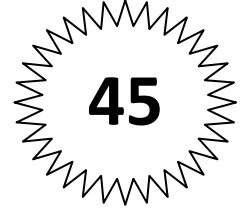


A study on history, socio-economic culture and architectural planning of rural villages - Case study of Athu Pollachi.

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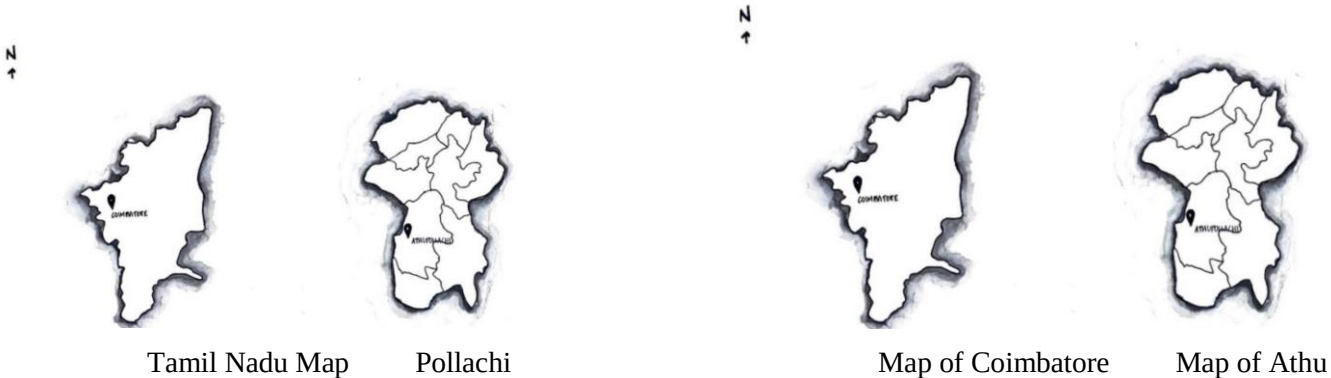
Abstract:

The Planning of a rural village is majorly influenced by the history, socio - cultural beliefs and geographical context of that particular area. Rural villages play a vital role in the cultural and economic fabric of a region and understanding the settlement pattern, cultural beliefs and their practices, this helps people understand how locals respond, adapt and build a livelihood for themselves. Athu Pollachi is a village which has accepted its socio - economic divisions and has planned their residential spaces responding to it. This study utilises a mixed-methods approach, incorporating historical analysis, socio-cultural surveys, architectural evaluations and aims to present a study of various factors that have influenced the settlement planning and its transitions.

Keywords- Rural settlement planning, Athu Pollachi, Aliyar River, Tamil Nadu, Socio - economic division, settlement pattern, vernacular materials

Introduction

“ஆழியாற்றங் கரையில் அமைந்துள்ள அழகிய கிராமம் ஆத்துப் பொள்ளாச்சி” -which translates to ‘Athu Pollachi is a beautiful village situated on the banks of Aliyar River’. This is from the book “Oru Gramathu Nadhi” by Sirpi Balasubramaniam, who was from Athu Pollachi. Athu Pollachi is a rural village situated 15 km away from its sub - district, Pollachi, known for its settlement near the running stream of Aliyar River. The village covers an area of 501.66 hectares, divided as “Nanjai”, “Punjai” and “Poramboke”. The settlement of the village is majorly influenced by the location of the Aliyar River, socio-economic divisions and topography.



Climate

In Pollachi, the monsoon is oppressive and overcast, the summers are muggy, partly cloudy, hot and humid. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from 37.13°C to 19.47°C and has an annual average precipitation of 144.6mm.

Origin of the village

The village is known to have originated from the Aliyar River and the Mariamman temple. The initial



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settlement pattern started with higher caste people occupying their residential spaces around the Temple and people who were considered lower caste settling near the banks of the river, with fishing being their major source of income. The village has four major approaches which connects it to the neighbouring villages of Manakadavu, Bodipalayam, Kaliyangoundan pudur and Ambarampalayam Sungam. The approach to Ambarampalayam is crucial as it is the only closest approach to the nearest town Pollachi. Pollachi is the only source in proximity for the locals' daily needs, vegetables, medical needs and entertainment. The transportation was affected due to the presence of the river. They either had to take long routes or get wet and walk through the river as it was the shortest route. The bridge that currently stands was opened only in 2011 after multiple requests to the government from the people of the village. It was constructed under the "Parambikulam Aliyar Pasana Thittam (PAP Act)". The bridge now makes people's transportation more convenient, and provides multiple opportunities for their economic growth. Source: Pictures taken during rural documentation



Athu Pollachi bridge



Street view

Demographics

Area of the village is 501.66 hectares and comes under Coimbatore district Ward-5. It is located at the latitude 10.6487°N and longitude 76.9197°E. According to the 2011 census, the village had a population of 2651 with 1322 men, 1329 women and 750 households. The updated numbers recorded by the panchayat office in 2022 are 2547 men, 2084 women and a total population of 4631. 65.11% of the villagers are literate out of which 72.31% are men and 27.94% are women. The predominant language spoken by the locals is Tamil and the major occupations practised are marginal work, farming and fishing. Caste is an influential factor in the planning and settlements of Athu Pollachi. The major caste divisions include 'Vellala Gounder', 'Paravar', 'Dombar', 'Valluvar' and 'Mudugar'.

Occupation

Agriculture was the main occupation of the villagers over the years. With the village in close proximity to the Aliyar River, there was an abundant supply of water for paddy crop cultivation. About twenty years ago, there was a shift in the occupation from paddy farming to coconut cultivation. The major reason which resulted in this shift was, coconut cultivation other than being a perennial crop, also required less labour force, lower maintenance and generated larger profits when compared to the seasonal paddy farming. Another advantage of coconut cultivation was that 80-200 trees could be cultivated per acre and each tree yields 25 coconuts on an average for a cyclic period of 40 days (after five years of planting). Some areas of the paddy fields were also converted into housing settlements for the SC's and ST's by the government in the year 2000 which resulted in a job shift for the farmers as their land was acquired.

The other major occupations in the village are daily wage work, fishing and weaving. More than 50% of the villagers are indulged in daily wage work like construction, forest work and as plumbers, astrologers, drivers, electricians and shop owners. Around 20-30 families are involved in fishing. They fish at night and their capture varies from 1-10 kg per night according to the season and the fishing equipment used. Weaving of cotton and silk sarees is practised by 6-7 families and they sell their products in Pollachi and



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Coimbatore. A large chunk of the population (26%) are dependent on the MGNREGA 100 days' work scheme so they remain unemployed for the rest of the year or end up doing odd jobs. Due to job shifts and unemployment, many families have migrated out of the village in search of better job prospects, education and livelihood.

Settlement planning and Infrastructure

Topography

The Topographic elevation of the village ranges from 205 m to 250 m. The higher elevation of the village is densely populated, while the lower elevation of the village, closest to the running stream of Aliyar River, is less populated, as a safety precaution from flooding. The total area of the village runs around to be 502 Hectares, which is classified into three main categories:

- *Nanjai* - covers paddy and sugarcane crop fields - 3.61 Hectares.
- *Punjai* - covers dry crop and coconut fields - 430 Hectares.
- *poramboke* - covers road, river and houses - 68 Hectares.

Infrastructure and Amenities

The Athu Pollachi bridge was constructed in 2011 after the people's request for easy movement and transportation especially during the monsoon season. It is now one the major approaches to the village. There are two public toilets provided; one in the northern tip of the settlements and another in the south. The village has a panchayat office, seven temples, a primary school, a high school, a post office, a pharmacy, a few essential shops, a couple of eateries and a bus stop.

Source: Pictures taken during rural documentation



Socio - Economic divisions and settlement pattern

The settlement pattern of the village is solely based on the socio-economic divisions. Majority of the population follow Hinduism. The Northern part of the village is occupied by the Scheduled Tribes and the Fishermen community in the land and houses provided by the Government. The MBC (Most Backward Class) and BC (Backward Class) caste people whose major occupation is agriculture, are settled in the Central part of the village. Most of them are economically well settled which ultimately



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improves their lifestyle. The houses in this region are thus modern, which is in total contrast with the rest of the dwellings. The Scheduled caste group are settled in the Southern part of the village. They are dependent on daily wage work. This land was acquired and provided to the SC group by the Government 40 years ago.



Typology of Individual houses

Varied typology of houses can be found in the village of Athu Pollachi. The typology of the houses can be identified based on the settlement pattern. The oldest houses with the most climate responsive planning and use of vernacular material and features are all situated in the central part of the village, around the Maariyamman temple, where the earlier settlements were said to have started. The houses of most of the higher caste families, who fall under the economically wealthy side, had their houses renewed over the course of their economic growth, they have ignored all the beautiful qualities their houses had, which their ancestors enjoyed and have made their houses look like a modern typical building, irrelevant to the elements of the village. The northern part of the Village has new brick houses for the fishermen and the scheduled tribe communities built by the government. For some existing houses with temporary roofings, the government has helped by building a permanent roof over their

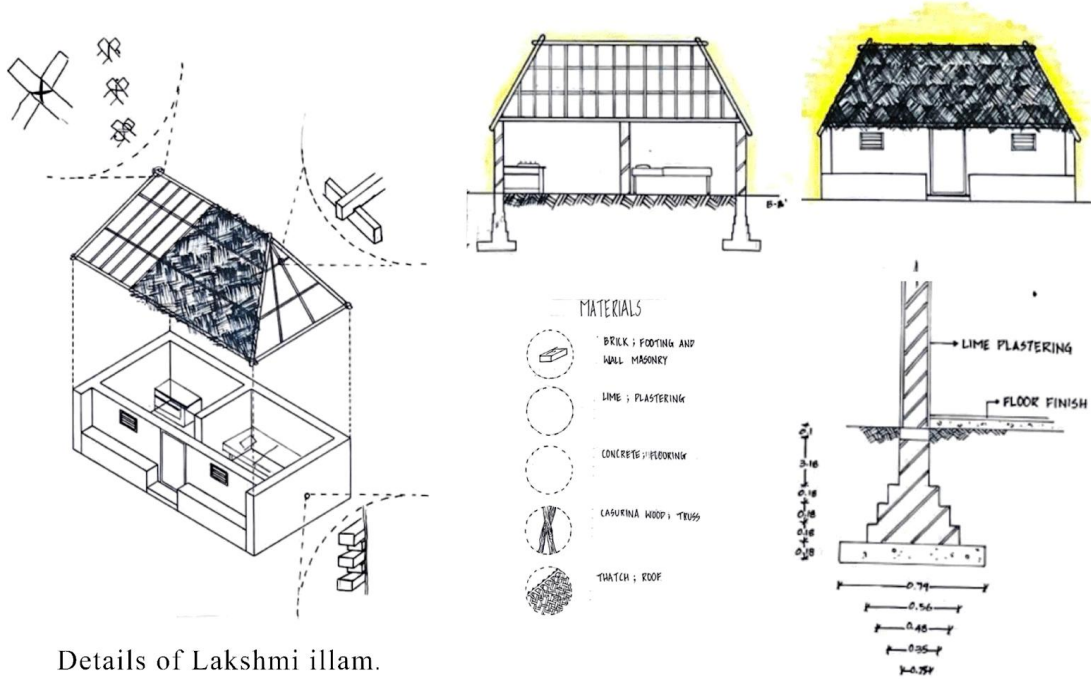


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heads. The southern part of the village, which houses the people who fall under economically weaker sections, live in unstable temporarily built structures (thatch, asbestos sheet).

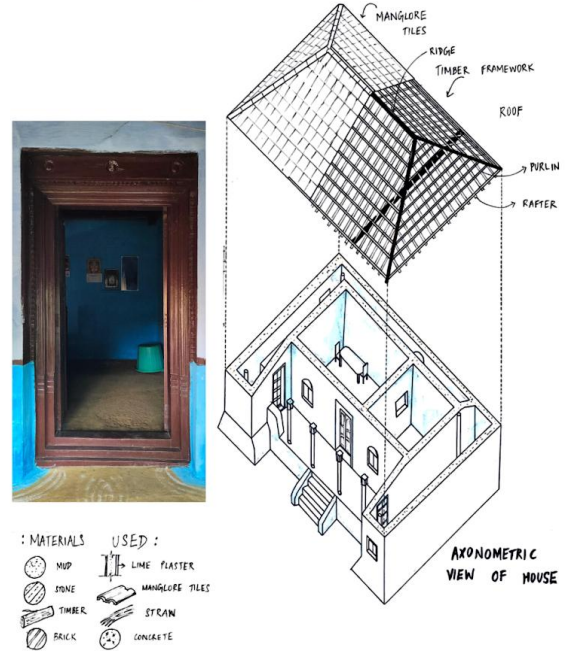
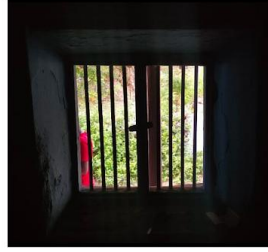
Some of the houses with the most notable vernacular qualities are, the house of a 77-year-old tailor Kumarasawamy and his wife (150-year house of Athu Pollachi), “Maaran’s veedu” - house of an unemployed old man, “Lakshmi illam” - house of a 56-year-old mother, “Rudran illam”- house of a 80 year old weaver.



Details of Lakshmi illam.



Pictures of “Maaran’s veedu(house)”



Pictures of Oldest house of Athu Pollachi

Issues and potential

Issues

The village lacks many major essential facilities like a Primary Health Care centre and a market for vegetables and groceries. Currently a vehicle comes only during the morning to sell vegetables from Pollachi. There are no large gathering spaces except for the temple yard. Children have no parks or any other leisure spaces for activities so they end up playing on the streets. The village has an open drain system which is a potential health hazard. Many people, especially women, who are solely dependent on public toilets, have to walk a long way to use them which are only present in the northern and southern tips of the village.

Potential

Potential developments include a Primary Health Care centre with emergency services, a community hall for events and gatherings, a park for children in proximity to residences, a market space which will also create employment opportunities and construction of more public toilets and toilets attached to houses. Other potentials include encouraging the fishing and weaving community to expand by providing more equipment and creating demand for locally produced goods. This will improve employment opportunities which in turn will positively impact the economy.

Conclusion

The many demographic characteristics, customary jobs, and economic activities of Athu Pollachi were unearthed during the study of its socio-economic culture. These settlements' complex social structures and communal dynamics were investigated. The research revealed the distinctive characteristics of vernacular architecture, native construction practises, and effective resource use. Architectural design was influenced by the climate and the surrounding area, and the spatial organisation and settlement layout reflected socio-cultural and environmental concerns.

The investigation also revealed a number of development-related obstacles and opportunities. The preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural assets has become increasingly important in upholding this village's distinctive identity. The potential for tourist and rural livelihood prospects, infrastructure development, access to basic amenities, and these factors are all acknowledged as ways to promote sustainable development. By implementing appropriate strategies, policymakers, urban planners, and local communities can work together to ensure the long-term vitality and resilience of Athu Pollachi.

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