ABSTRACT
The cities of today are facing an acute problem of over population. The birth rate and the rural-urban migration are resulting in cities that are “larger-than-life”, in terms of both the urban sprawl, and the density of urban space. This is especially true for the mega cities of the third world. Karachi is one of them. To meet the demands of this dramatically increasing population, it is essential to explore the idea of “high density dwelling”. Unfortunately, the very mention of the term brings to mind a stacked apartment building, with cell like homes. However, “high density living” does not imply an apartment building. The basic problem that arises when dealing with high density architecture is the overwhelming numbers, such that multiplication and stacking and the idea of “an ideal home x 500 = an ideal community” becomes a simple and clean solution. The problem of housing, on the contrary, is much more complicated. More important than the numbers are the needs and lifestyle of the people.
In Karachi, and in the subcontinent at large, a certain manner of living has evolved over the years. It has evolved as a response to climatic, cultural and economic factors, and is so inherent in its people, that any home that does not respond to those needs becomes unsatisfactory. This results in the failure of many subsidized housing projects that try to impose an alien lifestyle on the users, only to be able to simplify the large numbers. It is, therefore, essential, to examine how architecture can satisfy those numbers, without compromising on the needs and lifestyles of the people.

The current high density building trends underestimate the housing problems of the city, failing to satisfy on both economic and social fronts. The real needs of the urban poor
from a home are simple, and evolve from extreme poverty and cultural attitudes. It is those needs that architecture needs to respond to, in order to move towards an optimistic future of housing in the city.