BRILL

MANUSYA: JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES 27 (2024) 1–24

MANUSYA
Journal of Humanities
brill.com/mnya

From an Enclosure to Human-Scaled Encounters: Articulating the Notion of Third Space in the Vishwakarma Community Temple, Penang

Sanjeh Raman
Senior Lecturer, Interior Design Department, School of Built Environment, University of Technology Sarawak, Sibu, Sarawak, Malaysia
sanjehraman@gmail.com

Received 7 December 2022 | Accepted 30 May 2023 |
Published online 8 May 2024

Abstract

The Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, located on Jalan Dato Keramat, in Penang, Malaysia provides entry into the cultural world of Pathars, the traditional Tamil goldsmiths who have long established their business in Penang. The continuity of this temple is studied through its spatial attributes and social impact in anchoring collective community experience Primary data was acquired through ethnography and secondary data was drawn from a document and photo review. The analysis provides a narrative account of the temple's *mandapa* as a social space that facilitates the hybridity of identities that grow from this temple. As a representation of Bhabha's Third Space and emanation of Lefebvre's "space triad", the *mandapa* within this temple fosters the lived experience of its users through bodily encounters, to renegotiate and reimagine their culture and identity that has been shaped by colonialism, as well as the transnational movement of people, culture, and memories.

Keywords

third space – modern temple – spatial study – social space – diaspora

1 Introduction

According to Gin (2015, 35) who quotes Chanderbali (2008), during the 1800s, many Indians moved in and out of Penang[1] as transient migrants, with the Tamils, who migrated in huge numbers in the late 1800s and early 1900s, forming the majority. Many migrants eventually stayed, aided partly by small Indian-owned businesses that sprouted up to meet the needs of co-ethnics. The majority of these businesses now operate as micro-based informal businesses[2] (Xavier and Terence Gomez 2018, 300). Similar to this business model, the Indian goldsmiths in Penang, themselves belonging to diverse sub-ethnic groups such as the Tamils, Telugus, and Muslims, also cater largely to their co-ethnics. The present-day Indian goldsmiths in Penang employ their cultural identity to classify and develop their products, allowing them to carve out a market niche (Xavier and Terence Gomez 2018, 320). Kotkin (1993, 4) advocates for the notion of ethnic communities as homogenous "global tribes" with a deep sense of shared origin and beliefs, and claims that success in the modern global economy is defined by the international ties that immigrant entrepreneurs bring with them. However, Xavier and Terence Gomez (2018, 298) highlight that this transnational view that essentializes ethnic identity is problematic in the Southeast Asian context.

The Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam in Penang belongs to the community of Tamil goldsmiths commonly referred to locally as "Pathars". The temple is also the sole Vishwakarma community temple in Malaysia. While the term "Vishwakarma community" refers to a pan-Indian hereditary crafts community, in the context of this study, the term refers to the Pathars of Penang. Raman and Aqbar Zakaria (2022, 48) address this temple as a continuation of Vishwakarma craftsmen culture, which traces the roots of the Pathars' traditional gold craftsmanship to the technē heritage of medieval southern India and its long phase of temple urbanism. Upon establishing their business in Penang, the Pathars acquired two shophouse plots near their establishments in 1923 where this community temple is situated. The original temple was established much earlier, in 1914, as a modest structure for the sole purposes of worship and to continue the customs of this community. Construction of a formal temple did not commence until 1940, and the first

1 Penang is a state on the northwest coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Its capital, George Town, is the oldest British colonial town in Southeast Asia and bears the historical imprint of the establishment of the British settlement in Penang island's northeast region in 1786 (Hassan 2009, 309).

2 Micro-based informal businesses are trade activities of small entrepreneurs that are under little legal regulation and whose workers are not socially or legally protected.

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). This temple, therefore, is ideal for understanding how the middle-class Hindus who have resettled outside India work not only to modernize temples but to renegotiate their identities within their respective locales. While the number of traditional Pathar businesses has dwindled in recent times, their presence and history in Penang are accentuated by their community temple, the Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, located on Jalan Dato Keramat, a major road that connects to the center of George Town, Penang. Homi Bhabha's explanatory power of Third Space and Henri Lefebvre's "space triad" compel this study to look again at this community temple, given the history of Penang as a former British port-city with diverse migrant Indian communities. The following section offers a concise explanation on the nature and spatial design of modern temples that accompanied movements of Indian-Hindus during the colonial period. This subsequently opens into the theoretical nuances of Third Space for postcolonial portrayals.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Movements in the Diaspora and Modern Temples*

According to Waghorne (2004, 37), Hindu temples, which are normally anchored in space and time, occur in modern times at moments of "transition and movement". Hence, modern Hindu temples are the first signs of resettlement, though they may appear to be the least moveable part of Hinduism. While resettlement of communities has happened across history due to a variety of factors (Piggott-McKellar et al. 2020, 1), Rogers and Wilmsen (2020, 1) assert that resettlement is a political project with underlying spatial repercussions in that it promotes the reorganisation of capital, labour, and land, and ends up making people and space more controllable. The arrival of Indians into Penang during British colonialism is also backgrounded by the imperial authority that facilitated resettlement across its colonies. As such, the resettlement of the natives promotes land expropriation which translates into capital accumulation, enhances access to low labour, and creates new types of commodification and consumerism (Rogers and Wilmsen 2020, 7).

Sinha (2019, 191), in uncovering how Hindu religiosity has been reconfigured in new settings, discusses the notion of reform in Hindu domains in Malaysia. She highlights that it is possible to trace to 1920s British Malaya, at least, reformist discourse and actions aiming to "institute a rational, modern approach to religiosity". Waghorne (2004, 172, 237), in discussing the growth

of Hindu temples in the modern and globalized world says "middle-class religious sensibilities" and "globalisation of more localized temple traditions" is amongst the many reasons why Hindus have opted to divert a percentage of their revenue from commerce, technology and scientific knowledge to temple refurbishment, construction, and maintenance in the diaspora. According to Moodie (2019, 3), a modern temple might have three distinct characteristics that distinguish it from pre-modern architecture or refurbishment efforts. Firstly, these temples use modernist idioms like "rationality, democracy, order, and cleanliness" that contrast with pre-modern idioms guiding temple transformations, like "purity, divine power, and valour of aristocratic lineage". Secondly, in tandem with early signs of Indian nationalism, middle-class people began to shape new temples as places that would promote the distinctive cultural heritage of south Indian craftsmen and India. Thirdly, these middle-class people played a distinct role by engaging with government agencies to reform aspects of temple life.

While the architectural doctrines of Hindu temples "are based on ancient building rules" (Bharne et al. 2012, xvii), many modern temples outside India interpret these rules in innovative ways and implement new materials and construction processes. The involvement of business communities in temple building has birthed three kinds of Hindu temples: a) the eclectic temple that attempts to bring together all communities (inclusivity), b) the community-only temple which discards a dialogic relationship between communities and is confined to a specific caste group only (exclusivity), and c) the duplicated temple, built not as a simple copy, but like a "branch office" of of an older, more famous temple in India (Waghorne 2004, 41).

However, given George Town's past as a colonial city, its spatial materialisation can also be related to a particular notion forming the foundation of a referential framework that records locals' architectural creations even after the establishment of the nation-state, as long as they fall within the boundary that prioritises European categories as normative. This subsequently obscures how architecture actually responds to the realities of local people like the Pathars who currently inhabit and govern their buildings, as well asin addition to furthering the dichotomy of self-other in architectural discourse.

This study uses the Third Space theory of Lefebvre and later Bhabha, who departs from the binary structure to bring ambivalence of the subject to the understanding of Third Space in order to highlight the architecture of the working class in the city, the Pathars, by emphasising the circumstances and complex needs of this community living between socioeconomic strata in George Town. By focusing on the appropriation of space to the level of

human scaled encounters in buildings, this study can address the knowledge gap in understanding how architecture is shaped by memories, experiences, and cultural adaptations of a migrant minority group within diasporic communities.

2.2 *Third Space in Postcolonial Portrayals*

The importance of spatiality to people's lives has been reinterpreted in current studies as a fundamental existential component that interweaves with conventional historical-social modes of epistemological analysis. Edward Soja in *The Political Organization of Space* (1971), introduced the notion of "thirdspace" that allows us to consider the prospect of the emergence of a new place of exchange (Soja 1971, 8). As Soja (1996, 1) describes, this new "strategic awareness" enables a significant shift in how we perceive, understand, and act to alter the total spatiality of human life. According to Bustin and Speake (2020, 259), among the significant and original understandings of third space (and each with their own expressions) were Henri Lefebvre ("third" space), Homi Bhabha (Third Space), and Edward Soja (Thirdspace). Lefebvre's clear articulation of the material and representation symbioses inherent in "lived space" led Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja to coin the phrase "third space". Bustin and Speake (2020, 259) highlight that the main contribution of Bhabha is the idea of the spatiality of colonization and post-colonialism, where his understanding was profoundly shaped by Foucault (discursivity), Derrida (deconstruction), Lacan (psychoanalysis), and Said (orientalism and the Other). Bhabha developed his ideas based on these scholars' perspectives in conceptualizing a different discussion on "Third Space" and "hybridity", and explored how hybrid cultures and collective social practices evolve, displacing old traditions while also creating something new (Bustin and Speake 2020, 259). The intersection of these different conceptions of Third Space engages in concerns of spatial and cultural in-betweenness/Otherness, as well as resistance, contestation, and transformation opportunities. By incorporating Bhabha's writings into architecture discourse, we may steer into topics like the "thirdspace of multi-diversity, transnational migration, changing identities, and the hybrid cosmopolitanism of everyday life" (Bustin and Speake 2020, 261).

Some postcolonial scholars have theorized that boundaries between "us" and "them", "self" and "other" have formed communities and identities. However, according to Hubbard et al. (2004, 72), Bhabha moved away from this stance by suggesting that identities are eventually hybridised because social spaces are created by rupturing boundaries and by movements of illicit border

traffic. To express this upheaval, Bhabha uses concepts like "hybridity", "the in-between", "cultural translation", and "third space". While Bhabha believes that culture is mainly spatial, he also believes that it cannot be understood through oppositions such as tradition versus modernity. According to Bhabha, cultural space is the site of shared practices that cannot be classified as belonging to a single culture despite it arising in response to specific historical and geographical circumstances. Bhabha coined the term "Third Space" to describe the hybrid cultural activities of dispersed, displaced, or migrated communities who often negotiate discordant aspects of various traditions and construct their new home at their limits in response to such practices. As a result, Bhabha (1990) claims hybridised spaces are widespread in the dynamic composition of actual communities, shaped by migrating communities that are essential indicators of a fluctuating boundary that disenfranchises borders of the modern nation.

Lefebvre's articulation of "third" space, which also influenced Bhabha's thinking, speaks of space as a production. Lefebvre et al. (1991) assert that the concept of production does not fully materialise or have genuine meaning until questions of "Who produces?", "What produces?", "How does it produce?", and "Why and for whom?" have been addressed. The notion of the production of space then remains merely abstract outside of the context of these inquiries and the responses to them. As such, social space is neither an object nor a product. Instead, it encompasses all produced objects and their interrelationships in their simultaneous existence. It cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object because it is the result of a sequence and a collection of operations (Lefebvre et al. 1991, 73).

Parallel to Bhabha's account of hybridity or difference in his Third Space theory, Kinkaid (2020) analyses the idea of "difference" in Lefebvre's theorization of social space that functions as a counter to the homogenizing spatial logic of capitalism and bourgeois culture. Therefore, "difference" is a key concept in both of these works, where its relevance can be observed in its capacity to alter both space and society. However, even when questions of minority representation do occasionally surface, Kinkaid (2020, 169) emphasizes how Lefebvre's *Production of Space* is characterized by a lack of focus on historically concrete forms of difference. According to Lefebvre et al. (1991), in the context of human society, differentiation leads to class, which in turn challenges individuals' exclusion through class conflict. Nonetheless, to understand the production and experience of embodied experience, we cannot operate at the level of abstraction as Lefebvre frequently does (Kinkaid 2020, 169). "Difference" is not something that exists in space, but rather something

that is generated through lived experience and the layering of activity and actions that comes from the interrelationship of human bodies.

For Bhabha (1990a, 211), hybridity is the Third Space that allows other positions to emerge. Bhabha's Third Space attempts to spatialize the liminal position it represents by giving certain tangibility from where hybridization emerges. His idea of Third Space emphasizes the rhetoric of ambivalence, which serves as a tool to undermine the authoritarian architecture and the means through which it is exercised. Therefore, as actual participants in the ongoing altering of cities all over the world, people's actions as makers of their own living space can be chronicled and architecturally validated using Third Space theory. It is crucial to conceptualize the Pathars' community temple as a topic of Third Space since buildings are constantly caught figuratively between the objectives of dominating placemaking agents and users who are constantly re-signifying their buildings. This framework can demonstrate how the community temple communicates experiences of user conflict, social change, and power rather than being culturally fixed.

One of the main reasons Bhabha's Third Space theory applies to the subject of architecture in this study is his interest in the cultural productions of minoritized communities like the Pathars. According to Bhabha, the work created by these individuals is politically contentious because it contests the very mechanisms that have positioned them at the margins.

3 Methodology

This study is based on fieldwork with the Pathars and people who are involved in the day-to-day routines and temple programs inside the Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam building. The fieldwork took place between November 2020 and December 2021. The researcher utilized an ethnographic approach to carry out several open-ended interviews involving various members of the Pathar community–small-scale goldsmiths, disenfranchised Pathars and other clan members, as well as temple patrons who come from local neighbourhoods and conducted participant observation on different occasions, while examining the temple's space use, architectural layout, and components. According to Boccagni and Schrooten (2018, 209), participant observation is different from pure observation or participation because it aims to strike a balance between "going native" and "becoming the phenomena" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002; Jorgensen 1989). Ready et al. (2020, 418) use a passage from Bernard (2017) that reads, "participant observers are able to evaluate the information they get from informants in a broader social context

and retain a consistent written record of their observations", to highlight the value of participant observation. Participant observers are also able to keep track of the character and setting of encounters over a sustained time frame (Ready et al. 2020, 418). The secondary data is derived through document and photograph assessments from both participants and the temple archive.

In taking Lefebvre's acknowledgement of the human body as a key site for the creation of space, the researcher discovered the interrelationship of different bodies through the ethnographic study, where "[s]pace is a social morphology" (Lefebvre et al. 1991, 94) produced from the activities and actions of bodies that utilize the *mandapa* of this community temple. The term "mandapa", generally refers to a hall or pavilion in Indian architecture. It can be enclosed or open and is used as assembly hall for ceremonial or religious activities (Chaturawong 2017, 54). According to Sharma and Deshpande (2017, 311–314), while the *mandapa* demarcates the interior spaces in its scale of interiority, the specific purposes and proportions of the *mandapa* itself marks the public or private nature of the interior space in temples.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research components of this paper bring together the cultural and social engagements of the users of this community temple. While people who visit and attend this temple regularly are local Hindus, their identities are not monolithic. They include citizens as well as non-citizens like the present-day migrant workers. The social and cultural engagements of people in the *mandapa* of this temple can be analysed as an emanation of social space which is useful to understand how the hybridity of identity emerges out of this temple. To establish a narrative description of

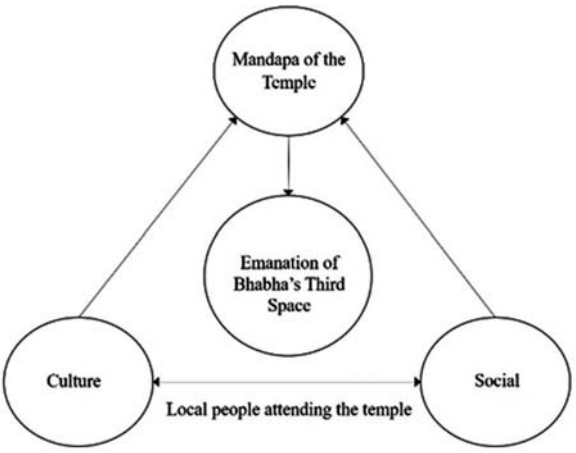

FIGURE 1 Research components

mandapa as a social space, the researcher analyzed the ethnographic data to identify the actions taken and language used by the people to explain their interaction and behavior.

4 Results and Discussion

Early Pathars transformed the conventional shophouse layout through their goldsmithing work and by simply living in the city. They transformed its physical spaces into a socially relevant and meaningful community temple. Present-day Pathars and local Hindus further develop the *mandapa*, a physical space in the community temple, into a place of significance. Lefebvre asserts that how a space is set up, especially in regard to its architectural thinking, reflects the social systems that are already in place. Theorizing space must consider the Pathars' life experiences, or it will just end up being an ideological fabrication (Lefebvre et al. 1991; Watkins 2005).

By presenting the first-person experience of space and social relations from the perspective of the Pathars and local Hindus, a minority group in the locality, this study provides accounts of the production of difference and its mobilization of community, a major concern of both Bhabha and Lefebvre's work. The rejection of an abstract space in which space is not a system in which things are arranged serves as the starting point for Lefebvre's conception of space. Instead, it is based on how the subject and space are related. Kinkaid (2020, 174) suggests that it is with the embodied person we should start to be able to understand Lefebvre's relational concept of space. Lefebvre et al. (1991, 405) establish a material basis for the production of space, stating "[t]he whole of (social) space proceeds from the body" and, thereby, acknowledging the human body as a primary place for the creation of space.

4.1 *The Mandapa as a Social Space*

The *mandapa* in the Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam is an interior space, unconventionally conjoined to the worship space as an extension, due to the temple's placement on two adjacent shophouse lots. Due to their pronounced differences, the historical assimilation of this temple in its neighbourhood and the sociocultural reality of the temple's users have produced a level of complexity. In its localised character, the *mandapa's* function as a social space incorporates and expresses this complexity.

Figure 2 shows the *mandapa* within this temple layout and its space use on regular days and peak days, respectively. On regular days, it is confined to the space away from the worship zone, but on peak days that see huge gatherings,

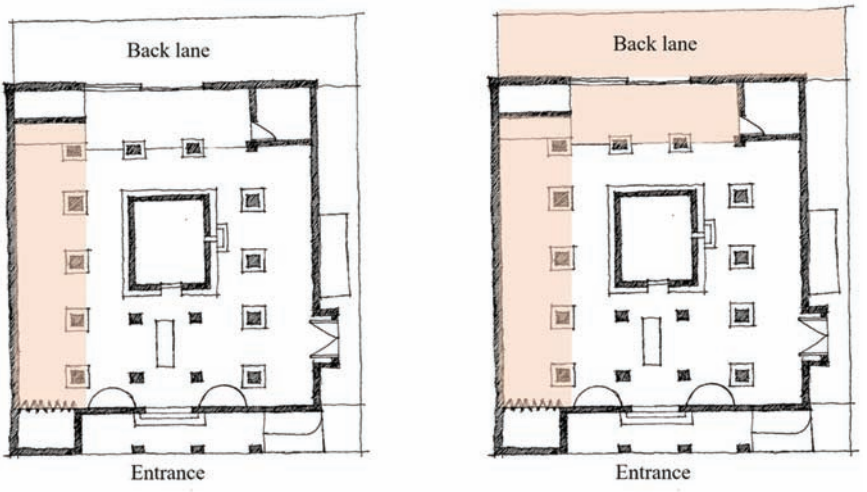

FIGURE 2 *Mandapa* space use (left) on regular days; (right) on peak days (not to scale)

the *mandapa* zone extends into the covered back lane of the temple, often serving as an outdoor dining space and activity area. The social space that the Pathars created through their community temple, via their work over many generations, is a result of social and cooperative production. As the demands of their society continue to change through time, the Pathars of today and their descendants, many of whom are no longer engaged in the gold craftsmanship trade, continue to evolve and modify their social environment. The *mandapa* attracts locals in a way that encourages cultural interactions among different generations and sub-ethnic groups of the Indian diaspora in Penang. This facilitates the development of Malaysia-Indian identity's hybridity and subsequently questions the idea of fixed identity of Indian and Malayan societies that is set along the national narrative to this day.

4.2 *Cultural Phenomenon: A Shifting Sense of Identities*

In surveying the range of architectural and modern subjectivities, Chang and Tajudeen (2019) argue the use of the term "Southeast Asia" as a geographic unit of analysis invites problems and limitations. However, it also opens up the possibility for the architecture of this region to be seen within a social, cultural, and political context. This is critical to interdisciplinary debates about the progress of the region. Similarly, the Pathars' community temple in Penang challenges the essentialist positions often held by architectural academics to interrogate the domination of a nationally based narrative in which "postcolonial geopolitical borders are seen as normative" (Chang and Tajudeen 2019, 140). The Pathars in Penang tried to address their living conditions by

banding together, encouraging collaboration, and building a community temple. Therefore, the Pathars' interactions and activities in Penang show how the work of migrating communities can transform spaces in receiving societies (Delaisse 2020). Work can make the production of space apparent and palpable since the elements in Lefebvre's "space triad" are connected. According to Lefebvre (2009), each community or society's social space has its own innate peculiarities to its framework. Lefebvre's "space trinity" of spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation work in tandem to create social space (Merrifield 1993; Merrifield 2013). Lefebvre et al. (1991) advanced this idea to clarify the conflict between the working classes' working conditions and the economic and political elite's capitalistic objectives, which are both contained in representations of space and intrinsic to them. As a result, while we can see how theorized factors of both Lefebvre's "space trinity" and Bhabha's Third Space influence the Pathars' spatial practices, we can also show how their understanding of space influences the development of new spatial practices for upcoming generations. The architecture of this temple gathers the migrant Pathar community's memories of its colonial past in Penang, together with their continuing efforts to transform tradition for the future generations.

Bond and Worthing (2016, 51) in explaining the value of cultural values in buildings argue that a building can metaphorically indicate the growth or ideals of specific groups by playing an important role in establishing community identity. On the other hand, buildings can also radicalize and exclude by affirming a certain historical perspective. This temple, a sign of resettlement built by migrant goldsmiths, stands as proof that within the post-colonial urbanism of Penang a direct and simplistic correlation between distinct types of architecture, places, and people can no longer be assumed. This temple started as a community-only temple, as evidenced from its architecture. However, today it has become eclectic in its programme by bringing all communities together while still retaining the Pathars' distinct cultural identity. In giving sanctuary to the local Hindu population, this temple also communicates the notions of the local community by negotiating its post-colonial identity in modern Malaysia. In a broader sense, given the compactness and the situatedness among shophouses on Jalan Dato Keramat, a major road in the city, this temple enters the conscious spaces of other residents who live cheek by jowl. Figure 3 illustrates a site map of this temple to highlight its neighbouring context. In its everyday function, this temple serves the local Hindu community's cultural, religious, and social needs.

Bhabha uses the architecture analogy of "space" in his work. However, the political nature of his work prohibits a superficial use of the terminology in

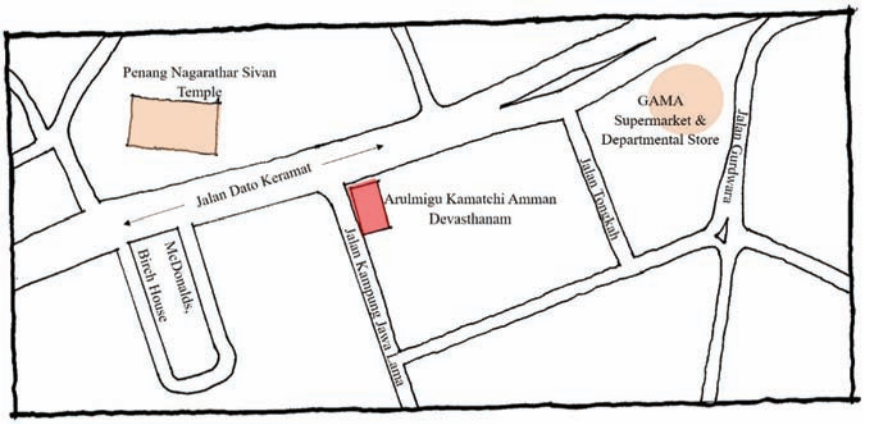

FIGURE 3 Site map of the community temple and its neighbouring landmarks (not to scale)

the study of buildings. To understand Bhabha's term "Third Space" within architecture, the researcher acknowledges the way the Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam, a temple building, responds to the individual and collective users' needs and social interactions. While this temple, as a building, is inert, it is not culturally static. The culture within this temple space is a dynamic composite of numerous aspects, histories, and subjective perspectives. This temple, as a subject in the Third Space, is a place where culture thrives, expressing narratives of encounters and conflicts between people, authority, and social change in Penang. Bhabha's use of the term "Third Space" as a space that interrupts the binaries that uphold power, yet does not erase differences into a homogenous ideology, can be explained in the context of the Pathars' community temple in Penang. According to Lefebvre et al. (1991), social spaces intersect, infiltrate, or exert themselves upon one another. Visible boundaries, like walls, contribute to the impression that spaces are divided when there is an ambiguous continuum. Despite being physically separated from social space by walls and other building features, this community temple's *mandapa* space is, nevertheless, inherently a part of the social space it has produced. Space, in the Pathars' lived experience, is not simply a container made to house whatever may be placed into it. Space is a social morphology of their lives because "it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure" (Lefebvre et al. 1991, 94). The *mandapa*, a social space that subsequently facilitates cultural phenomenon in its locality, can be explained under the following three headings: articulating cultural differences, negotiating modernity, and distinguishing features.

4.2.1 Articulating Cultural Differences

The participation of local people, both citizens, and non-citizens, in cultural rituals and social programmes within this temple is critical to the formation of cultural identity and subjectivity. While identity provides us with a level of self-belonging at its most basic level, it is also about our multifaceted connection with others in the formation of social relationships. This temple's cultural practices and activities encourage us to consider identity as a production that is always in progress and contained inside its representation. This in itself casts doubt on the concept of genuine "cultural identity".

The *mandapa* as a social space that generates intersubjectivity brings different users in active participation with one another, facilitated by the physical setting of the temple itself. In approaching the idea of Third Space, Bhabha holds subjectivities and articulation of cultural differences as in-between space. According to Bhabha (2004, 148), in the process of constructing the concept of a society, this in-between space offers the ground for developing methods of selfhood–either individual or collective– that begin new indications of identity and innovative locations of participation and confrontation. The interaction of people who come from different backgrounds and generations allows the crossing over of cultural differences and for new identities to form. In this in-between space, the existing cultural conventions and ethnic attributes get renegotiated and reinterpreted.

The temple has programmed and unprogrammed activities that inform us of its activity and use. However, to articulate the cultural differences that come from the vantage point of the users, who are also minority subjects in Penang, requires us to focus on the intersubjectivity of users and their embodied experience of the *mandapa* space itself. Table 1 demarcates the types of users, their physical space uses, and the way they experience space within this temple.

By keeping the users of the space in the foreground, we can see that they serve as the goals of transformative politics in Lefebvre's theory and have the ability to create a different or brand-new space. The annual Vishwakarma Jayanti and Upākarma are observances that gather people from the Pathar clan. While these events unfold solemnly in the *mandapa*, they are also anchored ritually to the separate shrines of both Lord Vishwakarma and Goddess Gayatri. This points us to the specific cultural practice and exclusive identity of the Pathars. The daily worship, cultural festivals, such as Navarathri, and religious extravaganzas, such as the temple's annual festival, bring all Hindus together. These events start in the *mandapa* and naturally spill into the back lane of the temple, depending on the size of the crowd that gathers. The back lane that extends as the *mandapa's* space often functions as a dining area. The activities in the *mandapa* also bring people in the neighborhood to congregate for social

TABLE 1 Different users and space production

Users	Experience of space	Physical space use	
Pathar clan members	Annual Vishwakarma *Jayanthi*,[3] and *Upākarma*[4]	Inside the mandapa	Shrines of Vishwakarma and Gayathri
All Hindus	Daily worship, cultural festivals, religious extravaganza.	Inside the mandapa	Extends into temple back lane
Everyone in the neighborhood	Social events (e.g., fundraisings, engagements, and weddings), Public festivals (e.g., chariot procession)	Inside the mandapa	Around major roads in Georgetown

events like fundraisers and weddings. During such events, we can see members from local institutions, such as schools and non-governmental organizations, or even local politicians joining forces with the temple trustees to provide for the immediate communities. Public festivals, such as the chariot procession that starts in the *mandapa*, spill out of the temple onto the major roads of George Town. This public religiosity among everyone in the neighborhood draws from experiences outside the temple building, as illustrated in Figure 4. The *mandapa* thereby also acts as Bhabha's Third Space, playing a crucial role in forming a cultural identity that is negotiated in-between the cultural spaces of different sub-ethnic groups and generations. Witnessing this contradiction of space that is rooted in the experience of its users highlights the role of spatial practice linking symbolic and material meanings of space. The spatial practice that spills out of the mandapa allows spaces to somehow cohere while simultaneously exposing inconsistencies that users experience.

The temple does not conceal its historical and current significance. While functioning as a community-only temple, it has also redefined its local role by allowing people to participate in its activities and bringing their interpretations into the space, creating acts of cultural translation for the present time. There

3 *Jayanthi* in this context refers to the auspicious appearance anniversary when the deity Vishwakarma assumed an appearance.

4 *Upākarma* (noun) refers to the day when specific rituals are observed before the commencement of Vedic studies each year.

FIGURE 4 The temple chariot passing in front of the Chettiar's *kittangi* in Little India, George Town, Penang
SOURCE: TEMPLE ARCHIVE

are many non-citizen migrant workers from India and Sri Lanka working around George Town who visit this temple. For many of these migrant workers, this temple aids in the processing of memory and longing by avoiding the possibility of reifying cultural differences that come from the diasporic movement that continues to this day. In conversation with the researcher, Sankar, an Indian migrant worker who works in nearby Little India, said:

> I usually come to this temple on my off days. I feel this temple gives me a sense of peace and refuge, away from the hectic life in the city. I spend some time here; I pray and sit for some time in solitude.

For many migrant workers like Sankar, the elaborate rituals and intense sociality of life back in their home country have been "shattered and fragmented" in Penang. This is aggravated by a sense of alienation brought on by linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as racial stigma. Because many of the cultural expectations inherent among these migrant workers are present in the setting of this temple, its rituals, and activities, this temple provides a glimmer of completeness to these men, enabling them a ritual language to convey what remains indescribable in themselves.

In this temple setting, cultural difference is valued, as evidenced by the use of the *mandapa*. The Pathars have their own set of customs that are distinct from those of the average Hindu who visits the temple. However, this does not prevent the Pathars from accepting different cultural practices within the temple's activities. As such, the temple's numerous identities communicate in progressive ways. Differences are accepted and a variety of people are permitted to interact. From a postcolonial perspective, the differences captured and supported within the physical setting of this temple constitute a process that embraces dynamic spaces of cultural change in people's daily lives as they adapt to changes outside the temple, as characterised by shifting identities, rather than mere reflection or criticism.

4.2.2 Negotiating Modernity

Hindu faith and culture responded to imperial onslaught in many ways as colonial power and growth took root in southern India in the nineteenth century, leading to changes in Hindu religious traditions (Steinschneider 2020). A specific socio-spiritual response to colonialism not easily contained within Western-inspired reform narratives is echoed on the external façade of the *mandapa* in the form of a stucco icon of Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–1874). Figure 5 shows this stucco icon of Ramalinga; a modern-day religious poet who, during the great famine in Madras, found a charitable feeding house in 1867, in Vadalur, a small town in the South Arcot district of what was then the Madras Presidency (Raman 2013, 2).

Ramalinga's life positions him at the margins of colonial operations and the recognized centres of *Shaiva*[5] authority. Ramalinga did not dwell in a traditional, sentimental world (Steinschneider 2020, 12). He also did not deal with the West in any obvious ways and used only Tamil in his local interactions and writing (Steinschneider 2020, 2). Nevertheless, Ramalinga, who was barred from working in major Shaiva monastic institutions due to his sub-caste, found an innovative voluntarist community that actively transformed Hindu practices outside of cosmopolitan colonial centres. Today, his initiatives that aimed to tackle the social injustice and hardship that prevailed in his time resonate with the spiritual modernity of Hindus in Penang, who together with the Pathars, reimagine and redefine the temple as a community space. Steinschneider (2020, 2) says Ramalinga's philosophy and reform must be recognized as modern because they call for strategic innovation in response

5 *Shaiva* (noun), one of the main branches of Hinduism, is devoted to the worship of Lord Shiva as the Supreme. Shaiva literature includes a wide range of scriptures, established practices, and institutions, such as monasteries.

FIGURE 5 Stucco icon of Ramalinga on the exterior façade of the mandapa

to current challenges. Ramalinga's philosophy views the present time as distinctive, versatile, and an exceptional opportunity for profound change that may herald future developments in community life. The trustees of this temple embody the philosophy of Ramalinga, popularly known in the Tamil-speaking diaspora as "Vallalar", by active participation in community activities and breaking many cultural stereotypes of caste, gender, or class that have often been associated with Indian socio-cultural way of life. Figure 6, constructed from the fieldwork data, illustrate this by highlighting the network of relationships that the present temple trustees foster. All major festivals hosted by the temple are observed communally in the spirit of *gotong-royong*, an inherently Malaysian way of community practice where the members of a neighbourhood gather as volunteers, working together to achieve a common goal. This gathering of people comes from men, women, and teenagers, each carrying out their allocated tasks.

The network of relationships that contribute to social activities in the temple depends primarily on immediate and direct relations between various groups and people like trade guilds, non-governmental and governmental organizations, and families that make up the local community. The temple

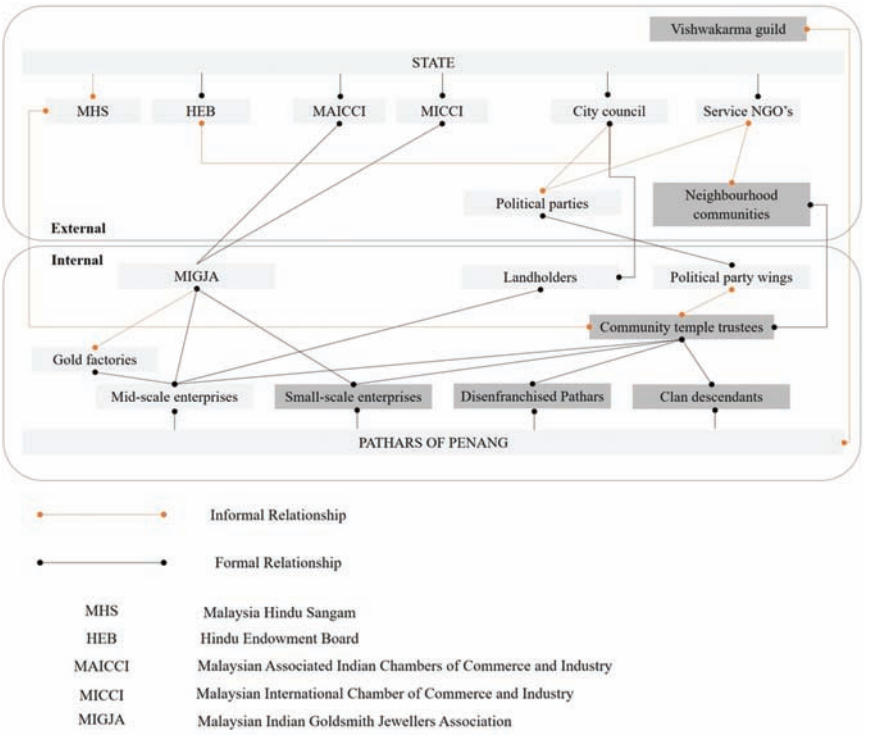

FIGURE 6 Relationships between various social bodies

is modern in its function as it embraces the master term "democracy" in its engagement with its community. In doing so, the barriers between what is sacred and profane that often delineate places of worship are blurred, allowing more secular participation from members of the local community to take place in the *mandapa*. The cultural phenomenon, and namely, the efforts of users in negotiating modernity and in articulating their differences, share not only the concern with the potential of perceiving a social space that can be reproduced through the *mandapa*, but also challenge the dominant ways of being in George Town.

4.2.3 Distinguishing Features

The Pathars trace their hereditary gold craftsmanship to the Vishwakarma guild that originated in southern India. Figure 7 shows an oil painting depicting these endogamous five-fold craftsmen who descended from Lord Viswakarma as *Manu* (Blacksmiths), *Maya* (Carpenters), *Tvashta* (Metalcasters), *Shipli* (Stonemasons), and *Visvajna* (Goldsmiths). The remembrance of this civilizational link is evident in the temple in the form of separate secondary

FIGURE 7 The oil painting of Lord Vishwakarma surrounded by five progenies of craftsmen on the interior walls of the *mandapa*

shrines for Lord Vishwakarma and Goddess Gayatri. According to Raman and Aqbar Zakaria (2022, 52), Lord Vishwakarma is recognized as the "God of engineering and architecture" and helps to point to the kinship-based identity of the Pathars as craftsmen who formed a sub-ethnic community amongst the Hindus. Besides that, the crest of the temple's modest *gopura* (tower entrance) also boasts stucco icons of Vishwakarma surrounded by five progenies. While many of the present-day members of the Pathar clan have moved away from the goldsmith trade into various other professions, they maintain ties to their civilizational roots through the specific religiosity of their sub-community which also differentiates them from other Hindus, thereby showing us that Hindus even outside India constitute a community of different and diverse cultural heritages. The distinguishing feature of the Pathars is also the result of encounters that have happened not only in Penang, but also in other parts of India where their counterparts (middle-class goldsmiths) ventured into constructing modern temples within commercial districts as colonial cities expanded. A plaque memorializing the names of the former temple chairmen, which goes back to as early as 1914, stands as a testament in the *mandapa* to the commitment of this community to engaging in their locality as civic citizens.

One of Bhabha's reasonings behind the potential of Third Space is the prospect of "encounter". Cultural contact is created by a series of encounters between individuals and groups in various social contexts. Encounters can result in something substantially different to create a hybridity of cultures. In multiple interviews with the older generation who worked to re-consecrate the temple in the late 1980s, the following account of trying to establish a link to the culture of origin emerged. Bala, an 80-year-old at the time of the interview, explained that prior to the re-consecration of the temple in 1989, the temple trustees of the time had established links with the *Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham* (Sri Kanchi Monastery) in Kanchipuram, southern India to regulate the method of temple worship. They had also established a connection with the Vishwakarma craftsmen guild in southern India, whose community identity is visible in the architecture of the temple. Bala also asked the researcher to observe the rows of oil paintings that line the inner walls of the *mandapa*. At the bottom of the paintings are the names of its donors, individuals and families of the Pathar clan from Malaysia and southern India. He said:

> These oil paintings were commissioned by Pathar families, some local, some from India. See, their names are recorded at the bottom of the frame. When I look at these paintings today, it reminds me of our goldsmith fraternity. But today our number has dwindled so low in Penang.

Bhabha, in using the term "Third Space," referred continuously to the margins of culture, i.e., the areas between cultures, wherein he located cultural productivity. In doing so, he highlights these marginalized positions as the most visible manifestation of the inequalities that characterize today's transnational relations. Bhabha was concerned about the effects of an economic system dominated by developed nations on marginalized cultural production. This is especially true of the Pathars, the traditional goldsmiths, whose works are situated on the margin. Bhabha (2004, xi) explained, "I do want to make graphic what it means to survive, to produce, to labour and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people".

True to Bhabha's explanation, the narrative account collected from the Pathars in this study highlights the restriction and challenges of being a visible minority goldsmith who operates on the margins of a market-driven economy. Bala's account of the temple demonstrates that cultural interaction is not a historical event that occurred at a different time. Rather, it entails a succession of encounters that continue to influence connections between cultures in various locales.

5 Conclusion

The Arulmigu Kamatchi Amman Devasthanam is not merely a result of the resettlement of Pathars in Penang during the period of British colonialism, but also a cultural phenomenon which has seen this community of goldsmiths attempt to tame capitalism by steering their labour, culture, and community to produce social space in the city by harnessing the potential of their community temple. This community temple is an example of the architecture of the people. It is by the people and for the people. It demonstrates an emergence of Bhabha's Third Space that overlaps and displaces domains of difference, thereby challenging the dialectics that present themselves in architectural thinking itself through the production of space by way of the intertwinement of the human body with its place.

The role played by the *mandapa* of this temple in facilitating cultural interactions shows how the histories and cultures of the Pathars permeate the present in such ways that their meanings are constantly reviewed, revised, and re-read with a new perspective by the community itself. Having grown distinct from their forefathers, the present-day Pathars, who band together as "Malaysian-Indian", still retain community-specific practices that are continually contested and negotiated in their social space without undermining their subjectivities and differences, to produce a new meaning. This temple is then modern in the sense that it has blurred the lines between sacred and profane by reinventing the role of the temple to be more democratic and guided by rationality, opening up new possibilities. While the older generation, in setting up this temple, attempted to represent their cultural practices in their new locality, those of the latter generation who inherited this temple have oscillated between their home cultures and the culture of Penang. They could not get away from their common culture and familiarity with Indian culture. However, the present generation is open to adopting the cultural practices of Penang. The disparity between generations demonstrates not only how diasporic Indian identities are always changing, but also the crucial function community temples play in facilitating the evolution of cultural identities in the third space of negotiations and transformations. Within the local Indian community that carries the imprint of their colonized past from India and the memory of colonization in Penang, the *mandapa,* as social space, eases and leads its users into intercultural and intergenerational communication to negotiate their traditions, cultural practices, economy, and even political standing when it comes to self-governance or fostering a sense of community, banding together as Malaysian-Indian despite all their differences. As Bhabha

(2004) contends, Third Space is equal to transitional space in which space and time cross and impact one another.

Disclosure statement

The author reports no potential conflicts of interest.

References

Bernard, Harvey Russell. 2017. *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Bhabha, Homi Kharshedji. 2004. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi Kharshedji. 1990. 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', in *Nation and Narration*. London & New York: Routledge, 291–322.

Bhabha, Homi Kharshedji (1990a) 'Third Space', in J. Rutherford (ed.), Identity: Community, Culture and Difference. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 207–21.

Bharne, Vinayak., Krupali Krusche, and Leon Krier. 2012. *Rediscovering the Hindu temple: The sacred architecture and urbanism of India*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Pub.

Boccagni, Paolo, and Mieke Schrooten. 2018. "Participant observation in migration studies: An overview and some emerging issues." *Qualitative research in European migration studies*. 209–225.

Bond, Stephen, and Derek Worthing. 2016. *Managing built heritage: The role of cultural values and significance*. John Wiley & Sons.

Bustin, Richard, and Janet Speake. 2020. "Third Space", 259–254. In *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 2nd edition, Volume 13. Elsevier Ltd.

Chanderbali, David. 2008. *Indian indenture in the Straits Settlements: The politics of policy and practice in the Straits Settlements*. Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree Press Ltd.

Chang, Jiat-Hwee. and Imran Tajudeen. 2019. *Southeast Asia's Modern Architecture, Questions of Translation, Epistemology and Powers*, Singapore: NUS Press.

Chaturawong, Chotima. 2017. "Mandapas of India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand." In *India-Thailand Cultural Interactions*, pp. 53–85. Springer, Singapore.

Delaisse, Anne-Cécile. 2020. "The spatiality of occupation in a migration context: exploring French-speaking immigrants' occupational engagement in Francophone community sites in Metro Vancouver." PhD diss., University of British Columbia.

Dewalt, Kathleen Musante, and Billie DeWalt. 2002. "Participant observation. Walnut Creek." *CA*: *Rowman Altamira*.

Gin, Ooi Keat. 2015. "Disparate identities: Penang from a historical perspective, 1780–1941." Kajian Malaysia-Journal of Malaysian studies 33, no. Supp. 2: 27–52.

Hassan, Ahmad Sanusi. 2009. "The British colonial 'divide and rule' concept: its influence to transport access in inner city of George Town, Penang." *Transportation* 36: 309–324.

Hubbard, Phil, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine. 2004. *Key thinkers on space and place*. London: Sage.

Jorgensen, Danny L. 1989. "The methodology of participant observation.", *Qualitative approaches to criminal justice: Perspectives from the field*. 12–26.

Kinkaid, Eden. 2020. "Re-encountering Lefebvre: Toward a critical phenomenology of social space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 1: 167–186.

Kotkin, Joel. 1993. *Tribes: How race, religion and identity determine success in the new global economy*. New York: Random House, p. 4.

Lefebvre, Henri. 2009. *State, space, world: Selected essays*. U of Minnesota Press.

Lefebvre, Henri, Donald Nicholson-Smith and David Harvey. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Merrifield, Andrew. 1993. "Place and space: a Lefebvrian reconciliation." *Transactions of the institute of British geographers*. 516–531.

Merrifield, Andrew. 2013. *Henri Lefebvre: A critical introduction*. Routledge.

Moodie, Deonnie. 2019. *The making of a modern temple and a Hindu city: Kalighat and Kolkata*.

Piggott-McKellar, Annah, Jasmine Pearson, Karen McNamara, and Patrick Nunn. 2020. A livelihood analysis of resettlement outcomes: Lessons for climate-induced relocations. *Ambio*, *49*(9), 1474–1489.

Raman, Sanjeh Kumar, and Safial Aqbar Zakaria. 2022. "Temple As Place: The Pathars And Their Devasthanam As A Unit Of Analysis." ALAM CIPTA, International Journal of Sustainable Tropical Design Research and Practice. Vol. 15 (Issue 1), 48–56.

Raman, Srilata. 2013. "The Spaces In Between: Ramalinga Swamigal (1823–1874), Hunger, and Religion in Colonial India." *History of Religions*, *53*(1), 01–27.

Ready, Elspeth, Patrick Habecker, Roberto Abadie, Carmen A. Dávila-Torres, Angélica Rivera-Villegas, Bilal Khan, and Kirk Dombrowski. 2020. "Comparing social network structures generated through sociometric and ethnographic methods." *Field Methods* 32, no. 4. 416–432.

Rogers, Sarah, and Brooke Wilmsen. 2020. "Towards a critical geography of resettlement." *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 2: 256–275.

Sharma, Shilpa, and Shireesh Deshpande. 2017. "Architectural Strategies Used In Hindu Temples to Emphasize Sacredness." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 34, no. 4: 309–19.

Sinha, Vineeta. 2019. "Modern Hindu diaspora(s)." In T. Brekke (Ed.), *Modern Hinduism* (pp. 179–199). Oxford University Press.

Soja, Edward William. 1971. *The Political Organization of Space*. Washington: Association of American Geographers Commission on College Geography.

Soja, Edward William. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Loss Angeles and other Real-and-imagined Places*: Cambridge Mass: Blackwell.

Steinschneider, Eric. 2020. The Emergence of Modern Hinduism: Religion on the Margins of Colonialism. By Richard S. Weiss, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 88, Issue 3: 911–914.

Thuraisingham, Raja., K. Ramanathan, Vineetha Sinha, S. Manimaran, and J. Anurendra. 2007. *Sacred Structures: Artistic Renditions of Hindu Temples in Malaysia and Singapore*. Bluetoffee.

Waghorne, Joanne Punzo. 2004. *Diaspora of the gods: Modern Hindu temples in an urban middle-class world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Watkins, Ceri. 2005. "Representations of space, spatial practices and spaces of representation: An application of Lefebvre's spatial triad." *Culture and Organization* 11, no. 3. 209–220.

Xavier, Jesrina Ann, and Edmund Terence Gomez. 2018. Still an ethnic enterprise after a generational change? Indian-owned SMEs in Malaysia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *49*(2), 297–322.