

## **Urban Migration and Rural Places**

### **Transformation of Traditional Houseform of Sylhet, Bangladesh- An Impact of Urban Migration.**

**1.Pushpita Eshika, 2. Fahmida Nusrat, 3. Kazi Asmunnahar Sumi**

Department of Architecture, Primeasia University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

[email.ar\\_pushpitaeshika@yahoo.com](mailto:email.ar_pushpitaeshika@yahoo.com), phone08801771559198

Urban transformation, due to globalization has direct influence on architecture. The morphology of building changes with the change of social behavior. The phenomenon urban migration generates various types of social behavior in various regions. Taking Sylhet, Bangladesh as a case study, this paper will try to explain the behavioral change of the society for the selected location which is significantly connected to the traditional house form of this region.

Historically Sylhet has experienced huge migration to various foreign countries; especially to England. This Diaspora community of Sylhet is now a strong identifiable community with huge changes in their social response to their traditional life style and living pattern. The traditional house form of Sylhet has its significant identity of regionalism. The spatial organization of buildings, the material and construction system, the treatment of elevation of these houses had directly instigated by the social hierarchy, topographic and climatic requirements for human habitation for this region. In Sylhet, these traditional house forms are in a verge of transformation towards an alien style due to this urban migration. Those who migrated from Sylhet to a developed country adapted and adopted their norms and culture along with social behavior. This Diaspora community of Sylhet always tries to imply their adopted culture on the traditional living. As a result modern houses influenced by foreign architecture started replacing the traditional house form of Sylhet. By random sampling, visual observation and plan analysis of traditional house forms and the modern houses, this paper aims to focus on the impact of urban migration on traditional living of Sylhet.

Key words: Urban migration, Social behavior, House form, Diaspora community, Spatial organization.

## **01. Introduction:**

Urban Migration, being a worldwide phenomenon has diversified impact on the country's socio-economic and cultural context. The long rooted history of migration has also shaped some significant aspects of Bangladesh likewise. Some specific region of the country have faced intense migration specially international one, among which Sylhet region is a renowned one in Bangladesh. Migration brings many social and cultural influences along with its economic development. In case of Sylhet, the rural areas which experienced migration most have faced the influences on house form specifically. The traditional house form of Sylhet is considered as a unique one for their vernacular construction approach and spatial organization. Despite various sectors, the traditional houses, whether these are in urban or rural areas has gone and still going through under modifications and changes; which in a blank look may seem status symbol of development. But deep down inside this development led changes of traditional house form is an alarm of losing some significant key knots of vernacular housing approaches of respective areas as well as delineating the clarity of a uniform settlement pattern.

The aim of the research paper is therefore to identify how the traditional houses are spatially arranged in comparison to the modern Londoni houses that are constructed in those areas and thereby how the visual clarity of the settlement is having the transformation into a different character whether its materially or spatially or both way.

## **02. Methodology:**

The study is carried mainly by reconnaissance survey on the selected site which for the specific research is Bishwanath and Ronkeli, two distinct areas of Sylhet district. Bishwanath, the former one is selected on the basis of extensive literature review which refer the area that experiencing highest migration rate, therefore having various impact of it including on settlement pattern and traditional house form. Bishwanath, being topographically an almost flat area, a significant region of hilly topography was required to be taken as a sample for the research, that is surveying the migration impact on the respective areas' house form. Therefore, As Sylhet has a huge hilly region, the later one, Ronkeli, is selected based on its topographical character.

The sample households from two above mentioned areas were 15, among which 7 houses are selected based on random sampling. These seven houses have various characters of absolute traditional to a juxtaposed character of traditional and modern. Finally all data regarding spatial, material, space use pattern and organizational characteristics of those samples are collected by extensive physical survey, in depth observation and semi-structured interviews of its users.

The collected data then are compiled and analyzed with syntactic approaches to identify how the various traditional houses and its transformed patterns; either its materially or spatially are functionally organized, therefore seeking the migration impact on the changes house form pattern.

## **03. Settlement History of Sylhet:**

Administrative Sylhet District was established on 3 January 1782. Until 1878, Sylhet was under the jurisdiction of Dhaka. In that year, Sylhet was included in the newly created Assam Province.

Until 1947 (excepting the Banga Bhanga period of 1905-1911) it remained a part of Assam. In 1947, as a result of a referendum, it was attached to the East Pakistan and was included in the Chittagong. Sylhet subsequently became a sub-division of Sylhet Division and was converted into a district in 1983-84. The greater Sylhet was divided into four new districts: Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj and Maulvi Bazar in 1983-1984. On 1 August 1995, Sylhet was declared as the 6th division of the country consisting of the four districts of the greater Sylhet.

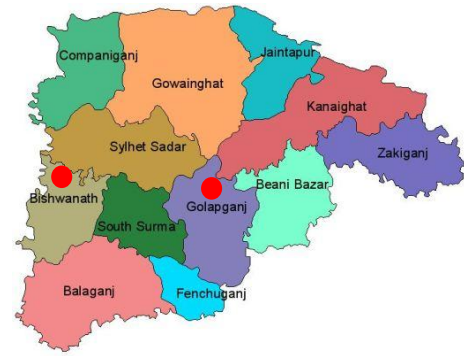


Fig: 01-a (Map of Bangladesh showing Sylhet Division in Red color) Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylhet\\_Division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylhet_Division))

Fig: 01-c (Study areas in Sylhet district in red circle)

Sylhet, being one of the oldest settlements of Bangladesh, possesses a strong socio-cultural and traditional background of its own. It has also got its identical geo-climatic character and topography due to the unique geographical location in a hilly terrain. Besides this earthquake prone zone had experienced two devastating historical earthquake that destroyed the region severely. Therefore regions like Sylhet, obviously will have climatic responsive construction technique for its every type of buildings. Specially the houses of Sylhet, as a place of mostly occupied and utilized one have an indigenous character considering the above mentioned issues. The house form of Sylhet therefore is extraordinarily a traditional one which is carrying a deep-rooted bondage with the locality and its people.

The social higherarchi of peoples' daily life and privacy status of family members is spatially arranged in traditional houses of Sylhet. The finely knitted spaces of such residential units thus maintain a specific indigenous character.

#### 04. Urban Migration in Sylhet: Dialectic between Internal and International Migration

Historically Sylhet is well acquainted with the migration phenomena that took in almost every part of the region mostly in British colonial period. Generally 'Migration' the term incorporates both the type-internal and international migration. The initial one indicates migration of people from one place to another inside a country boundary, the later one denotes from one country to another. Therefore Urban Migration literally can be applied for both cases; for internal migration it can be a place from the rural area to the urban area of the same country and for international migration from rural area to the urban area of different country. In case of Sylhet, urban migration exclusively holds the character of the later one.

This international urban migration of Sylhet has a unique character, as the majority of Sylheti migrants of Bangladesh are in United Kingdom. Approximately 95% of the British Bengali population is Sylheti in origin<sup>i</sup>. Intensive research on the migration of Sylhet region undoubtedly mark the point that Urban migration to UK specially in London is a long term phenomena that historically associated with the region whatever the reason for that. And thereby urban migration in Sylhet has all “three important characters about migration and development: remittances; the movement of the skilled; and Diaspora.”<sup>iii</sup> As a result Migration tended development through all three channels is intensely observed in whole Sylhet region in various sectors; mainly socio-economic development and thereafter cultural adaptation in some significant ways. The long term migration experience of Sylheti people to London thus has imprinted a newer image on their traditional house form too, which is from their point of view considered as a trademark of economic development and social status.

## 05. Impact of Urban Migration in Traditional House form of Sylhet:

Migrants, in particular, are said to develop “globally oriented identities and pluri-or trans-local understanding of ‘home’ ” (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:6). The transnational and diasporic trend of Sylheti immigrants of London, therefore instigate themselves to implant an identity of what they have achieved into what they were belonged. And the best physical representation of the notion is home. Thus the traditional houses of the region are introducing with modern Londoni houses with different spatial organization of their own.

**5.1. Traditional House of Sylhet:** The traditional houses of Sylhet is a “wooden frame structure with locally available material is one of the oldest house forms of this region”<sup>iii</sup>. This particular type of house is also unique for its spatial unity throughout the whole region. This type is locally termed as “Bangla Batton”<sup>1</sup>. It’s a chouchala type single storey building. The general space arrangement is shown in the schematic diagram below (Fig: 02).

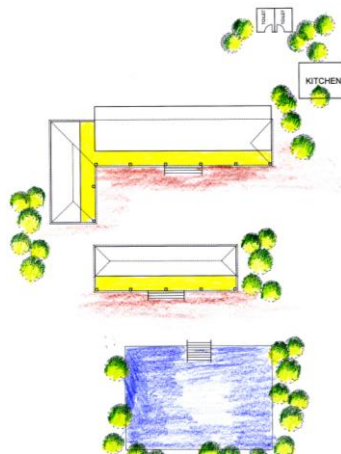


Fig-02: Typical traditional house layout

Fig-03: Central court yard

Fig-04: Front out house or formal living

This type of house form is the sensible outcome of the regions geo-climatic conditions. The space planning within the house is also initiated by the specific areas’ social behavior which is mostly conservative in terms of gender basis. Court yard or open to sky space (Fig: 03) in such

<sup>1</sup> “Bangla Batton has architectural significance as an urban vernacular archetype which is modified from indigenous primitive house with a mixture of Assamese house type and later adaptation has taken from colonial architecture.”- Sobhan, R. et al,

case acts as a buffer to maintain spatial segregation both visually and functionally from formal out house to private zone. The outhouse or ‘Bangla ghar’ is the frontal structure that approached directly from the road (Fig: 04). The existence of pond is undoubtedly a common feature for every house of this type.

**5.2. Modern or Londoni House of Sylhet:** In contrast to the visual aspect and spatial pattern of traditional houses, a prototype of British Bungalow pattern duplex, locally termed as Londoni house was started to be erected by the Diaspora community of Sylhet in their villages of origin. Starting from the proportion, scale and material to the spatial arrangements of such houses are all remain as a striking contrast to the original house of their own in the village. The conceptual diagram of such house pattern is described in Fig: 05. The space higherarchi of the modern house form is a compact one excluding the central court yard. The compactness of such type is not for land crisis, but for representing the so called status by showing foreign interpretation of home.

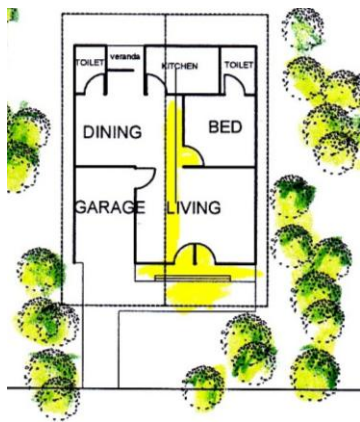


Fig-05: Typical Modern or Londoni House

Fig-06: Sudden Modern presence amidst of Village

Fig-07: All house contain a car porch and garage

### 5.3. Case studies: Physical analysis of selected house forms

The selected case studies of seven houses for this research are of two categories in terms of space arrangements; 01) Traditional house or Bangla Batton 02) Modern or Londoni House. These are sometimes individual building types in a single compound and some cases both types are located in the same property area.

The plans of **Traditional houses** (shown in figure: 08, 09, 10) reveal the spatial arrangement of such types. Circulation is shown in yellow color for each plan. These three house forms comprise of some identical features. The first two plans are of the houses from flat area of Rampasha Union of Bishwanath Upazilla, the third one is in a hilly terrain of Ronkeli village in Golapganj Upazilla. All three show some similarities in planning sequence; like having a central space or buffer zone for maintaining spatial higherarchi in order to respect privacy. Two house plans of flat land (Fig: 8 & 9) have a moderately spacious court yard whereas the other (Fig: 10) shows intelligent management of contour to ensure same privacy by elevating more restricted zone in upper level. Distributions of open spaces are the main linkage to the functional blocks of the house types. Service areas usually remained detached from the main served areas, but concern of comfort for household members are prioritized to attach the service zone in immediate adjacent to the residential zone.



Fig: 08

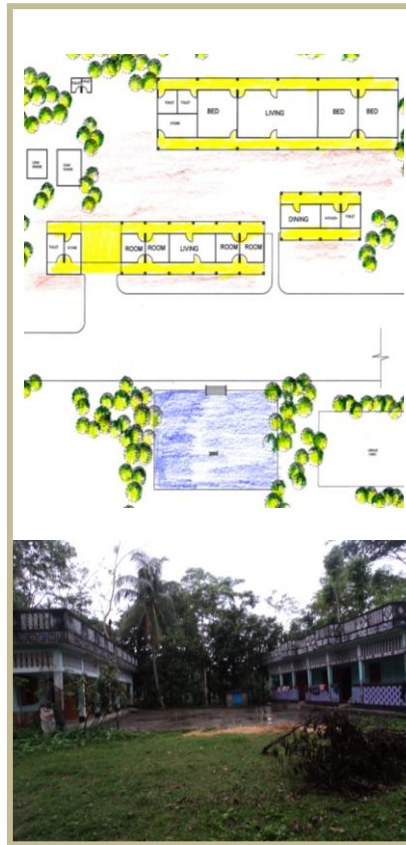


Fig:09

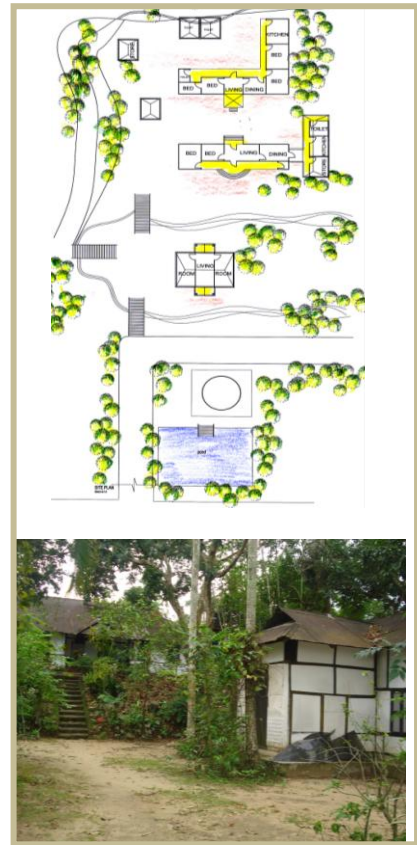


Fig:10

The approach of traditional houses are two ways; one through formal out house and the other through court yard varying with the person entering with different social status and personal relationship with the dwellers of that house. Thus social behavior of the Sylhet region, a more conservative one is well established with house form. Regardless land type, whether its flat or hilly, the spatial linkage is always assured with traditional setback from space to other. The advantages of hilly area for traditional houses are well sorted by leveling the functional blocks in different layer to achieve same spatial aspects of that in flat areas (Fig: 11 & 12-showing section).



Fig:11 (spatial segregation of space by vertical zoning of functions)



Fig:12 (In flat land the in between buffer space is maintained )

Now analyzing the plans of **Individual Modern Houses** from the case studies (Figure: 13 and 14), a strong variation of planning is observed from the traditional one. The modern Londoni houses are organized with a compact functional arrangement where circulation is bare minimum. Frontal approach of the house states visually the internal space arrangement (Fig: 13-a & 14-a). As compact in planning, required functional spaces are arranged vertically, therefore providing a central lofty double height space immediate after the entry (Fig: 13-b). Front façade having ornamental columns and foreign finish materials; like marble (Fig: 13-c & 14-c) are representing the alienation of such house forms in Sylhet where vernacular architecture of traditional building

materials more environment friendly. Even the climatic issue of heavy rainfall that predominantly govern the overall roofing system of local houses are absent mostly in this type except in the entrance porch.

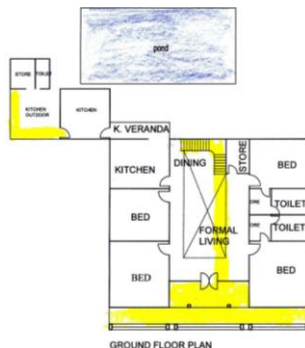


Fig-13: Plan



Fig-13(a): Front Façade



Fig- 13(b): Formal Living in a double height space



Fig-13(c): Entry porch showing decorative column

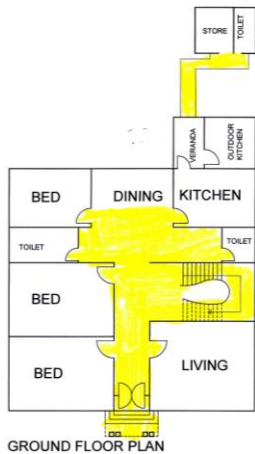


Fig-14: Plan



Fig-14(a): Front Façade



Fig- 14(b): Foyer



Fig-14(c): Stair from foyer to Upper floor

Again other two sample houses which bare the both of **Traditional and Modern type** within the same territory of the property (Fig: 15 & 16) have some scope to analyze the comparative issues considering each types planning and spatial organization in terms of approach road and connectivity with site. The first type of such case (Fig-15, 15-a) is arranged in a manner that took the advantage of setback of the site to enhance visual connectivity with the house from approach road. The remaining of the traditional part of the house is on the front of the compound as is now occupied with care takers' family.

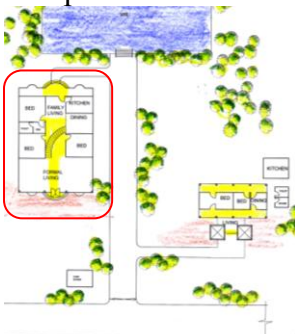


Fig-15: Plan in red mark shows the modern house



Fig-15(a): In site Approach road to the house



Fig-15(b): Car porch of the duplex modern house



Fig-16: Plan

The second type of such modern house in a traditional compound is also arranged in a way to be approached directly from the road to straight inside the house. This isolated house pattern, even a part of the traditional unit, doesn't bear any spatial connectivity with the remaining zone (Fig: 16- red area indicates modern house). Rather the rear part of the area having traditional unit, shows a well connected functional layout of its own.



Fig-16(a): Two separate approaches to both house types



Fig-16(b): Modern house



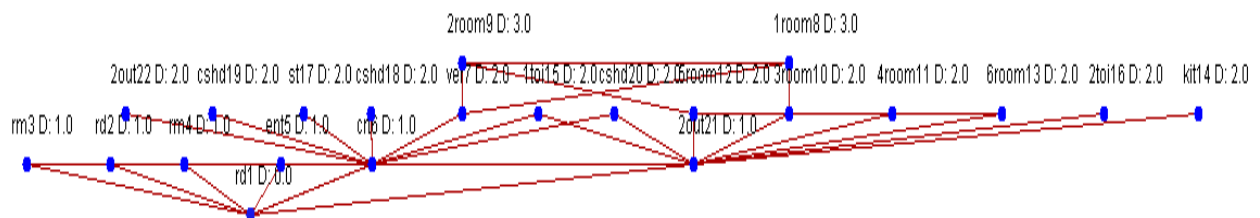
Fig-16(c): Rear part of Traditional court yard

## 06. Syntactic Analysis of the spatial pattern of selected house forms:

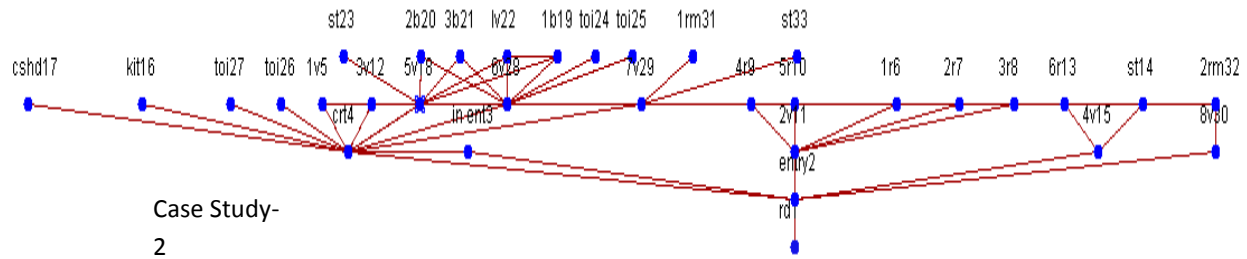
Space syntax analysis identifies the space-function inequalities in the configuration of houses (Guney and Wineman, 2008). The ordering of integration(RRA) values suggest a consistent pattern which is called 'inequality genotypes' and can reflex the underlying socio-cultural logic of the ordering of functions in a spatial pattern(Nezhad and Bastani, 2012).

In the house form of Sylhet two distinct characters is found in physical analysis, the traditional house form and the imposing Londoni houses of Modern type. This section will try to show the underlying relation between these two distinct types of spaces. Syntactic analysis of the seven cases altogether from contoured topographic zone and the flat land, therefore helped to identify the spatial hierarchy of these houses and the social hierarchy as well. Here justified graph analysis is the key approach for syntactic measures and the graph is termed as tree.

Case study one and two (Fig: 8 & 9 respectively) are situated in the flat topographic zone. In both cases the highest integration found in the internal court. In case study-1 this value is 5.5 which show it is a highly integrated space. And in case study-2 this value is 4. These spaces are in a shallow layer. The outhouse is one step deep from the connecting street. In both cases, the living unit is in the deepest layer in this layout. But all the spaces are integrated to the courtyard and can be accessed in between. Both the trees are shallow bushy trees having many branches.

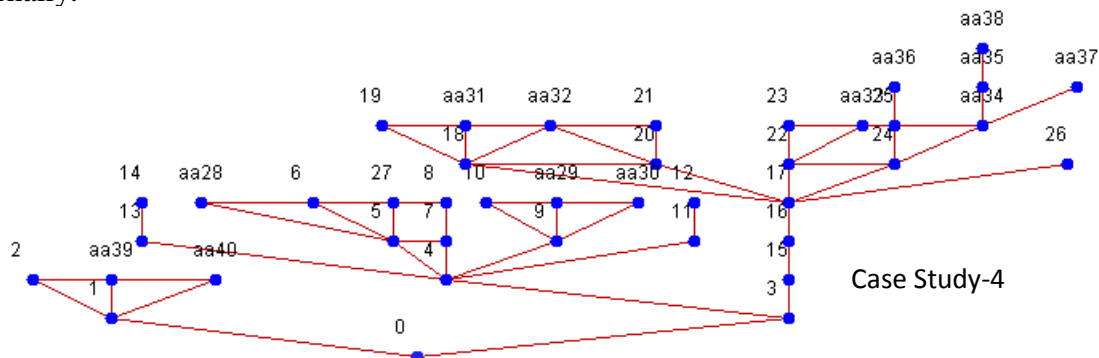


Case-Study-1



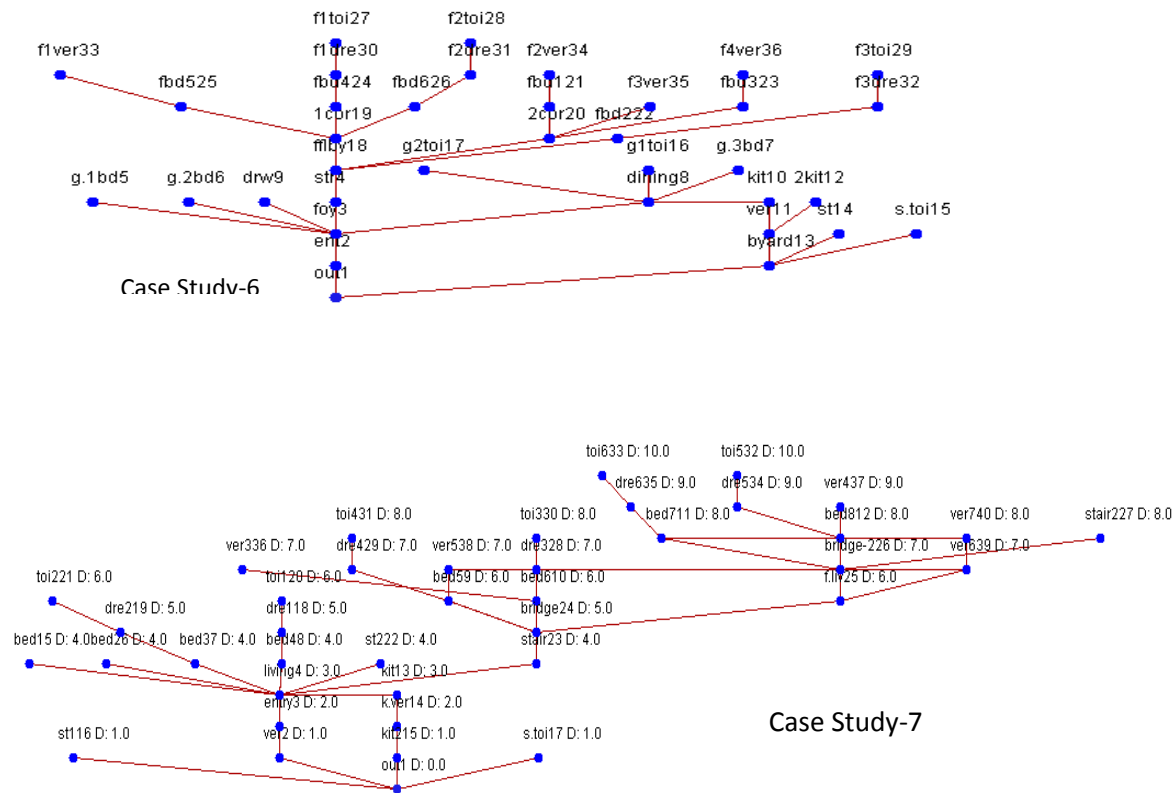
In both spaces all the internal spaces are distributed in rings with the internal courtyard. This courtyard is making segregation of exterior to the private interior space. All the functional spaces are non-distributed and connected to the courtyard, but the living zone is much distributed within one or more rings and connected to the courtyards. This sharing of living spaces shows the uncomplicated simple living pattern of the inhabitants.

In case study- 3 and case study-4 (Fig: 10 & 16 respectively) the traditional houses are set over the hillock. The out houses are in the lower layer and the inner house is in the upper layer of the hill. In these two cases the topography distinguished the spatial hierarchy. Therefore the house seems much deep than the traditional houses of the flat land. Case study-4 is eight layers deep from the connecting street, it is a deep sequential tree with three separated deep branches that carries the spaces of three layers of the hill. In this layout the court is the most integrated space. The rooms of different layers are distributed internally in inter connected rings and also with the court. But the transitional space from one layer of the hill to the other layer remained non-distributed. The outhouse is completely segregated from the main house block and distributed internally.



Therefore it can be said that, the traditional living of Sylhet is much sharing. The inhabitants of the traditional houses share their living spaces with one another. But these spaces are restricted for the visitors as the access remained non-distributed with the outdoor.

On the other hand the Londoni houses (case study -6 & 7 which are in fig:14 & 13 respectively) show totally different order in spatial layout. In these buildings the living spaces are segregated in deep sequential tree. Only the service spaces are distributed in external rings with the outdoor. Other than this all the spaces are segregated non distributed space. The highest integration value is found in the circulation spaces.



## 07. Remarks:

The space syntax analysis shows the social transformation due to urban migration. In traditional type of houses the internal residential spaces are distributed among themselves which indicates the sharing tendency of the inhabitants in living zone and functional spaces remained non-distributed segregated space in a deep layer. The service zone is separated from the living zone. On the other hand, in Londoni houses, the living spaces remain in non distributed deep sequence and the functional spaces remain distributed with the outdoor. The dependency of outsiders for different household functions has been increased in modern living. The living spaces are situated in the deep layer in the tree and are highly segregated ensuring strong privacy even with the adjacent room. This is an imposing character totally opposite to the traditional living.

## 08. Conclusion:

From above analysis it is seen that the urban migration brought a completely different environment in the villages of Sylhet which is unfamiliar to the traditional living. The dwellers of these houses accepted the transformation but kept their traditional living as it was. So it can be said that, the new Londoni houses remain as a new superimposed structure that transformed the vernacular integrated and distributed living spaces to segregated non-distributed spaces. Pattern of social interaction has been changed. Thus the spatial hierarchy has got a new character in Londoni houses.

In conclusion it can be said that, Urban Migration of Sylhet has many impacts on socio-economic and cultural strata of its traditional life-style of people and society. It has influenced

gradually even their way of living to some extent. The traditional house forms are having alien addition to their same compound representing a far, far away culture.

## 09. Reference:

---

- i Gardner, K. ,“Lives in Motion: the life-course, movement and migration in Bangladesh”, 2009
- ii Skeldon, R., University of Sussex , “Linkages between Internal and International Migration”, 2006
- iii Sobhan, R. et al, “ The Architecture of ‘Bangla Batton’ Houses in Sylhet City: An Ethnographical Study on Vernacular House Form, 2013
- iv Nihar Ranjan Roy, Bangalir Itihash, 1956.
- V. Hiller & Hanson, Social Logic of Space, 1986
- vi. Bandapaddhay, Abir, Space Syntax — A Tool For Understanding Spatial Organization and its Change Over Time, 2007.
- vii. Sobhan Rezwan, Saha Koushik, Sustainability in Architectural Built form of Sylhet region in contact of cultural ethnicity, ICETCESD 2014
- viii. Rashid Rumana, Traditional House of Bangladesh: Typology of house according to materials and location, Virtual Conference on Sustainable Architectural Design and Urban Planning, AsiaSustainabilityNet.upc.edu September 15-24, 2007.
- ix. Al-Ali N. & K. Koser, New Approaches to Migration, Transitional Communities & the transformation of Home, Routledge, London, 2002.
- X. Hillier, B. *et al.* “Ideas are in things: the application of the space syntax method to discovering house genotypes.” “Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design.Vol.14.” 1987: 363-385.
- xi. Metcalfe, T. R. “Architecture and the representation of empire: India, 1860-1910.” “Representations 6”: 37-65.
- Xii. Tasneem Siddiqui, Migration as a livelihood strategy of the poor: the Bangladesh case, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Dhaka University, Bangladesh, 2003