

## THE OTLA: A 'FREE SPACE' IN BALKRISHNA DOSHI'S ARANYA SETTLEMENT

Krystina Kaza

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An Otla is a vernacular element that occurs in some traditional Gujarati homes. It has many variations known by many names in other parts of India, but generally performs the same function: it marks the transition from street to house, usually with a change in elevation, and often with a change in material. According to architect Balkrishna Doshi, it serves as the meeting place of the sacred (house) and the profane (street). It serves as a space where neighbors meet informally, and completes the street and the house, bestowing upon each a unique character.

This paper will discuss Dr. Doshi's Aranya housing settlement in Indore, India, focusing on the otla of the Economically Weak Sectors (EWS) houses. The paper will analyze and compare examples of EWS^otla to determine the extent to which design and functional diversity pervade this common element. It will examine the extent to which Aranya's otla introduce new ideas, uses, and forms to a traditional element. The paper will also discuss the role of the otla within the context of the larger settlement, particularly the way in which it creates a unique street character for the EWS neighborhoods. In examining these issues, I will consider Dr. Doshi's Aranya settlement to be an unusual instance of 'designed vernacular'. While his EWS demonstration housing constitutes a fine

example of an architect-designed vernacular infused with modernity, the majority of EWS houses were built without the involvement of an architect. Builders constructed them according to resident's needs and the spatial and programmatic restrictions of the site. Because Aranya is a sites-and-services settlement, some amount of freedom was granted to residents within the tight control of its master plan. This freedom, I will argue, manifests itself most intensely within the small space of the otla.

*Keywords:*

*Doshi, Aranya, Otla, Vernacular.*