

## **Understanding the native scales from the dismantling of Chettinadu mansions**

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The Chettinad Mansions are famous for their rich architectural character and grand spatial morphologies. These mansions were built by the merchant class people called chettians who originally were traders of spices and salt later diversified and monopolised trading & banking in this part of the world. They travelled and brought many antiquities, styles, traditions and other cultural components to Chettinadu. Currently Chettinadu region is well known for its architecture, culture, antiques, heritage tourism and its cuisine. There were 95 towns in total, divided among nine clan temple regions within them. The chettinadu mansions were a collage of materials and techniques from various parts of the world. The status of each family was evident from the size and the extent of detailing in the ornamentation of these mansions, exhibiting their wealth. The famous Burmese teak and black granite was revered and preferred by the elitist while the others in the hierarchy chose according to their capacity.

With changing times the chettinadu region is losing these mansions one by one citing high maintenance cost, loss of patronage from the family members, reducing family sizes and migration to other parts of the world for better opportunities. They get back to the mansions during family weddings and festivals. Affluent families are able to sustain their mansions, while some of them are converting them into heritage hotels and resorts. The remaining families dismantle them to be sold and split it among themselves. The region continues to lose its glory, reducing their structures into stone and rubbles.

Antique shops are part of the major businesses at Karaikudi - the primary town of Chettinadu region. The dismantled parts are shipped across the country, to be retrofitted. The antique shop auctioneers and buyers possess a unique understanding of the architecture and the materials based on a rule of thumb to assess the value of the materials, their quantities, that could be salvaged or reclaimed from that particular house. The spatial typology of the house, iconography, ornamentation details, etc., hold numerous clues, hints and tell-tale features; they gain experience over time, to be able to evaluate the quantities of wooden columns, beams, architectural elements, other valuable materials, etc., to make their final bid in the dismantling auctions. This research strives to document the embedded native knowledge while the chettinadu mansions are dismantled; it looks forward to understand the spatial design and planning, materials, elements and other architectural features, that are products, done in the absence of standard measuring systems in place, between 16th to 18th centuries. With changing times the houses are being sold, dismantled and the components are used for other contemporary architectural projects. The bid values are completely based on their mental calculations, from the quantity of reclamation of recovery. Understanding their methods of evaluating the value could throw more light on the traditional architectural applications.