

From the Bhavan's President

Low Cost Housing

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Our living standards, indeed, the quality and beauty of our lives are directly linked with the adequacy of shelter and sanitation for the people.

As one of the three basic necessities of life - food, shelter and clothing-housing, especially for the masses, should occupy a central position in our programmes of development. Our living standards, indeed, the quality and beauty of our lives are directly linked with the adequacy of shelter and sanitation for the people. Good housing fosters social goodness. In India, we have already acquired food self-sufficiency. Many developing countries of the world are also striving towards the attainment of food security. There has been an impressive improvement in clothing for the growing population of the world, though qualitatively much still has to be achieved in these sectors. But the

housing situation in India and in many other developing or the developed countries, is hardly satisfactory. We are far, far away from our desired goal of providing good, unpretentious homes for all the people. In fact, our actual performance is much below our expectations in the housing sector. The gap between the number of housing units we need and what we have, is widening at an alarming rate.

To achieve promotion of research in building technology and development of cheap and local building materials are absolutely necessary.

The necessity for maintenance of existing houses through continuous effort is an unremitting endeavour. A house renovated is equal to a house

built. Our expertise should not stop with preservation of ancient monuments but extend to preserving small dwellings for posterity. Financial assistance should be extended to renovation of old houses as much as to building new ones.

The problems which require immediate attention are:- (a) how to place the housing problem in a proper perspective in the national economy, (b) how to involve people in house-building activities, (c) how to streamline administrative procedures to build more houses, (d) how to make construction technology viable in socio-economic terms.

The housing policy must embrace preservation and improvement of existing housing stock, provision of house-sites to landless poor, extension of schemes for subsidised houses to weaker sections of population, greater support to institutional agencies financing low-cost housing schemes and renewed intensification of research in and development of appropriate building materials in various

parts of the country. We must develop low-cost housing technologies, assuring shelter and sanitary facilities to the large masses of people. In this sense investment in low-cost housing must be integrated with slum improvement and provision of drinking water and sewerage facilities as well. It is essential that low cost housing schemes should not be interpreted in a narrow sense. Architects, social scientists and technologists should have a vision and must think of our overall requirements which would enhance and enrich human personality.

As far back as 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, it was announced that everyone had the right to decent housing. Why has this right not been fulfilled? We have in many cases touched the frontiers of technology. Why is it that we have not been able to improve upon construction techniques using building materials which are in abundant supply everywhere. This calls

for international collaboration in all social and natural sciences. Basic research must be integrated with applied research in scientific as well as sociological areas.

Housing is a labour-intensive activity. It is an accepted economic tenet that building activities contribute in a significant measure to all round economic growth and enlarge employment opportunities. It is estimated that in the United States and the United Kingdom, 2 to 3 million houses are built or construction on them started each year, providing employment for a large work force of builders, architects, and others engaged in landscaping activities. Some years ago it was estimated that in the housing sector an investment of one rupee will add 10 rupees to the wages of the workers. Further, in construction work, the capital-employment ratio is highly favourable to the growth of employment. I understand that investment of just about Rs. 1 lakh in housing gives direct jobs to 20 persons for one year, against the average capital-

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employment ratio of five to ten times in industry and transport sectors. The spin-off benefits of housing will be progressively greater as construction activities gather momentum. Even, as an employment programme, housing commands a high priority.

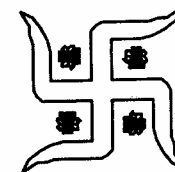
It is not necessary that we should use only such inputs in short supply as steel, cement, aluminium, glass, etc. Housing could be based on local materials treated or reinforced by innovative techniques. New technologies, including pre-fabricated structures, should be used extensively. To strike a personal note, I recall that in the 1950s I had strongly advocated the establishment of factories for the manufacture on a large-scale of pre-fabricated housing materials. If guidelines are formulated for a score of low

cost housing designs, these factories could produce materials to cater to varied tastes at graded scales of expenditure. As in many European countries, people could build their own homes on developed house sites.

To conclude, shelter and sanitation are labour-intensive ventures and the developing countries would do well to allocate substantial resources to them. For a qualitative improvement of life, housing

especially low cost housing, is the crucial need of our time. I hope this Government will evolve and develop integrated schemes for 'mansions for the millions' taking full advantage of advanced building technologies. If the population growth is a time-bomb ticking every minute of the day and night, the housing shortage is nothing short of a hidden thermo-nuclear explosive device which must be defused soon.

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