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"Blending Tradition with Modernity: The Integration of Chettinad Architectural Elements in Contemporary Homes"

Akanksha K V Rao¹, Ar. Yashaswini Nagesh²
PES University

Abstract: Traditional Chettinad houses, are known for its craftsmanship, sustainable design, and cultural significance has influenced modern homes. This research investigates how key elements of Chettinad architecture, have been incorporated into modern houses. The study examines whether these adaptations successfully preserve the essence of Chettinad houses or they tend to compromise on its authenticity.

Through comparative analysis the research talks about whether the traditional values and elements are retained or modified in present day designs. This study ultimately highlights the balance between the preservation and evolution in architectural design. Keywords: Chettinad houses, Contemporary design, Chettinad inspired modern houses, culturally rooted.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Indian architecture has played a significant role in shaping modern residential designs. Courtyard systems have been an integral part of India since the Indus Valley civilization. It serves as a multifunctional space that addresses environmental, social and cultural needs. The first courtyard house in India is dated back to 6500BC to 6000BC (2). There are different typologies of courtyard houses in India according to the climatic and materials found in the particular region, including Chettinad houses (Tamil Nadu) with grand wooden pillars, Rajasthani havelis with intricately carved facades, Wadas (Maharashtra) with enclosed courtyards, Nalukettu (Kerala) with open nadumuttams, Goan courtyard houses blending Portuguese and Indian styles, Pol houses (Gujarat) with shared courtyards, Haveli-style houses (Delhi & UP) with Mughal-inspired designs, and Kath-Kuni houses (Himachal Pradesh) with timber-stone construction for cold climates.

Among this, Chettinad architecture, originating from Chettiar region in Tamil Nadu is well known for its grand mansions, intricate craftmanship, and climate-responsive architecture. This study explores the transition of Chettinad architectural principles into modern homes, questioning whether contemporary interpretations are adaptations or transformations of the original style.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative analysis approach to evaluate the influence of traditional Chettinad architecture on modern homes. The methodology involves selecting a traditional Chettinad house as a benchmark for analysis, alongside two modern case studies—Savita Vadi Farmhouse (Vadodara) and a Chettinad-inspired home in Coimbatore.

The data is collected through secondary case studies, architectural drawings and photographs. The analysis is structured around five key parameters: architectural style, material usage, spatial planning, climate adaptation, and cultural influence. By assessing these aspects, the study identifies whether modern homes adapt Chettinad elements faithfully or transform them for contemporary living.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Chettinad Mansions, Tamil Nadu

Chettinad mansions are lavish homes that belong to the Nattukottai Chettiar community in the Chettinad region of South India. The Nattukottai Chettiar community were well known traders who shipped spices, rice and gems all over the world including places like Malaysia, Burma, ad Vietnam. Few of them ever served as bankers to kings and the British Raj for centuries. Therefore, these mansions were built with materials al across the globe to signify the community's wealth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The houses were mainly designed for 70-80 residents at one time since most of the houses were built for joint families. The house typically consists of 50 rooms, the primary plan of this house is an elongated and rectangular shaped, similar to that of havelis in the north.



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Since Tamil Nadu is known for its harsh tropical climate, the primary courtyard of the house was rectangular shaped and typically placed towards the south direction to take advantage of southern breeze in the summer and escape the cold northern winds in the winter.

1) Spatial Planning:

- The front portion of the house is the raised shaded verandahs called Thinnai where the guests are received.
- A grand wooden door is placed in the main entrance (Valavu) with intricate carvings (often carved with deities). Chettinad houses were designed a way to provide uninterrupted views from the front to the back door.
- The rooms and large halls (Koodam) are built around the courtyards.
- The kitchen and dining areas are placed in the rear end of the house. Based on the philosophy of pollution-purity axis the kitchen and toilet in the house are separated by the internal court in two axially opposite directions.

2) Materials and construction techniques:

- The walls are coated with Limestone and Egg White Plaster which keeps the interiors of the house cool. This coating acted as a natural temperature regulator, keeping interiors cool.
- The lime also had antibacterial and antifungal properties, making the walls more durable.
- Handmade Athangudi Tiles are used by locally available sand and clay, then polished with glass for a glossy effect. They were sun-dried and fired, making it low maintenance and durable.
- Teakwood was mainly imported from Burma, showcasing the Chettiars' wealth. Jackfruit wood was often used for beams and rafters due to its termite-resistant properties.

3) Water harvesting and drainage systems:

- Houses had underground water storage tanks connected to the courtyard for rainwater harvesting.
- Sloped roofs directed rainwater into ornamental water channels.

IV. SECONDARY CASE STUDIES:

A. Savita Vadi Farmhouse (Vadodara)

Savita Vadi, designed by Architects Vijay and Vaishali Chauhan, is a farmhouse in Vadodara, Gujarat, that blends traditional style of Chettinad style architecture with modern living. Unlike traditional Chettinad mansions that were vast in scale, Savita Vadi condenses its essence into a compact 5400sq.ft. footprint, tailored for a nuclear family of 6 people. The house consists of three bedrooms and was completed in the year 2022.

The heart of the house is a central courtyard, a defining feature of Chettinad mansions, which binds different rooms and fosters interaction among family members. At the centre of the courtyard stands the idol of 'Dakshinamurthy,' enhancing the space with positive energy. The house features tall Burmese wood columns with stone bases, similar to those in traditional Chettinad homes. The puja room features a red floor, a typical element in Chettinad homes and Mosaic tiles are used for the corridors. The house uses M.S. (mild steel) railings and partitions, reminiscent of the cast-iron details found in Chettinad mansions.

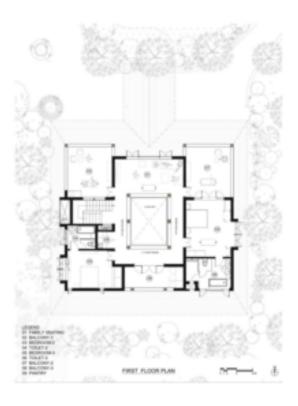






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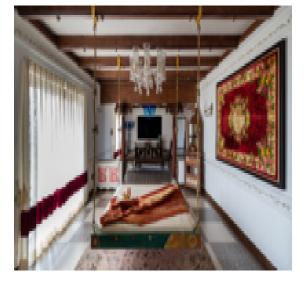
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B. Coimbatore Home

In Coimbatore, architect Sowmya Kumar of OWM Architecture designed a home that harmoniously blends Dravidian, Chettinad, and British colonial architectural styles, drawing inspiration from her childhood experiences in Tamil Nadu. This residence reflects a deep connection to traditional South Indian design while incorporating modern elements. The home showcases traditional Chettinad features, such as a Kolam marble inlay at the entrance and intricately carved wooden columns in the living area. These elements pay homage to the rich architectural heritage of the Chettinad region. Influenced from British colonial architecture are evident in the inclusion of an antique English grandfather clock and classic wainscoting in the living room, reflecting the historical British presence in the Nilgiris. The residence incorporates design aspects reminiscent of Dravidian temples, including a mythological painting that serves as a focal point, reflecting the grandeur and spiritual essence of South Indian temple art.

Despite the compact 2,900-square-foot plot, the design accommodates four bedrooms, an AV room, and a spa, all adhering to Vastu principles.







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V. COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS

A. Architectural Style And Design

ASPECT	TRADITIONAL	SAVITHA VADI	COIMBATORE HOME
	CHETTINAD HOUSE	FARMOUSE	
Design approach	Grand mansions with	A single courtyard	Open-plan
	multiple courtyard,	integrated into a modern	contemporary home
	designed for joint	farmhouse layout	with Chettinad-inspired
	families.		spatial elements.
Spatial Layout	Multiple interconnected	Large verandah with	Selective use of
	rooms with deep	stone columns, spacious	verandas and semi open
	verandahs and airy	courtyard as the core of	layout blending modern
	spaces.	the house	and traditional spaces
Ornamentation	Intricate wooden	Carved wooden front	Minimalist approach
	carvings, handcrafted	door and teak columns	with selective
	details, and rich motifs.	retain traditional	handcrafted wood and
		aesthetics.	tile elements.
Kitchen Design	Separate kitchens with	Open kitchen with a	Modular kitchen design
	large storage rooms and	blend oftraditional	with elements of
	open ventilation.	materials and modern	traditional
		appliances.	craftsmanship.
Furniture & Interiors	Heavy antique furniture,	Mix of antique and	Minimalist interiors
	handcrafted decor.	modern furniture,	with selective
		wooden elements.	traditional accents.



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Religious Elements	Dedicated prayer rooms,	Central courtyard features	Small puja corner
	ornate deity spaces.	a 'Dakshinamurthy' idol.	integrated into modern
			interiors.
Space Constraints	Requires large plots,	Adapted to a smaller site	Modern adaptations
	making them impractical	with a single courtyard.	ensure functionality
	in urban areas.		within a smaller
			footprint.

B. Construction Materials And Techniques

ASPECT	TRADITIONAL	SAVITHA VADI	COIMBATORE HOME
	CHETTINAD HOUSE	FARMOUSE	
Walls	Thick lime-plastered brick	Combination of	RCC and plastered walls
	walls for insulation.	exposed brick and lime	with some traditional
		plaster for a heritage	elements.
		look.	
Roofing	Sloping terracotta-tiled	Gable roof with modern	Contemporary flat roofs
	roofs with wooden rafters.	waterproofing,	with some sloping tiled
		complemented by	sections for aesthetics.
		terracotta tiles.	
Flooring	Handmade Athangudi tiles	Patterned mosaic tiles	Selective Athangudi tiles,
	and locally sourced stone.	and polished stone	complemented by polished
		flooring.	concrete and marble.
Woodwork	Burmese teak doors,	Repurposed wooden	Engineered wood and
	pillars, and window	pillars and carved	handcrafted elements used
	frames.	doors.	selectively.

C. Cost and Maintenance

ASPECT	TRADITIONAL	SAVITHA VADI	COIMBATORE HOME
	CHETTINAD HOUSE	FARMOUSE	
Cost & Availability	Expensive due to handmade materials and craftsmanship.	Moderate cost, with repurposed materials for authenticity.	More cost-effective with a balance of traditional and modern materials.
Maintenance	Requires high maintenance due to natural materials.	Easier maintenance with a blend of old and new materials.	Low-maintenance modern materials with traditional aesthetics.

VI. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis highlights that while Savita Vadi Farmhouse and the Coimbatore Home successfully incorporate Chettinad elements, they are adapted rather than fully replicated. While some traditional elements are retained, contemporary constraints such as space, cost, and functionality drive significant alterations. The research finds that although modern homes incorporate Chettinad elements, they often compromise authenticity in favour of practicality and evolving lifestyle needs. While Savita Vadi Farmhouse maintains a closer connection to traditional Chettinad design, the Coimbatore Home represents a more hybridized, contemporary approach. Thus, while adaptation allows for the preservation of key architectural features, transformation is inevitable due to changing urban demands. This balance between preservation and evolution highlights the dynamic nature of vernacular architecture, ensuring cultural heritage continues to inspire modern design.



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