



LIVING HERITAGE APPROACH FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRAHARAMS IN PALAKKAD, KERALA, INDIA

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Abstract

Palakkad is a town in the central part of Kerala. It has witnessed many historic events in the past. The reminiscence of this past is still visible in the constantly evolving fabric of the town. Agraharams, a traditional settlement where the Brahmin community resides is a physical manifestation of an exodus from Tamil Nādu, between the 14th and 15th centuries. It is a living heritage where the Brahmins still continue to live. For any heritage settlement to be sustainable, there must be considerations given to the changing needs of the community. The current policies and guidelines that govern the protection of Agraharam is limited to just one Agraharam. These policies heavily focus on authenticity of the physical fabric of the structures. This has posed major challenges for the community and its continuity. The author has used case study methodology as the larger tool to collect data. Review of literature to understand the concepts of existing conservation approaches, and existing policies for the conservation of Agraharams are done to attain inductive data. The research is exploratory and concludes if the living heritage approach, which focuses on continuity as the main criteria for preservation is appropriate for Agraharams. The research would contribute towards sensitizing people to the importance of identifying the appropriate conservation approaches for various typologies of heritage.

Keywords: Living Heritage, Cultural Heritage, Continuity, Living heritage Approach, Agraharams of Palakkad

Introduction

With the endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals by UNESCO during the World Heritage Convention process, cultural heritage has become a crucial component that can contribute significantly to both socioeconomic and environmental goals (UNESCO, n.d.) The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the relevance of regional diversity, global and local aspects of the culture as factors for long-term sustainability of human settlements (Billore, 2021). This makes it important for one to critically look at the current processes and guidelines that have been followed in the field of conservation, even at micro levels which include rural settlements. In India, international, national, and state agencies like UNESCO, ASI, and State Archaeological departments have a very limited number of monuments under their protection. The private sector initiatives for heritage conservation largely focus on the aesthetic aspects of the structure (Menon, 2014). The government's plans for the preservation and restoration of heritage structures focus primarily on monumental structures, with minimal attention paid to residential settlements with heritage characteristics. The rural heritage when dealt with appropriately can lead to its sustainable development (Nair et al., 2022). Even when regulations and policies are framed for settlements, they often fail to address the community who are the major stakeholders. This poses challenges to the community's sustenance which eventually affects the continuity of the settlement itself.

The aim of the study is to explore if Living Heritage Approach, which focuses on continuity, and community centric processes is the way forward for the preservation of Agraharams. The first objective is to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the community. Second objective is to understand and elaborate on the various approaches adopted in the area of conservation. The third objective is to compare the approaches against the case of Kodinthirapully Agraharam and justify how Living Heritage Approach is the way forward for the sustenance of Agraharams.

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What are Agraharams?

Agraharam, which denotes a prestigious location, means "the front or foremost row." It is a settlement seen in the Southern part of India where Brahmin community reside (Desai, 2018)." These are traditional houses in the temple towns of India where numerous generations of Brahmin community have lived creating memories and experiences. The practices associated with this community is ingrained in their daily activities, thereby developing this typology of settlement into a strong community-oriented settlement. The houses, streets, and temple all have their own unique characteristics which is the reflection of the residents' religious preferences and practices (Singal, 2022).

The word Agraharam has many etymological translations. One of the translations suggests that it is said to have derived from the Sanskrit word 'Agra' means tip and the Tamil word 'Haram' means garland. Another denotation is that it is a cluster shaped in the form of a garland with a temple in the center. A typical Agraharam has rows of houses on either side of the street with a temple in the center. The size of Agraharams can be varied in size with the largest one containing more than 100 houses and the smallest around 20 houses. The residents of the village are usually the priests and their families and are called Iyers. These houses are either built linearly or in concentric patterns around the temple like the Madurai Meenakshi temple complex. These are built on land donated by the ruling family or chieftain of the region.

Development of Agraharams

The development of Agraharam in South India can be traced back to the 4th century during the Pallava period. The earliest description of Agraharam is seen in the Tamil poem called *Perumpanarruppatai* written in the Sangam Literature. The village housed a community of people who protected the Vedas (Iyengar, 1929). In the book, *History of Tamils from the earliest times to 600 A.D.*, the author Iyengar also mentions details of how grants in the form of gift-lands were given to Brahmanas. Brahmins were appointed to carry out routine religious rites, rituals, and ceremonies in the temples. The rulers used a significant portion of state revenue to build and maintain temples (M.Sivanathan, A, S, & G, 2022). Temples functioned as the centre of political and commercial networks during the Pallava period in South India, which saw the emergence of new urbanization (Heitzman). The first Pallava king to have given grants to the Brahmanas was Bappa (Iyengar, 1929). Studies demonstrate that the Cholas, who ruled the Kaveri Delta, took an active role in supporting religious organizations by donating funds to them. The Cholas used this as a means of establishing local dominance as well as control over all of Tamil Nadu. During the Chola reign, Brahmanas were also mentioned as being among the decision-makers (Heitzman).

The Brahmins eventually gained control over local affairs. The Nayakas and the Marathas, two later dynasties that supported education and the arts and made significant contributions to the growth of Agraharams, were also patrons of learning and the arts (Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power - Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, 2021). They became social life for Brahmins where every ritual, festival, and marriage were celebrated as an event of the cluster and the processions passed through the streets of Agraharam. Agraharams also served the purpose of extending areas under cultivation. Brahmins became intermediaries who in turn restructured the existing population into castes and assigned each with suited labor (Jaiswal, 2016). The earliest Agraharams were seen in the Kaveri delta where the Brahman community were numerous.

Culture and Festivals

Iyer (also spelt Ayyar, Aiyar, Ayer, and Aiyer) adheres to Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara, who belongs to the Smarta school of thought. They study the Vedas and perform Vedic ceremonies in temples and homes. They taught their children the Vedas. The Shastras, Puranas, Vyakarana, Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Jyothisha were commanded by the scholars. Iyer rites are based on Hindu literature such as the *Apstamba Sutra*, which is attributed to Apastamba. The most essential ceremonies are the 17 basic Samskara. Iyers are initiated into rites at the time of their birth. The ceremonies of a Brahmin infant begin at the time of birth. This ritual is referred to as *Jatakarma*. However, this practice is no longer followed. Other ceremonies performed on a Tamil Brahmin child includes Sanskrit education, Veda Chanting, Sandhya Vandanam, mantra learning, and so on (Nigesh & Saranya T.S, 2017)

The Kerala Iyers has a distinct heritage that combines festivals observed in Tamil Nadu with influences from Kerala. Onam, Nirai, Navarathri, Avani Avittam, Gokulashtami, Vinayaga Chathurti, Deepavali, Karthigai, Thiruvadirai, Pongal, Sivarathri, Karadayan Nolumbu, Ramanavami, Vishu, Chitra Pournami, Pathinettam Perukku, and other festivals are observed (Keralaiyers.com, 2020).

Architectural Characteristics of Agraharams

The house opens up to the street on either side. The street becomes the main threshold bringing together the Agraharam into one single unit. Common water source, mostly wells and ponds is another feature one can see in Agraharams. The streetscape of the entire village depicts houses with shared walls that are two-storeyed. The spatial planning of the house is long and linear and can be bifurcated into four units: Mudhal Kattu (Receiving quarters which include Thinnai and Rezhi), Erandam Kattu (Living quarters which includes Koodam and Tazhvaram), Moondram Kattu (Service quarters including kitchen and cow shed), and the Thotam (Garden). The Agraharams also have a temple on either end of the street. The material used for construction is mostly wood for columns, structural members, doors, and windows; granite stone for flooring, capital, and base of the column; clay tiles for roofing.

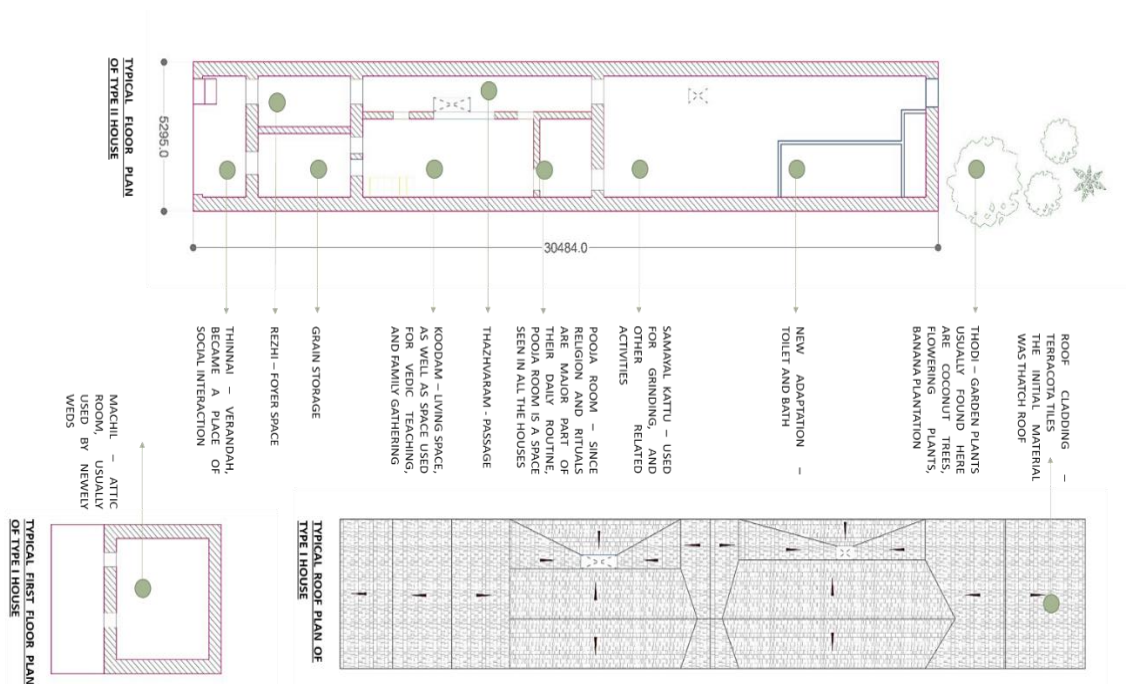


Figure 1. Image shows the spatial organization of a house in Agraharam; Source: By Author M.Arch Thesis, SCoA

Palakkad as context for the development of Agraharams

Palakkad is a district in Kerala belonging to the Indian subcontinent. Located at 10.7867° N, 76.6548° E, it is surrounded by Malappuram and Nilgiri districts on the North, Coimbatore district on the east, Trichur on the south, and Malappuram and Trichur on the west. It is a region with hills, rivers, and paddy fields. The unique physical features of Palakkad can be divided into two categories namely- midland and highland.

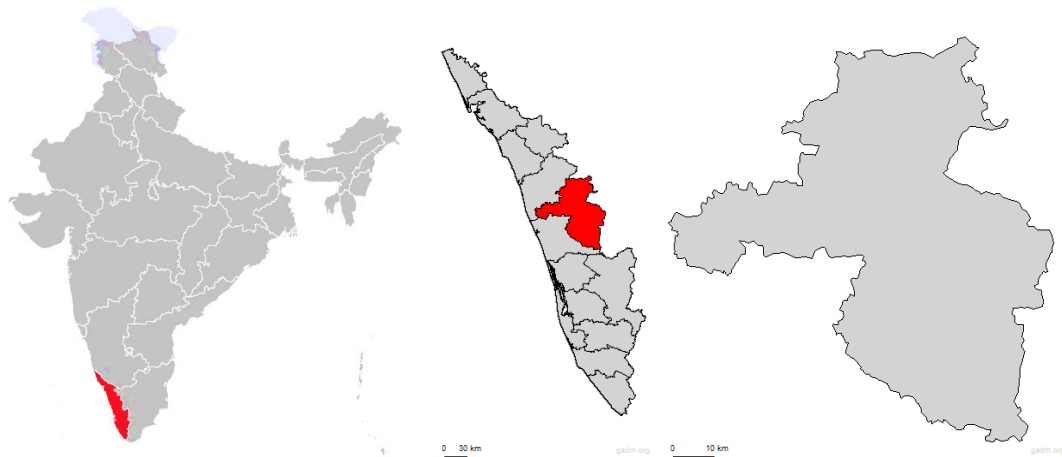


Figure 2. Shows the location of Palakkad in the context of India; Source: Ref: en.wikipedia.org; gadm.org

Palakkad shares its borders with Tamil Nadu and is connected to the region through a gap in the western ghats. The Palakkad Gap, a 30- to 40-kilometer-wide section of the otherwise continuous Western Ghats transformed into one of the most important migration paths for the area's later political and commercial associations. Additionally, people from various cultures settled here and integrated with the Aborigines to create a distinctive cultural fabric (Shah, 2016).

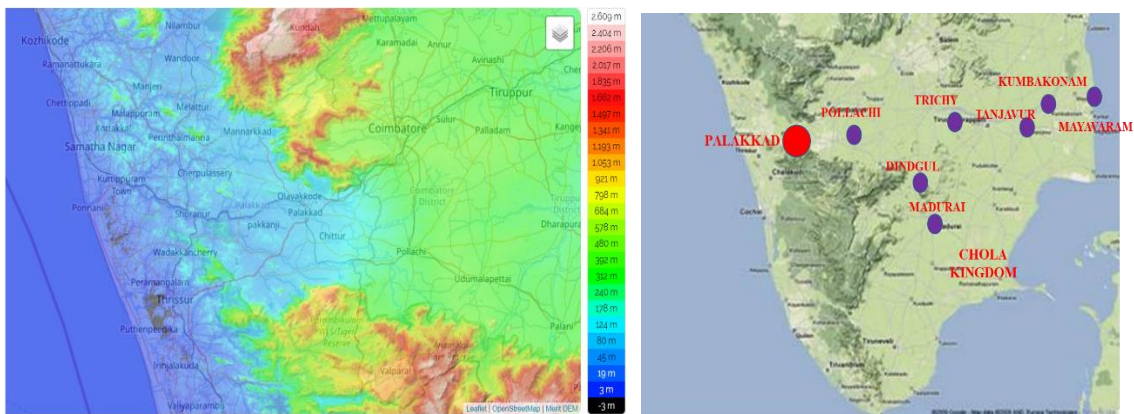


Figure 3. Map shows the elevation of the region; Ref: en-in.topographic-map.com

Figure 4. Map shows region from where Tamil Brahmins migrated; Ref: Historicalalleys.blogspot.com

The Palakkad Gap became a significant part that led to the mass migration of Brahmins from Tamil Nadu. When the Vijayanagara kingdom crumbled in the 13th century due to the invaders from the Northern part of India, The Brahmins had to flee due to fear of being prosecuted (Narayanan, 2020).

Tamil Brahmins first arrived in Kerala in the 15th century, primarily in the regions of Palakkad, Kochi, Trivandrum, Kollam, and Thrissur. The main waves of immigration into Kerala began during the ancient Sangam era and persisted until 1600 A.D. The southern Vijaynagar dynasty's downfall opened the independent provinces of the South to Muslim invaders from the northern region, which led to later migrations (Rajeev, 2015).

The migration of Tamil Brahmins to Palakkad as mentioned by K.N Lakshmi Narayanan in his Book "Cauvery to Neela" indicates two reasons. He dates it back to the time when the death of a Pandian ruler in the year 1310 brought instability to the kingdom. Invaders from the north took this opportunity to attack the Vijayanagara Empire. This dire circumstance made Tamil Brahmins from the Tanjavur region migrate to Kerala creating Agraharams of Kollengode, Koduvayur, Chittur, Tattamanglam, etc. to name a few (Narayanan, 2020). The second cause of migration suggests that the Tamil Brahmins were invited by the Palakkad Raja to carry out certain rituals in the Royal household when the Namboodiri Brahmins of Palakkad denied this request. The Tamil Brahmins who were also equipped with the rituals were seeking to settle near the Neela River and accepted to serve the King. Initially, 18 Agraharams developed in the present Palakkad town. A total of 96 developed across Palakkad Town and Palakkad District. Kalpathy is one of the first villages that was formed which gradually expanded eastward as the new Kalpathy, Govindarajapuram, and Vaidyanathpuram along the river (Sharma & Venkitaraman, 2019).

Significance of Agraharams

"Living heritage" has been increasingly talked about since 2003 when ICCROM developed a Living Heritage Sites scheme. The main purpose of the scheme was to emphasize the living dimensions of heritage places and their relevance to current life. It included the role of people, the long-term custodians as the main focus who would be involved in the continuous care of heritage (Wijesuriya, *Sharing Conservation Decisions : Current Issues and Future Strategies*, 2018).

UNESCO defines living heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the tools, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals, recognize as being a part of their cultural heritage. This inherited intangible cultural heritage is constantly being recreated by communities and groups in response to their surroundings, interactions with nature, and histories. It gives them a sense of continuity and identity and encourages respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

Agraharams are community-oriented settlements, where Brahmins reside. The Iyer Brahmins are bearers of Vedic knowledge, which was added by UNESCO in 2008 to its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, n.d.). This knowledge system is passed down from generation to generation. Their rituals, traditions, and cultural practices is an influence of the intermingling of the Tamil and Kerala culture.

Kerala which has a vast expanse of mid-land encourages the formation of isolated villages, each constrained to a little watershed delineated by ghat buttresses and small rivers. They are generally dispersed individual homes or house complexes spread throughout with the background of paddy fields (Susilo, 2007). Palakkad, being a district of Kerala has the same dispersed typology of homes. With the introduction of Agraharams, Palakkad saw the emergence of an urban characteristic in the housing typology. The architecture of the dwellings shows unique craftsmanship which is an amalgamation of the vernacular character of Kerala with the traditional Tamil style. The morphology of the settlement itself shows the strength of community living and becomes a model for sustainable settlements. The spatial characteristics such as shared spaces, shared water system, etc are unique to this typology.

Current situation of Agraharams concerning its sustainability

The society has undergone a lot of changes. When The Brahmins enjoyed a very different position in earlier times, the circumstances changed. The governing system, hierarchy in society, religious viewpoints, and needs have evolved. This has led to a slow and steady decrease in its number. The current regulations and management policies

only cover Kalpathy Agraharam of Palakkad. Study shows that the initiatives undertaken by the authorities have been looked at as restrictive by the dwellers of the settlement. This unsuccessful implementation has further led the community residing in other Agraharams to reject any such interventions. An NGO, called the Kerala Brahmana Sabha is working for the progress of Agraharams but their outreach is very limited. The challenges faced by the community include a lack of space to accommodate the new requirements, awareness regarding the maintenance of the structures, continuity of the Vedic knowledge system, and the Brahminic lifestyle. Another challenge is also the changed perspective of the second generation towards the culture. In most of the Agraharams, houses are left unoccupied, with the residents living in cities and towns. The community moving away from the Agraharams is eventually leading to the deterioration of the tangible heritage, thereby causing discontinuity of the intangible aspects. The sustainability of these settlements depends on a bottom-to-top approach where community-focused undertakings would lead to the continuity of this Living heritage.

Material and Methods

A mixed methodology was used to conduct this research. A case study to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the community. This included non-participant observations and interviews. Observations included activity mapping and photographic documentation where the author observed the way of living of community. The study was conducted for a period of one week. An interview of the community residing in Kodinthirapully Agraharam, was carried out. Purposive sampling and Convenience sampling were used to choose participants for the study. Purposive sampling to identify specific participants like the priest, the head of the village, and an accomplished scholar. Convenience sampling was used to interview a total of 30 participants who were available at the time of study. Community residing in this Agraharam is from the same sect and the characters were homogeneous. The questions posed were open-ended which included people's perception on the state of conservation of Agraharams, the tangible and intangible heritage associated with the settlement, threats to the site, and the community's take on the current regulations and policies governing the conservation of Kalpathy Agraharam.

A literature review of existing study on the current regulations and policies that governing the Kalpathy Agraharam was carried out. This allowed the author to gain an understanding of how the regulations affected the preservation of Agraharams and the community's reaction to it. This helped the author identify the lacunas and further validate the outcome of the case study.

A study of the existing approaches in the conservation of heritage was undertaken to understand the various criteria considered in each approach against which the parameters of study from the Kodinthirapully Agraharam could be compared.

The author was able to find a significant link between the criteria of the Living Heritage Approach and the qualities that need to be preserved in this traditional community through the study. This study is significant as there is very limited research conducted in the area of conservation approaches for Agraharam.

Various Approaches in the Field of Conservation

Material Based Approach

The primary emphasis of the material-based strategy revolves around conserving the physical structure. This approach's reflection is prominently evident in the Venice Charter, penned in 1964. The charter's various clauses delineate strategies for safeguarding the architectural composition of buildings and monuments. It also strongly underscores the importance of maintaining authenticity to ensure its transmission to future generations. This approach predominantly relies on the expertise of professionals, with minimal engagement from the community (Poulios Ioannis, 2014). The heightened attention to the building's physical structure might stem from its historical context, wherein a considerable number of historical properties suffered damage post-World War II. The charter placed a significant focus on upkeep and repair, imposing stringent restrictions on reconstruction and the use of alternative materials (Jokilehto, 1998).

Value-Based Approach

Value-based approach is an approach that emerged from the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 1979 which focuses on involving a wider range of stakeholders and values. It focuses on identifying and conserving the values of heritage that are recognized by the people to the things which dictate the cultural significance of a place. The statement of significance that develops out of the assessment of the values becomes the primary base for the conservation process. The Burra Charter defines cultural significance as aesthetic, historic, scientific, and social values (McClelland, 2018). In 1999, the revision made to the 1979 document defines "value" as the cultural significance encompassing aesthetic, scientific, societal, and spiritual worth for past, present, and future generations. "Cultural importance" is characterized as a manifestation that exists within the site, its structure, surroundings, use, interconnections, meanings, historical records, linked locations, and objects. As outlined by the charter, a location is likely to hold a range of values that differ among various individuals or groups (Australia ICOMOS, 1999). Professionals in the field of heritage preservation strive to find a middle ground between overarching policy reasons such as enhancing public well-being and generating tourism income, and the immediate concerns of practical conservation and management. These immediate concerns include preserving the noteworthy elements of a specific building or area and accommodating its functional needs for owners, occupants, or visitors. Through the process, the professionals produce increased worth to heritage through recognition, protection, and interventions (Avrami, 2019). Professionals become the main decision-makers through interactions with the people, and other stakeholders involved. Heritage gets defined based on the value people, and the stakeholder assigns to the identified heritage. The focus lies on safeguarding the set of values ascribed by the stakeholders (Poulios Ioannis, 2014).

Living Heritage Approach

The concept of the living heritage approach presents a framework for safeguarding living heritage, as articulated by Dr. Ioannis Poulios in his book 'The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach – Meteora, Greece.' This approach places emphasis on maintaining continuity as the principal criterion for preservation rather than focusing solely on authenticity. The central objective of this approach revolves around placing the core community at the forefront of all decision-making procedures. The principle of continuity places the community and their connection with the site above other stakeholders. The strategies encompassed within this approach encompass the following:

- The continuity of original function of the site which is rooted in the traditions,
- The continuity of community's connection to the site,
- Continuity of conservation practices followed by the community for the management of the site,
- The continuity of the evolving tangible and intangible expressions of the site

Meteora, situated in Greece, stands as a geologically significant landscape adorned with monasteries positioned atop elevated rocks. The Living Heritage Approach has been employed here to ensure the sustained legacy, guided by four key criteria. To maintain the continuity of the original function, the primary focus of conservation revolves around preserving the ongoing monastic purpose of the site. Moreover, efforts have been made to reinstate the initial function that was discontinued due to historical events like WWII and the Civil War. The core responsibility for conservation rests with the monastic communities. Collaborating with conservation experts and the broader community, they actively contribute to shaping the site, thereby upholding the continuity of the community's link to the location. They prioritize the perpetual revitalization of distinctive architectural elements seamlessly harmonized within the monastery's architectural style. This effort is overseen by the monastic community in partnership with conservation experts, fostering the continuation of community-led conservation practices. Lastly, the continuity of the evolving tangible and intangible aspects of the site, in accordance with the Orthodox Tradition, is driven by the monastic communities, facilitated by the involvement of conservation experts.

State of conservation of traditional settlements in India:

The safeguarding of heritage in India is primarily overseen by two key organizations, namely the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and INTACH.

The ASI's conservation principles predominantly center around the preservation of monuments, archaeological sites, and remnants. These principles advocate for limited interference with the structure to preserve its authenticity and integrity. Emphasis is placed on the structure's value, significance, authenticity, integrity, and aesthetics. The principles include approaches such as minimal intervention, restoring the structure to a previously known state, or preserving it as found. The guiding approach highlighted in the introduction is primarily rooted in value-based considerations, with no explicit reference to intangible cultural heritage or community engagement (Archaeological Survey of India, 2014).

Conservation ethics of INTACH revolve around the concept of authenticity, which serves as the foundational element within the Charter. Within the Charter, it is stated that authenticity must be shaped by traditional knowledge systems and the cultural environment in which the heritage resides. This is based on the Nara Document of Authenticity. The charter underlines the importance of the preservation of the technique and craftsmanship over the fabric (Luther, Indian Heritage the process to INTACH's Charter, 2010). The INTACH charter has outlined three standards for evaluating a building's value. These standards encompass historical importance, historical integrity, and historical context. The charter does not address the role of the community or their involvement in heritage conservation. Instead, it emphasizes the process involved like documentation, and grading of structures. It also defines the role of a conservation architect, as an expert or a member of a collaborative team, working toward attaining the established goals.

Current heritage conservation policies for Agraharams and its impact

The development regulations for the preservation of Kalpathy Agraharam are laid out under the Art and Heritage Commission constituted by the Government under the Kerala Municipality Rules, in the year 1999. The regulation prevents any kind of development, redevelopment, additions, alterations, repairs, renovations, replacement, demolition, use or reuse without prior permission for the preservation of the heritage fabric of the village. The regulations also lay restrictions on the height and retaining the character of the facade. Zoning regulations include control of land development and strict zoning based on the usage of land (Local Self Government Department Planning, n.d.).

The literature review of the research conducted on the perception of the community concerning the policies clearly shows the displeasure people residing in Kalpathy Agraharam have. People are protesting against the rules that restrict them from any development, redevelopment, additions, alterations, repairs, renovations, replacement, demolition, use or reuse without prior permission. The main stakeholders here are Residents, government officials, NGO members, Panchayat members, and Tourists. The restrictions suggest that any buildings having archaeological, historical, architectural, cultural, and historic significance will not be recommended to change from the existing layout. The study shows that the community is the main stakeholder, which finds it extremely challenging to maintain the structures due to difficulty in finding skilled workers for its maintenance, thereby making economic viability the top issue. On the other hand, the government's intention of the policy was to preserve the heritage character to promote tourism. The people are also unaware of the possibilities of preserving the heritage (Nair et al., 2022).

A Case Study of Kodinthirapully Agraharam, Palakkad, Kerala

The Agraharam at Kodinthirapully was formed in the 14th century when a group of Iyer Brahmins from Anbil village of Thrichirapilly migrated to Palakkad to escape from dire situations of drought in their village. The Agraharam derives its past from Srirangam. The land on which the village is situated was given to the Brahmins as a land grant by the Palakkatu Raja. The village developed in two stages, the first street, towards the east, was the 'Sali Gramam' which was also known as 'Adi Keshavapuram' named after the Deity Shri Adikeshava Perumal residing in the village. The village eventually grew towards the west where there are two temples, one dedicated to Lord Ayappa, constructed in the year 1733 century CE and another temple, called Sarpa Kavu dedicated to the snake god. The Brahmins were given land grants and became owners of cultivable land. The Agraharam has around 136 houses and around 700 Iyer Brahmins residing in the village. The village stands amidst paddy fields. Only Brahmins are housed in the Agraharam, which retains much of its historical character. The inhabitants' chosen body is in charge

of the Agraharam's governance. The land reformation act of 1971 led to the Brahmins losing all their property and turning to other job opportunities for income. Ayappa Kshethram, after a long time of neglect was renovated much later. The Jeernodhara Kumbhabhishekam happened on 22.04.2001.

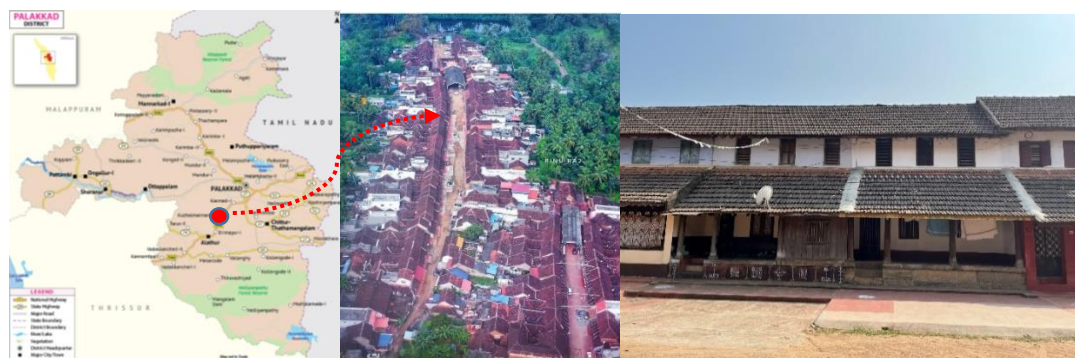


Figure 5. Location of Kodinthirapully Agraharam on map of Palakkad, Source: Mapsofindia.com;

Figure 6. Image shows ariel view of the settlement, Source: Rinu Raj;

Figure 7. Image shows architectural character, Source: By Author

The Kodinthirapully Agraharam falls under Pirayiri Panchayat. Apart from this the village also falls under Kerala Brahmana Sabha which works for the preservation and upliftment of the Brahmin community in Kerala. The village itself is governed by elected members of the community.

Table 1. Matrix shows the list of important rituals and festivals celebrated throughout the year; Source: By Author

RITUAL/FESTIVAL	DESCRIPTION
'Sundarakandaparanam' Ritual	performed daily in the early morning hours before the deity by Agraharam chief Vadhyar Sri Thiruvengkatanatha Sharma (Alias Ambi Vadhyar).
Anjamkalapatu Ritual	Celebrated on the 5 th of the Malayalam month Magaram. Performed for the village deity Lord Ayappa. This is also celebrated in Nedumkaihakota. This happens at the same time in both temples. The statue of Lord Ayappa (Angi) is taken out for procession. The statue is made in the image of Shri Kodanda Raman (Lord Rama).
Aratu Festival	Celebrated in Malayalam month Meena to Uthram. Dedicated to Lord Krishna. The statue of God that is taken out for procession is made from panchaloha.
Navarathri Pooja Festival	Earlier a ritual but it became a pooja after the interjection of Kerala traditions of Chendamelam, Vadhyamelam, and Thayambakam. The pooja is dedicated to Durga Dev. During the month of Chingam, they celebrate thapuyam. During this day, they do Tharpanam (Offerings) near the temple pond. Avani Avittam, also known as 'Upakramam,' is done on this day.
Avani Avittam Ritual	Celebrated during the month of Chingam, and coincides with Navarathri. It signifies the start of the study of the Vedas and is a key rite for the Brahmin community. The Brahmins also change the sacred thread on this day
Sandhyavandanam Ritual	The daily rituals performed in the morning and evening, usually done by the river, are now done either near the temple pond or their homes. This is called 'Aarghayam' or offerings to God.
Other temple Festival	In the month of Vrishchikam, festivals take place in the Ayappa temple.

The community residing in the village are Iyer Brahmins who are Samavedigar. They fall into the Jaimini Samaveda Shakha. This can be confirmed from the recital copied below as recited by the individual staying at the village. The community has a very closely-knit bond and celebrates all the festivals and ceremonies as a single unit. Fairs and festivals are of great importance which brings the whole community together. Due to the social stratification and ritual pollution which was prevalent in the earlier times, the culture of the community is inward and remains isolated

from the outside world. The community of Brahmins was well-versed in Vedas, Puranas, Jyothisham (Astrology), Ayurveda, Chitra Katha, Music, Devotional songs, Vadhyakala, and Purana Prayanam. They have also adopted the language Malayalam and celebrate festivals like Onam, Vishu, etc. which are festivals of Kerala.

The community also follows all the rituals. They reflect the ritual of the Temple of Nedumkaithakota here. The following matrix shows the rituals and festivals followed by the community.

Results

Observations from the case study

Stakeholders – The community, the NGO Kerala Brahmin Sabha, and the Panchayat

Intangible Aspects: The community is committed to upholding their cultural practices, fostering social cohesion, and maintaining their unique way of life.

- **Cultural Continuity:** The community's original function was administrative and religious in nature. The community remains deeply connected to their culture, adhering to rituals and festivals based on the traditional calendar. Festivals are pivotal events where the entire community comes together. Families return to the village to partake in celebrations, showing a strong sense of unity.
- **Traditional Practices of conservation:** The recent renovation of the temple indicates a revival of traditional practices after a period of neglect. The community employs traditional methods and rituals for the temple's restoration.
- **Strong Cultural Association and community engagement:** The community's connection to its culture remains robust, evident through their engagement in various activities and interactions. Residents are highly engaged, with men and women socializing and playing games together. The second generation is actively involved, participating in discussions while sitting on verandas. The community's close bond is apparent, reflecting a tightly-knit social structure. Celebrations at the temple are collective efforts, with every household contributing in various capacities. Safety and security are not major concerns, as houses are left open without constant supervision, indicating a strong sense of trust within the community.
- **Vedic Knowledge System:** The brahmins of this village are practitioners of the Vedas. Knowledge of Vedas is fading, with only a few well-versed Brahmins remaining. The second generation receives lessons, but there are concerns about the continuity of this knowledge.

Tangible Aspects: Community faces challenges in maintaining the authenticity of their traditional houses. While some alterations were made out of necessity, efforts are being made to restore and maintain the structures with external financial assistance.

- **Alterations:** Approximately 16% of the original houses have undergone changes, while 34% have retained some original features but have been adapted in various ways. Several modifications have been made to the houses, including cladding with vitrified tiles, changes to flooring, wall treatment, roofing materials, additional concrete structures, and the addition of features like grills and walls in verandas. The alterations have been driven by the challenges of maintenance, including a lack of necessary skills, health issues, and financial constraints.
- **Preservation of Character:** Despite alterations, the fundamental character of the area has been preserved, suggesting a certain level of harmony between modern adaptations and the original atmosphere.
- **State of Conservation of the fabric:** Lack of proper maintenance has led to deterioration of walls and roofing materials in many houses.
- **New Constructions:** New constructions have been erected within the settlement, replacing traditional houses that existed before.

- Support for Restoration: The Kerala Brahmana Sabha plays a role in restoration and maintenance efforts by providing funding based on applications submitted by residents. This implies an external support system for heritage preservation.
- Others – Lack of appropriate amenities like parking, room for a growing family, skilled workers, and funding for renovation.

Inference from the Policy review:

Currently, the policies exclusively apply to a single Agraharam in Palakkad, specifically Kalpathy Agraharam. The existing regulatory structure places significant emphasis on maintaining the original character of the fabric. The limitations placed on various forms of development, such as redevelopment, alterations, and repairs, present a dilemma for the community's adaptability to their changing needs over time. A notable deficiency in the policies and regulations lies in the absence of solutions tailored to the community's specific requirements. Moreover, there is no provision within these policies that outlines a framework for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of the village.

Inference from Interview

The interview suggested that the community was finding the existing spaces not adequate for current needs. The demolition of houses for reconstruction leads to the structural integrity of the neighboring houses. There is a difficulty in acquiring funds with funding only coming from the NGO, Kerala Brahmin Sabah at present, upon submission of the application. Some of the residents mentioned health and lack of funding as challenges that poses difficulty in the continuous maintenance of the houses. Non-availability of skilled workers is a gap they face when it comes to traditional maintenance of the structures. The residents mentioned that they had associated communities living nearby they have migrated elsewhere. The community showed concerned about the continuation of their culture. They thought that the physical aspects can be maintained but what adds to the essence of place is the people and their way of life. There are only 50 young Brahmins who are well versed in the knowledge of Vedas, after whom there is a threat of discontinuation and gradual loss of the knowledge system.

Discussions

Challenges faced by the community

The practice of cultural aspects is still intact among the people but there is a threat of discontinuity due to the changed requirements and aspirations. The settlement now has majority of old generation residing there with the second generation leaving the village for better living and opportunities. The traditional practices of conservation are followed by the community annually and during festivals. A lot of residents showed concern in continuing this due to lack of skilled craftsman, funding, and old age. There is a threat in the discontinuation of the Vedic knowledge system with the diminishing number of people with the knowledge.

The fabric of the village is mostly intact with a few alterations seen in the interior spaces. The alterations are mostly material changes for the ease of maintenance and cost. There is a threat of major changes in the future if the challenge of maintenance and funding is not addressed. The physical character of the village holds up with a few new constructions in between. If proper measures are not taken for to manage this change, there will loss of architectural character eventually. A lot of houses have issues due to lack of maintenance. Major aspect highlighted her is funding and old age. At present, funding for the maintenance comes from the NGO. One has to go through an application process and not everyone can acquire these funds easily. Amenities such as parking, extension to the houses, etc. are not possible

Enforcing the existing policies, which primarily emphasize fabric preservation, could potentially jeopardize the safeguarding of intangible elements. An examination of the research paper discussing public opinion on these regulations vividly illustrates the community's struggle. Such circumstances might prompt residents to depart from the settlement, ultimately resulting in the discontinuation of cultural traditions over time. The way forward for the sustainability of the settlement it to empower the community and make them the main decision makers.

Conservation professionals and experts can actively involve themselves in capacity building of the residents of the community. For this living heritage approach is appropriate as the criteria mentioned in it is inclusive and gives consideration to the site, community, their connection and the tangible-intangible aspects attached to it.

Living Heritage Approach for the sustenance of Agraharams

Unlike the existing policies and regulation which is material-based approach and concentrates on the preservation of the authenticity of the fabric, the living heritage approach focuses on continuity of both tangible and intangible aspects, with community as the center for protection and preservation of heritage. The table given below shows the different aspects of Agraharam and its relation to the criteria under both material-based approach and Living Heritage Approach.

Table 2. Shows the aspects of heritage of Agraharam and how it relates to the two approaches

Aspects of heritage of Agraharam	Current regulations and policies (Material Based Approach)	Living Heritage Approach
Cultural Strength	✗	✓ Criteria I, IV
Rituals and festivals	✗	✓ Criteria I, IV
Traditional Practices of conservation	✗	✓ Criteria I, II, III, IV
Community engagement	✗	✓ Criteria I, II, III, IV
Vedic Knowledge System	✗	✓ Criteria I, IV
Architectural Character	✓	✓ Criteria III, IV

Conclusions

Through this study, it is evident that a living heritage typology such as Agraharam, which is specific to a community, and community specific traditions and activities, must be looked at very differently. A sensitive approach that focuses on community and the continuity of the tangible and intangible aspects must be considered. Preserving the physical fabric might not be the solution for this. The living heritage approach which defines the continuity of a function, the process of maintenance, and the community's association with the site as the main criteria of conservation directly relates with the various aspects of heritage seen in the Agraharam. Hence, we can conclude that Living Heritage Approach may be appropriate for its sustainability.

- There must be a revision in the current regulations and framework. The policies must include framework for handling the intangible aspects of the site, the evolving nature of the site and the community's requirements.
- The authorities must collaborate with Kerala Brahmin Sabha (NGO) and conduct extensive surveys to understand the requirements and challenges faced in the preservation and protection of Agraharam. These surveys would help them make necessary changes to the policies.
- The authorities must undertake capacity building activities for the community, especially the second generation to develop a management plan driven by the community.
- The authorities must undertake awareness building activities to inculcate the importance of heritage, both tangible and intangible.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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