

SPECIAL PROJECT

(6)

SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONAL IDENTITY IN A COSMOPOLITAN SITUATION

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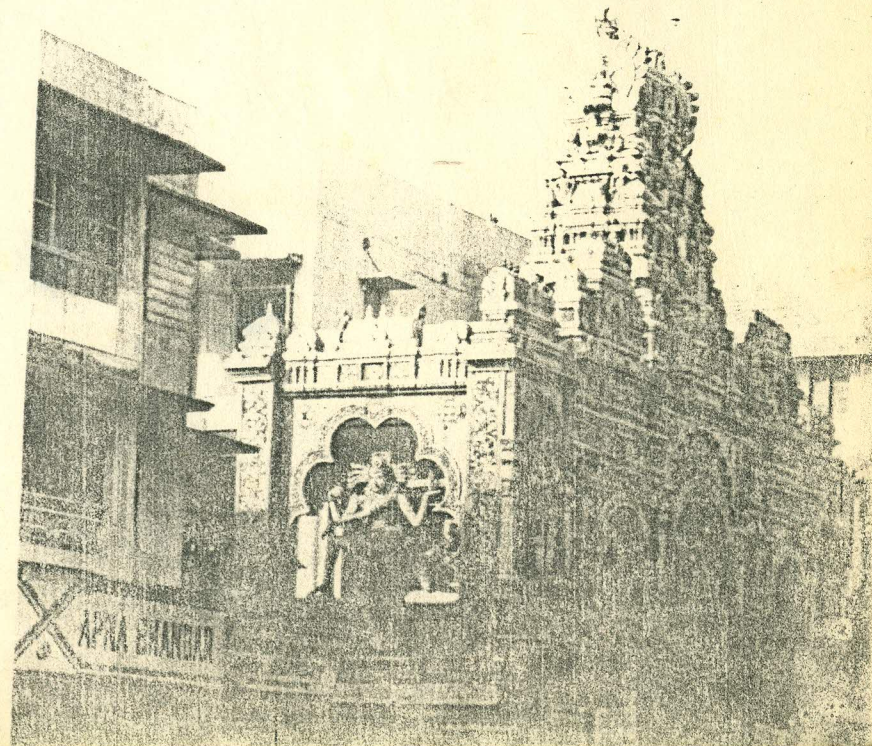
1991-1993

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SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONAL IDENTITY IN A COSMOPOLITAN SITUATION

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Visual Communication
Special Project ✓

SIGNIFICANCE OF REGIONAL IDENTITY
IN A COSMOPOLITAN SITUATION
study of the Tamil community in
Bombay

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Master of Design
degree in Visual Communication

by

RAVIKRISHNAN, L

Guide:
PROF. MOHAN BHANDARI

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Industrial Design Centre
Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
March, 1993

APPROVAL

The Special project entitled
"Significance of Regional Identity in a
Cosmopolitan Situation" by
Ravikrishnan, L is approved in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the
Master of Design Degree in Visual
Communication

Guide



Chairman

Examiner

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Mr. Viswanathan of M/s Giri Trading Agency for patiently providing me with the necessary material for documentation.

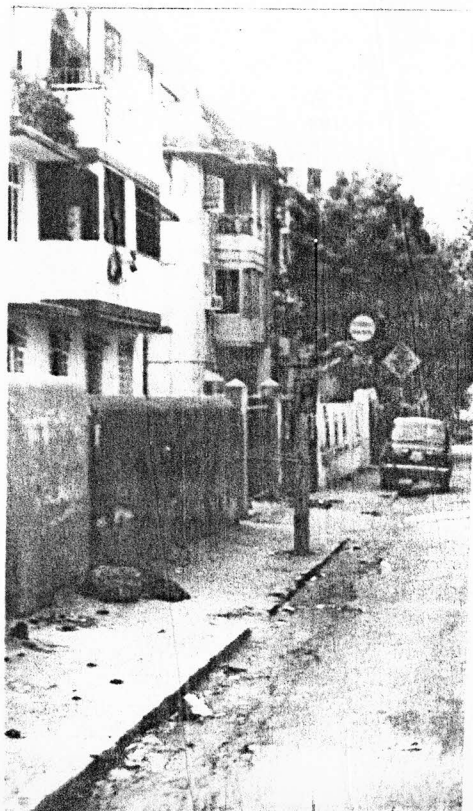
Sheetal Pak for lending his camera despite his pressing need.

Mr. Rajaraman for being so kind enough to let me in his house.

And so many others whom I cant list.

About the project

An observational study to find out the extent of regional identity that is in existence in a cosmopolitan situation. The Tamil community in Matunga, a suburb in Bombay, has been chosen as the representative sample for the study. The output of the study is an illustrated visual compilation of the observations.



Regional identity and cosmopolitanism

In most of the metropolitan cities and other urban centres in India, the immigrants coming from different cultural regions tend to simulate their regional, cultural and social environment. Such simulation of their regional culture in the urban situation leads to the characteristic community life of the immigrants of the city. The process of simulation of the regional culture in the urban area is facilitated by the residential segregation of the immigrants who tend to cluster around relatives and other immigrants belonging to their own region, caste, language, religion and class. The simulation of the regional culture in the city is selective in the sense that the immigrants do not bring to the city the entire joint family, but only the nuclear family. Probably because they cannot afford to bring every one. Therefore, they find all the more the need for simulating the culture of their place of origin, for they do not want to be left without traditional moorings, lest their families should feel lost in the city. Moreover because of the presence of their wives and children in the city, the immigrants are likely to find a greater need for security which is provided by the ethnic community which simulate the culture of the place-of-origin.



" While discussing the effect of participation of the immigrants in their native (cosmopolitan) system on the process of urbanisation in India, it is necessary to make a distinction between the North Indian pattern of recurrent male migration and the South Indian pattern of permanent family migration. One of the contrasts which emerges from a comparison is the relatively minor "pull" the village has for the Pariahs (a South Indian immigrant group) and the quite opposite tendency for the Bhaiya (a North Indian

immigrant group). Gore has also found that Tamil migrants visit their home less frequently than the Hindi migrants suggesting that the former is less tied closely to his home than the latter. One may observe a higher degree of simulation of the native culture among the South Indian immigrants as compared to the North Indian immigrants, because the South Indian pattern of migration is of permanent nature with family, whereas the North Indian pattern is the recurrent unaccompanied male migration. The South Indian immigrants derive necessary sense of security through their participation in the ethnic community in the city which simulate the culture of their native system whereas the North Indian immigrants, "look to their native village to provide them the necessary sense of security."

- K S Nair in "Ethnicity and Urbanisation"

In the process of simulation of the culture of their origin, the community will not be able to perfectly replicate within the urban area. They may have to make some functional adaptation in the city, and therefore, what one might find is a near approximate of the native culture in the urban situation. 'Assimilation' is the term used to describe this process of adaptation. This results in a kind of "give and take" whereby, a community dilutes or discards part of its culture by accepting the others. The immigrants will not and need not adjust, adapt, acculturate or assimilate in all spheres of life.

A migrant may feel ill at ease in a new social environment, but may feel adjusted to the professional sphere. There may be adjustment in certain aspects of life and even conflicts in others. Within various spheres of immigrant social life, there is likely to be conflicts of values between the old and the new.

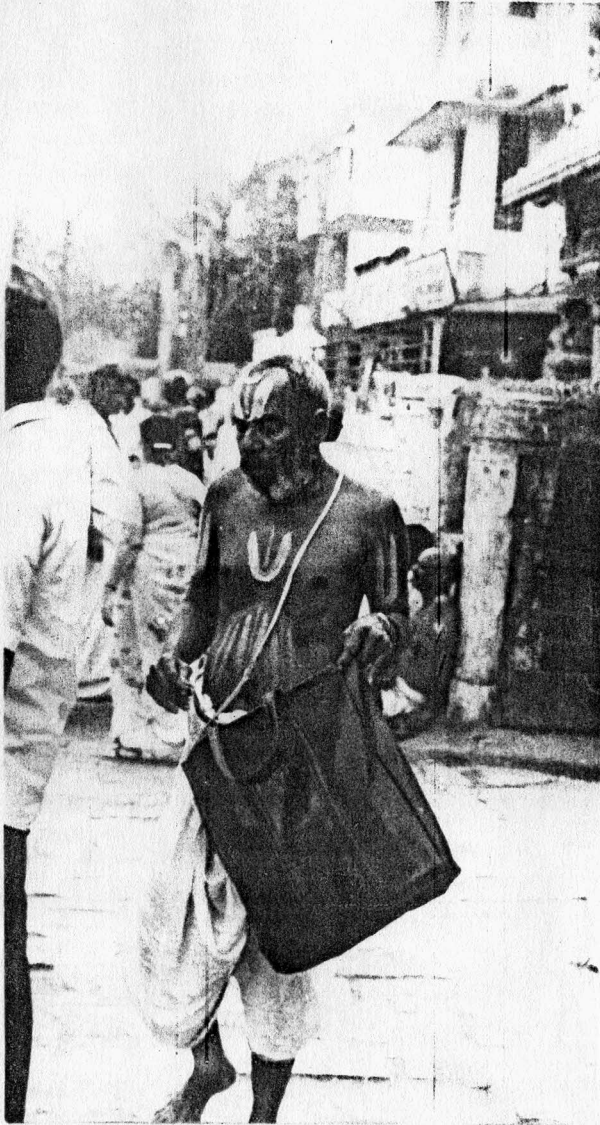
Matunga- "Little Madras" in the Bombay city

Excerpts from (Miss) K.L. Mythili,

A Socio-Ecological Study of a Immigrant Community.

Unpublished Ph.D. thesis of the University of Bombay, 1959.

This excerpt taken from Chapter 9, "Urban Sociology in India", by M.S.A. Rao



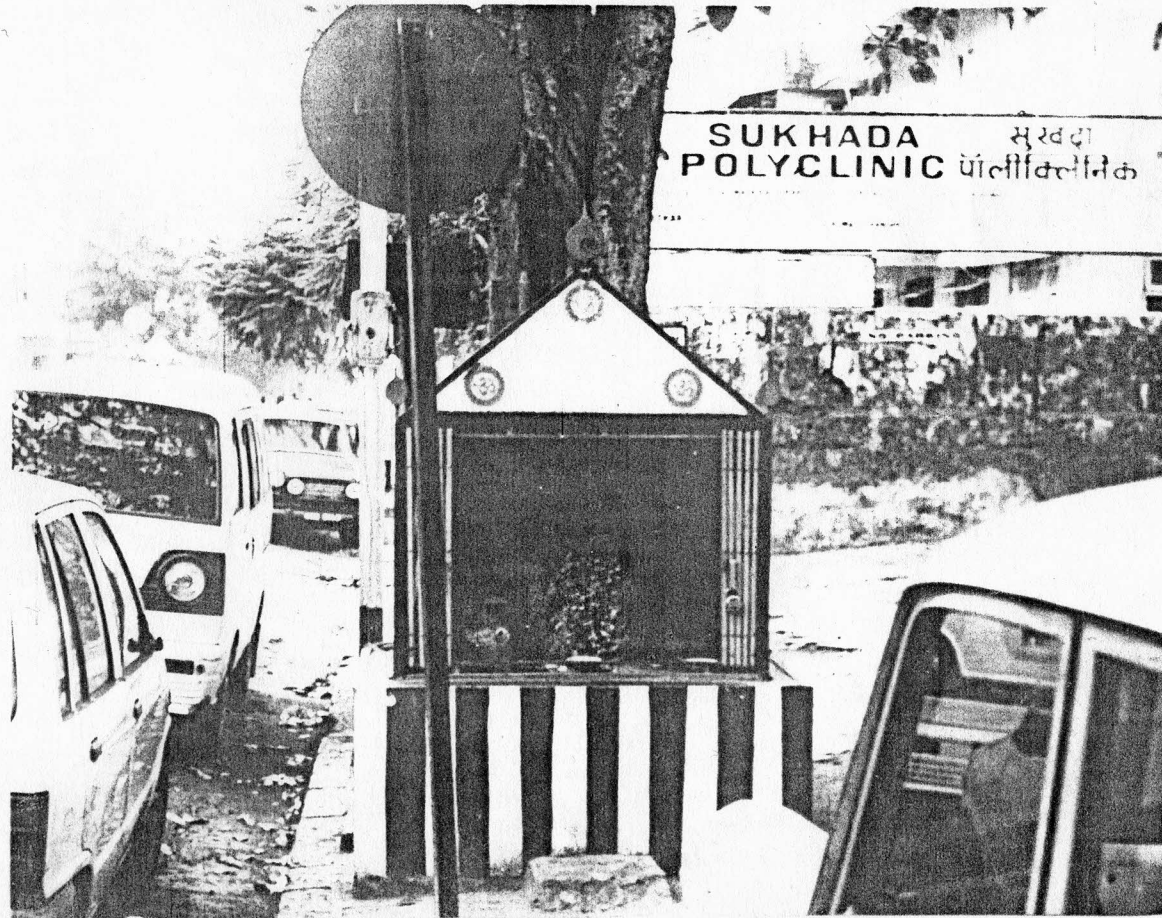
"**P**rompted by economic considerations the South Indians migrated to the city of Bombay in larger numbers particularly after World War I. At that stage, in keeping with long distance migratory movements, it was largely a movement of young adults of the male sex. They first settled down in the heart of the city from where economic and ecological factors drove them to the outskirts of the city. This movement crystallized in the emergence of Matunga-Sion as an immigrant townships of these immigrants from the South. There is a partial segregation and a concentration of the community centering around the Asthika Samaj, the Bhajana Samaj and other principal institutions.

The migrant, in his little Asthika Samaj, the Bhajana Samaj, has created an atmosphere which makes one feel as if he were back in well known religious centres of the South. These temples are not only places for worship but also great cultural associations bringing the members together on a higher plane.

The desire to come together and to provide their own traditional culture is seen best in their numerous associational activities. Some one remarked that Matunga today is a fossil of what Madras was thirty years ago.

The colour and character of that area is different from other parts

of the city. It is the nucleus of the migrant community which is the core of the township. They have transplanted a part of South India in Bombay and are nurturing it by their intense cultural activities which add a South Indian colour to this colourful city. South Indian colonies are springing up in other parts of the city but the nucleus of these colonies is supplied by the original township of Matunga."



The Study

In the present context of Matunga, owing to the fact that the residents belong to the second, third or even fourth generation of the family, this study is undertaken to find out the extent of regional identity that is prevalent. It should be obvious that the existing situation is subjected to adaptation over the years, dilution due to that and also certain amount of "give and take" (with other communities). These effects do manifest physically and hence the study is carried out in establishing through visual observation and documentation. Though to establish and state in concrete terms the extent of identity, one would require to do an exhaustive study by becoming a part of the community for a considerable period of time, this approach of relying on visual observation cannot be disregarded for visual cues do provide sufficient strength in establishing the actual facts.

The strategy adopted to depict the extent of identity is to juxtapose the origin situation with the cosmopolitan situation. This would enable to draw inferences by comparison.

The study is broadly categorised into Physical identity and Behavioural identity. It is for the convenience of comprehension and presentation that such a categorisation is made though the observations made were mostly accidental. The observations related to the physical elements- architecture, objects and colour, are dealt in the physical identity. Behavioral identity deals observations related to language, dress, appearance, mannerisms, status, profession, festivals and eating habits. In each category a distinction is made between

the Individual and the Community. This distinction is relevant because the role of an individual within the household and outside is varied. So there could be a disparity in the degree of identity exhibited at the individual level and at the community level. The "individual" means here a person, house or a household depending on the context. "Community" includes neighbourhood, streets, community buildings and the Tamil community as a whole.

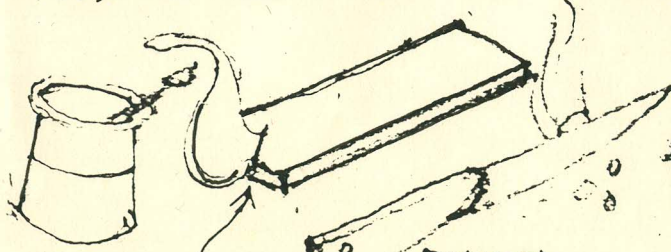
HOUSE PHYSICAL IDENTITY



COSMOPOLITAN HOUSE - NO ATTEMPT TO ASSERT IDENTITY

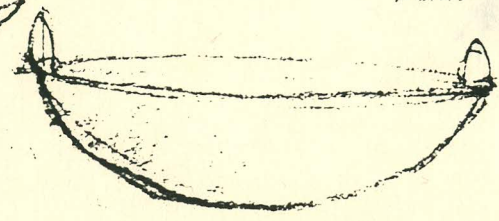
TRADITIONAL HOUSE FACADE

TRADITIONAL OBJECTS AND UTENSILS IN USE.

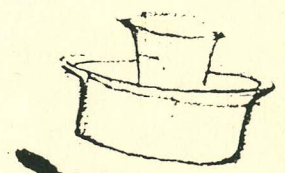


TRADITIONAL EQUIPMENT FOR CHOPPING VEGETABLES.

REPLACED BY 'KNIVES'



TRADITIONAL LOOK ALIKE LAMPS



DAVARA TUMBLER FOR COFFEE

PICTURES SUGGESTING IDENTITY

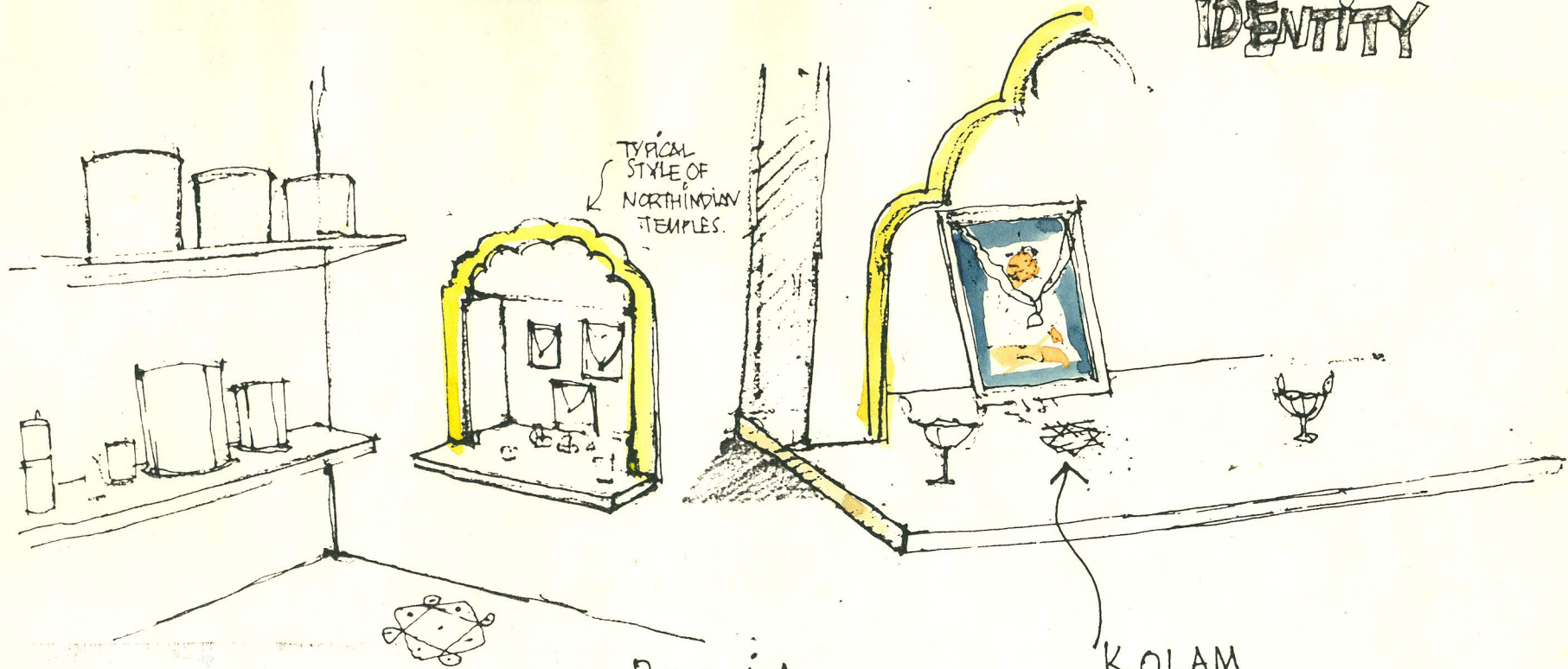
HOUSE INTERIOR

ENTRANCE



HOUSE

PHYSICAL IDENTITY

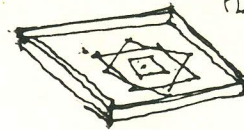


Pooja Room

AS PART OF THE
KITCHEN. DUE
LACK OF SPACE.
TO MAKE UP FOR THAT
ELABORATE DECORATIONS
ARE MADE.

KOLAM

DONE WITH READY MADE
PLATES THAN
THROUGH
HAND.



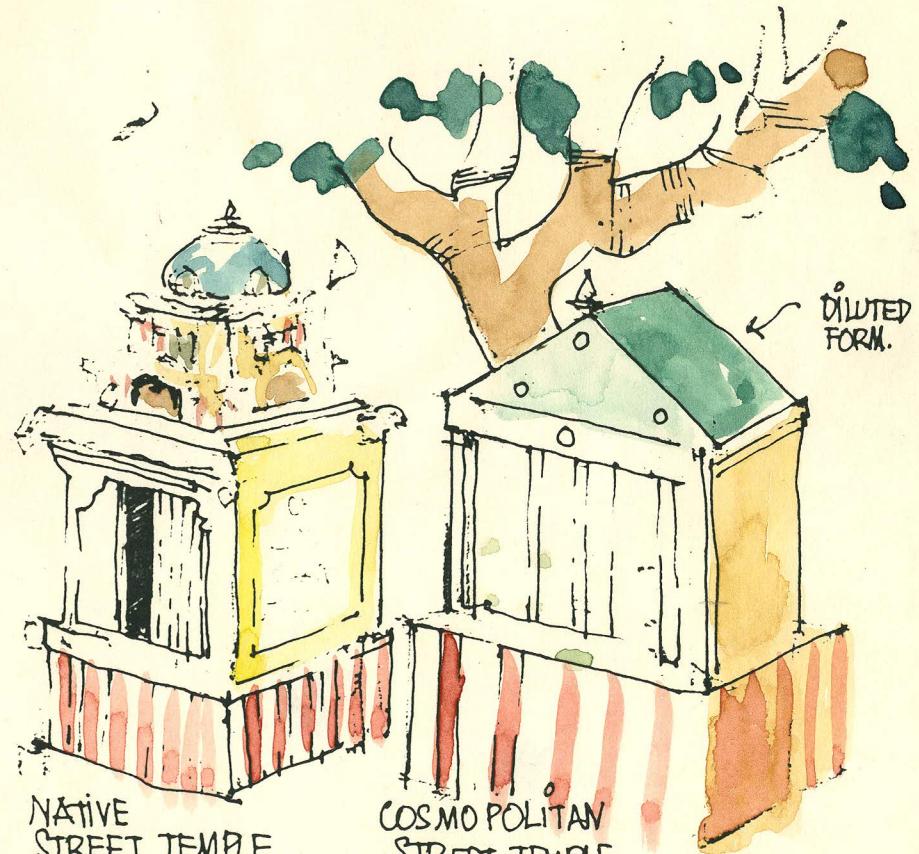
STREET

PHYSICAL IDENTITY



STREET
MARKET

A TYPICAL TEMPLE-STREET
MARKET (NEAR BHAJANA SAMAJ)
REMINING TEMPLE TOWNS OF
TAMIL NADU.



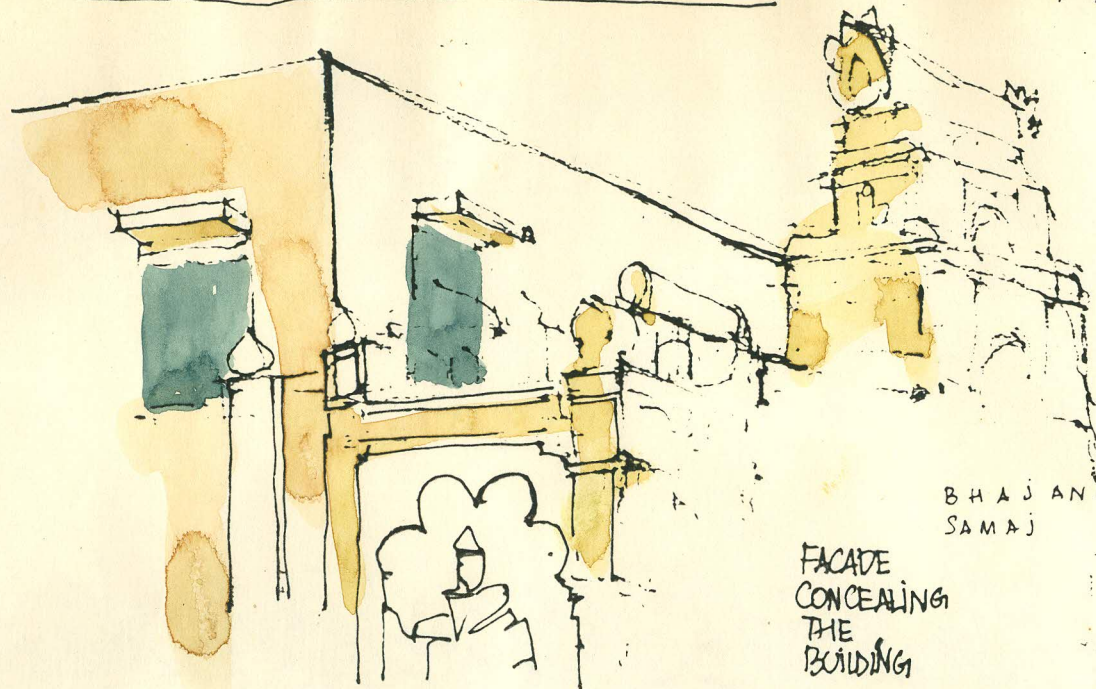
NATIVE
STREET TEMPLE.

COSMOPOLITAN
STREET TEMPLE.

STREET TEMPLE

IN A NATIVE SITUATION A STREET TEMPLE
WOULD BE A REPLICA OF
THE BIG TEMPLES IN
SMALL SCALE

TEMPLE PHYSICAL IDENTITY



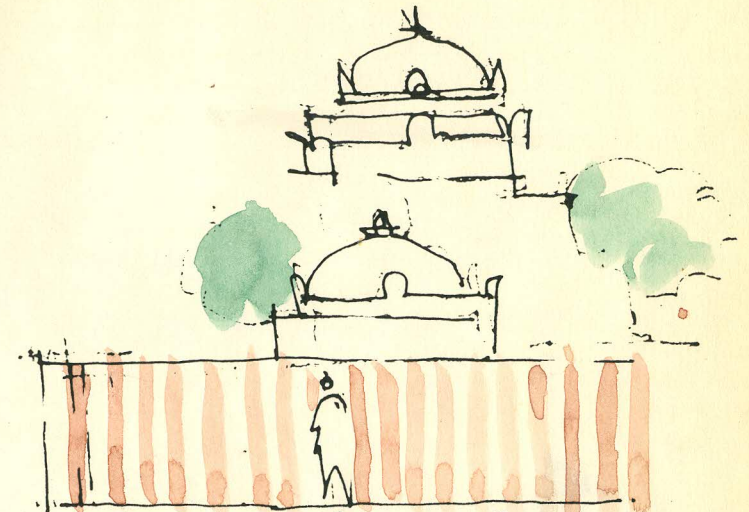
ELABORATE
DETAILING
AND
SCULPTURES
BEYOND SCALE.

BHAJANA
SAMAJ

FACADE
CONCEALING
THE
BUILDING

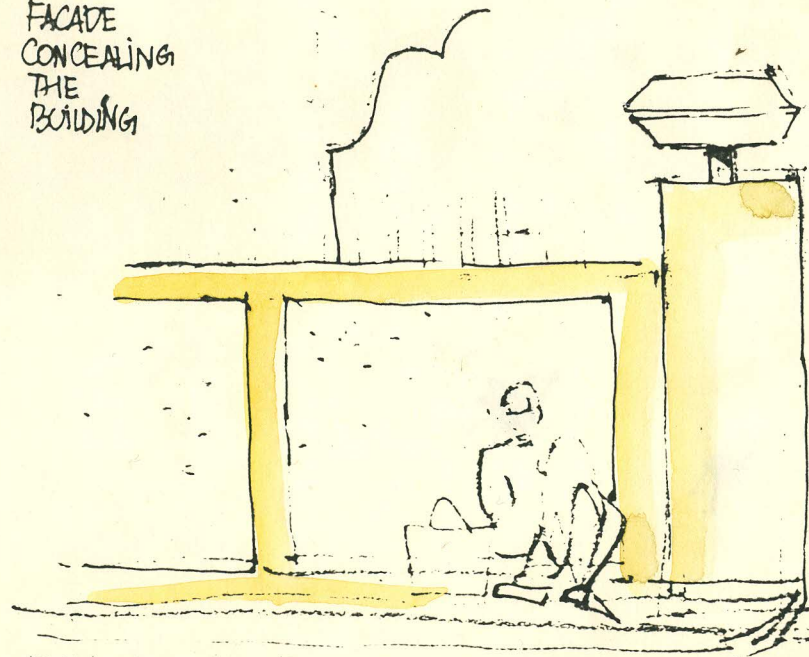
HABITABLE
SPACE ABOVE
THE TEMPLE.

COSMOPOLITAN TEMPLES
ASTHIKA SAMAJ, BHAJANA
SAMAJ OF MATUNGIA
DO SUPPORT COMMUNITY
FUNCTIONS LIKE MARRIAGE.
PART OF THE BUILDING
IS A 'KALYANA MANDAP.'
COSMOPOLITAN SITUATION
DEMANDS CREATING
HABITABLE SPACE ABOVE
THE TEMPLE WHICH
WOULD BE UNETHICAL IN
NATIVE SITUATION.



TYPICAL RED BANDS
SUGGESTING THE TEMPLE
WALL IN NATIVE SITUATION
ABSENT IN COSMO
SITUATION

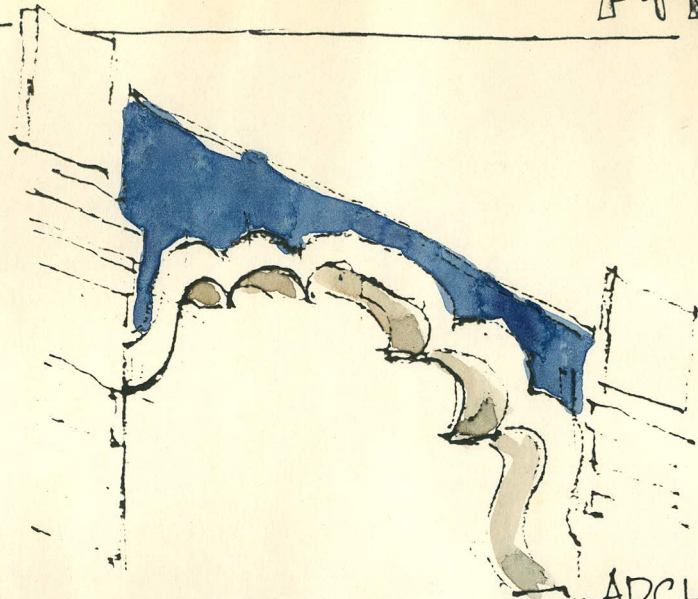
COMPOUND
WALL - COSMO LOOK.
STUCCO FINISHED.



BHAJANA
SAMAJ

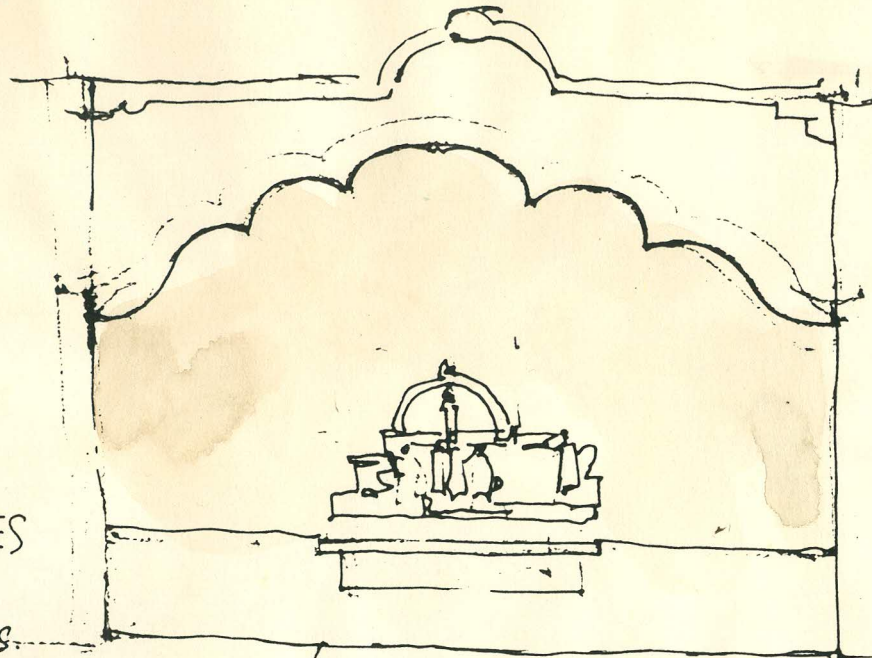
TEMPLE

PHYSICAL IDENTITY



ARCHES
IN THE
COSMO
TEMPLES.

INFLUENCE
OF NORTH INDIAN
TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE.

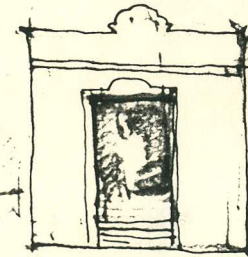


GARBA GRIHA

IN THE COSMO
TEMPLES.

WIDE AND
EXHIBITIONISTIC.

COMPARED
TO THE NARROW
ENCLOSED
NATIVE
TEMPLES.



NATIVE TEMPLE.



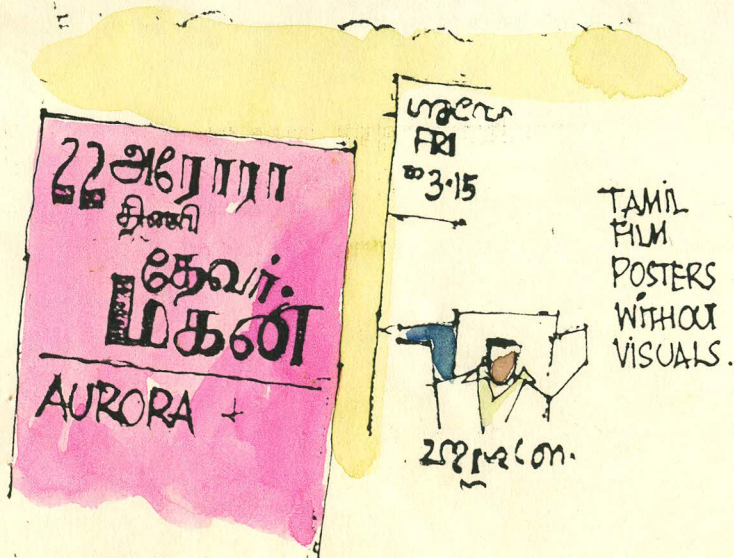
BOARD
IN HINDI

SHOP BOARDS, POSTERS

PHYSICAL IDENTITY

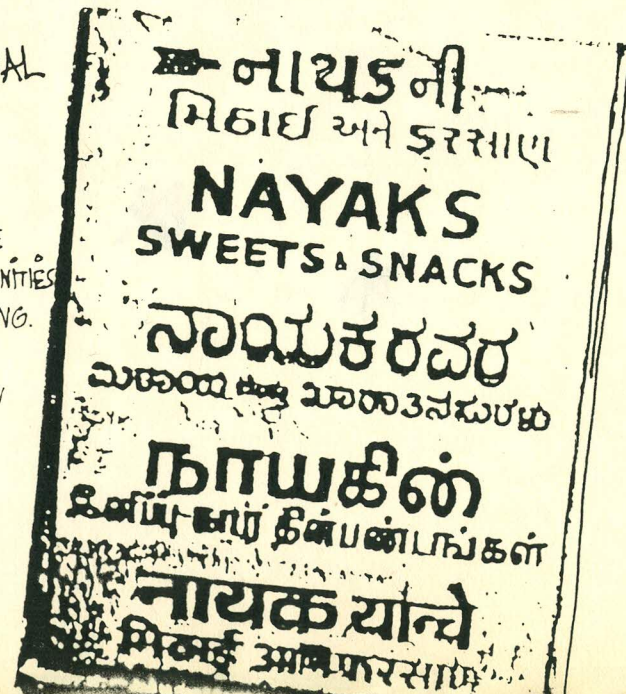


USE OF
TAMIL AS
MINIMAL. FOR THE REASON
IT IS CATERING
TO OTHER
COMMUNITIES ALSO.
BUT THIS
MINIMAL USAGE
GOES TO INDICATE
THE WILLINGNESS
TO ASSERT.



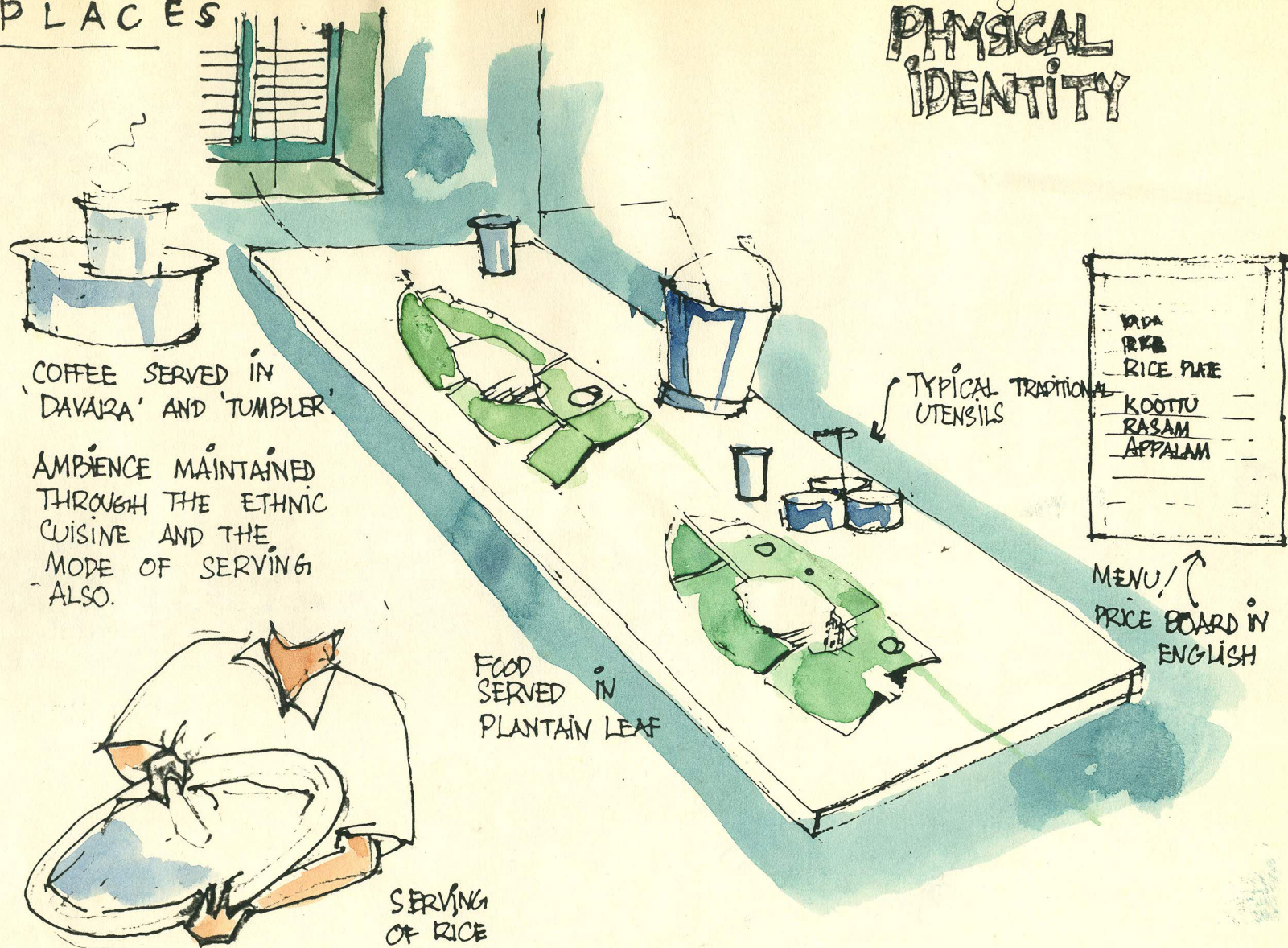
MULTILINGUAL BOARDS.

THERE IS A
TENDENCY TO
CATER TO THE
OTHER COMMUNITIES
WHICH IS STRONG.
IN A
COSMOPOLITAN
SITUATION.

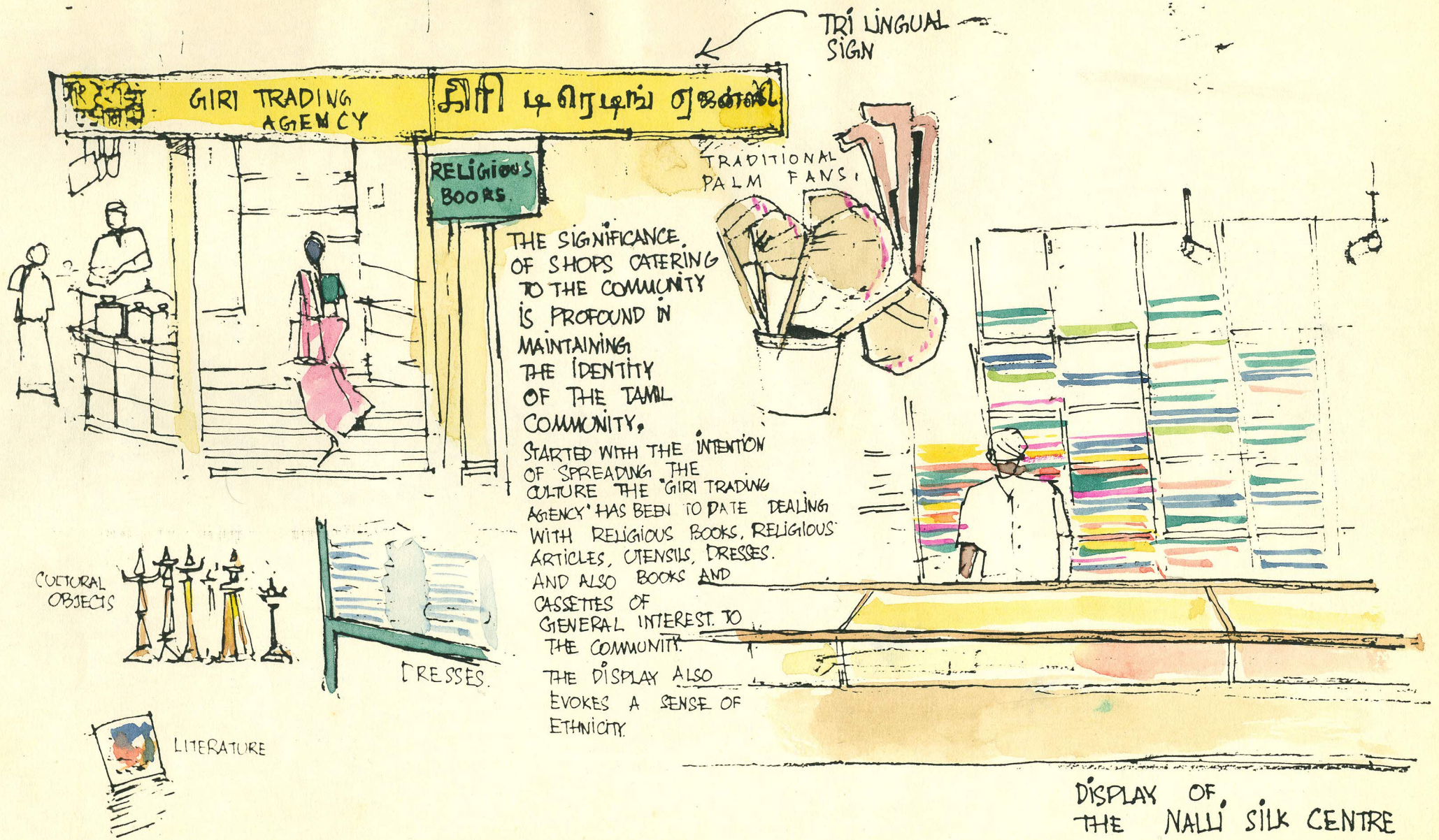


EATING PLACES

PHYSICAL IDENTITY



SHOPS CATERING TO THE COMMUNITY



DRESS MANNERISMS

BEHAVIOURAL IDENTITY

PRONOUNCED
EXHIBITION OF
IDENTITY IN
TEMPLE



BHAKTANA SAMAJ

ABSENCE
OF OLD MEN
WEARING
STRICTLY
TRADITIONAL
DHOTI



RELIGIOUS MARKS
ON THE FORE
HEADS.



ABSENCE
OF
TRADITIONAL
DRESS STYLE
OF
TEENAGE
GIRLS



TYPICAL CASE OF
A MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.
MOTHER IN SARI, DAUGHTER IN SALWARKAMEEZ

TRADITIONAL
HAIRDO AND
FLOWERS BUT...



WIFE

PUROHITS
SHOWING IDENTITY BY
PROFESSIONAL DEMAND.
THOUGH AT TIMES
COMPROMISING WITH
THE SHIRT



COSMOPOLITAN
COUPLE.

DRESS MANNERISMS

BEHAVIOURAL IDENTITY

SHOP KEEPER S



VERY OLD WOMEN
IN TRADITIONAL
DRESS.



PETTY SHOP
KEEPERS
SHOW
COSMOPOLITANISM
IN THEIR DRESS.



FLOWER
VENDORS
EXHIBIT THEIR IDENTITY
BY THEIR DRESS. DISPLAY
- READING TAMIL NEWSPAPERS.
- LISTENING TO TAMIL FILM SONGS.

SO ALSO
SHOPKEEPERS OF
SHOPS CATERING
TO THE
COMMUNITY.

SOMETIMES
IT IS DIFFICULT
TO DISTINGUISH A
TAMIL WOMAN FROM
THE REST BY THE
STYLE OF THE SARI
WORN.



TYPICAL
TAMIL.



INFLUENCE
OF OTHER COMMUNITY.



Conclusion

This study though remaining as a visual documentation it brought into focus many interesting insights with regards to the influence of the Tamil community on other communities and vice-versa. In any cosmopolitan situation its inevitable that the life style of one community should influence the other, merely due to proximity. In the process of assimilation into the cosmopolitan environment as said earlier the immigrant community creates its identity acknowledgement of which comes by way of imitation of its certain features by other communities.

The influence of Tamil community in Bombay in various aspects could be seen. As 'Madrasi' the community still form an object of ridicule for their alleged hard and harsh language. The English spoken by the community is attributed to the influence of the native tongue. Sadly, in many of the Hindi films one may find invariably a comedian being made to be a Tamilian, more rightly, a 'Madrasi'.

The community has made its mark through food and fashion. The exquisite silk sarees of Kancheepuram (near Madras) has its name in the city. The patterns of these are very much recognised, acknowledged and at times most sought after. There are exclusive showrooms that cater to the city.

The typical Tamilian food of Idli, Dosa do form a standard indispensable menu item of the restaurants in the city, though these are recognised more as South Indian dishes.

Off late the influence of the community is through the film music. Film songs of Ilayaraja are not only popular but the tunes of his have been used in many Hindi films which is a strange, but, interesting trend. The recent film of 'Roja' widely captured the hearts of the youngsters merely through the songs.

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