

## REVITALIZING THE ENVIRONS OF HISTORICAL CORE OF THANJAVUR

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### ABSTRACT:

Thanjavur, one of the heritage towns in Tamil Nadu, has lot of tourist important places for the heritage lovers within its historic core. The historic core of Thanjavur includes Brahadewswara Temple – the World heritage monument, Palace Complex, and traditional residential areas. All these places exhibit rich architectural and cultural heritage of Cholas, Nayaks and Marattas. The historical core of Thanjavur is also identified with certain developmental problems. Though large number of domestic and international tourists visit these places, there is a lack of infrastructure to promote tourism. This study aims to identify various developmental problems and lack of infrastructure for the tourists. As well managed tourism can contribute to the economy of the town, the cultural and architectural heritage tourism of historical sites of Thanjavur need to be promoted further. This study also attempted to provide strategies for enhancing the image of historically important places and development of infrastructure for promoting tourism.

**Keywords:** *Architectural Heritage, Tourism, Infrastructure, Urban Regeneration*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Most of the traditional cities in India are characterised by architecturally and culturally significant historic buildings such as temple or Mosque, palace and the residential areas. Traditional buildings in the historic core of towns and cities play an important role in heritage tourism. The Brahadeeswara temple, Palace and residential areas within fort form the historical core of Thanjavur town and tourists mainly visit the temple and the palace. As large number of tourists, both national and international tourists visit Thanjavur there is a need to assess the present infrastructure and additional infrastructure required for promoting the tourism. Today these traditional cities such as Thanjavur are facing problems consequent upon rapid urbanization which are devastating their historical physical form. Typically the historic core areas are congested, overcrowded lacking in basic amenities and steadily deteriorating. Several problems arise in dealing with such historic core areas that include the conservation of historic buildings and monuments and the problem of integrating the modern urban fabric with the historic core. Hence comprehensive urban regeneration programmes need to be formulated, which can provide solutions to enhance the quality of the historic environment, there by improves its economy. This research paper is aimed at identifying the various developmental problems and the shortcomings in the tourist infrastructure and also the strategies for enhancing the image of historically important places and development of infrastructure for promoting tourism.

## 2.0 THANJAVUR:

Thanjavur is a historical city located in the central eastern part of Tamil Nadu state. It is the headquarters of Thanjavur district, the 'Rice Bowl' of Tamil Nadu. It is also known for Thanjavur traditional paintings, exquisite handicrafts, and South Indian musical instruments. Thanjavur was the capital of Imperial Cholas and was ruled by different rulers, starting from 8<sup>th</sup> century Cholas, the Pandyas, the Nayaks, the Marattas and the British. Each ruler contributed to the development of the town in a unique way. Thanjavur is a remarkable city from the point of view of planning, design and the exquisite craftsmanship displayed in its built form in the heritage areas. There are two important heritage areas in the entire historic core; they are Brahadeeswara temple complex and the Palace complex [Balasubramaniam, K. 1994].

## 2.1 Historic Core

The historic area in Thanjavur is divided into two forts - Big fort and Small fort (refer fig.1). The small fort is located on the south western end, which is more elevated than the big fort. Small fort consists of Brahadeeswara temple and the Sivaganga garden, tank and Schwartz church. The Brahadeeswara temple on the southwest corner of the old town is the landmark structure of the city, for its historical and architectural significance as well as for its monumental scale. The temple visually dominates the whole area. The big fort has been located on the north eastern side of the small fort. The Big fort consists of a large inhabited area with the four main streets of the town defining the residential area .The magnificent palace of Nayak period is also located on the eastern side of this residential area, which is a focus of this district [Ramachandran, N. 2002].

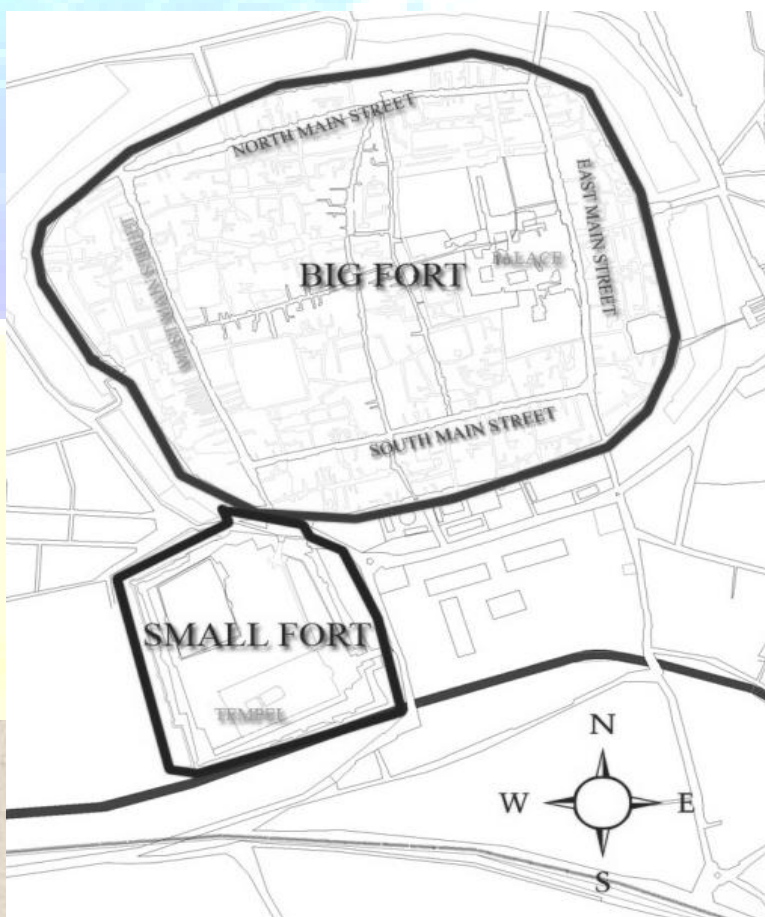


Figure 1: Thanjavur Historic Area Map

## 2.2 Brahadeeswara Temple

The great Chola King, Rajarajan (985-1014 A.D.) built Rajareswaram - the Brahadeeswara temple (refer fig.2) at Thanjavur, which according to experts, is a standing classical monument of the Chola style of art and architecture. The temple is constructed of granite, mostly of large blocks, a rock that is not available in the neighbourhood and had therefore to be brought from a distance, that itself a colossal task. The plinth of the Central Shrine is 45.72 sq.m., the shrine proper 30.48 sq.m. and the vimana 60.96 m. high. On the massive plinth, covered throughout with inscriptions, there are niches on three sides in two rows, containing representations of deities such as Siva, Vishnu and Durga. Temple of grand design and majestic proportion, embellished with the works of skilled sculptors, are the visible manifestations of the spirit and culture, priorities and principles, cherished values and beliefs of the people who lived in those days. The vimana of Brahadeswara Temple acts as a visual landmark as well as a city icon. In 1987 UNESCO & Government of India has declared this temple as a World Heritage Monument [Pichard, P. 1995; Gopalakrishnan, P. 2006].



Figure 2: Brahadeeswara Temple, Thanjavur

### 2.3 Palace Complex

The palace complex consists of many important buildings of Nayaks and Marattas. Bell tower, Arsenal Tower, Sangeeth Mahal, Darbar Hall and Sarja Madi are the important buildings of the palace complex. Bell Tower is a high rise structure of 32.36 m height, which was used for defence purpose as information transmission tower. Arsenal Tower is the most architecturally rich and attractive building in the entire palace complex. It is of pyramidal shape and has a height of 43.6 m. This tower was built as a pleasure resort for the royal family, by Nayak rulers. Later this building was used for storing ammunitions during war time in British period. Bell tower and Arsenal tower in Palace complex create a varied skyline in the historic core of Thanjavur. (refer fig.3). Sangeeth Mahal is used as an audience hall, where dance and music activities were performed. The royal family used this hall to view the performance and to enjoy the concerts with all comforts in privacy. The Darbar Hall is beautifully decorated with fresco paintings in the walls and ceilings. Darbar hall was used as an official meeting place during the Maratta Period. Sarja Madi is in the eastern part of the palace complex, built in the indo-saracenic style. It is a six storied structure, known for its architecturally rich projecting balconies [Gopalakrishnan and Pushplatha 2007].



Figure 3: Bell Tower and Arsenal Tower of Palace complex

### **3.0 PROBLEMS AND GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR HISTORIC CORE AREA:**

The historic core of Thanjavur is constantly getting transformed to accommodate and adjust to the new land use, materials and transport systems. The major problems include traffic congestion, commercial activity which attracts large volumes of traffic; lack of parking space and regular traffic jam; inadequate public facilities, lack of proper signage, and improper solid waste management; increasing pressure on infrastructure systems; change in land use resulting in the breakdown of the traditional social fabric. In spite of large number of tourists coming to see Brahadeeswara temple and the palace complex, the town lacks basic tourist facilities like information kiosks, hygienic toilets, pedestrian paths and good restaurants in the movement corridor connecting Brahadeeswara and palace complex. It is observed from the field study that more number of foreign tourist preferred to move on foot to Palace complex from Brahadeeswara temple. There is a lack of continuous pedestrian pathways on the road connecting Brahadeeswara and palace complex, forcing the people to walk on roads and thereby creating a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians.

Earlier surveys revealed that majority of people living in the historical core are aware of architectural values of the area. They also agreed that historical buildings give prestige to the area and increase the property value and expressed that the historical buildings need to be conserved [Ramprasad et al. 1992]. Today, due to market forces and lack of awareness and appreciation of traditional architecture and the heritage value of the town, the heritage properties in the historic core are being replaced with modern commercial centre. The new construction coming up in the historic areas are not compatible with the character of the area. The views of vimana of Brahadeeswara temple and other landmarks like Bell tower and Arsenal tower in the palace complex need to be preserved and enhanced to improve the image of the city. As per building bye laws of Thanjavur municipality, buildings of height not more than 9m only are permitted within a radius of 1km from the Brahadeeswara temple. Still certain high rise (more than 9m) modern structures are being constructed obstructing the views of temple and other towers in palace complex from the vantage points. In addition, the advertisement hoardings on the terraces of buildings in this area obstructs the temple view.

The main problems related to information components include absence of clear coordinated strategy for signage and visitor information and absence of obvious hierarchy of information delivery. Even the main attractions and places are not being signed. Existing signs do not develop linkages and assist movement between areas. Outwardly there appears to be no overall design philosophy, hence no consistent signing provision is in place. Existing signage are not distinctive and do not develop the character and sense of place of particular areas. Certain signage are difficult to read and could be better sited. The introduction of an imaginative and innovative signage and information system will contribute significantly to the vitality and viability of the historic city core as part of a wider package of streetscape, space improvement projects and major developments. The opportunity exists to greatly improve the image of the city in terms of creating and then reinforcing a good first impression.

Any new development in the historic area will have impact on the temple complex setting, so any new developments in that area should make use of the temple view and should not block the view of temple from other areas of the city. Building heights and signage needs to be controlled in this zone. Within the historic core, and in locations which affect the setting of listed buildings, scheduled monuments or nationally important archaeological remains, development proposals must respect adjacent buildings, open spaces, landmarks and settings and have regard to local scale, proportion, detail and materials. Proposals will be required to maintain or enhance existing urban spaces, views, landmarks, and other townscape elements, which contribute to the character or appearance of the area. Within the historical core the architecturally important buildings need to be identified and listed. With regard to listed buildings, consent should only be granted for the development in the immediate vicinity of listed buildings; demolition; internal or external alterations; change of use; erection of satellite antenna and mobile phone transmission towers, where there is no adverse effect on the character, appearance or setting of the building. Planning permission should only be granted for new, or alterations to existing buildings in conservation areas or on listed buildings where the proposed design preserves or enhances the character of the area or building. Within the historical core or on listed buildings, advertisements and hoardings need to comply with policy that consist of: a design and scale that respects the character and appearance of the area; good quality materials that are harmonious to the surface to which they are attached; advertisements, hoardings should not block the view, vistas of monuments and

historic structures; externally illuminated advertisements that require large light fittings should not be permitted.

#### **4.0 SPECIFIC ISSUES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS IN BRAHADEESWARA TEMPLE ZONE:**

Specific issues observed in Brahadéeswara temple zone and proposed actions are listed below:

- Brahadéeswara temple moat on the eastern side looks visually unimpressive, needs to be redeveloped.
- Visibility of the temple affected by building height & billboards above the building near the over bridge on southern side of the temple. hence a comprehensive development guidelines need to be framed and strictly implemented by local government.
- There is a lack of tourist amenities like information counters, toilets, water fountains, that needs to be increased and quality of the existing ones needs to be improved
- Shops / vendors in front of the temple, obstructing the view also causing hindrance to the pedestrians. Some of the shops are located on the pedestrian paths. Shops and vendors need to be given proper designated places.
- The parking spaces for vehicles are provided on the opposite side of the temple. Heavy vehicular movement on the road in front of the temple causing lot of hardship for the pedestrians. Effective traffic management pattern need to be worked out to reduce the movement of vehicles on the road in front of the temple and appropriate pedestrian crossings between the temple and parking areas need to be provided.
- Pedestrian path needs to be provided on both sides of the road leading to temple.
- Public toilet facilities in front of the temple does not maintain the character of the temple environs. Public toilet facilities may be provided near the parking area on the opposite side of the temple.
- Rajarajan garden needs to be improved, lacks park amenities and visual interest.



## 5.0 SPECIFIC ISSUES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS IN PALACE COMPLEX:

Specific issues observed in Palace complex and proposed actions are listed below:

- The palace complex is used by different agencies, some of them needs to be relocated. It is used by, state archaeology , Thanjavur Tamil university, Government School, Fire service Department, Thanjavur Prince, Saraswathi mahal library.
- The new government school building inside the palace complex does not respect the historical values of the built environment around it. They rather disturb the character of the area. The new buildings in the Palace complex, which have come up in the last fifteen years, are not compatible with the character of that historic place. Some of the functions inside the palace complex are not compatible with the character of that area. The whole complex needs to be listed as a heritage zone, whereas at present only few areas are designated as protected monuments under ASI and Archeology Department.
- There is a clear evidence of erosion of the following qualities seen in the complex
  - Coherence of building form / materials
  - Mix of land uses
  - Historical significance
  - General environment quality.
- The abandoned historical structure near the school building needs to be preserved and adaptive reuse with a new function should be proposed.
- Ornamental watch towers along the palace wall needs to be restored and should be integrated with the palace complex.
- The entry gate way on the northern side needs to be enhanced and the new structures on top of the gate way should be removed.
- The streets inside the palace complex should be paved and curbs should be provided on either side along with street furniture.

- The new developments do not respect the existing layout of buildings /streets/ and spaces. Guidelines needs to be provided for new developments and any alterations to existing buildings ,roof extensions, painting, finishing, windows/fenestrations, telecommunication equipment, soft landscape design / open spaces / views /vistas / landmarks.
- Pedestrian paths and street amenities need to be provided in East main street, which is the main approach road for the palace.
- The open spaces inside the palace complex needs to be integrated with built environment around and also soft landscaping needs to be provided to the open space adjacent to bell tower and arsenal tower with street furniture.
- Ticket counters, parking space for tourist, tourist convenience needs to be enhanced, no proper signage exist inside the complex.
- Restaurants, local art and craft shops can be added in the complex for the tourist.
- For the local residents around the palace, the proposed landscaped open spaces can provide good environment for morning walks, play area for children and interaction spaces.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION:

Urban regeneration and conservation of historic towns is one of the most important aspects of the safeguarding the monumental and historical heritage in many countries. In India many historical inner cities are characterized by an exceptional concentration of magnificent traditional buildings, which gives a unique visual character to that town. Thanjavur with its rich architectural and historical significance is under the threat of neglect and development pressure due to urbanization. It is evident from the study and analysis that revitalisation of Thanjavur historic core could lead to conservation of heritage monuments and the protection of the urban character. The main issues to be considered for the regeneration of Thanjavur historic core is the balanced approach of conservation and development and community involvement in the planning process and design, adaptive reuse, provision of infrastructure and administrative

structure to deliver the project and creation of awareness and responsibilities among the local people. Successful regeneration of historic environment in Thanjavur will transform places, strengthen the community's self-image and will re-create attractive places which will encourage sustained inward investment. The town has tremendous tourist potential and the tourist arrival is also increasing every year. If adequate and appropriate infrastructure for tourists are developed and the town's heritage value is revived, it will certainly enhance the image and identity of the town, which in turn will attract more tourists.

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