THE IMPACT OF KINSHIP SYSTEMS ON THE GENERATION OF HOUSE-TYPES

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A matrilineal descent system practiced in and around the city of Calicut in southern India has had far-reaching implications for the structure of the local built environment. The tarawad system, practiced by the Moplah Muslim, Hindu Nayar and Nambudri Brahmin communities, has created a residential pattern of clan houses, also called tarawads, that sometimes contain as many as one hundred residents. Although the traditional tarawad system is currently being eroded by the institution of the nuclear family as an independent economic unit, the persistence of the tarawad as a social institution has been facilitated for centuries by rules prescribing the transfer of property within descent groups. The maintenance of a pool of family property and the ability to fairly distribute living space within the tarawad house on occasions of marriage by female members of the tarawad were keys to the survival of the family structure. Corporate ownership of property in that structure provided physical evidence of the social bond between members of the kin-group. The tarawad system, as traditionally practiced, had a number of specific implications for the structuring of residential space. Key among these, for reasons of separation between individual household domains, was a distinction between public, semi-public and private space. Because rituals traditionally contained a communal component, each tarawad house also contained a ritual core. The paper proceeds from an analysis of features of the tarawad system which have implications for the structuring of the residential unit to an examination of four specific tarawad houses. These are presented as representative prototypes based on field research. Three of the four houses are from the Muslim Moplah community in central Calicut. The fourth belongs to a Hindu Nayar tarawad on the outskirts of the city, and is presented as a comparison to show how the tarawad house structure evolved differently in a different cultural group that subscribed to the same kinship system.

This paper seeks to identify and analyze some of the social and cultural factors that have had a critical influence on the structuring of traditional environments. It can be broadly viewed as an attempt to develop a more inclusive framework of inquiry and analysis concerning built form and the
structure of environments that may currently be undergoing transformation.

The focus of the study is a Muslim settlement in the core of the city of Calicut in southern India. Given the various groups that inhabit the region, including the Nambudri Brahmins, the Nayars and the Moplah Muslims, the settlement cannot be viewed as a representative type, and can more rightly be termed a sub-culture. However, an overlap of seminal issues does occur among the various groups which has helped guide the physical development of the area.

The scope of inquiry is restricted to investigating and analyzing a particular socio-cultural institution, the traditional matrilineal kinship structure, as it has affected the built environment. The kinship system, which does persist to a certain extent among the Hindu Nayar and Muslim Moplah communities, is one wherein descent is traced through the female line to a common ancestress. As part of the system, all female descendants are required to reside on marriage in the maternal house, or tarawad. This requirement is made operative by conferring on female descendants a complex set of rights of ownership, division and transmission of landed property. The system also clearly designates codes of conduct and authority for male and female members of descent groups. The settlement is characterized by a number of descent groups, each headed by a female descendant, forming clans that sometimes exceed one hundred members living together in a tarawad house.

In many instances, generational range has today made the
relationships between descent groups in a *tarawad* unclear, and the only evidence of common origin is sometimes the fact of common residence. In such an environment, aspects of residence and rights over landed property contribute significantly to sustaining the system in its traditional form. But recent ethnographic research has indicated that a steady disintegration of the matrilineal kinship system is occurring, the traditional structure being replaced by the nuclear family as an independent economic unit. Since recent developments have led to social and cultural changes with explicit ramifications for the urban environment, it is important to examine the body of conventions that determined the traditional environment. The appropriateness or inappropriateness of recent urban developments can only be gauged by analyzing the traditional condition.

It became apparent during the field study, which comprised the documentation of four traditional *tarawad* houses (FIGS. 1-4), that principles of residential spatial organization in the houses could only be discerned by understanding the dynamics of the traditional kinship system. At first glance, *tarawad* houses appear to have a relatively chaotic organization. But when viewed against the customs and conventions that inform the kinship system, their spatial layout reveals an array of meanings and rules of organization. As a consequence, this paper proceeds from a discussion of the
kinship system to an analysis of the documented houses. A
determination that the four houses could be seen as proto-
types was based on interviews and observations. The
analysis consists largely of an examination of artificial data
against ethnographic studies conducted in this and related
contexts.\textsuperscript{1}

THE INSTITUTION OF THE TARAWAD

The kinship system of the Moplahs and Nayars is not an
autonomous system, but an integral part of a more inclusive
culture pattern, in which it plays a critical, though not
dominant, role. The concept of culture pattern is here used
interpretatively, as a means to bring apparently diverse ex-
pressions together in a coherent structure of thought. Kinship
concepts, institutions and relations classify, identify and
categorize persons and groups. The tarawad system is
associated with rules of conduct whose efficacy derives
from general principles of morality rooted in the familial
domain, and assumed to be universally and axiomatically
binding. This is what Meyer Fortes has referred to as,
"prescriptive altruism as the principle of kinship morality."\textsuperscript{2}

Viewing kinship systems against the background of an
overall system of symbols by which a people organize their
lives, one is lead to an analytical position based less on
formal concerns than on intrinsic factors related to life
style. In the case of the Moplahs and the Nayars, such a
position leads immediately to an investigation of the dy-
namics of the social notion of tarawad. As an institution,
and as the crux of a kinship system, the tarawad has
exhibited a certain degree of flexibility, a factor contribut-
ing to its persistence and adaptability over time. Some have
traced definite periods in its development. These have been
termed "the old, the interregnum and the new order," and
they have been marked by distinct changes in rules, particu-
larly among the Nayars.\textsuperscript{3}

The Moplah and Nayar word tarawad derives from tara,
which in the local language literally means "a raised plat-
form on which a Nayar house is built." In terms of family
structure, tarawad refers to all the descendants of a com-
mmon matrilineal ancestress. Thus, for instance, a tarawad
might consist of a group of sisters plus their brothers,
children, and daughters' children. Usually, however, a
tarawad contains a wider span of relatives. All segments of
a tarawad, whatever their size, are referred to by the same
term, but when the term is used without qualification, it
refers to that segment of the descent group who own
property collectively and live together in a large house. The
house is also called a tarawad. Each tarawad was tradition-
ally an independent economic unit whose members derived
a livelihood from joint ownership of property. This fact
was especially true for the Nayars who are landowners in a
predominantly agrarian society. The term tavazhi is also
used by the Nayars to refer to the segment of the tarawad
headed by an elder woman.

The traditional tarawad was constituted as a corporation,
and was reinforced by the possession of an estate which in-
cluded a house (or houses) and land. Ownership of landed
property and houses in relation to the structure of the
tarawad was founded on a complex relationship of rights in
common, joint rights, and rights in division. C.J. Fuller's
classifications of "property group, clan and sub-clan" are
particularly useful to give further clarification to the tarawad
structure (FIG. 5). Fuller refers to the group owning
property collectively as the "property group." A tarawad
thus describes a particular instance where property group
and household (the residential group) are congruent, imply-
ing identical membership in a joint family. "Clan" refers to
the largest matrilineal unit in such a system, one claiming
descent from a common ancestress. On certain occasions,
a clan and a property group/household can be co-extensive;
but on others one can recognize segments between clan and
property group/household that can be referred to as "sub-
clans." Each clan has a name which forms part of the name
of each of its members. Thus, two people living in the same
area and bearing the same clan name are assumed to have
a common ancestress even though their exact relationship
might be unknown.\textsuperscript{4} In a large clan having a number of sub-
clans, each sub-clan would have its own name.

The clan is exogamous, meaning that no two persons with
an assumed common matrilineal ancestress are permitted
to marry. The exogamous segment is also the "community
of pollution," a group whose members together observe
rituals accompanying "rites of passage," such as death,
birth and puberty.\textsuperscript{5} The concepts of exogamy and commu-
nity of pollution are inextricably linked and associated with
descent from a common ancestress. Traditionally, the
ceremonies that accompanied "rites of passage" and "pu-
riety of women" were complex and had immense social
implications and symbolic meaning. They found explicit
expression in the spatial organization of the residential unit,
especially among high-caste Nambudri Brahmins and Nayars.

Insofar as authority and responsibility was traditionally concerned, the eldest male member of the tarawad was known as the karnavan, and was legally responsible for all major decisions related to the clan. The term karnavan literally means, "man with responsibility." Transformations in the structure of the tarawad have been attributed mainly to changes in its power structure, and in the authority of the karnavan, in particular. In the old order (before the 1920s) the karnavan enjoyed unquestioned authority. He was legally responsible for the well-being of clan members and the management of the tarawad estate. He had no claim on the estate, and all decisions related to tarawad property had to be sanctioned by a consensus of adult members (who also could maintain no individual claim, but who shared an equal interest in all property). Partition of tarawad property could only occur with a consensus of all adult members, even though in most cases the decision of the karnavan in association with a few elder male members remained unquestioned.

The salient factors of the tarawad during the period of the old order seem thus to have been:
- The existence of a joint family consisting of a matrilineal segment broken down into sub-segments called tavazhis on the occurrence of marriage. Each tavazhi was headed by an elder female member of the clan.
- The maintenance of a pool of household property through a continuance of the matrilineal lineage. Given the nature of the system, an in-marrying male was conferred a second-class status, and was commonly referred to as a "visiting husband." In principle, such a person was an outsider, and was treated as such, with only limited contact with his wife and virtually no responsibilities toward his children. The karnavan was responsible for the well-being of all clan members. He was usually the eldest two sons and two daughters, and one of the daughters had two children, the woman's family property would be divided into six parts. The daughter with two children would receive three shares, which she would retain for herself and her children (FIG. 6a). However, if one of the sons were dead, the property would be divided into five parts, because the dead son's widow and children would not receive a share (FIG. 6b). If the daughter with two children were dead, the property would be divided into five parts, with each of the dead woman's children having claim to one fifth (FIG. 6c). These examples show how the distribution of property takes place strictly within the living descendents of the matrilineal segment.

In contrast to family property, women can acquire individual property in ways other than matrilineal inheritance. Her individual property is distinct from her family property, and matters related to its disposal lie solely within her power. Thus, for instance, if a woman inherited property from her father, it would be considered personal property. If she transferred it to her daughter, however, it would become the daughter's family property. There would thus occur a complex reversal of property status from one generation to the next, implying that the process of inheritance/transmission does not necessarily diminish net family holdings. The critical rule governing this procedure of land division and transmission is that transfers be fair and equal. In the system, however, equality is not necessarily judged by area, but also by value and income-generation.

It is evident that a concept of property as a social institution underlies the tarawad scheme of rights, duties, privileges and powers. The recognition of social values is integrally linked with regulation of ownership, which is in turn reinforced by social sanctions. Within such a framework, property division and distribution is not primarily a matter of material transfer, but of interpersonal transaction that maintains and reinforces the social bond. Property is not

FIG. 5. Definitions of clan, sub-clan, property group and tarawad.
the basis of the kinship structure, however; it does not create the social relations of kinship and descent. It is, rather, the means by which such relations are made tangible. If kinship can be looked upon as the social instrument regulating relationships among individuals, then property holdings structure individuals' roles. It follows that the corporateness of a matrilineal descent group, as seen from within, derives primarily from its structure and ideology, not exclusively from corporate ownership of property.

The point that kinship relations are not necessarily sustained by property ownership is exemplified by the existence of similar kinship systems among the Nayars and Moplahs, notwithstanding the fact that the former are largely an estate-owning group while the latter are traders with virtually no estate ownership. Though the nature of vested interest traditionally varied among clan members in each community, the concept of "residence in the ancestral house" was the same. However, ownership did play a crucial role in the structuring of settlements. Non-ownership of land necessitated that the ancestral house be subjected to periodic transformations to accommodate the generational range implied by the kinship system. In this way non-ownership contributed in a fundamental way to the high density of the Muslim settlements. The Moplah residential unit also has a very complex organization compared to the relatively dispersed and unchanged spatial pattern of Nayar ancestral houses.

Before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of the impact of the kinship system on the spatial organization of the house-types, it is appropriate to draw attention to another aspect of critical importance insofar as the Nayar houses were concerned. This is their the strict adherence to rules laid down by a religious "text," the Vastu Shastras.

Stated summarily, the tarawad, as a body of cultural elements, has form and internal structure. Each cultural element carries with it, or is the outcome of, a specific context of social relations to which certain norms and customary behavior are linked. It tacitly implies a socio-spatial frame of arrangement in that, for example, a description of kinship institutions can be related to observable socio-spatial arrangements of home, workplace, and community. What gives the institution its coherence is that it comes about through the interweaving of such nexuses, in the conduct of persons in interaction.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE KINSHIP SYSTEM FOR THE STRUCTURE OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The kinship relations of a matrilineal descent system have direct and indirect implications on the structure of the built environment, from the level of the residential unit to that of the neighborhood. As a residential unit, the tarawad emerges as the physical symbol of the family's origin. Its spatial layout reveals the inevitable processes of segmentation and differentiation necessitated by prescribed rules over such things as inheritance, interaction and avoidance. The organization of the residential unit comes to be pivoted around the perpetually maintained social distinction between the individual household and the clan as a corporate group (FIG. 7).

From the total range of interrelationships constituting the kinship system, several aspects appear to be crucial in determining the rules that govern the spatial order of the residential unit. These are descent through the female line, the occasion of marriage of female members, the distribution of wealth (and the issue of property transmission), and
FIG. 7. (top) House one: plan showing the organization of activities
FIG. 8. (bottom) House one: plan showing the pattern of ownership by individual households.
The role of matrilineal descendants as representatives of the clan and centers of authority. The extent and nature of the impact of these aspects on the residential unit will be considered before proceeding to an examination of their presence in the four documented houses.

The bias for inheritance in favor of females and the requirement that women reside in their own tarawad after marriage have two significant implications for the residential unit. First, given the condition that descent takes place matrilineally, the number of females in a clan determines the number of descent groups that may comprise that clan. The formation of a new household is accompanied by the allocation of a set of self-contained living spaces, either by subdivision of the tarawad house, by extension of the tarawad house, or in isolated cases by building detached quarters in the tarawad compound. In most cases, especially among the Muslims, the first two patterns seem to predominate (FIG. 8). What is evident is that the extent and periodicity of transformations of the tarawad house are directly related to the number of female members of the clan and the occurrence of marriage.

Allocation of living space to new households today does not always comply with old order rules of property division (i.e., equal division among members of the descent group). This is attributable to the development of the concept of individual property as an independent source of income. Individual households can now acquire space within the tarawad on the basis of their relative status and economic situation.

The organization and location of household spaces in the tarawad house follows another criterion, as well. Since husbands are accorded outsider status, and since strict rules of avoidance must be maintained between male and female members of different households, husbands are allowed only limited access to the tarawad house. In fact, a husband's access is restricted to only those spaces allocated to his household. Such a set of conditions demands careful demarcation and organization of different household spaces to exclude unwanted intrusions into other domains. It is not uncommon to come across tarawad houses containing as many as five or six households. Given such a situation, in which the total clan can include as many as one hundred members, the designation of public, private and transitional...
zones assumes special importance (Fig. 9). The transformation of the ancestral house is inextricably linked to designated social zones, reinforcing the social norms that mark daily life.

The rituals that accompany rites of passage entail the provision and location of specific spaces within the residential unit. The rituals find their basis in notions of purity and impurity, pollution distance, and ritual status. Each ritual has two aspects, one related to the dynamics of the ritual itself (of concern to an individual), the other related to collective celebration by the entire kin-group, which usually follows completion of the ritual. Though rituals vary between the Moplahs and the Nayars, the act of collective celebration, usually in the form of feasting, is a constant (Fig. 10). The act of eating together is an occasion that symbolizes and reinforces the kin bond. The rites of passage rituals seem to have traditionally been more stringently observed by the Nayars, especially with regard to the females of the tarawad. Nevertheless, the individual and collective aspects of the rituals do determine to a degree the spatial organization of the tarawad residence for both groups.

One instance of the spatial correlates of ritual concerns the rites of puberty — looked at as a state of pollution, particularly among the Nayars. The ritual of puberty called for the seclusion of a girl in a dark chamber for a period of time. Her release from the chamber signified her entry into adulthood and was celebrated collectively by feasting. In view of the prevalent notion of “pollution distance,” the location of the chamber within the house was prescribed. A similar ritual took place on the occasion of birth and required the provision of a delivery room.

The notions of purity and impurity ascribe a special importance to the act of bathing, to a point where bathing — usually the only way to reenter a state of purity — attained a ritual status. The bathing tank came to be an inevitable aspect of a Nayar tarawad such as that shown in Fig. 4. In the case of wealthy tarawads, there were usually two bathing tanks, one for men and the other for women. Since the observation of kin-group rituals formed an integral part of the prevalent cosmology, large spaces in the tarawad house were specifically designated for use on special occasions. In fact, one can conclude (as the analysis of the four houses reveals) that such spaces form the generic core of the tarawad residence (Fig. 11). The order of occurrence of such spaces designates the rules related to their use by kin and non-kin members, designating in the process the public zones in the tarawad residence. The ultimate structure of dependence and amity, and its external independence, finds expression in the gatehouse as a primary definition between public and private domains.

THE SITE OF THE FIELD STUDY — KUTTICHERA NEIGHBORHOOD

The field study was restricted to the Kuttichera neighborhood of Calicut, an area having a predominantly Muslim population (Fig. 12). The settlement is one of the earliest to have been established in the area, dating back to the early fourteenth century.

The neighborhood of Kuttichera is located along the coast of the Arabian Sea, and is contained within the north-south Beach Road to the west and Trunk Road to the east. It is flanked by the highly commercial streets of Big Bazaar to the north and Francis Road to the south. At the intersection of Idiyangara Road (which bisects the settlement along the north-south axis) and Kuttichera Road is located a large communal bathing tank. The tank and the towering wooden structure of the Misqual Mosque on its northern edge form the focal point of the settlement. A noticeable feature of the settlement is the many smaller mosques which occur in it,
which serve different residential groups within the community. The settlement is predominantly residential with commercial activities restricted to the north, south and east edges and along the northern part of Idiyangara Road.

As one enters the neighborhood, one’s general impression is of narrow streets and alleys lined by high, blank brick walls intermittently broken by gatehouses marking the entries to individual *tarawad* houses. At times a second screen is placed behind the gatehouse to shield the forecourt within from view. The distinctiveness of the gatehouse and the high walls that enclose individual *tarawad* houses marks the autonomy of the domestic group and the boundaries of the private domain (FIGS. 13, 14). The gatehouse in some cases takes on an elaborate form, with seating arrangements within in the form of raised platforms, because transactions with outsiders may usually only take place at this point.

Within the *tarawad* compound, most houses exhibit a similar basic organization. Once beyond the gatehouse, a forecourt leads to a deep verandah, which usually runs along the entire front of the house. A large room with two raised platforms on either side follows the verandah, and leads into a large hall. Depending on the socio-economic status of the family, there then occur verandahs that are doubly backed (FIG. 15), two halls, or instances where these spaces have been appropriated because of the needs of an expanding household, as shown in the first-floor plans for houses two and three. In the scheme of spatial organization that characterizes a *tarawad* house-type, this sequence of spaces definitively demarcates the levels of publicness and accessibility afforded various members of the *tarawad* group. It forms the generic core of the house-type.
METHODOLOGY OF THE FIELD STUDY

The field study comprised the extensive documentation of four house-types. Of the four, houses one, two, and three belong to Muslim families and are located in Kuttichera. The fourth house belongs to a Hindu Nayar family, and is located in the suburbs of Calicut. The Nayar house was documented solely for comparative analysis, with the object of examining the residential spatial organization of a different social and cultural group subscribing to a similar kinship system. Due to the lack of any precise genealogical data on the individual tarawads, the study did not dwell upon the aspects of generational range in terms of the formation of households, property transmission, or tarawad subdivisions through time. The scope of the study is restricted to the pattern of existent interrelationships and is largely synchronic. The three Muslim houses are examples in which the kinship system is still adhered to, and they represent different generational ranges and prototypical patterns of growth. This conclusion was reached on the basis of observations, interviews with household members, and interviews with members of the local Masjid in which the tarawad was represented.

The three prototypical patterns are:

- House one (FIG. 1): a generic tarawad house of relatively recent origin, built sometime during the early twentieth century. The house has remained relatively unaltered because expansion of the household has been accommodated by residential units dispersed in different parts of the neighborhood. This is possible because the family is wealthy and owns landed property in different parts of the area.

- House two (FIG. 2): a household in which expansion has generated additions to the ancestral house, resulting in the expansion of the house as a physical unit within the precinct.

- House three (FIG. 3): a house where the formation of new households has led to internal divisions of the existing ancestral house through successive generations.

- House four (FIG. 4): the house of the Nayar tarawad, which, like house one, is of recent origin. Unlike the Moplah tarawad house, however, its unaltered state is mainly due to the fact that its tarawad no longer functions as a single economic unit through joint housekeeping. Nevertheless, this house is a striking example of the spatial organization of a residential unit laid down in the Hindu text of architecture, the Vastu Shastras.

The pattern of transformations that a tarawad house undergoes does depend on other factors — such as family or household economic and social status, generational range,
and lot size. But the salient feature that emerges from the above examples is that increased transformations of the ancestral house take place when there are a greater number of females in a tarawad. This outcome is directly linked to the kinship rule that requires the maternal residence of female members as rightful heirs to family property.

REFERENCE NOTES

The paper is part of an extended study and graduate thesis undertaken at MIT in 1983-84 in the History, Theory and Criticism program.

1. The specific ethnographic accounts pertaining to the Moplah and Nayar communities that have been referred to are by Kathleen Gough, C.J. Fuller, Stephen Dale and Roland Miller. The studies in related contexts are by Nur Yalman, S.J. Tambiah and E.R. Leach. These latter focus on communities in Sri Lanka which have similar structural bases. Yalman initiates a comparative investigation of the Nayars of Kerala with respect to aspects of kinship structure.


4. A male Nayar has four names: his clan name, followed by an inherited personal name (which is usually his mother’s eldest brother’s given name), a given personal name, and a caste title. A female Nayar has only three names: her clan name (which is inherited matrilineally), followed by her mother’s name, and a given name. She does not bear a caste name.


7. The generic Hindu text on architecture, the *Vastu Shastras*, on which the many regional variants are based, is an exhaustive compilation of aspects that deal with the qualifications of the architect, selection and orientation of the site, systems of measurement and proportion, building types, and detailed descriptions of religious rituals that accompany the different phases of construction. Most Nayar houses adhered strictly to the rules laid out by these texts, and were organized either around a single court or a combination of two internal courts, with the location and size of individual rooms also being prescribed.

All figures by the author, except FIG. 12 (Regional Town Planning Office, Calicut).