

As the end of May approached we got ready for the rain by buying raincoats and rubber shoes. I would have my annual argument with my mother, which stemmed from the basic difference in what we each thought was the most important criterion for a raincoat. My mother's was mainly the amount of protection it gave me; mine was avoiding the embarrassment of a raincoat that reached my toes. We generally compromised; I got to pick the color of a raincoat that touched my toes. Once the rain started in earnest, the flooded roads and gutters provided a new game. My sister, brother, and I (and the other children in the neighborhood) would have been waiting for days making newspaper boats. We would keep them on the verandah and spend hours making nicer and more extravagant ones. When the rains began we would then spend hours watching the water flowing down the road till there was enough of a stream to float our boats. We would send our simplest boats on trial runs but when we were able to float the large boats along we knew that the monsoon had finally arrived!

A very important part of getting a house ready for the rains is re-tarring the roofs. In central and southern India along the coastline, houses have pitched roofs covered with clay tiles called Mangalore tiles (after the pattern that is produced in tile factories in Mangalore). These tiles are laid on the roof and the joints at the ridges are covered with tar to prevent water from leaking into the house.

The *dambar-walla* (tar merchant) does the rounds of the houses in the villages, heating the tar in huge vats in someone's backyard or the village square. All the roofs in the area are touched up and problem areas given special attention. Most people traditionally do not pay the *dambar-walla* until after the first heavy rain, so they can be sure that the tarring is effective. Usually this results in a second visit to redo parts of the roof that are still leaking.

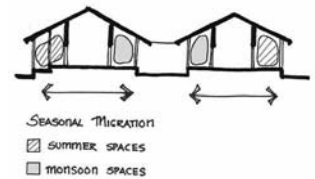
Another important preparation for the monsoon is trimming

all the trees around the house. Strong monsoon winds are capable of knocking down large healthy trees. People reduce potential damage by thinning the trees and cutting away all dead and dying branches. The trimmings are then burned in backyards while children dance around the blaze. The ashes are sometimes used as fertilizer for the gardens in which special “monsoon vegetables” are grown.

The traditional houses of southern India have deep overhangs and shaded verandahs.⁹ Some, like the wealthier *zamindaar* (landowner) houses, are usually large with inner courtyards. Other houses, like those of the farmers, are smaller and often do not have an inner courtyard. In these two kinds of houses, people adapt to the monsoon in different ways.

The larger, landowner houses have no need for major changes. Verandas encircle the inside courtyards as well as bordering the entire outside of the house. The outside verandas keep the hot summer sun from reaching the house walls but during the monsoon they get too wet to occupy. Consequently, people migrate to stay dry. Unlike the vertical migrations of Rajasthan to escape the desert sun of northern India, people in the south move horizontally through the house to avoid the rain. Activities that were conducted in outside spaces now move inside to the more protected verandas surrounding the courtyard. When the monsoon is over, the migration is reversed as the outside spaces become useful again.

However, the smaller, farmer houses in the same region sometimes lack courtyards for refuge so a way has been found to protect the outside verandas. Of course, these outside spaces get wet in the driving rain. So to protect them, most people put up temporary screens of intertwined coconut leaves tied to bamboo frames. The result, although on a smaller scale, is comparable to the *toldeo's* shifting effect in the Spanish courtyard.



The Zamindaar (landowner) House with Courtyard. (Diagram by Kavita Rodrigues). (Based on a section view by Suneeta Dasappa Kacker in *Haveli: Wooden Houses and Mansions of Gujarat* by V.S. Pramer 1989.)