes distinction in social interaction as far as social inter-personnel contact is concerned. Extension motivation, that is, the desire to suppress one's ego to help others, is a developed phenomenon as far as our relations and friends are concerned but it is not yet a community ideal except in these unusual living conditions. In the urban apartments on the other hand even if the entrances of the apartments face each other the tendency is to have their doors closed. The closed door helps to give privacy to the family, for selective admittance to the house and enough time for the housewife to tidy up the sitting room before admitting visitors and privacy to the family at meal times to partake of food in the absence of strangers watching them, as very often the sitting and dining room is combined. Within the apartment the sitting room is often the only place for social meetings. If the dining room is combined with the sitting room it does not give privacy to use the dining table for the purposes of reading or school work if the sitting section is constantly used for social meetings. If the verandahs are narrow and do not permit the placing of two chairs to face each other, which is essential for social interaction, the verandah is converted into a garden and very often the verandah is accessible through the main house and therefore its use for frequent social meetings is minimized.

The sitting room is meant for special guests, the guests who are invited into the apartment or for select friends and relations when they drop in. In a shanty, a given space is used for a number of purposes at the same time as well as different times of the day—for social meetings, cooking, toddlers corner, sleeping, having meals and gambling. Neighbours may interact with them when these activities are taking place. Meeting neighbours frequently in apartments are avoided. The middle-classes find such free integration unsatisfactory as interdependent relationships develop such

as borrowing and lending of domestic items which can become unpleasant; meeting often is an infringement on privacy, and also leads to unnecessary gossip and unpleasantness. To remain respectable within the high rise community it is necessary to maintain a social distance. Sometimes some may realize this through experience. If common meeting rooms or clubs are organized, it is too much effort to break up the daily routine and participate in activities especially if it is not satisfying. The common compound may not be a place where the children of the apartments mix freely if all the occupants do not belong to the same social class. Inter mixing of vertical occupational or status class has not been successful in apartment housing schemes in most countries, as shown by Wilmot and Young in "Kinship in East London".

On the other hand unorganized meetings such as spontaneous meetings at open doorways, narrow alley ways, at the water tap and under shade trees occur without effort where discriminatory patterns of thinking are much less obvious.

#### Community Interaction

Of the organized community housing schemes the recently tried out Aided Self-Help Housing Schemes bring out in the occupants a sense of cohesiveness. In this scheme all the material to build the housing units are provided by the Ministry of Housing & Construction and those selected to live in the housing units are expected to organize themselves and build the housing units with their own skills and labour. Those eligible belong to the income group of Rs. 150/-—300/- who get this income regularly. In an urban programme where the responsibility of organizing the work and building brings out in the people their skills and diplomacies in human interaction, community feeling and community spirit is developed, and spontaneous informal leadership is brought out. When the last housing unit comes up there is a developed sense of community achievement. When they draw lots to allocate the housing units including the model house from which they operate, there are no hard feelings if one gets a house that does not satisfy all one's expectations such as poor location or poor soil in the garden. After the houses are built the informal leaders continue their good work through their welfare society. Therefore the community activity and community spirit is retained. An attempt is made to provide welfare programmes such as establishment of nurseries, health programmes etc. through the welfare organization. We expect such community interaction and cohesiveness to continue if the same owners and their children who continue their parents' activities remain in the area. It may take twenty years for each householder to pay his way into owning his house, as such there is time for the occupants to strengthen the social bonds by sharing one another's experiences and interdependency at times of illness, death, mishaps and more pleasant events such as marriage, birth, feasting, alms-giving and pirith ceremonies etc. These are crucial events which revive the cohesive interpersonal bonds.

period of time. Thus if a solution to the problem is to be found, it is necessary to investigate what caused the problem in the first place, and use this information to formulate a viable housing policy for the future.

A quick glance at the problem reveals that the apparent cause appears to be the large gap between the real cost of housing to the consumer and his ability to pay for it. This may not necessarily be the root cause, but the effect of more fundamental causes. However, using this as a starting point let us try to identify the root causes for Sri Lanka's housing problem in order to establish a base on which future housing policy can be formulated.

#### A Cost-Benefit Approach to Housing

The real cost of housing to the consumer consists of:

1. Repayment of land costs,
2. Repayment of construction costs
3. Payment for infrastructure through local authority taxes, and
4. Maintenance costs.

While the benefits he derives from housing are represented by how much he is prepared to pay for it, or his ability to pay for housing; what a consumer desires in terms of a house is dependent on his socio-economic status and cultural background. Therefore his real costs are also dependent on these basic variables.

On the other hand a consumer is prepared to pay for housing depending on his socio-economic status, as well as other physical factors such as household size, the location of the house, and the size of the house.

Invariably the cost of what the consumer desires, is beyond his ability to pay for it at the lower socio-economic levels, or the costs are greater than the benefits, rendering housing for the lower socio-economic groups economically unfeasible.

Therefore the basic cause of the problem in Sri Lanka lies in the reasons for the high cost of production

on the one hand, and the inequality of income distribution on the other.

#### The Urban Sector

In the urban areas it is possible for a consumer to obtain a loan to build a house provided he owns the land which can be mortgaged. Only a very small percentage of the urban population can purchase urban land which can be mortgaged and a loan obtained. The net result is that potential investors are left out, resulting in the proliferation of slum and squatter settlements.

Even if a low income group consumer could afford the land, the outdated building regulations in this country would debar him from building a simple socially acceptable house and expect him to conform to some arbitrary middle class standards. Thus he is once again left out as his costs are way above his benefits.

In addition, the consumer is expected to pay local authority taxes for services he hardly receives, and maintain his house.

Public sector investment till recently has concentrated on building expensive flats, on expensive land, the costs of which are above the benefits derived by the consumer. The result is subsidy and the creation of vertical slums.

One may therefore conclude that the basic reasons for the urban housing problems are:

- (1) A lack of urban physical planning, creating a dearth of buildable land to the potential investor.
- (2) The absence of coordination between economic planning and physical planning, resulting in the physical separation of employment generation and residential location.
- (3) A lack of financing institutions for urban housing.
- (4) The absence of a realistic set of building regulations which reflect the socio-economic aspirations of the majority of the

## Who Plans Housing

To sum up, the occupants of human settlements can be divided into three main categories: those who can select the best possible environment; those who are housed without having much choice; and those who inhabit fringe areas. It is true that all human beings have the same fundamental needs; but it is only true in theory. If these three categories have any practical problems in common, they are those of freedom, the right to speak, and the right to act.

Members of the ruling classes automatically possess these rights. The essential thing is to belong, either directly or at second-hand, and money is less important than friendship with those who count. But even if people from the same milieu have no communication difficulties, this still does not solve all problems. For instance there is hardly a city in the world capable of controlling its own growth: when centres decay and suburbs sprawl, all the inhabitants suffer together.

For the majority, communication with the authorities is difficult, and indeed until recently people did not even know how to single them out, and merely indicated

them collectively as "they". "They" built express-ways, created or transposed industries, re-grouped and redistributed land; by a stroke of their pen "they" increased land prices ten-fold, demolished sound houses and erected high-rise office blocks: and all these were so many events to be endured, for both town and country were governed by fate.

Today however, fate, that far-off galaxy in charge of planning and development, is emerging from its anonymity. The promoters, economists, civil servants, engineers and town planners are acquiring an identity and thus losing some of the magic powers which admittedly not all of them were so anxious to possess in the first place. Now they are coming forward as technicians of goodwill.

They are by no means infallible, this they concede, and do so more frequently now that their decisions are being challenged; for they are beginning to see the public manifesting its rebellion on all sides. Those concerned are demanding to be informed of urban planning and development projects, so that they can have a chance to discuss, modify or reject them.,

Georges Fradier

Courtesy, *The UNESCO Courier*

conclude that a problem of vast magnitude exists. However, this would be an imaginary problem, and it could be disastrous if urban building regulations are forced on the rural sector.

## The Estate Sector

The plantation industry began in this country over a century ago. The standard of housing provided for estate labour was based on the thinking of that time, which is not far different from the thinking that produced terraced type slums in Colombo city. If we ask the question, why have not the slums of Colombo city been improved? the answer will be the same as the question, why have not the labour lines in the estates been improved? It boils down to the simple fact that housing was considered as the house and not the living environment, and hence some form of shelter was considered sufficient. The situation in the estates

population, thus widening the gap between costs and benefits, by forcing people build and occupy houses above their socio-economic demand.

- (5) The absence of a realistic approach towards housing by accepting slum and shanty clearance, rather than slum and shanty improvement, in an economically depressed environment.
- (6) The acceptance of the nation that investment in housing is a social overhead, and not an economic overhead, by neglecting indirect benefits of good housing to the country as a whole, thus leading to a lack of public sector investment in urban housing, and infrastructure development.

## The Rural Sector

As concluded earlier, rural housing is not really a problem.

The theory of costs and benefits appears to be practised in an ideal state, i.e. the rural population build houses that are socio-economically acceptable to them, so that their costs are equal to their benefits.

Of course if we try to infuse urban standards in the rural sector we can

## FLATS AS A 'SOLUTION' TO THE HOUSING PROBLEM

The availability of a range of employment opportunities in the city, together with the possibility of higher incomes, has resulted in continued migration from the rural to the urban areas. That, together with the natural increase of the urban population has brought increased demand for land for housing with resultant increases in the price of land. Public housing schemes have therefore often been in the form of multi-storeyed flats based on the assumption that the most efficient use of land can be obtained in this way.

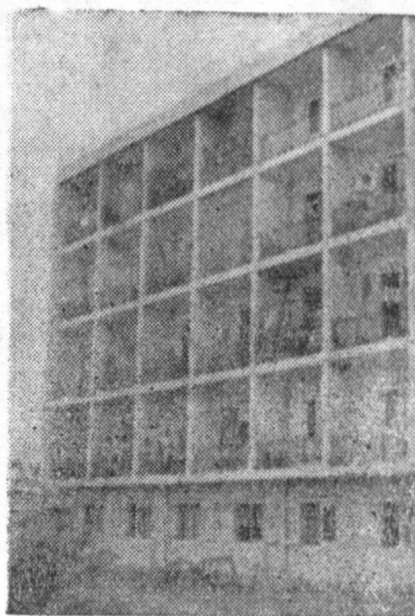
One of the major housing schemes that have been undertaken is at Maligawatte, where five storey blocks of flats have been built and further blocks are under construction. The flats which have been occupied each have two bed rooms, a sitting room, kitchen, a combined water closet and bath and a balcony. The total usable floor area is about 490 square feet but this is reduced to 420 square feet in the ground floor flats as they are not provided with a balcony. The rents range from Rs. 75 to Rs. 115 per month. It was commonly thought that this housing scheme was intended for the rehabilitation of shanty dwellers from the city centre but the rents charged are much higher than they can reasonably afford.

Tenants complained of lack of living space, lack of garden, poor sound insulation and difficulties of climbing to the upper floors. Firewood was often used for cooking, but the kitchens were not designed for this and apart from being dangerous the resultant smoke causes problems.

The ground floor tenants were affected by refuse thrown from the upper floors as well as leaking waste pipes. Other com-

plaints referred to poor maintenance and the difficulty in getting workers to attend to repairs. Some of the flats were overcrowded and eleven occupants were noted in one case, necessitating the sitting room being turned into a bed room every night.

People generally appeared to be unhappy living in flats and only accepted them because they were marginally better than their previous accommodation and there was no viable alternative.



City dwellers find little to choose between "flats" the vast impersonal structures of today and the cheaply built, neglected tenements of yesterday.

Can therefore be put down to a basic lack of knowledge about the science of housing, together with a compelling urge to maximise profits within the plantation industry, and the bad example set by city slums.

### A lack of co-ordination

From the foregoing analysis we can thus conclude broadly that a primary reason for Sri Lanka's housing problem is the lack of co-ordination between economic and physical planning, and the lack of co-ordination between physical planning and housing, together with the insistence of standards far above the socio-economic demands of the population.

### Housing an urban problem

The problem of housing as we face it today is essentially an urban problem. Throughout the world there is now a recognition of the magnitude of the problems created by the 'rush' to the cities, a trend generally regarded as irresistible and to some extent inevitable. This rural exodus, precipitated by the stagnant economic conditions of villages, brings in its wake a whole series of social, political, economic and administrative problems. Ways have to be found to prevent this 'exchange of rural poverty for urban misery'. The main thrust so far in tackling this urbanisation problem has been the analysis of existing situations and the application of emergency solutions to the most flagrant ills shown up in these analyses. But such solutions have proved to be only palliatives, not approaching the roots of the problem—the alarming rate of expansion of urban areas and the even more rapid increase of social evils to which this expansion gives rise. If any serious impact is to be made on these problems new designs for living will have to be created, incorporating the use of science and technology and relat-



*One recognised system whereby populations with irregular or low incomes could improve their housing by their own efforts is through self-help schemes.*

### AIDED SELF-HELP HOUSING

Aided self-help housing schemes have become an increasingly popular way of adding to the housing stock at comparatively low cost. The prospective occupants are provided with the site, house plans and building materials together with supporting technical advice. They are expected to contribute their labour and skills for specified time periods. The success of the scheme largely depends on the co-operation of the participants and the enforcement of the condition that the housing units should not be occupied until all have been completed.

A comparatively successful aided self-help scheme is at Hekitta in Wattala. The scheme has a total of 45 units, mainly twin houses. The houses are of brick construction with tiled roofs and each is on a site of seven perches. There are two common walls for the scheme and each house has its own pit latrine. Most of the occupants had previously lived in the same area and are either government employees in

the labour grade, workers at the Lakspray packing plant or are employed in the Welisara hospital. A regular income was a condition for participating in the scheme and the householders earn an average of Rs. 300 per month out of which their repayments are Rs. 15 per month.

While the occupants expressed general satisfaction with the scheme, they would have preferred the extra privacy given by a detached house rather than the twin houses provided. The area of land is also too small for them to grow a reasonable amount of vegetables or to keep chickens, both activities being important in order to supplement incomes and diet.

Most of the housing units have had timber kitchens built on at the rear and grants have been made available for this, although there have been some difficulties in obtaining the grants. The occupants would also prefer their own water supply and there is some demand for electricity connections.

ing it to the creation of better human settlements. Evenmore, for effective solutions to be found to these problems they have to be identified sufficiently in advance.

### Low priority

It is unfortunate that housing has continued to be assigned a low priority in economic development programmes because of its low capital output ratio. Many of the developing countries are now beginning to realise, however, that housing

should be given much greater priority since together with education, better nutrition and improved health services, and other social services it fosters the development of human resources. There is hope in the fact that it is being increasingly recognised that the provision and improvement of housing in the early stages of industrialisation and urbanisation can help to raise the productivity of a country's labour force and accelerate its development process.