

Durgdas B. Advani & Co., Architects and Surveyors, Karachi

Introduction

The works carrying the seal of Durgdas B. Advani at the Karachi Municipal Records so far discovered are dated from 1912 to 1929. The official letterhead of the firm shows its address as 785, Bunder Road (now M.A. Jinnah Road), Karachi. A number of architects of the time, namely, N. M. Gidvani, Gulshan Jalal and Hassasing H. Advani, appear to have initially worked with Advani before branching out on their own. Signatures of the above designers have been found above the Advani seal on several drawings and documents.

Building on Plot no. 21-A, Sheet F-14, Rambagh Quarter

Reference no. KMR.CDD.RbQ.1912-1913

This appears to be one of the earliest projects since it was designed more than a decade before any of the other projects by Advani so far unearthed at the KMR archives.

Documents reveal that around the turn of the century, the owner of Plot no. 21, Rambagh Quarter, Shamdass Kadanmal sold a portion of said plot to Hassamal Chellaram, who further stated a verbal intent of building a small bungalow for personal use.

Later however, Chellaram applied to the Karachi Municipality for permission to build a 5 storey high chawl for rental, on the entire plot allotted to him, proposing not to leave even a minimum 8' gully (passage) required under the byelaws for ensuring sunlight and ventilation to Kadanmal existing outhouses on his portion of the plot. Kadanmal ensuing complaint to the authorities led to an official enquiry and subsequent delay in gaining approval for the project.

A letter from Durgdas B. Advani, addressed to the Chief Officer and Chief Engineer at the Karachi Municipality, complained regarding delaying the approval process not only for Kadanmal project, but also for those that had been submitted for two other plots, claiming that his practice was 'dwindling on account of these delays'.

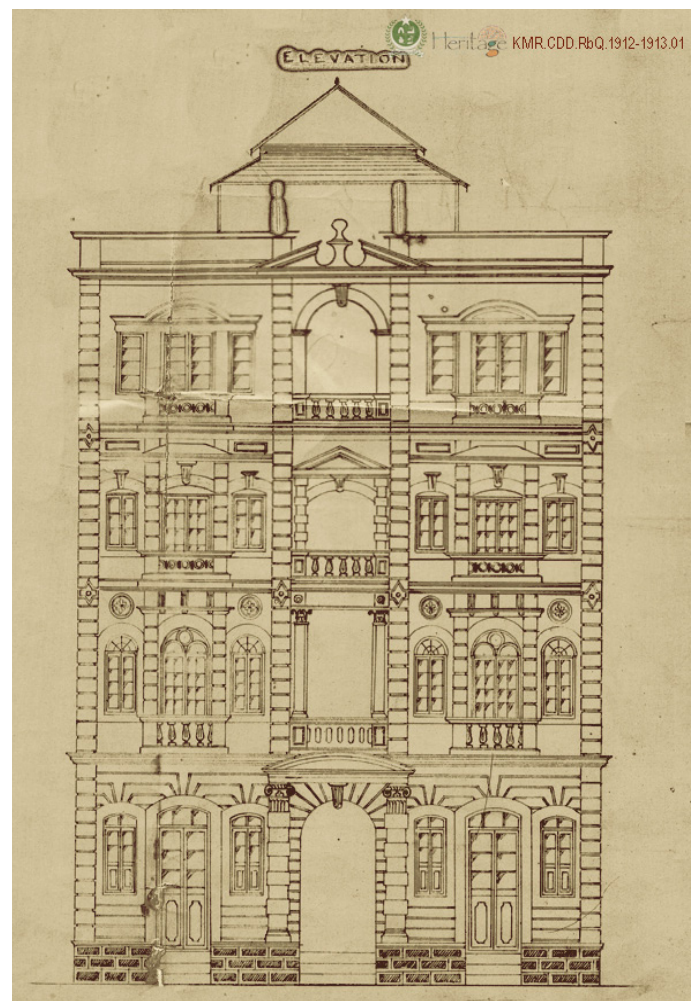
Here follows an exchange of notes amongst officers at the Municipality, tracking the mentioned plans and their approval statuses. In response to Advani's letter, Meacham Lea, Chief Officer and Chief Engineer at the Karachi Municipality at the time, informed "instructions have been given...that applications for permission to build are to be disposed of at the earliest possible date." Lea went on to point out that "disputes arise in some cases which are not trivial but relate to important matters."

With respect to Chellaram's plot, however, the Land Surveyor's report made objection to the building being too tall in proportion to its square footage, as well as inadequacy of the foundations to support such a structure. The drawing illustrates the layout for tenements in a north facing, 5- storey structure, with apartments on four floors and a much smaller, square cabin at the top level. The narrow plot faces

Ramchandra Temple Road at front and an open drain to the east. The 8' wide space – the bone of contention – is also delineated.

There are two linearly planned apartments on each floor. Each apartment has three rooms at the front, the last leading through a veranda to services that face a shared open yard at the back. This yard serves as an air well for the upper storeys. The main staircase is located at the centre, segregating the two apartments; in addition an emergency staircase has been provided along the rear wall of the building.

The elevation has been divided into three parts with the use of quoins: two equal, wider portions serve as entrance to the apartments at either side on the ground floor, and provide windows and balconies for the upper storey tenements. The narrower, central portion has a gallery housing the main access staircase for upper floor tenants. This is a particularly elaborate elevation with diverse window details at each level. The pitched roof of the cabin on the fourth floor centres with the four distinct arches vertically aligned midway on the elevation.



Elevation of Building on Plot no. 21-A, Sheet F-14, Rambagh Quarter, 1912-1913.

No Building Completion Report has been found with the accompanying documents; however, in 1920-1921 additions were made to an existing building on the same plot in the form of a third floor for Mr. Sahijram Moolchand. The drawing for the new floor follows a plan identical to the one on the submission drawing proposed in 1912-1913. It may thus be concluded that the structure was erected up to two floors a decade prior to the addition of the third storey, the Building Completion Report of which has been found dated 7th April 1921.

Bungalow on Plot no. 2-C, Sheet I-11, Garden Quarter

Reference no. KMR.CDD.GaQ.1921.01

This double-storey bungalow was designed for Vishinji Dossa Kalian.

The bisection and trisection of plans and facades seems to be an apparent trait in Durgdas B. Advani's designs. Here, too, the plan is sectioned in three parts: the wider, central segment has a large drawing room (20'x25') with verandas at the front and rear. Each of the narrower segments flanking the middle portion has two rooms with a bath and passage at the back. The rooms at the front of either wing are labelled Office Room and Music Room respectively; both have independent accesses.

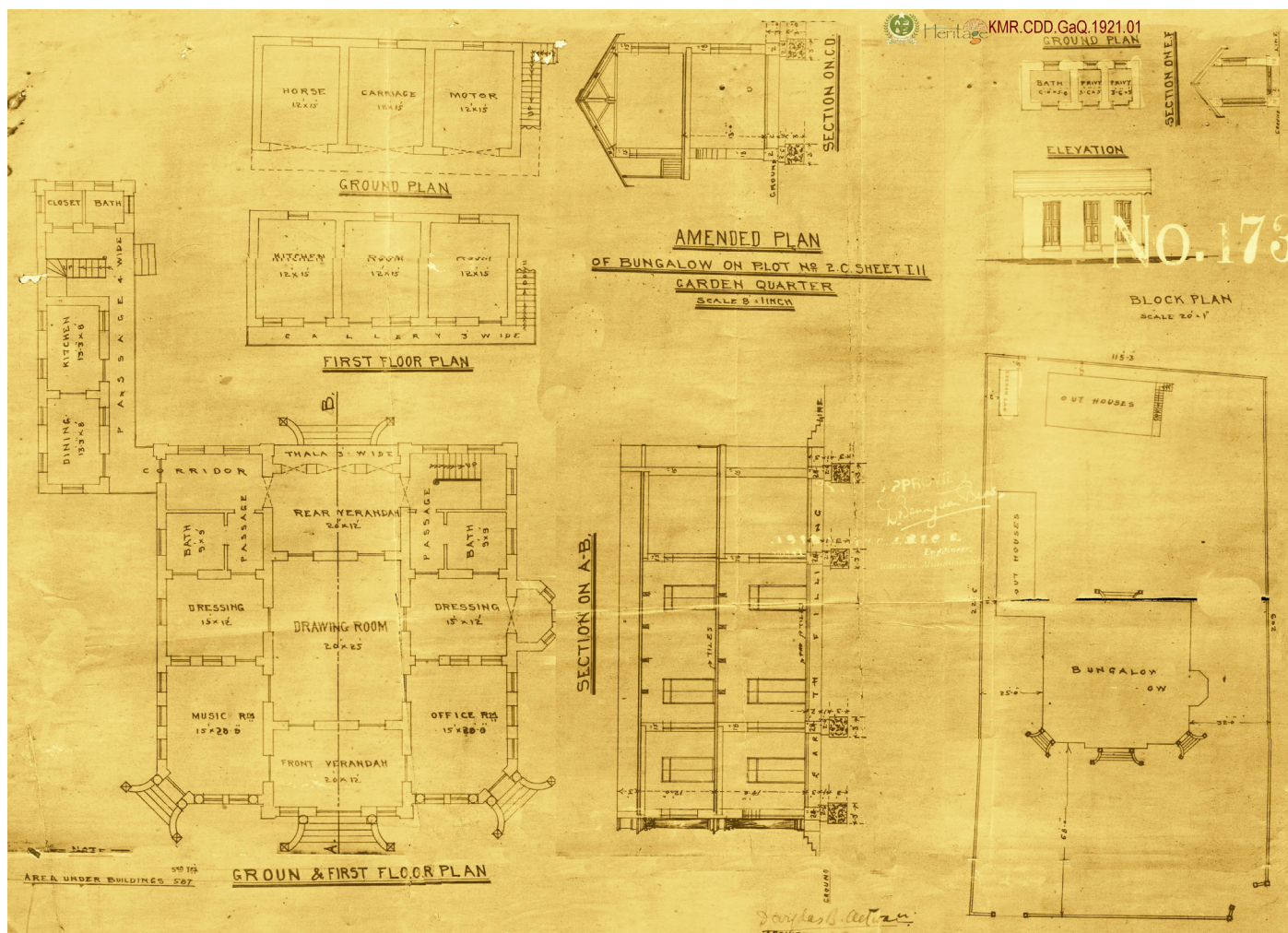
At one corner of the quadrilateral plan is a staircase and at the other, an outhouse in the form of a rectangular arm extending further behind the building line. The outhouse linked with the main building, consists of a dining room, kitchen, toilet, a second staircase and a service entrance.

In all there are five accesses, as shown on the submission drawing below, four of which have a wide staircase that tapers towards the bungalow. An alcove at one side of the building is connected by an internal arch.

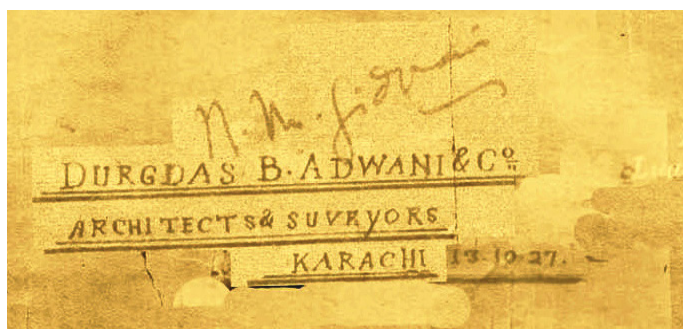
Integration of the exterior perimeter with its surroundings has been achieved through the use of approaches to the bungalow and the projection extending out of an otherwise straight boundary.

A second outhouse, aligned with the rear boundary wall of the plot, is a linear, double-storey structure with three rooms on each floor. The rooms on the ground floor of this gabled-roof structure have been allotted to a motorcar, a carriage and a horse respectively; the rooms on the first floor are presumably intended as staff quarters. Two privies and a bath are constructed at a little distance from this outhouse.

The Building Completion Report for the bungalow is dated 9th June 1921.



Submission drawing of Bungalow on Plot no. 2-C, Sheet I-11, Garden Quarter, 1921.



Signature of Naraindas M. Gidvani, who went on to start his own firm after working for Durgdas B. Advani for some time.

Naraindas M. Gidvani, under the banner of Durgdas B. Advani, designed a series of bungalows for Udham Kewalram, Secretary of the Cosmopolitan Cooperative Housing Society in the Jamshed Quarter. Upon research, a number of characteristics were found common in the corresponding submission drawings.

Although his elevations are less elaborate than Advani's, Gidvani has continued the tradition of segmenting plans in three parts: the formal hall and platform at centre, flanked by sleeping quarters and services.

The three bungalows are centred on their respective plots, each having two access gates at the boundary wall facing the road. According to the Building and Drainage Completion Reports, the construction materials for all three projects consisted of rubble stone masonry in the walls, reinforced concrete cement in the roof and teak wood for windows and doors.

As records unearthed at the KMR archives reveal, N. M. Gidvani went on to start his own firm around the late 1930s.

Bungalow on Plot no. B/7, Sheet Jm-3, Jamshed Quarter

Reference no. KMR. CDD. JmQ.1927-1929.01

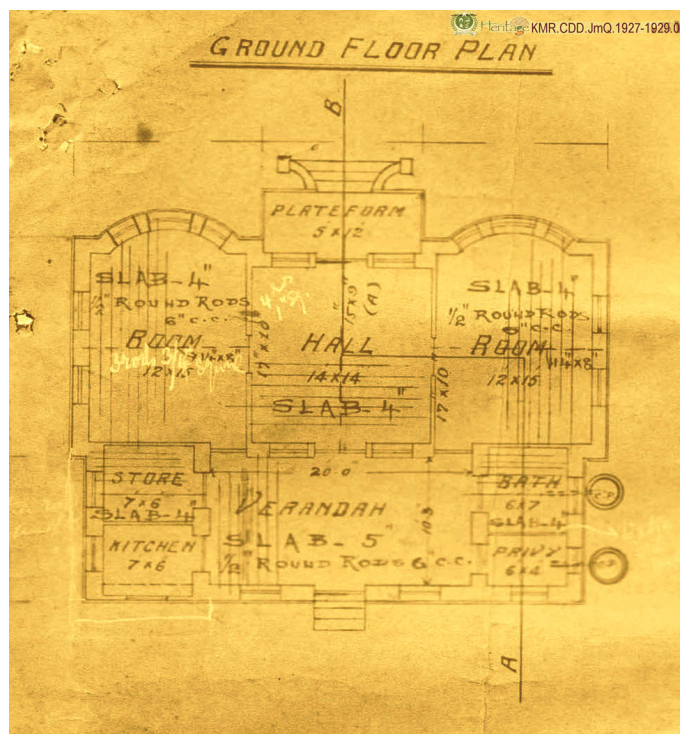
The residence at Plot no. B/7 has been built exactly 30' from all boundary walls. In the plan, a pair of rooms and services fringes the wider, central portion housing a hall and veranda on either side. It is understood to be the custom of the time to have a single set of services, that is, one kitchen, bath and WC each, per family. The veranda at the back thus provides ventilation to a bath and WC at one end and a kitchen and storeroom at the other.

The elevation to the east is minimal, having a single double doorway and two identical double-door windows on either side.

The staircase curving outwards at the formal entrance, coupled with the bowed exterior walls of the front rooms again points towards a softening of the building line.

As per Municipality requirements, usage of steel in the reinforced concrete has been clearly illustrated via detailed drawings of the longitudinal and cross-sections of two different T-Beams on the submission drawing sheet.

The Building Completion report for the structure is dated 12th July 1929.



Bunglaow on Plot no. B/7, Sheet Jm-3, Jamshed Quarter, 1927-1929.

Building on Plot no. E/8, Sheet JM-3, Jamshed Quarter.

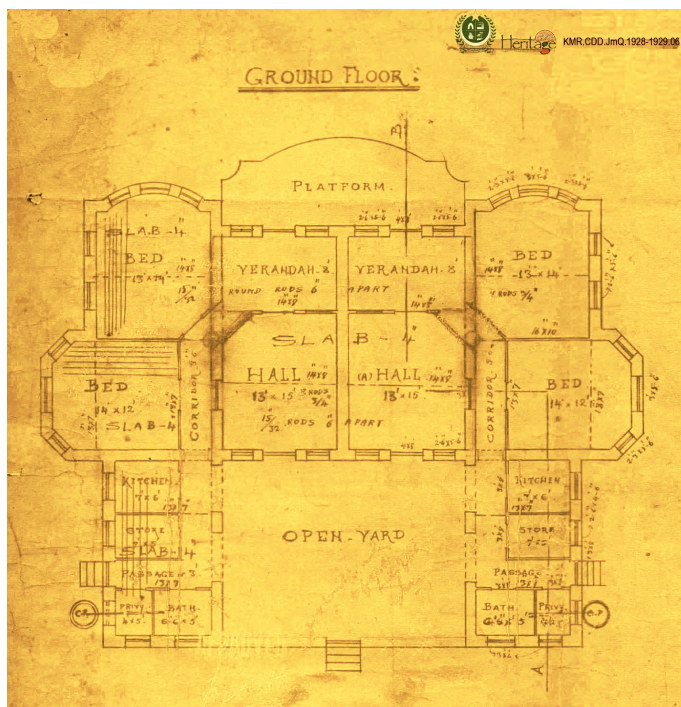
Reference no. KMR.CDD.JmQ.1928-1929.06

Documents show that the bungalows on plot nos. B/7 and E/8 were constructed simultaneously: N. M. Gidvani's signatures on the Building and Drainage Completion Reports for the two are recorded barely a month apart. A letter addressed to the Chief Officer at the Karachi Municipality requesting permission to occupy the completed structure, dated 16th July 1929, and a document, dated 20th July 1929, granting said permissions as part of the dossier.

This bungalow has the same layout as the ones previously discussed: an entrance hall and veranda, bordered on two sides by bedrooms and services. The main difference between this and the bungalow on plot no. B/7 is that this building is a duplex bungalow: it has been designed for two tenants or families. The entrance steps are laid up to the base of a large (approx. 16'x 30') open yard that leads to two separate halls, successive verandas and a shared rear platform. A single wall acts as a mirror line, equally dividing a large hall and veranda through the centre. A kitchen and toilet branch out on either side of the open yard at front, such that it provides excellent ventilation for these services.

The exterior walls of the bedrooms at centre project outwards equidistant on either side of the structure's periphery, simultaneously creating an interesting alcove space by the windows on the inside. The final plan, however, makes for a U-shaped structure, emphasised by the curved edges of the platform and bedrooms at the back of the bungalow.

Like the rest of Gidvani's facades, this one is simple, detailed with teak double doors and windows employed in other projects of the time.



The firm's signature style ground floor plan of Building on Plot no. E/8, Sheet JM-3, Jamshed Quarter:

Two double doors are at the centre, each flanked by a pair of double-door windows, and at either end of the elevation are two windows catering to the services' wings across the open yard.

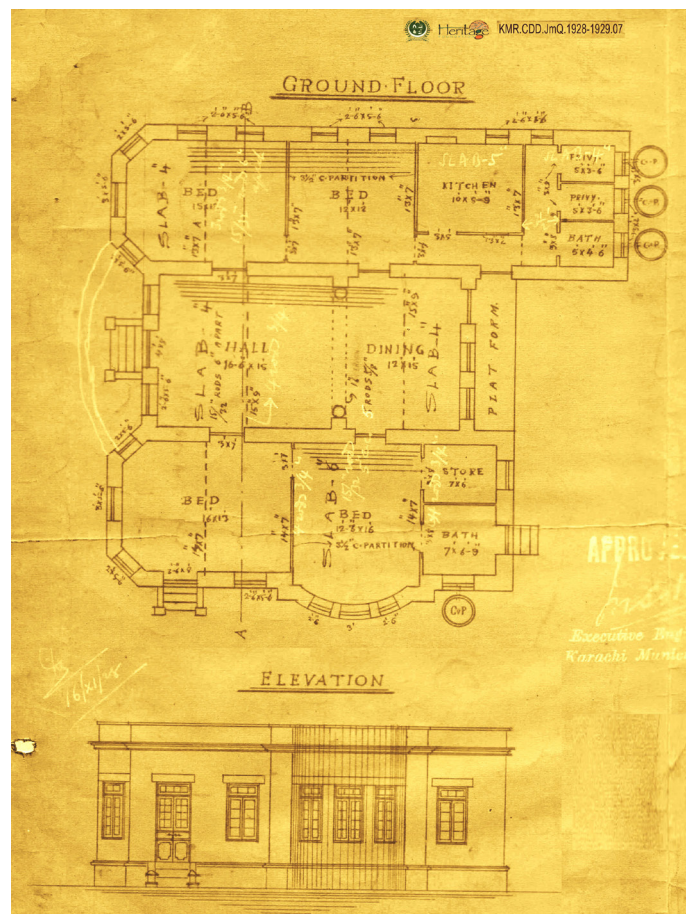
The drawing for the project again shows the long and cross sections of the T-Beams employed as well as a section of the compound wall. According to the documents granting permission to build and the Building Completion Report, dated 20th July 1929, the project was completed a few days short of 4 months.

Bungalow on Plot no. B/6, Sheet Jm-3, Jamshed Quarter

Reference no. KMR.CDD.JmQ.1928-1929.07

The submission drawing for the bungalow on Plot no. B/6 is dated 16th November 1928 and a document requesting permission to build was signed on 3rd December 1928.

The house is positioned roughly at the centre of the trapezium shaped plot. The plan follows Advani and Gidvani's signature style: hall, dining room and rear platforms are incorporated in the central division, flanked by residential wings each having two bedrooms. A store and bath are given at the end of one wing and at the end of the other projects a block consisting of a kitchen, 2 WCs and a second bath. In this way, the exterior ambit along the back of the bungalow forms an L-shape.



Ground Floor Plan of Bungalow on Plot no. B/6, Jamshed Quarter completed on 26th July, 1929.

The front bedrooms have bevelled walls and windows, protruding in line with the entrance steps, and emphasising the three-way division of the bungalow. The bedroom facing the gates at the southeast end of the plot also has a semicircular exterior wall and a resultant alcove on the inside. Its neighbouring bedroom has an independent access. The elevation employs the double doors and windows typical to Gidvani. The drawing also shows longitudinal and cross-sectional details of the T-Beam used in construction and a section of the compound wall.

The Building Completion Report is not dated, however, the Building and Drainage Completion Report is dated 26th June 1929.

A document requesting permission to make additions to bungalow has been found to date 6th July 1929; another from the Karachi Municipality requesting the amended plans to make slight deviations is dated 18th July 1929; Durgdas B. Advani's subsequent reply to the Municipality is dated 19th July 1929 and a final Building Completion Report is dated 26th July 1929.

Research, layout and image assistance
Ar. Mariyam Nizam, Ar. Nur Jehan Mawaz & Madeeha Badar

KARACHI MUNICIPAL RECORDS IS A JOINT PROJECT OF HERITAGE FOUNDATION (HF) AND CITY DISTRICT GOVERNMENT KARACHI (CDGK).
SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY IN KARACHI, (JULY 2010 TO DECEMBER 2010) IS GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED.