THE ARCHITECTURE OF LAURIE BAKER IN KERALA, INDIA: SPACE, EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

by

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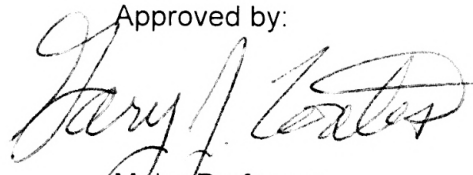

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the philosophy and architecture of architect Laurie Baker. An architect of British origin, Baker has been practising in India for the last fifty five years. Having come to India after a chance encounter with Mahatma Gandhi, Baker's architecture has been a response to the culture, landscape and climate of the Indian sub-continent. For Baker, the context and the needs of the user are of utmost importance. He believes in 'production for the masses' rather than 'mass-production'. After spending the first twenty years at various rural mountainous regions of India, where he learned the art of vernacular building, Baker moved to Trivandrum, Kerala. At Trivandrum, Baker gained almost instant popularity, his architecture becoming a household name and acquiring cult status. Baker is credited with having built more than a thousand private residences, numerous institutional complexes, film studios, hospitals, churches, mission buildings, tourist complexes, hostels, schools, auditoria, computer centers, housing and even earthquake rehabilitation settlements.

This thesis is a study of Baker's philosophy, his architecture and the reasons behind his overwhelming popularity in Kerala. Two major aspects of his work have been selected for study. The first is his residential architecture, which gained almost instant acceptance by their owners and users. The second is the institutional architecture, where Baker has dealt with complex programs, large built volumes and the 'collective' as user. The analysis of these two types of built forms leads to an understanding of the multi-layered, experientially rich architecture of Laurie Baker. It is argued that Baker's approach to architecture bears a strong similarity to Colin St. John Wilson's theoretical framework called the 'Other Tradition of Modern Architecture'. The thesis also studies the evolution of the *'Baker style'* in Kerala; the emergence of Baker followers, imitators, mimics and clones, making Baker into a tradition by himself. The understanding and transmittance of the Bakerian legacy is also dealt with in the thesis. This thesis is not only a study of Baker's philosophy with regard to economy, resources and low cost architecture, but it goes much deeper; it is a study of Baker's architectural spaces, the complex layering of meaning and symbol in his architecture, and the process by which he links the user to the spaces he designs. This is a study of Laurie Baker; the man, his life, and his architecture.

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To my mother

FOREWORD

Probably no work of Architecture is complete without a gentle manifesto. Let me state mine. I grew up watching Laurie Baker's architecture. To me, even as a child, his buildings always seemed different, a sort of backdrop to my childish games that every child plays. I remember how I used to look forward to visiting a neighboring 'Baker' house, for all the nooks, corners and cubby-holes it offered me to live out my dreams of princes, princesses, dragons and highway robbers.

As I grew up and started my architectural education, which seemed but a natural choice, I started noticing the differences between Baker's buildings and the others in my environment. First, the superficial differences from the accepted 'normal' modern architecture in Kerala, an eclectic mix of the concrete 'box' and the Kerala Postmodern. Later, the deeper differences started to become evident. I could not lay an exact finger on them, but I could start seeing the layers beneath the top crust of low-cost, economy and resources. Something spatial, something experiential, but beyond that, I was lost. The books on Baker, too, did not take me any further or deeper.

During the course of my Master's degree program, old thoughts still nagged me. I decided to explore further, to satisfy my own ego, and satiate my own curiosity. I was convinced that there was a complexity behind the simplicity of Baker's architecture. I set out on my course of discovery.

This thesis has led me to discover myself in many ways. There were days when I thought that the Bakerian way was the only way to design, the only way ahead. But over the past one year, I have grown to realize that everybody has a manifesto, every architect follows his/her program, some more meaningful to the world, some more meaningful to themselves. Every act, every art does not need to justify itself. The ultimate key, I guess, is the purity and honesty of the architecture in question. Honesty to oneself. Truth and beauty seem inter-linked. Again, one of Baker's teachings.

"You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: 'This is beautiful'. That is Architecture. Art enters in. My house is practical. I thank you, as I might thank railway engineers or the telephone service. You have not touched my heart. But suppose the walls rise towards heaven in such a way that I am moved. I perceive your intentions. Your mood has been gentle, brutal, charming or noble. The stones you have erected tell me so. You fix me to the place and my eyes regard it. They behold something which expresses a thought. A thought which reveals itself without word or sound, but solely by means of shapes which stand in a certain relationship to one another. These shapes are such that they are clearly revealed in light. The relationships between them have not necessarily any reference to what is practical or descriptive. They are a mathematical creation of your mind. They are the language of Architecture. By the use of inert materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotions. This is Architecture."

Le Corbusier
Vers une architecture, 1923.

"I painted the picture, with the colors vibrating in the rhythm of music. – I painted the colors I saw then. I painted picture after picture based on these visual impressions according to my emotional state at that time – I painted lines and colors that were fixed in my mind's eye – stuck to my retina. And I painted what I remembered without adding anything – without the details, I could no longer see. Hence the simplicity of the pictures – the apparent emptiness. I painted the pictures from my childhood – the diffuse colors from way back."

Edward Munch,
Extract from the catalogue accompanying
'The Frieze of Life'.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

This thesis is a study of the philosophy and architecture of architect Laurie Baker. Laurie Baker is an architect of British origin, who has been practicing his own brand of architecture in India for the last fifty five years. Baker, who came to India, influenced by a chance encounter with Mahatma Gandhi while waiting for a ship at Bombay, practices an architecture of purpose, necessity and meaning. He keeps in mind the context, climate, site, materials, as well as the resources and economy of the nation while he designs for the people.

During his first twenty years in India, Baker lived and practiced architecture in the rural mountains of Pithoragarh in the Himalayas and later, at Vagamon, Central Kerala. It was here that he learned from the vernacular settlements, the art of building with the simple everyday materials that one finds around oneself. This early work was his initiation into Indian architecture. Much later, Baker settled down in Trivandrum, the southernmost tip of India, where he started a regular architectural practice. Here, Baker's architecture gained instant recognition and popularity. With the growth of his practice, Baker became a cult figure. Followers, mimics and clones caught on rapidly and a whole new style of architecture emerged in Kerala, popularly referred to as the *'Baker style'*.

This thesis aims to study Baker's philosophy, his architecture and the reasons behind his cult status in Kerala. The thesis is not limited to Baker's philosophy regarding the resources and the economy of the nation and his resulting low cost architecture. It is also a study of his multi-layered architecture itself; his spaces which are filled with order and spatial complexity, the complex layering of memory, meaning and symbol in his works and the deep connections he brings about between space, use and inhabitant.

For the purpose of the study, two major sections of his work have been selected. First, a selection of the residences, which have been a main factor behind his immense popularity in the State. Baker has built more than a thousand private residences in

Kerala, which shows how much the user identifies with his residential architecture. Three residences were selected for the purpose of study and analysis. Laurie Baker identified the Dolas home, the Nalini home and the Jacob home as three of his favorite residences amidst the vast volume of his work. He felt that his philosophy and architecture were best reflected in these homes.

The second category of buildings identified for study were Baker's institutions. In the design of the institutions, Baker has dealt with a variety of building types and programs, from one-room churches to massive institutional complexes comprised of a vast array of built forms. At the institutions, Baker has dealt with a different kind of user - the 'collective' as a single entity. The complexities arising out of working with the collective user and the passage of time and change in the use of the built form are interesting aspects of the institutional architecture. Two contrasting institutions, in terms of the built volumes, building uses and the nature of the built forms, were selected for the study. The first is the Center for Development Studies, or the CDS, which is a research institute for economic studies comprised of a wide array of built forms and uses ranging from computer centers to libraries to office space to student hostels. The second is the Loyola Chapel, a single-roomed religious institution.

An attempt has also been made to understand Laurie Baker's architecture with reference to various theoretical frameworks. An examination has been made into whether a theoretical basis exists beneath the many layers of Baker's architecture or whether his philosophy and architecture bear any references or similarities to existing theories of modern architecture. The thesis attempts to understand the many reasons behind the popularity of Bakerian architecture in Kerala, the mechanisms which lead to the making of a cult figure. The thesis also analyzes the growth of the *'Baker style'* in Kerala, the movement which has lead to a mass spawning of followers, mimics, imitators and clones.

This thesis also aims at understanding the Bakerian legacy and how it can be transmitted to future generations of architects; not the superficial copying of Baker's philosophy or architecture, but the lessons to be learned and adapted to fit the larger picture of an architecture of honesty, beauty and meaning.

Methods of Study

The main methods adopted for the study of Laurie Baker's architecture were focussed interviews[1]. This author, on a research trip to India during the period of December - January '99-'00, visited most of Baker's buildings in Trivandrum and different parts of Kerala. Detailed and focussed interviews regarding the different aspects of his architecture were conducted with Laurie Baker at his residence, the 'Hamlet', over a period of many days. This researcher also travelled with Baker to many of his current building sites, where his methods of work on the site were observed and studied. Mrs. Baker, better known as Kuni, was also interviewed about her life with Laurie Baker.

The users of Baker's buildings were also extensively interviewed. The residents of ten Baker residences in Trivandrum were interviewed about the different aspects of living in a Baker home and how they identify with their home. A wide cross section of the users of the Baker institutions under study, were also interviewed regarding the usage of the buildings, their favorite places and how they relate to the institution. About ten to twelve of Baker's craftsmen, masons and other workers were also interviewed about the work process and their modes of working with Laurie Baker.

Other architects in the city of Trivandrum, contemporaries of Laurie Baker, were also talked to, regarding their opinions and thoughts on the 'Laurie Baker' architecture. Many of the followers of Laurie Baker were also interviewed in great detail; the members of the organization COSTFORD (Center of Science and Technology of Rural Development) and architect Padmakumar, the director of the Laurie Baker Building Center at New Delhi. Interviews were also conducted with other researchers on Laurie Baker, the most prominent amongst them being architect Gautam Bhatia at New Delhi, the author of the only book on Laurie Baker so far.

Other methods of study and analysis included the study of the identified buildings in

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[1] See Appendix 1 for the interviews with Laurie Baker.

person, a first hand experiential evaluation of Baker's architecture. The identified built forms were visited, photographed and sketches made. The spaces were felt, touched and experienced, a sort of ontological 'being there'. Spatial, visual and user related studies were also performed on the built forms selected for study. Documentary evidence in the form of architectural drawings were also studied and analyzed.

Observational studies were also made in the institutions. The researcher took on the role of a marginal insider, quietly and unobtrusively watching, observing and analyzing the behavior patterns, movement patterns and activities of the users and inhabitants. These observations were recorded in the form of behavior mapping, notations regarding use and photography.

Finally, the writings of Laurie Baker were studied and analyzed in an effort to understand the philosophy behind his architecture. Laurie Baker has published a small but significant number of short books and periodicals with regard to construction for the common man. The writings and published works of other researchers were also referred to during the thesis. Old issues of local newspapers were studied from an archival point of view to study the growth of Baker's architecture in Kerala.

CHAPTER 2

LAURIE BAKER: LIFE, PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD

The Background: Modern Architecture in India

The year is 1947. India had just gained her independence. The need of the hour was to throw off the colonial yoke and look ahead towards technological and social progress; economic self sufficiency. Technology was the new God and technocrats, the new Messiah's! The overthrow of the Empire was happening in every field. Architecture, too.

Social and economic progress demanded new built forms. It also seemed necessary to make a clean break from the cultural forms of the Raj. The modern age required new materials, new technology, a new religion. And what fitted the bill more perfectly than Modernism, with its right associations of 'progress' and 'liberalism'!

Modern architecture was brought to India during the leadership of India's first prime minister - Jawarharlal Nehru. To him, it seemed a suitable vehicle to express India's aspirations towards rapid modernization; a new tomorrow. Nehru invited Le Corbusier to design the new capital of Punjab - Chandigarh. Chandigarh represented the new Indian city, a result of technological and industrial growth, a symbol of Modernity. Le Corbusier brought the Modern Movement to India, but its revolutionary intent was lost in the process of transplantation from the Western soil to the Indian.

India's Modern Movement developed through the faithful imitation of the Masters. The presence of some architects in India, who had studied or worked under the Masters - Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, encouraged them to discover the East. In addition to Chandigarh, Corbusier built quite extensively at Ahmedabad, which was fast becoming the architectural capital of India. Louis Kahn also built a monument to the new leaders; the management gurus, with the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad. These works inspired their Indian counterparts, most of whom had a western architectural education. This led to the birth of the Indian Masters of Modern architecture. The most

prominent amongst them were Charles Correa, Balakrishna Doshi and Achyut Kanvinde.

Though strongly influenced by western philosophy and the Modern Movement, the Indian masters realized the need for a grounding in the Indian context. They understood the relevance of the Indian conditions - the site, the context, the climate, the history, and tried to design with respect to Indian needs. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the Indian architects did not follow suit.

For the majority, the Modern Movement became just a fancy new tool of design. Concrete was not used for its inherent fluidity, lightness or freedom of form that it gave, instead it was just a symbol of modernity. Used in buildings as a heavy, dense and weighty material, it defeated the very purpose for which it was intended. The Modernist box was not seen as what it was, a break away from the past, a free standing object. Instead it was read as form and copied blatantly without meaning or order. Through mere stylistic reductionism, Corbusier was reduced to exposed concrete fins, awkwardly curved sunshades or merely a proportional play of apertures. Louis Kahn was imitated through the uncomprehending use of circular brick openings and endless repetitions of the arch, the circle and the triangle.

After a while, even this pretense of Modernity was not adhered to. Architects designed according to their own will, creating their own styles or copying whatever the West had just abandoned. It was an eclectic mix of styles and approaches to building, ranging from the Classical to the Baroque to the Postmodern.

Now, after five decades of independence, Indian architecture does not seem to be going in any direction. Neither forward towards progress and technology, nor backwards towards history and tradition. The repeated copying of the International Style has resulted in inhumane cities which seem to be an ocean of concrete boxes. Others, who have sought meaning and purpose in history have ended up with a fractured version of the traditional sensibilities, with its characteristic vocabulary drawn from immediate historic and cultural contexts. For the most part, Indian architecture presently ranges from the most boring, drab, nondescript box to a celebration of kitsch and the bizarre.

One of the main reasons for the castrated condition of Modern architecture in India is its inability to learn from its immediate environment. The most important reality about India is its enormous regional, geographic, climatic, cultural and religious differences. These differences require differences in the approaches to design, construction and use of building materials. It is not feasible to discover or invent an architecture applicable to India as a whole. It becomes obvious that any search must culminate in a form of regional architecture, which is capable of expressing the local traditions of building, construction and content in a rational and logical manner while also being able to accommodate the demand for a wide spectrum of building types. The search for an architectural identity should ideally involve a concern for the site, culturally and environmentally appropriate architecture, and the limitations of local building materials and building skills.

Architecture in Kerala: The Site of Baker's work

Located at the southernmost tip of India, Kerala is a narrow strip of land bounded by the Arabian sea on one side and the Western ghats on the other. The land is generally flat near the coasts and becomes mountainous closer to the ghats. Tall coconut palms dot the evergreen landscape, a sea of greenery, as far as the eye can see. The Arabian sea along the whole border defines an edge; the lands end, a meeting of the sand, the sea and the horizon.

Kerala is renowned for her Arts. Malayalam literature and cinema have always been different from the mainstream commercial arena and have won international acclaim. The dance forms of Kerala - Kathakali, Theyyam and Mohiniyattom have an element of drama and vibrancy that is quite unmatched by other Indian dance forms. Unfortunately, this progressive art movement has not found its parallel in contemporary architecture. The sensitive traditional architecture has degenerated into a confused, eclectic laissez-faire approach to design.

The Traditional Architecture of Kerala

The traditional architecture developed as a response to the hot humid climate, with heavy monsoons for around six months of the year - high pitched roofs, low overhanging eaves and gabled openings. Also, note the similarities in form, whatever the building type, whether it be a residence, a temple, palace or mosque. Only the scale of the composition differs, treatment in terms of form and material remain the same.

Fig. 2.1 Kerala - a land of backwaters and coconut palms.

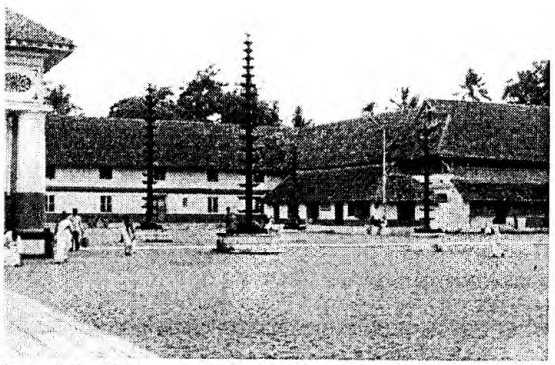

Fig. 2.2 The temple at Vakkom, Kerala; vast unbuilt areas bound by built form at the edges.

Fig.2.3 A traditional house at Kottayam, Kerala. The form is a typical response to the climate of the State.

Fig. 2.4 The Padmanabhapuram Palace.

Fig.2.5 A mosque at Calicut, Kerala.

Kerala's traditional architecture evolved largely as a response to the hot humid climate, which receives heavy rainfall for nearly five to six months of the year. The traditional vocabulary was simple but effective. Steeply pitched tiled roofs, deep overhanging eaves, high ceilings, central open courtyards, tiled floors and open verandahs. The building types were also a response to the social system of the State; the matrilineal system of social inheritance, also called the *'Marumakkathayam'*.[1] The dominant residential building type of traditional Kerala architecture was the *'Nalukettu'*, which had a central courtyard with built form on all four sides and supported the extended families of the matriarchal system.

The spatial quality of Kerala architecture is breathtaking. It is experientially powerful, taking the visitor through spatially polar oppositions. Though the spaces are quite simply resolved, there is an amazing play of light; the light and the dark almost resembling male and female elements, the play of the yin and yang. Diffused light brings out the play of shadows, the grey shades between black and white. The rays of the slanting sun seem to acquire a special quality when they light up the traditional built forms. The simple forms are bathed in shafts of sunlight, which are neither harsh nor gentle, but endow the built form with an aura which is almost transcendental in nature.

The traditional architecture of Kerala was a great equalizer. The common person's residence was not very different from the palace, which, again, shared similarities with the temple, the supreme residence. The visual form and spatial quality of all three types of dwelling were nearly similar and so were the building materials. The most significant difference was in the scale of the structures; though never monumental in terms of sheer space and form, the temples and the palaces were far more elegant and well composed in comparison to the commoner's residences. These similarities were probably due to the presence of a regulating system of building - the Vastushashtra, or

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A distinctive feature of the social organization of Kerala till recent times was the prevalence of Marumakkattayam or the matrilineal system among certain castes and communities. It involved inheritance and succession through the sister's children in the female line. The family in the matriarchal system was a joint family consisting of all the descendants of a common ancestress in the female line. The mother and all her children, all grand children by the daughters, all her brothers and sisters and the descendants on her sister's side lived in the same home sharing a common kitchen. This kind of matriarchal society is peculiar to Kerala, while the rest of India is largely patriarchal.

Fig. 2.6 A connector at the Padmanabhapuram palace.

Fig.2.7 The dance hall at the Padmanabhapuram palace

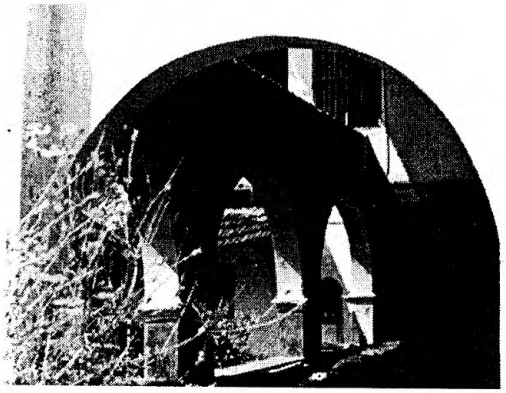

Fig. 2.8 A residence at Calicut, Kerala.

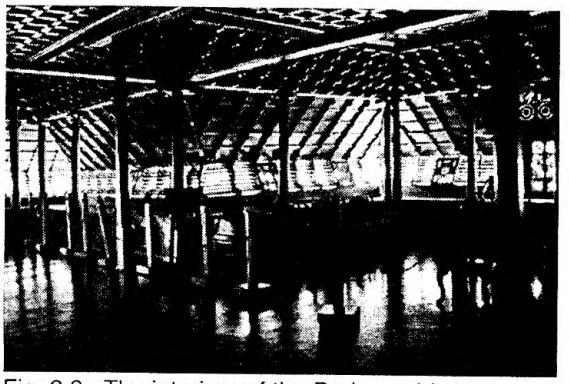

Fig. 2.9 The interiors of the Padmanabhapuram palace.

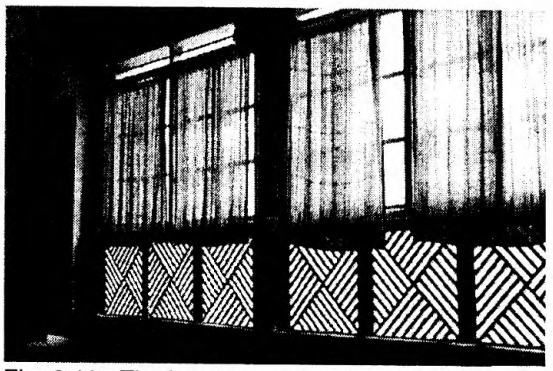

Fig. 2.10 The interior spaces of a residence, Calicut, Kerala.

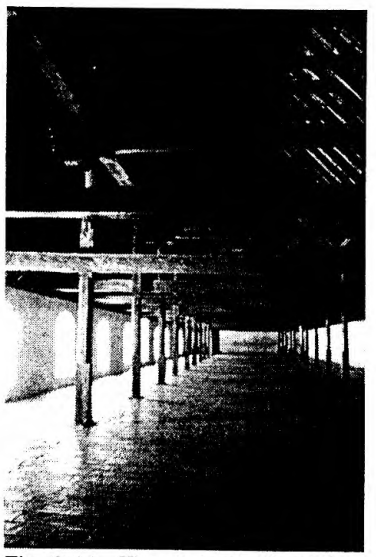

Fig. 2.11 The dining halls at the Padmanabhapuram palace.

Spatial experience

Some of the spatial experience generated by the traditional architecture of Kerala.

the science of traditional architecture. The traditional method of building had a total system, of measurements, proportions, craft techniques and hierarchy of experts for the different jobs, from designer to producer to craftsman.

However, architecture underwent major transformations with the breakup of the joint family system. The *'tharawad',* or the residences of the extended family, disintegrated and went nuclear. The migration to the cities started. The demand for one family residences grew. The craftsmen moved over for the engineers. New requirements and new uses demanded new forms, new building materials, and new methods of building. The Traditional gave way to the Modern!

Modern architecture in Kerala took the shape of a profession as late as the early 1960's. There was no distinction then between an architect and an engineer. Engineering was architecture, architecture was façade and concrete was structure. The vernacular building materials like thatch, tile and terracota were rapidly replaced by cement, concrete and steel. There was no difference between residential or institutional buildings; they were all concrete boxes with a different façade treatment.

The late seventies and the early eighties saw the growth of the Kerala-Gulf Architecture. The oil boom in the Persian Gulf led to a mass migration of workers from Kerala. This new influx of wealth saw a massive building boom in the State. The nouveau rich Malayalees, influenced by the eclectic styles of the Gulf, wanted a façade-rich architecture to declare their newly found social status. This led to an influx of Postmodern styles, leading to a Gulf PoMo architecture in Kerala.

The late eighties saw the end of the Gulf era. Architects were now recognized as a creative force rather than mere façade designers. Freedom was in, utility was out. Form was in, space was out. Each started doing his/her own; Classical columns, Roman villas, Baroque interiors. Postmodern forms were all a part of Kerala architecture. The nineties saw a return to the traditional. In an attempt to create meaningful architecture with links to the Kerala tradition, architects succeeded in creating only pastiche. They could not co-relate the modern building types and traditional values. For them, vernacular form represented tradition and the buildings of this period ended up being

Fig. 2.12 A residence in Trivandrum, Kerala: Attempts at Modernism and Corbusier'ian shading elements.

mere motifs and icons; multi-storey apartments crowned with a traditional Kerala tiled roofs, modern hospitals with wooden trellised interiors and residences with intricately carved false gables. Vastushashtra regained importance and it became more a gimmick of pseudo-tradition, rather than an attempt at unraveling the science of ancient architecture.

Fig. 2.13 A return to gimmickry 'tradition'; concrete roofs capped with tiles and depthless, elevational arches.

Fig. 2.14 Eclectic styles in Trivandrum, Kerala.

Contemporary architecture in Kerala is at the crossroads. Architects are not sure as to which direction to take. There is no conscious grounding of the architecture in Kerala to the practice of the Indian masters of Modern Architecture. Kerala architecture and her architects seem to be taking their own path, with no definite goal in sight. There is no single movement in the State. Every architect follows his/her own ideas and theories. The contemporary architecture ranges from the Modernist concrete box to the Postmodern to the sensitive traditionalist.

In the midst of all this architectural disorder and chaos, one man holds steady, practicing his kind of architecture steadily through all the years. From the initial disbelief of the

people to deep cynicism to gradual acceptance and cult status, Laurie Baker has held on to his beliefs and principles. He has practiced an architecture responsive to climate, context and resources, an architecture for the people, irrespective of trend or style: his is an architecture for the Malayalee.

Laurie Baker: Life, Background and Influences

"I have always been fascinated by ships and rooms and the feeling that you get when you go into these places."[2] *- Laurie Baker.*

Laurie Baker was born and brought up in Birmingham, England. He studied architecture at the Birmingham School of Architecture and is an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Right after his graduation in 1937, the Second World War broke out. Baker enlisted in the Friends Ambulance Unit and was sent to China as part of a Quaker surgical unit. During the war, Baker worked with people suffering from leprosy in China and Burma; these trials, tribulations and sufferings opened him up to a new world.

Passing through India on his way back to England, he happened to have a chance encounter with Mahatma Gandhi, which changed the course of his life. The aftermath of war and its ravages had already affected Baker deeply and he felt the need to devote his life to a meaningful cause. He talked to Gandhiji about his urge to come back to India, in spite of having 'Quit India' shouted at him repeatedly. Gandhiji strongly encouraged him, telling him that the nation needed him. And it did!

"What Gandhiji said many years ago is even more pertinent now. One of the things he said that impressed me and has influenced my thinking more than anything else was that the ideal houses in the ideal village will be built of materials which are all found within a five mile radius of the house. What clearer explanation is there of what appropriate building technology means than this advice by Gandhiji. I confess that as a

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Laurie Baker in an interview with this researcher at his home, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Jan '00. Text contained in the Appendix . Pp 180.

young architect, born and brought up, educated and qualified in the West, I thought at first Gandhiji's ideal was a bit 'far-fetched' and I used to argue to myself that, of course, he probably did not intend us to take this ideal too literally.

But now, in my seventies and forty years of building behind me, I have come to the conclusion that he was right, literally word for word, and that he did not mean that there could be exceptions. If only I had not been so proud and sure of my learning and my training as an architect, I could have seen clearly wonderful examples of Gandhiji's wisdom all around me throughout the entire period I lived in the Pithoragarh district".[3]

Within a few months, Baker was back in India, as part of a Mission involved with the care of leprosy patients in India. Baker was employed as an architect-builder with a knowledge of leprosy and its hospitals; his main task being to convert old refugee centers to treatment hospitals. At this stage, Baker came to realize the importance and necessity of getting to know the user of the space. The leprosy patient was very different from the usual patient and Baker had to know the patient's needs very intimately to design suitably. The beginnings of Baker's deep involvement with the client, his life and aspirations can be seen at this point of Baker's career.

"My job was mainly to convert or replace these old dreaded asylums with proper modern hospitals and create the necessary rehabilitation and occupation centers. But there was no precedent for this approach of treatment. Medical experts were few and far between and inevitably had varying and even conflicting ideas about how to go about the whole new set of problems. Who was to guide me in my work?.....The doctors had a fair idea of what they required for their work. But finally it were the patients themselves who would actually live in my buildings, and in them regain not only their health but their hope and self-respect, and finally gain a new entry into life. What better clients could one hope for?"[4]

During those days, Baker was introduced to the fascinating world of vernacular architecture. The architect from Britain was amazed at the sheer knowledge and skills of the local people, in front of whom Baker's construction manuals and textbooks were

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Quoted by Laurie Baker in his article - "The Question of taking Appropriate Building Technology to Pithoragarh" from Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 16.

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Baker, Laurie. "Baker on 'Laurie Baker' Architecture" in Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 224.

rendered obsolete. The ordinary poor villagers, who seemed ignorant and uneducated, built beautiful houses for themselves using the everyday materials one found around oneself. For Baker, the process of discovery had started. Mud, stones, bamboo, dried grass, twigs, fibres from cacti, creepers and vines were all used. These local materials combined with the indigenous methods withstood cyclones and the ravages of nature better than the brick and concrete structures. Baker's education into the art of building had just begun.

Over the years, Baker understood and took in all that he saw around him, the strange but effective ways of indigenous architecture. The process of self discovery and personal growth went on as well. During this time, Baker met a Malayalee doctor, Dr. Elizabeth Jacob and found in her a similar commitment to service, honesty and dedicated professional practice. She was to medicine what Baker wanted to be to architecture; use the profession as a tool for the greater good of humanity.

They were married soon after and on a trekking honeymoon to Pithoragarh, high up in the Himalayas, they decided to work and settle there. The Bakers lived, worked and built there for the next sixteen years. Though Baker had been introduced to the art of vernacular building, it was the years at Pithoragarh that really challenged and transformed him into a resilient, but innovative creator. Pithoragarh, being high up in the Himalayas, faced bouts of severe cold weather and was subject to landslides and earthquakes. The Himalayan domestic architecture was a perfect example of vernacular architecture at its best. Simple, efficient and inexpensive, it demonstrated hundreds of years of research by the way of trial and error on how to cope with the severities of climate, how to cope and make do with local materials, how to accommodate for the local social patterns of living, how to cope with the sparse vegetation and harsh unfriendly sites.

Baker's architecture of necessity seems to be a direct result of his years at Pithoragarh. While the building needs there were small, they were nevertheless, absolutely essential and necessary. Materials were also scarce and Baker had to build with whatever was locally available; rock, mud, laterite, even cow dung. The people were also extremely poor and could not afford to pay for anything more than the essential. This led to Baker

learning how to build as cost effectively as possible, learning new ways and processes to cut costs without affecting the structural strength of the building in any way. The people of Pithoragarh engaged in a sort of barter system, paying for building costs or medical treatment with food or physical labor on the building sites. This architecture of austerity seems to have influenced Laurie Baker deeply and can be seen as a dominant force throughout his architectural career.

At Pithoragarh, Baker built schools, hospitals and community centers. The structures were all low key and self supporting; the natural by-product of the site and local building skills available. The beginnings of a 'Laurie Baker' architecture.

The Bakers left Pithoragarh in 1963 and came south, where they resettled in yet another rural hilly terrain, Vagamon in Central Kerala. Baker, by now adept in the art of vernacular architecture, built his own home and hospital for Kuni, his wife, with the local building materials in the local style of the area. But Kerala was very different from the villages of North India. The climate was different, the building material was different, but most importantly the people were different.

"I found the relationships of Kerala to India very comparable to that of Britain with the rest of Europe. The people were 'insular' and proud, and their ways were very different (and in their own eyes, superior) to those of others. Many more people were educated and literate and this was especially true among the women folk".[5]

Baker spent sixteen years in this hill district, engaged in the building of schools, hospitals, leprosy centers, missionaries, churches, houses and even small institutions. During this period, Baker flowered as an intuitive designer accepting the constraints of skill, labor, materials, climate and site as natural and part of everyday life. By then, these constraints and the austerities of necessity did not seem to be imposed, but seemed to be a natural framework for design. Baker was able to let the architecture within him evolve and develop.

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Baker, Laurie. "Baker on 'Laurie Baker' Architecture" in Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 230.

After the period at Vagamon, the Bakers moved further down south to the plains, to urban Trivandrum - the capital of Kerala. In Trivandrum, Baker applied all that he had learned to a wider urbane client base. For the first time, the only constraint seemed to be a lack of actual constraint. But Baker, having seen how people lived, worked and enjoyed life in the hardy interiors, felt that the urban crowd did not live life to its fullest; the architecture was not developed to its inherent potential. Instead of adopting the easy lifestyle and extravagance of the common populace, Baker sought to demonstrate a way of life. Though he built for the middle class, he always kept in mind the homeless millions and the hand-to-mouth existence of the hill people. He designed and built an architecture of honesty, necessity and essentialism. But minimalism did not necessarily mean ugly. He sought beauty in scarcity, in absolute necessity and in honesty and truth of expression. Without the impositions of frugality on his architecture, Baker's expression started taking free form. The inherent freedom of form and space ever present in his architecture broke out of the framework of linearity. It flowed free, wild and passionate, a roller coaster on a juggernaut. It moved and danced with joy, and sang the song of creation. A creation of the morning!

Probably the three most significant influences on Baker's architecture are: Baker's chance encounter with Gandhiji, Baker's Quaker upbringing and his wife Kuni, or rather Dr. Elizabeth Baker. In the course of several discourses with the Mahatma, Baker imbibed the meaning of Gandhiji's most basic message for a modern India; that change and progress in a post-independent India can only be achieved through education and the revival of the small-scale industry and the local crafts and skills. Real independence lies in self sufficiency and self reliance.

The years of Quaker upbringing also seem to have strongly influenced Baker's architecture. The rigorous Quaker religion with its emphasis on simplicity, austerity and necessity and the rejection of all ornament and luxury, probably conditioned Baker to the frugal lifestyle of the Indian hills and enabled him to come to terms with such an architecture of purpose. It allowed him to accept as natural, the art of simple localized building; that the most simple and efficient system is an architecture which stems from local needs, local materials and local skills. The Quakers believe that each piece of work is an offering to God and must be without flaw, perfect in itself. They also believe that it

is impossible to put up a false front in front of the Creator and one must be oneself, honest and true. These beliefs probably reinforced in Baker the need for honesty in expression and the strong anti-façade-ism in his architecture.

Mrs. Baker, better known as Kuni, has also played an important role in Baker's development as an architect.[6] Though the influence may not have been very direct, she has been a source of constant support. Sharing the same ideals, the same zeal for service towards humanity, believing in the shunning of extravagance and the need for simple living and high thinking, she has proved to be a source of constant inspiration for Baker. Many a time, her ideals and medical service have proved to be an eye opener to Baker, who as a result, has consciously tried to apply a humanistic approach to architecture; showing the way towards housing the homeless, recycling slums and the rehabilitation of earthquake destroyed settlements.

The spread of Baker's practice in Kerala

Religion plays a very important part in the life of an Indian. It is not only a faith, but an institution which plays the role of a background support for life altogether. The Christian church is much more institutionalized and philanthropic when compared to the Hindu temple. The temple is an individual's personal conscience keeper, while the church plays the part of a societal role model. During Baker's early years at Vagamon, it was the church which had a main role in the spread of the popularity of his architecture. The church brought him to the common masses.

The conference of the Kerala Bishops had resulted in the decision to build an inexpensive small house for the poorest member of each parish, irrespective of caste or creed. But the expenses of building soon put an end to this philanthropic idea. When the Church came to hear about a member who was doing experiments in inexpensive building at the hill village of Vagamon, they wanted a demonstration. What better idea

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Refer to Appendix for the text of the interview with Laurie Baker, conducted by this researcher, at Baker's residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Pp 186.

than to promote a member of the Church for the greater good of the parish? Thus Baker got started, putting up many small houses, schools, clinics, hospitals, mission buildings and churches for the Church.

By this time, as Baker's popularity as a cost conscious, experimental architect grew, the State Government of Kerala started to notice him. The government had socialist leanings and they were looking for someone exactly like Baker, as a vehicle for the expression of their ideology. The then Chief Minister of the State became a Baker supporter and 'fan' and asked him to design and build the State Institute of Languages on a low budget, which the state-owned Public Works Department had declared as impossible. Baker was successful and that marked a start of the design of a long line of Government institutions and offices. The socialist Government identified Baker as the right person to depict in built form the socialist ideals; honesty, change, social reform and economic self sufficiency. The socialist Government's manifesto communicated a philosophy that was honest, without any form of extravagance or grandeur, stripped of all flamboyance; a government for the people and of the people of Kerala. Baker's architecture too spoke of the same principles. The exposed brick structure was honest, spoke of necessity and was stripped of all unnecessary external show. It was true to itself. It was also a symbol that represented the dignity of the downtrodden, the common masses. It also spoke of a revolution, an open rebellion against the established norms of building styles and methods. These ideas and what they represented, allowed the socialists to project their philosophy to the common man through the built form of their Government institutions and offices. This Government propaganda allowed Baker to experiment with his architecture on a much larger scale.

As Baker built more and more Government offices, the workers in these offices came to identify with Baker's spaces. They were also immensely attracted by the low-cost factor of Baker's architecture. Baker soon started building private residences for these workers, economists and officials. This lead to a rapid growth of Baker's architecture in Trivandrum, with the number of Baker clients growing every day.

Initially Baker's architecture was seen only as a response to the cost factor of building. He was credited only with innovative building. This idea lead to a greatly enhanced initial

demand for Bakerian architecture. The people were so taken in with the concept of new building methods leading to reduced costs that the deeper layers of Baker's architecture went unnoticed. It is only after long years of stay in a Baker home that many of the users have realized the presence of much more in the home, something that they cannot put a finger on; but can feel and realize its hidden presence in themselves. They are a part of their home and the home too, is a part of themselves.

Design Principles of Laurie Baker

The main design principles of a 'Laurie Baker' architecture are:

a.) Context

"We sometimes claim that Modern architecture is functional. Perhaps a few modern pace setters are both functional and in their own way beautiful. Unfortunately 99% of what is now known as 'Modern Architecture', especially here in India, is purely imitative.....often these have no relevance or function in areas with different conditions of climate, geology, vegetation, cultural and social living patterns from those of the place where the original prototype was perhaps originally conceived".[7] *- Laurie Baker.*

One of the main design principles that Baker adheres to is the relevance of the built form to site and context. Baker's buildings are highly site specific and carefully adapted to the context of Kerala, which forms the 'site' and socio-cultural 'setting' for his built forms. Baker also responds to the actual physical site. He imbibes the nature and essence of the site within him and designs for that particular site alone. Every stone, every rock, every tree, every contour is marked, understood and absorbed. The resulting architecture can fit into no other place other than that for which it is designed. He preserves the natural content of the site as much as possible, taking care not to cut across the contours of the land. The built form hugs the land, low lying and low profile. The buildings move and swerve to incorporate nature, the existing trees on the site within themselves. The built and the unbuilt are seen as one integrated whole.

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Quoted from Spence, Robin. "Laurie Baker, architect for the Indian poor" in *Architectural Association Quarterly*, Vol.12, 1980. Pp 35.

b.) Climate

"Our 'backward' ancestors had learned how to live and cope with the problems of climate".[8] *- Laurie Baker*

Baker's architecture is continuous with the thread of traditional Kerala architecture, which evolved as a response to the hot humid tropical climate. As a response to the heat and humidity, Baker uses the vocabulary of the high pitched rooves with high interior ceilings. The wall openings, almost at ground level catch local air currents. The hot air rises, travels upwards along the low eaves and to the outdoors through the openings at the end of the high ridge and the open-to-sky courtyard. The sloping roofs with the deep overhanging eaves form a natural response to the heavy monsoons of Kerala.

The 'jali' walls provide for privacy and protection, while at the same time sucking in the cool night-time air through the tiny openings in the brick. The 'jali's' also let the shafts of sunlight filter in, creating sequences of spatial experience and providing glare free light to the dark interiors. Wall surfaces are kept small in area and are protected by the overhanging eaves to reduce heat gain by absorption. Baker hardly uses smooth, hard or light colored surfaces, instead exposing the natural materials; the wood, laterite, brick and stone to eliminate the indoor glare.

c.) Resources

"In view of the fact that there are twenty million families in India without any sort of shelter, that we have to import cement from Korea to make up for the shortfalls, that we are using up a lot of our energy resources at an alarming rate, and that we have bred some of the top brains in the world of science, we should, for instance, in areas where mud has ben the traditional staple building material, show how modern we can be with mud!"[9] *- Laurie Baker.*

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[8] From Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 7.

[9] Baker, Laurie. "Is a Modern Indian Architecture Possible?" in Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 244.

Baker is very conscious of the nation's resources and their usage in built form. He prefers to use materials which are locally obtained or made, in an effort to economize. He uses those materials in his built forms which are renewable and can be produced again by Mother Earth. The denudation of natural resources, especially the forests, are of greatest concern to him and he designs his architecture in such a way that none of the existing trees on the site will have to be cut down. Baker is always aware that the nation's resources are being used up rapidly. He abhors wastage of any kind, both in his personal life and in architecture; he tries to preserve valuable natural resources for future generations.

d.) Materials

"Modern Portland cement came and suddenly our slow, steady, evolutionary building process came to a devastating and tragic halt. Cement and steel were joined in holy matrimony and lo! - their child was this universal anonymous expressionless 'modern architecture' which tells you nothing except that reinforced concrete has been lavishly and brutally used. The saddest thing about it is that reinforced concrete is a wonderful material that can do almost everything fantastic and exciting. It can stand, soar, twist, hang, swirl, gyrate, encircle, defy and placate. But we rarely ever let it do any of these exciting things. We merely imitate the building practices of the Dravidians, with their square stone pillars and split stone beams; and when in a dare-devil mood we cantilever out the beam-ends to an uncomfortable length, we think we are really and truly 'modern'."[10] *- Laurie Baker.*

"I think the time has come for us to ask a lot of questions about our Modernism. Can we be modern without brick and reinforced concrete? Can we apply our twentieth century knowledge and know-how while still showing a love and respect for all that has gone before us?"[11] *- Laurie Baker.*

Modern Architecture in India depends heavily on man-made materials like cement, steel and glass, which are critically scarce in India's capital starved economy. Baker, like Gandhiji believes in production for the masses rather than mass-production. He prefers

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Baker, Laurie. "Is a Modern Indian Architecture Possible?" in Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings*. Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 242.

11 Ibid. pp 243.

to use the locally produced indigenous alternatives - bricks, lime, tiles and mud; whose potential supply is almost limitless and whose production and assembly are also labor intensive. Baker also prefers to use natural materials, which shows the effects of use and the wear and tear of weathering. Thus the building ages gracefully, instead of remaining falsely young at all times. Brick, stone, tile and terracota show the ravages of the natural elements on them and the effects of everyday use, thus being honest to the user and to themselves.

e.) Craft

"How terrible it is to see a wall made of identical cement blocks or accurately shaped wire cut bricks! I am sure we could use craft skills to lessen the dreaded anonymity of prefabricated and machine made articles, in the same way that Picasso used a pair of bicycle handle bars to make a bull's head!"[12] *- Laurie Baker.*

One of the trademarks of a 'Laurie Baker' architecture is the extensive use of craft and craft skills. Baker promotes the living craft traditions of the region, by incorporating them in his architecture. Rarely relying on machine-made or industrial goods, Baker trains the native craftsmen to work as per his requirements. Baker compares the face of a brick to a human face; no two faces are similar, and it is these fine differences that Baker brings about in the assembly of his built forms. Baker uses craft and skill to bring out the dissimilarities and variations in the bricks to produce different arrangements of color, texture and size on the wall surfaces. The laying of the bricks speak of the skill and craft endowed in the handiwork of the brick-mason. Mud walls speak of the touch of the fingers of the craftsman by the imprints left behind; the love and care taken in the process of building is seen as physical evidence.

The sun screens, louvered windows and the bracketed columns were manufactured as part of the local crafts tradition of Kerala. How they were assembled were left to the individual builders. Baker encourages the craftsmen and creates appropriate places for the incorporation of this craft tradition in his architecture. Baker also uses the craft tradition when he incorporates recycled materials into his built forms; the waste created

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[12] Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in *Space and Society*, Vol. 15, 1992.

and thrown aside by modern consumerism. He reuses old bricks, tiles, wrought iron work, wood paneling, hand made glass and old colored bottles and assembles them in his built form using the craft skills of the local craftsmen.

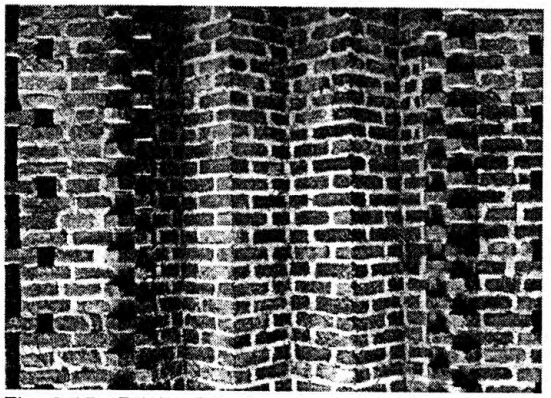

Fig. 2.15 Bricks dovetail into one another at the corners of the built forms.

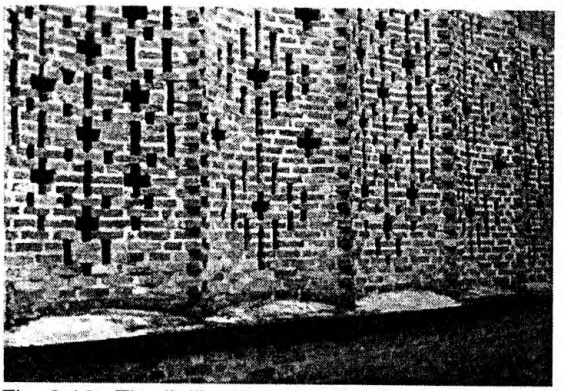

Fig. 2.16 The 'jali' walls of the computer center at the Center for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

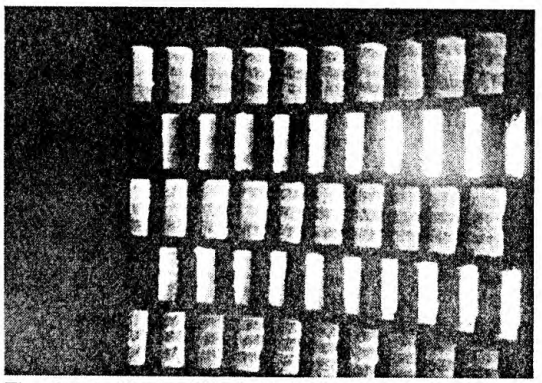

Fig. 2.17 Craft skills in Baker's architecture.

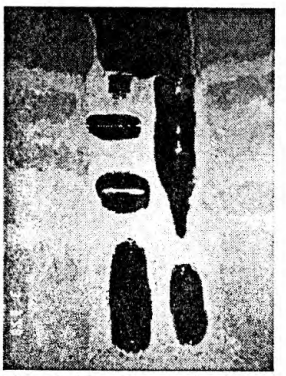

Fig. 2.18 Discarded bottles are integrated within the built form, which gives the wall, a stained glass effect.

f.) Construction Technology

"The innovation of architectural craft is not to reinvent the brick but to discover its potential with the changing circumstance of place and function. So, I always hope and try to produce something that appears as the 'right' idea for the setting".[13] *- Laurie Baker.*

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[13] Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in *Space and Society*, Vol. 15, 1992.

Laurie Baker does not use new construction technology in his architecture to create new forms. Instead, Baker uses new technology for necessity, for reduction in the costs of building and for innovation in structure to bring architecture to the level of the common masses. Baker also uses construction technology to bring out the regional identity of the place. He adapts the traditional Kerala terracota roof into a concrete folded slab design, using broken or discarded tiles as fillers in the slab.

Exposed bricks of merely half-brick thickness are used in innovative bonds. The walls are curved or stepped in plan for added stiffness and rigidity. Baker re-introduced the rat-trap brick bond in construction for greater stability of the wall. The rat trap bond also offers a twenty five percent saving of brick and mortar in its construction. The conventional door and window is used only if absolutely necessary. Instead Baker prefers to use the vernacular latticed 'jali' walls that filter in the light and air. The openings are also corbelled in brickwork and the shutters fixed directly to the masonry wherever possible.

Fig. 2.19 Discarded tiles are incorporated into the concrete of the roof, forming the typical 'Laurie Baker' filler slab roof.

Baker tries not to 'over design' the structures in his architecture. Foundations are designed as necessary for the loads of the building, instead of following conventional methods. Furniture is built into the home as much as possible using natural materials like stone, rubble and brick, thus cutting down on furniture costs.

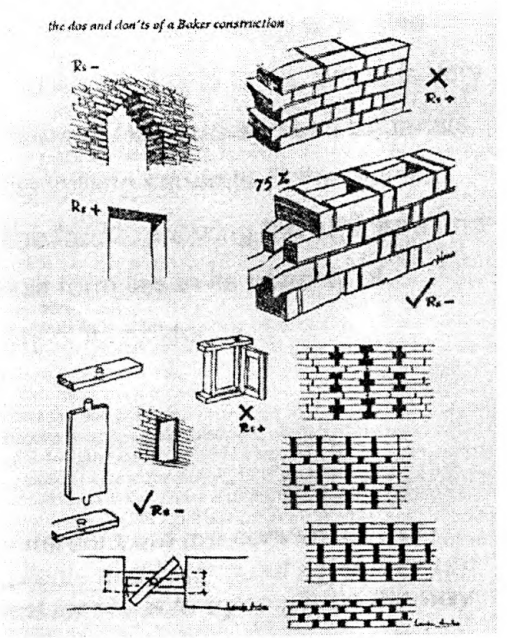

Fig. 2.20. Laurie Baker's list of do's and don't's of building construction.

g.) Honesty, Truth and Necessity

"Let a brick wall look like a brick wall and a stone wall look like a stone wall. Concrete should look like concrete and not be plastered or painted to look like marble".[14] *- Laurie Baker.*

"Normally, I don't do a flat roof, unless it is for need, like for further expansion or for the necessity of occupation, like in this case (The Quilon housing for distressed fisherfolk, who needed flat roofs to mend their nets, and dry the fish). Then, in a slum or in a closely built colony, where there are no spaces to gather or to sit out on a nice evening, the only option available is the roof."[15] *- Laurie Baker.*

The most essential and basic philosophy of Laurie Baker, whether in life or in architecture, is that every object, every function and every design has to justify itself in terms of use and necessity. Nothing extravagant or luxurious is accepted, since it is a waste of national resources. Every line, every curve, every brick is there because it needs to be.

Baker is also extremely conscious of the honesty of his architecture. Every material has to be honest to itself and to the user. The material should not covered up with false veneer, but be exposed to the world; be what it is and what it wants to be. Baker is very particular about expressing the structure of his built forms. He prefers to use materials as load bearing elements, as masters, rather than as infilling servants. If the building has to be a framed structure, then Baker exposes the frame, showing the structure and the infill as separate elements. The beauty of the built form lies in its honesty of expression, the truth of its purpose and the necessity of its existence.

h.) The Client

"The way I work is very personal and I think very different from the conventions of professional practice. It is my getting to know the clients and finding out what they are dreaming, thinking and hoping for. Equally important for me is to try to gauge the way

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[14] From Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 40.

[15] Laurie Baker in an interview with this researcher at his home, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Jan '00. Text contained in Appendix. Pp 169.

they live, how they occupy space and what I might be able to give them beyond the ordinary measurable functions of a house".[16] *- Laurie Baker.*

For Laurie Baker, the client, his dreams, hopes and fears are of utmost importance. The client is not supreme, but every aspect of the client is taken into consideration. The home is not a personal monument to Laurie Baker, but a gentle backdrop to the client and his/her life. Baker makes attempts to draw out aspects of the everyday life of the client and in the process, he finds out his/her secret hopes and aspirations. Baker aims to design for those aspired states of the client, thereby inducing the client to grow into a higher plane of life.

Laurie Baker: Methods of Working

Baker's methods of working are very different from the usual universal, Modernist architect. He does not like to be a part of a prescribed system, but rather prefers to work alone, as an individual. He does not have a formal office nor does he make endless working drawings. He operates from his home - the 'Hamlet', and makes sketches on bits and pieces of reused envelopes.

Once he meets with a client, he makes sure that the client has come to him out of necessity for a home, not for a 'Baker' home. Baker explains his principles of design to the client and he/she is instructed to have a look at other homes designed by Baker. Baker has long talks with the client, wherein he comes to understand the deepest requirements of the client/user. He asks them not to state their requirements, but to share with him their lives, their hopes and their dreams. He understands what they really need, not what they say they need, and designs for their hidden aspirations. This is probably the reason why the inhabitants of the Baker homes identify so much with Bakerian architecture.

In the process of actual physical design, Baker highlights the importance of knowing the

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[16] Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in *Space and Society*, Vol. 15, 1992.

site. He visits the site many times over and spends hours marking every natural element on it; every contour, every stone and every tree is observed, understood and imbibed. The combination of the site and the user triggers off the intuitive design processes of Baker. He arrives at the design solution almost instantaneously, every element in its 'right' place and setting.

"So, if you are going to do the planning, you have to know the site yourself. You, yourself have to get the site details like the stones, trees, wells, rain, wind direction and all that. Every building should be unique, no two people or no two families are alike, so why should two houses be alike?"[17] *- Laurie Baker.*

Baker prefers to work alone on the site too. He is without assistants, but makes it a point to visit the site nearly everyday. Baker is a delight to watch on a building site. Like an excited teenager, he runs from point to point, talking, gesturing, drawing out the intricacies of the design, even tying up the reinforcements on the roof. He is a complete autocrat on the site, he expects the craftsmen and masons to build exactly as per his instructions. Though unable to communicate efficiently in the local language, Malayalam, he is able to get across the finer detailing of the built form through detailed drawings drawn on the existing walls, rocks or stones on the site or old waste bits of paper.

The singular most important aspect of Baker's methods of working is the relationship of the triad that he forms. Baker believes in the triad of the architect, craftsman and the client.[18] Not for him, the universal machine aesthetics of the Modern Movement, where the craftsman was non existent, the client was not important and the architect was God. For Baker, the three go side by side, each one enhancing the other's presence. On the building site, Baker plays the role of the cohesive force between the craftsman and the client; the craftsman puts into a concrete form what the architect designs and the client requires.

17

Laurie Baker in an interview with this researcher at his home, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Jan '00. Text contained in Appendix. Pp 175.

18

Similar ideas and thoughts on the triad are expressed by the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy. See Steele, James. *An Architecture for People: The Complete Works of Hassan Fathy.* Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, 1997.

Baker's versatility on the site is truly amazing.[19] He has developed his own system of measurements, all based on the module of his most fundamental building material, the brick. A window is made up of 'n' number of bricks, the door '2n' and so on. His ability to envision space is so complex but perfect that he does not need any building drawings to co-relate to his work on the site. He is vastly intuitive, an intuition that comes with a superior understanding of space and form. Much of the design detailing is done on the spot at the site, amazing even the most experienced of crafts-persons. He moves, jumps and gesticulates on the site, every 'jump' or 'move' equaling the distance of a door or a window or an opening as the case may be, on the plan form; which to everyone's sheer disbelief turns out to be exact and perfect. Such is Baker's comprehension of space!

Another aspect of Baker's method of working which never ceases to amaze the onlookers, is his ability to improvise on the site. Curved 'jali' walls are drawn by the hand, on the spot, at the site without any other sort of equipment. Openings are designed as the wall is being built, niches are carved in and corners are detailed during the process of actual building. Skylights are added during the casting of the roof and colored bottles are added to already half built brick walls. Window seats are abruptly built in, in an awkward corner; suddenly completing the incomplete and making it seem perfect, as if it was the only way to be. The sheer beauty of all these improvisations lies in the fact that the end result looks planned to the last brick, complete and in place; an inherent rightness of things, a 'falling to hand'.

".....my point is that you have to be involved in what you do. Almost invariably, as soon as the walls start to go up, the client comes along and asks 'But, where am I going to hang my scissors?' or 'Where can I keep my shoes'? When they are at home, you will find that many people do not hang their trousers on the coat stand, but instead use it to hang their shears. So, on site, many clients will ask you 'Where will I hang my trousers'? And then you will have to make a hook or a niche for them on the wall."[20]

19

This researcher traveled with Laurie Baker to many of his building site's, during the field research trip to Trivandrum, India during the period of Dec-Jan '99-'00. Baker's methods of working on the site were observed and understood first-hand by this researcher.

20

Laurie Baker, in an interview with this researcher at his home, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Jan '00. Text contained in the Appendix. Pp 163.

Fig. 2.21

Fig. 2.22

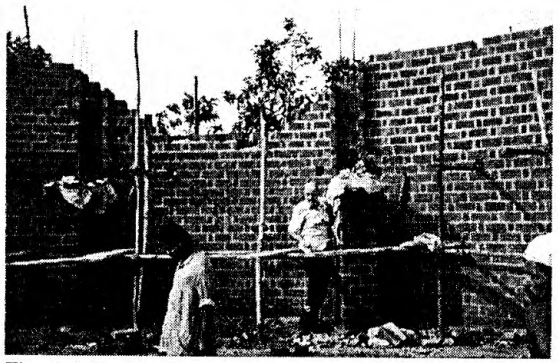

Fig. 2.23

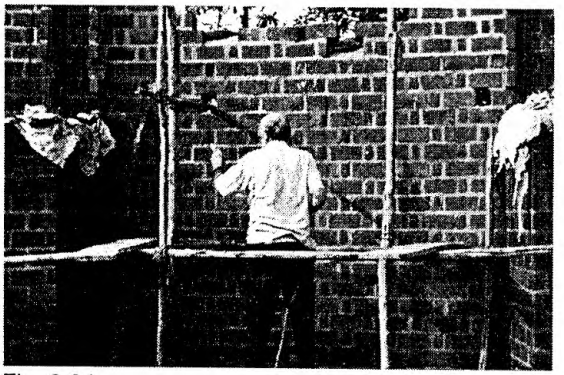

Fig. 2.24

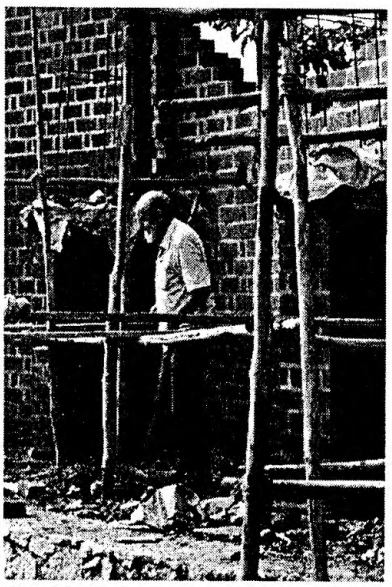

Fig. 2.25

Laurie Baker on Site

Laurie Baker on the site of a Women's rehabilitation center at Vilapilshala, Trivandrum, Kerala.

"There are many buildings that I have done, initially they are surrounded by trees, especially coconuts, which are wonderful things, but you can't see out at all. When you have gone up two storeys, then you are above the trees and suddenly you can see the sea about three miles away or the mountains or the Kanakakunnu palace! So, you probably had only one window on the other wall in your original drawings, because the wind comes from that side. But then, if you had a window here, which has a wonderful view, from where you can see the sea or the palace, then why can't you put a window in, right then and there, if the structure is sound?"[21] *- Laurie Baker.*

The beauty of Laurie Baker's architecture lies not only in the end product, but also in the process of its making and the necessity that calls it into being. The process is as important as the product, since it gives the proof of its inherent method and making. In Baker's architecture, to understand the product, which looks misleadingly simple in its art, it is essential to understand the complexity of the processes of its creation. The art of Creation or the creation of Art?

Baker in Kerala

"The contemporary approach seems to be towards an architectural anarchy of ruthless arrogance. Instead of the harmonious, honest, traditional architecture of Kerala, we now seem to prefer a senseless jumble of high-rise concrete structures, each unit clad in the most unsuitable materials we can think of. The scene is of strife, division, violence and communalism. Perhaps we are merely reflecting the present-day social milieu of strife, divisions, violence and communalism in our architecture. In being modern, virtue has gone".[22] *- Laurie Baker.*

Laurie Baker has always followed his own path. He has always done what has seemed right to him. Never having consciously followed any of the various 'isms' or theories, Baker has always stood alone in the midst of the ensuing architectural anarchy in Kerala. Baker has designed more than a thousand private residences, institutional complexes, computer centers, churches, mission buildings, hospitals, schools, colleges,

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21

Laurie Baker, in an interview with this researcher at his home, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Jan '00. Text contained in the Appendix. Pp 172.

22

Baker, Laurie. "Architectural Anarchy" in Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 1991. Pp 241.

hostels, auditoriums, tourist centers, film studios, fishermen resettlements and earthquake rehabilitation housing through out his architectural career. He designs for the twenty million homeless people of the country. He also designs for the Malayalee, as an individual.

Baker has gained enormous respect and recognition in India, while in Kerala he is an architectural giant, a legend in himself. Though his ideas, philosophy and building methods came in for tremendous disbelief and criticism initially, his architecture has spoken for itself. It has now become a 'style' rather than pure product.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOME: OF MEMORY, DREAMS AND INTERPRETATION

The backbone of Laurie Baker's architecture in Kerala consists of residences, over a 1000 of them, for individual clients and mass housing as part of Government schemes. It is these residences, pieces of highly personalized architecture, which have made 'Baker' a 'style' in himself. For these reasons of 'success' as an architect, and for the architectural quality of the residences by themselves, the residences form a unit of study and analysis for this thesis.

The Essence of 'Home'

A home is very different from a house. A house is an architectural manifestation of space, structure and order but the home has other attached emotional and cultural aspects. The dwelling or the home provides domicile to the inhabitant, a place of refuge and security. In addition to its formal qualities, a home is a locus in space for the inhabitant, marking his/her territory and providing a sense of ownership. A home is a reflection of the persons' ideals, values and identity.

Many architects are guilty of perceiving the house as an object, a stand-alone masterpiece, without coming to terms with its emotional values. The essence of architecture is its capacity in making man experience his existence with deeper significance and purpose. In the words of Aldo Van Eyck; *"Architecture must facilitate homecoming".*[1]

A home can be read at many levels. At the purely physical level, it reveals the identity of the user, the inhabitant or the client. The home is the center of activities for the inhabitant who seeks privacy and security within it. At a deeper subconscious level, the

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1

Aldo Van Eyck, as quoted in Pallasmaa, Juhani. "Tradition and Modernity" in *Architectural Review*, May, 1988.

home can be read as continuity in space and time of a culture. At a social level, the home is a symbol and a manifestation of the inhabitant's place in the social order. Juhani Pallasmaa identifies the three main ingredients of home as (1.) Elements which have their foundation at the deep unconscious bio-cultural level, (2.) Elements that are related with the inhabitant's personal life and identity and (3.) Social symbols intended to give certain images and messages to outsiders.[2]

Laurie Baker and the concept of Home

Baker views the home as an integral piece in the larger scheme of things. The home is like a jigsaw piece, which has to fit perfectly in the puzzle to complete the picture. The larger whole consists of the nation and the world, in general. The home is also a system, which must synchronize with the available materials, available craftsmen, the economy and the resources of the nation. With this system working as a broad framework, Baker starts at the details and works outwards to achieve a highly personalized home for every one of his clients.

Laurie Baker gets to know each client and his whole family personally. This knowledge allows Baker to create spaces with which each member of the family identifies. Baker meets with his clients many times and has long talks with them to be able to judge their sub-conscious needs. Often, he is able to get into their psyche and understand their innermost needs, which they themselves are not really aware of.

"In any case, I try and get to know the client. The easiest and best way to know the client is to go along with him and his wife to the site and ask him, 'What about this tree? This big mango tree? And these big stones? Will it get flooded from the river?' I ask them all the obvious questions and try and get to know them and their land."[3]

2

Pallasmaa, Juhani. "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile - Notes on the Phenomenology of Home" from Benjamin, David and Stea, David (ed.). *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings and Environments.* Avebury Publishing House, Aldershot, England. 1995.

3

Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text included in the appendix. Pp 161.

Baker perceives the house and the landscape as one, a total unified home. The home is automatically an extension of the site and vice versa. There is often a blur between indoors and outdoors, manmade and natural, built and unbuilt, site and house. The house follows the contours of the land and the trees are accommodated within the house or rather the house is accommodated within the existing trees.

Baker subjects each dwelling design to the demands of necessity, in keeping with the economy and resources of the nation, in this case, India. Necessity is an end in itself and every design has to justify its necessity for Baker. Baker does not perceive the home as a status symbol and refuses to design for the sole purpose of appeasing society. For him, the home is a very personal statement from the point of view of the inhabitant. He tries to project himself as the inhabitant and creates a whole world of existential experience for the inhabitant, within the larger framework of the system, of economy, necessity and the resources of India.

Phenomenological readings of home

During the focussed interviews with Laurie Baker, this researcher asked him to identify a few residences for study, which he thought were best suited towards use in this thesis. Baker identified the Dolas home, the Nalini Nayak home and the Jacob John home as the three best places where he himself felt most at 'home'.[4] He also added that these were the three houses he liked to visit the most and, in those houses, he believes that he has realized most of his design ideals.

a.) The Dolas Home

The Dolas home is the residence of Mr. Prakash Dolas, his wife and son. Mr. Dolas works at the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), a premier institute of space

[4] Refer Appendix 1, pp 183.

research in India. The house is part of a loosely organized housing cluster, which consists of 6 houses, all built by Laurie Baker. The six houses seem to form one singly designed entity, but each house is different from its neighbor as only a 'Baker' house can be.

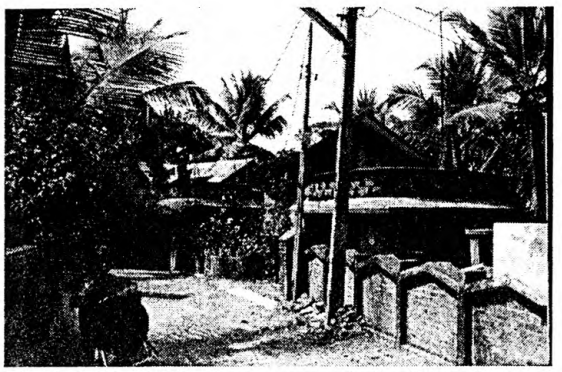

Fig. 3.1 The Dolas home as part of a 'Baker' house cluster.

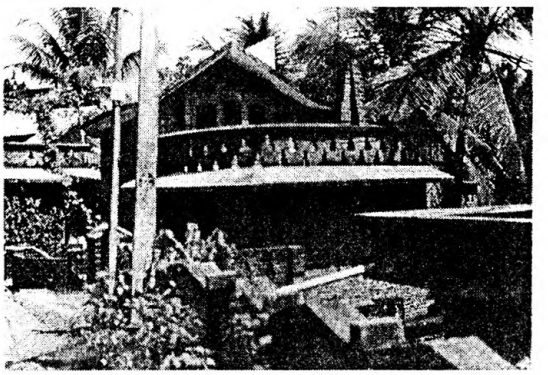

Fig. 3.2 The exterior of the Dolas home.

On approaching the house, the front entry is almost difficult to find. Tucked away in a small niche, as in most 'Baker' houses, the entry is almost insignificant and unassuming. Locating a doorbell is even more difficult and so, the researcher proceeded along to the back or the side door of the house, where it is common in most Indian houses to find more activity than in the front of the house. There the entry was welcoming and open, the door opening into a huge 'bowl' of indoor space. This 'bowl' of space freely flows and transforms to form the open kitchen on the right, rises and curves around to transform into the drawing room and is drawn upwards by a steel spiral staircase perched precariously at the edge of the central bowl. No walls divide up the space, but the entire ground level of the home seems to be made up of this single central volume. This space seems to have a life of its own, growing and shrinking in volume, moving and transforming of its own free will, without the user maintaining any control over it. There is no single theme in the house, no single focus but a constant drama of many forces that seem to be vibrant at an underlying level. The eye is repeatedly drawn to the light, almost ephemeral steel spiral staircase, which seems to be suspended in mid air, within the voluminous central bowl, and one almost fears to climb on it. This stair seems very different in treatment to Baker's usual earthy raw brick stairs. The brick stair exudes a

sense of solidity and confidence, emphasizes the connection to the earth and a world above and assumes yet another dimension, due to the quality of light piercing through the narrow 'jali's' on the wall of the stair well, forming patterns of impermanence on the stair.

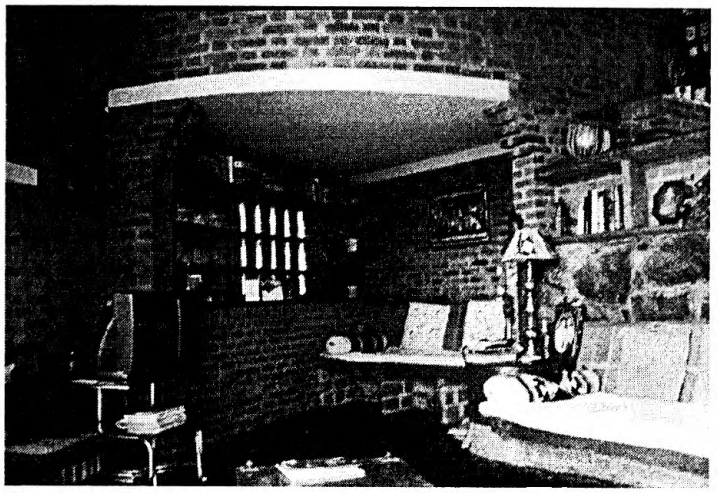

Fig. 3.3 The one end of the 'bowl' of space. The living areas start from this end. The 'bowl' grows and moves around the central stair.

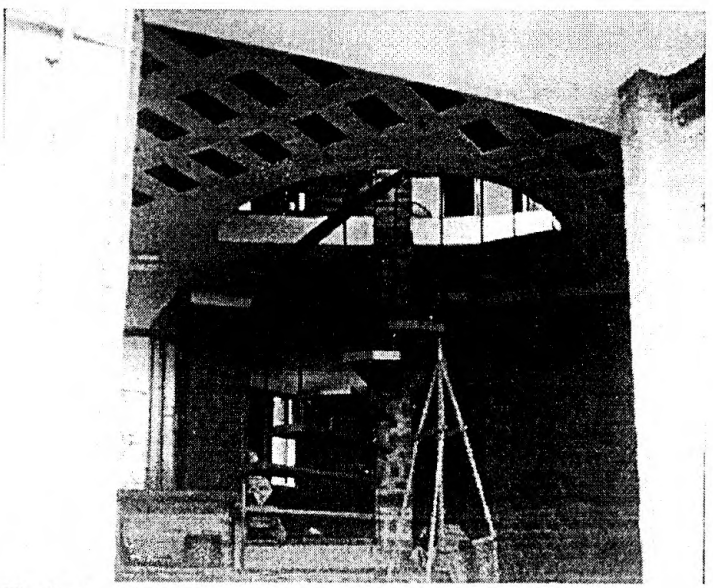

Fig 3. 4 The ephemeral steel stair suspended at the center of the 'bowl'.

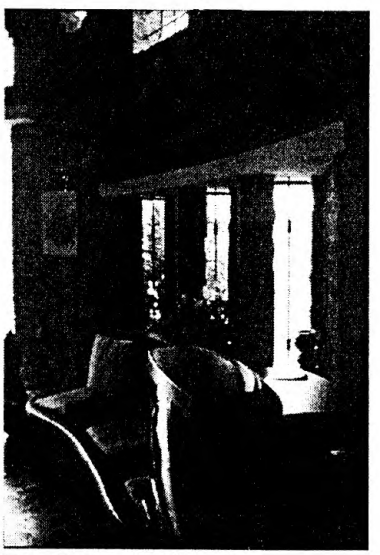

Fig. 3.5 The 'bowl' continues, as part of the living areas.

Fig 3. 6 The 'bowl' forms the dining at the other end, and rises to become the kitchen behind the half-wall.

The kitchen is not separate from this central conglomeration of living and drawing spaces, the division demarcated by only a half wall, which also serves as a counter top of the kitchen and a storage shelf on the dining side. This is very different from the typical Indian house, where the kitchen and the whole act of everyday eating is a very private affair, and is usually tucked into the furthest corner of the house.

Near the entrance door there is a little alcove with built-in seating, which transforms into a bed when required. It was originally intended as a space for Mr. Dolas's mother, who was unwell and wanted a space downstairs without having to climb the steps. A small screen drawn across the alcove makes it a very private space, with the common toilet attached to it, making it a complete quarter in itself.

Climbing up the steel stair, one is extremely conscious of the nothingness of the 'bowl' below one's feet. Each step is placed with care, heightening the act of climbing the stair and making this everyday activity an event. Upstairs, the space is not a single entity like it is downstairs, but is differentiated into specific rooms and their associated activities. There are two bedrooms, bathrooms and a storage space. The terrace or outdoor roof space is at an angle of 90 degrees from the main rooms and one has to cross over the emptiness of the steel stair to reach the threshold of the terrace. There is no direct opening to the terrace from the second floor and so, the consciousness of stepping over

an empty volume of the stairwell to get to the terrace, makes getting there an enhanced moment in time, heightening the tension of the brief moment. These disjunctive moments of tension in an otherwise soothing architectural atmosphere arouses that 'sixth' sense for a very brief split moment.

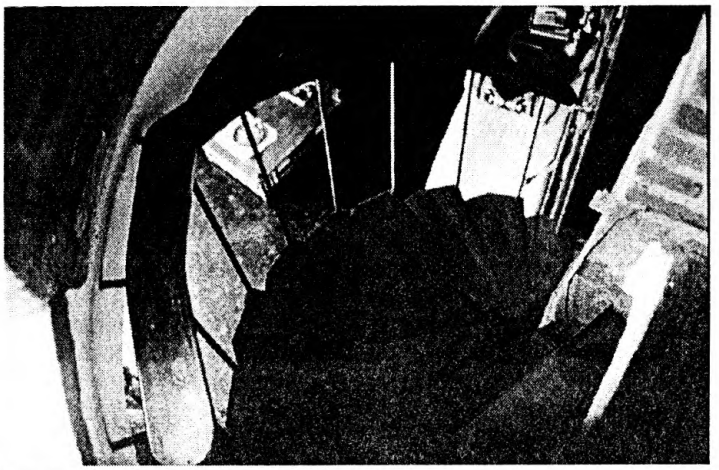

Fig. 3.7 The spiral stair descends to the lower level, over the emptiness of the double height 'bowl' of space.

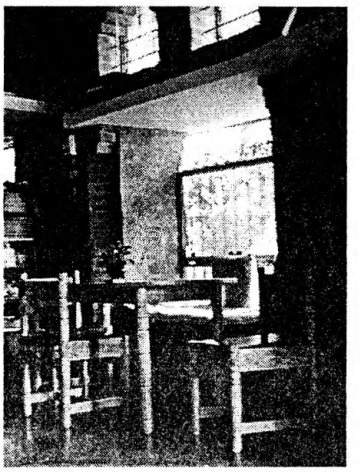

Fig. 3.8 The window seat, which Baker has so thoughtfully designed for Mrs. Dolas.

Baker succeeds in being down to earth as much as he plays with the inhabitant's sub-conscious. He returns, time and again, to the theme of 'necessity' and 'need'. Much of the program of the home was derived as a direct result of speaking to Mr. and Mrs. Dolas. Baker gives a lot of importance to the role played by the woman of the house. In a usual Indian household, the woman spends more time than the others in the home and Baker tries to make the woman of the house feel at 'home'. Much of the open plan of the Dolas home was derived thus, due to casual comments from Mrs. Dolas, who didn't like to be pigeonholed in the kitchen all the time and wanted to spend time with the family even when she was cooking or cleaning. Baker has designed a cozy window seat, which participates in the home, by being an extension of the dining space and a part of the 'bowl'. Here Mrs. Dolas reads the newspaper, while having food and is able to keep an eye on the yard, holding conversations with door-to-door tradesmen, without actually having to get up and go to the door. Such day-to-day mundane activities are no

longer a chore in the Dolas house. It is in this care for detailing and being able to make a difference in the everyday life of his inhabitants that Baker touches a chord in his client.

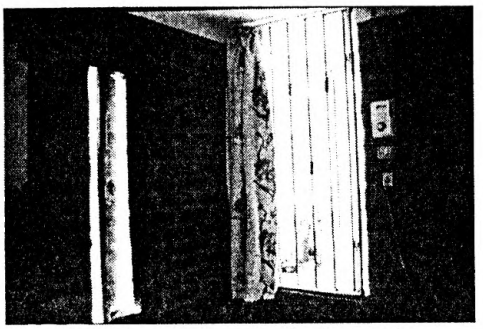

Fig. 3.9 The windows in the house have no frame, either the openings are simply grilled or the wooden panel of the window is hinged on a central pivot.

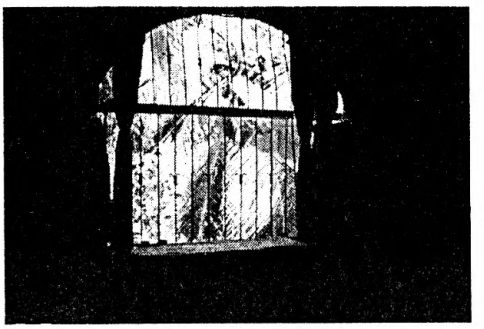

Fig. 3.10 The bare windows adorned only by the element of function: the simplistic grills.

Baker's usage of natural light to give depth and meaning to his architecture is remarkable. He is a master at achieving a high degree of control to the quality of light in his interiors by manipulating the size and positioning of the openings on the walls. At the Dolas home, Baker innovates as per the necessity of the moment. The central bowl has a huge opening to the outdoors. This door has no frame, but consists of two doors which interlock with one another. The outer one is a grill frame, and the inner door is made of planks of wood, which interlock into the grills. The grill door allows the 'bowl' to be open to the natural light all day long, without compromising security. The wooden planks are closed in times of rain, thunder or lightning or when the Dolas's need more privacy. The natural light penetrating through the grills changes the moods of the 'bowl' as the time of day changes. The texture and color of the indoor brick walls also change, dependant on the nature of the sunlight. The grill casts shadows on the cement floor of the 'bowl', which lengthen and change in direction and intensity as the sun moves across the horizon. The temporal and ephemeral quality of the changing moods of the 'bowl' is in contradiction to the feeling of solid permanence and earthiness generated by the totality of the house. These opposing polarities give a dimension of time and 'timelessness' to the Dolas home.

On the whole, the Dolas's are very content with their home. They feel at 'home' in it. They identify with the personalization the house offers them. They of course, do realize the imperfections that are a part of genius, like the uneven black cement flooring of the 'bowl' and are able to laugh at the permanence of the imprint of the paws of a passing cat on the wet cement floor. Again, a contradiction - a sense of permanence generated by a fleeting moment.

b.) The Nalini Home

The Nalini home was almost hard to find, given its slightly out of the way location. Trying to locate the house, this researcher asked for directions to an unplastered house in the vicinity. The response was immediate; *"Oh, you mean that different looking house, that Baker Saipu[5] house!"*

Fig. 3.11 The exterior of the Nalini home.

Nalini Nayak, the owner of the house is a social worker and lives with her aged mother and a faithful retainer of many years. The house is based on a tower plan, with units of rooms stacked atop each other. Surprisingly for a Baker house, there is an element of exterior visual form in the Nalini home. Though the tower is not very visually dominating, it makes its presence strongly felt. The entry to the home is also marked and highlighted by three steps of red oxide cement, bold and bright, almost daring one to enter the house.

As soon as one enters, the most striking element is the colors of the house. The house

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[5] 'Saipu' in Malayalam, the native language of Kerala, refers to a foreigner.

is composed of different shades of reds, maroons and browns, each with its own texture and feel. The red oxide of the entrance steps mellows to form an endless surface of uniformly divided squares of orange-brown terracotta tiles on the floor. The terracotta floor rises up to form built-in cement seating, plastered with bright red oxide. The floor continues almost seamlessly to form the earthy red brown brick walls, which give way to built-in wooden cupboards. The textures of the wall and floor almost oppose each other. The smooth, uniformly colored, equally divided terracotta tiles on the horizontal surface versus the rough, hewn, irregular, earthy brick on the vertical surface, each brick a different hue on a brown-red palette. The white of the ceiling provides almost stark relief to the earth colors of the walls and floor.

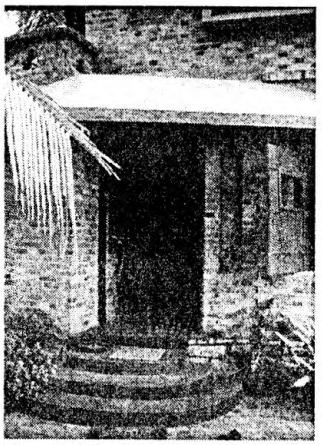


Fig. 3.12 The entry to the Nalini home.

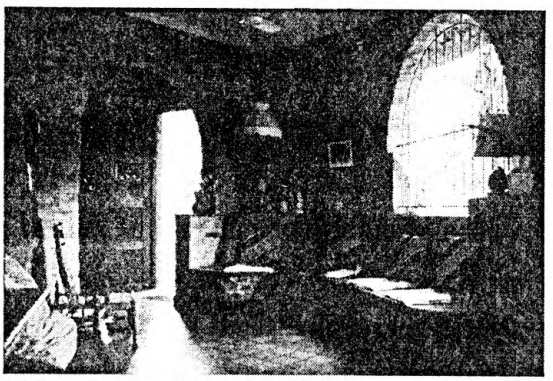


Fig. 3.13 The different shades of browns, reds and maroons in the textured living room.

The earth colors induce a feeling of security and refuge in the inhabitant. The texture, feel and luster of the building materials suggest the permanence of the earth and this permanence brings about associated feelings of security, warmth and comfort. When asked what she liked best about the home, Nalini was quick to reply that it was the warmth and coziness of the home, whereas in reality, Baker's buildings are designed so as to provide climatic comfort and cooling in hot humid Kerala.

The ground floor consist of well defined rooms and functions; living and dining spaces, a bedroom unit for Nalini's mother, another bedroom for the handmaid, kitchens and storage. The staircase, like in the Dolas home, again forms an important spatial

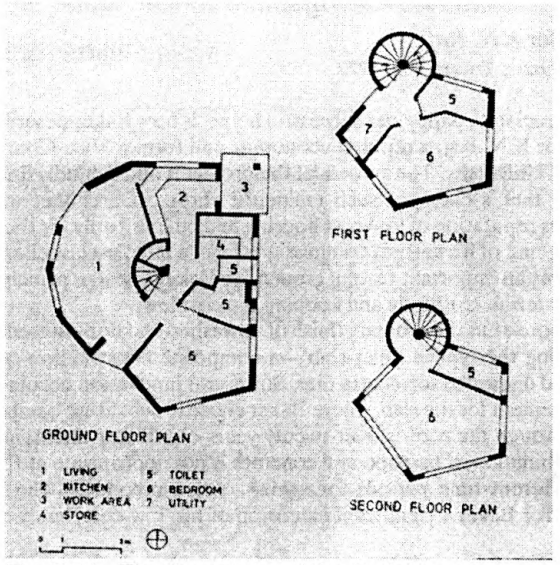


Fig. 3.14. The floor plans of the Nalini home.

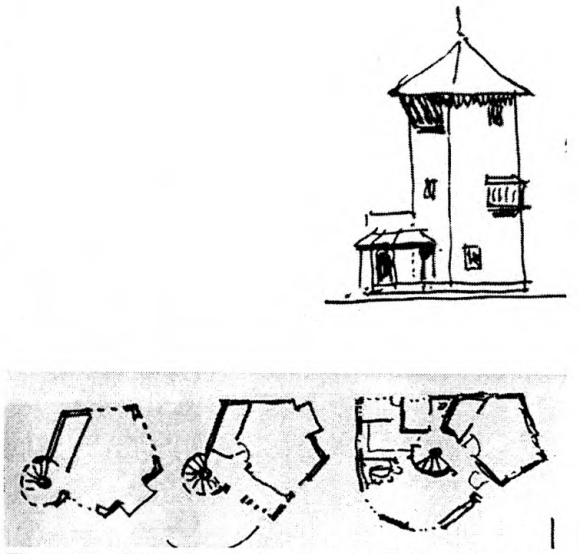


Fig. 3.15. Conceptual sketches by Baker, the home grows....

element. The brick spiral stair is visible as a prominent element from the main entry doorway. The stair is demarcated from the floor as a separate element by the use of the bright red oxide cement for the treads. The horizontal treads, which seem to be in a spiral upward movement are anchored into a strongly vertical, static brick column for support, bringing out the opposing qualities of conflict and confrontation. Other inherent oppositions are also brought out in the treatment of the stair and stairwell. A long narrow vertical slit in the wall at the edge of every horizontal tread provides light to the stairwell. This shaft of light falls across the treads in a rhythmic pattern, always there - a symbol of permanency, but also permanently ephemeral, always changing, depending on the intensity of light and the time of the day. This cycle of permanent ephemerality or temporal permanence is present in most of Baker's buildings, and he uses this quality randomly, almost humorously, laughing at the satire of his own creations.

The stair in this home is a symbol of connections, emphasizing the connection between ground and sky and between family and public life. The rooms below the staircase are very much different from the rooms above. At each landing, the stair opens out into a bedroom unit, which consists of a bedroom and an attached bath. These rooms are intended for Nalini and her social workers. The rooms are stacked up vertically, so that

the social workers and guests can use the rest of the rooms without disturbing Nalini or the family below.

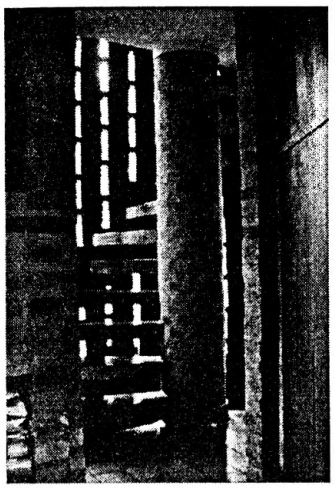


Fig. 3.16 The brick spiral stair is visible as a prominent element from the entry door.

Fig. 3.17 The spatial experience generated by the shafts of light thrown by the vertical slits on the horizontal treads.

The rooms are very stark, bare and simple, almost echoing the mind of the social worker. There is no furniture except for the built-in brick and cement furniture. The bed consists of a built-in slab, with a window at its side for light, wind and the view. Even the windows are very bare, with no frames, but just wooden panels pivoted on the grill of the window. Baker carries the principles of minimalism to the very basics. The bedroom and the attached bathroom share one frameless door. The door is hinged on the wall between the entry to the bedroom and the bath. When required, it is moved over, either to close the bedroom or the bathroom.

Baker creates a high level of spatial experience for the inhabitant. The narrow entry into the house suddenly widens to form the airy living room, which is almost light in spirit and immediately raises one's being into a higher, lighter plane. The central column of the spiral staircase is a focal point, as soon as one enters the house and the duality of the living room and the stair leaves one confused as whether to go up via the stair or steer oneself to the living areas. The living room cannot hold the person for long, since the intensity of the stair proves too strong, and after brief moments of lightness in the living

area, one is automatically drawn up to the stair. The stair creates moments of rich spatial experience for the inhabitant. The dark winding stair, lit at regular intervals by vertical shafts of bright light which diffuse across the treads, suddenly opens out at every level into a wide sweeping, airy bedroom, which almost seems light and joyous, in total contrast to the brooding staircase.

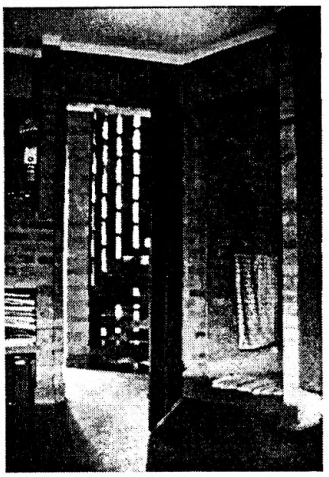


Fig. 3.18 Baker's architecture of minimalism: a single frameless door shuts both the bedroom and the bathroom.

Fig. 3.19 The sparse, bare room of the social worker with the built-in bed, and a window for light and the view.

Baker's architecture seems to place every object in the right place, like an easy 'falling to hand'. Nalini feels this in her house; every object, from the dining table to the ironing board to the telephone niche, everything is in place. It seems as though every detail has been given careful thought by Baker, not only about where to place it but also how it will be used. It seems like Baker has not zoomed down from the theme of the house to every detail in tune with it, but rather has perfected the inverse of it. He starts with every detail carefully thought out, and then develops the design to arrive at the total house, from inside to outside.

The Nalini home is not a 'family' home in the actual sense of the word, but is as required; a home for a single social worker, whose work is reflected in her home too. The sparse, bare, stark rooms, where only the necessary exists. There is no place or time for frivolous extras or luxuries, no rich furniture, no tapestries, no curtains. The

richness comes from the simplicity of the house and the honesty in the use of material.

Nalini is very happy with her home. She is currently working with Laurie Baker on another building at Vilappilshala, Trivandrum - a home for destitute women. She has grown to love her home and identifies it with her life's aims and goals - to live life with simplicity, be what you are, take pride in yourself and do what you want to do. Nalini's home, too, does just that.

c.) The Jacob Home

The Jacob home is located at Vattiyoorkavu, a suburb of Trivandrum. The locale is green and picturesque and Baker's architecture sits comfortably, the brick, stone and tiles blending with the natural landscape. The Jacob home is occupied by Lt. Col. John Jacob, a retired army officer, his wife, his two children, a son and a daughter, and his aged mother.

The home is set back quite a bit from the road and the brown earth slowly transforms into bits of landscape and sculpture, which again seem to transform to form the home. The Jacob home is a natural extension of the landscape and vice versa. Stepping stones begin right from the middle of the yard; hexagonal concrete slabs inlaid with broken waste pieces of mosaic and ceramic tiles, occur at irregular intervals reminding one of the Japanese concept of 'ma', of space and emptiness. The stepping stones culminate in a spiral stone sculpture, inlaid with mosaic and ceramic tiles and partly covered with moss, showing the effect of time and nature. One has to walk partly over the stone spiral to reach a round stone podium, which forms an entry pedestal to the home. Thus, the path from the road to the entry of the home is made up of carefully articulated sequences in space and time.

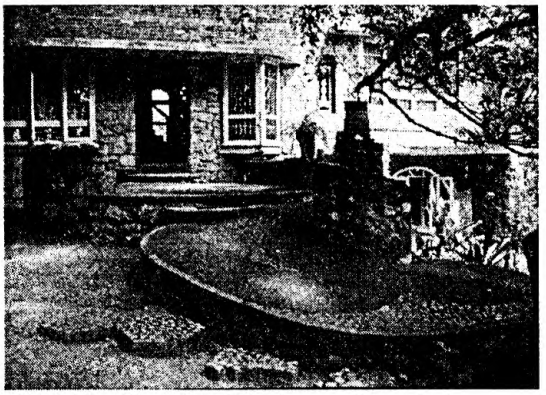
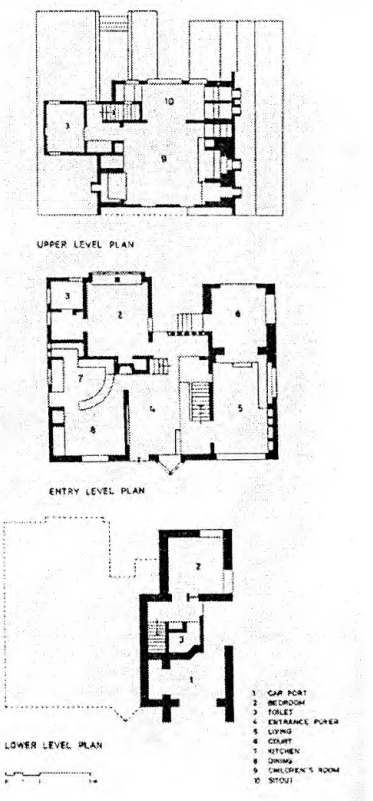


Fig. 3.20 The stepping stones, the spiral sculpture, the round podium and the entry!

Fig. 3.21 The exterior of the Jacob home.

The Jacob home is a romantic piece of architecture; it is obvious at once that it is designed for a family. There is no starkness here, no melancholic sparseness. There is a remarkable richness of detail and craft. Spaces are magnificent, flowing and eloquent. Baker achieves a remarkable playfulness in the articulation of spaces in the Jacob home. Rooms wander into one another, overlap, rise and fall. Staircases start from the middle of the room. Walls erupt into sudden bay windows. 'Jali's' dance and seem to sway in the wind. Brick walls undulate and burst forth in the form of built-in slabs or recede inwards to form corbels and niches. Colored glass bottles take the place of bricks in the wall and throw colored effervescent shadows on the terracotta floor.

Fig. 3.22 The floor plans of the Jacob residence.



The Jacob home is articulated in three levels due to the constraints of the site. The lowermost level contains the car porch, and a room for Mr. Jacob's mother, who is too aged to move around freely. The ground level contains the living and dining areas, the kitchen and storage spaces and the Jacob's bedroom. The living areas are spread out to form both enclosed and open spaces, indoor and partly outdoor spaces, where the landscape comes in or the built form goes out. The top

floor mainly consists of the children's quarters, their bedroom and play areas.

As in most Baker houses, there is no single theme or focus in the Jacob home. There are any number of foci, which keep pulling you from space to space, leading one to experience the whole home. As soon as one enters the home, to the right, from within a series of brick arches and at a higher level, a finely crafted built-in display niche becomes the focus and attracts one's attention. This brick display is a fine composition of arches and rectangles and framed in the arched doorway, resembles a hearth, which is at the center of the house. The sun shines through the multi-sized, red, blue and yellow whole bottles embedded in the brick wall of the display, and creates the effect of a stained glass window, only there are whole bottles instead of glass, again a sample of Baker's playfulness and humor.

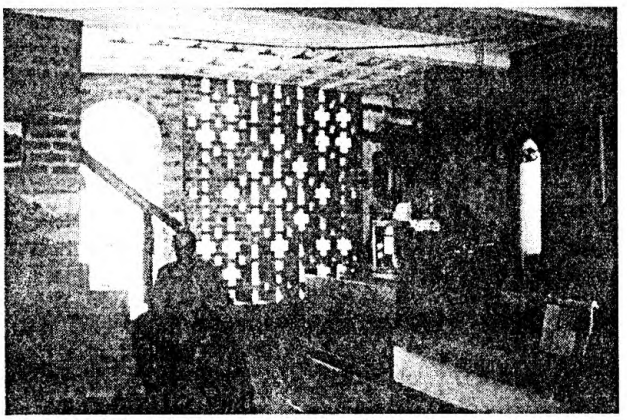


Fig. 3.23 The living room at the Jacob home.

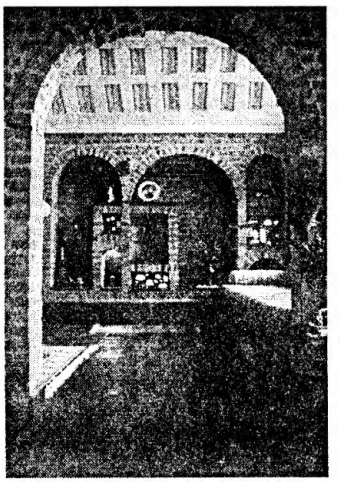


Fig. 3.24 The finely crafted brick display niche forms a focus for the visitor.

Moving on from the built-in display, the semi-enclosed living area up ahead and a level higher, beckons with glimpses and promises of greenery, grass and the open sky. From within the darkened room, only the green banana fronds and a hint of brown earth are exposed to the visitor, through an exquisitely crafted brick arch with glazing. The secret is revealed in stages, with each step forward revealing more and more of the total picture. From within this semi-enclosed space, a grill door leads to the back garden. The focus changes yet again, the visitor can resist the pull no more and is led into the garden. The garden holds many secrets and dreams; there is a pond, a gazebo far

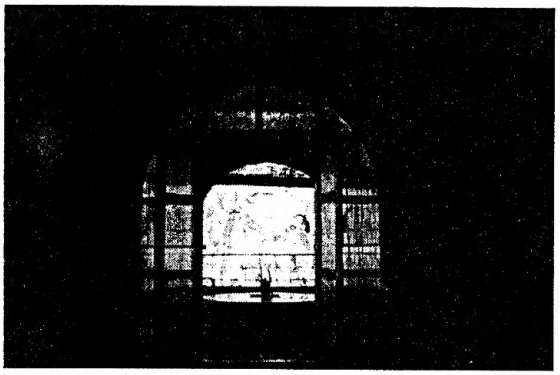


Fig. 3.25 Moving on from the display niche, the exquisitely crafted brick glazed arch beckons.

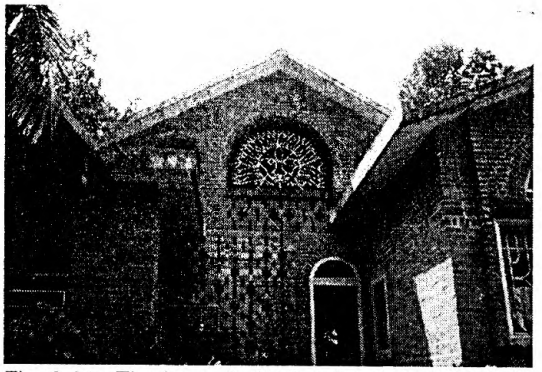


Fig. 3.26 The 'sun window' visible from the back yard.

away and stepping stones which lead to it. Turning back towards the house once more, one is amused by the grill on the sit-out of the top floor. The grill facing the north east, shows a laughing sun god, complete with his flames around him like a halo and Indianized by the presence of a *'tilak'*[1] on his forehead. The sun god seems to be laughing, mocking something, maybe mocking the actual sun! The Jacob's refer to this window as the 'sun window' and like to look at it, if nothing but for the fact that it brings an unconscious smile to their lips.

The 'sun window' becomes a changed focus and, eager to see it in more detail, one rushes into the house and upstairs. Unlike most of his houses, here the staircase is ordinary and even drab, only a means of vertical transportation. The children's room on the top floor is breathtaking. Baker has excelled himself as a romantic playful architect in the creation of this space. One automatically wishes one was a child again, if only to inhabit this room. A central open area to jump, dance, play, act and whatever else children do, niches to hide and seek, cubby holes for storage, peep holes to peep out, a sit out to dream, the 'sun window' to laugh at and arched brick enclosures like tents, to sleep under. The brick niched arches form built-in beds for the children; the material of the brick conveys associations of warmth, security and comfort and according to the children, they are the most comfortable and liked spaces of the home. The brick arched built-in beds are snug and dark. They are similar to the human 'womb' of a mother and

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1

'Tilak' is a mark applied on the forehead with vermilion and signifies valour and bravery. It can also be used as a mark or a prayer to return victorious.

associated meanings of greatest security and freedom from fear are derived from it. That seems to be Baker's greatest gift to the Jacob children.

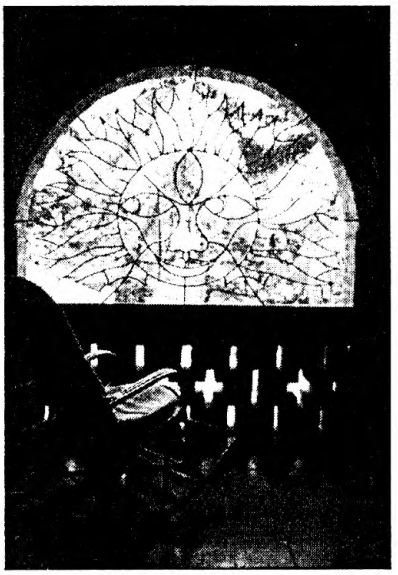

Fig. 3.27 The 'tilaked' sun-window to laugh at, forms a part of the children's bedroom space.

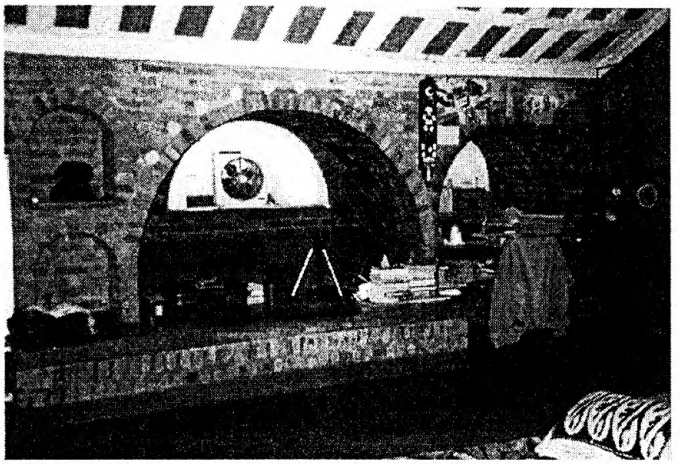

Fig. 3.28 The arched tent like built-in bed, built-in study tables and cubby holes; the children's territory.

The Jacob home is full of such similar charged spatial experiences, some pregnant with rich intensity, while others are playful, even humorous and satirical. Baker uses the natural elements like the sun, light, shadow, wind and water to create some of the most phenomenal sequences. Baker's playfulness does not make his architecture pretentious or shallow in any manner. It only adds an extra dimension to his creation, makes it lighthearted, humorous and able to laugh at itself. It brings out Baker - the man, in his architecture.

Baker is always conscious of necessity and need, even in his zest for play. His materials are, as always, brick, tiles and terracotta, even though he uses a lot of random stone in the Jacob home. He believes in small bathrooms and just adequate kitchens, avoiding extravagance at every opportunity. Sometimes, the creator's intentions and client usage do not always match. This correspondence might also change with time. Knowingly or unknowingly, the function of the staircase changed from being just a vertical element of transportation to a viewing gallery. In the days of early television, all the neighbors used

to gather at the Jacob residence in the evening to watch the television shows, and the staircase would function as a perfect seating gallery. Seating hierarchy was also established and a whole set of rules evolved, based on seating patterns, age of the visitor and time of arrival.

The Jacob's are happy with their home. With the completion of their home, Baker has become more than an architect, he is a friend to them. Mrs. Jacob has certain social misgivings with the kitchen. She wishes she could have had a marble topped, swank kitchen with plush cabinets like the ones her friends have; but Baker being a purist and a minimalist, has given them a kitchen with cement slabs topped with ground glass, wooden cabinets and such basic essentials. Mr. Jacob seems above such social comparisons, he is basically a romantic at heart and he's glad to have a romantic home. The children, simple as they are, are content with their world, which Baker has so wonderfully created for them. It is a home full of romance, playfulness and lighthearted humor with a bit of satire thrown in for good measure. It is a home, which the average Malayalee[2] would identify with and love to stay in. It is the home of a family.

The Home of Memory

The home is man's first universe, his first cosmos. A person experiences his/her home not only in its reality, but also in all its virtuality. Thus the home is not only an existential lived-in world, but it is also a home of memories and dreams. Laurie Baker tries to draw upon and create a home of memory for his inhabitants. Baker does this at more than one level, first at a purely physical level and then at a sub-conscious level.

a.) Connectedness

"To me, architecture is much more of an inside-outside affair! A building has to be in one particular place. And it is this location that decides how it is to be designed, not the

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[2] The people of Kerala speak the regional language Malayalam and are called Malayalees.

architect."[3] *- Laurie Baker.*

Laurie Baker strives to achieve a sense of connectedness or rootedness in his residential designs at many levels. At a purely physical level, he roots the built form or the house to its site. Every built form of Baker's belongs to that particular site it which it stands. Every brick, every stone and every tile seems to be in place, a product of the earth. The built form seems to caress every contour, not dominating and wanting to rule the land, but wanting to be part of it, blending to merge the foreground and the background, almost as though the built form is making love to the earth.

The home is connected to nature in a very intimate way. Baker incorporates nature as much as possible within his architecture and simultaneously incorporates architecture within nature: this symbiotic relationship leads to memories and dreams of the earth and nature as non-dual parts of the home. Baker strives to preserve as many existing trees on the site as possible and this leads to a natural merger of inside and outside, landscape and built form.

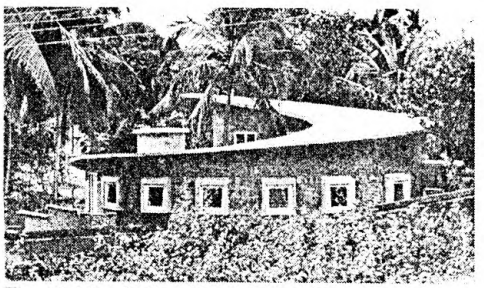

Fig. 3.29 At the Narayanan house, the built form goes around the existing coconut tree in the center, the space flowing easily, naturally, and effortlessly around the tree.

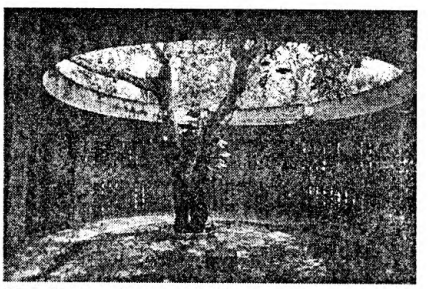

Fig. 3.30 At the Vaidyanathan house, the indoor courtyard is a natural outcome of the built form giving way to nature.

Baker also connects the client or the inhabitant to his/her actual needs. Through his residences, Baker is able to penetrate the innermost recesses of the user's mind and design according to his/her needs, which gives the home an easy 'falling to hand'

3

Laurie Baker in an interview with Gautam Bhatia in Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in *Space and Society*, Vol. 15, 1992. Pp 49.

feeling. One almost feels as though one has lived in the house for centuries, even if it is physically a new home. These necessities of the client arise, in part, as a result of past memories of homes or spaces lived in, with which they identify. The acceptance and meeting of these necessities revive and reinvigorate the dreams and memories of the inhabitant, making him/her feel more 'at home'.

"There is this feeling inside the space which was just....how shall I put it, well, you don't feel like leaving the place at all, just want to linger on. Particularly in a house, one tends to go to the same room again and again, your favorite room...."[4] *- Laurie Baker.*

At a more sub-conscious level, Baker connects the inhabitant to his/her past, rousing hidden memories and awakening dormant images of past spaces, sequences or experiences. The design is not entirely premeditated, but Baker's spatial sequences, charged with regional and cultural identity and the moods he creates and generates through his spatial quality, arouses the hidden unconscious dimension of culture[5] present in every person. This hidden dimension of culture discovers certain elements of Baker's architecture by pure intuition and identifies the Baker home as a home of the past, a 'home of memory'.

At a deeper level, Baker connects or roots the inhabitant to his/her childhood and childhood memories. Baker still retains a lot of the child in him, in his life, art and creativity. This inner child manifests itself in his architecture, playful and often humorous; and this playfulness intuitively reminds the inhabitant of his/her childhood memories. The memories and dreams of the various dwelling places in the inhabitant's life mingle with and penetrate each other, retaining the treasures of former days and associating them with the new home.

As Gaston Bachelard observes: *"And after we are in the new house, when memories of the other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed*

4

Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text included in the appendix. Pp 181.

5 See Hall, Edward. *The Hidden Dimension.* Double day and Company, Garden City, New York.

must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotions is perhaps nothing but an expression of the poetry that was lost."[6]

Baker's homes in Kerala, rekindle in the inhabitant, dreams and memories of his/her old ancestral family home - the huge tiled roof, the wide overhanging eaves, the lime plastered white walls, the wide open verandah's, the comfortable cool sills, which also functioned as seats on which to daydream in the humid summers and the cool summer breeze that blew inland from the back waters. These memories always bring back nostalgia of a childhood past, a childhood which always seems happy. The Baker residences, with similar spaces and spatial experiences, have the capacity to ignite memories of this ever happy childhood and the dreams of the past and present mix and mingle. Even in connecting the inhabitant to his/her own deeper self, Baker's subtle humor is revealed. Baker deconstructs the traditional Kerala home, inverting its colors; the traditional red tiled roof and white lime washed walls are now inverted, by the use of red brick walls and white filler slab roofs. This sort of deconstruction acts as disjunctive episodes in the memory of the inhabitant and blends the dreams of the past and the experience of the present.

6

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from French by Jolas, Maria. Beacon Press, Boston, 1964. Pp 5.

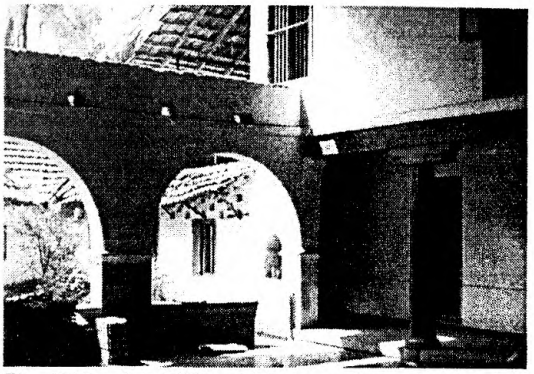

Fig. 3.31 A traditional 'tharawad' residence at Calicut, Kerala.

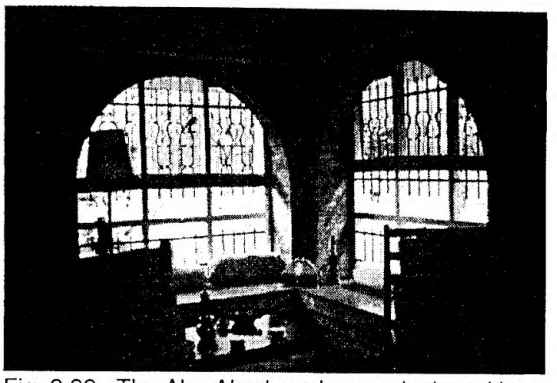

Fig. 3.32 The Abu Abraham home, designed by Laurie Baker at Trivandrum, Kerala.

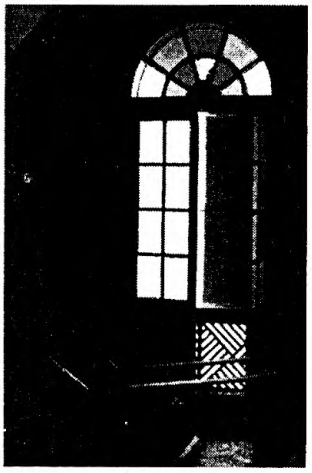

Fig. 3.33 A stained glass window at a traditional residence at Calicut.

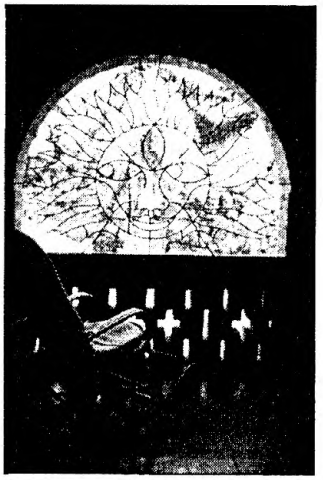

Fig. 3.34 The 'sun-window' at the Jacob home.

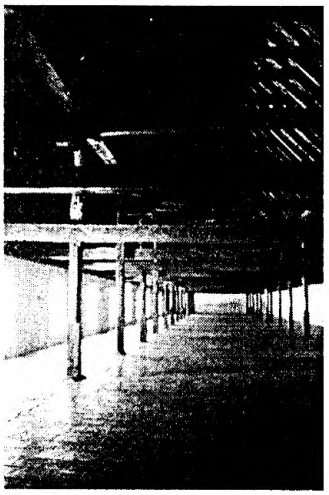

Fig. 3.35 Spatial experience at the Padmanabhapuram palace.

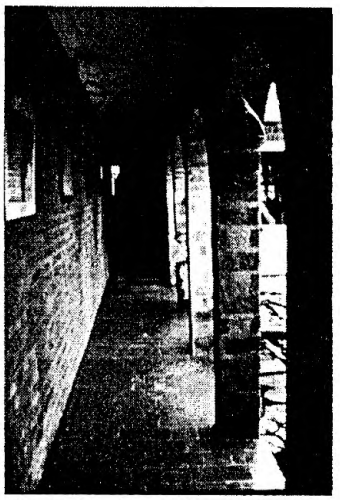

Fig. 3.36 Spatial experience at the Abu Abraham home, Trivandrum.

Baker's spatial sequences have a clear reference to the traditional spaces of Kerala. By using these spatial qualities as a tool in design, Baker touches upon the regional identity of the experiencer and awakens the hidden unconscious dimension of culture present in every human being.

b.) Permanence and Continuity

The home provides the human being with a domicile in space. It also concretizes personal images of privacy, security and intimacy. Man seeks refuge and protection in his/her home. Baker's residences project images of permanence and through it associations of refuge and security. The materiality of Baker's built forms has a language of its own. The stone speaks of its geological origins and symbolizes permanence and solidity. Brick brings about images of earth and fire and the processes of its making, evoking imaginations of the feel of the hands as they mix the earth and sense the heat of the kiln. Wood speaks of its life as a growing tree and as a product of love and skill, crafted by the hands of the carpenter. All these materials are associated with memories of time, duration and permanence. This sense of permanence brings with it feelings of security and privacy to the inhabitant and reinforces the function of the home as refuge.

Along with the symbolism of permanence, the Baker homes also evoke a parallel memory of continuity. Baker draws upon human memory to rekindle thoughts of continuity - continuity of tradition, continuity in time, continuity of culture, continuity of thought and continuity of dreams. These polarities of permanence and continuity which exist on a sometimes parallel, sometimes different layer of the sub-conscious, touch an invisible chord in the inhabitant, which even he/she may not be aware of. There is an enmeshing of object and field, foreground and background, memories of dreams and real life images.

The Home of Images

"A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of a house;...."[7]

7

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space.* Translated from French by Jolas, Maria, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964. Pp 17.

The image of home is probably the strongest when one comes back from work on a cold winter evening and see's the lighted window. Or when one comes back from a hard day of toil in the hot afternoon sun and the cool dark shade of the home envelops you. The former touches through the eye, while the latter touches through the actual sensation of touch or feeling. The strongest images of home, the first universe of the human being, are those of protection, security and comfort.

a.) Spatial Experience

Baker's architecture is not based on a single visual theme, there is no one dominant focus. Instead, his architecture focuses on existential experiential themes for the inhabitant. The simplicity, and thence, the beauty of Baker's architecture lies in the fact that only the inhabitant can completely experience the magic of his spaces. An outsider can only be a marginal participant in the space.

The spatial experience is not a central theme nor is it a dominating experience, too full of itself. The experience of Baker's spaces are highly charged sequences, which are episodic in nature. These episodes are part of everyday activities like climbing a stair or walking through the open courtyard or even looking out of a window. The charged sequences heighten the sensation of the actual doing of the act and the magic of the brief moment can only be felt, experienced, lived-in and cannot be described, explained or photographed.

At a simpler level, Baker creates memorable spatial episodes by using a vocabulary of simple and directly opposing sequences. Programmed complexity often results in seemingly simplistic outputs and is ingrained in the mind as sequential images. The tightly coiled, dark spiral staircase suddenly opens out to wide, airy, light, almost floating-in-space, rooms. The narrow corridor opens up into volumes of light and space. The outdoor light is captured in the indoor courtyard. The dwarfed entrance progresses to a magnificent 'bowl' of space. These opposing spatial sequences attain complexity with the duration of time. The relationship between Baker's intentions as a creator and

the experience of the inhabitant may change with the passage of time. The inhabitant gets tuned to the spatial sequences and they become part of habit and memory. This blur between the foreground and background, past and present makes the spatial experience richer in content, as it becomes a part of the inner consciousness.

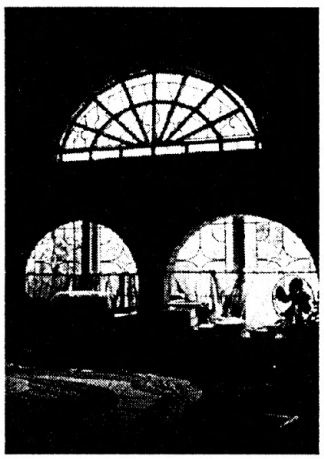

Fig. 3.37 The contrast of light and dark at the Jacob home.

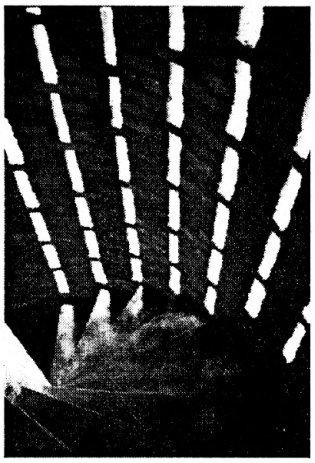

Fig. 3.38 The sharp rays of sun light up the dark staircase at the Nalini home.

Baker's richest spatial episodes are achieved by the complete mastery over the medium of light and shadow. Light and darkness can bring out opposing qualities in the human being. Light can be a source of joy and comfort and so can it be scary, a source of distraction and fear, forcing one to seek the security of a dark corner. Baker uses light and shadow to inspire these qualities. Baker carves out solids and voids, creates transparency, translucency and opacity in his homes by the master play of light and shadow.

"What's marvelous about a room is that the light that comes through the windows of that room belongs to the room. And the sun somehow doesn't realize how wonderful it is until after the room is made. So, somehow man's creation, the making of a room, is nothing short of a miracle. To think that a man can claim a slice of the sun!"[8]

8

Kahn, Louis. "1973: Brooklyn, New York" in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, Vol. 19, MIT Press, Cambridge and London, pp 93.

The dusty beam of light coming through the arched window and throwing the image of the arch on the dark floor, evokes a dual image of the window; once as a crafted artifact on the vertical surface and then again as a shimmering image on the horizontal plane. The dark, tense brick spiral stair is lit up by shafts of light, filtering through the 'jali's' and setting the tread on fire. The colored shadows from the colored bottles in the brick wall are ethereal and seem almost surreal. Baker's play of light and shadow seem to almost distend time and space for the inhabitant.

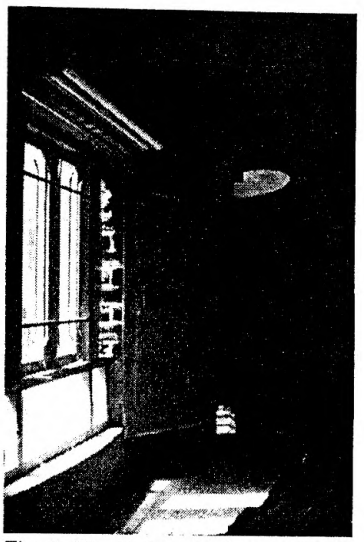

Fig. 3.39 Baker evokes a dual image of the window, using the sun as an experiential tool, at the Suresh home, Trivandrum.

Baker's use of light creates a differentiation of space and function in his homes. He creates spaces for solitude and for company. One of the greatest human emotional needs is the occasional necessity for solitude, to seek refuge in oneself. Baker realizes the necessity of that human longing, and with the effective use of light and shadow, carves out dark niches in which to brood, despair and mourn, and airy light spaces in which to rejoice at the miracle of life. It is the intimate knowledge of the inhabitant's existence that allows for such sensitive handling of space - space which transform into lived embodied experience.

b.) Materiality / Hapticity

"You say to the brick, "What do you want brick?"
And the brick says to you, "I like an arch."
And you say to the brick, "Look, I want one too, but arches are expensive and I can use a concrete lintel over you, over an opening."
And then you say, "What do you think of that, brick?"
Brick says, "I like an arch." [9]

Baker usually uses natural materials which are renewable by nature. He makes a conscious effort not to deplete the world's resources. He uses local materials, available

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9

Kahn, Louis. "1973: Brooklyn, New York" in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, Vol. 19, MIT Press, Cambridge and London, pp 92.

in the area of construction, so that there will be less energy and cost involved in the transportation and procurement of the material. The local material enables local craftsmen and builders to practice and perfect the craft of building in the medium they are most familiar with. The local material also brings a regional flavor to the built form, which allows the local user/inhabitant to identify with it at a stronger level.

Baker understands each material and allows it to take its own inherent forms. During Baker's early days of practise in India, at Pithoragarh and even in Vagamon, Kerala, he used a lot of the locally available material, which was stone. With stone, Baker's architecture seems more restrained, geometric and simple. Baker's favorite medium of creativity seems to be brick. It was after he really discovered brick that his exuberance of life and the joys of living seem to come to presence in his architecture. With the discovery of the possibilities of this 20 X 10 X 5[10] module, Baker's creativity seems to have taken on new dimensions. His architecture in brick dances, laughs, moves, twists and cries with unbridled joy, the joy of life and creation.

Baker uses renewable materials like brick, stone, mud, tiles, terracotta and wood in his architecture and honors every material he uses. Honesty to material, form and expression is one of the main elements of his philosophy of architecture. Brick is not used as an infill or an inferior material, wherein it loses its character. Brick is not used as a servant, but as a master, load bearing and supporting. Whenever it is used as an infill, Baker is honest in his expression by exposing the structural framework of his built form. At another level, Baker's homes can be described as the homes of images - images of hapticity. Memory is perceived as a product of the mind and images, as always a product of the eye. The eye, however, not only views, but also touches. The eye often touches before the skin does, touching, feeling and caressing the object and by actually perceiving through touch, the mind touches twice. The human memory retains within itself images of what the total body perceives. Mental images are usually memories of lived experience. Baker's architecture does not touch the eye alone, it calls out to all the five senses, the eye, ear, nose, skin and tongue. Sometimes it also has the capacity to arouse the sixth sense, that of intuition, consciousness and the perception of another

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[10] The size of a brick used in construction in India, measured in centimeters.

dimension of time.

"My perception is not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once."[11]

The cool breezes are sucked in through the 'jali' walls, providing cool comfort to the dry parched skin; the falling rain sweeps in through them and bursts into millions of tiny droplets, enhancing the sensation of touch. The first rain on the warm brick, heated by the stored warmth of the scorching sun, brings smells that evoke a nostalgia of a childhood past, when one danced in glee under the first summer showers. The eyes caress the warm, textured brick bringing a tangy rough taste to the tongue. The smooth terracotta floor cools the mind and tastes of chalk and polished lime plaster. The window seat arouses a consciousness of a past era, maybe a childhood game or maybe even a past life; of a queen who sits hidden in the shadows of her royal chambers and peeps out into the world unfolding below; hidden to the world, but secretly aware of everything.

c). Insideness

When one thinks of Baker's architecture, especially one of Baker's homes, the first mental image is that of the interior spaces. Baker attaches more importance to the spatial experience of the inhabitant than to pure visual form and therefore everything happens on the inside. There is a peculiar insideness to his homes, which is almost feminine in nature. This represents a clear move away from the hyper-masculinity of the Modern Movement, which emphasized the use of a clean, cold, linear geometry of form. By contrast, Baker creates warm, feminine, almost womb-like interiority.

Home is always associated with the mother figure. Mother earth, the woman of the home or even the feminine concept of home being the first refuge, are all associations one makes with one's home. The inhabitants of Baker's homes are thus able to identify with Baker's feminine interiority and feel at home in his built forms. Baker, being a

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[11] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Routledge Press, London, 1962.

regional organic romanticist is able to identify what the inhabitant really needs, at various levels of the conscious and the sub-conscious and then gives the inhabitant what he aspires to be, effortlessly raising the inhabitant from necessity to aspiration.

The Home of Identity

The home is a mirror of the self. An inhabitant tries to humanize any space by marking it, by trying to territorialize it. By doing so, he/she is establishing his/her own self as part of the space. *"I am the space where I am."* - Noel Arnauld.[12]
Laurie Baker tries to provide each inhabitant with a home of his/her identity - a place with no pretensions, a place where they could be themselves.

a.) Dialectic

Baker creates a dialectical architecture at many levels; between the user and the home and a dialectic within the built form itself. The inhabitant and the home are always in dialogue with each other, both at the physical and at the metaphysical level. Baker is highly perceptive and understands the inhabitant in intimate detail, maybe even more than the inhabitant does himself/herself. This perception allows Baker to create a world for the client which belongs to him/her and to which he/she belongs to.

"Baker absorbs every little thing, even every casual uttering of ours. I had not realized that what I said to Baker'ji' so casually, would be converted into design, so seriously. I had told him that I hated the darkness, and look what he has given me! Light and light everywhere!"[13] *- A user.*

"After moving into this home, I feel a conscious change in my lifestyle. I had mentioned

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12

From Pallasmaa Juhani. "An architecture of the Seven Senses" in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture, Architecture and Urbanism*, Special Issue, July 1994.pp 35.

13

Quoted by a female inhabitant of one of the Baker homes at the VSSC cluster housing, of which the Dolas home is a part of, during a personal interview with the researcher at Trivandrum, India, Jan'00.

to Baker during one of our casual conversations that I often feel left out of the family, since I am always in the kitchen and the rest of them are watching TV in the living room. Baker gave me such a strange design, the kitchen was almost a part of the drawing room...initially it looked odd, but now I am glad. My husband helps me wash and clean up the kitchen, something he never used to before, my son talks to me about his homework while I cook, and I can watch the TV too, through this little hole (connecting the kitchen to the living areas). My world has changed, after I came here."[14] *- A user.*

The home grows and adapts as the individual grows, both physically and mentally. Baker designs for the inhabitant's ideals and aspirations. This causes the client also to change, grow and adapt to fit his perfect world, which Baker has already created for him. This kind of constant dialectic is an ever renewing cyclic process and is ongoing in nature.

Baker's spatial configurations are in constant opposition or confrontation with each other. This brings in an element of underlying tension, an emotional drama which unites the composition. The spaces often correspond to the ying-yang or positive-negative phenomenon. Every space, every emotion seems to have its antithesis, in some form, sometimes complete, sometimes not. This dialectic between the built form keeps the atmosphere charged and always dynamic.

b.) The Scale of Time

Karsten Harries writes that architecture is a domestication of space as well as a defence against the terror of time.[15] Baker, at one level, tries to create beauty in his architecture by evoking a sense of timelessness, by fusing the past and the present. At another level, he allows the inhabitant to come to terms with the terror of time by constantly reminding him/her of the passage of time, by revealing the wear and tear of the materials he uses. This sort of dichotomy is always present in Baker's architecture and

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Quoted by a female inhabitant of one of the Baker homes at the VSSC cluster housing, of which the Dolas home is a part of, during a personal interview with the researcher at Trivandrum, India, Jan'00.

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Harries, Karsten. "Building and the Terror of Time" in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, Vol. 19, MIT Press, Cambridge and London.

reinforces the inhabitant's locus in space and time.

By creating a home of memory, by repeatedly taking the inhabitant back to his Motionless Childhood, Baker takes one back to an idealized past, over which time has no power. This fusion of dreams of the remembered essential home and the present lived-in home flattens time, rendering a timeless eternal space. But again, the inhabitant has to return to the real world to confront the ravages of time. For this, Baker reduces the impact by exposing the user/inhabitant to the reality of time and use. Baker's home is not a home of eternal youth, never wrinkled and never creased. Instead his materials - the brick, stone, mud and tile show the effects of weathering, wear and use on them. Cracks appear on the brick walls, the sharp brick edges become rounded, moss grows on the tiles, the white filler slabs darken with repetitive monsoons and the bright red-brown brick is bleached under the hot summer sun. The inhabitant comes to terms with real time and real space.

c.) The Home as Symbol

The home is a symbol of self identity as well as a social symbol. The symbol of self identity is not connected to the self alone, but is also an indicator of the identity of the self within the framework of the society. The social symbol refers to the society's understanding and placing of the home in its own framework, having its own set of rules and complexities. For Baker, the home is a whole within a larger whole and is not to be viewed as only a social artifact. Baker, in fact even refuses to design for clients who only want a 'Baker home' without understanding its larger implications and meanings.

"The rich normally have pre-conceived ideas, mostly archaic or borrowed images which they want architects to implement for them. I generally build for people in the lower strata, those who normally could not afford the services of an architect. They are always open to experiment, to new ideas, and they know the value of money, so many of my ideas on cost reduction and building with less material and more innovations are readily

acceptable to them."[16] *- Laurie Baker.*

Indian society, on the other hand attaches some special significance to a Baker home. The resident of a Baker home acquires a distinct identity. He/She is considered an intellectual by the society, a proponent of change and socialism in a society which is largely socialist in ideology. In fact, Baker's first major project in Kerala - the Center for Development Studies, was developed out of the socialist ideals and agenda of the then reigning communist government. The socialist thinking has romantic haloed ideals of minimalist, economic, suffering self denial and on a superficial level, Baker's architecture seems to fit the bill exactly. Many of the inhabitants like to be identified as 'Baker home owners' because of their elevated social position as harbingers of change. Such clients aspire to become intellectuals and even like to be known as an 'intellectual', a natural social by-product for a Baker home owner. This has lead to a large scale superficial copying and imitation of the so called 'Baker style', largely due to the demand for the supposed cost reduction in the construction.

Though largely unintentional, Baker's architecture has become a household name in Kerala. Many of the inhabitants of his homes are identified in the neighborhood as the person who lives in a Baker home.

d.) Gratification

Most of Baker's clients have a different set of goals and aspirations than the members of the common society. Deep inside their consciousness, they want to be different and think differently. They look towards higher ideals in life and that is reflected in their choice of architect for their ideal world, their home. Many of them, however, do not happen to consciously know exactly what they want to do, or what they expect from life. Baker tries to extract this knowledge from his clients by talking and getting to know them. He then tries to create a perfect and ideal world for that particular client, the home

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16

Laurie Baker in an interview with Gautam Bhatia in Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in *Space and Society*, Vol. 15, 1992. Pp 47.

not being so perfect that it is too complete and full of itself, but an ever changing dynamic world that grows and adapts. He realizes the aspirations of the client, gratifies their needs and inspires them to grow into his created world.

Baker's architecture consists of two definite worlds - the physical and the metaphysical. They do not exist on two planes which lie one over the other, but are two ends of the same spectrum. One flows into the other with smooth transition, like simplicity and complexity. It is impossible to pinpoint where one ends and where the other begins. On the same spectrum, lies the use, purpose and meaning of Baker's architecture, the 'use' and 'function' starting at the 'simple' end of the scale and 'meaning' attaining more complexity. Most of the Baker inhabitants realize the physical concepts of 'use' and 'function'; with the passage of time and more critical understanding of themselves, they realize the metaphysical side of Baker's homes. Their understanding of 'meaning' in themselves and their home leads to the gratification of their inner most desire - that of a more elevated and meaningful way of living.

"I never quite know what is meant when I am asked 'what is your philosophy' or what is the philosophy which guides my work. I think it is all summed up by saying that I merely do a building for a particular person, or family or organization and I try to make the design useful by expressing certain ideas simply and directly.....It is getting to know my clients and finding out what they are dreaming, thinking and hoping for. Equally important for me is to try to gauge the way they live, how they occupy space and what I might be able to give them beyond the ordinary measurable functions of a house".[17] *- Laurie Baker.*

[17] From Bhatia, Gautam. "Laurie Baker" in Space and Society, Vol. 15, 1992. Pp 41.

CHAPTER 4

THE INSTITUTIONS: HOME FOR THE COLLECTIVE

"In us
Inspiration to learn
Inspiration to question
Inspiration to live
Inspiration to express
These bring to man their institutions.
The architect is the maker of their spaces.
The mind, the body, the arts bring to light these inspirations.

The mind, brain and psyche, sensor of the universe and of eternity, in joy of wonder with the question 'why anything?'
The body is life, none without the psyche. Its beauty, grace and strength should be coveted and be honored by the man and by society.
Art is the language of the spirit. Art is the making of life. To create is the sense realization of the psyche and obedience to the laws of nature.

The institutions are the houses of inspirations. Schools, libraries, laboratories, gymnasia. The architect considers the inspiration before he can accept the dictates of a space desired. He asks himself what is the nature of one that distinguishes itself from another. When he senses the difference, he is in touch with its form. Form inspires design."[1]

Laurie Baker's institutional complexes form an important segment of his architecture for the sheer success that they enjoy in terms of user response and satisfaction. As a subject for analysis, they are again significant since the institutional user is more complex than the residential user. The user in the institution consists of the individual and the collective. The treatment of space for the two different kinds of users differ considerably, since there is a lesser degree of personalization of space for the 'collective' as user. Two contrasting institutions are selected for this study. The Center for Development Studies (CDS) is probably Baker's most prestigious and well-known of all his projects. It is a huge sprawling campus and is made up of a number of buildings, built forms and building types, while the Loyola chapel is a single building, a tight volume

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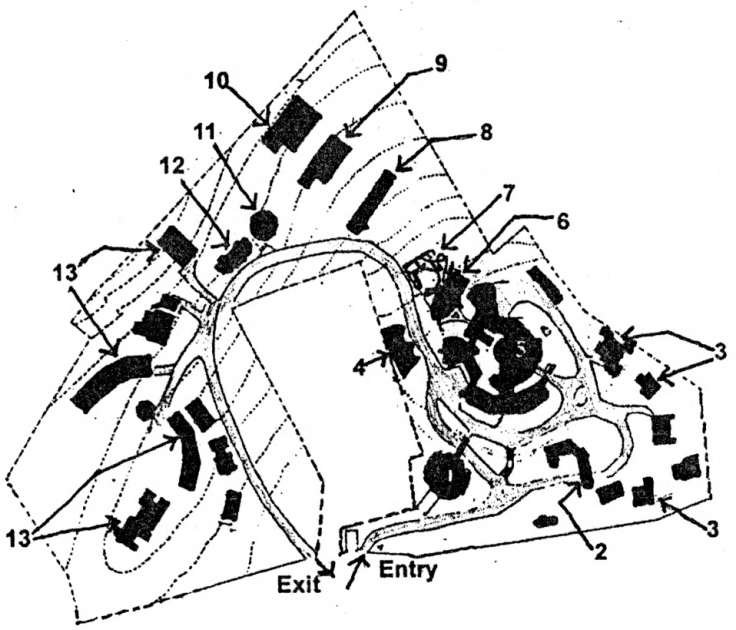
1
Khan, Louis. "Louis I. Kahn, Oeuvres 1963-1969" from *L' Architecture d Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 142, February/March 1969. Pp1.

of space and is religious in use.

The Center for Development Studies (CDS)

The Center for Development Studies is an economics research institute, located at the outskirts of Trivandrum, Kerala. The institution was founded in the late 60's by the Communist government of Kerala, which paved the way for social progress in the state. The socialist ideology with their glorification of poverty, economy and social equality, found in Baker's architecture the ideal vehicle to depict the changing times of social and economic reform. For them, Baker's architecture was a medium of art, which could convey to the common masses what the government stood for - honesty, simplicity and economy, all stripped down to the bare essentials.



1. Administrative Block
2. Offices
3. Faculty Housing
4. Computer Center
5. Main Block with Library
6. Auditorium
7. Amphitheater
8. Men's Hostel
9. Canteen
10. Guest House
11. Old Women's Hostel
12. New Women's Hostel
13. Staff and Faculty Housing

Fig.4.1 The site plan of the Center for Development Studies

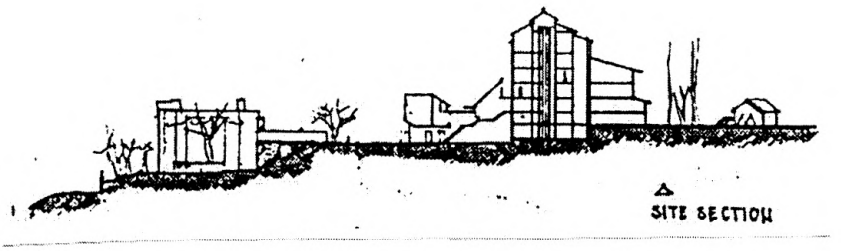


Fig. 4.2 The site section across the CDS.

The CDS is an economics institute, initially set up for the purpose of testing out the economic validity of government schemes and what better way than to practice what they preached. The meaning lay in the form! And form followed function! The modern age had arrived!

Scale, Movement and Experience

The entrance to the CDS is at the bottom of the hill and one follows the snakelike winding road to arrive at a fork on the hillside. Rough hewn rubble steps arise out of the ground like a natural outgrowth and seem to lead into foliage and shrubbery. On the right side of the fork is a low red brick building going across the road and bridging it, forming an intimate tunnel, inviting and cozy. On the other side of the fork is the administrative block, the pedestrian bridges going above you and connecting the building at different levels of the site. Looking upwards, a haze of brown and red brick and earth blend and form a silent background to the rich greens of the natural landscape.

The CDS is built on a rocky hillside, a nine acre site which rises in a steep gradient up to the crest of a hill. Contours run across the land as if drawn by a lazy irregular gesture of the hand. Trees and bushes dot the landscape. Coconut palms are scattered all over like a handful of seeds dispersed in the wind. The CDS is an institution, which has a wide range of varying built forms, both in function and scale. It consists of a library,

administrative buildings, main office spaces, a computer center, men's and women's hostels, guest houses, an auditorium, an amphitheater and staff housing.

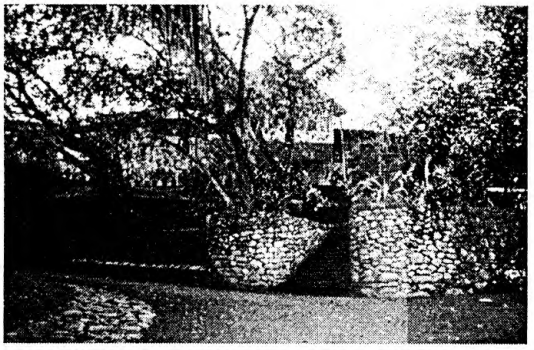


Fig. 4.3 The entry into the CDS.

Fig. 4.4 The slope upwards, with the building bridging over the road.

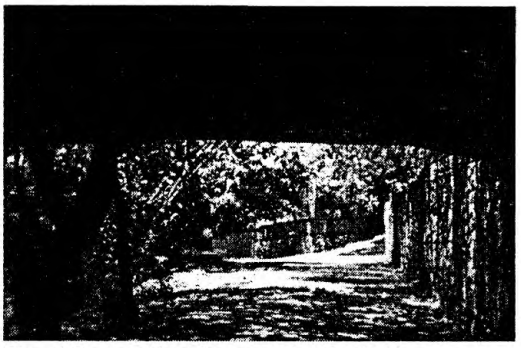


Fig. 4.5 Looking from under the bridge towards the entry to the CDS.

Fig. 4.6 The steps leading up to the main block.

The administrative block is on the upward slope of the hill, located near the entrance. Thin slender brick pillars support a pedestrian bridge which connects the upper level of the administrative block to the main block. This bridge is a center of activity, ranging from a place for mid-afternoon siestas to a place for coffee and casual gatherings. The bridge leads into a landing, from where one can either go up to a terrace or down to the upper levels.

The terrace is hauntingly beautiful, a silent space which speaks volumes. The terrace is not a place of joy, instead it seems to be a setting for melancholic contemplation. It is a backdrop for insights into the inner self and psyche and naturally attracts the research students. They identify with the place and enjoy watching the sunset from the terrace, all

by themselves. Even in company, the terrace evokes solitude. The terrace looks into a tiny courtyard enclosed on all sides by high brick 'jali' walls. The courtyard is usually uninhabited, maybe it is a court meant for silence. The small circular court with rough red brick enclosures, hewn granite paving on the ground, the shade tree in the corner casting half shadows in the late afternoon sun, all conjoin to project a strong image of everlasting silence, the auditory experience of the tranquil void.

Fig. 4.7 The bridge of the administrative block connects the varying levels of the hilly site.

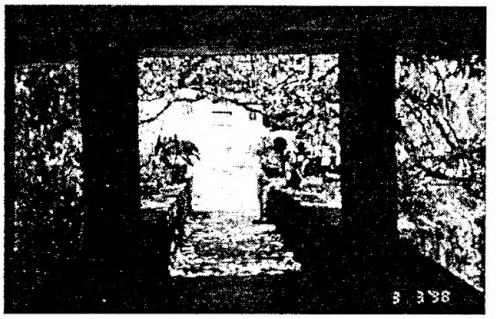


Fig. 4.8 The bridge becomes a center of activity.

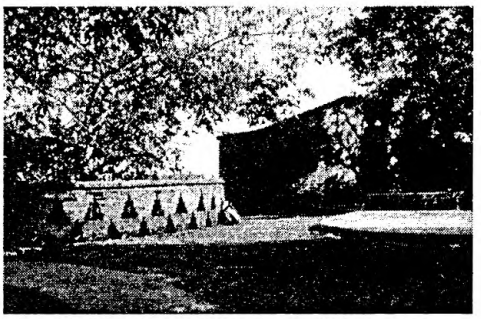


Fig. 4.9 The hauntingly beautiful terrace.

The administrative block is fan shaped in plan, like a deck of cards thrown carelessly around a central oval courtyard. The built form is representative of its function: all the administrative offices are arranged around the court, equal in hierarchy and position. The courtyard is uninhabited, the bridge forming the place of enactment and human drama. The terrace, not surprisingly, is the favorite haunt for most of the CDS population, whether it be the faculty or the students. They often visit and inhabit the terrace during the late evenings or dark nights when they can be alone. The researcher at the CDS is apparently content in solitude, happy in his melancholy.

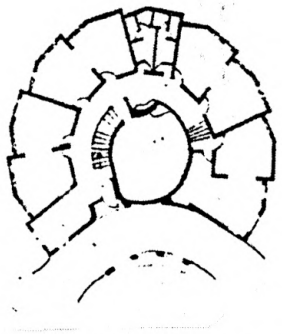


Fig. 4.10 First floor plan - Administrative Block.

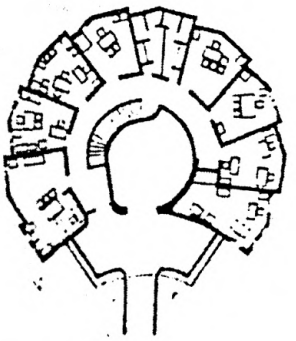


Fig. 4.11 Second floor plan - Administrative Block.

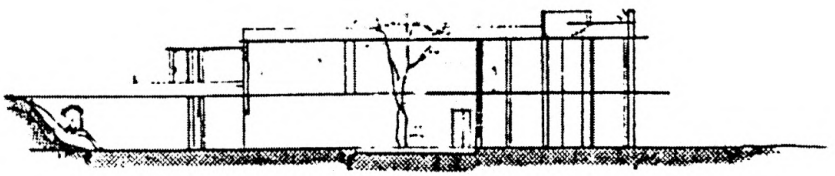


Fig. 4.12 Section - Administrative Block.

The main block sits on the crest of the hill, as if crowning the entire composition. Not a majestic crown in all its glory, but down to earth, its splendor in its simplicity. The main block seems like an eternal puzzle, a labyrinth of nooks and crannies, dark and light, mysterious and open. The dark interior spaces, warm and homelike, suddenly open out into wide open quadrangles and courtyards, silent spaces filled with trees of every possible size and shape. The cement floor transforms into green pools with water lilies, the reflection of the brick walls shimmering on the surface. The sun shines on the water, lighting it up to an electric green, bringing a tangy taste to the mouth, the taste and smell of the green moss under the water. Time stands still.

The CDS makes none of the monumental gestures that most institutions of this nature and size do. It is of the site, following the contours and hugging the land. Rarely does it stand up and proclaim itself to the world around. The roads follow the site slopes and encircle the lower levels. Pedestrian walkways, bridges and paths connect and bring together the built forms on the higher slopes. The existing trees on the site are

preserved as they are and the built forms move, grow and adapt to accommodate nature. This accounts for many of the odd shapes and angles the buildings acquire, but the meaning lies in the use and in meaning lies beauty.

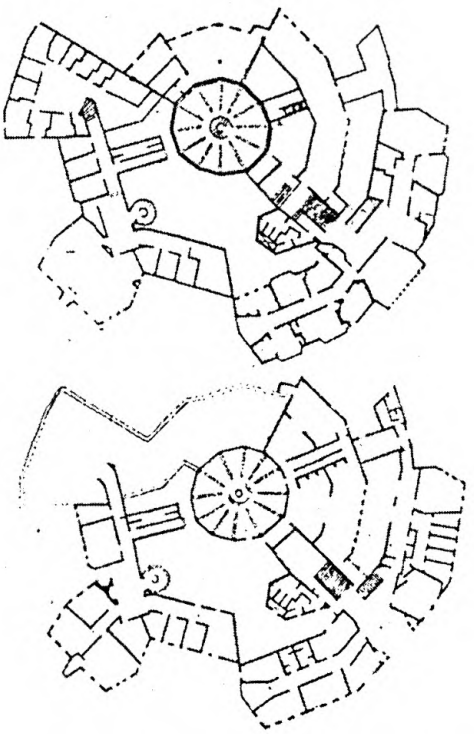


Fig. 4.13 Floor Plans - Main Block, CDS

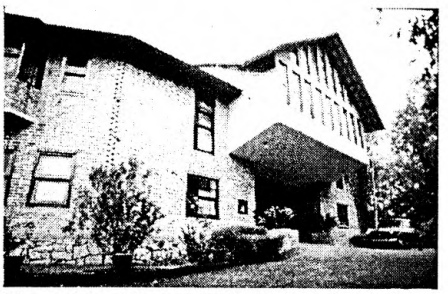


Fig. 4.14 The entry to the Main Block

Fig. 4.15 The outdoor courts between the built forms at the Main Block.

Fig. 4.16 The pool at the Main Block.

Moving past the main block, the library building comes into view. The only vertical element in the composition; a squat tower of brick 'jali' aspiring towards the sky, only emphasizes the rootedness of the other built forms. A dark tight spiral staircase takes one up the library tower, lit up by the sharp rays of sunlight which throw the intricate 'jali' patterns on the spiral treads. At every landing, the spiral uncoils itself, releasing the

tension, to form a wide sweeping arc containing the book racks and reading space. At the very top, on the seventh floor, the spiral coil ends in a serene view tower, from where the entire city of Trivandrum can be seen. A feeling of majestic glory uplifts and overpowers, as the city unfolds under you. The brown tiled massing and the ugly concrete boxes - symbols of modernity, dot the green paradise below. On a clear day, the distant blue Arabian sea merges with the horizon, passing ships seem to stand still. Baker imprisons time, the passing of centuries captured in an image.

The seven storied library tower is a column and beam structure, the brick 'jali' walls serving purely as an infill. Baker is honest in expression, he reveals the structure of the library, exposing the concrete of the column-beam structure. The library was designed in vertical floors, so that the researchers could use the library with the minimum of disturbance. Different categories of books are organized on different floors, with the privacy of the user in mind. With the passage of time, the library has become the weakest part of the CDS. The librarians complain of book vandalism, due to the absence of a strategic control point and the researchers often complain of the inconvenience of the vertical library. Future growth of the library is also not easy due to its verticality. The users feel the insecurities of exposing one's back to the stair, while reading in the library and so would rather take the books to their rooms. The favorite place of the dreamy researcher is the viewpoint at the top. There, he/she can get lost in his/her daydreams, lost to the world, lost in time.

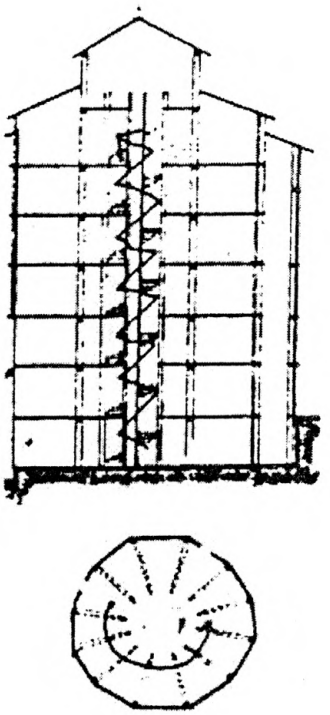


Fig. 4.17 Plan and section of the Library tower.

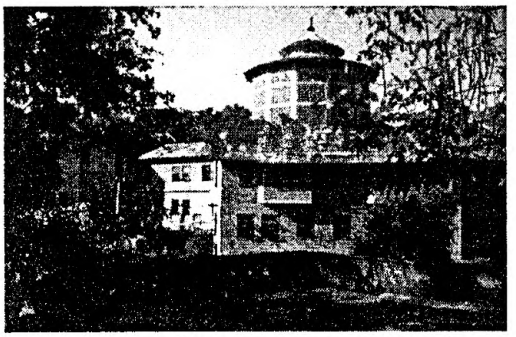


Fig. 4.18 The library tower comes into view, as one moves past the Main Block.

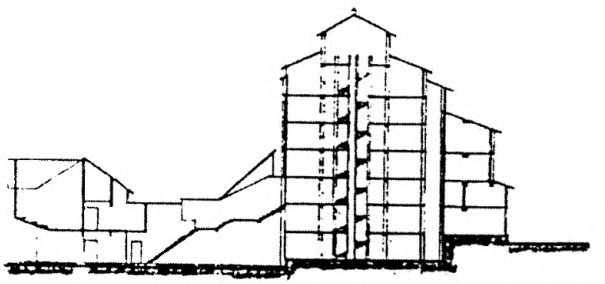


Fig. 4.19 The connections between the library and the Main Block.

From the library, one wanders further into the campus. The computer center on the right undulates and weaves in regular premeditated patterns. It swerves and cuts to avoid a tall coconut palm. The 'jali' is surprisingly regular and ordered, and resembles a computer punch card. Form and function!

The journey goes on. Further ahead the built form clears and an open space approaches. The open air amphitheater seems scooped out of the earth, but on closer inspection, it just follows the natural contours of the hill. The natural hill terraces form the seating, retained by random rubble masonry. The half walls of the stage and green room form a labyrinth of curves and angles, a squiggle of lines drawn by a dreamy child. Indeed, the child in Baker! A closer look reveals that every wall is in its proper position, every brick in its proper place. The series of apparently misshapen half walls, curving, now breaking, now stopping, ensure the privacy of the green rooms, the secrecy of the back stage, the dramatization of the entry and the nonchalance of the exit. Every sequence, every visual angle seems programmed. "Only the serious can play!" - Mies Van Der Rohe.

Anchored to the amphitheater is the indoor auditorium. Built later to accommodate performances during the rainy months, the latest addition to the CDS has just been completed. The exterior of the auditorium is ordinary, even nondescript, but as in most Baker buildings, the magic is inside. The interior of the auditorium stuns even the most prepared audience. There is so much joy in the air, it is almost a celebration of life! The brick 'jali's' move, sing and laugh. They dance; the dance of joy, the dance of music, the

dance of love, the dance of life itself. The overture goes on, the exuberance continuing as sunlight rejoicing on the floor, the wild rhythm of light and dark across the red terracota floor.

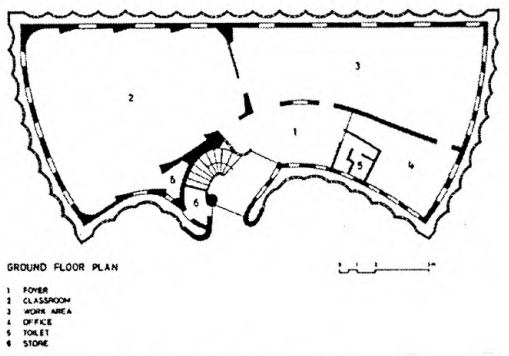


Fig. 4.20 Plan - Computer Center.

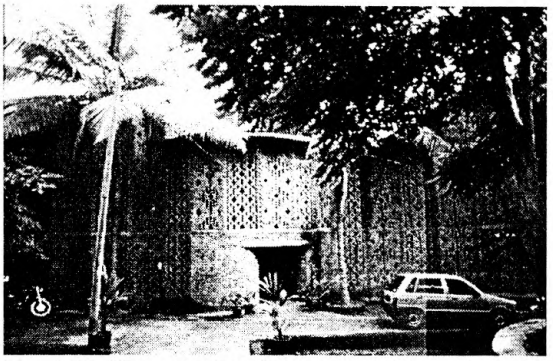


Fig. 4.21 The exterior of the computer center.

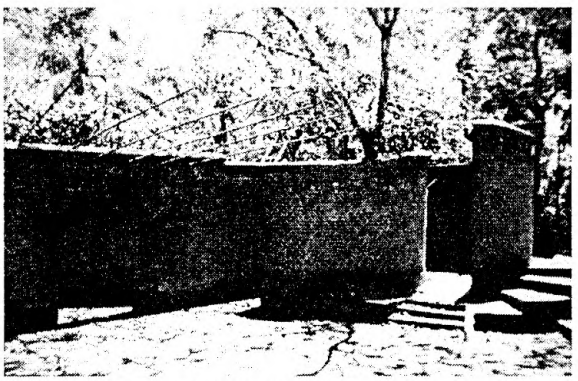


Fig. 4.22 The amphitheater at the CDS.

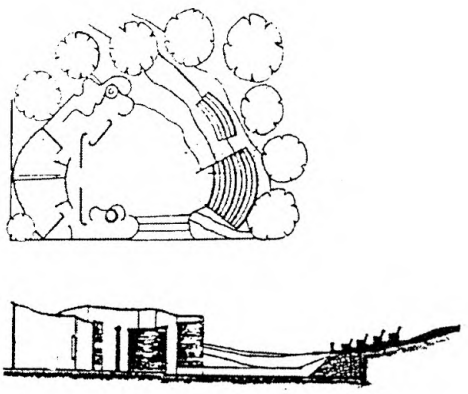


Fig. 4.23 Plan and Section of the Amphitheater.

At the computer center, Baker resolved the dichotomy of maintaining a continuity of built form with brick, stone and tile and at the same time ensuring the environmental controls required for a computer laboratory by a new articulation of form. His answer was a double wall, the outer wall of single brick thickness with 'jali's', maintains the continuity of neighboring patterns and the inner wall with windows, ensures a dust free, glare free volume for the computer center.

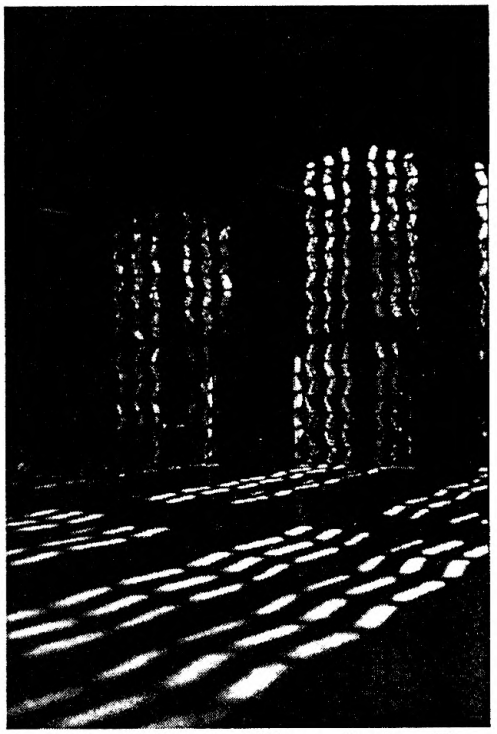


Fig. 4.24 The interior of the auditorium. The jali's create the setting for the performance of Art in the auditorium.

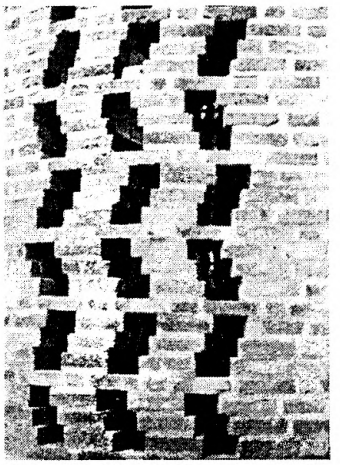


Fig. 4.25 The 'jali' patterns of the auditorium.

The experiential nature of Baker's spaces are existential. His architecture has the power to convey a multitude of expressions, evoke a plethora of impressions. With so much as a 'jali', a mere decorative tool in the hands of many architects, Baker conveys emotions of raw earthy joy, wild rhythmic dance and soft tender love. The 'jali' is the only element that Baker uses in the auditorium to charge up the atmosphere and create a setting for the performance of other arts. In fact, any other art performed in the auditorium seems to pale in comparison to the setting. Such is the power of the simplicity of the complex.

The descent down the hillside begins. The road curves and winds downwards, passing through spaces to sit, to laze in and to daydream in. There are places to just stand and stare as well as places to walk through without a second glance. The roadside lamps are fixed to a brick sculpture. The generally silent research campus shows some life, some chatter, some activity. The visitor has arrived at the hostels.

The men's and women's hostels are grouped around the heart of the campus - the canteen. Close by are the guest houses and the staff housing is not far away. There are two women's hostels, the second one growing as the number of female researcher's grew, a telling condition of the social progress of the state over the years. The canteen is a simple one storied structure, with a small contemplative pool and some outdoor eating spaces. The researchers come to life only around these parts of the campus and are otherwise immersed in worlds of their own.

The men's hostel. A magical world of freedom and self expression. Baker, moving away from his usual feminine interiors, has created a masculine world of straight lines and linear forms, almost modernist in expression. A regimented linear arrangement of eight rooms stacked over four floors. Baker has left untouched the interiors of the rooms, restraining his creativity, giving space to the occupant to create his own world inside. Restraint; the touch of a master. Even so, a touch of playfulness comes through. The circular staircase opening out to linear experiential corridors. The alternate bands of light and dark, filtered light on the dark floor, the light beckoning from the 'jali' at the end of the long corridor are just a few of the themes.

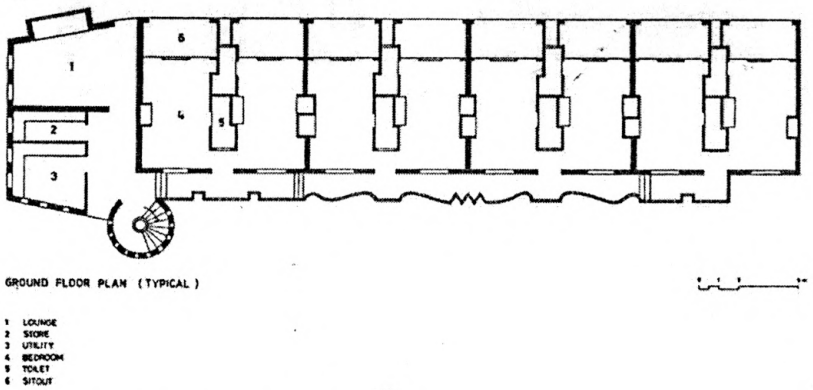


Fig. 4.26 Plan - Men's Hostel

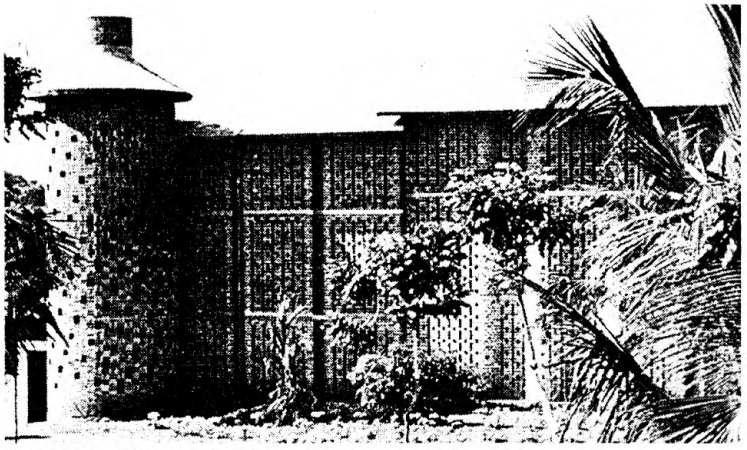


Fig. 4.27 The stark exterior of the Men's Hostel.

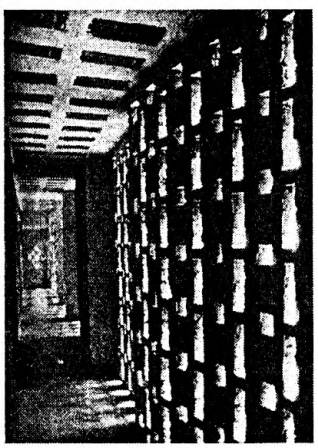


Fig. 4.28 Filtered light comes in through the 'jali's.

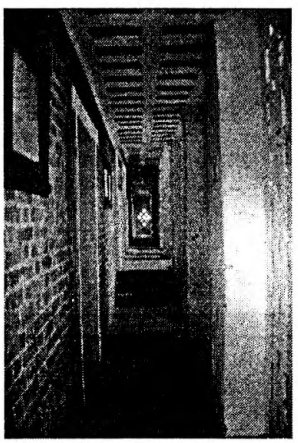


Fig. 4.29 The corridor of the Men's Hostel.

On the other hand, the women's hostels are feminine in nature. The old hostel is round in plan, enclosing and enveloping, a mother figure. It's simplicity is striking, holding the women close to itself, warm and protective. The new women's hostel is also strikingly feminine, only with a difference. The new hostel is much more complex, the spaces an expression of the modern woman. The rooms are unorthodox and bold, making a statement. The exterior brick 'jali' is flauntingly flirtatious, as it dances and moves in sinuous curves. The 'jali' speaks of sensuous grace, beautiful and delicate, yet with tremendous inner strength. A symbol of the modern Indian woman.

Baker's architecture is as functional in meaning as it is expressive. Every line, every curve and every fold is there for a purpose. The men's hostel is built of four and a half inch thick brick walls and the playful curves and circles also have a function of giving the structure added stiffness and strength. In addition to feminine grace, the women's hostel provides for its inhabitants an interactive community life.

Behind the 'jali' walls, are the foyer spaces for the women, with low built-in seating and work areas. The 'jali' undulates, creating wide spaces within for just sitting and talking, one of the necessities in a women's hostel. The 'jali' also serves as a one way screen, like in the Kerala palaces of yore, from where the women can see out, but not be seen from the outside. The men and women of CDS identify with their spaces. Many of them identify their own room as their most favorite place in the campus. The men also enjoy the terrace space of their hostel, which they use for parties and outdoor get-togethers.

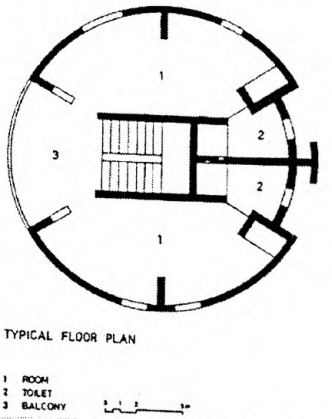


Fig. 4.30 Plan - Old Ladies Hostel

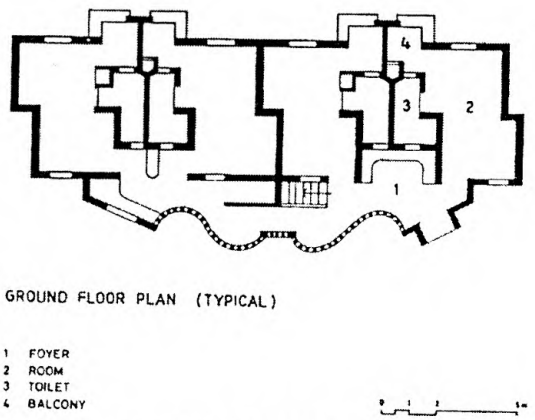


Fig. 4. 31 Plan - The New Ladies Hostel.

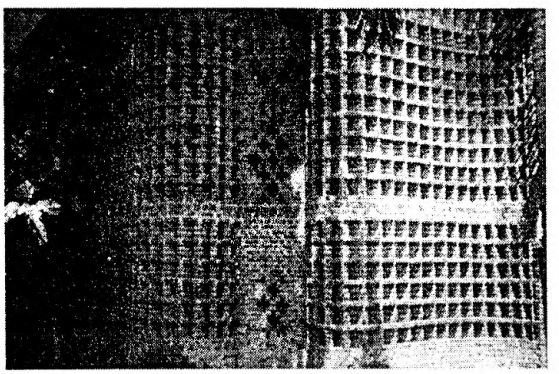


Fig. 4. 32 The sensuous 'jali' of the Ladies Hostel.

The journey is nearly over. The slope is nearly flat and the descent is minimal. The CDS has been an experience of integrity and character. Every built form is expressive of its function, its use, its meaning and its very essence. Every element, whether it be a hand rail, a 'jali', a window or a skylight, has character and integrity; it is true to itself. Every building material, be it brick, stone, tile, terracotta or wood, is a master, never a slave.

Every material is honored and used in a way where it could be proud of itself. The CDS has been an experience, where all the seven senses are involved. It has been an experience of emotions, of romance, of joy and of exuberance. It has not been an experience of a formal institution, but that of a native ancestral village, where everybody is familiar and every setting in its proper place. It has been a homecoming.

The Analysis:

a.) Organic Growth

"All the good environments.....are whole and alive because they have grown slowly over long periods of time, piece by piece. The pieces are small - and there are always a balanced number of projects going forward at every scale." [2]

The CDS is an institution which has grown over a period of time. Started over 30 years ago in 1967, the building is still growing, changing and adapting. Building activity, in the form of new buildings, repairs and extensions are taking place. The latest building to come up as part of the complex was the auditorium building. The growth of the center has been in small sized increments, resulting in a piecemeal growth. This kind of organic development seems to be one of the main reasons for the success of the CDS, especially since the growth was a direct response to necessity. The growth of each building and even parts of the building took place as and when necessity demanded. Meaning is nurtured by need and use.

In sharp contrast to large scale, lump sum growth, piecemeal growth usually leads to the formation of the 'whole'. All the various parts or pieces seem to come together in a timeless whole. The order is not imposed from above or outside, like in a lump sum development, but one increment leads to the other as a natural by product. Cause and effect!

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[2] Alexander, Christopher. *The Oregon Experiment.* Oxford University Press, New York, 1975. Pp 69.

The genius of Baker comes to light by the way this piecemeal growth is interwoven. There are no visible seams, no edges or boundaries. One space seems to flow into the other effortlessly. The joinery is flawless, in fact even invisible. Baker's mastery of the medium makes the increments almost natural, as though it were the only way to be. The beauty of the increments lies in their seeming simplicity.

At the CDS, the first buildings to evolve were parts of the main block and the library. The main block grew in three phases, each phase added on, as the necessities of the center grew. Initially the CDS started off in a very small scale, but Baker saw the possibilities of future expansion. The library grew almost simultaneously, being a part of the main block. Other associated spaces, such as a few units of staff housing, a small number of administrative offices as part of the main block and the hostels were created to house the researchers. This led to the need for a canteen and the amphitheater. Over the years, with the growth of the center, the need for an administrative block grew. This led to an increase in the volume of staff housing and the emergence of more female researchers created the need for a new women's hostel. Emerging technology and the entry of the cyber era saw the building of the computer center. The latest built form in the campus was the auditorium, since an alternate facility to the amphitheater seemed necessary for the months of the southwest monsoons. In addition to these newly built forms, additions, repairs and changes take place nearly on a yearly basis, depending on the needs of the institution.

"The CDS is still growing, things are still happening there. It's been 30 years since it was started, but buildings are still being built there. When you have built all this over a period of years, you wonder how you will fit and finish the auditorium, the latest addition there, and whether it will join on, how it will join on? You don't put something down, just because there is a piece of land there. Of course, the questions, 'Will it be useful? Will people be able to find their way there?' come up...."[3]

The capacity of Baker's architecture to grow and change almost effortlessly is admirable. Baker perceptively designs to accommodate for change and adaptability in his built form. The growth at the CDS is remarkably similar to Baker's own house, the

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of this thesis, pp 166.

'Hamlet', though it took place at a much smaller scale. The 'Hamlet' grew from a single room thatched structure to a multi-leveled complex organism. It grew as and when the need arose, so much so that it seems unbelievable now, that it was anything different than what it is.

"Well, I normally sit back and think what the probabilities are in a house, how the family might grow. We are a typical example, we started off with just a shed with a bamboo roof, and then we had to put the tiles on. Then, of course, the children were growing, so we built this part, which is like a railway compartment. There were two children and two of us, so we had four windows on one side of the wall and 'jali' on the other. We had the first window, then we had a screen made out of cupboards and desks, then another window and a partition shelf for our daughter and after that another window for my son. This way, all of us had our private spaces and when we wanted, we could move them and make the whole space, one huge public space."[4]

That is the nature of the 'whole' that Baker achieves. Similarly, the CDS is a 'whole'. It seems impossible to imagine anything added or taken off from the 'whole', but when the addition happens, the rest of the structures move and seem to give way, allowing the new built form to merge completely with the old. A system of wholes!

The only evidence of the presence of both the old and the new at the CDS are the signs of wear, age and usage of the building materials. Baker uses natural materials, which do not resist aging. They do not portray a false look of everlasting youth. Brick ages, the bright red turning a dull brown over the years of constant exposure to the torrential monsoons. The sharp edges blunt and round with use. The tiles bleach in the hot tropical summers. Moss grows over the terracotta, blending the natural and the manmade. The wood warps with the humidity. The filler slab roof acquires a color of darkish grey, the effect of beating rain alternating with the piercing rays of the sun. Baker does not take conscious effort to hide or mask the coming together of the old and the new. It just happens to be so natural that it goes unnoticed. Baker fits each new growth and change into the existing environment like a missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle, which has to sit exactly in the place meant for it. Only, in the case of Baker's architecture, the piece does not even seem missing in the first place.

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of this thesis, pp 167-168.

b.) Creation of 'centers'

At the CDS, Baker tries to define and create 'centers'. The 'centers' exist at many levels, purely at a physical level and then at a deeper subconscious level. At the physical level, Baker uses it as an empirical tool for organic growth. Baker first establishes 'centers' on the empty site, 'centers' of function, like the administrative 'center', the housing 'center', the research 'center' and so on. He uses a local scale or rather the scale of the pedestrian to establish the distances between these 'centers'. The piecemeal growth of a particular function starts from its respective 'center'. It grows outwards from the inside, as is usual of Baker's architecture, whether it be a home or an institution. Thus, all the built forms originate at their 'centers' and grow outwards to merge and mingle at some point of growth. This makes the campus into a growing organism, full of life and vigor, always changing, always adapting.

Baker's choice of location of the 'centers' on the empty site is as equally site-specific as it is intuitive. Some of the most complex thought processes are the origin of the phenomena simply explained as 'intuition'. Baker imagines the site in three dimensions, not simply as a site plan. He also interacts closely with nature - the trees, rocks and plants on the site, taking in their shape, size, fragrance, touch and feel. This merger of nature and site in his subconscious allows his intuition to come into free play.

At a deeper level, Baker tries to create 'centers' for the collective. A place, with which the human spirit could identify and root itself. It is not a 'center' for activity, but the very opposite, a 'center' for contemplation, territorialization and identification. It is easier to create such a 'center' in a home, since it is a home for an individual with a clear identity and preferences. But to create a home for the 'collective' is a difficult task for a designer. Baker strives to do just that and succeeds. He brings forth a memory of recall, a memory of dreams in the collective. Unlike the homes, where the individual inhabitant has a home of childhood memory to return to, the collective does not have a common ground to return to. Baker, thus creates references to the traditional spatial organizations of Kerala architecture. Baker draws upon the existential body-memory relationships of the collective by engaging the five senses. Through an architecture of

smell, taste, touch and feel, Baker recreates a lost world of the past, which the collective has a frame of reference to.

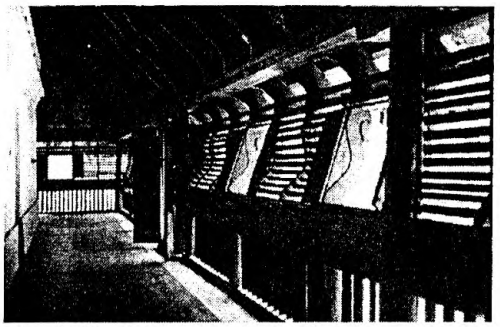

Fig. 4.33 Wooden jali's at the Padmanabhapuram palace.

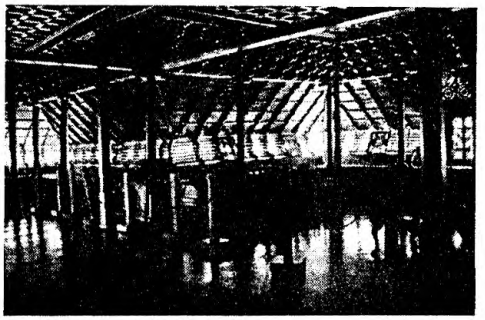

Fig. 4. 34 Interiors at the Padmanabhapuram palace.

Fig. 4. 35 Interior of the Administrative block at the CDS.

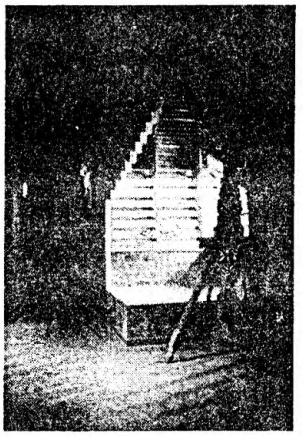

Fig. 4.36 Window seats at the Suresh residence.

Fig. 4.37 The interior of the Suresh home.

Laurie Baker, in his architecture, creates references to the traditional spaces of Kerala. The spatial similarities between the traditional spaces of Kerala, like the Padmanabhapuram palace or the ancestral Kerala family homes, and Baker's architecture can be seen in the above figures.

Thus the CDS, with its nooks and crannies, open spaces of delight, silent courtyards and deep spaces of melancholy, is not an institution where one is always an outsider. It is an ancestral village of the past where the inhabitant is an existential insider, it is a home for the collective.

c.) Articulation of Form

"Form is not simply function, but a conceived order; thus a being."[5]

Laurie Baker creates new form only when new need and new necessity demands it. He is against the imposition of forms and ideas from the outside, without relevance or meaning. For him, form is more than the visual, more than merely the exterior. It is the content, the whole, the totality which is generated from experience and existence. This is probably why most Baker buildings have no singular exterior form which easily take root in the eye of the memory. Baker's architecture is similar to that, which Juhani Pallasmaa describes as a fragile architecture[6] or the architecture of a weak image. Memories of Baker buildings are always the multi-sensory scenes, episodes and images of the interior, the insideness, and the femininity of the built form. The smell of rain on hot bricks, the taste of tangy earthy terracotta and images of filtered sunlight dancing on the dark floors come to mind.

"I think its foolish to impose your own ideas when you are dealing with people who know what their problems are and you can't know these till you have actually lived in the place."[7] *- Laurie Baker.*

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[5] Scully, Vincent. *Louis. I Kahn.* New York, G. Brazilia, 1962. Pp 33.

[6] Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Hapticity and Time - Notes on a Fragile Architecture.* Unpublished lecture notes for the RIBA Architecture Gallery, Annual Discourse Lecture 1999.

[7] Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of this thesis, pp 125.

Articulation of Form as a response to Program

At some of the buildings at the CDS, Baker articulates the built form as a direct response to the program of the artifact. This response is at the scale of the individual and at the 'collective', based on patterns of human encounter and use.

The administrative block is fan shaped around a central courtyard and all rooms are given equal importance in the building hierarchy. This is in response to the program of the brief, where all the administrators should have equality of rank and their own private spaces, yet also need to communicate at close quarters with the other administrators in order to function efficiently. The library, too, was designed as a response to program. The research library needed a lot of private space, where the researchers could work on different areas of research without getting disturbed. This led to the idea of the vertical library, where the different floors contained books of different subject matter.

"The CDS library, which is in the shape of a wheel, was just perfect for Raj and his research assistants. They could just go there, be there, and read and write without being disturbed, since each floor had different types of books and stacks. There were seven floors and about 75 to 85 people could all work there without getting disturbed."[8]

The ladies hostels at the CDS, with its implications of the mother figure and femininity, are good examples of form as a response to program. The circular shape of the old hostel evolved so as to convey meanings of protection and warmth. The form-giving prominent 'jali' wall of the new hostel allows visibility from the interior to the outside world but not vice versa, thereby protecting the privacy of the women inside.

Articulation of Form as a response to the site forces

Baker's architectural forms are always a response to the site, never dominating it, but belonging to it as only a Baker building can. Baker respects the site and its forces: the built form always seems to grow, adapt and move according to the site contours. At the

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of this thesis, pp 130.

CDS, none of the buildings cut across the contours, but lie along them, almost hugging the ground. The various vertical levels of the built form are articulated in accordance with the height differences of the site. It almost looks as though the whole of the CDS was designed in section. The versatility of Baker is enthralling, as he manages to playfully connect the different levels, heights and built forms with walkways, bridges and tunnels. These elements of connection play, dance and zigzag across the hillside and Baker seems like a master magician performing the 'illusion with mirrors'[9] . The amphitheater at the CDS is shaped along the natural contours of the land. The built form thus acquires the shape of the land, the site functioning as a definer of space.

"I do not paint from nature - I take from it - or help myself generously to its riches. I do not paint what I see - but what I saw."[10]

Baker also uses the natural elements, the sun, the wind and the rain, to shape his buildings, such that the built form becomes a vessel for the appreciation and celebration of nature. Many of his built forms acquire odd angles and shapes in order to preserve as many of the existing trees on the site as possible. The main block at the CDS breaks into a jumble of irregular open air courtyards and quadrangles to accommodate the existing trees within itself. A co-existence of nature and built form.

Articulation of Form as a response to climate and human comfort

Laurie Baker uses the local climate of Kerala - the hot humid summers and the six months of torrential monsoon rains as a template for the form of his buildings. His architecture is highly regional in nature and climate plays an important role in the generation of form. Not only is external form dictated by the climate, but the interior spaces are also designed so that the inhabitant can experience with all his/her senses the vagaries of nature and climate. Baker uses central courtyards, sloping roofs, high

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[9] The 'illusion with mirrors' is an ancient Indian magic trick.

[10] Quote from Edward Munch's catalogue which accompanied his 1918 exhibition of paintings at Christiania. From Helen-Wood, Mara (ed.). *The Frieze of Life.* National Gallery Publications, New York 1992. Pp 11.

ridges and low eaves, high ceilings, skylights and open verandah's as formal responses to the local climate of Kerala.

At the CDS, most of the buildings have formal responses to the Kerala climate. The main block and the administrative block have courtyards for cooling and human comfort. The canteen at the CDS has high latticed walls adjacent to a pool, which draws the outside air across the surface and cools the building, providing more comfort to the user.

Articulation of Form as a response to building technology

"We cannot create new form where there is no new content."[11] *- Alvar Aalto.*

Laurie Baker breaks new ground only where new need demands it. Form is always generated by content. At the CDS, Baker creates new form at the computer center with the development of the double wall. The double wall was developed, with the outer single brick 'jali' wall keeping in tune with the rest of the buildings of the campus. The inner wall, with windows was required to provide for a controlled dust and glare free environment for the computer center. The two story high outer 'jali' wall is built of a single brick thickness and for further stiffening, was shaped into repeating patterns of circular segments. These circular segments of 'jali's' give the computer center its characteristic form, form generated by building technology. The double wall cuts down on the dust inside the building creating a dust free atmosphere inside the computer center. Large corbelled windows on the inner wall control the diffused light of the 'jali' wall and provide a continuous glare-free atmosphere.

Baker uses every element in his building vocabulary with care and reason. The Mangalore tile of the vernacular is relieved of its accepted function of cover and is introduced into the folded concrete roof slab as a filler. This lightens the roof weight and

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11
From St. John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions. 1995. Pp 52.

eliminates the use of scarce timber. The resulting form has the shape of the traditional roof with overhanging eaves and skylights, but without the expense of traditional labor and construction. New occasions unfold their own new forms.

d.) Architecture as Experience

"The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light, the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night."[12]

Baker tries to awaken all the senses and the complexities of perception in the inhabitant. He marks the passage of time, light, shadow, transparency, color phenomena, material and detail in his buildings. Baker's use of natural materials, the brick, stone, laterite, mud, tiles and wood adds texture, color and odor to his built forms, enriching the seven senses of the user. His materials express their age and history as well as the tale of their birth and human use. The patina of wear adds the experience of time; matter exists in the continuum of time.

Baker is hardly merely visual in his architecture; he suppresses the retinal experience, instead concentrating on stimulating the other senses. The latticed 'jali' walls draw in the cool outer air into the building, enhancing the sensation of touch. The texture of the brick, stone and tile also stimulate the user. There is a subtle transference between tactile experience and taste. Vision also transfers to taste, as do colors and certain details. The rough red-brown brick brings a tangy taste to the tongue while the polished black oxide floor triggers off a sensation of cooling as well as a salty chalky taste of lime and white chalk.

At the CDS, Baker evokes auditory experiences of silence. It makes the researcher aware of his or her own fundamental silence. These silent spaces, like the courtyards of the main block and the courtyard of the administrative block, seem a backdrop to the gentle contemplative nature of the research students. The courtyards of the main block

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[12] Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought.* Hofstadter, Alfred (ed.). New York, 1971.

are a checkerboard of light and shadow, the dappled sunlight filtering through the foliage of the shade trees and casting moving shadows on the cement paved ground. The whole atmosphere evokes images of the timeless, past and present fused together - an everlasting sound of silence.

Baker uses nature to create such moving spatial and sensory experiences that one almost wonders whether nature was so beautiful, so majestic or so simple earlier. For the common person, nature and its beauty existed only on a mountain-top or a river-side or a tourist resort. With his architecture, Baker succeeds in bringing nature into the everyday life of the common people. His built forms seem to enhance the majesty and grace of the sun, the rain, the thunder and the clouds. Baker's mastery of light is tremendous. He seems to be able to capture the sun within his buildings, never imprisoning it; but allowing it complete freedom, to come and go, wax and wane as it pleases, gracing the architecture with its presence.

"The sun was not aware of its wonder before it struck the side of a building."[13]

Laurie Baker takes the user through a series of opposing spatial configurations. His interiors are typically warm and feminine, a protecting mother figure. These deep interiors suddenly open out into wide open exteriors, confrontational and almost masculine in nature. This moment of confrontation is not gradual and gentle, but sudden and unexpected. This experience of envelopment and detachment brings about conflicting experiences in the user. Sometimes, Baker also uses the experience of the threshold or 'in-betweenness' as a tool to generate an ephemeral architecture of impermanence.

"...it is uniquely the role of the masterpiece to make possible the simultaneous experience of these two polar modes; enjoyment at the same time of intense sensations of being inside and outside, of envelopment and detachment, of oneness and separateness."[14]

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[13] Kahn, Louis. *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui,* Vol. 142, Feb 1969, pp13.

[14] St. John Wilson, Colin. *Architectural Reflections.* Butterworth Architecture, Oxford, 1992. Pp 8.

Colin St. John Wilson in his book *"Architectural Reflections"*[15] quotes Adrian Stokes as he argues that it is in this fusion of conflicting experience that the built form moves and touches the inner depths of the experiencer.

Some of the spatial experiences at the CDS, which lead to this kind of fusion of simultaneous experience are: Tight tubes of spiral movement opening into huge volumes, movement sequences of varying and contrasting experience of the built and unbuilt, movement and rest, arid and water, tight spaces and spaces of expanse, variations in scale and scaled consciousness. Experience which touches the soul.

"You employ stone, wood and concrete and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is Construction. Ingenuity is at work. But suddenly you touch my heart. You do me good. I am happy and I say "This is beautiful." That is Architecture."[16]

e.) Incompleteness

Much of Baker's architecture seems incomplete or unfinished. So much so that there are many people who ask of Baker's own house - the 'Hamlet' as to when it will get finished. The unconscious conditioning over years, that a building is finished only when it is plastered on the outer walls probably leads the common masses to assume that Baker's built forms are not complete. This generated feeling of incompleteness, helps the residents and users accept the organic growth of the built form as natural, in contrast to the inherent oppositions to change, present in every human being. Even in the Baker residences, the inhabitants are not scared of nor do they refrain from making changes to the built form to suit their purposes. At the CDS, the users and inhabitants are not mentally opposed to change or growth for this main reason.

Baker's built forms seems always poised to grow, to take off from the point where last

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[15] St. John Wilson, Colin. *Architectural Reflections.* Butterworth Architecture, Oxford, 1992.

[16] Corbusier, Le. *Towards a New Architecture.* Translated from French by Etchells, Frederick. Praeger Publications, New York, 1970. Pp 187.

finished. This allows for growth to be seen as a natural phenomenon, rather than imposed upon from outside. The naked bricks, the lack of a plaster coat, the lack of painted interiors, the bare tiles seen on the inside of the roof rather than on the outside, and the corner bricks dovetailing into one another completely at the exterior corners where the building turns, all speak of continuity, a future growth.

The human being is always searching for perfection and, in it truth and beauty. When his/her search results in finding a fragment of this perfection, he/she expects and looks for more, for the incomplete pieces of the perfect fragment. This search for the incomplete pieces of the fragmented whole is endless and eternal. It is in the search, not the fulfillment, that beauty is realized. Baker's buildings provoke this kind of eternal search for the incomplete pieces of his built forms.

"Maybe I realized that the campus was beautiful when I first came here, I don't really remember now....it was still growing then. Now I don't notice it very much, it seems natural, as though it's a part of me. But sometimes, when I pass by casually, or when I am sitting engrossed in thought, it suddenly hits me and I realize 'Oh my God, this place is so beautiful'...."[17]

f.) Creation of Place

"The taste of the apple....lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself; in a similar way...poetry lies in the meeting of the poem and the reader, not in the lines of the symbols printed on the pages of a book. What is essential is the aesthetic act, the thrill, the almost physical emotion that comes with each meeting."[18]

The most fulfilling moment for architecture is when the built form is inhabited, used and enjoyed by the human presence. The human presence sets alight and invigorates the empty frame to create architecture. For Baker, the human presence is at the center of

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Quoted by a research faculty member teaching at the CDS, in a personal interview with the researcher at the CDS campus, January '00.

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Borges, Jorge Luis. "Forward to Obra Poetica" in *Selected Poems 1923-1967.* Harmondsworth Press, 1985.

his architecture. Baker's architecture is usually the background for human drama. It usually does not take on the qualities of the foreground and dominate the setting. The CDS, too, forms a gentle backdrop to the life and activities of the quiet researcher. Most of the spaces are silent and contemplative, echoing the mental state of the research student. On the other hand, the auditorium building at the CDS forms the setting, the actual drama itself! It is no longer the background, nor the foreground, but the place of action, where all other performances taking place pale in significance.

At the CDS, Baker introduces pockets of activity or 'nodes' throughout the complex, which act as hubs of activity. These hubs of activity become places, when charged with the human presence. Some form places of activity while others form places of contemplation. One such place of activity is the bridge connecting the administrative block to the campus. The bridge which is purely a connecting element transforms into a 'place' by late afternoon. It forms an informal meeting place, where people gather around to have coffee and a friendly chat. The wide brick handrails of the connector also form a perch seat and a place for a short siesta on a lazy hot afternoon.

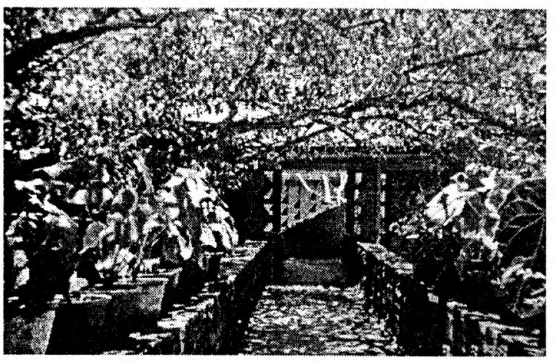

Fig. 4.38 The bridge to the Administrative block forms a 'node' of activity, especially during the late afternoons.

"The place I enjoy most in this campus is the 'bridge'. Whenever I get a break, I go there and relax; drink coffee, have a smoke or just sit there and watch all the passersby. After a while, others come and go, it is always active....."[19]

Some of the open verandah's and connectors between buildings suddenly open out to form wider spaces. These function as transition points, where the user naturally tends to slow down, stop for a moment or two, just to look around and loiter, before catching up on the fast pace of life yet again.

19

Quoted by a staff member working in the administrative offices at the CDS, in a personal interview with the researcher at the CDS campus, January '00.

"Architecture occurs at the meeting of interior and exterior forces of use and space."[20]

One place of contemplation that Baker creates at the CDS is the terrace of the administrative block. The inhabitants of the CDS, both the students and the faculty are attracted to this quiet place of serene calm.

"My favorite place in the campus is the roof top of the administrative building. I usually go there in the evenings, when I want to be by myself. Sometimes I also go there after dusk, lie down on my back and look at the skies, sometimes have a drink or two.....it gives me a lot of peace."[21]

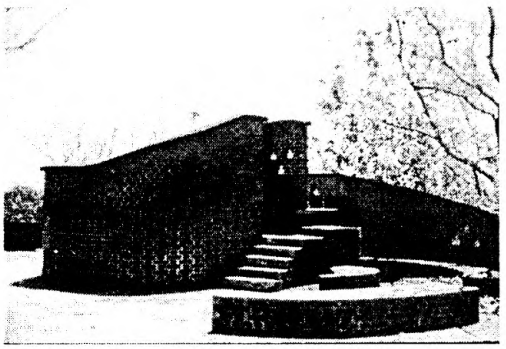

Fig. 4.39 The terrace of the Administrative block at the CDS.

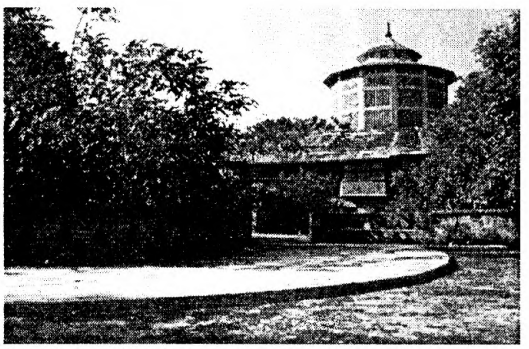

Fig. 4.40 The terrace forms a 'place' for introspection and contemplation.

The atmosphere of the 'place' changes with time; by late evening, it develops shades of the melancholic with the setting sun. There is no specific activity going on at the terrace, but it generates a mood of self-contemplation. The people usually come alone and choose their own specific places to sit or lie down. They engage in a time-space routine[22] , choosing the same spot day after day, establishing their own territory and place in the overall scheme of things. With the passage of time and, as night falls, the mood changes. The tragic melancholy transforms into a subdued gaiety or light, happy

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Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture.* New York, Museum of Modern Art, Boston, pp 8.

21

Quoted by a male research student working at the CDS, in a personal interview with the researcher at the CDS campus, January '00.

22

Seamon, David. "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines" in *The Human Experience of Space and Place.* Croon Helm, London 1980.

contemplation. Many of the researchers at the CDS like to gather on the terrace and watch the stars, only this time in small groups of two or three. Some of them like to sleep there too. Sleeping in a public area is the ultimate compliment a user can give to the space and its designer. It is an indication that a sense of total security and protection is expressed in the place. The empathetic insider turns into an existential insider. It is home!

Another favorite 'place' of the research students is the canteen and their own hostel rooms. The canteen transforms into a hub of activity by late evening, where the researchers gather after the day's work. The researcher also finds a refuge in his/her own hostel room, using the activity lounge and shared foyers for interaction and watching television but retreating into the shell of one's room for solitude and security.

"I love my room the most, I feel at home here. I even bring my books from the library to my room, where I can read comfortably. When I feel sociable, I just saunter down to the canteen and chat with the bunch of people there."[23]

The phenomenon of 'place' acquires significance with time, duration and perception of the built form by the users. With the passage of time, complexity develops between the creator and his intentions and the user and the built form. The creation or sustenance of 'place' no longer remains a predictable tool. Certain spaces which were designed as places no longer remain so and become sad failures to attract the inhabitants. Certain other spaces acquire a life of their own and become places of vitality. At the CDS, the amphitheater, the courtyard and bridge of the administrative block are such examples. The amphitheater was designed as a cultural and cohesive center of the campus meant for exchange and participation. It transformed into a largely lifeless place, unable to attract the inhabitants, unless for a cultural performance. The courtyard, probably originally intended as a zone of activity, transformed into a courtyard of silence and contemplation. The bridge which was a response to the site forces, changed into a place of activity and life.

23

Quoted by a female research student working at the CDS, in a personal interview with the researcher at the CDS campus, January '00.

The CDS is largely a quiet institution, full of silent spaces interspersed with a few activity nodes. It has none of the vibrant life and vitality associated with a campus. But that does not mean that it is unused or unattractive. The researchers too are few in number and this is reflected in the activity patterns of the campus. It is used as it is, a backdrop for contemplation and serious thought. It is not a setting for human activity and drama as most institutions are; the CDS is designed for a different purpose. The researchers are more involved with their research, use of the library, the computer center or they seek solitude within themselves. The CDS too reflects this spirit: it is pensive and meditative, scornful of frivolous chatter and gaiety. It is never overpowering or dominating, but always there in the background, a silent pillar of strength and restraint. The researchers identify with this kind of atmosphere and seek themselves in Baker's architecture.

The Loyola Chapel

The Loyola chapel was designed at about the same time that the CDS was initially conceived and planned. Though both the institutions were designed at about the same time, they are totally different in form, treatment and experience. The CDS is a growing organism, a lot of built forms coming together to form the total whole. The Loyola chapel is a singular entity, a part of the whole, comprised of the chapel and an auditorium. The CDS has evolved out of piecemeal growth, always dynamic and growing while the Loyola chapel is a tight volume of space, enclosed and static. Both speak of spatial experience. The CDS is a free spirit, flowing and moving with the dynamics of site forces; disjointed sequences of light and shadow. The Loyola chapel is an intense spatial experience of body and mind of a higher order, of the spiritual and the mysterious.

The experience of the sacred

A blank flat brick wall. Straight lines with no massing of forms, play of volumes or geometric proportioning of apertures. Stark and naked. A repetitious brick 'jali' punctures the flat façade. A massive frontal doorway and a concrete spiral staircase break out of the modernist box and stand aloof. A cold unfamiliar exterior.

The Loyola chapel is part of the larger campus of the Loyola High School and College. It is located at Sreekaryam, on the out-skirts of Trivandrum. The blank exterior and linear axial plan show influences of Modernism on Baker's architecture. The brown-red blank surface of the undressed brick and the naked concrete bring in more images of Modernism and its inherent honesty of material and expression. Even the rain water spouts on the entry portal bear strong resemblances to similar elements at Corbusier's Chandigarh.

Fig. 4.41 The stark, bare exterior of the Loyola Chapel.

Fig. 4.42 The entry portal portrudes out of the chapel.

Fig. 4.43 The concrete spiral staircase breaks out of the 'box'.

Fig. 4.44 The rain water spouts bear a strong resemblance to those in Corbusier's Chandigarh.

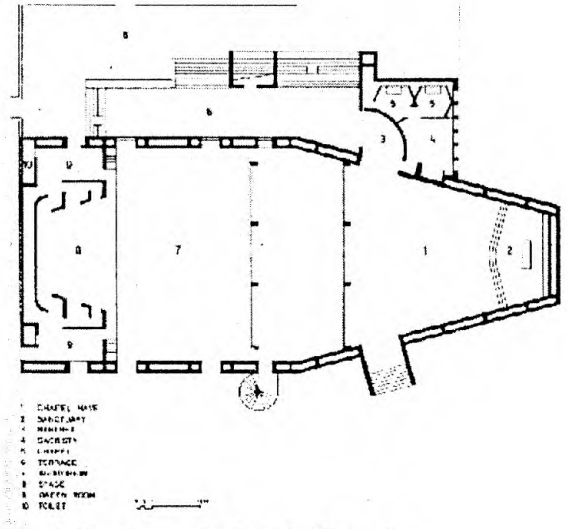

Fig. 4.45 Plan - The Loyola Chapel.

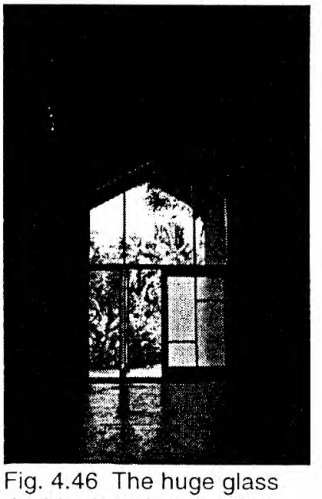

Fig. 4.46 The huge glass double door, bearing the wire sculpture of the Christ on the grills above the doorway.

Entering the chapel is almost a ceremony. The entry portal protrudes out of the chapel, emphasizing its special significance. A flight of steps leads up to the frontal entry, which is massive and dominating, overwhelming the human spirit. An act of humbling before the divine experience? The pivoted, huge glass double doors swing open and the transition from the bright sunny outdoors to the dark mystery inside is sudden and unexpected. A two dimensional wire outline sculpture of the Christ on the cross hangs on the grill above the doorway. The Lord seems almost ephemeral, with the outdoors and nature seen through the wire outline.

Nothing ever prepares one for the first experience of the chapel, the mysterious darkness, lit only by the diffuse lighting from the hidden skylight over the sanctuary. The high roof covered by finely crafted wooden trusses which are hardly visible in the dark. The trussed roof climbs in a steady slope from the end of the nave to the altar, where it bursts forth and soars upwards in a plethora of light and radiance. The diffused sunlight from above bathes the dark brick surface of the altar and envelopes it with a sublime luminance. The human spirit feels the presence of an invisible power. Infinite joy is felt, almost a kind of divine joy at the act of creation, at the miracle of life.

There is no image or idol of Christ at the altar. Instead the brick wall opens into a series of long axial 'jali's' taking the shape of a cross. The lighted openings form the image of the divine. The rays of the sun pierce through the east facing openings imparting a sense of sacredness to the space. The shafts of light cutting across the mysterious darkness almost feel like the fingers of God! They ignite and set alight the wooden pews, consecrating the kneeling devotee. The light has blessed.

"Art is the language of God.
The only language of man is Art."[24]

On either side of the axial 'jali' are outline wire sculptures, one of the Madonna with child and the other of the Christ. Baker is at play even when designing the spiritual. With a

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Quoted by Louis Kahn in Cook, W. John and Klotz, Heinrich. *Conversations with Architects.* Praeger Publications, New York, 1973. Pp 187.

dash of humor, he dresses up the

Mother Mary in a saree[25]*. An Indian Madonna! The wire sculptures do not stand out as in most churches, but merge with the brick walls, as the wire sculptures are only outlines and not solid. The back wall of the nave moves in a zig-zag pattern, enclosing within it cloisters and confessionals. The wall seems to be in movement and is lined with wire sculptures, characters from the Bible and Christian mythology. These biblical characters also seem to be in motion, captured in wire in a moment of action. The wire sculptures are almost cartoons, as if from a comic book filled with Jesus, Peter, Judas and King Herod, instead of Charlie Brown and Snoopy. The unsatiated child in Baker brings comic relief to the intense spiritual experience.*

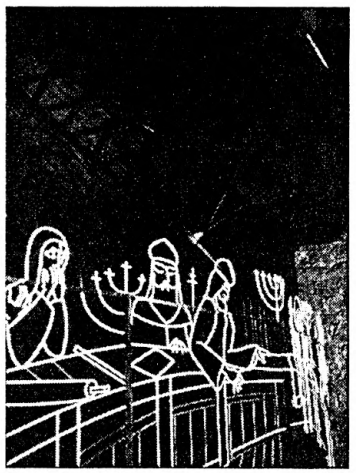

Fig. 4.47 Baker's wire sculptures with a hint of comic in them, at the St. John's Cathedral at Tiruvalla, Kerala.

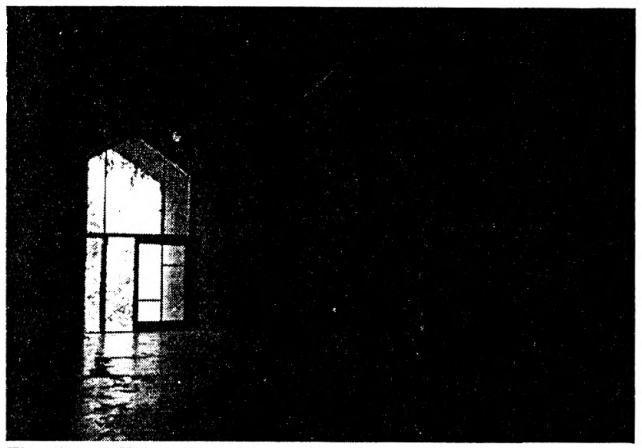

Fig. 4.48 The mysterious darkness inside....

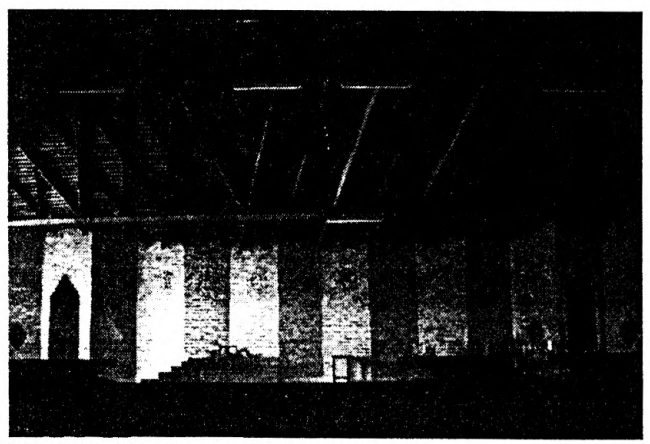

Fig. 4.49 The interior of the chapel.

[25] A saree is the traditional garment worn by most Indian women.

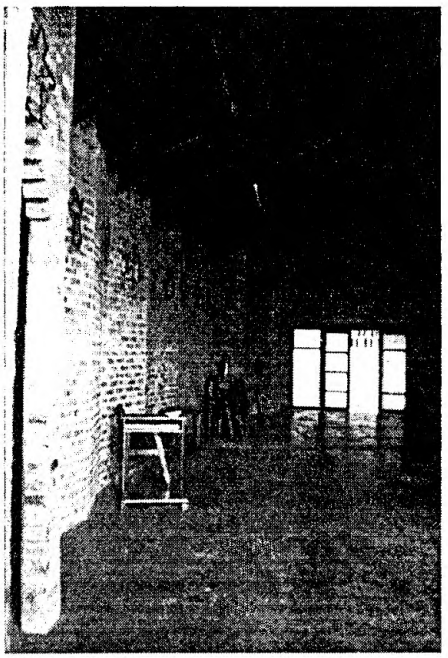

Fig. 4.50 The interior of the Chapel with the wire sculptures on the wall.

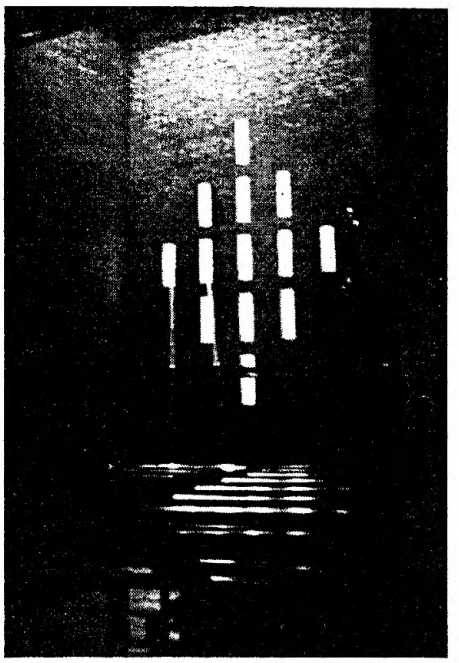

Fig. 4.51 The 'jali' cross and the fingers of God!

At the Loyola chapel, there is a world of difference between the exterior and the interior. The exterior is plain and blank, hardly hinting at the drama inside. The building is a contradiction of the exterior and the interior, the outsideness of the exterior in contrast with the heightened interiority of the interior. The Loyola chapel is perhaps the best example of a sacred building in Trivandrum. Baker brings out the sacred by the use of the natural; the brilliance of light and the mystery of shadow.

Baker does not use steel or concrete columns in the chapel. To increase the lateral strength of the brick walls, he uses wide double cavity walls of brick with cross bracing. Despite the height of the building, the acoustics of the chapel are quite good. The open brickwork absorbs the reverberations. Nevertheless a faint echo is heard, but it adds to the sanctity of the chapel, bringing to mind the great open prayer halls of ancient Tibet or the reverberations of the Italian churches.

The dark mysterious interiors. The heightened sanctity. The first rays of the morning sun, the lighted 'jali' cross. The faint reverberations of the morning mass. A prayer for the living. Truly, a home for God.

The Analysis:

a.) The Modernist Influence

Baker's early architecture in Kerala seems to be influenced quite largely by the Modern Movement. The influence seems to be unconscious, since Baker does not make any direct references to Modernism, either in his interviews or his writings. When the whole of Kerala was reeling under the sudden affluence of the Gulf returnees and the Art Deco Gulf-Post-Modernism[26] which followed as a natural consequence, Baker's architecture was simple, minimal and brutally honest. In his early years at Kerala, Baker seems to be largely modernist; linear forms, honest use of materials and expression of form. In later years, Baker moved away from the linear, breaking out of the straight line and discovering the freedom of the organic. He now revels in curves, spirals and free flowing organic shapes.

At the Loyola chapel, Baker is strikingly modernist. The plain façade, the simple symmetry, the rhythmic pattern of the jali's, the linear axial plan, the raw exposed materials and the minimalist expression are all characteristics of Baker's early architecture in Kerala. Even the interior at the Loyola chapel, though full of drama and spatial experience, is simple, functional and minimal.

Fig. 4.52 The rear of the Loyola Chapel. The bare walls, the linear forms and the simple symmetry speak of Modernist influences.

26

During the years of the Gulf oil boom, there was a mass migration of workers from Kerala to the Middle Eastern countries. They returned affluent and this prosperity was immediately translated into the architecture of the time, a imitation of the eclectic Gulf Architecture of the oil period. This architecture took all kinds of styles ranging from the Baroque to the Neo-Classical to the Post Modern and is commonly referred to as the Gulf-Post-Modernism.

b.) The Sacred as Experience

According to Indian mythology, every object is sacred, every object has sanctity at its innermost core. Thus, even the "profane" is sacred. With this element of sacredness contained in every object, every being, there has to be an enhanced experience of the spiritual in the place meant for worship and prayer. At the Hindu temples, where everything happens at the exterior, this is achieved by ritualistic movement and circumambulation. The circular movement around the temple heightens the experience of the spiritual and the zenith of ecstasy is reached at the very end; the entry into the shrine. Christianity has interiority as its main theme. The exterior only seeks to glorify the interior experience. The exterior raises the human spirit and develops it into a suitable vessel for the celebration of the spiritual, which happens inside.

Baker designs for the Indian Christian. The exterior may be plain, simple and unadorned, but it is still sacred. As in true Christian spirit, the experience of the sacred is heightened inside the chapel. The Gods wear an Indian garb; they are not alien but familiar and comfortable. Baker uses his favorite medium - light and shadow to create a sense of the presence of the Divine. The chapel is darkened by the materiality of the interiors. The rough cement floors, the red-brown brick walls, the deep brown wooden trusses on the roof and the wooden pews darken the chapel and give it a well worn and used look; ancient, therefore sacred. The darkness only serves to highlight the rays of light, which signify the sacred. *'And let there be light!'*

c.) The Dynamic Vs Static

The Loyola chapel is a clear play of opposing polarities. The static versus the dynamic, the plain exterior versus the dramatic interior, dark versus light are just some of the contradictions at the chapel. The interplay of polar opposites enhances the spatial and sensory experience of the user.

The Loyola chapel from the exterior seems plain and static, a modernist box of brick and

concrete. It is a totally contained box from the outside, static and stationary. The inside is just the opposite. The drama of the divine is breathtaking. The space is dynamic and full of energy. The darkness of the interior is charged with nascent energy, which explodes to the surface as soon as the rays of light enter the chapel. The atmosphere is suddenly different, charged and vibrant with images and memories of sacredness. One can almost hear the resounding incantations of the midnight mass at an ancient medieval church. Images of the auditory experience!

d.) Completeness

If the CDS seemed incomplete and capable of further growth, then the Loyola chapel is just the opposite. It gives the image of a complete 'whole', as though nothing can ever be added or subtracted from it. It is full of itself, self-contained and content. The building does not express the need to grow, in form nor in experience. It seems to give to the inhabitant and the devotee the most it can, its everything. It is rooted, rooted to the divine, rooted in the minds of the devotee. It seems perfect as it is, taking even a brick off will make it incomplete and adding one will make it overdone. It is as it is, at peace with itself and with the world.

Though the CDS and the Loyola chapel were designed at about the same time, they are inherently different from one another. They are different in character, in the expression of form, in function and even in the scale of the built form. But deeper down, they also have a lot of similarities which are not visible to the superficial reader. Both the CDS and the Loyola chapel have a basic honesty to material, form and expression. Each building is true to itself and to the user. It does not speak of false promises. There is no regression between appearance and reality. Both the buildings awaken the senses and enhance the experience of existence in the built space. Both the buildings bring back memories, images and dreams in the experiencer. Both remind the inhabitant of past experiences, an awakening of the dormant memory of images heard, seen or felt,

intuitive reflections of the forever happy moments of yesteryears. Both are essentially homes; the CDS is a home for the collective and the Loyola chapel is a home for the Divine.

CHAPTER 5

LAURIE BAKER: FACETS, GLIMPSES, INSIGHTS

The architecture of Laurie Baker is like the rituals of everyday life. What appears simple from outside has a breathtaking complexity to it from deep inside. What appears like an effortless one-to-one correspondence of mental process and activity is actually a set of elaborate patterns, rituals and underlying meanings. This becomes so ingrained over time that it seems simple and familiar, a sort of 'falling to hand'. Baker's architecture is similar. It seems clear and lucid to the passing observer who takes in only the superficial, obvious aspects, like the nature of the tectonics and the cost factor. But to the deep reader, Baker's architecture offers much more. The inherent complexity of intuition, memory and the metaphysical comes into play.

"The wonder of it all is that what looked for all the world like a diminishing horizon - the art-object's becoming so ephemeral as to threaten to disappear altogether - has, like some marvelous philosophical riddle, turned itself inside out to reveal its opposite. What appeared to be a question of object/non-object has turned out to be a question of seeing and not seeing, of how it is we actually perceive or fail to perceive 'things' in their real contexts." [1]

Baker's architecture is very much a part of his life. His architecture and life cannot be viewed as separate entities. They are interwoven into one another inextricably. His personality, principles and way of life is reflected in his built form. He is his architecture.

Baker - the Artist

Baker is a virtuoso artist with tremendous control of the medium in which he works. He is deeply intuitive and most of his design decisions are not premeditated and controlled, but free flowing and instinctive. His architecture is not imposing, but sensitive to the

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Irwin, Robert. Being and Circumstance: *Notes Toward a Conditional Art.* The Lapis Press, California, 1985. Pp 145.

need of the client/user. He does not confine himself to architecture alone: he also dabbles in cartooning, painting and sculpture. The artist in him is best brought out in his built forms, when he designs everything from the grill to the stair handrails to the landscape details. His design methods do not always follow one particular pattern. He usually proceeds from inside out, starting from the details and then developing and building up the design to arrive at the larger picture of the whole built form. He designs the structural framework of his buildings too, making technical innovations as and when necessary. The genius in him allows him to intuitively see in the mind's eye all the possible loads and forces in the structure. He counters these imagined forces effectively and artistically with his structures, much to the amazement of trained structural engineers.

Baker makes most of his design decisions on the site. He is a master at turning on-site mistakes into brilliant detail improvisations. Baker also makes last minute design alterations on-site which then look as though they were highly thought-out strokes of a master. He is an artist whose medium of creativity is brick and his palette, the site. He is almost a magician with bricks; the bricks move, sing and dance. The bricks seem capable of emotion; they cry in melancholy, are silent in solitude and laugh with joy. Baker's ability to give life to inanimate objects like brick and stone brings to mind the supreme artist whose creation is so beautiful that it comes alive.

As a true artist, Baker can be whimsical, sometimes going against logic to achieve artistic expression. He takes artistic license to negate the unifying whole and produce discontinuities and disjunctions in his architecture. He seems detached from his architecture, able to look at it from the outside in a light, unattached way. As much as he links art and architecture to the larger idea of purpose and necessity, the artist in him is impulsive yet dispassionate. This often leads to the rare creation of art for art's sake alone, producing a masterpiece. These built forms may be imperfect with regard to function and utility, but are brilliantly powerful in terms of spatial experience and sheer beauty.

Baker's architecture is not always perfect. His clients understand his imperfections and follies and take it as a natural by-product of his genius. John Ruskin discusses

imperfection as *"Imperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of process and change. Nothing ever lives is, or can be rigidly perfect; part of it is decaying, part nascent....And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies, which are not only signs of life but sources of beauty."* [2]

Baker - the Romantic

Baker's architecture is romantic in nature. Never harsh, never aggressive, never cold, Baker's buildings are characteristically warm and friendly. A sense of external control and visual dominance is replaced with a heightened feeling of interiority and feminine intimacy. His warm, dark interiors have connotations of Mother Earth. The materiality and colors of his built form bring forth memories and images of the earth. These references to the enveloping, protecting Mother Earth give the Baker buildings a womb-like quality, which is all embracing. The user feels safe and protected in his built form.

Baker, the person also seems to be romantic in nature. His creativity indicates that he believes the warm, the friendly and the romantic to be the path to beauty and, thus, to truth. Real life is always laced with a tinge of the bitter; disappointments, coldness and hate. It is the dream sequences that are always happy, always romantic. Baker loves to take the inhabitants through an imaginary world of gaiety and levity, a dream world of ever happy memories. Baker's spaces also speak of solitude and melancholy; but then melancholy is always romantic! The most passionate love stories are always tragedies!

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John Ruskin, as quoted by Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Hapticity and Time - Notes on a Fragile Architecture.* Unpublished lecture notes for the RIBA Architecture Gallery, Annual Discourse Lecture 1999.

The Child in Baker

Baker still retains a lot of the child in him. It is evident in his architecture too. The children's rooms are the best spaces in the homes he designs. He is able to identify with the children; their hidden hopes, fears and make believe games. In most of his artifacts, Baker is extremely playful. Many of his plan forms look like the careless squiggles of a child with a crayon.

The child in his architecture produces some of Baker's lightest works. This lightness allows him immense freedom of thought and expression. He breaks the structured framework of the adult and makes forays out of the confined mental box of coherent linear thought. Instead, the discontinuous, playful, parallel thought processes of the child bring out a creativity in Baker, which gives his architecture the courage to explore, experiment and play without adult inhibitions or restraints.

Humor in Architecture

Baker's architecture has the capability to laugh at itself[3]. Baker too, is humorous as a person. He is full of laughter, punning mercilessly on everyday matters, lampooning corrupt politicians, making endless cartoons on the state of the world and of course, writing satirical prose and poetry. His humor reflects on his architecture too. His cartoons and lampoons make their way into the built forms as elements of form and function. The laughing sun windows, the 'tilaked' Sun God, the Madonna in a saree and the biblical cartoons at the Loyola chapel are just a few of the examples. The humor in his built forms allows the adult inhabitants to become children once more, to laugh uninhibitedly at themselves and their houses.

Only truly content architecture, complete and wholesome, can laugh at itself. The humor within it comes out and fills the built form with levity and frivolity. This immense lightness

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Coates, Gary brings out similar ideas in the work of Eric Asmussen, a Scandinavian architect, in his book *'Eric Asmussen, architect'*, Byggforlaget, Sweden, 1997. Pp 204.

of being first shocks, then surprises, and, finally, amazes.

Baker and Tradition

"Tradition does not mean that you blindly copy something that has been done three hundred or four hundred years ago, like something that was done around the Taj Mahal. I am following on, not imitating, but making use of what they (our ancestors) have learned by trial and error, over one thousand, two thousand, ten thousand years."[4] *- Laurie Baker*

Tradition is important to Baker. Not 'tradition' as an end result, but 'tradition' as a process. To baker, tradition is not the endless copying and replication of form, use or meaning, but the understanding of the 'method' tried and tested over centuries. Baker does not use tradition as a visible tool in the design process, but uses tradition as a point to return to for all dreams and memories. Tradition is used as an image, as memory and as understanding. Tradition is not brought to the foreground through design, but rather the inhabitants are gently taken to it through themselves. It exists in every inhabitant, deep down as part of his/her inner consciousness and it is in this knowledge that the user grounds his existence in the present. Every present needs a past to return to.

Baker and the Metaphysical

"In my art I have tried to explain
to myself life and its meaning
I have also tried to help others
to clarify their lives."[5]

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 187.

5

From Helen-Wood, Mara (ed.). *Edward Munch - The Frieze of Life.* National Gallery Publications, New York 1992. Pp 52.

Baker explains life through his art. His honesty, humor and quest for truth are evident in his architecture. He also helps his clients and users rise up to their aspirations and aim for a higher form of life. The inhabitants of his spaces contemplate their existence, understand their past and aspire towards a new future. Only those people who want to make a difference with their lives and thereby also change society, approach Baker as their architect. Even such clients, however, are not completely aware of what they actually want or who they really are. Baker senses their hidden thoughts, ideas and potentials and designs for what each person is and can become.

Baker's architecture heightens the experience of everyday living. Each moment is more deeply experienced and savored. Commonplace acts like climbing the stair, opening the main door, crossing the threshold or even simply idling away in the shade of the courtyard on a hot summer day are experiences which are prolonged, heightened and longed for. The inhabitants of Baker buildings seem to be more conscious of everyday activities, like the passing of the day and its transformation into night, simply because the Bakerian spaces record and tell the tale of every movement of the sun and the wind. With the passing of time, these experiences fade from conscious memory, get ingrained in the self and become a part of life.

Truth as Architecture

"...there are natural resources, but then you destroy whole mountains. Huge areas of land are denuded and are not replaceable, so just because it is modern and efficient from a construction point of view, are we actually helping the nation or robbing the nation?"[6] *- Laurie Baker.*

For Baker truth is the absolute; and truth is strongly and inseparably linked to necessity and meaning. In the fulfillment of necessity lies beauty. This applies to his life, both personally and professionally. His way of life is strikingly similar to his architecture. Outer form alone is meaningless, it has to be complemented or even overshadowed by

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, December 1999. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 177.

inner content; this explains his emphasis on interiority in his built forms. A strong advocate of the unity of necessity and use, he shuns waste of any sort. Recycling old used envelopes and using them as fresh paper is just the same as using discarded pieces of tile as fillers in the filler slab roof.

"How can we even think of waste if we remember the forty to fifty million people who have nothing, no shelter, maybe not even one square meal a day?" [7]

Baker realizes truth in architecture by being honest to his art. He constantly questions himself and reexamines his philosophy and work in an effort to be true to himself. He is honest in material use, expression of form and structure, spatial use and expression of function. Truth is beauty.

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Laurie Baker in an interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum in December 1999. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 179.

CHAPTER 6

LAURIE BAKER AND THE 'OTHER TRADITION' OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Examining Baker in the light of theoretical frameworks

Every great work of architecture usually has a philosophical or theoretical grounding to it. Baker has his own philosophy of architecture, but has generally steered clear of a definitive theory. He does not even link himself to any propounded theory or framework. It would be interesting, after a detailed examination of Baker's works, to find out if he does fit into any accepted framework and if so, where and how.

Even a brief cursory glance at Baker's architecture of site, climate, context and resources indicate that he is a regionalist. He is against the modern universal man and the cold unfamiliar world that standardization brings about. Baker would agree with Paul Riceour's famous arguments against the rapid universalization of cultures.

"The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I call for the time being the creative nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind. The conflict springs up from there. We have the feeling that this single world civilization at the same time exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past. This threat is expressed, among other disturbing effects, by the spreading before our eyes of a mediocre civilization which is the absurd counterpart of what I was just calling elementary culture."[1]

"I can't see any reason for wanting to be global, for wanting to level you up to the same pattern. What is the point of all this global business? .....You won't know if you are in

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1 Riceour, Paul. "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" in *History and Truth*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965, pp. 276-277.

China or Stockholm.....It will be much better to stick to a regional aspect.'[2] *- Laurie Baker.*

The central premise of regionalism is the need to create places out of the confluence of the landscape, climate, language, food, social customs, ways of building and living of a particular region. Regionalism reveres the making of such varied places, and views architecture as a means to the end of cultural vitality, diversity and expression.

Kenneth Frampton, in his theory of Critical Regionalism, argues for the necessity of shaping a regional identity within the sphere of an universal culture. Baker's architecture also seems to fulfill Tzonis and Lefaivre's definitions of Critical Regionalism. They coined the term[3] and define it as *"upholding the individual and local architectonic features against more universal and abstract ones."*[4]

Kenneth Frampton makes a strong distinction between Critical Regionalism and vernacular building[5] . According to Frampton, Critical Regionalism assumes an *arriere-garde* position, which distances itself equally from the technologically progressive Modernism and from an impulse to return to the architectonic forms of the past. The self-conscious architect-designed vernacular is seen merely as an attempt to copy and duplicate sentimental and nostalgic forms of a past culture. He also contends that only an *arriere-garde* approach has the capacity to cultivate a resistant, identity-giving culture.

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 191.

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Tzonis, Alexander and Lefaivre, Liliane. "The Grid and the Pathway: An Introduction to the Work of Dimitris and Susana Antonakakis" in *Architecture in Greece*, no:15, 1981.

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Quoted from Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in Foster, Hal (ed.). *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*. Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1983.

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Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in Foster, Hal (ed.). *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture*. Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1983.

The Essence of Critical Regionalism

Kenneth Frampton has identified a set of criteria, which if adhered to in the practice of architecture, would lead to a critically regionalist architecture.

1. Critical Regionalism is manifested as a bounded architecture. Frampton uses the ideas of philosopher Martin Heidegger to explain that the boundary is not the line where something stops, but rather the contour within which something begins its "presencing". Critical Regionalism requires a "domain" from which it can derive its character.

2. Critical Regionalism questions the true limits of a region. Instead of restricting the region based on characteristics of climate and locality, such an architecture assumes a broader meaning by including within it the aspects of a larger architectural 'discourse'[6] and the cultivation of a client. The term 'discourse' refers to the architectural school or a similar school of thought of a particular culture or region.

3. Critical regionalism involves the creation of an experiential architecture, rather than a scenographic architecture. Frampton discusses the temporal character of a visual architecture, which is only suitable for the eye of the camera. He also discusses the negative influence of the media and television, where reality and unreality are fused and confused. These are the qualities that a sensitive critically regional architecture seeks to avoid.

4. Critical regionalism aims for a topological architecture, rather than typological. This topological architecture is site specific, rooted in the site and culture it belongs to, whereas typological architecture is typified in terms of program, structure and conventions of meaning.

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Frampton, Kenneth. " Ten Points on an Architecture of Resistance: A Provisional Polemic". from Speck, Lawrence (ed.). *Center: A Journal for Architecture in America*, Vol. 3, New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

5. Critical Regionalism maintains an interactive relationship with nature, as opposed to the artificial. Critically regionalist architecture is intensely involved with nature at many levels. It is responsive to climate, light and ventilation, and avoids or minimizes the use of artificial methods like air conditioning.

6. Critical Regionalism is contextual, it responds to the physical fabric in which it is rooted, and creates an appropriate identity for itself, within the context.

7. Critical Regionalism is architectonic in nature. The form, structure and its responses to climate, site and time are honest in nature, and not merely representational images.

8. Critical Regionalism involves all the senses in the experience of space. Materials, surfaces, air movement, ambient temperature, smell, sound all play a part in the experience and perception of architecture, and critically regionalist architecture is responsive to all the senses.

9. Critical regionalism is an architecture of 'place' rather than space. This approach to design believes in the creation of meaningful, experiential places in opposition to universal, placeless domains.

10. Critical Regionalism does not attempt to copy past forms, but by inserting within its fabric, reinterpreted vernacular elements or alien forms as disjunctive episodes, it creates a form of mannerist vernacular design or, in Frampton's terms, localized expressions of world culture.

At the First International Working Seminar on Critical Regionalism,[7] Tzonis and Lefaivre assert that the word *'critical'* originates in the essays of Kant and the writings of the Frankfurt School. The word *'critical'* challenges not only the established actual world, but

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The First International Working Seminar on Critical regionalism was held at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

also the legitimacy of the possible world view in the minds of the people[8] . Thus, in addition to confronting the way buildings are designed, the critical approach to regionalism also questions the legitimacy of the very thoughts which lead to the building and through which people use and appreciate these buildings.

From an architectural point of view, the critical function of a building is achieved by a special cognitive aesthetic effect on the viewer, which Tzonis and Lefaivre refer to as *'defamiliarization'*[9]. This word was coined by the Russian critic Victor Schklovsky and was initially applied to literature. Defamiliarization is employed in critical regionalism by selecting specific place-defining elements from the region and incorporating them 'strangely' rather than familiarly. It goes against the usual *'embracing'* between buildings and their users, instead *'pricking the conscience'*.

Doug Kelbaugh asserts that there are two sides to critical regionalism[10] . The first is the imperative for local self-determinism, where each region should celebrate what is unique and distinctive about itself and resist being absorbed by national and international civilization. The second aspect is the identification and promotion of certain principles common to any architecture that aspires to be critically regionalist. He argues that without common principles, regionalist architecture would simply be regional. Kelbaugh identifies five principles, which to him, form the essence of critical regionalism: 1. A sense of place, 2. A sense of nature, 3. A sense of history, 4. A sense of craft and 5. A sense of limits.

Tzonis and Lefaivre, borrowing an expression from philosopher Ludwig Wiggenstein, compare the concept of regionalism to a kind of thread, which does not get its strength from any fiber which runs through it from one end to the other, but from the fact that

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Tzonis, Alexander and Lefaivre, Liane. "Critical Regionalism" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

9 Ibid. pp 20.

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Kelbaugh, Doug. "Towards an Architecture of Place: Design Principles for Critical Regionalism" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

there are a vast number of fibers overlapping.[11] They identify critical regionalism as a reaction to a global problem of corporate/capitalist homogenization and argue that the operation of identifying, decomposing and recomposing of regional design elements must be a vital part of the universal skills of any architect practicing today.

Kristine Woolsey discusses Critical Regionalism as a process rather than as a theory[12] . She asserts that it is not a style, but is a process through which an infinite number of architectural solutions might be produced. She argues that a strict definition of critical regionalism is incredibly difficult, as is a definition of a methodology for achieving a critically regionalist architecture.

"To assign any kind of rigid format would be to negate the freedom inherent in a process oriented manifesto encompassing multiple ideologies."[13]

Woolsey discusses the possibilities of defining a category of starting points, assigning hierarchies to possible modifiers, and enumerating some general guidelines. The only absolute in the process of critical regionalism is the quality of the starting point. This point of beginning is generated by a continuous ideological search, reflecting both personal beliefs and international debate. This focused architectural ideology at the point of beginning, and modified by people, places and events, allows for customized solutions to become a part of a greater architectural discourse. Woolsey argues that Critical Regionalism is a dynamic balance between universals and modifiers. It is a method, not a new banner *'ism'*. Critical Regionalism is a process through which each architect can generate his/her own *'ism'* - an architecture of space, time and ideals.

Richard Ingersoll argues that Critical Regionalism is a theory, which is easier for a critic

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Tzonis, Alexander and Lefaivre, Liane. "Critical Regionalism" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

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Woolsey, Kristine. "Critical Regionalism: A Theory of Process" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

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Ibid Pp 324.

to apply than for an architect to use as a recipe.[14] He asserts that for the thinking architect, Critical Regionalism is a critical process of self-evaluation rather than a formula for application.

Baker and Regionalism

"It is important to be regional, a critical regionalist, but, you cant practice all that you preach, all the time; but, you should be able to adapt to different circumstances, different people and different places all the time."[15] *- Laurie Baker.*

Though Baker does not consciously practice a regionalist architecture, at some level he can be called a critical regionalist, at least to a certain extent. Like the critical regionalist, Baker practises a site relevant, climate conscious, experiential architecture which is in tune with nature. He is also contextual and topological, rather than merely typological. His architecture is tactile, not purely visual, involving all the senses in the experience of space. But again, Baker is at variance with critical regionalism on many grounds. While critical regionalism consciously strives to achieve a middle ground between local tradition and universal modern culture, Baker does what comes naturally and intuitively to him. His design ideals are not to seek out a critical midpoint between regionalism and modernism, but to design for need, necessity and meaning. He designs for something more than need, for a whim, an aspiration, a desire for life and living.

Critical regionalism uses the history and myth of a region to achieve regional patterns. It also maintains links to world culture by referring to it in design. For Baker, history is not a design tool nor is tradition a formal design vocabulary. Tradition is interpreted as space, spatial patterns and spatial experience. For him, tradition is not concerned with the visual, but with the tactile and the tectonic. Tradition is not an end in itself, but is a

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Ingersoll, Richard. "Critical Regionalism: A case for the Menil collection" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 160.

place of return for the user's dreams, memories and identity. It is a tool for homecoming. Similarly, modernism is not a premeditated 'ism' or a reference point to Baker, but is used as a tool for increased efficiency, innovation and economy.

Critical regionalism tries to create a world culture of local cultures by inserting reinterpreted vernacular elements as disjunctive episodes. Baker also creates disjunctive episodes in his architecture, but in a different manner and for different reasons. These disjunctions are not linked to the vernacular nor are they form related, but are spatial in nature. These spatial disjunctive episodes are intended to heighten the spatial experience of the user and mark the episode in space and time. The episode becomes memory.

Baker's architecture and design philosophy, therefore, cannot be cubby-holed into the framework of critical regionalism. Though many aspects of Baker's architecture agree with the principles and ideology of critical regionalism, it goes much deeper, at a plane much beyond regionalism. Regionalism is only a value and a process and in this sense, Baker's translation of philosophy into method can be called regionalistic. For Baker, being local and regional is the only way to be, since it is economic, of the place and promotes regional craft and labor.

Most critics of Baker read his architecture only at this level, but Baker's philosophy means much more. It aims at a larger picture; the understanding and concretizing of the human mind, will, psyche and existence. A philosophy which seems similar to the essence of Baker's architecture is Colin St. John Wilson's 'Other Tradition of Modern Architecture'[16] . Like critical regionalism, the 'Other Tradition' is opposed to the universal, unsympathetic architecture of the International Style. It also argues for a sensitive, user friendly, experiential architecture. Furthermore, it calls for an architecture of desire, of aspiration and gratification of human need; the need for a way of life and its fulfillment.

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[16] St. John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995.

The 'Other' Tradition of Modern Architecture

Colin St John Wilson in his book, *"The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture: The Uncompleted Project"*, discusses the theory, philosophy and work of a few architects, who from within the Modern Movement of the International Style, opposed its universality and the repetitive International 'box'. These architects argued for a more experiential, user friendly, sensitive, humane architecture. St. John Wilson calls these architects members of the Resistance, or those belonging to the 'Other Tradition' of Modern Architecture.

According to St. John Wilson, the first protests against the Modern Movement arose at the first CIAM meeting at La Sarraz in 1928. Alvar Aalto, the youngest amongst the architects who had assembled there opposed the doctrines of the Congress. Hugo Haering challenged Le Corbusier's prejudgments about the ideal geometry, the Cartesian method, the five canons and so on. Haering saw Corbusier as *"promoting the geometric order upon Nature and on the spontaneous and unpredictable manifestations of society."*[17] Haering wanted a less impatient, less prejudged enquiry into the way 'things' wanted to be in order to allow them to reveal their own form and was against the imposition of form from the outside. The term Haering constantly uses is *'Leistungsform'*, which is the form, which arises from performance or pattern of operations. He sought to understand life's complexities rather than mere rationalism, participation instead of blind order.

St John Wilson traces the roots of the philosophy of the 'Other Tradition' to the Classical theories of architecture. The Classical theorists like Aristotle distinguished between two kinds of art: Fine Art, whose end is only to serve itself, and Practical Art, which serves an end other than itself. Classical theory maintains that building was one of the Practical Arts, serving an end other than itself. The *'end'* was founded on the Greek concept of *'telos'*, which claimed that a purposefulness is inherent in all created things and it is the flowering and fulfillment of its potential powers that is the moving force in nature. All

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From St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. pp 16.

human enterprise and the enjoyment of life itself lies in this fulfillment. Classical theory thus demands a clear understanding and apprehension of the ultimate 'end' of all human endeavour. Therefore architecture's cause, origin and inspiration is to realize the 'end', which can only be fulfilled by a building. The concept of inbuilt purpose is very clearly related to necessity, and in so far as architecture is a Practical Art, its role is to provide the technical *'means'* to produce the desired *'forms'* necessary to realize the *'end'*.

Alberti writes that *"Architecture is born of Necessity and nurtured by Use".*[18]

Greek thought did not distinguish between aesthetics and function; to them beauty and efficiency were fused into one term - *'to kalon'.* The Classical theory requires that architectural design proceed in a linear sequence from the discovery of what is desirable, to the invention of a suitable form and the specification of the technical means which will make the intended form possible. This sequence can give a form of life its complete identity.

St. John Wilson argues that the 'Other Tradition' is not only classical in origin, but is the very essence of Classical thought. He goes on to say that the word 'Other' in the 'Other Tradition' not only refers to a school of thought of this century, but also to the claim that the school's authentic roots are in Classical Greek thought[19] . St John Wilson also discusses the fact that the two terms - the 'Classical' and the 'Functional' have lost their true meaning in the present age. The 'Classical' has been robbed of its roots in Greek thought and philosophy and has been reduced to a mere 'style'. The 'Functional' has also been debased into a 'style' by the Modern Movement and its alleged new concept of 'function'. Wilson emphasizes that the 'new' concept of function is actually the revival of the most ancient mandate of all - the Classical. The 'Other Tradition' is a resistance against this style of 'functionalism' of the Modern Movement, instead calling for a truly Classical approach. The Classical approach practices an architecture where there is a complete and unconditional fusion of purpose and means, invention which responds to

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From St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. pp 40.

19 Ibid.

desire, needs which give rise to the end and form which expresses the content.

The Ideology of the 'Other Tradition'

The writings of Colin St John Wilson - *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture, Architectural Reflections* and other such works help to identify the essence of the 'Other Tradition'. Other theoreticians like Juhani Pallasmaa, Michael Benedickt, Karsten Harries, Kimberly Dovey and Alberto Perez-Gomez have also expressed similar ideas and thoughts in their writings. These ideas, though having no direct references to the 'Other Tradition', has helped to flesh out the understanding of many of the characteristics of the 'Other Tradition'. These ideas, thoughts and writings have helped in the identification of a set of broad themes that elucidate the 'Other Tradition' of Modern Architecture.

a.) Authenticity

As described by St. John Wilson, the 'Other Tradition' theorizes that the origin of architectural form lies in the response to the desire for a certain form of life and only this form of architecture is truly authentic. The issue addressed here is not crude necessity or mere utility, but a full-blooded desire for fulfillment of purpose.

Kimberly Dovey expresses a similar thought in his article *"The Quest for Authenticity and the Replication of Environmental Meaning"* [20]. He argues that authenticity cannot be achieved through the mere manipulation of form. Authenticity is not a property of form, but of process and relationship. Dovey writes that authenticity as process is characterized by appropriation and indigenous quality. As relationship, it is the depth of the connectedness which exists between the people and their world. Appropriation embodies the dual qualities of both caring for the world and taking from it. Dovey borrows from philosopher Martin Heidegger the concept of 'caring', which is an

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Dovey, Kimberly. "The Quest for Authenticity and the Replication of Environmental Meaning" from Seamon, David and Muguerauer, Robert. *Dwelling, Place and Environment.* Nijhoff, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1985.

ontological and fundamental aspect of existence. The notion of 'taking' is to "make one's own" or an incorporation of the world into ourselves. This relationship of 'caring' and 'taking' is very similar to St. John Wilson's 'desire for a certain way of life' and 'fulfillment of purpose'.

Dovey also discusses the relationship between authenticity and meaning. Successive appropriations and identifications from past experience form an ontological ground for meaning. This meaning is culturally shared and leads to the generation of authenticity. Indigenous process also leads to authenticity. Indigenous here refers to a process with an inherent order, which grows in place, is intrinsic with the form emerging out of the dynamics of everyday life and the context of the place. Indigenous processes are those where the form is inborn, and are opposed to processes where the form is derived and imposed from outside to fit some wider order or idea. This intrinsic form is the essence of authenticity, which is an order of the 'Other Tradition'.

For Baker, too, the form, order and composition of a built form evolves from the processes of everyday life. A courtyard is not a design element, but a natural outcome of the site and the vegetation. An open kitchen plan could very well be derived, as a result of client aspirations for a different way of life; the woman of the home, as in the example of the Dolas home, wanting to mingle more with her family, rather than being hidden away in the kitchen.

Karsten Harries in his essay, *"Thoughts on a Non Arbitrary Architecture"*,[21] asserts that buildings cannot be autonomous aesthetic objects; they cannot just serve the demands of beauty. Buildings have to serve an end other than themselves. An architecture which serves only itself is an arbitrary architecture. Baker too, expresses similar thoughts when he says that *"I don't primarily think of a house as an object of Art, I look at it as something much more, as a building which everybody passing by has to look at. So, the architect has a much bigger responsibility towards the public and the nation as a whole,*

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Harries, Karsten. "Thoughts on a Non-Arbitrary Architecture" in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, Vol 20, MIT Press, 1983.

than an artist."[22] Again Harries emphasizes that a building should not be merely functional, since strict functionalism is also as superfluous as any ornament. Harries also echoes St. John Wilson when he writes that architecture should try to recover origins, *"where the return to origins is not so much a turn back to the past as a turn to what is essential"*[23] .

Harries asserts that the task of architecture is that of interpreting the world as a meaningful order in which the individual can find his place in the midst of nature and community. Harries agrees with Hegel's claim that *"the highest function of all Art is not to entertain or to amuse, but to articulate a binding world view; to express to human beings who they are and what they should be"* [24].

b.) Rootedness

According to Colin St John Wilson, the origin, order and identity of architecture is drawn from its role in fulfilling a way of life. This rootedness or embeddedness in the 'lifeworld' is a connection between the purpose of the building in question and the necessity, which gave rise to it. This sort of strong underlying connection between the 'means', the 'end', and the 'need' is called embeddedness or rootedness, and is a main theme of the 'Other Tradition'.

Rootedness is also a direct connection between the architecture and the place in which it is rooted. Architecture should be responsive to the climate, context and the region in which it is located. This thought is very similar to the ideology of regionalism, which also calls for an architectonic response to site, climate and the context of the region in which

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 173.

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Harries, Karsten. "Thoughts on a Non-Arbitrary Architecture" in *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, Vol 20, MIT Press, 1983. Pp 15.

24 Ibid. pp 16.

the architecture is rooted.

Kimberly Dovey discusses connectedness at many levels[25] . He views connectedness as an integral aspect of authenticity. He sees authenticity as a condition of connectedness in the relationship between people and their world. This person-environment relationship generates an authenticity, which is a connectedness born out of acts of appropriation. This is a spatio-temporal rootedness, which enriches the world with experiential depth. Dovey discusses a connectedness between the form of the phenomenon, or, architecture and the processes that produce it. Another level of connectedness that Dovey discusses is between the past and the present, the present and the future, and perception and action. Another level of connectedness is between the surface and the depth of the material world. These different kinds of connectedness exist between the everyday world and the deeper realities and processes which create it. It can also be referred to as the connectedness between the perceived world and the believed world. These forms of connectedness, which exist at many levels, are a trademark of the architecture of the 'Other Tradition' and particularly present in the work of Laurie Baker.

c.) Dialogue

The 'Other Tradition' calls for a dialogue between the architect and the user/client. Hugo Haering, one of the pioneers of the 'Other Tradition', argued for allowing new occasions to 'unfold their own forms'. He was calling for the creation of a forum of discussion that calls upon the participation of the local recipients and occupants of the buildings.

St. John Wilson asserts that the quality of intervention in response to dialogue is not only more authentic, but also much richer in content than that inspired by monologue. The process of dialogue understands the true factors at play. By true factors, St John Wilson refers to the response to specific context, the creation of appropriate ambience

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Dovey, Kimberly. "The Quest for Authenticity and the Replication of Environmental Meaning" from Seamon, David and Muguerauer, Robert. *Dwelling, Place and Environment.* Nijhoff, Dordrecat, Netherlands, 1985.

and the reconciliation of competing goals and forces. Wilson borrows an expression from Dr. Johnson, when he writes that a form of design which cannot find inspiration from such occasions or even disdains involvement with them is "tired of life".

Wilson also refers to brilliant works by architects, who engaged in a dialogue with the clients/users, such as the Zonnestraal Sanatorium by Byvoet and Duiker, low rent dwellings at Frankfurt by Ernst May and Aalto's work at Paimio. He quotes Peter Smithson who wrote about the Zonnestraal Sanatorium as having *"a purity and faith that we almost find too hard to bear"* and that they *"appear in retrospect to be central to a new sort of society, a new view of society....."*[26]

Wilson asserts once more that architecture is an embodiment of a desired way of life and only by the means of a meaningful dialogue with the users of the built environment can a desired way of life be achieved.

Baker too, engages in long conversations and repeated informal meetings with his clients and their families, in order to know them better. He is able to gauge their innermost feelings and aspirations, which they themselves are unaware of. Even while designing mass housing for rehabilitation purposes, Baker makes it a point to meet with and talk to the people he designs for.

"....in one house, there is just a man and his wife, and in another, there is a whole bunch of people, grandmothers and unmarried sisters and all that. So, it is a bit silly to do just one plan for all of them.....That is why I do not like doing very big schemes, unless you can do them a bit at a time. I like to ask the women of the house questions like 'Where are you going to do your cooking?', because where the housing already exists, most of the women were cooking outside. 'But, what will you do in the rain? Where will you cook?' It is only by knowing their actual daily life patterns that you can successfully design for people."[27]

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From St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995.pp 58.

27

Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 175.

d.) Gratification of Needs

Colin St. John Wilson writes that the 'end' of all Practical Art should be the gratification of some living purpose. The origin and meaning of form generated, lies in the response to a desire for a certain form of life. These desired forms are unpredictable and their origins are generated by factors far removed from the discipline of architecture. Thus these forms cannot be drawn up by any pre-existing stylistic canon. Wilson asserts that at times of significant social change, changing schools of thought and changing social values give rise to sources of inspiration, which lead to the discovery and gratification of a desire, which is not possible through any other form of genesis. Unlike any other form of Art, a built work has a life: the laws of statics and vagaries of nature act on it, and unless the building is charged at birth with the potencies proper to its role, it will be subject to vandalization, destruction or even demolition.

St. John Wilson refers to Wiggenstein, when he compares architecture to the way language is used contextually in everyday use. The meaning of a particular word lies not in itself alone, but in the context in which the word is used. Similarly the meaning of architecture lies in its context and use rather than some predetermined fixed sense. *"Don't ask for meaning, ask for use".*[28]

St. John Wilson alerts the reader to the fact that the possibilities of 'meaning' could be as wide as a gap between a shed and a cathedral. He uses the same analogy when he says that architecture extends from the symbolic to the instrumental, with the thread of a continuum, rather than as two discontinuous classes of phenomena called 'architecture' and 'building'. Again the grid of meaning is calibrated between the physical and the metaphysical. The closer the purpose of the building is to the fulfillment of a definable physical function, the simpler it is to define its use. The closer its purpose is to the symbolic, the more complex it is to weigh its purpose, but at no point is there a clear break or demarcation between one class of building and the other. In this sense, architecture is a practical art.

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From St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. Pp 61.

e.) Experience

The 'Other Tradition' is an order based on the quality of the experience of occupying real buildings. One of the main principles of the 'Other Tradition' is the emphasis on an experiential architecture. Colin St John Wilson writes that the main difference will lie between the building being viewed as an object and the building being viewed as a framework for the actions of human beings; as places of enactment and celebration, entered from within and experienced existentially, attuned in terms of light and the whole sensorium. Such architecture provides a framework where *"Space becomes Place and Time becomes Occasion".*[29]

Instead of a formal order based on axis, symmetry and mosaic, the architecture of the 'Other Tradition' is experiential and based on a quality of habitability of being inside or outside or in the in-between-world of the threshold. This quality of habitability arises in the relationship between the building and its occupant. This two-way relationship cannot be properly acknowledged or defined and St John Wilson calls this relationship a 'critical sense'. This critical sense is rooted in the physical experience of space and develops from the number of interwoven layers of experience, the form of body language drawing on psychological impulses based on empathy and the experiences between the two extremes of agoraphobia and claustrophobia.

St John Wilson asks why certain forms of architecture touch and deeply move the viewer/experiencing user.[30] He explains that this elation lies in the experience of some primal conjunction of forms. Wilson quotes Kant when he asserts that all human consciousness is grounded in spatial experience. This consciousness lies between the states of agoraphobia or claustrophobia; the outside or inside or the threshold between. St John Wilson emphasizes that the greatest works of architecture fuse in our minds the opposing psychological positions of envelopment and detachment.

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From St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. Pp 58.

30 Wilson, Colin St John. *Architectural Reflections.* Butterworth Architecture, Oxford, 1992.

The position of envelopment is grounded in an intimate experience of the protective and sustaining qualities of the mother-figure. This form of envelopment is spatial, physical and tactile in nature. Wilson refers to psychologist Adrain Stokes when he says that both these positions are charged with emotional drama, and the simultaneous experience of these two polar modes leads to the experience of a masterpiece. The enjoyment at the same time of intense sensations of being inside and outside, of envelopment and detachment, of oneness and of separateness is the ultimate experience granted by a built form[31] .

Spatial experience should, therefore, not only be visual, but must relate to all the senses. Juhani Pallasmaa in his book *"The Eyes of the Skin"*[32] discusses the denatured architecture produced by an ocularcentric conception of design. Historically human experience has involved all the senses - touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight. The reality of the present has regrettably intensified the importance of sight to the detriment of all other senses. Heidegger also criticizes the narcissistic and nihilistic view that seems to have dominated modern architecture. The narcissistic view sees architecture as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement. The nihilistic view on the other hand, disengages 'one's body-centered and integrated experience of the world', isolating the human self from the environment.

Pallasmaa argues for a total sensorial experience of architecture, as understood by all the senses. He asserts that all space is understood and experienced by the body in totality. The human body with its interaction with the surrounding environment, perceives the world around it as involving itself. Place is remembered at least partially because it has *"affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds".*[33]

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[31] Wilson, Colin St John. *Architectural Reflections.* Butterworth Architecture, Oxford, 1992. pp 8.

[32] Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin.* Academy Editions, London, 1996.

[33] Ibid. Pp 28

"Sensory experiences become integrated through the body, or rather, in the very constitution of the body".[34]

The sense of reality is strengthened and reinforced by all the senses. Pallasmaa asserts that architecture is an extension of nature into the human-made world, which provides the ground for the experience and understanding of the world. The built form is not an isolated and self sufficient artifact, instead it directs man's existential experience to wider horizons. Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory. The qualities of matter, space and scale are measured by the eye, ears, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle. Instead of mere vision, architecture involves several layers of sensory experience which interact and fuse into each other.

Pallasmaa argues that an architectural work is not experienced as a collection of isolated visual images, but in its full material and spiritual presence. The images of one sensory realm give rise to the experience of other senses as well. Images of presence give rise to further images of imagination. Colin St John Wilson explains that architecture is experienced and understood by a form of body-language. This body-language engages the whole sensorium: space is heard, smelled and touched. *"To see is only to touch more accurately."*[35]

Pallasmaa also emphasizes the significance of the shadow. He writes that deep shadows and darkness are essential because they dim the sharpness of vision, create a sense of depth and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy. Homogenous light paralyses the imagination in the same way as homogenous space dulls the experience of place. He discusses the fact that light has turned into merely the quantitative and the window has lost its significance as mediator between the two worlds of enclosed and open, private and public, interior and exterior, shadow and light.

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[34] Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin.* Academy Editions, London, 1996. pp 27.

[35] Attributed to Louis Khan from Wilson, Colin St John. *Architectural Reflections.* Butterworth Architecture, Oxford, 1992.

Pallasmaa emphasizes the importance of the ear as a sensory organ in the perception of architecture. The sense of sight isolates, but sound incorporates, vision is directional whereas sound is omni-directional. Hearing structures and articulates the experience of space. Sound often forms the continuum within which visual impressions are embedded. Each space has its own characteristic sound of intimacy or monumentality, invitation or rejection, hospitality or hostility.

The most essential auditory experience created by architecture is silence or tranquility. Pallasmaa asserts that architecture presents the drama of construction silenced into forms of matter and space. Silence connects with time, by evoking memories of the past. The architecture of silence is a responsive remembering silence. Great works of architecture are almost always frozen into a timeless present.

Pallasmaa discusses the spaces and memories of space generated by the sense of smell. The most persistent memory of any space is its odor. Smells trigger the human imagination, taking the person visually through the mind to far and distant places, enriching the experience of the environment. *"The nose makes the eyes remember".* Baker's architecture too, is multi-sensory, engaging all the five senses of the human being in its perception. His architecture is hardly visual, but deeply rooted in a sensuous interiority, enhancing the experience of the built form in the user.

Michael Benedikt in his book *For An Architecture of Reality*[36] discusses the experience of certain 'valued times' when the world is perceived afresh. He goes on to say that at these times, perceptions are suffused with an unreasoned joy at the simple correspondence of appearance and reality, at the evident rightness of things. Such experiences and moments are profoundly moving, and Benedikt calls them *'direct aesthetic experiences of the real'.* He discusses an architecture of reality and divides the aspect of realness into four components - presence, significance, materiality and emptiness.

A building with *'Presence'* is not merely assertive of its presence, but has a

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[36]Benedikt, Michael. *For An Architecture of Reality.* Lumen Books, New York, 1987.

sensuousness, a shine and a symmetry to it. According to Benedikt, the presence of the building is not only visual, but experienced by all the senses - touch, smell, taste and sound. Every material is itself and the texture is fully revealed. Benedikt explains that a building with presence seems attentive to the human presence. Heidegger puts it as a 'falling to hand'.

'Significance' is largely cognitive, as when buildings become significant to someone, rather than being symbolic of something. He distinguishes between symbols and significance. Symbols can be insignificant and significant objects can be devoid of symbolism, but a significant object or building has an existential quality that a mere symbol does not have.

'Materiality' is another aspect of 'Reality'. According to Benedikt, materiality does not speak of heaviness of materials, but of authenticity and truth in the use of materials. Benedikt realizes the impracticality of suggesting the use of only natural materials, but he asserts the importance of eschewing materials that do not look or behave like what they are. He emphasizes the use of materials that are tactile, visual and kinesthetic in nature and warns against the use of materials that look or feel like nothing in particular - the immateriality of materials.

Benedikt refers to *'Emptiness'* in the context of silence, clarity and transparency. With reference to architecture, emptiness means that a built form should not be a slave to its program, but should be formed according to the innate principles of order, structure, shelter and accident. He refers to Louis Kahn and Adolf Loos as truly practicing the architecture of silence when they arrived at the meaning of architecture as nothing other than the building itself - the materials and techniques of construction, sensuous and unadorned. He calls design without artifice, fakery or deception as the architecture of reality. Emptiness is also similar to the idea of space or interval like the Japanese concept of *'Ma'* - the gaps between stepping stones, the silence between the notes of music etc. When something is incomplete and there is a chance for continuation, there is emptiness. Architecture with emptiness is always unfinished, by the space it makes and the potential it shows.

Benedikt asserts that an architecture of *'Reality'* captures the human presence with the qualities of presence, significance, materiality and emptiness.

f). Expression

Hugo Haering calls for unprecedented methods to find out *'what a building wants to be'.*[37] He argues that the objective will not always be self evident, but will lie concealed within a tangle of misunderstandings that require patient elucidation. When the matter achieves clarity, the search for the techniques to achieve it will require more attention and patience. Therein lies the true expression of the building.

The Modern Movement imposed a geometric order upon nature, but the 'Other Tradition' goes far beyond interpreting expression as only an outcome of geometric order. Expression, in this case, has a role to address such issues as those which lie at the metaphysical end of the spectrum of use. The 'Other Tradition' believes in a dialectic, which embraces both the geometric order and natural organic form.

The Modern Movement believed in the geometry of Purism, the five canons of Le Corbusier and the technology of the frame structure. Architecture for them, was *'a knowing and correct play of forms in light'*.[38] This harmony of geometric architecture appealed to only the visual sense of the intellect and it is this very fact that the 'Other Tradition' strives to avoid. Hugo Haering sums up the essence of the 'Other Tradition' when he argues that *'we must examine things and allow them to unfold their own forms'.*[39] The most important aspect of the 'Other Tradition' is that the content generates the form: form cannot be created for its own sake and purposive form is always generated from inside out.

37
St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. Pp 57.

38
Ibid. Pp 52.

39 Ibid. pp 52.

"We cannot create new form where there is no new content".[40] *- Alvar Aalto.*

Colin St John Wilson argues that the International Style always had an obligation to be original and invent new forms and moulds whether the 'end' demanded it or not: this compulsion is totally absent in the 'Other Tradition'. New ground is broken only where new need demands it. The form is just the means of satisfying the end, which arises from need.

Baker too believes in a similar philosophy; every act, every line is there for a purpose, to fulfill a necessity. *"The appreciation, influence and impact of space and light...that is all very important in a building. If I put a window or a hole in the wall, its for a view or the light or the wind. I only put it there for a reason."*[41]

g). The System

St John Wilson quotes Paul Rudolph as saying that the architects of the twentieth century are highly selective in determining which problems they want to solve. Wilson claims that this is a characteristic of the aesthete of the Modern Movement. On the contrary, Haering writes that the special requirements of every task should be understood. Universal systems cannot be set up, but every task has to be started from the beginning many times over and over again till the right solution is achieved.

Aalto also discussed the process of design of the 'Other Tradition', when he argued that there existed one absolute condition for creative work and in every case a simultaneous solution of conflicting problems should be reached. The bringing together of apparently irreconcilable opposites was the condition of the poetry of architecture.
Rudolph asserts that nothing can be left out of the design process, because it is too

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St John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. pp 52.

41
Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 181.

awkward to be accommodated. Each component must have its place and its identity given presence in the 'whole'. If each part has its place and independence in the 'whole', it will bring with it the scale that is appropriate to its use. This will lead to the human presence and activity patterns to unfold their own identity and the building will attain its true character.

The 'Other Tradition' emphasizes the functional unity of all the parts and components of a built form, thus leading to the formation of the 'whole'. All the parts of a building should mutually correspond and none of the parts can change without changing the others.

Baker too feels very strongly about viewing the built form as a 'whole', complete in itself, not as an assembly of various parts that make it up. *"Here, you are asked to submit an 'elevation to road', so people make a very posh 'elevation to road' and to hell with the rest of the building. The building is not viewed as a whole, but as parts and the front and the side and all kinds of narrow subdivisions."*[42]

Thus each component is a determinant of the total building. St John Wilson quotes Alberti as saying that harmony is reached when nothing can be added, taken away or altered. The built form is whole and complete.

Laurie Baker and the 'Other Tradition'

The 'Other Tradition' places the human being at the center of its philosophy. Architecture is a vessel for the celebration of life and gratification of human desire. For Baker too, the inhabitant, client or user is of key importance. The main purpose and direction of Baker's architecture is two fold. The first is a search to place his architecture within a larger whole. The second is to allow his inhabitants to express who they are and what they hope to become. These are the 'ends' and every other aspect of his architecture become just a 'means' to achieve the end.

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Laurie Baker in a personal interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum, India, Dec-Jan '99-'00. Text contained in the appendix of the thesis, pp 173.

For Baker, architecture has to fit into the framework of the ideal world, where necessity and meaning have a greater impact than what the word suggests; where self sustaining systems flourish, where the cycle of renewal is ongoing. His architecture serves an end other than itself, it serves to economize and minimalize in terms of space, material and manpower in order to help house millions of homeless around the globe. It serves to reduce extravagance to be able to support the more needy elsewhere. His architecture conserves nature and natural resources, to save the world from an early depletion, to ensure the survival of future generations.

The second purpose of Baker's architecture is an authentic search for meaning and fulfillment of human desire. His work serves to gratify a living purpose of the human being, that of hope and aspiration for a higher and truer way of life. If the inhabitant is happy in his home, if he can relate to it and claim it as 'his own', if he dreams of his home, discovers himself in it and wants to rise beyond himself, then that is the yardstick of success that Baker sets for himself.

"My feeling as an architect is that you are not after all trying to put up a monument which will be remembered as a 'Laurie Baker' building, but as Mohan Singh's house where he can live happily with his family".[43] *- Laurie Baker.*

Baker engages in a dialogue with the client, getting him/her not to state just their requirements, but probing deep down to understand their way of life. Baker wants his architecture to be significant to the inhabitant, not symbolic.

Baker is honest and authentic in his expression of form. His built forms express what they are, what they are made up of and what they hope to become. His expression is honest to the degree of exposing every crack in the tile, every line of plaster between the bricks and every infilling tile in his concrete.

Baker, as a true exponent of the 'Other Tradition' roots his built form in the site, connects it to nature and to the user. His architecture is intrinsic, it grows in place and emerges as a natural outcome of the forces of everyday life. Baker draws connections

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[43]From Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life, Work, Writings.* Penguin Books India Ltd, 1991. Pp 3.

to the culture and tradition of the user. Tradition is not a return to the past, but a return to what is essential and necessary. He embeds his architecture in a continuum of time, memory and matter. The memory of past experience forms the ground for new meaning and helps the user's realize what they want to become. His architecture is experiential; the built form is not a place for viewing from the outside, but a place for experience, existence and the celebration of life.

"We must build so that the people can once more find in architecture the joy of charged powers and self-fulfillment".[44]

Laurie Baker's thoughts, ideas and philosophy on architecture and life in general, more or less match the treatise of the 'Other Tradition'. Both argue for a more meaningful existence in this world, in harmony with nature and with oneself. Both assert a more conscious existence, a deeper search into being, a higher form of life. Both search for truth and beauty; more importantly, the process of finding and elucidating it.

The translation of philosophy to design requires a medium of expression. Baker uses certain tools for this purpose. If interpreted in a theoretical vein, these tools can be seen as certain aspects of Critical Regionalism. On a closer inspection, regionalism and the 'Other Tradition' seem to co-exist on different levels of complexity. The 'Other Tradition' is a philosophy, while regionalism is a process. Both go hand in hand and complete the other. According to Juhani Pallasmaa, theory and practice are in a dialectical relationship with each other.[45] There may be points where they are opposing polarities, and this constant dialectic between opposition and similarity gives strength and meaning. The 'Other Tradition' and Critical Regionalism can be compared similarly.

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Attributed to Eileen Gray, one of the exponents of the 'Other Tradition' in St. John Wilson, Colin. *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture.* Academy Editions, London 1995. Pp 23.

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From a lecture given by Juhani Pallasmaa at the Kansas State University and private interview by the author with Juhani Pallasmaa on Oct 11th 1999.

The 'Other Tradition' forms the philosophical grounding for the process of Critical Regionalism. Like Kristine Woolsey[46] asserts, "Critical Regionalism" is not a style, but a process through which any number of architectural solutions might be produced. She discusses the possibilities of defining the quality of the starting point of design, which is generated by a continuous ideological search. This ideological search could be founded in the philosophy of the 'Other Tradition'. This would allow the process of Regionalism to become a part of the greater architectural discourse, which would involve the human aspect at the center, a vital aspect that seems to be missing from all the various theories of regionalism.

Laurie Baker can be called an exponent of the philosophy of the 'Other Tradition', while the medium or process of his architectural design, the actual putting of ideas into practice can be referred to as regionalistic. Though it is difficult to place such a versatile and multifaceted artist into a definitive mould, Baker's philosophy seems to encompass within it the 'Other Tradition'. Maybe, that is the very reason he has not been classified into any one of the multitude of architectural theories. Nor does he care to elaborate or discuss any theoretical background or leanings. He is more concerned about real life issues; as how to design for the rehabilitation of the Latur earthquake victims such that they will not face ever again the trauma of losing their shelter, how he will face the challenge of designing and building 250 different houses at Quilon for distressed fisherfolk who have to be resettled, how to effectively design better housing for slum dwellers at Trivandrum. Not for him, the endless theories or complex debates. He is an architect of the people. An 'Other Traditionist'?

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Woolsey, Kristine. "Critical Regionalism: A Theory of Process" from Amourgis, Spyros (ed.). *Critical Regionalism: The Pomona Meeting Proceedings.* California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California, 1991.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS: BAKER IN KERALA

Baker and success in Kerala

Laurie Baker is a household name in Kerala. Most people, from the high end Government bureaucrat to the average day worker or mason, to the bored housewife know of Baker saipu[1] and his unplastered brick architecture. For many people, the name 'Baker' is synonymous with raw unfinished brick, unmindful of whoever the actual architect is.

Baker's architecture is very popular in Kerala, especially in Trivandrum, Baker's adopted home town. The sheer volume of his work stands testimony to the success his architecture enjoys. Baker has designed and built more than a 1000 private homes, about 30 or more churches and mission buildings, numerous schools, institutions and housing schemes. The diversity and scale of his architecture is staggering. From one-room fishermen's huts to massive institutional complexes comprised of acres of land and a multitude of built forms.

Out of this wide canvas of built forms and building types, the most popular are Baker's residences. The residences have been the main factor behind Baker's overwhelming popularity in Kerala. The home is every person's refuge and Baker's residential designs have brought him into the world of the common person. The lay person is not unduly worried about the state of architecture in the country; but when architecture comes down to the scale of his/her territory, that is when the commoner looks closely at the built world around him/her.

A Baker home is markedly different from the usual concrete and cement houses of Kerala. In addition to the difference in tectonics of unplastered brick walls, filler slab

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[1] *'Saipu'* refers to a foreigner in Malayalam, the language of the people of Kerala.

roofs and tiled floors, there are also distinct differences in space and structure. The average Malayalee, quite used to the PoMo facades of the neo-Kerala-Gulf architecture[2] is taken by surprise at the lack of the external façade and the interiority of the Baker home. He/she is also taken aback at the high level of personalization that a Baker home offers its inhabitants. The usual houses are just divided by rooms and associated function. Even the ancestral traditional Kerala home, for all its spatial richness and climatically responsive design, does not really offer a degree of personalization. Nor was this possible during the ages of the joint family system. Spaces were divided according to function and location, like the Padinjattini, the Thekkini[3] and so on. The common man finds it difficult to comprehend the larger picture and cannot think beyond his/her immediate territory. He/She is overwhelmed by Baker's philosophy of resources, availability, materials and wastage and are not sure how each one of them in their small way can affect the economy of the nation.

The home or territory also marks one's place in the social ladder. The common person is highly conscious of social hierarchy. Owning or living in a Baker residence always has its own social implications. There are two prominent lines of thought about Baker in the Malayalee[4] society. There is one set of people who love Baker's architecture and either work or stay in one or would like to possess one. There is another set, who have an absolute dislike towards it, either because they are worried about the marked difference in the appearance and attitude of a Baker home or due to its social associations. One either loves a Baker home or hates a Baker home. The one emotion that a Baker home is incapable of provoking is indifference towards it. But in a State where appreciation of architecture takes a definite back seat when compared to the other arts, Baker has at least generated enough passion and interest for every lay person to pronounce his/her

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[2] During the years of the Gulf oil boom, there was a mass migration of workers from Kerala to the Middle Eastern countries. They returned affluent and this prosperity was immediately translated into the architecture of the time, a imitation of the eclectic Gulf Architecture of the oil period. This architecture took all kinds of styles ranging from the Baroque to the Neo-Classical to the Post Modern and is commonly referred to as the Kerala-Gulf-Post-Modernism.

[3] The Thekku, Vadakku, Kizhaku and the Padinjarru refer to the four cardinal directions; the North, South, East and the West respectively in Malayalam. The Thekkini, Vadakkini, Kizhakkini and the Padinjatinni are the rooms located in these four cardinal directions and are associated with a specific function.

[4] The people of Kerala speak the language of Malayalam and are called Malayalees.

opinion on his architecture.

Kerala is a state with strong socialist leanings in its politics, literature and cinema. Socialist thinking promotes social change, reform and economic equality. A socialist likes to be thought of as an intellectual and a reformer. He is ever eager to project his readiness for social change and the development of economic equality of the 'haves' and the have-nots'. The average Malayalee has always been a romantic socialist.

The arts of a particular region - the literature, cinema, art and architecture, are closely inter-related. An understanding of the arts of a region helps one to understand its people. The cinema and literature of a particular region or State also bring out in its central characters, the more than life-size idol with who the masses identify. The ideal man! Malayalam cinema has always been different from the mainstream commercial Indian Hindi cinema. Malayalam literature as well as cinema has usually drawn out the character of the 'hero' as a romantic brooder, usually an atheist; not someone who is a 'chocolate hero'[5] or a violent 'angry young man', but a man with a purpose. He is either portrayed as a melancholic romantic who pines for his lost love or an intense but silently angry man who wants to put right all the evils of society; casteism, untouchability and economic inequality. He may or may not actually succeed, but the truth of the film lies in the fact that he tried; the outcome is not of real concern. But the more tragic the hero, the more the Malayalee identifies with him. A different sort of 'Less is More'.

Thus, it is of little wonder that the socialist 'intellectual' Malayalee identifies with Bakerian architecture. Baker's homes are romantic and evoke a nostalgic longing for an evergreen past when movies were reality and heroes and heroines were always right. The insideness of Baker's architecture provokes the mood of joy or melancholy, as the case may be. The spatial experiences in his homes are intense and charged. In addition

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5
The 'chocolate hero' and the 'angry young man' are images projected by the mainstream commercial Indian Hindi cinema. These figures are representational of different epochs. The 'chocolate' hero was a sentimental romantic young man, who only loved and won. He had only positive attributes, capturing the hearts of the female population. The 'angry young man' was the object of men's adulation, representing on celluloid what they could never become. He was always angry and rhetorical, was always wronged against and in a perpetual bid to take revenge against his wrongdoers. He used physical violence and had a cult status among the masses.

to all this, Baker's architecture represents a change from the usual that the socialist Malayalee always longed for. By voting for the change; by living and working in a Baker building, he sets the example and practices what he preaches. The socialist Malayalee also adores the simplicity and associated meanings of poverty linked with the bare, unplastered brick façade. Poverty is again romantic!

The major turning point in the history of the evolution of Baker's architecture in Kerala was the building of the Center for Development Studies at Trivandrum. This brought renowned economists from all over India to the city, who realized at once the importance of Baker's architecture with regard to the larger whole of economy, resources and the Indian sub-continent. The CDS was also set up by a Government that had a socialist background and this mixture of socialism and intellectualism provided the right soil for Baker's architecture to grow and flourish. Once the first few economists at the CDS had built Baker homes and enjoyed living in them, the others too followed suit. This opened the floodgates for the rapid growth of the Baker residences.

This multitude of socialists, economists and intellectuals as clients paved the way for the common belief that it is only the intellectuals who reside in Baker houses. The inhabitants of Baker homes are seen as harbingers of social change and reform. These associated meanings have led to an even greater demand for a Baker home. Another reason for a rapid rise in demand for the Baker residences is the 'low-cost' factor associated with them. The goal of Baker's architecture is not cost reduction per se; lower costs are just a side product of Baker's approach to design. His principles of using local materials, resources, craft and shunning of extravagance and snobbery lead naturally to reduced costs in the construction. But to the general public, a Baker house is almost always linked to the idea of a low-cost house. This too, has led to a heightened demand for and increased popularity of the Baker home.

Though the 'home as a symbol' set off the initial gold rush for Baker's residential architecture, this kind of mass-generated hysteria cannot last for long. As the inhabitants started living, dreaming and identifying with their homes, they became more than a symbol to them. These houses became their space, their home and their territory. A place to return to, for themselves and their dreams. It was a homecoming.

The very aspects of Baker's architecture that sparked off such success, are also the key issues for the people who dislike Baker's architecture. Those opposed to change cannot conceive any other image of a home than the modernist cube; the cement, brick and concrete frame. They cannot break out of the rigidity of this image and remain prisoners of it. Others associate the Baker home with images of physical insecurity; the lack of window grills leading to a plethora of thieves and robbers, the lack of concrete and cement leading to mental associations of structural weakness and instability, the unplastered interior surfaces bring images of insects and cobwebs.

Some others, especially the nouveau rich, who would want to flaunt their new found wealth, do not get an opportunity to do so in a Baker home and so, naturally dislike such designs. They would rather build a façade-rich PoMo house! The associations of the plain, simple and honest Baker façade with poverty and penury also lead to its rejection by some of the image conscious, society conscious citizens. The immediate associations of 'low-cost' with 'low-end'.

The settlement patterns of Kerala, are very different from the other Indian cities. Its unique urban-rural mix has been immensely favorable to Baker and his architecture. Most Indian cities are made of distinctly separate urban and rural fabrics. The urban and the rural are discontinuous but definite pockets of settlement. The urban is a dense and congested mass, while the rural is made up of a looser, more scattered fabric. In Kerala, the patterns of settlement have been such that it is one large continuous urban-rural mix. One flows into the other effortlessly and seamlessly. The whole of Kerala can be called one huge village or one huge city. Of course, the urban and the rural can be distinguished by the density and massing, but it is on a much looser scale when compared to most other States in India. Baker's architecture fits into this semi-urban, semi-rural pattern of settlement very well. His buildings are a good mix of urban and rural elements and seem to want a bit of both as background. Without the rural element, Baker's architecture has the danger of seeming incomplete, as is evident from the discomfort of his built forms in a purely urban context. Again, there seems more to explore. Did Baker's architecture develop as a natural response to the settlement patterns of Kerala or does Kerala provide the ideal backdrop for Baker's architecture? It is probably a good mix of both.

Another major factor contributing to Baker's success in Kerala is the high literacy level of the State. It is the first State in the Indian republic to achieve one hundred percent literacy. The average Malayalee is an educated person, the Malayalee women know their rights, they are aware of the world around them. This makes them more conscious towards understanding their role in the Indian context. They try to understand Baker's philosophy of architecture as forming a part of the larger whole; not as a stand alone piece of Art. For the common person, this is not just a step ahead, but a giant leap towards a better future.

It would not be wrong to conclude that one major reason for the overwhelming success and popularity of Bakerian architecture is that Baker found in Kerala and her Malayalees, the ideal backdrop and setting for his architecture. The lazy romantic Malayalee who loves to live in a make believe world of 'setting the world right someday'. The Malayalee who projects his socialist intellectualism and readiness to accept the Bakerian 'poverty'. The literate Malayalee who loves to think of himself as a romantic idealist who gives up worldly comforts for a 'cause'. The matriarchal society[6] which has conditioned the Malayalee to love the feminine world; the associations of Mother as refuge, home as Mother and Earth as woman. The assertion is not that Baker's architecture would not have been successful in any other place. Baker's philosophy and architecture is so meaningful that it would have found its rightful place, independent of the setting, backdrop or the nature of its inhabitants. But in Kerala, Baker found immense popularity; almost an explosion in terms of sheer volume of built forms and an enviable cult status enjoyed never before by a 'mere' architect. Baker's sucess is probably due to the peculiar nature of Kerala society and her unique Malayalees.

Though Baker's architecture is extremely successful in Kerala and even though he practices meaningful architecture from every point of view; it is evident that his

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A distinctive feature of the social organization of Kerala till recent times was the prevalence of Marumakkattayam or the matrilineal system among certain castes and communities. It involved inheritance and succession through the sister's children in the female line. The family in the matriarchal system was a joint family consisting of all the descendants of a common ancestress in the female line. The mother and all her children, all grand children by the daughters, all her brothers and sisters and the descendants on her sister's side lived in the same home sharing a common kitchen. This kind of matriarchal society is peculiar to Kerala, while the rest of India is largely patriarchal.

architecture is not without some inherent weaknesses, which is only natural in every living object. Baker's architecture, with the exposed brick walls and filler slab roofs does not easily fit in with the urban environment. It stands out, distinct and well apart, refusing to merge or blend into the urban fabric. The few urban projects that Baker has done, like the Maveli Café in Trivandrum, have turned out to be failures, especially in the visual sense. The reduced importance that Baker gives to the visual image is probably the cause for these failures. This is not the failure of Baker as an architect, but an example of the stubborn inflexibility of his philosophy. Again, this is debatable; stubborn inflexibility or sticking up to one's ideals?

Another concern that can be raised about Baker's architecture is the sheer volume of work that he has produced. One feels that the quality of the individual works would have been much richer, if Baker had confined his design briefs to a select few. The artist in him seems to have got exhausted at times, producing some works of mediocrity. A creative well, which seems to have run dry at times, perhaps due to the bulk of creative output from a single source. Again, this issue is debatable. Baker has never designed for the monetary benefits; if he has taken on too much work at times, it has been in an effort to make his philosophy known to the masses, in order to save resources for the greater good of the nation. Again, the question arises: which is more important? Creativity for Art's sake or creativity in the light of the larger whole?

Baker'ism' as a Style

Laurie Baker largely likes to work alone, he is not part of a system. He does not have assistants designing for him. Being so largely intuitive, Baker's architecture wouldn't be Bakerian any more if he was not involved in every aspect of it. From initial site visits to conceptual design to design development to the actual site work, Baker works alone. In fact, he does not even like to be assisted or watched. But any cult figure spawns followers, whether the person in question wants them or not. It is largely inevitable, a by-product of fame and popularity. The masses love to adulate and deification brings with it its devotees.

Baker has become so popular in Kerala, especially in Trivandrum, that there is always a spate of Baker houses or Baker-like houses around a famous or popular original Baker home. Once a Baker home is built, then the owners of neighboring plots also clamor for the same and they either approach Baker or one of his disciples to design a home for them. Many of the lay people do not actually see the difference between an original Baker and a Baker-like residence. Any unplastered brick wall is a Baker wall! This springing up of more original Baker homes or its poor imitative cousins lead to a loose formation of a Baker or Baker-like colony, where most of the houses in a particular cluster are similar. If Baker is designing the cluster, then he takes up the whole cluster as a single entity. Instead of single houses, there is a complete whole. On the other hand, if the cluster is comprised of more Baker clones, then every house stands apart, distinctly out of context with its neighbor and remaining poor imitations of the original. Baker himself acknowledges that some of his disciples have built more Baker clones than he himself has built originals.

This sort of hyped demand for a Baker home has led to large scale copying and superficial imitation of his architecture. So much so that Baker's architecture has transformed into a style, an 'ism'. Anything resembling even remotely a Baker building, any and every unplastered brick wall, every filler slab roof and every tiled floor acquires the title of 'Baker style'. It has become the lingo of the common masses; the coinage of a new word, the making of a style.

The followers of Laurie Baker can be classified into two main categories: Disciples and Mimics. Manoj Kesavan brings out the essence of these two categories when he very aptly describes them as the 'Bakerist' and the 'Bakeresque'[7] ; the disciples being the Bakerists and the mimics the Bakeresques.

The most prominent amongst the Bakerists are the COSTFORD group. The COSTFORD or the Center of Science and Technology of Rural Development was

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[7] Kesavan, Manoj. "Disciples and Mimics" in *Talking Architecture - 8.* Unpublished series of articles on Laurie Baker in Kerala written for publication in a popular Indian newspaper. Manoj Kesavan is currently a graduate student at Kansas State University, 1999-2001.

started by the then socialist State Government and used as an organization to promote Baker's technology for rural development. They are the authorized or so called 'legal heirs' to the Bakerian philosophy. With the advancing years of Baker, they help and assist Baker at producing drawings and at the construction site, in addition to the center's own work. Unable to cope with too many extensive projects due to his age and health, Baker recommends many clients to the COSTFORD group.

The Bakerists understand the philosophy of Laurie Baker, but do not show the same clarity of thought and artistic vision. Their designs are a poor copy of the Bakerian ideal. Having understood the philosophy and in an attempt to regenerate it, they are almost fanatical in following it. They do not seem to see through the underlying spatial elements or meanings in Baker's architecture. They are able to comprehend only the outer design forms, rather than the content. In an attempt to replicate the formal 'play' that Baker achieves, the Bakerists end up with awkward forms, odd leftover spaces and discontinuous uncomfortable spaces which do not freely flow, but seem patched up and jointed. The difference between an intuitive master and an ordinary mortal!

Fig. 7.1 An example of the architecture of the Bakerists.

Fig. 7.2 The Bakerists end up with awkward forms and unnecessary decorative embellishments.

Not having to cope with the rigors of mastery in design, the Bakerists concentrate all their energies into the cost factor. While for Baker, the low-cost is only a 'means' to get to the 'end' of meaningful design, the Bakerists see the cost reduction factor as an end

Fig. 7.3 Another residential 'Bakerist' design.

in itself. Baker does not plaster the exterior brick surface of a wall because it is not necessary. The unplastered brick is honest and shows itself as it is. It is truthful and hence, beautiful. The money saved on the plaster, which is about ten percent of the building costs can be effectively used on another aspect of the built form. But the Bakerists insist on an unplastered wall just to reduce the total costs of the building. They seem obsessed with the low-cost techniques and go to any lengths, even to the extent of compromising with the actual design, to meet the low budgets.
Cost-guard rather than low-cost!

On the other hand, the mimics, the Bakeresque's, are not unduly bothered by the ideas or philosophy behind Laurie Baker's architecture. For them, it is more a case of supply meeting the demand! The only underlying principle seems to be the profit angle. They mimic the tectonics of the Bakerian architecture at a superficial level; the exposed bricks and the filler slab roofs. Since they are not worried about Baker's philosophy and don't aspire to learn from it either, they are not obsessed about the final cost of the built form. In fact, the costlier the better; since costly is high end and high end is beautiful! For them, an exposed brick wall is there just because people identify it with the 'Baker style'. On its own it is naked and ugly and needs to be covered up with paint or clear varnish, which will make it costly and so, beautiful; but without taking away that 'Baker' look. The Bakeresque's are not concerned about design either. They build whatever sells! They are quite unperturbed about building Gothic arches or Roman villas, classical facades, even Baroque interiors. Anything goes; but all in brick, that too unplastered!

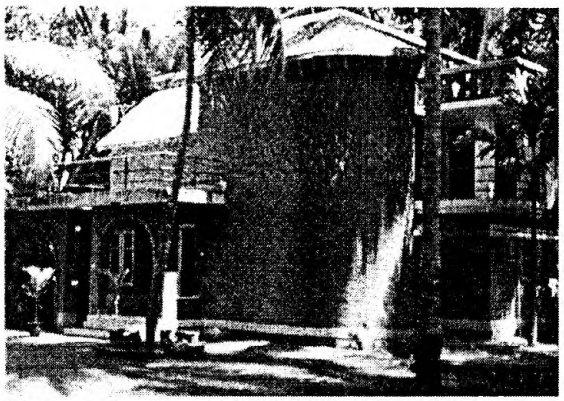

Fig. 7.4 The 'Bakeresque' use wire-cut bricks, expensive materials and unnecessary forms.

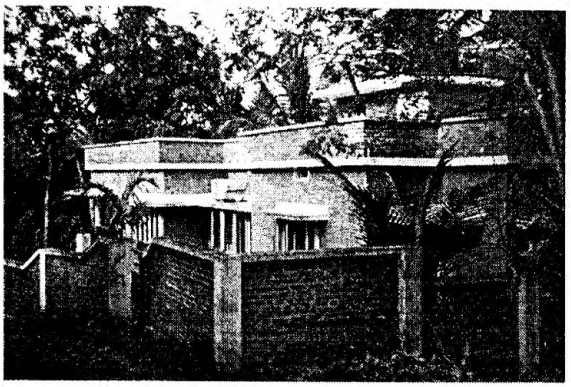

Fig. 7.5 An example of the Bakeresque, Trivandrum, Kerala.

Fig. 7.6 A residence by the Bakeresque.

There are a large number of Bakeresque's in Kerala, especially in Trivandrum. They multiply in hordes and are fast outnumbering the Bakerists. They are quite unethical in naming themselves too; calling themselves 'Baker Homes', 'Baker Constructions', 'Lovely Baker Homes' and so on. The Bakeresque's are of concern to Baker too, but his inherent good will and large heartedness does not allow him to pursue the matter further.

Every religion needs its devotees. Every leader needs his masses. The followers are meaningful only when viewed in the light of the Master; for the sake of understanding the movement generated. But again, no copy has the same passion or meaning as that of the original. The Bakerists have been largely successful in Kerala; if not for the architectural and spatial quality of their built forms, at least in generating a

comprehending of architecture and provoking a reaction from the common masses. They have partially succeeded in enhancing an architectural awareness amongst the people of Kerala, previously a State with jarring, haphazard architectural growth.

The Bakeresques do more damage to Baker's philosophy than good. The high costs and the gaudy architecture mislead the clients into thinking that Bakerian architecture is low-cost only in name and his philosophies do not actually work in real life. The clients often mistake the Bakeresque to be somehow connected to Baker or even the Bakerists, usually taken in by the 'Baker' name on the signboards. This proves to be not only misleading but also dangerous in the long run, with the danger of the masses losing faith in a philosophy and architecture that is graceful, honest and meaningful.

The Bakerian Legacy

Laurie Baker has been called *"the Hassan Fathy of India"* by many critics and architects. Indeed there are many parallels in the methods of work and philosophy of the two architects. Both design for the people; at New Gourna, Hassan Fathy custom designed each house in the whole settlement of about seven thousand houses. Baker too makes sure he knows the requirement of each and every family when he designs mass housing schemes for the Government.

"We do not design houses for the Government - we design for a family! The Government says 'build so many thousand houses for homeless families and they must all be thirty five square meters'. But how can that be done? One family may be just a man and his wife while another may be a man, his wife, two unmarried sisters and a mother-in-law."[8]

Both have similar methods of working; forming a trinity between the architect, the craftsman and the client. Both lay a high emphasis on the local craft of the region and the importance of its incorporation in the act of building. For Fathy and Baker, technology has to be applied in a way appropriate to both the users and the context.

8
Laurie Baker in an interview with the researcher at his residence, the 'Hamlet', Trivandrum; December 1999. Text contained in Appendix. Pp170.

Both also encourage a deeper respect for tradition and suggest methods of its usage in contemporary built form. Tradition is understood as the accumulated result of an ongoing evolution and is rooted in a continuity of experience established over a period of time.

Both Fathy and Laurie Baker believe in the idea of co-operative or self-help housing. Fathy put it into practice in the construction of the village at New Gourna. Baker also advocates it and has put it into practice during the rehabilitation of settlements for distressed fishermen. Baker also publishes pamphlets with simple writings and sketches for the common lay person on how to self-build effectively, without wastage of materials and at a low cost. Both have been architectural crusaders, taking on the role of educators and practitioners, reviving arts and crafts which had been long forgotten in their respective countries.

Laurie Baker has also been described as the only *"truly Indian architect in India"*. It has been a much bandied and cliched expression for Baker, every article about him has mentioned it many times over. But again, what is the image of a so called *"Indian"* architect? Does the negation of western culture or western architecture alone make a *"truly Indian"* architect? India is so diverse, so varied in terms of climate, context, language, food, dress and shelter, that it is impossible to have a single image for India or its architecture. Baker argues for and asserts the very same thing.

"In India there is an incredible wealth of regional architectural styles and there is not the faintest possibility of confusing one with another. Even where the same materials have been used for building, the climactic and regional variations are so great that different methods of construction have been used to produce unique individual distinctive styles. Furthermore, these distinctive styles apply not only to big and important buildings but right down to the smallest structures. We can say that the buildings of any small district are a quintessence of that district's culture and skill."[9]

It would probably be more apt to call Baker a "truly regional architect". But again, describing Baker as only a regional architect does not do full justice to his architecture. By categorizing him as only a regional architect, the importance the Bakerian

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[9] From Bhatia, Gautam. *Laurie Baker: Life, Work, Writings*. Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1991. Pp 30.

architecture gives to the human presence at its center is missed. As Juhani Pallasmaa says, *"The humane task of architecture is not to beautify or humanize the world of everyday facts, but to open up a view into the second dimension of our consciousness, the reality of images, memories and dreams."*[10] It would probably be right to call Baker a *"truly humane architect"* more than anything else.

Now, the question arises as to whether this legacy can be passed on to future generations of architects to protect, uphold and carry on, and if so how this can be done? Laurie Baker does not belong to a system; he is a one man institution. He designs alone and practices alone. It is impossible too, to assign him to any form of institutionalized system; the same way that his practice cannot be cubby holed into any systematized theoretical framework. By doing that, the inherent childlike freedom, humor and play will be lost from his architecture. He is best when designing intuitively and intuition cannot be institutionalized!

Thus, new debates arise as to whether Bakerian architecture can be a meaningful part of future generations. The present analysis suggests that this sort of intuitive, free flowing architecture cannot arise from an organization, but belongs to the individual. This is the reason why even strong Bakerists like the COSTFORD are not successful in the translation of Baker's philosophy into design. Organizations and schools, can absorb the broad philosophy, but the underlying understanding of space, experience and meaning is the work of a genius. Schools of thought are possible but schools of design are not!

Every master spawns disciples; not all the disciples can become masters, but out of all the disciples can emerge another master. The same holds true for the Bakerian legacy too. Each true master in the history of architecture has probably been a disciple, but has always found his/her own path. Nothing is gained by treading the same ground; new paths have to be discovered, new directions to be found. One can learn from the master, but one cannot merely copy.

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[10] Pallasmaa, Juhani. "Tradition and Modernity" in *Architectural Review*, May 1988. Pp 27.

With relation to Bakerian architecture, there are a few Indian architects, other than the Bakerists, who have been influenced by Laurie Baker. Gautam Bhatia and Gerald de Cunha[11] are two of them. Gautam Bhatia was highly influenced by Baker; any research or publication done so far on Baker has been by Bhatia. Bhatia's early architecture bears a strong formal resemblance to Bakerian architecture; the exposed brick walls, tiled floors and frameless windows. But over the years, Bhatia has found his own path to meaningful architecture. The form bears no resemblance to Baker's architecture whatsoever, but a closer, deeper look says otherwise. The philosophy is all there; the simplicity, the honesty of expression, the honesty in the use of material, the idea of necessity and use, the preference for elegance rather than flamboyance, and regional climactic design. It is Bakerian architecture after all!

That seems to be the true path for the future generation of architects. The upper-most layer of the Bakerian legacy, the philosophy of Laurie Baker, can and should be studied, understood and transmitted, but the underlying layers of spatial experience, existence and meaning have to be discovered from within oneself. It would be different for each architect and only by discovering and responding to this inner calling, can the truth be revealed. Truth, in the end, is the essence of beauty.

Baker discovered himself. There can never be another exact Laurie Baker, but through a process of inner discovery, there are so many others who could be masters in their own right. That is the message of Bakerian architecture; be simple, be honest, be humane, be regional and be true to oneself and to architecture, but discover your own path, your own meanings. Therein lies true beauty.

"A work of Art comes only from inside a human being."[12]

"Art is poetry: the emotion of the senses, the joy of the mind as it measures and appreciates, the recognition of an axial principle which touches the depth of our being.

11
Gautam Bhatia is a practicing architect at New Delhi, India, while Gerald de Cunha lives and practices at Goa, India.

12
Quote from Edward Munch's catalogue which accompanied his 1918 exhibition of paintings at Christiania. From Helen-Wood, Mara (ed.). The Frieze of Life. National Gallery Publications, New York 1992. Pp 11.

Art is this pure creation of the spirit which shows us, at certain heights, the summit of the creation to which man is capable of attaining."[13]

One of the prominent ongoing project's by Laurie Baker is the 'SEVA' - the Women's Rehabilitation Center at Vilapilshala, Trivandrum, Kerala.

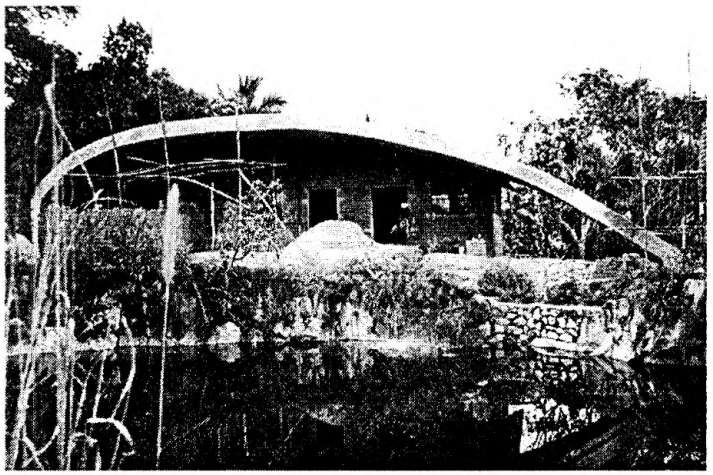

Fig. 7.7

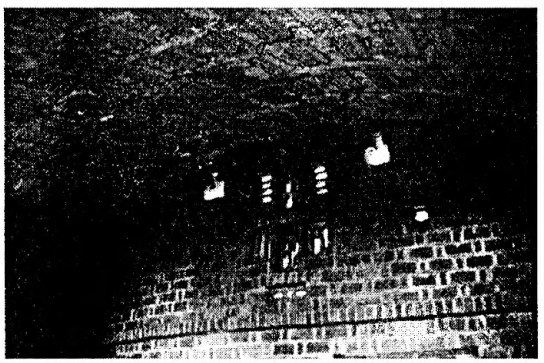

Fig. 7.8

Fig. 7.9

13

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW WITH ARCHITECT LAURIE BAKER

M. How did you get interested in architecture? What made you choose architecture for a profession and what were the early influences on your architecture?

I was educated and brought up in Birmingham, right in the heart of the industrial hub in England. My father and father's family had drawing talents, they could sketch and do black and white portraits, there were no painters. We three brothers, all of us used to sketch and draw. I was the only one in my generation, who used to do modelling, with clay and used to make models, not only architectural models, but all kinds of models.

After my four years at grammar school, it was time for me to decide on my profession. The headmaster of the grammar school suggested architecture since I was good with art and cartoons. We met a faculty from the school of architecture and he asked us to come for the interviews. The interview panel asked me to draw a tea-pot, kept at the center of the table. After it was over, they looked at it, liked it and asked me *"Do you do any drawings or sketching?"* I said *"yes"* and father said *"Whenever we go out, he makes drawings"*. They asked me what I usually sketched and I replied *"Buildings and cottages"*. Then they asked *"Do you do anything else other than drawings?"* and I said *"Models...all sorts of models, buildings, churches, cottages"*. They asked me to go home and get some of my drawings and models, which I did. They had a good look at those and told me that they start school on the 22nd of September.

And so, we were saying, an architect is an architect...he's not a potter or a man who fiddles around with bottles in walls....and to be just a designer with a drawing board, or oh no, now a computer, is a bit deadly.

Was reading through your writings, your proposal and is there any particular reason or advantage for wanting to be global, in any sense? We used to have 3 months holidays

every year, when I was in the school of architecture, and then we, my friends and I used to cycle around Europe, cycle, as in actually cycle, and it was there that I realized that buildings had nothing to do with architects and designing, in general. It is this tradition of using the local materials. Even in England, I could see that, just south of Birmingham, this place called Cotswall, where they had lots of this yellow, creamy white beautiful limestone, and all the houses, even the roofs are made of this stone.

There they haven't done what they have done here, by knocking down the old buildings of Trivandrum. Most of them were beautiful old buildings, some of them are still there, but most of them have been broken down and been given false fronts and false roofs, they don't care about the roofs behind them. Some of them at Palayam are still there, and if you climb up one of the tall buildings on the other side, you can see the old Kerala roofs, some of them are still there....not many, they are growing more and more scarce....but at Herefordshire, England, they have made the what had been the main central street, running through the middle of the town, the narrow winding street, into a pedestrian walkway and made roads circling or going around the buildings, accessing the back door of the buildings, to unload or load rice and dal or wheelchairs or whatever is being sold in the shop...thus keeping the flavor of the town intact.

Even in these, you live in a perfectly modern way, with all their computers and things, except probably for the tea shops and coffee houses, where they try to maintain the flavor inside also. But here, the people have no feeling for it, they ask *"What do you want to keep an old thing like that for? Let's pull it down."* They just want anything like that to be pulled down. They think what's the point in keeping a thing like that...so all you get is a hotch potch of buildings.

M. But vernacular architecture has mainly been a response to local climate. Its so contextual and responsive.

Yes, climate and ways of living.....On this side of the road were the Hindu houses, the Brahmins, because of the temple, and on this side further up, were the Christians,

because of the college. They had their own distinctive flavors; mainly because of the way they lived and used their space. Even now, even though modern houses have replaced all the old ones, it would be an interesting study to see how even the modern houses differ. Christians have this habit of cooking their dead parents in their garden, so they leave that much space in front of the houses. So such differences in the houses arise due to the difference in lifestyles.

Lots of people have these ideas, but they have to refuse clients then, because the client comes and says *"I want marble floors and marble walls and etc. etc. or give me plastic."* You can tell these people that if you use wood, then the wood used can be re planted, but if you use marble or plastic, the stones or mountains or the materials used to make these plastics, once gone is gone forever. But then they say *"But here are no mountains to be used up right here, so it doesn't matter"*
If I want to get rid of a client, I can say *"I think that its better for you to go to Mr. Ramaswamy"* or something like that, but if you are just setting up in business, you would want take whatever came and get into the run of things, and not afford to refuse them outright. Of course, some others have this attitude, reasonable enough, I guess, that *"It is not my house that I am building, this is Mr. Rao's house so, its alright."*

We can't be 'pure', I suppose it has the wrong meanings. You cant put yourself only into one category, its only one in a thousand or one in a million clients whom you can persuade to have a wooden roof. So, obviously I use a certain amount of steel and cement, but by using a filler slab or techniques like that you can reduce it. Now when you see a new building, where is the material from? It could be from anywhere, even Australia.

Have you seen the new Secretariat?,

M. Yes, I have.
Had you seen it before they put the *"Kerala roof"* at the very top?,

M. I had.

It looked like a submarine, an atomic submarine, but unfortunately it leaks on the Speaker, so they put a little Kerala roof at the very top. They made it on the floor, I'm told, then they lifted it onto the roof, that's why the crane is there.

M. Did you ever work as an architect in England?

Not on my own, as an architect in England. When I studied architecture at Birmingham, there were a small group of qualified architects, the faculty were practicing architects. There was an arrangement at that time, that if somebody, one amongst them was doing something of interest to the present project going on in studio, like if somebody was doing a colonnade or doing a row of arches, a brick vault, a dome or something like that, the school would be contacted and the concerned group could go and work with them.

There was also an arrangement that we could go and work with some contractors for 2-3 days, like actually working with them, when they were doing an arch or something like that, actually working on the arch. It must have been very annoying for the contractors. That was one side of it, the other side of it was that after we had qualified, we were advised not to settle down in any one firm or office, but to work in different firms, learn and observe different approaches and learn different types of work.

I qualified in 1937, I think, and then the war came in '39. By then I had worked in several firms, I had not yet settled down. I had done 2-3 houses also by then, but the war came. In England the system was, people were automatically put on to war and military service. I didn't get called up for about a year and a half, my age group that is. At the beginning of the war, the Quakers resurrected a movement they had during the First World War, a unit called the Friends Ambulance Unit, the Quakers were called the 'Friends'. I didn't wait to be called up, but voluntarily joined up, as I felt my necessity there and that was the end of my architecture in England. I started training in paramedical services, treating injured people and the war went on.

M. One of the goals of my thesis is to help other architects learn how to build in a developing country and also point out what you have given to the people of India.

I don't think you should confine your thesis to me. The aim should be more towards the West, there the people have no regard for using whatever is available. You cant say *"Look at what someone is doing in India."* They will say *"In India, they have no money, or bread nor this nor that nor brains, so let them do it, you cant expect us to do all these nonsensical things."* The key is to use local materials, self generated craft, that is the key to the whole thing, that is what everybody should practise,

Yes, it is very important to be regional, a critical regionalist, but as I said before, you cant practice all that you preach all the time, but you should be able to adapt to different circumstances, different people and different places all the time. A very interesting thing is, as you know we lived in the Himalayas for a very long time about 17-18 years, and every year, very regularly, at least three times a year, we used to have minor tremors, earth movements. You know, they weren't very strong, we never had a wall fall down, but in our part of Pithoragarh, there were dry stone walls and the bonding was perfect, obviously they had never been taught from a textbook, they had perfected it over hundreds of years.

It was a very slaty kind of rock, and when a tremor came, the cups would fall down or the plates would rattle or a picture would come off the wall, and then we would all rush out. The next morning, the men of the village would go around the village with a large log of wood, pine wood about as long as the length of this car, from the very front to the very back, and the men would lug it up the hill to the hospital and to the other houses and use it as a battering ram to push the walls back straight, which would have slid over and out of its original position due to the tremors, but had not collapsed due to the type of construction of the roof, and they would push it back straight again. Obviously they had learnt this over hundreds of years.

The long and short of this story is, during the Uttar kashi earthquake, we went there with some people from the Science and technology and COSTFORD and later, Kuni, my wife

and I went by ourselves. I did a bit of rebuilding there, just by making sure that there were no vertical cracks coming down and there was good bonding all the way across the wall. The amusing and interesting incident is that after the Tripoli earthquake, I was called to go there, since the houses I had done remained untouched, while the concrete things built by the CBRI had collapsed. For some reason, they just cannot understand the principle of triangulation, you know the triangle cannot move one way or the other, while the square can move over to form a trapezium. So even some of the so-called earthquake proof houses had collapsed in a mess. That's why I don't like my name being attached to these things like filler slabs and rat-trap bond. That was used in England 700-800 years ago. So, it is a bit foolish to add my name to it

M. Your buildings have a very interactive relationship with nature, you avoid cutting trees and design according to the topography of the land. Is this a very conscious design decision or is it very intuitive, all done on the site, as and when the need develops?

In any case, I try and get to know the client. The easiest and best way to know the client is to go along with him and his wife to the site and ask him, *"What about this tree? This big mango tree? And these big stones? Will it get flooded from the river?"* I ask them all the obvious questions and try to get to know them and the land, ask them questions, get some explanations. It was a different approach to those people who had chosen the land themselves. I asked them *"Why did you choose this piece of land?"* Sometimes it would be just because their friend had the nearby plot or because it was close to their place of work, I mean dozens of reasons.

If they had chosen a more difficult site over more suitable sites, and they deliberately chose it, then I would ask them and they would tell me why. Then I would know whether they would be interested in trees or no trees. Some of them would have these ideas about Vastu, where the entrance should be, where their house should be, the head should be, where their feet should be, where to sleep and all that sort of thing. That sometimes makes a difference, but it's not often and it's more so nowadays.

I tell them that there is this tree on this site, so where are you going to put the house? There is this big mango tree, this jackfruit and these 3 coconuts...then they tell me that *"Oh, we don't want the coconuts, we can get plenty of them from elsewhere or we can cut the jack and use it for timber."* Sometimes they tell me *"That's why we have come to you, because we don't want to cut any of them at all."*

During the design of Suresh's house, there was this concern of the road widening and so, I had to leave 7 meters from the road, and in what was left, a few coconut trees and a huge mango tree lay in the middle. Suresh's wife, Neerada said *"Oh we don't want to cut the tree"* and so I evolved a plan that would go around the tree. That didn't leave much space for the garden, so I said *"You need not worry about that, you can have your garden on the roof, it wont be very extensive, of course."* So we kept the tree and having kept the tree, I had to cut a few branches, but they didn't mind. Some of the branches were very big, and they didn't want half the mango tree or jackfruit tree in their bedroom. but her father went on cutting and cutting till I was left with a whole log of wood in the middle. but now, it is sprouting and that is good, since they can now control how they want the tree. They hadn't specified any courtyard, but it was a natural outcome, since the site and the vegetation demanded it. so, it depends on the client, the site and the vegetation.

I try to keep as much as possible, especially the big trees like mango and jackfruit. you can keep them and trim them considerably. The more you trim them, the better it is for using them for timber later, otherwise there are knots in the wood. There are some people who want everything paved and don't want any garden, but then there are others who absolutely insist on a garden, they want a little pond, fishes, water lilies and all that. so, its only when you know the client very well and find out whether they really need it or whether they want a pond in their house, because they think that I have one in my house. I think its foolish to impose your own ideas when you are dealing with people who know what their problems are and you cant know these till you have actually lived in the place.

M. The importance of craft in your architecture is so evident. What is the relationship between the craftsmen and your architecture?

Interestingly, I don't know whether you realize or whether you have been told that when we began, there were no trained craftsmen, there were no pucca masons, only these people who used to build *'kayalas'* (rustic boundary walls made of mud), of course now we have these masons, but they were also not trained in the rat trap bond or masonry of that kind.

Yes, it is a plus point and a minus point. For the average architect, they think that *"I'm a designer, I am not going to build walls or put bottles in walls"*. Again how can I do working drawings of all those, but my point is that you have to be involved in what you do. Almost invariably, as soon as the walls start to go up, the client comes along and says *"But where am I going to hang my scissors?"* or *"Where can I keep my shoes?"* When they are at home, you will find that many people do not hang their trousers on the coat stand, but instead use it to hang their gardening shears. So on site, many clients ask you *"Where will I hang my trousers?"* and then you will have to make a hook or a niche for them on the wall to hang their shears or trousers.

M. It is really wonderful that you are keeping the tradition of the living craft alive in your buildings, by using the local craftsmen, local material and local skills.

Yes, yesterday we had been to this place, Poonthura, and there was this little house, hut actually, made of stone and 'ola' (dried coconut palm leaves used for thatch), broken and stolen tin sheets, asbestos sheets, some of them were quite nice. In this case the people had left, taking whatever they could take with them, and only the frame was left behind, not much bigger than this car, but so beautifully put together, very well designed and proportioned. A very nice bit of work!

Talking about local craft, let me tell you what happened during the earthquake. During the earthquake, the ordinary buildings with stones like these, in one place had proved to

be better than the reinforced concrete. In Latur, they used these stones because of the heat and because they had nothing other than black cotton soil, like the whole of the deccan plateau. The status symbol there, of whether you had wealth or not were the walls of the houses. They would dig down and blast these nasty irregular shaped blocks, the stones are made of basalt. They would find the nicest stones, and put one on one end and the other on the other end and the middle would be filled with just bits and pieces. From the heat point of view, it was good, but from an earthquake point of view, even with a small shake, one wall would fall on one side and the other the other side, and the middle would just cave up. I went to the villages the day after the quake, and except for bits and pieces of timber and an occasional window sticking out, it looked like a huge chasm, kilometers and kilometers of villages just reduced to small pieces of stones, small miserable ones and some bigger ones, such that you could not even re-use the stones without a considerable bit of effort.

So, on one hand, you had people who had learnt to use stone, of course they had an unfair advantage of having a better sort of stone, while in the deccan area, they had no idea of how to stick the stones together, no idea of bonding at all.

If you look at the census, 68% of all housing in India is basically mud, and about 23% of that 68 is over 100 years old, very few people will build a house, and live in it for 100 years.

I did some work for the Sri Chithra Hospital, there is an old palace there, which has been given to Sri Chithra cardiac wing for research and development, non patient work, library work and all that. They wanted me to utilize the old building also, in addition to putting up some new ones. The old palace was all plastered, both inside and outside, and one thing that they had to do there was to put some charts. They were trying to nail the charts to the wall, but just did not succeed in even scratching the surface of the plaster. Finally they got a drill and drilled a hole in the wall, and wiggled a pencil in and brought out some mud. It was all mud walls! Of course, that was a palace, but normal people don't even plaster, you can see the marks of their hands on the wall, on the application of the mud..one can see the texture and feel of the hands that made it.

Now, I can never expect to find a client who will use it, earlier I used to find a client who occasionally would build or use a mud house, at least in parts. They say "Mr. Baker, we believe you, but I'm due to retire in 5 years and then I want to give this house away to my daughter when she gets married, and her husband wont be too pleased with mud." So, it is not for me to force my decisions on them. Though I wish I had done more mud houses. I suggested the same for the 1 lakh housing scheme, to do them in mud. When it got publicized, before the work started, there was such enormous resistance, from people who lived in mud houses.

You know, the reporters, when they come, quite a lot of them say *"Do you think you have done anything? Will there be anyone to carry on this crazy ideas?"* and then I say *"Yes, yes, there will be people, of course there are Sajan and Shailaja, they are the craziest."*

M. When I look at your architecture, I feel that your buildings do not emphasize on external form, at least as far as form for form's sake is concerned. All spatial experience seems to happen on the inside.

Yes, oh yes, I think that you have a responsibility towards the client, and this is what we are avoiding in Modern Architecture, by Modern, I mean present day architecture, unless its to show off, we are not considering the feelings of the public, in general. These are some drawings f the main road at Trivandrum, this is a sketch of the road at Palayam, when we first came here. The whole road till the East Fort looked like that except for the Secretariat, and even that did not look out of place, all beautiful buildings, and next to it is the Accountant General's office and even though it is colonial, it has a huge tiled roof and doesn't hit you in the eye. But in general, it was a very nice experience to walk down the main road of Trivandrum. The architects practicing now are so insensitive that they have put up buildings all over this main road, which have no relation to one another or the context.

I always encourage and ask students to carry these *(sketch pad and sketching pencils)*

wherever they are going, I always carry these wherever I am, they are very useful. Even I went back to England, I made these little sketches and doodles on the fliers that I had, as I was driving along.
(Baker shows a lot of his sketches - those of Trivandrum, a lot of them of Vagamon, where they first stayed in Kerala, their make shift hospital and lab, some of the mountain people, their first home at Vagamon, some sketches of Jaisalmer etc.)

You remember what you sketch so much better than what you photograph. This is what I was looking at, I just don't understand architects who will do this sort of thing. This is in Alleppey, the canal, the lovely trees, the lovely rubbish, and all that, and amidst all this, how can anyone be so soulless to put up this kind of a structure? *(shows a sketch of an ugly five storied building)* It may be functional from the point of view of the people concerned, but yet....

M. We did a study on *'scale'* at the CDS during my B. Arch at the Department of Architecture. We were interviewing a lot of people there, a lot of users and we felt that certain spaces became places, at certain times of the day and night. Place making seemed an essential part of the design process. Did your design process there follow any kind of preconceived pattern or process?

The Center, (CDS) is growing, things are still happening there, its been 30 years since it was started, but buildings are still being built there. When it started, they wanted a library and I started off with that building. It was a hexagonal building, twelve sided actually, and all the other important buildings began. I built the administrative rooms, and one room above that for lectures. Then they wanted another thing, cant remember what exactly they wanted, then I built the hostels and so on and so forth. When you have built all this over a period of years, you wonder how you will fit and finish the auditorium *(that is the latest addition)*, and will it join on and how will it join on? And then, you don't put something down, just because there is a piece of land there. And of course, the questions *"Will it be useful? Will people be able to find their way?"*, all these questions come up, because people do get lost, you know.

M. How do you accommodate for change and growth?

Yes, I try to do as much as possible, but the big mistake, there were various ones, was getting to complete the drawing I just showed you. Initially when I was talking to Raj and the other main people who would be there, they said that the main thing would be the library. You see, at that time, there was no teaching or classes, there were only research assistants, and only research was going on in full swing, writing papers and books, and referring books and using research material and all that sort of thing, and so the library was to be the focal point of the whole thing, but now during the last 20 years, library vandalism has become terrible.

Now at the CDS library, which is in the shape of a wheel, it was just perfect for Raj and his research assistants, they could just go there, be there, and read and write without being disturbed, since each floor had different types of books and stacks. There were seven floors and about 75 to 85 people could all work there without getting disturbed and they didn't even have half the number. Now there is no control in the library, because there are so many people, it is impossible to see what the people are doing.

But you asked how to deal with change? Well, I normally sit back and think what the probabilities are in a house, how the family might grow. We are a typical example, but this is a terrible way to have done it. We started off with just a shed with a bamboo roof, and then we had to put the tiles on. One of Kuni's patients at Vagamon, it was about 30 years ago, and this girl was in her twenties and blind, but Kuni treated her till she could see a bit. She was un-marriageable and her family did not want her, so she insisted on coming with us as a sort of hand-maid. She wasn't used to the gas stove and would light a match and then throw it on the mud floor, but we were scared that the thatch roof would go up in flames. Moreover the thatch had to be redone every year, so I put tiles. All the wood-work was done with the white of the wood. I would buy logs of wood for my clients in bulk, and we couldn't use the white of the wood for them, so I would use it for my house instead of letting it go waste. The white of the wood is nearly disintegrating now, so I have put up a temporary horrible white corrugated sheet up there to keep the rain-water out, but I don't want to replace the wood till it has completely disintegrated.

Then, of course, the children were growing, so we built this part, which is like a railway compartment, there were two children and two of us, so we had four windows on one side of the wall and jali on the other, we had the first window, then we had a screen made out of cupboards and desks, then another window and a partition shelf for our daughter and after that another window for my son. This way, all of us had our private spaces and when we wanted, we could move them and make the whole space one huge public space.

Yes, I always try and find out the possibilities for future growth, from the client also. At the CDS, I expected some growth, definitely; by then Krishnan, Gulati, Panicker and others had joined, but none of us expected the center to grow to this proportion. I told them *"You have 10 acres of land, so I'm sure that the institution will grow, if it is any good, presumably you'll be teaching and all that, so let us start in the middle and it can expand later on."* So I had it in mind all along.

Now people get a bit of land, and they fill up the entire land, right at the beginning and except for leaving the mandatory piece of land at the front, sides and the back as specified by the government, they fill up the rest of the land, and then there is no more space to grow except for upwards. That means you need to have a flat roof, and you have to explain to them the curses of a flat roof and the uses of a flat roof. So, its up to you, but I think that it's a good idea to keep the possibility open, and explain to the client, since they will be investing their life's savings.

I do try to accommodate for growth and change; for the Quilon Housing, I have given 6 different types, about 15 plans and shapes and any amount of interior arrangements and any number of roof types, whether pitched or flat. If it is a L shaped plan, one side pitched and one side flat, you could go up another storey, where they join, or on one wing. A lot of people want the flat roof, in spite of knowing how hot it will be, especially near the sea coast. There is a lack of space and so they mend their nets and dry the fish on the roof. Normally I don't do a flat roof, unless it is for need, like for further expansion or for the necessity of the occupation, like in this case. Then, in a slum or in a closely built colony, where there are no spaces to gather or to sit out on a nice evening, the only option available is the roof. But again, it depends on the clients money and

these sorts of things.

M. In most of your works, those of which I have seen and studied, I could see a lot of reference to the underlying tradition of Kerala. Do you think of tradition as a tool in design or is it a sub-conscious design process?

It is not so much a reference to tradition, as to the client. A good example is the building we are doing at Quilon, we also did the Zila Panchayat there. Then we were asked to build 230 houses or so, for distressed fishermen, people who had lost their houses. I also wrote up a small book. The Government and the Panchayat had a specified a certain size of plot - two and a half cents, about 100 square meters, and I showed that it need not necessarily mean 10 X 10, it could also be 9 X 11 or any other variations. It could also be irregularly shaped, and the same goes for the houses also. Every house was supposed to have an area of 35 square meters. Of course, you can have any number of variations for the arrangement of rooms, and I did 15 plans of different arrangements and plinth areas.

Then the Collector called a meeting of the recipients. First only the women were called, one woman representative from each beneficiary family came and COSTFORD had made some models of the houses, since a fishwoman cannot be expected to understand a working drawing, whereas they could understand a model better. It was like an election, *"Plan A - put your hands up...nobody, Plan B - 21 people, Plan C - 15 people, Plan D... "* There were also variations in the design of the roof. It would be much more comfortable to live under a pitched roof, because the sun is over to one side in the morning and then it moves over to the other in the afternoon. But they were left with very little area to dry their fish and nets and they liked to be able to use the roofs. I usually don't like flat roofs very much, unless there is an use for it, but some people opted for flat roofs, since it gave them space on the roofs, as fishing people, to do all that they needed to do.

About the variety of interiors, if you only have a small interior space, as much as this

lorry or bus, and then you divide it up, where is the space for everybody? One fisherman may be living with only a wife and 1 child, whereas another might have 2 wives, 4 children and a mother-in-law all living under the same roof...so how can each family be provided with the same interior spaces, every house cannot have the same bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen...the interior arrangement has to be different though the plinth area has to be the same.

Speaking of tradition and Kerala, have you seen the St. Johns cathedral at Tiruvalla, which I had built? It seems that they may take it down now. A couple of years ago, there was this occasional freak wind, like the beginning of a cyclone, only it is not a cyclone, but it whooshes along a crazy path coming in straight from the sea. It came in at Tiruvalla and passed straight over the cathedral, over which was the 25 foot cross. The cross was wooden, the whole thing was wood, and it kind of tapered up towards the top. I had the cross covered with thin sheets of copper for protection and hoped that it would turn green, which it did. The storm passed straight over the cross and it fell down , clutter, clutter clutter over all those old tiles and broke of course all the 'patikas' *(wooden rafters)*, under the tiles. It had been quite a problem, I had to work it out. I had these 12 feet trusses joining the purlins in a drum, but then it very difficult to put the patikas in a circle. The purlins were quite wide, small trusses nearly, especially the ones near the bottom. I worked it out and discovered that by making the top of the purlin a curve, it works.

I got hold of old men, some of them had worked on the old round temples. They knew how to put the tiles on the round temple. Again, there was the same problem with putting the tiles. Once you lay one row of tiles, then another row and when you come to the third row, you find that you cant get them in anymore, since the circle is becoming smaller and smaller. But these men knew how to do that as well. I built the church 29-30 years ago, I did it with the help of these men, and it was good for me as well as the men and the church. But when the cross fell off, rattled down and broke all these tiles, they just patched it up, and made a plastic cross, an imitation of the old one, but in plastic, because it was nice and light!

They put plastic covering also over it, since during the days when they did not know

what to do with it, I was in hospital and so, not available. They got their own masons and carpenters to do the job, and they wondering what all these little bits sticking out were, cut off all the irregular shaped purlins. So it wouldn't fit, and got all higgedly piggedly. Furthermore, they had to put new tiles, since the tiles had got destroyed, though the wood had not, and they did not know how to put the tiles in a circular manner, so in the next monsoon, all the rain came pouring down on all the people who sat underneath. Again, this proved useful for them, since it had never been accepted. In the earlier days there was this good old bishop, but his priests on the whole were opposed to the idea, as to why should the church should imitate the Hindu temple. Earlier, the bishop's ideas prevailed but later with the new generation, with the younger people of the congregation, coming in, they didn't like the idea very much , what with the BJP coming in. They used to get taunted also, that they have to turn to the Hindus for the form of their church. Anyway the church was leaking and it was looking terrible with all the patches, so the time has come. Even the church really does not approve of it. I heard only about a week ago from some acquaintances that it might be pulled down. I am not very sure whether its just gossip or whether its official.

M. I was wondering about the role of function in your built form? How much importance do you give to 'function' in your architecture and do you see beauty as 'function'?

You know, beauty is a funny word, maybe I should use attractiveness or better still, acceptability or pleasing acceptability. This comes from the fact that even when you have done a crazy thing, it is functional. Like 'jali's' instead of windows in a girls hostel and things like that. Very often, if you do something 'functional' in the modern sense of the word, then it sticks out like a sore thumb, it is in the wrong surroundings and so on. On the other hand, there are so many ways of dealing with any problem, usually, only you have to pick on the right one. Like for instance, this room used to be our dining room, before we redid that wing, but it was a bit tiresome moving to and fro from the kitchen, up and down these steps every time we forgot the salt or something like that....again, the reason for these peculiar grills, normally I don't use grills, if I can

persuade the person not to, simply because it won't be a deterrent to anybody who is determined to come in to steal. If you have come from the Gulf and have 100 gold biscuits and you sleep outside, the robbers only have to put a crowbar between the metal grill and its out! But here, we had the dining table here, and all the crows used to enter the room from the window and when we were not looking, nip in and fly out with a chicken leg or something, so I had to put in this wire netting, that the forest department uses, and then I put these little decorations in these jaws and again these are just stapled. This is the simplest way, of course, it could have just been the wire.

M. A lot of your design process is actually on site.....

Yes, yes.....if there is a big problem I face, it's the authorities, I mean, you do a drawing....you heard the Australians say how they had to do a pile of drawings and working drawings to submit before the authorities. Well, I think I gave various examples of people who want to change as they go along,*"Oh dear, we did not think that the room would be so big or small, or dark or move this window, since all the cows and the bus people and conductors can all look in or ...."* It is only when they see the drawings that you have done and as the building is coming up, that they realize this, and why not? Just because you have done a working drawing of it, why should you stick to it? There are many buildings that I have done, which is initially surrounded by trees, especially coconuts, which are wonderful things, but you can't see out at all. When you have gone up 2 stories, then you are above the trees and suddenly you can see the sea about 3 miles away or the mountains or the Kanakakunnu Palace!

So, if you only had a window on the other wall in your original drawings because the wind comes from that side but then if you had a window here which has a wonderful view, from where you can see the sea or the palace, then why cant you put a window in, as long as the structure is sound? Or like in Vilapilshala, in such a building, how can I specify working drawings, where there are bottles in the wall, which I, by myself do not know where they will be or how they will look like, until I am up on the wall or the scaffolding, looking at how the building is coming up and putting them in?
I didn't quite finish what I was saying about doing drawings for the people to see....the main problem today is the problem of facadism! There are any number of buildings

today, which are all fancy on the front, like the ones on the main road of Trivandrum, which is an old, narrow road, with many old buildings. How can you see the façade of a five storey building, unless you cross over the road and stand as far as possible from the edge of the road and peer at it, whereas if you are coming along the road or up the road, then you can see the sides of the building, which is all just streaky plaster and drainpipes and water pipes, a hotch potch of windows, all different shapes and sizes, lavatory windows, storage windows and bedroom windows. Really, the two sides are much more important than the front is, in many instances. Here you are asked to submit an *'elevation to road'*, so people make a very posh *'elevation to road'* and to hell with the rest of the building. The building is not viewed as a whole, but as parts and the front and the side and all kinds of narrow subdivisions.

M. There is the concept of Art and Architecture serving as an 'end' in itself; existing for its own sake, then architecture can also exist for serving a cause more than itself. Do you distinguish between these two forms of art?

I don't usually and primarily think of a house as an object of art, but I do look at it as a building which everybody passing by has to look at. So, the architect has a much bigger responsibility towards the public and towards the nation as a whole, than an artist. when people like Hussein or Picasso become famous, you are confronted with bits and pieces of Picasso at the shop or the cinema or a gallery. If you are a painter or a sculptor and you sell your pieces of art and it is displayed either in houses or shops or museums, then it is only the people who have bought them or those who enter the galleries, who are forced to view them.

On the other hand, in the case of an architect and the building, it is there for everyone to see whether they like it or not, they are forced into it. That's my complaint about present day architecture - you have no option when you go down the main street of Trivandrum; the old buildings which were nice to look at are gone, and then everybody does their own interpretation of what is modern now. so you get this whole thing one after the other. We were always taught that you must think of the building as a 'whole', not a front

and a back, there is a front simply because it is facing the road or park or whatever it is, but there are next doors and other people.

Interestingly, when I was asked to do something for keeping things suitable and in order for Alleppey. I did a few drawings of what had been there and then what had come up amidst these lovely buildings, and how they looked out of place. You know, Alleppey has these lovely canals, in which the buildings are reflected in and one can do such wonderful things there in a sensitive manner and look at what these people are up to!

M. How is meaning generated by architecture? How do you make meaningful architecture?

First of all, accept only a reasonable brief, if you do not agree with what the client says or you think that he is crazy and that you are the sane one, or you think that what you design will be an affront to the neighborhood or the public or you don't want to be associated with it, then don't join it. Like I said before, this is all very well to say for an architect who is 83 and is not really worried whether he gets the job or not, but for someone who's just starting, they obviously will want to take what ever job comes their way! So, accept only a reasonable brief, again, the word reasonable may vary, what is reasonable to you may not be reasonable to me.

Then, discourage extravagance and snobbery and refuse to take a job which is either, which you know someone is doing just to be one up on the neighbor. You can see what I mean from most of the people who come back from the Gulf, even some of my coolies who go, I don't recognize them when they come back, with their shirts and ties and watches. A lot of them who come back want to show the world that they have "made good". They build huge palatial mansions and then go back to the Gulf and their poor parents have to live in it. The parents, not quite used to such huge houses camp in one of the bedrooms or kitchens and live entirely there in that small space. Whatever, we have to remember always that there still are 40-50 million people who do not have anything, so one should discourage any form of extravagance and snobbery, in

particular.

Study the site, the soil, the topography, the water, the climate and the neighbors and all that sort of thing. Again, the potential services, like drainage, water, access, phone etc. and if not available, what would you do? I make sketches of the site showing the big trees here, the clump of stones there, the well here and the big nasty drop in the site contour and things like that. You have to get the site details like stones, trees, wells, rain and wind direction. Every building should be unique, no two people or no two families are alike, so why should two houses be alike?

It is difficult when it is a Government scheme or a Panchayat scheme, like right now we are doing a scheme at Poonthura. The site has to be 2 cents, and 200 square feet or 250 square feet or whatever. To me, this is silly in some ways, like I told you before, in one house, there is just a man and his wife and in another there is a whole bunch of people, grandmothers and unmarried sisters and all that. So it's a bit silly to do just one plan for all of them, in just 250 square feet, how do you get in a man and his wife, grandmothers and unmarried sisters? And where will they do the cooking and all this sort of thing? Even there, I give them a lot of choice of shapes in the plan, 200 square feet can be in any shape, you can go on indefinitely, there are hundreds of variations. They should choose, you should give them that option. That is why I don't like doing very big schemes, unless you can do them a bit at a time, I like to ask the woman of the house questions like *"Where are you going to do your cooking?"* because the place we went to last week, where housing already exists, most of the women were cooking outside. *"But what will you do in the rain? Where will you cook?"*. It is only by knowing their actual daily life patterns that you can successfully design for people. What is the fun in doing a hundred houses, all the same and handing it over?

There are many architects, whom I have met, know or have been brought to my notice, many famous ones too, who have met the client maybe once or twice, may or may not have visited the site personally, may have just sent somebody from the office, and may or may not have visited the building even once when it was being built. There are some architects, one or two of them very famous, but they haven't even been to the place afterwards to see what it looks like. So, it's not surprising that you get things which don't

fit in.

Then study and use the local materials, their availability, their performance, does it last or do they wear out or fall out? Study the costs, the workers and how to use them...you know the laterite in Kerala, the blocks are so solid, you can build on them....I used to have quarrels and fights with the authorities when I was doing the new university at Calicut. The PWD plans would show typical excavations 3 feet deep or 4 feet deep, 3 feet wide, and then some concrete, stepped foundations and all that, while the university site was just one huge area of stark laterite, visible to the naked eye, with just one or two tufts of grass, a couple of coconut trees and that sort of thing. But do the people know how to use the laterite, the local material?

It used to be in past years that 3 or 4 masons would work on the site, 2 of them would dig out the laterite in blocks, suitably sized so that none of the bits would be wasted when trimming it, and another few masons would trim the laterite block, without wastage, nice and smooth on one side, to be used for building purposes, and then another category of masons would put the laterite together in the building. But now, nobody uses or wants to use the laterite, they just use dynamite and blast it out. If anyone wants to build with laterite, they say that there are no masons who know how to work with it any more. They say, *"In any case, why do you want to trim it, you can just cover it up with plaster."* So the question is not only of using the local materials, but do people know how to use them and do you know how to use them?

Then, the energy used in the manufacture and the transport, you can say *"Oh, we have all aluminum windows"*, but they are all done in Calcutta, in that area, so the transport from there will add to the costs and other forms of energy involved, *"Do they blow up mountains to get the raw material?"*. You should have some idea of the energy involved, avoiding use of energy intensive materials, where possible. Its foolish to say that *"I'll never ever do a concrete building in my life and I'll never use steel and that sort of thing"*.

I don't think you can be pure. I don't think that you can say that this is the way to do it, and this is the only way. I wish people would understand that. Some people think I will

only use bare brick, but that is only because brick is the easiest and best locally available material. Again building codes are advisory, not mandatory. If you read the building codes, there are three big volumes, the whole of the first chapter is all about stressing this, that is, it is advisory. It is clear that you cant have a unified rule that is applicable in Kashmir and Leh and equally applicable, here in Kerala and West Bengal. That's all specified in the codes, but nobody ever looks at that, they are only worried about how far away you should build from the road or the mountain or wherever.

Then about natural resources; don't be extravagant, this applies to forestry. Robbing is only when it is there and then it should be the forest departments responsibility to provide more timber for building purposes. Then there is iron, duke iron, steel, glass and aluminum, there are natural resources, but then you destroy whole mountains and huge areas of land are denuded and not replaceable, so just because its modern and efficient from a construction point of view, are we actually helping the nation or robbing the nation? Then there should be truth and honesty in design and material usage, and the typical example, there are quite a number of very beautiful brick buildings in Trivandrum, one of them is the public services commission and there are many others as well, all beautiful brick buildings, very good brick work, then they are plastered and then red brick work is painted on them. *(Baker laughs a lot at this point).* Then there are beautiful brick buildings, which are plastered over and then people attach stone work, or sand stone or marble or polished granite either painted over or as cladding. So is it truthful or is it dishonest? It all depends on the showing off and the currently fashionable gimmicks, of course, they will all say, you are the wrong one, you set the fashionable gimmicks.....*(again laughs)*

Again, there are certain people who have used my name and used bare brick work and so on, but some of them have used wire cut bricks, which are three times the cost of ordinary bricks, while others have given a little lovely border of cement around the windows and the doors and painted it white....all sorts of variations.

In one house that I did, there were two wings of the house, one going this side and the other, the other side and in the center, connecting the two, was an entrance room, a door and a circular staircase, and I had a little circular tiled roof over it. Now you can see

dozens and dozens of them, similar houses.....

M. Now, you are a tradition in yourself. there are so many people calling themselves "Baker Homes", "Baker Constructions" and so on and so forth.

Yes, I once had a lawyer come in and ask me *"Are you associated with Baker constructions?"*, and I said *"No, I don't know who they are"* and then he asks *"Have you given your consent for your name to be used?"*, and I again say *"no"*, then he asked *"Would you object if we took legal action in the matter?"* I asked him who he was and what interest he had in this matter. He then told me that he was a part of the Consumer protection council, consumer rights and all that. It seems people had complained to their organization about these Baker constructions, who had built some usual ordinary building for them, while the clients thought that it would be a 'baker' building and it had no connection to 'baker' at all. I said that they should have been more careful, I don't want to take any action against them. The example I gave was that the town hall of Trivandrum is called the Victoria town hall after Queen Victoria, though she's never been there or connected with it in any way, not that I am equating myself with Queen Victoria!!!

Now there are a whole crop of 'Baker Homes', 'Lovely baker homes' and whatnot.....some of them 2-3 of them have been people who have been working with COSTFORD, and then gone off, either disgruntled or gone off to start something of their own, or thinking *"I can do this!"*. They certainly do not follow the cost reducing system nor the *"Is it necessary?"* system. Generally some of them are awful, while some of them are alright, while a few are obviously acceptable. I knew one man, he must have done far more houses than I have done, and they are all over the place and when we are passing by, people tell me *"There's one of your buildings!"* Its true that it's a bit more cheaper than the PWD or the ordinary contractor's costs, but only a little bit, its about 40-50% more expensive than my costs or COSTFORD's costs, but obviously people like it and so, why should I object to it? Though it gets a bit annoying, with all these people calling it the 'Baker style' and all that.

And then your conscience, how can you build wastefully after you have seen Chengalchoola or any of the other slums in India? How can we even think of waste if we remember the forty to fifty million people who have nothing, no shelter, maybe not even one square meal a day? How can you encourage people to waste money? Of course, its their own money, they have earned it, but its because they have had parents who could afford it to send them to college or engineering or whatever it is that they are doing. How can you blame the poor? Kuni used to have a clinic at Chengalchoola, the slum at the backside of the Secretariat. There practically all of them, the families were involved in scavenging, some of them used to get all the paper, some of them the rags, and the tin cans and now it's the plastic era, I don't know whether they are doing that still. They were getting their livelihood from that, very useful people, otherwise we would have this huge pile of rubbish down there. If you know how people are living like this, then you don't allow other people to waste their money. Why do we need to show off and flaunt our wealth in front of the others? Where is the conscience?

And of course, I have put this down to cover myself; look inside at your own prejudices, does it hold true any longer, have you outgrown them, question them and see if it is still justifiable. Of course, you also have to tell the difference between a conscience and a prejudice that you develop, believe in your own convictions and have the courage to stick to it, and if your client does not agree to it, then don't do it for them. As I said, its all very well for a person my age to say this, having established myself, but for an young architect, its very difficult to refuse a project that comes his way just because the client's ideas don't match his. Then of course, they maintain that the latest fashions are better than the established ways. Again it may not be necessary but a lot of people have told Kuni, when they were here *"So, when is he going to finish it off?"* They have been so used to the usual things, they ask *"How can a roof be complete without plaster?"* So, it depends on what you think is necessary.

Then you have to think about the cost of plastering the building, you also have to think about painting it or color washing it, and the total cost of plastering is about 10% of the cost of the building. So, does the client know about this? Is he aware of it? You could point out different areas where it could be done and where it doesn't have to be done. For example, the outside of the house, the climatic conditions of Kerala are such that,

the patterns of building are such that if the exterior walls do not have enough protection from the rain and other elements, they become black and covered with moss, even if they are plastered or not. Look at that wall, and look at that house. So, you have to point out all this to the client and distinguish between what is necessary and what is nice.

Then, use you common sense, of course, you better not ask me what common sense is, but have fun in designing, you should enjoy it and not do it because you have to.

M. Your buildings and spaces are so experiential, all the senses are awakened and heightened. One can feel the texture, smell and feel of the brick and it is so experiential that it is impossible to capture it on film. Is this heightened sensory experience a very thought about design process?

Certainly, not very conscious....I think, first of all, I suppose its purely very selfish, that unthinkingly, I want to express my own feelings and beliefs or prejudices or whatever. I have always been fascinated by ships and rooms; the feelings that you get when you go into these places. Strangely enough, some of the greatest buildings have not appealed to me. While I was a student of architecture and cycled around Europe, including Scandinavia and the British Isles, which was about the same as the area of the whole of India, I realized and wondered why the styles were so different, why the architecture you saw at Vienna was so different from the architecture you saw at Switzerland or Germany or Holland.

I was already aware of that, but the biggest architectural slap in the face was when I entered Rome and saw the Sistine chapel, with all its famous paintings on the roof, I thought *"What a terrible..."* I just didn't want to stay in the room. I knew my history and I knew that it was a terrific piece of work. Seriously, I didn't feel any elation or reverence when I entered the building, but some other things, like the open spaces in Rome at that time, of course, this is about a 70 years ago, were really amazing. Again, the Pantheon, going through those narrow streets and suddenly arriving at the Pantheon was terrific, a very unforgettable experience, the same with the Acropolis, if you climbed up, it was not

a tourist spot then, that was all very exciting, a little bit appearing at first, then different portions of it seen in bits, and then the whole building! The effect was terrific, just enormous!

There was this feeling inside the space, which was just....how shall I put it, well of course you have to do what you came there for, but you don't feel like leaving the place at all, just want to linger on. Particularly in a house, one tends to go to the same room again and again, your favorite room...I go around some rooms in this house, and change all the pictures on the wall, and adjust everything a bit, or else Kuni does it, she's brought in this couch and put it there for everyone to trip over.

The appreciation, influence and impact of space and light, that's all very important in a building, I mean if I put a window or a hole, its for a view or the light or the wind. I only put it there for a reason, as much as possible. It is very difficult to do this in a town, that's why I prefer the hollow plan, that way it is much easier, you don't want to open this door or window out, if you are going to look into the next door's bathroom, about 3 meters away, that's why I put a niche, you should know it yourself, have an idea of what you are going to look at and all that, if you have a clear idea of all that, you should envisage what the building will look like even when you start making the drawings, envisage it as solids, and not as 2D on paper.

M. A lot of your popularity and fame comes from the residences that you have designed. People seem to identify you more with the 'Baker' residences than the other institutions. Why do you think this has come about?

The institutions usually start off, you see in the case of the Center, initially, I had already met the chief minister, Mr. Achutha Menon. I got introduced to him by the Arch Bishop, Mar Gregorius. I had an excellent rapport with Mar Gregarious, having done some churches and residences for him, in my first couple of years here. Achutha Menon could hardly believe the cost, and asked me to do the State Institute of Languages, which I did and so on and so forth. Achutha Menon knew Raj and Raj knew Achutha Menon. I'd met

Raj when he was Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, and he'd told me that he wanted to come back to Kerala and wanted me to build a house for him here. Achutha Menon wanted to set up a place here in Trivandrum, where all government schemes could be scrutinized by economists. Would the scheme work and would it work to advantage? He also told Raj that in whatever you do, be it writing, research or buildings of the Center, you should show and demonstrate that economics is not divorced from economy.

Raj immediately said *"Yes, I know Baker's ideas and would like him to do the center, but since it was a government project, I thought that perhaps, you would like the government agencies to build."* Achutha Menon wanted to try out my ideas and asked me to do the CDS.

Initially it was people like Raj and Gowariker (the big chief of ISRO) who wanted me to do their houses. Now at the Center, all the officers, now in their mid 40's, who were research assistants when the center was being built, all of them except one has asked me to do their private houses for them. Even the older ones, like Panicker, Gulati, Subramaniam, I have done all their houses too. And the same with the VSSC, I think I have never been ever without at least doing 1 residence from the Space Place, at a time. Not only the top brass there, but down to the lowest cadre, I have done houses for 2 drivers, the office staff, some accountants and so on....when they see an important, or influential person who's done it, then they think that they can also do it, that must be the right thing, so they also do it. A person like Raj, they know, will not do anything that is extravagant or indulgent.

I have got a notice for a meeting tomorrow morning, it is on normal post card paper, and its got the venue, the dates, the chief speakers etc. etc., so and so, the topic, such and such, addressed to Laurie baker and all that on just one side of the paper, so I cut out all this and paste it on a post card and send it back to them, who ever sent it. It is such an enormous waste of paper, especially in this country where we lack the resources. It is not their fault, it is the fault of the DTP center's or whatever, since there even the toilet paper is only used on one side, I presume... this sheet of paper is about 60 centimeter square, and writing paper is both sides so that means 1200 centimeters square and all this fits onto one post card 6 X 8 or something like that! It is a terrific waste! So, I do all

my sketching and drawing and writing on the envelopes of invitations, they are wonderful!

M. Most of your clients seem to be thinkers, economists, socialists and a lot of them are intellectuals or they would like to be known as 'intellectuals'. Why do you think this happens? Is it because they identify more with this kind of architecture, or is it because they like to be identified as people supporting a social cause, even from the exterior of their house?

That's very interesting, I haven't thought about it before. I have done a lot of other work also, some industrial and all that...but as far as the residences are concerned, other than the mass housing, where there are 200 or 400 or 5000 houses to be built, all of the same plan, yes, most of my work has been residential. It is true, now that I think of it, that most of my clients have been intellectuals or well qualified people. I have also had others like accountants and others who have come to me, after their superiors have built residences, and then there is the fringe ring of relatives and friends of these people who come to you after they see the other residences. I usually try and explain to people and they understand...."*Is there anything you will gain by plaster?, is there anything wrong with this?"* there are some people who will say *"When will you finish it?"* then some people want plaster in the bedroom, and I agree to that, you can have it in the bedroom, that's no excuse to have all over the house.

M. Amongst all the work that you have done through the years, which would you rate as your favorite residences?

One house I always enjoy going to is the Jacobs house, Col. John Jacob and Mrs. Sally Jacob at Vattiyoorkavu. Another house I enjoy is Nalini's house - Nalini Nayak, she has made some changes to the house, put marble or some kind of stone in the kitchen or things like that, I did not object, I said "do whatever you want". That is quite a successful one, in the sense that I like going into it and feel at home and everybody does. I cant

really remember, I have done so many of them....but of the recent ones, I like the one I have done for the VSSC scientists. About 6 of them bought a field and I like Mr. Dolas's house very much, again feel at home there. I built the whole group of houses as a single entity, all together, but all of them different houses. I have been to Dolas's house only a couple of times after it has been built, but it was a irregular plot of land with all its usual problems. He had peculiar ideas, the wife had peculiar ideas, his mother had peculiar ideas and to accommodate all of them was fun. The house was an open plan, with a kind of central open space with a gallery all around. You entered at a level and then went down to the living space or climbed up towards the bedrooms. Then if you didn't want to climb, there was a little alcove, where you could sit down and we had a stone couch built in there, which if curtained across, could form a small room for his mother, who could not climb the stairs. The kitchen is also a gallery, and a spiral hollow staircase in the center.

There is another group of houses like these, the Vatiyoorkavu IAS officers colony, but very few of the original owners still own the houses, most of them have got transferred and all that and sold the houses.

M. All these 'Baker' clones that have come up, the 'Baker' houses look alikes, they don't seem to have captured the spirit that you want to propagate. They seem to be very imitative.

Yes, the interesting thing is, you know Shankar, he's a very nice man, very good person, he tagged on to me quite early on, I managed to extract him from the housing board to be on his own, actually the Collector wanted me to do some work and then he wanted some changes, which I didn't want to do, so I got him on the job. But at one stage, he was even sand papering the walls and even putting clear varnish. I don't plaster the walls, first because one, it is not necessary and secondly because it saves on 10% of the cost of the house, you could build another room or save 10%. A small tin of clear varnish costs 75 Rs, so covering a whole house with it, beats the very purpose. From that point of view, I think that it's because he doesn't provide a wide overhang and the

client thinks that it will absorb rainwater. Another thing he does is that, he thinks that the bare window looks ugly without the frame, and so, he plasters it and paints it white, so in the end all his windows have a white band of plaster around them, like a bandage. So, I can tell a Shankar house, everybody else says *"Oh, that's a Baker house"*. The name Baker is synonymous with any unplastered house. He must have done hundreds and thousands of houses by now, so obviously people like them, so why get upset about it?

M. Would you like other architects to understand and pass on your legacy?

Yes, but the other architects have not understood at all...quite disappointing, I must say.....You know Shankar understands, but he thinks that people want it, so let them have it. Most of the people who go to him will think hat I'm a bit too purist, in the sense that I will say *"Why do you want to have plaster?"* while he will say *"Ok, if you want plaster, why don't we put varnish instead, then it will be waterproof."* Then again, he uses wire cut bricks, but then as I say again, that's what people like. I'm told, I don't know, that his costs are very very high when compared to ours, if we build at something like 320 Rs per sq. ft., then his is like 450 or 500rs per sq. ft. but then, the Nirmitti Kendra will be something like 700 Rs or something like that.

I haven't come to India to convert India by way of its architecture, but its what I have had to do, I don't think I have the right to waste other people's money or the country's resources. Then I just go ahead and do it. If its taken on, then its no fault of mine, but then it's a bit annoying to see all these other things like baker Homes and Bakers Lovely homes and all that. These people have no conscience at all, and the interesting part is that some of these people 2 or 3 of them have been with COSTFORD and then decided to go on their own. Sajan and Shailaja get quite worked up about it, but what to do?

M. 'Mummy's' (Mrs. Baker) contribution must have been enormous in your development.

Yes, very very much so...first of all, when we were at the Himalayas, she needed some help while performing operations and all that, because she was the doctor and I was the rest of the hospital, and my architecture was shelved temporarily. I also had this war-time experience with old fashioned anaesthetics, knew a bit of hospital maintenance and all that. She also could not rely on shops for the medicines, because there were no shops, and we had to mix the medicines ourselves...we had this collection of 10-12 bottles with the standard mixtures, and she would prescribe the medicines and I would mix them and dole them out. We would also get the medical ingredients and powder them and use them...her experience in medicine was the same as mine in architecture.

Most of the people didn't have any money, during the building of the hospital and the house there, of course, for the later part of the construction, I employed laborers and skilled masons, but most of the coolie work, initially, a man would bring his wife in for a difficult delivery and for the payment of fees, since he wouldn't have the money would just help me in the garden or work at the hospital or the building site for a few days as a coolie..you know, it used to be the old barter system, they used to help me mix mortar or lay the bricks....it used to be a natural give and take relationship. Then they would also bring home big baskets of apricots and peaches and other fruits and another thing we used to get was tins of honey, big kerosene tins of honey, which used to grow wild on trees nearby. So, it was a mixture, I would help at the hospital, and payments used to come in the form of architectural help...

M. Its wonderful that both of you share the same spirit for service and human need...both of you are serving necessity in your own ways, its more a way of life for you.

Yes, that's what being an architect should be....

M. From what I've seen and studied of your buildings, I have grown up seeing your buildings, I think that some of them have a real timeless quality to them.....

Not if you live in them....they will fall down with time...(laughs)

M. I mean, they remain in your memory all the time, and when you close your eyes, you get these glimpses....

Gracious me...yes

M. So, how do you generate this timeless quality?

Oh, no it is a continuation....is it your thesis I have got? All the stuff about critical regionalism...you have got quite a lot about traditional architecture, which means the houses , which you've grown up with traditionally.....but anyway, tradition doesn't mean that you blindly copy something that has been done a three hundred or five hundred years ago, like something which were done around the Taj Mahal...but the material and the way they were used, why not go on using them, but you don't have to use them for the same purpose or in the same way.

There is no need to abandon principles of building and construction, which are locally used and materials, unless except if you have run out of materials, like if your village is near an isolated patch of slaty rock, and it has been a mine for thousands of years and now there's nothing left, then you have to look elsewhere for materials....

So, I am following on, not imitating, but making use of what they have learned by trial and error, over one thousand, two thousand, ten thousand years ago. You can see the change in the use of the buildings even in the Himalayas, earlier they used to use these very big stones, now they have a mixture of stones with bonding. In the very old temples, they had these huge monolith stones, which used to go all the way from this end of the wall to the other end, to give it a flat face on both the walls, now there's skin on this side and skin on the other....at some places they have learnt to bond them

properly, dovetail them, so that they do not fall down...again timeless...

Again, during the Uttar Kashi earthquake, all the small concrete houses had fallen apart, and the steel and the cement had all twisted out of shape, and could not be re-used, but while the old stone buildings, even though some of the stone buildings had fallen down, one could still sort them out and re-use the stone, the timber,...they were all there. So, as for the timelessness, time just goes on and on and on...its my sort of feeling that one shouldn't cut into all of that, or abandon it or reject it, just because we have invented computers or nuclear energy or something like that...especially since we do not know what the limits to these things are...like this thing they are expecting, the year 2000...yes, the Y2K!! I think that it will be a very good thing....(laughs).

But seriously, the side effects of all nuclear development, the fall-out and all that, you know my famous poem, I suppose....I come from the same area as Shakespeare...

"Bombs like bums, tend to explode
when people are walking down the road,
Its not the noise we worry about,
Far far more worrying is the fall-out!"

Most people don't know and haven't learnt yet that if we attack Pakistan with an atomic bomb, and the wind is blowing in this direction, most of the fall-out will be over Delhi and Bombay. The same goes for the other way around also.... Besides writing and talking about it, I also make cartoons about this nuclear business, so that I can get people to laugh and understand, at the same time, it is a good idea to keep people laughing....I do cartoons about all sorts of subjects, including shouting in parliament.

M. There is this amazing playfulness in you.

Yes, I mean why should I be belligerent and isn't it better off to be able to laugh at oneself and at others?

M. My thesis is based on the loose framework of the "Other Tradition" developed by Colin St John Wilson. The Other Traditionalists are those architects who rebelled against the Modern Movement from within it and called for a more sensitive, humane, experiential architecture. Where do you think you can place your architecture?

I do not think that my architecture would fall into the Modern Tradition at all.....
In principle, in general, I am against high rise buildings, but in big cities, there is some justification. In early times, when Nehru was in power, I have had the opportunity to meet him on several occasions. His main ideas, in those days was that all the big cities, like Bombay, Delhi, Madras and Calcutta should not go on expanding and other smaller towns should develop to a certain livable, workable and acceptable radius. When you go on developing a town like Bombay or Calcutta, you have no other option but to go upwards.

In Trivandrum, at these new residences which are coming up, these high rise structures, there are only 3-4 houses on each floor and they have practically nothing to do with each other. There could be an old couple in one flat, a businessman and his girlfriend in another flat, and maybe a man and his wife and their 3 children in another flat. The children have nobody to play with, the old couple get disturbed by the children running around and playing in the common areas where the lift and staircases are....so there is absolutely no community life at all and the children have to go down and out or to a park to find other children. So, socially they are a failure, structurally they are a waste of money, but on the other hand, where do you put people? But it's the fault of putting industries and factories in the center of cities instead of outside the city, as Nehru intended. In the end, all the problems come back to the problem of increasing ever increasing population, whatever it is, whether it is schools or hospitals or roads or transport or housing....whatever.

But I have also done the library at the CDS, I think that it is not an eyesore, I have used the framework and the structural framework is visible, and to keep away the driving rain from the sea, I have used jali walls. You cant do the same thing everywhere, but I

suppose one can do something sensibly. I suppose that people don't come to me for doing high rises, because they think I'll turn them down or something. They don't really realize that its connected to tradition, but it doesn't hit you in the eye by being modern, like that terrible high rise in Alleppey. I really don't want to do that, I enjoy doing what I am doing now., but that is how the world is going today.

M. Would you call yourself a Critical Regionalist, being critical of Modernism and at the same time, being regional, assuming a mid way position between both.

Yes, I think that's what you could probably call my work.....yes, I think *"modernism"* within inverted commas is insensitive to other people's feelings. Imagine living in a nice little house, but not being able to see the sky from the windows, because of a skyscraper in front of you, or having the lights on all the time. Modernism in India seems to have no connection to the context or building next door, everything is different...if it was all like New York, then it was a different thing forming a pattern or unity. But this is a sheer conference of anarchists, as if they were all dumped there and told to build their own buildings! So this the sort of anarchy that I don't like, but I am just as bad, you see, because I built that coffee house at Thampanoor, which is neither modern or traditional.....

M. But didn't the Government have some plan to pull it down?

Yes, they wanted to build their offices there for the Civil Supplies, they thought that it would be a good place for them. But it doesn't work, because it is not used as it is designed...it was designed to be a self help, like a Mc Donalds, you see what you want, you pick it up, pay for it and eat it wherever you want. They were adamant that they would only use their own system. So, you go in and only the tables at the very top are empty and after 10 min., the waiter comes and takes your order, after another 20 min., the order comes but he's forgotten about the drinks, and he comes up all the way again and in between all this you are in a hurry to catch your train which is going to leave in another 5 min.

So, it's absolutely stupid from a functional point of view and they have added on their own kitchen, and they want to cook everything there, which is not possible for a kitchen meant for fast food. Partly this is the client's; in this case, the Government's fault. So, the person who briefed me had good ideas; it was to be a perfect fast food center with pick up food and move along to catch the train or the bus or whatever, and they had only a small space to build, but its never been used like that. If he had stayed there, I guess things would have different. So you really can't blame the clients, it's the system.

M. Since India is such a diverse country, do you think that a more regional architecture would help create meaningful architecture in India?

I would definitely think so. Behind this all, we are still begging and borrowing from nations. We pretend to be the biggest democracy and all that and maybe our scientists are as good as any in the world and the top people at NASA and all that...but other hand we don't have energy or resources and we still have to depend on the Gulf for energy and there are so many misuses like nuclear power, there is a tide both ways for using that for power. It is true that if we used nuclear power for energy, we wouldn't have so many power cuts and we would have light every evening and we could do so much.

I cant see any reason for wanting to be global, to level you up to the same pattern. England, of course, I wouldn't like to live there the way they do now, is very distinctive and different from America, or China or South Africa, they are all different. Over thousands of years they have created their own patterns, why we want to or they want to do anything with us, except as a market, which is what everything boils down to. Then what is the point of all this global business? It will be much better to stick to a regional thing. And where will tourism be if we knock down all the old regionally flavored buildings, and make it global? You wont know whether you are in China or Stockholm, there was a book or a film about it, isn't it?

M. Are there any architects today in India whose work you like, relate to or admire?

There must be people who do good work, but I have always been a loner, worked alone, from the original days of *"Can you imagine anything more stupid?"* to the biggest architect of the place, I have had very very little to do with other architects, some of the younger ones like Shankar, to a certain extent, and that too its usually at a seminar or meeting or something like that. I am a member of the Indian Institute of architects, I get the news of meetings and all that, but I have never been to one. I just don't feel I have anything in common with most of them. And its purely on a personal basis, its not dependant on race or color or.....it's just that my way is different from their way. So, there is no point in trying to establish a friendship or relationship....Of course, they are all very civil and nice to me when they meet me, the ones who I have offended are already dead and the others are waiting for me to be dead.

While on this subject....the other day A journalist from the "Hindu" had come and was asking me to write on 10 most influential buildings of the millennium.....i couldn't even think of 10 in this century, leave alone the millennium.....I was not unduly impressed with the Taj Mahal, some of the other buildings inside the complex were impressive, but the Taj as such was not very impressive.

M. Do you have any directions for a better practice, in Kerala, at least?

I know so little about what they do, how they work and what buildings they do. Presumably all the buildings from the market all the way down to East Fort, there must be at least 50 - 100 big new buildings out there, some with columns, some with porticoes, some with straight walls, some with strange windows, I haven't the faintest idea who's done them all, only one building I know, has been done by Charles Correa, but it doesn't look a bit like the Charles that I know of and the Charles I've met. He's never seen it either apparently, or something like that. So, I cant relate the building to him. I have met Doshi briefly a couple of times, when I was doing work in Ahmedabad

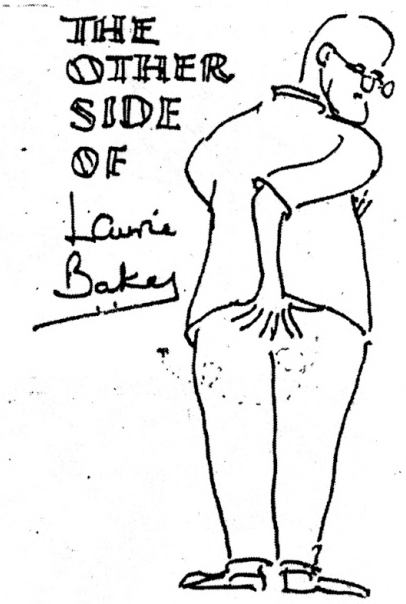
and Baroda and that area, but never professionally.

People seem to be divided up into religious divisions, political divisions and occupational divisions and they tend to move only within these circles. Most of the architects, the well known architects all know each other, their families know each other, they organize things together, but they don't know people, say in the space center, the scientists or the economists, and the same for the economists and teachers and all that. Everything has become so sub divided...

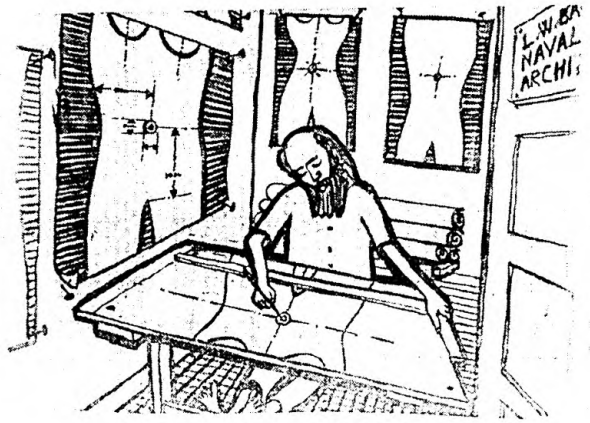
APPENDIX 2

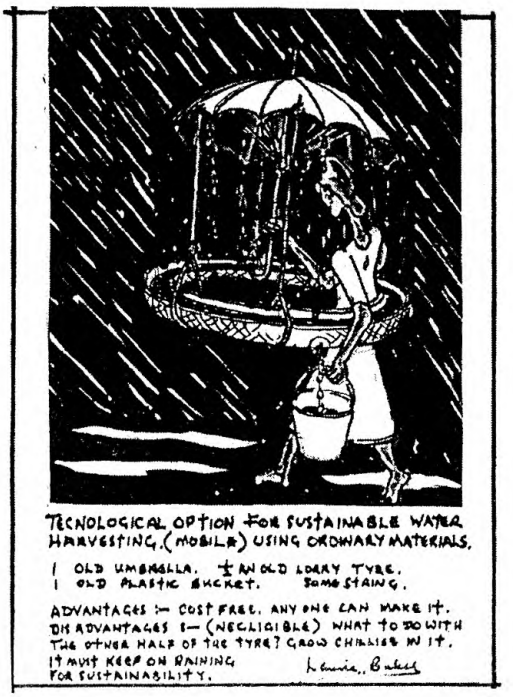
SKETCHES, CARTOONS AND DOODLES

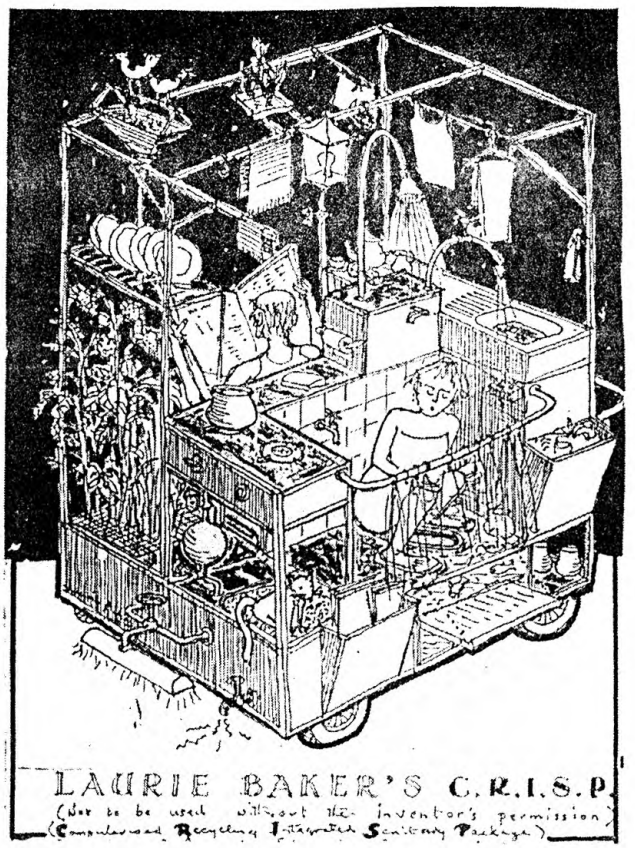
This appendix contains a few examples of Laurie Baker's numerous drawings, sketches, design doodles, cartoons and lampoons.

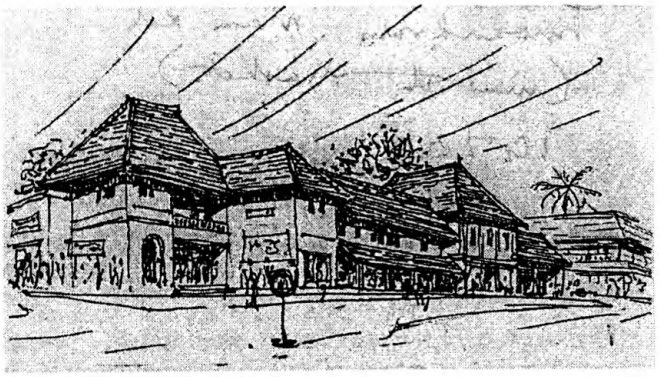


Baker's humor is evident here, as he makes fun of numerous issues: over-specialization in every field, the frequent referral to energy conservation and natural resource management by dishonest politicians and other such satirical subjects.

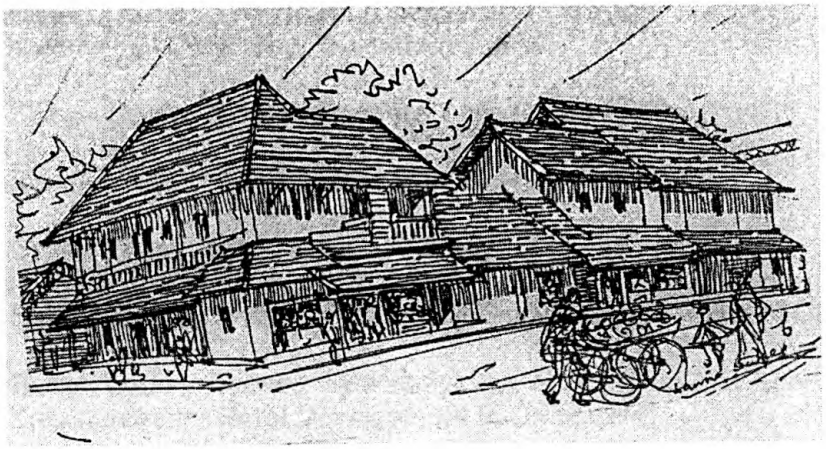








A few sketches from Baker's sketch book showing the architecture along the main road of Trivandrum, when Baker first came to Kerala. This is very different from the modern day, where buildings of all styles and forms are being built on the main road.



APPENDIX 3

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