

Aranya Township, Indore, India

An innovative Urban experiment for Human Habitat

Abstract

Urbanization in India and south Asia has generated one of the horrifying pictures of poverty in the form of Slum. It has been a very difficult task of dealing with this settlement form which has been the part of many of the growing urban centres of the country with almost 47% population of cities as slums. Aranya project represent a new paradigm in urban planning to resolve the growing issue and discuss one of the critical aspect of urban design and town planning approach with the economically weaker section of the urban population. What makes it special is – the idea of 'Planning and Urban Design framework of the settlement where people build themselves'. The framework was evolved through understanding the needs of the people. An attempt was made to address the issues of identity and sense of community which is often missing in conventional projects.

The site and services approach to planning and design for the 65,000 population in the Indore city is a new philosophy for handling the urban crisis of slum settlements. The project is the synthesis of the cultural, social and economic needs of the slum population and the more mundane aspect of cost effective site and services, creating one of the richest fabric for ideal habitation of the poor people. The concept for the project is defined by the broad goals of a good habitat – vitality, imageability, equity, efficiency, flexibility and feasibility.

The Aranya project demonstrates the vital aspects of urban design in its design of appropriate typology, hierarchy of streets and open space, housing cluster with human scale, flexibility in addition and growth of built form and an efficient sites and services layout integrated with the architecture of the township. The indigenous character of built form provides a setting for the continuation of fundamental values of society. As per the traditional Indian towns, the level of publicness and the degree of privacy is maintained through a spatial order. The clarity of spatial hierarchy enhances the imageability of the settlement. This was arrived at through a rigorous research of the Indian traditional settlement forms. The Aranya plan uses these universal principles of hierarchy in urban design by creating the centre with public amenities and major urban space moving outwards with series of streets and clusters of houses in hierarchy creating more private residential public realms. The street is also seen as an urban space with human activities and multiplicity. The emphasis on developing a cost efficient layout for services has brought down the cost of the project significantly and hence an important ingredient of the design of the settlement.

Aranya has become the model not only in the professional and the academic world, but also with administration and the implementing agencies. It has been the case study for many of the similar projects. The project has looked at the implementation process as a vital aspect in such a project for the poor. It defines construction of the minimum, so as to allow people to add and develop the house as per their requirements and affordability in the future. This inbuilt into the project, the aspect of sense of belonging and identity, which is a strong social issue for the habitation of the poor.

The efficient site planning, a fresh approach to infrastructure and using the strong traditional urban design principles of the country with a hope to provide the most ideal environment for living to the poor has produced the example of great urban design in the context of rapid urbanization. It has not only been accepted by the people but been a case study for further research in the field.