

Boundaries of Privacy: A Reevaluation of Spatial Dynamics in Traditional Kerala Homes

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Abstract:

Privacy within architectural spaces is a multifaceted phenomenon deeply intertwined with cultural norms and social practices. This paper explores the boundaries of privacy in traditional Kerala homes, characterized by open-plan layouts and communal living practices. Through a meticulous analysis of spatial dynamics in Thazhathangady, Kalpathy Agraharam, and East Fort Agraharam, the research uncovers the intricate relationship between spatial organization, gender roles, and privacy considerations. The findings reveal clear demarcations between public, semi-public, and private domains within these homes, reflecting cultural norms and social expectations. Gender significantly influences space utilization, with women primarily occupying areas associated with domestic tasks, while men frequent spaces designated for communal activities. The adaptability and multifunctionality of spaces, particularly courtyards, emerge as central elements in traditional Kerala architecture, accommodating various activities while maintaining privacy. Regional variations further highlight the nuanced approach to privacy, tailored to local customs and traditions. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture, informing culturally sensitive approaches to architectural design and urban planning.

Keywords: Privacy, Traditional Kerala Architecture, Spatial Dynamics, Communal Living, Gender Roles, Cultural Norms, Spatial Organization, Multifunctionality, Regional Variations, Architectural Heritage.

Introduction

In architectural discourse, privacy is a crucial factor shaping spatial design. However, traditional Kerala architecture presents a unique perspective, intertwining privacy with communal living practices. Kerala homes, characterized by open-plan layouts, foster both community bonds and individual needs.

This research delves into the nuanced relationship between privacy and communal living within traditional Kerala architecture. Through an analysis of spatial plans in key locations, we aim to uncover the cultural and architectural influences shaping privacy in these environments.

Aim

The aim of this research is to comprehensively investigate the role of privacy within traditional Kerala architecture, characterized by its communal living practices and open-plan layouts. By analyzing the spatial organization, cultural values, and privacy dynamics within these homes, the research seeks to inform culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches to architectural design, urban planning, and cultural preservation efforts. Ultimately, the aim is to bridge past architectural traditions with contemporary urban challenges, contributing to a deeper understanding of privacy in architectural discourse while preserving Kerala's rich architectural heritage.

Objectives

To analyze the spatial configuration of traditional Kerala architecture in Thazhathangady, Kalpathy Agraharam, and East Fort Agraharam, focusing on the delineation of public, semi-public, and private spaces within households.

To examine the gender roles and activities associated with different spaces within these architectural contexts, elucidating how social and cultural norms influence the utilization of spaces.

To identify the flexibility and multifunctionality of spaces, particularly courtyards, and analyze their significance in accommodating various activities and ensuring privacy considerations.

Scope

This study delves into the spatial organization and privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture, focusing on three distinct locations: Thazhathangady, Kalpathy Agraharam, and East Fort Agraharam. The scope encompasses an analysis of public, semi-public, and private domains within households, considering gender roles, activities, and the multifunctionality of spaces. Additionally, the study examines regional variations in spatial organization and privacy practices across the selected locations.

Limitations

This research is primarily focused on spatial analysis within traditional Kerala architecture, particularly examining activity and gender domains. However, this narrow focus may overlook other influential factors such as socio-cultural norms and environmental considerations.

Moreover, the analysis is confined to architectural plans and spatial configurations within traditional Kerala homes, potentially missing the lived experiences and subjective perceptions of privacy. Additionally, the research primarily focuses on activity and gender domains, neglecting other dimensions of privacy like acoustic or visual privacy.

Furthermore, the findings may lack generalizability beyond traditional Kerala architecture, and reliance on existing literature and observational data may introduce biases. These limitations emphasize the need for cautious interpretation and future research to address these gaps in understanding privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture.

Literature Review

The literature review synthesizes findings from six papers, namely:

"Study of Malayali architecture & its adaptation in the modern context" by Vishnu K Suresh

"Between Tradition & Modernity: Determining Spatial Systems of privacy in the domestic architecture of contemporary Iraq" by Ali Al-Thahab, Sabah Mushatat, Mohammed Gamal Abdelmonem

"Study of privacy in traditional residential architecture of Islamic region" by Fatemeh Khozaei & Ahmad Sanusi Hassan

"Conception of spaces: A case of Kerala Courtyard Houses" by Minu Zacharia

"An Architectural Review of Privacy Value in Traditional Indonesian Housings: Framework of Locality-Based on Islamic Architecture Design" by Muhammad Ismail Hasan, Bintang Noor Prabowo, Hazrina Haja Bava Mohidin

"The Vernacular Architecture of Kerala, South India: An Architecture knowledge on the crossroad between Southeast Asia & south Asia" by Indah Widiastuti

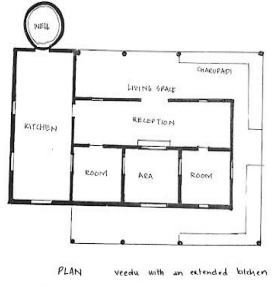
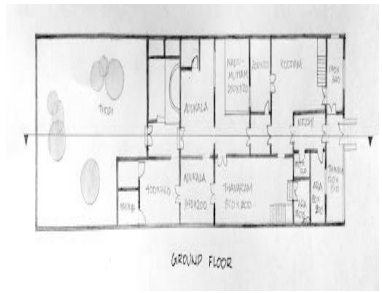
The literature review provides invaluable insights into the multifaceted nature of privacy dynamics within traditional architectural settings. Studies such as "Malayali Architecture & its Modern Adaptation" by Vishnu K Suresh underscore the delicate balance between preserving architectural heritage and meeting contemporary needs, guiding our approach towards understanding privacy within Kerala architecture. Similarly, research like "Between Tradition & Modernity" by Ali Al-Thahab et al. highlights the significance of transitional spaces in fostering social fluidity, shaping our understanding of spatial organization and its impact on privacy.

Moreover, investigations into traditional Islamic architecture in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as explored in "Study of privacy in traditional residential architecture of Islamic region" by Fatemeh Khozaei & Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, illuminate the cultural values embedded within architectural design, providing valuable insights into privacy considerations within communal living contexts. These findings serve as a framework for structuring our research, informing our analysis of privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture.

Furthermore, studies on Kerala's courtyard houses and Indonesian housings, such as "Conception of spaces: A case of Kerala Courtyard Houses" by Minu Zacharia and "An Architectural Review of Privacy Value in Traditional Indonesian Housings" by Muhammad Ismail Hasan et al., highlight the harmony between built and natural environments and the cultural significance of privacy values, guiding our exploration of privacy within Kerala architecture.

Collectively, these insights contribute to the structuring of our research, providing a nuanced understanding of privacy within traditional architectural contexts and laying the groundwork for our analysis of privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture. We concluded to analyze the plans based on the aspects of gender domain, privacy level, and activities, drawing from these diverse perspectives to inform our investigation into privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture.

Case Study

Casestudy	Space	Activity	Domain	Privacy Level	Plan
Thazhathangady	Living Space	5pm men Discussions	Male	Public	 <p>PLAN: verdu with an extended kitchen</p>
	Guest/Reception		Male	Public	
	Ara	10am-6pm Men mostly kayyaalanmaar(workers)	Shared	Semi-Public	
	Verandah	12pm-4pm Men(workers)	Shared	Semi-Public	
	Bedroom	10.30pm Karanavar for sleep	Shared	Private	
	Adukala Kitchen	6:30am -7pm women	Female	Private	
	Dinning	Dinning	Shared	Private	
Kalpathy Agraharam	Thinnai	Chatting and relaxing. 6am-8am Kids 2pm-4pm Men Naps 4pm-9pm Men / Women Discussion 9pm-6am Men Sleeping	Shared	Public	 <p>GROUND FLOOR</p>
	Rezhi	For storing cycles and interaction	Shared	Public	
	Mitham Nadumuttam	Courtyard which receives rainwater and drains to the thottam. 6am - 8am & 6pm-Tulsi Pooja by women 11am-2pm : Drying Grains by women 6pm-8pm :All Kids playing	Shared	Semi-Public	

		Sleeping of family members (At nights)			
	Second Courtyard	Service area for taps, bore wells, Vessel washing, bathing and washing clothes. 6am-9am & 11am-1pm: Vessel washing, washing clothes by women 6am-9am & 11am-1pm : Bathing	Women	Semi-Private	
	Koodam	A Multipurpose Living space with oonjal. 6am-8am: Cutting Vegetables by women & Kids preparing for school 6am-8am & 6pm: Pooja by men & women 2pm-4pm & 10pm-5am: Sleeping	Shared	Private	
	Adukala / Kitchen	6am-9am, 4pm-9pm: Cooking by women 10am, 1pm, 7pm-9pm: Dinning by All	Women	Private	
	Thazhvaram	A transition space provided with timber columns segregating koodam and mitham.	Shared	Semi-Public	
	Thottam	Backyard	Shared	Public	
East Fort Agraharam	Puramthinn a	Chatting & Relaxing	Men	Public	
	Akamthinn	Interaction & Relaxing	Shared	Public	

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	Rezhi	For storing cycles and interaction	Shared	Public
	Thalam	Space around courtyard , sacrificial fires	Shared	Semi-Public
	Mittam	Courtyard which receives rainwater and drains to the thottam.	Shared	Semi-Public
	Adukkala	Cooking, Cutting	Women	Private
	Kuchil	where the ladies during their menstruation are housed	Women	Private
	Machil	This room is assigned for the use of newly wedded couples.	Shared	Private
	Samayalkattu	Cleaning & washing utensils, small kitchen near well	Women	Private

Study Result & Analysis

The analysis of the casestudies unveils crucial insights into the spatial organization and privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture:

Clear Demarcation of Spaces: The casestudies underscore a distinct separation among public, semi-public, and private domains within the houses. Public areas like Thinnai, Rezhi, Puramthinna, and Akamthinna primarily serve communal activities and interactions with outsiders. Semi-public zones such as Ara, Verandah, and Mitham/Nadumuttam accommodate shared family activities with certain limitations, while private spaces like Bedrooms, Adukala/Kitchen, and Kuchil offer individuals or specific genders a sense of privacy and personal space.

Gender Roles and Space Utilization: Gender significantly influences space utilization within the houses. Women predominantly occupy areas like Adukala/Kitchen, Samayalkattu, and Kuchil, engaging in cooking, chores, and personal activities. Conversely, men utilize spaces like Ara, Verandah, and Puramthinna for discussions and relaxation. Shared spaces facilitate activities involving both genders, albeit within cultural norms and restrictions.

Flexibility and Multifunctionality: The casestudies reveal the adaptability and multifunctionality of spaces within traditional Kerala homes. Areas like Thinnai and Mitham/Nadumuttam function as versatile hubs accommodating various activities throughout the day, reflecting the dynamic nature of domestic life. Courtyards emerge as central elements in the architectural layout, offering multifunctional spaces for rainwater collection, family gatherings, and cultural rituals.

Regional Variations: Regional disparities in spatial organization and privacy practices are evident across different locations. In Kalpathy Agraharam, specific spaces like the Second Courtyard and Thazhvaram reflect distinct cultural norms. Conversely, in East Fort Agraharam, areas like Kuchil for menstruation and Machil for newly married couples exhibit nuanced privacy practices tailored to local customs.

Discussion

The analysis of the casestudies in traditional Kerala architecture revealed several key findings regarding privacy dynamics within these homes. A significant aspect was the deliberate spatial organization, with clear demarcations between public, semi-public, and private domains. Public spaces like Thinnai and Puramthinna fostered community engagement, while private areas such as Bedrooms and Adukala/Kitchen prioritized individual or gender-specific privacy needs. This delineation underscores the nuanced approach to privacy in architectural design, reflecting cultural norms and social expectations.

Gender roles played a crucial role in shaping the utilization of spaces within the households. Women predominantly occupied spaces associated with domestic tasks, emphasizing the cultural importance placed on maintaining privacy for certain activities. Conversely, men frequented spaces designated for discussions and relaxation, highlighting distinct gendered divisions in spatial usage. These findings highlight the intricate relationship between spatial organization, gender roles, and privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala homes.

Additionally, the adaptability and multifunctionality of spaces within traditional Kerala architecture were evident. Courtyards like Mitham/Nadumuttam served as communal spaces for gatherings and rituals while maintaining privacy through their layout and design. Regional variations across different locations further demonstrated the nuanced approach to privacy within Kerala architecture, influenced by local customs and traditions. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture, enriching scholarly discourse in the field of architectural studies.

Conclusion

This research has provided valuable insights into the privacy dynamics inherent in traditional Kerala architecture. The deliberate spatial organization, influenced by cultural norms and social expectations, reflects a nuanced understanding of privacy in architectural design. Gender roles significantly shape the utilization of spaces within households, underscoring the cultural importance placed on maintaining privacy for certain activities.

Moving forward, future research endeavors could explore the impact of modernization and urbanization on privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala homes. Additionally, incorporating perspectives from residents and stakeholders could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of

privacy within these architectural spaces. Furthermore, comparative studies with other cultural contexts could offer valuable insights into universal principles of privacy in architectural design.

Overall, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of privacy dynamics within traditional Kerala architecture, enriching scholarly discourse and informing future research and design practices in the field of architectural studies. By recognizing the cultural significance of privacy and its implications for spatial organization, this research fosters a greater appreciation for Kerala's architectural heritage and its enduring relevance in contemporary society.

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