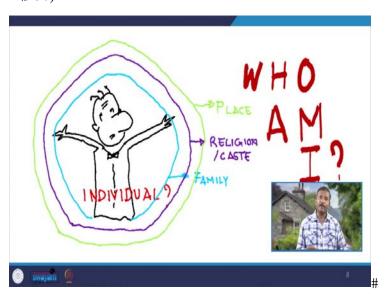
International Studies in Vernacular Architecture Professor Ram Sateesh Pasupuleti Department of Architecture and Planning Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee Lecture: 01

Culture, Identity and Built Environment

Welcome to the course International Studies in Vernacular Architecture. Today, we are going to talk about culture, identity and buildings. Before I speak about culture, let us take us deeper concepts of who we are. So, let us start with the very fundamental question of who am I?

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I am not the only one who have asked this question, various scholars, including philosophers, like great saints, like Ramana Maharshi, who actually talked about who am I, it is talking about taking the self, the body and the mind and relating it to this universe so, it is a very complex phenomenon, which is going to be discussed in both anthropological terms and sociological terms.

And here we are trying to relate in the studies of vernacular architecture. Let me start with a very basic understanding, when you or me, anyone who is born, what is our identity, we are first identified as an individual or is it something else, which is defining us.

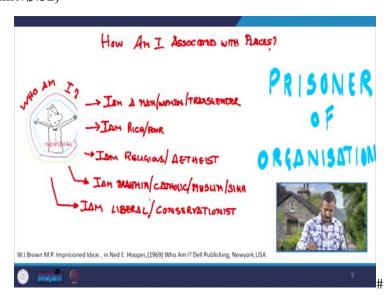
The moment we come to this world the very first identity, that is the very first identity is our family, our mother or father, our relationships with our siblings. So, the moment you are born, you are obviously your first identity is your family, your son and son of so and so, or a

daughter of so and so, or a grandson of so and so, or the granddaughter of so and so. So, this becomes a very first unit of your identity.

If you slightly expand this, that immediately there are other things which layers you, what is your religion, are you a Hindu or Muslim? Are you a Christian? What is the caste, in countries in some of the developing countries, we talked about the caste which sub caste you belong to, because you are defined through a particular organizational process.

The next layer which is we are talking about what place we are representing. Are you a native of a small village by name X, are you a part of a small district then obviously, it defines a part of a particular state, a country, a continent so, this is how our sense of place is associated not just in a very simples scale, but it expands to the from a small room from a small dwelling to a continent level.

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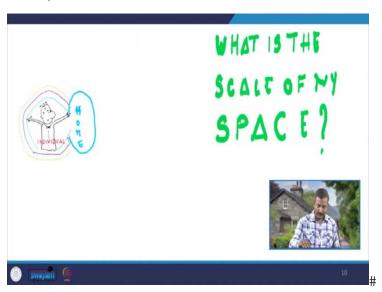
So, how am I associated with these places is who Am I? How he is associated with these places? First of all, am I a man or am I a woman, am I a transgender, let us say we say when a woman born in Philippines or in Lakshadweep or in Bhutan, which has certain matrilineal processes, which means the inheritance of a property, how it has to be exchanged from one generation to another generation, how the property comes from mother to the daughter, and who after the marriage, who goes to from which house to which house. So, all these equations will be defined the moment your gender is defined, and where you are born.

The same woman who was born in Indian mainland will have to go through a different process, the same women who was born in a country like Philippines they have to go through

a different process. So, the definitions of their belonging, the definitions of their nobilities is all defined with the this gender processes. Am I a rich, am I poor? Am I really religious, am I atheist? And what caste I do belong to? Am I a Brahmin, am I Catholic. Am I Muslim, am I a Sikh. And also all these layers which defines certain processes, how you lead your life in the next stages.

Then when you grow up, what is your political views? Are you a liberal democrats? Are you a conservationist? What is your views on it? So, how do so how do you perceive this world? So, your position towards this worldview is also important. And most importantly, out of all these it is someone is telling you that yes, you are a man, you are a woman, you are rich, you are poor, you are religious, you are atheist, at the same time you are communicating to them. And you are actually not really an individual here, you are actually a prisoner of an organization or a social institution, which has been defined with various cultural geographical context.

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Now, what is the scale of the space we are talking about? The very first association when you are born, it starts with your home, a simple household, your mother or father.

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And let us imagine we all have started our life in a very defined continent, very defined political world. Let us take an example of what Tom Hanks have depicted in his movie in castaway. So, he was a FedEx courier person, unfortunately, he met with an accident. And he found himself in a lone Island, there is no human being there, and he himself was alone survivor there. And he survived there, for about four years.

Now, the whole movie is about almost three fourth movies is about how he survives in that lone island. So, he starts making repairing his fire, he starts reinventing his fire then he started finding out how to fish. So, he started almost living a kind of nomadic or a tribal way of life like, where he is just living, hunting the fish, cooking it and then eating it.

So, one day, one of the parcel which was missed out in this accident, it comes to the shore, and he founds a small ball, which is a gift, and he takes that ball and he paints it with a small human face, and he named it as a Wilson. And whenever he feels angry, whenever he wants to talk to someone, whenever he want to share some of his grief or happiness or sorrow or anything, he used to talk to that nonliving thing, which is a ball, but he imagines that it is a living thing for him, it is something or someone whom he can cuddle with, whom he can talk with, whom he can become angry with.

So, this Wilson has been a part of his all his four year life and the climax of it the almost towards the end, he finally he prepares a small floating ship, I mean floating boat, and then he travels around. And in the middle of his journey, he somehow misses this Wilson. And he

really struggles as though his real family member has been missed out, he really struggles to so that is the kind of intimacy a person has develops with sharing certain things.

Though, it is just a simple ball, but for him, it is someone who took care of him, who was there with him. So, this is where he talks about how the Sack's definitions, places cannot exist without us, but equally important, we cannot exist without place. So, until Tom Hanks reaches to this island there is a sense of place has not been created.

So, it was a simple space with a natural geographical fact elements in it. Then he started modifying that particular place for his needs, for his local need, for his survival needs. So that is how we say a place is a survival instinct. And it is also referred as territorial instinct, how you define your geographical place, your belonging, your sense of belonging.

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Let us say when we start about a small home, in the Japanese traditional houses, we have this Japanese Tokonoma which is a kind of sacred space and here, they follow certain practices, even whenever the guest comes, they try to turn their back towards the token so that so they have certain procedures, how they make them, the guests sit over in this place.

So, similarly there is a hierarchy of orders that toko Bashira, the central wooden post, which they it actually segregate certain places, and they display certain font over there. And obviously, there are certain display items which are kept in a hierarchical order. So, a sacred space starts within a small room.



And let me tell you, how people are associated with these sacred spaces, it could be a small idol, and how people respond differently. Let us say I tell you one of an important understanding in my own life, I was living in Bhopal. And my mother came to see me. And she was from South India, she lived all her life in the southern part of India.

And I was working in central India, and for the first time she traveled, and she started staying for a few days with me. And initially, I observed she was not very happy. Then I asked her, what was the reason she said in my hometown, I used to go to a temple, Durga Devi temple every day, and I am missing my Durga.

So, then I found out a small temple, which has an idol made of marble. And I showed her, why do not you go to this Durga Temple, then she started going to the temple. But even after

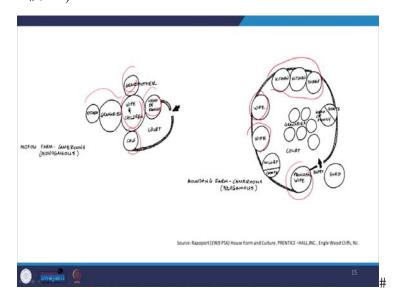
a few days, I asked her why you are still dull. She said, My Durga, which I go regularly, is so furious, she is black in color, but here, I am not able to associate my Durga here. So, which means that in symbolic expressions are actually she was linked with that symbolic expression. So, whether it is the color of the idol, the furious nature of the idol, here, she says that for me, the Durga and Krishna, both of them are smiling.

So, in that way, I am not able to relate with my what I have seen as a habitual experience from my past. So, this is something very important observation. And I try to relate what Gaston Bachelard talks about. A geographers Yi-Fu Tuan's term called topophilia in the book of Poetics of Space, and that is the life of the mind is given form in the places and spaces in which people dwell and those places influence human memories, feelings and thoughts.

So, it could be a color, it could be a certain semiotic element. But that is how people were associated with it. In the context of Tom Hanks, it was not a living thing, but he was associating as though it was someone who is sharing a life with him. So, when we talk about this topophilia, it is a practice that can actively produce places for people.

As I said we all become some kind of prisoners of the social institutions, whether it is a matrilineal society, whether it is a patrilineal society, for example, in Masai compound in Kenya somehow it is a polygamist society where he has his whole dwelling unit is has been oriented in such a direction that you have the place for the sheep's and cattle, there is just head man's room, there is first wife, the second wife, the third wife so that is how the whole orientation of the dwelling is done.

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Like Amos Rapoport, he talks about how the monogamous and the polygamous orientations of the dwellings how, for instance, you have this principle wife, the second wife, the third wife, and have this kitchen and the sheep and whereas here it is just a single person is the head of the family, the wife and children, the grandmother, the calf, place for calf, further kitchen and the granaries so it actually how you are positioned in a society and how it defines your small space of a dwelling, your belief systems, how it has to orient your small worship space, how you can actually conduct your processes of your life.

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So, let us take it further whether it is from the home and how it is situated in the neighborhood or in a street. And this is where we talk about the spaces of life, for instance, in a place like Sriramgam you have the central deity in the center, and you have majority of the

Brahmin community lives in the immediate concentrates rectangle of Sriramgam and then you can see that there is a huge barriers which were constructed from each of these clusters. And so they also have on the festival occasions they also have these chariot festivals they take these chariots and possessions around this uttara and chitra streets and how, where all these people from different caste, different groups they come together and participate in these events.

Not only with the life, but there is also the aspect of death, the spaces of death, like in my home cultures, where we can see in our home towns where on the pongal day on, which is usually coming on January 14th of every year, sometimes it might vary on 15th or so. But what people do is most of these burial traditions, many of them, they come here, they clean their burial places of their ancestors they decorate it.

So, it is a process of maintaining these burial grounds and once in a year, they come together and they identify, and this is one place I think many of the cousins meet there because that is where the knowledge about what who was the dead person and what he likes, and some memories to him, and it has been translated taken it to the information to the next generations. So, these are the places where the whole town gathers here for certain year celebrating, celebrations kind of on the festive day they also offer something to the dead.

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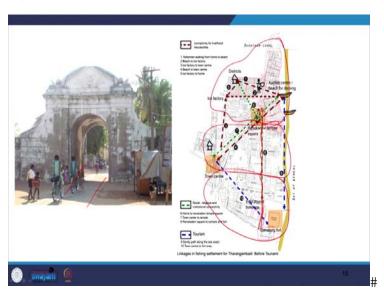


And if you take a larger scale, for instance, in the Mexico where we talk about the altar of dead, which is spin in the representative list in the indigenous festivity and the whole country whether it is a small child or whether it is families living abroad, they all travel mostly in the

month of October, end of October to November, and this liberate particular period of the dead for instance, there are some days which are dedicated for the people who died with some certain diseases, there are people who have, there are some days which are dedicated for the children like that they travel across and that is how it has become a part of the representative list to the UNESCO.

And today, all these festivities are getting modified because of various Western influences coming over because the people who travels abroad and they and when they come back, they take certain things what they already knew and also what they have experienced in other places.

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Now, when we talk about the streets, this is an example of Tharangambadi is a small fisherman settlements where you can see this is mostly the colonial structures are evident here and the pre colonial which is mainly occupied with a Muslim community. And this is the fisherman community. So, in fact, if you ever go to the colonial side, this is where you can see the whole and grand entrance gateways, the bungalows, the beach bungalow, the Dansborg fort all these colonial this is called Kingsway.

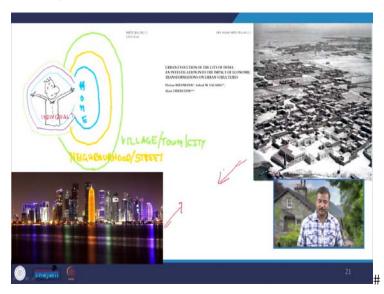
So, it is actually reflected in the way the streets, the scale of the street, the connections with the streets. So, but the only connection which actually connects all these communities is the Princess Street that is where it connects the Hindu, Muslim and the Christian communities together.

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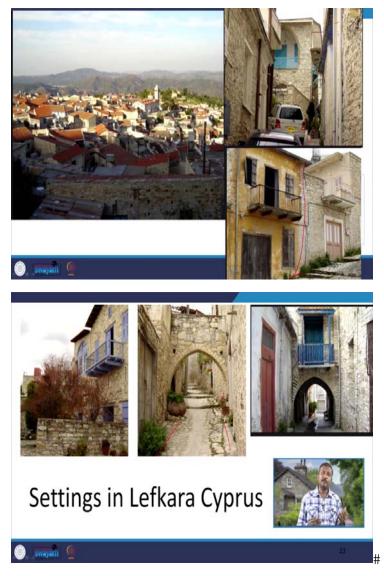
And if you look at the pre colonial houses, this is where you can see the traditional houses where they have and even the fisherman houses. So, they have this small veranda outside, which faces the street front, and it is also in Tamil culture, they talk about the talking streets in the evenings, they come over and they sit outside and they talk to each other, this is the kind of social interaction one can easily understand from this the nature of the built forms, which actually are oriented in the whole street, for example, in this Green Street, which actually connects all the three communities, but after the tsunami, very few people are walking in this particular street.

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So, now, when it comes to, when you scale it up to a village or a town or a city, now for example, you see this photograph of Doha 19, in 1950s, and today what the city of Doha look like. So, what are the determinants of this tremendous changes what are the is it only a social change or it is something an economic driver, the oil industry has boomed up the economies and has brought all the people across the world and then how different economic institutions have shaped this whole city, and also what in 15, 70 years of the time, this is what we can see the whole transformation.

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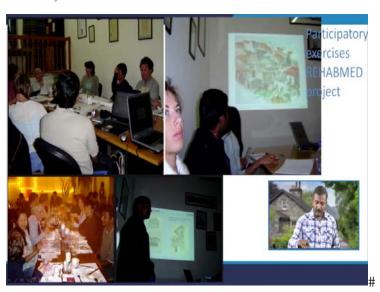
And in contrast with certain traditional settlements, like when we were part of course, we were taken to a place called Lefkara in the Greek part of Cyprus. And this is a small town where all the traditional dwellings are built with the stone walls, and even the streets, you can

see that all the stone paved streets. And interestingly, after the war between the Turkish part of the Cyprus and the Greek Turks and the Greeks, so you can see many of the houses are still abandoned, the Turks who were living in the Greek part, they left the Turkish part. Similarly, the Greeks who were leaving the Turkish part, they left to the other side.

So, now these houses who owns these houses, they have ownership of it. And many of these also left abandoned like this, so there are so there are many issues of how the generational changes, like for example, many of them went into as bartenders or many other newer income sources, but the traditional the embroidery work and what the woman used to make, so now, the youngsters, they are not relying on these traditional livelihoods.

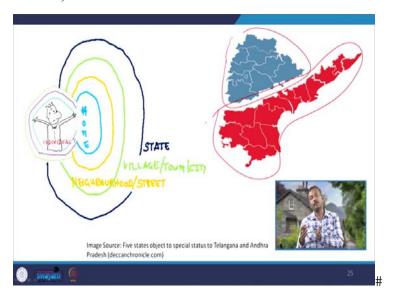
So, they are trying to because get attracted with some other jobs in the nearby cities. So, in that way, what happens to the village fabric what happens? So, in fact, the perception of what the youngsters perceive about this village and what the elderly people perceive about this, because they have lots of attachments with this village.

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So, this is where we were doing some studies and we started giving certain recommendations, how we can address make some small changes in this particular settlement, so, that it can sustain with the local economies, and it can sustain with the built fabric of this particular place.

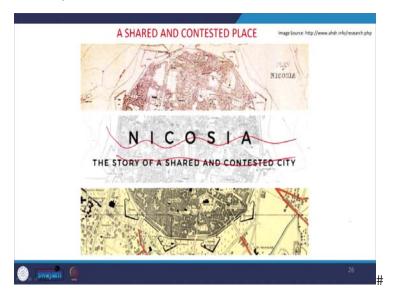
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So, let us scale it up further and when we talk about the state, so, earlier in India, there is a state of Andhra Pradesh and recently it has been splitted into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh so, now, the moment it has speeded up, obviously, when my classmates when we were studied together in Hyderabad we all were representing Andhra Pradesh, but today, the identity our slang, our food habits everything, though we are more or less similar, but slightly, the different aspects has been highlighted.

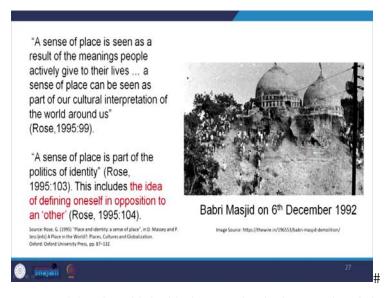
And now, each one of these state is looking for creating their own identities, looking at their own cultures like the way they celebrate the bonalu festival here, and the way they celebrate these pushkaram here so, all these are actually the culture plays an important role, how each community could be defined.

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Here we talked about dividing a state, but how about the Nicosia a city which is divided between two countries, the Lefcosa on the upper side and the Greek part of Cyprus, which is Nicosia, so, the UN buffer zone actually divides between and the city is divided between two countries. So, which means there is a socio political influences how people define their own spaces.

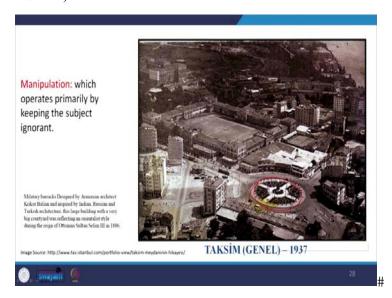
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Now, from a monumental level, I think this is one classical example of the Babri Masjid, where whether the Rama has been, is an evident. So, or the Barber, the Babri Masjid was so there is a lot of conflict which went on and of course, such sites are always there and some conclusions have been derived in different time with different possible references, but what

we are trying to here to learn about is a sense of place, which is actually a part of the politics of the identity. And it is also a sense of place can be seen as a kind of cultural interpretation, and it is a way how we create a sense of belonging by opposing others identity that is also a process.

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So, let me tell you about one more case in Turkey in Taksim Square about this Gaji park earlier. There used to be an Ottoman times barracks, and an Armenian architect have designed this barracks and this is the Taksim Square in Istanbul.

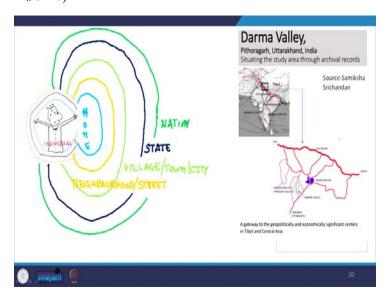
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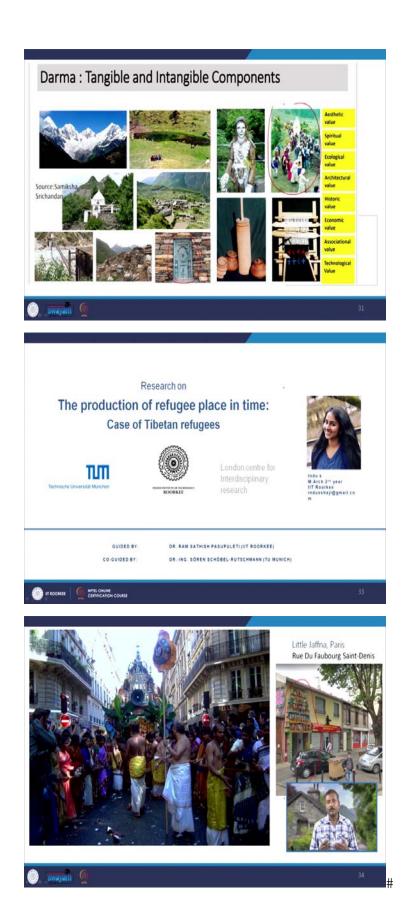


And in recently, the Logans government, they have proposed or come up with redevelopment because earlier this has been demolished, the whole barracks has been demolished, and it has been converted as a Gaji park. And for all the 60 years, this park was evident and that is one of the large urban green space in the center of Istanbul. And now the new government have brought a proposal that we should build back similar structure of what the Armenian barracks is, so which has certain impressions from the Indian and Islamic architecture.

And so, now, when the proposal is brought forward, now see the same people the people of this particular country, the whole nation have come forward that they made all the protests, because they were cutting down some trees. So, what we really can understand here is once upon a time, that was the pride but once the same image when it is brought back, you know how people were responding to these changes.

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So, when you look at the traditions how they are connected at a not only at a national level, from the Intercontinental passages, we talk about silk route, we talk about the spice route, people traveled across and also this is one route like even if you see that there are traditionally people who have come to India from Afghanistan and other places, and even from the China and Tibet route.

So, you have the Uttarapath and Pubantapath and Aparnatapath and we have this Dakshinapath. So, here, if you look at it, this silk routes, and we have these Indo Tibetan corridors, where one of my PhD student Samiksha Srichandan is currently working on this, documenting these routes, because these are the transhumance routes.

So, people used to come and collect the salt and everything from the plain areas, and they used to go to the higher mountain regions, and they used to collect the fruits and vegetables from there, they used to bring it to the plain. So in that way, they used to travel by the donkeys and they take they travel for months together to reach to the higher places that is how the trade routes do exist.

So, in fact, there when all these processes are happening after the 1960s, World War, so now there has been certain restrictions on these movements. And moreover, now the number of people who are going up and down because that has gradually reduced, there are many other changes which are happening with the society.

One is people are some of them have migrated, some of their houses are still abandoned. And there are some still some evident practices what they brought from the Tibet, whether it is the kind of tangible building elements they have brought, whether they are talking about certain tangible or intangible celebrations, whether it is a festival they conduct and which has certain sense of protecting their forest, protecting their farmlands. So, each and every intangible associations with the nature is always to do with the safeguarding these nature.

And gradually, when these movements have dropped down, definitely there is certain decline, we can see in these tangible and intangible forms. So, still one can actually notice that still some families do go and in fact, Samiksha is actually traveling with them. And she is actually documenting all these aspects.

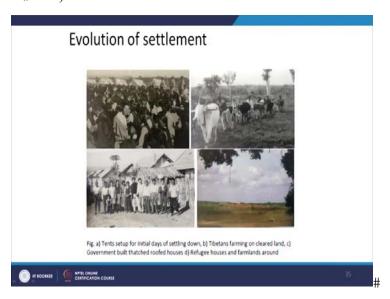
And what we are learning here it is not just only about a community here, and it is when they travel to Tibet, what they take from India to Tibet, and when they travel from Tibet to India,

what they bring from here to there. In a similar example, when we took up the continental US is one of our student Indu's work on the production of the refugee place in time.

I will just show you a few glimpses of as a German exchange student, she was documenting some of the work even in abroad, where we can see the Sri Lankan refugees who have settled for a long time in Paris, how they modified their places, even in Paris, how they celebrate their festivals, the local festivals there, in the same way, there is a way the mediating with the local culture with the foreign culture.

So, how they could able to see bring these elements into the built forms with the religious association. So, the moment you go to any other place in London, like Wembley or East Ham or South Hall, you actually can able to relate that the kind of performative is the function and the kind of built fabric that has been adjusted or negotiated with the foreign cultures.

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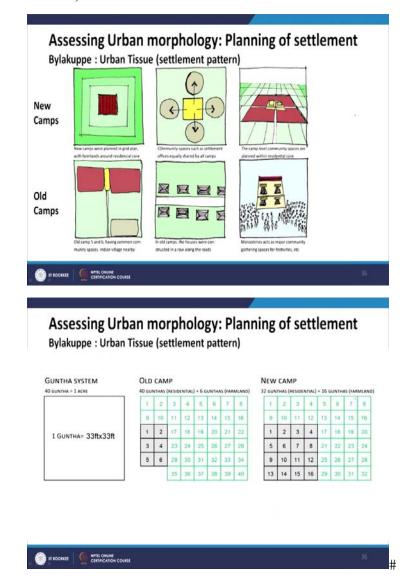


So, she actually worked on the Tibetan refugees when they migrated to India, and they were initially set up in a tent house tents for, and then some of them were taken to Laddakh. Some of them were taken to Dehradun, some of them they were taken to Karnataka like for example, she studied how the same Tibetan group how they settled in Laddakh, how they settled in Dehradun, how they settled in much remote area in Karnataka.



And initially they were given some farm lands. And say because they were the farming backgrounds and they are also from the handicrafts, and they also have this one person from the family they are sent to the monastery to become a monk. So, even still, it is evident that one of their family member is going to bring a monk. So, initially when they were given a kind of refugee housing so how they gradually modified it.

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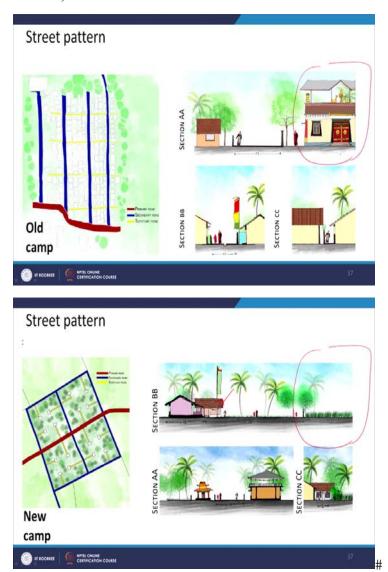


And in also these are some of the old camps and the new camps and how they gradually adjusted with this process. And they follow these guntha systems and so one guntha is about 33 feet into 33 feet.



So, about 40 guntha is about one acre. So you can see that, how initially they were given in a great kind of linear layouts. And gradually, one after another, they started building these the new additions to these next to the neighborhoods, how they started developing, they are actually still continuing certain things, what they brought from Tibet, at the same time, they are also adjusting with what they are learning from the local regions.

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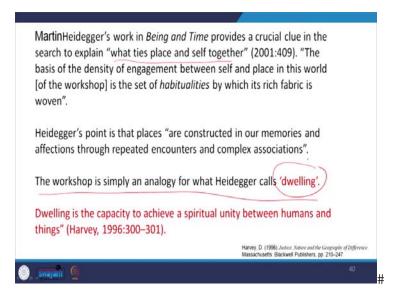
And also, this is where we can see certain elements are still represented in their whether in terms of monasteries, whether in the temples, all these were able to reflect and the same time the local addressing the local climatic conditions whereas in a Tibetan they have, because these Ramdath constructions, which is not seen here. But, whatever the materials, they were able to get with the brick and concrete and the tiles, the Mangalore tiles so, that is how they were able to adapt to this.

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And so, what we can actually learn from this case is so how the local climatic conditions how the local resources, actually, people try to negotiate with it, people try to adapt to this, how they can actually enhance the ability to adapt. So, on an overall, what we talk about is in a how an individual becomes a social individual. So, we started with where we were born, and then how it he started interacting with his organizations, with his workplace, with his state, with his village, with his country, with his nation, with his intercontinental relationships that is how they are related.

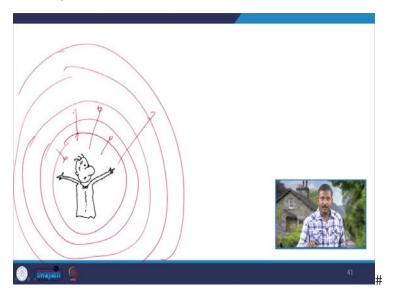
So, I would like to sum up all these with a nice stereotypical understanding what Martin Heidegger's talks about in being in time, because it is our body which is traveling to different places. And, and our mind is actually understanding those places at the same time, our mind is taking something what we already know.



So, this is where actually we talk about what ties the place and the self together, and how, how much time that engagement is actually tying them. For example, when I was a child, I always loved my hometown, but then when we moved on further, further different places, so the association with where you are living for more than 20 years, 30 years at another place. So, how your definition of home also matters a lot so who are there in your hometown who and after 40 years, do you still want to go back to your home, what really pulls you back?

And also these are all very fundamental questions, one has to be really looking at what ties these places. So, Heidegger points out that no, these are constructed our places are constructed within our memories, and our affections and we that are repeatedly encountered and with a very complex associations, and that is where he talks about this complex association of many things which are networked with an individual and how he prepares himself as a social individual, that process he talks about as a dwelling is the capacity to achieve a spiritual unity between humans and the things.

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And let us summarize things, we start with our work as an individual and we started looking at how our immediate society whether it is a family, or whether it is it is our village, whether it is town, how it actually defines you in a way how you interact with that and how it shapes your culture, how it shapes, how you eat, what you eat, how you perform your worship, how you marry, how you obey, everything is defined within your immediate circumstances. And then when you start growing up, obviously when you start interacting with your neighbors, with your friends, with your fellow mates, and what you learn from them that is again feeding back at the same time you again give it back to that.

And then when you move out for your jobs further so that is where when I moved from my hometown I was always referred to, I came from Nellore a small town but then I moved from Andhra to some other place. I always say I am from Andhra when I moved from out of India, I always say I am from India, when I moved out of India and we were all having some gathering there was some person was from Japan, someone from Middle East, someone from Pakistan, then we always say yes, we are from Asia. And also which means we represented certain similarities, though we as differentiated with many other habits, but we are representing one continent in when I was studying in London.

So, this is where both the continental and the intercontinental relationships and how we position ourselves where and how it is a very complex phenomenon which we need to understand when and these all these associations are reflected in our place making processes. I hope you understand this concept from the individual and how it relates to the place and its

buildings and how the identity changes with the time. A time is also a major important factor. Thank you very much.