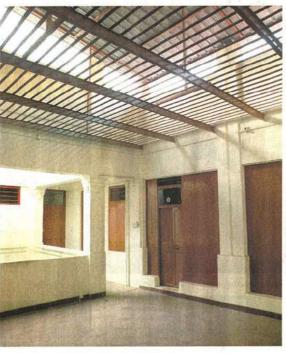
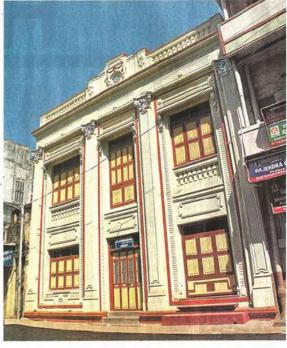
HERITAGE





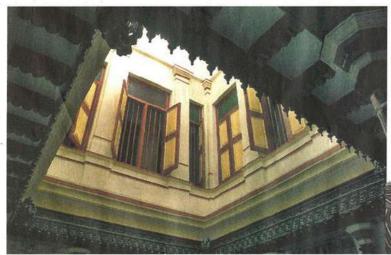


VAASAL-THALAM (left to right) The ornate main door has been preserved, the naturally lit terrace has been converted into an usable space, while the facade of the building facing Nainiappa Street, now restored to its former glory, has a carefully concealed entry that gives a secondary street access without taking away the essence of the architecture

ESTORE and reuse

Chennai architect V.S. Vigneswar talks to HEMA VIJAY

about the best way to preserve the few remaining Beri-Chettiar homes in the city



ver visited any one of Structural Analysis of Historic Constructions (SAHC) traditional Beritchettiar houses that coated in the Chennai aroof Park Town, George and Chintadripet?, city-based V.S. Vignesprincipal architect, A-V hitecture Plus Value), has concluded his research are located in the Chennai arare located in the Chennal ar-eas of Park Town, George Town and Chintadripet? Well, city-based V.S. Vignes-war, principal architect, A+V (Architecture Plus Value), has just concluded his research and documentation of these houses.

houses.

Based on the intriguing findings of the study, a research paper was authored by Vigneswar and Dr. Ranee Vedamuthu, Dean of SAP, called 'Structural Strategy and Con-struction Systems in the case of Beri-Chettiar Dwellings in Chennai'. Now selected by the

Why did you take up this study? It was primarily done to generate a historic perspec-tive on these houses and to provide an impetus for their conservation. They form an important link in the histor-ic and cultural evolution of the city. How many Beri-Chet-tiar houses are left standing now? That is difficult to say, but

I have documented six. Why do you recom-mend 'adaptive re-use' for these buildings? Re-inventing these build-ings and retrofitting them to

Why did you take up

MUN MUTRAM The

primary courtyard, an internal sanctuary for the homestead retains all its charm; and (left) V. S. Vigneswar suit today's needs is the only way they can be pre-served for future gener-ations, as most of these are being torn down for com-mercial purposes. It cannot happen without an econom-ic motive.

Has there been any tangible fallout from your research?
One of the case study houses, Kalathi-Chettiar house on Nainiappa Naicken Street in Park Town, was taken up for conservation. To make the venture suited to present needs, minor modifications were made to preserve its historic nature, service layers were added, and the house was retrofitted to become an office space. space.

Who

Who are the Beri-Chettiars?
The Beri-Chettiar community settled in the areas around Fort St. George far back in the 18th century. Their predominant occupation was trade in iron and steel with the British East India Company. They were also closely associated with a class of artisans called Kammadars, one of the reasons for the architectural richness of their houses.

What is the chief ar-

chitectural device in a Beri-Chettiar house?
What primarily defines the Beri-Chettiar house is the material, assembly and ornamentation, and the carving and exquisite craftsmaship give these homestheir unique identity.
For example, the main door is typically elaborate with detailed wood-cut work that includes a wood-en kalasam. There is enormous ornamentation and

mous ornamentation and detailing even on the rafters

detailing even on the rafters and supporting columns. Externally, however, they present a plainer look. The houses have excellent natural light and ventilation thanks to the open cour-tyards. These houses were built next to one another and shared common walls. and shared common walls. This is actually more space-economical in congested areas. For the same reason, they are earthquake resist-ant and structurally econo-mise on material.

What was the predominant building material used?
They had material such as egg-lime plaster, columns made from red sanders and Burma teak, hand-painted ceramic tiles imported from Europe, Rallain marble, Athangudi tiles...