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Incrementally, we dwell

V. Doshi's Aranya Township as a typological innovation in housing design inspired by the Habitat Bill of Rights

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"Incrementally, we Dwell: B.V. Doshi's Aranya Township as a typological innovation in housing design inspired by the 'Habitat Bill of Rights'"

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Soon after India's independence in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, commissioned Le Corbusier with the plan for the new capital of Punjab, Chandigarh. While Le Corbusier and his team were building Chandigarh largely based on the principles of CIAM's Athens Charter, the CIAM met in Dubrovnik, in 1956, with the aim to draft a Charte de l'Habitat. But while no such charter was ever formally drawn up, over the next two decades, discourse on 'habitat' would come to be dominated by members of Team 10 and their largely Euro-American affiliates. However, this paper argues that the most significant typological innovations in housing design in the second half of the last century are to be found outside the conventional canon of Euro-American circles. In fact, it was the Habitat Bill of Rights, a manifesto commissioned in 1976 by the Iranian government to an ad-hoc group of architects including Josep Luis Sert, George Candilis, Nader Ardalan, Moshe Safdie and Balkrishna Doshi, that proved to play a pivotal role in shaping post-colonial typological innovations in housing design that would take the notions of temporality, community, and patterns of human inhabitation as key factors in the design process. To illustrate the impact of the Habitat Bill of Rights, this paper will unpack the Aranya Township project, a 'sites-and-services' scheme prepared by Doshi in the mid-1980s in Indore in India that drew many of its design principles from the influential 1976 document. Using data collected on-site and graphic documentation of the settlement's transformation through time, from the late 1980s until its current state, this paper will demonstrate how Aranya promotes incremental growth as a determining factor to reconcile some of the key objectives of modern urbanism (improving sanitation and mechanical efficiency) while acknowledging and accommodating vernacular patterns of inhabitation and community.

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