

B. ARCHITECTURE

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

Western influence on vernacular architecture of India

Lecture-13

Architecture of Pondicherry:

Let get started, so we will go through the brief history and little elaborate, so that you can understand the various processes or the various things or the city or the smallest town that we go through. The Portuguese have been here, so have the Dutch, the Danes and the English. By the 18th century, this tiny fishing village had turned into a grand port city. So luckily somehow the entire fishing village had turned into a grand port city. The French first set foot here in 1670 and left a part of them when their undisturbed rule finished in 1954. The French actually left in 1954 while they came in 1670. So you can understand how long times they have spent and how much it would affect a place. A trip to Pondicherry is like a journey in time with a vibrant present celebrating its interesting part. It is divided into two parts, rarely you can walk into the city or town where you can find contrasting set of architecture at the same time. Pudhucherry or Pondicherry is one such place, his history goes back to before Roman times, but factually started with the arrival of the French in 1673, founded the town and built it to its present form, they have spent 250 years almost in this place.

So 'Puducherry' is the French interpretation of the original name 'puducheri' meaning 'new settlement'. Many pilgrims have shared the town's hospitality on their way to the temple town of Rameshwaram, thus enriching its culture. So even before the French or the Tamil architecture something it was developed and it was actually a hospitable port city. The known history of Puducherry dates back to the beginning of our era. It also had a flourishing maritime history. Excavations at Arikamedu, about 7 kms south of the Pondicherry town, show that Romans came here to trade in the 1st century AD. That influence is going to be shown always so Romans had come, we

know about the French so lots of pilgrims passing through the city. The trade included dyed textiles, pottery and semi-precious stones. The findings are now displayed in the Pondicherry museum. Ancient Roman scripts mention one of the trade centers along the Indian coasts as poduca or poduke, which historians believe to be the present Puducherry.

So the significance of history is going through that, among the few regions or the few discovered states or places where Puducherry is one of them. Columbus discovering Kerala and Africa and so many other things, similarly Puducherry was one among them those in the lines. Very little is known about the early period of Puducherry. Legend has it that the sage Agastya established his Ashram here. At the beginning of the four century A.D., the Puducherry area was part of the Pallava kingdom of Kanchipuram. Not only the europeans are here the prevalent ruling kingdom also have the role on this. That's how I guess it left the people of Tamil origin and the people of French. So in the tenth century A.D., the Cholas of Thanjavur took over, only to be replaced by the Pandiya kingdom in the thirteenth century, after the brief invasion by the Muslim rulers We have the Europeans we have the prevalentHindu kings and also a set of Muslim rulers who established the sultanate of Madurai, the Vijayanagar empire took the control of almost all of the south of India till 1638, when the Sultan of Bijapurbrgan his rule over Gingee. So this is the brief history, the Portuguese discovered the route to India and began to expand their inflence by occupying coastal areas and building harbor towns.

So the Portuguese we have also read in Goa, in case of Goa, in case of cochin which will be seen. They establish port towns wherever they could, so along with Goa and along with cochin town of Puducherry was one of their spots. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese established a factory in Puducherry but a century later, they were compelled to leave the city by the ruler of Gingee who found them unfriendly. The main reason that Portuguese coming in is, if you look at the Portuguese skylines or architectural skyline, the Puducherry skyline, it is extremely similar. So this is the reason because the Portuguese came and settle and had their influence on the architecture. While the later set up trading posts in Porto Novo and cuddalore, the French who had trading centers in the north, mahe and madras were invited to open a trading center in Puducherry by the new ruler of Gingee. So not only these people French are also invited. So the French officer took up residence in the Danish lodge in Puducherry began.

Officially the French period began. In 1674 they started to build Puducherry and transformed it from a small fishing village into a flourishing port-town. So what the other European came they did, they make sure that they had a port they had a trading center but they did not actually go into building a city or town, the French laid the first step to that. In 1693, the Dutch took over and fortified the town considerably.

So looking at the French placing their foot over and occupying the lot of the space, the Dutch also took over and fortified. But four years later, Holland and France signed a peace treaty and the French regained Puducherry in 1699. Global treaties had influence on Puducherry, it rarely happens that global treaty had a direct effect on small places like Puducherry especially in India. In the 18th century, the town was laid out on a grid pattern and grew considerably. They slowly started building a town and firmly they come out from the Grid pattern is prevalently the French town today. There was also the Dutch, there was also the English and also the French, the ambition clashed with the English and the local kingdom also had a clash and a period of skirmishes and political intrigues began. In spite of a treaty between the English and French not to interfere in local politics, the disturbances continued. Finally the French prevailed, and left until after independence when the situation arise from complete necessary independence even though the citizens were allowed to affiliated to France if willed. What happened was finally the French prevailed; they stayed on until even after the actual independence of India, they left only around 1950 or 1960. After it is necessary for Puducherry to gain its complete freedom. So India could be free and independent. But the citizens are allowed to be still stay there and allowed to be the citizen of France.

Now we are move on to the Architecture of pondicherry, you have the clear idea of what has been going through the Pondicherry in terms of history. Pondicherry has an interesting cross-cultural history and its built form is one of the major components in lending a unique identity to the town. So cross-cultural history which we have already seen, it becomes one of the most influential factor in the identity of the town. The old town of Pondicherry which is a showcases of the two distinct architecture styles- French and Tamil and the hybrid Franco-Tamil. The old town of Pondicherry is nothing but the town they flourish in French whether and also the Tamil town they flourished along with it.

Now the Pondicherry has developed and grown big, but this does not happen to be the old town. The old town was developed and the Tamil town was flourished with it and also an amalgamation of both the architecture styles happen. The French quarter has buildings inspired by the European classical style, completely inspired what they did was they use the building materials they use the feature of traditional vernacular style whereas the building in the Tamil quarter or in the vernacular style of Tamilnadu. This is not that something happens in the usually, the French Quarter has French style of building and the Portuguese influence French architecture, while the Tamil town or Tamil quarter had the Vernacular style. Both the styles does not make necessarily at all, they stay distinct and unique and had their own identity, eventhough they were ruled and necessarily built by other set of ruling people. In French quarter each building with different design, the interior of the building with its colonnade, portico, porch and garden made with total privacy from the street outside. French houses one can say are more 'introvert' the massive gate being the connection between the inside and outside. In contrast, the Tamil houses can be said to be 'extrovert' with their verandas(thalvaram) with the sitting platforms(thinnai) opening on to the street, welcoming neighbours and passes by for a chat or visit.

So we talked about how the pilgrims passed through, this town how they received and how they made the place they rich. This has an impact on the way the Tamil houses or quarter or Tamil town developed. So Tamil town had houses which is opened up to the street, the living space extended to the street or the thinnai space of the open veranda, encourages people to come for a chat or stay or sleep for the day and leave the next day in case of pilgrims, this was an important aspect of the Tamil house or the way the spaces interact and this made it essentially extroverted. So that not closed or not secluded and they do not hide anything creates a sense of privacy, very eminent sense of privacy, whereas the French obviously they were actually coming from the different land and settling in a Alien set of people so they had the tendency of being introverted or towards themselves.

Most of French town or most of French architecture if you noticed it is actually introverted or closed, you cannot see anything. This is an important way they associate. While the entrance verandas are very welcomed, they also preserve the privacy of the inner houses as only family and close friends are allowed inside. As I said Tamil houses do encourage privacy also. But it is not as strict or not closed or blocked out as the French town. In oldendays

the passing pilgrims were welcoming to spend a night on the thinnai, as I said the pilgrims passing has an impact on the way the houses developed.

French Town:

We will be talk about the architectural features or features of general, the French town, the French colonial architecture which is predominantly seen in the former French precinct now known as White town. The white town which is a very racial way of calling it they just use it for the town. White town is south of the canals laid by the French now known as Ambour Salai and Gingee Salai. It is the southern portion In the map towards the Bay of Bengal. So what essentially happen was when the town is developing, there was an important canal is between which is built by French. So strategically the south canal towards the Bay of Bengal or towards the sea, that portion built by French that was called French town. The other side of the canal became the Tamil town. That's how they were divided. The portion north of the canal is the Tamil Quarter which also encompasses Mission Street and is famous for its Franco Tamil architecture or creole architecture which an be called as White town is known for its colonial styled villas with big compound walls and stately doors.

So door was a door as far as Tamil architecture concerned. But for the French town or the French colonial architecture the door became the very prominent part and it had a personality of own. The other important feature is the Tamil towns or Tamilhouses were no so colorful they did have color which was more natural which they had to do directly with the building materials. If they use the Mangalore tiles they show the color of red, if they use the thatch they show the color of brown and similarly for town etc., the French town bought in the influence of colors.

So the colors used for the structures here are primarily sun burnt yellow, peach or white. That is the bright color that is something new to this kind of architecture. This quarter also known as the French Quarter has perpendicular roads which have now become somewhat of a problem with the heavy tourist influx and also because access to the Promenade on the sea is through this part of town. They place a strategically towards the sea, but today it becomes somewhat nuisance with the traffic or the way they passing through them in order to go to the sea. What is relevant here is that it is laid out in a grid out pattern on roads with strictly laid out streets. The Promenade is pondicherry's only sea facing boulevard with an artificially

created sand strip and lined up by a rock armour to protect the shoreline. If you have been to Pondicherry, you will notice that there is only one road that faces the beach or the sea. And this sea is artificially set up with the sand strip and also the set of rocks are placed artificially. This was done by the French development also. As you can see, this is the canal line and this is the sea, you notice that this is the French town, to extend this is the map of today, but rather the grid line pattern is visible in this part of the town, which is the main town and also the Tamil town developed in that manner reflecting its way of planning. This is essentially the old town separated by the canal. So the grid line pattern is clearly visible and it is towards the Bay of Bengal.

Now we will go through the series of images which shows the way the French town of architecture. We talked about the French architecture and how it is colorful with different set of colors it is blocked and very introverted and the interesting aspect is the way they handle climate. So both type of architecture have responsibility towards climate of which they were addressed, but here is the difference, Tamil architecture is essentially the Indian architecture answers climate requirements or climate conditions with the help of the courtyard or with the help of openings or with the help of the stories etc., the French or the European architecture is the way to use high ceiling or the use of large with shuttered windows etc., so that is very clear instead of having a courtyard or open space that something opens up to the street, it is completely closed, second thing is it has large openings and well shaded and answers in a different way to the climate, it has overhead hanging balcony's.

So this is not something present very much in the Tamil architecture with the distinct features. The colors yellow, white, or peach something that we widely seen with Tamil architecture or traditional Indian architecture. This is very much of European influence. As I talked about the doors or the gate being an important aspect, this is also had a very much European influence, villas or gateways or gated compounds or gated complex of how the European looked at housing, they had a huge compound wall, inside the house is placed such that it is completely shadowed away from the street. That you can see as the clear example.

So there is no relation or the encouragement of the relationship of the space between the streets and their living space. As you can see the compound

walls with set of railings with its set of detailing, compound wall is not something of the characteristics of the Tamil architecture. You can see the compound walls being more and more articulated clear door overhanging balconies the yellow colors, the peach colors, white with large openings, high ceilings and large verandas which help with the climate and answers the climate. You can see the big shutters how the way shaded. So the windows opening a large, the basic principle behind this is that during the day heat and the sun is kept outside. And during the night the windows are kept open so that the heat can flow out from the building and the wind is encouraged. Usually placing a courtyard is for converting the cooling but how they answer it they have high ceilings with clear storey windows. The French styled architecture is suited for this town because of the salubrious weather with its long and huge windows with vertical cast iron bars as grills, ornate balconies, large courtyards, the court yards that they mention here is not inside that of house is outside. When you enter the house there is a court then you move inside, circular arched gates, engaged columns and stucco designs. Stucco designs are something that Europeans brought over. A very significant difference between the houses in the French Quarter and the Tamil Quarters is that the houses built in the Tamil style are much more friendly to visitors.

So if you notice the foreigners or people from other countries always call Indian people supposed to be friendly or more jovial towards strangers. So this is something happens to be the community kind of feeling with Indian people or Indian kind of architecture. This is implied something more in the architecture. The important difference between both the architecture is that Tamil style is more friendly to visitors if the pilgrim or anyone come they could sit and catch the breadth in the thinnai. With their inviting verandas in front of their main doors they make the traveler comfortable in seeking refuge or rest. The French styled houses are much more imposing and the personal and social lives of the inhabitants remain a mystery behind those very high walled houses. So apart from being the mystery or apart from shut from the neighbours. It is very imposing such a way that. The European architecture have the way of huge or having solid masses that is very typical of European houses which is not typical of Tamil architecture.

The French buildings, in the ville blanche are still found an impressive number of colonial houses, mansion type houses with courtyards behind ornate gateways, dating from the 19th century or from the beginning of the

20th century, which constitute a tropical adaptation of the private mansions of the 18th century with large terraces. So adding in terraces makes the difference, most of them were built on a rather similar ground plan with variations in size, orientation and details. So the basic difference in each plan is just the scale or the size of the openings of the orientation and details as per individual wishes. The ceilings are marked by heavy wooden beams and wooden joists supporting terrace roofing made of brick-on-edge masonry in lime mortar, called argamasse in French and madras roofing's in English; the main building material for all masonry works was burnt bricks in lime mortar (the lime was made by burning sea shells from the local shore or limestone quarried from Tutipet).

Tamil Town:

The Tamil towns most of the buildings are of similar vernacular style and typology with, however, individual variations. The important characteristic of the Tamil town was that it was mostly similar, you remember that the way we studied the vernacular architecture they group of housing or group of houses that shares a common space, they have lot of similarities with common walls etc., a significant feature here is that in spite of the religious differences of its population, the entire settlement shares a common architectural pattern. So that is very unique in case of Pondicherry, the town is called Tamil town and not a Hindu or Muslim's town because the part of architecture and the pattern is similar and unique to the region and may not necessarily to the religion.

So the entire settlement shares the common architectural pattern. The present town is a hybrid of a European concept and the native building traditions; a synthesis of these two styles, which has resulted in a town that has a unique Franco-Tamil identity. So how initially the way the French style of planning is reflected in the way the streets were laid out and then the houses slowly turned out to be the amalgam of both the Tamil houses and the European houses. The typical way it happened was the ground floor or the lower floor was the Tamil town, the second story which was to be built or could be built as a European style architecture. This was how the Franco-Tamil evolved. Unlike the colonial house, the Tamil house is very much open to the street.

Now we talk about the difference in construction methods, it is built on rubble foundations with walls of flat bricks and madras terrace roofing. It is

characterized by a street veranda called talvaram with mangalore tiles over wooden columns and masonry benches for visitors, called thinnai then the corridor leads to the interior or central courtyard, open to the sky, called mutram, this was the important feature of the house lined up by an inner veranda with country tiles of baked earth over wooden columns. Beyond, are the more private spaces like sami aria. This is another difference, they didn't have the place where they could place the deity or have spiritual experience. So samiarai or the spiritual space was the important aspect of the Tamil house., store room or bedroom and kitchen which opens in to a rear courtyard that encloses a well, toilet and bathroom.

So this is the typical vernacular architecture of Tamilnadu. So you could look at the street opens out, this is actually a sketch of Franco-Tamil houses, it depicts how the Tamil house and the French house, fit in together and so you can notice the ground floor has the thinnai, it has roofs, it has plasters and columns. while the other roof has the mix of a European style in Tamil town. So the Tamil the part that just the Tamil that shades or cover the window everything else has large windows and columns with ornate and window glasses, the gables etc., everything happened to be French.

This is the typical Tamil house. There is a wooden columns, there is a doors, so any random stranger can come and sit and encourages the people to be comfortable in their own spaces. The another example, this is little bit outdated and still you can see there is a thinnai, the windows are rather simple and roof is slopped and has a coconut shell roofs and other example you can see that, the little bit influence for the French. The lower portion is completely Tamil have simple grill and doors, has the thinnai and has the raced plinth which is not that evident in French architecture. The upper portion has verandas which has actually an inspiration from the French. It has curved off or semi-circular portion of the windows. The interrogate details carvings or the railings has very much Tamil with the geometric patterns being followed. Thus, the Tamil house with its series of open semi-covered and covered spaces, is above all functional, adapted to the environment, conceived in such a way as to make use of cool and shady space as much as possible. Exchange of architectural patterns is evident in the facades of two-storied buildings where the ground floor is usually of the Tamil type with talvaram, thinnai and carved doors, While the first floor features the French influence, with arched windows, plaster decoration, luted pilasters, columns with capitals, architectural motifs such as moldings of the

doors inspired by French designs, as I said the religious aspect played a important role in the patterns of the Rezhi as such, because in some religion like Islamic religion the figuring's and ideas was not practiced and encouraged, the railings and motifs etc., were mostly the geometric patterns or plan patterns. Slowly the inclusion of French designs such as figures; it is came into the mix of styles.

So the Tamil and French styles are the signature mark of Pondicherry heritage. Now the mix of these two styles are actually a unique and become the signature mark of the Pondicherry heritage. It was considered fashionable to use French features in the facades of the native buildings. No longer they have constructed housing with usual Tamil features they also had used French features for the facades as they considered it fashionable and more likable. However the interior structure has never been influenced by western decorative motifs and, in many cases, in the street facades, there was no compromising on the old age-old functional elements of *oalvaram* and *thinnai*. Even though you look at the second storey expansion, semi circled or arched windows and plasters, decorated columns and motifs. The basic spatial planning, the aspects that went into the planning were retained as per the tradition.

So that was an important aspect. So façade what was mainly included with kind of elevations, so here is the Franco-Tamil house typically. We can list out the various features, below it is a typical Tamil house, so you can see simple windows, you can have wooden or stone columns, you have open and you don't have a direct compound wall as such, and have an open *thinnai*, so that people can come and sit or chat and you can see the straight line to the courtyard to till the end of the courtyard.

In French houses you can never see through, it's a typical Tamil houses which you can see completely, it has the roof which keeps the sun out and prevents the rain from reaching inside. So it is been covered by the *madrasi* styles as roofing system. If you notice, the building materials also distinct. If we look above the French style is typical with colors and arch windows, the motifs, etc., are very much French. This is also another example of renovation of French, Tamil house is adopting to French.