Poetics of Dwelling: Insights from the Baiga Tribe of Madhya Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The Baigas are one of the 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of India (PVTGs). They reside in the deep, remote, unapproachable hilly tracts of the Satpura valley of Madhya Pradesh in India. In a setting like this, the very concept of dwelling takes on a new meaning. Indeed, the idea of existence and needs are moulded by the surroundings and the shared narratives of the tribe. For them, poetics of dwelling signifies how each space is a unique manifestation, shaped by the influence of both tangible and intangible aspects that define their relationship with the land. In this context, this study examines the idea of dwelling as understood and practised by the Baigas, focusing on the interplay between their perceptions of the world and their tangible and intangible spaces. It asks the question as to what the idea of dwelling means for the people who do not live under the influence of the modern urban civilisations. It explores the unique dwelling practices of the Baigas, examining how their perception of the world manifests in both the tangible and intangible spaces.

The research employs case study as a method. Data was gathered through observations and measured drawings of seven houses in two clusters, and interviews with six families in two households in Madhya Pradesh, India. The study documented spatial arrangements, construction techniques and symbolic elements embedded within their houses. Furthermore, mythology, rituals, and daily routines were recorded to understand the cultural underpinnings of their built environment.

The findings reveal how the understanding of the Baigas of their environment shapes the architecture of the dwellings. Their houses are not confined to physical boundaries but extend into semi-open and open spaces. These spaces embody the perceptions of the Baigas: the seen and the unseen worlds, their mythology, territorial behaviour, and their layered understanding of boundaries. The research concludes that Baiga dwellings are not merely shelters but tangible expressions of a profound relationship with the natural and metaphysical realms, underscoring the unique way of life of the tribe.

Keywords: Dwelling, Settlement pattern, Boundaries, Tangible Intangible needs, Manifestation, Self Sustained Tribe, Rituals, Mythology, Shared Narrative, Mythical Landscapes.

Introduction

Human dwellings are more than just shelters; they embody social, cultural, and spiritual identities shaped by their surroundings. While urban settlements follow standardized planning, tribal communities in India exhibit a deeply rooted, organic relationship with their environment. Their dwellings integrate Nature, mythology and rituals, forming a 'poetic dwelling'—a way of inhabiting space that reflects a seamless connection between the built and the unbuilt environments.

The Baiga tribe is one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who resides in the Limha village of the Maikal hills in Madhya Pradesh. The unique way of life of the Baigas and the deep-rooted relationship with their natural environment offer a distinctive lens through which to explore dwelling—not as mere physical structures but as a profound interplay of tangible and intangible elements shaped by cultural beliefs, mythologies, and rituals. The connection between the village and its surrounding environment, particularly the forest, plays a significant role in their cultural worldview. In fact, the forest is not only a source of sustenance but also carries deep mythological significance, symbolizing both the origin and the continuity of their existence.

In this context, this research explores how the spatial practices of the Baiga tribe emerge from their socio-cultural framework, examining the role of mythology, rituals, and ecological consciousness in shaping their built environment. More specifically, it delves into the concept of dwelling as it pertains to the Baiga Tribe. Its aim is to understand the underlying socio-cultural framework that shapes the spatial arrangements of the Baiga Dwelling.

Its objectives are as follows.

- To document and analyze the spatial arrangements of the Baiga settlements, understanding their physical and symbolic significance.
- To reveal how mythology, rituals and ancestral beliefs shape the perception and organization of dwelling spaces.
- To ascertain the relationship between the Baiga people and their natural environment, particularly the forest, as a continuum of their cultural identity and spatial consciousness.

Fig 1: The Forest Tribe
Image source: MP tourism, 2019

Theoretical Framework

The concept of dwelling extends beyond mere habitation; it encapsulates the ways in which people engage with and find meaning in their environment. Heidegger (1971) presents dwelling as a fundamental condition of "being-in-the-world", in which existence is shaped through an interplay with the fourfold—earth, sky, mortals, and the divinities. According to Heidegger, "To dwell is to safeguard the fourfold in its essential being" (Heidegger, 1971:149). This perspective suggests that dwelling is not merely about constructing shelters but about inhabiting space in a way that resonates with both material and metaphysical dimensions. The

fourfold embodies the relationship between the natural environment (earth), celestial forces (sky), human temporality (mortals), and the sacred (divinities), forming the foundation of a poetic dwelling—a term that signifies an enriched, meaningful engagement with place.

Expanding on Heidegger's ideas, Norberg-Schulz (1980) emphasizes that "a place is a space that has a distinct character, and dwelling means to belong to a place, to identify with its character" (1980:5). This suggests that dwelling is deeply tied to a sense of place, where spatial experience is shaped by both tangible and intangible qualities. Seamon (2018) extends this discussion through the lens of phenomenology, arguing that places are experienced through bodily engagement and habitual routines, reinforcing the idea that human beings do not simply exist in space but actively participate in shaping and being shaped by it. Similarly, Dovey (1999) explores the socio-cultural dimensions of dwelling, emphasizing that "dwelling is a spatial practice that embodies cultural meaning, social structure, and power relations" (1999: 27). This highlights how habitation is not just a response to physical needs but a reflection of lived experiences, beliefs and rituals.

Phenomenological perspectives further enrich the understanding of dwelling by underscoring its embodied nature. Merleau-Ponty (1962) posits that dwelling is not just about occupying space but about experiencing it through the body, which acts as a medium of perception and interaction. The act of dwelling, therefore, is an ongoing dialogue between the individual and their surroundings, mediated by sensory and cultural experiences.

This framework provides a lens for this research to explore how the spatial practices manifest as lived expressions of identity, mythology, and ecological consciousness as related to the Baiga tribe.

Literature Review

The concept of dwelling as a poetic engagement with space has been widely discussed in architectural and phenomenological discourse. Heidegger (1971) argues that dwelling is not merely about occupying space but about experiencing and understanding the world through spatial relationships. He suggests that dwelling is a way of being, where space, time, and meaning are intertwined. Norberg-Schulz (1980) builds on this idea, emphasizing the role of *genius loci*, or the spirit of place, in shaping human habitation. He asserts that dwelling is not just about constructing a shelter but about establishing a meaningful relationship with the environment. Rapoport (1969) extends this discussion by exploring how vernacular architecture emerges from cultural, climatic, and social contexts rather than purely functional needs. He argues that traditional dwellings are shaped by symbolic and ritualistic practices, which provide insights into the deeper meanings of space. Seamon (1979) introduces the idea of place-ballet, which explains how repetitive bodily movements and spatial interactions reinforce a sense of place and cultural belonging. This concept is particularly relevant in understanding how rituals and daily activities shape tribal dwelling patterns. Dovey (1999) further examines how spatial organization in traditional settlements is a reflection of power, identity, and cultural continuity. He contends that space is not neutral but socially and symbolically charged, influencing how communities experience and interpret their environments.

More profound explorations also exist. For example, Mircea Eliade (1959) explores the sacralization of space, arguing that for religious communities, space is not homogenous but divided into sacred and profane zones. He posits that sacred spaces act as cosmic centers, where myths and rituals transform ordinary landscapes into meaningful places. This framework helps explain how the tribal settlements designate certain areas—such as groves, shrines, and burial grounds—as sacred. However, Eliade's approach often romanticizes indigenous spirituality without addressing the material realities that shape spatial practices.

Employing these ideas, Bharat (2019) examines how tribal communities in India adapt their dwelling practices to ecological and cultural contexts. He highlights that "tribal spaces are shaped not only by environmental necessity but by cultural logic" (2019:20.), reinforcing the idea that their settlements are not static but constantly evolve in response to external influences. However, while Bharat provides a contemporary perspective, his study remains broad and does not offer a detailed ethnographic account of specific tribal groups like the Baiga.

Furthermore, Elwin (1939) provides one of the earliest and most comprehensive ethnographic accounts of the Baiga tribe in "*The Baiga*." He meticulously documents their bewar (slash-and-burn agriculture), rituals, and spiritual beliefs, portraying them as deeply connected to their forested environment. Elwin (1939) writes that "the forest is not only their livelihood but also their temple, where every tree and stream has a spiritual presence." While this work remains foundational, it largely reflects the colonial-era anthropological perspective, often depicting the Baiga as a static society rather than an evolving one. In fact, his descriptive approach lacks an analytical engagement with how their spatial practices respond to historical and contemporary changes.

Despite these valuable contributions, the existing body of literature often presents the practices of the Baiga tribe as static data, documenting their myths, rituals, and spatial arrangements without probing the underlying cultural logic or subjective experiences that inform these practices. This research seeks to address this gap by delving into the Baiga's perception of space and the narratives—social, mythological, and environmental—that shape their worldview. By examining how these narratives translate into the physical and spiritual dimensions of their dwellings, the study aims to uncover the poetics of dwelling unique to the Baiga tribe, thus contributing a nuanced layer to the discourse on tribal dwelling practices in India.

Research Methodology

This study employs a case study method alongside ethnographic and phenomenological approaches to examine the dwelling practices of the Baiga tribe. The case study method allows for an in-depth exploration of their built environment, while ethnography provides insights into their lived experiences. Phenomenology helps interpret the meanings embedded in their spatial practices.

Fieldwork was conducted in Limha village, situated in the Maikal ranges on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, over 15 days with the support of Pradaan, a social organization working with the community. This extended stay allowed for deeper engagement and trust-building, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the daily life and spatial practices of the Baiga. To generate data, multiple techniques were systematically employed:

1. Participant Observation – Daily activities, social interactions, and spatial usage were closely observed. Detailed field notes documented how spaces were inhabited and transformed through rituals and everyday practices.

2. Sketching and Note-Taking – Spatial arrangements, material usage, and house layouts were recorded through sketches and notes, offering a detailed visual and descriptive understanding.

3. In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviews – Conversations with men, women, and elders provided insights into the myths, rituals, and ecological knowledge that shape their dwellings. Interviews focused on how cultural narratives influence the spatial forms.

4. Community Meetings – These gatherings allowed collective discussions, offering broader perspectives on settlement patterns, social structures and land use.

5. Architectural Documentation – Five houses from two families were measured and drawn, capturing both physical layouts and symbolic meanings. Photographic documentation complemented these drawings, highlighting material choices, construction techniques, and spatial configurations.

The research follows a macro-to-micro framework for analysis. At the macro level, the village landscape was examined in relation to its natural surroundings, such as forests, rivers, and communal spaces, emphasizing the deep ecological and mythological connections of the Baiga. At the meso level, clusters of houses were analyzed to understand land use, social

relationships, and spatial organization. At the micro level, individual houses were documented in detail, uncovering how rituals, beliefs, and everyday practices shape architectural elements. Data was analyzed thematically, focusing on myths in spatial organization, the role of landscape, symbolic architectural forms, and the sacred-profane divide. By systematically employing these research methods, this study ensures that the findings are both rigorous and replicable, providing a nuanced understanding of the poetics of dwelling of the Baiga and their unique relationship with space.

Case Study: Limha Village

Findings

Limha Urf Neemtola village is located in Dindori tehsil of Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh, India. It is situated 75 km away from Dindori, which is both the district and sub-district headquarter of Limha Urf Neemtola village. The total geographical area of the village is 123 hectares. Limha urf Nimtala has a total population of 557 people. There are about 144 houses in Limha urf neemtola village.

Fig 2: Plan of Limha Village
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Limha is situated at an elevation of 1100 meters, with the Chakra River, a tributary of the Narmada, flowing through the center of the village. It is a remote, alienated village with no direct access to any major road. To the North, across the river, lies a dense forest. To the South, as the land descends from the plateau, expansive farmlands stretch across the lower slopes of the hill village divided into four *tolas*—Beech Tola, School Tola, Manjulia Tola, and Sirha Tola—each with distinct characteristics. Beech Tola, the busiest and the most social, houses the *Anganwadi* and serves as the hub of the village. School Tola, located at the entrance, centers around the village school, the first visible structure. Manjulia Tola is sparsely populated with more farmlands, and its houses line the primary road. Sirha Tola, the least populated, overlooks an unreachable water body and is the farthest from the water source.

The study investigates how these spatial divisions impact the social and economic dynamics of the Baiga tribe.

Fig 3: Divisions of the Village in 4 Tolas
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

The Baiga Tribe

The Baiga tribe, one of the 74 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of India is found primarily in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Identified alongside the Bharia and Sahariya tribes, the Baigas inhabit the remote and hilly regions of the Satpura and Maikal ranges, particularly in the districts of Mandla, Dindori, Shahdol, and Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, and Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh. Traditionally practicing shifting cultivation, or *bewar*, their economic system remains largely self-sufficient, relying on a barter system with minimal interactions with the outside world.

According to field observations, the Baigas produce most of their necessities, including food, household goods, furniture, bricks, tiles, thread and brooms. The cycle of their livelihood is divided into two distinct phases. From July to February, they focus on farming, cultivating crops such as *kodo* and *kutki*. Interviews with residents suggest that their practice of crop rotation is essential for maintaining soil fertility. A resident, D1, shared the sentiment, *"Hum kodo-kutki barambar ugaate hain, jisse zameen kharab na ho aur har saal acchi fasal mile."* (We grow kodo and kutki in rotation so that the soil does not degrade and we get a good harvest every year.)

The remaining months of the year, from March to June are dedicated to secondary activities such as crafting handmade bricks, weaving bamboo baskets, and preparing *mahua* liquor. Field observations indicate that these activities not only fulfill their household needs but also serve as barter goods within the community. The architectural documentation of their houses highlights the extensive use of locally made bricks and bamboo, reflecting their deep-rooted knowledge of material sustainability.

The Tradition of Tattooing: Dhandha

Among the Baiga women, the practice of tattooing, known as *Dhandha*, holds deep cultural and spiritual significance. These tattoos mark important life transitions and are believed to accompany an individual even after death. Interviews with village women revealed that tattoos are considered sacred and cannot be erased, even by the gods. According to Elwin (1939), tattooing occurs at different stages of life, each carrying symbolic meanings. The first tattoo is applied at the age of five, a simple triangular mark or *chulha* (hearth) on the forehead, representing a girl's future role in providing nourishment for her family. At puberty, she receives more elaborate patterns—a peacock, a basket on her breasts, and a turmeric root (*haldi gath*) on her hand—symbols of fertility, domestic responsibility and prosperity. Upon marriage, additional tattoos appear: a *jhopri* (pattern) on the back of the hand, dots called *palani* or *kajeri* on the thighs, and *bail ankhi* between the dots, signifying her role as the "eye" of the family.

After bearing a child, the final set of tattoos is added, including a *phulia* (flower-like motif) on her knees, small flies on her back, and *chakmak* (fishbone or steel patterns) on her legs. These marks symbolize vitality, protection and the full bloom of life. Elder Baiga women, when interviewed, explained that these tattoos represent a woman's complete transformation. The tattooing process itself is a ritual, often performed by specialist women outside the community, using locally made inks derived from natural substances. The pain endured during tattooing is seen as a rite of passage, strengthening the woman's connection to her ancestors and the spiritual world.

Fig 4: Godna
Source of the Left Image: The Baiga, 1939
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 5: The Shades of Godna
Source of the Top Image: The Baiga, 1939;
Source of the Image at bottom: Author's, 2025.

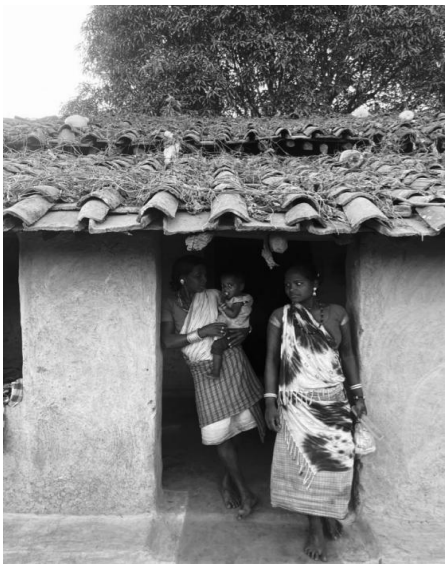

Fig 6: The Threshold - Baiga women on threshold of House
Source: Author

Fig 7: Idea of a dwelling
Source: Author, 2025.

Fig 8: The Threshold - Baiga women on the threshold of House
Source: Author, 2025.

Fig 9: Idea of a dwelling
Source: Author, 2025.

Boundaries and Marking Territory

According to field observations, the village boundary, known locally as the *Mero*, is marked by a cleared strip of land, typically twenty to thirty yards wide, with piles of stones placed at significant points after ritualistic chanting. This form of boundary demarcation is a defining feature of the Baiga settlements, reflecting their relationship with the surrounding landscape.

The settlement history of the Baigas reveals a shift from the lower plateaus of the Maikal hills to higher ground, specifically *Neemtola*, chosen for its abundance of neem trees. As noted by Elwin (1939), the selection of a new settlement involved both practical considerations and spiritual beliefs. He states, "When selecting a new settlement, they sought remote, flat terrain suitable for *bewar* (shifting cultivation, now banned) and interpreted natural signs—such as a fallen bird's nest with eggs and the sighting of a black snake—as blessings from the snake god, signaling that it was safe to establish a village."

Unlike conventional land-claiming methods, field observations indicate that the Baigas do not use name markers or fences to assert territory. Instead, they clear trees, leaving an open expanse, visually signaling to wildlife that the jungle ends and human territory begins. Interviews with residents reveal the significance of the *Mero* in defining the boundary between the forest and the village. As one resident explained,

> *"Eh vanaspati kahe bhai paida kare hai bhoot maa janwar maa, aur ho koi aaye humra pathar ka gathiyan hume batad hai agar koi humare bhaag mein aawe hain."*
>
> Resident A1: Interview on July, 2022

This statement underscores their belief that the forest is inhabited by spirits and wild animals, while the stone piles of the *Mero* serve as a silent guardian, alerting them if outsiders cross into their land.

The Settlement Pattern

Settlement patterns refer to the spatial organization of dwellings and their relationship with the surrounding landscape. Architectural documentation and field observations reveal three distinct characteristics of the Baiga settlement pattern as follows:

1. **Scattered Settlement**: Houses are dispersed across a large area rather than clustered closely together. This pattern is commonly observed in expansive flatlands where farmland separates individual dwellings. The spatial scale plays a significant role in shaping this dispersed arrangement.

2. **Diagonal Spatial Pattern:** No two houses face each other directly. Instead, they are positioned diagonally to avoid what the Baigas call *nazar*—the belief that one household should not remain in the direct view of another, as it may bring bad fortune. This observation was confirmed through interviews with residents. As one villager stated, *"Agar ghar ek doosre ke samne hote hai toh nazar lagti hai, isliye hum alag disha mein banate hain."* (Resident B2, interview) This reflects their cultural logic of ensuring privacy and protection from negative influences.

3. **Directional Orientation:** All houses either face East or towards the nearby Chakra River. Even when located along major pathways, their entrances are aligned according to these natural features rather than the road. Architectural documentation shows that this orientation is deeply embedded in their settlement logic, reinforcing the connection between Nature and dwelling.

Scattered Settlement and the Concept of Chhappa

To understand why Baiga households are scattered, it is essential to explore their underlying philosophy of settlement, which is built on the idea of self-sufficiency. This perspective is encapsulated in their saying:

> *"Khet, nanha, ghar, upjn, baari, khadi amaan, jeevan umang maran"*
> (*If you have a farm, child, home, crops, and water—you'll have a life of fulfillment and a death of happiness.*)

According to interviews and field observations, Baigas view a home as more than just a physical shelter. It is a *microcosm* encompassing tangible and intangible necessities—children, farmland, a *baari* (kitchen garden), and grain storage. Their unique concept of *छप्पा (Chhappa),* meaning one's personal imprint on the earth, emphasizes that every household should have its own independent space, including farmland, a cattle area, and a house. This cultural need for autonomy results in a scattered settlement pattern, where households are spread out rather than centralized.

As noted in sketches and architectural documentation, each dwelling is surrounded by functional spaces essential for self-sufficiency, such as kitchen gardens, storage areas, and cattle enclosures. Unlike conventional villages where houses cluster around a central space, Baiga settlements prioritize personal land ownership, ensuring that each family sustains itself independently.

Fig 10: A house facing East or North - A Baiga stepping out of the house and bowing down to sun
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

The Orientation of the House

The orientation of houses in Baiga settlements is deeply influenced by natural elements, particularly the sun and water. Through field observations, it was noted that all the houses are positioned to face either the rising sun or a water source, reflecting their alignment with both spiritual beliefs and environmental considerations. One resident, G3, explained, *"Suraj hamaara devta hai, har din usko pranam karke nikalna zaroori hai."* (*The sun is our deity; it is essential to bow to it before stepping out each day.*)

This belief is reflected in the architectural design of their houses. The front portion of the house, known as the *khadki*, is deliberately constructed at a lower height than human stature, ensuring that individuals instinctively bow as they exit their house at dawn. Documentation of selected houses showed that this architectural feature is consistently present across all the Baiga dwellings.

Equally significant is the rear of the house, which always faces the West. The setting sun is considered a bad omen, and according to the semi-structured interviews, no openings are permitted in the back of the house to prevent direct exposure to the West. Resident G7 shared, *"Pachhim bura hai, us taraf khidki darwaza nahi banate."* (*The West is inauspicious; we don't make doors or windows in that direction.*). This practice, observed across multiple households, underscores how the Baiga people integrate ritualistic beliefs into the spatial layout of their settlements.

Villages Connect with the Forest

The relationship of the Baiga community with the forest is one of reverence, fear, and interdependence. Their traditional saying, "Jungle hamara hai, purr baari hai," conveys their view that while the forest belongs to them, it remains beyond complete human understanding. Field observations indicate that Baigas do not see themselves as dependent on the forest, but rather as its caretakers—According to a village elder, H2 "jungle ka rakhra." The Baigas are often regarded as mystical figures, with their spiritual beliefs closely tied to the jungle. Mythological accounts among the Baigas speak of Nanga Baiga, the first Baiga, who was appointed as the lord of the jungle. Every village has a gunia (spiritual healer) who serves as the intermediary between the humans and Nature, working in service of Nanga Baiga. Interviews with a local gunia, H5, revealed that their primary duty is to protect the forest from harm, in return for which the forest provides them with medicinal plants (vanaspati) and safety from disease and wild animals.

Fig 11: Forest and village boundary- Gunai and the tiger
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

The extensive use of medicinal plants by the Baigas is well-documented in their daily practices. Gunias possess ancient knowledge of vanaspati, using herbs to cure ailments such as fever, asthma, and stomach aches. According to the documentation of healing practices, it was noted that specific plants are associated with certain rituals. Field observations recorded monthly rituals where the gunia places a chicken at the boundary between the village and the jungle. This act is believed to summon tigers, symbolizing a sacred agreement between the human beings and wildlife. An annual ceremony is also conducted at the threshold of the forest, during which the gunia narrates the story of the creation of animals and the appointment of Nanga Baiga. The extensive use of medicinal plants by the Baigas is well-documented in their daily practices. Gunias possess ancient knowledge of vanaspati, using herbs to cure ailments such as fever, asthma, and stomach aches. According to the documentation of healing practices, it was noted that specific plants are associated with certain rituals.

Dualities of Vanaspati Utsav

Baiga mythology deeply embraces the coexistence of good and evil, shaping the village's understanding of natural order. One of their central mythological tales recounts the final moments of *Nanga Baiga* and *Baigin*, who instructed their sons to consume their flesh to inherit their powers. As the story goes, the youngest son, repelled by the scent of boiling flesh, refrained from eating it and became the first *Gunia*, the embodiment of righteousness. Meanwhile, the son who consumed the flesh transformed into the first *Paapi Guru*, a figure capable of communicating with spirits and controlling misfortune (Elwin, 1939).

According to the field observations, Baiga villages have two intricately balanced divisions between *Gunia* and *Paapi Guru*. There is no absolute morality—only an acceptance of duality. The *Gunia* ensures the prosperity of the land by nurturing crops, protecting livestock, and safeguarding the well-being of the community. In return, the forest provides them with medicinal plants (*vanaspati*) and protection against illness. Conversely, the *Paapi Guru* is associated with the darker forces of Nature, possessing the ability to bring misfortune and engage with the spirits. Within the village, some align themselves with the *Gunia*, while others follow the *Paapi Guru*, maintaining a delicate equilibrium.

This division is most evident during the Vanaspati Utsav, an annual ritual held on the night of the full moon. As explained by the village elder, H2, the men of the village enter the forest, divided into two groups based on their beliefs. The *Gunias* seek plants like *Bajur Gaanth* and *Brahmraksh*, known for their healing properties, while the *Paapi Gurus* are drawn to *Gajmaar Haira* and *Banajri Kanda*, plants associated with mystical and darker energies. As the festival begins, the men create a rectangular box in front of each chosen plant. Inside these, twelve smaller compartments made from household flour are carefully arranged. They then fill these compartments with *khichdi* made from *kutki* grains and honey, collected from deep within the forest's honeycombs. The ritual concludes with a collective search for the honeycombs, marking the sacred *vanaspatiyaan* and reaffirming their connection with the forest's hidden forces.

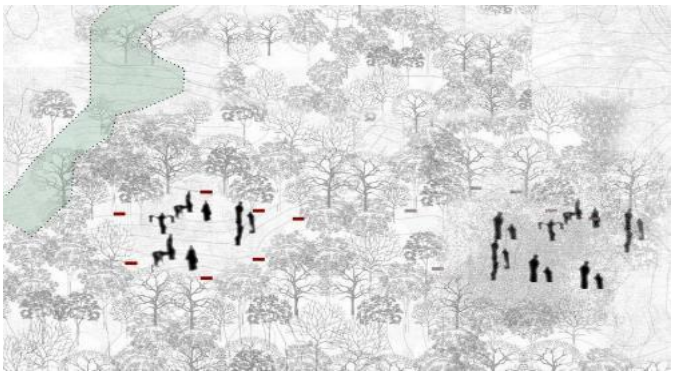

Fig 12: Vanaspati Utsav
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 13: The river bank
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

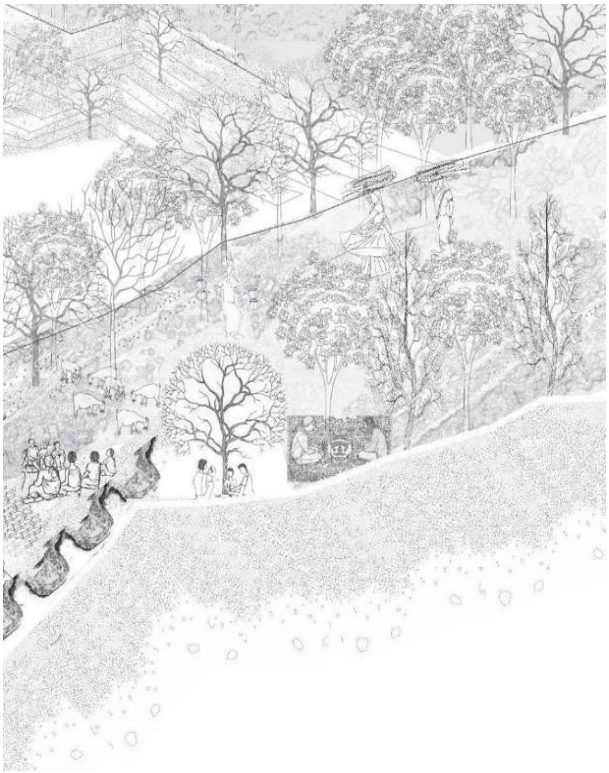

Fig. 14: Villages Connect with Water
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Limha is located atop a plateau, bordered on three sides by valleys, with a river flowing along the fourth. According to the field observations, the river, situated downhill, serves as a communal space, with the forest beyond marking a transition into the sacred land. Sketches and architectural documentation show that Baigas position their dwellings near water sources for easy navigation. The sal-covered slope leading to the river provides shade, creating a comfortable space for the daily activities. Participant observation confirms that the riverbank, with its gentle terrain, serves as a shared space for washing clothes, collecting water, making bricks, and bathing. Women gathering firewood together reinforces community bonds. These interactions, shaped by the natural elements define the spatial and social fabric of the village.

Fig 14: Baiga and their connect with the water body
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 15: Activities on the River Bank
Source: Author

Village and the Mythological landscape

The Baiga tribe's creation story, as documented by Verrier Elwin in The Baiga (1939), provides insights into their cosmology and worldview. According to field observations and interviews, mythology continues to shape the Baigas' perception of their environment. The myth narrates that in the beginning, only water existed, reflecting the sky above. Bhagavan, seated on a drifting lotus leaf, fashioned a crow named Karicag from the dirt of his arm and sent her to find earth. According to Elwin (1939), the crow, exhausted from flight, landed on Kekramal, a mystical crab who straddled the boundary between water and land. Kekramal provided 21 types of soil, including Pili Dharti (Yellow Earth), Kari Dharti (Black Earth), and Papi Dharti (Sinful Earth). Bhagavan mixed the soils, churning them into a circular expanse, similar to a chapati, and placed it upon the water.

Field observations note that Baigas associate stability with Bhimsen, who, after drinking liquor from Bhagavan, shaped the land by creating mountains and valleys. However, the earth remained unstable. Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin, the first humans were asked for help but initially refused. Interview responses indicate that Baigas acknowledge a deep kinship with the Gonds, as Resident A2 stated, "Our ancestors finally agreed to help, but only after the Gonds, our brothers, also agreed."

The mythology describes how Nanga Baiga and Nanga Baigin traveled to Bhagavan, encountering animals along the way. According to Elwin (1939), a jungle hen, sow, and barking deer offered their young in exchange for blessings. Upon reaching Bhagavan, they performed sacrifices to deities, including Dharti Mata and Thakur Deo, requesting stability for the land. The Agaria tribe attempted to stabilize the earth with iron needles, but only the selfless sacrifice and prayers of the Baigas led to divine intervention. A snake god emerged, supporting the earth between land and water, securing its foundation.

Mythology- Lived landscape

It is noted that this mythology becomes the lived landscape. Indeed, the land they inhabit resonates with the symbolic elements depicted in their mythological narratives, blurring the lines between the physical and the mythical. Their surroundings mirror the symbolic elements of this myth, where water flows below the hills and the community dwells safely above. This unique geographical feature plays a crucial role in shaping the Baigas' perception of their land. They attribute their sense of security to the snake god, believed to be the guardian between water and the land. The journey downhill to the water body, though dangerous, is viewed as a fulfilment of their request to the Gods for land. This narrative reinforces their bond with the land and affirms their belief in its sacredness. The mythology provides them with a profound sense of belonging, intertwining their existence with the physical and symbolic landscape.

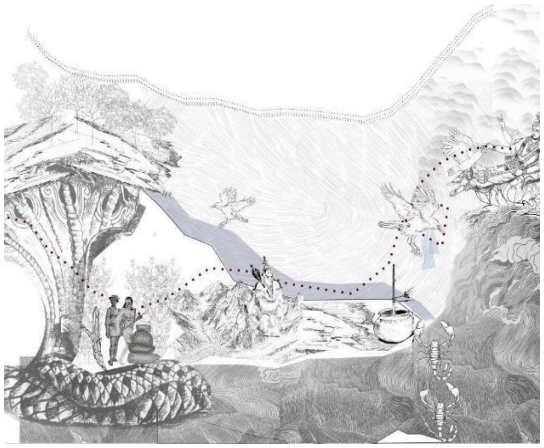

Fig 16: Visualisation of story of mythology
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Sacred Spaces and the Rituals of the Village

Field observations indicate that the Baiga village landscape is structured around sacred and profane spaces, shaping both communal and ritualistic life. Different locations within the village serve distinct spiritual functions, reinforcing a structured relationship between the people and their environment.

Village Entrance and the Rituals of Thakur Deo

According to field observations, the entrance of the village is a site for invoking Thakur Deo, a deity believed to manifest in human form during times of uncertainty. During this ritual, a mask is crafted and worn by a young boy from the *Gunia* lineage, signifying the embodiment of Thakur Deo. This event takes place at the village threshold, with fire positioned at the center. The assembly is arranged so that smoke does not enter the village, ensuring its sanctity.

Sal Tree Stumps and the Worship of Bura Deo

Architectural documentation highlights that the periphery of the village is marked by *saj* tree stumps, considered sacred due to their association with Bura Deo. As documented in Baiga mythology (*The Baiga*, 1939), Bura Deo was once believed to reside in an anthill and appeared in Nanga Baiga's dream to provide guidance. Following this tradition, field observations note that every year, during *Jeth* month, six village elders search for a *saj* tree with an anthill at its base. This site becomes the center of an important ritual where offerings of goats, fowls, coconuts, and *mahua* are made to seek divine counsel. The presence of these spaces establishes a clear division between the sacred and the everyday areas within the village.

The Chaura at the Village Entrance

Architectural documentation records the presence of the *chaura*, a sacred enclosure at the village entrance dedicated to Gansam Deo.

A flagpole adorned with red ochre zigzag patterns and peacock feathers marks the site. Rituals performed here involve the sacrifice of a horned goat, with its blood flowing over the *chaura*, and the preparation of black and yellow rice as offerings. Encircling the *chaura*, eight bamboo poles form a square, creating a protective boundary beneath a *peepal* tree.

During Diwali, the entire village participates in a ritual where they move in a circular formation around the village boundary, holding the sacred pole. This act reinforces the village's collective spiritual protection and reaffirms its connection to the land and its deities.

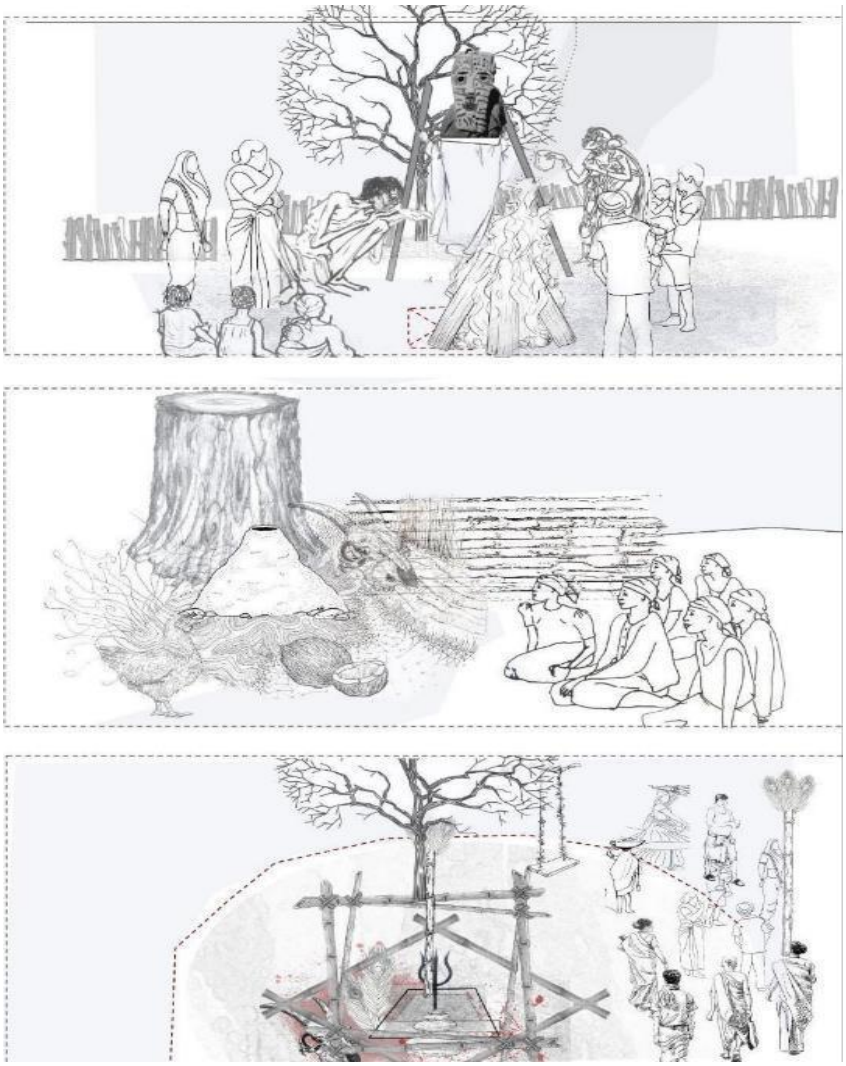

Fig 17: Rituals performed at various corners of the village
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

The Case Study Cluster

As part of the architectural documentation, two family clusters were selected as case studies due to their accessibility and the distinct differences in family dynamics and spatial organization. Each cluster consists of three houses, representing both elder and younger generations. Field observations confirm that among the Baigas, upon marriage, each generation establishes a new home in a process known as *Chappa*. This expansion results in separate homes, granaries, livestock areas, *baari* (farmland) and stables, leading to the division of land over time.

Cluster A: Here, houses are positioned close together, sharing a common *aangan* (courtyard) adjacent to the surrounding *baari*. Field observations indicate that these houses belong to two brothers who share a main entrance, while individual doorways lead to their separate living spaces. Although each house has its own *aangan*, these courtyards open into a larger communal space where both families gather, reinforcing social cohesion.

Cluster B: Here, the houses are more spaced out, separated by stretches of land. Architectural documentation shows that the parents and the younger brother reside in two houses positioned at a lower level, while the elder brother's family lives further uphill, closer to the water body. This arrangement reflects a different spatial approach, where individual households maintain more separation while still remaining within the family's landholding.

Fig 18: Cluster A
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

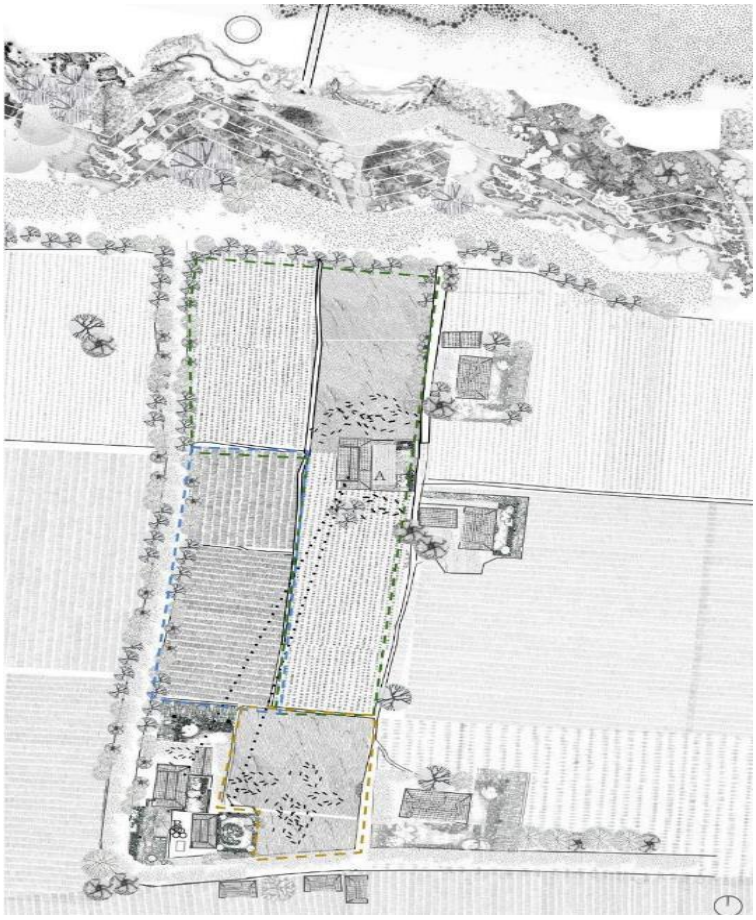

Fig 19: Cluster B
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

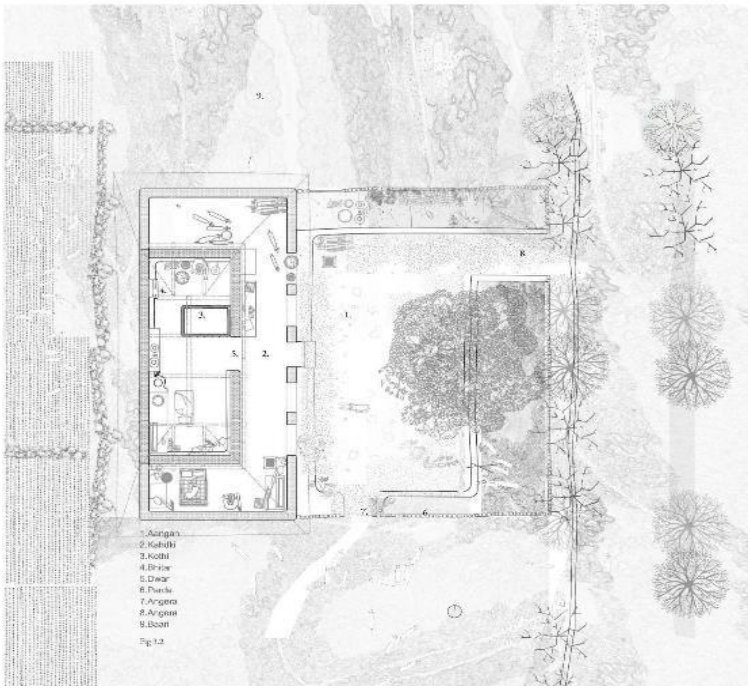

Fig 20: House 1 Cluster B Layout
Source:Author's own drawing, 2025.

House 1: Cluster A
Understanding the Layout

Above, the detailed layout of house 1 of cluster 2. Houses and huts are usually built around a square courtyard which is open at one side but shut off from the village path by a fence or hedge with a gate in the middle and, with red gravel soil if possible. The main house is generally about eleven cubits (hath) in length and eight cubits in breadth. The preferred site for a homestead is on slightly elevated ground to avoid water accumulation over time, which could cause cattle to become stuck in the soil. The house is constructed using bricks and a wooden roof topped with khapra tiles. Both the bricks and khapra are made by the tribe over the course of the year. The bricks are laid in a rat-trap bond to form a load-bearing structure, ensuring the stability of the house. The boundary wall surrounding the *aangan* (courtyard) is built with strong wooden logs, serving as a protective barrier to prevent animals from entering. The house typically has 2-3 trees within the compound, commonly bamboo or mango. Before selecting a site for their home, the Baigas perform a ritual known as *पाथर लाकड़* (Pathar Lakad), rooted in the concept of *जगीरा* (Jagira), which emphasizes that humans and animals have distinct territories that should not overlap. As part of this ritual, they place three stones on top of one another at the centre of the chosen plot.

In some cases, they also set three stones at the location where they plan to place the central posts supporting the roof's ridge. The site is then marked with bamboo strings tied around four sal tree poles, which remain for 15 days, a full moon cycle. After this period, the family revisits the site. If the three stones are undisturbed, it is believed that the site is suitable for building and that their family will come to no harm. However, if one of the stones has shifted, it is seen as a sign that the land is already an animal's territory and unsuitable for human habitation. This ritual symbolizes a respectful negotiation with Nature, acknowledging that other living beings may already occupy the land.

Each Baiga dwelling thus consists of distinct parts, including the aangan (courtyard), *khadki* (front porch), *kothi* (granary), bhitar (interior), dwar (door), and baari (farmland).

House 1: Cluster B

Understanding the Section

The house features a gable roof structure, constructed using wooden logs as purlins and bamboo as rafters, creating a lightweight yet durable framework. The truss system of the hip roof is designed to support the pitched roof over the *khadki* (porch area), seamlessly integrating the architectural elements. The *khadki* opens into the courtyard, featuring both a window and a door. These openings serve not only for ventilation and light but also as social spaces where family members often sit on the window ledge or at the threshold of the door, engaging in daily activities or conversations. Baigas practice hanging corn from the beam of the roof. This method is to protect the house from insects while it dries up the corn.

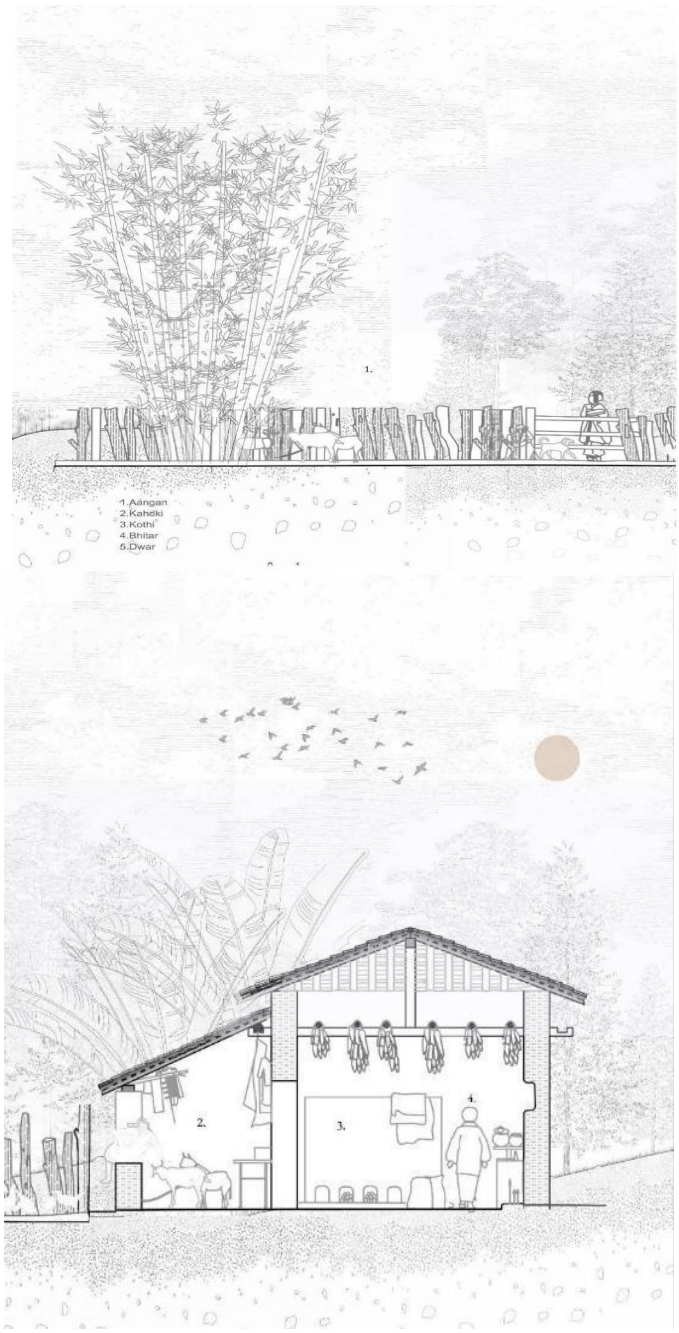

Fig 21: Sectional study
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

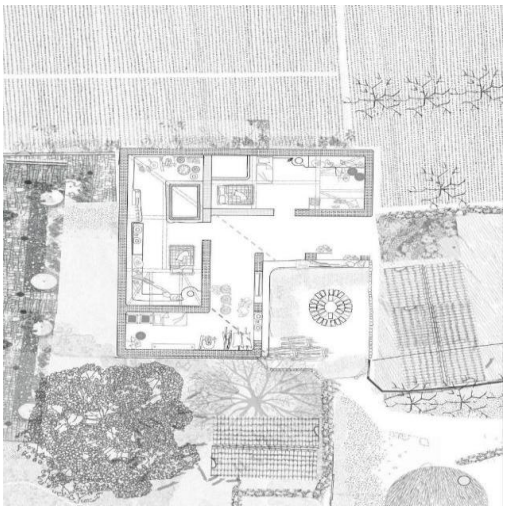

Fig 22: Cluster B
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

House 1: Cluster A

The house planning follows an L-shaped plan, oriented towards the East, with a layout that accommodates the growing needs of the family. It includes two inner sanctums, each with its kothi (granary), yet the ancestral space, known as the *bhitar*, remains singular, fostering a shared environment within the household. Though there is only one official kitchen area, several chulhas (fireplaces) are scattered throughout the house, including in the *khadki* (porch), ensuring warmth, especially in the semi-open spaces where 2-3 adults often sleep at night, to take care of the livestock. These chulhas are kept lit to maintain a comfortable environment in the cooler areas of the house.

The rooms inside open up into the *khadki*, which serves as a transitional space between the indoors and the outdoors, creating a seamless interaction between people and the livestock. The *khadki* leads into the *aangan* (courtyard), a central feature of the house. The aangan has three exits: one for the main entrance to the house, another leading to the *baari* (farm), and a third opening into a larger courtyard beneath a mango tree. The farm is integrated into the household structure, accessible only through the courtyard, reinforcing the connection between the house and the land.

At the entrance to the house, two separate huts serve the livestock: one for storing their food and the other as a shelter. Livestock, including goats, chicken, and dogs, roam freely around the property and often rest under the large trees that dot the landscape. The design, with its multiple exits and integration of farm and animal spaces, reflects the Baiga's concept of stability, where the boundaries between human habitation and Nature are thoughtfully managed.

Fig 23: Connection of the dwellings with the environment
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

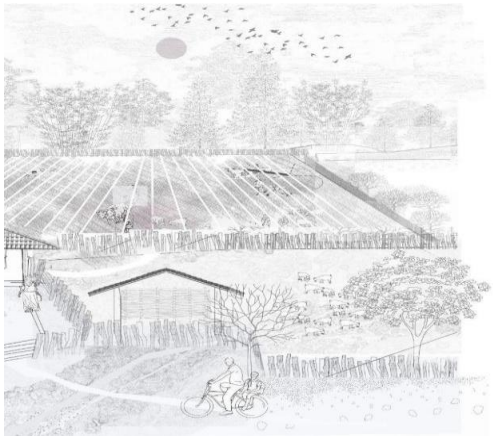

Fig 24: Connection of the dwellings with the environment
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Aangan - Courtyard

The *aangan* (courtyard) in Baiga dwellings functions as a dynamic space, continuously shifting in purpose based on daily needs and significant events. Field observations indicate that while it appears as a simple open area, it transforms into a setting for rituals, family interactions, and communal gatherings. Positioned beneath the open sky, the *aangan* fosters a shared sense of belonging, reinforcing the Baiga's connection to their surroundings. Ethnographic documentation highlights the ritual of *garbh bhumi*, performed after childbirth, where the umbilical cord is buried near a tree in the courtyard. This act symbolizes a continuity between the mother's womb and the earth, reflecting the Baigas' belief in the role of Nature as a nurturer and protector of the future generations. The courtyard remains central to life-cycle ceremonies, hosting events such as weddings and the *godan* ceremony. During *godan*, a sacred cloth is draped around the space, and village women gather in celebration. Architectural documentation of these practices underscores the *aangan* as an essential, adaptive space, deeply embedded in both daily life and the cultural traditions.

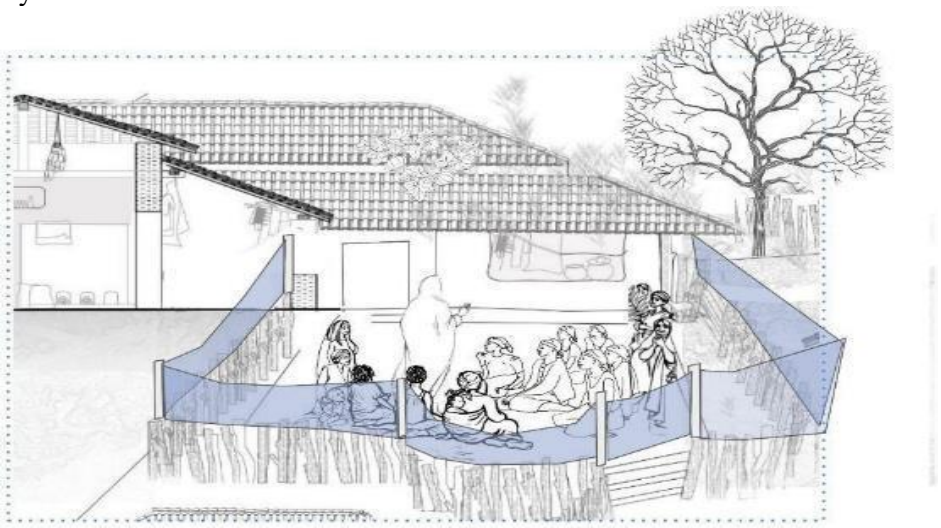

Fig 24: Godan intimate ceremony
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Daily activities such as washing utensils, making furniture, children playing, livestock roaming, guests visiting, and even village meetings all take place in this versatile space. The *aangan* is not just a physical area; it is the center of life for the Baigas, adapting to their needs

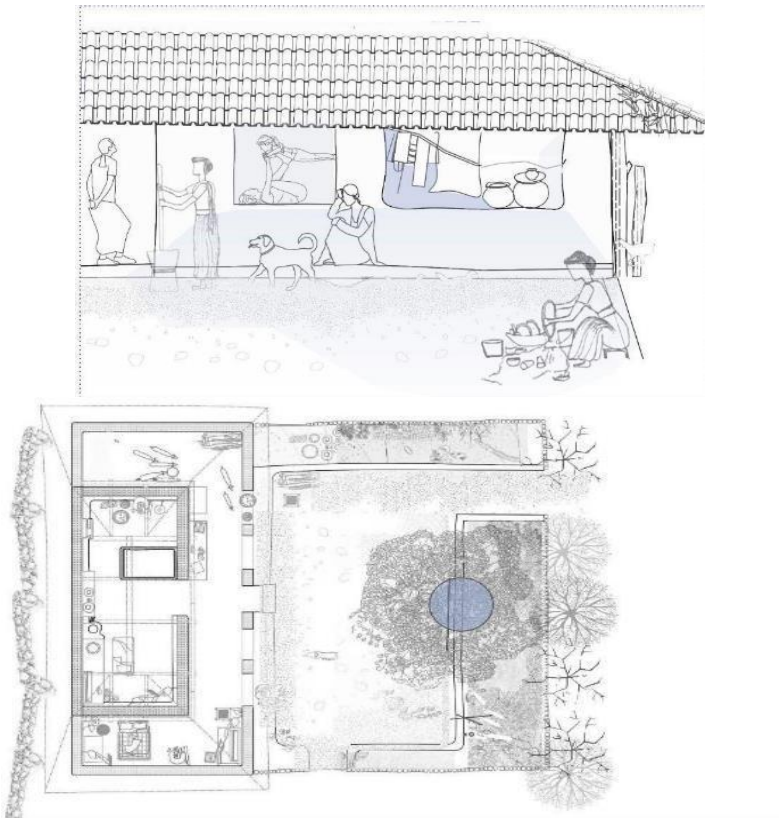

Fig 25: Affordance of a courtyard
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Khadki

The *khadki*, a semi-open space in Baiga houses, functions as a transitional zone between the enclosed interior and the open outdoors. Architectural documentation reveals that its design intentionally creates an in-between space, neither fully inside nor entirely outside. The entrance to the *khadki* is built lower than the average human height, requiring individuals to bow slightly as they step out, a gesture interpreted as an unconscious act of reverence to the sun. Spatial analysis of Baiga dwellings indicates a gradual progression in height and enclosure as one moves inward, transitioning from the communal openness of the *khadki* to the increasingly private and darker interior spaces. Ethnographic observations suggest that darkness within the house is associated with privacy and protection, shielding the inhabitants from external influences such as the *nazar* (evil eye). Throughout the day, the house serves primarily as storage, while most daily activities—cooking, eating, tending to animals, woodworking, and even resting—take place in the *khadki*. This semi-open area remains the core of household life, enabling interaction with the outdoors while maintaining a protective enclosure.

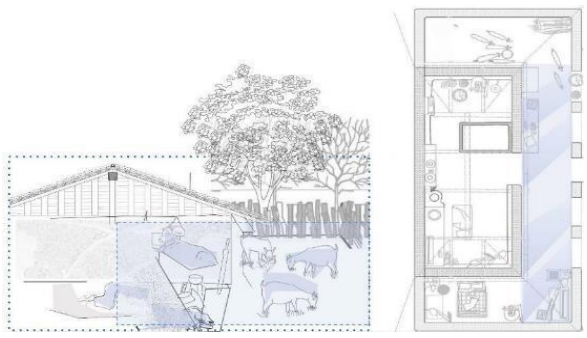

Fig 26: *khadki*, the semi-open space and its usage
Source:Author's own drawing, 2025.

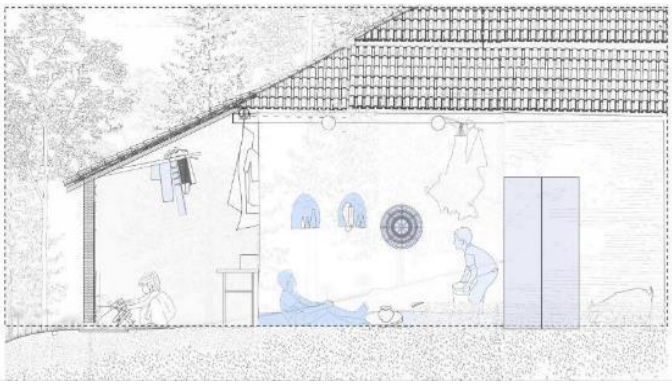

Fig 27: *khadki*, becomes the most vibrant place of the dwelling
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 28: Each house faces the East or North, towards the sun or Narmada
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Khidki: The Window

Thresholds can be understood as openings within boundaries, inviting one to cross over into new spaces. They do not merely facilitate transitions; they actively create space, defining the boundary while simultaneously giving rise to what lies beyond it. This dual function imbues thresholds with a sense of ambiguity that enhances their allure. Thresholds act as catalysts for change, turning boundaries into moments of passage that shape our experiences of space. In the context of a Baiga dwelling, the window, embedded in the immediate wall, serves as a distinct example of a threshold. There is an unspoken tradition, an inherent understanding, that the window is more than just an opening—it becomes a place where family members naturally gather. Its dimensions, the ideal width and height, make it a comfortable seating area, highly coveted in the household. Upon observation of several Baiga homes, one would notice that out of the four windows in the house, two are designated as seating spots for people. Another window, though, typically holds objects such as folded clothes, water, and food, while the final window often becomes a perch for the goats. Here, the threshold of the window transcends its role as a mere boundary or passage and becomes a destination in its own right. It transitions from a liminal space to a focal point, turning an ordinary architectural feature into a gathering place. Thus, the threshold not only facilitates movement but also fosters social interaction, transforming space into a lived and shared place.

Fig 29: Life taking place around a window
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

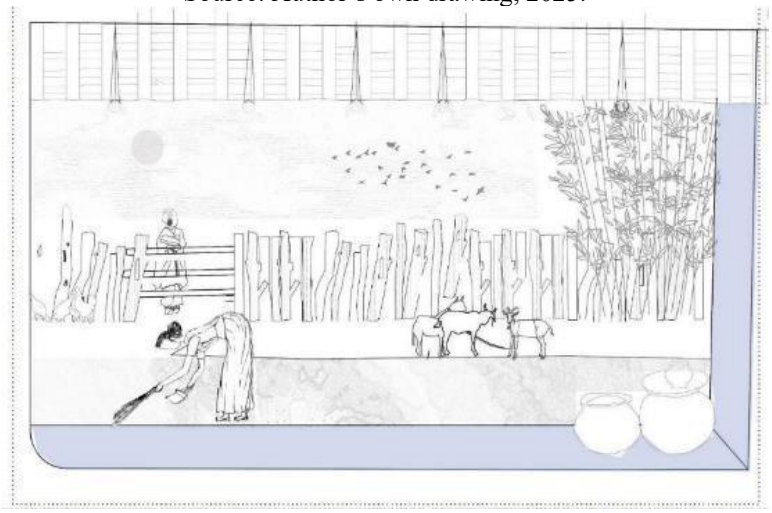

Fig 30: Window as a framed view
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

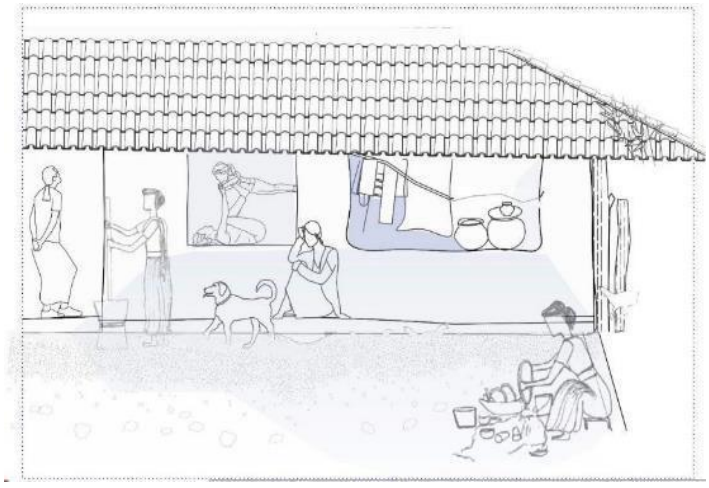

Fig 31: Affordance of a window
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Layered Form of a House - Private Closed Rooms

Field observations and architectural documentation of Baiga houses reveal that darkness is deeply linked to the notions of privacy and sacredness. Unlike conventional privacy concerns, Baigas believe certain aspects of life should remain unseen, shielding them from both human and spiritual eyes. This belief influences their architectural choices, as houses are constructed without interior windows, maintaining deliberate darkness. Minimal sunlight enters only through small openings above the stove or from the roof, ensuring that the inner spaces remain enclosed and protected. This dim, enclosed environment transforms the inner spaces into sacred areas, where the darkness itself acts as a shield, preventing external gazes from penetrating these intimate spaces. The *bhitar* (inner sanctum), ancestral space, and *kothi* (granary) hold particular significance, serving as sacred areas reserved for essential activities such as cooking, sleeping, and ancestral rituals. Visitors naturally respect these boundaries, remaining in the *aangan* (courtyard), *khadki* (porch), or by the window, without intruding into the inner sanctum. A Baiga proverb encapsulates this understanding: *Ain lai jave saari dhaage, dil tu jaave hai ain, haay lage ankhe sa hi*—if the eyes see something, it reaches the heart, and the heart can then unravel anything. But if the eyes cannot see it, the heart—and by extension, the home—remains protected from fears and external threats.

Ethnographic studies show that during the day, Baiga houses function primarily as storage, while daily activities shift outdoors into the *khadki* or *aangan*, integrating the house with its surroundings. The landscape itself becomes an extension of the house, as activities such as food preparation, bidi-making, brewing alcohol, and community gatherings unfold in open spaces, following the rhythms of Nature. The ample light and openness of the outside world take precedence, blurring the distinction between interior and exterior spaces. For the Baigas, the house is primarily a space for the night, where humans retreat and spirits take precedence, reinforcing their perception of darkness as both protective and sacred.

During the day, the land and fields serve as domains for human activity, while at night, the home provides shelter and protection from unseen forces. Thus, the Baigas' conception of home transcends the confines of four walls, extending to the environment.

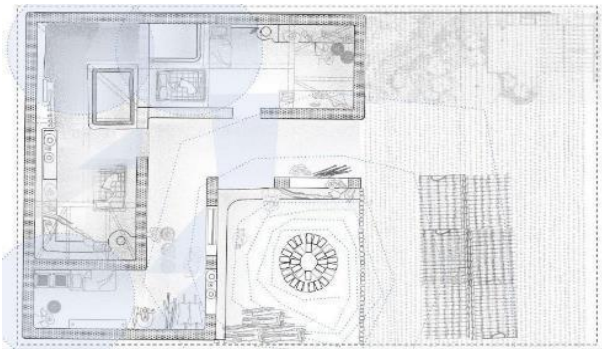

Fig 32: Enclosed dark private spaces of the house, relativity of darkness and light
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

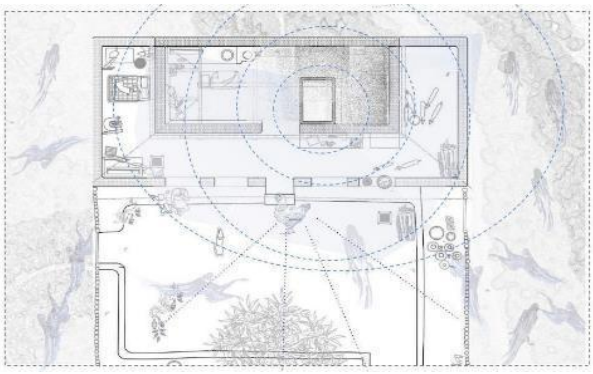

Fig 33: Public and private space
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Kothi

Field observations and ethnographic documentation highlight that the Baiga community operates without a conventional monetary system, valuing sustenance over material wealth. Their primary source of security is their annual harvest, which defines their concept of possession and growth. This belief is reflected in the *kothi*, a raised brick granary built on a plinth, which serves as the central storage for their crops. The *kothi* is not merely a functional structure; it embodies the community's relationship with the land, ensuring survival for the year. After the harvest, women perform the *lippan* ritual, coating the interior walls with a paste of rice, mud, and cow dung. This practice is both a preservation method and a spiritual offering to Nanga Baiga and Naga Baigan, deities believed to safeguard their sustenance.

The spatial organization of Baiga houses places the *kothi* at the intersection of two significant zones: the *bhitar* (inner sanctum) and the *dwar* (outer space). This placement emphasizes its sacred nature, as it is where food is stored and honored through ritualistic practices. Cooking within proximity to the *kothi* is regarded as sacred, with access to this space restricted to family members. The divine presence near the *kothi* reinforces its sanctity, ensuring that nourishment remains a spiritual act rather than a mere necessity. Moreover, offerings such as eggs are placed between the legs of the *kothi*, symbolizing reverence and gratitude. These observations reveal that, for the Baigas, the *kothi* is not just a storage unit but a sacred entity that bridges their connection to the land, the divine, and their ancestral traditions.

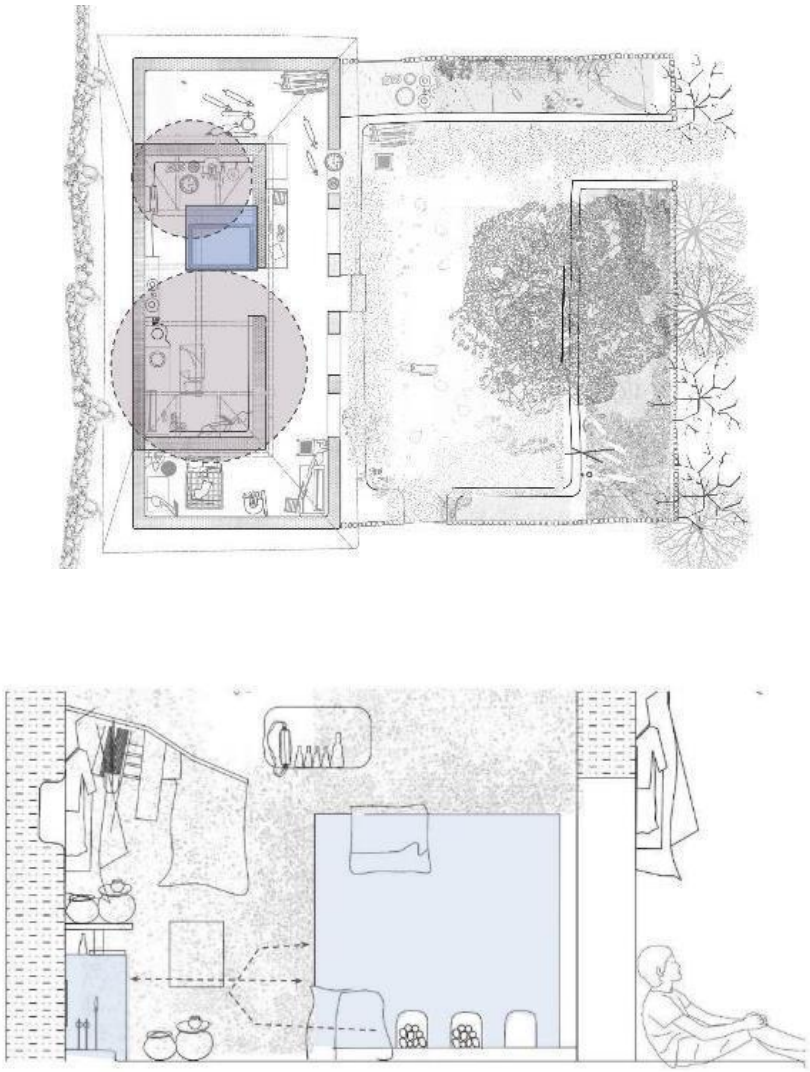

Fig 34: Central Placement of the kothi dividing the space in two
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

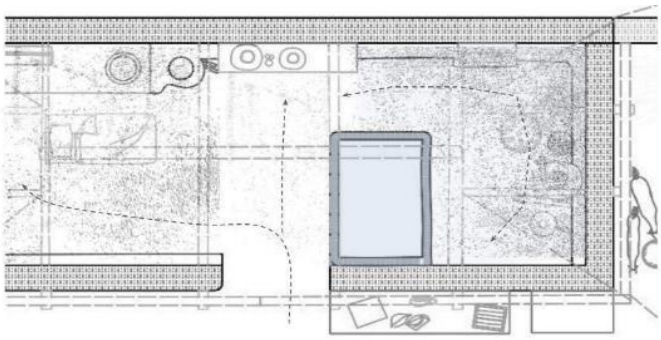

Fig 35: Movements around kothi
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Bhitar (interior sacred space)

Field observations and spatial analysis reveal that bhitar, the area behind the kothi (granary), serves as the sacred core of Baiga households, housing both the kitchen and the ancestral divine space. This dimly lit, enclosed zone is strictly reserved for family members, emphasizing its sanctity. Niches within the bhitar store essential objects such as bows and arrows, water vessels (matki), chimtas (tongs), and handcrafted bamboo items, each holding both spiritual and functional significance.

Living in dispersed settlements within dense forests, the Baigas experience an inherent uncertainty, fostering a deep reliance on divine forces for protection. Ethnographic documentation highlights that deities inhabit specific household spaces, manifesting through objects that reflect collective fears and experiences. During the Hareli festival in August, the Baigas honor Annadai, the goddess of crops (Kutki Dai), by tying bundles of four specific twigs—hasiadaphar (Baliospermum axillare), yogilacti (Asparagus racemosus), bhawarsal (Hymenodictyon excelsum), and bhilwa (Semecarpus anacardium)—above doorways. This ritual symbolically ensures a prosperous harvest by mirroring the growth cycle of kodo and kutki grains.

Each deity within the household plays a distinct protective role. Aji Dai, residing behind the hearth of Narayan Deo, safeguards the family, with the house's threshold considered her domain. As part of daily practice, individuals lightly kick the threshold upon entry or exit, symbolically shedding external influences and seeking protection. Additionally, Pantharin is associated with the area near the water pots, ensuring the purity of earthen vessels and safeguarding women as they fetch water. She is honored through offerings of pulses and the sprinkling of new rice into the fire. These observations highlight how Baiga spatial practices intertwine domestic architecture with spiritual belief systems, creating an environment where divine presence is integrated into daily life.

Fig 36: Bhitar Area
Source: The Baiga,1939

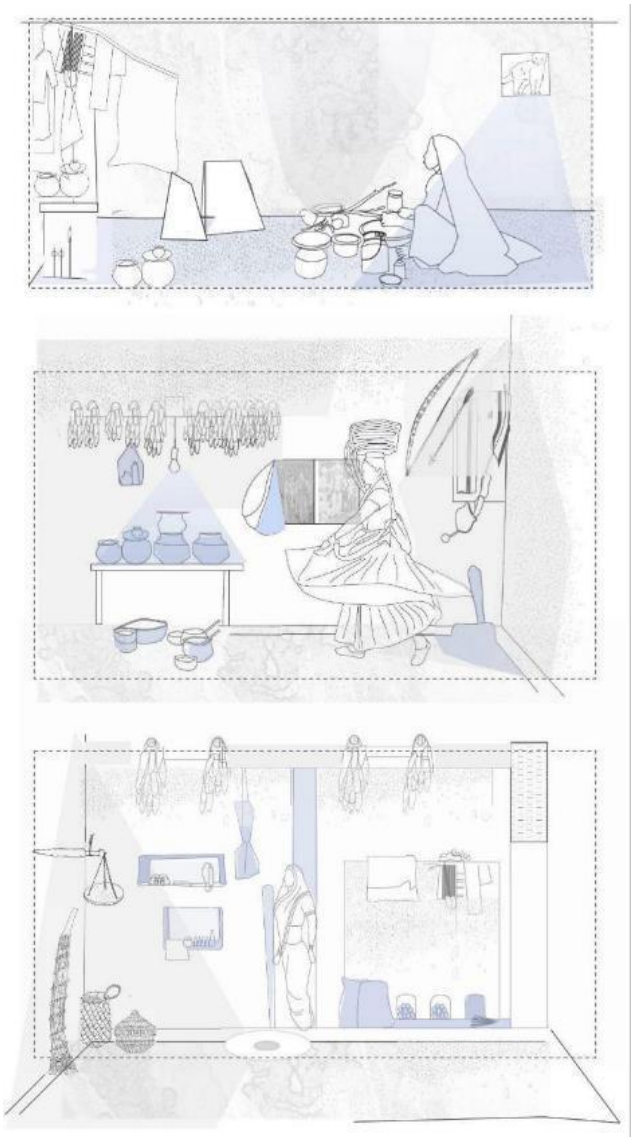

Fig 37: Visuals of Kitchen Area and Bhitar
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Field observations and architectural documentation indicate that the *bhitar* area also contains a sacred mud shrine known as *Madhia*, positioned on the plinth. Within this shrine, a trident (*tirsul*) and peacock feathers symbolize *Satadhar*, the deity invoked for protection against disease. Access to this sacred space is restricted to family members, and during illness, *chimtas* (tongs) are placed inside as ritual offerings. Over time, these *chimtas* become ancestral symbols, passed down through generations as families establish new homes, reinforcing the continuity of spiritual practices.

Ethnographic studies further document the presence of *Maswast*, the deity of the hunt, believed to reside within the bow and arrow. Oral narratives among the Baiga community describe *Maswast* and the twelve *Lodha* brothers—renowned for their hunting prowess—as inhabiting these tools. Rituals preceding a hunt involve honoring these deities, and upon a successful kill, the bow and arrow are ceremonially anointed with the animal's blood, reinforcing the spiritual connection between the hunter and the land.

Protective practices also extend to *Bansinaliya*, the guardian against malevolent spirits. Field surveys reveal that to prevent spirits from entering the home, bamboo stalks are strategically placed at 32 key points around the house, as the Baigas believe that the nodes

within the bamboo act as spirit traps. This practice is cyclically renewed every *Jeth* (May–June), when the old bamboo is ritually burned and replaced with fresh stalks.

These spatial and ritualistic elements highlight how deities, embodied within objects and household corners, serve as intermediaries between the Baigas and their environment. Through these practices, the Baigas maintain a continuous dialogue with both the physical and metaphysical forces shaping their daily lives.

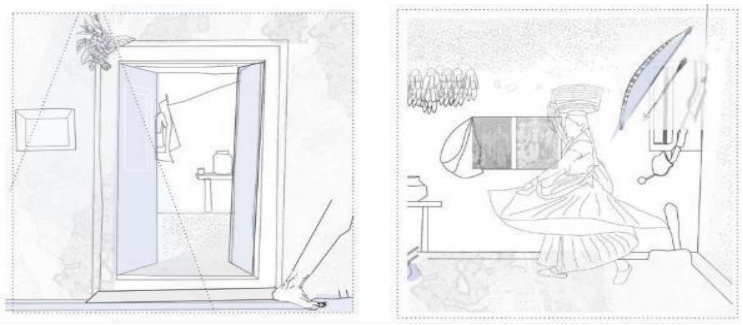

Fig 38: Perceived boundaries of sacred spaces. Gods & vulnerabilities manifested in various objects
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

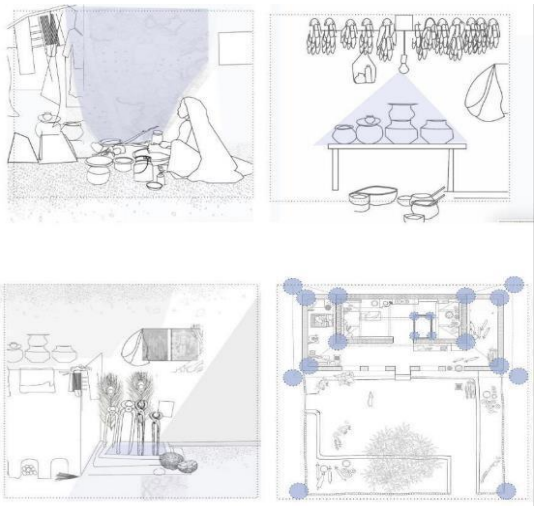

Fig 39: Perceived boundaries of sacred spaces. Gods & vulnerabilities manifested in various objects
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig. 40: The light from the door illuminates these metal utensils which suddenly light up the usually dark space to create a spectacle.
Source:Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 41: Objects silently unfold narratives, reciting volumes about the unseen lives within. The dangling corn signifies the season for making pej, while the illuminated hearth hints at a home belonging to sons, not fathers. And amidst it all, the traces of women's presence linger, leaving an indelible mark on the essence of the dwelling.
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 42: Treasure coveted by all—a radio. a person hands constantly tuning into the frequencies of distant signals
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Fig 43: Self-sustained tribe, they make everything by themselves
Source: Author's own drawing, 2025.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, this paper derives its conclusions from the research as follows.

1. The lived landscape comprises mythology manifested through the houses as well as the spaces within and outside.
2. The settlement spaces including the houses constantly articulate the notions of enclosure and safety sustained by beliefs rituals and traditions.
3. It nurtures numerous settlement patterns with significant meanings.

Mythology and the Lived Landscape

Baiga mythology is embedded in their spatial practices. However, mythological narratives do not exist merely in oral traditions but manifest in the way they inhabit space. Sacred sites within the village demarcate the threshold between the known and the mystical, reinforcing a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (Architectural Documentation, 2024). Rituals redefine spatial behavior—designating certain areas as sacred during ceremonies, transforming their use and meaning based on time and belief.

The agreement between the Baigas and the spirits of the forest is a central theme in their settlement planning. Certain spaces are reserved for spirits, while others are deemed fit for human occupation. This manifests in how ancestral areas, children's spaces, and cooking zones are layered with privacy and spiritual reverence (Ethnographic Interviews, 2024). These beliefs blur the boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical, reinforcing the idea that space is not merely built—it is experienced and lived through belief.

The Notion of Enclosure and Safety

Enclosure, safety, and beliefs shape the Baiga dwellings. As noted in multiple resident interviews, darkness is associated with privacy, leading to houses with minimal openings and no interior windows. This aligns with their belief in *Nazar* (the evil eye) and the presence of spirits during nighttime. The absence of windows ensures that what is sacred remains hidden from external gaze (Resident Interviews, 2024). Field studies confirm that the Baigas believe their houses serve not only as shelters but as protective realms where tangible and intangible elements of existence find refuge.

The layering of space—from public to private—follows a structured yet fluid approach. The courtyard (*angaan*) adapts to multiple functions: daily rituals, communal gatherings, and celebrations. Observational studies indicate that courtyards act as dynamic thresholds that transform with time and activity (Field Observations, 2024). Similarly, *khadki* (the entrance threshold) holds ambiguous qualities, neither fully open nor closed, reflecting the Baigas' nuanced approach to spatial fluidity.

Scattered settlement pattern

At the core of Baiga settlement planning lies the idea of *Chhappa*—each generation leaves its own imprint on the land, shaping their dwelling with essential elements: house, *baari* (kitchen garden), *aangan* (courtyard), a space for animals, and a water source. This self-sufficient model extends household boundaries beyond rigid enclosures, naturally leading to a dispersed village layout (Field Observations, 2024). Unlike conventional settlements, where houses cluster together, Baiga villages are scattered—each home positioned diagonally so that no house directly faces another. Instead, every dwelling is oriented towards either the sun or a water body, reinforcing their belief that one’s home should align with life-giving forces rather than with human neighbors (Architectural Documentation, 2024).

This spatial arrangement is not merely practical but deeply philosophical. Their belief in self-reliance and coexistence with nature dictates their settlement patterns, ensuring each household functions as an independent yet interconnected unit. Observational studies confirm that this unique approach to dwelling dissolves the rigid notion of boundaries, allowing the landscape itself to guide habitation (Sketch Documentation, 2024).

The Baiga tribe's dwelling practices reveal a profound interplay between their cultural, spiritual, and environmental narratives, embodying Heidegger's notion of the *poetics of dwelling*. For the Baigas, dwelling is an intricate expression of their relationship with the earth, and sky, and their mythological and spiritual beliefs.

Through the myths of creation and their symbolic rituals, the Baigas demonstrate how dwelling transcends physicality to encompass an intangible connection to their surroundings. The forest, viewed as both sustenance and sanctuary, forms the backdrop for their lives, reinforcing the tribe's identity as custodians of nature. The spatial arrangements of their villages and homes,all, embody a cultural logic that preserves their worldview.

By examining the Baiga tribe's practices through the lens of the *poetics of dwelling*, this research underscores the importance of understanding indigenous communities' spatial expressions as living manifestations of their beliefs and way of life.

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