

Importance of Conserving Our Architectural Heritage for Future Generation at Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

Karaikudi is a greater municipality in Sivaganga district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is part of the area commonly referred to as "Chettinad" and has been declared a heritage town by the Government of Tamil Nadu, on account of the palatial houses built with limestone called karai veedu. This paper main focus of the study importance of conserving our architectural heritage for future generation at Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu and Conservation of heritage buildings is very important because it provides a sense of identity and continuity in a fast-changing world for future generations. Heritage buildings basically represent the past history and culture of a nation. They constitute together the architectural heritage of an area.

Keywords: architects, building, heritage

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INTRODUCTION

UNESCO plan to preserve Chettinad buildings; The United National Education Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has prepared a draft plan to involve international multidisciplinary teams of jurists, architects and others to find ways and means of conserving and developing the Chettinad heritage buildings. The plan was prepared after the visit of eminent personalities, led by Minja Yang, Director, UNESCO, New Delhi, to palatial buildings of Chettinad a few days ago. Ms. Yang told The Hindu that ArchE-S (Architectural Heritage Safeguard), a France-based non-governmental organisation, and the Chettinad Heritage Committee would take the initiative [1].

The Revive Chettinad Development Project would be implemented in two phases. In the first phase, a plan for protection area would be designed. This would involve creation of a 'heritage house' and a 'heritage center' housed in a

restored palace and equipped with a multi-disciplinary team entrusted with the task of studying and promoting the site. In the second phase, a larger development project would be implemented. This would involve an eco-museum for conservation and exhibition of collections that serve as reference [2]. A center for training and production of handicrafts and applied arts and a center for international exchange would be created to find synergies between creativity and conservation of heritage and development of cultural tourism, she said. Initially a small geographical area and a few buildings representative of architecture of the region would be selected. The project would identify endangered sites that were unique for their architecture, urban planning, history or environment and implement a protection and restoration programme financed by international sponsors. These sites would help to create awareness and attract the attention of public authorities to the tragic state of these architectural

masterpieces. Ms. Yang said the objective was to preserve the structures of heritage value and revive the site by introducing activities useful to the community and compatible with heritage conservation.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

Chettinad possesses some outstanding physical characteristics of urban and rural planning which create a unique architectural ensemble with thousands of palatial houses. This ensemble reflects the way the Hindu Tamil community of Chettians lived. As the result of their travels, they have integrated multiple influences into the Tamil traditions. This blend represents the uniqueness of Chettinad [3].

They had a vision of land-use planning which has connected the different urban to landscape elements, particularly for rainwater harvesting and storage system. The architectural features of the houses comprised of series of courtyards organized along a longitudinal axis as well as the use of material is taking into consideration the semi-arid and hot climate.

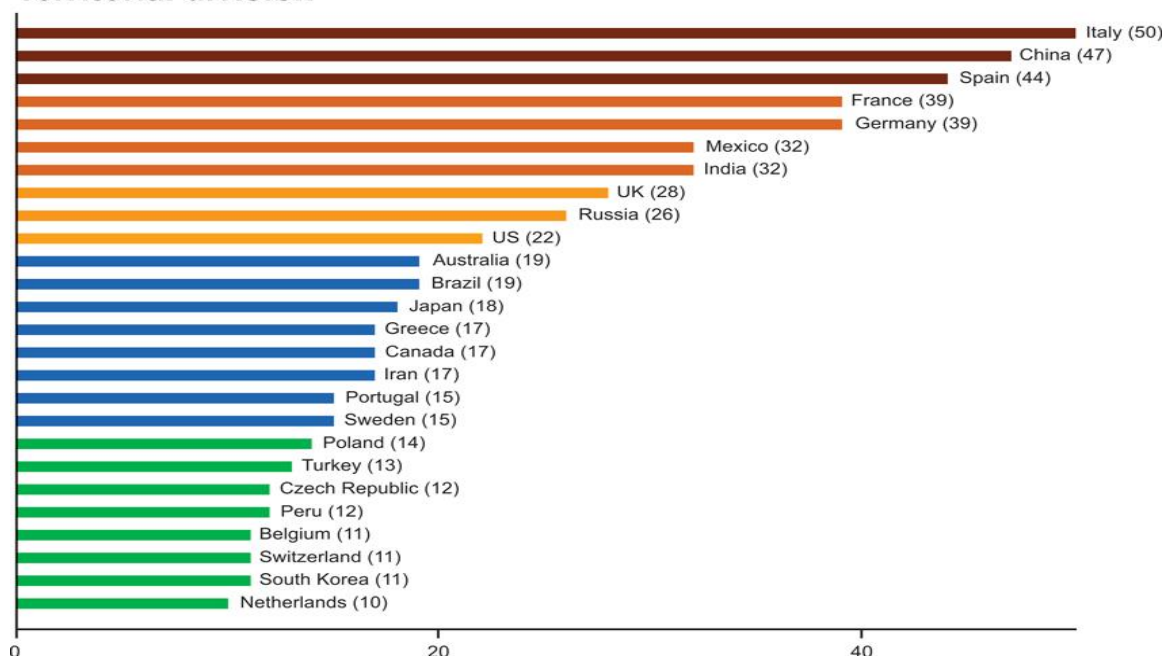
Chettinad architecture is also closely linked to the lifecycle rituals of the Chettian community. The mansions were conceived to perform the different functions, rituals and family celebrations during the course of life from birth to death. In addition to the lifecycle rituals, the temple and village festivals are part of the Chettian culture forming a large set of rituals all over the Tamil year.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

The United States initiated the idea of cultural conservation with nature conservation. A White House conference in 1965 called for a “World Heritage Trust” to preserve “the world’s superb natural and scenic areas and historic sites for the present and the future of the entire world citizenry.” The Convention came into force on 17 December 1975. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) lists places of special, cultural or physical significance and of outstanding universal value.

These places are named as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

India is at 5th place on World heritage list. Territorial division



Categorization on the Basis of World Heritage Sites

- Brown: nations with 40 or more heritage sites
- Light brown: nations with 30 to 39 heritage sites
- Orange: nations with 20 to 29 heritage sites
- Blue: nations with 15 to 19 heritage sites
- Green: nations with 10 to 14 heritage sites

The Importance of Heritage Conservation

Heritage conservation is important for identifying, recording, analyzing and protecting heritage and cultural resources. Conservation of heritage buildings is an important tool in city development which can be seen in some cities in the world. It plays an important role to define the landmark within the heritage area as well as to generate economic return and to support the tourism industry [4]. Conservation of heritage buildings is very important because it provides a sense of identity and continuity in a fast-changing world for future generations.

Heritage buildings basically represent the past history and culture of a nation. They constitute together the architectural heritage of an area. Heritage buildings possess historical values resulting from their beautiful architecture and their correlation with important events that occurred in the heritage area such as religious, social and political events. Heritage buildings are subjected to processes of degradation with time, which leads to a situation in which they became not able to fulfill the purpose for which they were built. For example, in Canada about 20 percent of pre-1920 heritage buildings to demolition over the last 30 years has been lost (Heritage Canada Foundation website, 20 December 2012).

Therefore, heritage buildings need an important tool to protect them. Conservation guidelines of heritage buildings are one of the proposed resolutions for protecting heritage buildings. The absence of these guidelines leads inevitably to deterioration of heritage buildings. They must be created and developed to ensure that any important changes in conservation work are undertaken in the most ways possible to preserve the heritage structure's, historic character and features. They prevent the random works that have spread in the conservation projects of heritage buildings. On this basis, conservation guidelines for developing and utilizing these properties must be established.

Comparison with Other Similar Properties

Kaiping Diaolou and Villages – China

The Diaolou represent in dramatic physical terms an important interchange of human values - architectural styles brought back from North America by returning Chinese and fused with local rural traditions - within a particular cultural area of the world.

Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland – Sweden

Seven timber houses reflect the prosperity of independent farmers who used their wealth in the 19th century to build substantial new homes with elaborately decorated ancillary houses or suites of rooms reserved for festivities.

Ancient Villages in Southern Anhui – Xidi and Hongcun – China

The two traditional villages of Xidi and Hongcun preserve to a remarkable extent the appearance of non-urban settlements of a type that largely disappeared or was transformed during the last century. Their street plan, their architecture and decoration, and the integration of houses

with comprehensive water systems are unique surviving examples.

The Victorian and Art Deco Ensemble of Mumbai

By 1850s Bombay became a fusion of varied cultures and opened her lands to truly develop as the “Gateway of India” bringing together industrial growth, international architectural styles and nurturing different ideologies to develop in an analogous fashion. The Chettinad region is rich of Victorian and Art Deco ensemble and is participating to development of international architectural styles in India.

Historic City of Ahmadabad

Ahmadabad city, reputed as “Manchester” of India, is a busy industrial city situated in cotton-growing hinterland north of Gulf of Cambay. The house form, the grouping of houses and the hierarchy of its access ways formed an extremely secure and homogeneous settlement pattern, which even today provides an excellent example of community living and urbanity based on cultural identity and sense of collective agreement in its formation. The main similarity consists in the community living and urbanity based on cultural identity.

Shanxi Businessmen’s Courtyard Houses – China

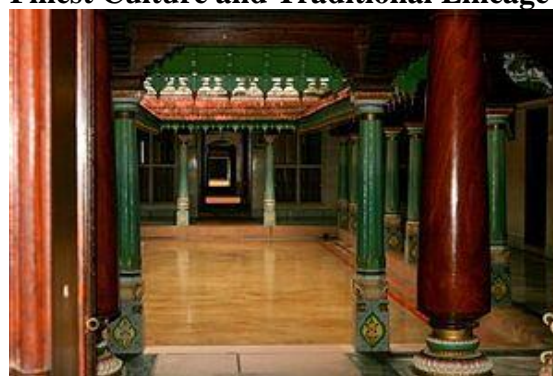
Shanxi Businessmen's Courtyard Houses located in Jinzhong city, Shanxi province are regarded as outstanding examples of civilian residence building (such as the Chettiar homes), when Chinese merchant capital grew rapidly during the Ching dynasty.

Problem Statements

Defects of heritage buildings can result from the degradation of the construction materials or from the damage of the heritage building elements due to mechanical actions. Heritage buildings are subject to process of degradation with time. In other words, the degradation of

the construction materials is a process that develops naturally with time, and can be accelerated by chemical, physical or biological actions. For this reason, several researches were conducted all over the world to assess the existing conditions of heritage buildings. For I was analysis of heritage buildings in Karaikudi with the main focus on the conditions of building defects and conservation approach used for these buildings. The research found that most of the defects that occur in heritage buildings in Karaikudi were at external walls followed by internal walls and, etc.

Heritage Tourism Karaikudi, A Place of Finest Culture and Traditional Lineage



Karaikudi is the largest town in Chettinad region of Sivagangai district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The name Karaikudi originated from the plant’s name *karai* that abounds in the area, and *kudi* meaning settlement. It belongs to the collection of 80 towns and villages in the Chettinad belt that stretched from Ramnad district to Pudukottai state of then British India [5]. The Chettinad or Chettinadu literally means Chettiars’ state. The Nagarathars, a Chettiar community, are the predominant people of the region flourishing in trade and commerce from many centuries. They are institutional in establishing in numerous educational institutions, financial services, temples, festivals, traditional ceremonies, and social welfare.

Karaikudi and its neighboring places have quite a number of historical significant buildings, and distinguished institutions

and places. The Chettinadu mansions are sumptuous, spacious, and flamboyant with intricate carved structures.



Chettinadu mansions are built using bricks (known as 'sengkal'), country made roof tiles (known as 'naattu odu') [preferably from 'Manamadurai', owing to the soil's rich iron content], decorative floor tiles (preferably, the famed 'Athangudi' handmade terracotta tiles), limestone-mixture (known as 'saanthu-kalavai') for mortar, and stone blocks, wooden support-structures, decorative doorframes and intricate carved panels [6]. The teakwood from Burma is the choice wood for woodworks and support structures. The household items range from artistically made wooden-furnitures, glasswares, ceramic wares, traditional wares, and to other exotic articles made around the world. These buildings and mansions popularly came to be known as "karai-vedu" (the house built with limestone-mixture).

These Mansions are built-in with arrangements for rainwater harvesting, to provide for clean drinking water. The rainwater is [fine cloth] filtered and funneled into large brassware; which then

can be stored for weeks. The rainwater being free from [ground] impurities, and by storing it in brassware gets electrically charged, which neutralises [many of the] harmful microorganisms. This provides a clean, healthy, and sweet drinking water that rivals the modern-day processed drinking water.

Particularly, the Saanthu-kalavai, which is made from the mixture of finely ground Saanthu (limestone) powder – the raw material, Kadukkai (gallnut) as accelerant, Egg's white-yolk – for smooth finish, and Karuppatti (palm-jaggery) as binder, that are mixed in prerequisite proportions with right amount of water. Sometimes Padaneer (unfermented palm tree sap) – as bonding agent, is also added. This provides a strong crack-resistant bond and gives a smooth finish. Many [significant] historical constructions still stand testimony to its strength and longevity spanning many centuries.

Nowadays these Chettinadu mansions are sought after place for film shootings; and are a well-known tourist attraction.

Chettiar Palace

Chettiar Palace, also known as Chettiar Mansion is located at Kanadukathan in Chettinad region. It is a historic home of the Chettinad.



Raja, which has been converted into a heritage hotel. This mansion was constructed by S. A. Ramaswamy Chettiar and it took over 10 years from 1902 to complete its construction. The rooms of this mansion are embellished using Burmese teak wood and the furnishings of the palace have been imported from various European and East Asian countries. There is a huge dining hall in this palace that can accommodate around 250 people at a time. The open courtyard of this mansion has beautifully stone-carved pillars that add to the beauty of this heritage home.

The palace at Kanadukathan symbolizes the exquisiteness of architectural marvels, woodwork and ancient lighting, besides the cultural ethos of the region. All homes have one to three “mittam,” or the inner pillared courtyard. Italian glossy tiles have been used on walls and ceilings. Burma teak, granite pillars, stained glass, artistic grills and such exquisite materials used in the buildings speak volumes of the quality and lifestyle of its owners and the skilled workforce. In these houses are numerous windows and very high ceilings. This mansion is available for stay, check out details below.

Athangudi



Athangudi is a village situated in Chettinad, which is popular for handmade terracotta tiles. These tiles are sun-dried and patterned beautifully for giving the desired texture. The colourful tiles here are mainly designed using sand, cement, belly jelly and synthetic oxides. These tiles are generally available in flora and fauna designs and are famous for their dark, white and earthy hues. All these tiles are designed in the Athangudi tile factory and are used mainly in the Chettiars ancestral houses. Athangudi village is located in the Kallal Taluk in the Sivaganga District and is just 24.8 km from this main district. Further, this village is 383 km from the state capital; Chennai.

Chettinad Museum

Chettinad Museum is a heritage home, bringing alive to its visitors, the Chettinad style of living. This house converted into a museum is a must visit place in Chettinad. You can find here traditional jewelry and clothing, huge copper water vats and grain bins and various other everyday items that trace the Chettiar's (a community of traders) way of life. It also tells you many characteristics of the Chettiars, like they would never eat out. There is an all-inclusive kitchen set on display in this museum to prove that point.

A visit to this place will surely transport you into a completely new world of tradition combined with opulence.

Kaviarsar Kannadhasan Mani Mandapam

Kaviarsar Kannadhasan Mani Mandapam was built for honoring poet laureate, Late Shri Kannadhasan. Poet Kannadhasan spent majority of his life with Nagarathars at this place, before he died in Nattarasankottai. After his death, the Nagarathar community built this mansion in his honor. The mandapam features an art gallery, museum and a library that are open for tourists and local public from morning till evening. The museum in this

mandapam is known for its artefacts, traditional jewelry, grains bins, clothing and copper vats. The Kaviarsar Kannadhasan Mani Mandapam is around 110 years old and showcases the variations in the Indian art over the decades.

Karpagavinayagar Temple



Karpagavinayagar Temple is located in Pillayarpatti of the Chettinad region. Pillayarpatti is named after the main deity Pillayar or Lord Ganesha and attracts lot of devotees. This old rock cut temple is patronized by the Pillayarpatti Nagarathar community of Chettinad.

This temple is situated around 71 km away from Madurai and 12 km from Karaikudi. Buses are available on the Thirupathoor-Karaikudi state highway to reach to this temple, which is just 3 km from Kundrakkudi. The Karpaka Vinayakar in the temple is around 6 ft tall. Apart from the Desi Vinayakar Pillayar, there are also rock cut images of Lord Shiva, Marudankudi Eesar and Vaadaamalar Mangai in this temple. It is believed that this rock cut temple is over 1600 years old. There are over 15 inscriptions within the temple that tell about the age of this temple.

Objectives

- To assess the overall structural integrity of the heritage buildings of the heritage tourism – Karaikudi, a place of finest culture and traditional lineage.

- To provide conservation procedures for repairing and maintaining the structural damages of the heritage buildings of the Karaikudi.

Scope of the Research

Conservation of heritage sites includes generally, buildings, artifacts, structures, areas and precincts of historic, aesthetic, architectural, cultural or environmentally significant nature (heritage buildings and heritage precincts), natural feature areas of environmental significance or the sites of scenic beauty. The research does not discuss heritage in general, but mainly focuses on the built environment. The economic and social aspects are mentioned, but are not the main emphasis in this research. For instance, when discussing about the impact of conservation on the economy, the built environment is regarded as the main emphasis.

The defined scope of the research is then conservation of heritage buildings in Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu. Heritage buildings of the old city of Karaikudi. Were chosen as a representative city for conservation of heritage buildings in Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu. This was done so that to address its past, present and its future possibilities. This research does not cover all heritage cities in Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu. But the case of the old city of Karaikudi. Has some characteristics and features with other heritage cities. Namely, the present research covers heritage buildings of the old city of Karaikudi. Including houses, mosques, and shops. Public buildings and the surrounding environment of the heritage area of the old city of Karaikudi. are not addressed by this research. Therefore, the study focuses on heritage houses, mosques, and shops of the old city of Karaikudi. As one of the famous places of the Karaikudi heritage area.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this research also highlights from the architectural design of the heritage buildings of the old city which makes the old city of Karaikudi. Important for studying its heritage buildings. The architecture of the heritage buildings of the old city is focused on resolving the climate problem and privacy and migrate to the old town and other cities during the summer, because the material of building construction and the air-conditioning in modern houses is unable to cope with the torrid heat of the desert and only the clay houses of the old town maintaining a degree of coolness, in summer-time the old town is still comfortable for living because of the good shelter against the extreme desert heat.

In addition, the old city of Karaikudi is located in desert regions. Therefore, it can be seen that its buildings are designed with flat roofs, small openings, and heavy weight materials such as dried mud. The thick exterior roof and walls help to absorb temperature fluctuations and, therefore, keep internal temperatures from rising above the outside surface temperature. An important function of the roof is its color. A white or light-colored roof will stay approximately the same temperature as the outdoor air during the day, and 6-10 Celsius cooler than the outside air at night. This is an important feature because the cooler night time's air will be channeled down by the slope of the roof and into the rooms in the building. One function of the small openings is to prevent dust from entering buildings. Windows are arranged so that equal areas are open on the windward and leeward sides of the building. The reason for this is very simple; the air stream can be directed into rooms that need constant ventilation such as the bedroom. When one window is positioned higher than another, thermal force will direct the airflow from the high window to the lower window creating good ventilation.

Courtyards, patios, and verandas are other common features of heritage buildings in the old city of Karaikudi. With high walls, these outside areas provide shade and a relaxing environment for their inhabitants for social gatherings, evening entertainment, food preparation, and domestic work such as laundry. Another way to provide shade in a more aesthetically pleasing way is through greenery. For example, trees, shrubs, and bushes provide natural shade from the sun while giving the courtyard area a pleasing look. The outside environment in hot regions is just as important as the inside because it is a daytime relief from the intense climate. This beautiful architecture is worthy to investigate by study.

CONCLUSION

The importance of conservation of cultural heritage in Karaikudi in Sivagangai district, Tamil Nadu is besieged by several practical aspects such as the profusion of built heritage in the country, but resource and skill-Deficit in the formal approach to their conservation. This is due primarily to the lack of critical mass working in the area of heritage preservation, and the lack of focus of mainstream overall structural integrity of the heritage buildings of the Heritage Tourism research on this subject.

Holistic preservation of Indian heritage would require recourse to pedagogical changes in school and higher education intended to rediscover the ancient Indian wisdom in arts, sciences and philosophies, which hinges on mainstream fundamental research. Economic viability of heritage will be a by-product of the process due to a revival of traditional arts and crafts, known popularly as intangible heritage, and initiation of new disciplines.

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BIOGRAPHY

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