ABSTRACT

Thesis: Why People Build the Way They Do: The Shaping of the Built Environment of Gangtok

Student: Sweata Pradhan

Degree: Master of Architecture

College: College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

Date: November 2008

Pages: 94

This thesis examines why people build the way they do, questioning and negotiating values highly esteemed by architects, engineers and authorities. It is a study of the formal-informal method of building employed by individuals living in the city of Gangtok, India. Obliged to conform to formal rules and regulations that do not always serve their best interests, these people have found novel ways to manipulate the system and create a built environment that suits their needs and wants. They build informally within a formal structure prescribed by institutions such as building authorities, banks and municipalities.

The thesis focuses on understanding the process of building from the people’s viewpoint, trying to comprehend the social and cultural factors that direct their building culture. It recognizes the efforts they make in creating a meaningful life for themselves,
reasoning that within the given resources, constraints and challenges, environments built by people are the most viable.

Research methodology included a review of literature available on Building Culture and Built Environments, a study of the built environment of Gangtok through books, periodicals, photographs and observation, interviews in Gangtok with four individuals involved in building as owners, and with employees at the local housing authority office.

The four case studies of building owners/builders form the backbone of this thesis. The views, perceptions and building processes of these individuals is an insight into the everyday building practice that ultimately shapes the built environment.