

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF JAFFNA: A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF HOUSING STRUCTURES AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS

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The objective of this paper is to study the housing structures and their distribution pattern in Jaffna Municipal Council area, in order to understand its cultural landscape. Carl Sauer (1925) in his morphological approach to landscape identifies housing as one of the forms through which a natural landscape evolves into a cultural landscape over time. Thus, housing functions as a sample of a particular cultural landscape. Jaffna, predominantly populated by Sri Lankan Tamils has evolved into a highly unique urban cultural landscape from pre-colonial to post-colonial period. This cultural landscape signified by its traditional social structure and cultural values has remained relatively intact in spite of the protracted civil war. This study explores this cultural landscape focusing on its housing characteristics. Carl Sauer's morphological approach uses various characteristics of forms to identify particular housing structures and their distribution pattern. Following this theoretical approach and inspired by Kniffen's study on Louisiana Housing Types in 1936, this study uses the radial network of roads as the basic sampling framework. A total of fifty houses were selected for this study through a systematic sample based on the distance units (3 km) of four major arteries from the center of the city to the outer boundary and the main artery along the coast line. Then, specific features of these houses such as type of roof, hood, windows, veranda, gable and gates were recorded through direct observation and photographic evidence. Further information about these houses were obtained through interviewing the residents. The sample of fifty houses was then classified based on the specific characteristics of the houses. Based on the above classification, four clusters of houses, namely, traditional court yard houses (Natsar), European houses (Portuguese, Dutch, and British architecture), modern houses (one storey and two storey houses), and semi-permanent houses were identified. These clusters were mapped along the selected arteries in order to identify the distribution patterns. Thus, this study reveals a clear pattern of regionalization of different housing clusters in different parts of the city and this pattern reflects the class and caste differentiation of Jaffna.

Keywords: Cultural landscape, Housing structure, Morphological approach, Carl Sauer