Reviewing Franco-Tamil Architecture of Puducherry - Case study

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Abstract - The study outlines the importance of local heritage sites and its unique mix of French and Tamil cultural heritage characteristics of Puducherry. (Siva, 2019) The city is laid out in a grid layout and is separated into two sections by the Grand Canal: Tamil and French. The constructions of the French town are in the European classical style, whereas the Tamil town is heavily influenced by the nearby Tamil Nadu vernacular. The cityscape, design characteristics, structural system, layout, and other architectural features of a French town differ greatly from those of a Tamil town. Heritage buildings in a French town are valued differently than heritage buildings in a Tamil town, which are divided into numerous categories based on their contribution to the city's architecture. The place's distinct identity is determined by existing architectural specimens (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

Key words: French Town, Tamil Town, Architectural features, Heritage, Conservation, Material.

I. INTRODUCTION

Puducherry's old town began as a scattering colony of fishermen and weavers, evolving into a thriving commercial port beginning with the Roman Empire and finally becoming a lively trading centre for colonial powers. This is when the French began referring to the area as Pondicherry and built structures in the French style. The architectural, historic, and archaeological value of Pondicherry's heritage buildings is categorised into numerous categories. That is, Grade I buildings are of national or historical significance and serve as a prominent landmark in the city, while Grade II (A & B) buildings are of regional or local significance and contribute to the city's image and identity, and Grade III buildings, which demonstrate the importance of townscape, help to define the locality's character. The place is one of India's heritage sites because of the structures' specific qualities (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

II. OBJECTIVE

To study the sensitivity of heritage buildings, their culture, and the city's unique traits (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

To investigate the distinctive heritage architectural elements of Pondicherry's structures (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

III. METHODOLOGY

Puducherry has a long and illustrious history as a destination for centuries-old Franco-Tamil culture. The study looks at the origins of the distinctive features of the French and Tamil town streetscapes in Puducherry. Understanding the characteristics of two heritage buildings in French and Tamil towns, the "Hotel De L'Orient" and the "INTACH Heritage Centre." It entails researching design elements such as cornices and pilasters, as well as other architectural features.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 French Town

4.1.1 Layout of the French Town:

Around Government Square, the town rose up along the coast. The grand government buildings lined the Square on all sides, with residential and institutional structures interspersed. (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010)

4.1.2 Architectural Features:

In the French quarter the buildings are of two main categories – public and residential:

Residential - The majority of the building stock is simple and diversified, with full or partial frontage and built wall to wall, resulting in the typical street character.

Public – The plans came from France and were adapted to local conditions, usually grand two-story structures with arcades on the ground floor and colonnades on the first floor, set amidst large plots with transparent enclosures (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

4.2 Tamil Town

4.2.1 Layout of the Tamil Town:

The Tamil Town is west of the Grand Canal, which divides the old town into two halves, one French and one Tamil. Comparing and contrasting the uniqueness of French and Tamil streets is fascinating (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

4.2.2 Architectural Features:

The thalvaram, which serves as a social extension of the home, and the thinnai, which serves as a semi-public verandah space, are two essential characteristics of Tamil streets. The roofs of these Tamil constructions are often a mix of flat and sloped. The first level of two-story Tamil architecture is usually given French traits, resulting in a hybrid of Tamil and French forms that is a trademark of Pondicherry's history (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

V.   CASE STUDY

5.1 French Town

5.1.1 Hotel De L'Orient: (Transforming cities through heritage preservation and places for people)

5.1.1.1 Streetscape:

The streets are characterised by continuous wall-to-wall construction, full or partial street frontage, towering garden walls, elaborate entrances, and solid walls separated into smaller panels by vertical pilasters and horizontal cornices.

5.1.2.2 Aspects of design:

The Madras terrace roofing is supported by strong wooden beams and joists, which are visible in the ceilings. The building's two storeys are connected by an arched stairway. A modest cornice runs below the ceiling beam, and plaster decoration splits the broad wall space into decorative panels at times. Balconies are normally four feet deep and are supported by wrought iron brackets over an edge beam. Cornice platforms are used to support the balconies on occasion (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.1.2.3 Entrance Gate:

The entrance gate is the most distinctive characteristic of the French streetscape. In the case of the hotel, modest pilaster projections designate the entrance. Heavy woodwork with strong iron rivets and, in most cases, posterns are used to construct the doors (small exit door). There is a wonderful range to be seen, from the entrance pier gate to the ornate architectural arch portals of the interiors (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.1.2.4 Windows and doors:

The majority of the windows are tall, with flat, segmental arches with white bands, wooden shutters with louvres and glass panels, and sturdy wrought iron bars bent outward in the lower half below a horizontal bar to allow a secure street view from inside. Doors are comparable to windows in that they are tall, arched, and have bands around them (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.1.2.5 Arcades:

On the ground floor, a series of arched openings overlook the entrance courtyard. They form a quiet transition space while providing a comfortable casual living area. Interiors with long spans benefit from structural arches. (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010)

5.1.2.6 Cornices and Pilasters:

Straight pilasters and horizontal cornice provide the basic structure of the exterior facade, serving as a framework for other features such as holes, carpets, and balconies. The cornices follow the floor split and have an adequate ventilation inside the sloping structure to protect the under-wall wall from rain. The pilasters follow the horizontal lines on the wall in the system, while the cones follow the floor divisions and have an adequate throat within the sloping structure to protect the lower wall wall from rain (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.1.2.7 Staircases and Balconies:

The structure's staircases are an unusual feature. The basic structural system of the hotel is a simple straight flight open stairway with an arched soffit. The perpendicular arched stairs flow into one another, with plain brick timber railings and wrought iron balusters at the tops. The balcony is a symmetrically framed projected Madras terrace built within the pilasters and cornices. Wrought iron brackets on an edge-rafter support the cantilevered, carefully spaced timber joists. These brackets are provided by the wall to prevent sagging (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2 Tamil Town

2.2.2 INTACH Heritage Centre: (Transforming cities through heritage preservation and places for people)

5.2.2.1 Aspects of design:

Thinnai, Thalvaram with wooden posts, Mutram, and other traditional Tamil houses are simple and functional, with a range of open, semi-covered, and covered spaces. The vertical plaster and horizontal cornice are also present in the Tamil colony, as they are in the French colony (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.2 Thalvaram:

The Thalvaram has been the most important and required aspect of Tamil structures and streets in Pondicherry. A street verandah with platform and lean-to roof over wooden poles serves as a social element (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.3 Thinnai:

Before entering a house, the sensitive transition region is referred to as Thinnai. These were practical areas where

residents might rest and socialise with their neighbours as well as receive visitors (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.4 Construction Materials:

Burned bricks, lime, terracotta tiles, and wood are used because materials are both environmentally friendly and readily available. Major structural wooden components such as columns and beams were made of teak, whereas minor structural wooden parts such as rafters and posts were made of native timbers (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.5 Entrance Door:

Multiple layers of wood are used to construct the elaborate frames, and the entrance doors are finely carved. The shutters are thick and come in two pieces: the front has a carved cut-out and the back is plain. The doors are held in place by iron hinges. These doors have a very regular carving design. Community symbols are depicted in the carving on the top of the door frame (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.6 Windows:

The windows have teak wood frames and are flat. The structure has semi-circular windows with intricate plaster work (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.7 Pilasters and cornices:

Pilasters and cornices, which serve as a frame for elements like as openings, parapets, and balconies, are crucial components of the facade. Pilasters commonly have a base and capital and are aligned with the wall lines (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.8 Parapet:

The parapets are the most prominent horizontal feature of the Tamil town's skyline. They're held up by an intricate cornice projection, with rectangular bays and terra cotta pot balusters being the most common. A continuous bottom band and an angled coping on top of the parapets drain rain water (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.9 Sunshade:

A sunshade constructed of Mangalore tiles hangs from wooden brackets (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

5.2.2.10 Colonnades:

Because the first floor is influenced by the French structures, they are placed along the street (Architectural Heritage of Pondicherry, 2010).

VI.   CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Pondicherry's architectural environment is the consequence of numerous transformations, beginning with the original settlement of Puducheri, then under the Dutch, French, and English after a cycle of destruction and reconstruction. With the infinity of architectural links, they've consolidated in the recent past, the cultural significance of a Tamil house, or a French house, will be lost, along with their particular power and style. The purpose of this study is to discuss architectural traits in order to evaluate the many types of life-styles and structures found in a certain territory and also by showing the difference in both the towns by illustrating an example in Tamil Town and French Town. The thing that provides you more without destroying what others have done before you, but rather evolving from it. With its unique architectural elements, it is a poignant portrayal of tradition spanning many centuries. The Indian heritage is a vital resource for presenting India to the rest of the world and demonstrating its unique and fascinating culture. Pondicherry's reality is based on my typological study method: Pondicherry, for me, is closer to current Indian reality while also being more open to the more ancient reality of this magnificent country known as India (Bartoli, 2006).

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