

## Preserving Chennai's vanishing heritage

To create an impact and make heritage more appealing to the younger generation, a team of young architects organises heritage walks to unravel hidden architectural treasures in the city



Pictures from the Mylapore walk organised by Madras Inherited Chennai:

Madras Inherited is an initiative started by a group of architects and volunteers who are passionate about making significant changes in the domain of heritage.

Spearheaded by Triple O Studio, an architectural firm, the initiative focuses on heritage management, cultural heritage tourism, heritage education and awareness. This will be carried out through a series of interactive events like photo walks and heritage walks that are open to people of all ages, in notable historical areas across Chennai.

Currently covering Mylapore, Royapettah and other sites of Indo-Saracenic architecture, the team looks to expand with further research and mapping. Tahaer Zoyab, architect and co-founder of Madras Inherited, says, "There is more to Chennai's architectural history in its residential areas and we are focussing on small residential buildings that are unnoticed, unlike the known heritage structures. Through a series of walks, we aim to unravel these hidden architectural gems and document the fast disappearing less-known structures in the city."

The vision for Madras Inherited stems from a larger vision for heritage conservation and management which aims to create an impact in the domain.

"The attention paid to heritage in the city is very minimal. This leads to the slow disappearance and dilapidation of the city's heritage resource, loss of significance of city's historic areas and heritage assets, all forming the city's identity. Further, leading to chaotic insensitive construction in and around historic areas and their surrounding landscape, which can be seen in many areas such as Triplicane, Parry's, Georgetown and Mylapore. Madras Inherited is an eye-opener to the vanishing heritage in the city."

Previously, Tahaer was associated with a group called Houses Of Mylapore that conducted walks every couple of months.

“We noticed that many beautiful structures with lovely designs and details across the city are being knocked down every now and then because economically, it doesn't make any sense to keep those buildings.

We cannot force anyone to keep their old houses without any renovation, etc. That's how the idea of heritage walk popped up — we decided to talk about the historical and architectural value of these old houses before they completely disappear,” he shares.

Their first walk was held recently — through the lanes of Royapettah, decoding its architectural history and heritage that range from Agraharam houses to buildings in the Art Deco style.

Besides heritage walks, the team wants to focus on heritage management as well.

“Cultural heritage management is all about striking a balance between developing the tourism industry while still conserving the physical integrity of the sites and promoting as well as celebrating their educational, historic and cultural value. We are planning to work with students and volunteers of architecture to do a detail drawing of these places and not just taking photographs.”

The mission of Madras Inherited is to sensitise the public about the pluralistic cultural legacy of Madras so that they can develop a sense of association with the place.

“We need to instil a sense of social responsibility towards preserving the common heritage of Madras. As a fellow Chennaiite, we should protect, manage and preserve the tangible heritage of the city by undertaking necessary measures and identifying specific tools needed to better plan and manage historic fabric,” he sums up.