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A SILENT LANGUAGE

An Examination of the Symbolic Significance of Dwellings



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Gayathri Senadeera
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Dwelling is both the process and artifact. It is the process of living at a location and the physical expression of doing so. In great many cultures it is the largest artifact that a man, a woman, or their family may ever construct. It is this double significance of the dwelling, which encompasses the manifold cultural and material aspects of habitation. There are virtually no peoples in the world that do not build or shape their dwellings, no cultures for whom a form of shelter does not exist. But human societies differ, and the differences are profound, they are expressed at many levels in the dwellings of mankind.

As the roof under which so much of this is acted and re-enacted in the daily, yearly and life cycles, the dwelling readily becomes the symbolic model of the greater universe of time and space in which they are seen to exist. The shapes of these traditional dwellings sometimes transmitted through a hundred generations, seem eternally valid. But from the beginning one civilisation has succeeded another, destroying the architecture of the first or ignoring it.



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While failing to produce satisfactory environments we are also losing the best of the old. We are in an era, when man does not take part in the shaping of his domain. He can no longer master his knowledge and skill in making of it, but depends on the experts to make him achieve the kind of dwelling he would be comfortable and secure in, as close as possible to what he would have achieved if he was in the shoes of the designer. Ancient powerful symbols and images, man's most telling evidence of a communal way of life are being neglected or totally destroyed. Modern man seems unable to produce their modern equivalents.

The beauty of them has long been dismissed as accidental, but today we should be able to recognise it as a rare good sense in the handling of practical problems.

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