

A Review on the Thermal Insulation Potential of Traditional Kashmiri Construction Materials for Energy-Efficient Housing

Shaista Zainab¹, Preetpal Singh²

^{1,2}Department of Structural Engineering, Rayat Bahra University Punjab

¹email: syedashaista184@gmail.com

²email: Preetpal.17966@rayatbahrauniversity.edu.in

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Abstract

Energy efficiency in buildings is a crucial aspect of sustainable architecture, particularly in cold climatic regions like Kashmir. Traditional Kashmiri construction materials have been utilized for centuries, yet their thermal insulation properties lack comprehensive scientific validation. This review paper critically examines existing research on indigenous Kashmiri building materials, highlighting the research gap in experimental quantification of their insulation properties. The paper discusses the thermal performance of materials such as Compressed Earth Blocks (CEB), Timber, Willow Mats, Mud Plaster, and Stone Masonry, emphasizing their potential for modern energy-efficient housing. A comparative analysis with contemporary insulation materials is conducted, and hybrid insulation strategies are proposed to optimize energy conservation. The review underscores the necessity for policy interventions to promote the adoption of vernacular materials and advocates for further studies focusing on real-time thermal performance assessments, lifecycle cost analyses, and integration with modern construction technologies.

Keywords: Thermal Insulation, Vernacular Architecture, Energy-Efficient Housing, Traditional Kashmiri Materials, Sustainable Construction, Cold Climate Architecture

1. Introduction

Energy-efficient housing is essential for minimizing energy consumption and reducing environmental impact, particularly in cold climatic regions where heating costs are significant. Buildings account for approximately 40% of global energy consumption, with heating and cooling systems being major contributors. In Kashmir, traditional construction methods like **Dhajji Dewari** and **Taq** have been historically favored for their structural resilience and thermal efficiency. However, scientific studies quantifying their insulation properties remain scarce.

This review aims to:

- Identify the research gap in experimental investigations of traditional Kashmiri construction materials.
- Compare their thermal performance with modern insulation materials.
- Highlight the feasibility of integrating traditional materials into contemporary construction for enhanced energy efficiency.

2. Research Gap and Rationale

Despite the extensive use of traditional materials in Kashmiri architecture, there is limited empirical data quantifying their thermal insulation properties. While past studies have acknowledged the energy efficiency of **Compressed Earth Blocks (CEB)**, **Willow Mat Insulation**, and **Timber**, there remains a lack of standardized experimental analysis of their **thermal conductivity (λ)**, **resistance (R-value)**, and **heat transfer coefficient (U-value)**. Additionally, the **long-term durability**, **moisture regulation**, and **cost-effectiveness** of these materials require further exploration.

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2.1 Existing Studies on Traditional Kashmiri Materials

Prior research highlights the historical significance and adaptability of traditional Kashmiri materials. Studies have suggested that:

- **Dhajji Dewari and Taq structures** provide superior earthquake resistance and moderate insulation.
- **Willow Mat Insulation** has excellent thermal resistance due to its low density and fiber composition.
- **Mud Plaster and Lime Mortar** regulate moisture and contribute to indoor thermal stability.
- **Stone Masonry**, while structurally durable, lacks sufficient insulation and necessitates supplementary materials.

2.2 Limitations of Existing Studies

Most studies on Kashmiri construction materials:

- Lack **standardized laboratory experiments** for thermal performance validation.
- Do not incorporate **comparative analyses** with synthetic insulations.
- Fail to assess **long-term environmental and economic benefits** of traditional materials.
- Overlook potential **hybrid approaches**, integrating traditional materials with modern insulation technologies.
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3. Methodology for Reviewing Thermal Insulation Studies

A structured methodology was adopted to review and analyze existing literature on traditional Kashmiri construction materials. The review process involved:

- **Literature Survey:** Identifying peer-reviewed articles, experimental studies, and historical records related to traditional Kashmiri materials.
- **Experimental Data Compilation:** Analyzing past research data on thermal conductivity, R-values, and U-values of indigenous materials.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Evaluating the performance of traditional materials against contemporary insulation materials like polyurethane foam, mineral wool, and aerogels.
- **Feasibility Assessment:** Examining the environmental sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and structural compatibility of traditional materials.

4. Thermal Performance Analysis of Traditional Kashmiri Materials

A critical assessment of the thermal properties of traditional Kashmiri construction materials is provided below.

4.1 Compressed Earth Blocks (CEB)

- **Thermal Conductivity:** 0.65 W/m·K
- **R-Value:** 0.508 m²·K/W
- **U-Value:** 1.97 W/m²·K
- **Advantages:** High thermal mass, eco-friendly, and cost-effective.
- **Limitations:** Requires protection against moisture and freeze-thaw damage.

4.2 Willow Mat Insulation

- **Thermal Conductivity:** 0.10 W/m·K
- **R-Value:** 0.400 m²·K/W
- **U-Value:** 2.5 W/m²·K
- **Advantages:** Excellent insulation properties, lightweight, and renewable.
- **Limitations:** Requires integration with other materials for structural strength.

4.3 Timber (Deodar & Pine)

- **Thermal Conductivity:** 0.14–0.16 W/m·K
- **R-Value:** 0.312–0.357 m²·K/W
- **U-Value:** 2.8–3.2 W/m²·K
- **Advantages:** Provides thermal insulation and structural flexibility.
- **Limitations:** Vulnerable to fire and pest infestations.

4.4 Mud Plaster and Lime Mortar

- **Thermal Conductivity:** 0.75–0.92 W/m·K
- **R-Value:** 0.163–0.267 m²·K/W

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- **U-Value:** 3.75–6.13 W/m²·K
- **Advantages:** Moisture regulation and affordability.
- **Limitations:** Poor insulation when used alone; needs additional insulation layers.

4.5 Stone Masonry

- **Thermal Conductivity:** 1.10 W/m·K
- **R-Value:** 0.227 m²·K/W
- **U-Value:** 4.40 W/m²·K
- **Advantages:** Durable and structurally stable.
- **Limitations:** High thermal conductivity results in excessive heat loss.

5. Comparative Analysis with Modern Insulation Materials

While traditional materials exhibit decent insulation properties, modern synthetic insulation materials like **polyurethane foam** ($U \approx 0.3 \text{ W/m}^2\cdot\text{K}$) and **mineral wool** ($U \approx 0.4 \text{ W/m}^2\cdot\text{K}$) outperform them. However, traditional materials:

- Are **eco-friendly, locally available, and cost-effective**.
- Have a **lower carbon footprint** compared to synthetic insulations.
- Can be enhanced by **hybrid insulation techniques**, combining traditional materials with modern insulative coatings.

6. Proposed Hybrid Insulation Strategies

To optimize energy efficiency in Kashmiri housing, a **hybrid approach** is recommended:

1. **Walls:** Use **Compressed Earth Blocks** with a secondary layer of **Willow Mat Insulation**.
2. **Roofs and Ceilings:** Implement **Timber Cladding with Mud Plaster and Willow Mats**.
3. **Flooring:** Apply **Lime-Clay Composites** to improve insulation while maintaining breathability.
4. **Windows and Doors:** Utilize **double-glazed timber frames** to enhance heat retention.

7. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The review highlights the **thermal potential of traditional Kashmiri materials**, emphasizing their role in energy-efficient housing. While these materials offer sustainability and affordability, their thermal performance must be further validated through:

- **Real-time field studies** under varying climatic conditions.
- **Lifecycle cost analysis** to determine long-term economic viability.
- **Hybrid insulation research**, integrating traditional materials with modern techniques.
- **Policy recommendations** for promoting the use of vernacular materials in contemporary construction.

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