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Conserve, Preserve and Rejuvenate Architectural aspects of “Kanchipuram”

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Abstract

Kanchipuram one of the seven holiest cities in India, is losing its cultural and historic importance. Well known for its multitude of values and Dravidian architectural style reflected in the temples, the city today has witnessed a tremendous degree of change from the original character. Studies state that its culture is slowly changing, being altered or destroyed because of urbanization and metropolitan influence. In the recent years the emphasis of its culture is being lost and the historic evidences have been disappearing. This research attempts to identify momentous character of this city and preserve the same with its values.

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1. Introduction

Indian peninsular is well known for its diversity in religion, language and culture. Tamilnadu, the southern state of India has a rich historic importance belonging to the Dravidian race which is considered to be one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Under Dravidian era, the Pallavas ruled Kanchipuram with thondaimandalam as its capital. This city is unique and has witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties from Pallavas in 3rd century extending all the way to the British Empire till the early 19th century. The Pallavas embellished the city with gigantic temples, shrines and other architectural marvels.

Among the countless popular religious cities in Tamilnadu, Kanchipuram is distinctive since it has the influence of many religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam apart from Hinduism. Located on the banks of the Vegavathy River it is best known for its temples and silk saris. History also states that the city of temples has a rich source of many art forms originated and developed through centuries.

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2. Temples - an Overview

Temples in India depicts the traditional and cultural growth of a region. Also, South Indian temples achieved momentous growth during the Pallava and Chola regimes. Temples show a distinctive evolution since the time of 'puranas' (ancient events). The rulers of different periods concentrated on constructing these temples to depict their political power and royal authority. 'Periya puranam' states that Pallavas were the first to construct stone temples (Kataligal). Mahendravarma I constructed the first cave temple Mandagapattu near Villupuram followed by Shore temple Mahabalipuram, Kailasanatha Temple Kanchipuram, till cave temple in Mahendravadi (Fig.1). According to well known historian and author Champaka Lakshmi there were neither temples, nor Iconic structures during Vedic period. Also, in 'Sanga Illakiyam' (literature) there was no mention about stone or rock cut temples. Prior to Pallava period temples were only constructed with degenerating materials like brick, lime, wood and metals. It was during the early period of Mahendravarma, who converted many structures into stone temples which is standing agelessly till date (Narasimha Rao P.V.L, 2008).

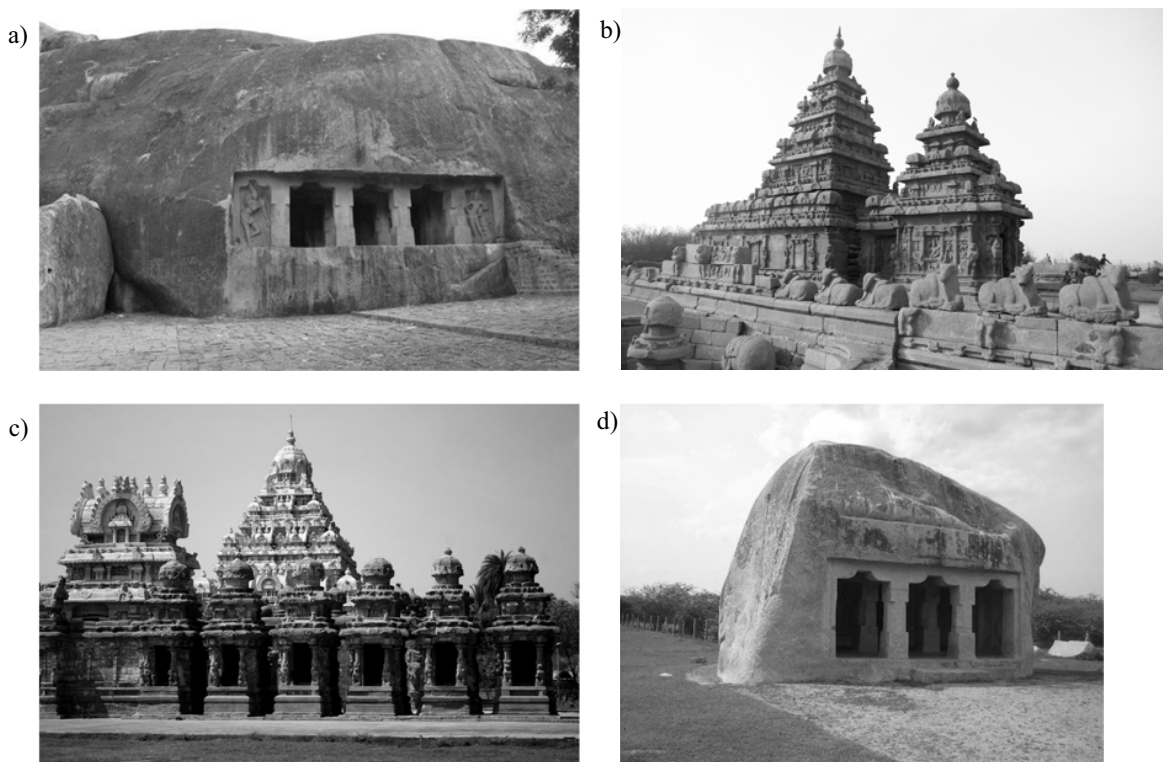


Fig.1 (a)Cave temple - Mandagapattu (b)Shore Temple - Mahabalipuram (c)Kailasanatha Temple - Kanchipuram
(d) Cave Temple - Mahendravadi

3. Early History of Kanchipuram

History dating back to centuries states about four independent kingdoms, mentioned in the Rock Edict No.2 of Emperor Asoka (3rd BC) at Girnar (Gujarat): Chera (Keralaputra), Chola, Pandya and Satyaputra situated in the south of Mauryan Empire. The Satyaputra is identified by historians as 'Thondaimandalam' described as 'Kurumbar Nilam'

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