

# Indian Housing Typologies that Encourage Social Interaction: A Cultural Context

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**Abstract-** This paper explores various traditional Indian housing typologies—Pol houses of Gujarat, Wadas of Maharashtra, Chettinad houses of Tamil Nadu, and Havelis of Rajasthan. These housing forms have been instrumental in fostering social interaction within communities due to their unique architectural and cultural elements. By examining the historical, cultural, and contemporary developments of these housing types, this research aims to understand their role in promoting social cohesion and how they can inform modern housing design.

**Keywords:** Traditional housing, social interaction, Pol houses, Wadas, Chettinad houses, Havelis, cultural context, India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Housing typologies in India have evolved over centuries, influenced by diverse cultures, climates, and historical events. Traditional houses such as the Pol houses of Gujarat, Wadas of Maharashtra, Chettinad houses of Tamil Nadu, and Havelis of Rajasthan were designed not only to provide shelter but also to foster strong social bonds within communities. This paper examines these traditional housing forms, highlighting their historical significance, architectural features, and their potential to inspire contemporary housing designs that encourage social interaction.

## II HOUSE LANDSCAPES

### A. Pol Houses of Gujarat

Pol houses developed during the medieval period and are designed for communal living with a focus on security and climate responsiveness. The gated nature of Pols symbolically isolates them from the outside world while creating a unique urban structure with interconnected passageways. This design allows for

easy connectivity within the community and provides security during times of social unrest.

### B. Design and Structure

Pol houses in Ahmedabad are notable for their compact urban settlements, which promote social interactions. These houses are typically arranged in narrow streets with connected courtyards, creating small neighborhoods that foster close-knit communities. The architectural design includes features

such as courtyards, enhancing thermal comfort and spatial integration. The construction system and building materials used, such as large bricks, mud, cow dung, and lime surkhi, contribute to the earthquake resistance of these structures. Additionally, Pol houses historically incorporated rainwater harvesting systems, highlighting their sustainability.

Pols are organized around a central road, with individual houses sharing walls with neighboring homes, fostering sense of community.

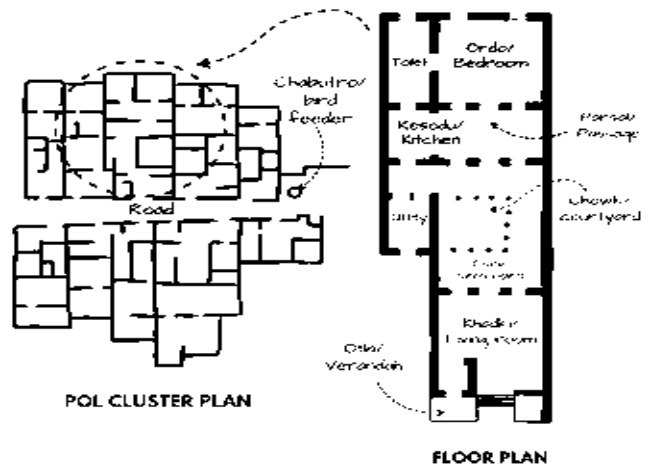


Fig.1 : Floor Plan and Elevation of the Pol

*Community Impact*

Pol houses foster strong community bonds due to their close living quarters and shared spaces. The gated nature of Pols symbolically isolates them from the outside world while creating a unique urban structure with interconnected passageways. This design allows for easy connectivity within the community and provides security during times of social unrest.

*Challenges*

Despite their historical significance, Pol houses face several challenges. The migration of residents from the walled city to New Ahmedabad due to various issues has led to a decrease in the population of the walled city. Many Pol houses are deteriorating due to neglect and the non-maintenance of building materials. Limited availability of natural light and ventilation in certain rooms, such as 'ordo', also poses a challenge. There is a need to revive rainwater harvesting systems and adapt these houses to modern contexts to ensure their preservation and relevance for future generations.

*C. Wada's of Maharashtra  
 Historical and Cultural Context*

Wadas evolved during the Maratha period and served as administrative and cultural hubs. These structures played a significant role in the social and cultural life of the region, hosting events and gatherings that fostered community interaction.

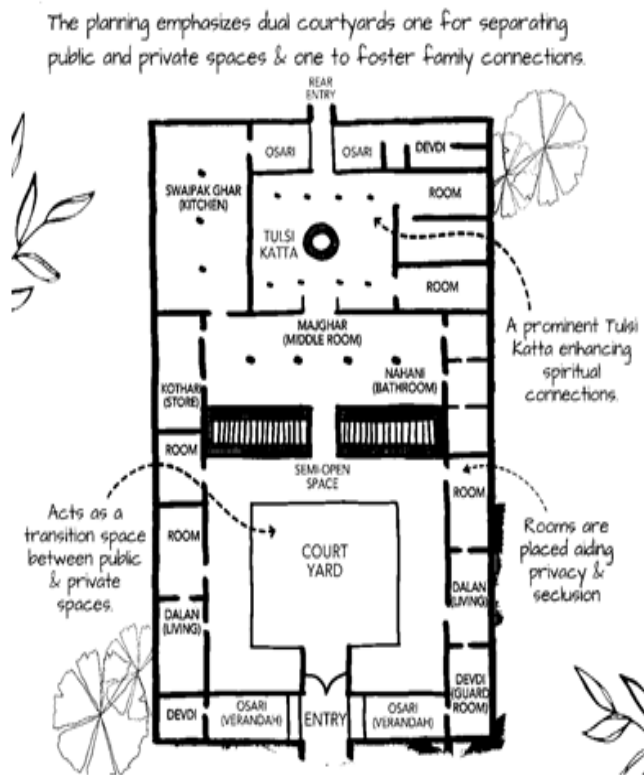


Fig 2. Floor Plan of Wada



Fig 3. Elevation of Wada

Wadas are characterized by their large courtyards, multiple floors, and intricate woodwork. These features reflect the grandeur and historical significance of the Maratha Empire. The spatial organization of Wadas harmonizes form and space, creating distinct architectural elements that serve both functional and aesthetic purposes.

*Community Impact*

Wadas were not only residences but also centers of political and cultural activities during the Maratha period. These structures played a significant role in the social and cultural life of the region, hosting events and gatherings that fostered community interaction.

*Neglect and Preservation*

Many Wadas today face neglect and are in a state of disrepair. The apathy from both civic bodies and private owners has led to the deterioration of these historical structures. There is a growing need to explore site-specific solutions to preserve Wadas and integrate them into the cultural infrastructure of contemporary cities like Pune.

*D. Chettinad Houses of Tamil Nadu*

*Historical and Cultural Context*

Built by the affluent Chettiar community, Chettinad houses emphasize trade, culture, and social gatherings. The architectural built form, layout, and building materials of Chettinad houses vary significantly, influenced by local construction practices and the socio-cultural significance of the area.

Characterized by central courtyards with rooms on four sides, raised verandahs, wooden columns, and spacious circulation.

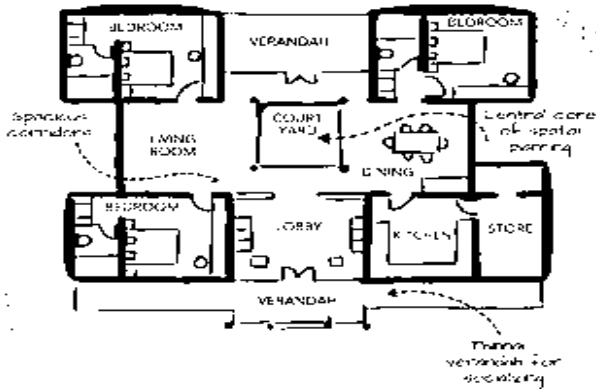


Fig 4: Floor Plan for Chettinad House



Fig 5: Elevation of Chettinad Houses

accommodating large families and hosting social and cultural events.

The planning emphasizes a central courtyard and feature separate areas for men & women to maintain privacy.

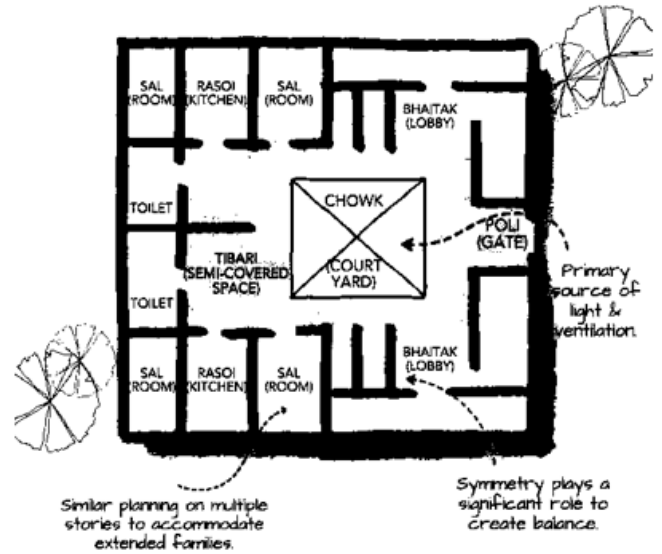


Fig 6 Floor Plan of Haveli

*Design and Structure*

Havelis are characterized by their elaborate facades, central courtyards, and jharokhas (overhanging enclosed balconies). These design elements provide privacy while enabling social interaction within the family and community. The inward-looking design of Havelis is well-suited to the harsh arid climate of Rajasthan.



Fig 7: Haveli of Rajasthan

*Design and Structure*

Chettinad houses are known for their use of local materials such as lime plaster, teak wood, and Athangudi tiles. These materials contribute to the durability and aesthetic appeal of the houses. The architectural built form and layout of Chettinad houses include spacious courtyards and intricate wooden carvings.

*Social Role*

Chettinad houses serve as spaces for social gatherings, weddings, and festivals. The design of these houses facilitates large gatherings and community events, fostering social interaction and cultural expression within the community.

*D. Havelis Of Rajasthan*

*Historical and Cultural Context*

Havelis originated under the Mughal empire and reflect a blend of Rajput and Mughal architectural styles. These houses emphasize privacy and community living,

Historically, Havelis served as residences for wealthy merchants and nobility. These structures were designed to accommodate large families and host social and cultural events, playing a significant role in the social fabric of the region.



IV MOVEMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

*Pol Houses of Gujarat*

1. Revitalized Courtyards:

Modern Implementation: Create central courtyards in new homes and residential complexes that serve as focal points for social gatherings, community activities, and relaxation.

Benefits: Encourages regular social interaction among residents, provides a shared space for communal activities, and enhances a sense of community.

2. Interconnected Living Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Design homes with open-plan layouts that connect living, dining, and kitchen areas, allowing for easier movement and interaction within the household.

Benefits: Promotes family interaction, makes it easier to host gatherings, and enhances visibility and communication within the home.

3. Shared Facilities:

Modern Implementation: Develop shared facilities such as community halls, co-working spaces, and shared kitchens within residential complexes. Benefits: Provides common areas for residents to meet, work, and socialize, fostering a stronger community bond.

*E. Wadas of Maharashtra*

1. Central Communal Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Integrate large central courtyards or common areas in new residential developments that can be used for social, cultural, and recreational activities.

Benefits: Acts as a social hub where residents can gather, interact, and participate in community events, enhancing social cohesion.

2. Multi-Generational Living Areas:

Modern Implementation: Design homes with flexible spaces that can accommodate multi-generational families, including private quarters and shared living areas.

3. Cultural and Recreational Facilities:

Modern Implementation: Include spaces for cultural activities such as performance areas, exhibition spaces, and recreational facilities like playgrounds and sports courts in residential complexes.

Benefits: Offers opportunities for residents to engage in cultural and recreational activities, promoting social interaction and community engagement.

*F. Chettinad Houses of Tamil Nadu*

1. Spacious Verandas and Porches:

Modern Implementation: Incorporate wide verandas and porches into the design of new homes, providing outdoor spaces for relaxation and socialization.

Benefits: Creates a transitional space between indoors and outdoors where residents can interact casually, enhancing social ties.

2. Community Gathering Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Designate communal gathering spaces within residential complexes for events, festivals, and daily interactions.

Benefits: Encourages residents to come together for community activities, fostering a sense of unity and shared culture.

3. Flexible Indoor Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Design large, open indoor spaces that can be adapted for various social functions, such as family gatherings, meetings, or cultural events.

Benefits: Provides versatile areas that can be used for different social purposes, making it easier for residents to host and participate in community activities.

*G. Havelis of Rajasthan*

1. Inward-Facing Courtyards:

Modern Implementation: Design homes with inward-facing courtyards that serve as private communal spaces for families and close-knit communities.

Benefits: Ensures privacy while providing a central area for social interaction, gatherings, and family activities.

2. Shared Community Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Develop shared community spaces such as gardens, terraces, and rooftops within residential complexes to encourage informal socialization.

Benefits: Offers residents common areas to relax and interact, promoting spontaneous social encounters and community building.

3. Architectural Elements for Interaction:

Modern Implementation: Use traditional architectural elements like jharokhas (overhanging balconies) and open terraces to create semi-private spaces for social interaction.

Benefits: Provides unique areas for residents to engage with each other while maintaining a degree of privacy, enhancing social dynamics.

H. General Strategies for All Typologies

1. Community-Centric Design:

Modern Implementation: Plan residential developments around central communal spaces such as parks, gardens, and plazas that serve as hubs for social activity.

Benefits: Centralizes social activities, making it easier for residents to gather and interact, strengthening community bonds.

2. Inclusive Shared Amenities:

Modern Implementation: Provide shared amenities such as libraries, gyms, and play areas that cater to diverse age groups and interests.

Benefits: Encourages interaction among residents of different ages and backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and social cohesion.

3. Regular Community Events:

Modern Implementation: Facilitate regular community events such as festivals, markets, and workshops within shared spaces to foster interaction and engagement.

Benefits: Creates regular opportunities for residents to come together, share experiences,

and build relationships.

4. Interactive Public Spaces:

Modern Implementation: Design public spaces within residential areas with features that encourage interaction, such as seating clusters, play areas, and interactive art installations.

Benefits: Enhances the usability of public spaces for social purposes, making it easier for residents to engage with each other in a meaningful way.

I. Heritage Conservation and Adaptive Reuse

Heritage Conservation: Efforts to restore and maintain these historical structures are crucial for preserving cultural heritage. Conservation initiatives focus on maintaining the architectural integrity and historical significance of traditional houses.

Adaptive Reuse: Transforming traditional houses into museums, hotels, and cultural centers is a strategy to integrate these structures into contemporary urban life. Adaptive reuse provides a sustainable approach to preserving historical buildings while meeting modern needs.

Sustainable Development: Incorporating traditional design principles into modern housing projects promotes sustainability and community living. Elements such as courtyards, natural ventilation, and the use of local materials can enhance the environmental performance of modern buildings.

J. Women and These Houses

Traditionally, women played a central role in maintaining the household and organizing social gatherings within these housing typologies. These spaces provided them with a platform for social interaction, cultural expression, and community engagement. The design of traditional houses often facilitated the activities and responsibilities of women, creating a supportive environment for family and community life.

K. Theoretical Framework

The study employs a multi-disciplinary approach, integrating architectural theory, cultural studies, and social sciences to understand the role of traditional housing in fostering social interaction. Concepts from Vaastu Shastra, sustainability, and community cohesion are examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of housing design on social dynamics.

V METHODOLOGY

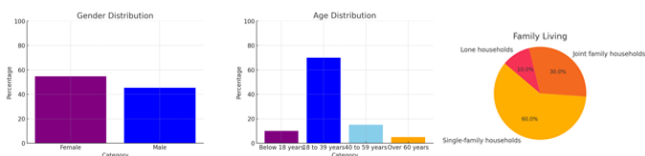
A. Research Design

- **Qualitative Analysis:** Historical documents, architectural blueprints, and cultural texts are analyzed to understand the design and significance of traditional housing typologies.
- **Case Studies:** In-depth analysis of specific Pol houses, Wadas, Chettinad houses, and Havelis is conducted to highlight their unique features and social impact.
- **Interviews:** Discussions with residents, historians, and architects provide insights into the lived experiences and cultural significance of these housing forms.

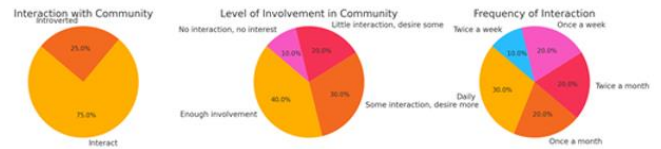
10. Data Collection

- **Field Visits:** Observations and photographic documentation of housing structures are undertaken to capture the physical and spatial characteristics of traditional houses.
- **Archival Research:** Examination of historical records and architectural plans provides a historical context and understanding of the development of traditional housing typologies.
- **Surveys:** Gathering residents' perspectives on social interactions within these housing typologies helps to understand the contemporary relevance and challenges of traditional houses.

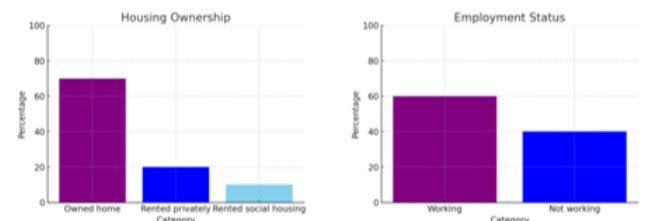
The survey, specially designed for this research paper, investigates the attitudes and behaviors of residents living in traditional housing typologies across India. By focusing on Pol houses in Gujarat, Wadas in Maharashtra, Chettinad houses in Tamil Nadu, and Havelis in Rajasthan, the survey aims to shed light on social interactions and community cohesion within these unique residential settings. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how demographic profiles, housing types, and social behaviors shape the community dynamics in these regions. The total size of survey was 70 respondents.



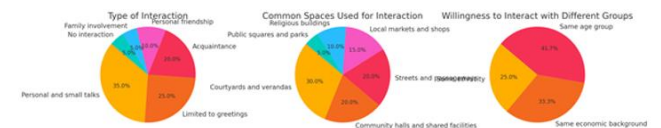
- Gender Distribution:** The survey respondents consist of 54.7% females and 45.3% males.
- Age Distribution:** A majority of respondents (70%) fall within the age group of 18 to 39 years, followed by 15% aged 40 to 59 years, 10% below 18 years, and 5% over 60 years.
- Family Living:** 60% of households are single-family, 30% are joint families, and 10% are lone households.



- Interaction with Community:** 75% of respondents actively engage with their community.
- Level of Involvement in Community:** 40% feel they have enough involvement, while 30% desire more interaction.
- Frequency of Interaction:** 30% of respondents interact daily, with varying frequencies observed among others.

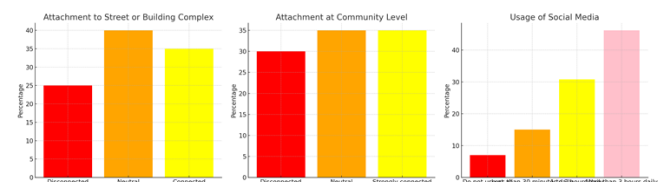


- Housing Ownership:** 70% of respondents own their homes, 20% rent privately, and 10% live in rented social housing.
- Employment Status:** 60% of respondents are working, while 40% are not employed.



- Type of Interaction:** 35% engage in personal and small talks, 25% limit interactions to greetings, 20% are acquaintances, 10% form personal friendships, 5% involve their families, and 5% have no interaction.
- Common Spaces Used for Interaction:** Courtyards and verandas (30%), community halls and shared facilities (20%), streets and passageways (20%), local markets and shops (15%), religious buildings (10%), and public squares and parks (5%).

**Willingness to Interact with Different Groups:** 50% are willing to interact with the same age group, 40% with the same economic background, and 30% with the same ethnicity.



- Attachment to Street or Building Complex:** 40% feel neutral, 35% feel connected, and 25% feel disconnected.
  - Attachment at Community Level:** 35% feel neutral, 30% feel strongly connected, and 35% feel disconnected.
- Usage of Social Media:** 30% use social media for 1 to 2 hours daily, 20% for more than 3 hours daily,

10% for less than 30 minutes daily, and 5% do not use it at all.

CONCLUSION

VI OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

A. *Social Dynamics*

- Pol Houses: Strong community bonds due to close living quarters and shared spaces are observed. The design of Pol houses facilitates social interactions and collective living.
- Wadas: Central courtyards serve as venues for social and cultural activities, fostering community engagement and interaction.
- Chettinad Houses: Spacious interiors and courtyards support large gatherings and social events, reflecting the cultural richness of the Chettiar community.
- Havelis: Private yet communal spaces within Havelis foster extended family living and social interaction.

B. *Contemporary Relevance*

- Preservation Challenges: Urbanization, neglect, and changing lifestyles pose challenges to the preservation of traditional houses. There is a need for conservation efforts and adaptive reuse strategies to maintain the historical and cultural significance of these structures.
- Adaptive Reuse Potential: Opportunities to integrate traditional design principles into modern urban housing can enhance sustainability and community living. Adaptive reuse can provide a sustainable approach to preserving historical buildings while meeting contemporary needs.

C. *Further Research Needed*

While this paper has provided a comprehensive overview of traditional Indian housing typologies and their role in fostering social interaction, several areas warrant further research to deepen our understanding and address contemporary challenges effectively.

1. Comparative Analysis with Global Housing Typologies
2. Technological Innovations in Preservation
3. Gender Dynamics and Inclusivity

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute significantly to the understanding and preservation of traditional Indian housing typologies. This knowledge can inform contemporary housing design and urban planning, ensuring that the cultural, social, and environmental values embodied in traditional houses continue to enrich modern communities.

Traditional Indian housing typologies like Pol houses, Wadas, Chettinad houses, and Havelis offer valuable lessons in fostering social interaction and community living. Preserving these structures and incorporating their design principles into contemporary housing can enhance social cohesion and cultural continuity. The study underscores the importance of understanding and preserving the historical and cultural significance of traditional houses to inform modern housing design and urban planning.

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