

TEMPLE AS PLACE: THE PATHARS AND THEIR DEVASTHANAM AS A UNIT OF ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam in Penang is the sole Vishwakarma community temple in Malaysia, and it marks an entry into the world of Pathars; the traditional Tamil goldsmiths, a sub-ethnic group within the local Indian diaspora. The conception of this temple as “devasthanam” or “place of God”, by the Pathars, implores this study to explore this community temple as a place. This study frames the temple and the lived experience a person has in it as a unit of analysis. The primary data comes from ethnographic study that involves participant observation and spatial study. The secondary data is drawn from document and photo reviews alongside the writings of pioneering Indian art historians. The findings of this study are chronicled as a narrative account to reveal this temple as a dimension of the local Pathar community’s lifeworld and to understand how it develops into a locus that gathers human experience, insideness and identity formation through the conception of Hindu temple as a synergy of form, meaning and use. The findings of this study not only record this temple as a space of specific cultural continuity, but highlights the need to recognize the diversity and differences within Indian diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, located on Jalan Dato Keramat, Penang, belongs to the local *Pathars*. The word “devasthanam” itself, (in Tamil: தீவஸ்தானம்) translates into “place of God” (in Tamil: கடவுள் நிலையம்). The *Pathars* are traditional Tamil goldsmiths, and are part of a larger group of Vishwakarma craftsmen who trace their cultural roots and technē heritage to medieval southern India and its long phase of temple urbanism (Raman, S., and Zakaria, S., 2021). There are many studies done on Vishwakarma craftsmen and community in India. However, the existence of Indian goldsmiths in Malaysia is yet to be addressed as a continuation of the Vishwakarma cultural heritage, in academic studies. The *Pathars*, who have established their first business in George Town, Penang, acquired two shophouse plots near to their establishments in 1923. The initial temple was however established much earlier in 1914 as a modest shed for the sole purpose of worship and to continue the customs of this community. Construction of a formal temple did not commence until 1940, and the first mahā kumbabishēkam (*consecration of the temple*) took

place on 27th October, 1944, with top Japanese officials of that time, presiding as honoured guests (Thuraisingham et al., 2007). The temple has had three subsequent mahā kumbabishēkam in 1975, 1989, and 2004. While the practice of Hinduism within institutional framework is provided by the Penang Hindu Endowment Board (PHEB), which is founded in the colonial context of early twentieth century, there are many Hindu temples and its affiliated endowments that are still being administered by the communities themselves. The Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, is one of such temples that continue preserve its unique cultural attributes and that of the sub-ethnic community that it belongs to. According to Bharne et al. (2012), the discussion on Hindu temple is both about its continuity and change. While its architectural doctrines “are based on ancient building rules” (Bharne et al., 2012), many modern temples outside India interpret these rules in innovative ways and implement new material and construction processes. While it is well known among Penangites that this temple belongs to the Pathar community, this study focuses on the temple as a place via the lived experiences of

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its users. Conceiving the temple as a place is significant because it can serve as a collective case for the *Pathars* to form a meaningful community, negotiate their right to space in the city, and then construct a community home away from home. The temple is examined using three broad categories that give any place its meaning: form and meaning, activity and use, and finally image and meaning, in attempt to discover the crux of the existential essence of place experience: insideness.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 The Diaspora and Temples

Booming trade within the region and Penang during early period of Western colonisation had attracted all kinds of other people to the island. According to Ahmad (2015), who cites from the summarized official museum booklet of Penang State Museum Board, the early Indians, coming from different parts of the Indian sub-continent into Penang, were dominated by the Tamils who were mostly merchants, traders and money lenders. In an effort to clarify the often-marginalized aspect of architectural historiography; human migration, the researcher draws attention to view the Indian population in Malaysia, as part of Indian diaspora. While Jayaram (2004) uses *Indian Diaspora* as an italicised designation to distinguish it as a field of academic research from its substantive focus, namely the sociocultural reality of Indian diaspora, he also outlines two distinct characteristics must be understood in human migration. Migration is not only the physical movement of individuals, for migrants bring sociocultural baggage with them, which includes (a) a predetermined social identity, (b) a set of religious beliefs and practises, (c) a framework of norms and values guiding family and kinship organisation, as well as food habits, and (d) language. In some of these diasporic communities, for multiple reasons, deliberate efforts are being made to restore some of these traditions and attributes as a kind of revival of Indian culture (Jayaram, 2003).

With the transnational movement of various forms, trade coupled with mercantile and community wealth flowing into the temples; the cultural grammar of temples in Penang urges us to recontextualize the temple in a different frame using terms like “*ethnoscape*, *financespace*, *technoscape*, *mediacape*, *ideoscape*” (Appadurai, 1996: 45). Waghorne (2004: 41) says, the involvement of mercantile communities in temple building has birthed three kinds of Hindu temples: a) The *eclectic* or generic temple that attempts to bring together all communities (inclusivity), b) The *community-only* or ‘caste’ temple, which discards a dialogic relationship between communities and is confined to a specific caste group only (exclusivity), c) The *duplicated* temple, ‘built not so much as copies, but as kinds of “branch office” of older, more famous temples in India. “Temples, usually associated ... with anchoring space and time, actually appear in modern times at periods of transition and movement. Temples, seemingly the least likely aspect of Hinduism

to be portable are the first indications ... of resettlement” (Waghorne, 2004: 650). According to Sinha (2019), the interface of globalization with modern Hinduism from the colonial period onwards, evident in growth of Hindu temples and its role in the lives of communities also reveal how religiosity has been reconfigured in new settings. Moodie (2019), outlines three features that defines modern Hindu temples. Firstly, its building utilizes modernist idioms like rationality, democracy, order and cleanliness that stands in contrast to idioms like purity, divine power or the valour of aristocratic lineages, associated with pre-modern Hindu temples. Secondly, motivated by Indian nationalism, many middle-class actors started shaping modern temples as sites that will personify their specific cultural heritage, first to colonial powers and then, the world. Thirdly, is the role played by these middle-class actors who work alongside state power or institutions to modify aspects of temple life, where these modernizing attempts are framed as public interest and beneficial to everyone. Hence, “temples cannot be reduced to an intellectual proposition nor bracketed from the economic world” (Waghorne, 1999:649). Modern temples are concrete element of material culture, but they also become benchmarks, signifying periods of optimistic expansiveness for Hindus in creating new social institutions, both physical and cultural.

1.2 Place: An Important Dimension of Temple Experience

Place, a theoretical construct in the field of spatial studies, brings together “architecture-urbanism, urban and regional planning, landscape design, ecology and geography” based on “physical-territorial approach to the environment” (Castello, 2010). While place can provide existential experience to people in their daily lives, the meanings given to places shift dramatically between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, highlighting the distinction between the concept of place as a social creation and place as an economic reform. (Castello et al., 2021). Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) interpret psychological dimensions of human-place embodiment as “sense of place,” accentuating affective, cognitive, and behavioural components (Morgan, 2010). According to Counted (2019) and Chesterman et al (2021), the “sense of place” (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001), as an attitude towards place, has been used to assess the degree to which people are connected to, rely on, and identify with a place as a marker and interpretation of their sense of community. The emotional transaction that happens to nurture a sense of place, supports people spiritually through particular types of places. The process of experiencing deeply is the stimulus that transforms any location or setting into a place. Place, is then a portion of the environment that has already been seized by emotions. (Gussow et al., 1997; Brady et al., 2018; Cope et al., 2019; Parkinson, 2020). The individual person’s emotional sense of place adds to the distinctive formation of the community narrative in a given place (Cope et al., 2019). Sense of place can also be explained using the theory of “simultaneous perception” (Hiss, 1990; Mace, 2018), an idea similarly echoed by Tullis (2020), is “the part of the structure of our attention, a mechanism that drinks whatever it can from our surroundings” (Hiss, 1990).

In holistically understanding this sense of place as a lived experience, phenomenology urges us to examine lifeworlds. Lifeworld is a person or group's everyday world of taken-for-grantedness normally unnoticed and thus hidden as a phenomenon (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 1979; Seamon, 2017; van Manen, 1990). Subsequently, place as an integral dimension of a lifeworld, can be defined as any environmental locus that gathers individual or group meanings, intentions, and actions spatially (Casey, 2009; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 1976/2008). According to Relph in his book *Place and Placelessness* (Relph, 1976/2008), the existential crux of place experience is *insideness*. In other words, the more deeply a person or group feels themselves inside an environment, the more so does that environment become, existentially, a place. Lifeworld as “unit of analysis” allows us to move away from subject/object division and see experience as multimodal and embodied (Sokolowski, 2000).

2. METHODOLOGY

This article is based on fieldwork and acquaintance with the local *Pathars* and people who are involved in the temple activities. The ethnographic method used comprises three stages: fieldwork, analysis and writing a narrative account of the ethnographic data. In the fieldwork stage, the researcher conducted participant observation, examined temple's physical setting and the space use, and conducted a series of open-ended interviews with selected participants. The primary data came from ethnographic method that involved participant observation and spatial study of the temple architecture. Participant observation is different from pure observation or pure participation (Bocconi and Schrooten, 2018), where this method aims to find a balance between both “going native” or becoming the phenomena” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002; Jorgensen 1989). Ready et al., (2020) in highlighting the advantage participant observation quotes: “Participant observers are able to evaluate the information they receive from informants in a broader social context and keep a consistent written record of their observations (Bernard 2017)”. Participant observers also have the chance to observe the content and form of relationships in context and over a substantial amount of time (Ready et al., 2020).

Figure 1 shows the relevance of the temple as a “place” and how it can bracket an individual or groups' lived experience as, “a unit of analysis”.

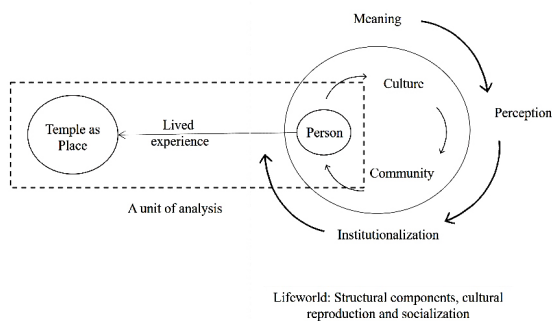


Figure 1: A unit of analysis. (Adapted from Casey, 2009; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 1976/2008 and Simarmata, 2018).

The researcher carried out analysis within the framework of “unit of analysis”, by analysing the ethnographic data to capture the deeds done and words used by the community that can explain the behaviour and social interactions within their own locales, to establish a narrative description of temple use. The researcher examined the temple's spatial use and activities, people, including those who work at the temple (priests, managers, and managerial staff) and visitors (adults, elders, and children), social interaction among various people (e.g., adult to adult interactions, children being taught how to conduct themselves in temple, interactions between groups of people and families), and religious proceedings, rituals, and ceremonial events, such as community ceremonies and rituals. The secondary data comes from document and photo reviews, and literature review drawn from the writings of pioneering Indian art historian like Stella Kramrisch and selected key manuscripts on Indian art and architecture as practiced by Indians, made available through translated and reviewed works (e.g., Acharya 1928; Krishna, 1916), to represent the narrative structure of users based on their daily lived-experiences.

Babbie (2012), says in social science research, the unit of analysis is the main entity under study where typical units of analysis include individuals, groups, social organisations and social artefacts. The unit of analysis used in this study helps to construct the narrative account of the temple use by capturing the lived experiences of people, while reducing the complex phenomena into elements that can be studied empirically.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam can be seen at the corner-lot of the crowded row of shophouses on Jalan Dato' Keramat, Penang. The origins of this temple lie in its kinship-based belief of the Vishwakarma craftsmen and hence its character as *community-only* temple. However, over the years, through its program, the temple has also embraced inclusivity in its outlook to cater to the religio-cultural needs of the local Hindu population, for it is the “culture of origin” that binds the diasporic community in Penang together. This temple encompasses elements of design, materials, iconography and graphic detail which are matters of tradition that is made practical to local context yet deeply imbued with religious significance and keeps in line with the āgama (*doctrine or precept*) rule that governs temple worship.

This temple can be framed more prominently as an ideoscape. As an ideoscape, this temple is a visible communal symbol (Younger, 2010: 243; Clothey, 2006: 28) and a visual identity (Bhana, 1999: 301; Baumann, 2001: 67; Kumar, 2013: 52) of *Pathars* who have resettled in Penang and their civilizational link to the Vishwakarma techne heritage. The transnational movement of *Pathars* was not merely movement of their bodies and trade, it also brought along the flow of ideas and aspirations that accompanied cultural renewal during colonial period. This aspiration for the future, merged with

the memory of the past presents itself as the architecture of this temple. The Vishwakarma community temple is the cultural space of the local *Pathars* that is transformed into place; the synergy of form, use and meaning. This temple is an example that can contribute to the character of Indian enclaves in Penang as “community of interpretation”.

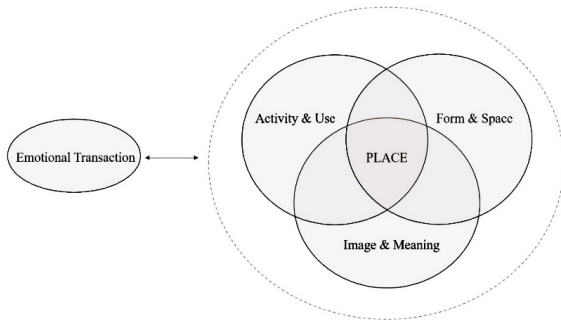


Figure 2: The person-temple embodiment. (Adapted from diagrams by Carmona and Punter, 1997; Montgomery, 1998; and Carmona et al., 2003).

3.1 Form and Space

According to Kramrisch and Burnier (1976), the intent of the Hindu temple is revealed by its form. In the oral tradition, nothing that can be seen on the temple is left unresolved, and no detail is irrational or unnecessary. Each has a specific function and is an essential component of the whole. To the devotee who visits this temple, “it is a *fīrtha* (*sacred place or passage*) made by art, as others are by nature and often is both in one” (Kramrisch and Burnier 1976:143). The purpose of temple visit is *darśana* (*auspicious sight*) that is both seeing and being seen at. In fulfilling this purpose, this temple has not only its form but also its image and meaning; the total fact of its form.

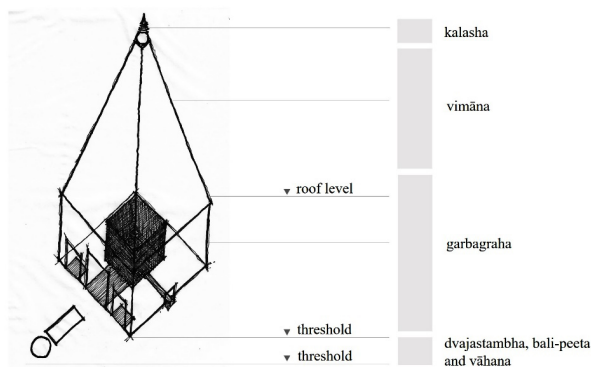


Figure 3: Inventory of the core complex of the temple.

Vimāna, is the name of the superstructure built according to tradition, using various standards of proportionate measurement. This definition is given in the ‘*Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati*’, III. Ch. XXVIII, and repeated in the ‘*Silparatna*’, XVI. (Kramrisch

and Burnier 1976). The word *vimāna* was first used to refer to a historical mechanical aircraft, then came to represent mythological flying palace or chariot in ancient history, and finally came to mean the monumental roof structure over the *garbagraha* (*sanctum sanctorum*) in temple architectural language. The *vimāna* here translates as “transportation” of the human from mundane life to a spiritual existence. While *vimāna* is the name of the main temple superstructure, it is synonymous with *prāsāda*. ‘*Silparatna*’ XVI records, “*prāsādas* please (*prasadanti*) by their beauty the minds of gods and men” (Kramrisch and Burnier 1976:134). This is translated in virtue of the form and meaning, where the devotee sees and comprehends through the look of knowledge. The word *prāsāda* does not mean something that is built, rather it has wide application. The ‘*Mayamata*’, II. 6-7, lists the following building as *prāsāda*; (*sabha, sala, prapa, rangamandapa* and *mandira*), where they are part of the whole establishment of a south Indian temple (Kramrisch and Burnier 1976:135).

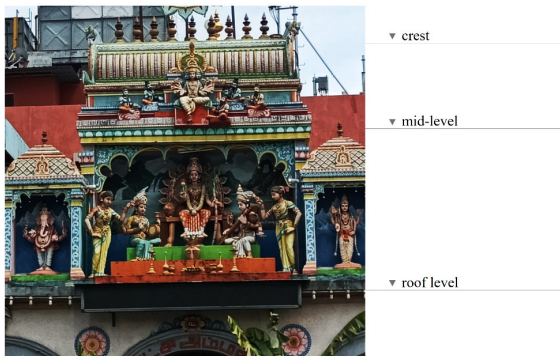
Directly below the *vimāna*, is the *garbagraha* (*sanctum sanctorum*); the main chamber of the temple. The *garbagraha* maintains the consecrated image where the Supreme Principle dwells. The interior of this sanctuary is filled with darkness, and only a single opening. Kramrisch and Burnier (1976:163) say, “*garbha* which signifies the womb as well as the embryo in the microcosmic sense, denotes *Prakṛti*, primordial Substance, in its macrocosmic application”. A devotee arriving at the threshold of the *garbagraha*, takes in the experience of ceremonial flame being waved in front of the consecrated image. The illumination, as an act of awareness the Supreme Principle in the potent darkness, revealed now and known further in all images outside the walls of the temple, shining in the daylight, is an essential requirement for the transition that is wrought in the devotee who visits the temple to experience *darśana*. The devotee who visits the temple therefore, experience the temple as a ‘seer’ not a spectator. This is made possible when architectural form accompanies and translates the ritual action, joining to express one and the same meaning. The *dvajastambha* (*flag mast*) is often what stands out, visually during the temple’s *bramhotsavam* (*annual festival*), when a white cloth banner holding symbolic details of the presiding deity is hosted, carrying the esoteric message to the devotees.

3.2 Image and Meaning

According to Dutta and Adane (2018), the function of symbolism in temple art has priority over their mere appearance. Therefore, temple art seeks not to create works of art but “spiritual models, images to be interiorized through meditation” (Dutta and Adane, 2018). Gupta et al. (2002: 29) say that ‘symbol’ is “something that represent something else by association, resemblance, or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible”. The image and meaning of this temple are explained as following:

a. Mannerism and Façade Composition

Aligned to the shophouses' plot, the mannerism in facade composition of the temple enable its individualization of building components and their design; to shape, face, and define the space that is Jalan Dato' Keramat and Jalan Kampung Jawa Lama. Visitors are directed to the entrance with the presence of a modest gōpura that reflects the identity and religious affiliation of the temple. The side face facing Jalan Kampung Jawa Lama has a ceremonial door that remains shut on most days. It is used for processions alone. Indicating the ceremonial role of this door, are the sculptures on this side of the roof that depicts scenes of Meenakshi Thirukalyanam (*celestial wedding*), an event closely tied to Chitrai thiruvizha (*Festival in the month of Chitra*), a month-long public festival, which is unique to Tamil culture in India. There is also an ottukadai, made of lightweight, collapsible materials such as timber, canvas, and a simple roller shutter, that serves the patrons of the temple by selling flowers, garlands and other prayer necessities. The ottukadai gets its unusual name from its structure, which is a basic lean-to roof affixed to the sides of buildings. The ottukadai, which measures around 3 metres by 1.5 metres, was introduced by Indian migrants in the 1930s as a small-scale miscellaneous business that offers basic necessities (Md Nasir, 2015).



b. The Iconography of the Temple

i. Gōpura

Figure 4: The gōpura

While the gōpura in south Indian temples can be traced back many centuries ago, they are however later additions, for the temples in south India themselves started with modest beginnings. With increasing wealth and innovative construction technologies, the gōpura became a feature introduced around 14th century AD to confer architectural grandeur to south Indian temples (Sharma et al., 2019). The gōpura of the Vishwakarma community temple in Penang however, is modest and in proportion with the roof heights of its neighbouring shophouses. The sculptures on the gōpura follows a select theme of iconography that is associated with the identity of the temple. The crest of the gōpura has nine kalashas (urns). On both sides of the crest is the kīrthimukha (*face-of-*

glory), a common feature to signify an apex or point of confluence. Below the crest, is the middle layer that has icons of Vishwakarma surrounded by five progenies; Manu, Maya, Tvasta, Silpi and Visvajña that is understood to be the forbearers of the five clans of craftsmen; the blacksmiths, carpenters, metalworkers, stone sculptors, and goldsmiths. Today, these five clans of craftsmen are known collectively as the Vishwakarma community. The lower layer of the gopura is shaped like a canopy and has iconographic scenery that is described in śrī lalitā sahasranāma stōtram as “*sacāmararamāvāntīsavvyadaksinasevitā* (123)”. The stucco icon of the principal deity of this temple, Lalita Tripurasundari, is attended by Lakshmi, who is playing a drum and Saraswathi, on the veena. The trio are flanked by two female-attendants who wave the cāmara (*fly-whisk*), which is used in deity worship as regale of respect and symbolic “sweeping away” of ignorance and mental affliction. In front of these sculptures are an array of paraphernalia (tall lamps, tray of offering, rose water sprinkler) that gives the impression of ‘act of worship’. On both sides of this gōpura are smaller pavilion structure that houses the stucco icons of both Ganesha and Kartikeya.

ii. Dvārapālaka

The door-keepers of the temples are known as dvārapālaka and they are in pairs. They are four-handed, with different attributes depending on the denomination they belong to. While the gadā (*mace*) is common for any dvārapālaka, in the case of this temple, the dvārapālaka also convey the attribute of the principal deity, where they carry the pāśa (*noose*) and aṅkuṣha (*elephant goad*). Their lower hand shows both abhayamudra (*gesture of fearlessness*) and tarjanimudra (*gesture of vigilance*) respectively, their gaze is wide and ferocious to command the attention of the devotees to align their intentions to the Supreme.

iii. Secondary shrines: Vishwakarma and Gayatri

A recent addition to the temple complex in 1990's, the Vishwakarma and Gayatri shrines presides over the cultural and religious needs, specific to the *Pathars*. These two shrines strengthen the unique cultural attribute of this temple, reflecting the kinship-based identity of this sub-ethnic community in Penang. Vishwakarma, is venerated as the “God of engineering and architecture”. This belief takes on a form of awareness, of the descent of the craftsmen from the principle; “Lord Vishwakarma”, and is active on all levels of the goldsmith's being. The iconography that sets the vocabulary for these sculptures can also be traced to Mānasāra (Krishna, 1916). The etymological rendering of the word ‘mānasāra’ is ‘the essence of measurement’, Its meaning may also be rendered ‘the system of proportion’ or ‘the standard measurement’. (Acharya, 1928). The stucco icon of Vishwakarma above this secondary shrine follows this prescribed iconography where “Vishwakarma has ten hands and holds the characteristic symbols of the three Brahmā, Vishnu and Mahēsvara. One of his symbols mentioned in in the *Silpasāra* is the *māna-danda*, ‘measuring rod’” (Krishna, 1916).

3.3 Activity and Use

Activities within this temple can be divided into programmed activity and unprogrammed activity, where these activities are encouraged and the temple tries to accommodate to them. Programmed activities require some prior planning and organization to happen. The temple has programmed activities, that is managed by the temple's trustees. The programmed activities can be further categorized as in Figure 5 below.

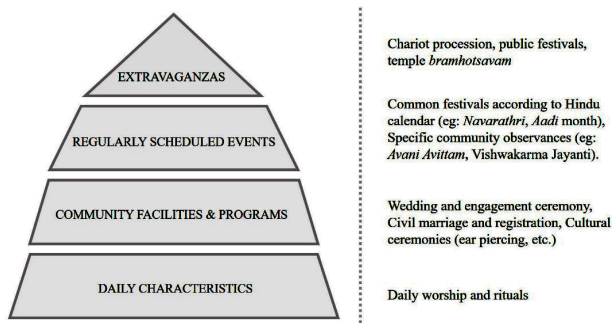


Figure 5: Programmed activities in the temple

“Daily Characteristics” are foundation things that people who visit this temple will find and do every day. This is the key element that makes local people to make the temple space a habitual part of their daily lives. Closely related to this is the “Community Facilities and Programs” that allows the temple to host gatherings. Acting as a home for the community interest, the temple becomes a place where the people are more likely to build rapport with and frequent it even when the group is not meeting. To facilitate this, the temple employs a manager. The manager is a retired civil servant who maintains the day-to-day logistics of the temple and serves as a point of contact between the temple trustees and the public. In explaining his duty, he says, “*I unlock the gates during operating hours, check the surrounding, to ensure that operations and things are in order to receive people into the temple. Most of the time, I’m here at the desk, handling the ticket counter and to assist the devotees, should they require it. Otherwise, people come and go as any other temple in this area.*” The *arcaka* (officiating priest) says, “*my basic task is to ensure the daily standard worship is performed and to attend to the needs of the devotees. There is no much difference between this temple and other temples when it comes to public worship. This temple belongs to the local goldsmith community. I suppose that is what makes this temple unique.*”

“Regularly Scheduled Events” are things like common festivals according to the Hindu calendar and specific observances unique to the local Pathar community. The *Pathars* in Penang observe the annual Vishwakarma Jayanthi, and *Upākarma* (in Tamil: *āvāṇi aviṭṭam*); observed on the full-moon day of Tamil month, *āvāṇi* (August-September), which marks the beginning of the study of Vedas. This observance is observed by the male members of Pathar community in Penang, within the temple, as well as Malaysian

Brahmins of south Indian descent in domestic spheres (Sankar, 2011). The *Pathars* also observe *Ayudha Puja* towards the end of *Navarathri* festival which directly signify the function of this community only temple and allows us to understand how the specific cultural practice by the *Pathars* provide a functional mechanism by which these goldsmiths adapt and adopt technologies to establish relationship with their work and to deal with it in a manner that suits them (Geraci, 2019). Collectively, these religious observances that can be tied to the visible presence of Vishwakarma and Gayatri shrines, points us towards the intimate religiosity of this community where “the ritual care of tools, and the worship of Vishwakarma may illuminate artisanship, manufacture, and the role of materiality in religious life” (Narayan and George, 2019). Shifting the domestic rituals of the *Pathars* into the public realm of the temple, brings visibility and distinguishes the *Pathars* culturally, from other local Hindus. This culture difference enables the recognition of the materiality within this temple; through its rituals which again, point visitors to the Vishwakarma techne heritage of the *Pathars* that lives alongside the generic stance taken by the trustees to accommodate for the larger public.

“Extravaganzas” are like the annual chariot procession, large festival like *Thaipusam* and the temple *bramhotsavam* (annual grand festival) that spills into the public space of Penang, gathering people of all walks of life. Unprogrammed activities are things that people initiate on their own as part of their individual use when the physical space feels right. This includes activities like sitting, relaxing, talking with each other, singing devotional hymns, public displays of affection (e.g.: parent-child), and taking in the ambience of the temple by sitting in short meditation. For these unprogrammed activities to occur regularly, the characteristics of the temple space resonates with human predispositions, feel friendly, offer spatial definition, be occupiable in a way that the visitors subconsciously behave and see. These behaviours that define human activities are measures that define the success of this temple as a place. As descendants of migrants, the memory of the past and aspiration for the future is evident is the present-day Pathar community’s predetermined social identity with the Vishwakarma guild and in renewing and reviving Hindu culture. In a larger scheme of things, this also helps to form norms and values that guide the local Hindu community about their sense of community or kinship.

3.4 Insiderness: Existential Essence of Place Experience

Whatever space and time signify, place and context mean more when it comes to expressing dynamic human engagement with place. For space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion (Carmona, 2021). The modern-day architect’s preoccupation with space as the architectural quality, cause them to read buildings as forms, its enclosures as space, and the visuals and sculptures as colour, texture, and scale. This ensemble becomes an abstract expression in architecture. Symbols and signs inherent

in Hindu temple architecture, at various levels of perception and meaning in both building and space is lost on the space-oriented architect. The association and references that this temple's architecture carries in its memory and meaning, is conveyed by its cultural symbols which is also the development of meanings associated with human interaction over time in civilizational ethos that the Vishwakarma design culture has been shaped from.

The core form of the temple sets threshold at the dvajastambha, bali-peeta and vāhana, that directs the devotee to a "personal prayer space", that is best explained as "simultaneous perception" (Hiss, 1990; Mace, 2018; Tullis, 2020): "*A devotee visiting the temple is simultaneously aware of all of the various stimuli: the interaction with people, of the scents from the aromatics used in worship, the visuals of thresholds that gradually invites her in, the barricade that averts her from transgressing into the sacred space, the sun spitting through the ventilation outlets, and the thoughts in her own head*".

The next threshold is the garbagraha; restricted to the temple arcaka (*officiating priest*) on duty alone. The exterior walls of the garbagraha, carries stucco images at punctuated centers to form circumambulatory space that encircles the entire core complex. Pradakṣiṇā (*circumambulation*) is the act of moving around the core temple complex, a practice executed by the devotee, in a meditative mood. What makes any devotee visiting the temple to react consciously is the shared understandings that focusses on the centrality of the core temple complex as "sacred space" to differentiate it from the rest of the space within the temple building. This emotional transaction is strengthened via the use of ornamentations on the built forms, to bring a devotee closer to personal experience. Sense of place is not a mere marketing slogan for live-work-play, mixed-use project, but rather it is a biological fact of the embodied human interaction with the environment. Sense of place is our conscious and unconscious, lived body interaction that intertwines with the surrounding where each place has a unique "address" without explaining how it becomes identifiable. For the locals, whose identity merges with the Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, their *insideness* can be characterized existentially in three dimensions: a) physically, through active participation with the temple on regular basis, b) socially, where people feel as integral part of their community through social relationships and exchanges that takes place via the temple program, c) autobiographical, where the temple's identity and qualities merges into an environmental mosaic that marks out the individual person's and communal history in relation to the temple as a place.

In explaining and reiterating how "insideness" that Relph (1976/2008) proposed gives us a good account of how a person relates to their place, Baber and Corkery (2020) say the very sense of belonging and identity gets determined by how people "position" themselves in their place and it ties down to the intent of the person. The "insideness" in this community temple is structured by how

people who frequent it, interact with and engage with the temple environment, their purpose for being there, the activities they engage in there, and how they traverse and participate with it, both formally and informally. The structure of "insideness" revealed in this study is not just the physical infrastructure of this temple as place, but also the understanding that both the *Pathars* and the local people cultivate via active engagement with their environment and the affective interactions they foster along the way.

The unique aspect of this temple in comparison to other Hindu temples is evident in how its architectural elements capture triggered memories and moments of enlightenment of the local *Pathars* for the visitors. As a physical stimulation of memories of the Penang Pathar community, this temple is a cultural reminder of the traditions of their ancestors and their struggles under colonial rule. These memories are strong enough to motivate the users to behave in certain way in the temple, in participating in its events and rituals, for the place experience relate to its culture and identity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study offers a narrative account of 'temple as place' by highlighting the socio-cultural relevance of modern temple architecture to a specific sub-ethnic community of the local Indian diaspora in Penang. At individual level, the deepest experience of this temple; "insideness", delineates how physical, social and autobiographical entanglement form identity and a sense of belonging. Therefore, place is an important aspect to be studied from multi-disciplinary sources to understand holistically, the lived experiences that unfolds to create community identity through a dynamic process that merges individual and collective sense of place, attachment and identity. This community temple functions as locus that gathers the collective experience of the *Pathars* of Penang and the local population. Presently, there are about two local Pathar families who are still in the traditional, small-size enterprise. Many from this community have moved on to mid-size enterprises, other trades and businesses; yet they still maintain their cultural roots. This temple is important to keep the tradition and legacy of Vishwakarma craftsmen, despite the sharp decline of the traditional *Pathars* in Penang.

While the freedom, frankness and familiarity of this temple breaks away from the constraints of ancient temples in India, it also adheres to tradition in trying to reinvent it in a new context. The *Pathars*, in building their community temple in Penang, sought through its design, a balance between respect for tradition represented in forms as diverse as conformity to āgama doctrines and the compromises required to construct any temple at all in the face of cultural, bureaucratic, and resource limitations. Hence, the Vishwakarma community in Penang is an example of the Indian diaspora, bringing their local culture and custom to where they work and live. By constructing this temple, the *Pathars* have revitalised their religious tradition, moving religious activities out of domestic realms and into

public domains. The presence of this temple amongst shophouses in the urban space, is the evidence of a globalized localism enabled by the *Pathars* of Penang to represents the working, middle class as active participants in the rise of a cosmopolitan civil society.

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