UNDERSTANDING KAMPUNG MADRAS OF INDONESIA LIMITED PROMINENCE VERSUS MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE LITTLE INDIAS

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Abstract

As debates on multicultural heritage intensify across Southeast Asia, this study investigates the architectural and cultural conditions that shape the identity of Kampung Madras in Medan in comparison with Little India districts in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. While these three enclaves have undergone coordinated conservation efforts, curated streetscape enhancement, and cultural programming that reinforce their Indian heritage, Kampung Madras presents a contrasting trajectory. Its temples, shophouses, and commercial corridors reflect traces of Indian architectural tradition, yet appear fragmented due to unregulated growth, weak façade continuity, and limited municipal intervention. Intangible cultural life in Kampung Madras remains vibrant through rituals, festivals, and intergenerational practices, but these expressions operate with minimal public visibility and rely almost entirely on community initiative. In the comparative cases, similar traditions are supported, staged, and woven into city branding, enabling a stronger symbolic presence. Through qualitative analysis supported by visual documentation, this study shows that the reduced prominence of Kampung Madras is rooted in policy gaps, uneven heritage governance, and the absence of culturally sensitive planning mechanisms that have long guided the development of Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore's Little Indias. The study argues that recognizing enclaves like Kampung Madras as integral components of urban multicultural identity is essential for sustaining their architectural and cultural vitality. It suggests that heritage-sensitive zoning, inclusive conservation strategies, and participatory planning are necessary to strengthen Medan's commitment to cultural diversity and enhance the resilience of its Indian enclave.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Cultural Enclaves, Urban Heritage, Urban Policy, Urbanism and City Planning.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Little India districts have become important sites for understanding how Indian diasporic identities are expressed and sustained in Southeast Asian cities, particularly through state-led cultural representation and urban spectacle (Kong & Yeoh, 1996). Studies on Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang demonstrate that these enclaves communicate cultural heritage through the organisation of public space, commercial activities, and ritual performances that reinforce ethnic identity within the urban landscape (Rath, 2007). The historical formation of Indian enclaves in the region is also closely linked to colonial trade networks and the role of Indian business communities, which contributed to the socio-economic development of cities such as Singapore and shaped early patterns of ethnic settlement (Sandhu & Wheatley, 1989). Although this body of scholarship is well established, Indonesia's Little India has received considerably less academic attention, particularly regarding how its cultural identity is articulated within a densely multicultural environment.

Medan, Indonesia, provides an important context for exploring this contrast. The city's multicultural composition developed through the colonial plantation economy, which attracted diverse migrant groups, including Chinese, Malay, Arab, Javanese, Batak, Karo, and Indian

communities (Reid, 2010). Within this plural urban setting, the Indian community established religious institutions, commercial networks, and social organisations that shaped the area now known as Kampung Madras. Historical accounts of Kampung Madras further indicate that its development was closely tied to plantation labour migration and subsequent urban settlement patterns, which influenced both its spatial structure and socio-cultural composition (Sembiring, 2023). Despite this long-standing presence, the enclave evolved differently from the more spatially consolidated and policy-supported Indian districts found in Malaysia and Singapore.

To understand these differences, this study employs two theoretical frameworks. Bhabha's Hybridity Theory explains how cultural identities emerge through processes of interaction and negotiation within what is termed the Third Space (Bhabha, 2012). This perspective is particularly useful for interpreting how Indian identity in Kampung Madras is continuously reshaped through engagement with Indonesian, Chinese, and colonial influences. In addition, Low's concept of negotiated space highlights how social groups adapt and redefine urban environments in response to shifting economic and spatial conditions (Low, 2000). This is evident in the case of Kampung Madras, where modern commercial developments such as Sun Plaza increasingly intersect with and transform traditional neighbourhood structures.

These perspectives highlight both tangible and intangible expressions of identity in Kampung Madras. Tangible elements include temples, hybrid shophouse forms, and remnants of colonial architecture that reflect layered cultural influences rather than a singular Indian visual identity. Intangible expressions, including religious festivals, culinary practices, and the gradual linguistic shift from Tamil to Bahasa Indonesia, demonstrate both cultural continuity and processes of assimilation that are more pronounced than in the Indian districts of Malaysia and Singapore (Rath, 2007). Furthermore, Kampung Madras lacks the spatial coherence, pedestrian-oriented design, and formalised cultural zoning that characterise areas such as Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur and Serangoon Road in Singapore. The absence of structured heritage policies and branding initiatives contributes to the relatively low visibility of Indian identity within Medan's broader multicultural urban fabric.

Based on these observations, this paper examines why Kampung Madras is less prominent than the Little India districts of Malaysia and Singapore. The analysis focuses on how architectural characteristics, cultural practices, and spatial dynamics shape and negotiate Indian cultural identity within Medan's evolving multiethnic context.

B. METHOD

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the spatial and cultural dynamics of Medan's Little India, multiple data collection methods were employed:

1. Field Observations: Direct observations were conducted to examine urban spaces, architectural features, and cultural rituals, focusing on how both physical and social dimensions shape the identity of the district.
2. Photographic Documentation: Key spaces, including temples, shophouses, and public areas, were photographed to visually capture the integration of cultural identity and urban form.
3. Secondary Sources: A comprehensive review of existing literature, including maps, academic journals, and urban planning documents, provided historical and contextual insights.

This study employs a comparative analytical framework to examine the spatial and cultural dynamics of Kampung Madras, Indonesia in relation to three other Indian enclaves: Serangoon Road in Singapore, Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur, and Queen Street in Penang. The comparison highlights the varying influence of governmental policies, community participation, and urban development on the preservation and transformation of cultural identity. By situating the Kampung Madras, Indonesia case within these regional contexts, the

research identifies both shared and distinct strategies of cultural sustainability in multicultural urban environments.

The analytical framework differentiates between tangible and intangible dimensions of cultural identity to assess how Indian heritage manifests within Kampung Madras. Tangible aspects involve physical and spatial expressions of culture, whereas intangible aspects pertain to lived practices, beliefs, and social interactions that sustain identity across generations.

Table 1 Analytical Framework for Tangible and Intangible Dimensions of Cultural Identity in Kampung Madras

Category	Aspect	Analytical Focus in Kampung Madras
Tangible Aspects	Architectural Elements	Presence of Indian-inspired motifs in temples, shophouses, and public buildings that blend colonial, indigenous, and Indian aesthetics.
	Street Layout, Signage, and Gates	Configuration of streets and communal areas that facilitate social interaction and multicultural coexistence.
	Policy (Physical Environment)	General planning and heritage-related policies that influence the preservation, transformation, or visibility of architectural and spatial elements in the enclave.
Intangible Aspects	Cultural Practices and Rituals	Observation of festivals such as Diwali and Thaipusam as inclusive community events within a diverse urban population.
	Cultural Hybridity	Adaptation of Indian cuisine, attire, and social customs in response to local influences and shared daily practices.
	Policy	General cultural and community-related policies that affect the support, visibility, and continuity of intangible cultural practices within the enclave.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analytical synthesis of tangible and intangible cultural elements.

Through qualitative observation, interviews, and spatial analysis, this framework enables an integrated understanding of how Kampung Madras embodies both cultural persistence and adaptation amid the pressures of urban modernization and social diversity.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Kampung Madras, Indonesia

Kampung Madras, located in the urban core of Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, represents one of the oldest Indian settlements in the country. Its origins can be traced to the Dutch colonial period in the nineteenth century, when South Indian, particularly Tamil, labourers were recruited and transported to East Sumatra to work in plantation economies. These workers were primarily employed in tobacco and rubber estates under large colonial enterprises such as the Deli Maatschappij, which played a central role in shaping Medan's early urban and economic development (Reid, 2010). Over time, these migrant communities, consisting of both Hindu and Muslim Tamils, established a relatively stable settlement that later developed into what is now known as Kampung Madras. The formation of religious and social institutions, including temples, mosques, and community organisations, reinforced collective identity and cultural continuity within the enclave. One of the most prominent landmarks, the Sri Mariamman Temple, constructed in the late nineteenth century, continues to function as a central node of religious and cultural life.

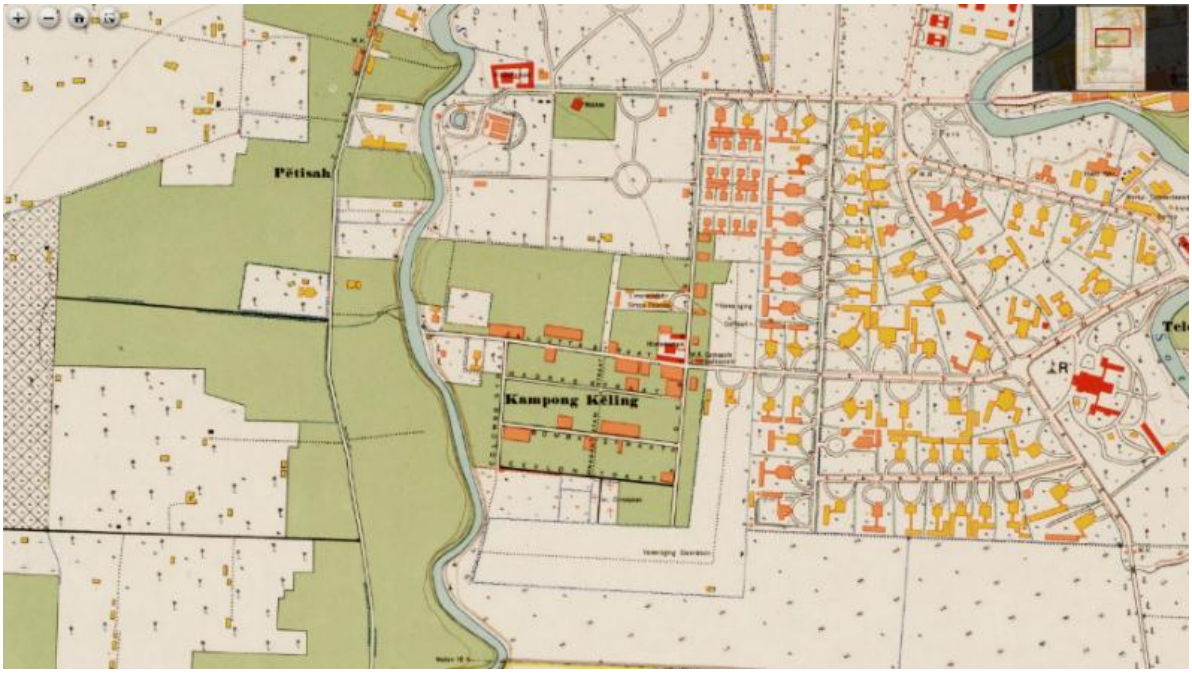

Figure 1. Kampung Madras or Kampung Keling during the early to mid-twentieth (Leiden University Libraries Digital Collection, no date).

During the early to mid-twentieth century, the Indian community gradually diversified beyond plantation labour into trade, small-scale commerce, and religious leadership. Although their population remained relatively smaller compared to other ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Javanese, and Batak, the community sustained its cultural identity through ritual practices, religious festivals, and everyday social interactions (Reid, 2010). Following Indonesian independence in 1945, Kampung Madras became increasingly integrated into the broader socio-economic structure of Medan while maintaining distinct cultural characteristics. The coexistence of multiple religious structures within close proximity reflects the historically plural and multiethnic nature of the city.

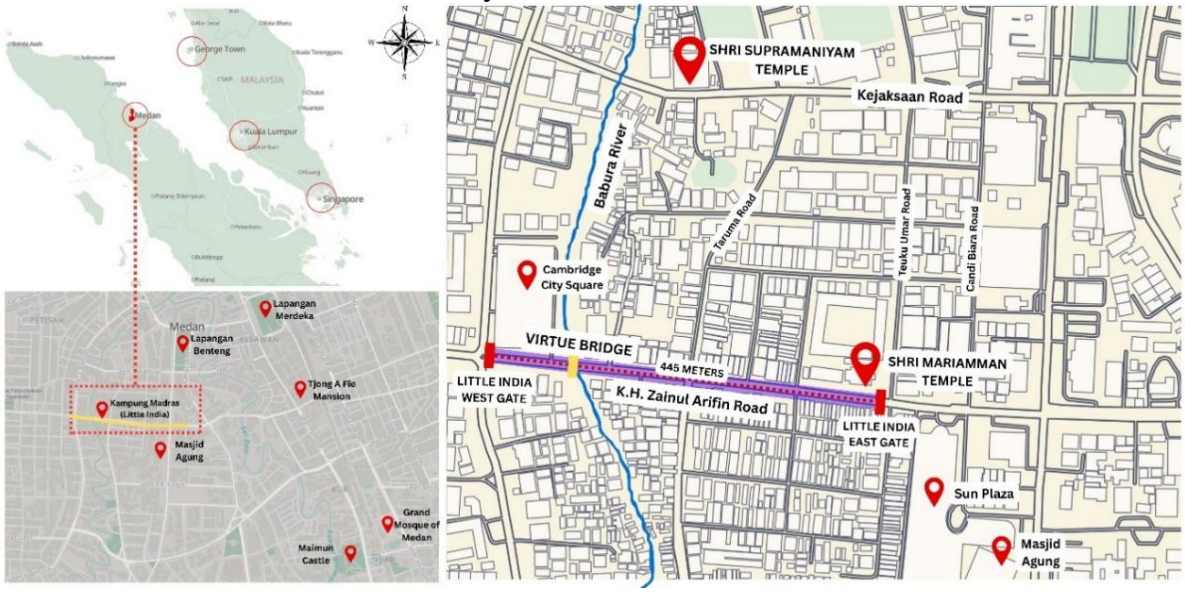

Figure 2. Little India of Medan, Indonesia. The base map data is sourced from CadMapper

In the contemporary period, Kampung Madras, often referred to as Medan's Little India, functions as both a residential and commercial district. Situated along Jalan KH Zainul Arifin and surrounded by major urban corridors, the area serves as an important centre for Indian

cultural and economic activity. The neighbourhood accommodates a diverse population, including Tamil Hindus, Indian Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians, whose religious institutions contribute to its distinct spatial identity. Architecturally, the area presents a hybrid urban form, combining colonial-era shophouses, modern commercial developments, and traditional religious buildings. This layered spatial character reflects broader processes of cultural negotiation and hybridity within urban environments (Bhabha, 2012). At the same time, everyday practices such as religious rituals, food culture, and street-level commerce illustrate how cultural identity is continuously reproduced within shared public spaces, aligning with the concept of negotiated urban space (Low, 2000).

Unlike more formally planned and state-promoted ethnic districts in Southeast Asia, the development of Kampung Madras has been largely organic, with limited institutional intervention or cultural branding. In contrast, studies of urban cultural representation demonstrate how state-supported events and spatial strategies can enhance the visibility of cultural identity within cities (Kong, 1997; Rath, 2007). The relatively modest visibility of Kampung Madras therefore reflects not the absence of cultural identity, but rather a different mode of spatial and social production shaped by historical, economic, and political conditions specific to Medan.

2. Tangible Aspects of Cultural Identity

a. Architectural Elements: Temples, Shophouses, and Public Spaces

1). Temples

Religious architecture in Indian enclaves demonstrates how diasporic communities preserve cultural identity through spatial and material expression. In Kampung Madras, Medan, religious buildings function as key cultural, ritual, and social anchors. The Sri Mariamman Temple, constructed in 1884 during the Dutch colonial plantation period, is widely recognised as the oldest Hindu temple in Medan and continues to serve as a focal point for major religious festivals and community activities. Built collectively by early Tamil plantation labourers brought to East Sumatra in the late nineteenth century, the temple reflects the formation of a diasporic community grounded in shared religious practices and collective identity (Reid, 2010). Architecturally, the temple is characterised by a vertically articulated “gopuram” rising above the entrance gateway, decorated with vividly coloured sculptural depictions of Hindu deities arranged in hierarchical tiers. This is complemented by a linear axial layout leading toward the inner sanctum (“garbhagriha”), as well as a ceremonial hall (“mandapam”) and enclosed courtyard used for ritual processions. These elements reflect the adaptation of South Indian “Dravidian” temple architecture within a diasporic urban setting, where built form sustains cultural memory and religious continuity (Rath, 2007).

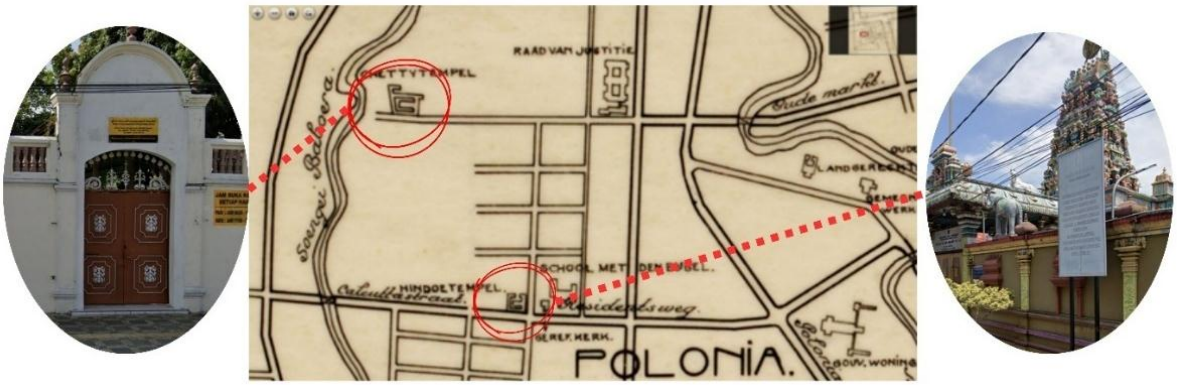

Figure 3. Shri Supramaniyam Temple and Shri Mariamman Temple from left to right shows in the colonial maps (Leiden University Libraries Digital Collection, no date).

Approximately 600 meters to the north stands the Shri Supramaniyam Temple, founded in 1892 by the Nattukottai Chettiar community, a Tamil mercantile group active in regional trade networks across Southeast Asia. Compared to the Sri Mariamman Temple, its architectural composition is more compact and inward-oriented, with a smaller-scale "gopuram" and a stronger emphasis on the sanctum dedicated to Lord Murugan. Historical colonial maps from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries identify these structures as "Hindoe Temple" and "Chetty Temple," indicating their early establishment and institutional significance within Medan's colonial urban system. The later construction of Gurdwara Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1955 introduced Sikh religious architecture into the area, characterised by a central prayer hall and dome-like roof form. In addition, Masjid Jamik (established 1887) and Masjid Ghaudiyah (established 1918) represent early Tamil Muslim communities, featuring elements such as "minarets," arched openings, and layered roof structures. Together, these buildings form a dense multireligious architectural landscape within a relatively compact urban area, reflecting broader patterns of plural urban society in Southeast Asia (Reid, 2010).

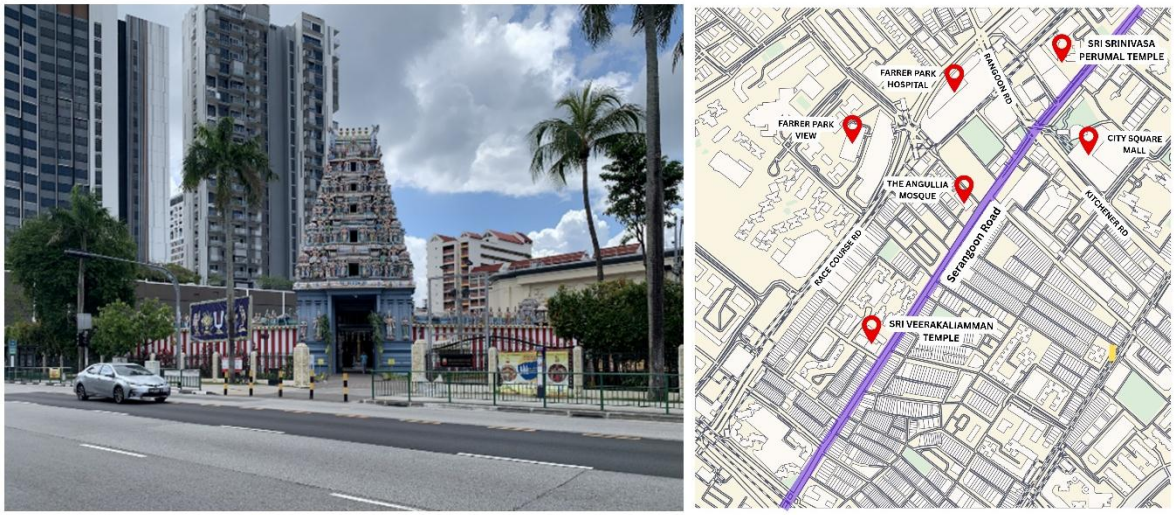

Figure 4. Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple, Singapore. (Chainwit, 2025. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Little India SG-Sri Nivasa Perumal Temple Singapore ஸ்ரீ ஸ்ரீநிவாசப்பெருமாள் கோவில (2025)-img 20.jpg (3754×2815)). The base map data is sourced from CadMapper.

Comparable dynamics can be observed in other Southeast Asian cities, although often shaped by stronger institutional frameworks. In Singapore's Little India, major temples such as Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple (originally established in 1855 and expanded in 1966) and Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple (nineteenth century) are strategically located along Serangoon Road, forming prominent visual and spatial anchors within the district. Architecturally, these temples are distinguished by highly elaborate and vertically dominant "gopurams," intricate façade ornamentation, and clearly defined processional routes that extend into surrounding streets. Their spatial prominence is reinforced through state-led heritage and identity construction strategies, where urban spectacle and symbolic representation play key roles in shaping national and cultural identity (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Kong, 1997). The establishment of formal conservation frameworks since the mid-twentieth century further ensures the preservation of these architectural elements and their integration into Singapore's planned urban landscape (Blackburn & Tan, 2015).

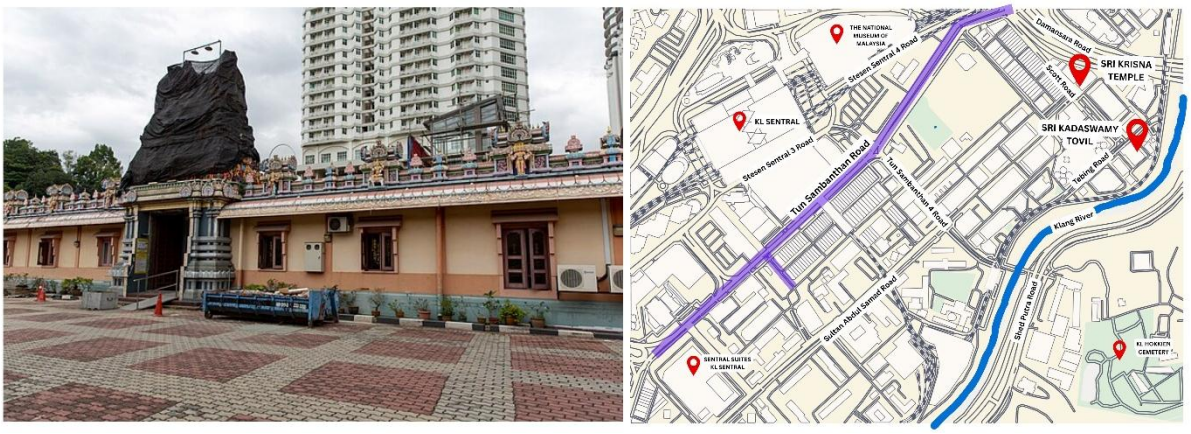

Figure 5. Sri Kandaswamy Kovil, Kuala Lumpur. (Shesmax, 2019. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kuala_Lumpur._Sri_Kandaswamy_Kovil._North_East._2019-12-13_17-53-15.jpg). The base map data is sourced from CadMapper.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Brickfields district reflects a different trajectory, where Indian cultural identity developed alongside rapid urban expansion during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Temples such as Sri Kandaswamy Kovil, completed in its current form in 1902 and later expanded, are located slightly off the main commercial spine, Jalan Tun Sambanthan. Unlike the highly formalised spatial arrangement in Singapore, religious buildings in Brickfields are interwoven with transportation infrastructure, commercial strips, and mixed-use developments. The streetscape is characterised by linear shop rows, signage-dominated façades, and vehicular-oriented circulation patterns. This reflects the transformation of Kuala Lumpur into a "globalising city-region," where infrastructure development, economic growth, and spatial restructuring influence the organisation and visibility of ethnic enclaves (Bunnell et al., 2002).

2). Shophouses

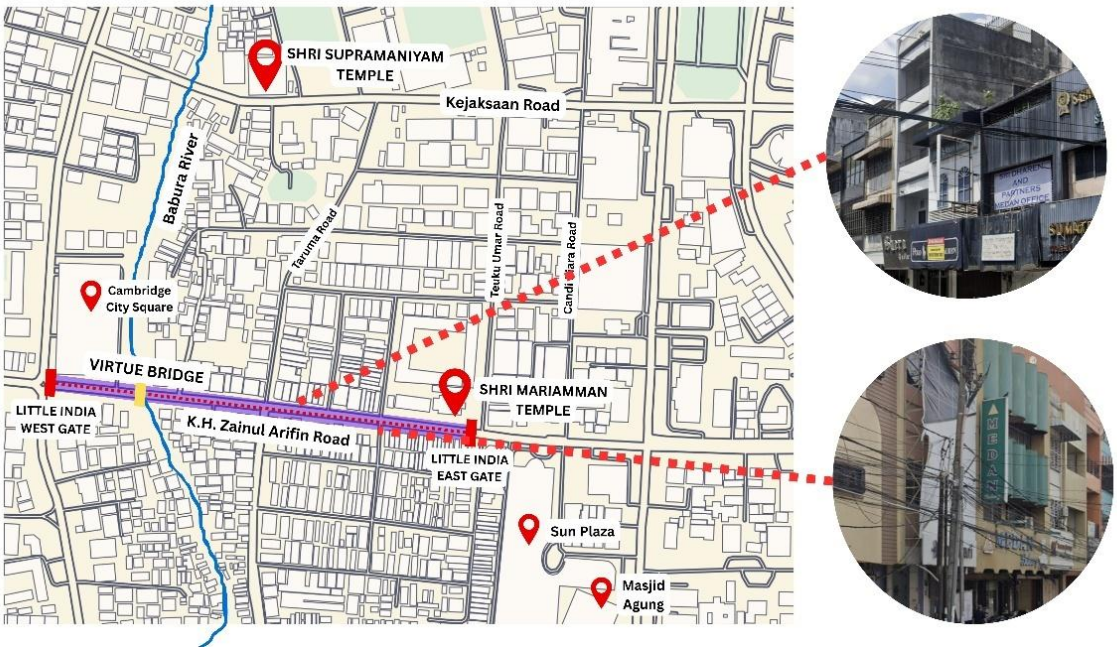

Figure 7. Shophouses on Kampung Madras, Medan

Shophouses across Indian enclaves further represent layered histories of migration, commerce, and cultural exchange. In Kampung Madras, these buildings, largely developed during the late colonial and early postcolonial periods, typically consist of two- to three-storey

structures with narrow façades (approximately 4–6 meters wide), deep interior plans, and continuous street-facing verandas known as "five-foot ways." Architectural features such as plaster ornamentation, timber shutters, ventilation openings, and repetitive structural bays reflect adaptations of European colonial building typologies to tropical climatic conditions and local cultural practices. The ground floor is predominantly used for commercial activities, often opening directly onto the street, while upper floors serve residential purposes. This mixed-use configuration creates a dense, active streetscape where economic, social, and cultural interactions occur simultaneously (Rath, 2007).

In contrast, Singapore demonstrates a more regulated conservation approach, where shophouses are preserved with consistent façade treatments, controlled colour schemes, and strict building guidelines, resulting in a cohesive and highly legible urban identity (Blackburn & Tan, 2015). Kuala Lumpur adopts a more flexible model, where modifications, extensions, and redevelopment have produced a more heterogeneous urban fabric, reflecting ongoing processes of urban transformation (Bunnell et al., 2002).

3). Public spaces

Public spaces within Indian enclaves function as important sites of cultural expression shaped by both community practices and urban governance. In Kampung Madras, temple forecourts, sidewalks, and adjacent streets are regularly transformed during major festivals such as Thaipusam and Deepavali into temporary ceremonial spaces filled with processions, offerings, and communal gatherings. These spaces are informal and adaptable, lacking fixed spatial boundaries and evolving according to the scale of activities. This reflects processes of "negotiated space," in which cultural practices continuously adapt to existing urban conditions (Low, 2000). In contrast, Singapore's Little India features more structured public spaces, where pedestrian circulation, designated gathering areas, and infrastructural support systems are formally integrated into urban planning strategies (Kong & Yeoh, 1996).

Overall, Kampung Madras is characterised by a concentration of religious and socio-cultural buildings developed between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, reflecting the layered histories of Tamil Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities in Medan. The Sri Mariamman Temple (1884), as the oldest Hindu temple in the city, remains a key visual and cultural landmark, distinguished by its vertical "gopuram," vibrant ornamentation, and central spatial role within the neighbourhood. These architectural and spatial characteristics illustrate how cultural identity is sustained through both physical form and everyday practice. Such dynamics align with broader theoretical perspectives on "hybridity" and "Third Space," where identity is continuously produced through interaction within multicultural urban environments (Bhabha, 2012; Low, 2000).

Table 2 Architectural Elements Comparison in the Four Indian Enclave Corridors

Category	Kampung Madras (Medan)	Serangoon Road (Singapore)	Brickfields – Jalan Tun Sambanthan (Kuala Lumpur)	Queen Street (Penang)
Key Temples/ Religious Buildings	Sri Mariamman Temple (1884); Shri Supramaniyam Temple (1892); Gurdwara Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1955);	Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple (1855; expanded 1966); Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple (19th century). Strong Hindu presence	Sri Kandaswamy Kovil (completed 1902; later expanded). Religious buildings located near	Sri Mahamariamman Temple (1801; expanded 1833). Key historic Hindu landmark within multicultural urban setting.

	Masjid Jamik (1887); Masjid Ghaudiyah (1918). Dense multireligious enclave (Hindu, Sikh, Tamil Muslim).	along main corridor.	but not directly dominating main street.	
Architectural Style of Temples	South Indian "Dravidian" style: prominent "gopuram," vivid iconography, sculptural reliefs; axial layout with "garbhagriha" and "mandapam." Sikh gurdwara with dome and axial hall; mosques with "minarets" and layered roofs.	Highly elaborate "Dravidian" temples with tall, vertically dominant "gopurams," intricate façade detailing, and strong visual presence along street axis.	Combination of "Dravidian" and regional Tamil influences; temples less visually dominant due to surrounding urban infrastructure and commercial development.	"Dravidian" temple form with historic masonry construction; visually prominent due to heritage conservation context.
Significance of Temples to Streetscape	Act as primary spatial anchors; religious activities extend into surrounding lanes; shape daily and festival-based spatial patterns.	Strong visual and symbolic landmarks; integrated into planned streetscape; support organised festival routes and urban identity.	Symbolically important but spatially secondary; streetscape identity shaped more by commercial corridor and infrastructure.	Key landmark within heritage streetscape; contributes to cultural identity and tourism narrative.
Shophouse Characteristics	2–3 storeys; narrow façades (±4–6 m), deep plans; colonial + local adaptations; plaster ornamentation, timber shutters,	Highly regulated conservation; consistent façades, controlled colours, decorative plasterwork, timber louvres; strong visual coherence.	Mixed styles (colonial, modern, regional); frequent modifications and extensions; more	Historic shophouses with strong conservation control; cohesive façade treatment and preserved architectural details.

	ventilation openings; many modern alterations.		heterogeneous urban fabric.	
Shophouse Use	Mixed-use: ground floor commercial, upper residential; active street engagement and spillover activities.	Retail, cultural businesses, and tourism-oriented uses; regulated frontage and signage.	Commercial diversity: retail, services, and mixed-use functions; adaptive reuse common.	Retail and cultural commerce; contributes to heritage-based economic activity.
Public Spaces	Informal and flexible; temple forecourts, streets, and sidewalks used during festivals (Thaipusam, Deepavali); adaptable spatial use.	Structured and planned; pedestrian networks, designated gathering areas, and organised public spaces integrated into urban design.	Semi-structured; combination of streets, sidewalks, and temple areas; influenced by traffic and infrastructure.	Pedestrian-oriented heritage streets; active street life with strong cultural and commercial interaction.
Public Space Governance	Informal; shaped by community practices and religious cycles.	Highly regulated; managed through planning and heritage frameworks.	Hybrid; influenced by both planning and organic development.	Conservation-driven; governed by heritage management frameworks.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature review.

b. Street Layout, Signage, and Gates

The streetscape in Kampung Madras reflects a layered historical and cultural narrative shaped by colonial development and diasporic settlement patterns. Narrow streets lined with mixed-use shophouses create an intimate, human-scaled environment that supports pedestrian activity and street-level commerce. The absence of formal street furniture and clearly defined sidewalks results in a semi-informal urban fabric, where vendors, vehicles, and pedestrians negotiate shared space dynamically. This condition reflects the "social production of space," in which everyday practices continuously reshape spatial use and meaning (Low, 2000). Vegetation, including scattered street trees and potted plants, appears irregularly distributed, softening the streetscape while providing limited shading. Streets and open areas are frequently appropriated for religious processions and festivals such as Thaipusam and Deepavali, demonstrating how cultural practices actively transform public space into temporary ritual landscapes (Rath, 2007). Similar observations in Southeast Asian cities show that everyday street practices, including informal vending and temporary spatial appropriation, play a crucial role in shaping urban experience and cultural expression (Zainudin et al., 2016). Such adaptive and informal spatial configurations are also identified in contemporary urban studies as characteristic of developing cities, where pedestrian environments and spatial organisation are

shaped more by everyday practices than by formal planning systems (Noraffendi & Rahman, 2020).

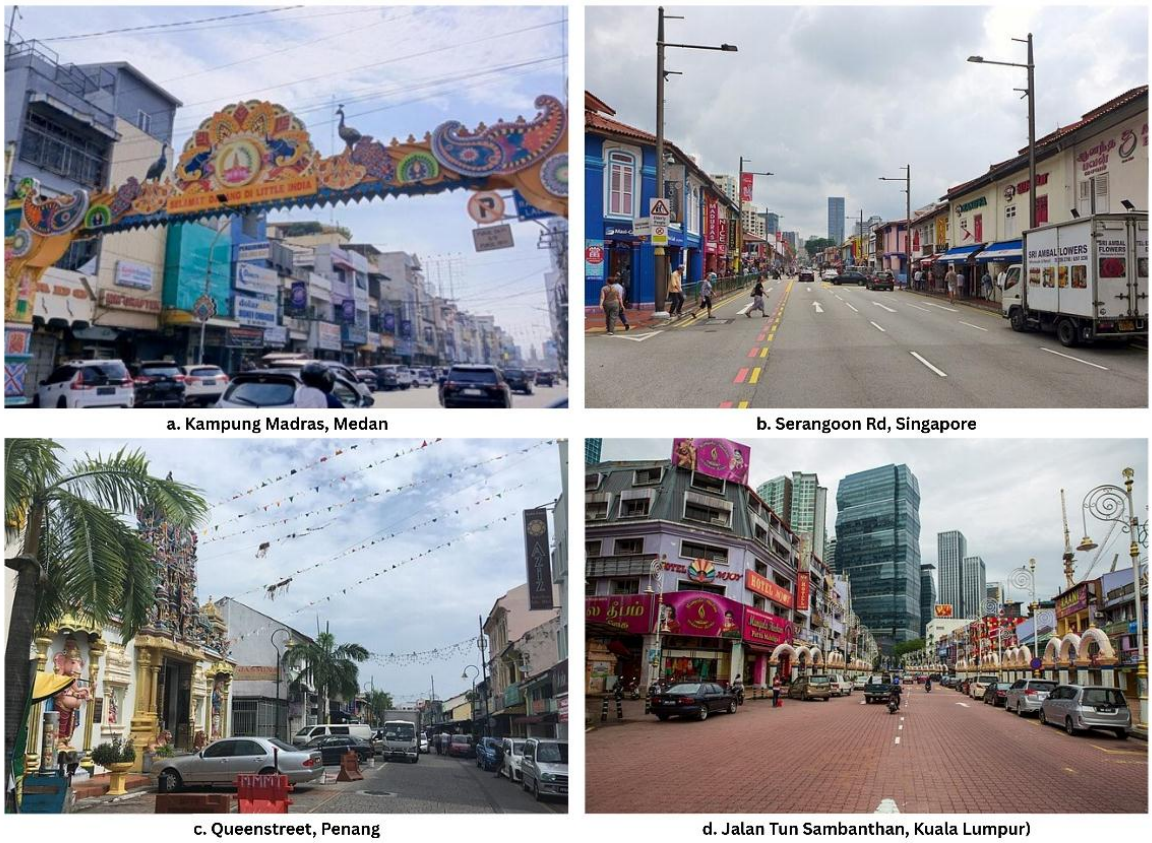

Figure 8. Streetscapes difference between Four Indian Enclave Corridors

a. (Siregar, 2023. https://akcdn.detik.net.id/community/media/visual/2023/10/04/gapura-kampung-little-india-di-kawasan-jalan-zainul-arifin-medan-farid-achyadi-siregardetiksumut_169.jpeg?w=700&q=90)
b. (Christophe25, 2018. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lebuh_Queen_in_Georgetown.jpg)
c. (Shesmax, 2019. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kuala_Lumpur._Brickfields._2019-12-14_09-39-24.jpg)
d. (Pangalau, 2023. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Town_2023_20.jpg)

In contrast, Serangoon Road in Singapore presents a highly regulated and structured streetscape shaped by long-term planning and conservation policies. The presence of continuous “five-foot way” arcades, typically around 1.5 meters in width, provides sheltered pedestrian circulation, while coordinated streetscape elements such as lighting, signage control, and façade uniformity contribute to a coherent visual identity. These spatial characteristics reflect broader strategies of cultural representation and urban spectacle, where built form and public space are deliberately managed to reinforce identity and visibility (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Kong, 1997). The establishment of formal conservation frameworks since the mid-twentieth century has ensured consistency in streetscape design and heritage presentation, integrating cultural identity into national urban planning strategies (Blackburn & Tan, 2015).

Jalan Tun Sambanthan in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, exhibits a streetscape shaped by rapid urbanisation and infrastructure development during the late twentieth and early twenty-

first centuries. Sidewalks are generally wider, ranging from approximately 2 to 3 meters, accommodating commercial spillover such as outdoor dining, street vending, and temporary markets. However, the continuity and quality of pedestrian infrastructure vary. The streetscape is characterised by a mix of historic shophouses, modern commercial developments, signage-dominated façades, and transportation infrastructure. This heterogeneous urban form reflects the transformation of Kuala Lumpur into a "globalising city-region," where spatial organisation is influenced by economic growth, mobility networks, and metropolitan expansion (Bunnell et al., 2002). Empirical findings from Brickfields further demonstrate that heritage-led redevelopment and conservation initiatives have enhanced the area's commercial attractiveness and urban image, while simultaneously facing challenges such as congestion, limited pedestrian infrastructure, and pressures from ongoing urbanisation (Thirunavukkarasu & Mat Radzuan, 2021). The walkability and street design in Kuala Lumpur are shaped by the interaction between formal planning frameworks and informal street activities, producing uneven yet dynamic pedestrian environments.

Queen Street in Penang, located within the historic core of George Town, presents a more cohesive and pedestrian-oriented streetscape shaped by heritage conservation practices. Narrow streets, continuous covered walkways ("five-foot ways"), and active ground-floor commercial uses create a dense and socially vibrant environment. The spatial configuration supports close interaction between economic, cultural, and everyday activities, reinforcing the role of the street as both a commercial corridor and a social space. Compared to Kampung Madras, the streetscape in Penang appears more visually consistent and formally organised, reflecting stronger institutional control and heritage management (Rath, 2007; Nas, 2009).

Figure 9. Sidewalks Condition on Kampung Madras, Medan

Sidewalk configuration plays a significant role in shaping street life across these enclaves. In Kampung Madras, sidewalks are relatively narrow, typically between 1 and 2 meters, and frequently function as extensions of commercial activity, with pedestrian movement often spilling into the roadway during peak periods and festivals. This reflects a flexible and adaptive use of space consistent with the concept of "negotiated space," where boundaries between public and private domains are continuously redefined (Low, 2000). In contrast, Singapore's "five-foot way" system provides continuous, sheltered pedestrian circulation, supporting both movement and small-scale commercial activities within a regulated framework (Blackburn & Tan, 2015). Kuala Lumpur offers wider but less consistent

pedestrian infrastructure due to incremental urban development (Bunnell et al., 2002), while Penang maintains traditional arcade systems that support both pedestrian flow and commercial interaction within a conserved historic setting (Nas, 2009).

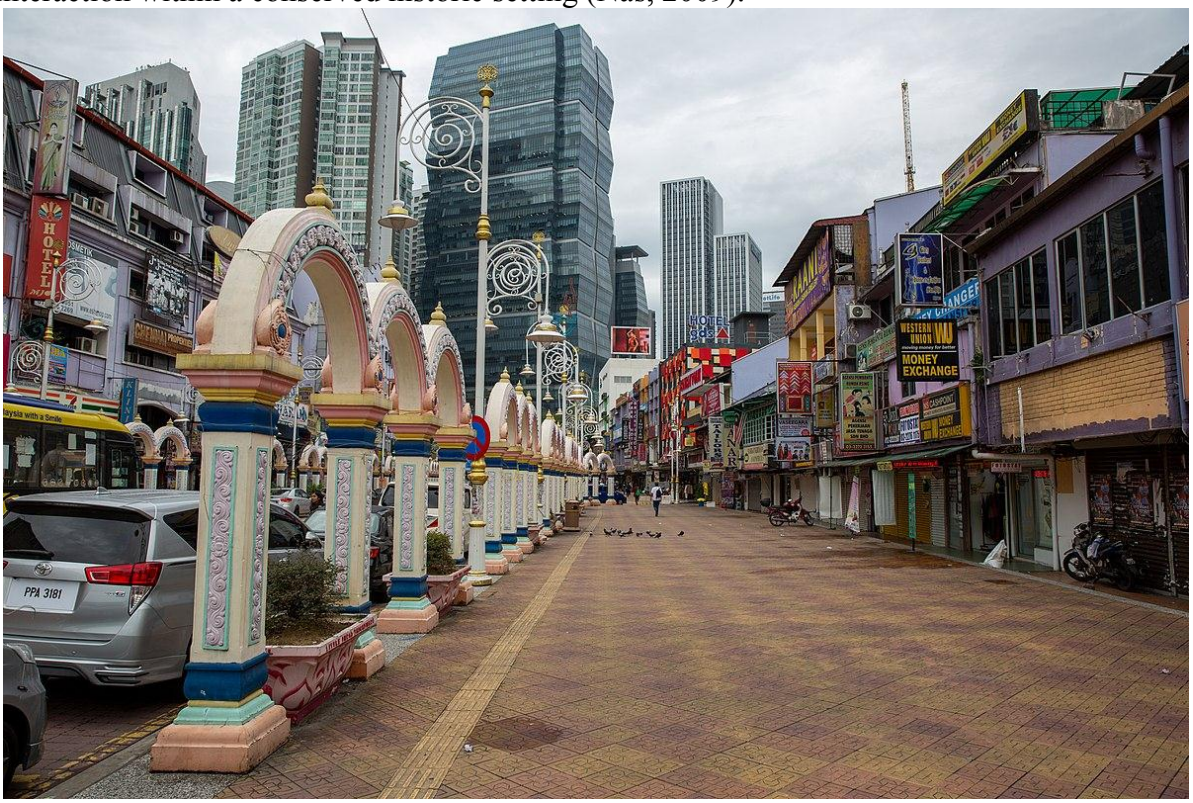

Figure 10. Wide and vibrant sidewalk at Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur (Shesmax, 2019. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kuala_Lumpur._Brickfields._2019-12-14_09-40-00.jpg)

Street furniture in Kampung Madras is largely informal and temporary, consisting of movable seating, vendor carts, and makeshift shelters that are adapted to daily needs and festival events. This reflects a bottom-up spatial practice where users actively shape the environment. In contrast, Singapore integrates standardised and durable street furniture—such as benches, lighting, and signage—into a coordinated streetscape design, reinforcing a cohesive urban identity (Blackburn & Tan, 2015). In Kuala Lumpur, particularly in Brickfields, streetscapes reflect a hybrid condition shaped by the interaction between formal planning frameworks and informal commercial activities, where pedestrian flows, shopfront adaptations, and spatial negotiations contribute to a dynamic but uneven urban environment (Bunnell et al., 2002; Thirunavukkarasu & Mat Radzuan, 2021). This condition is comparable to findings in George Town, where linguistic and spatial landscapes reveal how multicultural interactions, tourism, and postcolonial urban development shape the visibility of cultural identities in public space (Jiao & Singh, 2024).

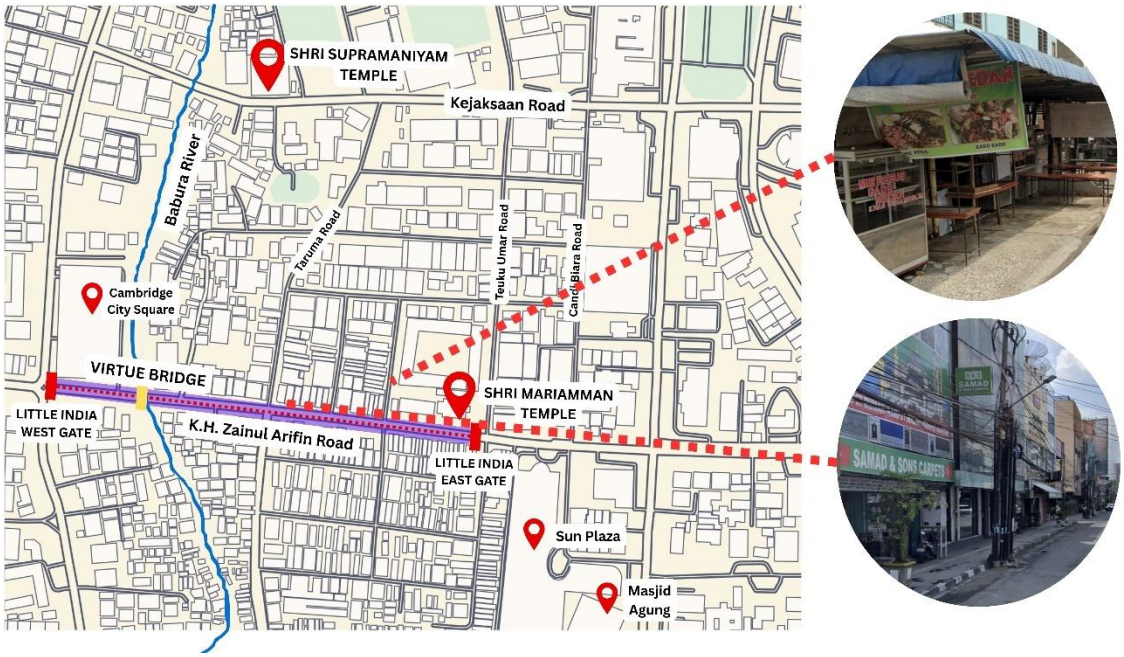

Figure 11. Street Furniture on Kampung Madras, Medan

Figure 12. Street Furniture of Serangoon Road, Singapore (Pang, 2007. Serangoon Road, information board: close-up [1])

Entrance gateways further illustrate differences in spatial expression and identity. In Kampung Madras, gateway structures are relatively modest in scale, typically around 3 to 4 meters in height, functioning primarily as symbolic markers rather than dominant visual features. Their decorative elements reference Indian cultural motifs but remain integrated within the surrounding urban fabric. In contrast, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur feature larger and more visually prominent gateways that serve as focal points within the streetscape, reflecting deliberate strategies of cultural branding and urban representation (Kong, 1997; Bunnell et al., 2002).

Figure 13. The uniqueness of gates design and scale across areas

a. (Siregar, 2023. detikSumut. https://akcdn.detik.net.id/community/media/visual/2023/10/04/gapura-kampung-little-india-di-kawasan-jalan-zainul-arifin-medan-farid-achyadi-siregardetiksumut_169.jpeg?w=700&q=90)
b. (Pangalau, 2023. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Town_2023_19.jpg)
c. (Angys, 2022. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Torana_Gate,_Kuala_Lumpur_(220714)_01.jpg)

Overall, Kampung Madras demonstrates a streetscape characterised by informality, adaptability, and strong community use. While these qualities support vibrant everyday life and cultural continuity, they result in a less visually cohesive and formally structured environment compared to the more regulated and strategically designed enclaves in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang. This difference highlights how varying levels of planning, governance, and institutional intervention shape the spatial visibility and perceived prominence of ethnic enclaves within Southeast Asian cities (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Low, 2000).

Table 3 Streetscape Comparison in the Four Indian Enclave Corridors

Aspect	Kampung Madras (Medan)	Serangoon Road (Singapore)	Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur)	Queen Street (Penang)
Streetscape Character	Narrow, human-scaled streets with mixed-use shophouses; semi-informal environment; irregular vegetation; flexible use of space for daily activities and	Highly regulated and structured streetscape; continuous "five-foot way" arcades (~1.5 m); coordinated lighting, signage, and façade control;	Heterogeneous streetscape shaped by urbanisation; mix of historic shophouses, modern developments, and infrastructure; signage-dominated façades; active	Cohesive heritage streetscape; narrow streets with continuous "five-foot ways"; strong pedestrian orientation; active ground-floor uses; high

	religious festivals (Thaipusam, Deepavali).	strong visual coherence.	commercial corridors.	social interaction.
Sidewalk Width & Use	Narrow sidewalks (~1–2 m); often used as extensions of shops; pedestrian flow frequently spills into roadway, especially during festivals; flexible and adaptive use.	Continuous sheltered arcades (~1.5 m); support pedestrian movement and small-scale retail within a regulated system.	Wider sidewalks (~2–3 m); accommodate outdoor dining, street vending, and temporary markets; continuity varies.	"Five-foot ways" (~1.5 m); support pedestrian flow and small-scale commerce; preserved as part of heritage streetscape.
Street Furniture	Informal and temporary: movable seating, vendor carts, makeshift shelters; adapted to daily use and events; bottom-up spatial arrangement.	Standardised and integrated street furniture: benches, lighting, signage; consistent design reinforcing urban identity.	Hybrid condition: combination of formal and informal elements; varies across locations; reflects ongoing urban change.	Heritage-sensitive elements: traditional benches, signage, and small-scale installations aligned with conservation context.
Signage	Predominantly Bahasa Indonesia; Tamil appears mainly in temples and religious contexts; less visually standardised.	Controlled and consistent signage; integrated into regulated streetscape; supports cultural identity and legibility.	Mixed signage system; commercial and cultural signage coexist; reflects diverse urban functions.	Multilingual signage integrated with heritage environment; contributes to cultural identity and tourism.
Indian-Style Gates	Modest-scale gateways (~3–4 m); decorative motifs referencing Indian culture; function as local identity markers rather than dominant landmarks.	Larger and visually prominent gateways (~5–6 m); integrated with streetscape design; sometimes enhanced during festivals; strong symbolic presence.	Prominent and monumental gateways (including large ceremonial gates); function as major visual identity features within the corridor.	Moderately scaled gateways (~4–5 m); designed to align with heritage character; less visually dominant than KL and Singapore.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature review.

c. Building Heritage, Government, and Policy

Heritage policies and government regulations significantly shape the visibility, preservation, and transformation of architectural elements within Indian enclaves in Southeast

Asia. Kampung Madras in Medan exhibits a rich Hindu and Indian architectural legacy, yet the policy environment surrounding its tangible heritage remains relatively weak. Kampung Madras has not been formally designated as a protected heritage zone under national or municipal regulation. Nevertheless, several buildings, including the Shri Mariamman Temple (1884), Shri Supramaniyam Temple (1892), Masjid Jamik (1887), Masjid Ghaudiyah (1918), and Khalsa School, have been recognized as cultural heritage assets under SK Wali Kota Medan No. 433/28.K/X/2021. Indonesia's primary regulatory framework, including Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, provides mechanisms for heritage identification and protection, yet implementation remains uneven at the local level. Research on heritage governance in Indonesia highlights issues such as weak institutional coordination, inconsistent evaluation systems, and limited integration between research and policy implementation, which reduce the effectiveness of conservation efforts (Lubis et al., 2024). The Medan City Spatial Plan 2020–2035 acknowledges the cultural importance of Kampung Madras but lacks detailed architectural conservation strategies. Consequently, historic buildings remain vulnerable to modification and redevelopment. In this context, heritage preservation is largely sustained through community participation and religious institutions rather than strong institutional governance (Rath, 2007).

In contrast, Serangoon Road in Singapore benefits from a highly institutionalised conservation system. The Urban Redevelopment Authority Conservation Master Plan designates Little India as a protected Conservation Area, where strict regulations govern façade treatment, building materials, colour schemes, and the preservation of "five-foot ways." Additional legal protection is provided under the Planning Act and Preservation of Monuments Act, safeguarding key structures such as Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple. Enforcement is supported by monitoring systems, penalties, and financial incentives. These mechanisms reflect a broader state-led approach in which urban conservation policy plays a central role in preserving historical and cultural heritage while integrating it into modern urban development (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Kong, 1997; Blackburn & Tan, 2015; Yuen, 1996; URA, 2023).

Jalan Tun Sambanthan in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, operates within a more selective heritage framework. Malaysia's National Heritage Act 2005 provides a legal basis for protection, yet only a limited number of buildings in the area are formally gazetted. As a result, many historic structures remain exposed to redevelopment pressures. Planning initiatives such as the Brickfields Heritage and Culture Master Plan aim to promote adaptive reuse and cultural tourism, but implementation remains inconsistent. This reflects broader urban dynamics in Kuala Lumpur, where rapid metropolitan growth and infrastructure development influence spatial transformation and limit conservation effectiveness (Bunnell et al., 2002). Research on Little India Brickfields further indicates that new urban development often prioritises economic growth over cultural preservation, creating tensions between modernization and heritage conservation (Zainudin et al., 2016).

Queen Street in George Town, Penang, represents a strong example of heritage governance supported by both national legislation and international recognition. The area is protected under the National Heritage Act 2005 and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008. Conservation policies regulate building use, façade integrity, and architectural continuity. Recent studies show that heritage designation not only preserves built form but also increases economic value and tourism pressure, requiring careful balance between conservation and development (Ong & Marzuki, 2025). The George Town World Heritage Incorporated supports enforcement, restoration programs, and community engagement to maintain long-term sustainability (GTWHI, 2021).

Overall, the comparative policy landscape indicates that Kampung Madras has relatively low architectural visibility due to limited formal protection, selective listing, weak institutional coordination, and insufficient enforcement. In contrast, Singapore and Penang

demonstrate strong institutional frameworks and consistent policy implementation, while Brickfields occupies an intermediate position characterised by partial protection and uneven execution. These differences reflect broader relationships between urban conservation policy, governance systems, and the preservation of cultural heritage in Southeast Asian cities (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Low, 2000; Yuen, 1996).

Table 4 Intangible Cultural Heritage Policies in the Four Indian Enclave Corridors

Aspect	Kampung Madras (Medan, Indonesia)	Serangoon Road (Singapore)	Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)	Queen Street (George Town, Penang, Malaysia)
Area Status	Not designated as a heritage district; only selected buildings recognized under SK Wali Kota Medan No. 433/28.K/X/2021.	Designated as a Conservation Area under the URA Conservation Master Plan.	Not designated as a heritage district; only a limited number of buildings are gazetted.	Located within the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town (inscribed 2008).
Primary Legal Frameworks	Law No. 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage; Medan City Spatial Plan 2020–2035 (RTRW).	Planning Act; URA Conservation Master Plan; Preservation of Monuments Act.	National Heritage Act 2005; Antiquities Act 1976; Kuala Lumpur planning regulations.	National Heritage Act 2005; UNESCO World Heritage framework; George Town heritage management system.
Type of Protection	Selective protection of individual buildings; absence of conservation zoning and detailed architectural guidelines.	Comprehensive conservation control covering façades, materials, colour schemes, typologies, and "five-foot ways."	Partial protection limited to gazetted buildings; many historic shophouses remain unprotected and exposed to redevelopment.	Strict conservation regulations governing building alterations, materials, façade integrity, and spatial continuity.
Governing Bodies	Medan municipal government; Cultural Heritage Expert Team (TACB); local community and religious institutions.	Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA); National Heritage Board.	Department of National Heritage; Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL).	George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI); Penang State Government;

				local authorities.
Enforcement Level	Low; weak institutional coordination, limited monitoring, and frequent unregulated modifications.	Very high; systematic monitoring, strict enforcement, penalties, and financial incentives.	Moderate; inconsistent implementation due to development pressures and rapid urban growth.	High; strong enforcement supported by UNESCO status, permit systems, and institutional coordination.
Community Role	Central role; heritage maintained largely through community participation, temple management, and local organisations.	Collaborative; supported through state-led programs, incentives, and outreach initiatives.	Significant; NGOs and local groups contribute due to limited formal protection.	Integrated; community engagement embedded within structured heritage management frameworks.
Policy Effectiveness	Low; limited formal protection, weak enforcement, and lack of integrated conservation strategy reduce visibility of heritage.	Very high; strong institutional framework ensures consistent preservation and high visibility of cultural identity.	Intermediate; partial protection with uneven outcomes due to competing urban development priorities.	High; integrated governance ensures preservation, economic value, and strong cultural identity.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature and policy review.

3. Intangible Aspects of Cultural Identity

a. Cultural Practices and Rituals

Cultural practices and ritual observances form an essential foundation of Indian enclaves, functioning as key mechanisms through which collective memory, identity, and social cohesion are produced and sustained. Festivals and ritual activities are not isolated events, but are embedded within broader socio-cultural systems of habitation that connect people, place, and everyday spatial practices (Wiryomartono, 2020; Rath, 2007). Within Kampung Madras in Medan, major festivals such as Diwali and Thaipusam are expressed through temple-centered rituals, street processions, and communal gatherings that activate both sacred and public spaces. These practices extend beyond religious functions and involve participation from diverse ethnic and religious groups, reflecting the pluralistic character of Medan's urban society. Such dynamics illustrate how cultural identity is continuously negotiated within shared spaces, aligning with the concept of hybridity and the "Third Space," where meanings and identities are produced through interaction across cultural boundaries (Bhabha, 2012). At the same time, the use of streets and open areas during festivals demonstrates how public space is socially produced and temporarily redefined through collective practices (Low, 2000).

Figure 14. Thaipusam Festival in Kampung Madras (Website Pemko Medan, 2025. https://portal.medan.go.id/berita/hadiri-thaipusam-medan-street-festival-2025-bobby-nasution-wujudkan-kolaborasi-bangun-hindu-center read4954.html).

In contrast, Serangoon Road in Singapore presents a more institutionalised form of ritual practice, where festivals are organised within a structured governance framework. Events such as Deepavali and Thaipusam are supported by formal institutions and regulated through planning systems, resulting in clearly defined processional routes, controlled spatial arrangements, and coordinated public participation. This reflects a broader approach in which cultural practices are integrated into state-led urban management and identity construction, reinforcing both social order and cultural visibility within the city (Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Blackburn & Tan, 2015; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2023).

In Malaysia, Indian festivals similarly reflect the intersection between cultural expression and urban-economic dynamics. In Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, celebrations such as Deepavali and Thaipusam are characterised by large-scale temple rituals, commercial activities, and public gatherings. The presence of bazaars, retail spillover, and tourism-oriented events demonstrates how cultural practices are intertwined with economic functions in a rapidly developing urban context. This condition reflects the transformation of Kuala Lumpur as a globalising city-region, where cultural identity is shaped by both community traditions and market-driven forces (Bunnell et al., 2002; Rath, 2007). Participation in these events varies across different groups, including local residents, migrant communities, and visitors, resulting in a dynamic but more segmented form of cultural engagement.

Queen Street in George Town, Penang, presents a different pattern in which ritual practices are closely linked to heritage conservation and historical continuity. Festivals associated with temples such as Sri Mahamariamman Temple are embedded within a protected urban environment, where cultural activities reinforce both religious traditions and heritage values. The designation of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has strengthened the role of festivals as part of a broader cultural and economic framework, in which heritage conservation, tourism, and local identity are closely interconnected (GTWHI, 2021; Rath,

2007). Compared to Medan, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur, Penang's celebrations place greater emphasis on continuity, place-based identity, and the preservation of traditional cultural practices within a regulated environment.

Across these contexts, festivals and ritual practices demonstrate both continuity and adaptation. While each enclave reflects different levels of institutionalisation and governance, all share the role of cultural practices as essential mechanisms for sustaining identity, reinforcing social networks, and shaping the meaning of urban space within multicultural cities (Bhabha, 2012; Low, 2000; Wiryomartono, 2020).

b. Cultural Hybridity

Cultural hybridity within Indian enclaves emerges through the blending of Indian cultural traditions with local sociocultural environments. Scholars widely acknowledge that hybrid cultural expressions arise from everyday practices, interethnic interactions, and the ongoing negotiation of identity within multicultural urban contexts (Hall, 2019; Kraidy, 2005). In Kampung Madras, hybridization is most evident in daily routines, language use, clothing practices, and culinary preferences. While core cultural markers such as temple rituals, sacred music, and festival performances retain strong Indian characteristics, the use of Bahasa Indonesia in daily communication and the adoption of contemporary Indonesian fashion reflect the enclave's integration into Medan's wider urban fabric. Tamil remains used primarily in temples and among older generations, indicating a shift from community-wide language maintenance to context-specific cultural retention. This reflects broader dynamics of transnational communities, in which cultural practices are selectively maintained while adapting to dominant local environments (Vertovec, 2009).

In contrast, Serangoon Road in Singapore exhibits a more structured form of hybridity influenced by state multiculturalism. The coexistence of traditional attire, multilingual signage in Tamil, English, and Malay, and the integration of Indian cuisine into national food culture illustrate a highly institutionalised form of cultural blending. This reflects how governance frameworks regulate cultural expression while maintaining social cohesion within a multicultural society (Yuen, 1996; Kong & Yeoh, 1996; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2023).

Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur presents a hybrid identity shaped by the intersection of religious activity, commercial intensity, and multiethnic interaction. The widespread use of Tamil alongside Malay and English, the presence of traditional attire in daily routines, and the fusion of Indian and Malaysian cuisines reflect the enclave's dynamic hybrid environment. Commercial activities further accelerate hybridization as traders, workers, and visitors contribute to a fluid cultural landscape. This condition reflects broader urban transformations in Kuala Lumpur, where globalisation and economic activity influence the production of cultural identity and space (Bunnell et al., 2002; Kraidy, 2005).

Queen Street in Penang maintains a more heritage-oriented hybrid identity. While traditional dress, Tamil language, and religious rituals remain prominent, hybrid influences appear through the integration of Penang's broader multicultural culinary and urban traditions. Sensory markers, such as food practices and street-level interactions, demonstrate how Indian cultural identity merges with Penang's historic streetscape to create a distinct cultural atmosphere. This reflects how hybridity operates within conserved heritage environments, where cultural continuity is maintained alongside adaptation to tourism and urban change (GTWHI, 2021; Logan, 2020). This aligns with recent studies on linguistic landscapes in George Town, which show how language visibility, cultural diversity, and postcolonial dynamics intersect to produce layered and hybrid urban identities (Jiao & Singh, 2024).

Collectively, these enclaves illustrate how cultural hybridity is shaped by historical development, migration patterns, urban policy, and everyday practice. Rather than indicating cultural dilution, hybridity represents a dynamic process shaped by global and local

interactions, where cultural identity is continuously produced and negotiated (Hall, 2019; Kraidy, 2005).

Table 5 Summary of Intangible Cultural Dimensions in Four Indian Enclaves

Dimension	Kampung Madras (Medan)	Serangoon Road (Singapore)	Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur)	Queen Street (Penang)
Cultural Practices & Rituals	Temple-centered Diwali and Thaipusam; processions extend into streets; inclusive participation across ethnic groups; informal and flexible use of public space.	Institutionalised festivals with structured routes and regulated participation; strong state coordination and formal organisation.	Large-scale rituals combined with bazaars and tourism activities; dynamic but more segmented participation across different groups.	Temple-based rituals rooted in heritage setting; emphasis on continuity, tradition, and place-based identity within a regulated environment.
Cultural Hybridity	Blend of Tamil traditions with Indonesian language, clothing, and daily practices; cultural retention becomes context-specific (mainly in religious spaces).	Institutionalised hybridity shaped by multicultural policy; coexistence of Tamil, English, and Malay; strong and visible Indian identity.	Dynamic hybridity shaped by religion, commerce, and multiethnic interaction; fusion of Indian and Malaysian cultural elements.	Heritage-oriented hybridity; traditional Indian practices integrated with Penang's multicultural urban culture and tourism context.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature and policy review.

c. Governance and Policy Support for Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage in Kampung Madras, Singapore's Little India, Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur, and Queen Street in Penang is shaped by varying degrees of government support, cultural policy frameworks, and community-based initiatives that influence the visibility and continuity of Indian cultural practices. In Kampung Madras, the preservation of intangible heritage relies heavily on community initiatives rather than formal government policy. While Hindu festivals, ritual processions, and cultural activities remain vibrant, Medan's cultural governance framework does not yet provide targeted protection or sustained funding for Indian intangible heritage. Support for major celebrations such as Thaipusam and Deepavali depends largely on local religious organisations and informal networks, with limited integration into municipal cultural programs. This reflects broader challenges in Indonesia's heritage governance, where policy implementation, institutional coordination, and documentation systems remain uneven, particularly for intangible cultural heritage (Lubis et al., 2024). The absence of formal designation of Kampung Madras as a cultural heritage zone further limits institutional support for safeguarding linguistic traditions, ritual arts, and community-based cultural expressions.

In contrast, Singapore maintains one of the most comprehensive frameworks for intangible cultural heritage in the region. The National Heritage Board's Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory, along with structured support programs, provides mechanisms for documentation, safeguarding, and transmission. Festivals along Serangoon Road, including Thaipusam and Pongal, benefit from coordinated government facilitation, regulated

processional routes, and sustained public funding, ensuring continuity and strong national visibility (National Heritage Board, 2023; Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2023). This reflects a broader model in which cultural policy and urban governance actively shape cultural expression and identity, reinforcing the role of culture in nation-building and urban representation (Kong, 2007; Yuen, 1996).

In Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, intangible heritage is supported within a broader multicultural policy framework, although implementation remains selective. Malaysia's National Heritage Act 2005 allows for recognition of intangible heritage, yet relatively few Indian cultural practices have been formally gazetted. Consequently, many cultural activities in Brickfields remain community-driven. Major festivals such as Deepavali and Thaipusam are facilitated through municipal coordination and partnerships with cultural associations, often linked to tourism and commercial activities. This reflects broader urban dynamics in Kuala Lumpur, where rapid development and globalisation influence how cultural identity is produced and expressed within the city (Bunnell et al., 2002).

Queen Street in George Town, Penang, presents a stronger framework for intangible heritage protection due to its UNESCO World Heritage status. Cultural practices are supported through policies administered by George Town World Heritage Incorporated, which actively documents, promotes, and provides funding for traditional performing arts, ritual practices, and community-based cultural activities (GTWHI, 2021). This approach reflects a broader understanding of heritage as a cultural and social practice linked to identity, diversity, and human rights, where conservation extends beyond physical structures to include living traditions and community participation (Logan, 2012).

Overall, the comparison demonstrates that Singapore and Penang maintain structured and institutionalised frameworks for intangible heritage, supported by strong governance and policy integration. Kuala Lumpur occupies an intermediate position characterised by partial institutional support and significant community involvement, while Kampung Madras in Medan relies primarily on grassroots initiatives due to limited formal policy support. These differences highlight how governance systems, policy frameworks, and institutional capacity shape the preservation, transmission, and visibility of intangible cultural heritage in Southeast Asian urban contexts.

Table 6 Intangible Cultural Heritage Policies in the Four Indian Enclave Corridors

Location/Corridor	Formal Policy Framework	Government Support for Festivals and Rituals	Community Involvement
Kampung Madras, Medan (Jalan KH Zainul Arifin)	No specific intangible heritage framework; not formally designated as a cultural heritage zone despite national legislation (Law No. 11/2010).	Limited and ad hoc; municipal involvement is minimal, with no structured funding or long-term cultural programs.	Very high; religious institutions, temple committees, and local communities are the primary actors sustaining rituals and cultural practices.
Serangoon Road, Singapore	Comprehensive framework through National Heritage Board's Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory and	High and institutionalised; festivals such as Thaipusam and Pongal are formally regulated, funded, and supported	Strong and collaborative; community participation is actively supported through government programs, cultural

	national multicultural policy.	through coordinated planning systems.	organisations, and heritage initiatives.
Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur)	Partial framework under National Heritage Act 2005; limited formal recognition of intangible heritage at the enclave level.	Moderate; supported through municipal event facilitation and tourism-oriented programs, but lacking long-term structured safeguarding mechanisms.	Strong; NGOs, cultural associations, and religious organisations play a key role in organising and sustaining festivals and cultural activities.
Queen Street, Penang (George Town)	Strong framework linked to UNESCO World Heritage status, National Heritage Act 2005, and GTWHI cultural management programs.	High; festivals and rituals are integrated into heritage management and tourism strategies, supported by grants and institutional programs.	Strong and institutionalised; collaboration between GTWHI, local communities, and temple organisations ensures continuity and visibility of cultural practices.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature and policy review.

4. Concluding Synthesis: Tangible and Intangible Aspects of Cultural Identity in Indian Enclaves

Table 7 Tangible and Intangible Aspect Across Four Corridors

Aspect	Kampung Madras (Medan)	Serangoon Road (Singapore)	Brickfields (Kuala Lumpur)	Queen Street (Penang)
Tangible Aspect				
Architectural Elements	Dravidian temples embedded within mixed colonial–local shophouses; modifications common, limited conservation.	Highly regulated conservation zone; restored temples and shophouses with strict façade control.	Indian-themed streetscape; temples slightly off main street but spatially integrated; adaptive reuse common.	UNESCO-regulated shophouses with strong architectural integrity; temples as major heritage anchors.
Street Layout, Signage, and Gates	Organic layout with minimal cultural signage; informal public spaces; multireligious proximity enhances coexistence.	Planned grid with heritage trails; bilingual Tamil–English signage; strong identity markers.	Planned pedestrian-friendly improvements; bilingual Tamil–Malay signage; decorative arches and themed elements.	Compact grid with trilingual heritage signage; strong pedestrian culture; sensory identity from shops and activities.

Policy (Physical Environment)	No specific heritage policy; general urban management allows flexible but inconsistent preservation.	National heritage policies regulate conservation and aesthetics; strong state oversight.	Government redevelopment and branding policies shape streetscape and commercial identity.	UNESCO World Heritage policies enforce conservation, adaptive reuse, and community-based heritage management.
Intangible Aspect				
Cultural Practices and Rituals	Festivals (Thaipusam, Diwali) are inclusive and community-led with cross-ethnic participation; temple rituals maintain continuity.	Festivals highly organized, state-supported, culturally curated; major temples as structured ritual hubs.	Large-scale temple rituals and festivals with citywide draw; participation segmented by commercial character.	Temple-based, intimate celebrations; rituals preserved through strong heritage and community rootedness.
Social Cohesion and Language	High tolerance, low conflict; Bahasa Indonesia dominant, Tamil mainly ritual; limited neighbourly interaction but strong family networks.	Strong social organization; Tamil widely used with English and Malay; high multicultural integration.	Multilingual (Tamil, Malay, English); strong temple and community associations; mixed permanent and transient community.	Tamil widely used in daily life; close-knit social ties supported by temple networks; strong heritage-driven cohesion.
Cultural Hybridity	Hybrid daily practices blending Indian and Indonesian culture; traditional attire mostly festival-based; cuisine influenced by local tastes.	Hybrid commercial and cultural practices shaped by urban cosmopolitanism; traditional attire widely visible during festivals.	Fusion of Indian, Malay, and urban lifestyles; strong culinary hybridity; daily rituals incorporate modern urban rhythms.	Deep continuity of Indian cultural expressions blended with Penang's multicultural food and trade traditions.
Policy (Intangible Environment)	Intangible culture sustained by community initiative and occasional municipal support; no	Cultural policies formalized through state institutions (e.g., Hindu Endowments Board); strong cultural programming.	Cultural identity shaped by national multicultural policies and local commercial governance.	Community-driven cultural preservation supported by heritage regulations and small-scale

	dedicated heritage policy.			cultural organizations.

Source: Own elaboration based on literature and policy review.

D. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the tangible dimensions of Kampung Madras remain significantly less developed than the established Little India districts in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. While Kampung Madras contains temples, historic buildings, and small-scale commercial corridors that reflect Indian architectural traditions, these elements are spatially dispersed and lack the visual coherence that characterises the three comparison sites. In Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, coordinated conservation frameworks, curated streetscapes, and tourism-oriented planning have produced cohesive and legible cultural environments that clearly express Indian identity within the urban landscape. In contrast, Kampung Madras presents a fragmented physical environment shaped by incremental development, limited conservation control, and the absence of a clearly defined heritage zone. These conditions reduce its visibility and weaken its recognition as a distinct ethnic enclave within Medan's multicultural urban structure.

Despite these spatial limitations, the intangible cultural life of Kampung Madras remains active and socially embedded. Religious rituals, festivals, and everyday cultural practices continue to be sustained through strong community participation and intergenerational transmission. These practices demonstrate a form of cultural resilience comparable to those observed in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. However, unlike the comparison cities where festivals are institutionally supported, spatially organised, and integrated into broader cultural and tourism frameworks, cultural expressions in Kampung Madras remain largely informal, localised, and dependent on community initiative. As a result, their visibility within the wider urban context is limited, even though their cultural significance remains high.

The comparison across the four enclaves further reveals that differences in cultural visibility are closely linked to variations in governance structures, policy frameworks, and levels of institutional support. Singapore and Penang demonstrate highly structured systems in which intangible and tangible heritage are integrated into formal planning, cultural policy, and tourism strategies. Kuala Lumpur represents an intermediate condition, where cultural expression is supported but remains influenced by market dynamics and uneven implementation. Kampung Madras, by contrast, operates largely without a comprehensive heritage governance framework, relying on grassroots efforts in the absence of sustained institutional support.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the relatively low prominence of Kampung Madras is not due to a lack of cultural richness, but rather to the absence of integrated policy mechanisms that connect spatial planning, heritage conservation, and cultural programming. In multicultural urban contexts such as Medan, the recognition and strengthening of cultural enclaves require more than the preservation of individual buildings or periodic cultural events. Instead, they depend on coordinated strategies that integrate tangible and intangible heritage, establish clear cultural zoning, and support community-based practices through formal institutional frameworks. Such approaches would enhance the visibility of Kampung Madras, reinforce its cultural identity, and contribute to more inclusive and resilient urban development.

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