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Cannon of Change/Change of Cannon?: Popular Architectural Style of Jaffna Temples

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Although the existing popular discourse around Hindu temple architecture in Sri Lanka assiduously identify temple style with south India or Dravidian, the existing examples in Jaffna from the colonial time exemplify a rupture. Further in the last thirty years *villu mandapams*/ barrel vaulted *mandapams* became the prominent and predominant facet of the Jaffna Temples. Conversely the emergence of this local style coincides with the sweeping changes in the social fabric ignited by Tamil nationalism, civil war, displacement, formation of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, Sanskritation of temple rituals and availability of new building materials and technologies. These *villu madapams* produced through fragmentation, collage, copy and fusion of different styles and vocabularies, question the popular believe that link the 'Dravida' style with Tamil identity in architecture. This paper while locating the cultural history and the visual character of contemporary popular architecture with special reference to *villu mandapam*, read Jaffna temple architecture as an eclectic entity that integrating colonial, vernacular and South Indian architectural elements, and architectural imaginations and memories from popular cinema and theater. This reading while probing the aesthetic and cultural significance of this spectacular architectural project, try to argue this as an attempt to make the ordinary, common, low cost, impermanent architecture of occasional use, to create a permanent visual grandeur and festivity.