

Exploring Banavasi: A Study Tour of 2nd Year Architecture Students

Ar. Shridevi Vinay Anavatti*

Abstract

The study conducted by 2nd-year architecture students from the MIT School of Architecture in Banavasi, provides a comprehensive exploration of the area's rich historical, cultural, and architectural heritage. The focus of the study was the surroundings of Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple, an architectural marvel showcasing Dravidian style and intricate craftsmanship. The students examined the surrounding century-old houses, which reflect traditional building practices using local materials like laterite, stone and timber. These homes, with their sloping roofs, large verandas, and intricate woodwork, are emblematic of Karnataka's vernacular architecture. Banavasi, one of the oldest towns in Karnataka, was the capital of the Kadamba dynasty, giving it great historical significance. The town is also known for the annual Kadambotsava festival, which celebrates its cultural heritage through various traditional performances like music festival, music concerts, folk songs performance, folk dance performance etc, and activities like bullock race, buffalo race, food fests etc.,... The local economy is predominantly agrarian, centered around areca nut cultivation, and processing, which the students observed firsthand. One could see the diversity of artisans involved in sandalwood carving, artistic carpentry, shoe mending, black smith, pottery and rangoli. The study tour emphasized the integration of architectural heritage with local socio-economic practices, offering valuable insights into the region's sustainable development and conservation efforts. The event made it even more clear how crucial it is to protect Banavasi's architectural and cultural heritage for upcoming generations. Based on the study, the architectural design studio was conducted in designing a Agro based Areca nut processing unit at Banavasi, as a part of minor project.

Keywords: Banavasi, madhukeshwar temple, architectural tour, arecanut processing, kadambotsava

INTRODUCTION

Banavasi, a quaint town in the Sirsi taluk of Karnataka, lies in Malenadu region, is a hidden gem that offers a rich tapestry of history, culture, and architecture. For the MIT School of Architecture, 2nd-year architecture students, a visit to this historical town was not just a study tour but a journey back in time. The focus of their study was around Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple, a significant monument that stands as a testament to the architectural and cultural heritage of the region. The surrounding houses and other temples, many over a century old, provided a unique opportunity to understand traditional

architectural practices and the socio-economic aspects of the local community, which primarily revolves around the processing of areca nuts.

*Author for Correspondence

Ar. Shridevi Vinay Anavatti
E-mail shridevi.anavatti@mituniversity.edu.in

Assistant Professor, MIT School of Architecture, Department of Architecture, MIT ADT University, Pune, India

Received Date: July 18, 2024
Accepted Date: October 03, 2024
Published Date: October 10, 2024

Citation: Ar. Shridevi Vinay Anavatti. Exploring Banavasi: A Study Tour of 2nd Year Architecture Students. International Journal of Architectural Heritage. 2024; 7(2): 33–38p.

SHRI UMA MADHUKESHWARA TEMPLE: AN ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL

The Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple is the heart of Banavasi's architectural heritage. This temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, showcases the intricate craftsmanship and architectural prowess of the period it was built in. It is impressive to see the statues and sculpted pillars on the temple's façade.

The central sanctum houses a Shiva Lingam, and the temple complex is adorned with various sculptures depicting scenes from Hindu mythology. The students observed the temple's layout, noting the Garbhagriha (sanctum), the Antarala (antechamber), and the Mandapa (hall). A comprehensive study was done on the temple's Dravidian architectural style, which is distinguished by its vimana (tower) and elaborate carvings [1, 2]. The temple also features a beautifully carved Nandi statue at the entrance, which is a significant aspect of Shiva temples. The temple complex comprises many small temples of Parvati, Subramaniyam swami, Ganapati etc. (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Temple entrance.



Figure 2. Temple complex.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Banavasi is one of the oldest towns in Karnataka, with references dating back to the 4th century. It was the capital of the Kadamba dynasty, one of the earliest ruling dynasties of Karnataka. The Shri Umamadhukeshwara Temple itself is believed to have been built during this period, making it a site of immense historical significance. The temple and part of the street surrounding the temple is also documented by the Archaeological Department of India.

The town has been a center of cultural activities, particularly during the annual Kadambotsava festival, which celebrates the rich heritage of the Kadamba dynasty. The festival offers a lively cultural backdrop for the students' visit with traditional music, dance, and theater acts.

THE FESTIVAL - KADAMBOTSAVA

Kadambotsava usually takes place in December and spans multiple days. The festival features a wide range of activities that highlight the cultural and artistic heritage of Banavasi and Karnataka. The town comes alive with performances, exhibitions, and rituals that draw visitors from across the state and beyond. The Rituals and Activities includes, Inaugural Ceremony, where the festival begins with a grand inaugural ceremony, often attended by dignitaries and local leaders. Kadambotsava Traditional dance and music performances kick off the celebration and set the mood. Among the main attractions of Kadambotsava are the vibrant parades that crisscross Banavasi's streets. The procession features musicians, dancers, and performers portraying legendary and historical figures. Participants dress traditionally.

The festival showcases various traditional art forms, including classical music and dance, folk performances, and theatrical plays. Kadambotsava Stories from Hindu mythology, historical events, and regional legends are frequently portrayed in these performances. Kadambotsava includes exhibitions that display local crafts, artworks, and historical artifacts [3, 4]. These exhibitions provide insights into the region's rich artistic traditions and craftsmanship. As a town with deep religious significance, Banavasi's temples, especially the Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple, play a central role during Kadambotsava. Special pujas (prayers) and rituals are performed, attracting devotees from

various places. The celebrations are made more lively and competitive by the inclusion of traditional sports and games in the festival. Both residents and guests take pleasure in these events, which promote a feeling of community. Kadambotsava is a treat for food enthusiasts, with stalls offering a variety of traditional Karnataka dishes (Figure 3). These food stalls provide an opportunity to savor local delicacies and explore the culinary heritage of the region. Educational workshops and seminars are conducted during the festival, focusing on topics such as local history, traditional arts, and cultural preservation. These sessions aim to educate and engage attendees, particularly the younger generation.



Figure 3. Old Ratha constructed at 1608, used for utsav Procession.

THE OLD HOUSES OF BANAVASI

There are architectural gems among the homes surrounding the Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple. These homes, many over 100 years old, are constructed using traditional building materials such as laterite stone, timber, and clay tiles. The students noted the use of sloping roofs, which are ideal for the heavy monsoons of the region, and the large verandas that provide shaded outdoor spaces. The Architectural features of these houses are: The houses are primarily constructed using locally available materials such as laterite stone, timber, and clay tiles. These materials are well-suited to the local climate and have contributed to the longevity and durability of the structures. The houses feature sloping roofs, which are ideal for the heavy monsoons of the region. Typically, the roofs are covered in Mangalore tiles, which are renowned for their strength and visual appeal. Large verandas are a common feature, providing shaded outdoor spaces that serve as transitional areas between the indoors and the outdoors. These verandas are essential for social interactions and daily activities, reflecting the community-oriented lifestyle of the inhabitants. The houses are designed with a functional layout that includes a central courtyard, known as the 'angala' or 'thotti'. The courtyard serves as the heart of the home, providing ventilation, natural light, and a communal space for family activities. The interiors are divided into multiple rooms, including living areas, kitchens, and storage spaces. The spatial organization reflects the socio-cultural practices of the time, emphasizing privacy and functional segregation of spaces [5, 6]. The houses boast intricate woodwork, particularly on the doors, windows, and pillars. The carvings, which highlight the artists' talent and inventiveness, frequently feature geometric patterns, floral motifs, and scenes from mythology. Decorative elements such as stucco work, frescoes, and murals adorn the walls and ceilings, adding to the visual appeal of the interiors.

The cultural and historical significance of these houses are: These houses are not merely structures; they are living heritage sites that offer insights into the daily lives, customs, and traditions of their inhabitants. The architectural features and spatial organization reflect the social norms, family structures, and cultural practices of the period. The houses provide evidence of the economic activities prevalent in Banavasi, particularly the cultivation and processing of areca nuts. The expansive courtyards and storage spaces highlight the significance of trade and agriculture to the local economy.

Over the years, these houses have been adapted to accommodate changing needs while preserving their historical character. This adaptive reuse demonstrates the resilience and sustainability of traditional architectural practices. These homes' cultural and historical significance is highlighted by the Archaeological Department of India's documentation and preservation of them. In order for future generations to enjoy and benefit from this rich architectural legacy, conservation efforts are being made to preserve these buildings.

These houses are an excellent representation of Karnataka's vernacular architecture, which is distinguished by its attractive and practical layout. The intricate woodwork, particularly on the doors and windows, showcases the craftsmanship of the local artisans (Figures 4 and 5). The students also observed the adaptive reuse of spaces within these homes, which have been modified over the years to accommodate changing needs while preserving their historical character (Nazir). The homes surrounding the temple (nearly 200m.) from both sides are under the archaeological department of India, because of that the homes cannot be reconstructed again. They can restore it with the help of new material but are not allowed to demolish and reconstruct. Few homes are nearly 300 years old.



Figure 3. 300-year-old house.



Figure 4. Image shows roof details.

ARECA NUT PROCESSING: THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The economy of Banavasi is predominantly agrarian, with areca nut cultivation being the primary occupation. The region's climate and soil are ideal for areca nut farming, and the processing of these nuts is a significant economic activity [7, 8]. In Banavasi, many households process these areca nuts in their backyards (Figure 6). The students had the opportunity to visit local areca nut processing units, where they observed the various stages of processing, from harvesting and de-husking to drying and grading. The processed arecanut is sent further to the dealers for sales purpose. One of the dealers near Banavasi is TSS (The Totgars Co-operative Sales Society Pvt. Ltd.) which is located in sirsi, Karnataka.

Areca nut farming in Banavasi is not just an economic activity but also a way of life that has shaped the region's culture and traditions [9]. The students learned about the sustainable agricultural practices followed by the farmers and the challenges they face, such as fluctuating market prices and environmental concerns (Figure 7).

OBSERVATIONS AND LEARNINGS

Architectural Techniques and Materials

The region's traditional building methods and materials were explained to the students. The use of locally available materials such as laterite stone and timber not only adds to the aesthetic appeal of the structures but also ensures their sustainability.

Cultural Continuity

The visit brought to light how crucial cultural continuity is to architecture. The Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple and the old houses of Banavasi are living examples of how traditional architectural practices have been preserved and adapted over the centuries.



Figure 5. Process explained by Students



Figure 6. Areca Nut.

Socio-Economic Aspects

Understanding the local economy and its dependence on areca nut cultivation provided a holistic view of the region's socio-economic fabric. The integration of agricultural practices with architectural heritage was an important learning aspect for the students.

Conservation And Preservation

The study tour underscored the need for conservation and preservation of heritage structures. The students observed the efforts being made to preserve the Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple and the old houses, and the challenges involved in maintaining these historical structures.

BUILDING SERVICES IN BANAVASI

Banavasi has experienced a blend of traditional and modern building services, reflecting the town's ability to adapt to changing needs while preserving its heritage [9, 10]. Traditionally, the town relied on wells, stepwells, and rainwater harvesting systems for its water supply, ensuring sustainability and community access. These systems are designed to harvest rainwater efficiently and maintain groundwater levels, providing a reliable source of water throughout the year. In recent years, modern interventions have introduced a piped water supply system managed by local authorities, supplemented by water treatment plants to provide clean and safe water. This integration of traditional and modern water management practices ensures that the community has access to a reliable and safe water supply, highlighting the importance of sustainable development. The drainage system in Banavasi has evolved from open drains and soak pits to a more efficient underground drainage network, which transports wastewater to sewage treatment plants for thorough processing. This modern drainage system helps prevent waterlogging and contamination, contributing to improved public health and sanitation. Sanitation in Banavasi has significantly improved with the adoption of flush toilets connected to septic tanks, replacing older pit latrines and community toilets. Public toilets have been installed in key locations, and initiatives under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan aim to eliminate open defecation and enhance waste management. The town's dedication to enhancing public health and hygiene by implementing sustainable sanitation practices is reflected in these initiatives. Despite these advancements, Banavasi faces challenges such as aging infrastructure, water scarcity, and effective waste management. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing efforts to integrate traditional knowledge with modern practices, ensuring sustainable development that respects the town's rich heritage.

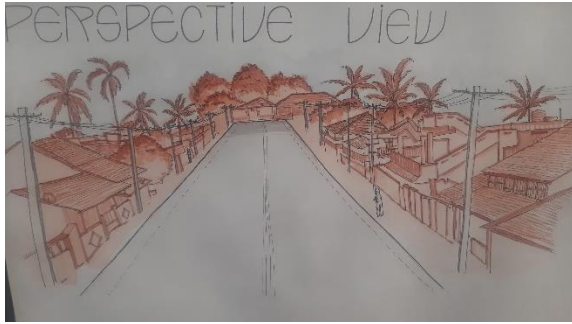


Figure 7. Street view showing electrical lines.

CONCLUSION

The study tour to Banavasi was a profoundly enriching educational experience for the 2nd-year architecture students. It provided them with a deeper understanding of the region's architectural and cultural heritage, the significance of traditional building practices, and the socio-economic dynamics of the local community. The insights gained from this visit will undoubtedly enrich their academic pursuits and inspire them to contribute to the preservation of architectural heritage in their future careers. Banavasi, with its rich history, cultural vibrancy, and architectural splendor, continues to be a source of inspiration and learning for all who visit. The Shri Uma Madhukeshwara Temple, the old houses, and the areca nut processing units together create a tapestry of experiences that offer invaluable lessons in architecture, history, and culture. The students' journey through Banavasi underscored the importance of preserving and celebrating architectural heritage, fostering a deeper appreciation for the timeless beauty and wisdom embedded in traditional practices.

REFERENCES

1. DR. B.T. Ramappa, Areca Nut Cultivation in Karnataka: Economic and Cultural Perspectives" - Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics, January 2013
2. Julia A. B. Hegewald, Chapter 3. Temple Architecture in Coastal Karnataka: An Interplay of Climatic Dependencies and Artistic Freedoms, Book name: Embodied Dependencies and Freedoms (pp.69–96), March 2023
3. Narasimhacharya, R. History of Kannada Literature. Asian Educational Services, 1988.
4. Abdul Qadir, Mohammad Arif Kamal, (Abdul qadir, 2022), American Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture. 2022, 10(1), 23–30.
5. Uthara Suvrathan, The multivalence of landscapes- Archaeology and heritage – Book name Decolonising Heritage in South Asia, 2018 (Hegewald, 2023)
6. Nagappa P. Koti, Recent Perspective on Karnataka Art History, Review of Research, Volume – 7, Issue - 7, April - 2018
7. Hema Thakur, Early Historic Material Culture in Karnataka with Particular Reference to Banavasi, North Kanara, India. Ancient Asia, 2017, Volume 8, pp. 1–11
8. Oliver, Paul. Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World. Cambridge University Press, 1997.
9. Komala Bhat, A Scientific Vision in The Traditional Arecanut Cultivations in Sirsi Taluk, Uttarakannada District, Karnataka State, Indian Journal of Life sciences, 117–119, 2013.
10. Humaira Nazir, Educational Benefits of Study Tours for The Students of Architecture, Sir Syed University Research Journal of Engineering & Technology.