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Content Part 1/3

❖ Thanks.....	7
❖ Introductory Note.....	8
❖ Chettinad in a glance	10
A. Chettinad area	10
Key information	10
A noteworthy typology of building.....	17
B. Chettiars' history.....	18
The Chettiar legend	18
The expansion of Chettiars community in Chettinad.....	20
The end of the Chettiars golden area.....	20
C. Chettiars' heritage	21
Architecture and planning.....	21
Water	25
Intangible heritage	25
Sponsorship	28
D. An Heritage endangered.....	28
A lack of maintenance	28
New uses of these mansion.....	32
E. Recommendations	36

❖ Governance.....	37
❖ Working Method	38

❖ Thanks

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❖ **Introductory Note**

The heritage of Chettinad has proven its worth. Famous for its cuisine, handcraft and mansions, Chettinad seduces more and more tourists. Since 2005 guides books from all around the world attach greater importance to it as a must see place in Tamil Nadu.

However Chettinad is an endangered place: mansions are sold piece by piece, families are leaving the place for better economic opportunities in city ... 73 villages are left on the 96 from the beginning of the XX^o century.

The State of India has decided to launch an UNESCO campaign to protect 12 villages from Chettinad and had added them on its tentative list in 2014.

Protecting a place like Chettinad is not an easy work: some technical questions emerged when we were working on the file leading to more theoretical questions concerning the meaning of heritage and its perception.

This report will present data collected in order to be a base for a UNESCO application file. It will introduce the context around these data and also the challenges thus brought to light during the review. Finally the report will try to propose avenues for improving, after a focus on the traditional water system.



Figure 1 Chettiar mansion in Kottaiyur (photo by M.SINOUE)

PART 1

PRESENTATION OF CHETTINAD REGION

❖ Chettinad in a glance

A. Chettinad area

About 80 km west from Madurai, in Tamil Nadu, Chettinad was a cluster of 101 villages, founded by the Chettiars, a healthy merchant community. By planning and building these villages in the middle of nowhere, they earned the name of Nagarathar (the townfolks or the sophisticated) or the name of Nattukottai (land fort) Chettiars by building fortress like mansions during their heyday, almost 100 years ago.

Key information

Today 1 million of inhabitants lived on this 1 000 km² area in 73 villages and 110 000 are Chettiars, representing 11% of the population (India census 2011).

Most of the villages are from the 19th and 20th centuries but traces of oldest villages were found according to some inscriptions on temples. The oldest mansion was made in 1850

(Guy Trebay, "Houses of the Holy", New York Times, 17 November 2010).



Figure 2 : Tamil Nadu State in India (made by C.BUGEIA)

Chettinad is not an administrative entity and has not defined borders which complicate the study of this area. It belongs to Pudukottai district and Sivagangai district.

Chettinad is, generally, the area between Pudukottai (North), Aranthangi (East), Devakottai (South) and Tirupathur (West).

The main cities are Pudukottai, Thirumayam, Devakottai and Karaikkudi, the smallest one but also the closest one to the main touristic attractions.

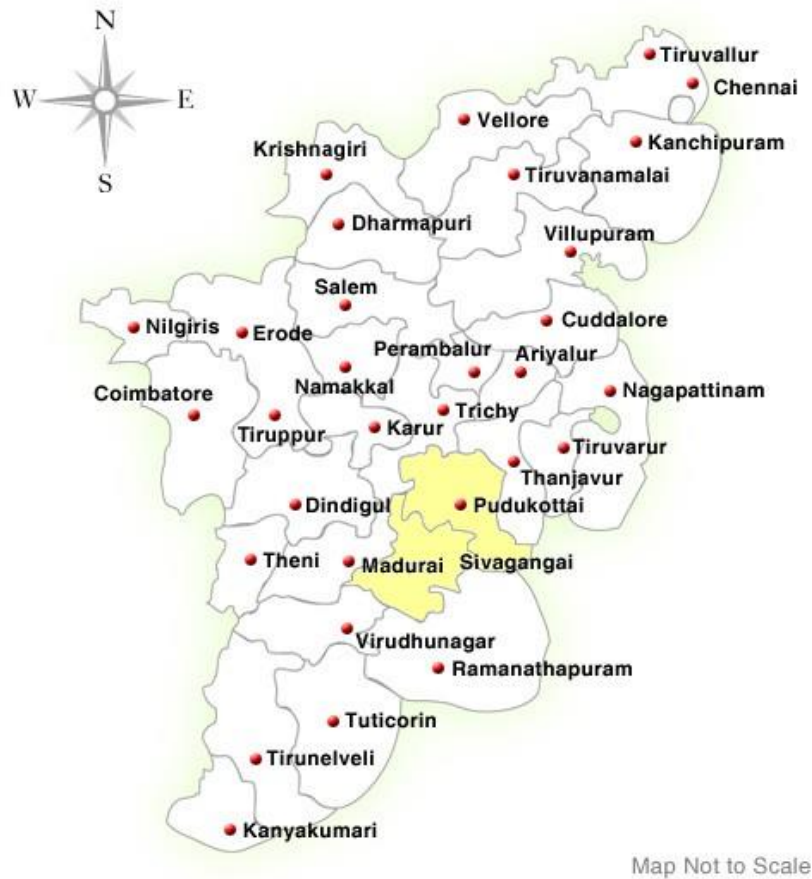
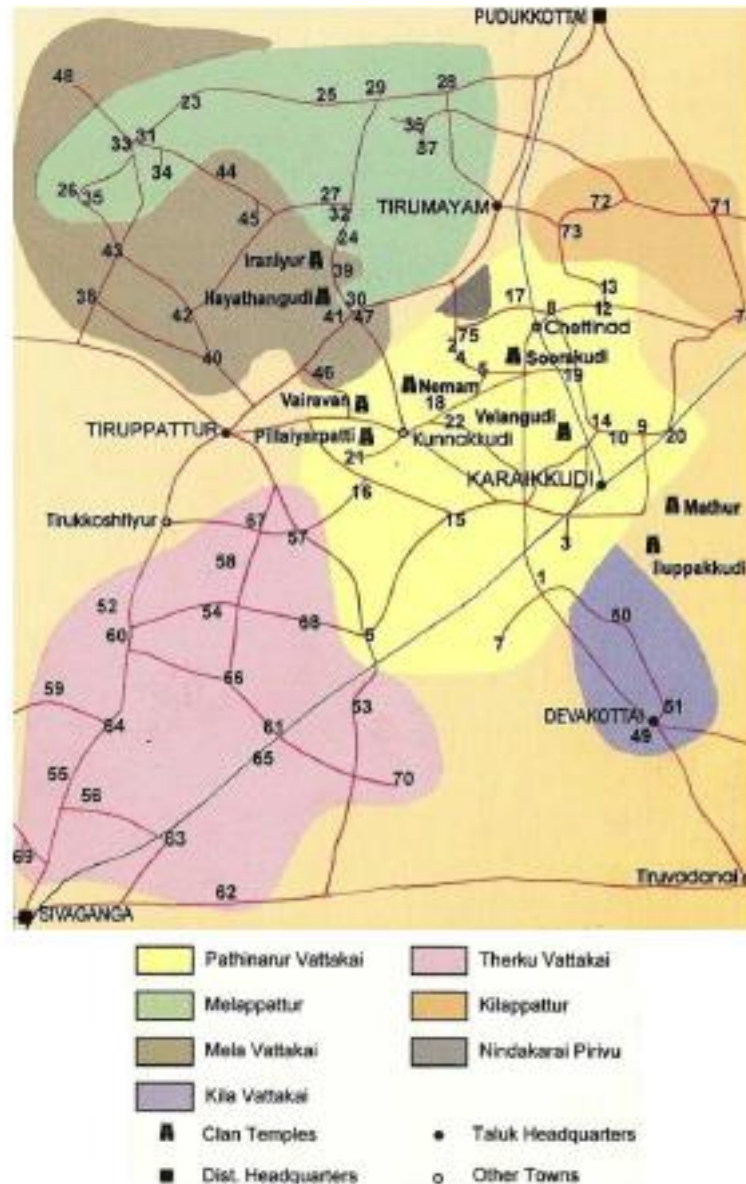


Figure 3 : Pudukottai and Sivagangai districts in Tamil Nadu (made by C.BUGEIA)

Carte arches



Organisation of the Chettiar clans

Every Chettiar, wherever he is born, is a member of one or the other of the nine temples that had been established by his ancestors. He belongs to his father's clan.

These temples are clan centres, each is a shrine to which a group of Chettiars are members for life.

The bigger temples have sub-clans which are recognized as clan in themselves.

Wedding are not allowed between people from the same clan or sub clan.

Figure 4 Clan temples and the 73 villages of Chettinad (S.Muthiah, M. Meiyappan, V. Ramasamy (2000), The Chettiar Heritage, Madras)

According to ArcHeS (a NGO working on the protection of Chettinad), the major attractions are :

- Kanadukathan :

Touristic center of Chettinad, with 5 000 inhabitants. Some broad roads with mansions are there. The most famous is the Raja Palace. It is also a place where is made the Chettinad saree in coton.



Figure 5 Raja Palace (photo by C.BUGEIA)



- Kottaiyur

Big village with 10 000 inhabitants, where lived the doctor Allagappa Chettiar, famous for his philanthropic endeavours. The university is named after him.

Figure 6 Stamp in honor of Allagappa Chettiar (Phila Art.com)

- Pallathur :

Village of 12 000 inhabitants, famous for its grid planning and right angled streets. The natural slope was used to develop an ingenious water system : the rain will tricle down to a water body at the end of the village.

Figure 7 Pallathur from the sky (Google Map)



- Karaikudi

Economic center of Chettinad, the city has some Chettiar neighborhood and a street dedicated to craftsmen and antique dealer.



Figure 8 A antique shop in Karaikudi (photo by C.BUGEIA)

- Ellangudipatti and Kothadi



Two of the sixty temples dedicaced to Ayyanar, god of children, cows, villages and land. A lot of terracotta offering surronds each sanctuary.

Figure 10 A terracotta offering in Ellangudipatti (photo by C.BUGEIA)

- Kundrakudi

At the top of this hill, one temple is dedicated to Murugan, son of Shiva and Parvati. At the bottom, a second temple is dedicaced to Ganesh.



Figure 11 Lord Murugan (mardugawallpaper.com)

- Neman and Pillayarpatti

The two most famous clans temples in Chettinad. The first one contains carved stone sculptures and the second one is dedicaced to Ganesh

Figure 9 Varaivan Kovil (www.pillaiarpattitemple.com)



- Pudukottai

Capital of Pudukottai district, the city has an interesting temple and one of the most complete museum. It includes stone statues, taxidermy etc



Figure 12 Museum of Pudukottai (www.pudukottaiinfo.com)

- Tirumayam

XVII century Fortress on a top of a hill with two temples at the bottom. One contains cave paintings from the VII century.

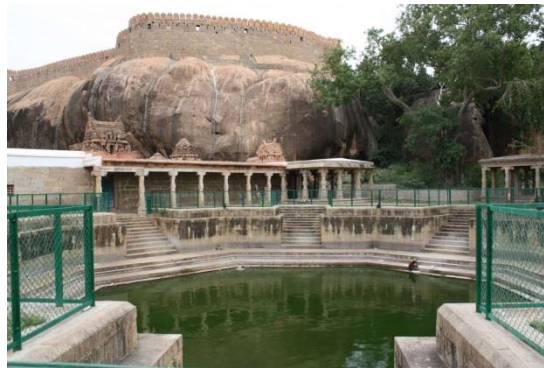


Figure 13 Tirumayam temple (photo by C.BUGEIA)

Access to Chettinad is possible by two mains highways and one national road:

- Highway 36 connects Thanjavur to Sivaganga, connecting also Pudukottai and Kanadukathan.
- Highway 336, which connects Trichy (Tiruchirappalli) to Karaikuddi, connecting also Pudukottai and Ramanapuram.
- National road 29, which goes from Aranthangi, through Karaikudi, to Kayarkoil.

It is also possible to access the zone by the inner roads from Madurai or Tirupathur.

There is also one railway station in karaikudi and two mains bus stand where public and private buses serving the all area.



Figure 14 Main access by road to Chettinad (Google Map)

A noteworthy typology of building

The Chettinad is well known for its urban design especially for its 19th-century mansions whose wide courtyards and spacious rooms are embellished with marble and teak. Construction materials, decorative items and furnishings were mostly imported from East Asian countries and Europe. The marble was brought from Italy, chandeliers and teak from Burma, crockery from Indonesia, crystals from Europe and wall-to-wall mirrors from Belgium.

They developed row of houses from street to street without castes blending creating grid organization with autonomous neighbourhood, a common framework to most villages, including ingenious water system.

Today much of the village look like a ghost city, the mansions are used only during festivity and wedding time.



Figure 15 Inside of a Chettiar house (photo M.Sinou)



Figure 16 : View of Kanadukathan streets (photo by M.Sinou)

B. Chettiars' history

Chetty or Shetty is commonly used in India to describe a merchant and it derives from the Sanskrit shresti, meaning a leader of a merchant guild. The "ar" was added later by the community in sign of respect.

The Chettiar legend

Chettinad is considered to have been a part of the ancient Pandya Kingdom whose capital was Madurai (Guy Trebay, "Houses of the Holy", New York Times, 17 November 2010) but also to have been a part of Ancient Cholas Kingdom. For some historians Madurai was not the capital of the Pandya dynasty but the one of Ancient Cholas.

In fact, there is no real scientific proof from where the Chettiars exactly came from. However, few legends are being told and some resources give elements and evidences about their origin, so here we will summarize the legend presented in The Chettiar Heritage, written by S.Muthiah, M. Meiyappan, V. Ramasamy (2000), Madras.

According to the legend, the Chettiars originally migrated south from Naganadu, the land of the Nagas. We don't know where is Naganadu, the Sri Lankan chronicles have Naganadu as being

Jaffna (but the migration would have been northwest), some say it was Assam, perhaps even Nagaland.

Some others legend say the Chettiars came from what is today Andhra Pradesh or even from the Tondaimandalam of the early Cholas (territory stretched from the coast between Pulicat and Mamallapuram to Kanchipuram) which from the 3rd century AD became the kingdom of the Pallavas. According to these legends the heavy taxes imposed by the successors to the Cholas for the trade they did from the great ports of Mylai and Mamallapuram forced them to move to more hospitable area in the south.

This migration has them arriving in Manuneechi Cholan's great port in the 2nd century AD

The Chettiars played a leading role in the business world of the Chola kingdom by dominated the coastal business as ship chandlers, salt merchants and gem dealers.

Their business and their respectful and integrity that earned them the favour of successive Cholas monarchs (and eventually had them being given the honour of crowning every successor to the Chola throne).

This partnership was doomed to last only a thousand year and was broke when a Chola king abducted and married a Chettiar girl. The Chettiars, a community that prided itself on the

sanctification of marriage within the community and according to its convention, revolted.

The revolt is described differently in various legends. One speaks of migration of the entire community, another one speaks of mass suicide leaving only 1500 male children to their guru.

But the Chola king can't be crowned by unmarried male (which was the case for the 1500 young Chettiars) and ordered to marry them with Vellalar girls.

The Chettiars found no happiness in marriage in the Chola kingdom that had deprived them of their families and when a Sundara Pandyan of the Pandya dynasty in the 13th invited them to his kingdom, they agree and migrate to the Pandya Nadu in 4 villages around the temple in the village Ilayathangudi (about 25 km west of Karaikudi the chief town of Chettinad now).

We had interviewed around 40 Chettiars in Pondicherry and Chettinad, asking about their history and their link with this place. The most heard legend was: the Chettiars were settled close to Vaippar River or Vaigai River and the sea. A huge tsunami ravaged their villages, resulting in many civilian casualties. At this time they were well known merchants thanks to their innate financial sixth sense and their integrity. The king of Madurai (Chola dynasty or Pandya dynasty) asked them to be one of his economical partners and offered them some lands to take root. The Chettiars accepted and chose a dry place without flood risk: Chettinad.

Some of them justified the presence of stairs and platforms (which elevate the house) as a mechanism against flood. But the oldest Chettiars houses are ground floor without stairs or platforms...

Every Chettiar knows one of these legends and also his personal history until four generations before him. They keep alive the story of their house and the builders of it. Their portraits are displayed in every house.



Figure 17 Portraits of Chettiars builders in Kothamangalam mansions (photo by M.Sinou)

The expansion of Chettiars community in Chettinad

The Chettiars begin to establish new settlements as the community grows.

In all, there were 9 nines temples and 96 villages around them in a 600 square miles area between the principality of Pudukkotai and Sivanga in the south.

They established a partnership with the local rajas and earned land and titles but also bring them to the notice of the ruling power: the British East India Company.

When Calcutta replaced Madras in 1774 as the East India Company's seat of government that the British company began to look for reliable men to help them to govern and to do business with the locals. So they encouraged the Chettiars to establish financing firms in Calcutta, Ceylon, Burma etc., with even a small presence in South Africa.

Few put down roots in these countries and were used to go home for a year in Chettinad after 2 or 3 years abroad. It was there were the wealth earned was used to transform the Chettinad houses in palace and mansions with imported materials (teak from Burma, marble from Italy etc.).

The mansions of the rich in each village may be only a dozen but even in the smaller homes there is much to appreciate, for the local handcraft and inside embellishments.

This heyday of the Nagarathar continued for another half century after the 20th century dawned.

The end of the Chettiars golden area

The crash of Arbuthnot & Co in Madras, in which many Chettiars had invested, was the beginning of their darkest period.

Then came the Great Depression of the late Twenties and the early Thirties, which plunge many Chettiar business

Several Chettiars firms that failed were bought by others Chettiars created competitiveness between the clans and a reduction of their bonds.

The independences of south and southwest Asia in the years after the WWII have a traumatic effect on Chettiars. In these countries the Chettiars were closed to the rulers and acquired a lot of land without taking root. The burgeoning nationalism leaves locals little sympathy for a community that had put them under obligation, breaking almost all the connection between the Chettiars and the locals in the Forties.

With almost 70% of the Chettiars wealth being in Burma, Independent Burma's antipathetic attitude ensured the major part of the Chettiars becoming impoverished. The patter was repeated also in Indo-China and in Sumatra.

It was the beginning of an exodus from these countries with whatever the Chettiars could salvage and the decline of the community in the Fifties and Sixties.

The few Nagarathar who had invested in India, had favoured three modern banking institutions, an insurance company and some spinning mills. Only one family has invested in industry.

The number of village has shrunk to 73, a lot of jewellery was sold, mansions were pulled down, their artefacts and household goods were sold to Antique dealers. This helped the resurrection of a lot of families by giving an access to a higher education for the Chettiars children.

Nowadays the traditional banking communities may still maintain links with those roots in the business of finance, but many are industrial entrepreneurs, more are in business running agencies for pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, more and more are in employment, including large numbers of women.

Their traditions of a splendid past are still strived to sustain in a fast changing world where the business environment is different

but many of the Chettiars are seeking theirs fortune in faraway lands like theirs ancestors.

C. Chettiars' heritage

Architecture and planning

The well knows Chettiar house has at least one courtyard, often two, surrounded by galleries and rooms without windows where sons and their families lived. The house is centred on the family daily life which is common in Tamil Nadu.

This result in a physical separation by genre and social role. For



Figure 18 Pillars from the first courtyard in Chettinadu Mansion (photo by C.BUGEIA)

example the first courtyard is dedicated to the men of the family and their guests. The second courtyard, less decorated is dedicated to the women and the daily life (cooking, eating meals, women resting place).

Sometimes, there is a third courtyard dedicated to the servants of the family.

The houses are a place of religious and daily rites. The biggest mansions were able to offer accommodation for 300 to 500 people.



Figure 19 Chettinad function (photo by M.Sinou)

At this classical house organization, the Chettiar add ornamentations everywhere in order to show their power. But the main innovation from them is adding a floor. This floor has a central loggia, decorated with wood pillars surrounded by lodges.



They also add, on the ground floor, news rooms like salons, receptions hall... They imported a lot of buildings materials in order to build their mansions

Figure 20 Belgium chandelier in one of Chettiar mansion in Karaikudi (photo by M.SINOUE)

The marble was brought from Italy, chandeliers and teak from Burma, crockery from Indonesia, crystals from Europe and wall-to-wall mirrors from Belgium.



Figure 21 Details of a Karaikudi Chettiar facade with two British soldiers (photo by M.SINOUE)

Since 1940, people wanted more intimacy, which resulted in a modification of the urban landscape: the houses are smaller, often at the end of the plot, behind plants screens. The house begins to be dedicated to only one family. The architecture is still influenced by western countries: bedrooms are created and the standards of comfort are approaching the English ones.

This spatial organization is also visible in the way of villages were planned. They followed a grid based plan with right angled streets, equal sized plots and aligned exterior façades.



Figure 23 Street view in Pallatur (photo by M.SINOU)



Figure 22 Street view of a Chettiar mansion (ArchEs)

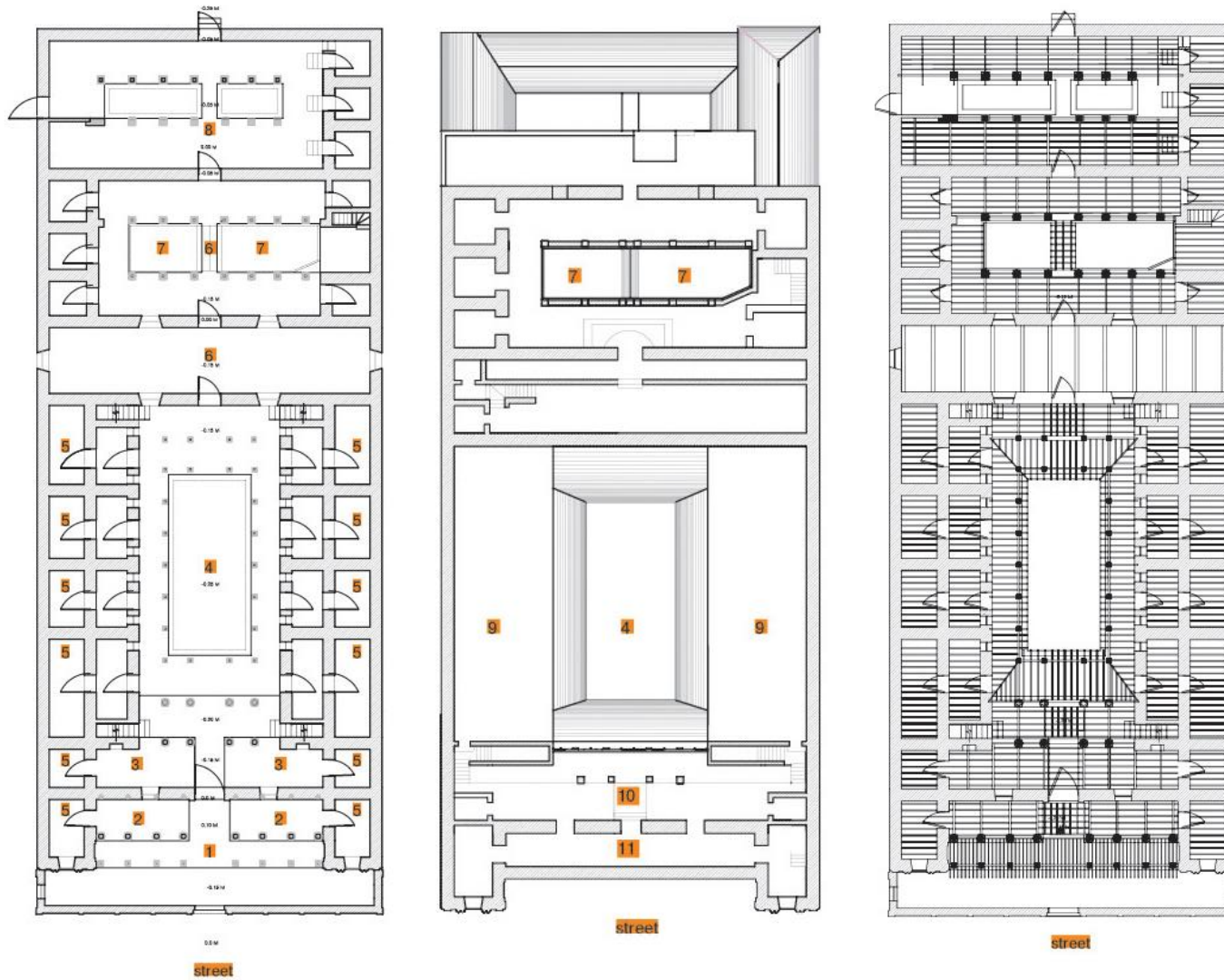


Figure 24 (From left to right) ground floor plan, first floor plan, reflected ceiling plan (ArchES and Sowmya Sudarsanam)

Legend :

- Ground floor :
1 Thalvaram 2 Outer Thinnai 3 Inner Thinnai 4 Courtyard 5 Storage Rooms 6 Dining Hall 7 Service Courtyard 8 Backyard 9 Rooms 10 Passage 11 Look out area
- First floor :
1 Thalvaram 2 Outer Thinnai 3 Inner Thinnai 4 Courtyard 5 Storage Rooms 6 Dining Hall 7 Service Courtyard 8 Backyard 9 Rooms 10 Passage 11 Look out area

Water

Receiving so many people created a huge need in water. Also water is a central element in the daily and religious life for the Chettiars which is why they created a complex water system connecting every house to the temple tanks using pipes and the grid shape of the streets map. Thanks to that system, they were able to obtain water in the courtyard for their daily uses. The waterworks include filters along the way.

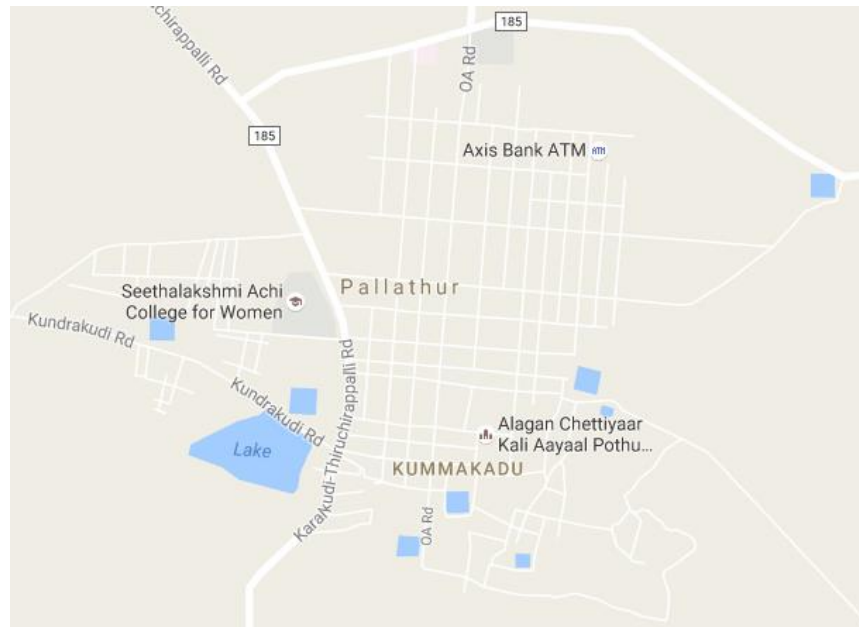


Figure 25 Pallathur where the slope of the streets (from north to south) allows water to be collected in water bodies at the south end of the vilage

The floods caused by monsoons are diverted to sub watersheds close to the temples. In order to not depend only on monsoons they also created a rainwater collection system on their rooftop terrace.



Figure 26 Water body in Kothamangalam (photo by C.BUGEIA)

Intangible heritage

Thanks to their journey, Chettiars bring different influences in their own traditions creating a specific culture. Theirs villages are built according to the rules of Vastu Shastra (traditional science of architecture and urbanism).

Their lifestyle is a blending of traditions and openness to the world. For example the ground floor architecture of their mansions is Tamil with an outside Tinnai (which is the entrance porch and also a veranda), an inside Tinnai and a Nadu Vassal (central courtyard), surrounded by rettai veedu (small rooms to keep food, wives dowry or to pray). And the architecture of the storey or the façade is strongly influenced by western countries: series of colonnades, ledges, balustrades, organized according to the rules of the western classic architecture.

They are really religious and believe in gods like Ganesh, Shiva or Muruga. They believed especially in god related to their occupation like Lakshmi who, according to them, is related to wealth and also banking profession or Gajalakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and protector of the traders.



Figure 27 Detail of Chettinad facade in Karaikudi (photo by C.BUGEIA)

“Huge elaborately carved teak front door has ajalakshmi who symbolize Goddess of wealth and a Kumbam (brass pot) with sprouting leaves engraved on them to symbolize wealth are depicted.”(K. Sasidhar, Dr. R. Vedamuthu).

They celebrate all Hindu religious festivals but two of them are really important for the community who will celebrate them wherever the Chettiars are. The first one is Pongal, the harvest festival, in January and common to all the Hindus, the second one is uniquely a Nagarathar festival, Pillaiyar Nombu and it is celebrated in the beginning of December.

Apart of these festivals each temple has its annual festival, called tiruvila, which is attended not only by its congregation but by the village in an act of collective worship. The tiruvila lasts several days but the highlight is the day when the decorated temple chariot (ratham) with the deity installed in it is hauled by the congregation around the temple square before being returned to the temple.

The Nagarathar participate also in several temple festivals of shrines. The Palani temple festival (north-western area of Tamil Nadu) is a very important pilgrimage. It is the most important one undertaken by the Chettiars except for the once in a lifetime visit to Kasi (Vanarasi).



Figure 28 Chettiar function in Kothamangalam (photo by M.SINOUE)

Every functions, festivals or wedding is the occasion of a feast, served at everyone on a banana leaf inside the palace mansion.

Chettinad cuisine has become popular. The tastiness of that food is related to the traditional way in which it is prepared (batter in archaic stone, clay hearts fuelled with wood ...).



Figure 30 Chettiar breakfast during a function in Kothamangalam (photo by M.SINOUE)

One of the most famous item is the chicken 65, 65 is the storage period of that food. A memory of the time when Chettiar were sailing away.

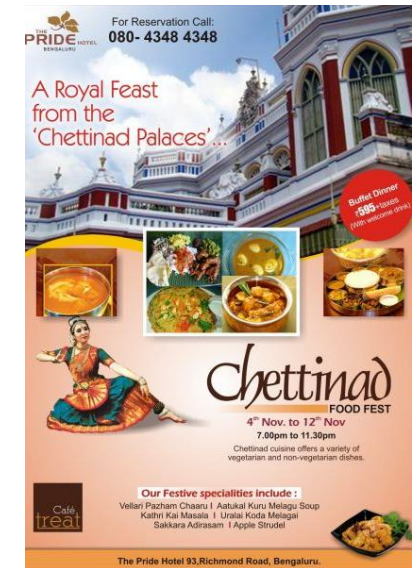


Figure 29 Posters for Chettinad food festival (<http://www.buzzintown.com/bangalore/events>)

The taste for embellishment was also including in daily life utensils. Skilled craftsmen in Chettinad created Brassware of high quality of variety of containers for water, stools for the Pooja room, sacred oil lamps etc.

Wood carving was also practiced both for utility as well as ornamental purposes. Wood work (and latter tiled floors) has long been the pride of Chettinad with wooden pillars, ornately carved doors, and ceiling edges.



Figure 31 From left to right : Detail of a crafted wood door, some tiles from Athangudi tiles (photo by C.BUGEIA)

Chettiars encouraged woodcraft, stone carving, metalworking for utility as well as decorative purposes and textile weaving. Stone and metal craftsmen are a part of the heritage of the villages of Chettinad. For over a century, their products have been in demand in large number in the Chettiar homes.

Sponsorship

Their wealth was not only use to embellish their house but also used for the greater good of the community. They have paid for temple restoration, healthcare facilities, and educational

institutions. They also supported, besides handcraft, literature and fine arts.

D. An Heritage endangered

A lack of maintenance

The majority of Chettiars doesn't live anymore in Chettinad; some come to their mansions for each familial gathering as wedding, temple festival etc. but no more than 4 or 5 times a year.

These gatherings are the occasion to renovate the house (often only the wall painting is done) but without any will to conserve the old color or materials.



Figure 32 Left : façade in Kadiyapatti/Right: façade in Kothamangalam (photo by M.SINOU)



Figure 32 Maintenance of a house in Kothamangalam before a wedding (photo by M.SINOUE)

“Today, besides a few palatial homes which are still maintained by the families for the purpose of important occasions and gatherings, a considerable amount of houses have been already demolished, and those which have survived, whose exact number is yet to be determined, are in a critical state of conservation.” (ArcHeS website).

This lack of maintenance has various reasons, according to the interview we got. The main reason is the lack of financial means, letting people visiting the house in exchange of an entrance fee is not enough to solve this issue.



Figure 333 : A mansion in Pallatur (photo by C.BUGEIA)



Figure 34 : Part of mansions left in Kadiyapatti (photo by C.BUGEIA and M.SINOU)

Moreover there is only a few handcraft men specialized in Chettiar mansions, which complicates every maintain work.

Also the mansions are owned by a group of person which complicates the maintenance. Dismantled the mansion and sold piece by piece is a source of income and facilitate the situation of joint ownership. The dismantling of Chettiar mansion has led to a lucrative antique business: pillars and doors are exported all around the world.



Figure 35 Chettiar pillars on sale in Karaikudi (photo by C.BUGEIA and M.Sinou)



Chettinad is a rural area and has to face the same issues that every rural area: families and young people are leaving for better economic opportunities in city.

New uses of these mansion

There is no rules or regulations to protect the Chettiar mansions. They are a part of urban landscape and there are use differently even in some surprising way in the villages nowadays.

- Using the house as a testimony

Some owners who live (or not) in their house, let people come inside and show them around, telling their family story. Sometimes they will ask for an entrance fee. One or two houses in Chettinad are doing more professional visit with opening time and fee schedules.



Figure 36 Some Chettiar items on sale in Karaikudi (photo by M.SINOU)



Figure 37 A house you can visit in Pallathur (photo by M.SINOU)

- Maintening the house for hostellerie purpose

The main hotel in Chettinad are located in renovated Chettiar mansions. They are destined to different type of customers with a starting price at 8 000 roupies for a night.



Figure 38 The Bengala in Karaikudi
(photo by M.Sinou)



Figure 39 Chidambara vila, a resort
hotel (photo
www.chidambaravilas.com)

- Renting some parts of the mansion as housing

Some owners rent some part of their mansion to earn some money or to keep a human presence to guard it. Often the renting rooms are the rooms around the second or the first courtyard, and the rooms on both side of the main gate.



Figure 40 : Rented parts of a Chettiar house in Kadiyapatti (photo by M.SINOUE)

- Some owners will rent their outer walls to advertisers.



Figure 41 Chettiar house
in Kothamangalam
(photo by M.SINOUE)

- Renting as a movie set

Some empty houses are only used as movie sets for movies, drama, or advertisements. The crew will bring furniture, textiles, etc. to make it “alive”.



Figure 42 Movie set in Kothamangalam (photo by M.SINOUE)

- Renting (partially or totally) as shop

Some owners rent the rooms on both sides of their main gate to merchants. Sometimes the entire mansion is converted into a shop. The main structure of the mansion is kept, but advertisements are painted on it, and sometimes the sculpted details are hidden.



Figure 43 Chettiar houses in Karaikudi



Figure 40 Chettiar house converted into a bank in Kothamangalam (photo by M.SINOU)

- Others uses
Some abandoned mansions are used as house by poor people who will use the structure to built some huts in palmer tree life.

Some owners will keep their house as storage system. We saw some courtyards full of tiles or shingles for roof.

Some inhabitants will also use the outter walls to support their shops.



Figure 41 A house supporting two shop (basket shop on the left and a small canteen on the right) in Kadiyatti (photo by M.SINOU)

These uses of the mansions bring them to life but can also cause their disappearing. Today there are only 73 villages left on the 96 recorded in 1947. What will remain in ten years? Can the Chettiar way of life continue without these mansions ?

E. Recommendations

The first difficulty on the way to protect Chettinad is the lack of clear borders. It will be useful to open a debate on this issue, involving all the institutions concerned.

During our time in Chettinad, we lead around 30 interviews with questions about the type of ownership, the type of house, the needs and struggle of the owner, his opinion and effort he will be ready to make to protect his heritage. It was a helpful source of knowledge. We have also used these interviews to learn more about their origins story and their way of life. It will be interesting to continue this work and meet every owner of Chettiar Mansion to obtain precise information with a recencement of every house.

We have interviewed some people, who would like to create a museum in Chettinad to disseminate validated information about their culture and way of life.

It will be necessary to work with the government to create planning and regulations in order to maintain Chettinad heritage: *“A specific regional plan will be necessary to outline the*

possibilities of heritage-based development which would include the following: Definition of the heritage zone; height of the buildings; alignments; types of windows; materials and colours. Connectivity, mobility and public facilities also have to be considered.”

(ArcHeS website)

❖ Governance

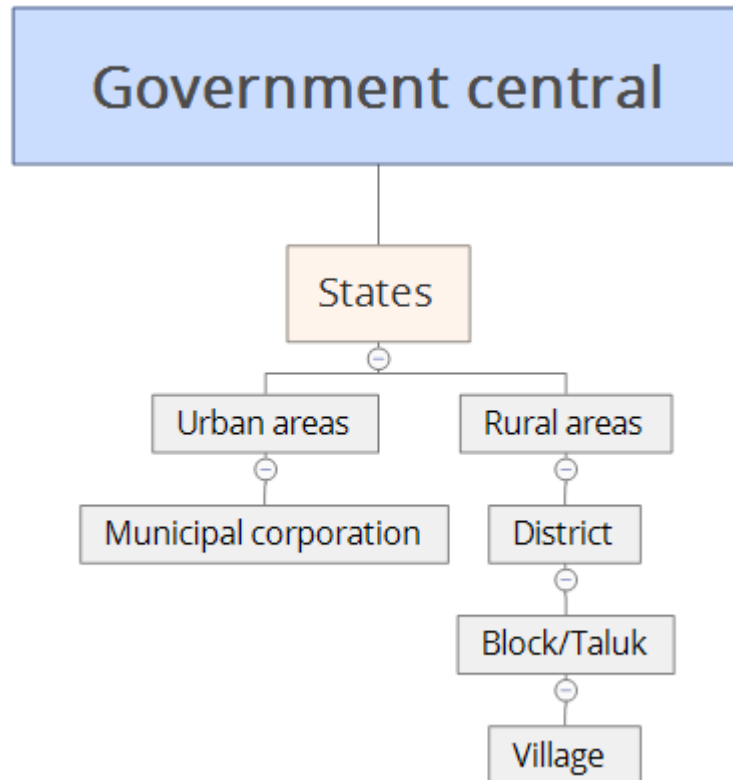


Figure 40 General territorial organization in India

Each state or union territory is further divided into administrative districts. There are two forms of Local Self-Government, the Urban Local Self-Government and the Rural Local Self-Government.

The urban areas, cities and towns type of Local Self-Government are Municipal Corporations and Municipalities. The Chettinad area comprises 2 towns such as Karaikkudi, the economic heart and Devakottai the cultural heart.

The Panchayati Raj is a system of Local self government for achieving rural development. It involves a three-tier structure of democratic institutions at district, block and villages levels. The 73 villages of Chettinad are run by the Panchayati Raj system.

The federal state level covers most of the competencies. A district is headed by a Deputy Commissioner/ Collector, who is responsible for the overall administration and the maintenance of law and order. Other key responsibilities include the collection of revenue, and criminal prosecution in the district. A local Government is an autonomous unit and looks after the 'local' functions like water supply, local streets, garbage collection and disposal and similar other local heads.

❖ Working Method

After collecting and reading documents in Anna University (Chennai) and in the French Institute (in Pondichery) to understand the field and the challenges faced by the Chettinad protection project; we spent almost one month in Chettinad. We used this time to make a draft of the application file of Chettinad for Unesco world heritage list and to list all the missing elements.

We met and interview inhabitants, Chettiars, panchayat staff, town planner, sub collector and comissioner on two subject : Water management and Heritage protection.

Studying the traditional water system is a way to highlight the challenge facing by Chettinad protection project. It is included in the UNESCO project as Chettiar Heritage and it is one of the most pratical study subject because it is a form of tangible heritage

It also shows how Heritage is currently maitain and how people perceived it.

We also spent time walking in the villages, observing the daily life and the uses of water bodies. We visited Chettiars houses, movies set, went to Chettiars functions, temples festivals to understand how Chettinad is living through its heritage. It helped us to give us an update on the conservation state of this heritage and on what is threatening it.

Interview grid

Can you introduce yourself ? What is your link with Chettinad region ?

What do you know about the History of this place ?

Why was a traditional water system built in Chettinad ? Did the tanks have the same role everywhere in South India than they have in Chettinad region ?

Who is the owner of the water bodies ? Who maintains them ? How and How often ?

How do you use them today ? Do you have special needs concerning this water system (renovation, desctruction, ...) ?

What is the condition of the tanks system today ? What threats does it have to face?

Are you aware of projects concerning tank?

Do the tank system have a heritage value ? Is it including in touristic journeys in Chettinad ?

What do you think about the UNESCO project ? Were you aware of this project ?

What do you think about the fact that some foreigners are working on Chettinad Heritage protection ?

What is Heritage for you ?

