The Relationships Between Socio-Economic, Political and Cultural Profiles of the People and House-Forms:
Sawantwadi, Maharashtra, India During the British era.

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Abstract
India is a country with diversity in climate, socio-economic status, political background and culture. Thus, the uniqueness of each region resides in its knowledge system in the form of its traditional architecture and climate responsive characteristics. Domestic architecture helps understand the socio-economic, political, and culture of any place. In order to understand housing in any particular place, one needs to understand the governing factors that have shaped it, such as the socio-economic status, political background and culture. These parameters exist at two levels: the macro and the micro. The macro level relates to planning & architectural aspects while the micro level relates to art, architectural details and social practices affecting the built habitat.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between historic houses of Sawantwadi during the British era (1865 to 1947) and the socio-economics -political and cultural aspects. The paper discusses different socio-economic-political & cultural aspects of the people of the Sawantwadi town of British era and its relationship with the house-forms.

This Research employs data collection through documentary surveys, focus group discussions and observations. The paper concludes that the traditional house-forms in Sawantwadi have strong connections with socio-economic -political & cultural profile of the residents and that it has enabled effective, efficient, economical and user-friendly house forms.

Keywords: House form, socio-economic -political aspects, culture.

1.0 Introduction

Sawantwadi is situated in the southern part of the coastal Maharashtra (*Konkan*[1]), within its administrative set-up. It is a *taluka*[2] in the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra, India. It has a tropical climate with temperature varying between 27 °C and 34 °C.

The history of Sawantwadi is very rich. The state was earlier ruled by the Maratha

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[1] *Konkan*: Coastal region of Maharashtra in Western India.
[2] A *taluka* is a subdivision of a district, comprising a number of villages for revenue purposes.

dynasty Sawant-bhonsale. Historically, the region was very well-linked to distinct places through ports (eg. Vengurla port) long before the arrival of the Portuguese. These ports were used for trade regularly and were one of the main sources of transport.
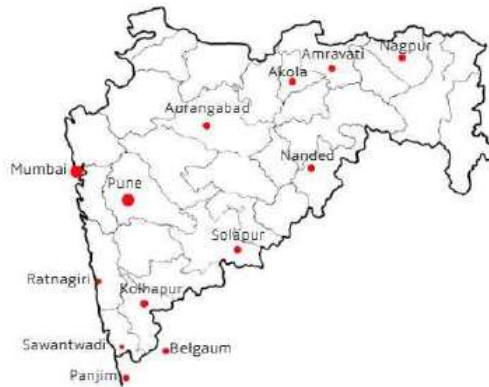
Fig. 1: Maharashtra map showing location of Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

On 7th April 1865, Sawantwadi state became a British protectorate. The rise of the British and the declining glory of the Marathas resulted in unstable conditions. On the same day, Sawant-bhonsale (king of Sawantwadi) and the British reached an agreement and obtained trade concessions in each other's territory. According to this agreement, the *Wadikars*[3] gave lot of trade rights to the British in Sawantwadi. As a result, if the goods had to be transported from one state to another, the British were also given a license to do so. Due to this agreement, British traders started trading freely in and out of the state.

Sawantwadi, the capital of the Sawantwadi Sansthan was well-known for making wooden objects like Children's toys and *Ganjifa*[4].The wood required for making wooden products was found in abundance here. However, the demands for these items were low. *Ganjifa* playing cards were of two types, 1) Hukumi 96 and 2) Dashavatari 120 cards. *Ganjifa* was started in Sawantwadi Sansthan, for the first time in 1760.

In 1949, Sawantwadi state merged with India and became part of Bombay and then Ratnagiri. On 1st May 1981, it was announced to be a *taluka* in the Sindhudurg district.

The selected research area of Sawantwadi falls within the *Western Ghats region*[5], which is one of the UNESCO's listed World Heritage sites (as natural site).The historic houses of this place are products of the socio-economic- political and cultural aspects; it is sustainable and cost effective too. An analysis of these would yield a richer understanding of how socio-economic, political and cultural aspects have shaped it. Due to the change in these aspects, the historic house forms are becoming vulnerable. Today, apathy of climate and environment change is followed by change in the character of the place.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between historic houses of Sawantwadi during the British era (1865 to 1947) and the socio-economics, political and cultural aspects. The objective is to study the influence of the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects on the domestic architecture of the place and time.

2.0 Review of Literature

Amos Rapoport (1969) in his book 'House Form and Culture' has discussed the form-giving parameters for a house in the vernacular context. He has argued that of all different parameters like climate, knowledge system, function etc., socio-cultural considerations are the

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[3] *Wadikars* are the residents of Sawantwadi.

[4] *Ganjifa* is a type of playing cards and are traditionally hand-painted.

[5] *Western Ghats region* are the Sahyadri hills range running parallel to western coast of India.

most influencing in giving a form to ta house. According to him, culture is responsible for giving certain type of forms.

In the Indian context, lot of work is available on *Haveli*[6] or courtyard. V.S Pramar's (1990) book on the *Havelis*-Wooden houses and Mansions of Gujarat describes wooden houses as the showcases of fine wooden art in the region. These wooden houses are good examples of traditional lifestyles, customs, and beliefs of its occupants.

When we talk about the domestic architecture of Maharashtra, two works should be considered. One is the work by M.S Mate (2008) on the architecture of Maharashtra and other is G'K. Kanhere (2013) on the courtyard houses of Pune. Both discuss various aspects of traditional architecture and socio-cultural factors, which shape domestic architecture.

3.0 Methodology
Multiple strategies and methods are used to collect data. The strategies are,
   I. Interpretive - Historical Strategy
   II. Case Study Strategy

I. Interpretive - historical strategy
Part 1: Analysis of archival writings.
The interpretive-historical strategy focuses on processing the available quantitative data from secondary sources. Different data sources, which are available in native and English language are categorized as follows:
   a) **Official records:** These include sources like the Gazetteer, survey reports and other publications by the government.
   b) **Descriptive writing:** These include travelogues, guides, memories, etc. written with the purpose of describing the town and its houses to a general audience.
   c) **Prescriptive writing:** These are written by authors conversant with the field of house design and construction in order to increase the awareness about the subject.

Part 2: Field inventory of extant house form.
All the extant houses from the British era of Sawantwadi were considered as data and are collected from the revenue department (i.e. from property tax department).
Based on the visual reckon survey, following houses were eliminated from data.
   a) Houses with no proper access and permissions.
   b) Houses built with multi-owners.
   c) Houses dilapidated beyond recognition.
   d) Houses that had been extensively modified and do not reveal its original characteristics.

After elimination, 110 extant houses were recorded from the British era of Sawantwadi and were considered as the sample. Photographic inventory for these samples were prepared and further analysis was done. Based on the identified characteristics of the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects, these samples were categorized into four major types.

The types are based on house forms influenced by
   1. Political affiliations.
   2. Cultural aspects.
   3. Socio-economic status.
   4. Others.

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[6] *Haveli* is one of the traditional house forms of India.

Table: 1 Identified characteristics of house form types
Source: Author

Identified Characteristics		Methodology/ Justification
I. Political affiliations		
1	Family background	Multiple-strategy method
2	Architectural Characteristics of the house form	
	• Size of the plot area is bigger with more built up area. • Consists of one or two courtyards. • More rooms with bigger span compared to other types. • Consists of *Kacheri* (office)/*Darbar* (meeting room) area, *Sopa* (covered veranda), social gathering space, inviting entry, more than one wooden staircase. • Houses with large square or circular pillars for front veranda, large & good quality of wooden sections, mostly imported from abroad. • Bigger size main door with decorative frame. • Coloured glass windows with iron barred grills. • Cantilevered balconies, use of steel sections etc. • Wall thickness is more than 1 meter, constructed with stone, mud, lime, jaggery etc. • Use of aesthetic elements like decorative facia and arches.	
II. Cultural aspects		
1	Family background	Multiple-strategy method
2	Architectural Characteristics of the house form	
	• Planning as per *Vastu Shastra* • Provision of front verandas for visitors. • Consists of one *Majghar* house plan. • Majority of houses for particular Brahmin community have two kitchen concepts and *Devghar* is near the vegetarian kitchen. • *Nahani* (Bathroom) is provided near the kitchen (as per cultural aspects, kitchen can only be entered after bathing). • Walls are constructed with mud and floors are finished with cow dung. • Women-centric spaces are provided at the back of the house.	
III. Socio-economic status		
1	Family background	Multiple-strategy method
2	Architectural Characteristics of the house form	
	• Two *Majghar* (Hall) planning is the main character of this type. • *Padavi,* the back side varanda contain various equipment. • *Loota* is provided with a wooden jail. • Use of aesthetic elements like decorative facia, and arches • Guest bedroom is provided at the front (entry from *Loota*).	
IV. Others		
1	Family background	
2	Architectural Characteristics of the house form	

	• Small in size with limited rooms. • Constructed with mud and locally available materials. • Small staircase, which leads to the attic. • Linear planning.	Multiple-strategy method

Limitation

This research does not carry out any depth analysis of materials, or any investigation by physical intervention in the building (scraping, removing layers, collecting samples, opening joints, etc.) It also does not involve any techniques like chemical analysis. All this is beyond the scope of methodology.

II. Case Study Strategy

Multiple case studies consider socio-economic, political, cultural, architecture and technological aspects with maximum diversity but evenly spread over the period of study was the basis of selection of cases. This data was derived from the published biographies, memories and other documents. Wherever no published data is available, surviving family members became the data source.

The second type of data is architectural characteristics of the selected houses. The houses themselves are the sources of this data. Additionally, archival photographs, documents, or drawings were also used as a data source. Data for the case study is collected from the following sources:
   a) **Interviews:** In-depth open-ended interview of the owner's descendant is conducted and data is identified as per the heads and codes mentioned in the table no 2. Content analysis of the transcripts are used to extract relevant data from the conversation.
   b) **Field Observations:** Documentation of the house.
   c) **Document Analysis:** Archival documents related to the owner/ family/ house if found.

Table 2: Type of content.
Source: Author

S. No.	Type of content (heads)	Code
1	Family background.	FB
2	Economical & social status of family	ES
3	Lifestyle	LS
4	Traditional customs & values	TCV
5	Environmental values of house form.	EV

4.0 Socio-economic and political profiles of the residents of Sawantwadi.
4.1 Social life

The Sawantwadi society was generally stratified in terms of caste, economic status, occupation and gender. The residents of Sawantwadi follow the historically rooted occupations, based on community definitions. For example, the different caste groups are based on occupations. As a result, every caste was independent from the other and specific customs, traditions, and practices of a particular caste existed. As per the census 1871, a total 21 castes or community divisions were recorded belonging to different traditions and culture (Fig.2). Based on these different occupations, people formed into small groups called *wadi*[7].

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[7] *Wadi* is a small settlement comprising with majority of people belonging to the same caste and occupation.
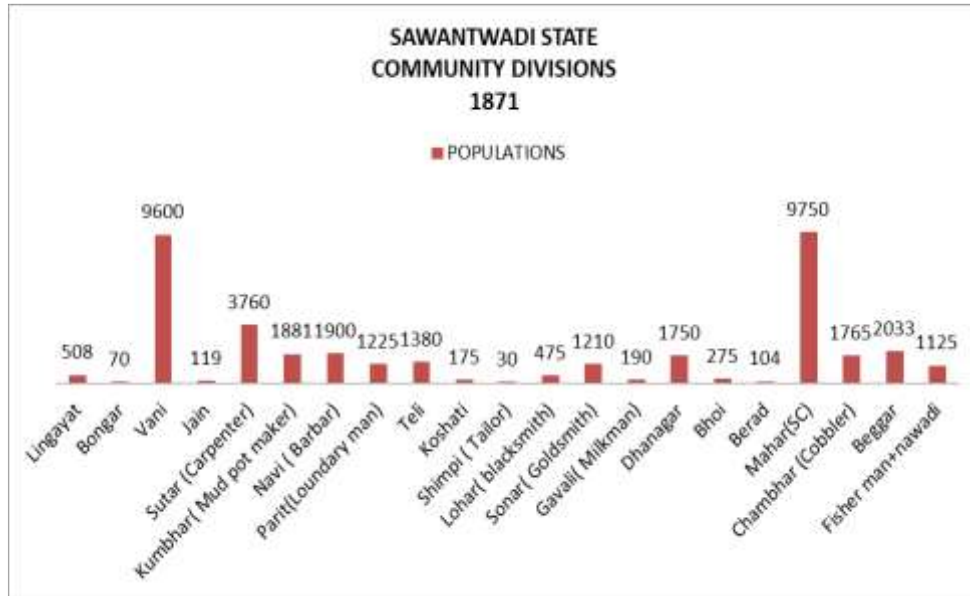
Fig. 2: Sawantwadi state community divisions 1871.
Source: Author

4.2 Social status of women

Women were considered weaker and less important than men in all aspects and were looked down upon. They were neither given much attention nor were their education taken into consideration. However, the women of the royal family were educated and used to take part in politics.

4.2.1 Dev-dasi (*Bhavin[8]*)

Bhavin traditions were found in this period. A proper set of rules were made for *Bhavin* traditions by the administrators. *Bhavin* was selected by the administrator or member of the royal family. It was necessary to take permissions from the king to function as a *Bhavin*. In some cases, the king used to give a salary to them. This remained in practice until the 19th Aug 1931, when the rule of anti-*devdasi* (*Devdasi Pratibandhak Kayda*) was enforced.

4.2.2 Purchase and sale of *Kunabi[9]*

Kunabi was bought and sold in the Sawantwadi state. *Kunabini[10]* had no place in the society and were treated as slaves. All kinds of household and farm work were done by them.

4.3 Education

During the 19th century, traditional education system was common in the society. Father's skill and knowledge was passed to his children. In 1838, the first school started in Sawantwadi palace for the prince, and the children of *Sardars[11]* & *Vatandars[12]*. Higher income group started appointing private teachers *'Paantoji'* for their children. *Modi[13]* reading-writing, maths, and the reconstruction of account were added to their syllabi. In 1852, the first library was established. In 1859, the first English school was started. In 1919, 104 schools were

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[8]*Bhavin* is a selected woman, who gave up all their social as well as personal life rights and dedicated their lives to God.Also called as *Devdasi.*

[9] *Kunabi* is a caste found in Konkan region, and the male belongs to this caste is called as *Kunabi.*

[10] *Kunabini* is female belongs to *Kunabi caste.*

[11] *Sardar* is a chief or leader of a group.

[12] *Vatandars* is a title given to landowners, particularly in Maharashtra.
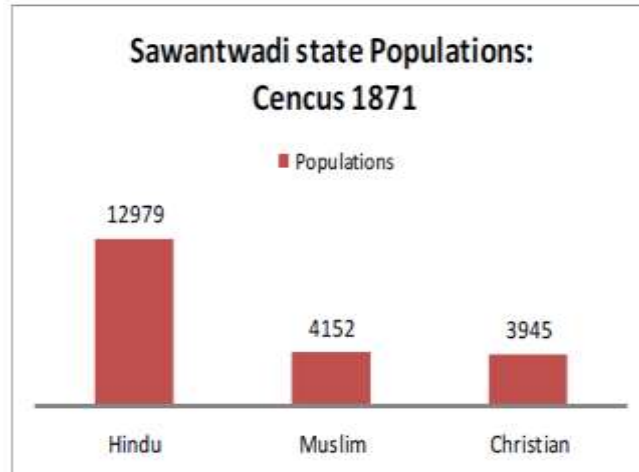
[13] *Modi* is a type of script.

functioning. Education on technical fields like carpentry, blacksmith, bamboo work, handicraft etc. was offered as free education within the family or the same caste.

4.4 Population
As per the census 1871(Fig.3), 3/4 population were Hindu's in the Sawantwadi.

Fig. 3: Sawantwadi state population: Census 1871.
Source: Author

4.5 Economy
The Sawantwadi Sansthan in the early phase of time-line had agriculture as it's primary employment source. The main crops consisted of coconut, coffee, cashew nuts, black pepper and *kokum*[14].Tobacco farming/trading was also one of the important sources of income. Various taxes such as the land tax, coconut tax, betel nut tax, jaggery tax, jack fruit tax, tax on tobacco etc were enforced. The professional taxes included carpentry and fabrication etc. Tax on toll plaza, on punishments, on remarriage of divorcee, and on re-entry into the caste were also imposed. The barter system was followed where goods were purchased in exchange with grains rather than the conventional money.

During the British era, Sawantwadi has faced many financial crisis due to heavy floods (1874), draught (1876-77) and a locust attack (1904). In 1885, a legislative committee was appointed by the British for smooth working of Sawantwadi Sansthan.

As per the Fig.4, the Jain community was largely involved in businesses. There were five classes of local merchants in Sawantwadi. These included *Vani*[15], *Lingayat*[16], *Jain*[17],*Bogar*[18], and *Jaangam*[19] etc. *Vani* who came from North Karnataka years ago and settled in this state.

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[14] *Kokum*: It is a plant growing in Sawantwadi and surrounding area, which also becomes part of local cuisine.
[15] *Vani* – People belonging to Vaishya-Vani sub-caste in Hindu mainly involves in retail business also known as Banyan.
[16] *Lingayat*, - It is caste, majorly native to Karnataka state in India, who worships Lord Shiva.
[17] *Jain* -A Jain is a follower of Jainism, a religion of India.
[18] *Bogar* was a South Indian by birth, belonging to the goldsmith caste.
[19] *Jangam* is a sub-caste in Hinduism.
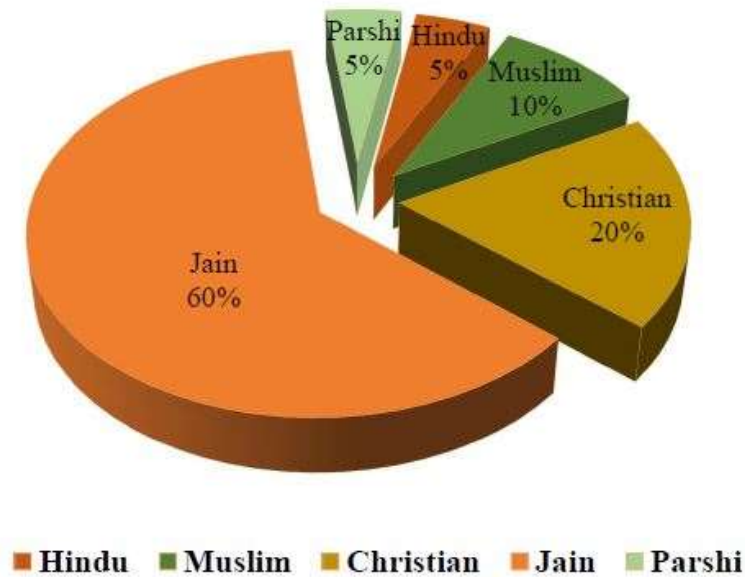
Fig. 4: Percentage of people involved in business.
Source: Author

The town of Sawantwadi had many small factories manufacturing chess and various kinds of toys as well as wooden utensils. Colourful goods including idols of cow horns, anointing vessels, etc., were very popular in the state and artisans were recognised and appreciated abroad.

Several natural calamities in the consecutive years in the area impacted crop yields thus creating a base for out-migration. The British ruled nearby states were developing rapidly. Construction of railways, an industry, cantonment etc., in these states required a huge number of labourers. Therefore, calamities and availability of occupations in the nearby states made the residents to migrate from Sawantwadi. In fact, the Brahmin of Sawantwadi also migrated to Pune (Brahmin ruled Maratha estate) in search of better social status and growth. Less education, low development rate, and lesser health care facilities became the reasons for out-migration. The rate of out-migration increased as never before and that was due to above events.

5.0 Socio-economic and political profile and domestic architecture.

Domestic architecture is an example for understanding the socio-economic, political and culture of any place. In order to understand housing, one needs to understand the governing factors such as the socio-economic status, political background and the culture that have shaped it. These factors help in the evolution of different types of house-forms of any place.

The layout of the house-form of Sawantwadi is also influenced by socio-economic as well as political and cultural profiles of residents. The housing type of Sawantwadi is a result of the socio-economic, political and culture of the residents.

Fig. 5.c: Section of house of the elite class, Sawantwadi.
Source: Author
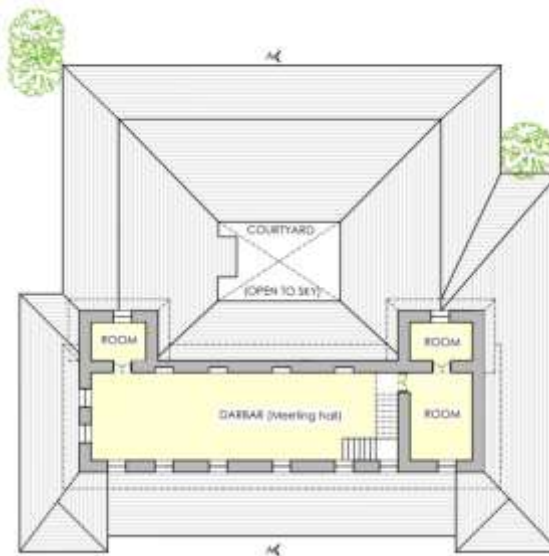
Fig. 5.b: First floor plan of house of the elite class, Sawantwadi.
Source: Author
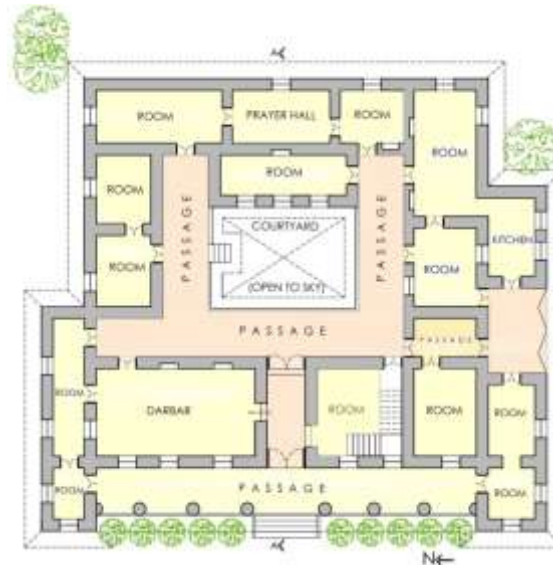
Fig. 5.a: Ground floor plan of house of the elite class, Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

The royal families enjoyed the highest social status due to their positions. The house-form which was more influenced by political affiliation consisted of one or two *courtyards* with different functional rooms around. The first *courtyard* is for the public use, social gathering and was also used as an office normally called as *Kacheri*[20]. *Kacheri* area had separate arrangements in walls for the storage called *paadtal.* The daily business was conducted in the *Sopa*, which is a physical form of a covered veranda. In some cases, *Sopa* is supported with huge square or circular pillars constructed with stones and mud as materials. These pillars gave the impact of royal or political background (Fig.6). The windows of the royal family houses consisted of colour glass panes, which were imported from eastern countries.

Fig.6: Huge pillars of *sopa* & colored glass windows of houses of the elites.
Source: Author: Kazi wada Sawantwadi.

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[20] *Kacheri* is an office place.

Fig.7: Inner courtyard of house specially meant for ladies.
Source: Author: Kazi wada Sawantwadi

Different rooms were placed around the inner courtyard like the *Balantinichi-kholi* (Delivery room), the kitchen, store room etc. *Balantinichi-kholi,* a dedicated room was provided for the new born babies and nurturing mothers. The room was located and designed in a way to provide the required warmth, natural light, ventilation and privacy to the users. Windows and ventilators of this room were placed at a higher side of the wall to avoid any vision from outside the room. Women-centric spaces were at the back of the house and they were mostly not allowed to be in the front part. There were a dedicated space/dark room for the menstruating women away from the hustle of the house.

The house planning in Sawantwadi is simple and functional. The geometry of the *Konkani-house*[21] plan is based on square/rectangle models. The activities needed to be accommodated in the planning of the house for particular seasons, religions and occupations. The culture, tradition, daily activities in household, climate divides *Konkani house* into different spaces like (Fig.8.c) *Aangan/Khal*[22] , *Loota*[23] ,*Majghar*[24] , *Swayampakghar*[25] , *Devghar*[26] , *Adgalichi kholi*[27] , *Balantinichi- kholi*, *Padavi*[28] , *Paras*[29] , *Maangar*[30] , *Gotha*[31] , Detached toilet. The activities such as harvesting the fruits, drying, cutting, peeling, making by products or utilizing various parts of trees such as wood, leaves, and branches were manually carried out *in Aangan*. *Aangan* provided with *Tulsi Vrundhanvan*[32].

[21] *Konkani houses* are dwellings in coastal Maharashtra in Western India.

[22] *Aangan* is a front open space of the house.

[23] *Loota* is the transitional space that connects *Aangan* and *Majghar.*

[24] *Majghar* is main room located at the centre of the house.

[25] *Swayampakghar* is a cooking space provided in every house.

[26] *Devghar* is a residing space for god/goddess, where Hindu people perform prayers and rituals.

[27] *Adgalichi kholi* is the store room.

[28] *Padavi* (backside veranda) is the transitional space that connects *Majghar* and *Paras* (backyard).

[29] A *Paras* is the space at rear side of the house with *Gotha*, *Maangar* and detached toilet.

[30] *Maangar* is the covered space at rear side of the house for storage of farming equipment, grass and wood.

[31] *Gotha* is a cow shade.

[32] *Tulsi Vrundhavan*: In Hindu religion, it is a special structure constructed to grow *Tulsi* (Holy Basil) plant for worship.

Fig.8.c: Schematic section of House influenced by Socio-economic status at Sawantwadi.
1. Aagan 2.Loota 3.Majghar 4.Majghar (for female) 5. Padavi 6. Mala (Attic) 7.Paras 8.Tulsi
Vrundhavan
Source: Author
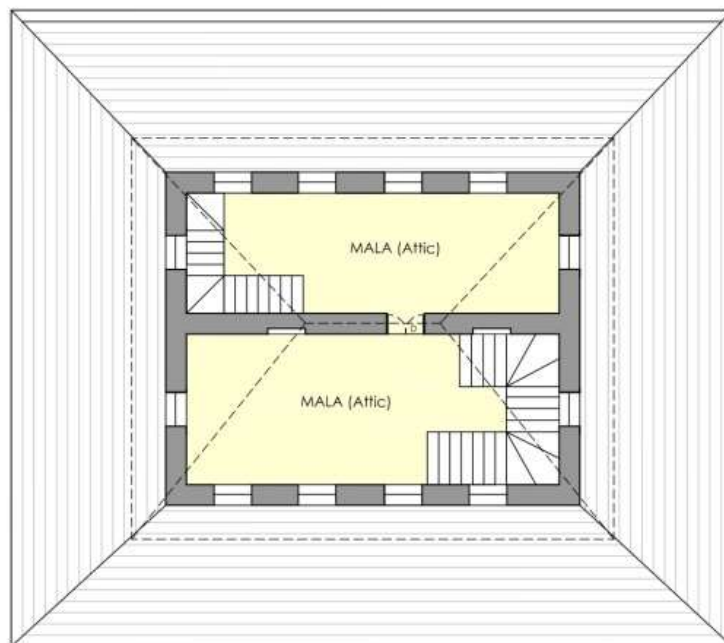
Fig.8.b: First floor plan of House influenced by Socio-economic status at Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

Loota is a space provided to cut off the direct entry to other spaces in the house. Entry for guest bedroom is provided through *Loota*. *Majghar(hall)* located at the centre of the house usually is a cool and dark room surrounded by other rooms.
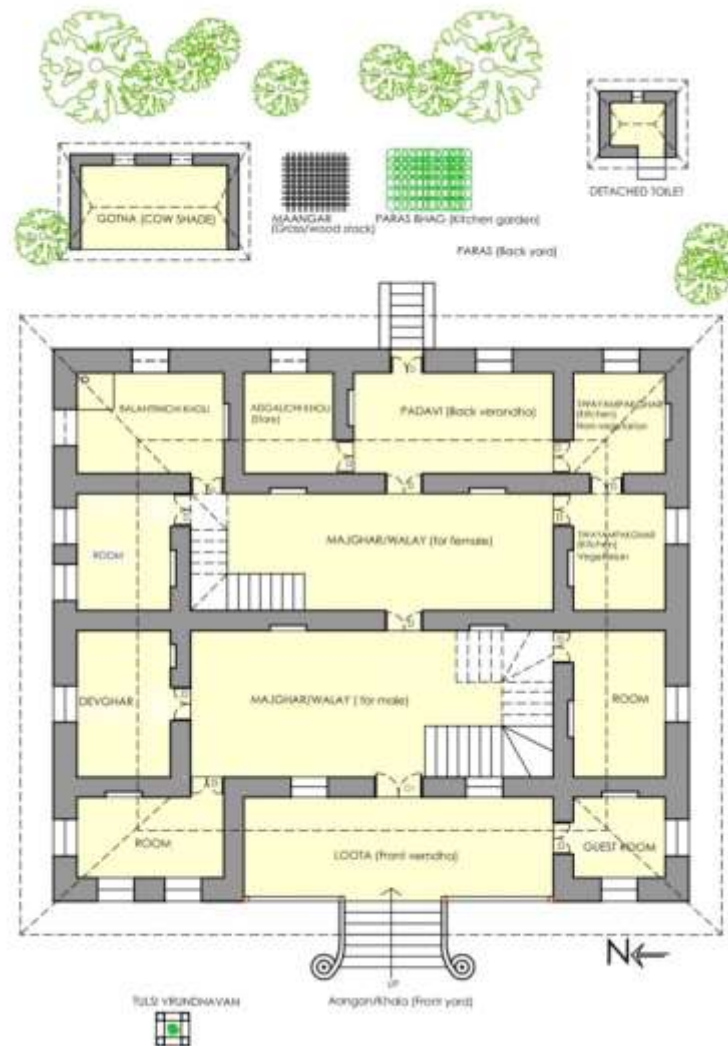
Fig.8.a: Ground floor plan of House influenced by Socio-economic status at Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

Two *Majghar* (Hall) planning is the main character of the house form influenced by socio-economic status.The first *Majghar* was used to welcome the guests or to host any other social activities. The second *Majghar* was normally used by ladies and was surrounded with *Balantinichi-kholi, Adgalichi kholi, Swayampakghar and Padavi. Padavi.* The back side veranda of the house layout was peculiar, containing various equipment for different purposes like, *jata*[33] for flour making, *ukkhan* for grounding *chillies, pata- varvanta*[34] for grounding the spices, *chul*[35] etc, used by ladies. Two wooden staircases were provided in the house; one is from the first *Majghar* used mainly by the visitors and the other is from the second *Majghar* used by the ladies.

The two-kitchen concept was observed in the few Brahmin community houses. One was for vegetarian cooking and the other was for for non-vegetarian. A worshiping place *Devghar* is always near to the vegetarian kitchen with a low level opening to provide *Naivedyam*[36] for daily ritual, which is part of the daily ritual. *Devghar* was important and the

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[33] *Jata* is a traditional mini flour chakki.

[34] *Pata-varvanta* is term used in the state of Maharashtra. *Pata* referring to flat stone and *varvanta* referring to a cylindrical grinding stone.

[35] *Chul* is term used in the state of Maharashtra referring to traditional earthen cooking stove.

[36] *Naivedyam* is a food item offered to god/goddess as a ritual.

house could not be occupied until the *vastushanti* (house warming ceremony) had been performed and the *vastu*[37] idol was embedded under the *devghar*. The storeroom would contain enough grain required for a year while the *Maangar* would store a year's supply of timber used as fuel for cooking and heating water.

Fig.9.b: First floor plan of house form
Influence by culture aspects at Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

Fig.10.b: First floor plan of house form
of others
Source: Author

Fig.9.a: Ground floor plan of house form
Influence by culture aspects at Sawantwadi.
Source: Author

Fig.10.a: Ground floor plan of house form
of others
Source: Author

Detached toilet concept is seen in all houses, but this concept is changed due to the impact of British culture. Considering the change in technologies and materials, the iron-barred windows have crept in. They are a British era feature since no earlier buildings shows them. Arches and use of glass have been introduced by the British. Spanning of roofs with trusses is also the example of the changes in technology and modernization. Steel sections came to be

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[37] *Vastu* is a Structure/ Dwelling in a plot of land.

used as floor beams and joists. Use of cast iron building components; both decorative and structural, glass, factory made floor and roof tiles, sanitary ware, and plumbing apprentices are the changes seen in domestic buildings during the British era.

6.0 Religious Beliefs

In Sawantwadi, *Bhoomipuja*[38] is an auspicious moment, which was considered important before starting any construction work. This puja has respectful and emotional links to the traditions. *Bhoomipuja* is a ritual performed before commencing the construction work, with a belief of wiping out the ill-effects of *vastu* and seeking forgiveness for causing harm unknowingly to living organisms on that piece of land. Once the puja is completed, before beginning the actual construction, the chief of the mason (*Vishwakarma*) lays down the layout of the structure either on a slate or directly on the soil as the action of respect to the land.

At the beginning of the construction work, it is a tradition to start with the main door frame *'chowkat*[39]*'* puja. Every house is witnessed to have a wooden lintel with lord Ganesha carved on it (regionally known as *ganeshpatti*). *Umbartha*[40] is also a feature seen at the entrance of all houses, which is made from *Umbartree*[41] wood. It is believed to absorb all the negative energy while crossing and entering the house.

Cow dung and *gomutra*[42], were considered to be holy and signified purity. Once a week, the flooring in the house and sometimes the walls were also plastered with a thin layer of cow dung. *Gomutra*, sanctified with holy verses was sprinkled in the house using mango leaves to purify the environment. This tradition was also witnessed in Sawantwadi settlement during the British era.

7.0 Conclusions

This research paper concludes that Sawantwadi traditional house forms have strong connections with socio-economic, political and cultural profiles of the residents to evolve effective, efficient, economic and user-friendly house form. In fact, these aspects also create functional and Nature-friendly design. Hence, these houses are also called as "Medicinal Houses".

Reflection of the culture and tradition is seen in the lifestyle of the people of Sawantwadi, in every aspect and every space we encounter. The study revealed various examples where one can see lot of references in people's way of living, staying, working and house planning styles deriving inspiration from the history, tradition and culture of the place. However, certain change in lifestyle is witnessed as the reason being modernization, migration of youth to cities for work and education, technological advancements, etc.

House-forms also accepted exotic foreign features that made it aesthetically appealing on the one hand and on other hand show the influence of foreign rule, and influence of urban elements post-migration.

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[38] *Bhoomipuja* is a ritual performed before commencing the construction work.

[39] *Chowkat* is a frame of door or window.

[40] *Umbartha* is the plank, stone, or piece of timber that lies under a door.

[41] The scientific name of the Umber tree is the Ficus glomerata, also known as fig tree.

[42] *Gomutra:* Urine of cow.

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