**KEY WORDS:**
Marla House, Aesthetics, Perception

# Negotiations on the Facades of Marla Houses

**Priya Gupta**

Tekton Volume 12, Issue 1, June 2025, pp. 48 - 68

**ABSTRACT**

Chandigarh has been a canonical reference within modern architecture and planning in India and Le Corbusier's oeuvre. However, Chandigarh, from the premise of a new city post-independence, a new capital for a partitioned Punjab, a new home for partitioned migrants, or the role of the complete Capitol Project Team, including Indian counterparts beside and despite Le Corbusier, becomes visible at the actual site of habitation – the house. The private houses, known as the Marla houses, represent this complex palimpsest but are also unique because they were subjected to Development Controls, a set of aesthetic and volumetric regulations. They were organic and piecemeal but set a visually robust schema that bestowed an architectural identity of the Chandigarh Style and ensured the posterity of Chandigarh's modern architecture. This paper focuses on the evolution of the regulated façade of Marla house as a site of impositions and negotiations. The façade configuration has been analysed by conducting an architectural survey of houses – photographic documentation and architectural drawings; an archival study of the evolution of controls, and semi-structured interviews with residents (20), architects (7), experts (2) and stakeholders (7) in the local administration. The study of the facades of houses represents a revisionist history of Chandigarh's domestic architecture under the evolving imposed aesthetic regime.

**Priya Gupta**, PhD, currently an Associate Professor at Jindal School of Art and Architecture, OP Jindal Global University, completed her doctoral degree from Faculty of Architecture, CEPT, Ahmedabad. Her Ph.D. research analyses the impact of regulations on Chandigarh's private houses. She has been in academia for ten years, teaching and researching at CCA, Chandigarh, and briefly at CEPT, Ahmedabad. Her areas of interest are 20th-Century Modern Architecture, Design Pedagogy, Walkability in South Asian cities, and Chandigarh's revisionist history and everyday urban life.

priya.gupta@jgu.edu.in, priya.gupta.phd19@cept.ac.in

## Chandigarh - The Everyday City

Chandigarh's modernism, besides being rooted in principles of CIAM, neighbourhood unit, and Garden City, is layered with aspirations of nation-building, a new way of dignified living in independent India, negotiations with modernity via the colonial baggage, austerity in scarcity (KARIM, 2019), and the ideologies of multiple and contesting authorships (Perera, 2004) that came from a messy transnational collaboration (V. Prakash, 2016).

Chandigarh, therefore, is often seen as two cities, one of Le Corbusier's footprints - the Capitol Complex and the grand schema of planning, and one of the everyday city that borrows part of Corbusier's modernism, Jeanneret-Fry-Drew's contextual sensibilities and attempts by Indian counterparts like MN Sharma, SD Sharma, and Aditya Prakash to interpret and indigenise modern architecture. The simultaneity in negotiating the region's uniqueness and the universals of science is most visible in domestic architecture.

However, the discourse on its everyday practices, space use, and domestic architecture, accounting for almost 70 percent of private housing, has often been overshadowed by Corbusier's ideologies and his iconic public buildings in the city. There has been limited focus on the ground reality of the actual city-the city meant for the habitation of refugees, migrants, and officers, as well as everyday life, especially the living units-the houses-that are also Chandigarh. Houses in Chandigarh marked the modernization of domestic living through their spatial and aesthetic character. Besides the more known government housing, what makes private housing unique for a modern planned city for a post-independent country in the 1950s is that it came under Development Controls. Because of the development controls, the façades of the private row houses reflect a unique architectural character representing an architectural development post-independence as well as Chandigarh's everyday architecture.

This paper focuses on the impositions and indigenity of controls visible on the façades of Marla houses, tracing their implementation and evolution. It reorients Chandigarh's modern history from its dominant Corbusean narrative to the everyday Marla house façade, where tensions between state control and individual agency unfold. Regulatory controls that once extended beyond planning to dictate the domestic threshold transformed the façade into an instrument of visual order and aesthetic conformity. Yet, as the outward face

of the household, the façade also carried traces of individual aspiration, functional adaptation, and everyday negotiation.

It shows how decades of aesthetic regulation gave way to gradual transformation and contestation, reframing the city as a living palimpsest. It further advances debates on modernism, heritage, and private-domain agency by positioning the Marla façade not merely as an architectural element, but as a contested surface where governance, identity, and lived practice converge.

## Methodology

The study had multipronged approach-analysing archival records of the framework of controls, conducting architectural surveys through photographs and drawings, mapping changes on the facades, and conducting interviews.

The archival study draws on documents including meeting minutes, correspondence, regulatory acts, notifications, and drawings related to residential controls. Key sources include the M.S. Randhawa section at the Government Museum (Sector 10), Le Corbusier Centre (Sector 19), Chandigarh Urban Planning Department (Sector 9), Chandigarh College of Architecture, and the CCA, Montreal. While access to official records was limited, the Randhawa archives provided key letters and minutes-though incomplete-that offered insight into the rationale behind residential regulations, the actors involved, and the evolving forms and frameworks of standardization in zoning and layout plans.

The photographic documentation was initiated through systematic city walks, observing Marla houses in Sector 22-one of Chandigarh's earliest residential sectors-at different times of day to understand the street-facing spatial uses. These were initially specific to V5-V6 streets to identify typical patterns of facades that eventually could be traced across time-from early deep balconies and frameless facades before 1958, to the rigid, standardized frames introduced post-1958, and more recent changes such as expanded balconies, large glazed surfaces, new facade materials, and tall boundary walls. These photographs were then compared with archival clauses and subsequent relaxations in building controls, allowing the identification of patterns of transformation and a correlation between regulatory shifts and changes in built form.

Interviews were conducted as qualitative semi-structured conversations with residents, architects, experts, and officials from the Chandigarh Administration. Residents (n=20) reflected on the use of specific spaces, façade preferences, and changes in domestic life. Sampling combined convenience and snowball methods to build trust and ensured a range of contexts-across Phase 1 and 2, and streets of varying hierarchies (V2-V6) and house types. Architects (n=7) shared how they interpreted site constraints, permissible volumes, and client needs within the imposed controls. Officials from the Architecture and Planning

wings of Chandigarh Urban Planning and the Estate Office provided insight into policy adaptation, decision-making, and permissible flexibilities. Experts offered broader perspectives on the impact of building controls on residential design and the city. These included S. D. Sharma (Capitol Project Team), former Chief Architects S. S. Sandhu and Sumit Kaur, and architectural historians Vikramaditya Prakash and Maristella Casciato, who have extensively researched Chandigarh focusing on Aditya Prakash and Pierre Jeanneret's works – people most relevant in making controls and ideation of the row housing in the city.

## Situating the Modern in the Marla House

Marla is a colloquial term for a unit of Land Area Measurement in parts of North India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The connotation of Modern, borrowing from Chatterjea's (1997) three qualifiers - *adhunik*, *navya* and *unnati* - contemporary, new, and improved - reflects an aspiration for change. Modern Marla is the unit of habitation in Chandigarh that represents Hosagrahar's (2005) 'Indigenous modernity' where "paradoxical features of modernities rooted in their particular conditions - negotiate the uniqueness of a region and its history with the 'universals' of science, reason, and liberation" and Scriver and Srivastava's (2015) "contextually specific local modernity" - an idea rooted in cognizance of the context. This house was controlled, regulated, and standardized under Development Controls, and I argue that they defined the modern of the everyday city.

The well-known government houses were known to exhibit a suitable response to climate and cost and 'aesthetic innovations than for their plans' (Joshi, 1999), and they set a benchmark for private domestic architecture. It was the development controls that enabled this architectural vocabulary of the 'Chandigarh Style Architecture' (Evenson, 1966; Sabikhi, 1987; Wattas, 2005), citing it as "simple, austere brick houses with plastered, whitewashed bands of chajjas and cantilevers" (Wattas, 2005) to transfer to private housing. The private housing comprised around 70% of the houses, broadly classified in Marla and Kana[1]. Row houses account for 2/3rd of the housing stock (Chandigarh Administration, 2015). Most Marla houses were prototyped as row/terraced houses, and kanal houses were semi-detached and bungalow types. Area sizes of Marla houses varied from 125 sq. yards to 4000 sq. yards.

[1]Most kothis and havelis in Punjab were (and are) measured in *marla* and *kanal*. A kanal in India is the equivalent of the globally accepted as one one-eighth of an acre. Marla is measured as 225 sq ft or 'big marla' as 272.25 sq.ft.

## Development Controls

Formation of Acts[2] ensured a legal framework to retain the city's physical planning and construction practices. The need to regulate private domestic architecture arose due to the initial haphazard development (A. Prakash, 1961), and the need to align with the modernist vision of the Capitol Project Team[3]. Other relevant reasons were the lack of qualified architects, the demand for building quickly, and a vision to have a distinctly urban character. Controls applicable to private row houses included Zoning (different for different phases), Full Architecture Controls (applicable on houses along the V4 roads), Frame Controls (applicable for houses up to a 10 Marla size), and Gate and Boundary Wall Design (applicable throughout). Regulations varied in scale from the "urban design measures to extensive architectural controls that prescribe volumes, outlines and skyline, forms, spatial setting, facades, materials, textures, colours, fenestrations and even boundary wall and gates" (Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2002). There is even a mention of dustbin design in Kalia's (1987) making of the city. These controls differed for the two phases of the city (Phase 1 - Phase 2), creating distinct urban forms. Hence, an elaborate framework of architectural controls emerged.

While the over determination and imposition of standardized and aesthetic regulatory frameworks direct toward political and moral complexities of identity, ownership, and dehumanization, the controls schematically catered to functions of cost, climate, and the extent of individual unit development. The latter is the volumetric aspect of regulations, which can be seen as integral to modern life for health and safety, a tool to facilitate the construction and integration of technological advancements. It also attempted to provide dignified housing and austerity through scarce resources. If we look just at the Frame Control, we see how it evolved over the first decade as a reactionary and improvised tool.

## Frame Controls

The Frame Control was a control where the outer frame was the container of the façade The **Figure 1** shows that the red lines encasing the house in a frame as an outer definitive boundary. Within which, the design of the façade appear different reflecting relative

[2]Formation of Acts, namely, the Capital of Punjab (Development and Regulation) Act 1952, Punjab New Capital (Periphery Control) Act 1952, Building Rules and Chandigarh Rules (Sales and Site) 1952, and Chandigarh Tree Preservation Order 1952, ensured a legal framework to uphold the city's physical planning and construction practices. These have been discussed in Chapter 3.

[3]The Capitol Project Team was Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew and Indian architects Aditya Prakash, M N Sharma, S D Sharma, and Eulie Chaudhary. Archival records show Aditya Prakash introducing frame controls and names of Pierre Jeanneret, M N Sharma and Aditya Prakash on Architecture Control drawings.

flexibility and the house could be built stage wise. A defining aspect was the protruding outer frame - side party walls and a top horizontal band. It recessed the façade behind the frame by 1'-6", and no projection was to exceed the frame.

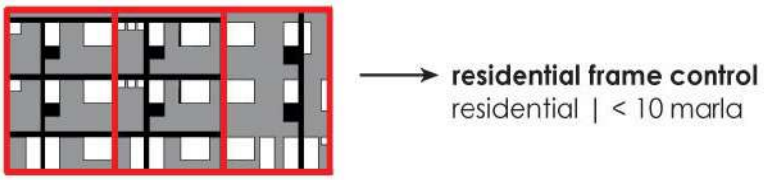



***Figure* 1***: The defining element of Frame controls is the outer frame* (*Prakash, Chandigarh Urban Lab - http://chandigarhurbanlab.org/frame-control-in-chandigarh-background/)*

The frame control was implemented to include all the private row houses up to 10 Marla (Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2002). The Frame Control proposed by Aditya Prakash in 1958 (Multani, 1958), as a negotiated version of a Façade Control, seemed to enable a relative degree of design freedom. However, it expanded its jurisdiction over a larger area of the city. The **Figure 2 (a)** becomes archival evidence of the Frame control sheet. A typical frame control was disseminated as a control sheet **Figure 2 (b)** – drawings depicting volumetric extents and additional written clauses describing construction requirements to reduce ambiguity. An old practicing architect interprets the frame, "Why frame? *Frame toh jaise chaukhat*[4] - each marla-type house has a *chaukhat*." The *chaukhat* of the home becomes the frame, a symbol of a portal into private space, but a portal that repeats as a unit module as a symbol of modernist tropes and a unifying element for a coherent street façade.

Clauses pertained to plinth demarcation and referencing, specifications of shared walls about the proportions of materials, structural stability, and cost-sharing between two houses (**Figure 3**). Through the clauses shown in **Figure 3**, it becomes evident that the control sheet was not merely a diagrammatic framework of constraints, but also a tool for reading and interpreting the architectural drawings. However, the aesthetic constraints are visible in clauses 8-13 and 19-21, where components like the window and door sizes, decorations and symbols, cantilevers, and water services were addressed. These frame controls differed for the first two phases of the city (Phase 1 – Phase 2), and zoning regulation defined a significant portion of its built form (**Figure 4**). This has been discussed in the next section.

[4] *Chaukha*t – Door frame – also symbolising the mark of an entry point.

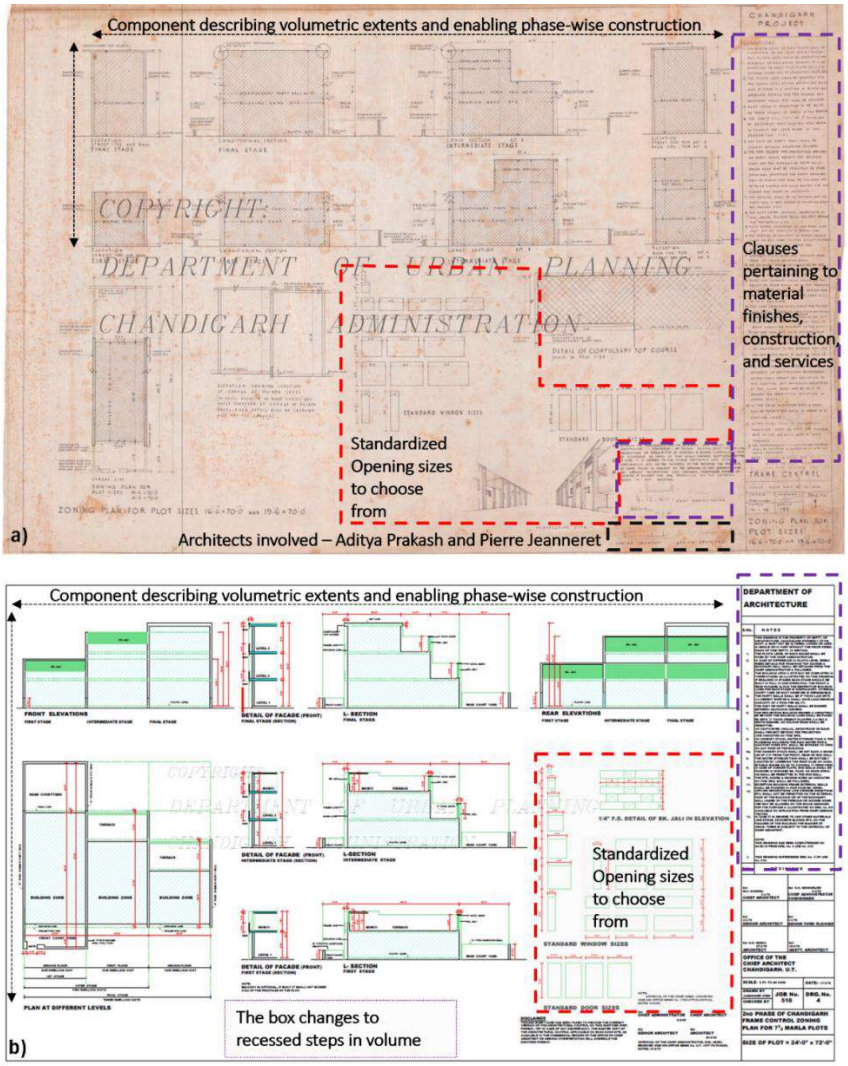
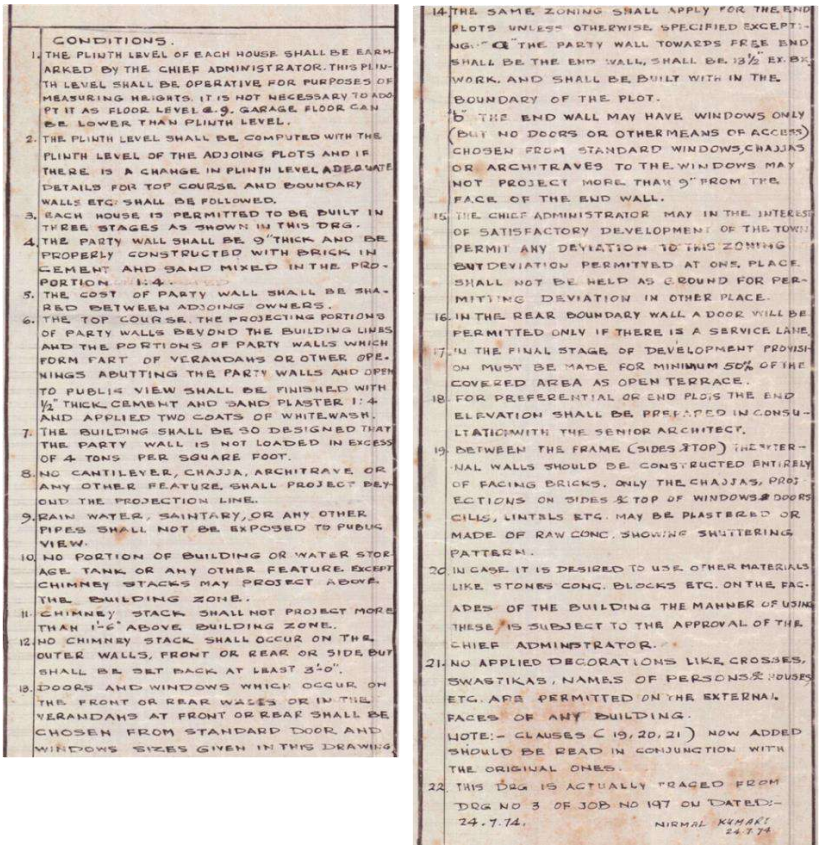



***Figure 2:*** *The defining element of Frame controls is the outer frame* (*Prakash, Chandigarh Urban Lab - http://chandigarhurbanlab.org/frame-control-in-chandigarh-background/)*

## Evolution of volumes in Frame Control

The One main difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2 was the overall volume - outer extents and height (**Figure 4**). Phase 1 had a boxed approach of ground and first floor of the same built-up area (**Figure 4,** left), and the second floor as a half floor called the *barsaati* covered up to around 25%. The inclusion of *barsaati* as a regulated space since the early days catered to regional practices of sleeping outdoors. However, Phase 2 (1965

onwards) has more room for outdoor connection as the barsaati transformed into terraces on each floor (**Figure 4,** right). In phase two, the ground floor began with 50% coverage; the first floor was recessed by 12ft, and the second was recessed by another 12ft. The height is increased from 31'-6" in Phase 1 to 32'-3" in Phase 2 where each floor in Phase 2 is stipulated as 9'-9" as opposed to 11'-0" in Phase 1. The change in volumetric regulation reflects densification in Phase 2. However, the volumetric differences in Phase 2 control an outcome of the role of Indian counterparts - S D Sharma and M N Sharma. Regulating the presence and size of terraces ensured each house (and floor) had access to the outdoors, ample space for sleeping, and everyday activities visually segregated from adjacent neighbours. Interestingly, the jaalis get interpreted into brick patterns and regulated onto the terraces. The controls, therefore, were revised, accounting for the needs of the people.



CONDITIONS.

1. THE PLINTH LEVEL OF EACH HOUSE SHALL BE EARMARKED BY THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR. THIS PLINTH LEVEL SHALL BE OPERATIVE FOR PURPOSES OF MEASURING HEIGHTS. IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO ADOPT IT AS FLOOR LEVEL e.g. GARAGE FLOOR CAN BE LOWER THAN PLINTH LEVEL.
2. THE PLINTH LEVEL SHALL BE COMPUTED WITH THE PLINTH LEVEL OF THE ADJOING PLOTS AND IF THERE IS A CHANGE IN PLINTH LEVEL ADEQUATE DETAILS FOR TOP COURSE AND BOUNDARY WALLS ETC. SHALL BE FOLLOWED.
3. EACH HOUSE IS PERMITTED TO BE BUILT IN THREE STAGES AS SHOWN IN THIS DRG.
4. THE PARTY WALL SHALL BE 9" THICK AND BE PROPERLY CONSTRUCTED WITH BRICK IN CEMENT AND SAND MIXED IN THE PROPORTION 1:6 BY VOLUME.
5. THE COST OF PARTY WALL SHALL BE SHARED BETWEEN ADJOING OWNERS.
6. THE TOP COURSE, THE PROJECTING PORTIONS OF PARTY WALLS BEYOND THE BUILDING LINES AND THE PORTIONS OF PARTY WALLS WHICH FORM PART OF VERANDAHS OR OTHER OPENINGS ABUTTING THE PARTY WALLS AND OPEN TO PUBLIC VIEW SHALL BE FINISHED WITH ½" THICK CEMENT AND SAND PLASTER 1:4 AND APPLIED TWO COATS OF WHITEWASH.
7. THE BUILDING SHALL BE SO DESIGNED THAT THE PARTY WALL IS NOT LOADED IN EXCESS OF 4 TONS PER SQUARE FOOT.
8. NO CANTILEVER, CHAJJA, ARCHITRAVE OR ANY OTHER FEATURE SHALL PROJECT BEYOND THE PROJECTION LINE.
9. RAIN WATER, SAINTARY, OR ANY OTHER PIPES SHALL NOT BE EXPOSED TO PUBLIC VIEW.
10. NO PORTION OF BUILDING OR WATER STORAGE TANK OR ANY OTHER FEATURE EXCEPT CHIMNEY STACKS MAY PROJECT ABOVE THE BUILDING ZONE.
11. CHIMNEY STACK SHALL NOT PROJECT MORE THAN 1'-6" ABOVE BUILDING ZONE.
12. NO CHIMNEY STACK SHALL OCCUR ON THE OUTER WALLS, FRONT OR REAR OR SIDE BUT SHALL BE SET BACK AT LEAST 3'-0".
13. DOORS AND WINDOWS WHICH OCCUR ON THE FRONT OR REAR WALLS OR IN THE VERANDAHS AT FRONT OR REAR SHALL BE CHOSEN FROM STANDARD DOOR AND WINDOWS SIZES GIVEN IN THIS DRAWING
14. THE SAME ZONING SHALL APPLY FOR THE END PLOTS UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED EXCEPTING:- "a" THE PARTY WALL TOWARDS FREE END SHALL BE THE END WALL, SHALL BE 13½" EX. BR. WORK, AND SHALL BE BUILT WITH IN THE BOUNDARY OF THE PLOT.
"b" THE END WALL MAY HAVE WINDOWS ONLY (BUT NO DOORS OR OTHER MEANS OF ACCESS) CHOSEN FROM STANDARD WINDOWS, CHAJJAS OR ARCHITRAVES TO THE WINDOWS MAY NOT PROJECT MORE THAN 9" FROM THE FACE OF THE END WALL.
15. THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR MAY IN THE INTEREST OF SATISFACTORY DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN PERMIT ANY DEVIATION TO THIS ZONING BUT DEVIATION PERMITTED AT ONE PLACE SHALL NOT BE HELD AS GROUND FOR PERMITTING DEVIATION IN OTHER PLACE.
16. IN THE REAR BOUNDARY WALL A DOOR WILL BE PERMITTED ONLY IF THERE IS A SERVICE LANE.
17. IN THE FINAL STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT PROVISION MUST BE MADE FOR MINIMUM 50% OF THE COVERED AREA AS OPEN TERRACE.
18. FOR PREFERENTIAL OR END PLOTS THE END ELEVATION SHALL BE PREPARED IN CONSULTATION WITH THE SENIOR ARCHITECT.
19. BETWEEN THE FRAME (SIDES & TOP) THE EXTERNAL WALLS SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED ENTIRELY OF FACING BRICKS. ONLY THE CHAJJAS, PROJECTIONS ON SIDES & TOP OF WINDOWS & DOORS SILLS, LINTALS ETC. MAY BE PLASTERED OR MADE OF RAW CONC. SHOWING SHUTTERING PATTERN.
20. IN CASE IT IS DESIRED TO USE OTHER MATERIALS LIKE STONES CONC. BLOCKS ETC. ON THE FACADES OF THE BUILDING THE MANNER OF USING THESE IS SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR.
21. NO APPLIED DECORATIONS LIKE CROSSES, SWASTIKAS, NAMES OF PERSONS & HOUSES ETC. ARE PERMITTED ON THE EXTERNAL FACES OF ANY BUILDING.
NOTE:- CLAUSES (19, 20, 21) NOW ADDED SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE ORIGINAL ONES.
22. THIS DRG IS ACTUALLY TRACED FROM DRG NO 3 OF JOB NO 197 ON DATED:- 24.7.74.
NIRMAL KUMARI 24.7.74

***Figure 3:*** *Inset of Frame Control Sheet showing Typical Clauses in the Frame Control Drawings. (Prakash, Chandigarh Urban Lab - http://chandigarhurbanlab.org/frame-control-in-chandigarh-background/*

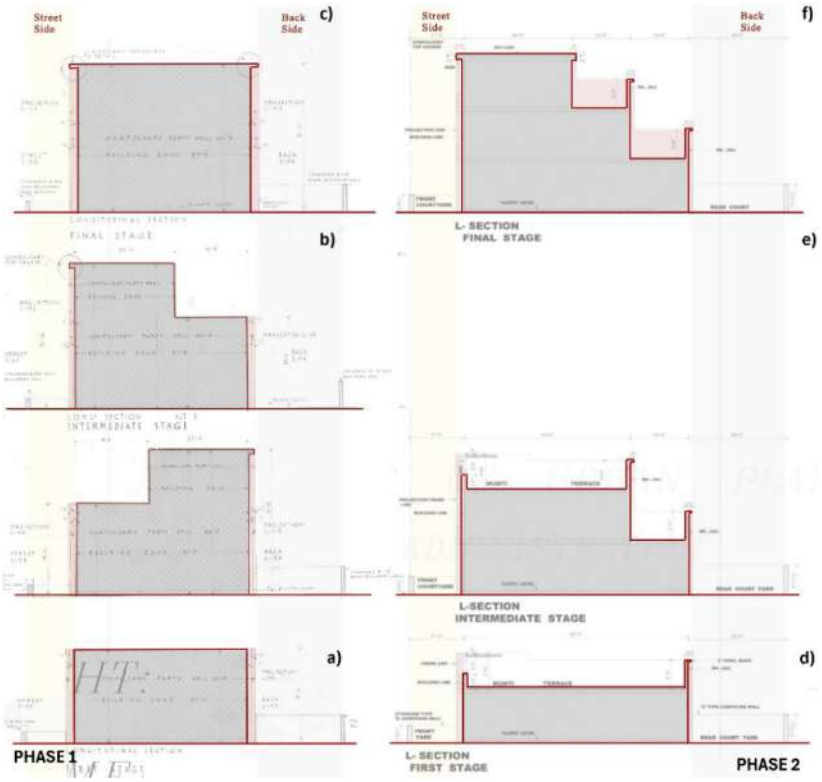



***Figure 4:*** *Stage-wise construction in Frame Control in Phase 1 and Phase 2 reflects the difference in the extent of built form permitted. (Gupta 2024)*

## Façade as an Ideal Image

The façade becomes the skin of the building. This skin performs the role of a shelter partly from climate and partly from the public gaze. Martinelli (2019) suggests that the façade is the diaphragm between the two worlds of domestic and urban design. This role pertains to comfort and privacy inside the house. The Marla house, being a row house, had deep plot proportions, where only the narrow facades and these facades were subjected to aesthetic and volumetric controls. It builds around Sennett's (2008) idea of an imposed ideal image using the façade. If we look at the clauses of the Frame Control (**Figure 3**), there appears to be an assembly of kit of components. The controls were not just cognizant of cost - effectiveness and cultural and climatic practices; they prioritized a collective urban identity over personal identity.


***Figure 5:*** *Rear Facades of Phase 1 Frame Controlled Houses (a,b) - Planar Facades, two and a half floors, and the presence of jaalis in patches. Rear facades of Phase 2 Frame Controlled Houses (c,d) - Recessed built forms and full-width jaalis (Gupta 2024)*

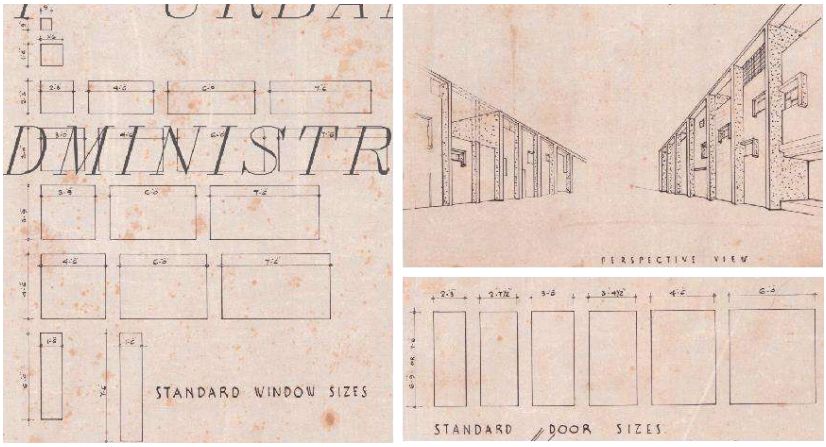



***Figure* 6:** *Standard Window and door sizes specified in the Frame Control. (Chandigarh Urban Planning,2021,https://urbanplanning.chd.gov.in/uploads/architecture_control/72_1618218746-drg__no__1_job_no_197.pdf)*

For example, a set of 13 standardized door-window opening sizes was given to choose from (**Figure 6**). While the specified widths started from a 9” up to a 7’-6”, most common window openings tended to be of smaller widths - 2’-6” and 3’-6” to save costs of wood and glass. Considering that no projection was allowed beyond the frame and compensatory additional space was provided –the front balcony shrunk. The limited depth of 1’-6” was clubbed with

a standardized width as wide as the door width expanse, reducing the possible ways and duration of use of this balcony (**Figure 7**). It was a strategic negotiation to contain the domesticity within this Frame and limit the interaction with the street (Divyansh, Harismaran, 2024) (**Figure 7**) shows the balcony types - the ones under frame control have a strict regime of adhering to limited openings and projections.

Houses built before the Frame Control had projections of 3 ft deep (Type A). Houses under the Frame Control, since 1958, limited the balconies to be within the frame of the house - implying a depth of 1'-6" effectively and approximately 3'-6" wide, just encasing the width of the door (Type B). To accommodate access to this shallow depth, the doors were 1'-6" double leaf in mesh and a full wooden door on the inside to close from the outside. This hence forth only limited the use and duration of balconies (**Figure 7**).

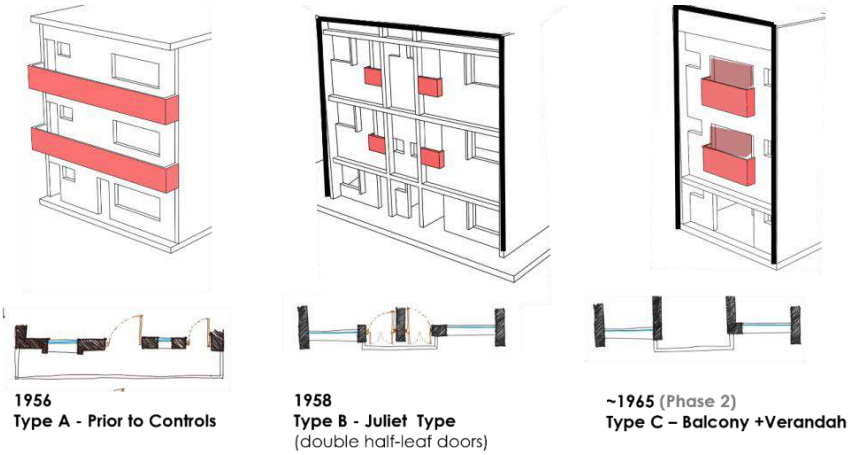



***Figure 7:*** *Demarcated categories of balconies prior to Frame Controls (A), Phase 1 Frame Control (B), Phase 2 Frame Control (C). (Divyansh, Harsimran, 2024)*

***Figure 8***: Snippets of facades of houses with religious motifs reflecting personalization - personal identity. *(Gupta 2021, 2024)*

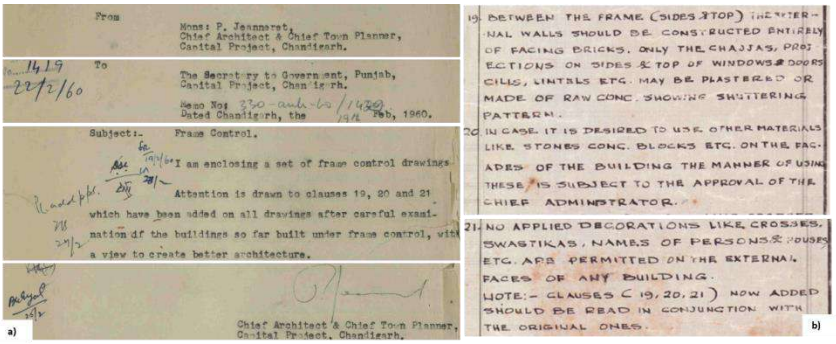



**Figure 9:** *a) Jeanneret's letter stated additions to the then-existing drawings of Frame Control in 1960, where the justification was only 'to create better architecture.' b) Clauses on Choice of Material in Phase 1 and Phase 2.*

The other example was the specification of material and personalization. While the Frame Control had been devised in 1958, seeing individual personalization on the facades of houses, Pierre Jeanneret and Aditya Prakash added three clauses on aesthetic control in 1960 (**Figure a and 9b**). These clauses pertain to the material specification of external facades, facing bricks and projections in plaster or raw concrete that show a shuttering pattern, no applied decorations - any personal names, symbols, or religious motifs.

Often, items within residential prototypes and specifications had to be altered to reduce cost. Brick cost Rs 28/- per thousand, while concrete and stone cost 3-4 times more. Glazing and woodwork cost seven times more per square foot than a brick wall (Chowdhury, 1961). It also meant reduced lintel spans to reduce steel reinforcement. The availability of material and cost made brick an obvious choice for mass housing, from load-bearing structures to parapets, sun-breakers, balustrades, and furniture. From one perspective, stipulating facing brick accounted for the cost-effectiveness and quick construction. It also aligned with modernism's ideology of truth to materials. In the process, this imposition also resulted in some form of innovation - case in point, the brick jaali patterns used geometrical proportions and abiding by rules.

As we look specifically at the front facades of Phase 1 Controls, the standard features appear to be smaller windows, Juliet balconies in brick parapets, the play of horizontal and vertical bands, and in-built cupboards that protrude as a play on the façade (**Figure** ). This also meant reduced heat ingress (smaller glass openings and cupboards as a buffer). A few variations had a balcony connected to a corridor space at the back, deepening the narrow opening. Within this was a variation where a few houses attempted to make perforations above the lintel over the balcony aperture for increased ventilation.

Phase 2 front facades of the Marla houses, however, were less opaque as they had more openings on the façade (**Figure 11**). The verandahs, centrally positioned behind the balconies within the frame, allowed for deeper, effective projections for shade and ventilation. The verandah projection had brick-plastered parapets, but interesting patterns began to emerge within these. Here, floor wise construction was more prominent, and a compulsory band at 6'9" at each stage defined the façade. Therefore, the wholly built houses often had multiple horizontal bands - one at lintel height and one marking the floor slab. Between two consecutive bands lay clerestory fixed glazing or innovative jaali patterns to increase the daylight intake for the recessed verandahs.

Chandigarh's regulatory framework resonates with Scott's (1998) critique of modernism and Dean's (2009) notion of governmentality, operating as a social-engineering scheme through standardization, simplification, and control - a form of design governance and design standardization (Carmona, 2016, 2017; Imrie & Street, 2011). The Marla house façade exemplifies this governmentality, as regulations extend into the private realm, embedding a form of aesthetic governmentality rooted in modernism's geometric fixations (Ghertner, 2010) and carrying the weight of an 'imposed ideal image' (Whyte in Sennett, 2008). The following section explores how residents negotiate spatial configurations to accommodate everyday life, thereby questioning the very premise of aesthetic rigidity.

## Everyday Practices Reflected in the Marla Façade

While the façade becomes the identity of the house, it also becomes the identity of the city, in a way. In this case, the city's identity has been determined through the domination of regulations about urban management and a codified and regulated visual order. It shaped the local practices of space use (or any aspect of design) and everyday living. When read through De Certeau's (1988), distinction between strategies and tactics, the state's imposition and residents' negotiations appear not as compliance but as everyday practices of subversion, reconstitution, and resistance. In this sense the façade becomes the site where aesthetic governmentality confronts the actions and practices of everyday life, override it and make these spaces a site of agency and resistance. These everyday life practices add layers of alterations and transformations within the domestic spaces. When explicitly seen in the facades **-** elements like the openings, the projections, and the integration of services reflect the affordance of everyday life on the facades.

Most façade controls had intended to limit the presence of domestic life. When it came to frame-controlled balconies, most residents struggled. A family living in a house with a balcony configuration of Type A (**Figure** ) found great use in the balcony to soak the sun in winter. However, families stuck with the Juliet balconies commented that they do not have balcony spaces - "We have just a 9" projection." Another resident found other ways to negotiate. They would try to fit a chair and soak in the sun as well. The configuration of this balcony is unique because of the double-leaf half-width doors that open onto the narrow protrusion of the balcony.

Although the original design disallowed any expression of the building's inner workings on the façade, the influx of new technologies soon made their presence visible - TV antennas (**Figure** ), air conditioners, coolers, and water tanks (**Figure** 1**3**) began to punctuate the regulated surfaces. Over time, the façade emerged as a site of resistance to the regimented aesthetic, where residents asserted agency through everyday interventions: drying clothes, adding plants, enclosing balconies, repainting surfaces or joinery, and installing AC units. By the 1980s, the horizontal bands of the façade were repurposed as convenient platforms for mounting such technologies, while many windows gained protective awnings. Today, façades also carry temporary shading and screening devices - especially for west-facing houses - and, more recently, flags signalling solidarity with political or religious affiliations as well as sheds for cars (**Figure 14**).

## Relaxations in Controls

The emergence of new technologies, construction practices and the influx of newer materials in the 1990s began to influence user expectations in residential architecture. The Chandigarh Administration, starting 1990s began relaxations (Chandigarh Administration, 2015; Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2002) (Table *1*) and started accommodating the addition of devices such as dish antennas, inverters, and chimneys within its building permissions provided catering to the fire safety standards. New proposed cooperative housing typologies opened up new spatial configurations that had more contemporary façades also prompted gradual concessions in the design controls for Marla houses. There is a hesitance seen in the pattern of relaxations beginning 1990s, be it for openings on the façade or material choices. From letting go of window proportions to window shapes and sizes to permitting different railings, jaali sizes, and materials to the complete façade materials, the aesthetic controls slowly also gave way to slight volumetric projections on facades by permitting 3'-0" balcony protrusions (with offsets from the shared walls on the sides by 3'-0") (Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2002; Handa & Chandigarh Administration, 2011).

Based on the interviews - residents who had renovated, rebuilt, or continued to live in the same house had one common issue - the daylight was less, and the windows were small. Post relaxations, one of the most common renovations (and new constructions) has been to increase the aperture sizes of windows to let in more light. With the increased spending capacity, column - beam construction, availability of and economical ease to procure large-span glazing and cooling technologies, the aspiration of glass transparency became a sign of affluence. Within this, another trend has been to fix the glass or, in a few cases, keep a consolation-sized window opening. "Bigger windows or at least glass opening windows. We had those old windows and wooden doors, so there was no light in the house," Commented a resident when asked what would they change in their as-is Marla house in Sector 16. A 10-Marla resident of Sector 15, who renovated in 2009, cited "Actually my main issue with

this house was to have light. We had very little light. So, this window here…." suggesting that she increased its size. Most of these sizes come from the government houses. A relatively young city-based architect observes – "I feel some of the government houses sector 22 have a 2 ft by 2ft window, I cannot even fit an AC inside it. I do not know how people use that."

Façades began to lose their climatic function, becoming more representational than performative. This absolved the facades from the role of climate moderation. While it let go of the Modulor proportioning trap, it also exposed a large portion of the façade to heat gain and, in some orientations, direct sun ingress for longer hours. This complete freedom in opening sizes was just before the awareness of large glass panels as hindrances to climate-responsive, energy-efficient buildings. It reflects an incompetence to pave the way for a climate-responsive relaxation. In this way, the new façade freedoms compromised climatic responsiveness and often disregarded contextual continuity.

Eclectic stylistic insertions (Error! Reference source not found.) curved projections, oversized French windows, or stark material juxtapositions-became prevalent, as tile cladding and glass railings gained traction. The façade regulations and relaxations are distant from the concerns of today's pressing concerns of sustainability, energy performance, or heritage continuity. This shift, while expanding user agency, reflects a missed opportunity to reinterpret building controls through a more climate-sensitive and resource-conscious framework.

| Year | OPENINGS - Projections | Material | Inclusions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | Full Balcony Width but protrusion within the Frame | Relaxation in brick jaali pattern<br>Material change for houses | Dish Antennae on the rooftop, but with approval of location<br>Two Gates and Shed in front yard for car parks |
| 1998 | Non-standard square or rectangular windows and doors | Railing design for parapet walls | Non-standard gate with composition fee<br>Water tanks 4'-0" max ht and 4'-0" away from end walls |
| 2000 | Height – Barsaati habitable – therefore, 1'-6" increase permitted | | |
| 2001 | Any shape of door and window opening | | Gate height increased with standard width. |
| 2008 | Relaxation in Full Architectural Control | | |
| 2009 | Balcony Projections – 3'-0" maximum with offsets of 3'-0" from the sides | | |

***Table 1:*** *Relaxation in Controls Beginning 1990s (Complied from Chandigarh College of Architecture, 2002; Handa & Chandigarh Administration, 2011)*


***Figure* 10:** *Houses from Sector 22 show similar house facades based on frame control clauses. (Gupta, 2021, 2023)*

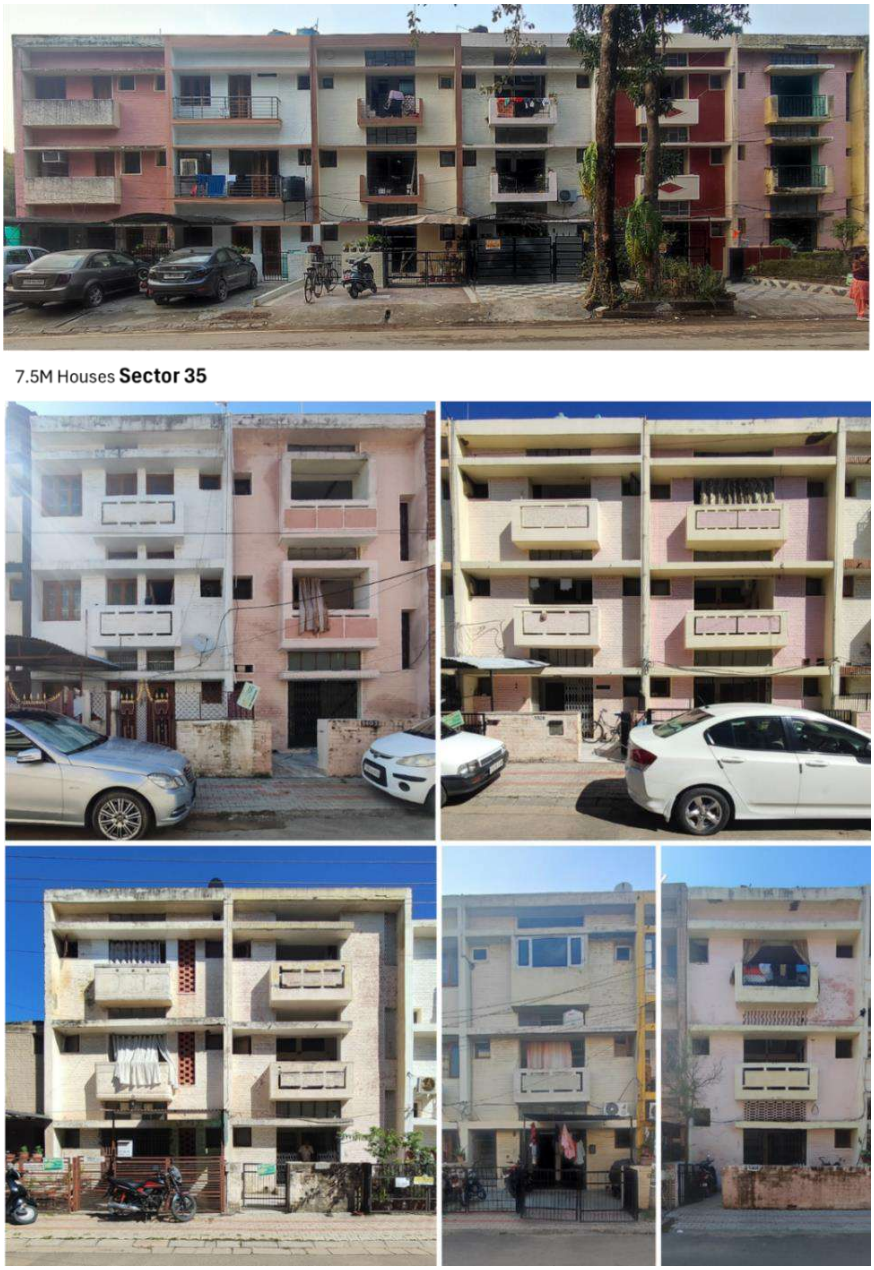



***Figure 11*****:** *Front Facades in Phase 2 (Sector 35) - Most houses have a similar built profile under the frame control, with a central balcony and verandah and two smaller windows on the sides. The play is visible in the brick jaalis and the facade's color (Gupta, 2023)*

**Figure *12***: *Houses under Frame Control roughly in the 1980s show tall TV antennae above the roofs and string of clothes drying at the entrances.*

***Figure 13****: Houses under Frame Control in Phase 2 show water tanks and AC installations on the facades. In some cases, the windows also have desert coolers.*


***Figure 14**: Marla House Facades show houses under Frame Control - laden with window ACs, clothes drying, dish antennae, parking shed, plants c) Facades screened for shade and loaded with AC units, c) Clothes drying, and flag on the top marking solidarity with a specific political agenda.*

## Conclusion

This study shows how Chandigarh's regulations for Marla house façades became a project of aesthetic governmentality - seeking to regulate not only the city's image but also the everyday life of its residents. The façade emerged as the site where modernist ambitions collided with lived realities, turning regulation into both a constraint and a terrain of negotiation. What was meant as visual coherence hardened into fortification, holding interior life in check to preserve an imposed appearance. Yet residents continually

reinterpreted and resisted these controls-through discreet side extensions, balcony enclosures, or quiet repainting beyond the prescribed palette.

Tracing the evolution of the Marla house façade reframes Chandigarh's history as a hybrid experiment: a city sustained by aesthetic obsession but fractured in practice. Everyday adaptations-from air-conditioners over chajjas to curtains on verandahs - both undermine and enrich its identity, producing a city marked by tension rather than uniformity. This tension raises questions of architectural value: if merit lies only in the original design, change appears as threat; yet lived; functional modifications carry historical significance of their own. The challenge lies in evolving elastic, negotiated versions of the façade-responsive to cost, climate, and domestic practice—rather than rigidly preserving or abandoning modernist ideals. By foregrounding the everyday façade, this study reframes Chandigarh's modern history around the entanglement of control and agency, heritage and change. The façade's journey reveals a persistent longing for identity - shaped by state impositions, resident improvisations, and market pressures - rendering the Marla house facades as a living palimpsest of modernism's afterlives.

## Acknowledgment

This research is part of my doctoral research undertaken at CEPT University. I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Gauri Bharat, who helped shape this research. I am also indebted to the Chandigarh Urban Planning Department and the Government Museum Sector 10 Chandigarh for giving access to archives and facilitating necessary information.

## References

Carmona, M. (2016). Design governance: theorizing an urban design sub-field. *Journal of Urban Design*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1234337

Carmona, M. (2017). The formal and informal tools of design governance. *Journal of Urban Design*, *22*(1), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1234338

Chandigarh Administration. (2015). *Chandigarh Master Plan 2031*.http://chandigarh.gov.in/cmp_2031.html

Chandigarh College of Architecture. (2002). *Chandigarh Aesthetic Legislation : Documentation of Urban Controls in Chandigarh (1951-2001)*.

Chowdhury, U. E. (1961). High Cost Housing and Interiors. *Marg*, *XV*, 26–31.

Dean, M. (2009). *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. SAGE Publications.

Evenson, N. (1966). *Chandigarh*. Berkeley : University of California Press.

Ghertner, D. A. (2010). Calculating without numbers: Aesthetic governmentality in Delhi's slums. *Economy and Society*, *39*(2), 185–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085141003620147

Handa, S., & Chandigarh Administration. (2011). *Suvidha*. Chandigarh Administration.

Hosagrahar, J. (2005). *Indigenous Modernities : Negotiating Architecture, Urbanism, and Colonialism in Delhi*. Taylor & Francis Routledge.

Imrie, R., & Street, E. (2011). Architectural Design and Regulation. In *Architectural Design and Regulation* https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444393156

Joshi, K. (1999). *Documenting Chandigarh: the Indian architecture of Pierre Jeanneret, Edwin Maxwell Fry, Jane Beverly Drew*. Mapin Publishers.

Kalia, R. (1987). *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City*. Oxford University Press.

KARIM, F. (2019). Of Greater Dignity than Riches: Austerity and Housing Design. In *Of Greater Dignity than Riches*. University of Pittsburgh Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/J.CTVD7W7JN

Martinelli, P. M. (2019). INSIDE THE FAÇADE: THE INHABITED SPACE BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND URBAN REALMS. *Journal of Interior Design*, *45*(2), 55–75.

Michel de Certeau. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Vol. 1). University of California Press.

Multani, P. S. (1958). *Frame Control* (p. 1). Estate Office.

Perera, N. (2004). Contesting visions: Hybridity, liminality and authorship of the Chandigarh plan. *Planning Perspectives*. https://doi.org/10.1080/0266543042000192466

Prakash, A. (1961). Architectural Control, Shops, Flats, etc. *Marg*, *XV*, 39–41.

Prakash, V. (2002). *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier. The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India*. Mapin Publishers.

Prakash, V. (2016). Messy Work: Transnational Collaboration in Chandigarh. In M. Chalana (Ed.), *Messy Urbanism* (pp. 175-192). Hong Kong University Press. https://doi.org/10.5790/HONGKONG/9789888208333.003.0010

Sabikhi, R. (1987). The City of the Future. *Architecture + Design*, 42–44.

Scott, J. C. (1998). The High-Modernist City: An Experiment and a Critique. In *Seeing Like a State: How certain schemes improve the human condition have failed.* (pp. 103–146). Yale University. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn7ds

Scriver, P., & Srivastava, A. (2015). *India: Modern Architectures in History*. Reaktion Books.

Sennett, R. (2008). *The uses of disorder : personal identity and city life*. Yale University Press.

Sood, S. (n.d.). *Changing Pattern of Housing in Chandigarh - A critical Appraisal* [Bachelor of Architecture Thesis]. Panjab University.

Sood, S. (2009). Housing in the City. In H.-U. Khan, J. Beinart, & C. Correa (Eds.), *Le Corbusier : Chandigarh and the modern city: Insights into the Iconic City Sixty Years Later* (pp. 121–129). Mapin Publishing.

Wattas, R. (2005, January). An Icon in Transition. *Architecture + Design*, 32–37.