



Anthropology in Architectural Research: Past, Present and Prospect

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Abstract: Nowadays, our world is being confronted with human-induced global problems such as climate change, space management, and energy crisis. In this situation, the multi-disciplinary research approach is the best way to resolve the global crisis. For example, anthropology and architecture, both disciplines are interrelated through working with/for people. As a discipline, architecture shapes all the places and spaces around us and anthropology tries to explain all the aspects of human life, both are interconnected. For a long time, anthropologists particularly social anthropologists have paid attention to studying societies, culture, tribals, their culture, and their social upliftment. As well as they have engaged themselves to study different behaviours and patterns of culture. By doing this they have paid less attention to the 'house' where we live. In recent decades, few anthropologists have begun to connect architectural works with social-cultural anthropology. They proposed the term 'architectural anthropology' to describe the interrelation between humans and their built environment. Based on existing literature, this paper explored how our dwellings can be a research object for anthropologists and prospects of architectural research from an anthropological viewpoint. This paper also provides a potential lead for anthropological research on architecture to a deeper understanding and better approaches for tackling the challenges of human-induced global problems.

Keywords: Architectural Anthropology, Ethnography, House, Culture, Human Induce Global Problems, Climate Change

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Introduction

A very little number of anthropologists have paid attention to the 'houses' in which we live. On account of this, Humphrey (1988) complains that there is 'no place like home in anthropology', which is quite valid to some extent. Vellinga (2011) further argued that anthropologists have paid very little attention to houses as much as they have given importance to the study of kinship, religion, economy, political organisation, and social structure. Carsten Hugh-Jones (1995) was right in saying that 'houses'- as like our body- are '.....taken for granted' by anthropologists. The anthropological study of the house and its architecture have not been conducted long before the 18th century. In the mid-18th century, Marc-Antoine Laugier proposed the concept of 'primitive hut' in his book *An Essay on Architecture*. According to him, human-being (huts) built primitive huts in the forest just to fulfil the need for shelter- such constructions were natural and were driven by instinct. The concept took into consideration the nature-man-environment relation. Thereafter, the concept of 'primitive hut' was ideologically accepted by anthropologists and other social scientists (Stender 2017). Thus, anthropologists accepted this concept in search of the origin and development of human society. Later, anthropologists became interested in architectural research to get intellectual support to build theories in anthropology during the 'long nineteenth century' (Buchli 2013). In this effort, the works of Gottfried Semper and Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-due, both architects, brought to focus on anthropological aspects particularly cultural anthropology of architectural research. Indeed, the scholarship in architecture was confined to the study of monumentality and practically sightless to anything outside of Greek, Egypt, and Europe (see Rapoport 1969, Rudofsky 1965, Kamatsu et al. 2003, Vellinga 2011). At the same time, another prominent work was the worldwide ethnoarchaeological collections of Lieutenant-general Pitt Rivers; the belongingness of those materials ranged from Lower Palaeolithic to Roman Empire and even the mediaeval age. These ethno archaeological collections virtually support the development of human invention and the cultural evolution of mankind along with the origin and evolution of the house and its architecture (Chisholm 1911). In the late 19th century, the foremost anthropological contribution to the built environment was found through the work of Morgan's *House and House-Life of the American Aborigines* (1881). The book gives an account of the built environment to reconstruct their social-cultural realities like their kinship structure and social organisation (see Waterson 1990).

After Morgan's work, anthropologists for a long-time disregarded 'house' as a study object except for a few anthropological monographs that appeared in the

19th and 20th centuries for example Horowitz 1967, Heider 1979, and Chagnon 1983 (see Vellinga 2011). Those monographs took into consideration the architecture of traditional houses to better understand the native society. Since the mid-20th century, the symbolic analysis of South-East Asian societies emerged through the scholarship of some eminent anthropologists. In the book *Order in the Antoni House* (1964), Clarke Cunningham presented that spatial symbolism and gender opposition have intertwined connections among the Indonesian ethnic group named Antoni. Bourdieu (1973) proposed architecture as symbolic capital, in which the idea, beliefs, and aesthetic sense of inhabitants are embedded. Waterson (1990) presented that the house has a significant role in the social structure of the societies of South-Asian countries. Further, she described that the house has symbolic relations with the kinship system; the rules regarding the use of space; interconnection between spatial divergence and social category. Since the 1960s, the study of architecture twisted towards the 'vernacular', 'indigenous', and 'polite' form of architecture alongside the symbolic analysis of architecture, which has emerged with new conceptual and methodological formulation through some architects without knowledge of professional anthropology.

In 1965, Bernard Rudofsky published his book *Architecture without Architects*, in which he drew attention to vernacular tradition around the world. The book also provides the demonstration of artistic, cultural richness, and functional aspects of vernacular architecture. Amos Rapoport (1969) wrote the book *House form and Culture*. The book proposes a conceptual framework for looking at the great variety of house types and factors that affect them to make a such variety. He interpreted that house forms as individual units and every traditional house is an accumulation of different evolutionary lines by which every element developed in itself. For example, the roof has a primary evolutionary line, as well as an entrance, hearth, windows also have their development. Most recent published two books that deal with these issues namely Paul Oliver's *Dwellings: The House across the World* (2003) and *Build by Hands: Vernacular Buildings around the World* (2003) written by Steen et al. Both the books present diverse kinds of global vernacular traditions with photographic collections, detail of sketches, documenting the making process of distinct traditional houses. Further, the concept of 'vernacular' is becoming more national and international. A worldwide movement has emerged with numerous architects and international organisations focussing on the study of traditional or vernacular houses.

In the above discussion, the author introduced the overlooked or partial anthropological interests in architecture from the past to the recent past. Yet, it is true that these researches have vast amount of primary data on the topic

of architecture, those are collected by anthropologists whose principal interest is not lie in the house *per se*. It is observed that anthropological studies of the houses explain the comparative theories, and cultural evolution, to enrich the ethnographic accounts of the traditions of specific cultural groups, and to explore the symbolic view of primitive groups. Consequently, these studies also encourage us to separate architecture into 'traditional' and 'modern'; 'their' and 'our'; 'western' and 'non-western' in the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, what anthropologists did in past it is not important to us, what anthropologists should do in future it is the foremost fact for academic and professional anthropologists.

In this paper, the author has tried to illuminate several scopes for anthropologists to engage in architectural research. Further, I have discussed how anthropological contributions could help architects, builders, and experts to make a sustainable built environment. Likewise, such anthropological contributions will help to overcome human-induced global problems such as climate change, population growth, high levels of energy consumption, depletion of resources, and migration. Those problems are closely related to architecture- without saying it also includes the architecture of commons. This paper is written based on existing literature on anthropological research on architecture, it tries to explore the potential field for anthropologists for future research. This paper is divided into four sections where the author tries to explore potential outcomes of architectural research for anthropologists. The first section deals with the relationship between architecture and human culture. The anthropological views on architecture can be alternative approaches to studying the culture. Whereas architecture plays a communicative role in society to express the meaning of the built environment; it expresses a variety of cultural and symbolic values of a society through its physical appearance. So, we can consider that architecture is a mirror of culture. The second section discusses the role of the anthropologist to conserve the knowledge of traditional house building, which will give shelter from the uncertain environment to future generations. In the third section, the author discusses the problem of slum proliferation and the role of anthropologists. The fourth section illuminates anthropological perspectives on the global housing problem. The whole paper deliberates the dynamic roles of anthropologists to resolve human-induced global problems in view of architectural research.

House as a mirror of culture

Culture and architecture are not organically related to each other, but architecture is an expression of culture. Every built form or built-up environment is the

appearance of culture masked behind its layers of abstraction. The appearance may be royal or may be simple, it always expresses the creator's identity and nobility. This is because, any design when conceptualized to perform the desired function, is directly or indirectly derived from, or synchronized with the cultural identity of the user (Senan 1993, Upton 1993, Kisku and Santra 2017). If we go back to the Egyptian civilization, the people of Egypt believed in life after death. This belief directly converted into their architecture in form of the great pyramids. In Rome, the cultural belief in polytheism was expressed in its true form in the Pantheon. The Greek concept of the Agora, which is nothing but a gathering space also evolved out of their cultural practice of congregation. Thus, culture and architecture are two sides of the same coin. Architecture never separates the culture of society; it adapts and merges with the layers of abstraction and sometimes exists in transition when there are dramatic paradigm shifts in the way people live. Over the years cultural influences have moulded the way spaces have been designed in India and other countries. The influences of culture are not only seen in religious places such as temples, churches, and mosques; but also the design of residences has been influenced by the cultural practices of dwellers. As an example, the Jodhpur town of Rajasthan was occupied by the Brahmins who belong to the elite class, they perform ritualistic chores in Jodhpur. The basic cultural principle that the belief in unity and keeping away from others (non-elite) so all the dwellings share a common colour and common structure. Another classic example is the houses of Santals. Santal houses are distinguished through their traditional wall paintings and multicoloured designs, which conveyed their identity and 'we-feeling' sentiments of Santals (Kisku and Santra 2017).

Under the above context, the present research explores how the study of architecture can be an alternative approach to understanding culture. The paper also illuminates the possible outcomes of the research on culture through architecture which was ignored in most of the anthropological descriptions (Yimsruel 2012). Also, the relationship between the socio-cultural organisations of people and the built environment has been ignored in architectural history.

Since the formative phase, anthropologists have paid attention to the 'culture' of human societies for theorisation, understanding evolution patterns, and culture change. For doing this, anthropologists have studied kinship, marriage, economic activities, religious institutions, and political forms. In the simplest sense, they have mostly focused on social institutions. Often, Radcliffe Brown (1922) said that culture is expressed through social institutions.

Nowadays, the social institutions of societies are changing with the influence of globalisation, social mobilisation, migration, and rapid urbanisation. Social institutions are not existing in their age-old form. In the 21st century, anthropologists need to be more dynamic in terms of the subjectivity and objectivity of their research. The conventional approach to studying society should change. In this situation, the anthropological study of architecture can be an opportunity for anthropologists. The ethnographic knowledge of anthropologists will help to study culture from a different perspective. Nowadays architects also use the ethnographic method to collect laws, regulations and some social aspects of inhabitants. But this process generates only data and does not provide reciprocal influences like empathy between the researcher and inhabitants. Anthropologists could point out the cultural need, wishes, and expectations should keep in mind of architects, builders, and planners during policy-making and programming. The knowledge of anthropology at home could use as a tool for innovation (Stender 2017).

Climate change and traditional or vernacular architecture

Nowadays, climate change is one of the major global challenges. A common interest emerged among scholars, academics, architects, and engineers in making environment-responsive buildings. Few very recent publications have suggested that vernacular buildings or traditional houses are more environment-friendly than modern buildings, and need to be conserved. Such architectural design has a low environmental impact and is made with locally available materials and low-energy technology (Philokyprou and Michael 2015, Kumar 2013, Curtis 2014). For hundreds of years, vernacular houses provide comfortable shelter to the people. These kinds of houses are predominantly seen only in the countryside regions of the world. Due to continuous migration from rural areas to cities for sophisticated living and fragile jobs opportunity, these traditional or vernacular houses are abandoned. So, these houses become a model and are used for spending vacations, and holidays. In the quest for indigenous solutions to climate change, we have to conserve these houses. Over the years, our ancestors have been using various technologies to construct these houses to confront climate change. The knowledge of their technologies will help us to make modern houses to confront climate change in future.

But the question is how long vernacular buildings will conserve in future? In my opinion, the conservation approach is only appropriate for academics and theorists. Practically, it is not possible to conserve it for longer. As Oliver

(1999) notes the vernacular becomes synonymous with thatched cottages and mud houses, which are good for holidays and fun for tourists, but possibly not for much else in the age of globalisation. In this perplexity situation, we should conserve the vernacular technologies alongside conserving vernacular buildings that should help to make us a sustainable built environment in future. However, the process of vernacularization will come in front of many other processes such as modernisation, globalisation, and urbanisation. Yet, we could not isolate ourselves from the process of modernisation, globalisation, and urbanisation, because the high standard of living style will never let us stay isolated. Inevitably, we should stay with modernisation, globalisation, and urbanisation in the vernacular building. How could it be possible? It is only possible if we will use vernacular technologies to make modern buildings. That should directly or indirectly help to reduce high energy consumption for household purposes. We could continue the high standard living style but don't need to maintain comfortable thermal conditions. So, we need to conserve such vernacular technologies (Kulshreshtha 2020).

In this situation, anthropologists can contribute different ways to conserve such vernacular technologies and how could apply these technologies. Whereas their methods such as the cross-cultural ethnographic study method can be the best approach to conserve vernacular technologies. Through the method, anthropologists could document such knowledge of vernacular technologies. Further, such knowledge could give suggestions and recommendations to make sustainable houses in different geographical locations.

Understanding the problem of slum proliferation

In the 21st century, most countries from Africa and Asia are experiencing rapid urbanization with the support of new innovative technologies. New towns are being designed and planned and existing urban centres are being renovated for development. Before the 1950s, urbanisation mostly occurred in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) such as the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, France, and other European countries. Later, urbanisation occurred in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) such as India, Pakistan, China, and other third-world countries since the 1950s. The urbanisation process in LEDCs is expanding more rapidly compared to the more economically developed countries. Due to the urbanisation process, a mass number of people are moving from rural to urban centres, the whole process has led to a population influx in urban areas. As result, people have started to live on the outskirts and surrounding lands of cities. Disperse of the

population in city outskirts areas has caused the growing up of extra-municipal areas, slums, and informal settings.

According to the report of the United Nations, 54% of the global population lives in urban areas that expected to increase by 66% in 2050. The most of urban population lives in slum areas. The growth of slums in the last fifteen years is unprecedented in most developing countries. In 1990, the world was inhabited by almost 715 million slum dwellers. The slum population has increased to approximately 998 million by today. United Nations Habitat estimated that if the trend continues, it will reach 1.4 billion by 2020.

In considering the urbanisation issues, some questions are aroused in the reader's mind why do people choose to live in cities rather than stay in rural areas? and what factors are pushing them to live in the urban centre? A city is a place with all the required services and things available to live in the modern world. The cities are well equipped for economic and business opportunities, having advanced transportation systems, educational and health facilities, and recreational amenities which are enough to attract anyone who wants to improve their living standard. Besides it, the poor economic condition and limited types of employment opportunities, political instability, ethnic tension based on casteism, and lack of infrastructure to provide basic public services (e.g., education, water, electricity, road, and hospital) in rural areas are the main push factors for rural to urban migration.

Adversely, rapid urbanisation makes pressure on physical, social and ecological resources (such as space and water) in the urban centre. In the name of the well-being of the poor by giving the gift of informal settlements, squatters, and slums. In this situation, governments and NGOs did not come across a sustainable solution. For this reason, policymakers, urban planners, developers, stakeholders, architects, and designers are giving efforts to slum upgradation. However, nobody gives attention to the fact that at the same time new groups of people are coming to cities and making other informal settlements. Rural to urban migration is a continuous historical process. As a result, the challenges of sustainable development remain unsolved in urban areas.

Under this circumstance, we need a holistic approach to urban planning and management is needed to improve the living standard of urban dwellers. Anthropologists could apply their knowledge and skill to make a sustainable citylife. The anthropological study of space can enable a holistic analysis to achieve an overall and synthesised view of society and culture and to create a more liveable society in future. Anthropologists are specialized in doing an in-

depth study of humans in their society and culture. Through this knowledge, they can find out the root causes of an influx of humans to urban areas and the problems humans face in those areas, especially in terms of housing and living conditions. By doing this, they can suggest how physical space can be managed in urban areas.

Anthropological perspectives on the global housing problem

The United Nations declared the year 1987 as the 'International Year of Shelter for the Homeless People.' During the 1990s, the UN recognised that everybody has 'the right to live in an adequate house'. Through this recognition '...live in adequate house' enlisted with some other rights such as human rights, economic, social, and cultural rights. Since the year 1996, governments of various countries have revised their housing policies concerning various aspects of human rights. Therefore, dozens of housing programmes, policies, agendas, and meetings have been carried out by those countries. However, the major challenges were faced particularly by the third world countries to provide adequate shelter for their homeless citizen. Till now, thousands of millions of people are homeless in these countries. In response to the challenge, governments, international agencies, and NGOs have been trying to provide subsidized permanent dwellings, which are built with cement, concrete, steel and other industrial made substantial materials. With this interest, architects, builders, engineers, and planners have been providing low-cost buildings to low and middle-income class families. Unfortunately, all the good intentions could not reach success, sometimes houses are rejected by inhabitants, sometimes inhabitants are not used the provided houses, and sometimes inhabitant does not use them for shelter alternatively they use them for storage purposes. For example, very recent news was published in a popular Bengali daily newspaper namely *Anandabazar partika* (21st September 2022) that the landless people are not willing to government-sponsored houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin). The incident happened in various places in Purba Burdwan district of West Bengal, India. The district authority marked 2736 families who were living for a long time beside the roadside lands. The district authority has decided to resettle in another government land. But the beneficiaries are not willing to go to the government-selected lands. As for them, 'the government-selected land is located a few kilometres away from markets, there is no electricity and no roads.' Without knowing the consumers' requirements, the Government of West Bengal has tried to resettle them. As a result, the programme failed. In this context, anthropologists

can make major contributions by designing effective support programs for homeless people.

Cole and Lorch (2003) argued that the major cause of failure is cross-cultural technology transfer, the houses being built by architects and builders are not fit with the cultural practices of the inhabitants. By supporting the statement, Vellinga (2005) proposed that inability of the builder to consider cultural needs, wishes, and expectations are staked to implement the housing programmes. Often it is an assumption that the technologies provided by the builder which is not always appreciated by the culture of the beneficiaries. There is a wide gap that has emerged between the culturally specific understanding and the implementing technologies of the programmes (Tribhuvan 2005). The use of technologies to build a house has wide variation among different cultural groups. Where, architecture has a portrayal reflection of every culture, which is followed by the people of this culture (Rapoport 1965, Kazinee 2008, Furlen and Faggion 2016, Gulzar 2017).

Conclusion

The present paper attempted to explore possible anthropological engagement in architectural research to overcome human-induced global problems in the 21st century. However, all the possibilities and opportunities could not be reached success if both the subjects these are anthropology and architecture do not collaborate. Historically, both subjects have close relations through research, methods, approaches, and techniques such as ethnographic methods, in-depth interviews, and case study methods (Askland *et al.* 2014). The history of anthropology is provided by some accounts of longhouses, sketches of the layout of villages, and how the spatial organisation of households signified cultural and symbolic meaning (Stender 2017). Thus, some ethnographic studies of the 20th century advocated that architecture does not only represent material structure but also represent social structure. Later, the new post-structural approaches began to emphasize to study of dwellings, buildings, spaces, and landscapes to inquire about what architecture does, rather than what it represents. Although anthropologists and architects both have been exploring human culture, the mode of exploration is different. Anthropologists are studying human beings from the outside of the house as opposed to architects studying human beings from the inside of the house. Whereas anthropologists at first seek to understand human culture and later comes to understand how culture influences their habitat or house, architects study house first and then seek to know the culture. Experts, academics, and scholars

of both subjects are seeing human culture from different foci. Instead of it, their collaboration will enrich subject knowledge and help the practical application of both subjects. In this situation, anthropologists must rethink roles, methods, techniques, and paradigms to solve contemporary human-induced global problems, those global problems are directly or indirectly linked with human habitation and its practices.

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Abbreviations

UN-United Nations

NGOs- Non-Government Organisations

MEDCs- More Economically Developed Countries

LEDCs- Less Economically Developed Countries

PMAY-G- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin

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