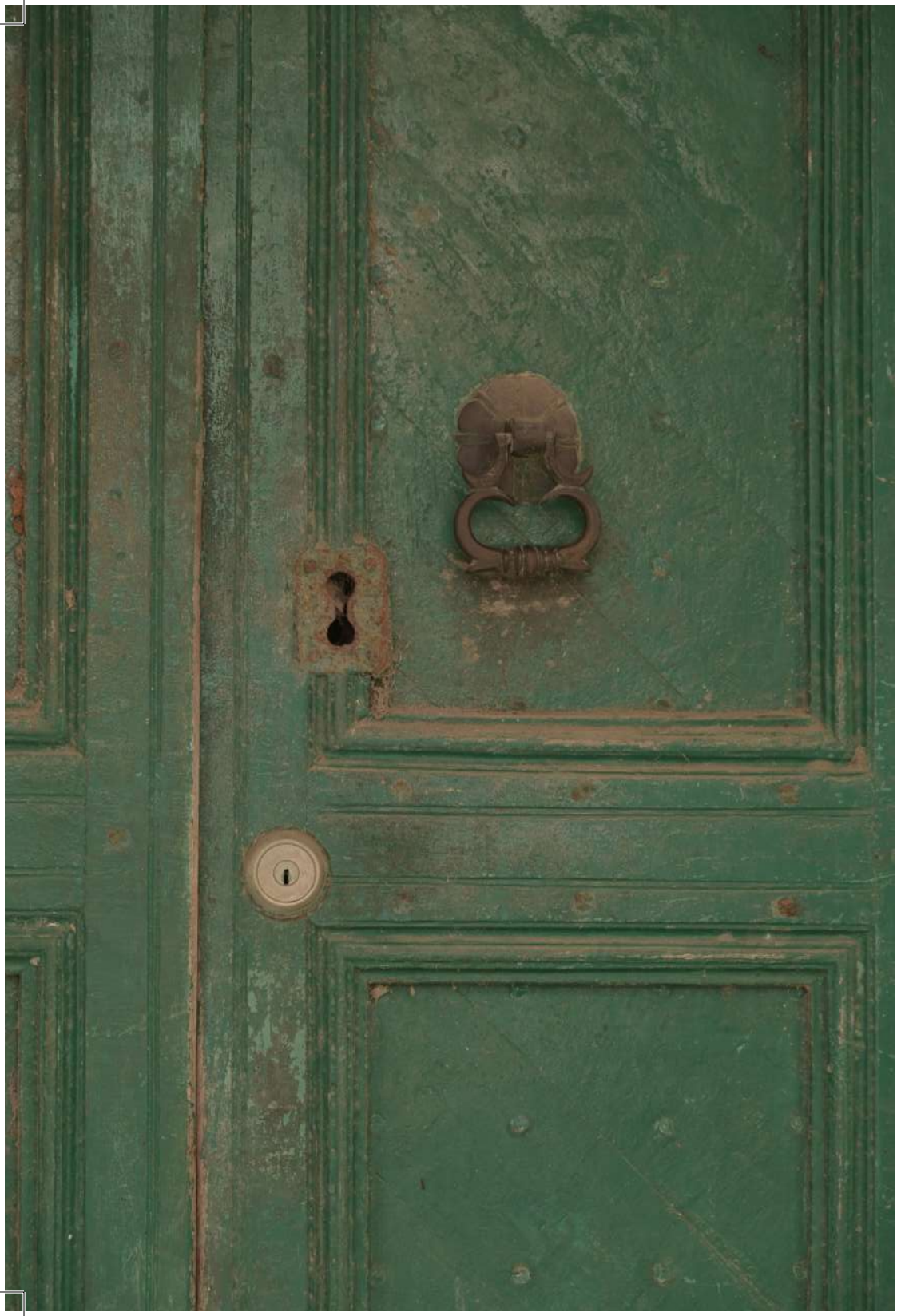

Five houses of Bheemili

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This compilation is an outcome of a field study undertaken by students of the 7th semester B. Arch. programme at the GITAM School of Architecture, Visakhapatnam in 2025. As part of the elective course Introduction to Architectural Conservation, the students documented five historic houses of the 20th Century CE.

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AI tools such as ChatGPT and Claude AI have used for minor editing of this documentation. Drawings are schematic as detailed measurement was not always possible due to accessibility and feasibility issues.

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Five houses of Bheemili

Preface

Bheemili is a historic coastal town near Visakhapatnam that abounds in heritage spanning different time periods. It is a prime example for studying and understanding coastal settlements.

This study was curated as a learning experience to sensitize students to the layered histories of such settlements.

Students began with documenting five houses of Bheemili from the early 20th century that are suffering from escalating land values and uncertain ownership. The team put together measured drawings, photographic documentation, informal conversations with local residents, and archival research to understand the architectural character and cultural significance of these houses.

This compilation presents our findings. It aims to serve both as a student-led contribution to the documentation of Bheemili's heritage and as an academic resource for further research on old coastal towns.

We aim to curate documentation of other sites that will serve to generate awareness and sensitization towards heritage.

Content

Preface

Brief history of Bheemili

One: *Manduwa* memories

Two: House with *arugu*

Three: *Panchavati* house

Four: Host to *Lavana Satyagraha*

Five: House with a *tulasi kota*

Further readings

Bhimili Vadda Samudram , 1992

...

Lapping itself in several folds
The Sea seems a primordial man
Swathing under its watery covers.
Like somebody tickling you trying to wake up
When the sun was high on the sky
The Sea moves languorously
Spraying smiles of surf all around.
Sprinting up to beach sands, terrain,
And swaying with its frothy bubbles,
Resembling the anklet bells of a baby,
It appears like a silken cloudlet aground.
With its eons-old eagerly looks
It dreamily awaits the first baby-boats
Which tossed over its chest.

...

(Telugu Original: Aduri Satyavathi Devi, English Translation: NS Murthy)

Brief history of Bheemili:

Bheemili, also known as Bheemunipatnam, is believed to be named after Bhima, the legendary Pandava brother from the Mahabharata. Nestled along the eastern coast of India, Bheemili is a place where land, ocean, river, and hills meet, witnessing centuries of interplay of nature and culture. Together with Visakhapatnam, it forms a 24 km coastal strip characterized by diverse geomorphic landforms.

The oldest remains in Bheemili date back to the 3rd century BCE in its hills of Pavurallakonda. Excavations have unearthed rock-cut cisterns designed for collecting rainwater, alongside remnants of vihara foundations of the once vibrant Buddhist community. Artefacts from this period, including coins and pottery, tell tales of trade and cultural exchange, marking Bheemili as a significant site during ancient times. By the 14th century, under the reign of the Mindi kings, a temple dedicated to Narasimha was erected, adding another layer to the town's sacred landscape.

The early-17th century saw the arrival of the Dutch East India Company, who established a fort and a factory in Bheemili. This marked a pivotal moment in the town's history, as it became a hub of trade and commerce. Following the Dutch, the British East India Company recognized Bheemili as a significant

trading port on the eastern coast. This contributed to Bheemili's status as one of the oldest municipalities in India.

Today, remnants of this colonial past can still be seen in Bheemili. The Dutch cemetery, St. Peter's Church, the Clock Tower, and other structures stand as silent testimony to the town's vibrant history. Diverse residential typologies, from fishermen's shelters, traditional houses of the 19th and 20th centuries to modern houses can be found here.

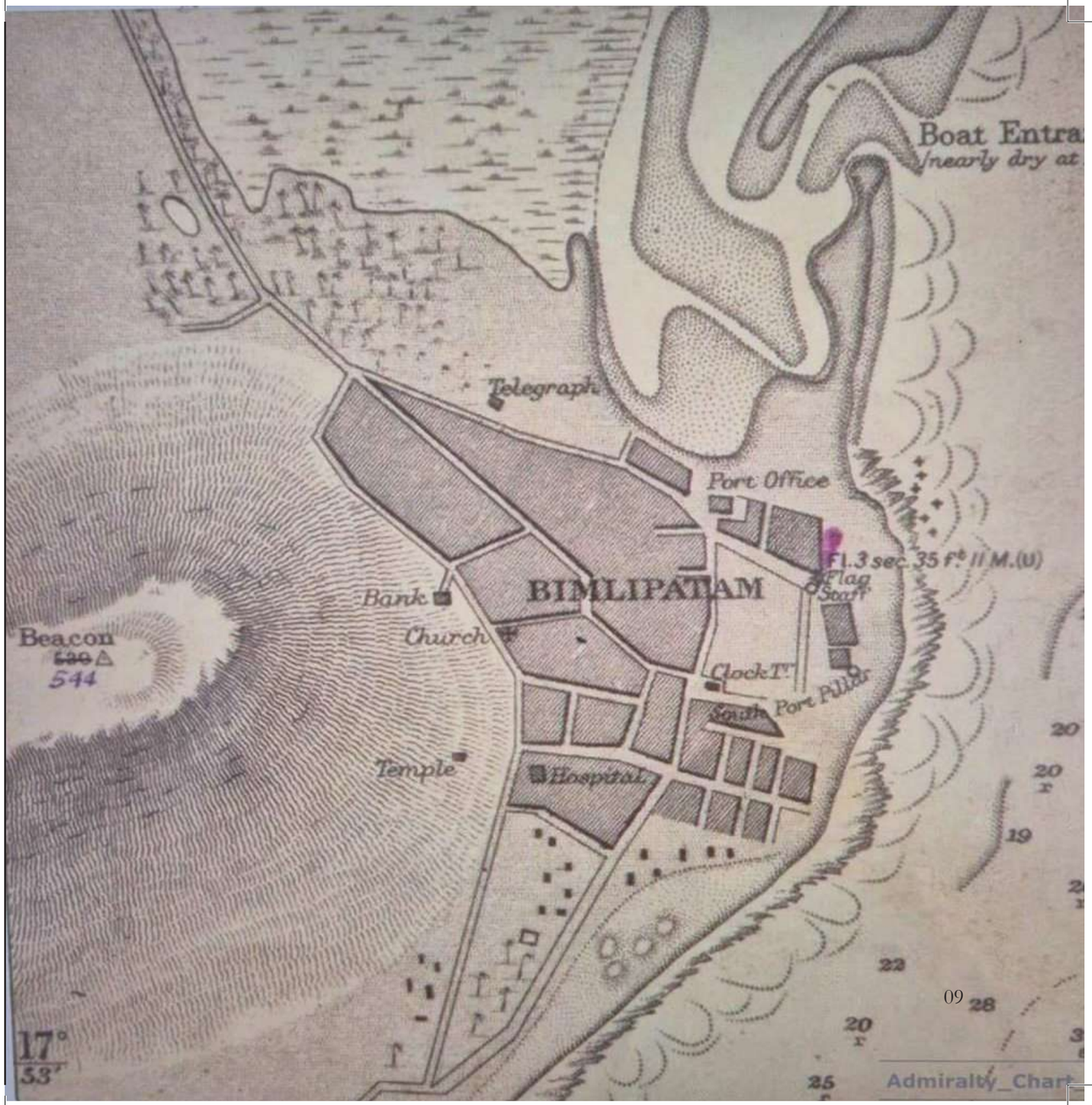
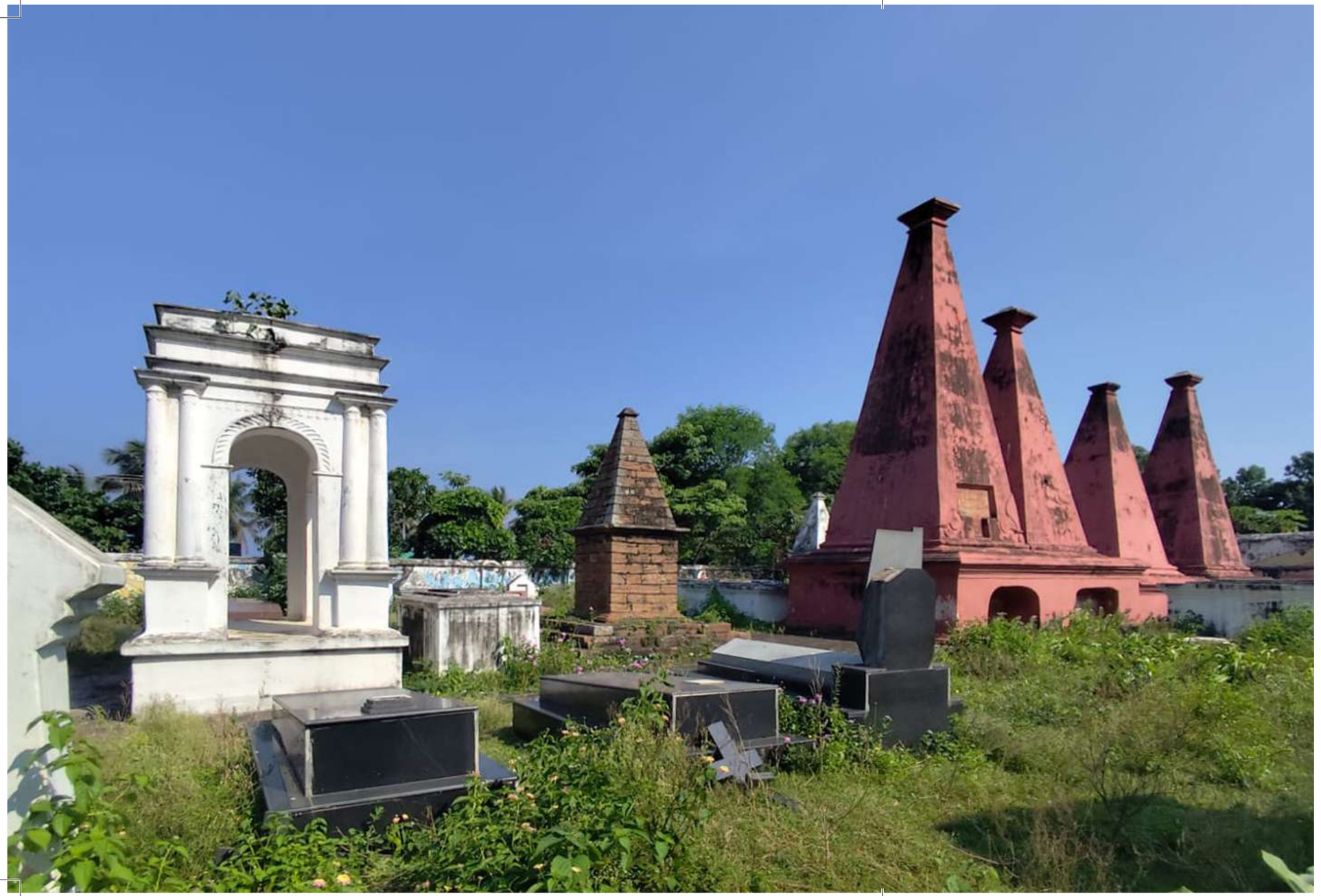


fig 1 1890s Map of Bheemili (Source: Admiralty Chart #1424, Bimlipatam Ancorage from Bimlipatam to Gopalpur Marine Survey 1890, personal collection of John Castellas)

Left: fig 2 Bheemili Clock Tower in 1890s. The Fort wall can be seen in the background (Source: Personal collection of John Castellas)

Below: fig 3 *Gali Meda* or 'The Building of Winds', a circular tower located within the Governor's Bungalow Complex (Source: www.yovizag.com)

fig 4 St. Peter's Church



Left: fig 5 Dutch Cemetery
(Photo: Piyush Das)

Overleaf: fig 6 Dutch period building next to the Buddhist site at Pavurallakonda, Bheemili
(Photo: Google Earth)

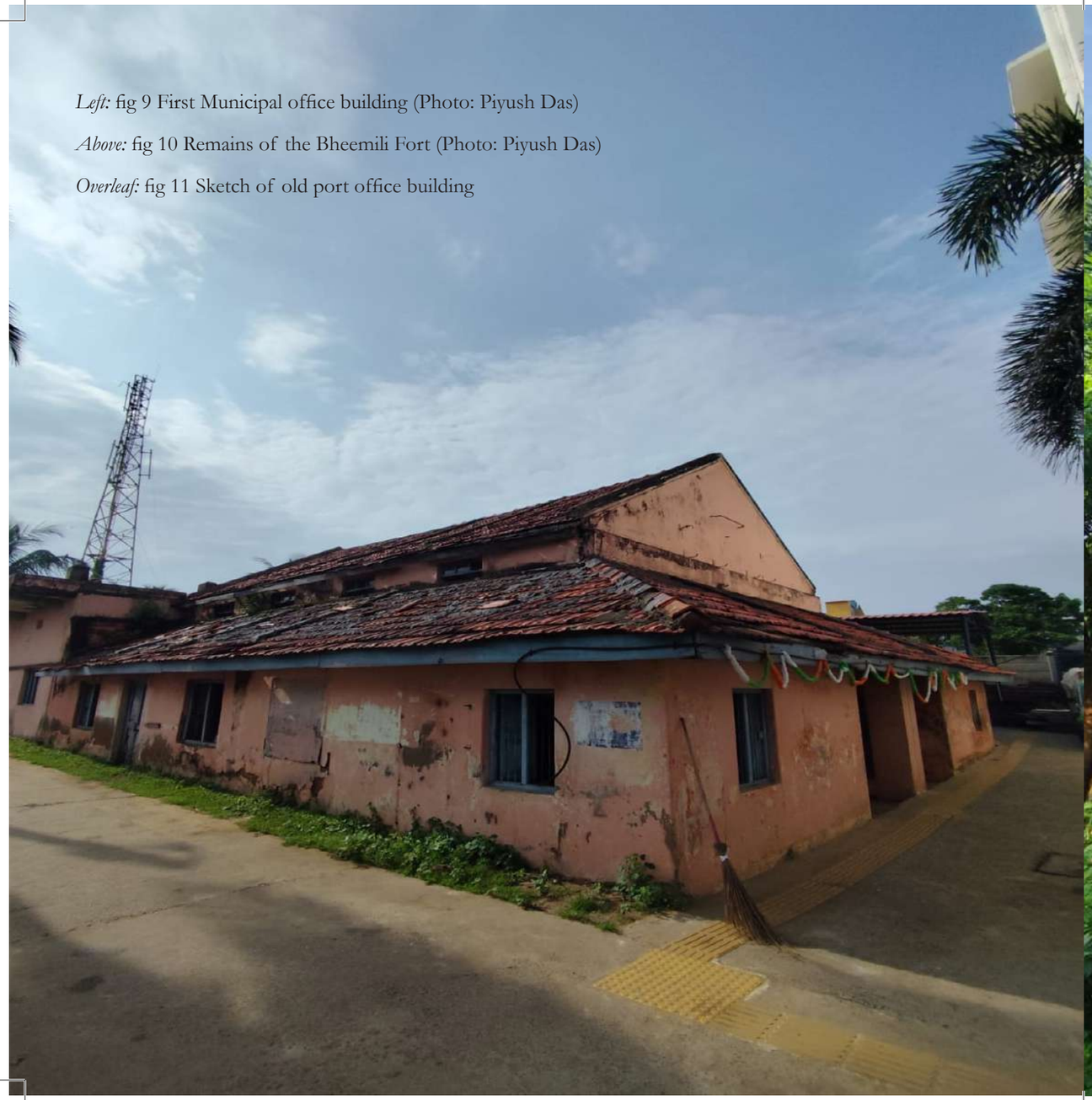
Left: fig 7 Port office (Photo: Piyush Das)

Right: fig 8 Historic structure near the old prison (Photo: Piyush Das)

Left: fig 9 First Municipal office building (Photo: Piyush Das)

Above: fig 10 Remains of the Bheemili Fort (Photo: Piyush Das)

Overleaf: fig 11 Sketch of old port office building



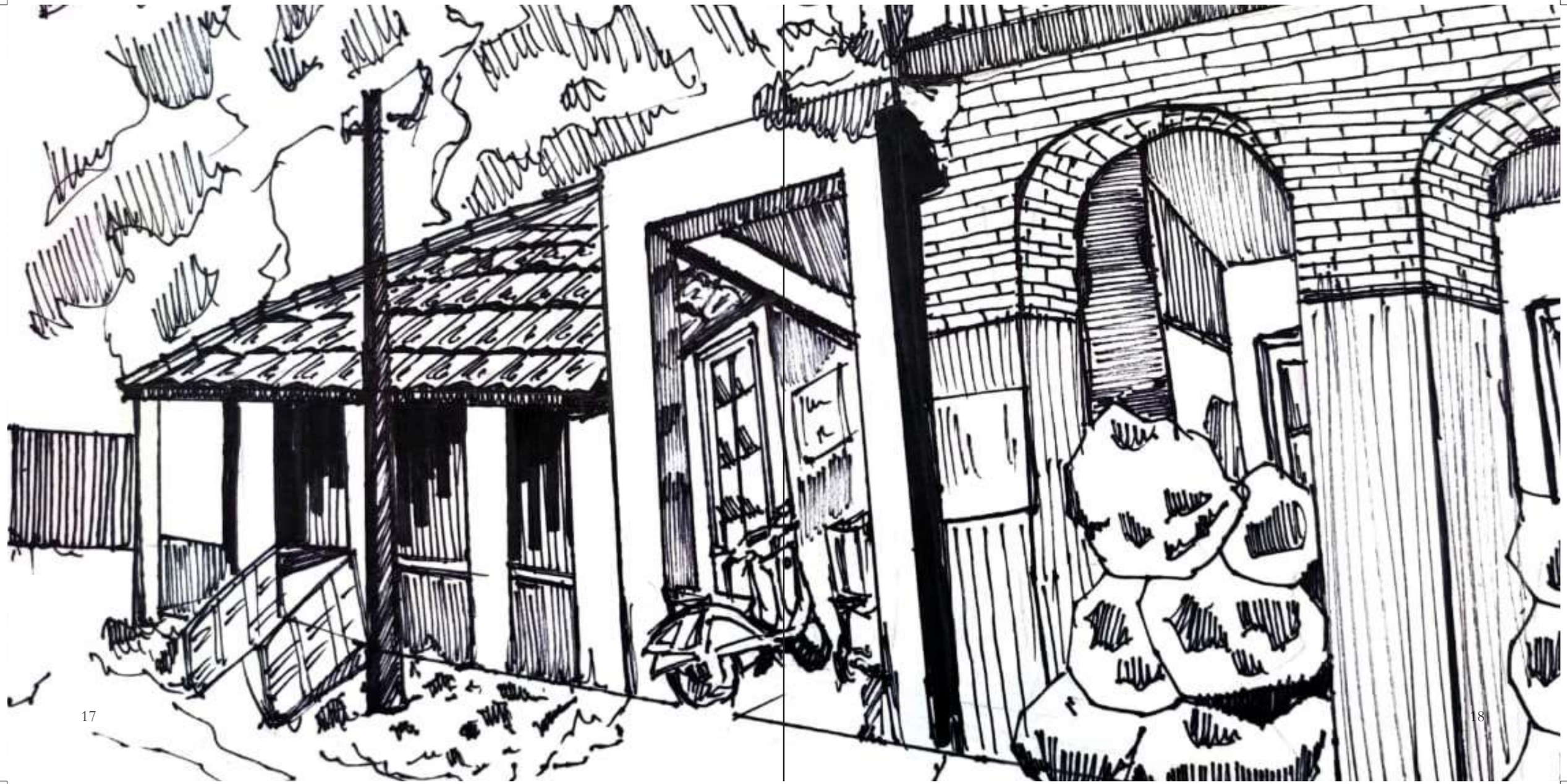


fig 12 A Dutch-era water tank that was fed by the nearby hills (Photo: Piyush Das)

One: *Manduva* memories

Just a street away from the busy vegetable market and near the iconic Bheemili clock tower, the house stands as a testament to the previous century. Surrounded by modern homes, this house showcases the *manduva logili* architectural style, a typology common throughout the Andhra region, though only remnants of its original glory remain.

The house follows a rectangular layout, with a central square courtyard bracketed by two linear buildings. A front yard acts as a transitional space, inviting the outdoors into the home. To the south lies the kitchen. The house has been divided into four sections for rental purposes.

On one side of the courtyard, a storeroom sits between the two houses, and a well is conveniently located on the other, adjacent to the bathrooms. A staircase leads up to the sloped roof, providing access to overhead tanks and ensuring maintenance can be performed when needed. The walls are made of stone, with plaster crafted from a mix of melted karakkai and other indigenous materials. Over time, some of the original plaster has worn away, replaced by modern cement plaster during repairs.

Wooden supports for the beams and rafters, along with clay tiles for roofing, add to the house's character. Although the

corridors are narrow and the rooms small, they feel spacious due to their adjacency to the central courtyard and front yard. These outdoor spaces are primarily used during the day, creating an illusion of extended living areas.

The owner plans to demolish the house for redevelopment; however, this structure signifies the architectural essence of the early twentieth century and holds potential for adaptive reuse.

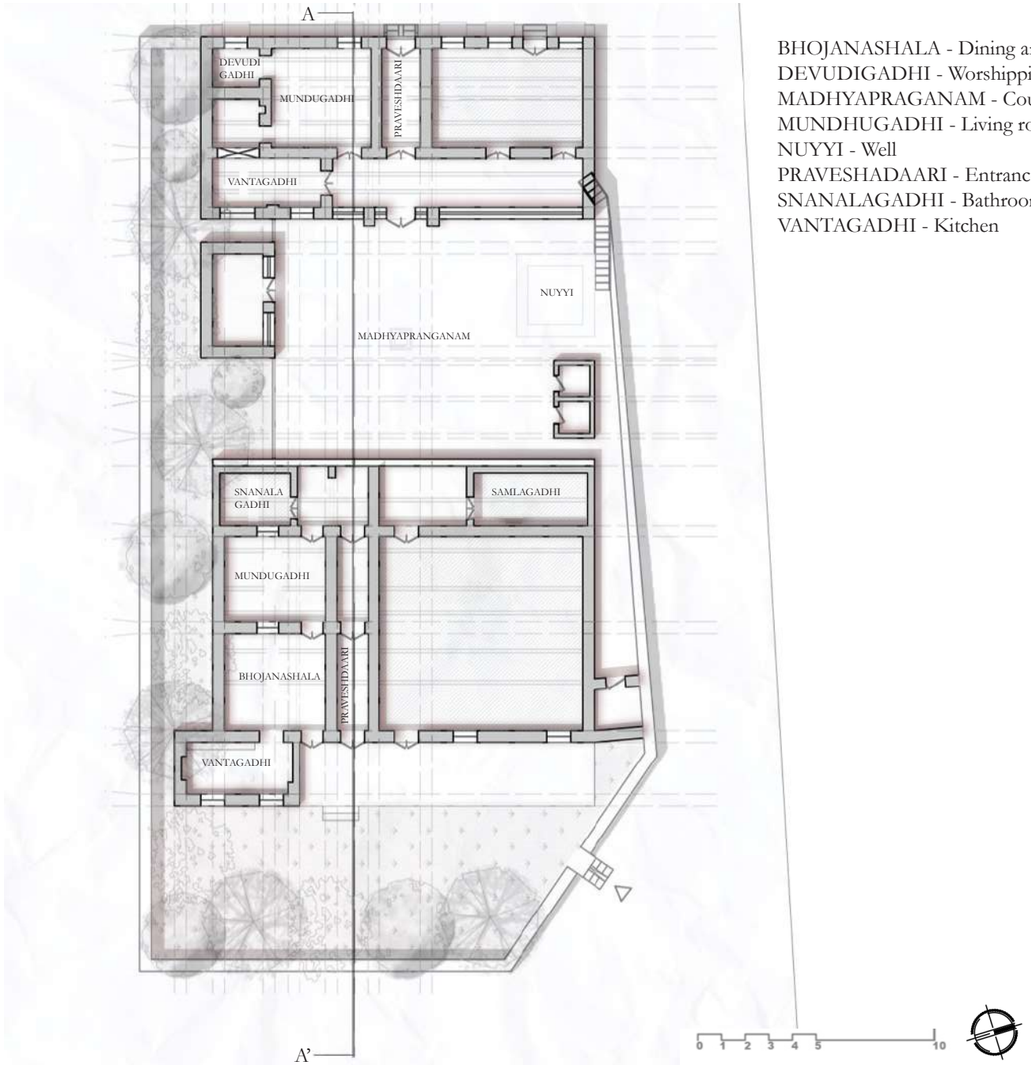
fig 13 West entrance

fig 14 Roof plan

fig 15 West elevation

Left: fig 16 Central courtyard and surrounding modern houses

Overleaf: fig 17 Vegetable market in front of the Bheemili Clock Tower



BHOJANASHALA - Dining area
DEVUDIGADHI - Worshipping space
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
MUNDHUGADHI - Living room
NUYYI - Well
PRAVESHADAARI - Entrance
SNANALAGADHI - Bathroom
VANTAGADHI - Kitchen

fig 18 Ground floor plan

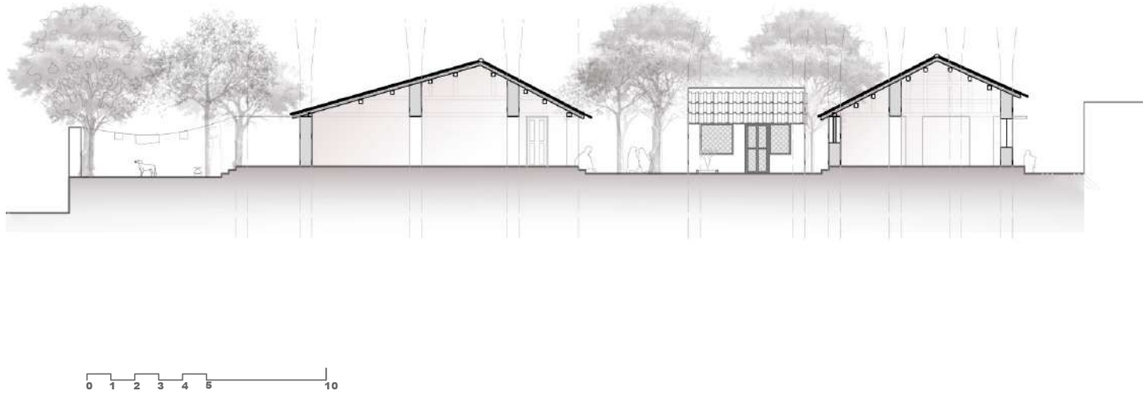
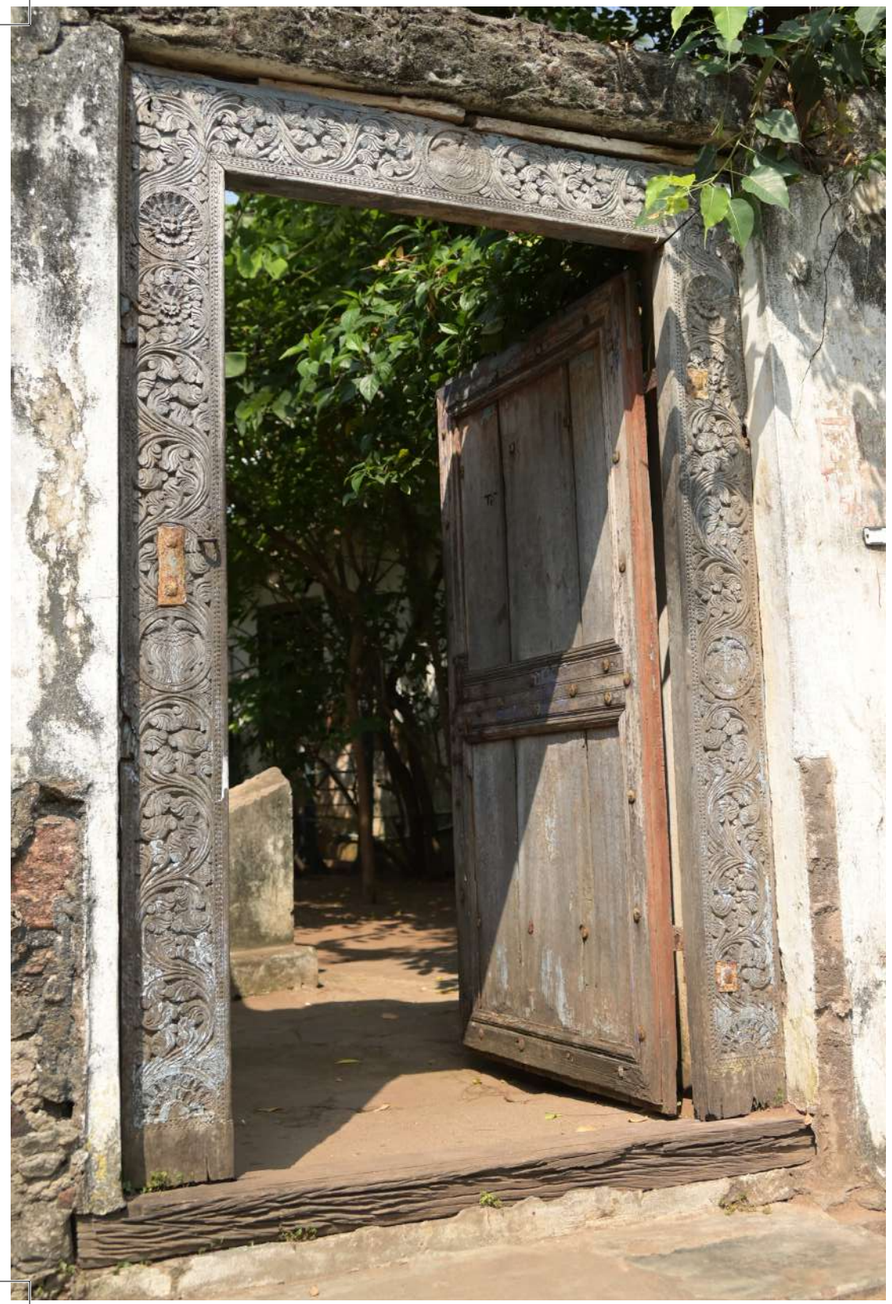


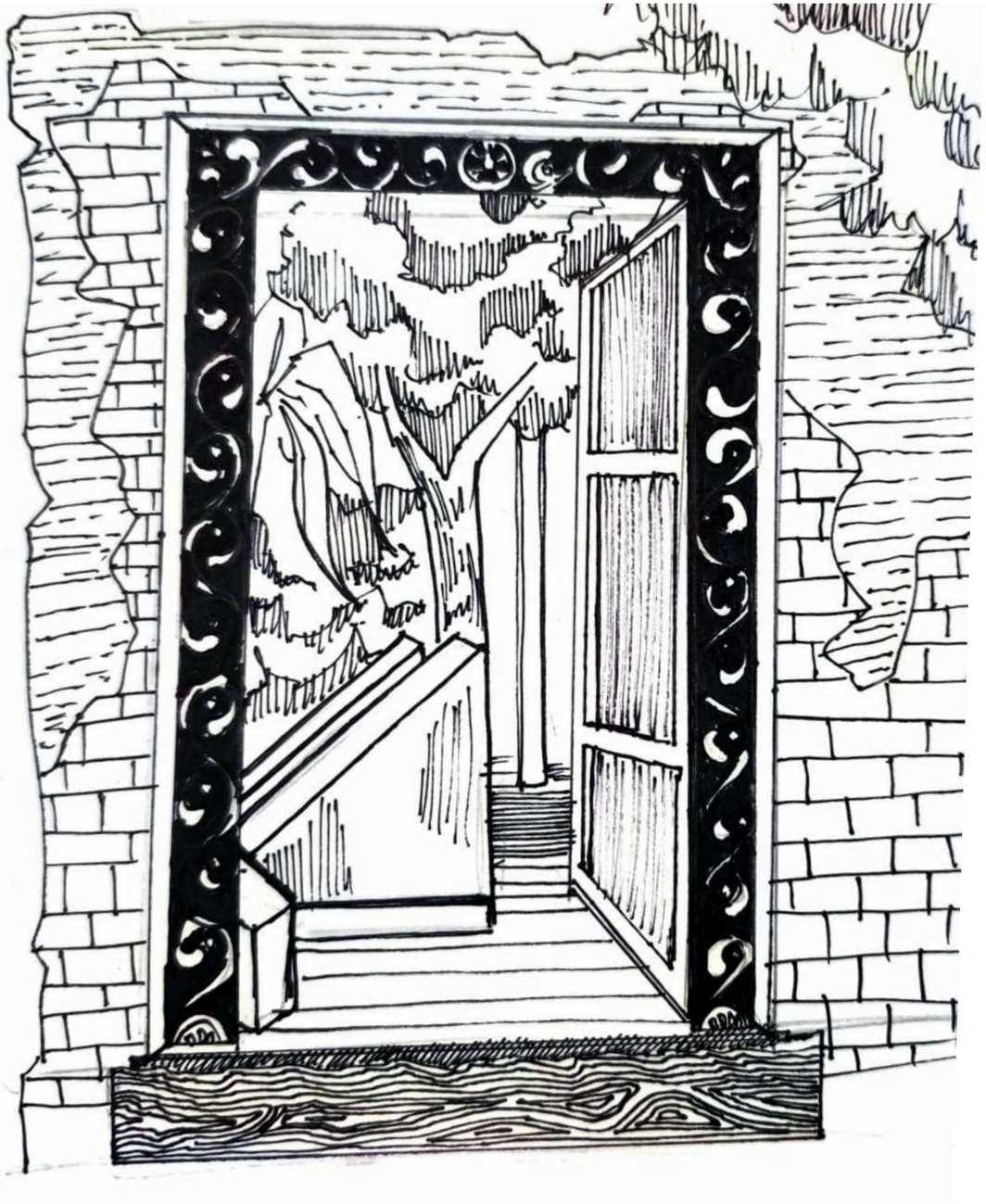
fig 19 Section AA'

Left: fig 20 Living room

Overleaf: fig 21 Kitchen



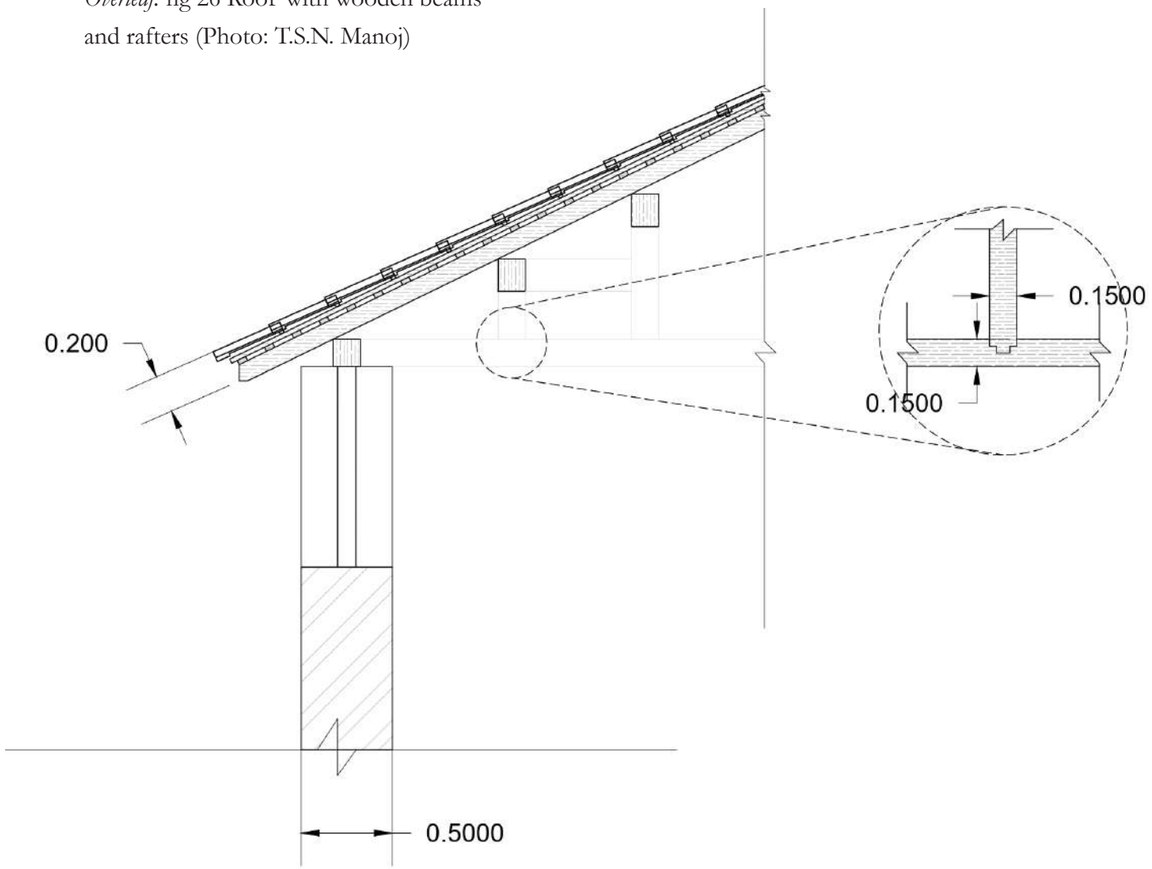
Left: fig 22 Main entrance doorway with carved frame
Right: fig 23 Sketch of carved door frame



Left: fig 24 Auxiliary kitchen

Below: fig 25 Roof details

Overleaf: fig 26 Roof with wooden beams and rafters (Photo: T.S.N. Manoj)



All dimensions in mtrs

Two: House with *arugu*

The house, nearly a century old, belongs to Kaallakuri Prakash Rao and Mrs. Kallakuri Ramanamma. It has weathered the storms of time and nature, standing resiliently close to the coastline. A sitting space known as *arugu* (verandah) graces the front of the house, where neighbours gather to chat and connect, showcasing a lifestyle where outdoor semi-open spaces are integral to daily living.

A courtyard to the rear of the house hosts utility areas, including water drums and potted plants, along with a sacred tulsi plant that thrives in the sunlight. At the back, a well, operated with a motor, provides water to a tank within the house. A facade of wooden jaali once adorned the courtyard, now covered with cardboard to shield it from harsh weather conditions. Although the house features two entrances, only one is currently in use, and three of the rooms remain vacant. The doors are made of solid wood, and the walls are notably thicker than those of modern houses, measuring between a quarter to nearly half a meter thick.

As one steps inside, a narrow entrance leads into a large living room serving as the focal point of the home. It connects to the courtyard, providing access to the staircase and a terrace. Inside, one can observe jack arch roofs. Small openings and windows throughout the house ensure cross-ventilation, a crucial feature in humid coastal zones. Indigenous materials define the construction of this home: visible brick masonry, plaster, Mangalore tiles for roofing, and wooden trusses.

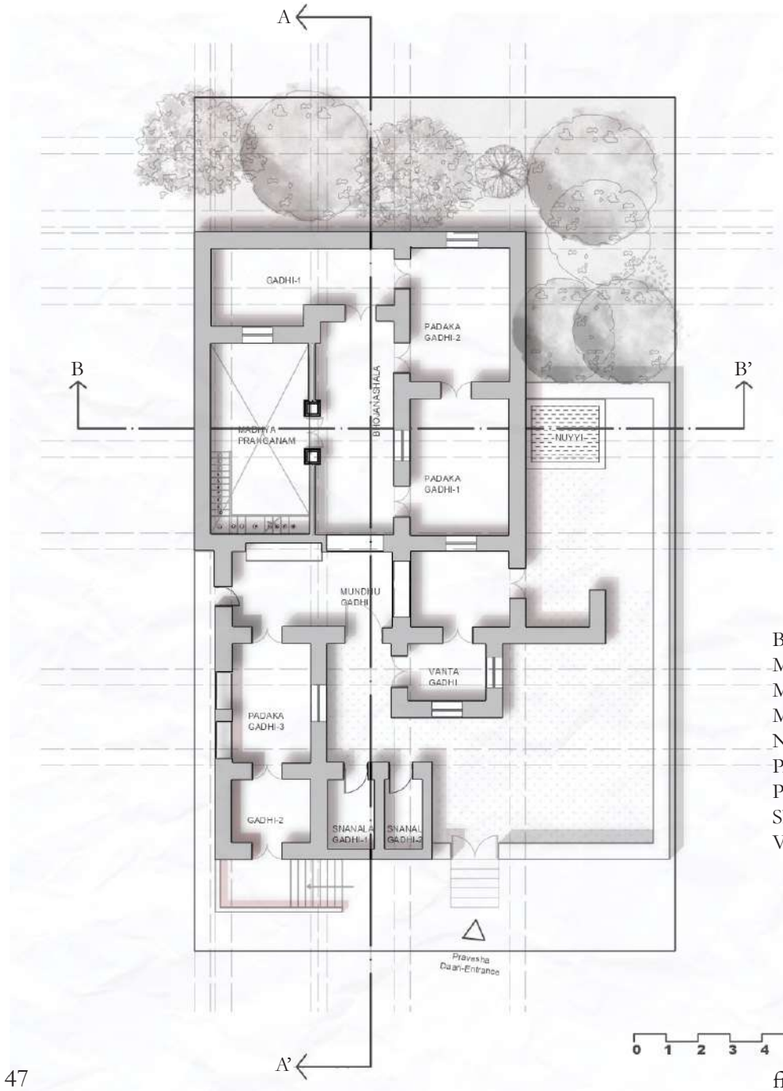
Though the house shows signs of wear, loss of masonry, plaster, and some roofing, it still stands resolutely in the face of time.

Left: fig 27 Photo of main entrance of the house

Below: fig 28 Roof plan

Left: fig 29 Well in the backyard

Right: fig 30 Vaulted roof



BHOJANASHALA - Dining area
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
MARGAM - Road
MUNDHUGADHI - Living room
NUYYI - Well
PADAKAGADHI - Bedroom
PRAVESHADAARI - Entrance
SNANALAGADHI - Bathroom
VANTAGADHI - Kitchen

fig 31 Ground floor plan

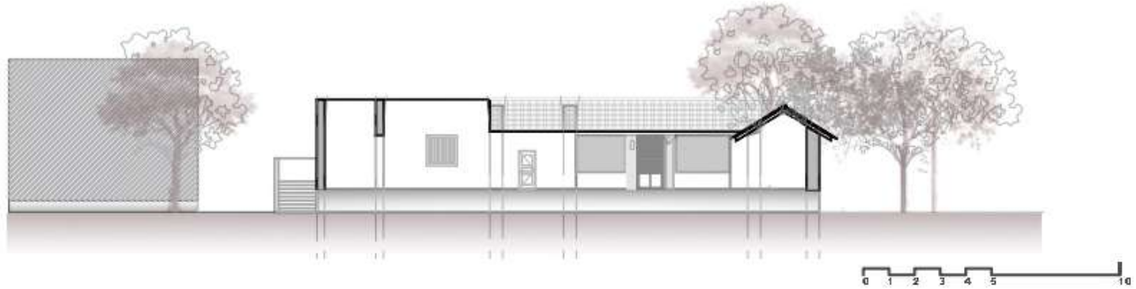


fig 32 Section AA'

fig 33 Section BB'

fig 34 Trussed roof

Overleaf: fig 35 & fig 36 Air vents

Three: *Panchavati* house

Located on Gupta Street, known for its literary community, the house stands proudly near the clock tower in Bheemili and in close proximity to a temple. Built around a century ago in the *Panchavati* architectural style, this house once featured a central courtyard flanked by mirrored blocks. Today, only one block and the courtyard remain intact, while the other half has been replaced by a new structure.

The term '*Panchavati* style house' as the resident describes, homes inspired by the serene forest dwelling of Rama and Sita from the Indian epic, the Ramayana. This style emphasizes a connection to nature.

Inside, the house features two bedrooms, a hallway, a kitchen at the rear, and two smaller rooms, along with a toilet. A welcoming verandah greets visitors at the entry point, leading up a small staircase to the central entrance. The facade is elegantly balanced, adorned with five arches in a row and a staircase leading to the plinth.

The doors and windows, crafted from wood and iron grills, may show signs of wear, but they still reflect the traditional style of the era in which the house was built. Above the arches, a low parapet wall is decorated with cast iron railings featuring floral and spiral patterns.

Constructed as a traditional masonry building, the house combines flat and sloped roofing. The walls are made of brick masonry, finished with lime mortar and plaster. Over the years, the plaster has aged naturally, revealing stains, patches of dampness, and areas where the finish has worn away, exposing the underlying masonry. The floor, made of lime concrete, is marked by cracks and subtle undulations, a testament to decades of use.

Despite the changes over the years, the old courtyard and the original front portion of the house remain unchanged. The courtyard continues to be the heart of the home, open to the sky and allowing fresh air and natural light to flow through, fostering a sense of connection between the rooms.

Overleaf: fig 37. Arched veranda at house entrance.

fig 38 Roof plan

fig 39 Front elevation

Left: fig 40 View of the clock tower from the terrace

Right: fig 41 Neighbouring buildings reflecting the local architecture

ARUGU - Verandah
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
MUNDHUGADHI - Living room
NUYYI - Well
PADAKAGADHI - Bedroom
SNANALAGADHI - Bathroom
VAHANASALA - Parking
VANTAGADHI - Kitchen

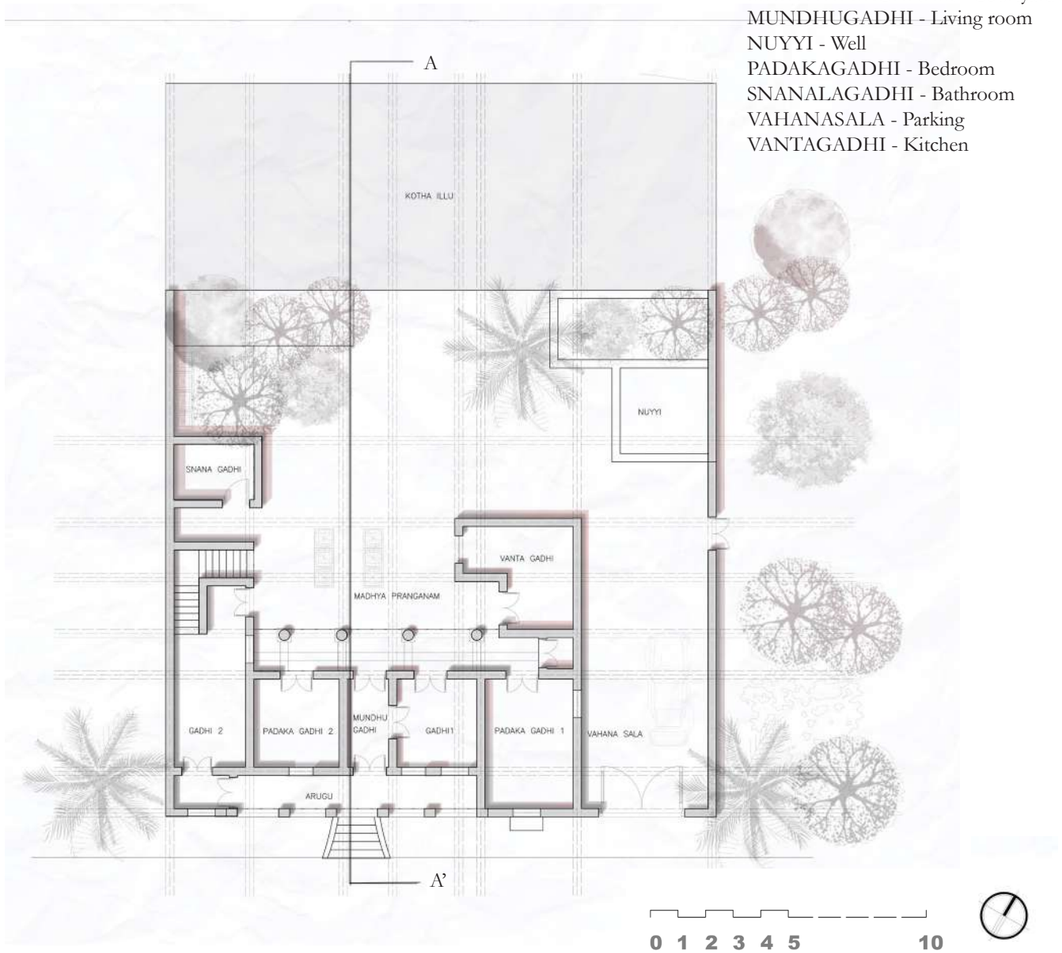


fig 42 Ground floor plan

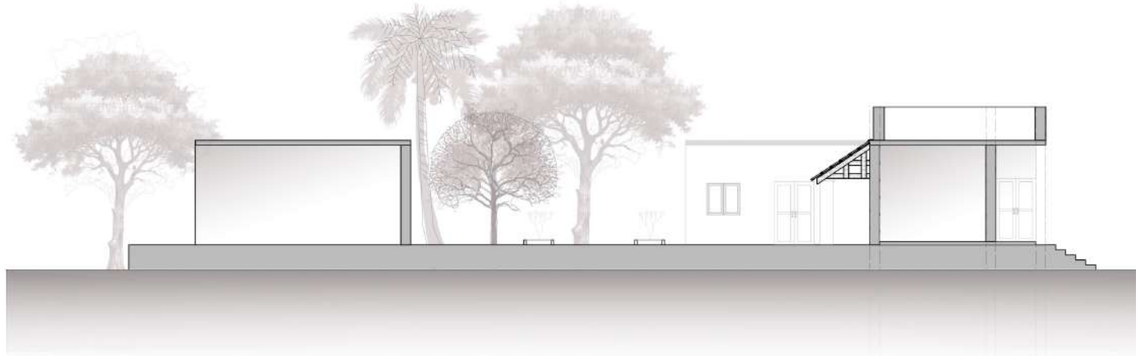


fig 43 Section AA'

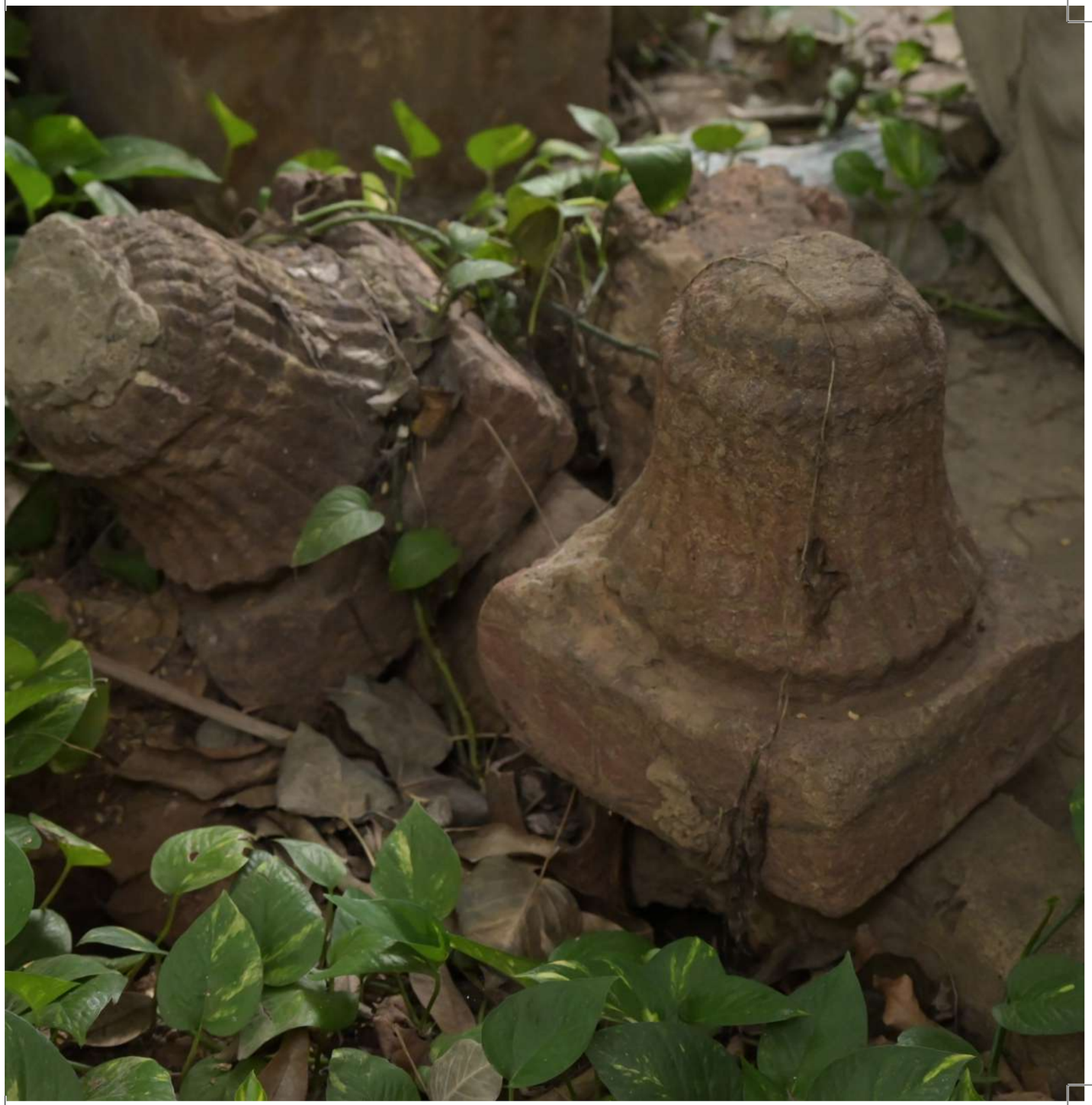
fig 44 Veranda

Left: fig 45 Students examining the condition of the house

Right: fig 46 Remains of the original columns

Overleaf left: fig 47 Sketch of the front view

Overleaf right: fig 48 Sketch of the internal corridor



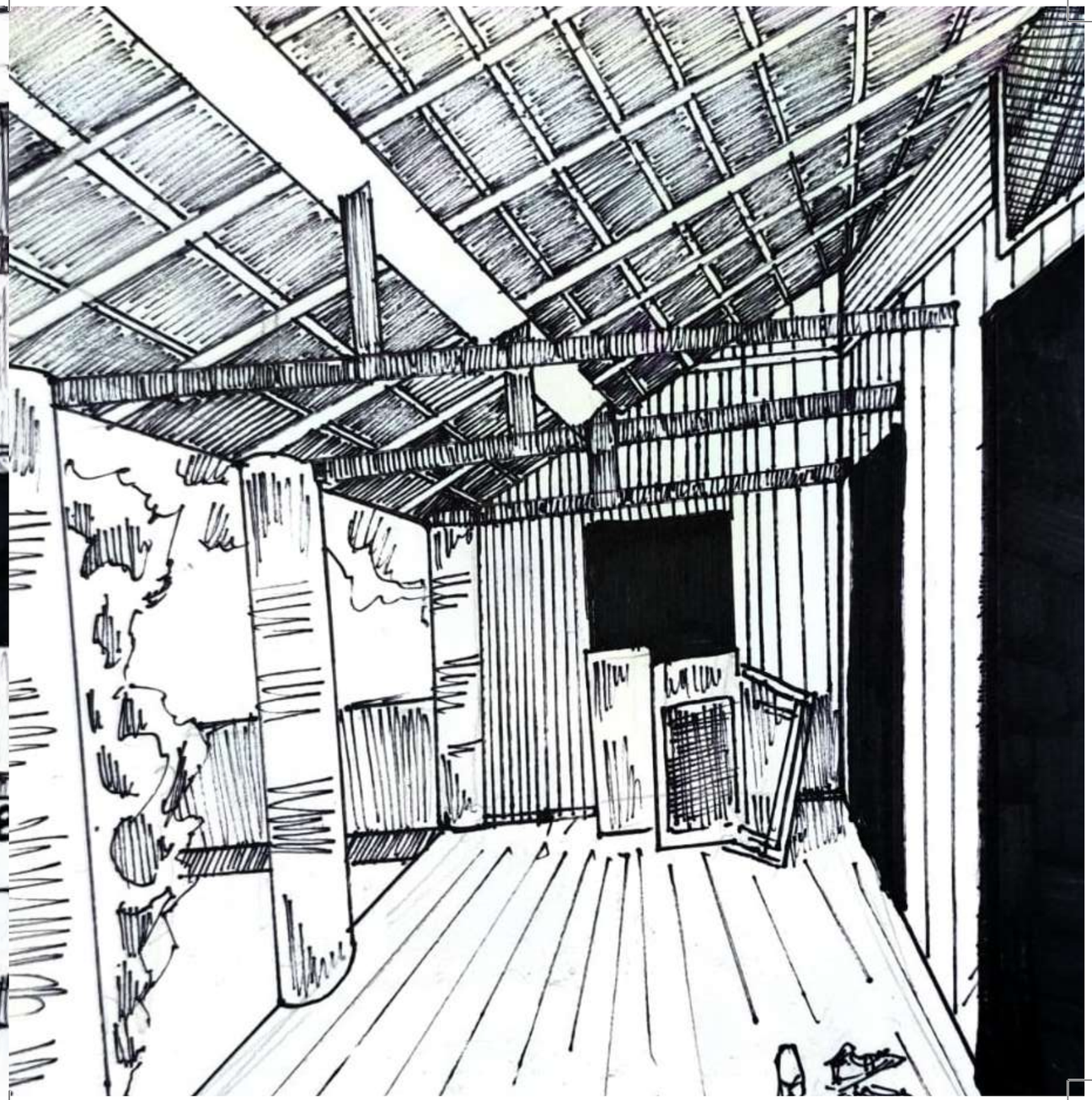


fig 49 Courtyard

Four: Host to *Lavana Satyagraha*

Located in a densely packed neighborhood, this house stands out amidst a mix of vernacular and modern architectural styles. Built in 1911, this structure is notable for its striking blue windows and jaalis, setting it apart from the modern tones of the neighboring houses. The house holds historical significance as Mahatma Gandhi visited and stayed here during the *Lavana Satyagraha* movement, adding a rich layer of associational value to its architecture.

The roof features a unique combination of flat sections over corridors and passageways, complemented by pitched roofs over the bedrooms, creating an eye-catching elevation. Upon entering, visitors navigate through narrow rooms that open up into a courtyard adorned with arched columns, leading to an open skylight above. The layout is rectangular, centered around this courtyard that invites natural light and fresh air.

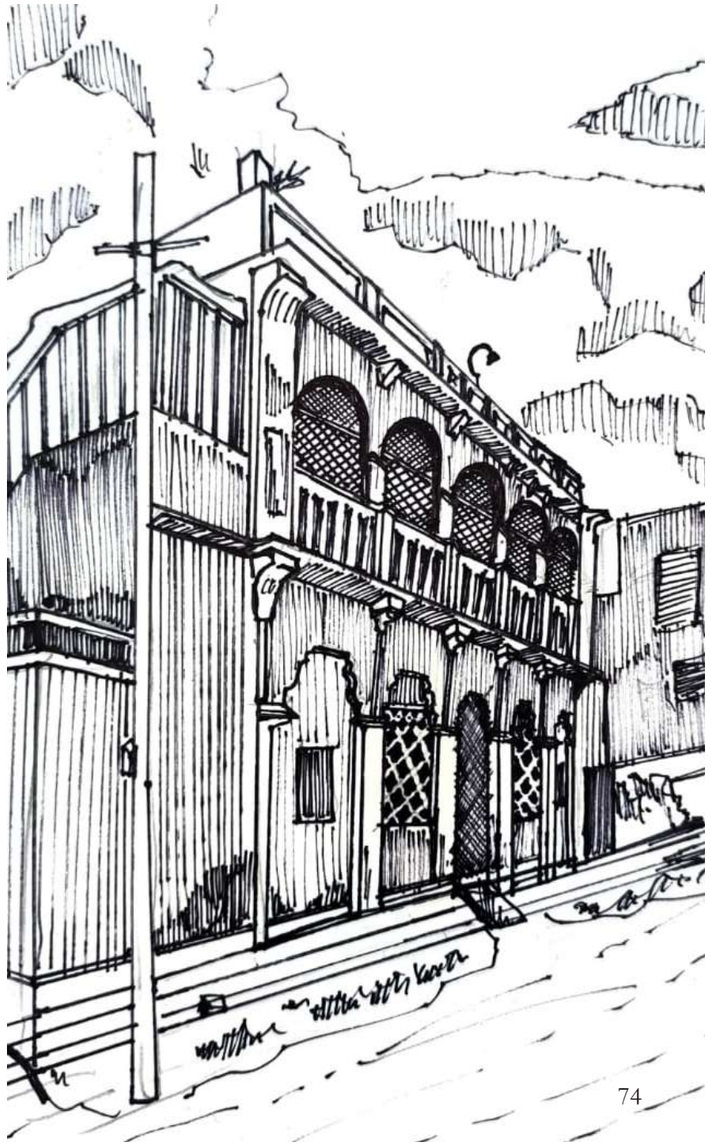
The house comprises a total of 13 rooms. All rooms are spacious, featuring small windows that ensure adequate ventilation. The central courtyard has experienced some leveling over the years due to maintenance issues, but a small square area still retains its original essence. The plan remains consistent across both floors, with a staircase outside connecting to the upper level.

The facade is characterized by multifoiled arches framing the windows and doors, while the upper floor balcony showcases jaali panels adorned with floral and geometric motifs. Horizontal cornices run across the facade, creating layered shadow play, supported by small ornamental brackets. The ground floor openings are protected by intricate wrought-iron grills, featuring geometric and floral patterns. Molded stucco bands and decorative frames around the arches enhance depth and rhythm on the otherwise plain walls.

Despite the passage of time, the house remains strong, and the owner plans to reuse it as a guest house in the future, ensuring that this historic structure continues to be a part of the community's story.

Overleaf left: fig 50 Building facade

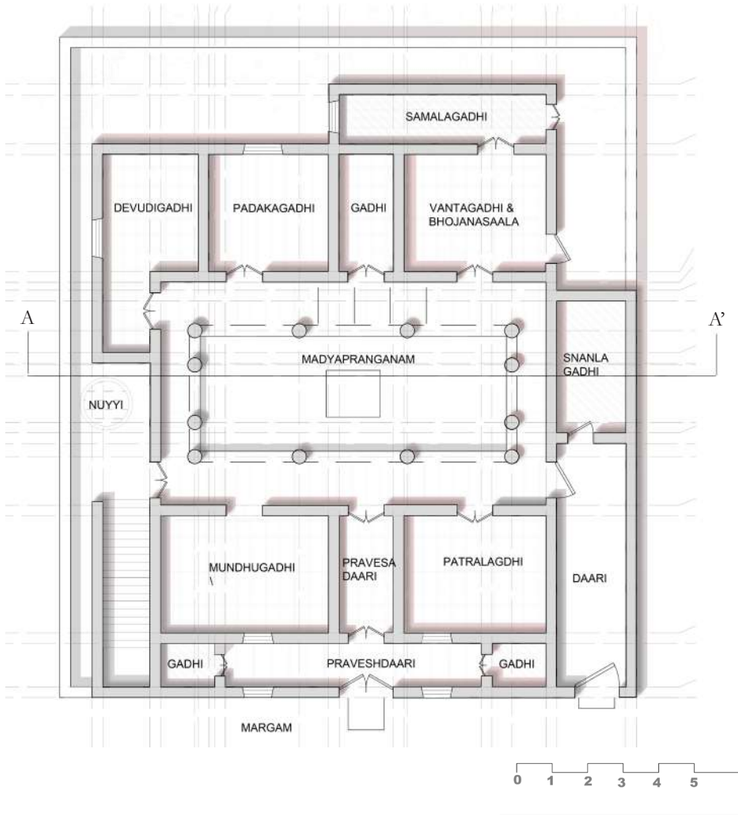
Overleaf right: fig 51 Sketch of the house



Below: fig 52 Roof plan

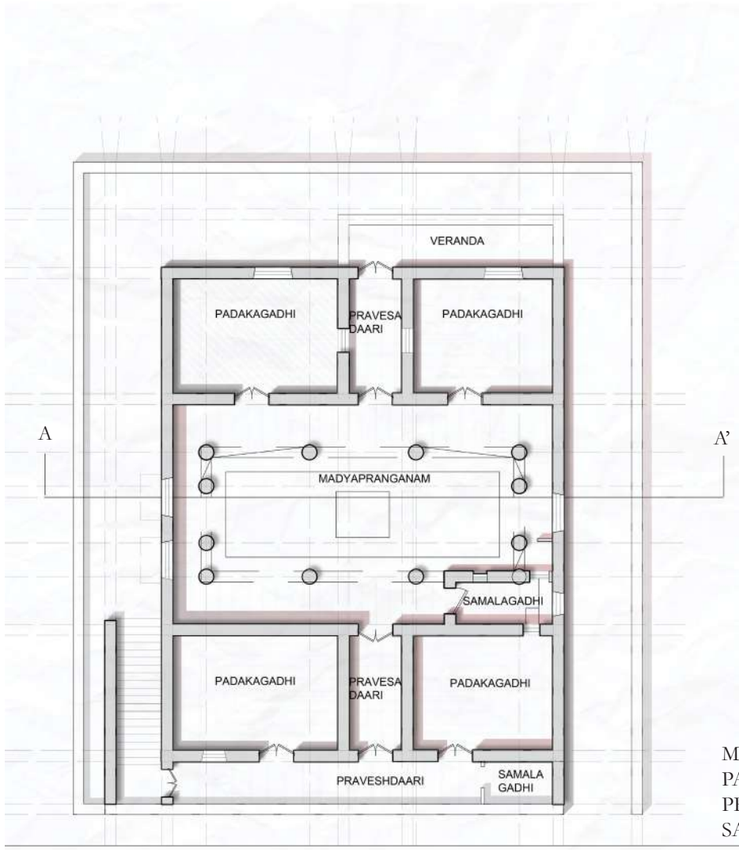
Right: fig 53 View of the house from road level

Overleaf: fig 54 & fig 55 Neighbouring houses



BHOJANASHALA - Dining area
DEVUDIGADHI - Worshipping space
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
MARGAM - Road
MUNDHUGADHI - Living room
NUYYI - Well
PADAKAGADHI - Bedroom
PATRALAGADHI - Office
PRAVESHADAARI - Entrance
SAMLAGADHI - Store
SNANALAGADHI - Bathroom
VANTAGADHI - Kitchen

fig 56 Ground floor plan



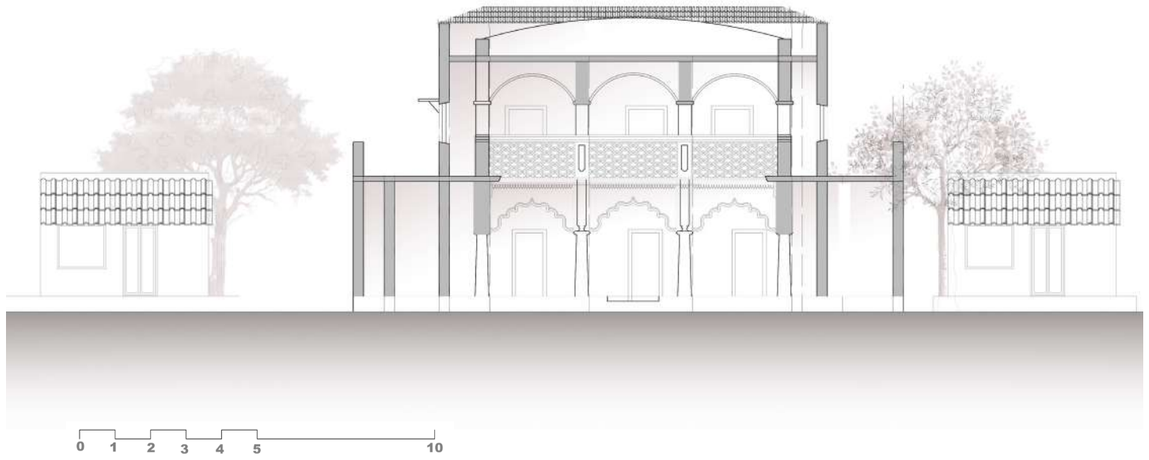
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
PADAKAGADHI - Bedroom
PRAVESHADAARI - Entrance
SAMLAGADHI - Store

fig 57 First floor plan

Below: fig 58 Section AA'

Right: fig 59 & fig 60 Corridors on first floor (Photos: Piyush Das)

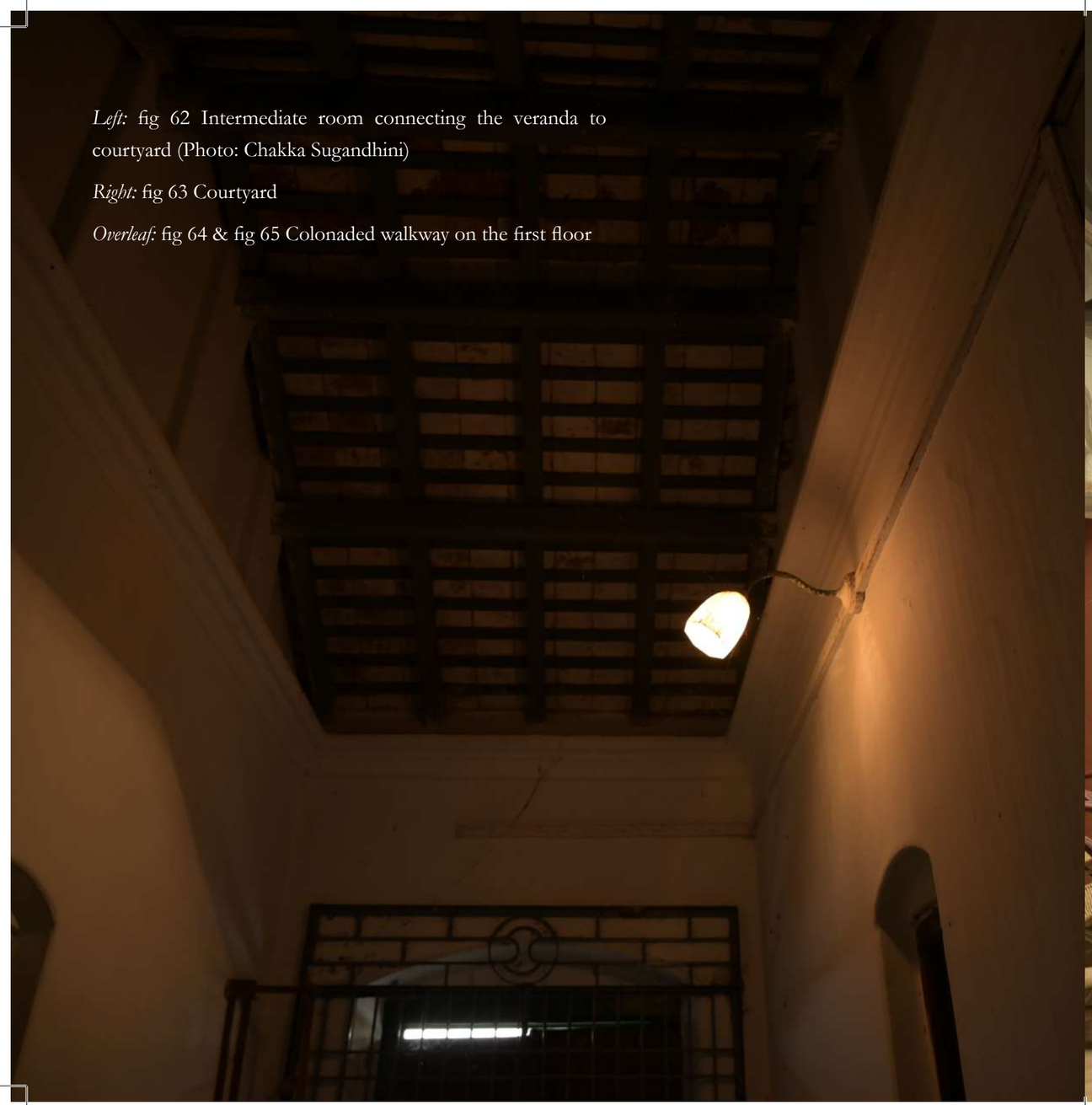
Overleaf: fig 61 Courtyard

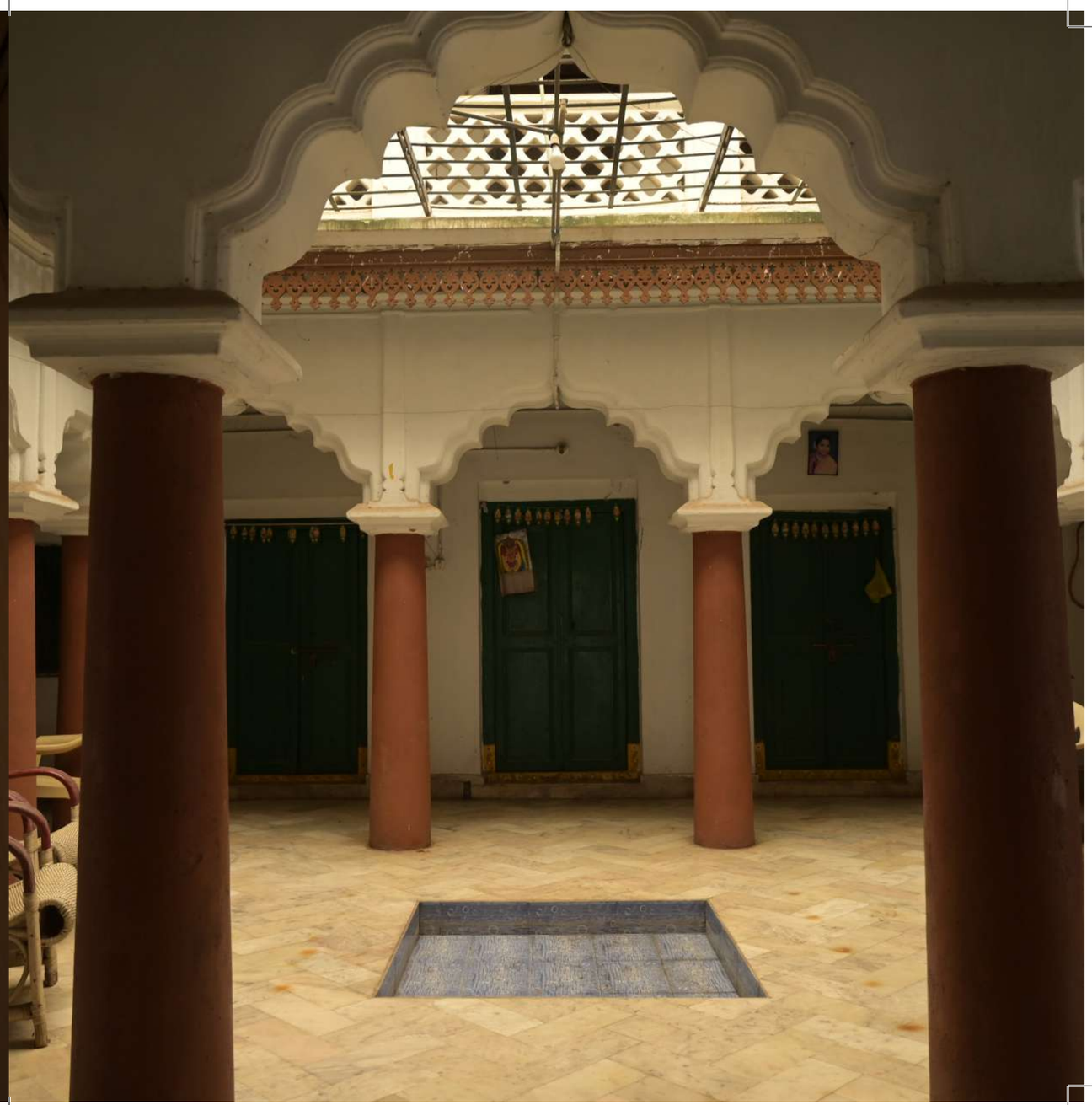


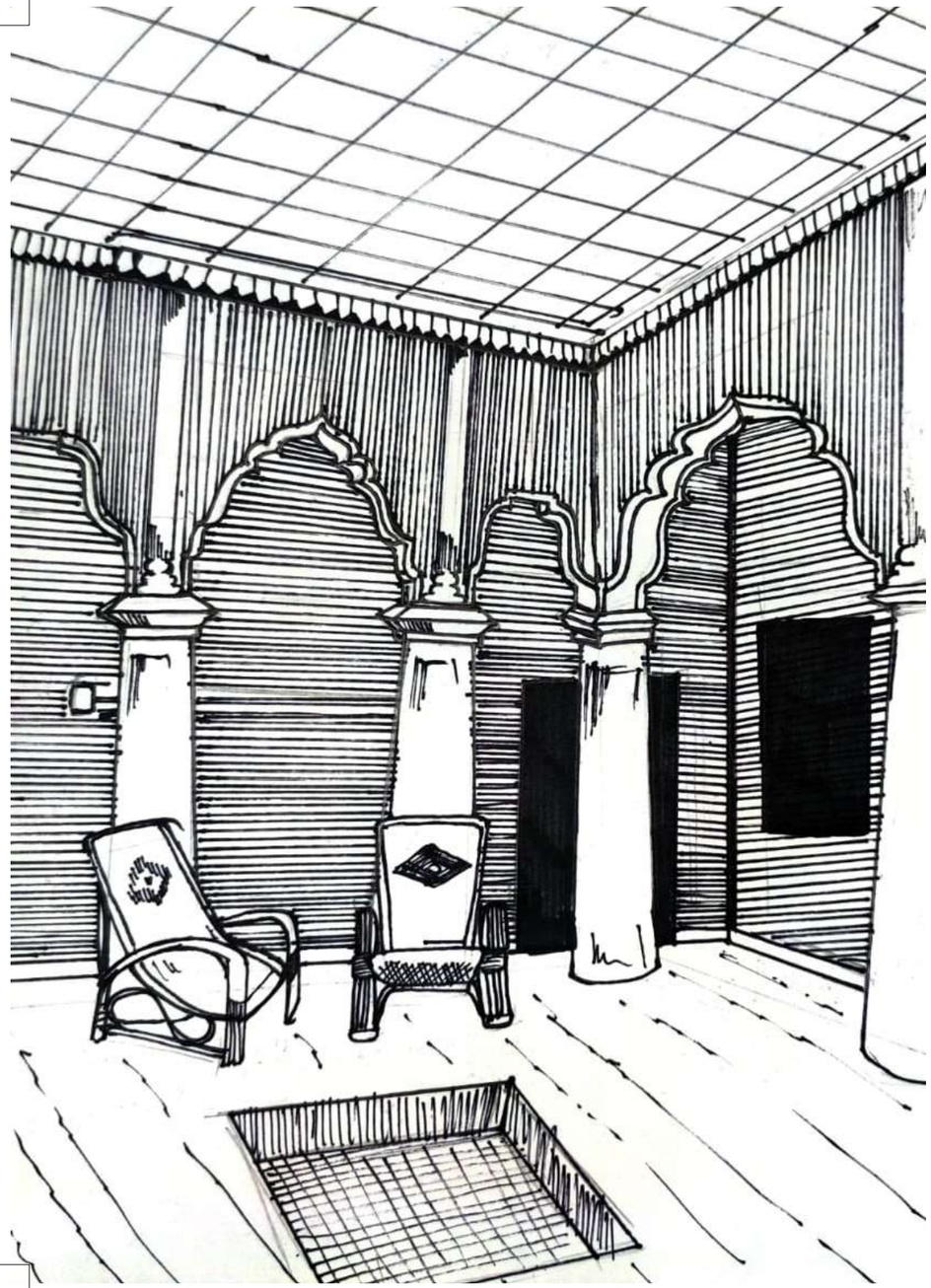
Left: fig 62 Intermediate room connecting the veranda to courtyard (Photo: Chakka Sugandhini)

Right: fig 63 Courtyard

Overleaf: fig 64 & fig 65 Colonaded walkway on the first floor







Left: fig 66 Sketch of courtyard

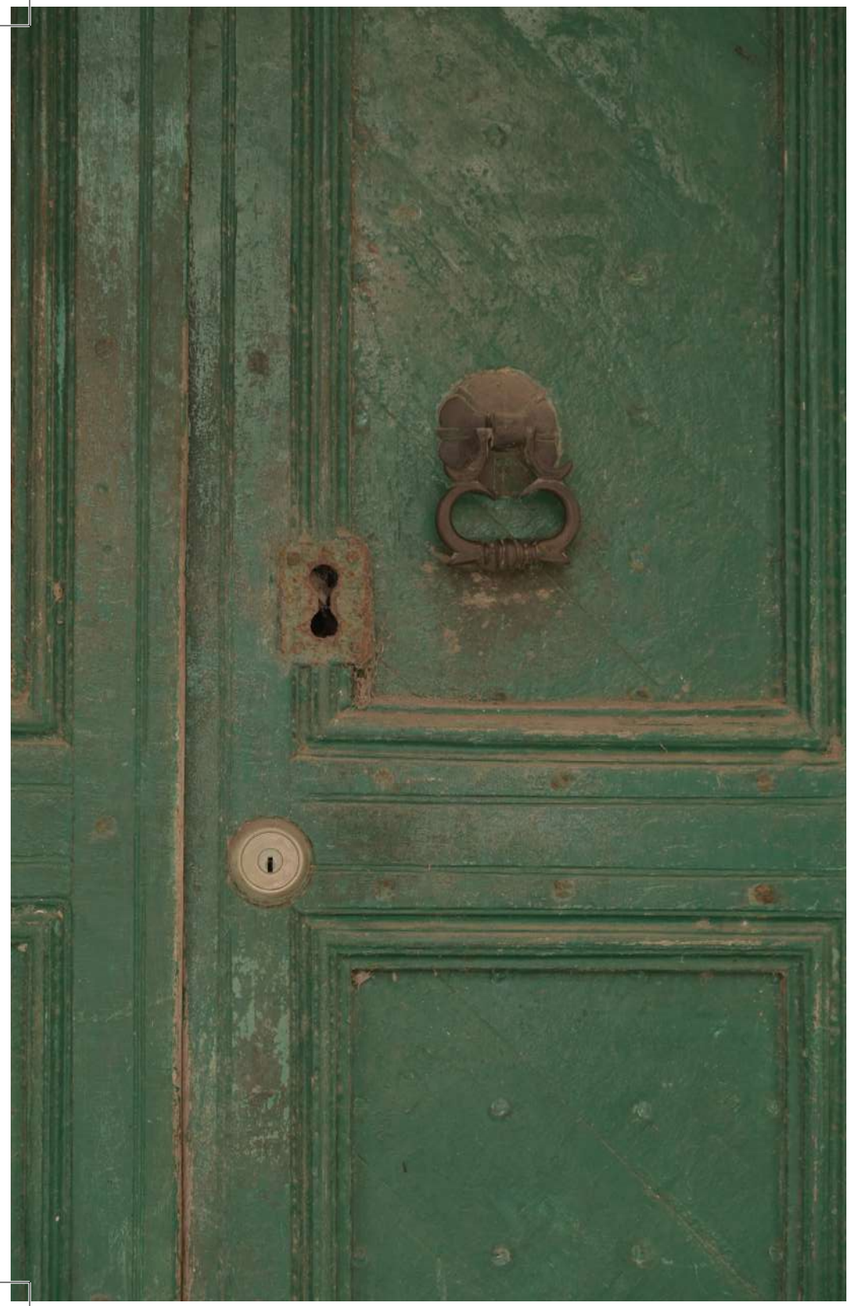
Right: fig 67 Sketch of neighbouring house

Left: fig 68 First floor corridor and the roof details (Photo: Piyush Das)

Right: fig 69 Tiled roof

Left: fig 70 Switchboard

Right: fig 71 The carpet believed to have been used by Mahatma Gandhi during *Lavana Satyagraha*



Left: fig 72 Door handle detail

Right: fig 73 Gramophone found in the house

Overleaf: fig 74 Small window detail

Five: House with a *tulasi kota*

A stone's throw from the seashore and the mouth of the Gosthani River, this house belongs to an elderly lady who proudly shared that it has been in her family for nearly four generations. Built in a linear form, the structure features a sloped roof and a central linear courtyard.

The henry has a verandah with seating provision at one end. The roof of the entry area is supported by sturdy wooden rafters, beams, and three round columns. On the left side, a small room with a low-heighted double door adds an interesting touch. From the verandah, another double door leads into a linear living area, which serves as the spine of the house, with various rooms and functional spaces zoned along it.

To the right of this central spine, a series of rooms unfolds, including two interconnected bedrooms. The living room is brightened by an opening in the roof that allows natural light to flood the space, although this design presents challenges during the rainy season.

Beyond the living room, the corridor runs adjacent to the courtyard, with a bathroom accessible from the courtyard on the left. The courtyard, which is one step lower than the corridor, houses a small water tank and a *tulasi kota*, a sacred space for the family. On the opposite side of the corridor, a room and a kitchen are situated, leading to another room or backyard at the far end, which was inaccessible during the visit.

The walls of the house are thick, constructed of brick and plastered with lime, while the sloping roof is supported by wooden beams and rafters, topped with Mangalore tiles. All doors and windows are crafted from wood, featuring minimal detailing.

The elderly lady expresses her desire to remain in this cherished home for the rest of her life, grateful to her daughter for respecting this wish and for staying by her side to provide care and companionship.

fig 75 Front view of the house

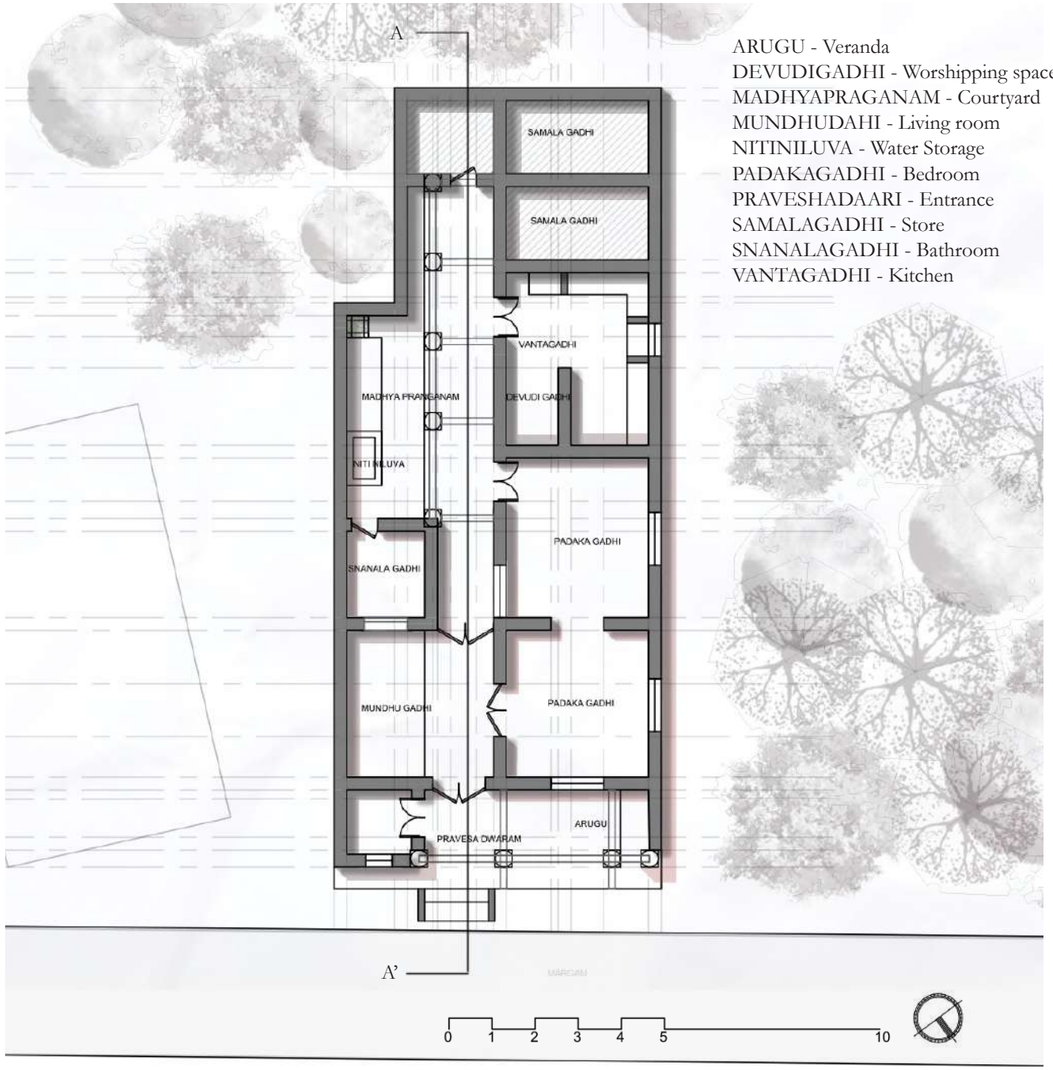
fig 76 Sketch of the house

fig 77 Front elevation

Left: fig 78 House owner

Right: fig 79 Raised seating in the *arugu*

Overleaf: fig 80 Portico roof detail



ARUGU - Veranda
DEVUDIGADHI - Worshipping space
MADHYAPRAGANAM - Courtyard
MUNDHUDAHI - Living room
NITINILUVA - Water Storage
PADAKAGADHI - Bedroom
PRAVESHADAARI - Entrance
SAMALAGADHI - Store
SNANALAGADHI - Bathroom
VANTAGADHI - Kitchen

fig 81 Floor plan

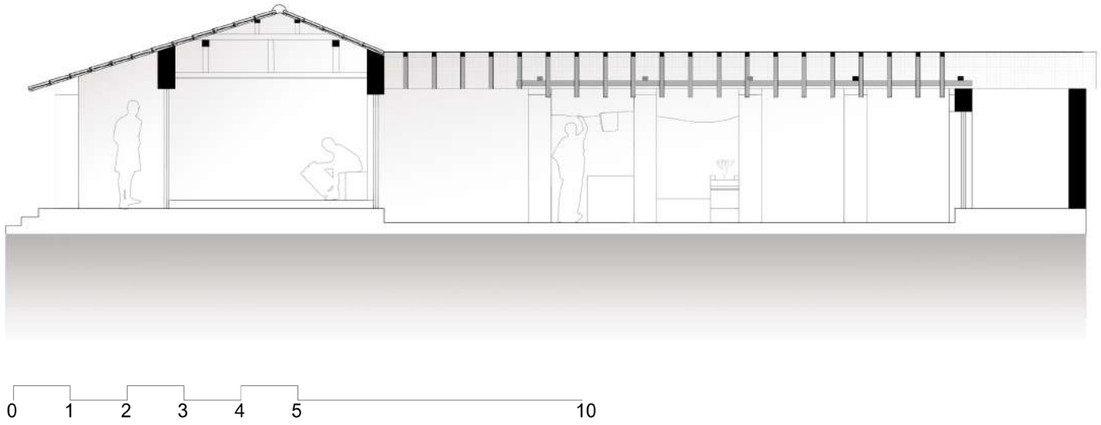


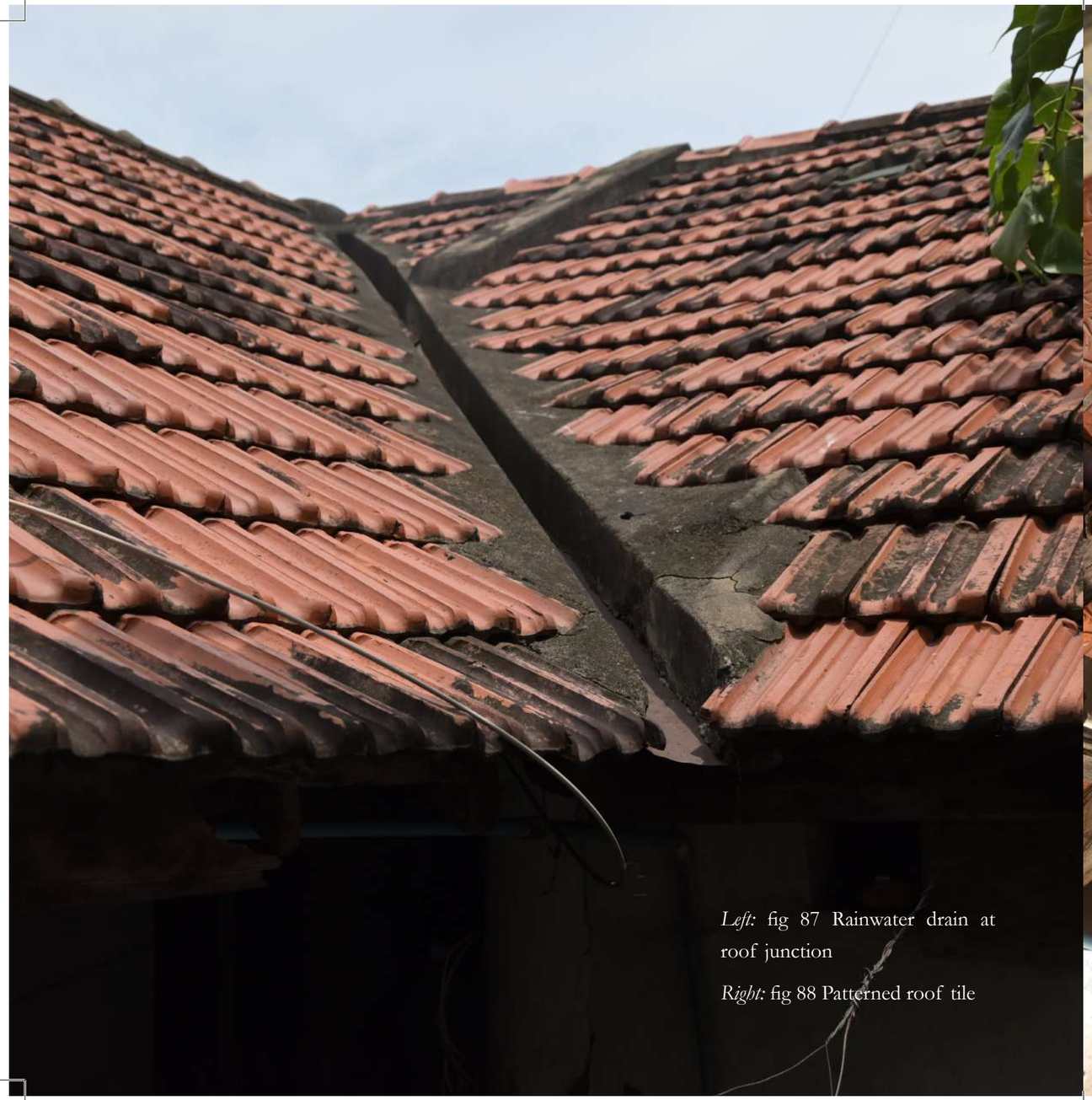
fig 82 Section AA'

Left: fig 83 Kitchen

Right: fig 84 Way to backyard

Overleaf left: fig 85 Courtyard

Overleaf right: fig 86 Water storage



Left: fig 87 Rainwater drain at roof junction

Right: fig 88 Patterned roof tile

Left: fig 89 Living room
Right: fig 90 Sketch of interior space

fig 91 *Tulasi kota* in the courtyard

Further readings

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