



Exploring the versatility of Athangudi tiles in Interior design

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Abstract

This qualitative research delves into the intricate world of Athangudi tiles, renowned for their cultural significance and aesthetic appeal. The study aims to uncover the practical applications and limitations of Athangudi tiles in various settings. Data collection was conducted through purposive sampling, targeting architects, civil engineers who have experience with Athangudi tiles and used it in their projects, and Athangudi tile manufacturers. The interview method, featuring both structured and semi-structured questions, served as the primary tool for gathering insights. The study embraces a thematic analysis approach to dissect and interpret the data, revealing patterns and nuances associated with the use of Athangudi tiles. Findings suggest that while these tiles are ideal for indoor spaces and certain dry areas, precautions are needed to avoid exposure to water. Notably, their customization options and cooling properties make them distinctive, yet challenges arise in their application for furniture and commercial spaces. The study provides valuable insights for architects, designers, and enthusiasts seeking to integrate Athangudi tiles into their projects, contributing to a detailed understanding of these cultural artifacts in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Tradition, athangudi tiles, versatility, eco-friendly

Introduction

Athangudi tiles or 'Chettinad tiles' are sun-baked flooring terracotta tiles famous in the southern part of India for their intricate details. Handcrafted by the rural people of Athangudi of the Chettinad region in Tamil Nadu, these flooring tiles are known to fill an entire house interior with colour, simplicity, and grandeur. Athangudi tiles also known as 'Karaikudi tiles' are inspired by the Victorian style of architecture. Athangudi tiles have graced the floors and walls of traditional South Indian homes, palaces, and heritage buildings for generations, but their adaptability to various spaces beyond their place of origin remains a topic of keen interest. The central objective is to discover inventive ways to incorporate Athangudi tiles into Interior design. This research gives a balance between the aesthetic appeal and the practical suitability of Athangudi tiles.

Materials and Methods

Aim

To explore the versatility of Athangudi tiles in Interior design.

Operational Definitions

Athangudi Tile

Athangudi tiles are handmade vernacular tiles, more than a hundred-year-old art form, which is still practiced in a small village called Athangudi in southern India. (Ramanathan & Dhakshinamoorthi, 2023) ^[6].

Variables

Independent variable: Use of athangudi tiles, Various spaces
Use of Athangudi tiles as a design element in interior spaces.

The various types of interior spaces where Athangudi tiles are integrated, such as residential, commercial (e.g., restaurants, hotels), or outdoor spaces.

Dependent variable: Functionality and durability

Functionality may include their, ease of maintenance, slip resistance (for flooring), and other functional aspects.

The performance and durability of Athangudi tiles in terms of their suitability for different interior applications and their resistance to wear and tear.

Scope

The scope of this paper includes the study of tile making in detail, study of few mansions and houses where Athangudi tiles have been used in the region of Chettinad, Tamil Nadu. And to conduct interviews with architects, civil engineers and manufacturers to know whether these tiles can be used in commercial spaces, in furniture other than homes. The paper will offer insights into how these tiles can be integrated into various spaces of modern architectural projects while preserving the historical and cultural heritage, gives an idea about the tiles as an sustainable and culturally significant element that bridges the gap between tradition and modernity.

Type of research: Creative Research

There are researches, case studies and practical implications with Athangudi tiles limited only to flooring and as wall tiles.

So this research aims to discover unique and inventive ways to incorporate these tiles into interior design. To incorporate in various commercial spaces, furniture and using the patterns as upholstery.

Exploring various possibilities for incorporating Athangudi tiles, considering aesthetics, patterns, color schemes, and spatial arrangements in creative ways.

This offers an opportunity for cross-cultural design fusion by blending traditional Indian craftsmanship with contemporary interior design aesthetics.

Athangudi tiles are not just functional elements; they are pieces of art. Leveraging them in interior design allows for artistic expression and creative interpretation, where designers can use these tiles as a medium for their creative ideas.

Research design

Type of research: Qualitative research

It involves collecting data through questionnaires or interviews from a sample of a population.

Sampling

Population: Architects, Civil engineers, tile manufacturers

Sampling method Purposive sampling Sample

Architects and civil engineers who used Athangudi tiles in their projects or who have experience with it and Athangudi tile manufacturers.

Inclusion criteria

Architects and civil engineer who have actively incorporated Athangudi tiles in their projects or have practical experience working with these tiles.

Individuals directly involved in the production and distribution of Athangudi tiles.

Exclusion criteria

Architects who have used Athangudi tiles in their projects but have only limited knowledge about it.

Data Collection

Method: Qualitative

Tools used

Structured and Semi structured interview questions

In the research process, a literature review was conducted to understand existing knowledge about Athangudi tiles. Following this, a case study was carried out specifically focusing on buildings where these tiles are used. To gain a deeper insight into the production of Athangudi tiles, a visit was made to the Athangudi tiles factory. Since the study aimed to gather qualitative information, interviews were conducted with architects, civil engineers, and Athangudi tile manufacturers. The questions asked during the interviews were both structured and semi-structured, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the subject. The collected data was then analyzed manually using thematic analysis methods. The identified themes and findings were carefully documented, leading to the formulation of a detailed report summarizing the results of the study. This qualitative approach aimed to provide a deeper understanding of Athangudi tiles, their usage in architecture, and the intricate process of their production.

Literature Review

Extensive literature review was done to understand existing research, case studies, and practical implications of Athangudi tiles, focusing on their use in flooring and wall tiles. Research gaps in the literature that indicated a lack of exploration in incorporating these tiles into various aspects of interior design, such as commercial spaces and furniture.

Tile Making Study

A detailed study on Athangudi tile making was conducted, delving into the traditional techniques, materials used, and the cultural significance of these handmade tiles. This study provided a foundational understanding of the tiles' craftsmanship and historical context.

Study of Mansions and Houses

Explored specific mansions and houses in the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu where Athangudi tiles have been used. This on-site study offered practical insights into the real-world applications of these tiles, considering both aesthetics and functionality.

Interviews with Professionals

Identified and selected a sample population of architects, civil engineers, and Athangudi tile manufacturers through purposive sampling. Structured and semi-structured interview questions was developed to gather qualitative data.

Then interviews was conducted with professionals who have hands-on experience with Athangudi tiles in different interior design applications.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The main focus was given on functionality, durability, and the creative aspects of incorporating these tiles into interior design.

Data Analysis: Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analysed to identify patterns, themes, and insights. Responses were categorized based on the different aspects

of interior design, such as residential, commercial, and outdoor spaces, as well as furniture applications.

Documentation and Reporting

The research process, findings, and insights were documented in a comprehensive report. Recommendations were provided for designers, architects, and manufacturers interested in utilizing Athangudi tiles in innovative ways within the realm of interior design.

Collected Data

Data was collected from architects and civil engineer who have experience with Athangudi tiles and who have used these tiles in their projects. Also data was collected from Athangudi tile manufacturers. The method used was Interviews.

Results and Discussion

Athangudi tiles, known for their intricate designs, have both strengths and limitations. They are not suitable for wet areas of kitchens and bathrooms due to vulnerability to water and oil exposure, which may cause fading. But nano coating can address concerns about oil and water absorption, expanding their potential use in kitchen decor and bathroom wall tiles.

However, in dry areas of the kitchen, they can be creatively used for aesthetic purposes. These handmade tiles shine in indoor spaces with indirect sunlight, making them ideal for balconies. Athangudi tiles display versatility in commercial spaces and can be applied in low and high-traffic areas, ensuring safety with their non-slippery nature. They are good choice for high-traffic commercial areas but they are susceptible to scratches, especially from furniture and shoes. Therefore they are more suitable where people walk barefoot. It also work well in smaller residential spaces, adding a touch of traditional charm. Their weight limits their use in furniture, but their unique, imperfect, and handmade quality enhances their cultural appeal. The tiles find success in creating partition walls but may not be suitable for all furniture due to their weight. Despite challenges, they remain popular for their timeless beauty and ability to infuse spaces with unique patterns. However, recent observations suggest a decline in overall tile quality. The tiles' robustness is evident in older structures, showcasing durability over time. While requiring little maintenance, their cultural richness and adaptability make them a worthwhile choice for those appreciating tradition in their living spaces.

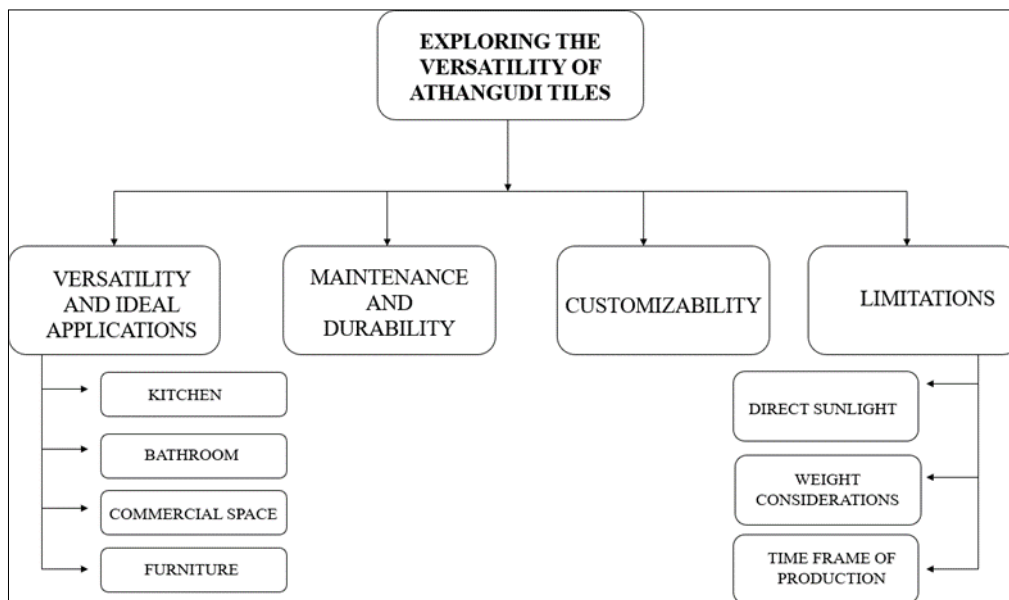


Fig 1: Thematic map

Discussion

Versatility and Ideal Applications

Kitchen

Athangudi tiles bring a traditional touch to kitchen spaces, adding a blend of beauty and practicality. While they are not recommended for wet areas like kitchen backsplashes due to their vulnerability to water and oil exposure, creative solutions such as nano coating could potentially expand their possibilities in kitchen decor. Their cooling effect and resistance to foot pain make them suitable for dry areas of the kitchen.

Bathroom

These tiles are not recommended for bathroom use due to

their porous nature and susceptibility to moisture. While nano coating could potentially address concerns, maintenance in bathroom settings may be challenging. Alternatives are suggested for practicality, with ceramics favored over Athangudi tiles for ease of maintenance and evolving societal dynamics.

Commercial spaces

Surprisingly, Athangudi tiles find a place in commercial spaces, proving suitable for both high and low-traffic areas. They are good choice for high-traffic commercial areas but they are susceptible to scratches, especially from furniture and shoes. Therefore they are more suitable where people walk barefoot. Their non-slippery nature enhances safety in diverse environments. Despite concerns about wear and tear,

their application in commercial settings showcases their versatility, contributing to visually appealing and culturally rich surroundings.

Furniture

Athangudi tiles can be incorporated into furniture, including doors, centre tables, side tables and headboards. However, caution is advised where joints are undesirable. Weight considerations limit their practicality for certain furniture applications. The shine of these tiles may not increase over time in furniture settings, and they are not suitable for outdoor furniture.

Maintenance and durability

Maintenance of Athangudi tiles is relatively easy, requiring only water for cleaning. However, their susceptibility to stains and challenging cleaning processes, particularly in kitchen and bathroom settings, is acknowledged. Despite their handmade quality embracing imperfections, recent observations note a decline in the overall quality of these tiles.

Customizability

Athangudi tiles offer customizability, allowing clients to convey preferred designs to manufacturers. Molds can be created in Gujarat based on these designs. With approximately 400 available designs, these tiles provide ample choices for personalization, catering to individual aesthetic preferences.

Limitations

Direct sunlight

Athangudi tiles are not recommended for areas with direct sunlight, which may impact their durability and aesthetic appeal over time. Indirect sunlight is deemed suitable for these tiles, emphasizing the importance of placement in indoor spaces and balconies.

Weight considerations

The weight of Athangudi tiles is highlighted as a limiting factor, particularly in furniture applications. Their heaviness may pose challenges, caution is advised in handling heavy materials to prevent breakage and also transporting is hard.

Time frame of production

The production process for Athangudi tiles is time-consuming, taking approximately 20 to 30 days for covering a 1000 square feet area. This emphasizes the need for advanced planning when considering the use of these unique tiles in interior spaces.

Conclusion

Tradition and Aesthetic Appeal

These tiles bring a traditional touch and contribute to the overall aesthetic charm.

Consideration of Limitations

It's important to note their sensitivity to moisture, making them unsuitable for wet areas.

Ideal for Indoor Spaces

Athangudi tiles excel in indoor spaces with indirect sunlight.

Unique Choice for Balconies

They prove to be a distinctive and unique choice for balcony spaces.

Feasibility in Furniture

Incorporating these tiles into furniture is feasible, but caution is advised where joints are less desirable.

Partition Wall Potential

Athangudi tiles can be used for partition walls, but it's noted that only one side may look aesthetically pleasing.

Commercial space

It is a good choice for commercial spaces where we walk barefoot.

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