ABSTRACT

Temple towns of Tamil Nadu in South India form a unique class of urban settlement owing to their rich cultural history and religious lineage. The genotype of Hindu sacred space inscribed on the urban form of the settlement lends a distinct spatial identity to these towns. The fundamental hypothesis of this research is that historic temple towns form a unique urban pattern that combines the instrumental and symbolic characteristics of space in a single spatial type - the Hindu urban genotype. This research identifies and applies a suitable method of spatial configuration analysis using space syntax and urban image analysis techniques in the historic Temple towns of Tamil Nadu as a case example. Case studies of seven historic towns; Madurai, Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Tirunelvelli and Tiruchengode, are presented. All the seven urban settlements are analyzed separately and compared with each other to arrive at the common genotype of temple towns. The methodology adopted in this study utilizes the qualitative aspects of historical evolution of the case studies and combines them with the objective analysis of the syntactic measures and urban image survey measures to arrive at their urban characteristics. The symbolic aspects of space have also been considered through the analysis of line types and urban element structure.

The main characteristics found in these towns are; a high degree of axially, less deformed spaces in a regular settlement pattern, a high level of connectivity with integration cores centered on the temple forming highly intelligible structures. The analyses converge on the hypothesis that the temple as a grand monument of religion influences the functional and visual global structuring of the town. The geometric, topologic and notional center of the city is the main temple complex. Thus the Historic Temple Towns of Tamil Nadu form a unique combination of the instrumental and the symbolic type of cities. It is therefore important that this class of unique urban type be studied and made known for the rich data and information they possess before they are completely transformed.

Key words: Historic Temple Towns, Tamil Nadu, Space Syntax, Symbolic Structure.