

**Routing-out Portable Antiquities:
A biographical study of the contemporary lives of Tamil
antiquities**

Volume 1 of 2

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ABSTRACT

Developing the idea of an 'object biography', as defined by Kopytoff (1986), this thesis challenges a fixed, static concept of antiquities and their present meanings by focusing on the *routes* they travel through space and time as they circulate through the hands of unauthorised finders, dealers and collectors. The research has been carried out in India, focusing on the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As a non-Western country with a period of colonial history, India is an ideal location to explore not just the diversity and mutability of these meanings but also the tensions between authorized and divergent viewpoints regarding the value and management of the past.

My methodology has drawn on theoretical models from the social sciences that approach the production of meaning in and through material culture as an organic and on-going process of human-object relations. Through a process of qualitative surveying using purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews, two distinct object case studies have been devised and investigated: the circulation of structural and household antiques from the 19th and 20th century houses of the Nagarathar Chettiars, and the excavation of coins, beads, jewellery and figurines in the riverbeds of Tamil Nadu and their subsequent sale, collection and circulation. In the course of fieldwork I have recorded over 55 hours of interactions with 107 respondents in locations across Tamil Nadu, as well as Bangalore, Mumbai, Jodhpur and London. I have supported this data with photographs, fieldnotes, and internet sources.

In my analysis of this data I have argued that many people in Tamil Nadu and South India feel a sense of distance and alienation from the world of 'heritage' as defined and managed by the government, while at the same time people are engaged in their own processes of meaning-making through the old objects they engage with and circulate on a daily basis. The objects studied in this thesis are not seen as pertaining to the 'sleeping' realm of antiquities and authorized heritage, but to the 'waking' realm of active circulation, use and transformation. Furthermore, in the variety of ways that people engage with

A. Lawson

and transform these objects we can see the negotiation of relationships with the past and identities in the present at a time of rapid social and economic change in India.

TABLE OF CONTENTS (VOL 1)

ABSTRACT	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS (VOL 1)	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS (VOL 2)	8
LIST OF FIGURES	9
LIST OF TABLES	14
LIST OF MAPS	15
GLOSSARY	16
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	18
1 Routing-out portable antiquities and redressing the cultural property bias: background, aims and objectives	20
1.1 <i>Background, aims and objectives</i>	20
1.2 <i>Antiques, Antiquities and Cultural Property: Language, meaning and value of old things</i>	28
2 Research Context: the perception and management of antiquities in Tamil Nadu, India	37
2.1 <i>Introduction to Tamil Nadu</i>	37
2.2 <i>The evolution of the concept of Indian antiquities: a historical overview</i>	41
2.2.1 <i>Battle for custody and meaning: origins of heritage management in India</i>	42
2.2.2 <i>Indian antiquities on the move: trade, collection, legislation, and management</i>	56
2.3 <i>Summary</i>	66
3 Methodology	67
3.1 <i>Theoretical Framework</i>	67
3.1.1 <i>Ontology: material habitus, object agency, and the social life of things</i>	67
3.1.2 <i>Epistemology: Qualitative research and Interpretivism</i>	75
3.1.3 <i>Methodology: Object biographies, routes and comparative case studies</i>	80

3.2	<i>Research Methods</i>	92
3.2.1	Structuring fieldwork	93
3.2.2	Navigating the field	94
3.2.3	Qualitative Interviewing	98
3.2.4	Sampling	100
3.2.5	Recording and transcribing	102
3.2.6	Translators and field-guides	103
3.2.7	Supporting data – photographs, field notes and web data	104
3.2.8	Ethical considerations	105
3.2.9	Appendices and cross referencing	105
3.2.10	Qualitative analysis methods	106
4	CASE STUDY 1: Chettinad Antiques – setting and materials	112
4.1	<i>Introduction</i>	112
4.1.1	Selection of case study	113
4.1.2	Sources	114
4.2	<i>Background: Chettiars, Chettinad and the market in Chettinad antiques</i>	116
4.2.1	Nagarathar Chettiar community	116
4.2.2	Chettinad region	119
4.2.3	Chettinad and the antique market	123
4.2.4	Chettinad Heritage	124
4.3	<i>The Objects</i>	127
4.3.1	Structural material	128
4.3.2	Sree Danam	134
5	CASE STUDY 1: Chettinad Antiques - routes and biographies	138
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	138
5.2	<i>The Sources</i>	140
5.2.1	VRMV House	144
5.2.2	Athangudi Palace (and demolishing houses)	151
5.2.3	Chettinadu Mansion	156
5.3	<i>The Dealers</i>	163
5.3.1	Chettinad	164
5.3.2	Pondicherry and Auroville	177

A. Lawson

5.3.3	Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai	185
5.3.4	Export market	196
5.4	<i>The Destinations</i>	208
5.4.1	The Home	208
5.4.2	Hospitality, retail and tourist industries	216
5.4.3	Public and private collections	221
5.4.4	Film Industry – sets and locations	232
5.5	<i>Summary</i>	234
6	CASE STUDY 2: Riverbed Antiquities	235
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	235
6.1.1	Selection of case study	236
6.1.2	Sources	237
6.2	<i>Background: Riverbeds, coin collecting</i>	238
6.2.1	Coin collecting in India	238
6.2.2	Riverbed antiquities	242
6.3	<i>The Objects</i>	246
6.3.1	Coins	246
6.3.2	Fakes, replicas and magical coins	250
6.3.3	Other objects: beads, terracotta, bronzes	254
6.4	<i>The Routes</i>	255
6.4.1	Overview	255
6.4.2	The Sources	258
6.4.3	Dealers and Collectors (Tamil Nadu)	280
6.4.4	Dealers and Collectors (Bangalore and Mumbai)	295
6.4.5	Indian coins outside India	310
6.5	<i>Summary</i>	315
7	Comparative biographical analysis: routes and cycles	317
7.1	<i>Chettinad Antiques</i>	318
7.2	<i>Riverbed Antiquities</i>	320
7.3	<i>Summary</i>	324
8	Combined thematic analysis: essays on materiality, heritage and identity in Tamil Nadu	328

A. Lawson

8.1	<i>The antiquities are sleeping at the museum: defining Indian antiquities</i>	328
8.2	<i>Objects of prosperity and ruin: the entangling of people and things</i>	333
8.3	<i>Nostalgia and authenticity: recycling, repurposing and replicating</i>	339
9	Conclusions	344
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	348

TABLE OF CONTENTS (VOL 2)

APPENDIX A	376
<i>Description and explanation</i>	377
<i>Explanation of interaction headings</i>	377
<i>List of interactions</i>	379
APPENDIX B	860
<i>B1: MAR 2013 – APR 2013</i>	861
<i>B2: NOV 2013 – MAY 2014</i>	873
<i>B3: AUG 2014 – NOV 2014</i>	878
<i>B4: APR 2015 – AUG 2015</i>	890
APPENDIX C	906
<i>Research participants</i>	907
<i>Interviewers</i>	907
<i>Translators</i>	907
<i>Respondents</i>	907

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 - Data summarised and subdivided into three broad groups	107
Figure 3.2 - Each broad stage of the biographical analysis has been subdivided	107
Figure 3.3 - An early draft of the riverbed routes antiquities flowchart.	108
Figure 3.4 - Notes have been highlighted and annotated	109
Figure 3.5 - This brainstorm looks for emergent themes	110
Figure 3.6 - An example of several of the many lists made in analysis	110
Figure 3.7 - 'theme cards' were a useful tool for organising sub-themes	111
Figure 4.1 - Colonial-era portraits of Chettians in European attire and settings.	118
Figure 4.2 - Dry flat scrubland on the outskirts of Karaikudi	121
Figure 4.3 - Raja of Chettinad's palace in Kanadukathan	122
Figure 4.4 - Partially demolished Chettiar mansion in Karaikudi	123
Figure 4.5 - Intricate carvings depicting a Yalli (mythical beast)	130
Figure 4.6 - Carved main of VRMV house.	130
Figure 4.7 - Carved panel at the top of the door called a <i>Surya Pallakai</i>	131
Figure 4.8 - A row of pillars lines the edge of each <i>thinnai</i> .	132
Figure 4.9 - Antique shop warehouse (or <i>godown</i>) in Pondicherry	134
Figure 4.10 - <i>Sree Danam</i> found in the antique shops in Karaikudi.	136
Figure 5.1 - Flowchart summarising the routes of Chettinad antiquities	139
Figure 5.2 - A typical Chettinad village street.	141
Figure 5.3 - Modern house development in Kanadukathan	142
Figure 5.4 - Decorative stucco figures on the front exterior of Chettiar houses	143
Figure 5.5 - Interior courtyard (<i>valavu</i>) surrounded by raised platform (<i>thinnai</i>)	144
Figure 5.6 - VRMV House – front porch leading to the first <i>thinnai</i>	145
Figure 5.7 - VRMV House – the first <i>thinnai</i> lined with solid wooden pillars	145
Figure 5.8 - VRMV House – the main door is elaborately carved	146
Figure 5.9 - Chokilingam (R53) seated in the front <i>thinnai</i> of VRMV House	146
Figure 5.10 - VRMV House – view from the front entrance to the back entrance	147
Figure 5.11 - VRMV House – signs of disrepair	147
Figure 5.12 - Pilliyarpatti temple	150
Figure 5.13 - Athangudi Palace in the village of Athangudi	151
Figure 5.14 - The caretaker at Athangudi Palace	153
Figure 5.15 - Dilapidated house in Kanadukathan	154
Figure 5.16 - Empty plot in Kanadukathan	155
Figure 5.17 - Partially demolished house in Pallatur	156

A. Lawson

Figure 5.18 - Chettinadu Mansion heritage hotel	157
Figure 5.19 - Chettinadu Mansion second <i>valavu</i> has two storeys	157
Figure 5.20 - Chettinadu Mansion has a small museum	158
Figure 5.21 - Chettinadu Mansion furniture	159
Figure 5.22 - Aiyandar temple statue	161
Figure 5.23 - Local 'collector' dealer in Karaikudi with his recent acquisitions	165
Figure 5.24 - Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudie	166
Figure 5.25 - Large quantities of kitchen articles for sale	167
Figure 5.26 - Some small personal items for sale	168
Figure 5.27 - Upper floors of Bismi Arts	169
Figure 5.28 - Mr Rabik (R20) holding one of his favourite terracotta figurines	169
Figure 5.29 - Embroidered wall hanging at Bismi Arts	172
Figure 5.30 - Wood salvaged from house demolitions	173
Figure 5.31 - Ramu (R35) in Athangudi	174
Figure 5.32 - Carpenters at Savaripillaiyar Kovil Street	175
Figure 5.33 - Carpenter working on a decorative panel	176
Figure 5.34 - Carpenters catalogue of designs for traditional <i>surya pallakais</i>	176
Figure 5.35 - Antique pillar being stripped	178
Figure 5.36 - Aurorachanna is an antiques and carpentry business in Auroville	179
Figure 5.37 - Salvaged wood and furniture stacked in the courtyard	180
Figure 5.38 - Front of Suprajaa Furnitures	182
Figure 5.39 - Original antique pillars (right) next to replica pillars	182
Figure 5.40 - Al-Everest Old Furniture on ECR Road	183
Figure 5.41 - Small antique and salvaged wood businesses on the ECR Road	184
Figure 5.42 - Phillips Antiques in Mumbai	186
Figure 5.43 - Advertisement for Balaji's (R68) antique show at RainTree	189
Figure 5.44 - Antiques at Balaji's (R68) antique show	190
Figure 5.45 - Unsold Swedish enamelware purchased by Balaji (R68)	192
Figure 5.46 - Basava Amabara, Bangalore	193
Figure 5.47 - The interior of 'heritage boutique' Amethyst in Pondicherry	195
Figure 5.48 - Antique articles from Chettinad for sale at Amethyst	195
Figure 5.49 - SunCity Art Exporters showroom in Jodhpur	198
Figure 5.50 - Antique doors (in the Chettinad style) for sale in Jodhpur	199
Figure 5.51 - Chettinad antiques at Prachin Art Gallery warehouse	200
Figure 5.52 - Items for sale on Prachin Art Gallery's eBay site	201
Figure 5.53 - 'Masala' cupboards	202
Figure 5.54 - Indigo Antiques in Wilthire, UK	204

A. Lawson

Figure 5.55 - 'Under the Bo', Thailand	205
Figure 5.56 - The Past Perfect Collection' in Singapore	206
Figure 5.57 - Chloe Alberry on Portobello Road in Londonia	206
Figure 5.58 - Enamelware from Chettinad for sale at Chloe Alberry	207
Figure 5.59 - Chettiar lady in Karaikudi with a pickle jar	210
Figure 5.60 - Customer at Bismi Arts in Karaikudi	211
Figure 5.61 - Karthic Vaidyanathan's apartment in Bangalore	214
Figure 5.62 - Ramanchandarans (R61) apartment in Bangalore	215
Figure 5.63 - The dining area of the Bangala heritage hotel	217
Figure 5.64 - Saratha Vilas a heritage hotel in Kothamangalam	218
Figure 5.65 - Enamelware from Chettinad at a Stabucks, Bangalore	219
Figure 5.66 - Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi sari shop	220
Figure 5.67 - Chettinad display at the Government Museum, Chennai	222
Figure 5.68 - Miniature model of a Chettiar house at the Government Museum	222
Figure 5.69 - Exterior of Chettiar house at DakshinaChitra open air museum	224
Figure 5.70 - Interior of Chettiar house at DakchinaChitra	225
Figure 5.71 - Chettinad antiques in the British Museum	227
Figure 5.72 - Brass vessel from Chettinad belonging to antique collector R72	229
Figure 5.73 - <i>Surya Pallakais</i> displayed on the wall in the home of R72	229
Figure 5.74 - Ramprasad (R77) in his home in Bangalore	231
Figure 5.75 - Thota Tharani is film art director and production designer	233
Figure 5.76 - Screen shots from the Tamil film <i>Jeans</i>	233
Figure 6.1 - Irula riverbed diggers, working on a stretch of the Kaveri	236
Figure 6.2 - A small hoard of Chola coins	244
Figure 6.3 - A range of coins found in the riverbeds in Tamil Nadu	247
Figure 6.4 - Copper Chola (9 th -12 th century) coins found in the Kaveri	248
Figure 6.5 - A collection of coins belonging to Chennai based collector, R9	249
Figure 6.6 - Marudhar Arts numismatic auction house in Bangalore	250
Figure 6.7 - A range of genuine antique coins and 'tourist forgeries'	251
Figure 6.8 - Ramatanka temple tokens	253
Figure 6.9 - ' <i>Copper Iridium Lebbo Coin</i> '	254
Figure 6.10 - Range of objects that are found in riverbeds in Tamil Nadu	254
Figure 6.11 - Flowchart summarising the routes of riverbed antiquities	257
Figure 6.12 - The Kaveri riverbed at Musiri in April is almost completely dry	261
Figure 6.13 - Irula riverbed digging team, Kaveri riverbed near Musiri	262
Figure 6.14 - Makeshift shelter of riverbed diggers at Manumandurairi	262
Figure 6.15 - Riverbed digging in progress, Kaveri River, April	263

A. Lawson

Figure 6.16 - Woman uses a small piece of metal as a shovel	264
Figure 6.17 - One riverbed digger at Musiri demonstrates how he digs	265
Figure 6.18 - Deeper river bed excavations	266
Figure 6.19 - A Hindu ceremony known as a Thidhi Pooja	267
Figure 6.20 - The remains of a ruined temple and ghat on the Kaveri River	268
Figure 6.21 - The river near the Amma Mandapam temple at Srirangam	269
Figure 6.22 - The Irula team at the Amma Mandapam using sieves	269
Figure 6.23 - The Irula riverbed diggers near Srirangm showing finds	270
Figure 6.24 - The Irula use coin names of their own invention	271
Figure 6.25 - Assortment of Irula riverbed diggers finds	272
Figure 6.26 - Objects found by one family group over the past 10 days	274
Figure 6.27 - Sand extraction taking place on the Kaveri riverbed	276
Figure 6.28 - A community of Kuruvikaran	277
Figure 6.29 - The beach in front of the Danish fort at Tharangambadi	278
Figure 6.30 - Ancient beads belonging to R44	279
Figure 6.31 - Irula riverbed diggers deal with middlemen dealers	282
Figure 6.32 - Some riverbed antiquities belonging to R44	286
Figure 6.33 - Information cards produced by R44	287
Figure 6.34 - R9 demonstrates how to wear ring from the riverbed	288
Figure 6.35 - Etched carnelian beads in the collection of R9	288
Figure 6.36 - Coin collectors sort, categorize and label their coins	289
Figure 6.37 - R9 keeps some of his collection on display	289
Figure 6.38 - Numismatic books by Tamil collectors published in Tamil	290
Figure 6.39 - R72 makes necklaces using riverbed beads	291
Figure 6.40 - Oversized model replicas of coins, Government Museum	294
Figure 6.41 - British India, Falcon Coins website	297
Figure 6.42 - South Indian coins, Marudhar Arts website	298
Figure 6.43 - Ten incarnations of Vishnu coin collection	299
Figure 6.44 - Lavin also has a fascination with 'mint error' coins	299
Figure 6.45 - Numismatics exhibitions	303
Figure 6.46 - Numismatic groups on Facebook	304
Figure 6.47 - Lavin (R49) buys many of his coins on eBay	304
Figure 6.48 - eBay is also rife with fake and replica coins	306
Figure 6.49 - Father (Farooq) and son (Malcolm) of Todywalla Auctions.	308
Figure 6.50 - Girish Veera, founder and director Oswal Antiques	309
Figure 6.51 - Auction catalogue for Oswal Antiques	309
Figure 6.52 - Spink and Son, Southampton Row in London	312

A. Lawson

Figure 6.53 - Stephen Album is a coin dealer based in California

313

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4-1 - List of Chettinad towns and villages marked on map (Map 4-1), after (Muthiah et. al. 2000: x).	121
Table 5-1 – List of recorded interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are members of the Nagarathar Chettiar community	140
Table 5-2 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are dealing in Chettinad Antiques in various locations	163
Table 5-3 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are customers/consumers of Chettinad antiques	208
Table 6-1 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) who are connected to the digging, panning or otherwise searching for coins and other antiquities in Tamil Nadu.	258
Table 6-2 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) within Tamil Nadu, who collect and deal in coins and other antiquities found in riverbeds	280
Table 6-3 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) in Bangalore and Mumbai who deal and collect coins	295
Table 6-4 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) who are involved in the collection and trade of Indian coins outside of India	310

LIST OF MAPS

Map 2-1 - Tamil Nadu is a South Indian state on the southeast coast of India. Its capital is Chennai (formerly Madras).	38
Map 4-1 - Chettinad region, showing all remaining Chettinad villages, including those where the nine Chettiar clan temples are situated, after (Muthiah et. al. 2000: xi). Karaikudi (No.1 on map) is the principal town of Chettinad. See table for full list of town/village names (Table 4-1)	120
Map 6-1 - Rivers of Tamil Nadu showing sites where the excavation and panning for antiquities has been recorded in the course of this research, as well as other sites of reported antiquities hunting.	260

GLOSSARY

<i>Aasari</i>	Caste name used in Tamil Nadu to refer to craftsmen of the Vishvakarma caste grouping
<i>Aazhi kasu</i>	Great king/ruler (or great wave/ocean) coin - name given by a group of Irula riverbed diggers to coins of Rajaraja Chola
<i>Bhai</i>	Muslim trading community
<i>Caste</i>	Used in the Indian context to describe a grouping within a heirarchical social order based on occupaion and familial and community relationships.
<i>Chettiar</i>	Caste name meaning trader
<i>Crore</i>	10,000,000 (ten million)
<i>Ghat</i>	A set of steps leading down to a river or other body of water
<i>Godown</i>	Warehouse or storage area
<i>Hundi</i>	Offering/donation - the donation box in a Hindu temple is called a Hundi or hundi box.
<i>Irula</i>	The name of a Scheduled Tribe of Tamil Nadu
<i>kalai porul</i>	Tamil term meaning 'art thing'
<i>Karungali</i>	Ebony wood
<i>Kasu</i>	Tamil word for coin or money
<i>Kottan</i>	A type of basket woven from palm leaves which is a traditional craft Chettinad
<i>Kovil</i>	Temple
<i>Kozhi kasu</i>	Rooster coin - name given by a group of Irula reiverbed diggers to the copper coins that they find
<i>kuradana</i>	Hindi/sanskrit term meaning antique or antiquity - not commonly used in modern spoken Tamil
<i>Kuruvikaran</i>	The name of a Scheduled Tribe of Tamil Nadu
<i>Lakh</i>	100,000 (one hundred thousand)
<i>'masala'</i>	A Hindi word literally meaning a mixture or blend. Used by some dealers in the antique and handicraft business in India to describe objects that have been constructed from parts of multiple other objects. Often refers to objects that are a composite of new wood and parts of antique carved wood.
<i>Muruga/Murugan</i>	Hindu deity. Son of Siva and Parvathi.

<i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>	Literally meaning 'Chettiars who live in urban settlements'. Community or sub-group within the South Indian trading caste called Chetti, Chetty or Chettiar. Sometimes referred to as Nattukottai Chettiar or simply Chettiar. The community name originates in the Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu now known as Chettinad.
<i>Nattukottai Chettiar</i>	Literally meaning 'Chettiars who live in country forts'. See Nagarathar Chettiar
<i>palaiya porul</i>	Tamil term meaning 'old thing'
<i>palam perum poluram</i>	Tamil term meaning antique or antiquity - not commonly used in modern spoken Tamil
<i>Pathiyakkal</i>	A type of ceramic tile
<i>Pooja/Puja</i>	Hindu prayer ritual
<i>porul/porukal</i>	Tamil word meaning thing, things or stuff
<i>poruse</i>	Ceylon Satinwood
<i>puttu kasu</i>	Small portion coin - name given by a group of Irula riverbed diggers to fanam coins
<i>Sree Danam</i>	Chettiar term for the gifts presented to a bride by her father (a form of inherited wealth).
<i>Surya Pallakai</i>	Literally sun board/plank - used to refer to the decoratively carved piece of wood above the door to a house in Tamil Nadu
<i>thagadu kasu</i>	Sheet coin - or thin as a sheet coin - name given by a group of Irula riverbed diggers to certain types of Pallava coin
<i>thagaram</i>	Tin
<i>Thidhi Pooja</i>	A Hindu ceremony to remember/honour ancestors and deceased relatives
<i>thinnai</i>	raised seating platform
<i>uthrangal</i>	Wooden roof
<i>Vahana</i>	Vehicle or animal companion to a hindu deity
<i>valavu</i>	Interior courtyard
<i>Vel</i>	Type of weapon like a javelin, belonging to Lord Muruga, a Hindu deity
<i>Yali</i>	Mythical animal from Hindu mythology

Note on transliteration of Tamil words: In this thesis the transliteration of Tamil words is not fully consistent, in that my own preferred transliteration sometimes varies from those of other people. For example, while I have used the spelling *Chettinad* to refer to that area of Tamil Nadu inhabited by members of the Nagarathar Chettiar community, some respondents or published materials may refer to the same area as *Chettinadu* or *Chettimarnad*. I have not attempted to standardise transliteration where no confusion as to intended meaning is likely.

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A. Lawson

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1 Routing-out portable antiquities and redressing the cultural property bias: background, aims and objectives

1.1 Background, aims and objectives

Background

This thesis starts from the premise, first postulated by Appadurai (1986) with regard to commodities, that *antiquities, like persons, have social lives*. The aim of this thesis is to explore these social lives. To ask how and why some old objects come to be re-used and re-valued, and to attempt to understand the relationship between these processes and broader cultural attitudes towards the meaning and management of the past. The research has been carried out in India, focusing on the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As a non-Western country with a period of colonial history, India is an ideal location to explore, not just the diversity and mutability of these meanings, but also the tensions between divergent viewpoints regarding the management of the past.

In October 2011, New York based art dealer Subhash Kapoor was arrested in Germany and extradited to India to stand trial for his alleged role in the theft and illegal export and sale of eighteen temple idols from Tamil Nadu (Kumaraswami 2012). This proved to be only the tip of the iceberg. Kapoor currently stands accused of stealing over \$100 million worth of antiquities, mostly from India, and illegally exporting them to his gallery in New York (Pohlman 2014).

These events have been much discussed and sensationalised by the media, in India and elsewhere. Both the story itself and the subsequent interest is indicative of an increased concern that India's movable, material heritage is being destroyed, and/or lost due to poor management, legislative issues, lack

A. Lawson

of awareness, lack of funding, immoral groups and individuals, and any number of other reasons. In July 2012, an article in *The Hindu* asked, 'Why is liberalised India Smuggling it's Heritage Abroad?' (Ahuja 2012). In-fact this situation is not new for India, which has been subject to a number of notorious cases of antiquities smuggling over the last 100 years (Pachauri 2003, 273-6). Moreover it represents but one aspect of a much broader issue involving the rights and wrongs of ownership, trade and management of an enormous range of portable antique objects.

While the demand for Indian antiquities from abroad has existed for many decades, there is increasingly now a domestic market for such objects. Furthermore, while sensationalist news media may choose to focus its attention on only the most dramatic and expensive objects to surface on the antiquities market, the reality is that countless numbers of smaller or less spectacular antiquities are collected and traded everyday. Just a quick glance at ebay.co.in can give some indication of the scale of this activity.

Though it should be noted that there is a perfectly legal and above-board element to the trade and collection of antiquities, the broader debate about how those material things that come to us from the past should be used and managed remains far from settled. This moral debate has largely revolved around the idea of 'cultural property', and its rightful ownership. It involves multiple, competing 'stakeholders', amongst which archaeology has been one of the loudest voices within the Western debate. Archaeologists have a tendency to see the life of an antiquity as finished, its meaning and value existing entirely in the past. However, a recent critical thread in the field of heritage studies has challenged such an assumption by arguing that heritage is a process very much constructed in and shaped by the present, and undeniably political (e.g. Lowenthal 1985; Hewison 1987; Hall 2005; Harrison 2008). Thus, looked at from another perspective, an antiquity, as an object of heritage, is as much a product of the present as it is of the past.

Following this line of argument, some have commented on the existence and inherent biases of what has been referred to as an 'official heritage' (Harrison

2013), a 'heritage-from-above' (Robertson 2012), or an 'authorized heritage discourse' (Smith 2006). Smith (2006) uses the term authorized heritage discourse to describe the modes of defining and presenting the past as 'heritage' that are employed and regulated by institutionalized bodies, usually at the national or international level. She also notes that this discourse and the present day concept of heritage that is vaunts have very particular historical and geographical origins:

'The when of heritage stretches back to nineteenth-century values and cultural concerns, the where of this discourse may be found not only in Western Europe, but also more specifically in the authorial voices of the upper middle and ruling classes of European educated professionals and elites. It is as much a discourse of nationalism and patriotism as it is of certain class experiences and social and aesthetic value' (Smith 2006, 28).

Others have likewise drawn attention to the European and colonial origins of the World Heritage and conservation movement, arguing, like Winter (2013) that 'it is important we begin to seriously address the heterogeneous nature of heritage, for both the West and non-West, and explore the conceptualisation of multiple heritages' (Winter 2013, 556). In response to these debates a number of studies have sought to explore alternative heritage perspectives and practices to the top-down authorized Western model. However, these tend to address the meaning and value of sites, monuments and landscapes rather than the circulation of portable objects (e.g. Holtorf 2005; Robertson 2008; Zube & Pitt 1981; Clarke & Johnston 2003; Berte 2009).

Discourses within archaeology regarding the contemporary circulation of portable antiquities have been dominated by the concept of cultural property (chap. 1.2) and the question of 'who owns objects?' rather than that of why and how we value them (e.g. Renfrew 2000; Robson et. al. 2006; Atwood 2007). Despite the emotionally heated and polarized nature of much of the rhetoric in the cultural property debate, some archaeologists are beginning to shift their approach towards understanding other stakeholders better, with a

A. Lawson

view to negotiating new solutions to the current dispute. Luke & Kersel (2005, 197) have argued 'archaeologists can no longer pretend that this [antiquities] market does not concern them just because they are not active participants. We need to understand the collecting ethos, the secretive world of moving illicit antiquities, and local attitudes towards the destruction of the archaeological landscape'.

With this attitude in mind, there have been several papers and studies focusing on the activities and motivations of specific stakeholders who are typically treated as a threat to the archaeological record: collectors (Belk 2006; Tubb 2006), metal-detectorists and field walkers (LaBelle 2003; Thomas and Stone 2009), subsistence diggers (Matsuda 1998, Hollowell-Zimmer 2003), and the links between 'looters', dealers and collectors (e.g. Kersel 2006; Kersel 2012). This in part reflects the fact that, as ideas about what constitutes heritage have become increasingly diverse, the cultural property debate has also begun to incorporate a recognition that there are many more communities and stakeholders to consider than just governments, museums, archaeologists and collectors. However, while these studies aim to understand a wider variety of perspectives in relation to heritage and portable antiquities, they are still firmly rooted in the biases and interests of archaeology and frequently use terminology that reinforces this bias, such as 'looting', 'illicit antiquities' and 'cultural property'.

This thesis deals primarily with the trade and collection of portable antiquities by *unauthorized* groups and individuals, acting within, and sometimes against, an existing framework of *authorized*, official, top-down approaches to heritage and the interpretation and management of the past. For the purposes of this thesis the term *authorized heritage* is preferred and based loosely on Smith's (2006) concept of an authorized heritage discourse. Authorized heritage is seen here to incorporate the definitions of and approaches to the past that are adopted and presented by national and international heritage institutions and governments, and often supported and perpetuated by academics, professionals and social elites. In the wider, international context this authorized heritage centres on the concept of cultural property as discussed

A. Lawson

above. In South India and Tamil Nadu more specifically there exists an established authorized heritage discourse defined by and embodied within the key national and state level heritage institutions such as the Archaeological Survey of India, the Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology and the Government Museum in Chennai. In Chapter 2 of this thesis I argue that this authorized heritage is heavily influenced by the interests and opinions of elites, including the British colonial governments and archaeologists of the past two centuries, and as a consequence suffers from an ethos which see the primary purpose of heritage management in India as protecting heritage *from* the public, rather than making heritage available to and *for* the public. I also argue that this authorized heritage is characterised by a narrow pre-occupation with certain types of antiquity that are seen to qualify as 'Indian Art'. In Tamil Nadu the most valourised Indian Art is very clearly the bronze Hindu iconographic sculpture of the medieval Chola dynasty, and religious sculpture and temple architecture more generally take precedence within the authorized heritage of Tamil Nadu.

In the context of Indian antiquities there are currently relatively few examples of studies that step outside this authorized heritage discourse to explore diverse alternative perspectives (chap. 2). A notable exception is the study by Davis (1999) which explores the re-interpretations of Indian religious sculptures at various different points throughout history (chap. 3.1.3.1). However Davis's focus is largely historical and does not extend much into the present day. Furthermore it is concerned with a category of object, religious sculpture, for which there already exists a noticeable bias of interest and attention within Indian archaeology, heritage and art history discourses (chap. 2).

Aims and Objectives

This thesis seeks to re-address the cultural property debate from an angle that is significantly underdeveloped in the area of portable antiquities, particularly in the Indian context: that of how heritage as a concept and as a category of material objects is valued, perceived and constructed. In order to

A. Lawson

do this I will explore the collection and trade of antiques and antiquities in and from Tamil Nadu, with the purpose of challenging authorized heritage discourse by looking at the production of meanings and values from the ground up.

My aim is to understand the ways in which contemporary circulation of old objects in India contributes to heritage, identity, and a sense of the past as a culturally-embedded phenomenon rather than a universal fact. It is argued here that a better understanding of these processes is a critical pre-requisite to any satisfactory attempt to address questions regarding the management and ownership of those objects we deem to be heritage. It is also an opportunity to explore perceptions of 'heritage' and the processes of its production within a specific non-western cultural context. India is a country in which the development of heritage management evolved in a colonial and post-colonial context. However, it is also a country with its own strong cultural roots. Understanding how these two influences affect the role and value of material heritage in contemporary society will be a key focus of this thesis (chap. 2).

I wish to examine the contemporary circulation of antiquities as a social and cultural phenomenon rather than a legal or ethical problem. To do this I have adopted a methodology drawn from the field of material culture studies which has rarely been applied to the contemporary circulation of antiques and antiquities (chap. 3). Developing the idea of an 'object biography', as defined by Kopytoff (1986), this thesis challenges a fixed, static concept of antiquities and their value by focusing on the *routes* they travel through space and time in their present incarnations as antiquities. These routes connect multiple and diverse contexts, people and places in a single object, all of which contribute to its meaning and value. Following the routes that objects are currently travelling from their sources in Tamil Nadu, through multiple hands to various destinations across India and the world I ask the questions: *What are the multiple meanings of these objects? And how do they arise?*

A. Lawson

Through a process of qualitative surveying using purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews (chap. 3), two distinct object case studies have been arrived at and investigated:

a) The destruction, separation, sale, recycling and re-purposing of structural material, and *Sree Danam* (a form of dowry) objects from houses built by the Nagarathar Chettiars – a small elite community of bankers and traders – in south-central Tamil Nadu during the late 19th and early 20th century (chaps. 4 & 5)

b) The digging and panning for old coins, beads, jewellery and figurines in the riverbeds of Tamil Nadu by groups of people belonging to the Irula community - a scheduled tribe - and their subsequent sale, collection and circulation amongst dealers and collectors throughout Tamil Nadu, India and abroad (chap. 6).

These two case studies are not intended to be entirely representative, rather they serve as a point of entry to a broader discussion, a means to illuminate and explore a range of themes. Their selection was based in part on their differences of size, form, meaning, function, history and source. These differences have led to my use of the term 'antiquity' in the case of the objects excavated from riverbeds, and 'antique' in the case of objects sourced from Chettiar houses. This is a linguistic distinction commonly used in English to differentiate between objects from the recent past and objects from a more distant past. However, the applicability of these terms in these contexts is by no means certain. When considering the diverse meanings and values of objects that are valued, at least in part for their age, the use of particular words and terminology can become problematic, due to the implicit values and meanings wrapped-up in such terms (chap 1.2). This is even more the case when discussing such objects in a region where English is not the only, or the primary language spoken. This is a concern that is present throughout my research, and will be returned to in Chapter 8.

A. Lawson

It is important to mention that in the very early stages of fieldwork there was a third case-study under consideration, which was ultimately rejected for both practical and academic reasons. This third case-study included religious temple and shrine sculpture, of both stone and bronze. There are well documented and publicised cases of the theft of religious iconography from temples and shrines throughout Tamil Nadu, and sometimes their later re-emerged on the international art market (chap. 2.2.2.3). Hindu sculpture originating from Tamil Nadu, particularly that of the Chola dynasty, is well known and valued in the art and antiquities world both within and beyond India. An early conversation in this fieldwork (A13) suggested that there may also be healthy current market for Buddhist and Jain sculpture from Tamil Nadu in South-east Asia. These sculptures could be easier for dealers to remove from their original locations since they are less likely to be heavily guarded and managed by the predominantly Hindu population in Tamil Nadu. Religious sculpture is a much studied and curated category of Tamil antiquity and is well represented in the museums of Tamil Nadu, including the Government Museum in Chennai. There are also interesting cases, both historical (chap. 2.2.1.1) and modern (A6), of the re-appropriation of ancient sculpture by present day communities.

All these factors initially made religious sculpture an attractive and interesting category of object to study within the framework of this thesis. Furthermore, when taken together with the other two case-studies outlined above (coins and other small antiquities collected from riverbeds, and structural and household antiquities from colonial era Chettiar houses) the three studies would make a well representative set that covers the three major sources of antiquities in Tamil Nadu: Old house, temples/shrines, and the ground. However, after consideration, religious sculpture was rejected as a case-study for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, on a practical level, gaining access to the networks of unauthorised trade in these objects would be difficult and potentially dangerous since they inhabit the realm of highly lucrative organised crime. Secondly, on an academic level, this category of objects is representative of the very pre-occupations of authorised heritage discourses with Tamil Nadu and south India that this thesis aims to step away from and

challenge. For the purposes and scope of this thesis it was decided that the available time and resources would be better spent focusing on those two case-studies that fall outside the scope of authorized heritage. However, I believe that a complementary study of this category of objects at some future date would provide a fascinating counterbalance to this thesis and offer a more fully rounded picture of the object biographies of antiquities that are traded and collected in Tamil Nadu.

1.2 Antiques, Antiquities and Cultural Property: Language, meaning and value of old things

The term most commonly used within the debate surrounding cultural property to describe the old objects with which it is concerned, is 'antiquity', and in the case of movable objects, 'portable antiquity'. It is also a term commonly found in many national legislations relating to the management and movement of objects of age and value. It is a word both ambiguous and value-laden at the same time. However, it is not the only word available for describing the objects we keep from the past.

There are multiple ways of defining and classifying old objects. These classifications can be problematic, partly because the people who use them are not always explicit in what their intended meaning is, but also because such terms are inherently imprecise and flexible. I would argue that the differences and distinctions between these various terms are highly subjective and in some cases arbitrary. This is particularly so in the context of legislative definitions which place age qualifications such as one hundred years or older. Nonetheless, language forms an important component of cultural meaning, and the ways in which it is used can be revealing of implicit assumptions and value judgments. Therefore, understanding how, when, why and which antique objects are defined one way and not another may help to give

A. Lowson

valuable insights into how people perceive, value and relate to the material remains of the past.

The term 'antiquity' is first found in usage in the English language in 1513 (Soanes and Stevenson 2010). In its simplest sense it refers to anything hailing from antiquity, which in general means the ancient past. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as 'a building or object from ancient times', with ancient past referring especially to the times of the 'Ancient Greeks and Romans' (Soanes and Stevenson 2010). In current usage, particularly in the field of heritage management and the formulation of heritage codes and legislations, the term antiquity has come to be used to describe a much broader range of material. For example, the 1993 Sarawak Cultural Heritage Ordinance defines 'antiquity' as: "Any object, whether movable or immovable or part of the soil, which has been constructed, shaped, painted, carved, inscribed, erected or otherwise produced or modified by human agency and which is reasonably believed to be at least one hundred years old..." (O'Keefe 1997, 10).

The two main defining features here are the man-made origin of the object or structure, and the moving age marker of one hundred years. Similarly, the Indian Antiquities and Art Treasures Act (1972) defines an antiquity as 'any coin, sculpture, painting, epigraph or other work of art or craftsmanship . . . which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years . . .'. The Antiquities Act of Israel (1978) begins with a similar definition with a slightly older but fixed age marker of the year 1700 AD. However this is followed by a second clause, which includes any object made or modified by man 'after the year 1700, which is of historical value, and which the minister has declared to be an antiquity' (web: Israel Antiquities Authority). Here the presence of 'historical value' is significant in marking an old object as an antiquity.

The usage of the term 'antiquity' is not always consistent, nor is it clear how and to what extent it differs from other similar terms. There are a range of other words with similar, yet different, meanings and connotations. For example, an heirloom is something with very personal historic significance,

A. Lawson

while a curio can refer objects both old and new of an exotic or unusual nature. A term commonly used in archaeology is 'artefact' - literally something made by or using art. It is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest' (Soanes and Stevenson 2010). This term is perhaps favoured by archaeologists because of its scientific connotations, since it can also be used to mean 'something observed in a scientific investigation' (Soanes and Stevenson 2010).

Perhaps the closest similar term to 'antiquity' is 'antique', an almost identical word deriving from the same etymological root. However it has acquired slightly different connotations, and tends to be used by different people in different contexts. The relative age of the object is one of the main differences. While the term antique can be used to describe objects from time periods that are within living memory, it is uncommon for the term antiquity to be used in such a context. However, there are also several other subtle differences. Rosenstein opposes the antique to the artefact, which he sees as being an object that is merely documentary. The antique on the other hand embodies complex layers of associative meaning and value (Rosenstein 1987, 396).

In the Oxford English Dictionary definition of antique, there is an emphasis on collectability, value and aesthetic qualities of the object: 'a collectable object such as a piece of furniture or work of art that has a high value because of its age and quality' (Soanes and Stevenson 2010). In his definition, Rosenstein emphasises the importance not just of the object's particular characteristics, but also of the value-based perceptions of the beholder: '[an antique is] a primarily handcrafted object of rarity and beauty which, by means of its style and the durability of its materiality, has the capacity to evoke and preserve for us the image of a world now past' (Rosenstein 1987, 394). Here it is the evocation of a sense of the past that is the most important factor. Indeed, even in the absence of actual age and quality, this word can be used to describe appearance of age and quality, in the context of an 'antique look' or 'finish'.

The dispute between archaeologists and collectors of antique objects has often been polarized as an opposition between treating such objects as art, and treating them as indicators or vessels of historical information (Carman 2005, 26). A strong advocate of the former view has been the antiquities collector George Ortiz. He has accused archaeologists who privilege the importance of archaeological context over any other considerations of 'knowing too much and feeling too little' (Ortiz 2006, 15). Ortiz argues that 'besides the information conveyed by an object there may often lie the wondrous dimension of art, of beauty; a spiritual dimension that astonishes, inspires, and exhilarates; a fundamental response to human need, now as much as when it was made' (Ortiz 2006, 15-16). Similarly, archaeologist Neil Brodie has argued that 'when antiquities are redeployed in public or private collections as "art", shorn of their contextual relations, they are then forced to conform to Western conceptions of artistic production and consumption' (Brodie 2006, 1). The 'contextual relations' Brodie is speaking of are the archaeological contexts which can provide so much information about past actions and lives, and by understanding an object in this context one could well argue that its meaning and value is enhanced, regardless of its artistic attributes. However his objection to the valuation of antiquities as 'art' as a 'Western conception' is unfair given archaeology's own western origins, and seems to reflect the tendency of archaeologists to cast themselves as objective and scientific in contrast to the subjective and emotional collector.

In the art world provenance refers to the history of ownership of an object, while in archaeological usage it tends to refer to the archaeological context or 'find-spot' (Chippindale & Gill 2000, 467). Both are aspects of an objects life history that serve to define and enrich its value and meaning. Both help to confirm an object as one thing and not another, and in this sense they are concerned with authenticity. But they are also a means of conferring associative value on an object. To an archaeologist, a ceramic vessel becomes more interesting and meaningful when it is know that it was found in the context of a burial, and to a collector of antique objects the association of an object with a prestigious history of collection is desirable. In recent years a

A. Lawson

complete recorded provenance has also become a valuable asset in itself in as much as it can serve as a certificate of the legal legitimacy of that object (Chippindale & Gill 2000, 467).

Knowledge as context is not just about implicit cultural preconceptions; it also comes into play in the form of more deliberate and explicit ways of presenting or framing antiquities. In describing that power of an antique object to evoke a sense of the past, Lipe (1984) is careful to point out that this vision is dependent on the knowledge one has or is given: 'the vision of the past that it evokes and the affect associated with the experience is highly conditioned, if not determined by the other knowledge about the past that the participant brings to the encounter, or that he is with provided with on the spot' (Lipe, 1984, 291).

The most obvious examples of how information and knowledge can influence value and meaning are be found in the context of the museum, where objects are displayed in specific ways, and visitors are provided with certain information so as to lead to a particular interpretation of things. One of the characteristics of museum interpretation and presentation is the tendency to select and prioritise one 'reading' of an object over others. This re-enforces a static and fixed view of objects that clashes with the biographical approach discussed earlier in this section. Clavir observes that museums present objects as 'static moments in linear time' (Clavir 2002, 32). How objects are kept, displayed and conserved all form a part of this. According to Clavir there is a common distinction in the museum world between a 'preservation' approach to objects classified as 'ethnographic' and a 'restoration' approach to objects classified as 'art'. Clavir describes this as choosing whether to present something "as-created" or "as-used", with ethnographic objects usually being 'allowed to keep a "dirtier" appearance than other categories of object' (Clavir 2002, 33).

A concern prevalent in both the archaeological and heritage management worlds is that there is an increasing commodification of antique objects, in a large part due to the aesthetic desire of the antiquities market where they are

A. Lawson

bought and sold for monetary values, and that this is incompatible with a proper respect for their archaeological value. At the extreme end of this is a resistance to any attempts to put a price to such objects. This is difficult in a practical sense. For example, for insurance purposes museums are required to monetarily value their collections. It is also difficult in an ideological sense, as implicit in the concept of 'cultural property', a notion archaeology is traditionally allied with, is the assignation of a market value (Blake 2000, 66). Bauer (2007) has argued that archaeologists, by the attention and value they bestow on antique objects, are as much a source of the commodification process as collectors and dealers. In his own words (Bauer 2007, 698): 'I do not think it is possible to intervene in the commodification process, particularly since the majority of what we [archaeologists] do is fetishize the archaeological record and build our careers and livelihood on it'.

Perhaps another way to look at this phenomenon is to turn it on its head, and suggest that it is actually the attempted de-commodification of antique objects, through the development of archaeology and heritage legislations, which is the unusual and recent development. After all, the collection and trade of antique objects as a form of material wealth is not a new phenomenon. However, the resistance to commodification is also, surprisingly evident in the world of collecting, be it institutional or private. It is possible to construe the collection of antique objects as a 'de-commoditizing activity that 'singularises' objects, since it is about removing objects from circulation and bestowing a special significance on them as part of a collection' (Kopytoff 1986; Belk 2006, 541).

One final term for classifying antiquities worth discussing here is that of 'cultural property'. This is a term that originates in the formulation of UNESCO conventions on the protection of 'cultural heritage', particularly in relation to trade and export of objects, and which is used to define antique objects of a particular cultural significance and value. Its roots therefore lie in the UNESCO ethos of international cultural patrimony. In the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954),

A. Lawson

'cultural property' is defined as: 'movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people...'

More recently some authors have questioned the validity of labelling cultural objects as property. Carman (2005) has argued against the idea of cultural property. He feels that dominant heritage management practice and rhetoric has led to 'a 'resource' model that inevitably leads to the adoption of an economic understanding of heritage management issues' (Carman 2005, 121). Instead he suggests that encouraging shared valuing of such things in all stakeholders is the key to good management: 'when the value is a social value held by all, then to conserve the resource no one need be granted any right of ownership' (Carman 2005, 116). However Carman fails to address how this shared value might be achieved, and it is worth questioning whether the subjugation of a plurality of values to a single shared value is truly desirable. Moreover, his arguments seem to be aimed more at built or landscape heritage, where the location (and connected issues of use, interpretation and access) of the cultural heritage in question is less open for debate.

While age is clearly an important defining factor for all of these terms, the extent of that age is variable and unclear. The main unifying feature between them is that they all are used to describe the old things we keep as opposed to the old things we discard. In this sense, by labelling an old object an antiquity or antique, one is also making a claim about its value. One is saying that it is an important old thing, a valuable old thing, as opposed to just 'junk'.

In attempting to explain the allure of antiques, historian and collector Dr. Dixon Ryan Fox (1944) describes the ways in which antique objects are in some sense embodiments of their history, and in particular, their creator: 'Rich human interest clings to a chair or a clock or a fabric which was planned by an artist-artisan whom we could not now possibly meet and know face to face. Yet this part of him – so hard it is in our thought to separate creature from the creator – survives for our companionship' (Fox 1944, 97). What Fox is describing, is the ability of certain objects to retain and suggest the identity

A. Lawson

of their past owners. In a different context this phenomenon has been discussed by Weiner (1985; 1992). Certain objects are argued by Weiner to be 'inalienable', in the sense that their value and meaning cannot be separated from their creator and/or past owners. In her own words (Weiner 1985, 210): 'the object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles or mythological events become an intimate part of a person's present identity'.

Human bones represent perhaps the ultimate degree of inalienability. Bones are emotive and powerful objects because they are the material presence of dead persons, and as such they have been the source of many cultural property disputes involving reburial and repatriation. Krmpotich, et. al. (2010) seek to explore the 'emotive and affective potency and efficacy of bone as material, and bones as uneasy, ambivalent subject/object' (Krmpotich et. al. 2010, 371). They argue that bones, as objects directly and intimately tied to the agency of another, possess an agency of their own: 'The key question is not 'what do people do with bones?', but rather 'what do bones do to people?'. Or more generally, what do bones enable, afford, provoke, constrain or allow?'

In their analysis of the valuation of ethnographic objects, Henry et al. describe the interplay of 'object' and 'thing' which is equally apt when thinking about antique objects: 'Collected materials become artifacts and gather values through the process of their collection, documentation, movement, and flow through various hands . . . while every semantic categorization of the artifact is in fact a process of objectification – making a thing into an object – the thing itself persists as a potential for transformation and revaluation' (Henry, Otto et al. 2013, 46). Recognising the interrelationship between material world and social world in the construction of meaning and value is key to understanding the way people use and value antique objects. Importantly it means that the material and socio-cultural worlds represent two sides of the same coin, and thus can be used to understand one another. In other words, cultural attitudes towards the notion of heritage and the value of the material remains of the past are not simply being reflected in the way people use and exchange

A. Lawson

antique objects, such attitudes and perceptions are being actively created in and through these activities. Thus by investigating the 'cultural biographies' of antique objects in this context one might hope to better understand cultural attitudes to heritage and how they are being formed. This view supports the idea of 'heritage' as a process rather than on concrete thing.

Perhaps the most important recognition not yet mentioned is that all of the terminology discussed here so far is in English, and representative of Western ideologies relating to the management of the past. This will be particularly significant when considering the ways that other cultures conceptualize, perceive and relate to the material remains of the past. The next chapter (chap. 2) will discuss in more detail Indian approaches to antiquities, heritage and its management.

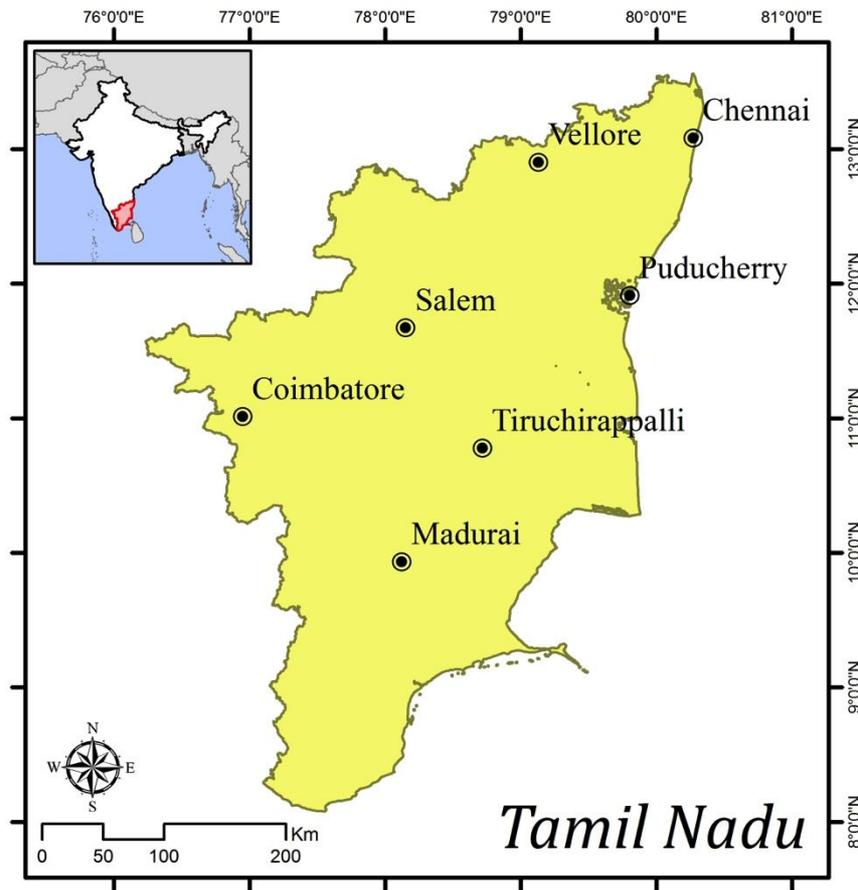
2 Research Context: the perception and management of antiquities in Tamil Nadu, India

The aim of this chapter is to explore the research context in terms of how portable antiquities have come to be perceived and managed. The primary research context in this thesis is Tamil Nadu, an Indian state in the far south east of the country. Chapter 2.1 provides a short introduction to the region in terms of its key demographics with a brief account of how the government management of portable antiquities is conducted here. However, the historical development of approaches to the management and perception of portable antiquities in Tamil Nadu is bound-up with that of the country as a whole. Indeed many of the key events in this respect relate to a period in which present day Tamil Nadu fell within the British ruled territory known as the Madras Presidency. Therefore the main portion of this chapter (chap. 2.2) will be devoted to the evolution of heritage management in India.

2.1 Introduction to Tamil Nadu

Along with Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Tamil Nadu is one of the states of South India, a regional distinction often made on linguistic and cultural grounds between the Dravidian languages of the south and the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the north of the country. Tamil Nadu covers an area of 130,060 square km and is the seventh most populous state in India, with a current population of approximately 76,775,220 (web: TamilNadustat). As per the 2011 Census of India around 48.45% of this population live in urban areas and the state capital city is Chennai (previously Madras) in the north of the state (web: Government of Tamil Nadu)(Map 2-1).

Map 2-1 - Tamil Nadu is a South Indian state on the southeast coast of India. Its capital is Chennai (formerly Madras).



Tamil is the official state language and is spoken by the majority of the population, while other languages such as Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, English and Hindi are also spoken to varying degrees by sections of the population (Aiyappan 2016). The majority of people in Tamil Nadu identify as Hindu at just over 87%, followed by Christian at 6.12%, Muslim 5.86%, with Jains, Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs accounting for less than 1% of the population each (web: Census 2011).

Information about caste identity in Tamil Nadu is difficult to obtain since after the 1931 Census of India questions regarding caste affiliation were dropped (Chandrashekar 1980, 23). However, caste and cultural relations have been central to the politics late- and post-colonial politics of Tamil Nadu. This period

A. Lawson

saw the emergence of political movements, often grouped under the title of the 'Dravidian Movement', that have sought to elevate the status and position of a typically low-ranking caste group known as Sudra or 'untouchables' (Barnett 1976; Sivathamby 1995; Hancock 2002). The exact details these political ideologies and machinations are too complex to explore here, and do not directly pertain to the subject of this thesis. However it is important to note that a central argument of the Dravidian movement was that the Sudras of Tamil Nadu could be equated with the descendants of a pre-Aryan indigenous, Dravidian population, and that they have been unjustly subjugated by North Indian Aryan Brahmins (high ranking priestly caste). Thus, the movement has sought to emphasize the antiquity and pre-eminence of distinctly Tamil language, history and culture, and in this way can be seen to have played a part in the development of attitudes and approaches to heritage in Tamil Nadu (Sivathamby 1995, 55; Hancock 2002). It also worth pointing out here that caste and class are by no means equivalent in Tamil Nadu, and there are many elite non-Brahmin communities (e.g. the Nagarather Chettiars, chaps 4 & 5).

Tamil Nadu has a rich and long history and is home to many sites, monuments and antiquities regarded to be of national and international significance. It is particularly renowned for its Hindu temple architecture, much of which dates to the medieval Chola dynasty (850-1173 A.D.) (Sastri 2012: 190). Tamil Nadu is home to five UNESCO World Heritage sites, four of which are Hindu Temples, including a group classified by UNESCO as 'Great Living Chola Temples', since they have remained in continuous use since their original construction (web: UNESCO: a). Tamil Nadu is equally well known for its religious temple sculpture, particularly bronze images of Hindu deities, such as Siva Nataraja, dating to the late Chola period. These images feature prominently at the Government Museum in Chennai, and have also been the focus of much of the high-end illegal antiquities market from Tamil Nadu (chap. 1.1; chap. 2.2.2.3).

In terms of public engagement with heritage, the States historic temples have long been popular worship and pilgrimage destinations. Recent years have

A. Lawson

seen number of privately funded heritage organisations, businesses and events emerge that could be bracketed as heritage tourism, such as heritage houses and hotels, craft revival organisations and craft museums like Dakshinachitra (chap. 5.4.3.2). In August 2004 an annual heritage event called Madras Day was launched in Chennai and has enjoyed considerable success since then, expanding from a single day of activities in its first year, to a full week in its present form. The event organises a range of activities such as heritage walks, photo exhibitions, lectures and food fairs. Madras Day is not only intended as an educational venture but also as a means to express local identity and pride and to motivate local communities towards the conservation of aspects of Chennai's heritage (web: Madras Day). Mary Hancock (2002; 2008) has postulated a link between recent increased public engagement with certain forms of heritage in Tamil Nadu, those of tourism and consumption, and the influences of urbanization, globalization and liberalization of the economy. She argues that this has resulted in 'elite anxiety' stemming from rapid changes to the physical environment and fears of cultural homogenization (Hancock 2002, 697).

The system of management of portable antiquities in Tamil Nadu derives from, and accords with, that of India as a whole in most important respects. The key organisations are the Archaeological Survey of India, a central government organisation responsible for excavation, survey and conservation of archaeological sites and monuments, with a branch, or 'circle' in Chennai and 10 sub-circles in various regions of Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology which has similar aims and activities to that of the ASI but is established and run at the state rather than the national level (), and the Government Museum in Chennai. These are the organisations that deal most directly with the enforcement of the 1972 Indian Antiquities and Art Treasures Act (chap. 2.2.2.2), which is the most significant legislation for antiquities in Tamil Nadu as elsewhere in India. However the manner of enforcing the act may differ slightly from other states. For example, the registration of antiquities has until very recently been undertaken by the Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology, but has now been given to the care of the ASI. Antiquities seized in Tamil Nadu as Treasure under the act are

A. Lawson

typically housed in the Government Museum in Chennai, but depending on circumstances they may alternatively go to the State Department of Archaeology Museum, also in Chennai, or to one of the smaller district museums.

In addition to the governmental heritage organisations it is worth mentioning the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a national NGO with seven 'chapters' in different regions of Tamil Nadu as well as one in the union territory of Puducherry (Pondicherry). INTACH's aims include both the conservation of threatened sites and buildings, and public education and engagement on heritage issues (web: INTACH). Lastly there are several small university departments specializing in archaeology: the Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology at Tamil University in Thanjavur, the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at the University of Madras in Chennai. While these departments have conducted excavations and house their own small museums they are not directly related to the public management of portable antiquities in Tamil Nadu.

The historical origins of approaches to heritage in general, and portable antiquities specifically, in Tamil Nadu are rooted in the history of India as a whole, and this will be explored in the next section (chap. 2.2).

2.2 The evolution of the concept of Indian antiquities: a historical overview

As discussed in Chapter 1, the concept of the antiquity, which has become prevalent within the fields of archaeology and heritage management, is one with particular historical and cultural origins and connotations. It is a word and a concept that privileges the historical or original meaning of an object while conversely placing it in a very new context and role. In India the term antiquity is very clearly an imported one, featuring as it does in much of the associated governmental legal acts, and so too are many of values and meanings

A. Lawson

associated with this word, yet they have evolved within India's own particular historical trajectory.

'Such ancient artifacts . . . are embedded in distinctly modern biographies. Their antiquity, like their artistic and historical significance, came to us as uniquely modern values, transmitted through the specificities of India's colonial and nationalist pasts and her post colonial present' (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 2).

Thus in order to understand the current role and value of such objects, it is necessary to look at the historical processes through which they *became* Indian antiquities. Here then, I aim provide a summarised overview of key events and themes in the development of heritage values and practices in India, with particular attention being paid to the perception, use and management of portable antiquities.

2.2.1 Battle for custody and meaning: origins of heritage management in India

2.2.1.1 Indigenous perspectives

Whilst intangible notions of history, heritage, time and tradition are well developed and well studied within the Indian context, there is comparatively little in the way of academic research into the pre-colonial ways in which Indians approached their own past in terms of its *physical* remains.

Romila Thapar has looked at Indian genealogies as a way of perceiving the past as well as the concept of time and history communicated through the great works of Sanskrit literature (Thapar 1991; 1992). K. Paddayya refers to Thapar's work in his argument that an indigenous Indian historiography has long existed: 'Contrary to the long-held views about the ahistorical attitude of Indians, it is now clear that ancient India had its own historical tradition called

A. Lawson

the *itihasa-purana* tradition stretching back to Vedic times' (Paddayya 2002-3, 298). He sites a twelfth century text called the *Rajatarangini*, as being a culmination of this tradition. This text is both a history of Kashmir and a commentary on what history is and how it should be approached.

Krishna Mohan Shrimali has drawn attention to the language used in Sanskrit and Pali literature for evidence of indigenous equivalents to such terms as heritage, antiquity and cultural property, all of which, he argues, 'have a perceptible European bias' (Shrimali 1998, 27). He refers to the term *daya* which is found in use as early as the *Rgveda* and which Shrimali translates as something akin to the English 'inheritance'. However he is keen to point out certain differences too: 'From the point of view of our immediate concern, connotations of *dayajja* make it very clear that Pali usage is concerned with aspects other than material interests as well' (Shrimali 1998, 27).

Another Sanskrit term which is sometimes used in the context of heritage is *parampara*, literally meaning one thing after another (Kumar 2012) In an article for the Indian newspaper The Hindu, cultural activist Navina Jafa suggests that *parampara* is a more appropriate term than heritage within India:

'Heritage in English is a very limiting word. The more appropriate word is parampara because heritage is not just something that you inherit from the past but also the new traditions that are being made in the present and both the past and the present are going to affect the future. It is an equation' (Kumar 2012).

However, Shrimali criticises popular usage of this term in connection with the archaeological or material past, arguing that it confuses the boundaries between tradition or cultural knowledge on the one hand, and archaeological knowledge on the other (Shrimali 2008-9, 189).

The above examples focus on what we might now define as the intangible aspects of heritage, but was there also an equivalent indigenous antiquarian

A. Lawson

tradition? Richard Davis has written about destruction, salvage and appropriation of religious buildings and objects for various social and political reasons in medieval India (Davis 1999). However, perhaps the best evidence we have for how local Indians approached antiquities in pre-colonial times, can be found in colonial survey reports of local discoveries of antiquities.

The reports of Colin Mackenzie, who conducted several topographical, historical and cultural surveys of south India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, relate a number of such incidents. For example, during a trip along the Coromandel coast to collect historical information and coins, MacKenzie's Maratha translator, Baboo Rao, came to hear of a gilded Buddha which had been discovered by a local farmer whilst ploughing, and had been taken it to the nearby temple:

'After rubbing off eight or ten pagodas worth of gold, the manager of the temple was preparing to melt the image down to make brass pots out of it, "to save their character and to prevent its coming to the knowledge of the Circar people" (Cohn 1996, 86).

In a similar event during a survey of Guntur district, Mackenzie travelled to a village in which recently uncovered ruins were in the process of being excavated by a local Raja who was using some of the material to build a new temple as well as his own house. Mackenzie noted that some uncovered statuary had already been taken into the new temple and set-up for worship (Cohn 1996, 90).

The tale of local villagers and temples appropriating ancient sculpture for present day worship appears to have been a relatively common one, and can be found in colonial reports right into the twentieth century. For example, in 1917, in a hamlet near Patna called Didarganj, a local *Maulavi* (Muslim religious preceptor) uncovered a large stone sculpture of a female deity (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 3). This sculpture later went on to be classified as a Yakshi and displayed in museums and exhibitions as one of India's great art treasures. D.B. Spooner, the Archaeological Survey (Eastern Circle)

A. Lawson

Superintendent at the time, reported that after the *Maulavi* had dug the statue up, it had been moved to a spot upstream and set up as an object of worship. But the statue was quickly 'salvaged from its "unauthorised" worshippers for the "authorised" claims of history and archaeology' (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 3). Guha-Thakurta believes that such stories reveal a common practice throughout India:

'In setting her up for worship, the Didarganj villagers were no doubt being true to the past ritual life of such Yakshi figures, who were usually invoked as beneficent powers of wealth and fertility ... There must have been a long continuous history of such images reappearing in local settings, acquiring new ritual meanings and values.' (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 4-5).

While these stories do indeed evidence a practice of re-use of antiquities, either for an entirely new practical purpose, or one that echoes their original ritual role, we must remember that they are somewhat limited in scope. They tend to focus on the religious sculpture that so interested the colonial surveyors of the time, and as such, local re-appropriation in the form of religious worship is perhaps not so surprising.

2.2.1.2 Colonising Indian heritage

At present, the historical evidence available suggests that archaeological research and investigation, and the related work of heritage management, preservation and display, began in India as colonial projects. This is an important point when considering how antiquities and antique objects are currently defined and understood in India, particularly within the context of government sponsored heritage management. As Cohn has persuasively argued:

'It was the British who, in the nineteenth century, defined in an authoritative and effective fashion how the meaning and value of the

A. Lawson

objects produced or found in India were determined. It was the patrons who created a system of classification which determined what was valuable, that which would be preserved as monuments of the past, that which was collected and placed in museums, that which could be bought and sold, that which would be taken from India as mementoes and souvenirs of their own relationship to India and Indians' (Cohn 1996, 77).

Various European efforts to document historic sites and monuments in India had begun as early as the 16th century. The earliest mentioned by Dilip Chakrabarti in his *History of Indian Archaeology from the Beginning to 1947* (1995) is the writings of Dutchman John Huighen Van Linschoten. He lived in Goa from 1583 to 1588 and his writings on India, which were published in 1596 included some observations of temples and images. These early writings tended to be rather subjective, paying more attention to the perceived immorality and idolatry of Hinduism, than any historical significance. It was not until the later half of the eighteenth century that a more scholarly interest in the historic sites and monuments of India began to develop. In 1784 the Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta, in 1807 Colin MacKenzie conducted one of the first large scale surveys of south India which included details about historic and archaeological sites and features, and in 1861 the colonial government established the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

The first government funded archaeological surveys led by Alexander Cunningham in the 1860's gave more priority to assessment and documentation than to conservation of any kind. However by end of 19th century this had begun to change. The nineteenth century had witnessed the development of heritage values in Britain, in particular through the 'anti-scrape' movement led by John Ruskin and William Morris among others (Sutton 2013). This movement promoted the sanctity of the original fabric of the tangible past. It was first and foremost an aesthetic sensibility founded on 'protestant aloofness from the material mediation of worship; irreversible Hegelian time; and an aesthetic order affronted, and wounded, by industrialized modernity' (Sutton 2013, 138). Alongside this nostalgic aesthetic

A. Lawson

was an ever-increasing emphasis on science and reason as the basis of knowledge. As much as any other frontier, the past was there to be explored, investigated, classified, catalogued and arranged into an order that reflected the inevitable march towards progress.

In India these ideologies fed into the colonial desire to define and control a foreign land. It was increasingly felt that India's natives were not suitable custodians of their own heritage. Colonial reports of the period bemoan the destruction and inappropriate uses of antiquities by local Indians (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 5). Sutton (2013) and Branfoot (2013) both have explored the ways in which these attitudes came into conflict with indigenous practices regarding the care and renovation of temples, many of which were considered to be monuments of antiquity by the colonial government. By focusing on the physical fabric of the temples and privileging the 'original', the colonial administration failed to appreciate the living character of these buildings (Branfoot 2013, 46). Sutton also sees this clash in terms of differing aesthetic tastes:

There was a clear conflict between the aesthetics of conservation, distilled from European affective registers, and those of popular Hindu ritual practice: matte was preferred over luminosity, plainness over ornament, sight over touch, patina over renewal (Sutton 2013, 136).

However an equal threat was identified in the British themselves. In an address made to the Asiatic Society in 1900 Lord Curzon decried the behaviour of British officers and officials with regard to India's historic monuments and gave several accounts of their vandalism:

'At an earlier date when picnic-parties were held in the garden of the Taj [Mahal], it was not an uncommon thing for the revellers to arm themselves with hammer and chisel, with which they whiled away the afternoon by chipping out fragments of agate and cornelian from the cenotaphs of the Emperor and his lamented Queen' (Pachauri 2003, 272).

In response to these perceived atrocities the ASI envisioned a role for itself as the rightful protector and custodian of India's archaeological heritage, bolstered by the claims of "science" and "order" (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 6). The Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 set a new precedent for the 'national' status of Indian antiques, and thus their rightful acquisition and management by the government.

2.2.1.3 Management, museums and identity

Following the principles of the 'anti-scrape' movement, the colonial administration in India gave priority to in-situ preservation of antiquities and sites wherever possible. However any objects of antiquity which were either not structural (e.g. coins, pottery and seals) or were detached/detachable from buildings (e.g. architectural panels and sculpture) were given the label "movable/removable antiquities". These items now came into the legitimate purview of museums (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 5).

Through the early and mid 19th century government museums were established in the main centres of colonial power such as Madras and Calcutta, and from 1870's the India Museum in Calcutta became the Imperial Museum. It was encyclopaedic in scope, housing everything from fauna to ancient artefacts, and a strong contender for the accumulation of a representative 'national collection' (Singh 2002-3). Alongside these central encyclopaedic museums, there was a parallel drive to establish provincial and site based museums. As well as excavations and Treasure Trove acquisitions, museums acquired objects as "gifts", from temple priests, raja's and Zamindars (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 8).

Museums saw their purpose as scientific in nature, to collect and catalogue 'specimens', but they were also central to the colonial desire to know and define India (Singh 2002-3, 186). 'India was to be provided with a linear history following a nineteenth-century positivist historiography' and museums

A. Lawson

were a key vehicle through which this could be achieved (Cohn 1996, 80). Museums were encouraged to form a representative, chronological collection, using replicas wherever necessary to fill in any missing periods. 'The exercise of dynastic and chronological classification made each object representative of something beyond itself – a sample of a school and a style' (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 8). By focusing on the historical and aesthetic character of these objects museums were clearly establishing a new identity for Indian antiquities, and along with this came a different way of approaching and interacting with them.

In his biographical study, *Lives of Indian Images*, Richard Davis considers the case of a bronze Siva relocated from Tiruvengadu temple in Tamil Nadu to the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., for an exhibition in the year of 1985. He uses this example to explore the sharply contrasting treatment of the same object in these two different contexts. On the one hand the multi-sensory cacophony of the temple, where priests and worshipers interacted with the icon in a number of ways, on the other the quiet austerity of the museum:

'the National Gallery displayed this religious icon from another culture as a self-contained aesthetic object, meant to be appreciated for the beauty of its essential sculptural form. The atmosphere was hushed; no extraneous noise (except the unavoidable rustlings and whispers of other visitors) was allowed to detract from the visual experience of the museum goer' (Davis 1999, 17).

Davis also notes how this bronze Siva, taken from a site of worship and given pride of place at a museum exhibition, would not have been the main focus of attention in its original context. The Siva would have been one of many secondary images surrounding the primary object of devotion, the Linga. Yet Lingas did not attract the attention of the new museums. 'Deemed uninteresting as a sculptural form, the Linga is seldom seen in Western art museums' (Davis 1999, 18). A certain idea of what constituted 'Indian Art' was already beginning to evolve, and the Linga did not fit this model.

Singh has described the ways in which museums contributed to the categorisation of Indian material culture. As the scope of material became too great for one museum in Calcutta to encompass, specialisation museums began to emerge in natural history, medicine and art. The government of India decided to split the domain of art into two categories: 'antiquities' and 'industrial arts' (Singh 2002-3, 188). The latter displayed the living crafts of India, which the government saw as a potentially lucrative market, and was keen to showcase to the world. The category of Indian art antiquities, while inclusive of a wide range of material from coins to inscriptions, placed an increasing degree of emphasis on religious sculpture.

'By foregrounding the stone sculpture of India, the enthusiasts of Indian art could testify to a civilization that in some respects rivalled European civilisation and which also might be considered its equivalent' (Singh 2002-3, 178).

This vision of Indian art was confirmed at 'The Arts of India and Pakistan' exhibition held in the Royal Academy in London three months after Indian Independence.

'We now see Indian art being singled out and valorised, as never before, as the choice field for the self-representation of the nation ... Such an exhibition, we find, reinforced a particular definition of the "masterpiece" in Indian art, equating it primarily with sculpture – that too, with stone sculpture over and above bronzes and terracotta, and with the ancient rather than the medieval schools' (Guha-Thakurta 2002, 15).

After the Royal Academy exhibition the collection was returned to Delhi and put on display in an exhibition entitled 'Masterpieces of Indian Art'. This exhibition attracted so many visitors that the government decided it should be retained and made the core component of a new National Museum. The

A. Lawson

National Museum exemplified a new role for Indian antiquities as representations of the independent Indian nation:

The National Museum had two tasks: it had to show that India was eternal, and it had to show that India was great ... 'nationalism' is on display in the sculpture galleries which adhere to the nationalist narrative of art history' (Singh 2002-3, 177,194).

The preoccupation with sculpture was retained, but while the British had been most interested in Gandaharan sculpture which, with its Greek connections, fitted into their own Eurocentric view of history, the emphasis now shifted to the Gupta's as the golden age of Indian art. Likewise, in subsequent years, the purview of Indian art has expanded to include the medieval and the south of India, particularly the great bronze sculptures of the Cholas. Yet the categorisation and separation, between living craft and antiquities, and between sculpture or 'art' and other antique objects, remains.

2.2.1.4 Contested heritage in modern India

"In this highly utilitarian age, how does one justify archaeology?" (Speech delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1961 for the celebrations of the Centenary of the Archaeological Survey of India)

While the contestation of heritage in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had been dominated by the tensions of colonialism and burgeoning nationhood, it is a rapidly expanding population and economy that has perhaps become the greatest challenge for heritage management in modern India. Speaking in 1961 at the celebrations for the Centenary of the Archaeological Survey of India, Jawaharlal Nehru made reference to the recent construction of a reservoir in the vicinity of the remains of an ancient settlement at Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh (Shrimali 2008-9, 173). The reservoir project went ahead, despite concerns about the destruction of the archaeology, but as a compromise many of the excavated remains of

A. Lawson

Nagarjunakonda were moved to an island in the middle of the reservoir where they were reconstructed. Although Nehru stated that he believed archaeology was 'of the highest value, like art, and goodness', he was also at pains to make clear that archaeology could not and would not be prioritised over more basic practical demands.

"There was a direct conflict between the claims of today in the sense of practical utility and the claims of the past. We were troubled by the conflict. But it was inevitable that we should decide ultimately in favour of the present" (Shrimali 2008-9, 173).

India is rich in archaeological remains, many of which are unidentified and unmarked, however land has become an increasingly scarce and valuable resource. As such, archaeological material is under constant threat from development, as well as industrial activities such as quarrying. This is compounded by the lack of any planning regulations pertaining to archaeology:

'There is an urgent need to enact Cultural Resource Management legislation so that the agencies responsible for land development are obliged to have all archaeological sites investigated and recorded before they are erased out of existence' (Paddayya 2002-3, 299).

As well as commercial pressures there are also financial constraints from the point of view of government spending. Writing in 2010, fifty years after Nehru addressed the Archaeological Survey of India, Selvakumar asks very similar questions. Specifically, how can India expect to prioritise archaeology and heritage, when it is still struggling to overcome poverty, illiteracy, lack of basic sanitation and health care amongst other things? Selvakumar (2010, 470) estimates that the government spends around 0.1 percent of its annual budget on 'arts and culture', which includes archaeology, and of that around 50% goes to the Archaeological Survey of India. The problem is not only at a national level but also at a State level, as States within India have the power to distribute their budget differently. Chakrabarti's view of State expenditure

A. Lawson

on heritage management is fairly disparaging, and he believes this has contributed in part to the gradual degradation of the country's heritage sites, monuments and artefacts. On the matter of India's museums he suggests:

'Their resources will vary but on the whole it is fair to say that except the museums directly under the government management and the few proper University Museums, the state of museums in India is not generally good' (Chakrabarti 2003, 164).

In 2011 UNESCO published a report detailing the poor maintenance, lighting, signage and a number of other issues, of India's top eight museums. Four years later an article in The Hindu attributed the situation to 'years of political and ideological neglect' (Srinivasan 2015). Similar regional newspaper articles in Karnataka and Telangana have criticised the perceived neglect of their various state and government museums (Vellat 2013). Commenting on the 'dilapidated' state of the Government Museum in Egmore, Chennai the Times Of India suggests:

'If museums are short of funds they may find it worthwhile to appeal to both citizens and corporates to contribute towards the maintenance of India's national treasures' (Kadambi & Topdarl 2006).

Private funding often goes hand-in-hand with commercial motivations. The commercialisation of heritage and heritage tourism is a feature of the modern age, and India, like elsewhere, has seen a proliferation of heritage houses, craft boutiques, and eco-resorts. Rana Singh (2008) has argued that tourism and the economic potential of archaeology and heritage is an important factor in India in terms of justifying its protection and promotion:

'The greater value accorded tourism as an avenue for development reflects a perception that the marketing of heritage offers an avenue for preserving and enhancing the value and visibility of the endangered residues of the past' (Singh 2008, 134).

A. Lawson

The increasing privatisation and commercialisation of heritage in India has also further opened-up the contest for what version of the past is represented in the present. In a study comparing the way India's heritage is presented by the Indian government and the Indian tourism trade media, Bandyopadhyay et al. (2008) argue that there is a clear difference between the historical narratives promoted by the two. While the government emphasise accounts of Indian resistance against colonial oppression popular tourist media offers a more sanitized and nostalgic picture of colonial India:

'This contrast suggests that the Indian government may be using heritage tourism to instil feelings that India endured and overcame much suffering while under foreign control and in this way may be engendering support for its nationalist ideologies' (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2008, 804).

Mary Hancock (2002; 2008) has explored the competing visions of the past offered by DakshinaChitra, a privately funded open-air museum on the outskirts of Chennai, and Tamil Nadu's State funded heritage sites. In 1967 the first of a number of Dravidianist political parties came to power in Tamil Nadu. Dravidianism is a popular regional movement based around linguistic and cultural identity. It claims that non-Brahmin castes (sometimes including Dalits) are the original inhabitants of Tamil Nadu, with Brahmins seen as Aryan invaders and oppressors. Since the early '70s the government of Tamil Nadu have sought to inscribe a Dravidianist ideology into the city of Chennai through a number of sites and memorials which give voice to a distinctively Tamil vision of the past. DakshinaChitra however, Hancock suggests, challenges these government narratives. She argues that it is marketed instead to an English-speaking audience familiar with Euro-western concepts of heritage, and promotes a pan-Indian vision of self-sufficient 'village-republics', as envisioned within Gandhism. Hancock is keen to stress that the political and ideological struggle within Indian heritage need not be defined in colonial and post-colonial terms:

A. Lawson

'the 'local' that stands in opposition to the 'global' is not necessarily the 'nation', but can be a region or a group, bound by language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or class, which exists contentiously within (and against) the nation-state, to which it may have been ceded by erstwhile colonial authorities' (Hancock 2002, 714-5).

Indeed some of the most notorious events in the heritage politics of India over the last fifty years have been religiously motivated. The destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya in 1992 by right wing Hindu fundamentalists was the sad culmination of a long running dispute between the Muslim and Hindu communities regarding the history and identity of the site. Similar events such as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the on-going dispute between the Hindu and Buddhist communities over control of the religious sites at Bodhgaya, suggest that the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of South Asia is a significant feature of current heritage politics of the region.

Despite these events some scholars have suggested that there is a general lack of public interest or concern with the archaeological and material past in India. As Paddaya wryly observes, *'heritage management is one topic which hardly excites interest among the workers in India'* (Paddayya 2002-3, 299). However Chakrabarti believes that popular attachments to the past are strong but relate to different aspects of heritage than those that archaeology is concerned with:

As far as the issue of identity is concerned, for the vast mass of 'native' Indians it is still the tradition derived from the epics, the stories of the religious books and teachers of diverse kinds' (Chakrabarti 2003, 185-6).

Chakrabarti argues that insufficient focus on archaeology in Indian school and college level education is one of the reasons for this apparent lack of concern the more tangible aspects of Indian heritage (Chakrabarti 2003, 187). Selvakumar also points to changing social conditions, particularly migration

A. Lawson

abroad or to large cities, which has severed many of the links between local populations and India's historic sites and landscapes (Selvakumar 2010, 470).

2.2.2 Indian antiquities on the move: trade, collection, legislation, and management

2.2.2.1 The trade and collection of Indian antiquities

In the years following Indian Independence a growing concern was felt about antiquities that eluded the custodianship of the state, particularly those being exported outside of India. This culminated in the enactment 1972 Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, which was specifically targeted to control the private ownership, trade, and export of Indian antiquities. However, by 1972 this phenomenon was not new one. Once again, it is with the arrival of Europeans that we find the first clearly recorded evidence of Indian objects being collected and traded for their antique value, and not surprisingly, the direction of movement tended to be westward away from their Indian source.

'They were removed from their homelands as curiosities, souvenirs, or art objects, transported abroad to be sold or presented as gifts, maintained in private collections or placed on display in public institutions, and viewed by Western audiences as variously bizarre, curious, heathenish, picturesque, spiritual or beautiful' (Davis 1999, 145).

One of the earliest recorded accounts of this type of collection is that of William Hedges, who in 1683, during his short-lived post as governor of the East India Company, took a trip down the Hooghly river for 'sightseeing and a little collecting' (Davis 1999, 143). That day he acquired an eleventh century stone carved Vishnu, which two years later he gifted to the new Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (where it still resides). As the phenomenon of the amateur antiquarian grew in Britain, India became a rich source of exotic and rare

A. Lawson

material. In 1899 a series of articles entitled 'The Coin-Collector in Bombay' were published in the Times of India under the pseudonym Cryptopolis (1899a; 1899b). Here a British man relates tales of his adventures through the jewellers and markets of Bombay, hunting for ancient coins. A reader's letter printed in the Times of India in 1882 suggests that Cryptopolis was far from alone in his activities:

'If our skilled numismatists are few, we have an abundance of collectors in India, for there is scarcely a town or place of any note where-in coins are not being eagerly picked up either by a commissioner, collector, railway clerk or some other enthusiast for ancient relics' (E.L. 1882, 2).

The individual collecting activities of British military and civil personnel were the major source of early Western collections of Indian antiquities. However it was not until India gained its independence in 1947 that the Western consumption of Indian antiquities, under the guise of 'Indian Art', can really be said to have taken off. Following this new demand, trading activities in such material started to become more organised and commercially driven.

'Art' has since become a catchall term to describe the collectible material culture, antique or otherwise, hailing from India and other Asian cultures:

It is a well established convention in the collecting literature that almost anything from Asia that can be collected is referred to as 'art' (Brodie & Doole 2004, 84).

Within India itself scholars and government officials had already begun defining the boundaries of the Indian archaeological and industrial arts (chap. 2.2.1). However in Europe and the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian artefacts were not widely appreciated within the context of collectible art, being seen as crude and heathen (Brodie & Doole 2004, 91). Buddhist objects, particularly the Greek influenced work of Gandhara, were viewed somewhat more favourably. Yet by the time of the

A. Lawson

1947 'The Arts of India and Pakistan' exhibition in London this had clearly begun to change (chap. 2.2.1). In particular it was the Hindu stone and bronze religious sculpture that attracted the attention of collectors. In the United States there already existed a flourishing market in objects from China and Japan along with a growing number of museums dedicated to Far Eastern Art. In the 1930's the then director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Frederick A. Whiting, made efforts to steer the museum in the direction of South Asian material, reasoning that as nobody else seemed to be collecting it, it should be comparatively easy to acquire (Brodie & Doole 2004, 91).

'The expansion of Cleveland's South and Southeast Asian holdings was symptomatic of a more general shift in US collecting practices, at both individual and institutional levels, as established collectors of Chinese and Japanese material began to look further afield' (Brodie & Doole 2004, 94).

While the colonial Indian government had already taken measures to manage and protect the movable heritage of the country, by the 1940s these were proving ineffective and new legislative measures were sought.

2.2.2.2 Legislation and management of Indian antiquities

The Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 had defined "treasure" as 'anything of any value hidden in the soil, or in anything affixed thereto' (*Indian Treasure Trove Act 1878*). Antiquity is not a prerequisite here, and 'value' is not defined. Despite the vagueness of this piece of legislation it was sufficient for its purpose at that time, which was to allow the government to lay claim to any movable object with a known archaeological or monumental source. It was not however a suitable means of managing private ownership, trade or export of antiquities.

The 1904 Ancient Monuments Preservation Act was intended to provide for the protection any sites or monuments that had been designated under the

A. Lawson

Act, and included restrictions on the removal of objects from such places. It introduced the term “antiquities” to Indian legislation, which it defined as ‘any moveable objects which (the Central Government), by reason of their historical or archaeological associations may think it necessary to protect against injury, removal or dispersion’ (*Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904*). It also contains a sub-section dealing specifically with ‘Traffic in Antiquities’. This effectively gives the government the right to restrict a person from exporting antiquities and issue them with a fine of anything up to five hundred rupees. The wording of the Act implies that enforcement of these regulations is discretionary on the part of the government. Interestingly there is also a separate section dealing with the removal and traffic of ‘Sculptures, Carvings, Images, Bas-reliefs, Inscriptions or like objects’, indicating that these had already been marked-out as a particularly important, or perhaps particularly desirable, class of Indian antiquities.

Both of the above legislations allow for much flexibility in both interpretation and enforcement. It is not perhaps surprising then that under colonial governance they did little to prevent the steady flow of antiquities from India to Britain. However as international interest in, and demand for, Indian antiquities grew, the newly independent Indian government saw a need for stronger legislation. Furthermore, with the rise of ‘Indian Art’, ideas about what constituted an antiquity or an object of value were evolving and changing.

In 1947 the addition of the Antiquities Export Control Act introduced a new requirement to obtain an export license for the removal of antiquities from the country, and gave full and final powers to the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India in both identifying an object as an antiquity and granting permission for its export (web: Archaeological Survey of India). Ten years later the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act introduced a new definition of the term “antiquity”:

- (i) *any coin, sculpture, manuscript, epigraph, or other work of art or craftsmanship,*
- (ii) *any article, object or thing detached from a building or cave,*

A. Lawson

- (iii) *any article, object or thing illustrative of science, art, crafts, literature religion, customs, morals or politics in bygone ages,*
 - (iv) *any article, object or thing of historical interest*
 - (v) *any article, object or thing declared by the Central Government, by notification in the Official Gazette to be an antiquity for the purposes of this Act,*
- which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958).*

While in some ways this definition is more specific than previous versions, making reference to a range of qualities such as scientific, religious, and artistic significance, as well as introducing a minimum age requirement, it is also incredibly broad. By covering all possible bases the new definition means that anything, or indeed everything, of one hundred years of age or more, could potentially be deemed an antiquity. Significantly, this definition applies regardless of the source of the object. An antiquity need not be archaeological or associated with a designated monument. Thus, a one hundred year old bronze Ganesha passed down through several generations could be regarded just as much an antiquity as a similar item unearthed in a field or removed from a temple.

In 1970 widespread concern about the growing international art and antiquities market had been voiced at the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. It was during this time that a new rhetoric about “illicit” antiquities dealing, revolving around the concept of “cultural property” began to come to the fore (chap. 1.2). Fears about the damage to archaeological knowledge caused by unrecorded and unsupervised excavation or “looting”, and about the loss of cultural heritage were the main talking points.

Indian heritage legislation had so far been primarily addressed towards the protection of designated sites and monuments, with trade and export of antiquities treated as something of a side issue. This overlooked the fact that much of the material now flowing into the international art and antiquities

A. Lawson

market was not coming from these designated sites, but from unknown and/or unidentified sites all over India (Brodie & Doole 2004, 98). Furthermore the legislation as was, and the infrastructure and bureaucracy designed to enact it, was simply not designed or equipped to deal with organised trafficking of Indian antiquities on the scale that it had now grown to.

The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 (enforced in 1976) more than any of the previous Acts, was intended to address the unregulated trade in Indian antiquities. It currently still stands as the most important piece of Indian legislation for anybody wishing to buy, sell or possess Indian antiquities within or from India. Its exact objectives are stated as follows:

‘to regulate the export trade in antiquities and art treasures, to provide for the prevention of smuggling of, and fraudulent dealings in, antiquities, to provide for the compulsory acquisition of antiquities and art treasures for preservation in public places and to provide for certain other matters connected therewith or incidental or ancillary thereto’ (Antiquities and Art Treasures Act 1972).

The definition of “antiquities” remains unchanged from the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, except for the addition of a minimum monetary value of ten rupees, and the inclusion of an extra category under the title “art treasures”. This covers manuscripts, records and documents more than seventy-five years of age that are deemed to be ‘scientific, historic or aesthetic value’.

The most significant feature of the new Act though was its expansion of the licencing system for trading in antiquities, and the introduction of a new requirement for anyone merely in possession of antiquities to register each one individually with the government. The Act expressly forbids the export of antiquities and gives enormous powers to the government in enforcing this rule, such as to ‘enter and search any place’ and to ‘seize any antiquity or art treasure in respect of which he suspects that any provision of this Act has

A. Lawson

been, is being, or is about to be, contravened...' (*Antiquities and Art Treasures Act 1972*).

The 1972 Antiquities and Art Treasures Act forms the central model for each State to establish their own Acts and rules which means that these regulations and how they are enacted varies somewhat across India.

2.2.2.3 Impact of antiquities legislation

Since the implementation of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act India there have been a string of widely publicised cases of illegally exported Indian antiquities surfacing on the international art market or in the possession of foreign museums. In 1986 an early Chola period bronze Nataraja image was returned to Sivapuram temple, Tamil Nadu, thirty years after its disappearance. It had been stolen from the temple in the 1950s and replaced with a replica, and had since spent time in various private collections in India before coming into the possession of Mr Norton of Norton Simon Foundation in the USA. Simon sent the idol for repairs at the British Museum where it was recognised and impounded by Scotland Yard. The Government of India filed a court case against Simon, who argued in his defence that he had bought the object in good faith. In 1976 an agreement was reached whereby the Norton Simon Foundation would keep the Nataraja for ten years and then it would be returned to India (Pachauri 2003, 274). In a similar case another Nataraja image, stolen from Pathur, Tamil Nadu, was returned to Tamil Nadu after a court case in 1991. This too had been appeared on the USA art market shortly before it was seized (Paterson 1996). More recently there has been the case of Subhash Kapoor and his arrest for illegally exporting millions of dollars worth of Indian antiquities, including many temple idols from Tamil Nadu (chap 1.1).

From one perspective these cases and the successful return of several artefacts to India are a sign that the legislation is helping. However, it could also be argued that the fact that such cases continue to occur is a sign that

A. Lawson

the legislation is not working, and that rather than preventing antiquities dealers from taking objects out of the country illegally it has simply moved the trade further underground. In their analysis of the antiquities trade between Asia and the West, Brodie and Doole (2004) note that since the tightening of Indian antiquities legislation in the 1950s the market seems to have continued unabated. They draw attention to the activities of a number of well know American collectors and dealers such as Norton Simon, Jim and Marilyn Alsdorf, and Samuel Eeilenberg who all managed to acquire very large collections of Indian antiquities from the 1950s to the 1990s (Brodie & Doole 2004, 95-6). However increased legislation has impacted the nature of the market in that now the connections between source and consumer have become increasingly obscured:

'Most Asian objects that appear on the market do so seemingly out of thin air. They are hardly ever accompanied by any details of find circumstances or previous ownership' (Brodie & Doole 2004, 100).

Peter Watson's (1997) investigation into Sotheby's auction house in London revealed that, in order to circumvent customs and antiquities regulations, objects were being sent to London from India and Italy via a front companies based in Switzerland. Watson's research demonstrated that legislative measures in source countries could not be expected to succeed when they were contending with the direct involvement and complicity of collectors, dealers, and even respected institutions such as Sotheby's, in Europe and the USA.

Aside from the effects of antiquities legislation on the international antiquities market, there have also been significant repercussions for those within India who find, own or deal in antiquities. While bringing a degree of regulation to the antiquities market it has also been argued that the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act is too sweeping in its approach (Chakrabarti 2003, 182; Ahuja 2012; Shrimali 2008-9, 187). In an attempt to stem the international, high-end market in stolen antiquities, the law has had the effect of criminalising large numbers of ordinary Indians, and serves to 'inhibit community participation in

A. Lawson

caring for artefacts' ('Protecting antiquities' 2010). Dilip Chakrabarti has fiercely criticised this aspect of Antiquities and Art Treasures Act: 'The Act is Draconian. It is Draconian in the sense that it virtually makes the possession of an antiquity by a god-fearing Indian a criminal offence' (Chakrabarti 2003, 182). Chakrabarti is particularly critical of the time, effort, and financial outlay that is demanded of an individual wishing to register an antiquity, for which no assistance or compensation is offered by the government. He questions the appropriateness of this in a country where poverty and illiteracy is widespread:

'It is the illiterate and poor peasants ploughing their land who make most of the antiquity finds in India. One does not expect them to forego labour and spend money on a trip to the nearest large city to hand over, without any remuneration, what he has found to a government officer. I cannot think of a single reason why he should not hand it over to a wandering agent of the area's antiquity dealers and earn a little money' (Chakrabarti 2003, 182).

Several articles in *The Hindu* from 1976, just months after the enforcement of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act reported some reduction in antiquities thefts but also several incidents of old coins being melted down in order to avoid their registration. The suggested reason for this was that the cost of registering an antiquity (in paperwork, photographs and postage) outweighed the market value of many old coins ('Decline reported in art thefts' 1976, 9). 'Thus one collector's item which has been in ample supply is likely to become truly scarce as a result of the new law' (Girilal 1976, 8).

Pachauri (2006, 242) has argued that the main problem is a lack of public awareness and understanding of the law, and suggests that what is needed is more education in these matters. Shrimali (2008-9) on the other hand believes that the Act itself needs to be changed. He argues for a more open and inclusive approach and suggests that knowledgeable and motivated collectors should be viewed as a resource rather than a problem:

A. Lawson

'I am not very sure how many archaeologists try to access such resources. It is time that we think about such avenues as well. Dialogue with such resource-persons can be extremely useful for all concerned parties' (Shrimali 2008-9, 187).

There is also concern regarding the clarity of the Act, as Pachauri has commented, *'the definition of the term antiquity has been found lacking and varies from country to country'* (Pachauri 2003, 278). The only objective criterion is the age of the object being more than 100 years. In a country such as India, steeped in history and culture, this covers a vast amount of material. The other criteria, such as religious, historical or scientific importance, are all subjective, and the Act gives no other indication as to how they should be judged.

As previously mentioned, the law came about largely in response to concern about the international arts and antiquities market and the illegal export and sale of large pieces of ancient sculpture. This sort of antiquity is most unlikely to be the property of ordinary Indians. Such cases that have been reported are items stolen from temples, museums or village shrines. Yet the legislation makes no distinction between these sorts of antiquities and those objects of relatively modest size, artistry and age belonging to small household shrines or collections. Nor does it differentiate between these and archaeological artefacts illegally excavated from protected sites. The result seems to be a good deal of confusion and interpretation from both citizens and law enforcers. An indication of this is a 1974 Times Of India article titled 'Hide That Nataraj!' which pokes fun at the Delhi police force for their overly simplistic interpretation of the new antiquities legislation:

'The hunt is on for antiquities, and antiquities, according to the Delhi police, are anything representing a divinity of sorts, mildewed, mellowed, properly chipped, undeniably cracked and preferably with an arm missing. Your Nataraj may well qualify' (Trivadi 1974).

2.3 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to describe the context in which this research has been undertaken. To this end the location and basic demographics of Tamil Nadu have been described and the current state of heritage management briefly summarised. In the second part of this chapter the historical background and present state of heritage management in India as a whole was explored, particularly in relation to the perception and management of portable antiquities.

The present system of heritage management in India can be traced back to British Colonial rule and it was they who early on sought to define what Indian heritage was and how it should be managed. We have seen how the British emphasis on the sanctity of the original fabric of the tangible past came into conflict with local instances appropriation and continuous use of material heritage. At this time the collection of portable Indian antiquities was largely the purview of colonial officials and many were removed from the country. Later the museumification of Indian antiquities led to an equivalence being drawn between the categories of 'antiquities', 'Indian art' and 'religious sculpture', a definition that corresponds with the development of a commercially driven international market for 'Asian Art'. Finally, we have noted that heritage management in modern India faces many challenges in the form of illegal export of antiquities, urban and industrial pressures, and limited government funding, and raised the question of how far public interests with regard to heritage accord with those with authorized heritage management.

3 Methodology

This chapter deals with both the theories and methodologies that inform and underpin this thesis as well as detailing the actual practices and techniques employed to carry out the research.

3.1 *Theoretical Framework*

For the purposes of clarity the theoretical underpinnings of this research have been subdivided into three sections. Chapter 3.1a deals with my ontological position – that is, my philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality. In particular, in the context of this research, it looks at the relationship between the human and material world in the production of cultural meaning. Chapter 3.1b looks at my epistemology and sets this research within a broadly interpretive, qualitative research paradigm. Chapter 3.1c deals with the particular methodological framework of this research and the reasoning behind it.

3.1.1 *Ontology: material habitus, object agency, and the social life of things*

As this research is primarily concerned with the meanings and values of particular types of object, it is important first to define how I as the researcher understand such meanings to be constituted. My ontological position regarding the nature and meaning of material things derives from particular theoretical currents within archaeology, anthropology and material culture studies. These currents have sought to breakdown a long established conceptual dualism between the material and symbolic worlds by proposing new theories in which thought and matter are seen to be co-constitutive of one another (Miller 1987; Gell 1998; Ingold 2000; Gosden 2001; Meskell 2005; Knappet 2005; Keane 2005). This particular theoretical development represents one aspect of a much broader debate about the relationship

A. Lawson

between subjectivity and objectivity. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary only to discuss those concepts that have lent the most to my own research approach: 'material habitus', 'object agency' and 'the social life of things'.

3.1.1.1 *Material Habitus*

Archaeologists, who most often only have the material world to work with in their interpretation of social meanings and values, have struggled with the perceived limitations of their endeavour. By searching for the 'idea' behind the artefact, archaeologists are 'aspiring to mentalism but condemned to materialism' (Knappett 2005, 168). Within processual archaeology it was assumed that the external world of activity and function could be investigated independently of the internal world of ideas (Shanks & Tilley 1987, 84). Such attempts as there were to understand the minds of the makers tended to be limited to narrow conceptions of 'style' as either explicit modes of social communication, or implicit reflections of cultural norms (Knappett 2005, 4-5). Later attempts at a more culture-centred approach came in the form of cognitive, symbolic and structural models (Knappett 2005, 5-7; Preucel & Hodder 1996, 303). The latter, based on Saussurian semiotics, treats products of material culture as signs within a language-like system (Preucel & Hodder 1996, 303). More recently however criticisms have been levelled against cognitive and linguistic approaches for equating 'meaning' with 'symbolism' and perpetuating the unnecessary division between thought and matter (Conkey 2005, 363; Keane 2005, 182; Knappett 2005, 7).

In answer to these and other critiques of symbolic and functionalist approaches, a field of material culture studies has emerged, which has combined concepts and theories from philosophy, sociology, archaeology and anthropology to produce a re-conceptualization of the relationship between human thought and the material world. Many aspects of this development can be traced back to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. Bourdieu's primary concern was the theoretical reconciliation of social-structure and determinism

A. Lawson

with individual agency. To attempt to solve this conundrum Bourdieu developed his 'field theory', in which human practices are the result of an unconscious relationship between a *habitus* and a *field*. The *habitus* consists of durable tendencies or dispositions in the form of cultural knowledge and norms, while the *field* consists of the present day social conditions and agents (Maton 2012, 50). Importantly, the relationship between the two is dialectic. The current *field* is the arena for the on-going construction of *habitus*, while the *habitus* at the same time informs our individual actions within the *field*, and thus the *field* itself.

"On one side it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus ... On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge of cognitive construction. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world" - Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) cited in (Maton 2012, 51).

In material culture theory this reciprocal relationship between *habitus* and *field* has been adapted to describe human-object relations. Lyn Meskell suggests a '*material habitus*' or 'lifeworld', as 'an enmeshing that combines persons, objects, deities and all manner of immaterial things together in ways that cannot easily be disentangled or separated taxonomically' (Meskell 2005, 3). Likewise, drawing on the philosophical concept of 'objectification' espoused by Hegel, Daniel Miller has argued that the creation of meaning through material culture is a process of externalization and sublimation in which 'there is no prior subject or object' (Miller 1987, 32). Rather society and cultural form are seen as mutually constitutive (Miller 1987, 18).

Both Meskell and Miller are describing a conception of cultural meaning that has no a-priori platonic existence, but rather is an organic and on-going process of human-object relations. Tim Ingold (2000) has even argued that with respect to material culture a concept of 'growing' or 'weaving' should replace that of 'making'. In this framework meaning is processual and relational rather than fixed and inherent. It also removes the assumption of a one-way relationship between thought and matter, with ideas being inscribed

A. Lawson

onto the physical world through action. Instead cultural meanings are seen as the outcome of interplay between ideological and material influences. An important aspect of this shift has been that social *agency* could now be understood as distributed between the two (Knappett 2005).

3.1.1.2 *Object Agency*

The idea that objects have a type of agency of their own is difficult, not least because at a common-sense level it is entirely counter intuitive. Nonetheless the re-evaluation of the relationship between inner and out realities has made room for the possibility that material things play a role in the construction of social and cultural reality that is as important as the role played by human agency. This possibility has been explored with considerable success from several angles.

Some have focused on the formal and sensory properties of objects and the ways in which these can influence human behaviour and experience (Gosden 2001; Keane 2005; Hoskins 1998). In her study of the role of human touch in the perception of museum objects Elizabeth Pye notes how the smell, feel and appearance of certain things has the power to trigger strong memories (Pye 2008,19-20). It is not difficult to imagine the ways in which different objects affect us: the soft fabric of a cushion might invite one to touch it, while the scratches and dents of a car suggest to us long use and past owners. In this vein Webb Keane (2005) has argued that objects themselves can invite actions, though they cannot determine them. The realization or suppression of an objects potential is, he says, 'the stuff of historical struggles' (Keane 2005, 194). Thus the meaning of a thing should be seen as an inter-play between all its performative possibilities and those that are realised.

Another approach has been to consider objects as extensions of human agency within social networks. In his theory of the agency of art objects Alfred Gell (1998) argues that people are not distinct units, but rather that a person's identity and agency is 'distributed' through a network of both people and

A. Lawson

things. In this way objects have the potential to act as 'secondary agents' (Gell 1998, 16). Anthropological studies of exchange networks have long noted the complex relationship between people and things in socio-economic interactions. (Mauss 1954; Strathern 1988; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1985). In her study of the *kula* shell exchange networks of Melanesia, Annette Weiner (1985) described a capacity for certain objects to represent the identities of past owners and exert their influence in present social contexts. 'The object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles or mythological events become an intimate part of a person's present identity' (Weiner 1985, 210). Such an object is described by Weiner as 'inalienable', in the sense that its value and meaning cannot be separated from its creator and/or past owners.

3.1.1.3 *The Social Life of Things*

It is a focus on movement and context in the creation of social meanings and values that underpins *The Social Life of Things* (1986). In this volume Arjun Appadurai offers the theoretical conceit that objects, like people, have social lives. Appadurai suggests that within the web of social meaning, "persons and things are not radically different categories", and that in the realm of social interactions and exchanges material objects can have social identities, just as people do (Appadurai 2006, 15). Focusing on the circulation of commodities, Appadurai asserts that it is exchange that creates value. Thus in order to explore the social and cultural structures of value it is necessary to look at the movement and exchange of objects, much in the same way that we might consider the social interactions and relationships of an individual:

"we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" (Appadurai 1986, 5).

A. Lawson

According to Appadurai the nature and context of exchange is essential in the definition and negotiation of an objects meaning and value. For example 'auctions accentuate the commodity dimension of objects (such as paintings) in a manner that might well be regarded as deeply inappropriate in other context' (Appadurai 1986, 15). The frequency of exchange, and of ownership can also influence value; indeed, withholding something from the realm of exchange is as significant as exchange itself (Appadurai 1986, 24). An aspect of this is Weiner's notion of 'keeping-while-giving', which involves 'retaining prized possessions while offering others for exchange' (Weiner 1985, 366). In this way the exchange and/or possession of valuable things can serve as a political tool for the communication of status and power.

Just as Appadurai talks about the social lives of things, Igor Kopytoff (1986) uses the idea of the object biography to illustrate how objects identities are not fixed, but evolving. According to Kopytoff the most important factor of consideration in an object biography is context, in the form of culturally defined spheres of exchange (Kopytoff 1986, 71). Continuing a focus on commodities and commodity value, Kopytoff argues that such identities and values are fluid and represent phases that objects (and indeed people) can move into and out of. He criticises the conceptual polarity between 'individualised persons' and 'commoditised things', noting how "people can be and have been commoditized again and again, in innumerable societies throughout history, by way of those widespread institutions known under the blanket term "slavery" (Kopytoff 1986, 64). Equally, objects have the capacity to become 'singularized', in a process directly opposed to the force of commoditization. Kopytoff offers various examples of this from family heirlooms to religious icons. However, whatever its current state of being, an object always retains the potential for re-evaluation. 'Commoditization, then is best looked upon as a process of becoming rather than an all or nothing state of being' (Kopytoff 1986, 73).

A. Lawson

3.1.1.4 Summary and Review

Following from the idea of 'material habitus' as described by Meskell (2005), I believe that a stark conceptual division between material and immaterial culture is inaccurate and unhelpful. As Ingold says, 'human beings do not exist on the 'other side' of materiality but swim in an ocean of materials' (Ingold 2007, 7). Therefore, when considering objects and their cultural meanings and values it would seem to be more profitable to explore the relationships and interactions between people and things, rather than attempting address material objects and human ideas as separate entities.

Gell's (1998) notion that social identity and agency is 'distributed' throughout a network of people and things is compelling and echoes the complex 'enmeshing' of human and material worlds described by Meskell. While it could be argued that the concept of 'secondary agency' humanizes objects too much, an emphasis on the important role that objects play in social interactions is valuable. In this view, agency, be it human or object, is always relational rather than inherent. According to Gosden (2001), the most important contribution that Gell's notion of agency has provided, is in encouraging us to consider the 'effects' of things as much as their 'meanings'; to 'pay attention to the formal qualities of objects, and the ways in which those formal qualities affect human social interactions' (Gosden 2001, 164-5).

Material things are not blank slates waiting for thoughts and ideas to be projected upon them; they exert their own materiality, limiting and enabling, thoughts, connections and behaviours (Keane 2005, 194-5). Objects have the power to affect us emotionally, intellectually, and physically, and to suggest certain behaviours and possibilities, not through any intentionality of their own, but rather owing to the very materiality of human thought and experience. As Gosden has noted:

'we can now see, on the one hand, that human bodies are material objects with physical properties that are a crucial aspect of human life;

A. Lawson

on the other, we realize that objects affect people in ways that would not happen if they were not there' (Gosden 2001, 165-4).

Weiner's 'inalienability' seems particularly pertinent to the consideration of antiquities and their ability to retain aspects of past meanings and identities (Weiner 1985). However, I would argue that many forms of inalienability only hold so long as the object remains within the same social and cultural spheres. As soon as it is removed to a new context it loses connections to previous social identities and reasserts its potential for varied interpretations. Approaching objects as having social lives or biographies overcomes this by allowing for a fluidity of meaning and value as objects move between different spheres of exchange.

Appadurai's and Kopytoff's models have their limitations. Firstly, both pay little attention to the processes by which value and meaning arise in objects outside the realm of economic exchange. To see everything through the capitalist lens of commodification (and singularisation) may be very relevant to the current world in which we live, but could be overly limiting as a means of understanding the full potential of an object's value and meaning. I would argue that both approaches place too much emphasis on the deterministic power of social structures, regarding objects merely as methodological 'tools' to 'illuminate their human and social context', rather than as essential components in the on-going construction, or 'weaving' of the cultural *habitus* (Appadurai 1986, 5; Ingold 2000, 64).

However, when considered in tandem with the concepts of material habitus and object agency, the notion of the social lives or cultural biographies of things emphasises two important dimensions in our understanding of the processes by which meaning and value arise in and through objects: movement and context. All things when looked at from one point in time and space are snapshots that are missing a bigger picture. Their perceived identities in that moment may offer the illusion of permanence, but they are in fact volatile and changeable. As Appadurai (2006,15) argued:

A. Lawson

“Thus, today's gift is tomorrow's commodity. Yesterday's commodity is tomorrow's found art object. Today's art object is tomorrow's junk. And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom”.

3.1.2 Epistemology: Qualitative research and Interpretivism

This research focuses on culturally specific case studies (chap. 3.1.3) and employs qualitative methods (chap. 3.2) such as unstructured and semi-structured qualitative interviewing and observational field notes. The decision to adopt such approaches stems from an epistemological position that regards human social behaviour as culturally constituted and therefore requiring of an interpretive and open research strategy.

3.1.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a very loose categorisation, commonly used within the social sciences and humanities, and typically regarded as an alternative to quantitative research. Its broad character makes a concise definition difficult, however such definitions as there are tend to focus on two aspects. Firstly, a particular range of data types and research strategies:

‘A form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis’ (Hammersley 2013,12).

And secondly, an epistemological position which rejects positivistic approaches to knowledge, and regards the endeavour of social research as primarily one of *interpretation*:

‘the goal of these methods is to understand – that is, to interpret – the meanings that people ascribe to events and actions, how they make

A. Lawson

these meanings their own, and how they negotiate these meanings in interactions with other people' (Magnusson & Marecek 2015, 1).

3.1.2.2 Interpretivism

The epistemological perspective of positivism was first described in the 19th Century by French philosopher Auguste Comte. Comte believed in the existence of an objective reality to which we have access, and promoted a refusal to extend knowledge claims beyond the bounds of scientifically observable and measurable behaviour (Hammersley 2013, 22). In response to this position a quantitative approach to the study of the social realm developed that was strongly influenced by a natural science definition of acceptable knowledge. The term 'social science' can itself be seen as an attempt to align the discipline with the perceived rigour and procedural objectivity of the natural sciences. Thus quantitative methodologies aim to collect statistically representative and replicable data for the purposes of making broader generalizations about trends and tendencies over populations (Bryman 2012, 285).

In parallel, and partly in response, to the positivist approach arguments were made for a different way of investigating the social world. The core issue was felt to be a fundamental difference between the objects of study within the natural and social sciences, in that 'unlike atoms, chemicals and most non-human forms of life – people actively interpret or make sense of their environment and of themselves' (Hammersley 2013, 26). Max Weber developed the concept of *Verstehen* within sociology which is based on the human capacity to empathize and understand others actions in terms of their motivations (Hennis 2000, 7). Weber argued that utilisation of *Verstehen* is essential in the investigation of human behaviour, and thus social research could best be described as a process of *interpretation*:

"sociology...is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action" (Weber 1978, 4).

3.1.2.3 Cultural context

The development of anthropology emphasised a relativist view of reality through an increasing focus on the importance of cultural context in the construction of social meaning and behaviour (Baszanger & Dodier 2004, 12). The significance of cultural context has become a key feature of qualitative approaches, leading anthropologists and sociologists to pay more attention to the differences between populations and individuals. Indeed, the social reality described by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) is one directly opposed to the positivist notion of an objective reality behaving in accordance with universal laws:

'Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz 2000, 5).

Such a position inevitably limits the potential for broad generalizations within and between populations, and places a greater importance on the detail and depth of data, or what Geertz describes as '*Thick Description*' (Geertz 2000, 6-7). This involves the observation and inclusion of a great deal more apparently trivial detail in and around the research subject than a quantitative methodology would typically allow for; the rationale being that the context in which behaviour takes place is as significant to its interpretation as the behaviour itself, and that the researcher cannot always know in advance which details will prove to be of significance (Bryman 2012, 281). Therefore qualitative research methods such as observational and reflective field-notes and unstructured interviewing are designed to allow for the collection of rich, in-depth accounts of their subjects.

A recognition of the significance of cultural context also serves to highlight the subjectivity of both researcher and research subjects, particularly in the case of researchers working outside of their own socio-cultural contexts. According

A. Lawson

to Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited in Bryman (2012, 277-8) 'qualitative researchers concepts and theories are representations, and there may be other equally credible representations of the same phenomena'. Thus it could be argued that the nature of the qualitative research endeavour is collective and accumulative rather than definitive, with each piece of research offering a unique perspective on a many faceted theme.

In order to mitigate the potential for researcher bias limiting or controlling the research outcomes, qualitative research tends to adopt an *open* design. Open in the sense that initial research questions tend to be broadly rather than narrowly defined, and research techniques, such as unstructured interviewing and participant observation, allow for the research subjects to lead the process. An open research design also makes for greater flexibility in adjusting research scope and direction in response to new and on-going findings. This approach could be described as data led, rather than researcher or hypothesis led.

3.1.2.4 *Choosing qualitative research*

Positivism and interpretivism exist towards opposite ends of an epistemological spectrum, but this does not automatically correspond to an opposition between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Indeed researchers may choose to employ elements of both in the same project. That said, certain research aims and objectives lend themselves more to one approach than another, and an epistemological position that leans towards interpretivism is more likely to focus on qualitative methods.

The *open* nature of a qualitative research design makes it more likely to produce results that are not predicted by the researcher, and minimises the potential effects of researcher bias. However, it is also more likely to produce large amounts of data, much of which may not yield useful results. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology by no means eliminates researcher

A. Lawson

subjectivity and bias, and in either case a self-reflective approach is important for research validity and reliability.

Focusing on depth over breadth makes qualitative research particularly well suited to studies where cultural conditions are seen to be essential to the understanding human behaviour. While a limited capacity for broad generalization beyond the scope of the research is sometimes given as a criticism of qualitative approaches, Bryman (2012) has pointed out that the potential for generalizations differs in kind not in scope:

'The findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory rather than to populations...it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization' (Bryman 2012, 285).

This research aims to investigate the individual and cultural meanings and values associated with certain objects within specific cultural contexts, and how those meanings are created. I, the researcher, have adopted a broadly interpretivist epistemology that places a high degree of importance on the role of cultural context and on the processes of subjective meaning making. As such I have chosen to use an open research design and a range of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis.

3.1.2.5 Critical Theory

In addition to positivism and interpretivism it is also necessary to mention a third epistemological position that differs from the former two in a significant way. A 'critical' research approach tends to view human behaviour either through the lens of a particular model of historical process or progress (such as those of Hegel or Marx), or in the context of some set of ideals or standards that reach beyond the particular setting being studied. Almost all 'critical' researchers believe that researchers have a responsibility to resist dominant ideologies and to challenge inequitable social relations through their

A. Lawson

research' (Hammersley 2013, 34). Examples might include research with a feminist, socialist or racial equality agenda.

It seems fair to suggest then, that my research has several critical theory elements in its formulation and design: firstly it suggests from the outset that existing political, historical and ideological factors, namely authorized Western heritage discourse (chap. 1), might be impacting current human interpretations and behaviours, and seeks to investigate this. Secondly it aims, in part, to address a perceived inequality within the academic and heritage management worlds, that is believed to stem from these suggested political, historical and ideological factors. However, I believe that the political model I have suggested is not beyond question and have therefore sought to maintain an open research strategy that would in theory allow for outcomes incompatible with my initial position.

3.1.3 Methodology: Object biographies, routes and comparative case studies

This section deals with methodology in terms of research design and structure rather than covering the specific data-collection and analysis methods employed (these will be discussed in chaps. 3.2 & 3.3). The methodological design I have created for this research is in part a reflection of my ontological and epistemological positions as elaborated in the previous two sections (chaps. 3.1.1 & 3.1.2). It is also determined in no small part by the particular nature of my research subject in that, a) it involves a focus on objects that are currently in circulation, and b) it is investigating a widespread phenomenon but aims to understand it in relation to its specific cultural context/s. The former of these two factors has led to the adoption of a route-based approach to data collection and analysis, which is based on the concept of the 'object biography'. The latter of the two factors has led to a case-study research design with a comparative element.

3.1.3.1 *Object biographies*

Archaeologists in pursuit of past cultural worlds have had a tendency to privilege the 'original' meaning of an object at the point of its fabrication, overlooking any subsequent re-interpretations, or indeed the potential for new interpretations in the present and future. At the same time, and almost without intention, the process of archaeology transforms objects from the past into something entirely removed from their original meaning. They become 'artefacts', pieces of evidence, material clues to be analysed, decoded, unravelled, and iconic representatives of a distant and foreign culture. In short they become fetishized; that is they become imbued with values and meanings that reach far beyond their physical properties.

The origins of the 'object biography' can be traced all the way back to a theoretical distinction between two types of object: the commodity and the gift. Karl Marx saw the commodity as an object that serves as an exchangeable unit of value, apparently divorced from social relations (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 173). Alternatively, the transaction of a gift as defined by Mauss (1954), is one which sets up a relationship of reciprocity and obligation between giver and receiver (Thomas 1991, 14). Thus the values and meanings of such objects are seen to extend outwards from themselves into a network of cultural relations that combine both people and things. Meskell has noted that:

'fetishism arises from an organic unity between persons and things, as opposed to the strongly contoured divide between persons and the things they produce and exchange in capitalist societies' (Meskell 2005, 3).

However, Marx's notion of commodity fetishism acknowledges that commodities too hold a 'fetishlike "power"', which emerges from their ability to conceal the hidden relations of their production (Kopytoff 1986, 83).

The distinction between these two kinds of object and their various human and social conditions has generated a vast amount of literature, particularly in

A. Lawson

the field of anthropology. Many of these studies explore the ways in which exchange of certain objects produces social structures and relationships, as well as the role that certain objects play in the construction of identity and personhood (Hoskins 1998; Gell 1998; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1985; Thomas, 1991). The idea that objects have social lives (Appadurai 1986), or cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986), is different in that it places a greater degree of significance on the *context* of exchange. In this view objects are neither gifts nor commodities in and of themselves; rather commoditization is seen as a spectrum and objects are capable of moving in and out of different commodity phases or states. It is the socio-cultural context of exchange that determines the meanings and values associated with a thing, however 'from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context' (Appadurai 1986, 5). Following this approach, meaning and value are fluid and can change and shift over space and time. Therefore it is not sufficient to examine a thing at a single point in time, one must rather consider the entirety of its life, from birth to death.

A somewhat different approach to the idea of an object biography has been taken up in the field of archaeology. A narrative, or processual, approach to understanding objects was in any case not new to archaeology, with "use-life" analysis, looking at physical evidence of use-wear in artefacts, and the *chaîne opératoire*, detailing the sequence of decisions and behaviours involved in the technological manufacture of artefacts, already well-established methodologies. Some biographical or 'life-history' approaches within archaeology have followed the lives of things in the past up until their discard or deposition (Schiffer 1987; Tringham 1994; Joy 2009, 542). However, I would argue that a more profitable application of the object biography approach has been in studies that extend the life of archaeological and historic objects into the present.

Some of these studies have focused on the *long duree*, following objects through various incarnations over time. The shift of an object from its original context to its present day context can be seen as a significant break in a biography, likewise in the case of encounters and exchanges between

A. Lawson

colonial and indigenous communities (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 177). In his study of the biographies of Indian iconographic images Richard Davis (1997) uses historical records to explore the variety of ways that different communities throughout time have viewed and interpreted such images, arguing that:

‘Subsequent “reinterpretations” of these objects in new settings are equally worthy of disciplined inquiry... the lives of Indian images may be just as filled with change, disjuncture, and readjustment to new circumstances as those of humans’ (Davis 1997, 11).

Davis brings his study into the recent past and present day by looking at historical appropriation of Indian images during the colonial period and the current market in the West for Indian Art. In his ethnographic study of the life of a newly discovered pot sherd over the course of an archaeological excavation, Cornelius Holtorf (2002) argues that the present day is the *only* relevant context for understanding what objects from the past mean to us, because all meaning-making about that past, takes place in the present:

‘A study of the life history of things must therefore not assume anything about what they are, but try to understand how they come to be ancient artefacts or whatever else. I am arguing for an investigation of the life histories of things as they unfold in the present and extend both into the past and the future ... to accept that material culture is meaningfully constituted – in the present’ (Holtorf 2002, 55).

Holtorf’s approach resonates with Lowenthal’s (1985) view of heritage as a process of assimilating the past for purposes of present concerns and perceptions. In her ‘social history’ of the Kow Swamp aboriginal burial remains of New Zealand, Julie Lahn (2007) explores the way archaeology as a discipline perceives, interprets and presents the past through material culture. Lahn modifies the term ‘cultural biography’, used by Kopytoff (1986) to describe the culturally-informed biographies of singular things, and the term ‘social history’, previously defined by Appadurai as ‘tracing longer-term shifts

A. Lawson

often in demand and larger scale dynamics that transcend the biographies of particular members of that class or type' (Appadurai 1986, 90). Instead she argues a cultural biography is an 'ideal' formed of cultural expectations of certain types of object, while a 'social history' includes the 'actual' trajectories of these objects, which may or may not conform to such an ideal:

'The use of these two terms will highlight the discrepancies between the 'ideal' and the 'actual' life, or path, the Kow Swamp remains have taken ... These disruptions show how a change in valuation or meaning can alter the status or career of an object' (Lahn 2007, 364).

Lahn (2007) explores the political nature of the 'possession of powerful objects' by looking at the confrontations between archaeological and aboriginal attitudes toward the proper interpretation of the Kow Swamp remains (Lahn 2007, 364). An example of this is the differing perceptions of time between the two cultural viewpoints. The narrative nature of the object biography could imply a linear view of the passage of time, in keeping with archaeological reconstruction of the past. However, Lahn notes that such a perspective cannot be taken for granted:

'This linearity can be examined as an archaeological artefact of the West. It is not universal. From another perspective the 'social history' of the Kow Swamp remains can also appear cyclical ... consequently the social history presented here is just a segment of the cycle' (Lahn, 2007, 365).

Lahn suggests that a focus on the 'objects themselves' and their successive births, deaths and rebirths may help to challenge a linear modelling. Jody Joy (2009) has also noted that the object biography need not take a narrative form, but instead focus on the variety of existing meanings of an object or class of objects. Drawing on the social agency of things described by Strathern (1988) and Gell (1998), Joy argues that 'if identity is multiple and made up of relationships with other people, biography cannot be viewed purely as a historical narrative; it is relational' (Joy 2009, 544). Consequently,

A. Lawson

'an object biography is comprised of the sum of the relationships that constitute it' (Joy 2009, 552).

And while linear narrative is not the only model for viewing and presenting the object biography, neither is exchange the only context for producing it. Gosden & Marshall (1999) have explored how certain objects, specifically ceremonial masks from Northwest Canada, only become meaningful through ritual performance. Similarly, Cornelieus Holtorf (1998) and Harold Mytum (2003) have used biographical approaches to explore the ways that megaliths in Germany and gravestones in Ireland respectively, gather biographies as static monuments. Here the biographical possibilities of monuments are realised by successive generations of people, not through movement and exchange, but rather through an ideological and physical incorporation of them into the life-world of the time, often in the form of 'visible markers in the landscape, referring people back to the distant past' (Holtorf 1998, 34). Mitchell has argued that people, objects, and space are all 'transformed' through performance of various kinds (Mitchell 2005, 399). Performance can be seen as a distinct and special activity, or in a broader sense it can be used as a metaphor for activity in everyday life. In some ways, all forms of object biography accumulation around objects can be viewed through the lens of performance. Circulation itself could be seen as a kind of performance, though certain types of exchange are more highly ritualised than others, for example, birthday gifts or art auctions.

Most of the research mentioned above is notable in that it does not treat things as materially provocative in the manner described in Chapter 3.1.1. Appadurai has himself described the approach as a 'methodological fetish' which ascribes a false animation to objects in order that they can throw light back on the social contexts that 'enliven' them. This view has been strongly criticised by Peter Pels (1998) for over-privileging the role of human intention. He uses the concept of the fetish to turn Appadurai's methodology on its head, arguing that fetishism is not a matter of 'derivative agency', of people acting through things, but rather it is a concept which allows for things to 'communicate their own messages' (Pels 1998, 94).

'As I see it, Appadurai's social life of things is more properly the life of the ventriloquist's dummy, a "methodological animism." A call for a "methodological fetishism" would entail something more radical, for it would indicate a relationship in which such transcendence of materiality by human intention or artifice is not possible' (Pels 1998, 94-95).

According to Pels, by focussing on the commodity and the processes of commodification Appadurai highlights the transcendence of human systems of exchange values over the phenomenological presence of the things themselves (Pels 1998, 98). However, Pels goes on to say, that by looking at the biographies of things one can see moments in which 'the materiality of things can stand in the way of and deflect the course of human traffic' (Pels 1998, 95). This counter drive to commodification is not the same as the process of cultural singularisation described by Kopytoff, wherein certain objects are precluded from commodification by cultural, historical, or personal values (Kopytoff 1986, 73). Rather what Pels is describing in his notion of fetish retains more of the inherent, or natural singularity of all things that Kopytoff also mentions. Here the natural world is seen as made up of an endless array of singular things, which for the sake of order, individuals and cultures seek to homogenize through classification and categorisation (Pels 1998, 70). Pels goes on to argue that the best way to understand the power of objects to disrupt human systems of value is through the senses:

'This happens, for instance, when the "stillness" of a souvenir or monument suddenly changes our everyday rhythm, to connect it with a memory or a history that is commonly absent ... [or] when we are confronted with the difference from everyday life by strange museum objects or other curiosities' (Pels 1998, 100).

In his study of a 19th century toothbrush discovered in a Colombian archaeological excavation, Felipe Gaitan Ammann (2005) explores the past and present fetishisation of an innocuous object. By focussing on the 'multi-

A. Lawson

sensuous performative possibilities entangled in the materiality of this archaeological toothbrush' Ammann manages to convey an object biography which is not entirely defined by social, cultural and historical conditions, but which also addresses the latent possibilities encompassed by the object's materiality. Relating the historic account of a French naturalist having his toothbrush stolen while camping in 19th century New Granada and later discovering it on a nearby chapel shrine, Ammann explores the process through which such objects could acquire a fetishized identity that moved them from the realm of taste, touch and action, to the realm of visual contemplation:

'Their materiality was allowed to develop all its fetishistic power, breaching planned routes and hegemonic taxonomies, invading other sensuous realms than the ones originally addressed in their physicality' (Ammann 2005, 87).

Similarly, the decontextualisation of the toothbrush from 19th to 21st century Colombia has allowed for further redefinition and, in this case, a greater emphasis on the visual form of the object, which plays an essential role in archaeological identification and analysis.

'Our biographical toothbrush is part of some past elitist trifles whose material power has become reactivated by means of archaeology. The useless has become priceless; the disposable has been turned museum-worthy ... It's restored physicality bore the mark of the cause of its discard; yet, it also showed some evidence of its irreverent recovery' (Ammann 2005, 89).

In her study of the circulation of lithics and ceramics in first millennium AD Argentina, Marissa Lazzari (2005) brings together the social life of things with an appreciation of their materiality. She argues that objects that travel long distances and pass through many hands not only have the power to indicate distant people, places and social relations, but that they are active agents in the construction of social space. The movement of both people and objects

A. Lawson

across the landscape creates networks, relationships and rhythms that are constitutive of the lifeworld that is the 'simultaneously natural and social world' (Lazzari 2005, 135). Furthermore, Lazzari argues that different materials do this in different ways with different limitations and affordances (Keane 2005). She explores the various ways in which these two materials offer different interpretations and possibilities, from where they are sourced to how they are used. For example, clay is a more malleable substance in its primary form, yet lithics can undergo repeated transformations over time, and their very use involves such transformation in a way that is not true for ceramics (Lazzari 2005, 142). Lazzari argues that the materiality of ceramics afforded more explicit or symbolic representations of distant people and places, while lithics, in particular obsidian, did so in a more implicit, embodied way, thus reflecting the tension between presence and representation within this lifeworld (Lazzari 2005, 146).

'obsidian, both expressed and created a different understanding of the world, one that was not based on conveying meaning through the creation of images but in transformation while moving, in practice' In a non-representational way, obsidian made it impossible to ignore the world beyond the local' (Lazzari 2005, 146).

To summarise this section, objects can be understood as having social lives and acquiring their own unique biographies. This view is based on the recognition that in the field of social agency, the line between human and object is blurred, perhaps arbitrary. A biographical approach, directs attention towards the social and cultural context in which an objects meaning and value is determined, and allows for a high degree of fluidity and change. In this model, meaning is always a process of becoming.

The lives of archaeological and historic objects dont end in the past. Indeed the present is perhaps the most important context to consider in the reconstruction of past biographies, since the construction of the past is an on-going contemporary cultural project (Holtorf 2002; Lowenthal 1985). Objects that have been in existence over a longer period of time offer the possibility to

A. Lawson

explore breaks or shifts in biography, and the variety of reinterpretations that arise from these processes. These different interpretations can occur over stretches of time, as in the case of monuments that have been incorporated into the landscapes of successive generations (Holtorf 1998; Mytum 2003); they can exist over space, as in the case of objects that circulate between different countries and cultures (Davis 1997; Thomas 1991); they can exist simultaneously between different communities, as in the case of contested heritage (Lahn, 2007); they can be activated by particular practices, as in the case of objects of ritual performance (Gosden & Marshall, 1999).

The biographical approach forces us to look at the significance of cultural context in the creation of meaning and value in and through objects. However, this should not be seen as a deterministic model, where the creation of cultural meaning is a one-way process of culture shaping objects meaning. Objects also have the power to shape cultural meaning, both as social agents within a relational network (Strathern 1988; Weiner 1985; Gell 1998; Joy 2009), and as physical entities that, by their particular materiality, affect our senses and influence our behaviour (Pels 1998; Ammann 2005; Lazzari 2005).

3.1.3.2 *Routeing-out portable antiquities*

This research incorporates the ideas outlined above and uses them to formulate a methodological approach that focuses on the various *routes* taken by movable objects that are currently circulating within an antique and/or antiquity market. The idea of routes is intended to place an emphasis on the *movement* of objects and of people, and the *relationships* this movement both produces and is produced by. The sum of these routes and relationships can be understood as a series of *networks* linking objects and people across space and time, both informing and informed by the cultural habitus in which new meanings and interpretations are generated. The idea of routes and networks to an extent combines the narrative and relational biographies described by Joy (2009). It also allows for the possibility of different shapes

A. Lawson

and patterns to emerge, such as the circular biographies described by Lahn (2007).

The objects I will be following the routes of are all in some manner defined in the present day as antiques or antiquities. Between the two case studies presented in this thesis a broad range of objects are investigated, including coins dating to the early centuries B.C, and enamelware vessels dating to the comparatively recent 1930's. However as a class of object they are united in that their physical origins exist in a past beyond most peoples living memory, and in most cases they have been removed from their original context. The defining of an object as an antique or an antiquity is in itself a form of recontextualisation that represents a different phase in an objects biography. An interesting extension of this class of object is the phenomenon of fakes and replicas, which are fabricated in the present but which are intended to replicate some of the qualities of objects that have a much longer biography.

I am interested in the *variety* of biographies and routes available to these objects, so rather than focusing specific objects, each case-study in this research looks at a group or category of objects. Thus, I am not so much recording an individual object's full biographical route, but rather a 'typical' biographical route taken by a category of objects, with reference to individual objects and a variety of divergent routes. As described by Lahn (2007), this approach allows one to explore the tensions between the ideal or expected routes according to different communities and interested parties. Of particular interest to me are the power-relations between heritage management and antique dealers and collectors, but also between different communities and cultures linked by these object routes.

I have chosen and categorised these object groups not according to material, size, shape or function, but according to where they are sourced and what type of exchange network they move through. The research uses ethnographic methods to follow the routes of these objects in the present day, and the starting point for each case study is taken to be the earliest stage in an object's route that is accessible to an ethnographic investigation. In the

A. Lawson

case of these objects, that earliest accessible stage is usually the point at which they are 'discovered' as antiquities (as in the case of coins dug from riverbeds), or 'transformed' into antiques (as in the case of Chettinad house material that is taken from demolished buildings). Commercial exchange is certainly an important process within these object's biographical routes, since they are all moving within a capitalist market, however it is not the only process. Display, collection, re-contextualisation and physical transformations of the objects can all also be seen to contribute. Though this is primarily a study of the social lives of Tamil Nadu antiques and antiquities in the present day, some consideration has also been given to the history of the objects. The routes and networks that link these objects and the people who value them do not just extend across space - from India, to Europe and the far East and vice-versa - they also extend through time. Therefore, an acknowledgement of the past lives or social histories of these objects, in terms of the social and historical processes that brought them to their present incarnations, is an important component of this thesis.

3.1.3.3 *Comparative case studies*

The case study is a strategy adopted across the social sciences, but is particularly associated with ethnography and any research that seeks to understand human behaviour within a particular socio-cultural context. It stands in contrast to alternative research designs such as the experiment or the survey, in that it is based in real-life situations and events, and approaches them holistically within their broader human contexts:

"A case study is an empirical inquiry that – investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 2003, 13).

This thesis is interested in exploring the current relationship between circulating antique objects and the people who value them. The contemporary

trade and collection of antique objects is a widespread phenomenon that occurs in almost every part of the globe. However, I am not looking to discover universal truths about this phenomenon, since I do not believe such truths exist. As per the interpretivist position (chap. 3.1.2), I believe that these processes of subjective meaning-making are contextually specific. That is, in order to understand them, one must take into consideration the cultural contexts in which they take place.

The broad cultural context I am interested in investigating is collection and movement of antiques and antiquities within and from Tamil Nadu, India, for the reasons laid out in Chapters 1 and 2. In this sense, this thesis is a case study, looking at a particular social, historical and cultural example of a widespread phenomenon. However, it is a case study defined by object communities, rather than human communities, and the object routes presented here traverse multiple different human cultural contexts, of place, community and class, both within India and beyond. Thus, a comparative element is at its core. In addition, case studies can be many layered, and this case study is made-up of two comparative cases focusing on two different object groups and exchange networks. The use of two object studies is a strategy to allow for the comparison of particular variables relating to the objects themselves, such as size, age, function, and origin. In particular, one case study looks at objects from a relatively recent past while the other looks at much older, archaeological objects.

3.2 Research Methods

The data collection methods employed in this research are all drawn from ethnography, which is defined primarily in terms of 'the importance given to direct, *in situ* observation of concrete sequences of activities' (Bazanger & Dodier 2004, 9). Thus the majority of data collection was conducted through fieldwork in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India, in direct contact with objects and people involved in the collection and trade of antiques and antiquities. Another term associated with this style of research is 'participant observation'.

This is used to describe a prolonged immersion in a particular social setting, which stands in contrast to the clear separation between researcher and research subject that is typical of more quantitative approaches within social sciences. This sort of relationship between 'observer' and 'observed' can vary from complete participation in all activities, to one in which the balance is more in favour of observation (Walsh 2012, 250). However all such approaches share a fundamental reliance on first-hand experience:

'The observer is the primary research instrument, accessing the field, establishing field relations, conducting and structuring observation and interviews, writing field notes, using audio and visual recordings, reading documents, recording and transcribing, and finally writing up the research' (Walsh 2012, 248).

It is important to distinguish that, unlike most ethnographic studies, this thesis has been designed around groups of objects rather than groups of people. The main focus and guiding principle for fieldwork was following their movements, contexts and transformations, which entailed visiting a wide variety of different social settings. The people (referred to in this thesis as 'respondents') provided much the rich data about the meaning, value and role of the objects, but it is the objects themselves that in some sense constitute the community under study.

3.2.1 Structuring fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in successive stages over a period of a little over two years, with each stage having slightly different goals and objectives (see Appendix B for more detail). The extended period of fieldwork over several successive stages supported the immersive quality described above, and also allowed for a progressive reassessment and refinement of goals and objectives from one fieldtrip to the next. The fieldwork was carried out over the following four periods:

A. Lawson

Fieldwork period 1 (B1): MAR 2013 – APR 2013

Aims: Exploring the research area, choosing case studies to focus on, establishing contact with respondents.

Locations: Bangalore, Chennai, intensive five day tour of interior Tamil Nadu.

Fieldwork period 2 (B2): NOV 2013 – MAY 2014

Aims: Chettinad antiques case study focusing on local traders and city based collectors and dealers for both case studies.

Locations: Intensive six day tour of Auroville, Pondicherry, Chettinad, Bangalore and Chennai

Fieldwork Period 3: AUG 2014 – NOV 2014

Aims: Chettinad antiques case study, focusing on the source, suppliers and customers

Locations: Bangalore, Chennai, Chettinad, Pondicherry

Fieldwork period 4: APR 2015 – AUG 2015

Aims: Riverbed antiquities case study, focusing on source, trade and customers, follow-up meetings for both case-studies, and trade destinations for both case-studies on a national and international level.

Locations: Bangalore, Chennai, Central TN, Mumbai, Jodhpur, London

The primary field notes from each of the above fieldwork periods have been transcribed and comprise Appendix B of this thesis.

3.2.2 Navigating the field

Overall, this fieldwork was a hugely enjoyable experience for me, bringing me into contact with people and places I may never have otherwise encountered. However, as a foreigner and a woman working to a schedule and a budget it also involved a number of challenges.

A. Lawson

3.2.2.1 Logistics – travel, accommodation and schedule

I was fortunate enough to acquire a rented apartment in Bangalore that served as an excellent base from which to plan and conduct intermittent field trips to Tamil Nadu and several other locations around India. Affordable travel and accommodation is not difficult to find in most parts of India. Most of my travel was by bus, train and auto-rickshaw, along with flights to Mumbai and Jodhpur. Chennai was also an important secondary base as many of my initial contacts were found in this city, along with those who acted as field-guides and translators and who helped to plan routes and schedules for my work further south in Tamil Nadu. It was these trips through south-central Tamil Nadu that proved to be the most challenging and expensive, since they involved visiting places away from the main tourist centres and often remote and difficult to locate, as in the case of tracking down groups of working riverbed-panners. Because on these occasions it was necessary to have a field-guide/translator with me, whose availability was also limited, I tended to plan these fieldtrips to be as short and intense as possible, taking in as many places and people as possible in the space of a week or even several days. This meant that hiring a car and a driver was also a necessity. Whilst I tried to plan and schedule these, the nature of the fieldwork meant that a schedule was only ever a rough guide and changed day-by-day depending on who we met and how easily they were located. By contrast, fieldwork conducted in the cities of Chennai and Bangalore was less pressured and better planned. It depended on arranging meetings with people, usually by phone or email, rather than simply going to a location and hoping for a spontaneous encounter. Fieldnotes providing details of itineraries and meetings are included in full in Appendix B.

3.2.2.2 Working with people

Finding the right people to talk to and then persuading them to give-up some of their time for me was possibly one of the greatest challenges of the fieldwork. The success of my research depended heavily on acquiring new

A. Lawson

contacts and advice from existing contacts (*snowballing*, chap. 3.2.4) and I was lucky enough to meet several people early on in my research who were very helpful in this respect. Encouraging relative strangers to talk to me at length about subjects that they may or may not want to discuss required me to be doggedly persistent and unfailingly polite, even when greeted with initial indifference or even mild hostility. While many of the people I spoke to were only too pleased to meet someone who showed an interest in their work or hobbies, others were either suspicious of my motives or lacked the time or interest to talk with me. Likewise, my own availability, time restrictions, and knowledge meant that I have undoubtedly missed out on speaking to some people who might have been interesting respondents.

3.2.2.3 *Safety*

I am a reasonably confident solo-traveller and overall I did not experience any serious concern regarding my personal safety during fieldwork. I always took care to ensure that I felt comfortable about the safety of my accommodation and I remained in regular contact with my Bangalore based co-supervisor. Early in the fieldwork I encountered an occasion of sexual inappropriateness by a male respondent. The experience alerted me to the possibility of this hazard and thereafter I decided to wear a ring on my wedding finger in situations where I felt at all uncomfortable, in order to indicate that I was married. While this sort of deception could be regarded as unethical in a research context, I felt it to be a necessary precaution. On those fieldtrips to more rural areas I was glad to have the company of a field-guide/translator and on reflection I realise that to be in the company of a man when travelling in this way provided an extra measure of security.

3.2.2.4 *Cultural barriers*

Working as a researcher in a foreign country inevitably entails challenges. The most obvious for me was the language barrier when working with non-English speakers through a translator (chap. 3.2.6). However, throughout my

A. Lawson

fieldwork there were many cultural factors at play. In the more rural and less-tourist visited areas of Tamil Nadu, my presence, as a single white female with a notebook and digital recorder was always conspicuous. It is difficult for me to assess exactly what effect this may have had on my fieldwork and the resulting data. I believe that at times I was welcomed out of curiosity, at other times I was assumed to be a potentially lucrative customer, while on occasions I had the impression that I was feared as someone in a position of authority, perhaps with government connections. I always made efforts to explain my position as a researcher and my particular research interests to respondents, and in general I think this had more of an impact on what people chose to tell me than my nationality, colour or gender did.

In urban areas of India I attracted much less attention. Here the issue of being a British person commenting on Indian affairs, with all the colonial associations that could evoke, felt more pertinent. Especially since many of the people I was speaking to were far more knowledgeable than myself within their particular fields. My thesis subject matter has an ethical dimension that could be seen as critical, or at least questioning, of current methods of heritage management in India. It also involves interacting closely with people on both sides of this ethical divide. However I think this particular cultural barrier was felt more strongly by myself than any of my respondents, and it certainly was never voiced by any of them.

While on a surface level communication could flow more easily between myself and respondents when conducted in English in a relatively western and familiar context, there was still a need to consider the appropriate degree of formality for a particular conversation. In India, deference to age and authority are taken very seriously. Furthermore, my thesis subject matter has an ethical dimension that could be seen as critical, or at least questioning, of current methods of heritage management in India. It also involves interacting closely with people on both sides of this ethical divide. These were all factors that needed to be considered when meeting with a respondent.

3.2.3 Qualitative Interviewing

The main data collection method used in this thesis is semi-structured qualitative interviewing. This is a preferred method for collecting data about personal experiences, attitudes and values, because these are all things that cannot be predicted and built into the research design. Qualitative interviewing tends to be characterised by a flexible, semi-structured interview style with open-ended questions, in order to allow respondents a high degree of freedom to talk about subjects in their own terms and to take the interview in directions they choose (Byrne 2012, 208).

In the early stages of fieldwork attempts were made to provide a relatively high degree of pre-structuring to the interview process by designing questionnaire type sheets. This was partly due to a concern on my part of not being able to conduct good interviews without a structure to refer to, and partly it was an attempt to provide a higher degree of quantification to the data. However these structured interviews did not prove to be successful in the field were quickly discarded in favour of a more spontaneous and flexible style for a number of reasons.

Firstly, structured interview questions added a formality to the interview process which felt inappropriate and inhibiting in many of the situations I found myself in. Whilst a more formal and structured style worked well in the context of a pre-arranged meeting conducted in an office with a respondent who was fluent in English, much of my fieldwork was not of this nature. Spontaneous interviews conducted in Tamil through a translator, on a roadside, or whilst the respondent was engaged in their job, required a more flexible approach. Secondly, often a better rapport and sense of openness and trust developed between the respondent and myself when the interview was allowed to proceed in a more unstructured and conversational manner. And thirdly, the high degree of variability in the character and circumstances of different respondents meant that my pre-defined questions were often limiting rather than supportive, or simply not applicable. In this way a more

A. Lawson

flexible interview style, which did not limit outcomes to pre-selected options, was in-fact more in keeping with my interpretive research epistemology (chap. 3.1.2).

Not all respondents contributed in equal degrees to this research. The nature of the fieldwork required me to be open to recording spontaneous encounters as well as pre-arranged meetings, and to work with a wide range of individuals, some of whom were more willing or able to engage with me than others. Therefore interviews vary widely in length and depth from brief five minute conversations to three hour interviews. For this reason the term 'interaction' is preferred in this thesis as it has a broader applicability than the term interview.

Interactions were loosely structured around the idea of the object biography, and could be categorised into three main types of question:

- What/where/when/who/how? Questions concerning the biographical details of objects, such as 'where did you get this from?', 'how much did you pay for it?', 'what do you do with it now' and 'what will you do with it in the future'?
- Questions about the biographical details of the respondent, such as age, occupation and background
- Why? Questions concerning the motivations, attitudes and values of the interview subject. Here very abstract questions, such as 'what does heritage mean to you?' were usually avoided in favour of questions directly related to objects, people or activities, such as 'what do you like about these objects?' or 'do you think these objects need to be preserved?'

The nature and direction of interactions was dictated largely by the respondent and loose interview structuring allowed for the inclusion of any number of additional lines of questioning, such as questions about the social background and history of the trade, questions about particular people, communities or organisations, or questions about relationships between the respondent and other relevant persons or objects.

The primary data arising from these interactions has been compiled in Appendix A of this thesis in the form of transcriptions.

3.2.4 Sampling

Interview subjects were selected using a *purposive sampling* methodology, with selection being based on relevance to the research topic rather than a random process. This is in general a technique better suited to the case study, which is focused on a particular phenomenon in a real life context. In this case, the movement of the objects under study dictated to a large extent the places and people selected. However other factors also contributed. For example, several prominent members of the Nagarathar Chettiar community were interviewed on the basis of their knowledge of the community and its history, rather than a connection to the current trade and collection of Chettinad antiques. Purposive sampling in this way provides a very high degree of relevance to the research topic, but it can also be challenging since the number of potential interviewees is necessarily much smaller, and accessing them is not always easy. To combat these difficulties this system of purposive sampling was supported by a strong reliance on what is sometimes referred to as 'snowballing', that is, relying on the personal references and recommendations of existing interview subjects as a way of finding new interview subjects. This technique complemented my purposive methodology well, since the people recommended by interview subjects were often those linked by the trade and exchange of the objects under study. Furthermore, being referred to a new respondent by an existing respondent often helped in the building of trust between respondents and myself.

The process of sampling evolved throughout as research progressed. In successive field trips as my research agenda changed and became more defined and focused, the criteria for selecting interview subjects also became more defined and focused. For example, in the first field trip a broad range of individuals were interviewed, some of whom did not relate to the case studies

A. Lawson

later selected, reliance on snowballing was high, and fieldwork structure and itinerary was loose and flexible. By comparison, the final field trip was more structured with many locations and interview participants decided beforehand. In addition, a number of core participants or 'primary respondents' emerged who I was able to return to on more than one occasion for successive interviews and recommendations for new respondents.

A potential pitfall of over-reliance on snowballing, and purposive sampling in general, can be to skew data towards particular social groupings that may tend to support one another's views. This risk is somewhat mitigated in my research due to the role of the objects and their movements as the important linking factor, since these movements often cut across a wide range of social groupings. However, in certain cases ensuring balanced sampling was more difficult than others. For example, individuals involved in the trade of Chettinad antiques were relatively easy for me as an 'outsider' to access since they tended to be attached to businesses and have shops that are open to passing members of the public. Furthermore, they were usually willing to discuss their business connections and activities openly with me. In contrast, individuals involved in the trade of coins, particularly those dealing directly with the source end of the market, were extremely difficult to access since they tended to operate as private individuals and be secretive and protective of their business activities. In the Chettinad case study the customer end of the trade route was the most difficult to access, since they could not be identified on the basis of location or occupation. In general, my only means of accessing them was via the traders, who tended to be protective of their customers privacy. On the other hand, in the case study looking at riverbed antiquities, coin collectors proved to be very accessible to me as a researcher, though it should be noted that snowballing was used heavily within the coin collecting community and thus an emphasis on certain social groupings is likely here. Though these discrepancies in sampling were not always possible to mitigate it is important to recognise them so that they can be taken into account in the analysis of the data.

3.2.5 Recording and transcribing

Wherever possible interactions were recorded on a hand-held digital audio recorder. This was always done with the consent of the respondent. Wherever an audio-recorder was not used hand-written notes were taken by myself. Often, in the case of spontaneous interactions, the audio-recorder was only used after a period of conversation on the topic had already taken place and a good rapport had been established with the respondent. In some cases this sense of rapport did not develop and the audio recorder was not used. The decision about whether or not to request a recorded interview came down very much to instinct and whether or not I felt it would disrupt the flow and quality of the interaction or not. In the entire first fieldtrip no audio-recorder was used and only hand written notes were taken. This fieldtrip was intended primarily as a broad survey of potential case studies and respondents. Making connections and creating a sense of rapport with potential respondents was deemed more important at this stage than recording interviews, and the presence of an audio recorder was not helpful in this process.

The audio-recorder had an extra purpose in the case of interviews conducted primarily in Tamil. Though a translator was always present in such interviews, it was common for the translator to paraphrase or fail to translate some things they thought to be irrelevant. This was difficult for me to overcome in the field, so the audio-recordings were fully transcribed and translated into English by an English student from Madras University, in order that this might reveal anything of interest that was missed or changed by the translator at the time. Interviews conducted in English were transcribed by myself either in full or in note form (Appendix A).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim to the accuracy of words and sentences, but not including non-verbal utterances or sections of conversation that were off-topic (for example myself and my field assistant discussing how we are to reach the next destination). Some interviews have been summarized for convenience and these are labelled as such in Appendix A. Any interviews

A. Lawson

translated from Tamil have been spot checked by a second Tamil speaker for accuracy.

3.2.6 Translators and field-guides

All interactions were conducted in person by myself with the exception of one (see A39, Appendix A). The majority of fieldwork carried out in urban centres such as Bangalore and Chennai was conducted by myself alone. However, for certain sections of fieldwork, where some guidance on navigation and local information was useful, and where the likelihood of needing to speak with people in Tamil was high, a field-guide/translator was also present. This was the case for most of the fieldwork conducted in south- central Tamil Nadu, away from urban centres (for details of field-guides/translators see Appendix C).

Though essential to my fieldwork the need for a translator inevitably inhibits the interview process by interrupting the flow of conversation and changing or limiting the amount of information conveyed between interviewer and respondent. However this has been acknowledged and, it is hoped, mitigated to some degree by the process of full translation and transcription of audio-recordings. Different translators had different styles of working, with some taking more of a dominant role in the interaction by asking their own questions and leading the conversation to some extent. This was more the case with T1 and T2 (Appendix C) who are both archaeologists in their own right and had an interest in and understanding of my subject. In some ways this was positive for me as both of these translators were able to gain a good rapport with respondents and ask questions that may not have occurred or felt appropriate to me. However, it also made it more difficult for me to maintain control of the interaction, sometimes leaving me slightly removed from the flow of the conversation and unaware of interesting comments that have only become known to me following the transcription process.

3.2.7 Supporting data – photographs, field notes and web data

In addition to qualitative interviewing, other sources of information and forms of data collection were also used:

3.2.7.1 Photography

Photographs were taken by myself at all stages of fieldwork. Photographs play an important role in the biographies of the objects by providing detail and information about the object's physical appearance, condition and environment. Because of the potential need for anonymity of respondents, emphasis was placed on photographs that avoided close-up's of respondent's faces, except when respondents agreed or requested to be photographed directly.

3.2.7.2 Field Notes

In addition to interview notes, descriptive and reflective field notes were also taken intermittently throughout fieldwork (Appendix B). These were often in support of interactions and recorded much of the contextual detail that is not present in the interviews, such as time, place, environment, participants and any other relevant information. At other times they include my own reflections about interactions, respondents, objects and places. Most commonly these notes were made by hand directly after an interaction or at the end of a day's fieldwork, and recorded in a small fieldwork notebook. These notebooks were later transcribed by myself (Appendix B).

3.2.7.3 Internet, literature and ephemera

Finally, the internet was used extensively during and after fieldwork, both to find and make contact with potential respondents, and to research around subjects in support of other data. Internet sources were particularly important

A. Lawson

in researching online trade activities and community networking between dealers, customers and collectors. In addition to internet-based research, more traditional desk based research using books and journals has supported data collected through ethnographic fieldwork.

3.2.8 Ethical considerations

Following university guidelines the consent of participants has been considered at every step of the process. Verbal consent was received from all respondents and participants and recorded as part on a digital audio-recorder when permitted. While many participants gave consent for their names and photographs to be included in my thesis, some requested anonymity. Anonymity has been provided through the allocation of numbers to all research participants, which are used in place of personal names whenever anonymity has been requested by the participant, or was thought to be appropriate by myself. In addition any specific details thought to compromise participants anonymity have been omitted from the data. Any information offered *off-record* by participants has been omitted from transcriptions and not directly referred to, though it has been taken into account in the data analysis process.

3.2.9 Appendices and cross referencing

This thesis is accompanied by three appendices containing elements of primary research data. Appendix A contains transcriptions of all interactions (or interviews) conducted. Appendix B contains all primary fieldnotes recorded and organized chronologically by fieldwork period and date. Appendix C contains a list of all research participants, including respondents (R), Interviewers (I), and Translators (T). Throughout this thesis data from the appendices is referenced using an alphanumeric system. Specific interactions from Appendix A are referenced with the letter A (e.g. A4). Fieldnote entries are referenced with the letter B followed by a date (e.g. B:14/04/15). Research

A. Lawson

participants are referenced with the letter R, I or T depending on the type of participant (e.g. R61).

3.2.10 Qualitative analysis methods

In the fieldwork undertaken for this thesis a total of 55:33:25 hours of interaction time has been recorded and transcribed (Appendix A), with 106 respondents (Appendix C) in locations throughout Tamil Nadu, Bangalore, Mumbai, Jodhpur and London. This is supported by fieldnotes (Appendix B), over 3000 photographs taken by myself in the field, and internet based research. This collected data has been analysed following a two-step process, and was carried out, for the most part, in handwritten form using large sheets of paper, as this suited my style of thinking and working (Figure 3.1).

In the first stage, data was analysed separately for each case study. The data was organised into a narrative format based on the concept of object biographies and routes (Figure 3.1). Data was subdivided into three broad categories, pertaining to history and source, dealers and trade routes, and destinations and customers. These categories were further organised into different people places and stages in the object routes (Figure 3.2). This information led to the production of route flowcharts (Figure 3.3) and narrative accounts (chaps. 4, 5, & 6), which, drawing on theoretical elements discussed in chap. 3.1.3, were examined comparatively for differences and similarities (chap. 7). This analysis also provided the groundwork for the second stage of analysis.

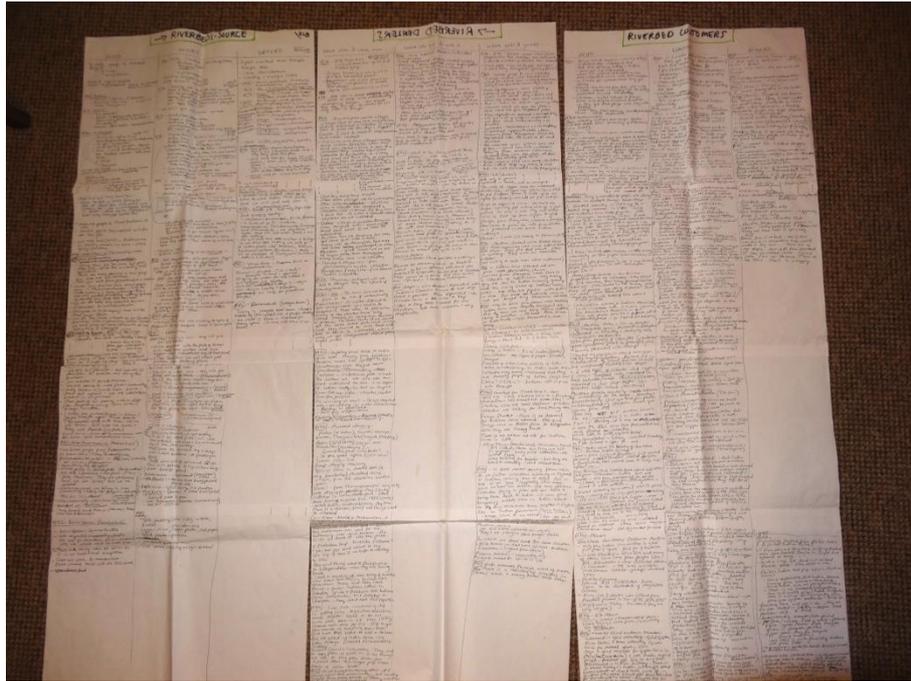


Figure 3.1 - Data relating to the riverbed antiquities case study has been summarised and subdivided into three broad groups: Source, Dealers, Destinations. The majority of analysis was carried out in handwritten form as this suited my style of thinking and working better.

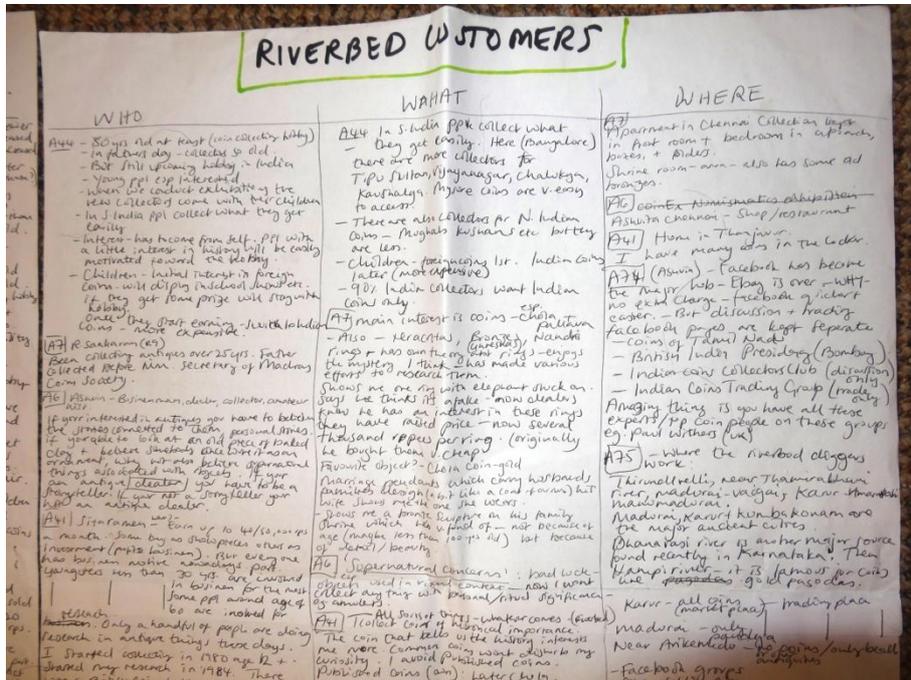


Figure 3.2 - Each broad stage of the biographical analysis has been further subdivided into information relating the objects, people, places, how the objects arrived at this point, what role they play in this context, and where they will go next.

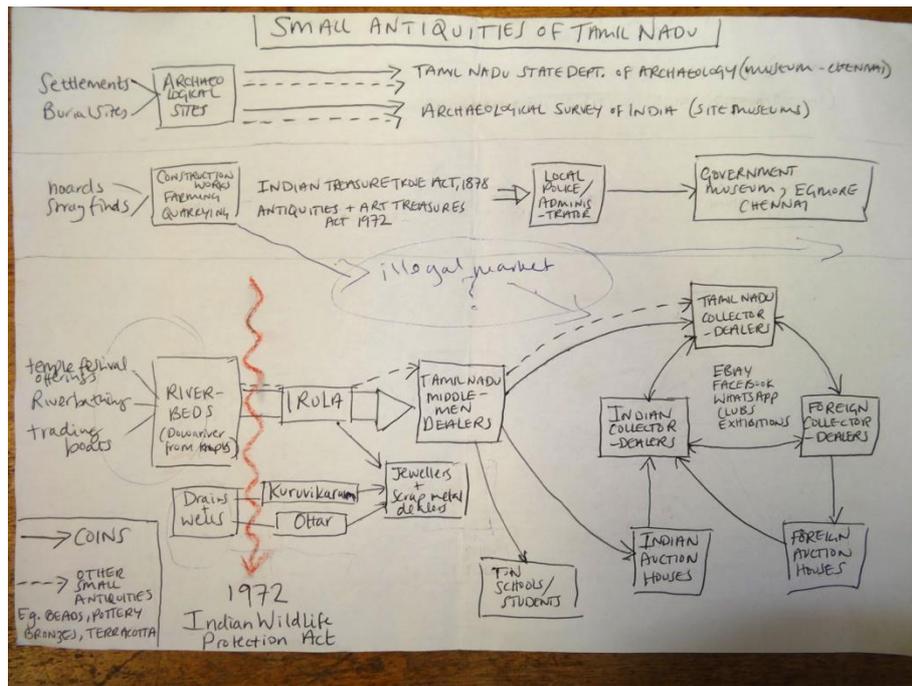


Figure 3.3 - An early draft of the riverbed routes antiquities flowchart (cross ref) which was produced in the first stage of data analysis.

In the second stage of analysis the entire body of collected data relating to both case studies was subjected to qualitative analysis for commonly occurring themes. My analysis methods drew on approaches from ‘thematic analysis’ (Braun & Clarke 2006), and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et. al. 2009). Thematic analysis is a generalized form of qualitative data analysis not wedded to any particular theoretical framework, which looks for repeating themes in data through a process of thematic coding, in which data is reviewed multiple times and repeating themes are designated with a code. IPA is similar, but is more specifically tailored to the generation ‘emergent themes’, rather than the testing of set of pre-defined themes, and relies on the generation of lists and clusters of theme headings rather than codes (Rapely 2011, 274-5). In this respect the analysis method adopted in this thesis corresponds closely with IPA. However both of the above methods employ repeatedly reviewing data and refining themes in order to arrive at a set of broad over-arching themes comprised of more specific sub-themes.

A. Lawson

Transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs, flowcharts, narrative biographies, and internet sources were reviewed multiple times to identify *emergent themes*. My intention was to draw out themes latent in the data, however this does not mean that the identification of themes was not limited by my particular aims, objectives and biases as a researcher. Both the research aims and objectives (chap. 1.1.2) and theoretical framework (chap. 3.1) have instrumental in guiding analysis. The analysis process has been organic and dynamic, employing a variety of methods such as highlighting and annotating (Figure 3.4), brainstorming (Figure 3.5), list making (Figure 3.6), and 'theme cards' (Figure 3.7) to generate and refine the themes discussed in Chapter 8.

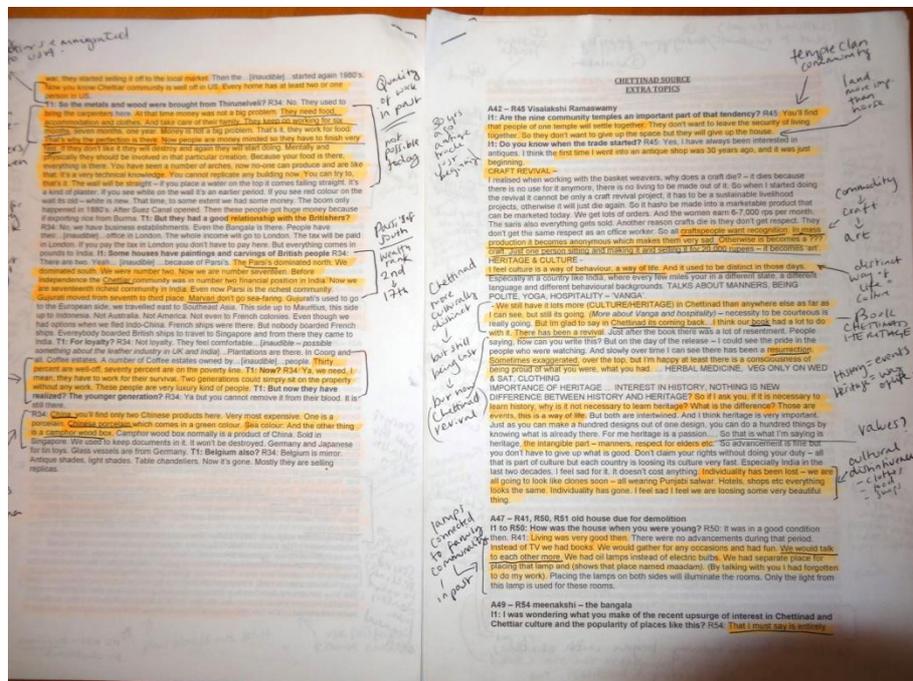


Figure 3.4 - Notes relating to the Chettinad case study made in stage one of the analysis were reviewed, highlighted and annotated to draw out points of significance

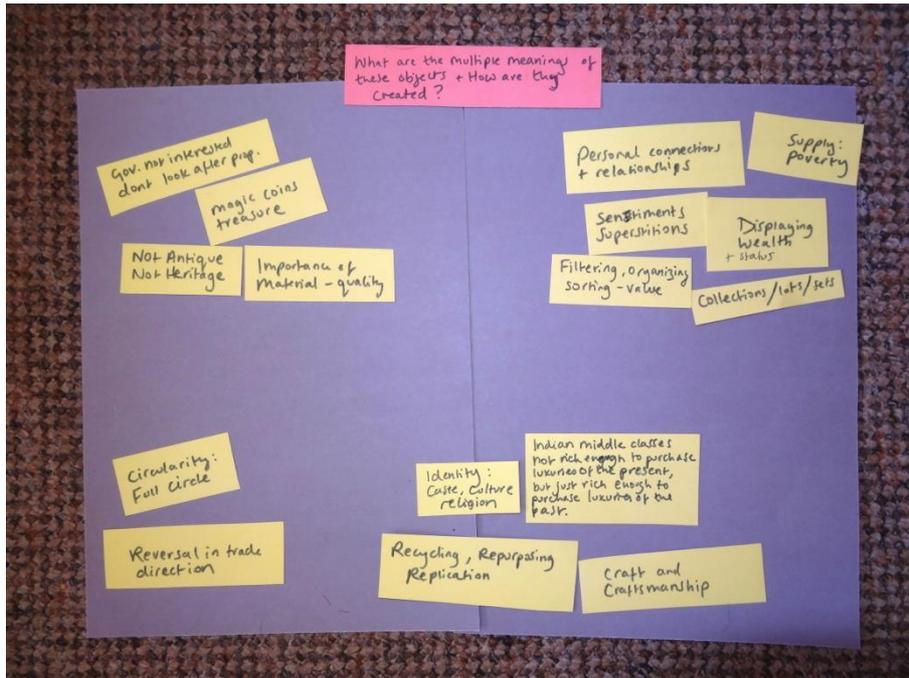


Figure 3.7 - One of the final stages in analysis used home made 'theme cards'. This was a useful tool for organising sub-themes into groups in order to arrive at overarching themes

Furthermore, the broad themes discussed in Chapter 8 are by no means exhaustive of the outcomes generated in the analysis process, but rather reflect those aspects considered most relevant in terms of the aims of this thesis.

4 CASE STUDY 1: Chettinad Antiques – setting and materials

4.1 Introduction

Anyone who spends a little time in the antique shops of Chennai, Bangalore or indeed any of the other major urban centres of India will sooner or later come across Chettinad antiques. Large, elaborately carved doors and pillars of Burmese teak are perhaps the most striking example of this type of artefact, but there are many more modest items to be found. Glossy colourful wall tiles, Italian chandeliers, heavy brass oil lamps, Bristol-made stone jars, glittering mirrors of Belgian glass, carved wooden dolls, stone grinders and wooden salt boxes. However, while this material, sourced from a small corner of south-central Tamil Nadu (along with the many replicas and copies) and associated with a particular community called the Nagarathar Chettiars, has been spreading far across India and the world since the 1960's, the idea of 'Chettinad' as a distinct material culture and a source of 'heritage' is developing at a slower pace.

The trade in antiques sourced from Chettinad houses and mansions is now approximately fifty years old. However in the last fifteen to twenty-five years it has significantly expanded. Moreover, the last five to ten years has seen a significant decline in the profitability of this business for some of those in the middle, partly due to a lack in available material from the source that has gone hand-in-hand with an increase in the manufacture of replica antiques and 'antique effect' items.

This chapter forms the first of two parts of a single case study. Here the setting and historical context of the case study is set –out and the objects are described. In the next chapter (chap. 5) the objects are followed along the routes that then take within the present day antique market in Chettinad antiques. Both of these chapters are predominantly descriptive, leaving the

A. Lawson

analysis and discussion of the data to Chapters 7 and 8. The information presented here is drawn from, but not exhaustive of, data collected for the first of two case studies (the data collected for the second of these case studies is related in Chapter 6). It is a synthesis of recorded interactions and field-notes, personal reflections and observations, photographs, and web based research. The data is presented in a narrative form, beginning with a description of the objects and their historical context, and then charting the routes that Chettinad antiques take from their source in Tamil Nadu to various destinations throughout India and the world.

The narrative related here is both enabled and restricted by the type and quality of data that was collected. Therefore certain sections are very rich in detail, such as the antique dealers in Karaikudi and Pondicherry, where locations, objects and research participants were relatively accessible. Other sections however, such as the customer end of the international market in Chettinad antiques, are lacking in data and therefore beyond the scope of this chapter.

4.1.1 Selection of case study

This case study was selected following an initial fieldwork survey of the antique and antiquities market in and from Tamil Nadu, which was conducted between March 26th and April 25th 2013 (Appendix B). During this survey particular types of object, mainly carved wooden doors and pillars, were traced from antique shops in Bangalore and Chennai, to Pondicherry and Auroville, to Karaikudi, and finally to their source in the houses of the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu. There are several interesting aspects of this particular type of object and trade that led to its selection as a case-study.

Firstly, it involves objects belonging to a relatively recent past. Most of the Chettinad houses and their contents that are supplying the antique market date to the late colonial period, an era that falls either side of the 100 year marker which defines objects as antiquities under the 1972 Arts and

A. Lawson

Antiquities Act. Unlike the coins, beads and terracotta's being dug from riverbeds, that make up the second case study in this thesis (chap. 6), the Chettinad artefacts are associated with a past still within living memory for many, and indeed, still a form of 'living culture' in those Chettinad houses that remain occupied. I have therefore designated them as antiques as opposed to antiquities. This is a loose subjective distinction, which is often made for objects that are old but not so old as to seem remote, and it is something I wish to explore.

Secondly, it includes a range of objects some of which are quite large and which formerly were components of a built structure. Thus this particular trade overlaps themes relating to both built and movable heritage.

Thirdly, while some of these objects are valued for their artistic beauty, others are clearly mass produced, utilitarian in their design, and many are of foreign manufacture. Given the bias in Indian approaches to heritage management towards items deemed to be 'Indian Art' explored in Chapter 2.2, it is interesting to examine to what extent objects like these are included within the sphere of Indian heritage.

4.1.2 Sources

Unless otherwise referenced, all the information in this chapter is based on primary data collected over several fieldwork periods between 2013 and 2015 (see Appendix B). This data has been recorded as interviews (Appendix A), fieldnote diary entries (Appendix B), and photographs. Unless otherwise stated all photographs in this chapter were taken by myself.

Each 'Route' section in this chapter is provided with a table listing those Interactions and Respondents most relevant to the section (Table 5-1; Table 5-2; Table 5-3). However the narrative draws on a broader range of Interactions than these, as well as other relevant data.

A. Lawson

Existing literature on the Nagarathar Chettiars predominantly deals with either their socio-economic history (Perumal 1937; Rudner 1995; Seigelman 1962; Chandrashekhar 1980), or their oral history and folklore, of which there are currently no English translations (Ramanathan Chettiar & Ramanathan Chettiar 1953; Sarma 1970; Essarem 1995; Annamalai 1988; Meyyappan et al. 1997).

Information relating directly to Chettinad material culture and the trade in Chettinad antiques is relatively scarce. The topic is mentioned in several publications that cover Chettinad culture and heritage more generally. Perhaps the most comprehensive of these is *The Chettiar Heritage* (Muthiah et al. 2000). The authors are all themselves of the Nagarathar Chettiar community, and the book is very much a homage to what is seen as a culture under threat. With its high proportion of large glossy photo's it is something of a 'coffee table' read, however the information content, covering the history, mythology, traditions, architecture, material culture and food and crafts of the Chettiars, is significant. Indeed, Visalakshi Ramaswamy, co-author of *The Chettiar Heritage*, is an acknowledged authority on all things relating to Chettinad culture and heritage, as well as founder and manager of the M.Rm.Rm. [family initials] Cultural Foundation, a charitable organisation for the preservation of Chettinad heritage. While this book is useful for offering an overview of Chettiar culture (particularly the material culture) and is exceptional in its aim to do so, information specifically related to the antique market is minimal here.

S. Muthu's 'Art and Architectural features of Chettinadu Houses – A Study' (2009) also makes mention of the market in Chettinad antiques, albeit very briefly. This paper is mainly useful for its description of Chettinad house architecture and floor plan. Nishimura (1998) also refers to the architecture and layout of Nagarathar Chettiar houses, but this is primarily in relation to issues of gender roles and customs. A paper by Hardgrove (2002) makes a comparative study of the houses of the Nagarathar Chettiars, and those the Mawari's of Rajasthan, and looks particularly as their present role as tourist

A. Lawson

destinations, however she does not explore the demolition of Chettiar houses and associated antique market.

4.2 Background: Chettiars, Chettinad and the market in Chettinad antiques

4.2.1 Nagarathar Chettiar community

The term Chetti or Chettiar is a broad caste term, meaning merchant or trader. Those Chettis who settled in the area now surrounding Karaikudi, situated in southern Tamil Nadu (Map 4-1), and established themselves as highly successful traders and bankers during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, call themselves the Nagarathars, meaning people of the 'nagarams' or urban settlements, and are sometimes referred to as Nattukottai Chettiars, which translates as 'Chettiars who live in country forts' (Muthu 2009, 475). The abbreviation of 'Chettiar' is more commonly used in speech and, unless otherwise stated, the use of the term Chettiar in this chapter refers specifically to the Nagarathar Chettiars.

Their origins are shrouded in a mythology that still plays a significant role in their cultural identity and community practices. The story involves the community's migration south from a land called Naganadu (land of the Naga's) and their arrival in the port of Kaveripoompattinam in the second century BC. They have been associated with the 'Danavaisyas' of the Tamil epic *Silappathikaram*, who worked as ship chandlers, salt merchants, and gem and pearl dealers, and who established themselves in positions of high status with the Chola Kings of the period (Muthaiya et al. 2000, vii). However, as the story goes, in the thirteenth century a Chola King abducted a girl of the Chettiar community, causing the Chettiars to revolt and ultimately to migrate once again, this time to settle in the kingdom of the Pandyas further to the south. There are in fact over twenty Chetti communities throughout Tamil Nadu, and many of them identify with the story of a girl from their community

A. Lawson

being abducted by a Chola King, but the Chettis who later came to call themselves Nagarathar are those who established the town of Ilayathangudi (Map 4-1: no. 7) around 30km north west of Karaikudi. Another story tells of a devastating flood or tsunami that frightened the Nagarathar Chettiars into leaving their coastal home and relocating inland. The decision to settle in the area around Karaikudi is said to be based on its arid landscape and climate, where no risk of flood could ever threaten the community again (A40; A56; A58; Muthaiah et al. 2000).

Whatever their distant origins, the caste name does not appear in historical records until the seventeenth century, as small-scale itinerant salt traders (Rudner 1994, 3). According to Ramanathan Chettiar (1953) in his compilation of Nagarathar oral histories, by the early nineteenth century the caste was chiefly involved in the trading of grain, salt, cotton and pearls, with their commercial activities extending out beyond Tamil Nadu to what was then Ceylon and Bengal (Rudner 1994, 57). It was also at this time that the Nagarathars, under the British Imperial expansion through South and Southeast Asia, began to extend their activities from commodity trade into the world of banking and moneylending, where they flourished for the next century. In this time the Nagarathars became one of the main sources of finances for agrarian expansion in the British territories of Madras, Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, and they acted as intermediaries for business transactions between the British and local populations. They had good relations with the British and adopted many of their styles and customs as is evident from portraits of the time (Figure - 4.1). Through their moneylending activities they were able to acquire land and other assets in these countries.

“In 1939 about 41 per cent of the paddy fields in lower Burma and 68 per cent in Upper Burma were held by non-agriculturalists, the majority of whom comprised the money-lending Chettiyars” (Moraes 1945, 6).

The Gazetteer of South India commissioned by Lord Mayo, the General Governor of India in 1869, has this to say of the caste sub-group:

'The Chettis [of Madura District] number 81,000. The most interesting and distinctive subdivision of this community are the Nattukottai Chettis, whose head quarters are in the Tirupattur and Tiruvadani tahsils. They trade as far as Burma, the Straits Settlements, and Colombo, are shrewd men of business, hold much of the wealth of the District, and are noted for their gifts to temples and public charities.'
(Francis et al. 2002, 219).



Figure - 4.1 Colonial-era portraits of Chettiars in European attire and settings, reflecting the communities close ties with the colonial British authorities at the time.

While their success in these activities took them far from Tamil Nadu, to various parts of the then British Empire, most chose not to relocate permanently, but to maintain a luxurious lifestyle for themselves and their families back home, as well as investing huge amounts of money toward industry and philanthropy in that region.

The dramatic rise in fortunes of the Nagarathars was followed in the mid-twentieth century by an equally dramatic collapse, which eventually led to the present day antique market in Chettiar houses and household items. The

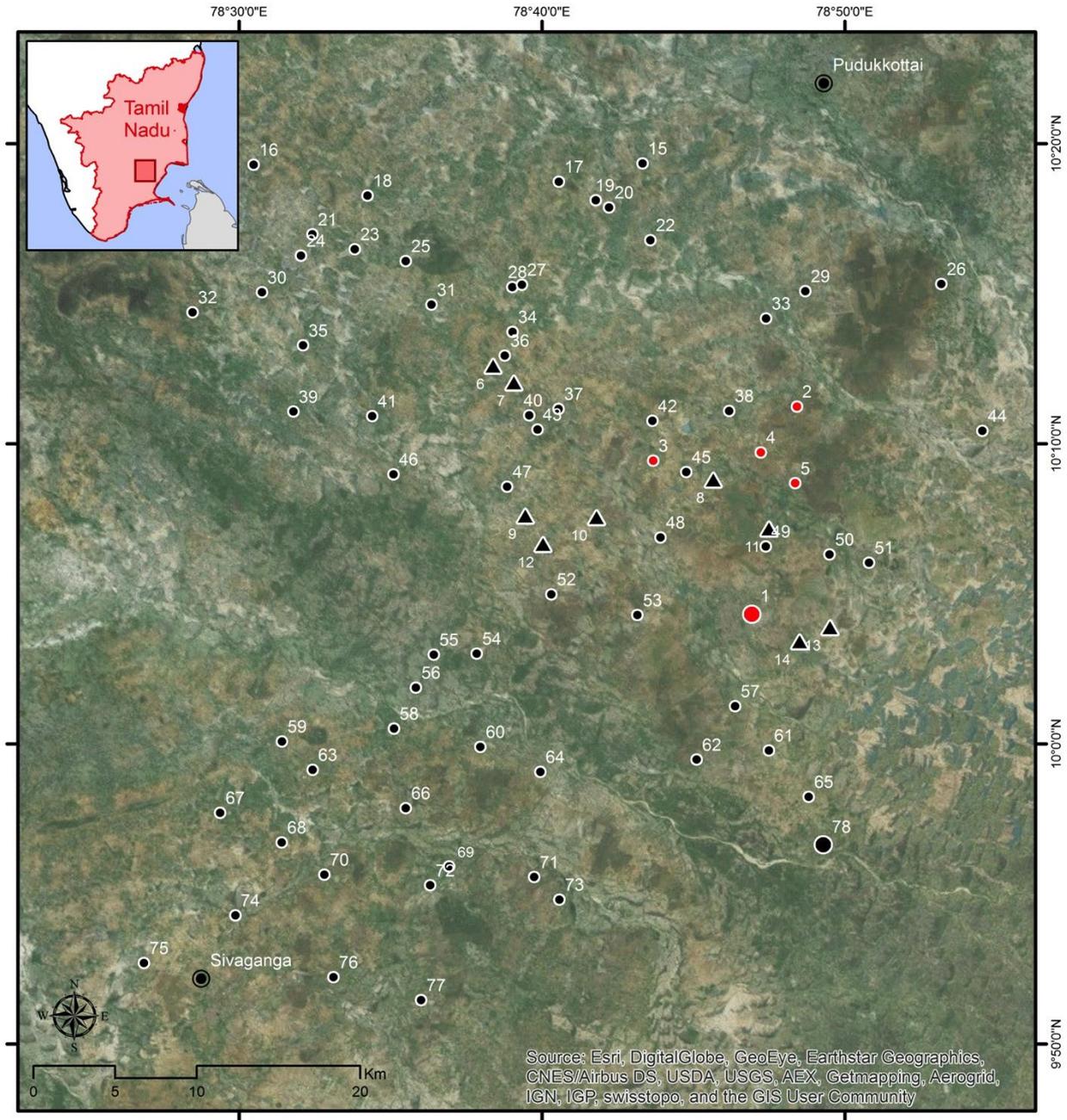
changing economic and political conditions of post-independence South and Southeast Asia proved inhospitable to the Nagarathars business activities. This affected those Chettiars living and working in Burma more so than those situated in other parts of South and Southeast Asia (Moraes 1945, 6). The majority of Chettiars with overseas assets (some 80-90%) lost their fortunes to nationalist movements in Burma, Ceylon and their other business outposts, and were forced to search for new employment opportunities elsewhere (Rudner 1994, 3). The Chettinad region itself offers limited work opportunities, and therefore, since their economic decline the Nagarathar Chettiar community have spread out around India and the globe. Many now live and work in Europe and America while others have relocated to Chennai and other Indian cities.

4.2.2 Chettinad region

The region of Tamil Nadu that has become known as Chettinad (or Chettinadu, meaning 'land of the Chetties) consisted in its heyday, from approximately 1870 to 1930, of 96 villages in a 600 square mile area between Pudukkottai in the north and Sivaganga in the south (Muthiah et al. 2000, viii). The number of villages has since shrunk to under 80 recognised villages (Map 4-1; Table 4-1). The area has become known as Chettinad on account of the community of Nagarathar Chettiars living in this region, and their historic association with the area. However, the number of Chettiar caste members per village is a minority figure, with multiple other castes and communities making up the majority of the local population. The main town of the Chettinad region is Karaikudi, and it is to this town that the antique articles from the surrounding area are gathered before being sold onto the wider antique market.

A. Lawson

Map 4-1 - Chettinad region, showing all remaining Chettinad villages, including those where the nine Chettiar clan temples are situated, after (Muthiah et. al. 2000: xi). Karaikudi (No.1 on map) is the principal town of Chettinad. See table for full list of town/village names (Table 4-1)



- ▲ Clan temples
- Chettinad towns
- ⊙ District headquarters
- Chettinad towns with interactions recorded

A. Lawson

Table 4-1 - List of Chettinad towns and villages marked on map (Map 4-1), after (Muthiah et. al. 2000: x).

1. Karaikudi	21. Ponnamaravathi	42. Konapattu	63. Madagupatti
2. Kothamangalam	22. Kulipirai	43. Viralmathi	64. Kallal
3. Athangudi	23. Vegupatti	44. Thenipatti	65. Thanichavoorani
4. Kanadukathan	24. Valayapatti	45. Chokalingamputhur	61. Shanmuganathapuram
5. Pallathur	25. Pulankurichi	46. Kandavarayanpatti	62. Kulluppatti
6. Iraniyur	26. Arimalam	47. Sirukoodalpatti	63. Madagupatti
7. Ilyathangudi	27. Rangiemp	48. Uyikondan Siruvayal	64. Kallal
8. Soorakudi	28. Mithilapatti	49. Kottaiyur	65. Thanichavoorani
9. Vairavan	29. Rayavaram	50. Kandanur	66. Paganeri
10. Nemam	30. Vendanpatti	51. Puduval	67. Kilapungudi
11. Velangudi	31. Sevr	52. Nachiapuram	68. Okkur
12. Pillayarapatti	32. Melasivapuri	53. Managiri	69. Panangudi
13. Mathur	33. Kadiapatti	54. Kandaramanikam	70. Kalaiyarmangalam
14. Illupakkudi	34. Kurivikkondanpatti	55. Pattamangalam	71. Aranmanaisiruvayal
15. Nanchandupatti	35. Nerkuppai	56. Kurungulam	72. Natarajapuram
16. Ulagampatti	36. Avinipatti	57. Amaravathi	73. Vetriyur
17. Panayapatti	37. Pillamangalam	58. Chokkanathapuram	74. Cholapuram
18. Koppanapatti	38. Nemathanpatti	59. Alavakottai	75. Sakkanthi
19. Virachilai	39. Athikadu Thekkur	60. Sembanur	76. Nattarasankottai
20. Virachilai	40. Kilasevalpatti	61. Shanmuganathapuram	77. Alagapuri
Lakshmapuram	41. Mahibalanpatti	62. Kulluppatti	78. Devakottai



Figure 4.2 – This dry flat scrubland on the outskirts of Karaikudi is typical landscape of the Chettinad region.

The environment of this region is semi-arid and prone to drought (Figure 4.2). Agriculture does not thrive here. However, the source of the wealth displayed so lavishly in the homes of the Chettiars is not agriculture but trading and banking.

The numerous grand houses built by wealthy Chettiars at the height of their success in the 19th and early 20th centuries are one of the most noticeable distinguishing features of the Chettinad region. The village of Kanadukathan has perhaps the greatest concentration of these mansions or *Nattukottai*'s (country forts), including the home of the Raja of Chettinad (a posthumous title bestowed by the British to a favoured Nagarathar Chettiar in the early 20th century) (Figure 4.3). They are noteworthy, not only for their size and architectural design, but also their present condition. Many now stand in a state of semi-decay, while many more have already been demolished, and the contents and valuable parts fed to a hungry antique market that has grown up around this area (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.3 - Raja of Chettinad's palace in Kanadukathan reflects the scale and style typical of the numerous grand mansions built by the Chettiars in the region of Chettinad



Figure 4.4 - This partially demolished Chettiar mansion in Karaikudi is relective of a general trend in Chettinad for the demolition of houses, the materials and contents of which are sold to antique dealers and carpenters.

4.2.3 Chettinad and the antique market

The trade in Chettinad antiques began in the 1960s and has gradually increased over the following decades. The earliest period of this market seems to have been a direct result of the economic crisis among the Nagarathar Chettiar community, with many choosing to cash-in on the wealth stored in their lavish properties (chap. 4.2.1). Initially this took the form of the selling off smaller portable items such as ornaments, furniture, accessories and other household items. Later came the complete demolition of houses wherein the agreement would include sale of the valuable and salvageable materials such as wood, tiles and light fittings.

The reasons for the widespread demolition of Chettiar houses are multiple. Firstly, since the loss of their banking businesses, many members of the community have either been forced, or chosen, to live and work away from the Chettinad region (chap. 4.2.1). Traditional Chettiar mansions are large

A. Lawson

and expensive to maintain, and many that have been left unoccupied for long periods have fallen into disrepair. Secondly, younger generations in some cases are opting for a more modern style of home, designed for smaller nuclear families. Chettiar houses built in the late 19th and early 20th century were designed to be occupied by extended joint-families, and this is no longer an arrangement that suits many Chettiars. Thirdly the traditional Chettiar family homes, were not only occupied on a joint-family basis, but also owned and inherited as such, with all the sons of the family typically owning an equal share of the property. At the time that these houses were built the arrangement made sense, as the different branches of the family not only lived together, but also worked together, each sharing in the fortune of the family business. However with the loss of these businesses and the fragmentation of joint families, economic disparities and disputes between brothers has sometimes contributed to the decision to demolish the family property and distribute of the profits.

At a similar time to the increased demolitions in Chettinad, and partly in response to them, an eager consumer market for Indian antique wood, furniture, ornaments and household items, was opening-up amongst the foreign residents of India, particularly in the area around Pondicherry and Auroville, around 150km south of Chennai on the Tamil coast. While the trade seems to have been initially export oriented, with Europe providing the main market, in the last ten to fifteen years this seems to have changed. Currently the exporting of antique items from Chettinad houses is minimal, with the exception of the trade from Rajasthan (chap. 5.3.4.1), in comparison to the growing demand from within India itself, particularly the urban centres of south India such as Bangalore. However the export of antique items from Chettinad does still continue (chap. 5.3.4).

4.2.4 Chettinad Heritage

Due to the distinctive architectural character and grandeur of the Chettiar mansions, combined with the fact of their on-going destruction, Chettinad has

A. Lawson

become a focus of attention for several heritage organisations and advocates. ArcHe-s (Architectural Heritage Safeguard) is an NGO founded in 2004 by two French architects, Michel Adment and Bernard Dragon (R60, A55). They are based in the Chettinad village of Kothamangalam where they also run a heritage hotel called Saratha Villas in a renovated Chettiar house. The objectives of ArcHe-S include the identification of threatened sites of architectural significance in the Chettinad region and developing strategies for promoting the conservation and protection of these sites (web: ArcHe-S: a). In addition, ArcHe-S has campaigned for greater recognition of the significance of the cultural heritage of Chettinad, with a particular emphasis on its built architectural heritage. In 2007 they launched the Revive Chettinad Heritage Campaign which has received support and funding from UNESCO, INTACH and the Government of Tamil Nadu (web: ArcHe-S: b). However, despite these efforts in the direction of an active heritage management of Chettinad, Bernard Dragon of ArcHe-S feels that little progress has been made and blames institutional corruption for this lack of progress. '*Five crores [50 million rupees] of funding has just disappeared. Nothing has happened*' (R60, A55). Similarly, efforts to have the Chettinad region awarded UNESCO World Heritage status have been unsuccessful, though in 2014 it was added to Tentative List of Cultural World Heritage Sites (web: UNESCO: b). The UNESCO bid for Chettinad asserts that:

Chettinad possesses some outstanding physical characteristics of urban and rural planning which create a unique architectural ensemble with thousands of palatial houses. This ensemble reflects the way the Hindu Tamil community of Chettiars lived. As the result of their travels, they have integrated multiple influences into the Tamil traditions. This blend represents the uniqueness of Chettinad (web: UNESCO).

Dragon also expresses frustration that ArcHe-S have not been able to gain the full co-operation of certain influential and wealthy Chettiars, some of whom are also active in the heritage of Chettinad. He feels they are possessive of Chettinad and resistant to the idea of any regulation of the planning and built heritage of the region (R60, A55). Certainly some within the

A. Lawson

Chettiar community have expressed the opinion that Chettinad does not really qualify as World Heritage. One prominent historian from the Nagarathar Chettiar community argues:

‘Dragon is trying to sell Chettinad as World Heritage – whatever his reasons are for that is a different issue. But we are nowhere near a World Heritage destination. It’s laughable. What is the heritage in our buildings? We made a little money. We spent that money putting up some buildings and now we are pulling down the buildings because we have run out of money. Tell me one thing that makes it heritage?’ (R73, A68).

The Nagarathar Chettiars have produced advocates of Chettinad heritage too (e.g. R45, R54, R73, R74), a process which can be seen to have begun with the publication of *The Chettiar Heritage* (Muthiah et al. 2000). One of the co-authors of this book, Mrs Visalakshi Ramaswamy (R45), also founded the M.Rm.Rm. *[family initials]* Cultural Foundation in 2000 with a view to document and research the architecture, crafts, and culture of the Chettinad region. She says it was the concern that the Chettinad culture was in the process of disappearing that prompted her to start the foundation.

‘When I would go on trips sometimes the third or fourth time I saw a house it had disappeared, or something had been broken or removed. So if in four years it can disappear to this extent, what will happen in the future?’ (R45, A42)

However, rather than focus on the built heritage of Chettinad the M. Rm. Rm. foundation has worked to develop several projects designed to revive particular craft traditions, such as *kottan* basket weaving and Athangudi tile production, and to support local craft communities.

There are members of the Chettinad community who have chosen to invest in the idea of conservation and ‘Chettinad heritage’, partly for the sake of their own history and heritage, but also to capture a newly developing tourist

industry. Several of the largest and grandest Chettinad mansions in Kanadukathan and Karaikudi have been converted into luxury heritage hotels and home-stays, such as The Bangala and the Chettinadu Mansion (A49, A50, A55, A58, also chap. 5.4.2.1). Muthiah Chettiar, the Raja of Chettinad, has opened-up his palace to the public for viewing, while his brother's house next-door has one floor converted to a museum of Chettinad material culture. To some extent Chettinad tourism has been boosted by the antique market in the area, with urban South Indians making stopover trips to Karaikudi to shop in the local antique market and perhaps visit the historic houses while they are there (for example see Tamilarasan 2013). However, Visalakshi Ramaswamy feels that this has not, on the whole, been a positive contribution:

'It's getting people in, but they are breaking Chettinad into small bits and taking it all away. Without contributing anything to Chettinad they are taking everything away from there. I get annoyed when I see these dealers and the way they buy things. So you feel sad. I feel sad. I don't think it's a wonderful thing at all' (R45, A42).

4.3 The Objects

The material sourced in Chettinad for the antique market can be anything from around 200 years old to very recent indeed, with some of the brass lamps for example, being little more than ten or twenty years old. In fact, it is very difficult to find out the exact age of these items, as in many cases antique dealers themselves do not know or do not admit to know. They may know the approximate age of the house it was taken from, but no more than that. These houses that were built by Nagarathar Chettiars at the height of their success tend to date from as early as the middle of the 19th century and as late as the middle of the 20th century. In this event it is difficult to say whether or not the 1972 Indian Antiquities and Art Treasures Act covers the bulk of the Chettinad antique material on the market, since this Act specifies that objects must be older than one hundred years to qualify as an 'antiquity' in the legal sense.

A. Lawson

The proliferation of recycled, repurposed and replica material has only made this situation murkier.

While the market in antique items from Chettinad houses includes a wide variety of objects, the most recognizable types can be divided into two categories: structural material (chap. 4.3.1) and dowry items, or *Sree Daman*, (chap. 4.3.2). In the case of structural material, a further sub-category includes articles that have been made from recycled wood either as replicas of traditional architectural pieces or entirely new designs.

4.3.1 Structural material

Wood was a central feature of Chettinad house construction, a fact now well known by those in the local antique market: '*old buildings are famous for old and strong wood items*' (R30, A25). Much of this wood was sourced from overseas in the lands that Chettiars travelled to for trade and business. Satinwood from Sri Lanka, and Teak from Burma are perhaps the most often mentioned. The wood was fashioned into architectural pieces for the Chettiars homes by local craftsmen. Local opinion is that these carpenters were master craftsmen (*asari*) who came to Chettinad from Thirunellveli, further south (A31, A38, A48). However, no connection could be found between Tirunelveli and the carpenters currently working in Chettinad (A51, A52). Freestanding furniture was not common in traditional Chettiar homes until the later influence of Europeans, so instead all the artistic expression went into the structure of the building itself. The work the carpenters created for Chettiar homes was exceptionally detailed and intricate and favoured designs taken from Hindu mythology and nature (Figure 4.5).

Chettiar homes were often built over many years, and craftsmen would be paid with food and board for as long as the work took to complete. Certainly in the larger homes, it seems that the craftsmen were given free reign to take as long as they needed to achieve the grandeur and artistry that we see today, with the main door alone taking up to three years to complete (see Muthiah et.

al. 2000, 104). According to Karthic Vaidyanathan (R43, A40), a designer from the Nagarather Chettiar community who has spent some time researching his ancestors homes, Chettiar houses were primarily a display of wealth.

‘There was really no logic to the Chettinad design, some were floral, some rounded. They just said to the carpenter, “you know what you did in that house before, I want it ten times grander”. I started writing a book, didn’t have money to finish, I interviewed several people. A lot of the ancestors said “we really didn’t think about it (style/design) it was just a status symbol, like a car. That’s why the front doors and gates we so very grand - all about show’ (R43, A40).

Perhaps the most characteristic, and immediately recognisable feature of the Chettiar house is the main front door (Figure 4.6). This is not the entrance leading onto the street; there you find a wall with an arched gate. Rather it is the door that takes you from the first open fronted *thinnai* (raised platform for seating) into the first main interior *valavu* (courtyard). The door is much larger than necessary and closely resembles the design of the Hindu temple doors of Tamil Nadu. Much of the carving too is a reflection of stone carving found in temples from 15th and 16th centuries (Muthiah et al. 2000, 106). This carving dominates not on the door itself but on the deep surrounding frame. The centrepiece is the panel above the door, the *Surya Pallakai* (literally meaning ‘sun board/plank’). It is a symbol of welcome and in Chettiar homes is usually carved with a depiction of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and good fortune.



Figure 4.5 - Intricate carvings depicting a Yalli (mythical beast) surrounded by vines, on a door bracket in a Chettiar house



Figure 4.6 - Carved main of VRMV house. The large front doors of Chettiar houses are based on the Hindu temple doors of Tamil Nadu, with deep frames and detailed decorative work.

These doors and their carved surrounds are some of the most valuable parts of the Chettiar house on the antique market. Doors and their surrounds are sometimes sold as entire pieces, but parts, such as the *Surya Pallakai*, or the side brackets, are often sold as separate, ornamental pieces. In Chettiar homes today all, or parts, of the door painted over in silver and gold paint (Figure 4.7). It's not clear whether paint of some sort was used in the past or whether this is a modern feature. In either case such a modification is not desired on the antique market and any parts that are sold as antiques will have this paint removed if possible. Just as not all Chettiars were equally wealthy, so too, not all Chettiar houses are equally grand and it is possible to find a range of size and quality on the antique market. In addition, the interior room doors tend to be much smaller and plainer, but these too will be sold as antiques.



Figure 4.7 – The carved panel at the top of the door is called a *Surya Pallakai* and is a distinctive and common characteristic of traditional Tamil homes. It often features Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune. This one has been painted over with gold and silver by the Chettiar occupants, an addition that is not desired in the antique market.

The other main wooden architectural features of the Chettinad houses are the pillars. Each interior *thinnai* is lined on all four sides by rows of pillars, with one or two rows lining the first *thinnai*. These are often made of wood, but sometimes granite or marble. The wooden pillars are carved into the smooth, tapered shape of a palm tree trunk, a design that can be seen elsewhere in traditional South Indian homes. At the top and bottom of the pillars are usually decoratively carved pedestals and capitals (Figure 4.8). As with the doors the pillars are often sold as entire pieces, but pedestals and capitals may be sold separately or repurposed as parts of furniture or lamp stands for example. These too will have any colourful paint applied by the Chettiars removed before they are sold as antiques.



Figure 4.8 - A row of pillars lines the edge of each thinnai in a traditional Chettiar house. These pillars are made of wood and carved into the tapered shape of a palm trunk, and topped with highly decorative capitals.

Whether this style of building and architecture is entirely unique to Chettinad is debatable. Karthic Vaidyanathan thinks not. *'When it all comes together it is. But if you take any individual pillar and you see it on the market, that pillar could have been made anywhere in South India'* (R43, A40). It is certainly true that many of the elements found in Chettinad homes are common across Tamil Nadu. Travelling through the countryside and towns of the broader region one can see many houses built to a similar design of the older, more traditional Chettiar houses, with pillared *thinnai*'s and a carved door with a *Surya Palakai*. But what marks out Chettinad houses are their scale, opulence, and intricacy of carving.

Chettinad has become something of a byword, or a recognisable label, for carved doors and pillars and dealers will sometimes use the name for items that were sourced elsewhere. Dealers in Auroville and Pondicherry spoke of a

A. Lawson

number of places from which they source structural material from demolished houses: Mayavaram, Kumbakonam, Seerkazhi, Chidambaram, among others (R28, A23). However, carving styles will vary according to the religious and community affiliations of the house owners. Muslim houses for example will have a main door with a surround and panel, but the carving will be simpler and focused on vines and floral motifs. In Nagoor for example, *'pillars will be small about only 5ft and they don't have any figures on them. In Islam we don't have any figure so there will be no figures on the pillars or doors'* (R27, A22).

In addition to the features such as doors and pillars there is a great deal of structural wood, some of which will have a degree of decorative carving, such as ceiling panels and other parts which are plain. Much of this wood will still end up on the antique, handicraft or furniture market, but in a different form. This is the market in recycling, replicating and repurposing. The wood from old houses such as these has a value of its own, since it is often of a higher quality than modern woods of a similar price. Most of the cheaper modern wood furniture in India is made with cheaper varieties of wood (termed 'country wood' carpenters and antique dealers), that has been cut young (15 years or less. This makes it both softer and less long lasting than antique wood taken from Chettiar houses, which tends to be imported high quality wood such as teak, cut from trees of 50 years or more.

Some of this wood ends up being fashioned into modern designs, some used to replicate traditional designs at a lower cost, some is worked together with wood from other sources to make a 'masala' or 'kidjiri' item (meaning a mix or 'hotch-potch'), and some is repurposed (i.e. a door used as a full length mirror frame or converted into a coffee table) (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 – Antique shop warehouse (or *godown*) in Pondicherry, containing antique pillars and a Chettiar main door which has been ‘re-purposed’ as a full length mirror

4.3.2 Sree Danam

Sree Danam, meaning ‘woman’s wealth’, is the traditional Chettiar dowry, except that it is gifted to the bride by her parental family upon her marriage rather than to her prospective husband’s parents. ‘*In those days when a woman got married she had to take to her husband’s home everything she may need for the rest of her life – could be pots, cupboards, vessels, teaspoons, even brooms*’ (R45, A42). In the Nagarathar Chettiar community property is traditionally inherited through the male line, while women (though only those that marry) receive *Sree Danam*. In this way it is perhaps closer to a married daughter’s inheritance, since the wealth belongs to her alone. ‘*We give to the girl. That is her share of the wealth. The word dowry is misunderstood. What we give to the girl is her share. She can do anything with it, it cannot be called dowry*’ (R55, A58).

A. Lawson

Some of the most common items now sold through the antique market from Chettinad are kitchen vessels. Many of these are brand new in the sense that they have never been used. Gifted as a part of a large *Sree Danam*, they have simply been kept in storage until they were sold back onto the market. *'So all these things were stored in rooms. Mother-in-law had to give them rooms. Supposing she was one of three brother's wives, she would get that portion of the house. And all the Sree Danam property will be stored there'* (R45, A42). Any number of items from Chettiar homes may at one point have made up a bride's *Sree Danam*. However, there are several particular types of kitchen vessel that seem to have been stored in particularly vast quantities as *Sree Danam*, and which are now making their way onto the antique market.

The first is a type of lacquerware made in Burma (Figure 4.10a). It is characteristically red and black and can be found as plated, bowls, tiny cups, and rounded containers. Second is a type of colourful enamelware, some of which was made in Sweden, some in Czechoslovakia, and some in England (Figure 4.10b). This comes in numerous forms, from plates and bowls to jugs, kettles and tiffin boxes. The third is a type of stone jar used in Chettinad for preserving salt pickles (Figure 4.10c). These were mainly imported from England where they were produced.

While these are all utilitarian items, their foreign manufacture would have made them expensive by comparison with locally manufactured vessels. They are in some sense the early 20th century Tamil Nadu equivalent to the designer goods that wealthy Chettiar brides receive in the present day. The *Sree Danam* was laid out for display at the wedding, and this was as much a demonstration of wealth as the house itself.

'Presentation was a very big thing for them, and how they displayed everything, all that is really an art. Each one trying to do better than the other... At the wedding they'll display everything. It was pride to show what they have collected, or also in order that there were witnesses to what has been given over' (R45, A42).

A. Lawson



a. Burmese lacquerware



b. European enamelware



c. British stoneware



d. Tamil family initials etched onto plate

Figure 4.10 – A selection of *Sree Danam* found in the antique shops in Karaikudi. *Sree Danam* is the Chettiar term for bridal gifts given by a father to his daughter as a form of inheritance. These items were the luxury imports of their day. *Sree Danam* items will usually be marked with the family initials, and many of them have remained unused in storage since their gifting.

Each individual item in the *Sree Danam* would be engraved with the family initials so there could be no mistake about who it belonged to and who gifted it (Figure 4.10d). These small Tamil letters can be seen today on Chettiar vessels as far away as London, making their origins easy to deduce. Not surprisingly items such as these were some of the first to be sold to the antique dealers in times when Chettiar families needed money, with the full demolition of the house being the last resort. However, these items were mass-produced, and collected en masse by Chettiars so there seems no risk of the supply running short in the near future. Most of it has remained unused and carefully stored, so the condition, aside from the engraved initials, is as good as new. Though utility items, they were not put to any practical use and have now seemingly outlived their symbolic function too.

A. Lawson

'Now no one wants all of this anymore, but in those days they used to collect. It was a major form of art collection. You should have seen them go into the stores to choose. The quality control and choosing was so perfect. And they would always have in mind how it will look when it is displayed. As a child I would go with my aunts and mother to the shops and I learnt a lot from them. Today every time I display, every time I do an exhibition, every time I do a brides dowry I think of my aunt because I learnt all this from her. Choosing, quality control, so perfect'. (R45, A42).

5 CASE STUDY 1: Chettinad Antiques - routes and biographies

5.1 Introduction

Having introduced the objects and their historic and geographical background in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to describe the routes that the objects travel through the present day antique market. The section follows a narrative and descriptive format to relate the range of different contexts in which these objects are found, as well as considering the relationship between one context and another and between the objects and the people who collect and trade them. This chapter has been subdivided into three parts:

'The Sources' (chap. 5.2) looks at Chettinad itself and those Chettiars still living in the area by focusing on several Chettiar houses that reflect different aspects of present day Chettinad. 'The Dealers' (chap. 5.3) is broken down by location, starting with Karaikudi and Chettinad itself, then moving on to Pondicherry which in the past was a major exporter of Chettinad antiques, but now mostly supplies Indian customers, then urban centres of South India such as Bangalore and Chennai, and finally looking at the international market in Chettinad antiques much of which leaves India via Jodhpur in North India. 'The Destinations' (chap. 5.4) is broken down not by location, but by the various usages and contexts that objects sourced from Chettinad houses eventually reach via the antique market. The narrative described here is entirely dependent on primary data collected for this thesis. Therefore some areas, where data is plentiful, offer more detail than other areas where data is scarce.

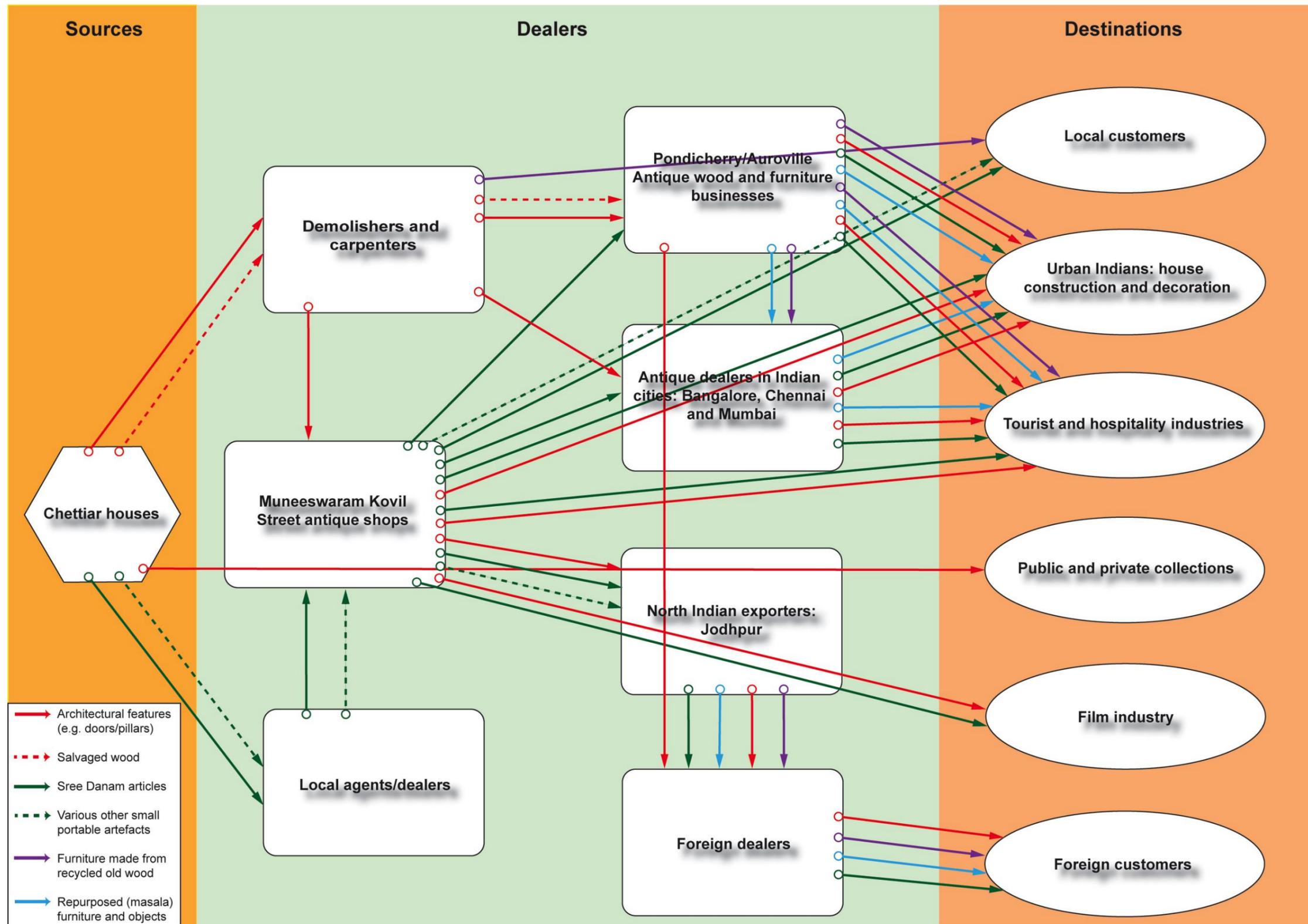


Figure 5.1 – Flowchart summarising the routes of Chettinad antiques

5.2 The Sources

Table 5-1 – List of recorded interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are members of the Nagarathar Chettiar community

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A14	21/04/2013	Kanadukathan	I1, T1, R16
A31	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R34
A33	26/11/2013	Kanadukathan	I1, T1, R36
A34	26/11/2013	Kanadukathan	I1, T1, R37, R38, R39
A35	26/11/2013	Pallatur	I1, T1, R40
A38	26/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R41
A39	27/11/2013	Karaikudi	I3, R41
A40	01/12/2013	Bangalore	I1, R43
A42	23/04/2014	Chennai	I1, R45
A47	20/08/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T2, R41, R50, R51
A48	20/08/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T2, R41, R53
A49	20/08/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T2, R54
A68	09/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R73
A69	09/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R74

Entering a Chettinad village such as Kanadukathan or Pallathur is both eerie and awe-inspiring to the newcomer. A pervading sense of lost glory and quiet decay is enhanced by the sheer scale of the buildings. They have been called ‘villages of mansions’, a description that captures well this curious concentration of grandeur (Muthiah et al., 2000: 69) (Figure 5.2). The straight, grid-plan streets are lined on both sides by one vast fort-like building after another, broken only by the weed grown plots where mansions once stood, and the occasional new-build, with its clean contours contrasting sharply with the intricate embellishments of the older buildings (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.2 – A typical Chettinad village street. Chettinad villages are small and quiet but populated by many large palatial buildings such as this. For this reason they have been called 'villages of mansions'.

The mansions of the Nagarathar incorporate a mixture of architectural styles: Indo-Saracenic, Neo-Classical and traditional Tamil to name but a few (Muthu, 2009: 475). The interiors and furnishings display a myriad of materials and design features cherry-picked from the wide range of cultural influences that their travels and trading activities brought them into contact with. However, despite this, there is still an overall uniformity of style between the buildings. This may owe a lot to the manner of their building, which was often carried out by the same pool of craftsmen, and to the direct competition between the families, who sought to copy and then out-do their neighbours in grandeur.



Figure 5.3 - Modern house development on the site of a demolished Chettiar house. The newer building developments do not replicate the traditional Chettiar architecture.

In Chettinad houses were expressions of the wealth, prosperity and social status of the family. They sought the best materials money could buy from across the world. Marble floors from Italy, teak wood from Burma and cut glass mirrors from Belgium. The houses also reflect the close relationship between the Nagarathars and the British rulers of the time. The elaborate carvings and friezes on the exterior of the buildings include not only figures from the Hindu pantheon, but also images from the Raj; British soldiers and ladies in Victorian dress (Figure 5.4).



a. Lakshmi flanked by ladies in European dress b. British gentleman and lady dress

Figure 5.4 – Decorative stucco figures on the front exterior of Chettiar houses often depict British colonial figures as well as Hindu deities and mythical characters

Whilst many of these embellishments display a distinctly foreign flavour, the basic layout of the houses is in keeping with a traditional Tamil design and architectural philosophy known as *Vastu Shastra*. The houses are typically built on a rectangular floor plan, which stretches between two streets. From the front door one can see a straight line leading through a series of interior courtyards (*valavu*), each one surrounded on four sides by a raised seating platform or *thinnai* (Muthu, 2009: 473-4) (Figure 5.5). Each of these *thinnais* has a particular function. The first, which is often open at the front like a large porch, is for entertaining male guests. The second is the main communal family area, with private family rooms leading off. The third is a courtyard for the women to congregate. The fourth comprises the kitchens and leads out to a backyard or straight onto the back street. Many of the wealthier families also extended their houses to a second or third floor.



Figure 5.5 - An interior courtyard (*valavu*) surrounded by a raised platform (*thinna*) in a Chettiar house. Most Chettiar houses are formed of a series of courtyards such as this leading into one another. This is a traditional architectural feature of Tamil Nadu houses.

5.2.1 VRMV House

Close to the middle of Karaikudi, but hidden from the street by an outer wall is VRMV House. Entering through the front, a long covered porch leads into the first *thinna*, an open fronted raised platform (Figure 5.6). Here there are many features distinctive of Chettinad houses. A row of solid wood pillars, thick and rounded in the South Indian style so that they resemble the trunks of coconut trees (Figure 5.7). Semi-circular stained-glass windows in colours of red, blue and green. And of course, right in the middle, a magnificent wooden door, heavily embellished with intricate carvings in scenes drawn both from nature and from mythology (Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.6– VRMV House – front porch leading to the first *thinnai*, which is open fronted, but concealed from the street by an exterior wall and gate.



Figure 5.7 - VRMV House – the first *thinnai* lined with solid wooden pillars made of Burma teak

The house is co-owned by four branches of one family, but only one of these still lives here in Chettinad while the others have settled in Chennai and the USA. Chokilingam (R53) is now in his 80's (Figure 5.9). His father built this house and he believes it is around 120 years old. At that time the family ran a money-lending and banking business in Malaysia and Ceylon, while his mother's side of the family owned large plantations in Ceylon growing rubber, tea, and coconut.



Figure 5.8 - VRMV House – the main door is elaborately carved and fitted with large brass studs in the style of temple doors



Figure 5.9 - Chokilingam (R53) seated in the front *thinnai* of VRMV House, is one of four co-owners of the house, though he is the only owner-occupier. The other branches of the family have moved to Chennai and the USA.

The house is built to a single storey plan with one *valavu* leading to the next. Looking from the front entrance one can see all the way through to the various *valavu* to the back entrance, which opens onto the next parallel street (Figure 5.10). The initial effect of the house on the newcomer is impressive, however a second glance reveals signs that this is a building no longer in its prime. It is a large house and takes considerable effort to maintain. The first *thinnai* is thick with dust and cobwebs, while some of the coloured glass windows have been broken and replaced with clear glass (Figure 5.11). Chokilingam's adopted grandson, Subramaniyan (R41), explains that while there is paid help with some of the cleaning, much of which Chokilingam manages himself.



Figure 5.10 - VRMV House – view from the front entrance to the back entrance through a series of inner courtyards (*valavu's*)



a. Missing glass panels and peeling paint



b. Ceiling features thick with dust and cobwebs

Figure 5.11 - VRMV House – signs of disrepair such as broken windows and heavy dust. The house is large and difficult to maintain for Chokilingam who cannot maintain a large household staff.

Subramaniyan was adopted into this family. He explains that adoption of male heirs is a traditional practice in the Nagrahar Chettiar community where property and businesses pass down the male line only, so a male heir is seen to be important for the continuation of the family name and identity:

A. Lawson

R41: Houses with a male heir only get its identity/initial. Or else their name will be gone.

T2: Why so?

R41: Because always a girl child in a family will go to her husband's house after some years then they take after their in-law's name. On the other hand, the male child of the family will keep up the family's name (A47).

Chokilingam and Subramaniam, talk readily about the house, its contents and its construction. Subramaniam is himself involved in the antique trade as a local dealer and is aware of the interest in Chettinad material culture. He talks about some of the ways in which the various construction materials for the house came to this part of India. The glass he says came with foreign businessmen and dealers. While the teak wood was transported from Burma by the Chettiars themselves, not by boat he says, but by allowing the natural currents to float the trunks from one shore to the other. If this story is true, it seems likely that the trunks would have been tied to a boat and towed rather than left to float free:

R41: The wood items came from Burma. It was transported through the water current of the seas.

R53: It will carry our number. We will know to take ours by that number (A48).

The beautifully intricate carved designs of gods, vines and flowers, and mythical beasts were done by hand, and thus unique to each home, though certain designs and motifs were more popular than others. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is a popular figure in many homes, and so too are peacocks. The peacock is the animal vehicle, or *vahana*, of Murugan, the son of Siva and brother to Ganesha, who is worshipped by many in Chettinad.

'We worship Lord Muruga. We usually perform certain rituals to Lord Muruga and his wives Valli and Deivanai with his vehicle Peacock, as if what is kept in a temple. In temple you could see Murugan, Valli,

A. Lawson

Deivanai with his peacock and a Vel in his hand. The big Vel will be with the lord. We will perform pooja (sacred) rituals to the small Vel. After the sacred pooja, we will offer food to the needy. Every Chettiar will do this ritual. Lord Muruga is of prime importance to them' (R41, A47).

Religious beliefs and affiliations play an important part in the choice of decoration.

'Each pillar has different scenes from Ramayana. The people of this house worship Perumal, they're Vaishnavites. So they were interested in having this type of carving. Some others were interested in carvings of Lakshmi, Mahalakshmi' (R41, A38).

The Nagarathar Chettiar community is divided into nine clans, each with their own clan temple in the Chettinad region (Figure 5.12). Chokilingam and Subramaniyan are both members of the Pattanasamiyar clan, which has its clan temple in Iliyathangudi. Though Subramaniyan was adopted into this family, he tells me that this sort of adoption only happens within the same temple clan, while marriages happen between two different temple clans, with the bride adopting the temple of her husband. The temple clan system seems to be an integral part of the community and their sense of ancestry. In talking about this ancestry Subramaniyan draws a line all the way back to the Sangam Age of the great Tamil epics and poets:

'The name Pattanasamiyar derived from the person's name Pattinathar. He is our ancestor. Following him, our clan came from Kaveripoompattinam to some elevated lands here to save ourselves from flood. It was our original place nearby Mayiladuthurai. Right now it is called Poompuhar. The famous persons of Sangam age, named Kovalan and Kannagi, belong to our caste. In the same way Kaaraikkal ammayiar [Tamil poetess] belongs to our caste. There is a story about this poetess. While walking on a footpath once, there happened to be Shiva lingams on all the way. As the sacred Shiva lingam should not be

A. Lawson

touched by the feet, she decided to walk upside down. While doing so, her clothes fell on her face. To avoid the attention of others, she made her face scary like a ghost' (R41, A48).



Figure 5.12 - Pillaiyarpatti temple – One of nine clan temples of the Nagarathar Chettiar community (Map 4-1)

However according to Subramaniyan this strong sense of heritage does not necessarily extend into the material past, with the younger generations of Chettiars preferring modern materiality:

R41: Most of them prefer modern style only one or two will take some pillars for their dining hall. Not too much. Other caste people like this. Each and every day the Chettiar people are seeing these things, so they are not interested. Other people will not see this, so all the other caste people like it. Chettiar family, from past hundred years, two hundred years, they have seen each and every thing, so it is not interesting (R41, A38).

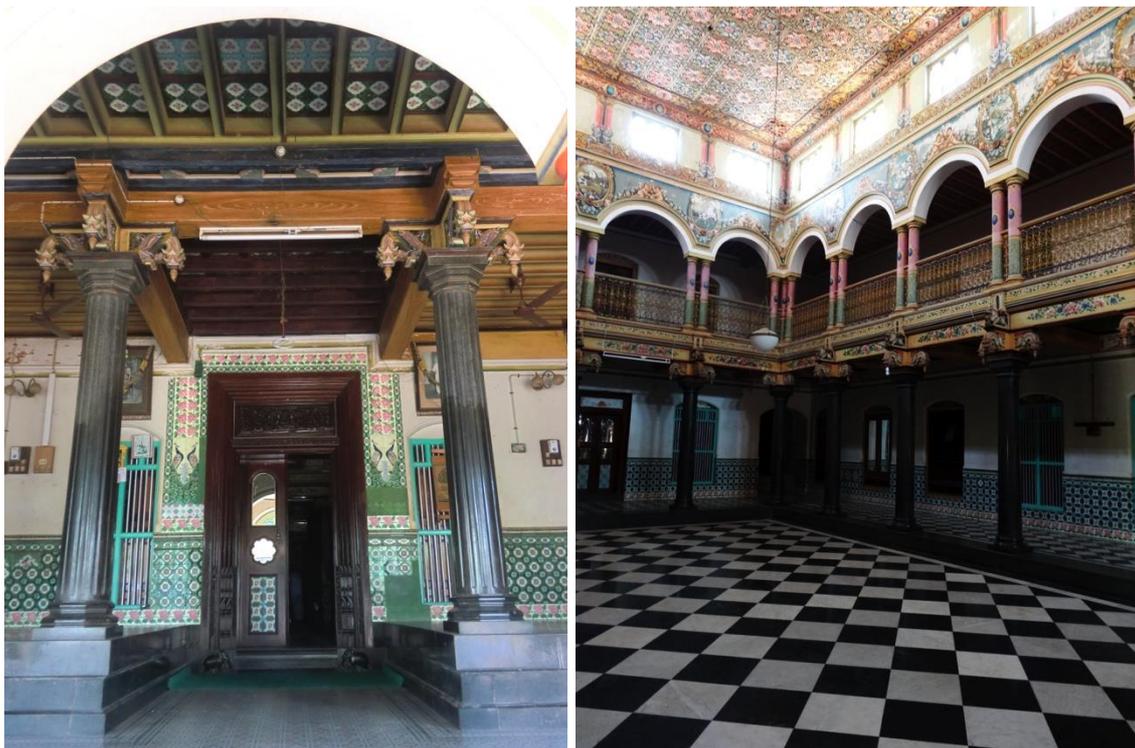
Despite this apparent lack of sentiment for their material heritage, and the fact that most of this family live far away from Chettinad, there seems to be no willingness here to part with the ancestral home:

I3: Won't they sell the whole house as it is?

R41: No, they won't sell. The tourists will ask but they won't sell (A39).

5.2.2 Athangudi Palace (and demolishing houses)

There are numerous houses in Chettinad that stand empty for most of the year. Maintaining these properties for everyday living is expensive. Moreover, the extended family living these houses are designed for is no longer agreeable to many present-day Nagarathars, who like many others have shifted away from joint family living to a nuclear family arrangement.



a. Front door decorated with mirrors and Japanese tiles *b. First valavu with two storeys*

Figure 5.13 – Athangudi Palace in the village of Athangudi is one of the largest and most richly decorated houses in the area. While still following the courtyard layout of traditional Tamil architecture it incorporates many European, Neo-Classical elements such as Romanesque pillars and marble floors.

A. Lawson

While the family are away some of these houses are managed by a skeleton staff of one or two. The resident staff, for a small fee, will allow visitors to take a look around the larger rooms of the house. Athangudi Palace in the village of Athangudi is one of the larger and more opulent buildings in the area with a main entrance door adorned with mirrors and Japanese tiles, and double storey *thinna*s with floors of marble (Figure 5.13).

It is often empty and the caretaker here is happy to show visitors around (Figure 5.14). He keeps up constant flow of talk, and it seems that he knows what the tourists have come to see:

'Come here and see this...That you can take a photograph of...This is a Burma teak wood, single piece...This one is Lakshmi, Ramayana, two horses and this is Yali...Come here...This is a deer... Come here...It is a Krishna painting done in natural colours using vegetables...This they bought when they built the house...This is Lakshmi and eight lady...This is a marriage hall...These are local tiles from Athangudi...This is wood with silver painting...This is an oil lamp' (R36, A33).

He also knows that money, or a shortage of it, is the main reason that the houses in this area are disappearing:

'A person who has a shortage of money will sell his house. The owners of this house have their own very rich house outside Karaikudi, and they are very rich. So they wanted to keep their ancestors house to be maintained as a memory' (R36, A33).



Figure 5.14 – The caretaker at Athangudi Palace looks after the house for the family who live elsewhere much of the time, and for a small fee he is willing to show tourists around the building

While it might be easy to assume that all Nagarathar Chettiars have a history of great wealth, this is not the case. There is a class divide, or scale, here just as in most societies, and while some sections of the community did indeed amass fortunes overseas, others either did not have the means to conduct business on such a large scale, or were not as fortunate in their dealings. Similarly, different Chettiar families and businesses were affected to varying degrees by the breakdown of colonial power in South and Southeast Asia, with some losing considerably more than others (chap. 4.2.1).

In the nearby village of Kanadukathan is a small house that is in an advanced state of dilapidation (Figure 5.15). The elderly lady who lives here alone (R16) does not have the advantage of money to maintain the house of her ancestors as a memory. She does not know the full age of this building, but she has lived here all of her life. Its size and architectural style suggest that it is one of the older buildings in the village, considerably more than one hundred years (Figure 5.15a). This house has none of the opulence and grandeur of Athangudi Palace. However, while it is modest in scale, the wood pillars and beams inside are as beautiful as you can see in even the largest mansion, though much degraded (Figure 5.15b).



a. House is small and simple in the traditional Tamil style, indicating it may be older than some of the more elaborate houses dating to the early part of the 20th century



b. The building is crumbling but many of the architectural features, such as the pillars, remain intact.



c. Front door with surround and Surya Pallakai covered in a thick coat of white paint

Figure 5.15 – Dilapidated house in Kanadukathan

A. Lawson

She says she remembers the big house further down the street where now there is only an empty plot (Figure 5.16). It was demolished just last year. People tell her that her own house will have to be demolished soon.



Figure 5.16 – Empty plot in Kanadukathan where a Chettiar house was recently demolished

The system of joint-ownership of these houses further complicates matters. In the past Nagarathar Chettiar families would live in extended units. Not one, but all the sons of the family would continue to live in the family home with their own families. However increasingly Nagarathar Chettiars are living in smaller family units, either by choice or by necessity. Furthermore, if one sibling can afford the upkeep of the property while another can't, demolition of the house, sale of the contents and distribution of the profits, sometimes serves as the best solution.

'Problem today is that the extended families have split apart. To maintain a Chettiar house you need 5-6 lakhs a month. Many Chettiar families can't afford that. So a lot of the families have locked up the first floors' (R43, A40).

In the village of Pallatur a large house stands in a state of partial demolition (Figure 5.17). Outside a woman (R40) carrying a young boy looks on. She is a

A. Lawson

relative of the family who own this house. She says the house was more than 150 years old and has only recently been demolished. '*They started the work one month before and demolished it in ten days*' (R40, A35). It was a conflict of interest between different joint owners of the house that led to the final decision to demolish. '*The owners of the house, some wanted to build new house and some didn't, and at last it was demolished...They felt sad because the house was not in a good condition*' (R40, A35).

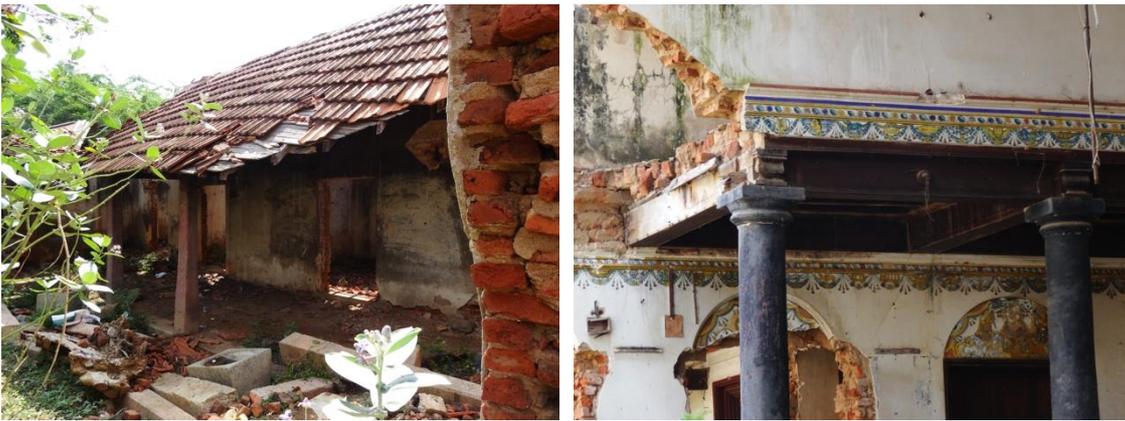


Figure 5.17 – Partially demolished house in Pallatur. The demolition of this house was precipitated by a dispute between the joint-owners, some of whom wanted to keep the house and others who (perhaps due to a lack of funds) wanted to demolish it.

5.2.3 Chettinadu Mansion

One solution to the upkeep of the more palatial houses has been to convert the buildings into tourist destinations (chap. 4.2.4). The Chettinadu Mansion is one of the handful of 'heritage hotels' that have been established in Chettiar houses. It is situated on a quiet side street in Kanadukathan. This house is approximately one hundred years old. It is in good condition with a well-tended front garden and freshly painted exterior (Figure 5.18). This is in no small part due to the fact that it now operates as a hotel. Just like most of the older Chettinad houses it incorporates the traditional South Indian *thinnai* style layout, but on a much larger scale with many European design influences (Figure 5.19).

A. Lawson



Figure 5.18 – Chettinadu Mansion heritage hotel in the village of Kanadukathan. The front entrance is neat and well tended



Figure 5.19 – Chettinadu Mansion second *valavu* has two storeys. The pillars and railings are made of steel imported from Britain

In one of the rooms there is a museum style display with many utilitarian and decorative household items on display (Figure 5.20).



Figure 5.20 – Chettinadu Mansion has a small museum in one of the ground floor rooms. It includes a variety of household objects that belong to the family who own the house and date to the first half of the 20th century, including kitchen vessels, toys and ornaments.

The hotel is marketed as *'the oldest unaltered heritage resort in Chettinad'* (web: Chettinadu Mansion). The current owner of the building is Mr Chandramoulia Chettiar (R55) is keen to emphasize the authenticity of these interiors. *'You wont find anything new here except for the chairs and tables. Nothing else has been altered'* (R55, A58). However, later his son (R63) reveals that some of what we can see here is replica antique furniture (Figure 5.21b). *'See this [indicating the coffee table made from a door] (Figure 5.21a). I bought it from a friend in Kochin, and the door is from Kerala. And he showed me the first Chettinad cot. He's such a good friend he said to me 'what are you doing? I bought it from your place [i.e. from Chettinad] and now you want to buy it from me!' So he gave it to me at whatever price he bought it from here. And then we replicated it. So the furniture here is not all antique'* (R63, A58).



a, Coffee table made of antique wood door and pillar pedestals



b. 'Replica' antique furniture made with recycled wood and antique Japanese ceramic tiles

Figure 5.21 – Chettinadu Mansion furniture set out for the use of hotel visitors in the first *valavu* is made from recycled antique wood

Prior to its conversion into a hotel the house was rarely occupied by the family, who are spread around various parts of the world: Kerala, USA, Chennai, Malaysia. However it still played an important role in family celebrations. *'It remained closed. If we had any function we would open and clean it up'* (R55, A58). Even now, only Chandramoulia himself remains at the house for the most of the year while his son visits occasionally to help in the running of the business:

'Only my father is here and we have developed this place, but I don't live here, I live in Kochin. If I didn't have business interest or my father then I would not come here. Now I come once every forty-five days or so. You need man-power, you need interest and you need money, which is not there in every case. Also people who have settled in America might have money but they can't come here and look after the house' (R63, A58).

The hotel business has been vital in saving this house from the fate of so many others. *'The simple answer is that they [other Chettiars] could ill afford*

A. Lawson

them... For us it's ok because it's running as a small resort. Most of the money will go back into maintaining the house' (R63, A58).

The house was built by Chandramoulia's grandfather in 1912, at a time when the family banking and money-lending business in British ruled Burma was thriving. Most of the materials that make up this house were imported. Chandramoulia looks about, noting the different parts of the world that have contributed to his home. His knowledge is second hand, and not always correct.

'These black columns are granite. I used to tell people that they came from Italy until I went to Italy and found that there they have no black marble, so it must have been from Spain. Mirrors came from Belgium. Entire wood came from Myanmar and entire steel came from Myanmar' (R55, A58).

This family was wealthy and owned multiple properties. *'They had places everywhere, in Tamil Nadu and abroad, so it was not inhabited by the owners' (R55, A58).* Thus even in its heyday this house was often empty, occupied more often by staff than by the family themselves. Once again, it seems that its primary value was its role in family functions and its proximity to the family temples. *'It was full only at the time of marriage and celebrations. Chettiar houses here were always empty. Used only by accountants. When women came they stayed at the back of the house. They would shut down most of the house' (R55, A50).*

To Chandramoulia this house was a status symbol more than a home, and once the means of maintaining it was lost, it became a burden. *'When it rained the whole of the first thinnai would fill with water. The cost of repairs was extortionate. More than someone on a paid wage could manage. They were never proper homes' (R55, A50).*

The rise of nationalism in Burma in the 1940's and 50's led to a dramatic change of fortune for Chandramoulia and his family. The banking business

A. Lawson

was lost, along with most of the family wealth, and Chandramoulia himself went to work for a company in Kerala. Most of the family don't live in this house now, and the younger generations have spread far and wide around India and abroad, they return to the house still for special occasions such as births and marriages. As the ancestral home this building retains an important role in the life rituals of the family. There is soon to be a Naming Ceremony held in this house for a new child in the family.

It is not only the house but also the wider locality that is still central to the Chettiar way of life. As well as the clan temples and village temples there are the Aiyandar temples that house the traditional village guardian deity of Tamil Nadu (Figure 5.22). *'We believe one god protects us, and it is invariably Aiyandar. Aiyandar is another version of Aiyappan. These temples are inside the forest'* (R55, A58).



Figure 5.22 – Aiyandar temple statue – protective village deity worshipped in Chettinad

The importance of tourism is obvious to the survival of buildings like this, but it seems as though this is a precarious position, at least for the Chettinadu Mansion. *It was because it became a resort that we are able to maintain this.*

A. Lawson

The others [referring to the other main hotels in Chettinad – The Bangala and Vishalam] they are already rich people, they had other assets outside of Burma and were not affected. The rest of the people were all affected. And what happens is they can't stay here and still do work (R63, A58).

Tourism to Chettinad seems to be growing but, like its material culture, Chettinad has more links with Europe and South East Asia than with the rest of India. *'Here it is very seasonal because it is only European visitors and very little Indian visitors...I have seen this European, this foreign, interest in Chettinad evolving, and now the Malaysians. Because the Malaysians who are second generation Malaysian Tamils have not seen Tamil Nadu...So now a lot of those people are coming and they know the temples here are the same gods' (R63, A58).*

On the subject of the antique market from Chettinad, Chandramoulia's son is not especially positive, complaining that it does little to attract tourism to the area. *'That big market is just a few. And they wont come as tourists. They'll come just a few nights, stay in a place like your staying (budget hotel inside Karaikudi), buy the antiques and go' (R63, A58).* More than this he feels that it is tied to feelings of shame and secrecy within the Chettinad community. He explains that his mother will occasionally buy things from fellow Chettiars in need of money so that they don't have to experience the shame of going to the antique dealers. *'The people who don't have money they would have already sold all their things. But they do it without others knowledge, because they don't want people to know that they don't have money (R63, A58).*

5.3 The Dealers

Table 5-2 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are dealing in Chettinad Antiques in various locations

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A5	09/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R6
A8	18/04/2013	Auroville	I1, T1, R10
A15	21/04/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R17, R18, R19, R20
A18	30/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R23
A19	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R24
A20	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R25
A21	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R26
A22	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R27
A23	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R28
A24	23/11/2013	Pondicherry	I1, T1, R29
A25	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, I3, T1, R30
A26	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R18
A28	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R20
A31	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R34
A32	26/11/2013	Athangudi	I1, T1, R35
A36	26/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R41
A37	26/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R41, R42
A54	26/08/2014	Pondicherry	I1, R59
A56	06/09/2014	Bangalore	I1, R61
A59	15/09/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T3, R20
A60	15/09/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T3, R18
A61	22/09/2014	Bangalore	I1, R67, R68
A62	27/09/2014	Auroville	I1, R10
A63	27/09/2014	Pondicherry	I1, R59
A64	28/09/2014	Pondicherry	I1, R69
A65	28/09/2014	Pondicherry	I1, R70
A66	05/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R71
A70	10/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R75
A79	11/04/2015	Karaikudi	I1, T4, R20
A80	11/04/2015	Karaikudi	I1, T4, R18
A89	20/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R95
A90	20/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R96
A95	21/05/2015	Jodhpur	I1, R102
A96	21/05/2015	Jodhpur	I1, R103
A97	22/05/2015	Jodhpur	I1, R104
A100	15/08/2015	London	I1, R107

5.3.1 Chettinad

5.3.1.1 Local 'collectors'

Every day at around six o'clock in the evening, freelance agents (e.g. R41 & R42), who travel around the Chettinad towns and villages buying up antiques, gather on the corner of Muneeswaram Kovil Street to sell their wares to the antique shops here (Figure 5.23). Several of the more prosperous of these agents are members of the Chettinad community itself who have the advantage of their 'insider' status to build relationships between the house owners and the antique dealers. Sometimes people wishing to sell something will call the agents to arrange a deal. At other times the agents will come to know of a house that is going to be demolished and they will visit the family to negotiate the purchase of some or all of the buildings valuable contents.

R42 is a local dealer who travels by motorcycle through the surrounding villages and returns at the end of a day to sell what he can to the shops along Muneeswaram Kovil Street. He has been doing this job for the past 20 years and his father worked in a similar way before him. He deals mainly in old objects and materials that come from Chettiar homes. He says there are two main reasons that people wish to sell their belongings: funerals and weddings.

'It is like readying the house for the occasion. While tidying up, if they [the house owners] find some objects not worth keeping they will sell those things to these persons. At the same time, it is a practice in Tamil Nadu that one must not keep all the things in the memory of deceased. So, obviously those things have to be sold however antique they are. If the dead person has owned some property [movable property], it is to be shared within the family members and the remaining things are sold out. Almost every house in that area will have a room reserved for these occasions' (R42, A37).



Figure 5.23 – Local ‘collector’ dealer in Karaikudi with his recent acquisitions

These local collectors are generally not too selective about what they are willing to purchase from the houses, as it seems that there is a market for everything. Even broken objects or salvaged building materials are recycled.

‘I mostly don’t avoid any materials from wood works to playing toys. Everything has a value...There are people here who make valuable products from damaged items. They will repair and reuse it’ (R42, A37).

In addition, many of the articles from Chettinad houses are of foreign manufacture, which gives them an added value, while some have never been used (such as *Sree Danam* items kept in storage) and are in a ‘good-as-new’ condition.

'Most of the second-hand household goods are from other countries, and those goods are always worth buying because they are very rare and they will definitely give us profit...Sometimes we encounter some things which are not even used...Such things can be sold at a good cost' (R42, A37).

5.3.1.2 Muneeswaram Kovil Street: Bismi Arts

Many of the Chettinad antiques that find their way to Pondicherry, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and abroad, come via Muneeswaram Kovil Street in the middle of Karaikudi. It is a narrow lane, not passable by cars, and is lined on both sides almost exclusively by antique shops selling a baffling variety of Chettinad furniture and household items (Figure 5.24). There is considerably more variety in the types of objects available here as compared to the antique shops of Pondicherry, Bangalore or Jodhpur. There is a particular abundance of the smaller household and utility items such as ceramic, enamel and lacquerware vessels (Figure 5.25), wooden salt boxes, table lamps, nut-cutters, wall tiles, wooden game boards and carved wooden dolls.



Figure 5.24 - Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudi is a narrow lane lined on both sides by antique shops where many Chettinad antiques are for sale



Figure 5.25 – Large quantities of kitchen articles for sale at a shop on Muneeswaram Kovil Street

The larger wooden items, such as doors and pillars, are also on display here and further down the street is a workshop where old wood is being made into new doors and wardrobes. As well as the more obviously saleable antique items (lamps, vessels, pillars etc.) there is a large amount of ‘stuff’ that does not fit so neatly into the category of the ‘commodity’. Browsing the nooks and crannies of these shops one can happen upon the most mundane and the most intimate of personal items – handwritten notebooks, photographs and letters from over 60 years ago, tiny glass bottles with the petrified half-used contents still remaining, clothing pins made in England, and empty soap box covers (Figure 5.26). But it seems that there is a market somewhere for everything. Mr Rabik (R20) of Bismi Arts, which is situated in the middle of Muneeswaram Kovil Street, points out some small cardboard boxes which used to hold soap some 50 or 60 years ago.

I1: What type of customer would buy these soap covers?

R20: The dealers would buy that. People are so attracted to the West that if they just saw the name England on it, they are ready to buy it at any cost. There is a dealer here (his native is koothanallur) who goes to Malaysia often for business. At that time he buys this soap in more numbers. He buys all England products (A59).



Figure 5.26 - Some of the small personal items that end up in the antique shops on Muneeswaram Kovil Street

The businesses here tend to be around twenty to thirty years old, however Mr Rabik claims that his business is eighty years old. It was originally started by his grandfather, who worked from his home and traded antique items with dealers in northern India. As the local supply of Chettinad household antiques increased the business expanded, until twenty years ago when it moved to its current location on Muneeswaram Kovil Street. It is one of the largest establishments on the street. The tiny shop front open to the street reveals nothing of the maze of rooms on the floor above, all of which are stacked haphazardly with a bewildering array of antique items (Figure 5.27). However even this is not the full extent of their stock. *'However many things you see here, an equal amount is there in the godown [storeroom or warehouse] (R20, A59).*

Mr Rabik points out various items as he guides us around the labyrinthine shop – laquerware from Burma which he says is over one hundred years old, Ravi Varma prints, palm-leaf manuscripts (these are sometimes bought by

A. Lawson

local university students), small, brightly painted terracotta figurines. His pleasure in the objects he shows me is palpable. This is more than a mere business interest. He talks enthusiastically about the benefits of antique cooking vessels. How much healthier they are (he believes modern plastics and metals pass unhealthy chemicals into your food), and how much tastier the food that is cooked in them is.



Figure 5.27 – Upper floors of Bismi Arts contain a maze-like series of rooms filled with antique items



Figure 5.28 – Mr Rabik (R20) holding one of his favourite terracotta figurines

'I have a personal interest. I am not just doing this business for profit but also for my own interest because our ancestors have used these products and these objects teach us some lessons that how to live and so on. ...I like all the objects but specifically the terracotta figures... because of their workmanship' (R20, A28) (Figure 5.28).

The main source the articles in these shops, are the Chettiar houses in Karaikudi and the surrounding villages. As to why Chettiar homes seem to offer such an abundant supply of such things, Mr Rabik believes it is due to the Chettiar practice of accumulating and storing household items:

A. Lawson

Chettiars are the only people who safeguard these things. No one can beat them in their treasure. They maintain it in such a way that they roll everything in a cloth and after using they place everything in appropriate places (R20, A59).

Mr Rabik estimates that around 100 houses in the Chettinad region are demolished in a year. While there are fewer full demolitions than several years ago, there are still enough to provide for a slow but steady market in these materials. There is a regular trade here with antique dealers from other parts of India, particularly the north. Dealers will come from Delhi and Jodhpur, maybe once or twice a year. They bring large lorries and buy antiques in bulk. There is also regular trade with dealers in other towns and cities such as Pondicherry, Kochin, Bangalore and Mumbai. In addition to this is steady trickle of local and passing trade. In general the businesses here claim to have a slow but steady trade.

Most of the antique dealers in Chettinad are not members of the Nagarathar Chettiar community (though there are several exceptions – see R34 & R41). Mr Rabik believes that this is because due to issues of pride and shame for the Chettiar community:

'I am a Rowther. If I go to Chettiars house, they will give me objects provided I am more acquainted with them. Once they get to know us they will start to believe in us blindly. I can even sell tin in the name of gold. That much is the trust. Chettiar will not give things to Chettiar because it is a prestige issue for them' (R20, A59).

Mr Rabik says that as dealers they don't tend to find out much about the history of the items they buy from Chettiar homes, beyond their approximate age and material. For example, on the subject of different types of woods, their sources, their quality and their market value Mr Rabik is very fluent.

A. Lawson

You can see this is Teak wood in Chettiar houses and you can see this poruse [Ceylon Satinwood] in Karaikal, Nagappatinam, and it comes from Sri Lanka. If Chettiar has teak, Bhai [Muslim trading community] has a better quality than teak that is karungali [Ebony]. If teak is 20,000 rps this one [Satinwood] is 25,000 rps. The karungali will be 1 lakh [100,000] rupees' (R20, A28).

While he claims not to know about the history of the objects, Mr Rabik is a ready source of stories about local Chettiars. While talking on the topic of competitiveness between Chettiars in their displays of wealth he tells an amusing story about a missing toothpick:

'A Chettiar called Alagappa Chettiar kept offerings in eleven houses for the marriage of his daughter. And he sent thirty people to find any mistakes, and he found that one toothpick was missing. So he gave 101 more toothpicks in gold. 'I did this' one old Chettiar said this to me' (R20, A28).

Pulling out a large embroidered cloth (Figure 5.29) he relates another story involving a local Chettiar and Jawaharlal Nehru:

'This Kanadukathan Chettiar and Nehru were classmates. There would be four cars standing in front of Nehru's house, and this Chettiar also asked his father to send four cars and on that evening there were 4 cars. Then that Chettiar called Nehru for his daughter's reception and Nehru refused because of the heat and that place was a village and how could I come. That Chettiar confirmed the arrival date of Nehru and put tents from the railway station to his house about 4km and spread "ratna kambalam". This type of kambalam' (R20, A28).



Figure 5.29 – Embroidered wall hanging at Bismi Arts shown by Mr Rabik to illustrate a story about a local Chettiar

5.3.1.3 Local Carpenters

As well as the antique shops on Muneeswaram Kovil Street, there are also a number of carpentry businesses in Karaikudi and the surrounding villages. These often make use of wood salvaged from house demolitions to fashion new furniture (Figure 5.30). Some valuable architectural pieces, such as finely carved doors and pillars, are kept intact and sold on to antique dealers in towns and cities further afield like Pondicherry and Bangalore. However, the main market for these businesses is local.

One such business is situated in Athangudi, on a side street right next to Athangudi Palace (chap. 5.2.2). The business has been run by Ramu (R35) for the past thirty-five years but he says it is at least seventy-five years old, suggesting that the practice of salvaging demolished house materials has existed in Chettinad since before the crisis in the Chettiar community. Ramu gets his information about people who are thinking to demolish their houses from brokers throughout ninety villages in surrounding area. Ramu will

A. Lawson

undertake the demolition and part of the contract made with the house owners states that he will be able to take away any structural material afterwards.



Figure 5.30 – Wood salvaged from house demolitions is used by local carpenters, such as Ramu (R35) in the construction of new furniture

'We will estimate the value of the wood, which is of primary importance. If the wood worth five lakhs, we will offer some 4 lakhs. Also we need to cover the cost of the demolition, the labour etc., within that amount. So there is a 50,000 margin for those expenses' (R35, A32).

The main part of his custom comes from the local community, who purchase doors and furniture. These will be newly constructed by the carpenters at Ramu's workshop using antique wood salvaged from the house demolitions. One of the most popular items is a wooden wardrobe carved with peacocks, vines and flowers, which is a traditional dowry gift locally (Figure 5.31b). At the same time, certain valuable items recovered by Ramu, such as antique carved doors and pillars, will go for sale outside of Chettinad, usually to dealers or architects in towns and cities of South India (Figure 5.31a).



a. This antique door will be sold as a complete piece to architects or antique dealers

b. Ramu standing next to a wardrobe that his carpenters built and carved from salvaged antique wood. Wardrobes like this are traditional wedding gifts in the local area

Figure 5.31 – Ramu (R35) in Athangudi runs a business that carries out house demolitions in the local area and recycled the salvaged material, as well as selling on architectural components such as doors and pillar to antique dealers.

Ramu says the most desirable and valuable woods are taken from houses around 75-80 years of age – anything much older and the wood will have deteriorated to much to be usable, anything much younger and it is less likely to be well aged, good quality woods that were used. Although wood seems to be the main interest for Ramu there are many other things gained through house demolitions which are also salvaged and recycled:

‘Uthrangal [wooden ceiling], that is a wood, roof tiles, asbestos sheet, thagaram [tin], iron, pathiyakkal [a type of decorative ceramic tile]. From the floor we won’t get anything, because those days there were no tiles only cement. In some houses they have wall tiles from Japan and China too. We will also look for iron and steel items while demolish a house’ (R35, A32).

A. Lawson

Though dependent on the need/wish to demolish houses, Ramu is confident that there is a long future left in the business. *‘There are many old houses in Kanadukathan. Some old houses are still in good condition. Whenever those houses reach a stage of demolishing these people will definitely have a huge profit’* (R35, A32).

In Karaikudi itself there is a street dominated by carpentry businesses, Savaripillaiyar Kovil Street. The men who work here are mainly from several weaving communities (Figure 5.32). R57 is from the Kammalar community (a Tamil name or subgroup of the Vishvakarma caste of artisans). He says his family have practised carpentry, specifically chariot making, for several generations in and around Karaikudi, but that they have no connections with Thirunelveli or the carpenters that purportedly came from there to work on the construction of Chettiar houses.



Figure 5.32 – Carpenters at Savaripillaiyar Kovil Street who work with wood salvaged from demolished houses.

The carpenters here sometimes engage in house demolitions, but mostly they take old wood from houses after demolition, as well as using new wood, and

A. Lawson

fashion it into new furniture. The work here is done using machine saws, and hand chisels (Figure 5.33). The designs are simpler than those of old, which means it is quicker and cheaper than the hand carving carried out during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the old Chettiar houses were being constructed. He estimates that an old design door, carved new by hand, could cost as much as ten lakhs (1,000,000 Rupees) to produce, while a more modern design made with the help of machines would cost around one lakh (100,000 Rupees). They have a catalogue of previous work and other examples customers can choose from (Figure 5.34). R56 says that this is in keeping with the local customers demands:



Figure 5.33 - Carpenter working on a decorative panel using a chisel and hammer

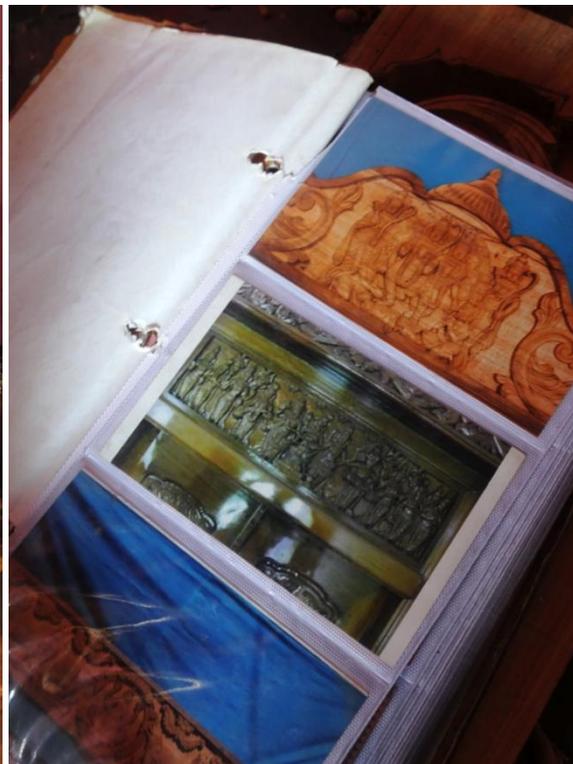


Figure 5.34 – Carpenters catalogue of designs for traditional *surya pallakais*

'It is expensive to research old houses and our clients generally don't want reproductions of those older designs. Mainly because they are so expensive to reproduce [due to depth and detail of the carving involved]. It would be cheaper to buy an actual antique door than reproduce one from new wood with current labour costs' (R56, A51).

While the new designs are plainer and simpler than the old, the favoured motifs do not seem to have changed much, or at all. '*Popular designs locally are peacock or flowers on door itself and Gaja Lakshmi, Vinaiyakar on the panel and frame (R56, A51).*

5.3.2 Pondicherry and Auroville

One of the earliest markets in Chettinad antiques seems to be that which has developed in and around the coastal town of Pondicherry and the nearby spiritual colony called Auroville. Long term travellers, attracted to the area by the Auroville ashrams and spiritual community, provided some of the earliest custom, while European expatriates initiated some of the first antique businesses in this area. Many of the shops on the outskirts of Pondicherry and Auroville have large yards/workshops where salvaged wood, furniture and structural features such as doors and pillars are refurbished or reworked into new pieces (Figure 5.35).

The dealers who work in these businesses say that when the market began some 30 years ago it was very much export based, particularly to Europe, but that in the last ten years that market has increasingly dropped away while the Indian demand for antique or 'antique style' items has risen. Some attribute this to the 2008 financial crisis in the West. Many of the antique dealers here say that custom from the local community is limited and is a relatively recent development. They talk of a 'sentimentality' or 'superstitious' attitude toward the idea of second-hand objects that still pervades in Tamil Nadu. People don't want to own an object that has a prior history in another house with another family. Not only do they prefer the aesthetic qualities of newness, but they believe that bad luck might come with something that is old. Instead the majority of the onward trade from these businesses in Auroville and Pondicherry is with the large urban centres of South, and even North, India



Figure 5.35 - Antique pillar being stripped of a coat of bright blue paint at a workshop on the outskirts of Pondicherry. It will be varnished to enhance the natural wood

5.3.2.1 Aurorachanna

Clemmens Grutmann (R10) moved to Auroville from Germany 25 years ago with his wife Coco. She was interested in antiques so they bought a few pieces of old furniture and refurbished them to sell. They sold-out straight away, and gathered from the response that there was a good market for such things. The business, named Aurorachanna, has continued to expand from there. Originally they were a totally export business, selling Indian furniture and antiques to Europe, but in the last 10 or so years the export market has dwindled. However, over the same period the Indian market for these things has expanded rapidly, so that now they are selling more within India than they ever exported to Europe. Clemmens says that the reason for the change is that the Indian economy has become comparatively stronger:

‘15 or 20 years ago India was a country used for cheap labour and manufacturing. That has changed. That market is not there anymore. India has gone more and more into ‘quality’.....and with 1.3 billion

A. Lawson

people, you have a market of your own, which is stronger than the European market' (R10, A62).

In addition to focusing more on the Indian market they are increasingly moving away from refurbishing antiques toward the construction of new furniture in original designs using salvaged antique wood (Figure 5.36). He says that when they first started Aurorachanna it was perhaps the only one of its kind locally. However, now new businesses are constantly appearing. *'They get a few pieces of refurbished furniture and call it an antique shop. Some of them last and some of them don't' (R10, A8).*



Figure 5.36 – Aurorachanna is an antiques and carpentry business in Auroville. They have several workshops like this where antique furniture and architectural pieces are refurbished, and salvaged wood is made into new furniture

Aurorachanna is a large rambling enterprise next to a courtyard-cum-workshop. Antique furniture and demolished wood parts are propped up everywhere and anywhere (Figure 5.37). Stone and wooden sculptures line the staircase leading up to a large room that is an Aladdin's cave of antique ornaments and small utility items. They source most of the antiques from old houses which are being demolished. Clemmens's reasoning for this is that people living in these houses are selling-up and moving to the cities.

A. Lawson

Clemmens was aware of the Chettinad region and its richness as a source of antique articles from the very beginning of his business activities. Sometimes European customers would want to know something about the history of the items they bought and he made a point of learning the basic outlines of 19th and 20th century Chettiars. *'When they sell something like this in Europe they want to know where it has been born'* (R10, A8). However Chettinad is by no means the only source of material for Clemmens. He operates in a radius of 150-200 km, anything more would be uneconomical due to transport costs. To the south there is Chettinad but to the west and north there are many other communities which offer a similar source of household objects but in varying styles depending on community and religion. Clemmens says that the availability of these things is haphazard and depends a good deal on family events and rituals, as well as annual festivals.

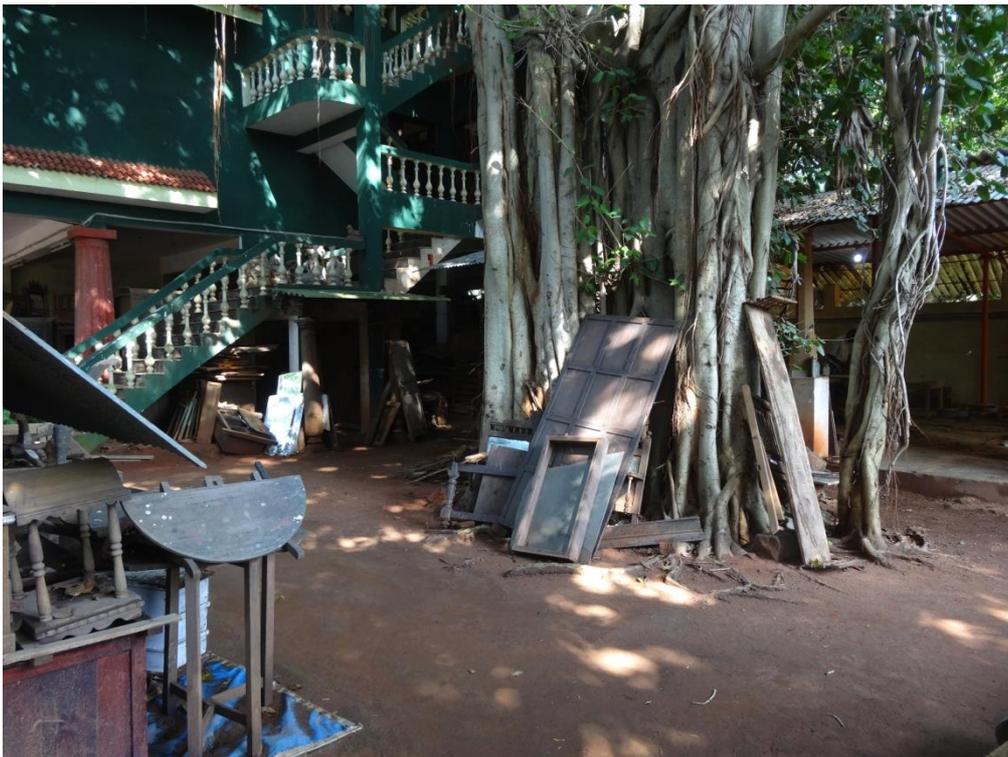


Figure 5.37 – Salvaged wood and furniture stacked in the courtyard outside Aurorachanna

'You cant regulate the market. People sell when they have a certain need. A daughter is getting married, or some function is happening and they need additional money, so at that time they sell. We get an influx

A. Lowson

of brass articles, for example, after Diwa [Diwali]. Old brass articles are being sold and new brass articles are being bought. In the old days we you were getting it by the kilo, but nowadays it's being pre-sorted, because people have realised that figures and artefacts sometimes have a higher value than the brass itself' (R10, A8).

5.3.2.2 East Coast Road

On the stretch of the East Coast Road between Auroville and Pondicherry both sides of the road are lined with the newer businesses that Clemmens referred to. They are full of antique wood, dissembled pieces from demolished houses. Many have small workshops where furniture is being restored, and old wood is being used to produce new items. Several antique furniture owners estimate that there are around 60-70 businesses of this kind in the Auroville and Pondicherry area.

One of the larger establishments here is Suprajaa Furnitures (Figure 5.38). This business, which started out as a seller of antique articles from Chettinad and other nearby areas, has moved almost entirely over to the manufacture of replicas of traditional structural pieces such as doors and pillars. The proprietor (R29) points out two rows of pillars. One row is of original antique pillars made of solid teak. The other row is of replica pillars, that is, newly made in a traditional South Indian style, though he objects to me calling them new, as the wood used for their construction is still antique (Figure 5.39). He says that most customers cannot tell the difference between the antique and the replica and would rather pay for the cheaper replica version. He is generally despondent about the future of this type of business as he feels that both custom and supply have diminished in recent years.

'The number of people buying the real antique has been reduced as I said before...75% of people have money but don't have the knowledge to see the difference between the real antique and the replica. So, 60% of them buy only the replica and only a 40% of people buy the real

A. Lawson

antique.... Only if we do replicas can we run the business, otherwise it is not possible' (R29, A24).



Figure 5.38 – Front of Suprajaa Furnitures, which is one of the largest most expensive looking antique wood shops on the ECR Road outside Pondicherry



Figure 5.39 - original antique pillars (right) next to replica pillars made of antique wood (left) lined up in the showroom at Suprajaa Furnitures

In contrast to this, just a little further down the road is Al-Everest Old Furniture (Figure 5.40), which specializes in large antique doors and pillars, and seems to be thriving. Though the proprietor says that fewer of such objects are available today than in the past, the demand has also increased for them, particularly from the hospitality trade; restaurants, hotels, silk sari shops, as well as wealthy individuals in the large metropolitan centres of India, particularly Bangalore.

'These products are not created or done by us. We have to get it from different places and these are becoming rare to get it. But every year the price of our product are increasing and our labours too. So, there is no loss in this business' (R27, A22).

He has resisted the move towards replication, and instead has chosen to specialize in high quality old woods and intricate hand-carved features, which appeal to a wealthier market. He says that (in the area of wood furniture and structural features) while the new replicas might look nice enough to some, they are not such good quality as the antique pieces. The quality of wood and craftsmanship is too expensive to reproduce today.

'Today machines are available and we cannot increase the depth (of carving) with the machines. The finishing in hand is worth more than the material finished using machines...likewise the old woods are strong enough...In olden days they cut the tree only after 50-60 years. So that the wood has a natural colour and strength but today they cut the trees after ten years' (R27, A22) (Figure 5.40a).

Many of the items here were bought from agents and dealers in Karaikudi, while others come from towns with a similarly rich history and architecture such as Thanjavur or the coastal town of Nagapattinam. Design differences are noticeable between the material from Hindu and Muslim houses. However, the proprietor says that increasingly items are given the 'Chettinad' trademark, regardless of where they actually come from, because customers recognise it.



a. Shop assistant explains the difference between old hand-carving and modern machine carving



b. Front entrance lined with un-refurbished antique pillars

Figure 5.40 – Al-Everest Old Furniture on ECR Road just outside Pondicherry specialises in original antique doors and pillars and the top end of the price range for such things

A. Lawson

As well shops like Suprajaa and Al-Everest, where large finely polished doors and pillars are on display, there is also a proliferation of much smaller establishments along the East Coast Road, many of them little more than openfronted sheds (Figure 5.41).

The items on display in these are also much more modest: large amounts of unworked or finished salvaged wood, window frames and shutters and south Indian wood doors of the smaller and simpler variety. One such is V.S. Art Gallery. It is a small, open-fronted building on the East Coast Road. There is a predominance of wooden tables and dressers, along with smaller items such as brass lamps, coconut scrapers and carved panels from doors and temple chariot fragments.



Figure 5.41- Small antique and salvaged wood businesses on the ECR Road have appeared in increasing numbers over the last 5-10 years. They sell cheaper and plainer antique items than those on display at Al-Everest and Suprajaa Furnitures

The proprietor (R24) says he started this business eight years ago. He started out as a low-wage worker for a larger antique company and from there decided to start a business of his own. He wanted to sell similar types of objects at a lower profit margin and higher turnover than the bigger antique companies. He sells mainly antique and second-hand wooden furniture, which is refurbished in his shop. He acquires much of his stock from Muneeswaram

A. Lawson

Kovil Street in Karaikudi, but also travels to other towns in this area, such as Madurai and Thanjavur, to source material. The majority of his customers are Indian. He says that there is a noticeable difference between what Indian customers and foreign customers look for. While Indian customers want functional items of good quality materials, foreign customer look for something artistic and decorative.

'The Indian customers want the utility items of good quality and made from wood, as most furniture in India is in plastic or tin, but the foreigners want the non-utility items for decoration' (R24, A19).

5.3.3 Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai

When they reach the big cities of south India, Chettinad antiques find there way into a number of different types of shop, each of which caters to a different type of customer. Some very few may end up in handicraft emporiums. Most of these seem to be run by Kashmiris, and they deal predominantly in North India handicrafts, which are sold at high prices to tourists (see A1, A5). Many Chettinad antiques can be found in shops similar to those on the East Coast Road near Pondicherry – essentially carpentry businesses linked to the demolition of houses (see A2, A56, A70). In addition, and more particular to these cities, are shops catering to a mix of foreign expats and urban middle class Indians. These include those that are more clearly 'antique' shops, in the sense that they deal not only furniture and household objects, but also in what one might call 'collectables' (see A61, A89, A90), as well as a growing number of 'heritage boutiques' (see A57, A66, A73).

5.3.3.1 Phillips Antiques

One of the oldest antique shops in Mumbai is Phillips. It is an unassuming grey stone building from the outside but inside is a gleaming display of Indian

A. Lawson

antiques, artfully arranged and lit by crystal chandeliers. The proprietor, Farooq (R95), explains that the shop was originally established in 1860 as a pharmacy, but was converted into an antique shop by his wife's great grandfather in 1920. He says there was a good market for antiques at that time with the British presence. Twenty years ago they sold mainly glass items such as bowls, vases, chandeliers and mirrors. Now they have moved over to selling mostly what he calls 'tribal and folk art'. This includes a lot of traditional wood carving from various parts of South India – Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

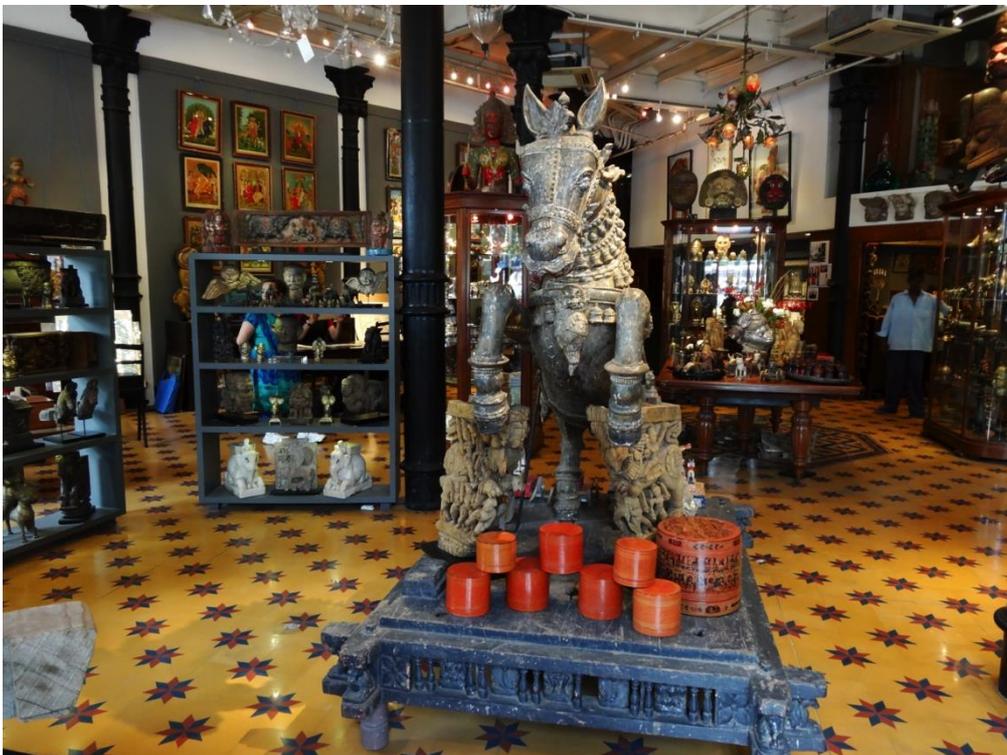


Figure 5.42 - Phillips Antiques in Mumbai caters to a wealthy middle and upper class Indian and tourist market. They sell a number of objects from Chettinad, including this Burmese lacquerware, situated in the foreground

Farooq explains that many of the items in the shop have come from Chettinad, however nothing is explicitly labelled as such. Immediately noticeable are the bright red lacquer betel boxes, arranged in front of a large wooden horse (Figure 5.42). The horse is part of a temple chariot, which Farooq says, also came from a town near to Chettinad. On a shelf further back are several carved wood *Surya Pallakai* door panels, also from

A. Lawson

Chettinad. In stark contrast to the similar items seen in Karaikudi and Auroville antique shops, the setting here is designed to enhance their artistic and ornamental qualities.

'People want larger more showy pieces nowadays. Most people just want something showy. They don't care about age. The demand for small collectibles is less than it used to be. But there are still customers who are collectors – for things like Bhuta bronzes and chariot panels. They will collect themes and gods etc.' (R95, A89).

5.3.3.2 Balaji Antiques and Collectibles

Meanwhile, one of the oldest antique business in Bangalore has a slightly different approach. Balaji's, was established in 1924 as a gramophone company and has been dealing exclusively in antiques since the 1970's. The main shop is hidden away on a small side street just off Avenue Road in Bangalore. For many years the proprietor, Balaji (R68), has carried on a steady trade based on regular customers and word of mouth. His shop is not arranged as a showpiece for the antiques he sells. It is more of a rambling series of storerooms. However, he explains that most of his customers do not simply walk in off the street. They are known to him, and he to them. There is a relationship. They will call him and ask what he has for them and, based on his knowledge of their interests he will tell them. He describes many of his regular customers as 'collectors', people who are both knowledgeable and passionate about the objects they collect, often with a specific area of interest.

'Like this one collector, he collects bronzes, and Mysore school and Thanjavur school paintings. He collects everything. Thanjavur, Mysore, bronzes, porcelain, Persian carpets, tapestries' (R68, A61).

This type of customer may purchase some of the elaborately carved wood from Chettinad. R68: *'Kaveri panels (Surya Pallakai), doors, very elaborate doors they would get'*. They are not, Balaji says, usually interested in the Sree

A. Lawson

Danam variety of Chettinad antiques, which are too plain for their tastes. 'It's very, very utilitarian. Not artistic in any way' (R68, A61). Balaji says he sources his antiques from all over Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, but mainly focuses on the Mysore region. Only very recently has he begun to buy antiques from Chettinad. This is in part due to a friend of his, Oriole (R67), a British woman who grew up in Madurai and now lives in Bangalore, who has been helping him to organise antique shows several times a year (Figure 5.43). The idea of hosting a show to draw in a different type of customer was Oriole's idea and as part of this she decided to look for a different type of antique to sell at such shows.

'I basically help organise shows outside of the shop. So the buying part that I got involved in was that I wanted to have cheaper, vintage stuff, that I thought would sell more often to more people, and would interest people to come to the shows, rather than just having the very expensive stuff and one-off pieces or furniture. So it was my idea to go and buy enamelware and stuff like that from Karaikudi' (R67, A61).

Just recently they have hosted a show at RainTree, which is one of Bangalore's 'heritage boutiques' (Bhumika 2015), a recent commercial trend in South India RainTree is located in beautiful colonial-era mansion surrounded by walled gardens. Here they have filled two of the rooms with a selection from Balaji's stock. It has been arranged in the manner of a home (Figure 5.44a); a desk in the corner, a table in the centre, shelves on the wall. On all the surfaces are a variety of antique articles, including stone pickles jars, enamelware, and several architectural pieces from Chettiar houses repurposed as table-top ornaments (Figure 5.44).



EST 1924

BALAJI'S

ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES

invites you to a sale of
antique teak and rosewood furniture, Tanjore paintings,
Japanese blue glass, vintage gadgets, enamelware,
and rare artifacts.

In the cottage at Raintree
from Thursday the 19th until Saturday the 21st of February.
Timings 10am - 7pm.

We are also featuring Patrick Wilson's beautiful
silk bags and cushions.

www.balajiantiques.com

Figure 5.43 – Advertisement for Balaji's (R68) antique show at RainTree, a 'heritage boutique' in central Bangalore

Balaji says that customers at these shows don't tend to know anything about Chettinad, however they will ask about the antiques from there because they want to know how second hand items can be in such perfect condition. At the antique show at RainTree a lady is examining one of the stone pickle jars. Later, at his shop, Balaji says that the lady bought the jar. She had wanted to know why he was charging 2000 rupees for it, when similar jars can be bought from the local market for 200 rupees. Only after Balaji explained that it was an antique jar, made in England and brought from Chettinad, did she decide to purchase it.



a. Antiques arranged to create a home-like feel at Balaji's antique show



b. Carved wood taken from architectural details in Chettiar houses, 're-purposed' as candlesticks



c. Stucco yali head from house exterior sold as a table ornament

Figure 5.44 – Antiques at Balaji's (R68) antique show, at the 'heritage boutique' RainTree in Bangalore, are arranged to give the impression of a real room in somebody's home

A. Lawson

In their last trip to Karaikudi, Balaji and Oriole purchased 300 pieces of enamelware.

'I had no idea of the scale of what they had until I got there. And I wasn't at all sure that I was right, that it would sell. So I took ten or twenty pieces, and then we had our first show and we sold out on the first day. So I thought, yeah' (R67, A61).

Both Balaji and Oriole describe their shock at the amount of enamelware they found in Karaikudi. Balaji tells of a house in Chettinad with 7000 pieces of enamelware in storage, while Oriole talks about a dealer they visited who had amassed a huge quantity of enamelware.

'That's the place that really shocked me. He's got a room that's twice the length of this and is just enamelware. It's just unbelievable...and then because we didn't buy hundreds he tried to overprice it. And it ended up we didn't buy anything from him. And he's holding out against this Jodhpur fellow' (R67, A61).

Balaji and Oriole are not intending to purchase antiques from Karaikudi again in the near future. They have a lot in storage (Figure 5.45) and they say that there is not enough variety there to justify repeated trips. *'Because the same stuff we get. Even in enamelware, the same things'* (R68, A61). *'You don't get anything 'wow I've never seen that before'* (R67, A61). Also Balaji complains that the dealers from Jodhpur who buy these things in bulk are pushing up the prices, making Chettinad less attractive to other dealers.



Figure 5.45 - Unsold Swedish enamelware purchased by Balaji (R68) and Oriole (R67) on their last trip to Chettinad and stored at Balaji's shop near Avenue Road, Bangalore

As well as his main store and the occasional antique show, Balaji has recently expanded his business online. He says that the internet and social media is becoming an increasingly important tool in the antique business, with many dealers contacting him through Facebook and WhatsApp. The website seems like a logical step. However it is not quite the change that one might imagine. While the website is used to advertise his merchandise and reach a wider audience. Balaji says that sales still happen on a personal face-to-face basis. *'Business here is very personal and trust based and one-on-one'* (R67, A61).

5.3.3.3 Heritage Boutiques – Basava Amabara and Amethyst

In the last ten years or so a number of boutiques, all sharing a similar style and ethos, have emerged in the cities of Chennai and Bangalore. They have a cultural heritage slant, are often located in refurbished 'heritage houses', and seem well designed to cater to the middle and upper-middle classes of urban South India, as well as the many tourists and Western ex-patriots living in

A. Lawson

cities such as Bangalore and Chennai. Their style blends Indian and Western in equal parts, and feels aspirational yet still achievable, putting one in mind of European companies such as Habitat. They sell a range of personal and homeware items, traditional crafts, natural materials but modern designs, textiles and jewellery, and antiques.

Bangalore now has a number of these boutiques, including RainTree, and Cinnamon. Basava Ambara is one such heritage boutique. It is located in the wealthy Basavangudi district of Bangalore. The building itself is a renovated house dating from the early 20th century (Figure 5.46).



Figure 5.46 – Basava Ambara is a boutique in Bangalore with a ‘heritage’ angle. The website main page includes a hand drawing of the converted colonial building in which Basava Ambara is housed, (web: Basava Ambara: a)

It combines a courtyard café with a shop selling clothes, jewellery, handicrafts and textiles. It also sells antique furniture and other articles, which the website defines as ‘Indian Art’:

‘Basava Ambara is also a destination for the connoisseur of Indian art & antique jewellery. Artifacts in various forms and media such as stone, wood & metal collected over the years right from the 17th century by Venkataram Reddy adorn the store with their distinctive beauty. Handpicked antique jewellery that evokes the sentimental

A. Lawson

worth of its ancestral Heritage completes the experience of being in a different era' (Basava Ambara 2017).

In the courtyard restaurant is a painted wooden horse taken from a temple chariot of the Chettinad region. The proprietor Venku Reddy (R62) says he also sells doors, pillars, brass items (such as lamps and vessels) and antique sari's from Chettinad. Venku entered this business as an antique enthusiast and collector and soon found that it was a growing market where good profits could be made:

'In my enthusiasm to build a collection for myself I got into the business. There is a good market for quality, artistic things. The price of such things has increased dramatically even in my own experience. In the early eighties those huge carved doors were selling for two lakh. Now I have seen one dealer advertise a door for one and a half crores' (R62, A57).

One of the first heritage boutiques in Chennai was Amethyst, which was established in 2000 and has since opened a second store in Pondicherry (Figure 5.47). From the beginning antiques were an important part of the Amethyst range. The Pondicherry branch currently stocks a large amount of enamelware, lacquerware and stone pickle jars from Chettinad (Figure 5.48). These articles are stacked and arranged in a beautifully decorated room that feels bright and contemporary. And yet it's also true that these Chettinad objects seem perfectly in-keeping with the colonial-era building which houses the shop. *'Most of these boutiques sell lifestyle products – and that goes well with the idea of the space. It evokes nostalgia'* (Narasimhan, cited in Bhumika 2015).



Figure 5.47 – The interior of 'heritage boutique' Amethyst in Pondicherry, reflects the mixture of modern and vintage, Western and Indian, that characterises the company. Enamelware from Chettinad can be seen on the table in the foreground.



a. European enamelware



b. Burmese lacquerware

Figure 5.48 – Antique articles from Chettinad for sale at Amethyst include European enamelware and Burmese lacquerware

5.3.4 Export market

Many Chettinad antiques do not seem to be problematic to export. There are of course those that are not old enough to be officially classed as antiquities, though these things are difficult to date precisely and belong to a historical period that falls either side of the one-hundred year age requirement for Indian antiquities. Some dealers spoke of their need to obtain certification of an objects 'non-antiquity' status in order to export certain objects. This was only necessary for larger items such as furniture or sculpture. Interestingly it was commonly said to be needed for replica objects, especially those that had been given an 'antique effect' finish. The use of replica objects as decoys in order to obtain false export certification for genuine antiques has been spoken about by Pachauri (2006: 242). No evidence of this practice was found during this research, though some dealers did mention it.

'I know the ASI. We have to deal with them a lot. We get licences from the ASI for buying and selling antiques. This is even necessary for replicas of antiques, because some dealers will try to export genuine antiques by pretending they are replicas. Some objects need to go through at least one, and sometimes two, ASI committees to decide whether it is genuine, and if it is genuine they will seize it. Illegal exportation is a big problem in South India' (R6, A5).

It seems likely to me that the major reason for the relative ease with which many items from Chettinad are exported is that they do not fall into the category of 'Indian Art' that has been discussed in Chapter 2.1 as a central feature of Indian approaches to heritage. Many are too plain and utilitarian, while their manufacture is foreign and mass produced. As one Chettiar put it, 'Well if you have a teapot that is more than a hundred years old nobody is going to stop you taking it' (R73, A68). The exception to this is the carved wood features produced by south Indian carpenters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet even these have been able to find their way onto the international market. Finally there is the use of antique wood,

A. Lawson

sometimes decoratively carved, possibly older than one hundred years, in the construction of new 'masala' furniture. It seems that the breaking apart of this material, and re-assembling it with newer parts, removes any likelihood of it being deemed something of antiquity.

Chettinad antiques are undoubtedly exported from and through most major Indian cities and ports. However, the state of Rajasthan, and in particular the city of Jodhpur, has gained a name as a major exporter of handicrafts and antiques, including many from Chettinad. Internationally there are dealers all over the world, from London to Singapore, who sell antiques sourced in Chettinad. The internet is also an important sphere for the international market in Chettinad antiques, making it easier than ever before for dealers in India and elsewhere to connect with potential customers.

5.3.4.1 Jodhpur

The city of Jodhpur is home to a large number of businesses specialising in the export of handicrafts and antiques. They are primarily wholesale retailers, selling in bulk to retailers in other countries, as well as to architects and interior designers. *'Interior designers come there from all over the world and buy container loads. Because its vintage, so they can ship it without any issues'* (R67, A61). These export businesses seem to deliberately emphasize the handicraft element of their trade, and play down any association with antiques or antiquities. Their names reflect this, and 'art' seems to be the favoured term: *'Prachin Art Gallery: manufacturer and exporter of all South Indian handicraft articles'*, *'Prince Art Exporter'*, *'SunCity Art Exporter: manufacturer and exporter of Indian artistic furnitures'*. It is true that a significant part of their business now is in the manufacture of replica, recycled, new or 'masala' articles. Prince Art Exporters, for example, claims to be 100% handicraft based now (A95), while several of the other businesses offer a range of both new and antique articles.

A. Lawson

Exporters from Jodhpur have been visiting Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudi for several years now in order to make bulk purchases of antiques. Bismi Arts in Karaikudi (chap. 5.3.1.2) has a regular trading relationship with SunCity Art Exporters (Figure 5.49), who visit twice a year and take away lorry loads of antiques. Suncity is run by a father and son. The son, Sanjay (R104), says that 80% of what they sell is antique, while the rest is manufactured in their own workshop.



Figure 5.49 - SunCity Art Exporters showroom in Jodhpur has four floors and an outside area displaying a range of antique, modern handcraft and replic antique objects

They conduct much of their business online, with a website which allows registered customers to view and purchase the full range of their stock in multiple currencies; INR, EUR, GBP, AUD or USD (web: Suncity-Art). Browsing this site gives one an idea of how large their stock is. In the category of “Architectural, Doors” alone, on a single day there are 168 items available. Though no information about age or place of origin is given on this website, from studying the photographs it appears that only two of this 168 doors are from Chettinad (or at least central Tamil Nadu) (Figure 5.50).



Figure 5.50 – Antique doors (in the Chettinad style) for sale on the Jodhpur based company SunCity Art Exporters website (web: Suncity-Art)

SunCity's showroom in the city also displays many antique doors. A few of them are from Chettinad while there are others from old houses in different parts of India. Indeed Sanjay says that only a fraction of what they sell comes from Chettinad, or South India as a whole, it being more economical to source from areas closer to Jodhpur.

By contrast Prachin Art Gallery has made a niche for itself specialising entirely in South Indian antiques, with many coming from Chettinad. The proprietor is originally from Mangalore in Karnataka and first came across Chettinad antiques in Bangalore. He decided they would do well in the Jodhpur export business as no-one else seemed to be trading in them. At his showroom-cum-

A. Lawson

warehouse there are doors (Figure 5.51a) and pillars but also large quantities of the *Sree Danam* articles. Rows and rows of enamelware, lacquerware and pickle jars, as well as terracotta figurines, suitcases, iron keys, betel nut cutters and a plethora of other items that appear to have come straight from the antique shops of Karaikudi (Figure 5.51). Everything is tidy and organised by type.



a. Chettinad doors



b. Enamelware



c. Terracotta figurines and Burmese lacquerware

Figure 5.51 – Chettinad antiques at Prachin Art Gallery warehouse in Jodhpur are collected here on a large scale and organised by type. There is a fairly limited range of Chettinad items here in comparison to the variety of objects found at the antique shops in Karaikudi

A. Lawson

Much of these smaller items are sold on Prachin Art Gallery's eBay site under the name 'orientalhub' (Figure 5.52). They can be purchased individually and are small enough to be posted direct to the purchaser without difficulty.

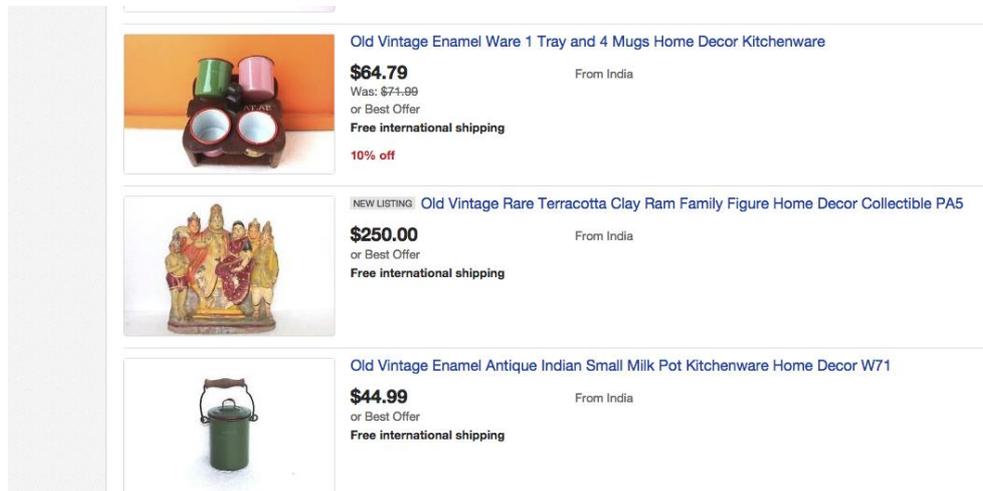


Figure 5.52 – Enamelware and terracotta items for sale on Prachin Art Gallery's eBay site 'orientalhub' (web: eBay: a). These are small enough to be posted to customers abroad. Larger items such as doors and pillars can be ordered through the main company website and transported overseas in cargo containers.

In the outdoor workshop next to the main warehouse there is evidence of 'masala' work taking place. A row of newly built bookshelves have been fitted with the carved *Surya Pallakais* taken from south Indian doors (Figure 5.53).

One of the oldest and largest antique and handicraft exporters in Jodhpur is Prince Art Exporter. Its many warehouses, workshops and *godowns* spread over a vast area and visitors are shown around in a golf cart. One of these *godowns* contain row after row of antique doors, while another contains a similar quantity of pillars. One large warehouse contains many pieces of lacquerware and enamelware from Chettinad stored amongst a multitude of antique items from other parts of India. It is all tidy and orderly, and there is a woman carefully dusting all the objects, a sharp contrast to the higgledy-piggledy antique shops of Karaikudi itself. Outside there are separate workshops for metal and wood where craftsmen are busy constructing furniture and ornamental objects.



Figure 5.53 – ‘Masala’ cupboards, so called because they are made by blending new, or salvaged, wood with antique parts. These modern bookshelves have been fitted with antique panels, or *Surya Pallakais*, taken from the tops of doors in Tamil Nadu houses.

The business was started 42 years ago as an antique exporter but despite the large numbers of antique doors and other items in their store they say that have now moved over almost entirely to manufacturing their own articles. Many of these are replicas in that the design is based on that of a genuine antique item. The proprietor (R102) has his own collection of antiques, many of which serve as the model or ‘blueprint’ for the hundreds of replicas that are made in his workshops and sold abroad.

5.3.4.2 *International market*

The exporters in Jodhpur ship all over the world. Generally this trade is with other retailers in foreign countries. Who the eventual customers are is not fully understood at this point, as the data collected for this thesis was not able to extend this far.

A. Lawson

SunCity Art Exporters mention trading with companies in USA, Europe, Australia and Japan as countries they regularly export to. Sanjay (R104) says that while 6-7 years ago they had many UK customers but now they have only a few. Prachin Art Gallery report that different items sell better in different countries: Australia for enamelware and crockery, the UK for Ravi Varma prints, and the USA, Singapore and Belgium for wooden doors and pillars. The USA is currently the main source of custom for Prince Art Exporter. There is a customer in China (Shanghai) who provides them with good business and orders three to four container loads per month. Like SunCity, they say that the European market is not so good right now. In the UK they have three to four customers, however the replica and 'masala' business is better there.

One such UK customer of Prince Art Exporter is Indigo Asian Antiques and Interiors, situated in Wiltshire. They stock antiques and handicrafts from all over Asia, but a high proportion of this comes via Jodhpur. However, very little is recognisably Chettinad, with most items coming from Rajasthan, Gujarat and other parts of North India. All the items on their website are provided with at least a minimal amount of information about what they are and where they come from. For example, one of the few South Indian items is described as.

'Brass bound rosewood chest from South India. £960. Chests and boxes from India are found in an extraordinary variety of styles reflecting the many cultures that influenced India. They were usually made from teak, rosewood or jackfruit wood. They were used for storing valuables such as textiles, jewellery and cash. Our pieces are mostly from the 19th century and occasionally 18th and early 20th century. From India' (web: Indigo Asian Antiques and Interiors: a).

As well as many genuine antiques dating from the 18th and 19th centuries' Indigo sells furniture made from reclaimed wood, which has been produced in the workshops of Prince Art Exporter. For example:

A. Lowson

'Cabinet made from old painted carved teakwood panels. £820. This is not an antique, however it is made from old reclaimed painted teakwood and old teak carvings. It is decorative, extremely durable and environmentally friendly' (web: Indigo Asian Antiques and Interiors: b) (Figure 5.54).



Figure 5.54 – Indigo Antiques in Wiltshire, UK sells furniture made of salvaged wood, which they source from Prince Arts in Jodhpur (web: Indigo Asian Antiques and Interiors: b)

The Chettinad name is not always, or indeed often, mentioned when antiques sourced in Chettinad are sold. For that reason a simple internet search is unlikely to find all of the many places these articles find their way to. However if one does search the word 'Chettinad' and the word 'antique' together the top results include several sellers outside of India, both of which are in South-East Asia.

The first is 'Under the Bo', a company based in Thailand and established by a Frenchman in the early nineties (Figure 5.55). Chettinad doors can be found for sale here but none of the other types of Chettinad antique, such as the *Sree Danam* articles. Though they import antiques from all over Asia, Under

A. Lawson

the Bo is itself an export company, which sells in US dollars and ships internationally.



Figure 5.55 – ‘Under the Bo’ is an antique retailer and export company based in Thailand. The company owner is from France. Under the Bo imports antiques from all over Asia, including Chettinad (possibly via Jodhpur), and also exports them to customers all over the world (web: Under the Bo)

The second is the Past Perfect Collection. Based in Singapore and catering to both Singapore and international customers they specialise in Indian antique furniture and architectural pieces. Interestingly their website makes no attempt to conceal the fact that all of the pieces they sell are both Indian in origin, and more than 100 years old. Indeed they place a great deal of emphasis on the historic significance of the items for sale here:

‘By definition antique furniture is more than 100 years old, which of course already makes it very special. Furthermore they are unique pieces of history that could probably tell amazing stories’ (web: Past Perfect Collection: a).

The Past Perfect Collection website offers Chettinad doors for sale (Figure 5.56) and states that it also supplies Chettinad pillars (web: Past Perfect Collection: b), however there is no mention of lacquerware, enamelware or stone pickle jars.

A. Lawson

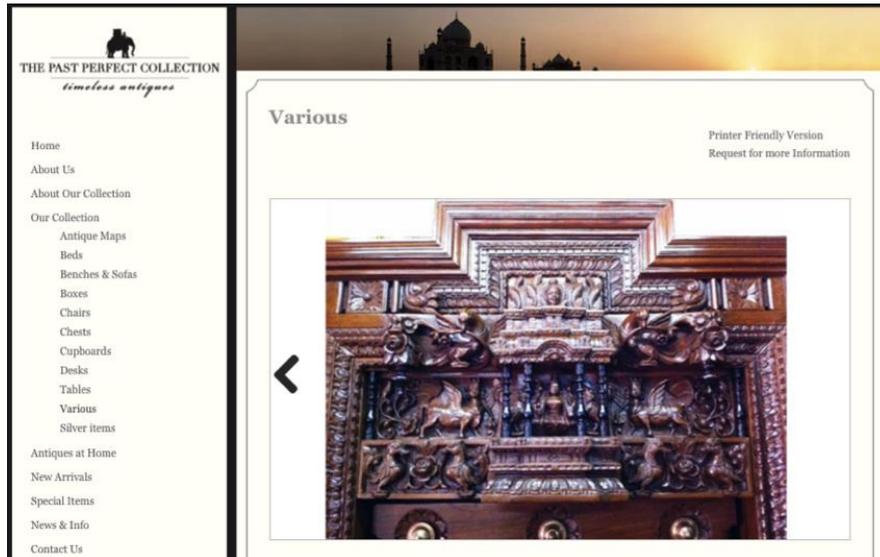


Figure 5.56 - The Past Perfect Collection' in Singapore sells antique doors from Chettinad, amongst other Indian antiques, to customers in Singapore and abroad (web: Past Perfect Collection: c).

A search for Chettinad antiques in London yielded only one source, Chloe Alberry on Portobello Road (Figure 5.57) which sells enamelware from Chettinad. They are not labelled as coming from Chettinad, rather their manufacturing source, Sweden. However tiny etched Tamil initials on each piece of enamelware is the clue (Figure 5.58). The shop is not an antique shop, rather it is advertised as a specialist in door handles, cabinet fittings, hooks and mirrors.



a. Exterior of shop on Portobello Road, London

b. Interior of shop displays a variety of lampshades, door handles and hooks. The Chettinad antiques are right at the back of the shop and not visible from the front

Figure 5.57 – Chloe Alberry on Portobello Road in London specialises in door handles and cabinet fittings but also sells antiques from India

A. Lawson

There is nothing here to suggest that any of these items have come from India, but a conversation with the proprietor, David (R107), reveals that he is a self-confessed 'Indophile' who has travelled there regularly to source material for the shop. He knows of Chettinad, but not directly, as it seems he acquires his Chettinad enamelware from dealers in Jodhpur. He is more familiar with Shekhawati, an area in Rajasthan that is often compared to Chettinad due to its palatial colonial-era buildings and their association with a particular trading community known as the *Marwaris*. David explains that the articles he purchases from Chettinad originally came to India as European imports. He prefers not to tell customers that these things were bought in India, and in his experience they don't usually ask. Even the little Tamil initials on the enamelware apparently to not excite curiosity. Besides, he tells me, the Indian look is not in fashion in the UK right now.



a. This Swedish enamelware bowl from Chettinad is marked at £34, approximately 3 times their rate at Amethyst in Pondicherry or Balaji's in Bangalore



b. There is no label in the shop to explain that enamelware was sourced in India, and the small engraved Tamil initials on each piece are unlikely to mean anything to the customers here

Figure 5.58 – Enamelware from Chettinad for sale at Chloe Alberry

5.4 The Destinations

Table 5-3 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) who are customers/consumers of Chettinad antiques

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A6	15/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R7, R8
A27	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R31
A29	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R32
A30	25/11/2013	Karaikudi	I1, T1, R33
A40	01/12/2013	Bangalore	I1, R43
A43	27/04/2014	Chennai	I1, R46
A50	22/08/2014	Kanadukathan	I1, R55
A51	22/08/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T2, R56
A52	22/08/2014	Karaikudi	I1, T2, R57
A53	25/08/2014	Pondicherry	I1, R58
A55	28/08/2014	Kothamangalam	I1, R60
A57	08/09/2014	Bangalore	I1, R62
A58	12/09/2014	Kanadukathan	I1, T3, R55, R63
A67	09/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R72
A71	12/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R76
A72	16/11/2014	Bangalore	I1, R77
A73	22/11/2014	Bangalore	I1, R62
A92	04/05/2015	Chennai	I1, R100

5.4.1 The Home

I1: Who buys this sort of thing?

R3: People just looking for something nice to furnish their houses (A2)

Chettinad antiques have come from homes of the past, so it is perhaps no surprise that one of the main destinations for these objects, in their routes through the antique market, is homes of the present. Structural architectural items such as doors and pillars are often kept intact in the process of demolishing the old Chettiar houses, in order that they can be reused in the construction of new houses. *Sree Danam* articles such as kitchen enamelware and stone pickle jars are either resold as utilitarian kitchen vessels, or as decorative home accessories, or a combination of both. Though the line between utilitarian and aesthetic in the re-use of Chettinad antiques is

A. Lawson

a blurred one, it is possible to draw some distinctions based on geography. In short, the market for Chettinad articles in the locality of Chettinad itself, and nearby towns, seems to be based more strongly on concept of recycling their utilitarian value; further afield, amongst middle and upper class urban Indians, Chettinad antiques can become something more aesthetic or symbolic, through their capacity to conjure a nostalgia for past generations. This is by no means a simple distinction though. The local market is also pervaded by symbolism connected to a sense that objects with past lives can sometimes carry bad luck, ill will, or shame.

5.4.1.1 Recycled and Utility – the local market

The recycling of antique wood to make into new furniture is one of the main markets stemming from the demolition of houses in Chettinad. Local carpenters work to order, making wardrobes and doors amongst other things (chap. 5.3.1.3). The antique shops all along Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudi tend to report trade with customers and dealers from outside of Chettinad. But they also have customers closer to home. Perhaps the most surprising is the custom from Chettiars themselves. Mr Rabik of Bismi Arts (R20) says that local Nagarathar Chettiars will occasionally purchase items in order to replace or repair things in their own houses, such as original light fittings, ceiling fans, or kitchen utensils (A79).

For many Chettiars there is little attraction to the artefacts of their parents and grandparents generations:

‘Most of them prefer modern style only one or two will take some pillars for their dining hall. Not too much. Other caste people like this. Each and every day the Chettiar people are seeing these things, so they are not interested. Other people will not see this, so all the other caste people like it. Chettiar family, from past hundred years, two hundred years, they have seen each and every thing, so it is not interesting’ (R41, A38).

But in some cases, an appreciation of their own material culture has been revived by the antique market and the interest of people outside of Chettinad. One elderly Chettiar lady (R64) explained that the stone jars she still uses to keep pickles and salt fresh, have been in the family for over 100 years (Figure 5.59). However, it is only in the last few years, with the growing interest in these articles from people outside Chettinad, that she has come to know how hygienic and effective the old stone jars are in comparison to modern kitchen ware, such as plastic or stainless steel tubs. So she keeps them with great pride (B:14/09/14).



Figure 5.59 - Chettiar lady in Karaikudi with a pickle jar that has been with her family for a century

A. Lowson

The perceived quality and durability of antique articles, particularly those used in the cooking and storing of food, attracts customers to Karaikudi from surrounding towns and cities. Three women have travelled from Madurai specifically to visit Bismi Arts (R32, A29). They are looking for useful household items. They prefer the antiques because they are made from good quality and durable materials like wood and brass, rather than the plastic and tin of the modern versions (Figure 5.60). Mr Rabik says that antique cooking vessels give a better taste to the food. *‘There is a lady from Bangalore who will come here to buy this. She will not buy the fresh pan. She always buys the used ones which look black in colour’* (R20, A59).



Figure 5.60 – Customer at Bismi Arts in Karaikudi shopping for antique kitchenware (R32, A29). She says that she dislikes the modern kitchenware made from cheap plastic and prefers to shop for antique versions made of good quality materials.

A. Lawson

However, the local market for antique structures and articles is limited and hampered by a pervasive negative attitude to second-hand items, which is described as have 'sentiments' about old things.

'Sometimes Indians have sentiments about these things. There are local traditions. For example in a new house there has to be a new door (not an old/recycled door), even though new wood is 40% more costly' (R59, A63).

There are several aspects to them, which play into one another. First, there is a sense of social shame attached to the selling of personal belongings, a sign that one has fallen on hard times. This in turn reflects negatively on any future owners of such items. Second, and linked, is the way in which ordinary household and personal objects are seen to be able to absorb and retain energy, from the places, peoples and events around them, and pass it on to future owners (chap. 8.2).

5.4.1.2 Antique and decorative – the urban market

Many antique dealers in Karaikudi and Pondicherry spoke about the falling demand from customers outside of India. However they also spoke of the increased demand from Indians themselves. In the big urban centres of South India, such as Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, there is rapid urbanisation and a growing number of middle class Indians riding the wave of the IT industry boom. These people have money to spend on their new homes and are willing to spend more to achieve a certain aesthetic.

'Today Indians are spending a lot. They all want Chettinad houses, it's become a big style suddenly in the last 10 years. Slowly it's gathered. There are hundreds of people asking me 'can you get me Chettinad pillars' (R45, A42).

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A good deal of credit for this interest in the 'Chettinad style' should go to Karthic Vaidyanathan (R43), a young member of the Nagarathar Chettiar community who has incorporated elements of Chettinad design and architecture into his modern home in Bangalore. He is of a generation who did not grow up in Chettinad. He was born and brought up in Mumbai and had very little to do with Chettinad until he started to take an interest in his family history and heritage:

A lot of the Chettiars stopped doing what they used to do, lost touch with culture, and became a fairly diluted version of Chettiars, and the younger generation really don't value where they came from. Until the last four to five years I didn't really. Was only when I bought my own apartment and all those influences from growing up in my grandmothers house came into the house. That's when I started researching it (R43, A40).

Karthic decided to decorate his small Bangalore apartment in a modern style that drew on key elements of traditional Chettiar houses, such as wooden pillars and coloured glass windows (Figure 5.61). It received a good deal of positive attention and was featured in interior design magazines, becoming something of a trend.

The amount of people who, after looking at pictures of my apartment, have gone to Karaikudi looking for the enamelware and the woodwork. So there is an increasing demand from the nouveau-riche, the upper, working middle class, who want to do up their house and who want to bring an element of South Indianess to it (R43, A40)

A. Lawson



a. arched glass windows

b. teak pillars

Figure 5.61 – Karthic Vaidyanathan’s apartment in Bangalore, which he designed, incorporates decorative and architectural features inspired the Chettiar houses of his family background. It has been featured in a number of interior design magazines and websites, such as apartmenttherapy.com, where he is quoted “*My home is a trip down lane. It’s an amalgamation of all the influences in my life as I grew; but more important – it is a reflection of my cultural heritage and past*” (web: Aptment Therapy).

However Karthic sees the singling out of Chettinad as a special place for antiques as largely an invention of the industry and the workings of fashion. He argues that there is nothing especially unique about the items that come from Chettinad, rather it’s a case of greater availability due to the peculiar historical and present circumstances of the Nagarathar Chettiar community.

These [indicating wooden pillars/door in his own apartment] are not from Chettinad, they are from Mysore. But now everything has a generic ‘Chettinad’ name. It’s a tool for marketing it, because my earlier flat got written about (R43, A40).

An example of the trend for using antiques and antique wood in new house construction is the apartment of Ramanchandaren (R61). He is himself an antique dealer based close to the busy shopping district of Commercial Road in Bangalore. The building opposite his shop is a large old house owned by himself and his two brothers, and recently they have undertaken some

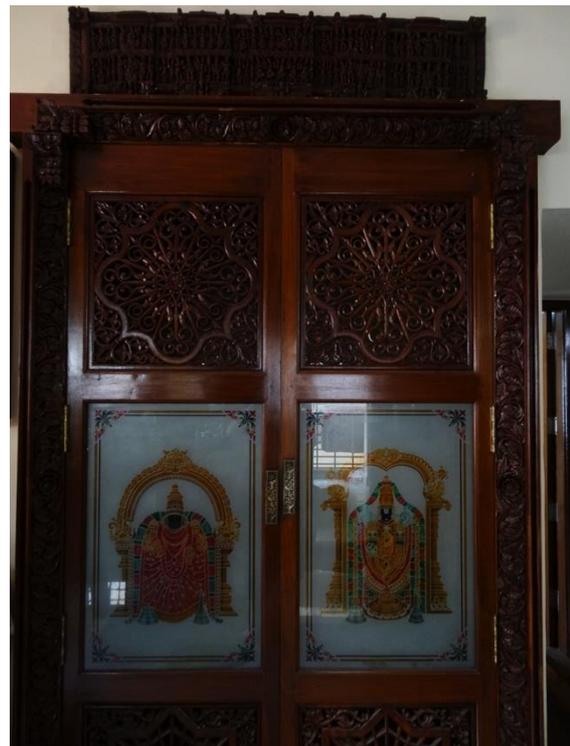
A. Lawson

renovation work. *'This building is three houses. Its 150 years old. We broke it down [he means partitioned] and three floors we made for three brothers. All this wood we have used from Chettinad. For the whole building. Come I will show you the front portion of this wood. The carved portion I will keep and I will sell it'* (R61, A56).

Ramachandaran's portion of the house is on the second floor. The entrance to his apartment is a modern wood door, but above it is a carved *Surya Pallakai* taken from an antique Chettiar door (Figure 5.62a). Inside there is antique wood everywhere. His modern fitted kitchen units are made of recycled wood from Chettinad, his bed and wardrobe too. In the living room is an elaborate carved panel from Mysore which Ramachandaran has converted into his Puja room door (Figure 5.62b). Above it is a carved wood panel from Kerala.



a. *Surya Pallakai* from Chettinad above Ramachandaran's apartment door



b. Antique carved wood used to build pooja room doors

Figure 5.62 – Many parts of Ramachandaran's (R61) apartment in Bangalore have been constructed with the use of antique wood and architectural features, including some sourced from Chettinad

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Antique dealers have noticed that this trend in India for antiques is aesthetically different from that of their foreign customers. Put simply, Indian customers prefer antiques to look as good-as-new. *'In India we don't sell antiques unless they are fully refurbished. We don't like the unrefurbished look. Everything is made to look fresh'* (R71, A66). A dealer in Pondicherry who specialises in newly made pieces with an antique finish, or 'antique effect' noticed the differing demands of his Indian and European customers:

We make new things with antique look. People also prefer it and that is our business secret...Europeans, foreigners, like old and antique pieces...Indians will ask for these things but they wanted to make it bright. We will explain them that we won't make it bright but dull to give it an antique effect (R26, A21).

Another recent trend noted amongst antique dealers is the repurposing of antique articles in novel ways. One dealer in Karaikudi, for example, mentioned a customer, a European man, who buys pieces and then converts them into something different, for example, a carved wood door made into a table, a cot made into a drinks trolley, a cartwheel made into clothes hanger, and rickshaw made into a bar (R20, A15).

5.4.2 Hospitality, retail and tourist industries

The use of antique, antique effect and replica articles is popular in hospitality businesses in India, such as hotels, restaurants and shops, where a traditional or heritage mood or theme is desired.

5.4.2.1 Heritage hotels and houses

The most obvious examples of this are the 'heritage hotels' in the Chettinad region itself. The Bangala in Karaikudi was one of the first of these. It occupies an old Club House dating to the Early 20th Century and is owned by

A. Lawson

the Maiyappan family. An effort has been made to decorate the hotel in the style of the Chettiar houses of old. In the dining area there is a large display of antique kitchen vessels and utensils. Mrs Meenakshi Maiyappan explains that many of the objects and used to renovate and decorate the building are either from her own home or from the local antique shops. *'The pictures, the Burmese lacquer, the enamel. All that is from my own collection or from my dowry collection, and from the antique street'* (R54, A49).



Figure 5.63 – The dining area of the Bangala, a heritage hotel in Karaikudi located in a converted club house dating to the early 20th century. There are many kitchen vessels and utensils on display here which date to the same era at the building itself. Some have come Mrs Meenakshi Maiyappan's (R54) own *Sree Danam* and others have been purchased from the antique shops on Muneeswaram Kovil Street.

Saratha Villas is a heritage hotel situated in a renovated Chettiar house in the Chettinad village of Kothamangalam (R60, A55). The house dates to 1910 and many of the original features have been retained while other aspects such as bedrooms and bathrooms have been modernised. This has been achieved with the addition of many antique items from other Chettinad houses, via the antique shops in Karaikudi. There is an emphasis on the re-

A. Lawson

purposing of traditional antique objects evident in Saratha Villas which complements the mixture of modern and traditional interiors. For example, enamel kitchenware as bathroom accessories, and a small table made from reclaimed carved wood (Figure 5.64).



a. enamelware kitchen vessels used as bathroom accessories

b. coffee table made with salvaged carved wood

Figure 5.64 – Many of the items used to restore and furnish Saratha Vilas, a heritage hotel in Kothamangalam, have come from the local antique dealers. They two Frenchmen who run the hotel have chosen to repurpose many of the antiques in roles they were not originally intended for.

Even more so than Chettinad, the tourist hub of Pondicherry, particularly the sea front area known as White Town, is full of renovated heritage houses, many of which are run as hotels and guesthouses. These renovations have been carried out with the help of the Pondicherry chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). Ajit Koujalgi (R58) is the Chief architect and Co-convenor of INTACH Pondicherry. He explains that material from demolished buildings, such as those in Chettinad, are an important resource for heritage house renovations:

'We use many old parts in the restoration of heritage houses like this. In one way it's good if things are being used/appreciated - if they're being broken apart anyway. But as an architect I can't help but look at these things and wonder where they came from – what was the setting – the original context. It's sad. It's also become an impetus for demolition. Originally houses were demolished and a market was found

A. Lawson

for them, but now the market is the driving factor and people are encouraged to demolish because they know there's a market for it' (R58, A53).

5.4.2.2 Shops and restaurants

Occasionally Chettinad antiques can be found used as decorative pieces in situations where no obvious Chettinad, or even heritage, associations are observable. For example, the Brigade Road branch of Starbucks in central Bangalore has a display of Chettinad enamelware (identifiable by the engraved Tamil initials) (Figure 5.65), but there is nothing here to indicate what it is, where it came from, or even that it is old or antique in any way.



Figure 5.65 - Enamelware from Chettinad at a Starbucks coffee shop in Bangalore is displayed on the wall in an ornamental capacity without any other cultural references

However, more often antique decorative pieces such as pillars or carved wood panels are used in shops with a definite heritage or traditional South Indian ethos, such as South Indian cuisine restaurants or traditional silk sari shops. A good example is Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi. This is a silk sari company with stores all across south India, which has made a deliberate

A. Lawson

effort to incorporate antique architectural pieces into the shop fronts and interiors. The company website explains the reasoning for this and makes an explicit reference to Chettinad architecture as a source of inspiration:

'Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi – call it temple or store: The store façade harmonizing with the design strategy generates a conventional aura which is being created out of old materials blended with new techniques. An amalgamation of bright artworks, long posts, Mangalor tile (kiln) on MS frame with pedestal crafted out of fibre shores up the storefront. The storefront is more of art inspired by traditional architecture of old Chettinad house with wooden pillar and glass' (web: Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi).



Figure 5.66 - Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi sari shop is a South Indian chain which emphasises the role of tradition and heritage in its marketing. Their stores regularly feature Chettinad style pillars and other design elements which reference Chettinad houses (web: Kancheepuram Varamahalakshmi)

5.4.3 Public and private collections

Very few antique items from Chettinad houses have been acquired by collectors, either for private enjoyment or public display. Most Chettinad antiques are neither extremely old or extremely rare, and only the carved wood is sometimes viewed as a form of art. For these reasons such objects do not feature prominently in the museum collections of Tamil Nadu and India more generally, but the Government museum in Chennai does house a very small collection, and elsewhere in more specialised collections, such as DakshinaChitra or Pudukkottai Museum, a wider range of Chettinad objects have been collected.

5.4.3.1 Government Museum Chennai

There is one display cabinet in the museum here dedicated to 'Artifacts of Chettinadu' (Figure 5.67). It contains primarily traditional kitchen utensils including a coconut scraper and wooden spoon holder. The labels are brief and to-the-point (e.g. '*coconut scraper – 19th century*') and there is no contextual information about the history of the region or people.

In the same gallery, on a table, is a three-dimensional miniature model of a traditional Chettinad house (Figure 5.68). It is built from wood and constructed in exquisite detail, though much in need of cleaning.



Figure 5.67 – Cabinet displaying ‘Artifacts of Chettinadu’ at the Government Museum, Chennai. The minimalism and lack of context contrasts sharply with both the Chettinad houses from which they came, and the many antique shops, heritage houses and other environments they now occupy.



Figure 5.68 – This detailed miniature model of a Chettiar house at the Government Museum, Chennai looks unremarkable from the outside, but crouch down and peer through the small front entrance and you can see that it has been constructed with an incredible amount of accurate detail, right down to the front door with its miniscule *Surya Pallakai* atop. However, much like some of the emptier houses in Chettinad, the model is thick with dust and cobwebs.

5.4.3.2 *DakshinaChitra, Chennai*

On the outskirts of Chennai is DakshinaChitra, an open-air museum featuring reconstructions of traditional architecture and crafts of South India (chap. 2.1.1.4). It is notable as the only museum of this kind in India, with the closest comparison being the National Crafts Museum in New Delhi. DakshinaChitra was founded by Deborah Thiagarajan (R100) and opened to the public in 1996. Deborah is a native of the USA, who is married to a Nagarathar Chettiar and is now settled in Chennai. It was a visit to Chettinad to meet her husband's family which initiated an interest that eventually led to DakshinaChitra.

'When I went to Chettinad and saw the different houses I became interested, thought about how long this would last and how important it would be to start some projects to record and preserve something of these things before its all lost' (R100, A92).

The name DakshinaChitra translates as 'art of the south' or 'picture of the south'. The site contains eighteen reconstructed houses representing the traditional vernacular architecture of the four states of south India: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Many of the rooms inside the houses contain exhibitions and information boards demonstrating aspects of traditional social life (Figure 5.70b). In addition DakshinaChitra organises on-going events, courses and exhibitions relating to traditional arts. In the Tamil Nadu area of the site, next to the traditional 'Agriculturalist House', is the 'Merchant House', and this has been depicted as a Nagarathar Chettiar home.

'The whole settlement was planned and designed by occupation. So merchants was one of the occupations, along with agriculturalist and several others. When I look into it, it seemed that many merchant houses were designed after the Chettinad model, though with some variations' (R100, A92).

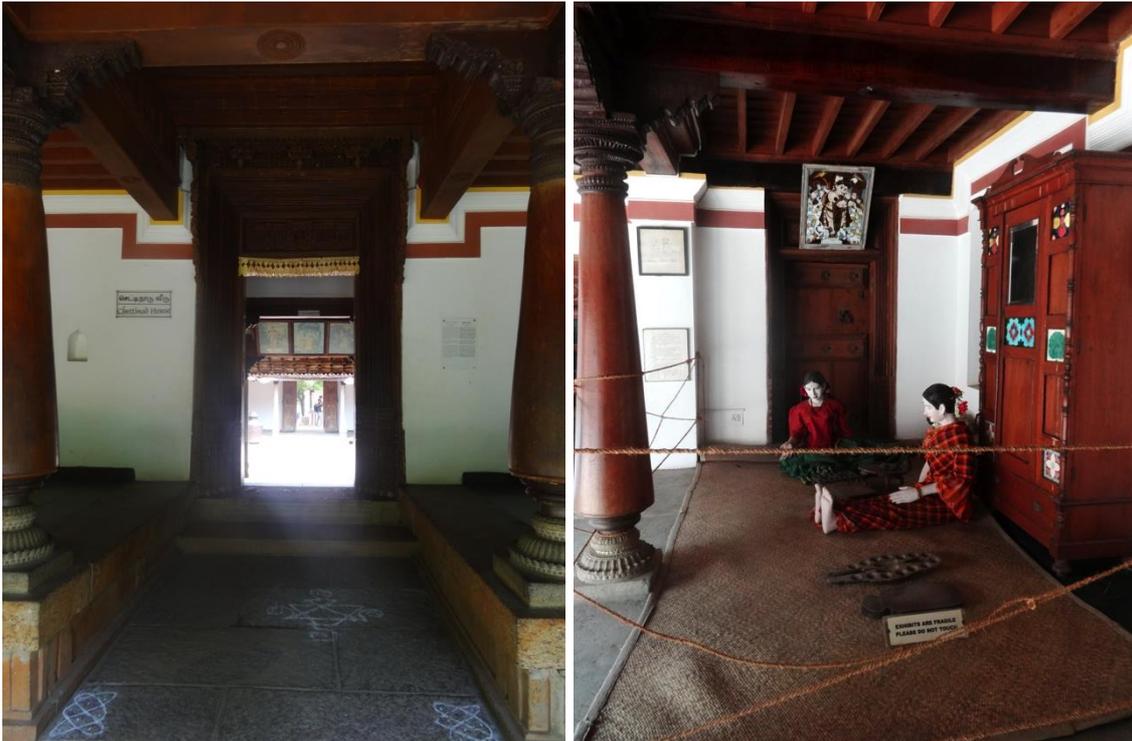
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As with the other buildings at DakshinaChitra, the Chettinar house is a reconstruction of an entire house from Kandanut village in Chettinad, which was dismantled, and reassembled at the museum site (Figure 5.69). The task of locating a suitable building that was available, dismantling it, and then reconstructing it, was a complicated one, and all of the houses at DakshinaChitra took at least three years to complete.

'It has to be a whole house, you can't put it together from bits and pieces of different houses as it won't fit together properly. The only part of the Chettinad house that came from a different building was the front door and the pillars' (R100, A92) (Figure 5.70a).



Figure 5.69 – Exterior of Chettiar house at DakshinaChitra open air museum on the outskirts of Chennai. The house is a reconstruction of an entire house from the village of Kandanut (Map 4-1: no. 50)



a. The main door and pillars come from a different house than the rest of the building as these parts are often sold separately from the rest of a Chettiar house due to their particular value as desirable antiques

b. In various areas of the reconstructed house there are exhibitions depicting scenes of traditional Chettiar lifestyle, with labelled artefacts from everyday home life. Here the models are seated next to a traditional wooden board game.

Figure 5.70 – Interior of Chettiar house at DakchinaChitra

Deborah explains that decorative parts of old houses, such as the doors and *Surya Pallakaj*, are often sold to raise money for other house repairs, and it would have been difficult to find a house fully intact. Outside the house is an information board in English and Tamil, explaining the layout of the building, the origins of the reconstruction, and a brief outline of the Chettiar community. While there are many household articles displayed in the Chettinad house, such as stone pestel and mortars, wooden game boards, and brass vessels, the mass-produced European imports that have become so common on the antique market, such as Swedish enamelware and British stone jars, are conspicuously absent.

The museum attracts tourists and locals alike, as well as school groups and is widely regarded as a success. However, Deborah says that encouraging ordinary, middle class Indians to visit was difficult at first:

A. Lawson

'We get 20,000 visitors per year. But it took a long time, eight years. Slowly people started to realize that it wasn't an elite institution. Now we get many middle class families. I would say most of our visitors now come from the middle class. We recently did a 'grandparents day', where grandparents and children got in free. It's now on the map of Chennai. Though it's still a little hard for people from north Chennai to reach' (R100, A92).

5.4.3.3 British Museum, London

There is a very small collection of just 14 objects from Chettinad houses in the British Museum in London. This includes a pair of carved wooden door brackets dating to the 18th century and a carved *Surya Pallakai* from the 19th century. All the other objects are articles of Burmese lacquerware from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though none of them are part of a permanent display several have been included in temporary exhibitions. The door brackets were part of the *'Faith, Narrative and Desire: Masterpieces of Indian Painting'* exhibition at the British Museum in 2007, while several pieces of the Burmese lacquerware were displayed in the *'Visions from the Golden Land: Burma and the Art of Lacquer'* exhibition at the British Museum in 2000.

The curators comments on the British Museum online catalogue provides a brief account of the probable manufacture of the objects, their role in the homes of Chettiar merchants of Tamil Nadu, and their provenance thereafter: the carved wood was acquired by the museum in the early 1960's from two different European donors; of the Burmese lacquerware, six pieces were purchased by the museum in 1998 from Phillips Antiques (4.4.3.3), and five pieces were donated to the museum in 2003 by an Australian lady who had herself purchased them some years earlier from the antique markets of Rajasthan (web: British Museum) (Figure 5.71).

A. Lawson

Results

Your search for Chettinad returned 14 results.

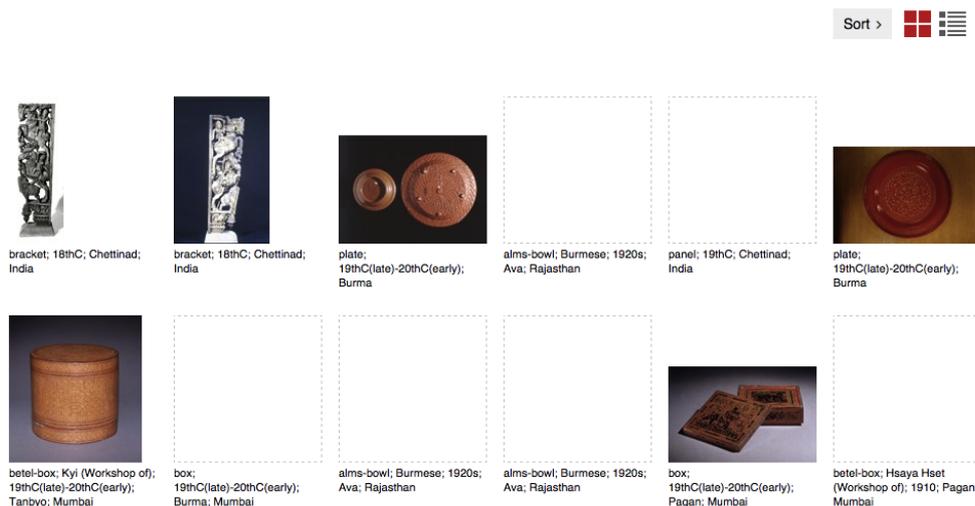


Figure 5.71 – Chettinad antiques in the British Museum online catalogue. The collection is limited to Burmese lacquerware, several carved wooden door brackets and a *Surya Pallakai* door panel. Each object is accompanied by a relatively detailed explanation of its history and provenance. None of these objects were on display in the museum gallery at the time of the research (web: British Museum).

5.4.3.4 Private antique collectors

Most dealers of Chettinad antiques acknowledge that many of the items sold from these houses are not attractive to those they deem to be serious ‘collectors’. The items such as enamelware are not old enough, rare enough or artistic enough for such people:

‘Karaikudi antiques don’t appeal to collectors [he’s talking about enamelware etc.] ... It’s very, very utilitarian. Not artistic in any way.... Some wooden carvings and all, which are 1800’s, those are considered antiques’ (R68, A61).

Likewise, the very large structural items such as doors and pillars are too large and expensive to truly be ‘collectors’ items. However there are antique collectors who have taken an interest in objects from Chettinad houses. A Chennai-based collector (R72, A67) who has given over most of her home to

A. Lawson

an extensive collection of South Indian antiques has a number of items from Chettinad houses, such as the carved wooden *Surya Pallakai* (Figure 5.73). While she has over five of these, which she hangs from the wall as art, only one of them is from a Chettiar house, the others coming from various parts of South India such as Mysore and Kerala. She describes her collecting interest as being in 'decorative art', and most of the things she has come from South India.

'I am not an art historian. I don't collect about the age or region or Pandyas. I don't care. The only thing is, I don't want to collect a new item. For me minimum is 100 years. And it should be aesthetically sound. That is my criteria' (R72, A67).

She keeps everything she collects on display in her home. Nothing she has openly on display, from furniture to utensils to decorative things like pictures and ornaments, is newly made. It is all old, at least second-hand, and has been selected for its beauty or craftsmanship. *'Every house should look like a museum. An Individual museum'* (R72, A67). In her kitchen, are a number of brass vessels and wooden utensils from Chettinad (Figure 5.72). *'See as an art collector, its not just bronzes or wood carvings that matter. Anything that we use everyday, like vessels'* (R72, A67). In another room are painted heads and other pieces from the stucco exteriors of Chettiar houses. She says that artistic pieces like this have gradually accumulated value.

'When I went there [to Chettinad], they were demolishing all the old buildings unfortunately, and there were throwing all this from the palace walls onto the ground. It was not of value. Nobody was collecting it then. I was actually the first one to buy all this. Nobody knew the value of this. They said any money you want to give us, just give. They are poor people. So I gave 500 Rps per piece. Now each one is selling for 1 lakh' (R72, A67).

A. Lawson

Only a few items in her vast collection are from Chettinad and she says she is not likely to go there again for the purpose of antique collecting, as the best items, from a collector's perspective, have already gone:

'Ninety-nine per cent is all gone. There are only pillars and doors. Who wants them? They are heavily priced. There is nothing much to buy. And they have this Swiss make enamel. You cannot use them. They immediately spoil and you get flakes. Swiss make – that is the only fascination. And I am not interested in imported goods' (R72, A67).



Figure 5.72 – Chennai-based antique collector R72 likes to acquire antique articles which have both a utilitarian and decorative role, like these brass kitchen vessels from Chettinad. The family initial can be seen etched into the lid.



Figure 5.73 - *Surya Pallakais* displayed on the wall in the home of R72. Much of the house feels very much like a museum, with antique objects from various eras and various parts of South India arranged as a visual display.

In Bangalore is another voracious antique collector, Ramprasad (R77, A72), who has a different attitude to Chettinad. He has never been there himself, nor does he have a great many antiques from there, but he has heard of it and is very interested in the place and the houses. He shows me a photograph of an interior *valavu* in a partially demolished Chettiar house with

A. Lawson

large, brightly-painted pillars. He says the photograph was taken by his antique dealer (R68) on a recent trip to Chettinad.

'You can see the richness. I'm sure people who lived there were really rich and they had a flair for European things. I'm sure the genuine ones [antiques] are coming from there. See the tiles. See the pillars. See the work on the ceiling. I saw this and was so impressed; I had to have a picture. It's so beautiful. My dealer keeps visiting there. I have never visited. Enamelware that comes from there is very popular now' (R77, A72).

Like R72, Ramprasad has given over his home to his huge collection (Figure 5.74), however the types of things he looks for are somewhat different. Partly this is a difference of budget, as Ramprasad explains, he does not come from a particularly affluent background. He spends all of his spare income on his antique collecting, but even so availability has become more limited as the demand for and price of such things has risen in India:

'Now antique collecting has become an expensive thing. It was easier twenty years ago. Now there are more collectors, but mainly for furniture and house building (pillars etc.) Many new houses want pillars – rich houses' (R77, A72).

Though he doesn't have antiques from Chettinad in his collection, he is interested in acquiring some cut glass from there. *'I saw a beautiful cut glass decanter which had those family initials on'* (R77, A72). Primarily he is attracted to objects that communicate something of the person who made them or kept them, and the effort and care that went into them:

'I buy things which cannot be produced now. Lots of effort must have gone into making it. For example these oil lamps, there are lots produced now, but the same quality of burner can never be produced now. Even glass, old glass was so thin. Mass production cannot produce this quality. The condition is not an issue – I have many used

A. Lawson

and worn things. Attar bottles half full of old oil, I think “perhaps this person had spent a lot of money on them and wanted to save it” (R77, A72).



Figure 5.74 – Ramprasad (R77) in his home in Bangalore, which is filled with his antique collection. He uses all of his, limited, spare income to buy antiques and now struggles to find space to keep them all.

Unlike R72, Ramprasad does not purchase antique items for utilitarian purposes in the kitchen. This is out of respect for his mother, who lives with him and holds certain beliefs about antiques.

R77: Because I am from a conservative Brahmin family. Strictly speaking you're not supposed to buy anything old...They say wood and all that, they carry a lot of negativity. They don't buy the old doors or even beds. But I have been okay. They say if its been used before it carries a lot of negativity. Wood. Stone. All over India this belief is there.

5.4.4 Film Industry – sets and locations

Tamil Nadu has a thriving film industry based in Chennai, sometimes dubbed 'Kollywood'. Chettinad has become a relatively popular film shooting location for filmmakers from Kollywood, as well as some from the Telugu, and Hindi film industries.

'If you go to a place like Kanadukathan, a lot of ads and film serials shoot there. Chettinad has suddenly become a buzzword. People have realised there is this vast backdrop available. It's also become one way of paying for upkeep of the houses' (R43, A40).

This is largely due to the ready availability of large empty houses as well as their dramatic scale and décor. Athangudi Palace (chap. 5.2.2), Chettinad Mansion (chap. 5.2.3) and the Raja of Chettinad's Palace in Kanadukathan have all been used as film locations in the past (Ramadurai 2014). In addition several antique dealers in Karaikudi have rented their stock to filmmakers to use as set design pieces (A25, A28, A59).

'Within the last ten years only they hire things for cinema shooting. They shoot in this area. We will get more money in hiring. But we always have a doubt that whether the things will be returned in good condition' (R20, A59).

Thota Tharani (R76) (Figure 5.75) is an art director and set designer who has worked extensively in the Tamil Film industry. He has worked on film like *Jeans*, which was shot on location in Chettinad (Figure 5.76). He believes he was one of the first people to begin using antiques in film sets.

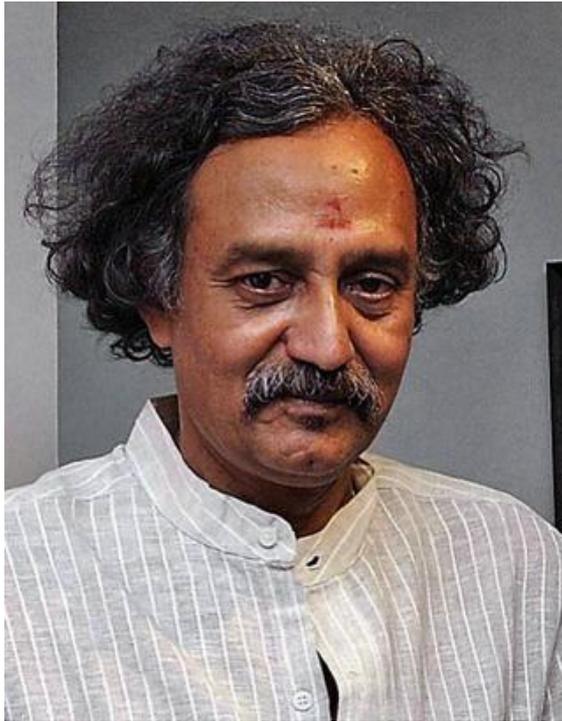


Figure 5.75 – Thota Tharani is an art director and production designer working in the Hindi and Tamil film industries. He has often used antiques or antique replicas in set designs (web: Veethi)



Figure 5.76 - Screen shots from the Tamil film *Jeans*, which Thota Tharani worked on and which was partly shot on location in Chettinad (web: Wn)

'Props is one thing. But I'm talking about awareness. I was the first to bring that to the public. Many older people see my films and notice the objects – recognise and remember them from their past... Not that I invented bringing craft into sets, but I had a chance of putting craft in its proper place and giving awareness too it. People know me for the way I used artefacts and arranged them – artefacts of Karaikudi or Rajasthan. Film is a chance to do that' (R76, A71).

He has a particularly liking for Chettinad, both as a place and as a source of antiques. R76: *Chettinad is my favourite place. The culture and tradition have been preserved. I have been many times for collecting* (A71). However, while he will shop for antiques, for himself or as inspiration, he prefers to use replicas of antiques on set. *'When I go to choose set pieces, first I go to the craft section. Only if they don't have it will I use antique. First I would try to*

A. Lawson

make a copy' (R76, A71). He explains that the reason for this is the risk of such objects being damaged on set.

'I know the value of the originals and I know how these fellows used to work with them...There is a lack of awareness and appreciation about arts and crafts within Tamil film industry (both in terms of antiques and his own artwork). So I stopped taking any of my props' (R76, A71).

5.5 Summary

This chapter has aimed to synthesize collected research data in order to chart the biographies of Chettinad antiques and the routes that they take in the present day antique market.

Starting in the region of Chettinad in southern Tamil Nadu we have seen how a particular trading and banking community, the Nagarathar Chettiars, directed their wealth into the construction of large homes, using exotic imported goods and materials during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Following the breakdown of the British colonial power in South and Southeast Asia the Nagarathar Chettiars lost much of their wealth, a situation which eventually led to the abandonment and/or demolition of many Chettiar homes and the dispersal of their materials and contents into a burgeoning antique market.

This antique market has developed over the last 30 years, from one that was initially focused on the export of antiques, particularly to Europe, to a market, which is now dominated by the demand from India's expanding urban middle class. The range of different meanings and values these objects acquire in their journey through the antique market, and the processes by which these meaning and values evolve, is apparent in this chapter. However it is not discussed in any depth here. Rather this has been left for a more detailed discussion in Chapters 7 and 8.

6 CASE STUDY 2: Riverbed Antiquities

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a narrative synthesis of data collected relating to the second of two case studies, which looks at the sourcing trade and collection of antiquities dug from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu (the data covering the first of these case studies, which follows the routes of household and structural antiques from Chettinad, is presented in Chapters 4 and 5). This includes recorded interactions and field-notes, personal reflections and observations, photographs, and web based research. The narrative begins with a description of the objects and their historical context, and then goes on to chart the routes that riverbed antiquities of Tamil Nadu take from their source in the Kaveri and Vaigai rivers to various destinations throughout India and the world. The chapter is predominantly descriptive, leaving analysis and discussion of the data to Chapters 7 and 8. The narrative related here is both enabled and restricted by the type and quality of data that it was possible to collect, with some stages of the object routes being more detailed than others.

Coins have been minted in India since the Iron Age. In Tamil Nadu there is a wealth of historic coinage from the early kingdoms of the so-called Sangam era (approximately 300 B.C. – 300 A.D.) onwards (Krishnamurthy 1997; Sastri 2012: 104-5). *'The numismatics of Tamil Nadu is like an ocean. It has some five hundred varieties, of people like Pallavas, Cheras and Cholas'* (R44, A41). Indian coins began to be collected in an organised manner by Europeans, and particularly the British, during the colonial occupation of India from the 17th century onwards. The 20th century has seen a rising popularity of the collection of Indian coins amongst Indians, and in the last 15 years the market for ancient Indian coins has expanded dramatically within India.

Many of the ancient South Indian coins that enter the collecting market from Tamil Nadu have been excavated from riverbeds, particularly the Kaveri and its tributaries. This activity is carried out for the most part by a particular

A. Lawson

Scheduled Tribe community called the Irula, who scour the riverbeds for anything that can be sold for a profit (Figure 6.1). As well as coins they bring up a range of antiquities including terracotta and bronze figurines and jewellery and archaeological beads. Ancient Indian coins, including those excavated from Tamil Nadu riverbeds, are collected by people throughout India and the world, while the other types of riverbed antiquity seem have a more limited appeal restricted to collectors in Tamil Nadu.



Figure 6.1 – Irula riverbed diggers, working on a stretch of the Kaveri river near Musiri, will collect anything of value they find, including ancient coins, and sell them to local dealers. Many of these coins will eventually reach the wider Indian coin collectors market.

6.1.1 Selection of case study

This case study was selected following an initial field survey of the antique and antiquities market in and from Tamil Nadu, which was conducted between March 26th and April 25th 2013 (Appendix B). During this survey several coin collectors in Chennai helped to direct the research towards the Kaveri River, where Irula riverbed diggers were found to be excavating antiquities.

This category of objects was selected as one of two complementary and comparative case studies in this research for several reasons.

A. Lawson

Firstly, the objects that come from Tamil Nadu riverbeds are small and thus highly portable. This contrasts with the large architectural objects of the previous case study (chaps. 4 and 5).

Secondly, the majority of objects excavated from riverbeds and sold to collectors are considerably older than the 100 year marker in Indian legislation which defines objects as 'antiquities'. They come from a distant past and are associated with historic kings and kingdoms, rather than the comparatively recent history of the overseas trading and banking activities of the Nagarathar Chettiars.

Thirdly, these objects are buried, albeit in a dynamic and shifting context, arguably bringing them more clearly within the purview of archaeology than the built heritage of Chettinad.

6.1.2 Sources

Unless otherwise referenced, all the information in this chapter is based on primary data collected over several fieldwork periods between 2013 and 2015. This data has been recorded as interviews (Appendix A), fieldnote diary (Appendix B), and photographs. The information related in this chapter draws on, but is not exhaustive of the data. Each 'Route' section in this chapter is provided with a table indicating those interactions and respondents most relevant to the section (Table 6-1; Table 6-2; Table 6-3; Table 6-4). However the narrative draws on a broader range of interactions than these as well as other relevant data.

There is currently no published material that looks specifically at the sourcing of coins and other antiquities from the riverbeds of Tamil Nadu (or indeed the rest of India) and the movement of this material into the hands of dealers and collectors. There are several coin collectors in Tamil Nadu who have researched and published parts of their coin collections, much of them have openly declared to be sourced from local riverbeds. Two of these were

A. Lawson

consulted in this research: R9 and R44. Their publications currently exist in Tamil only, and address the historic context of the material but not the present day context. A third, Mr R. Krishnamurthy, was not interviewed as part of this research but has published extensively in Tamil and English on the historic significance of coins he has collected, many of which come from the Kaveri basin region (e.g. Krishnamurthy 1994; 1997). An unpublished paper on Roman coinage of Karur, by Rebecca Darley (R. Darley 2015, personal communication, 11 Aug), gives some attention to the activity of antiquity hunting in the Amaravati River, and the economy surrounding it, but not in any great depth.

6.2 Background: Riverbeds, coin collecting

6.2.1 Coin collecting in India

The coin collectors consulted for this research tended to view the activity as a still growing hobby amongst Indians. However many traced their own interest back to their fathers or grandfathers generations (R44, R47, R48, R49, R91).

'From my experience I would say its at least eighty years. When I was a small boy and my father was selling coins, the collectors then were so old. But in India it is still an upcoming hobby' (R47, A44).

One coin dealer linked to the minting of special editions and series of coins by historic kings to the birth of Indian numismatics:

'Jahangir minted a special series called 'zodiac series'. That suggests he had an interest. Maybe he himself was a numismatist or a coins lover. He issued a coin of his wife. He issued a coin in the name of the prince Salim. So according to me it was then that the coin collecting in India started' (R48, A45).

A. Lawson

The earliest stories and reports of coin collecting in India are associated with the activities of colonial antiquarians:

'We believe it was majorly when the invaders came to India that the coin collecting started...Then there were many overseas scholars who studied Indian history' (R48, A45).

Though numismatics was not at the forefront of colonial investigations into the history and archaeology of the Indian subcontinent, it was an important part of its evolution. One of the most prominent early Indian numismatists was Alexander Cunningham (chap. 2.1.1.2) who, in the course of his travel and work built a large coin collection of his own, some of which is now held at the British Museum in London (A98). Most of the coins in Cunningham's collection were not found by him but bought from dealers in India, and indeed most coins collectors at this time would have sourced their coins from the local bazaar. This market was described by 1881 by Charles J. Rodgers for the Times of India (Rodgers 1881). The coins, he said, were discovered in old buildings, towns and tombs as well as in fields and wells. From here they would be taken to the local *'moneychanger, bullion dealer or jeweller'*, where they would *'rapidly disappear'*, being melted down for re-use (Rodgers 1881, A2). *'They are in great demand for ornaments as the metal is good'*. However some few would be sold on to collectors *'who walk the whole country through and ransack every bazaar for them'* (Rodgers 1881, A2). The collectors Rodgers speaks of were Europeans, for in his opinion, *'the natives of India show little love for numismatics...and if they get hold of a good coin, they hoard it up with others and they worship it occasionally, but it might as well be buried'* (Rodgers 1881, A2).

Some of these early colonial antiquarians were in part motivated by a desire to illustrate the moral and cultural superiority of Western culture, as a justification for the colonial presence. Thus an early preference for, and fascination with, the Greek and Roman, as well as to some degree Buddhist, archaeology was mirrored in Indian coin-collecting. In the late nineteenth century the Times of India published a number of articles under the title 'The

A. Lawson

Coin-Collector In Bombay' (Cryptopolis 1899a; 1899b). These were written by a British coin-collector going by the pseudonym 'Cryptopolis', and detail some of his experiences trawling the markets, and the Marwari moneychangers of Bombay for ancient coins. Cryptopolis sees the coins of India as a physical representation of the crudity and baseless nature of Indian culture free of Western influence. He laments the '*degradation*' of Indian coinage after the waning of Greek and Roman power, and is unapologetic in his disgust for those coins which bear marks of '*barbaric Pali*' and the images of '*heavy sensual despots of the common Oriental type*' (Cryptopolis, 1899a).

By contrast, the collection of Indian coins in the present day can in some ways be viewed as an expression of national and cultural pride and economic strength by Indians themselves (chaps. 5.4.4 & 5.4.5). Many of the coins which were taken out of the country by the European collectors of the last century have since been bought back by Indians both inside and outside India.

All the auctions in UK, the ultimate buyers are either Indians or NRI's. There was a time when everything was taken out of India. But this is the high time, the last five years, when everything is coming back to India from every auction house in every part of the world. And if its not coming back to India, the ultimate collector or buyer is still of Indian origin. In ninety per cent of cases that's true (R48, A45).

In the last 15 years coin-collectors in India have reported an opening-up of the market. This coincides not only with developments in government legislation and licencing of the ancient coin market, but also with an increase in the income and general wealth of certain sections of Indian society. While many of these more recent collectors take an academic interest in the historical significance of ancient Indian coinage there is also an increasing emphasis on ancient coins as an investment item.

A. Lawson

'Today it's all about money...earlier we were looking for coins in good condition and the main driving force was looking for something interesting and unique to research and publish. But now, everybody wants a rare coin because of the monetary value more than anything else' (R44, A41).

However, the distinction between numismatics as an academic pursuit and coin collecting as a business or investment is by no means clear-cut, and many coin enthusiasts comfortably incorporate both of these motivations into their hobby.

'It's very much a continuum, from a very small number of pure academics who received a standard training, PhD in Sanskrit or Art History or something, and went on to hold academic position, and who have never engaged with collecting, to at the other end, people who only collect and have no interest in the history, but in between it's a continuum' (R105, A98).

Even more blurred are the boundaries between the buying of coins and the selling of coins. In the course of this research, not a single coin collector was found who did not also engage in the trading of coins to some degree.

With the exception of large scale dealing, such as in the case of the new coin auction businesses in India, the buying, selling and collecting of ancient Indian coins as become increasingly open and above-board in the last 10-15 years (A6, A74, A91). The requirement to register any 'antiquity' with the government is not in practice applied to individual coins. Most dealers and collectors seem assured that coins have been removed from this requirement in the legislation (A74, A91), yet no evidence of this could be found in any of the current legal documents available on the Archaeological Survey of India website. In fact coins remain the very first item listed under the definition of the term antiquity in the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act (1972: 3). In any case the impracticability of registering individual coins, given their abundance, has meant that regardless of the legal position, it is not done. Given the lack

A. Lawson

of clarity on this issue it is not surprising that a degree of suspicion and secrecy has surrounded the market until very recently. The lack of provenance, and probably illegality, that is attached to many coins is also a factor in this (chap. 6.2.2).

6.2.2 Riverbed antiquities

Ancient Indian coins that are bought and sold and collected almost never come with reliable provenances. However, in Tamil Nadu the collection of ancient coins has become increasingly linked to the excavation of riverbeds, in including the Kaveri and the Vaigai (Map 6-1). This activity, conducted by certain tribal communities of Tamil Nadu such as the Irula, appears to have begun in earnest in the 1970's (chap. 6.4.2.1). Thus the foremost coin collectors of Tamil Nadu date their own participation in the hobby back to this period and the following decade (see R9, R44).

'That's when early collectors like Krishnamurthy, one of the largest collectors started. That's when Sangam coins and Pallava coins came out. That's when these large quantities became available. Before that you could find coins but more randomly, and there were very few coin collectors then. It exploded in the 70's and 80's and this riverbed thing spread like wildfire' (R7, A74).

How and why these coins were deposited in the riverbeds is not known, but different theories attribute it either to river trade, votive offerings, and/or intermittent flooding (Suresh 2004; A74; A75; A76; A78). The excavation of riverbeds in Tamil Nadu has also led to the recovery and collection of other types of small antiquities, such as small figurines and jewellery items of bronze and terracotta, as well as a variety of worked stone beads (chap. 6.3.2). However these items are far less commonly or widely collected. The coins and other items removed from the riverbeds are extracted by several different means. Some groups dig into areas of dry riverbed while others pan

A. Lawson

or sieve the sand in areas of shallow water. Hence the activity is sometimes referred to as riverbed panning.

Most of the collectors spoken to for this research acknowledge riverbeds as the foremost source of ancient Tamil coins in the present context: '*All places from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, 90% of the ancient coins are only from riverbeds*' (R9, A75). However, they are not the only source. Similar coin hunting activities are undertaken around wells and drains and along particular stretches of coast, but this is to a much smaller extent (chap. 6.4.2.2). Coins are also discovered in archaeological excavations, or seized under Indian Treasure Trove legislation, and in the case of Tamil Nadu, these end-up in the custody of one of three institutions: the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) (R87), the Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology (R101), or the Government Museum in Chennai (R99).

Of those coins that make their way onto the collectors market, some are also likely to have come from sources other than the riverbeds, particularly any coins in a very good state of preservation, as riverbed coins are often marked by signs of corrosion and wear.

'There are two types of coins: riverbed coins, which is 99%, and then there are contemporarily collected coins, meaning the patina and condition is better (R7, A74).

For the purposes of this research there is no first-hand evidence of these alternative sources. However collectors have mentioned a number of possibilities, including jewellers, money-lenders, scrap-metal dealers, old houses, foreign collections (particularly British), and temples, which have received vast amounts of coinage from devotees over many centuries and will occasionally conduct *hundi* auctions for some of the less valuable items (Sajul 2012; Soman 2017).

A third potential source should be mentioned in the form of those coin hoards that go unreported. Indeed one such hoard (Figure 6.2), albeit modest, can be

A. Lawson

attested to in this research, belonging by a collector in Tamil Nadu who claimed he bought it from riverbed diggers (A41).



Figure 6.2 – A small hoard of Chola coins belonging to a collector in Thanjavur (R44). He claims the coins were found in the riverbed by riverbed diggers.

Even hoards discovered in riverbeds may hold a number of well-preserved coins in the centre, which have been protected from any adverse conditions by those surrounding it. Robert Bracey, Curator of South and Central Asian coins at the British Museum has some knowledge of how such hoards can enter the coin market from north India.

‘Most hoards I suspect go to dealers, and the dealers then sift them, because what they are interested in is the coins at the centre of the hoard which have been protected from corrosion. They can discard or bundle the additional material to be sold as a parcel, but they can pick out the material that’s in good condition in the centre, and that can then be moved to a large city to be resold. Some of that material undoubtedly comes to European auction houses’ (R105, A98).

This research has come across no evidence of planned, or even spontaneous, raiding of protected or known archaeological sites for this type of material in Tamil Nadu, though this by no means provides confirmation that it does not happen, as it undoubtedly does in other parts of India (for example:

A. Lawson

Gauri 2016). Yet the only evidence of deliberate antiquity hunting at archaeological sites found in this research relates to archaeological beads rather than coins (A7, A9). There is however, evidence of rampant, unregulated, and in some cases illegal construction, sand extraction, and stone quarrying activity throughout Tamil Nadu. This activity is almost certainly responsible for the destruction of archaeological material, and it is not improbable that occasionally archaeological items of value, including coin hoards, are also recovered this way. One example of such a find occurred in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, in 2014, when two construction workers building a septic tank in a farmer's backyard, discovered a hoard of 104 *pottu kasu* (probably some denomination of very small gold coin such as gold fanams) (Dominiquel 2014). The Times of India reported how the farmer attempted to conceal the coins.

'When the construction work was over, Ramasamy left the site. Periyannan took the metal box and broke it in the presence of the farmer. To their surprise, they found small gold-like coins. They believed that someone might have buried the metal box with coins after performing rituals to ward off evil spirits. The farmer transferred the coins to a plastic container and kept it in his house' (Dominiquel 2014).

However when construction workers demanded a share of the coins, a dispute broke out which eventually led to the police being alerted, at which point all three were arrested and the coins were seized. Despite the likelihood of alternative sources of ancient coins in Tamil Nadu, the abundance of such coins is unattested. Conversely, the extent of the riverbed coins collected and published by R. Krishnamurthy, R9, R44 alone suggest the richness of this source, and this in all probability, represents only a fraction of the total. The unlicensed excavation of coins from riverbeds, or any other location, is undisputedly illegal under Indian heritage legislation, and occasional altercations between the police and those that dig the riverbeds attest to this (e.g. A76). However in Tamil Nadu the ASI openly ignores the digging of riverbeds on the grounds that such material lacks a fixed context. When questioned on the subject, Dr Maheshwari, then Commissioner of ASI

A. Lawson

Chennai Circle said, *'I'm not ashamed to say that there has never been any study in this area so far. You see all this riverbed material is washed. Fixing a date and a place is difficult'*. (R87, A83). Similarly, Dr. Sundararajan, Numismatic Curator at the Government Museum Chennai, did not acknowledge riverbeds as a source of treasure trove finds (R99, A93).

6.3 The Objects

The people who excavate coins and other material from riverbeds are driven primarily by a need for income. This has meant that until very recently the primary focus of their search has been metal, particularly precious metals, which if not bought by coin dealers, can easily be sold to jewellers and scrap metal dealers (chap. 6.4.2.1). Even now the number of people willing to pay the riverbed diggers for the various bronze and terracotta items they recover is limited (chap. 6.4.3.2).

6.3.1 Coins

An extremely wide range of coins are found in the riverbeds covering a long history (Figure 6.3). The oldest attested to in this research are defined by respondents as 'Sangam' (Figure 6.3c). These are early Chera, Chola, and Pandya coins (approximately 300 B.C. to 300 A.D.) (Krishnamurthy 1997). The most common variety of coin recovered from riverbeds is reported by local collectors and dealers to be copper coins of the later Chola dynasty (850-1173 A.D.) (Sastri 2012: 190). These are so common they usually only sell for a very low rate of around 20 rupees at the source, unless they are of an unusual type.

'Most common coin is the ordinary Chola. The market rate of a Chola coin is 20-25 rupees. It is thousand years old. But if it is the coin of other varieties of Chola, one copper coin costs 2000-3000 rupees' (R44, A41).

A. Lawson

However, dealers, collectors and finders all report that the preponderance of certain coins will vary between different rivers, depending on their association with historic kingdoms (e.g. A75; A76; A77). The Kaveri basin, for example is the heartland of the Chola dynasties, and is believed to have been a major trading route with other historic kingdoms and empires, including ancient Rome. The Vagai on the other hand, runs through the region once dominated by the Pandyas and later the Madurai Nayaks. Tharangambadi, also known as Tranquebar, is a small coastal town, which was historically a port belonging to the Danish and thus is known as a place where Danish coins can be found along the shore.



a. Madurai Nayak (16th – 18th century) (left) and Indo-Dutch East India Company (17th-18th century) (right) coin found in the Vaigai riverbed near Manumadurai.



b. Silver and gold fanams found in the Kaveri riverbed near Musiri (possibly Travancore issue, 17th – 19th century)



c. Sangam age (approx. 300 B.C. – 300 A.D.) coins bought by a dealer from riverbed diggers in Tamil Nadu



d. Late Vijayanagara or Nayak (16th-18th century) coin with the image of a bull, found in the Kaveri riverbed near Musiri

Figure 6.3 – A range of coins found in the riverbeds in Tamil Nadu. They cover a long period of history starting with the Sangam age coins, some of which may be up to 2300 years old, all the way up to the modern day

A. Lawson

The condition of riverbed coins is generally poor, with signs of both erosion and corrosion (Figure 6.4). Precious metal coins tend to be in a better condition. It is also possible that coins that have been dug from deeper in the sand and closer to the middle of the river have suffered less wear (R. Darley 2015, personal communication, 11 Aug). There is growing concern amongst dealers and collectors that the numbers of coins found in the riverbeds is reducing, and the condition of those that are found is deteriorating. While this trend may be a reflection of the size and nature of the material historically deposited, there is a belief that it is the result river pollution.



Figure 6.4 - These copper Chola (9th-12th century) coins found in the Kaveri riverbed are heavily corroded, as are many of the coins that are found in the riverbeds. Coins like this are reportedly the most common variety found in the riverbeds here and sell for as little as 20 rupees.

'Five years from now you won't have riverbed panning. We are killing our rivers, so what's happening now is the coins are getting eroded. There's so much pollution in the water it's just eating through the coins... Because we have tanneries that send sewage into it. All cities are overgrown and have no infrastructure. You should see the rivers outside Thanjavur. It's just filthy. Just sewage. And every time it rains it gets washed out' (R7, A74).

A. Lawson

The pollution of the Kaveri and its tributaries as a result of cloth dying industries has been well substantiated by research (Furn 2004; Sellamuthu et. al. 2011) and is another possible cause deterioration of coin numbers and quality.

The riverbed coins that are bought by coin dealers end-up in the collections of coin enthusiasts in Tamil Nadu. They tend to be stored and displayed by these collectors primarily as specimens, or representatives, of a type or class of coin (Figure 6.5).



Figure 6.5 - A collection of coins belonging to Chennai based collector, R9. The coins are kept in individual clear plastic boxes and accompanied by specimen labels. Several of these are gold Rajaraja Chola coins in a relatively good condition. They will sell for a much higher value than the more common copper Chola coins.

While the wider appeal of many ancient South Indian coins has been limited by their lack of easily identifiable information in English or Hindi scripts, some dealers feel that this is beginning to change (Figure 6.6).

‘Two years back I made an effort to take South Indian coins to a Bombay exhibition. They all asked me, ‘what is this’? They were interested because the South Indian coins all have deities and kings – Konnerirayam, Thitumangaya, Sundarapataya, Sidputirajas. And

A. Lawson

collectors from North India are looking for something new. South Indian coins are small and very attractive. With British Indian coins everything is there displayed on the coin – there is no history in it. With south Indian coins there is history’ (R90, A94).

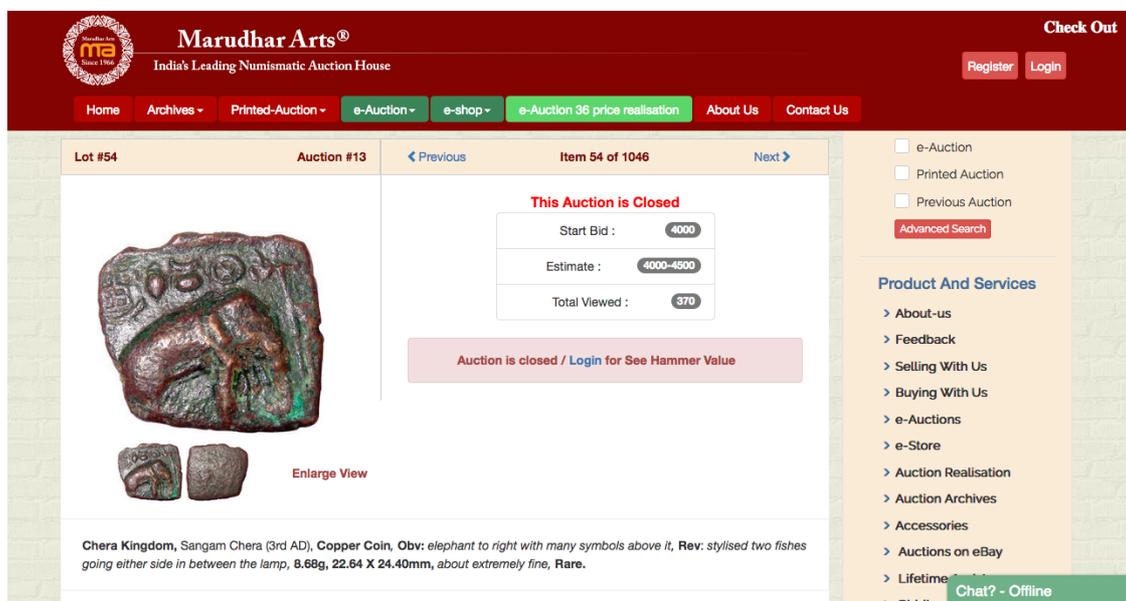


Figure 6.6 – Marudhar Arts (web: Marudhar Arts: a) is a numismatic auction house in Bangalore who sell coins from all parts of India. Coins from Tamil Nadu, such as this Chera Kingdom coin, have tended not to be as popular amongst coin collectors as, for example, British India coins, due to the lack of a widely understood script. However this is reportedly beginning to change and Tamil coins are now more widely collected.

6.3.2 Fakes, replicas and magical coins

The Indian coin market is also host to a variety of fakes and forgeries. Many of these are what some have termed ‘tourist forgeries’ (A98; A41), which are crude, and not intended to be taken for genuine antiquities (Figure 6.7), while others are more sophisticated.

‘Often I will hear collectors distinguish tourist forgery and collector forgery. And I actually will occasionally collect when visiting India coins which are dubbed as tourist forgery, which are that even the person selling them admits they’re not real. I picked up a coin which was this large and the original was half the size, it was in copper and the

original was in silver, and somebody had stamped 1666 onto the back of it. The person selling it said it was a good luck charm, so there was no pretence that this was an ancient coin' (R105, A98).

Several coin collectors named Mysore and Bangalore as a current source of south Indian fake coins (A41, A74). China too has been indicated. *'From China and Hong Kong lot of duplicate coins started coming for British India. So people are afraid to buy' (R9, A75).* It has also been suggested that some 'fakes', particularly those coming from China, are being produced from the original historical dies. *'In the seventies the Royal Bank of India sold all the remaining dies that they had of the British coins' (R7, A74).* If true, such coins would be extremely hard to distinguish from original coins, and it would arguably undermine the distinction between 'authentic' and 'fake'.



Figure 6.7 - A range of genuine antique coins and 'tourist forgeries' for sale in Mumbai. The large coins on the right were being sold as souvenirs or charms

.Cryptopolis attests to the existence of forged or fake coins in 1899 Bombay. These he says were *'generally of Alexander and Akbar'*, and he assumes them to have been produced by the same Mawaris who were selling them.

A. Lawson

He also describes coins of modern production with Hindu deities, which were being ascribed mythological provenances. These he immediately dismisses as *'a mere religious token turned out by the dozen for the faithful of today'* (Cryptopolis 1899a, 4). The attachment of supernatural or spiritual properties to certain coins was similarly noted by a Times of India reader in 1882, who commented in a letter to the Editor,

'there are many natives – Hindu, Mahomedan and Parsee – to be met with, to whom certain coins present a fictitious value, and which scarcely anything can tempt them to part with. For instance, in the southern part of India a coin of extreme rarity but known by name to many called the Ramticca possesses with Brahmins miraculous power' (E.L. 1882: 2).

The manufacture of religious coin-like tokens, often called Ramatankas, by temples in India has been a common practice for many years, at least as far back as the 19th century, and possible much longer (Vijayan & Choudhury 2004, 302.3) (Figure 6.8). Such tokens are still produced today (Figure 6.8a). However the growing collectors market for antique and ancient coins has made these religious tokens the source of considerable confusion and misinformation in the Indian coin market, since the date such tokens bear typically has no relationship to the date that the token was actually struck. Barbara Mears, South Asian coin specialist at Spink & Son in London says she is regularly contacted by people in India about these items:

'Every week I get sent a picture of these coins with the Ramayana on, and they're not coins, they're religious tokens basically. The trouble is, they've always got some very old Vedic date on, like 2900 BC or something, and they'll say 'this is a very old coin, its very valuable, it's been in my family for many generations'. And I have to tell them, 'no these are made in Bombay in the 1950's and they're just made as religious tokens' (R106, A99).



a. Example of a temple token very recently minted (2016) for a temple in Kerala. The token is described on their website as a 'Sri Ram Tanka Coin (Auspicious Wealth)' (web: Asthika Samaj)

b. Example of a temple token struck between 1920 and 1940 (web: Joel Anderson Interesting World of Coins)

Figure 6.8 – Ramatanka temple tokens (also known as Ram Darbars) have been minted by temples as religious souvenirs for over 200 years. Because they closely resemble coins and are often marked with an ancient date relating to Hindu mythology they are sometimes mistaken for ancient coins accidentally, or deliberately passed off as such by con artists

Such tokens are now being produced and sold with the deliberate intent to deceive the buyer that they are of genuine antiquity, the easiest place to see this is on YouTube (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltgkU0crqRU>). In addition, temple tokens have now become conflated with a new type of supernatural coin, sometimes called 'rice-puller' or Lebbo coin. These are often falsely attributed to the East India Company and claimed to have magical powers. They are usually the product of deliberate scam-artists (e.g. Figure 6.9). While such coins vary, both in form and in the stories surrounding them, there are a few characteristics that are typically repeated. The coins bear some similarities with Ramatanka temple tokens such as a depiction of Hanuman or Rama and Sita; they are claimed to be produced by the East India Company, and marked with the dates 1616, 1717 or 1818; they are sometimes claimed to be made with iridium, and are typically endowed with a variety of magical properties, including the ability to attract grains of rice, interfere with electrical circuits and affect the weather (web: Lebbo Coin).



Figure 6.9 - Coin advertised on the internet as 'Copper Iridium Lebbo Coin: copper iridium coins are magical and powerful...' the advertisers require interested parties to pay an initial fee in order to see the coins powers 'tested' (web: Lebbo Coin)

6.3.3 Other objects: beads, terracotta, bronzes

While coins are the main item collected from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu, there are some collectors who will pay for other items that are also recovered. These include terracotta beads, figurines and lamps, jewellery or various sorts, and beads (Figure 6.10). In addition archaeological beads are deliberately hunted for at some archaeological sites (chap. 6.4.2.2). These objects typically have a much narrower appeal and are collected primarily by antique and coin enthusiasts in Tamil Nadu (chap. 6.4.3.2).



a. Bronze finger and toe rings belonging to a Tamil dealer in riverbed antiquities (R78)



b. Terracotta figurines, lamps and pots belonging to a Chennai based collector (R9)

Figure 6.10 – A range of objects that are found in riverbeds in Tamil Nadu alongside coins. These objects are not as widely collected as coins. As well as ancient jewellery and terracotta objects like this, riverbed diggers will also occasionally find beads, bronze figurines, and modern jewellery

A. Lawson

The reason for their lack of wider appeal may be in part due to their condition, which is often worn and/or broken. Furthermore, the collecting appeal of the coins has a lot to do with their easy identification and association with a specific ruler or kingdom, and this too is something the other objects lack. Conversely, it is their mysterious character that appeals to those collectors in Tamil Nadu who do take an interest in them. For example, one collector, R9 (chap. 6.4.3.2), has taken a particular interest in a type of ring with the image of a Nandi bull and seems to enjoy forming theories about what they might be. He also collects terracotta figurines, and though the objects are heavily worn he displays them ornamentally in a way that he does not with any of his coins.

The legal status of these items also differs somewhat from those of the coins. While coins appear to exempt (if not in law, at least in practice) from the requirement to register the objects as antiquities, the terracotta figurines and possibly many of the other items, are not exempt. This restricts the open trading and collecting of such objects more so than coins.

6.4 *The Routes*

6.4.1 Overview

Having introduced the objects and their historic and geographical background in the previous sections, the aim of this section is to describe the routes that the riverbed antiquities of Tamil Nadu travel through the present day antique market. The section follows a narrative and descriptive format to relate the range of different contexts in which these objects are found, as well as considering the relationship between one context and another and between the objects and the people who collect and trade them.

Unlike the previous chapter, these object routes (the coins in particular) do not take such a one directional form, moving objects outwards from the source. Nor is it possible to distinguish so clearly between those people who are

A. Lawson

dealers and those who are collectors or consumers. Rather they objects move through several spheres of exchange in which people who are both collectors and dealers may circulate them frequently.

The narrative described here is entirely dependent on primary data collected for this thesis. Therefore some areas, where data is plentiful, offer more detail than other areas where data is comparatively scarce

This section has been subdivided into four parts: 'The Sources' looks at the digging and panning of riverbed sites in Tamil Nadu, predominantly by a community called the Irula, as well as a range of other sources where coins and other small antiquities are found. 'Dealers and Collectors (Tamil Nadu)' looks at the collection of these objects by various collectors in Tamil Nadu, predominantly Chennai, via middlemen dealers. It also looks at the relationship between these private collectors and government collections such as the coins of the Government Museum in Chennai. 'Dealers and Collectors (Bangalore and Mumbai)' looks at the wider sphere of coin collection and trade throughout India and considers the growing importance of the Internet in this trade. 'Indian coins outside India' looks at the extent and character of the international collection and trade of Indian coins in general and Tamil Nadu coins more specifically. Here there is a noticeable trend for the movement of Indian coins that were once removed to foreign collections, back to India.

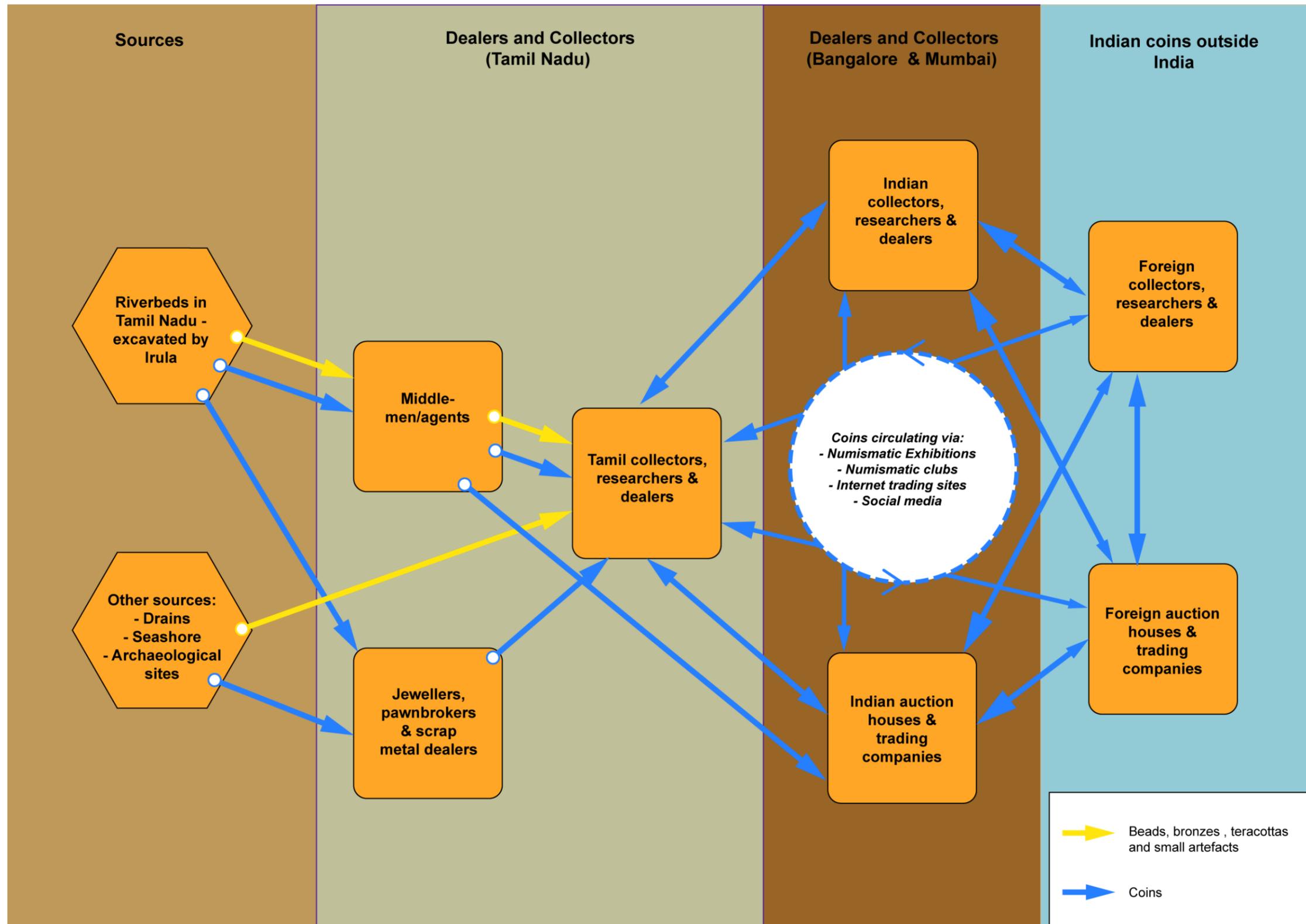


Figure 6.11 – Flowchart summarising the routes of riverbed antiquities

6.4.2 The Sources

Table 6-1 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) who are connected to the digging, panning or otherwise searching for coins and other antiquities in Tamil Nadu.

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A9	19/04/2013	Arikamedu	I1, T1, R11
A10	19/04/2013	Tharangambadi	I1, T1, R12
A11	19/04/2013	Tharangambadi	I1, T1, R13
A16	22/04/2013	Musiri	I1, T1, R21
A17	22/04/2013	Karur	I1, T1, R22
A76	09/04/2015	Srirangam	I1, T1, R78, R79
A78	09/04/2015	Musiri	I1, T1, R78, R80
A81	12/04/2015	Manumadurai	I1, T1, R83
A82	12/04/2015	Paramakudi	I1, T1, R86

6.4.2.1 Riverbeds

The excavation and panning in riverbeds Tamil Nadu, for coins and other objects of value, takes place right across the state, and indeed in the neighbouring states of Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. It is carried out in the majority by a particular community of people called the Irula. The Irula are not a caste as such, they are a Scheduled Tribe according to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists Modification Order 1956 (Mitra 1961: 36-37). The Irula traditionally lived in forested areas and made a living from hunting wild animals, such as snakes, and harvesting forest resources, such as wild honey.

'We are all Irulas. Our main occupation was tree cutting and honey collecting...we do all works in forests. That was our main occupation. These [river digging/panning] are temporary works. Before that we were involved in selling the skin of snakes (R79, A76).

A. Lawson

However the enforcement of the 1972 Wildlife Protection Act which prevented the Irula from continuing to make their livelihood in the ways they had done previously.

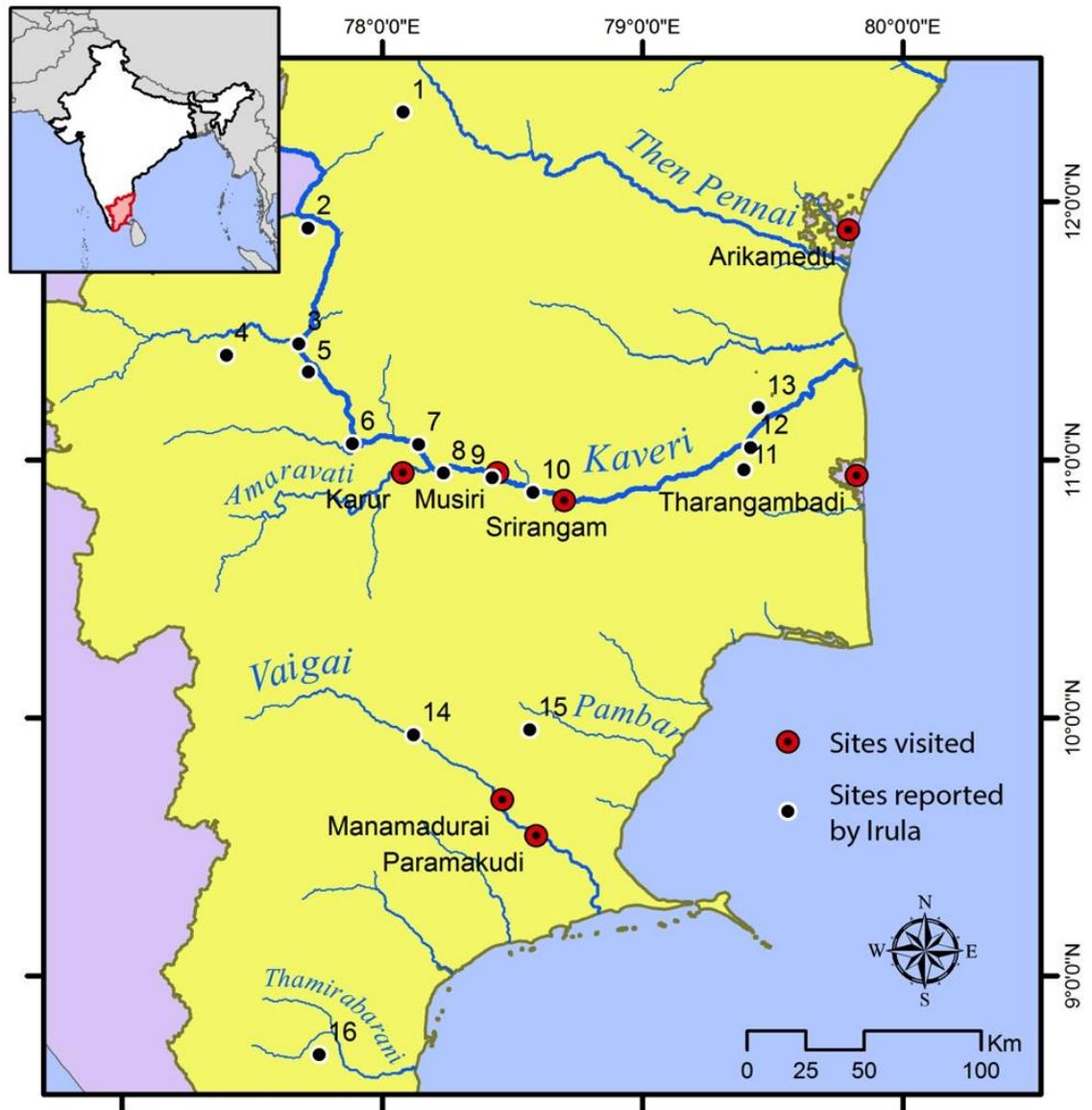
'Prime Minister Indira Gandhi put laws to safeguard animals. Then we started doing various odd jobs like this' (R79, A76).

There are several other similar tribal communities in Tamil Nadu, such as the Kuruvikaran and the Kurumbar, who have been similarly affected by the 1972 Wildlife Protection Act and have also resorted to coin hunting and riverbed digging, though to a lesser degree than the Irula (A41; A82; 5.4.2.2). Some of the Irula claim that they learned how to find objects in the rivers from other communities, mentioning both basket weaving and well digging communities (A78; A81). Others have implied that the practice amongst the Irula of occasionally panning for gold or jewellery pre-dates 1972, and was simply intensified after the Act (A17). Some say that they chanced upon objects in the river whilst engaged in other occupations, such as fishing.

'No one has taught us this skill. While fishing, people start to collect coins. Once I was cutting trees, I saw a silver object shining in the water. Then my son asked me to preserve it. Next day many people started to do this' (R79, A76).

Four different teams of Irula riverbed diggers were interviewed in the course of this research, of which one team was met twice over two different field seasons. Two teams were found on the Kaveri River, one near Srirangam (A76) and one near Musiri (A16; A78). One team was found in the city of Karur (A17) on the banks of the Amaravathi River, and one team was found on the Vaigai River near Manumadurai (A81). Each of these teams reported a number of different locations that they also regularly visited. Most of these reported sites were on the Kaveri River, but in addition the Irula reported travelling as far south as Thirunelveli and as far west as Kerala.

Map 6-1 - Rivers of Tamil Nadu showing sites where the excavation and panning for antiquities has been recorded in the course of this research, as well as other sites of reported antiquities hunting.



1. Vellichandai; 2. Kaveripuram; 3. Bhavani; 4. Ayalur; 5. Erode; 6. Kodumudi; 7. Mohanur; 8. Mayanur; 9. Kulithalai; 10. Mokka; 11. Kumbakonam; 12. Cholapuram; 13. Gangai Konda; 14. Sellur; 15. Sivaganga; 16. Thirunelveli.

The Irula are difficult to find, in the sense that the dealers who buy from them directly are very protective of their sources and do not readily share them with strangers. However, once in the right vicinity they are easy to find. Locals

A. Lawson

know immediately what is meant when asked about the people digging the riverbeds for old treasure.



Figure 6.12 – The Kaveri riverbed here at Musiri in April is almost completely dry. Many rivers in Tamil Nadu are dry for around half the year and it is during this period that antiquities hunting activity occurs

In the month of April, in the city of Karur, situated on the banks of the Amaravathi, locals speak of a group of riverbed diggers who are currently staying on a street of jewellers. They are a group of six families, staying in a makeshift camp, with tents made of scrap plastic and metal. They say they have travelled here from Kerala, along river routes, and they will continue to work in many different rivers through out Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Riverbed digging is seasonal, and itinerant. In the wet season, from around September to January, the water level in the rivers is too high to allow for panning or excavation. At this time the Irula work as agricultural labourers. From February onwards they travel the river routes, now largely dry, camping in particular locations for periods as short as a few days or as long as a month or more, depending on their productivity, before moving on to a new location (Figure 6.12). The same group may visit a number of different rivers, in a single season.



Figure 6.13 - Irula riverbed diggers, like this team camped on a stretch of Kaveri riverbed near Musiri, travel in large groups combined of several families, including women and children

'We will come here at the Tamil month of Maasi (February) to Aadi (August). After Aadi month, there will be more water in the rivers. At that time, we go for agriculture (R80, A78).



Figure 6.14 – The open, dry riverbeds offer the Irula little in the way of shelter from the scorching summer heat. As the Irula will camp on or near the riverbed throughout the digging season they erect makeshift camps, like this one on the Vaigai river near Manumadurai

A. Lawson

Throughout this period the Irula travel and work in groups, or teams, of several families. Men, women and children travel together and all contribute to the work (Figure 6.13). They live and work on or near the river, often constructing temporary camps or shelters (Figure 6.14).

Asking for directions in the town of Musiri on the banks of Kaveri, locals point in the direction of a temple down by the riverside. From there it is impossible to miss the groups of people out on the open expanse of the vast riverbed. It is April and the river is almost completely dry. There are small groups of people scattered along the bank, and further off towards the middle of the sandy river bed, some digging with small hand held trowels and others using picks and mattocks to lift more sand (Figure 6.15).



Figure 6.15 – Riverbed digging in progress on the Kaveri River in April at a site near Musiri. The people here are all members of a single ‘team’ who travel and work together, but the diggers spread out and excavate small pits, either individually or in small groups of two or three. They are using mattocks to remove the top layers of sand

A woman seated on a cotton cloth nearby one of the small excavations explains that they are a team of around 35 people of all ages, including children, coming from ten families. Another man from the same group says that there are 65 interrelated families, of which ten families are represented in this group.

A. Lawson

The Irula here are making numerous small excavations, with two or three people to each hole. They use a mattocks to remove the top layers of sand and then dig more slowly and carefully with small pieces of metal, which they say they have adapted from their agricultural tools. Some of the smaller children are using shells to scrape away at the edges of pits.

The methods of extracting the coins vary between different teams of Irula and sometimes within them. Shallow pits are sometimes dug towards the edges of the riverbed (Figure 6.16), particularly in the vicinity of rocks and vegetation where sand accumulates:



Figure 6.16 - This woman uses a small piece of metal as a shovel to carefully scoop loose sand from a small pit she is excavating close to the riverbank

'Coins are found only near rocks. It will not be found in sands. When the water runs, it will deposit whatever it has when it hits the rocks. So we will remove such rocks which are there and search for coins' (R80, A78) (Figure 6.17).

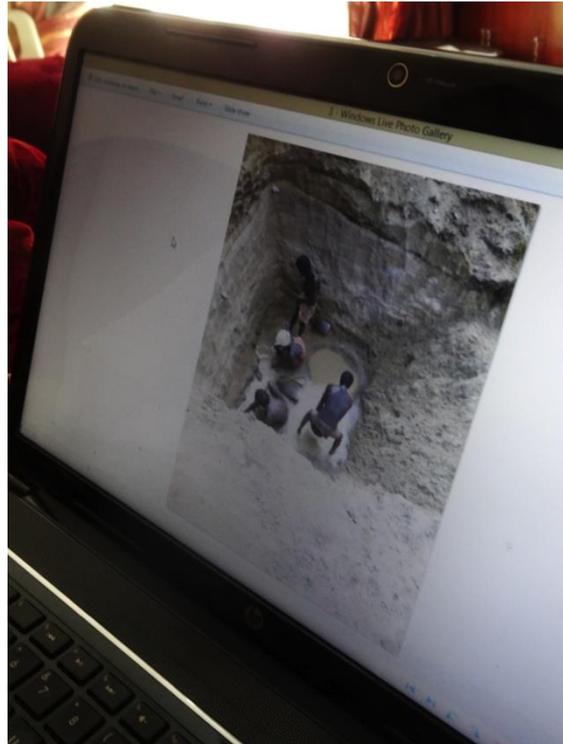


Figure 6.17 – One of the riverbed diggers at Musiri demonstrates how he digs for coins around the edges of rocks where objects dragged by the river current are more likely to accumulate

Sometimes larger pits of several feet or more will be excavated (Figure 6.18). Certain types of object can only be found at greater depths. *'If we go some six feet deep we will get some terracotta objects'* (R79, A76). The Irula also sometimes dig closer the middle of the riverbed. It has been suggested that older coins in a better state of preservation can be found here (R. Darley 2015, personal communication, 11 Aug) and this too requires them to go deeper. *'Near the shores, the rocks are three to four feet deep. In the middle of the sea [river], we have to dig, more than ten feet... Mostly we look for some ten feet. We don't go more than that'* (R80, A78). Other teams focus on areas of shallow water to pan, sieve or even snorkel (A76).



a. A riverbed digger working on the Vagai River near Manumadurai crouches in an excavation of several feet deep.



b. An image of a riverbed excavation on R9's (coin collector in Chennai) laptop. The hole appears to be over 15ft deep.

Figure 6.18 – While most excavations made by riverbed diggers are confined to the first few feet, they do sometimes make deeper excavations in order to look for different types of coins and other objects in a better state of preservation

On the banks of the Vagai River near Manumadurai there is a crowd of people by the ghats which lead down to the dry riverbed. Some of them have excavated a deep hole in a nearby area of riverbed. However, these are not Irula. This is a Thidhi pooja, a Hindu ceremony to remember and honour ancestors and deceased relatives (Figure 6.19). At such times offerings are made to the river, perhaps coins will be thrown in. However it seems that with the riverbed dry they need to dig for water to conduct the ritual. Just a few hundred feet upstream of this activity is a team of Irula. They have been digging here for the past ten days, but it seems it has not been very productive and they are considering moving on.



Figure 6.19 - A Hindu ceremony known as a Thidhi Pooja being performed on the ghat (flight of steps leading down to the river) by the Vaigai River near Manumadurai. At ceremonies like this people may make offerings of coins and other valuables to the river. Just nearby this spot there is a team of Irula digging for antiquities

The Irula usually dig areas of riverbed in front of, or near, temple ghats (flights of stairs that lead down to the river for the purpose of bathing and the conducting of religious ceremonies). This is a deliberate choice. They select such places because people bath in the river and perform rituals here, and presumably have done so for many hundreds of years. Not just coins and not only old things but also more recently lost or offered objects. They will even select places where there is no current temple, only the ruined remains of the ghat (A78) (Figure 6.20).

'There were temples here. There is a Shiva temple in the west side. These stairs were built in those days. We will look for coins near old stairs and old temples' (R80, A78).



Figure 6.20 - The remains of a ruined temple and ghat on the Kaveri River near Musiri has been selected by a team of Irula as a good place to dig as this spot will have been used for bathing and temple rituals in the past

Others mention that they also take into account nearby historic towns and cities, and their relationship with ancient kingdoms (A17, A81).

'We will look for places near temples. Mostly in ups and downs where there are deposits. We also consider the kings who ruled that particular area' (R83, A81)

Back on the Kaveri River, around 40km downriver from Musiri, near the ancient temple town of Srirangam, is another team of Irula. They are working a section of the Kaveri directly in front of Amma Mandapam, a Hindu temple with ghats that are a popular ritual bathing site (Figure 6.21). There is shallow water here and some members of the team are seiving the sand on the bed of these pools rather than digging (Figure 6.22).



Figure 6.21 – The river near the Amma Mandapam temple at Srirangam is mostly dry in April, but there are deep pools close to the ghat which is a popular bathing and pilgrimage site



Figure 6.22 – The Irula team at the Amma Mandapam temple ghats are sieving riverbed sand for valuables in the areas of pooled river water rather than digging in the dry areas of riverbed

Out towards the centre of the river where the bed is completely dry they have their temporary campsite. They say that they have been camped here for a month and a half and may stay longer, but it depends on how much they are able to find. Sitting down in the shadow of the bridge to escape the scorching heat they display some of their latest finds. They do not store their finds collectively. Rather each person or sometimes each individual family will store

A. Lawson

their own finds separately in a range of plastic tubs and bags (Figure 6.23). *'We are like a beehive. No separate leader for us. We don't fight for anything. All are leaders for their own findings'* (R79, A76). Nor do they have any way of identifying in which place or on which river a particular item was recovered.



Figure 6.23 -The Irula riverbed diggers near Srirangam sit down to show some of their finds. They store them in a variety of plastic tubs and bags. Each digger, or family unit tends to keep their own finds separately rather than collectively amongst the entire team

Though their knowledge of the coins is limited, it is growing, and they are sometimes able to distinguish the coins of different rulers. Here at Srirangam they are looking for a particular coin they call a Sree Veera coin (possibly a type of Thanjavur or Madurai Nayak coin), which they say is commonly found in this area. They have their own names for these coins, which sometimes relate to the ruler who issued them, but usually are based more on their physical characteristics (Figure 6.24).

Kasu means coin in Tamil. So, for example, the very gold and silver coins known as fanams by coin collectors are called by these Irula as *puttu kasu*, meaning 'small portion coin' (presumably referring to their size) (Figure 6.24b). A Sree Veera coin is also called by them a *kozhi kasu*, meaning rooster coin. The logic seems to be that they have often found copper coins with the image of a rooster (possibly a type of Indo-French coin minted in Pondicherry), and now they use the name to refer to all copper coins (Figure

A. Lowson

6.24a). A Rajaraja Chola coin they call *aazhi kasu*. *Aazhi* is a Tamil word meaning 'great wave or ocean', but it can also mean 'great king or ruler'. Another coin they think they may find here is a type of Pallava coin, they call *thagadu kasu*. *Thagadu* means sheet. '*It is called thagadu kasu because it is as thin as a tin and it can be broken easily*' (R79, A76). All Irula use their own names to refer to coins but these may vary between groups.

'Every place has its own dialect. This name of coins ends here. If you go to other places, the same coins are called by different names. In Thanjavur and Madurai, there are different names' (R79, A76).



a. *Kozhi kasu* – Irula name meaning 'rooster coin', used originally to refer to a type of Indo-French copper coin bearing the image of a rooster, but now used to refer to copper coins more generally



b. *Puttu kasu* – Irula name meaning 'small portion', for a fanam coin due to their small size

Figure 6.24 – The Irula use names of their own invention to refer to the different coins they find. Most of these names relate to the physical characteristics of the coins and the images they bear.

They also find bronze and terracotta figurines (Figure 6.25a), usually of a devotional nature, depicting gods and goddesses, jewellery and beads, some very old and some very modern. Plastic beads and modern jewellery is also common (Figure 6.25b). '*Sometimes people miss studs, anklets etc. We may get it sometimes*' (R79, A76).



a. Small bronze figurine found in the Kaveri riverbed



b. Coins and items of modern jewellery found in the Vaigai riverbed

Figure 6.25 – Though the Irula riverbed diggers are primarily hunting for old coins and any for of precious metal they will keep other items they might find, many of which can also be sold to coin dealers, jewellers or directly to collectors

The coins and other objects collected by the Irula are sold to middlemen dealers or agents who travel the region purchasing the items on a face-to-face basis. These middlemen have appeared alongside the growing demand from the coin collectors market in India, and prior to their involvement the Irula would deliver their finds primarily to local jewellers and scrap metal dealers (A17, Shetty 1991). While dealers such as R78 are very protective of their sources, the Irula report that occasionally collectors will visit them directly, as will school children and college students (A76; A78). They also seem aware of the wider market for ancient coins and some of the ways they are traded and collected:

‘We will sell it to the dealers. It will be placed in exhibitions and auctions. Many school going children will read about the coins. Even some foreigners will come and buy those coins’ (R79, A76).

A. Lawson

The dealers may only visit each group of Irula once every few months. At the beginning of the season the Irula will need to borrow money in order to begin their work. *'We will get loans for interest and start to search. After we get items for some 3000 or 4000 rupees we will call the dealers to come and collect'* (R83, A81). 4000 rupees is around £40, and this will be shared between the team.

The Irula who work in the riverbeds make a very meagre living from their finds. One reason for this is that they lack the expertise to be able to command the highest possible price for the coins. They are beginning to gain a knowledge of the differences between coins and are aware of certain fetures that will increase the value, such as the presence of a clearly visable script and image, and of course the type of metal. However, they still do not have a comprehensive knowledge of the coins and the full value they may be able to command from collectors. When asked about how much money they will get for one of their latest finds the Irula at Manamadurai replied, *'We can't tell that for sure, it is the dealer's wish...Coins engraved with the faces of kings will add more weight and sold for higher cost'* (R83, A81). The middle-men dealers such as R78 are aware of this lack of knowledge and use it to their own advantage (chap. 6.4.3.1).

Furthermore their income is extremely irregular, in that the Irula cannot guarantee the numbers of coins they will find in any one place or any one day, or for what price they will be able to sell them. The Irula at Manamadurai explain that in all the ten days they have been there they have not found anything of high value (Figure 6.26). *'We do not have regular income. Some days will go without any income'* (R83, A81).



Figure 6.26 – These are all the objects found by one family group over the past 10 days, in an Irula team working on the Vaigai River near Manumadurai. They are mostly poor quality copper Chola coins that will sell for around 20 rupees each

They will occasionally find coins of a higher value. Several had gold fanams carefully stored in their personal stash. They were not always keen to sell these as they saw them as a form of insurance. Something that could be saved for a rainy day. One man in the Irula team at Karur had a gold coin which he had been offered 25,000 rupees for. He said that he had decided to keep it so that he had something to pass on to his son (A17). For all that, he was aware of the poverty of situation, saying that he had not found any other coins of that sort of value. *'if I did would I still be living here?'* (R22, A17).

The Irula are clearly motivated by profit. Their livelihoods are dependent the money they can make from selling their finds. However this does not mean that they have no interest in the history of the coins, or that they are unaware of their wider value and significance. On the contrary, they expressed pride in the fact that the coins they found were physical links to Tamil history, and that they may be collected by students or researchers. They also saw this as a valid defence against any accusations that they are doing something illegal.

'Through this, we are looking at the ages of different kings before 2000 to 3000 years. We are not doing anything illegal. Whatever we find

A. Lawson

under the soil we are collecting it. Even though we work here, we face many problems' (R82, A78).

The 'many problems' do not involve the Archaeological Survey of India, which, as has already been noted, take very little interest in the activities of the riverbed diggers (chap. 6.2.2). There are however occasional altercations with the local police, who are aware of Indian legislation regarding the digging-up of antiquities and are entitled to enforce it (e.g. A76).

'If they [the police] ask so, we will say that if we find any big objects, we will surrender it to the government. We only have some small items with us. We will sell items to those dealers coming from archaeological department. We have given things to school students for their education' (R82, A78).

Another possible source of conflict mentioned by a Chennai based collector who has visited the riverbed diggers on several occasions is illegal sand extraction (often referred to as sand quarrying or mining in Tamil Nadu). This activity occurs on both the Vaigai and Kaveri rivers on a massive scale (Figure 6.27) and is a source of considerable concern on environmental and humanitarian grounds due the detrimental impact it has on river water levels (Saravanan 2015; Sivan 2013).

'So riverbeds have sand, and the rate at which construction happens here means that the demand is so large that they are proper mafia, in the sense that they will kill you if you go there in the night while they are quarrying. They will shoot you and then ask questions. So these guys get hassled by them because they invariable dig in the same areas. There is no understanding at all, like 'you remove the sand and we will excavate', because they are both doing illegal things' (R7, A74).



Figure 6.27 – Sand extraction taking place on the Kaveri riverbed near Musiri, very close to where Irula riverbed diggers are working. This type of sand extraction takes place on an industrial scale throughout Tamil Nadu. Some of it is legal but much of it is not.

Aside from the potential threat to the Irula and the environmental factors, the large-scale extraction of sand from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu has undoubtedly led to the loss of archaeological material.

6.4.2.2 Other sources

In addition to the riverbeds, old coins and other small antiquities are occasionally sourced from other places. This research came across the small-scale exploitation of the following sources:

Drains

In the town of Paramakudi, on the banks of the Vagai River, are a group of people from the tribal community Kuruvikaran who primarily work as agricultural labourers but occasionally support their income by dredging gullies and drains in the town (Figure 6.28). Their main object is to find scraps of precious metal, which can then be sold back to the jewellers in sufficient quantities, and they deliberately focus on drains in the vicinity of goldsmiths and jewellers shops.

‘The jewellery shop owners will filter the wastewater here. Usually goldsmiths will take baths here after their work. So the fine gold

A. Lawson

particles are filtered here. We cannot do it as a regular profession. We will do it then and there, whenever we find time' (R84, A82).

It seems that they occasionally find old coins, but not many and they are not very familiar with the different types or their potential value.

'We don't find many. Occasionally we will get some copper coins and old silver coins. We can find it in rivers and gutters also' (R84, A82).



Figure 6.28 – A community of Kuruvikaran living near the Vaigai river in Paramakudi. They do not usually dig in the river, rather they dredge drains in the town, particularly in the areas near to the goldsmiths, for coins and scraps of metal

Coast

The coastal town of Tharangambadi, also known as Tranquebar, has suffered considerable coastal erosion. A local fisherman (R13) says that they can see the ruins of old buildings under the water when he is out in his boat. Occasionally he pulls up old objects, including coins, in his net, but he always throws them back as he is not sure what they are. Other local fishermen keep the coins they pull-up in order that they might sell them and at certain times of year, when the weather is right, they also search the beach deliberately for anything of value (Figure 6.29). They primarily look for gold to sell to the jewellers in the town, however, they also come across old coins, many of

A. Lawson

which are Danish. The town was occupied by the Danish in the early seventeenth century and remained a Danish colony until the mid 19th century. It is known to coin collectors as a source of Danish coins. There is currently a coin collector and dealer in the town who has been buying coins from the fishermen for the last 25 years (A10). Some of them he keeps for his own collection. Others he sells to other dealers and collectors (A46).



Figure 6.29 – The beach in front of the Danish fort at Tharangambadi is a popular site for locals to hunt for coins and other valuables which are then sold to coin dealers and collectors or local jewellers

Archaeological sites

Arikamedu is an archaeological site 4km south of Pondicherry. The remains of a trading port occupied from 2nd century B.C. to the 8th century A.D. was excavated here by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1945. The site warden at Arikamedu says that locals visit the site, not to collect coins, but to collect beads. These are often easier to find just after a rainfall when the top layers of sand get washed down towards the river. He says the locals will sell these beads to tourists if they can. He mentions one man, though he won't give a name or any further details, who has been collecting beads for some time and making them into a necklace. He thinks this man may be ready to sell soon, for the right price. He says there is nothing he can do to stop people coming

A. Lawson

to the site and doing as they want. He works there alone and the site is large. He complains that people come there to drink alcohol and there is nothing he can do about it because he is just one man.



Figure 6.30 – Ancient beads of various types of semi-precious stone belonging to a collector in Thanjavur (R44). He says that he gets the beads from local riverbed diggers. However, other collectors such as R9 in Chennai collect similar beads from known archaeological sites in Tamil Nadu

There are people in Chennai who collect archaeological beads (R7, R9, R44, R72) (Figure 6.30). Some of them buy these from dealers and claim they come from riverbeds. It is quite possible that such beads do come from riverbeds, washed there by flooding or rain, or thrown in as offerings in the same manner as coins. However several of these collectors have also directly visited a known megalithic burial sites at Thiruporur in Tamil Nadu to collect archaeological beads from the soil (R7 & R9, A7). It is not clear whether they were collecting these beads from the surface, or digging them from deeper levels. This appears to have been a one-off visit rather than a regular activity on their part.

6.4.3 Dealers and Collectors (Tamil Nadu)

Table 6-2 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix B) within Tamil Nadu, who collect and deal in coins and other antiquities found in riverbeds

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A6	15/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R7, R8
A7	17/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R9
A10	19/04/2013	Tranquebar	I1, T1, R12
A18	30/04/2013	Chennai	I1, R23
A41	16/12/2013	Thanjavur	I1, T2, R44
A67	09/11/2014	Chennai	I1, R72
A74	07/04/2015	Chennai	I1, R7
A75	07/04/2015	Chennai	I1, R9
A77	09/04/2015	Srirangam	I1, T1, R78
A83	16/04/2015	Chennai	I1, R87
A93	05/05/2015	Chennai	I1, R99
A94	08/05/2015	Chennai	I1, R90

Coin collecting is still an emerging hobby and market in Tamil Nadu, and in India more broadly. It is not so very long ago that coins were being taken to jewellers and melted down for their metal.

Fifteen years ago people didn't know the value of old coins. All exchanges were done by weight. You could buy a bag of copper coins by weight but now they are sold individually (R99, A93).

The current market for riverbed coins and other antiquities in Tamil Nadu is composed of a number of local dealers acting as middlemen or agents between the riverbed diggers and the wider community, both in Tamil Nadu and beyond, who engage to varying degrees in the collection, trade and research of old coins.

6.4.3.1 Middlemen/agents

These middlemen tend to be businessmen rather than collectors in their own right, though their interest in and knowledge of the various types of coins and

A. Lawson

where they are found is considerable. One of the largest collectors of old coin in Chennai explains that there are currently three dealers (R78, R81 & R83) of this sort who dominate the market.

'It's completely controlled by three boys. They have their bikes and cars and they go up and down Tamil Nadu making sure whatever is found in the riverbeds comes to them, otherwise they create hell for the other guys who are taking it out' (R7, A74)

These dealers travel directly to the riverbeds in order to buy from the riverbed diggers and they establish a regular working relationship with them (Figure 6.31). They will then sell them to dealers and collectors in Chennai and other cities (chap. 6.4.3.2) at a profit. This works well for the collectors as it saves them the cost, time and effort of travelling to numerous sites across Nadu (A41, A75).

'See if I want to go myself I will have to travel in third AC [third-class air-conditioned rail], because minimum single AC bedroom cost 1000 to 2000 rupees. So if I give to the middleman he may be happy, and middlemen know the market price. Because auction catalogues has come. They quote 'this is lot 53 Todywalla, this is on auction for 1000 rupees, why you are asking for 10,000 rupees?'" (R9, A75).

However, for the Irula and other communities who find the coins it means that they receive a considerably lower price for their finds than they would fetch on the wider collector's market.

R78 is one of these middlemen dealers and well known to all the Irula groups consulted in this research (Figure 6.31a). He is from Salem and belongs to a Chettiar community of gold traders (not connected to the Nagarathar Chettians of Chapters 4 and 5). He says that an interest in collecting coins led him to this particular line of business.

A. Lawson

'At the beginning, I was a collector. My father was goldsmith. At that time, many coins of copper and silver were available. I would like to preserve those coins from then. Gradually it became my profession'. I am very much interested in this job. Without interest, you cannot sustain' (R78, A77).



a. R78 is coin dealer from Salem. He acts as a middleman between the riverbed diggers and the collectors in Chennai and other towns and cities in Tamil Nadu

b. R78 weighs coins individually and appears to take this into account when offering the Irula diggers here at Musiri a price.

Figure 6.31 – Irula riverbed diggers most commonly deal with a small number of middlemen dealers who travel throughout Tamil Nadu and visit different riverbed digging teams directly to purchase their finds once every few months

Since he started in the coin dealing business, R78 has noticed an increase in the price of coins and greater numbers of people getting involved in both the dealing and collecting of them.

'Copper coin rates have increased drastically. Before ten years Chola coins are sold for just five rupees. Now it costs up to 20 rupees (dealers). It is sold for 50 to 100 rupees... Coins with Tamil script are fast moving. Rajaraja, Samaragodars and many Chola and Pandya coins. All Tamil script coins are sold more than 500 rupees. Other language coins are cheaper...If the Chera, Chola and Pandya coins are in good condition, it would be sold up to some 4000 rupees' (R78, A77).

A. Lawson

R78 will prearrange his visits to the Irula riverbed diggers over the phone (everyone in India has a mobile phone, even those who live in makeshift tents on the riverbeds). When he arrives they will take him to a shady spot where they can lay out some plastic sheeting and sit down in a circle to do business. R78 is aware that his knowledge of the collectors market and of the history of the coins themselves gives him an advantage over the riverbed diggers. *'They know whether it is old or new but not the exact period of that coin'* (R78, A77).

R78 seems to weigh all the coins he buys from the Irula, despite the fact that the weight of the coin is almost never an important variable in the collectors market (Figure 6.31b). This suggests he may be paying the Irula for their metal value rather than their antique value. He studies books and auction catalogues in order to learn all about the coins. *'I know to read Tamil with which I read many Tamil books on coins. My boys will read me books in English'* (R78, A77). In addition, he has a good working knowledge of which types of coins occur most commonly in different areas. *'With my experience in this field, I can study many coins. By seeing the scripts, I will find out the Roman, Dutch, British and Portuguese coins'* (R78, A77).

6.4.3.2 Tamil collectors, researchers and dealers

The numbers of coin collectors in Tamil Nadu is not known but the collectors spoken to in this research believe that it is relatively high, in the thousands, and increasing. Of these not all will collect to the same degree and not all will source their coins from riverbeds. The collecting of coins is sometimes associated with a research interest in numismatics, but is also almost always associated with the dealing of coins to some degree, however small.

'There are many college students involved in it. Whoever enters in this field first, come as collectors. They will collect things for three or four months. Then they will become dealers. There are 5000 dealers in Tamil Nadu to date. Only some ten persons are doing research. There are some 10,000 collectors here' (R44, A41).

Living in Thanjavur, R44 is one of the most respected authorities in Tamil Nadu on Tamil coins on a par with R. Krishnamurthy (chap. 6.1.2). His collection is sourced to a large degree from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu. As well as researching and publishing his own coin collections, R44 teaches numismatics at the local Tamil University. In Chennai there are three significant purchasers of riverbed material. *'So there is a holy trinity of dealers in Chennai: R90, R9, and myself (R7). We have our own agreements and don't invade each others space'* (R7, A74). R90 works in banking and says that coin collecting and dealing is a sideline for him.

He is primarily a dealer, and while he collects coins too, he does so with a view to selling them at some point in the future. R9 has been a collector of coins and other antiquities for over 20 years. He lives in a small apartment in Chennai with his family. He is a keen researcher of his collection and he has published some of his coins in Tamil, though not as prolifically as R44. He is also the Secretary of the Madras Coin Society. R7 is a businessman and entrepreneur. He is the creator and manager of Ashvita, a restaurant, shops and events business in Chennai. He collects modern art, coins and other antiquities and is a strong advocate of a more open market in antiquities in India. A slightly different type of collector is represented by R72 (chap. 5.4.3.4). She has a large collection of antiques and antiquities in her home, which she classes under the category of 'Indian art'. She has collected archaeological beads, some of which she believes come from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu. These she makes into necklaces for herself to wear, or to sell or as gifts for others.

All of these collectors source some of their collections from the riverbeds. R9 and R7 are both regular customers of R78 (chap 6.4.3.1). R7 has bought coins over the Internet and through auctions, including coins from the UK auction house Baldwins. R44 sometimes travels directly to the riverbeds himself to buy antiquities. R72 purchases her beads from R7, who sources some of these from R78.

A. Lawson

R9 says he has been buying material from the riverbeds since the 1980s. He thinks that there used to be much more available but that now less and less is coming. He has also seen the prices of coins increasing over the years, lamenting that what used to cost five rupees now costs a hundred. R9 has also bought some of the items in his collection from jewellers and scrap metal dealers.

'Mainly this is with jewellery makers [referring to a copper seal which he attribute to the Madurai Nayaks (1529-1736) or possibly the Vijayanagar Empire (1336-1646 A.D.)]. They will keep it there. These are not from riverbed...See wherever you go they will do poojas. So they will keep it as treasure, for four or five generations they will keep it. If you go to any jewellery shop, they keep British India coins. Every year Diwali festival, for 100 coins or 150 coins they will do poojas. Like that, these jewellery makers will keep all these old treasures in the pooja room. For jewellers, these are all old treasures and they worship it. If they have some problem, if they vacate, they will disperse it. It has come like that' (R9, A75).

While these collectors know roughly where the objects they collect have come from, with the exception of R44, they often don't know the particular details. They may have an idea which riverbed it was found in but not the exact location, nor by whom. R72 is at least three steps removed from the source of her beads and her knowledge their origin is vague.

'They come from two places he mentioned: Malmada river in the north, some place in Madhya Pradesh or some place [possibly the Mula-mutha river in Maharashtra]. Then the Kaveri river...But someone asked me 'which age are all these beads?' I said I cannot answer. The name is not written anywhere. From where do all these beads come? Then I checked with all the jewellers. They said 'these are all antique beads, they are not available to me' (R72, A67).

A. Lawson

Coins that are bought from other collectors and dealers from further afield come with even less information about their original source. *'Provenance is literally unavailable. Nobody discloses it. Because they're always worried that you'll find out how much you took them for'* (R7, A74). Of these five different collectors R90 is unusual in that he collects coins exclusively. The others all have a wide variety of items in their collections, including the multitude of bronze and terracotta objects that also come out of the riverbeds.

'There is nothing from the riverbed that I don't collect. There is the affordability factor. There is absolutely no market for it. Nobody collects it. So if I don't collect it is getting trashed' (R7, A74).

R44 has an enormous variety of riverbed objects. Two rooms of his home have been set aside to store them. Etched carnelian beads, a Danish whistle, a British weight, terracotta female figurines, various types of finger rings and earrings, all of some considerable age and all from the riverbeds (Figure 6.32). A Chola terracotta lamp, a Neolithic stone tool, a Vaishnavite tattoo brand, these are just some of the items in his vast collection. In addition he has items he bought from antiques shops, including those in Karaikudi (chap. 4 and 5), such as several palm leaf manuscripts and a fountain pen and ink pot.



a. Range of small bronze riverbed antiquities including earrings, toe-rings and religious brands
b. Two of the terracotta figurines in R44's collections

Figure 6.32 – Some of the riverbed antiquities belonging to Thanjavur based collector R44, His main interest is in coins, but he owns a very wide variety of other antiquities, many of which he says he purchases directly from riverbed diggers in the Thanjavur area

A. Lawson

However his main interest is in coins. He collects only Tamil coins, and is especially interested in the Sangam age (aprox 300 B.C. – 300 A.D.) the older and rarer the better. His is particulaly excited about four coins in his collection, for which he has prepared information labels to use when he exhibits them at numismatic exhibitions and schools (Figure 6.33).

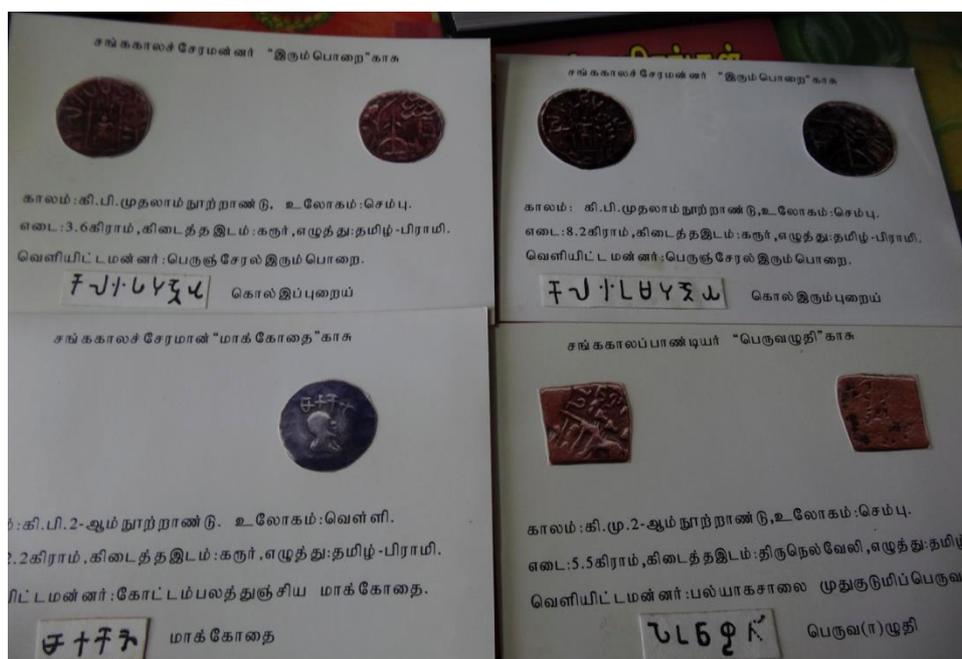


Figure 6.33 – Information cards produced by R44 himself describing four of the coins in his collections. He is proud of these particular coins because he believes them to be some of the oldest and most historically significant in Tamil Nadu.

'This is a rare coin in Tamil Brahmi script. It is 2000 years old. (spells the script on the coin) "Pollirumburai"- a Sangam Chera. A Sangam Pandya – "Peruvazhudhi". In Tamil script which is 2000 years old. It is 2nd century B.C. "Maakodhai"- silver portrait coin 2nd century A.D and "Kollipurai". These four coins are masterpieces of Tamil Nadu coins...These are the earliest coins in Tamil Nadu which we get along with script. The models of these coins are imitated from Roman coins. When Roman coins entered Tamil Nadu, people imitated from those coins' (R44, A41).

R9 has recently started a collection of bronze rings with three-dimensional figure of a bull on the top. They have all been found in the riverbeds but R9

A. Lawson

does not know their history or function. He suspects that the bull is an image of Nandi and that the rings are somehow associated with Shaivite temple worship or management. R9 says that since dealers like R78 have become aware of R9's interest in them they have started to get more from the riverbed diggers and have begun to increase their price. He suspects that one ring sold to him recently is a fake, made by attaching a bull figurine to a plain ring. He has another type of ring that looks too small for an adult but putting it on he illustrates how it was meant to have been worn, on the tip of the finger (Figure 6.34). He says that he didn't know what it was when he first got it, but of late he has noticed rings worn like this depicted on the hands of idols sculpted in the Chola era.



Figure 6.34 – Collector of riverbed antiquities R9 demonstrates how he believes this ring, found in a riverbed, was intended to be worn



Figure 6.35 – Etched carnelian beads in the collection of R9. He says that he collected these beads himself from an archaeological site near Chennai

R9 also has a number of archaeological beads. He shows me a box of various types of bead made of different semi-precious stones (Figure 6.35). He says that he collected them himself from a particular known megalithic burial site near Chennai (chap. 6.4.2.2).

There is a tendency among these collectors to sort and categorize their antiquities, and their manner of storage reflects this (Figure 6.36). Coin collectors often group their coins by era, ruler, mint or any number of other categories and store them in coin folders or trays with handwritten labels.

A. Lawson



a. Coins belonging to Chennai based collector R7 stored in felt lined trays



b. Coins belonging to a collector and dealer in Tharangambadi, R12, stored in a coin album

Figure 6.36 – Coin collectors have a tendency sort, categorize and label their coins, which function as specimens representing particular class or type. There are a number of ways they are stored, allowing for coins to be protected individually while still organized into groups and sets.



a. Chola hand bell



b. Terracotta figurine

Figure 6.37 – Chennai based collector, R9, keeps some of the riverbed antiquities in his collection on display in a glass fronted cabinet in his living room

R9 keeps many of his antiquities, including his coins, in trays, boxes and folders. These are not on display but stored away in a spare room. However he is happy to take them out and handle them. Other objects he keeps on display in a glass cabinet in his living room. Opening it, he takes out a bronze

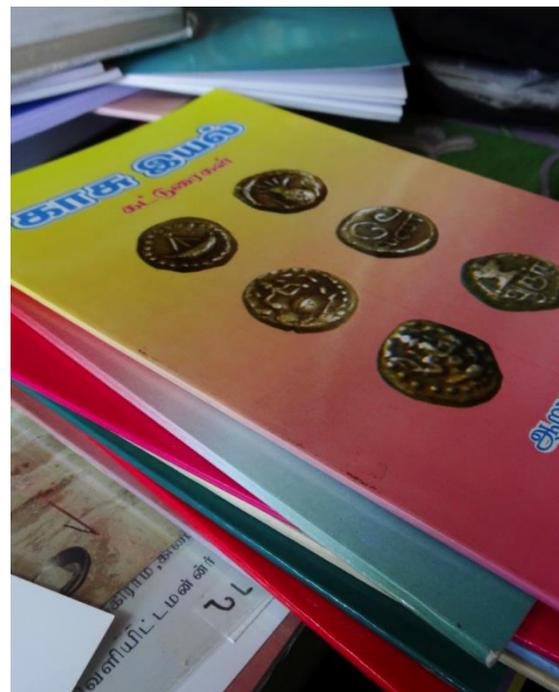
A. Lawson

hand bell (Figure 6.37a). *'I never touch these things. This is only the second or third time I've even opened this case...This is typical Chola [pooja bell], minimum 1200 years. Look its still sandy from the river'* (R9, A75). There are also a number of terracotta figurine fragments here (Figure 6.37b). *'Most people don't collect terracottas like this. They're scared the ASI will make trouble. This sort of thing should be registered. But small coins and small bronzes are much easier, its not required to register those'* (R9, A75).

Display is an aspect of coin collecting for many collectors. This often happens at coin exhibitions and numismatic clubs. R44 is putting together a collection to exhibit in his son's school. Book publication too is a way to display a coin collection, one that R44 and R9 have both engaged in (Figure 6.38).



a. R9 has published a book in Tamil detailing some of the coins in his collection



b. A collection of R44's published works, all in Tamil only

Figure 6.38 – Several collectors of riverbed coins and other antiquities in Tamil Nadu take a serious research interest in their coins, and have published books in Tamil on the subject

R72 uses the beads she collects to make necklaces of her own design (Figure 6.39). While she stores these in a dresser drawer they are meant to be displayed as bodily adornments. Many she keeps and wears with her South Indian silk saris, others she has given as gifts. *'I have made a few bead*

A. Lawson

necklaces. For my 80th birthday I presented all my relatives a bead necklace in a beautiful embroidered bag' (R72, A67). She began collecting the beads with the express intention of making them into necklaces, explaining that the artistic aspect appealed to her. 'That was the reason. See with this you use your imagination. What will suit your saris? They don't come in just two colours. A lot of colours they come in. Some are only five in one colour. Some are ten in one colour. Some are fifty. Like that. So you have to absorb what comes to your mind and choose the design' (R72, A67).



a. The beads in her collection are widely varying in shape and colour. Not all of them are from Tamil Nadu. She believes some of them have come from rivers in Gujurat and Maharashtra

b. She takes the beads to a jeweller to have them properly strung and clasps fitted.

Figure 6.39 – R72 collects a range of antiques and antiquities that she deems to be 'Indian Art'. Amongst them are a number of necklaces, designed by herself, using ancient beads which she believes were found by riverbed diggers.

Many coin collectors are motivated by an interest in the history of the coins, but this is often mingled with other interests, in particular the desire to accumulate wealth. It is not possible to draw a clear line between dealing and

A. Lawson

collecting of coins as most coin enthusiasts practice both. R90 perhaps reflects one end of a spectrum.

'R90 has some of the best coins ever. He is responsible for hundreds of collectors having the best coins. He has more knowledge than anybody else, but he is a closed book. His knowledge is only for the purpose of making money' (A7, R74)

R44 can be seen to occupy the opposite end of the spectrum. His interest in coins is motivated by his interest in Tamil history and culture.

'In our culture particularly, I collect coins of historical importance. The coin that tells us the history interests me more. Common coins won't disturb my curiosity. I avoid published coins...Through this, we get to know about the lifestyle and culture of people in Tamil Nadu. It has a lot to do with the people. The numismatics of Tamil Nadu is like an ocean. It has some 500 varieties of people like Pallavas, Cheras and Cholas. It is as huge as we catalogue it and put large volumes of books on it. Every coin has surnames. We can find the name of kings in inscriptions' (R44, A41).

R7 has an interest in the history of coins, but he is critical of some of the political leanings of some coin collectors, which in Tamil Nadu often follows from a Dravidianist or Tamil Nationalist ideology which seeks to valorise the Tamil language and culture above others (chap 2.1).

'I don't believe in collector driven research. I only believe in dealer driven research...Collectors always collect with their own idea. It's their slant...because you're dealing with history. You're establishing who did what first and who was greater. There are guys who collect only Tamil coins, guys who collect only Pandya coins. You know the whole politically motivated: 'Pandyas were the sons of the soil, 'Cholas were the sons of the soil' (R7, A74).

A. Lawson

The collectors are all aware that the law prohibits some, if not all, of their collections, however most have a relaxed attitude toward this, which reflects the similarly relaxed attitude of the Tamil government (chap 6.2.2). *'It's an open secret. Everybody knows. There is no point in talking about the legalities...because we just have ridiculous antiquity laws. Technically everybody you're talking to in your research, they are all doing illegal thing'* R7 says that the Archaeological Survey of India have an unusual relationship with some of the prominent coin collectors such as R44: ASI rules prohibit much of his collection and dealing activities, *'but at the same time ASI will come to his book launch and talk about it and praise him and say he's done a lot of good work'* (R7, A44). But R44 says that the reason he is accepted by the professional archaeology community, whilst being a collector and dealer as well as an amateur researcher, is because his expertise surpasses their own.

'The present scenario of Tamil Nadu is that there is no eligible person to teach classes on coins.... If in the excavation of Tamil University they got some new coins, they would ask me about its details. Even in Madras University' (R44, A41).

R9 doesn't register any of his objects as antiquities though he knows that the law requires it. He says that though registration is not necessary for coins and small bronzes it is for some of his other objects, such as his terracotta figurines. However he thinks the registration is too cumbersome and time consuming, and he is concerned that some of his objects may be confiscated. Dr Sundararajan (R99), numismatics curator at the Government Museum in Chennai, confirms that R9's attitude is not unusual even amongst those who collect only coins. *'Coin collectors don't come to us. There is a gulf. They are afraid we will catch them'* (R99, A93).

In the opinion of R7 this gulf is the fault of the government, including government museums, who he accuses of elitism and negligence with regard to amateur collectors and their objects of interest. He complains that it is near impossible to see any of the coin collections held by the Government Museum in Chennai, which does not easily grant access to their collections. None of

A. Lawson

the coins displayed in the Numismatics gallery there are genuine, rather they are oversized models of the originals (Figure 6.40). Dr Sundararajan explains that the originals were removed from the display following an attempted robbery several months ago.

'What is on display is rubbish. It's fake. The materials in display are copies. Historically, according to their bulletins they are sitting on millions of coins, beads and artefacts. Nobody knows where they are. It is a giant vault or storeroom somewhere there. To get permission, even if you get letter of authorisation from Prime Minister of India, they will say no' (R7, A74).



a. The numismatics gallery at the Government Museum in Chennai

b. These larger than life models are displayed instead of genuine coins

Figure 6.40 – Following an attempted break-in, the Government Museum in Chennai no longer puts any of its numismatic collection on public display. Instead, oversized model replicas of coins are displayed next to small information plaques.

Collectors from other parts of India have made similar complaints (R91, R98) saying that if an Indian coin collector wishes to see Indian coins it is necessary to go the British Museum in London, where supervised access to their numismatics collections can be arranged by email without any other requirements. Robert Bracey (R105), curator of South and Central Asian coins at the British Museum, says that he regularly grants access to visitors from India from India, many of whom are coin collectors (A98).

6.4.4 Dealers and Collectors (Bangalore and Mumbai)

Table 6-3 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) in Bangalore and Mumbai who deal and collect coins

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A44	23/05/2014	Bangalore	I1, R47
A45	25/05/2014	Bangalore	I1, R48
A46	25/05/2014	Bangalore	I1, R49
A84	18/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R88
A85	18/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R89
A86	19/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R92
A87	19/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R93
A91	21/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R91, R98

Coins that reach the hands of collectors may stay in one collection for some time, but often they will be sold on to other collectors and dealers at some point. There is an active trade and circulation between coin collectors and dealers, with collectors constantly attempting to renew or improve their collections on the one hand, and make a profit on the other. In the last 15 years this trade has evolved from one conducted primarily on a personal and word-of-mouth basis, with a level of caution and secrecy, to a more organised and open market.

‘At that time [year 2000], the trade was like a hush trade. People did not want to talk about it and the transactions were all in cash... People transacted through cash and nobody ever wanted to give a cheque’ (R91, A91).

Todywalla Auctions in Mumbai became the first licenced numismatic auction house in India in 2000, and it has been joined by several more such auction houses. In addition the internet has provided an new arena for both regulated and unregulated trade in coins and other antiquities. Collectors and dealers report that Tamil coins are not as widely collected as other Indian denominations. This seems to be in part because the coins lack a script that is widely understood. British India and Presidency coins are said to be the most

A. Lawson

popular amongst Indian collectors because they are easy to read and interpret (Figure 6.41).

'Presidency issues are the best market. Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency and Bengal Presidency. Because they issued just before British. They are all clearly dated.... Fashion always differs. Colonial issues have clear date and catalogue, so people like to collect it' (R9, A75).

However, several collectors have suggested that in the hobby's search for new and novel areas of interest, the popularity of Tamil coins is increasing (Figure 6.42).

'Now there is a good market for South Indian coins. Because North Indian coins are plenty available...South Indian coins now more popular. There is a craze for Ganapathy coins. Before they are available in 200, 300, 500 rupees. But market recent rate is up to 2000 rupees' (R9, A75).

'Because they're very beautiful and they have all these gods and icons. They are like miniature bronzes in and of themselves' (R7, A74).

Aside from the coins, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the other material excavated from Tamil Nadu riverbeds, such as the bronze and terracotta items, is reaching a wider Indian or international market, with the possible exception of archaeological beads, which bead and coin collector R7 says are occasionally sold at numismatics auctions. Antique and ancient beads from all over the world are also bought and sold on eBay, suggesting an international market for such items.



Figure 6.41 – British India coins, such as these for sale on the website of Bangalore based company Falcon Coins, are some of the most popular amongst Indian collectors. They are widely available, and unlike many older coins they have a script that is understood by most coin collectors in India.

Coin collectors have a tendency to use themes to organise their collections into groups or ‘sets’, an approach that guides their collecting choices. These themes are often based around the historical kingdoms and rulers by whom the coins were issued. However, some collectors choose themes entirely unrelated to the coins original issue. For example, Lavin (R49), a coin collector in Bangalore has a collection entitled ‘Vishnu and his Dashavatara’ (Figure 6.43). This contains ancient Indian coins from a variety of different regions and eras but each one portrays one of the ten incarnations (eleven including Vishnu himself) of the Hindu god Vishnu.

Lavin also collects coins with imperfections created at the point of their minting, known as ‘mint errors’ (Figure 6.44). This reflects another tendency of coin collectors to direct the focus of their collection towards very small details and differences. The aim of searching for something unique is always balanced against the aim to find or create an interrelated set of coins.

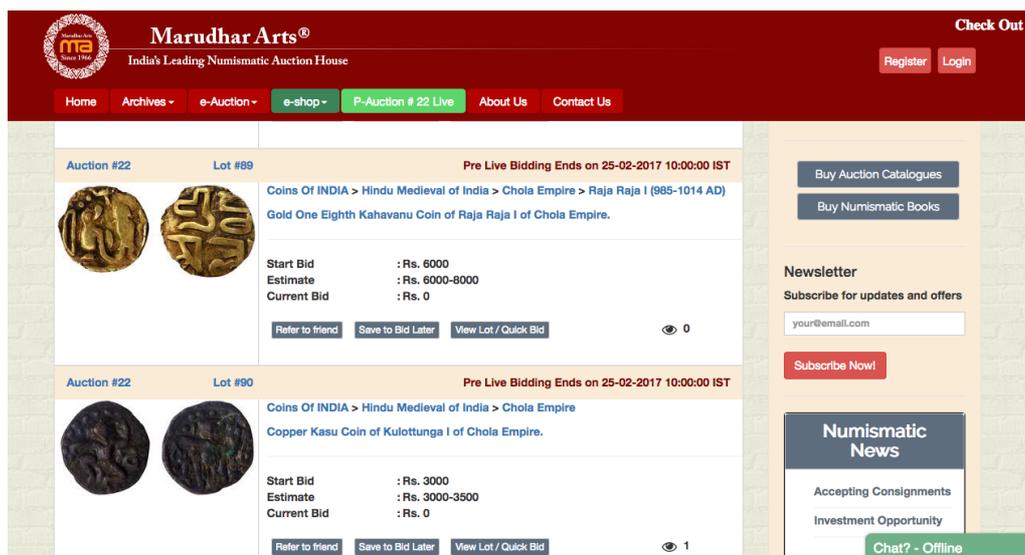


Figure 6.42 - South Indian coins, such as these Rajaraja Chola coins for sale on Bangalore auction house website Marudhar Arts, are starting to become more popular and available as established coin collectors seek new areas of interest.

'The beauty of a normal coin is one thing. You can get it anywhere. But the beauty of an error coin is something very very different. So I read those article and started collecting error coins. But I saw that they are endless. Each and every coin is separate from another. So I tried to concentrate on types of errors. So from my study I made a list of 34 errors. No sorry, 40. And out of 40 I've collected 32 types' (R49, A46).

Archie Maru (R48), another collector and dealer from Bangalore, is also attracted by the small details in a coin:

'I have to speak about the 1862 one rupee. There are so many different varieties. I have over 500 varieties. What happened was they froze the date 1862 and the next date they minted coins was 1872. For the intervening 10 years they added dots to indicate the number of years past 1862 which the coin has been minted. Then I noticed there are variations in the positioning of the dots. All these things fascinated me' (R48, A45).



Figure 6.43 – Bangalore based coin collector Lavin (R49) collects according to themes. This theme is based around Vishnu and his 10 incarnations.

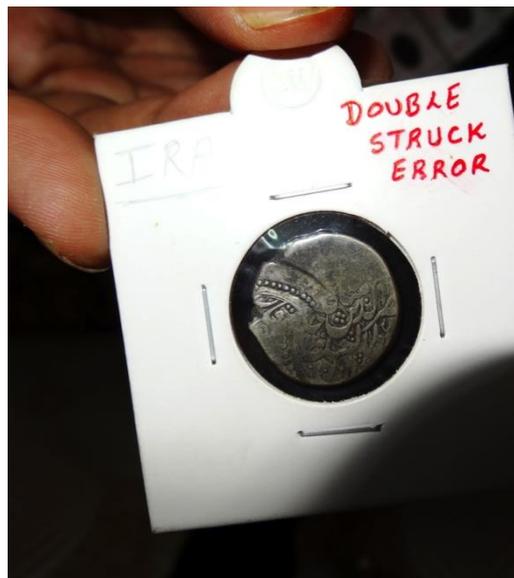


Figure 6.44 – Lavin also has a fascination with 'mint error' coins, which are a product of mistakes in the striking process

As well as their unique and collective features, coins are judged by collectors according to their quality of preservation and their material. In the coin collecting world these qualities are all reflected in a coins value. A beautifully preserved, gold coin of rare minting and availability will be extremely highly valued, while a very worn copper coin of a type widely available will be little more than its metal weight value. Provenance and context, in the archaeological sense, never enter into the equation, except where it is used as evidence of authenticity. However provenance of dealer and sale is becoming increasingly highly valued as a mark of authenticity, in a market threatened by the shadow of fake or illegally sourced material.

Coin collectors and dealers usually conduct business with one another on a personal, individual basis, which is increasingly conducted via the internet and mobile phone networking apps such as WhatsApp. For example R9 is based in Chennai but has sold coins to Lavin in Bangalore through eBay (A46). This makes Falcon Coins in Bangalore an interesting exception. It is a coins and philately shop sited in the Majestic area of the city, close to the main bus and railway station. The shop relies on an established network of customers and suppliers but has the added advantage of attracting passing trade both of

A. Lawson

those who wish to buy and those who wish to sell. The proprietor, Kirti Parekh (R47), explains how a visit to London inspired him:

'I have been inspired to see the coin shop Spink opened in 1790 [the business was started as a pawnbrokers in 1666, and became Spink & Son in 1772]...They have an auction house and different floors for different sections – Indian section has its own floor. It inspired me that a coin shop had been opened in 1790. It's a great thing. A really, really great thing' (R47, A44).

Falcon coins is small with a long glass counter. It is displaying a collection of Mughal coins. He says they regularly change the display to different types of coins. On the wall behind the counter are bank notes: some old, some special edition. On the opposite wall from the counter is a decorative display, large 3D plaques painted a bronze colour depicting a Harappan bull and replications of temple friezes. Kirti emphasises that this is a business for him and not a hobby. Though he did collect coins for a short period, he soon gave it up in order to focus on the business.

'I was interested in knowing more about the coins. In between for a couple of years I started collecting coins also. My subject was south Indian gold coins. But as I belong to a business community, always it has tempted me to sell the coins if I got a profit...I am not fascinated with keeping the coins. I buy and I sell' (R47, A44).

Kirti explains that most of the coins he sells come from villages in outlying regions around Bangalore.

Villagers used to come here and sell coins. And we redistribute to collectors. So that the villagers knew about this coin shop in the Majestic. Earlier I used to travel, to raise awareness and make contacts. That way slowly I started by business.

A. Lawson

By villagers he is actually referring to jewellery businesses who he says are the first port of call for most local people wishing to sell old coins they have found in their homes or in the ground.

Most Indian families, when they find any metal or coins it goes to a jewellers shop. Ladies have more attraction for the jewellery. So if they find some old coins they'll go to jewellers and ask them to make something. But the jeweller is a smart guy and knows the old coins should not be melted as they have extra value. That way we get the coins (R47, A44).

The shop also buys from coin collectors and dealers,

We buy from other collectors/dealers. Sometimes a collector who has completed a collection/set is bored with it and we buy it as a full set, or when a collector dies, if the children are not interested then we might buy the collection (R47, A44).

Kirti sells coins in his shop from all over India as well as some foreign coins. He displays them according to themes, which change regularly. Today's theme is Mughal coins, but other days it may be British India or copper coins. When it is Diwali he displays only gold coins. Kirti says that gold coins sell very well, the more beautiful the better. He has a special room above the main shop where he takes trusted customers to show them the more valuable coins. His customers, he explains, are generally very well off.

'The hobby is a rich hobby, so most of them are upper-middle class. They are mainly from Bangalore. Most of them are from top /official side. As well as IT and business' (R47, A44).

As Kirti is talking, two men enter the shop with a small object. It looks like a metal weight wrapped in cloth. They speak mainly in Kannada but it is apparent that they want Kirti to tell them if the object is 'genuine', and to ask if he is willing to purchase it or find a buyer for them. Kirti is polite but reserved;

A. Lowson

he seems reluctant to agree to anything, telling them 'we are just an ordinary coin dealer'. It seems he doesn't want to buy whatever it is. They tell him that they will get it tested and come back. Later Kirti tells me in hushed tones that the men wanted to sell him a 'rice-puller', but that he doesn't believe in such things. This appears to have been an attempt to sell a rice-puller coin or something similar (chap. 6.3.1).

Most collectors and dealers do not operate out of shops or established businesses; rather they rely on building a network of contacts and relationships. As a result, social groups and events are an important means for coin collectors to meet and to buy and sell. Most of the major cities in India have at least one numismatics society. Kirti Parekh (R47) is a member of the Karnataka Numismatics Society, which has around 750 members

'We meet every second Sunday of the month in Rajajinagar [residential area in Bangalore]. We'll have a meeting, then a speech on the coin, on various subjects. To motivate them and keep them informed about new info/coins...And we keep our members informed about any other coin events and exhibitions going on throughout India. SMS messages. For example there is an upcoming event in Gujarat'. So we sent SMS' (R47, A44).

These exhibitions are conducted frequently, sometimes as often as once a month, in different towns and cities across the country (Figure 6.45). They are organised and sponsored by different organisations. They include a number of different activities and events: coin dealers operate from stalls, coin auctions are conducted, competitions are run and prizes awarded, and numismatic talks and meetings are held.



a. A school student is awarded a prize for his coin collection at the 5th National Numismatic Exhibition in Bangalore on the 22nd February 2014



b. Rows of stalls occupied by coin dealers and numismatic organisations from all over India filled the MVIRDC World Trade Centre in Mumbai for the 24th Shukla Day Numismatic Exhibition on 20th April 2015

Figure 6.45 – Two numismatics exhibitions were attended in the course of this research. Events like this now take place all over India on a regular basis and are attended by coin collectors, dealers and researchers alike.

The type of networking that events like this are designed to facilitate is increasingly taking place on the internet. The internet trading site eBay has become a place for coin collectors to buy and sell on a national and international level. However collectors and dealers report that eBay is rapidly being overtaken by social networking platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, which offer coin collectors and dealers a place not simply to buy and sell, but also to connect to networks and communities and to share information (Figure 6.46).

'[A] new generation is coming up. If they have anything they click a photo and put on a website to ask what it is. There are many websites in India (social network sites) where people can get identification of coins. Many experts are there who immediately reply for this. For example, South Indian Numismatic Group. You need to register and then you can see comments, many people arguing about a particular identification' (R47, A44).

A. Lawson



a. This Facebook page is an online community for people interested in South Indian Numismatics to share information and seek identification advice from others

b. This Facebook page is an online community where members can buy and sell south Indian coins

Figure 6.46 – Increasingly coin collectors and dealers are trading, communicating and sharing on social media such Facebook



a. Lavin is a primary school teacher living in Bangalore who has been collecting old coins since he was a child



b. Lavin gets many of his coins from purchasing them over the internet. He has bought coins from two collectors and dealers in Chennai (R9 & R90) in this way, including this Indo-Danish coin

Figure 6.47 – Bangalore based coin collector Lavin (R49) buys many of his coins online from sites like eBay

A. Lawson

Lavin (R49) in Bangalore, has purchased many of the coins in his collection over the internet. He has been collecting since he was a child (Figure 6.47).

'In the beginning I was collecting everything, whatever I can get. Where I lived at the main chowrasta [main shopping or market street] a person sat at the crossroad and used to sell coins. Then I would use my school money 1-2 rupees to buy old coins. When I saw the value of these coins increased. Then I started on the Internet' (R49, A46).

He has bought coins from both R9 and R90 over eBay. He says that the internet gives him access to many more coins and dealers than he would otherwise have, including dealers in other countries. However, he explains that the payment methods required make it inaccessible to many Indians, though this is changing.

'With eBay I can buy them from anywhere. And sometimes it happens that from foreign dealers you can get Indian coins at a cheaper rate than Indian dealers... they don't know the current rate in the Indian market. They just put it on eBay and start the bid from one dollar. Also four to five years ago not many Indians knew how to pay on eBay. Because you can buy on eBay only if you have a credit card, and for many Indian buyer this was not possible' (R49, A46).

The internet has also opened-up the market for fake coins (e.g. Figure 6.48). Lavin points out that when buying on the internet you are very reliant on the quality of the picture provided, and even then it is not always possible to be sure of what you have bought. R90 argues that selling coins through Facebook is completely unregulated and he does not recommend it.

A. Lawson

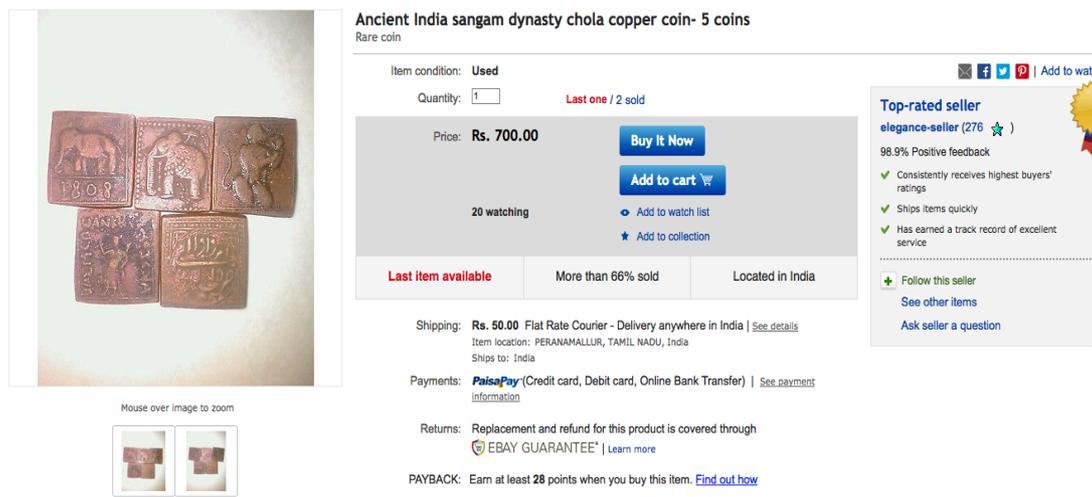


Figure 6.48 - eBay is also rife with fake and replica coins, such as these fake 'sangam chola' coins (web: eBay: c)

Parallel to the opening up of unregulated online trade in coins has been the evolution of a licenced and regulated auction trade. Archie Maru, Director of the Bangalore based Numismatic auction house, Marudhar Arts, believes that the new auction houses that have been established in India in the last fifteen years offer a reliability that the rest of the Indian coin market currently lacks.

'If you're a beginner you should be looking at the reliability of source and the authenticity of the coin, because if something seems wrong about the coin you should be able to go back to the seller. Auction houses give guarantees...if you're buying from private dealers you don't get that. Auction houses get a license from ASI. When it comes to authentication of coins they have that. So nowadays people will be buying even a 500 rupees coin from the auction. When we sell a coin we give an invoice, and if we buy from another auction house we get an invoice from them' (R48, A45).

Archie says that there are now around five licenced numismatic auction houses in India (A45). The oldest is Todywalla Auctions in Mumbai. The company founder and manager Farooq Todywalla (R98) has been collecting coins since the 1960s and conducting auctions since the 1980s (Figure 6.49). These were at that time illegal. He has spent many years putting pressure on

A. Lawson

the government to change their rules and authorise public coin auctions. Though he was successfully granted an auction licence in 2000 this was later removed for a short period.

'In 2007, the government has ordered us to stop our auction. We went to high court and it gave us permission to continue our auction' (R91, A91).

Farooq's son, Malcom (R91), agrees that it has been an uphill struggle getting the government to relax their rules on the dealing of old coins

'It took some six years or more to get a license because we are the first to apply for a license after the gap of two decades. So the government was very reluctant. Dad managed to get a license after about six years' (R91, A91).

Once the precedence was set by Todywalla Auctions other, similar, businesses followed. In 2007, Oswal Antiques in Mumbai began auctioning coins. They now conduct online 'electronic auctions' through the company website, as do Todywalla Auctions and Marudhar Arts. In addition, they conduct auctions at their own events and at numismatic exhibitions, such as the recent 24th Shukla Day Exhibition at the MVIRDC World Trade Centre in Mumbai (Figure 6.50). The Oswal auction takes place on the afternoon of the first day and the company founder and director, Girish Veera (R92), is there in person to conduct proceedings. Plastic chairs are set out with enough space for around 50-60 people to sit. The space fills up slowly and people arrive and leave as those coins they are most interested in come up for auction. Before starting everyone stands while the national anthem is played. Girish himself conducts the bidding. There are 379 items in the catalogue (Figure 6.51) and the whole thing takes around an hour and a half. Some coins go unsold while for others the bidding is competitive. The highest bid is over ten lakh (around £10,000) for a gold, 1835, William III East India Company 1 Mohur. There are a limited number of actual bidders and some of the most frequent and successful bidders are not actually present. After the auction Girish explains.



Figure 6.49 – Father (Farooq) and son (Malcolm) of Todywalla Auctions in Mumbai, which was the first numismatic auction in India to gain a government license to auction old coins.

‘Yes, you see the auction starts online several days before. So many items have already been bid on. There are some customers who can’t attend the auction so some pre-bid online, others in writing. 774 was an absentee bidder’ (R92, A86).

He says that the coins that are sold in his auctions come from all over India, but primarily from what he calls ‘local sources’. *See the main thing is we should get the coins direct from local sources and they should be coins that will sell. It has to be sustainable, which is why we get consignments direct from local sources’ (R92, A86).* Sourcing coins from Tamil Nadu, he explains, is difficult for anyone from outside, unless they have local contacts or agents.

‘It’s a little difficult to get consignments. You need to be accepted in that area to get coins. Many of the dealers there only speak Tamil so language becomes a problem (R92, A86).



Figure 6.50 – Girish Veera, founder and director of Mumbai based numismatic auction house Oswal Antiques, conducts bidding at an auction held for the 24th Shukla day numismatic exhibition in Mumbai

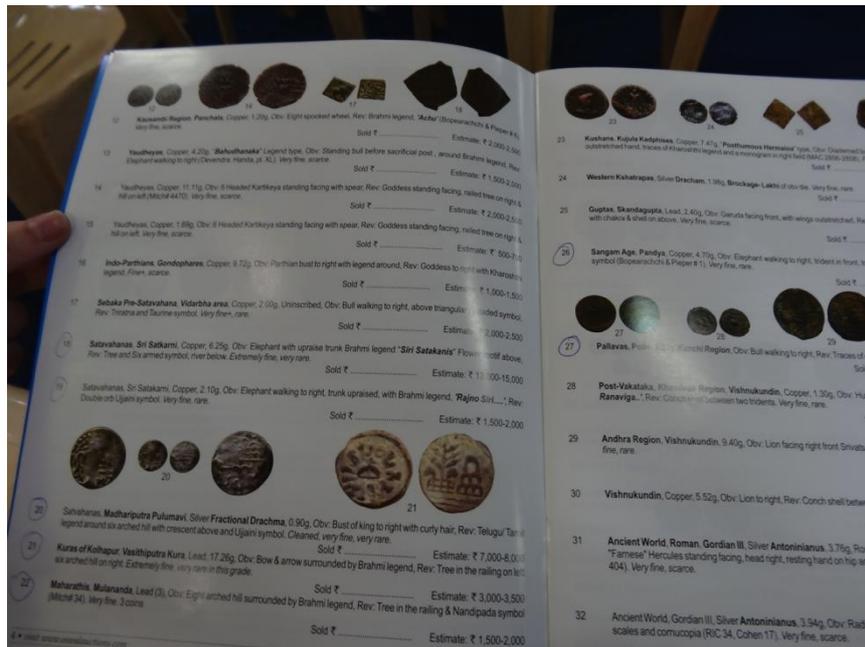


Figure 6.51 - This auction catalogue for Oswal Antiques lists 379 items. Those numbers circled on this page appear to be south Indian and could well have come from riverbed source in Tamil Nadu, though the catalogue gives no details of provenance

6.4.5 Indian coins outside India

Table 6-4 – List of interactions (Appendix A) with respondents (Appendix C) who are involved in the collection and trade of Indian coins outside of India

INTERACTION	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
A88	19/04/2015	Mumbai	I1, R94
A98	10/08/2015	London	I1, R105
A99	13/08/2015	London	I1, R106
A100	15/08/2015	London	I1, R107

The association between British colonialism and antiquarianism, including coin collecting, in India (chap. 6.2.1) has led to a tendency for such objects to be taken out of the country. However, dealers and collectors alike report that this trend has reversed over the last ten to fifteen years, and Indian coins previously held in foreign collections are now flowing back into India.

There is no demand for Indian coins abroad. All the good things went to British prior to Independence. Now they are coming back (R90, A94).

Much of this movement is happening through British auction houses such as Spink & Son, and Baldwins, who have recently auctioned off several large collections of Indian coins. However, it seems that collections like this are becoming increasingly scarce.

'So the most recent large auction was the David Fore collection. That's the only one that's happened in the last five years. Paul Stevens collection is coming up, he was the advisor to David Fore... This material has now been exhausted in the UK. Because Indian dealers have been going there and buying everything. The market boomed. So people like Baldwins don't have anymore material to have auctions. After David Fore, then nothing. (R7, A74).

Barbara Mears (R106), South Asian coin specialist at Spink & Son (Figure 6.52), has noticed the shift in demand since she joined the company in 2004.

A. Lawson

At that time she says that most buyers were British or American, while now they regularly have Indian customer flying over for auctions.

'When we have an auction we have dealers and collector flying over from India to bring them back to India. Now there is such a great burgeoning middle class in India, they want to buy them. More than anyone in England' (R106, A99).

She says that this upsurge of demand for native coinage is unique to India, but that this is perhaps a reflection of the amount of coins that were historically taken from India to Britain.

'As for other countries though its definitely an Indian phenomenon, this big turn around of collectors. Nowhere else in the world I think has got that. China to an extent. I think Chinese coins are becoming popular, but you don't see Chinese people coming over here and buying them...Probably because we don't have the same sort of colonial backlash, we don't have the same sort of collections in England from China' (R106, A99).

Despite the demand for Indian coinage in India, Barbara says that Spink very rarely deals in Tamil coins.

'I'd be surprised if it was more than 100 per year. For a start they have to be these rare ones like early Sangam or Pallava. Something like this worth 50-70 pounds. But most auction houses at this capacity you've got to make up a lot worth about 300 pounds to make it worth your while selling it. So we tend not to get these things. Maybe they'd turn up in local trade markets. But I'd say most of it is on eBay now' (R106, A99).



Figure 6.52 – Spink and Son, currently situated on Southampton Row in London, is one of the oldest numismatic auctioneers in England. They sell Indian coins, and very occasionally Tamil coins, but most of the buyers are in India

Although the collectors and dealers spoken to in this research agreed that the dominant trend is taking Indian coins back to India, the illegal export of coins from India has not entirely ceased.

Many of the coins in the David Fore collection were collected after Indian Independence. Indeed, one coin dealer claimed that many were bought in the late 1960s and early 1970s from dealers still operating in Chennai. The information about the provenance of the collection given in the Baldwin's website is vague and while it places an emphasis on auction bought historic collections, it also mentions '*other collections and dealers*'.

'Many of the coins in this collection came from the Pridemore collection, but also from other famous collections of Indian coins such as the Sir John Wheeler Collection, the Ken Wiggins Collection and the Diana Collection, all auctioned by Baldwin's in London...Numerous coins were purchased at other auctions and from other collectors and dealers' (Weir 2017).

Chennai based coin collector and dealer R7 claims that the organised export of Indian coins by foreign collectors and dealers continues today, citing the

A. Lawson

USA Numismatic dealer Stephen Album, whose representative, Joseph Lang (R94) regularly attends Indian numismatic Exhibitions (Figure 6.53).

'They have this guy called Stephen Album who runs out of New York. How is he getting a continuous supply of Indian coins? And that guy comes to India every three months. So you know he's taking stuff back. There are enough dealers who I know that have said it' (R7, A74).

Lot 1069 Item 182397		CHERA: LOT of 4 small square copper coins of Chera, 2 pieces with bow and arrow surrounded by various symbols / bow and arrow (Mit-SI.46/50, 2.11g, 1.42g) and 2 pieces with horse / ankus & bow and arrow (horse right, Mit-SI.92/96, 0.69g, and horse left, Mit-SI.97/99, 1.29g), fine condition, but as is usual with these pieces, some porosity, and 1 uncertain coin, possibly also of the Cheras (elephant / lion? 1.51g), lot of 5 coins . Estimated Value \$100 - 150 View details and enlarged photos	Realized \$130
Lot 1070 Item 182394		PALLAVAS OF KANCHI: Potin unit (2.20g), ca. 400-600. Mitch-SI.240 ff. Pieper-752. Bull right / 8-petal flower, EF to About Unc . Estimated Value \$120 - 150 View details and enlarged photos	Realized \$180

Figure 6.53 – Stephen Album is a coin dealer based in California. They have a website for direct sales and also conduct auctions. They often sell Indian coins. One of their staff, Joseph Lang is a regular visitor to India and R7 believes he takes Indian coins out of the country with him, though there is no direct evidence for this

Robert Bracey of the British Museum (R105) says that despite the general trend, some types of Indian coin, such as Indo-Greek, are still more popular outside of India than in.

A. Lawson

As a general rule, I've been assured by a number of dealers, the flow of material is towards India. So Europe seems to be travelling that way. I would imagine that while that is generally true, so true of south India, true of Guptas, certainly true of Mughal material, I would imagine it is not true of Indo-Greek and Bactrian-Greek material. My feeling is that Indo-Greek and Bactrian-Greek material still has much higher demand in North America and Europe and that the flow of material is almost certainly still westwards. (R105, A98)

Similarly, there is demand for certain types of Indian coinage in Asia according to a coin collector based in Delhi (R88), who buys exclusively gold Gupta coins and coins with Buddhist imagery in order to sell them to collectors in Japan, China and South East Asia.

Robert Bracey says he is regularly offered Indian coins for sale or as gifts, which, due to the legal situation, he is obliged to refuse. Most of this, he says, is North Indian coinage. He sees very little Tamil or South Indian coinage come his way, though he concedes that this may be a reflection of his own area of expertise (which is north India and Central Asia). The British Museum holds in its collection many coins that were historically collected by British colonial officials. Robert Bracey explains that the situation as far as provenance is concerned has not changed dramatically between now and the past, in the sense that the original source of coins is usually unknown.

The situation is not fundamentally different to the modern situation. Collectors would usually acquire them by purchase in the country of origin...We are a considerable number of steps removed from the point at which the material reaches us. We tend to get material from European collectors and this is true right the way back to the nineteenth century...We don't know in most cases how the collector got it, and usually the collector got it from multiple sources, usually by purchase, which means that usually they were interacting with dealers' (R105, A98).

A. Lawson

While it is illegal to export Indian coins from India that are more than 100 years old, their small size makes them very difficult to regulate. According to Barbara Mears it used to be possible to order Indian coins in the UK and have them posted to you, concealed inside a hollowed-out book (A99). While she says that the Indian authorities seem to have clamped down on such operations, the increased availability of coins on international based trading websites such as eBay has only made the situation more difficult to regulate.

'Coins go by speed post. It's pure personal ethics. I will never ship to a white person, even if they say they have an address in Chennai and are working here, because they're not going to stay here for they rest of their life. That's my personal policy. R9 will not ship. You can come to him and buy, he doesn't care, but he's not selling to somebody abroad' (R7, A74).

Even taking coins through airport customs seems to be possible, depending on the efficiency and ethics of customs staff (A74). Conversely, Farooq Todywalla (R98) has reported facing problems bringing Indian coins back into India, arguing that front line customs staff are either confused by, or ignorant of, the law and higher officials are simply trying to make difficulties for coin dealers (A91).

6.5 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to synthesize collected research data in order to chart the biographies of riverbed antiques and the routes that they take in the present day antique market.

Starting in the riverbeds of central Tamil Nadu we have seen how itinerant groups of Irula travel up and down both the Vaigai and Kaveri (amongst other rivers) during the dry season each year and dig or pan for antiquities. This activity clearly increased following the enforcement of the 1972 Wildlife

A. Lawson

Protection Act. The coins and other objects are then sold to middlemen dealers who in turn sell them to a variety of collectors in Tamil Nadu.

Once in the hands of coin collectors the riverbed coins may circulate further between collectors throughout India, who in general are both collectors and dealers. Other objects that come from the riverbeds, such as beads and terracotta figurines do not seem to travel beyond Tamil Nadu.

We have seen how the trade and collection of coins in India has become increasingly open and organised over the last 15 years and how the internet is contributing to this process. The increasing popularity of coin collecting in India has meant that many of the Indian coins that were once taken outside the country by colonial antiquarians and more recent foreign collectors, are now returning to India. The range of different meanings and values these objects acquire in their journey through the antique market, and the processes by which these meaning and values evolve, is apparent in this chapter. However it is not discussed in any depth here. Rather this has been left for a more detailed discussion in Chapters 7 and 8.

7 Comparative biographical analysis: routes and cycles

This chapter serves as an analytical summary of the data presented in the previous three chapters. A more discursive exploration of the themes arising from the data follows in Chapter 8.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the data through the lens of object biography, by examining the trajectory and character of the different routes these objects take, so that these routes may illuminate their social contexts. The concept of the object biography has been applied in a number of different ways in previous research (chap. 3.1.3.1). In this thesis I have used the concept to structure fieldwork and data collection as well as analysis. Rather than focusing on the particular biographies of individual objects, in each case study I have looked at a particular group or class of object with a shared source and historical provenance. I have attempted to trace the movements of these objects from their historical source to their current setting in the context of the present day trade, through the hands of various dealers, collectors and consumers. As this research progressed, broader historical trends in the emergence of the trade of these objects have become more apparent and significant to the analysis of their biographies. For this reason I have chosen to incorporate the concept of the social history of things originated by Appadurai (1986) and adapted by Lahn (2007) (chap. 3.1.3.1).

Each of these case studies encompasses different classes of object that have taken different routes, both geographically and historically. This chapter will first look separately at the different routes and histories of the objects before assessing them together in terms of their main differences and similarities.

7.1 Chettinad Antiques

As the flowchart illustrates (Figure 5.1) the present day routes of Chettinad antiques are highly location based. This is true in terms of the source (a small region in south central Tamil Nadu) their trade (characterised by the movement between different regions and centres of trade such as Karaikudi, Pondicherry, Chennai, Bangalore and Jodhpur) and their destinations (the consumption and re-use of Chettinad antiques varies between different localities). There is a marked progression from a larger percentage of Chettinad antiques being recycled near the source for utilitarian purposes, to the re-purposing of them as decorative antiques in the urban centres of India, and the replicating of some for both Indian and foreign customers in Pondicherry and Jodhpur.

The dominant flow of material is away from the source in Chettinad, and towards the urban centres of India, but ultimately some objects are travelling as far as Europe, USA, Southeast Asia and East Asia. There is an interesting circularity to this process given the original provenance of many of the objects. Several respondents (R60, R20, R34) have drawn attention to the circularity of the routes of many Chettinad antiques which have taken them from Europe and Southeast Asia, to India, and now back again.

There is a clear distinction in this case study between those people who are suppliers of Chettinad antiques, those who are dealers, and those who are consumers, although this does not necessarily correspond to how interested in or knowledgeable people are about the objects. Many of those who deal in these objects have developed a deep interest and affection for them (e.g. R18, R20, R27, R68, R71), while at the consumer and source end there are people who have comparatively little interest or knowledge in their particular history or provenance, being more concerned with general concepts of aesthetics and style.

The objects tend to change hands a limited number of times in their route from source to destination, and these destinations are usually final, at least in

A. Lawson

comparison to the ongoing circulation of riverbed coins. For example: Chettiar house – local agent – Karaikudi Muneeswaram Kovil Street shop – Jodhpur exporter – foreign dealer – foreign customer. The range of different destinations for these objects is quite varied, from museum or private collections, to film props, to decorative antiques to utility articles. However certain types of destination clearly dominate: the use of Chettinad antique objects and materials in the decoration and construction of houses, particularly in the expanding urban centres of south India, and a similar use in the context of the hospitality, commercial and tourist sectors such as shops, restaurants and hotels.

The objects in this case study undergo a high degree of modification and filtering. First in the breaking apart of Chettiar houses into their various saleable and re-usable parts, objects and materials. Then in the refurbishing and recycling of some of those parts, for example in the form of so-called 'masala' furniture, and in the selection of certain objects by different dealers and customers.

Finally, the social history of Chettinad antiques sees them moving through a number of overlapping phases characterised by different meanings and values. Just as with the circularity of the routes between Europe, Southeast Asia and India, these phases also seem to repeat particular themes:

- International trade; display and status; wealth and collection; houses and homes; carpentry and craft (1850s – 1940s): the first phase in the social history of Chettinad antiques sees them being purchased, collected and imported to India from different parts of the world at a time of affluence and power for the Nagarathar Chettiar community, and put to use in the creation of palatial houses in the Chettinad region which were intended as displays of wealth, power and status.
- Abandonment, breaking and dispersing (1960s – present): the second phase sees the disintegration of the Nagarathar Chettiar businesses

and way of life, the gradual emptying and abandonment of many of the houses in Chettinad, and the sometimes willing, and sometimes unwilling destruction and sale of the houses and their contents, which has often been associated with feelings of loss and shame.

- Re-use, recycling, international trade (1970s – present): the third phase is the beginnings of what will grow into the present day antique trade, with the parts and contents of Chettiar houses feeding a local market based on utility and recycling as well as a foreign export market based in Pondicherry.
- Display and status; wealth and collection; houses and homes; carpentry and craft (1990s – present): The fourth phase sees a return to many of the themes in the first phase, with the recycling and re-purposing of Chettinad antiques in the construction of new homes, shops and hotels. They are once again objects of status and display within the expanding urban Indian middle classes. As Chettinad ‘style’ becomes more popular and the demand for affordable quality woods greater, the replication and recycling of Chettinad antiques increases in the carpentry businesses of Pondicherry in particular.
- Nostalgia, heritage and tourism (2000-present): At the same time new themes have been introduced in this phase, with the destruction of Chettinad houses and the exporting of Chettinad material culture through the antique market prompting a surge of interest in Chettinad as a tourist destination and a subject of cultural heritage.

7.2 Riverbed Antiquities

Unlike the Chettinad antiques, the routes of riverbed antiquities (Figure 6.11) are more easily described by connections between communities of people than by connections between geographical locations. These could be seen as a number of overlapping spheres of exchange: the local trade in and around

A. Lawson

Tamil Nadu which is largely one-directional, away from the riverbeds and towards dealers and collectors in urban centres; the national trade between dealer/collectors facilitated by clubs, exhibitions and auctions; the international trade, now increasingly taking coins removed from India at an earlier time back into the hands of Indian citizens or Non-Resident Indians abroad.

The number of links or exchanges between the riverbed sources and the sphere of Indian collection and trade are few. However once objects reach this sphere they are likely to continue to circulate fairly frequently, certainly in comparison to the Chettinad antiques. This is in part because there is no clear distinction between dealers and collectors here and most coins collected are likely to be sold on again at some point in the future. It is also a factor of the differing size and function of the objects in the two case-studies. Coins are smaller and more portable, while Chettinad antiques often become incorporated into contexts, such as buildings and households, which provide a degree of permanence not offered by the numismatic collection. And while Chettinad antiques sometimes remain with the same dealer for many months or even years before a suitable buyer is found, riverbed antiquities travel comparatively quickly away from their source and into the sphere of collector-dealer trade and collection.

Whilst the dominant flow of material in this case study is away from the international and the local and towards this central sphere of Indian collector-dealers, there is some variation depending on the type and character of the objects. Coins are likely to travel further and change hands more frequently than the other objects excavated from riverbeds, beaches, drains and archaeological sites in Tamil Nadu, which either never leave the source or remain in the possession of a handful of collectors within Tamil Nadu. Likewise, the type and quality of the coins affects how far and in what direction they are likely to travel. For example, particularly rare or beautiful coins are more likely to be retained by collectors for some time and will gravitate towards the collections of wealthy urban Indians, while coins with a

A. Lawson

clear script, particularly those in English, are more likely to reach the collections of a wider variety of people throughout India.

Just as with the Chettinad antiques, there is a high degree of filtering, grouping and regrouping at each stage along the routes of riverbed antiquities. From the point at which they are removed from the riverbed there is a selection and a division between those objects regarded as high value and those less valuable, as well as between the coins and the other objects. Once in the hands of collector-dealers, the coins are further sorted into those to keep and those to sell, while each individual coin is categorised by a type or theme. These themes and categories may vary from collector to collector and thus coins may constantly be shifting between different frameworks of meaning.

In contrast to the Chettinad antiques there is very little in the way of modification of individual objects, unless it is in the form of wholesale recycling of coins by melting them down for their metal. This is becoming increasingly rare as awareness of the antique value of old coins increases.

Finally, the social history of riverbed antiquities sees recurrent themes arising in a circular fashion similar to that of the Chettinad antiques, though in some ways riverbed antiquities undergo a more clearly defined break in their biographies in the form of physical burial and, in many cases, the passage of hundreds of years of time. Thus, their relationship to their prior, historical and human context is distanced and more open to redefinition:

- Currency, trade, cultural identity, religious devotion, display: The riverbed antiquities case study is dominated by coins which have historically operated as circulating currency and provide evidence of wide ranging trade, cultural and power links. The coins were objects of monetary or exchange value, and emblems of identity and power, be it in the context of the Cholas, the Vijayanagar kingdom or the more recent British Empire. However it is possible that their value went beyond their role as objects of circulation. Based to the type of material

A. Lawson

recovered by Irula diggers (including small idols, figurines) and their association with temple ghats there is reason to postulate that they may have entered the river as votive offerings.

- Time, movement, burial: all the objects in the riverbed antiquities case study have undergone a phase of burial, in many cases for periods of hundreds of years. However even here they have not remained entirely static, as their burial contexts in most cases are dynamic and shifting. Rain, river flow and sea currents have shifted, eroded and regrouped them.
- Displacement, poverty, enterprise, recycling: There is a clear historical moment which precipitated the current practice of hunting for ancient coins in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the riverbeds by the Irula and other Scheduled tribes. This was the enforcement of the 1972 Indian Wildlife Protection Act, ironically drawn up in the same years as the 1972 Antiquities and Art Treasures Act. Riverbed antiquities in this phase, which continues into present, are objects of recyclable value and a means of survival to the Irula, often being sold for their metal value to jewellers, scrap metal dealers and pawnbrokers, and agents, but increasingly seen as significant historical objects able to command a higher price for their collectability.
- Currency, trade, cultural identity, religious devotion, display: once again the riverbed coins have become a form of currency albeit in a more restricted, less public manner than previously, as well as objects of accumulation, wealth and status. They circulate frequently and their relative value now depends of a variety of different factors such as rarity, beauty, history and knowledge. The exchange of these coins as collectibles and objects of the past has become more akin to an art market or a 'tournament of value' as described by Appadurai (1986, 21). Display is an important theme for most riverbed antiquities in the present context, be it as personal adornment in the case of beads, or

as part of a 'collection' in the case of coins, figurines and other objects. In some ways the theme of religious devotion has been retained through the idea of old coins as objects of luck and good fortune in the form of temple tokens, magical coins and the practice of keeping old coins and antique metal figurines in household shrines.

7.3 Summary

These studies and their object communities were initially selected for their many differences in terms of age, size and portability, nature of source and function. In this comparative analysis of the object routes in the two case studies we can see some of these differences reflected. For example, the riverbed coins, as very small and highly portable objects, move between different people with more frequency than the larger items in the Chettinad antiques case study, yet as objects they are less subject to physical change and modification and more likely to remain within a single overall context – that of the numismatic collection. One can also notice a level of secrecy, privacy and protectionism in the trade of riverbed antiquities which is not present with the Chettinad antiques, probably due to the fact that they are older and have to be excavated from the ground or sand, and believed to fall more clearly within the purview of Indian antiquities legislation. Thus, there is a fear of legal ramifications, even though this research suggests that such fears are unwarranted since the Chennai circle of the ASI take little interest in the excavation and trade of riverbed material (chap. 6.2.2). This can be seen in the way a small number of dealers protect and dominate the source, while trade is often conducted on a personal, one-to one basis rather than through established companies (though this is clearly beginning to change with the establishment of numismatic auction houses).

However, despite these differences the routes and biographies of these two object case studies share surprising similarities, particularly in their social histories - the way their routes and biographies have developed over time. It is apparent in both case studies that broad historical events and processes are

A. Lawson

vital to the emergence of both availability and demand of and for these objects. Were it not for the political events in Southeast Asia following the Second World War, or the enforcement of the 1972 Indian Wildlife Protection Act, I would argue that we very probably would not be seeing the phenomenon of Chettinad antiques or riverbed antiquities evolving in the way that we do now.

Both riverbed antiquities and the Chettinad antiques have undergone a phase of loss, abandonment and deterioration, before being rediscovered or re-valued in ways that mirror their earlier lives. This return to earlier meanings and values is preceded on both cases by a phase of recycling and utility.

The pattern could be summarised as:

- Prosperity/trade/accumulation/status
- Loss or relinquishment/depreciation/dispersal
- Recycling/utility
- Prosperity/trade/accumulation/status

This pattern is less like the model of the object biography which sees object lives as a linear progression from birth to death, and more in keeping with cyclic models of time (Lahn 2007, 365; Thapar 1991; 1992). There is a relatively high-level of continuity in these routes and histories, rather than sharp breaks between past and present, yet there are also differences and changes. Themes repeat but also evolve. For example Chettinad antiques continue to be incorporated into houses as structural and decorative items indicative of wealth and style, however, while for the Nagarathar Chettiers of past generations they evoked a sense of worldliness and modernity, they are now imbued with a sense of 'South Indianess' and nostalgia for a recent but disappearing past (chap 8.3).

There is a close association, or inalienability (Weiner, 1985) between the Chettiar objects and their prior owners while they remain close to their source,

A. Lawson

in the region of Chettinad and Karaikudi. This is expressed both in positive terms, for example in the relationships between some of the dealers on Muneeswaram Kovil Street, the objects themselves, and the Nagarathar Chettiar community, and in negative terms through feelings of shame amongst the Chettiars who find themselves needing to sell their belongings, and in the superstitious sentiments some people hold towards these objects (chap. 8.2). This inalienability is quickly lost once the objects travel further from their source. They instead become associated with a particular style of architecture and material culture and are in many ways seen as equivalent to similar objects from other regions of Tamil Nadu or modern replications.

It is interesting to note that the link between the objects and their past owners that is evident in the case of Chettiar material does not seem to be mirrored in the case of the riverbed objects. The possibility that these things may have been deposited as votive offerings, or at the very least items associated with elite communities of the past, never arose in this research as concern in the context of their current circulation, collection and display. Moreover, the low social status of the Irula does not appear to inhibit them from collecting objects associated with temple sites, nor does it in any way reflect on the objects ability to become sources of value and status further along the chain of exchange. It is possible that the greater passage of time and movement in the context of a public space (riverbed) has distanced the riverbed objects from their past lives, unlike the Chettinad objects which are still very much entwined with the history and elite status of the Nagarathar Chettiar community.

Both Chettinad antiques and riverbed antiquities arise from the sphere of commodity exchange and intermittently recede from and return to this sphere, much in the manner described by Kopytoff as a process of singularization and commoditization (chap. 3.1.1.3, Kopytoff 1986). However, the divide between these two polar opposites has been found in most cases throughout this research to be extremely blurred and difficult to define. This is in keeping with Kopytoff's view of commoditization as a spectrum and a process rather than an 'all or nothing state of being' (Kopytoff 1986, 73). Even as Chettinad

A. Lawson

antiques and riverbed antiquities move through the hands of dealers in an apparently commodity based market, this research has revealed ways in which they are shaping and informing personal identities and relationships, and are perceived and valued for much more than their economic potential. For example, many of the Irula spoken to in this research have come to regard the old coins they find as important historical objects and a source of pride, even as they are dependent on their sale for their livelihoods. Conversely, while many of these objects may reside in personal collections as objects of historical and personal significance, status and beauty, the data suggests that their commodity potential is never far from the surface in people's minds. For example most of the coin collector-dealers spoken to in this research feel no sense of conflict in the notion that their prized personal collections are also a source of future capital or exchange.

The circularity and continuity of the routes and histories of both these object groups can, to some degree, be seen as a consequence of their particular status as old but not quite antique, this is a distinction that will be explored later (chap. 8.1). Thus, the majority, have not been removed from the realm of everyday use and exchange. There are examples in the data of objects that have been designated as antiquities and removed in this way by museums, archaeologists and collectors, however, for these two categories of object such occurrences are the exception rather than the norm.

8 Combined thematic analysis: essays on materiality, heritage and identity in Tamil Nadu

The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the themes that have emerged from the data which I deem to be significant in terms of my initial research aims and questions. The process of analysis of the data arising from the two case studies followed a broadly interpretative and thematic methodology, described in more detail in Chapter 3.2.10, which involved reviewing the data multiple times and drawing out ‘emergent themes’ before organizing these into broader over-arching themes.

The themes discussed here are by no means the only ones present in the data, and someone asking slightly different questions with a different theoretical perspective might arrive at a different range of significant outcomes.

As with my data collection, my analysis started with the assumptions that the past is, at least in part, produced in the present, and that meaning and value emerge from an interplay between human and material influences. From this perspective I ask the questions of what meanings these objects hold, how those meanings arise, and what role, this plays in the production of heritage and identity.

8.1 The antiquities are sleeping at the museum: defining Indian antiquities

Throughout this thesis I have continued to use the term ‘antique’ to describe the objects coming from Chettinad houses and ‘antiquity’ to describe the objects coming from riverbeds (chap.1). Nonetheless, the question of whether these terms are relevant or appropriate in either of these contexts has been a constant presence. This is not only because these are English words rather

A. Lawson

than Tamil, but also because they are words loaded with meanings that derive from a Western authorized heritage discourse context.

I propose that the objects in these case studies are on the whole not seen as 'antiquities' by the people who find, deal and collect them. Respondents, even those who are collectors, researchers and enthusiasts of these objects, have tended to avoid the term antiquity along with the similar term 'antique' even though they sometimes use other English words such as, vintage, collectible, ancient, old, art or artefact. In Tamil there are words that have potentially similar or equivalent meanings to the terms antique and antiquity (examples: *palum perum poluram*, or *kuradana*) (A67, A43) however in practice these do not seem to be commonly used in spoken conversation (at least not in the context of these objects). Instead objects were described by their particular form/function (eg. coin, pillar, vessel etc.) or more generally as 'things' or 'stuff' (*porul* or *porulka*) or in particular conversational contexts as 'old things' (*palaiya porul*) or 'art things' (*kalai porul*).

The reluctance to view these objects as antiquities or antiques is not merely a factor of their age, which in the case of many is old enough to place them within scope of Indian antiquities legislation. Nor does it mean that these objects are not playing an important and active role in the construction of a sense of heritage and identity. Rather, I would argue, it reflects a perceptual gulf between the authorized, government definitions and appropriations of old objects and the everyday, domestic and personal appropriations of old objects that occur in the realm of commodity exchange and use.

The people in this thesis draw an association between 'antiquity' status and government ownership and management, and this is repeatedly described in a negative way, with heritage institutions such as museums seen to be hiding away, burying, or neglecting Indian antiquities (eg. T1, R7, R23, R26, R72, R98). Antiquities, in these people's eyes, are objects that are not available to the public. More than this they are objects that lack the living associations and material presence of the circulating old objects in this thesis. The difference can be seen only too clearly in the stark contrast between the plain

A. Lawson

featureless environment of the Government Museum in Chennai (chap. 5.4.3.1) where the Chettinad objects are remote and contextless, and the vibrant enthusiasm and profusion of detail and variety displayed at Bismi Arts with Mr Rabik (chap. 5.3.1.2). The title used here was suggested by a particular comment made by a handicraft and antique shop owner in Pondicherry:

“Some of the antiques were taken by the Britishers, who invaded our country, when they left. Rest are buried under the ground by the kings, and rest are sleeping at the museum. And some are with rich people. But they are not available to the public” (R26, A21).

The sentiments expressed in this statement are based on a feeling that antiquities are things that have been taken or withheld from ordinary people by successive powerful groups: the British, the Kings, the rich, the museums. Such remote and rare objects are not, in his mind, to be equated with the old things that circulate amongst dealers such as himself.

In terms of what *is* regarded as falling within the sphere of antiquity, the definition and elevation of ‘Indian Art’ as religious and sculptural art, which was discussed in Chapter 2, seems to be reflected in the attitudes of respondents in this thesis. Objects (and sites/buildings) which might be identified as religious and/or sculptural art are more readily associated with notions of antiquity (e.g. R72 & R73), and perceived as being more likely to attract the attention of the government (eg. R9 & R60). Respondents also tended to emphasize age as an essential quality of antiquity, often describing 100 years as too recent, particularly in the context of India (R7, R34, R46, R59). There is a prevalent sense here of a deep and rich material heritage that is not distant or distinct from the present and that sets India apart from other countries where 100 years may feel comparatively significant: *“In a country like India, 100 years is not a great number. Every house has stuff. In India there are too many things available. You cannot possibly protect all that” (R7, A74).*

A. Lawson

This statement echoes arguments made by Appadurai (2006), who suggests that the mass and cacophony of both material and human things in India precludes the sort of separations between commodities and singular objects that are often made in the context of Western societies:

'things in India never lose some of the magic of their human makers, owners or handlers . . . the sheer profusion of things in India makes it impossible to set art apart from its wider context and makes it difficult to distinguish art clearly from the objects of everyday life' (Appadurai 2006, 17).

Unlike Appadurai I am not willing or able to make conclusions about whether this sort of blurring of boundaries between art and commodity, subject and object, is unique to Indian society, an argument which Appadurai himself admits has distinct overtones of Orientalism (Said 1978). However, in the context of this thesis it *is* possible to suggest that the old objects that are circulated in the present have qualities of both past and present, for the people who interact with them, and this active circulation and interaction sets them apart from those old objects that have been removed from circulation. The idea that antiquities are *sleeping* at the museums is an evocative one that seems to resonate with many of the thoughts and opinions expressed by respondents in this research. It suggests a removal from the human, living realm, but one less final than death. There is always the potential for reawakening. Thus the distinction between antiquities and circulating old objects should not be seen as intrinsic, but as biographical, and always open to change and re-evaluation.

The term *living heritage* has been used in academic and official heritage discourse in the context of India to describe a continuity of form, function and/or meaning, particularly in relation to religious sites and monuments (e.g. Weerasinghe 2011). This usage is derived from the UNESCO definition of a *living monument* (Jokilehto 2005, 13). I suggest that this thesis offers an alternative way of defining and understanding what constitutes a *living heritage*. In the circulation, and transformation of old objects in Tamil Nadu,

A. Lawson

and India more broadly, it is possible to witness an on-going engagement with the material past. These circulating old objects occupy a grey area, or liminal space, between past and present and as such they are open to exchange, destruction, reinvention, and it is in these very processes that we can see different attitudes to heritage and the past emerging (chaps. 8.2 & 8.3).

Alternative to the term *living*, the title of this chapter section and the corresponding statement from a respondent in Pondicherry, suggest a different term: *Awake*. These objects are old but still awake. They carry the presence of past people, practices, places and knowledge, but their uses and meanings are fluid and malleable. Being *awake* rather than *sleeping* at the museums, these circulating objects are contributing to modern society – they are active agents in people's lives rather than passive bystanders.

This is heritage from below, but not in the sense described by Robertson (2008). It is not a conscious collective resistance to authorized top-down models of heritage. Rather it is an organic cultural process driven by a combination of personal desires and material affordances, historical processes and market forces. It can also be seen as a *heritage discourse* (after Smith 2006, 4-5), a discourse that takes place, not symbolically through language, but in a more embodied and implicit way through the movement and transformation of both objects and people.

The following two sections of this chapter look at several ways in which this movement and transformation manifests and is both shaped by, and contributing to peoples understanding of heritage, identity and sense of the past.

8.2 Objects of prosperity and ruin: the entangling of people and things

Academic and authorized heritage discourses often make a distinction between tangible (sites, buildings, monuments, artefacts) and intangible (oral history, customs, traditions) heritage (Ahmad 2006). However, this research illustrates that such distinctions break down in the context of these movable old objects. Through their movement and materiality these objects serve to presence distant people, places, practices and times, and confer both positive and negative values in the present, thus challenging the notion that tangible and intangible heritage values can exist independently of one another.

A major characteristic and focus of this research has been the portability of certain old objects and the routes they travel across space and through time. In doing so, these objects build networks of relationships, values and meaning between different places and people. The durability of material things means that these networks transcend human limitations of space and time. Ian Hodder (2012) has described these networks of meaning and association stretching out from an object, or indeed a person, as *entanglement*. Importantly this entanglement, or interdependence, is both human, and material. An objects current state and significance in any context arises from a combination of human and material causal dependencies, meaningful associations, limitations and affordances. Thus, as an approach to materiality, it differs from the *social life* of things (Appadurai 1986) and perhaps corresponds more closely with Keane's (2005) *bundling*.

In a similar approach, Knappett (2008) has posited the idea that objects can be seen to exist in communities in a similar way that humans do, and that *'the networks of association that radiate out from an object or thing, incorporating humans and non-humans in a web of connections, may in a sense be directly perceived'* (Knappett 2008, 84). Knappett explores the ways in which these communities extend spatially, but I would like to suggest that they also extend across time and link communities of both things *and* people, past and present.

A. Lawson

Throughout this research communities of people and objects have been a consistently arising theme. The routes taken by these objects trace connections between communities, which seem to be important in defining identities and relationships and conferring or transposing both positive and negative values from person to thing and back again.

The object routes described in this thesis traverse multiple different communities of people, creating meaningful relationships and playing an active role in the negotiation of relationships. In both case studies the movement and exchange of these objects between collectors, dealers, finders, producers and past and present generations, is more than mere commodity exchange or equivalent commercial values. It is integral to the construction of relationships of trust, knowledge, power and identity, and in this sense incorporates many of the elements of the Gift as defined by Mauss (1954).

For example, the inheritance and subsequent destruction or sale of Chettiar houses and their contents has been a locus for present day Nagarathar Chettiars to define their identities in relation to past generations. In some cases this has been in the form of attempts to preserve revive or restyle their material and cultural heritage, in others it has been a desire to modernise and cast-off past cultural associations, while others emphasise the importance of place and practice rather than the physical structures of previous generations. The selling of Chettinad house materials has been a tangible loss of status and pride for some Chettiars, and thus an important locus for the negotiation of relationships between the Nagarathar Chettiar community and dealers who tend to come from other local communities and castes. Riverbed coins and other objects have provided a lifeline to displaced and marginalised social groups such as the Irula and other Tamil scheduled tribes. Increasingly they have also become a source of identity and pride for these groups, a means by which they connect both to past people and civilizations and the wider community of dealers and collectors. While their social position, knowledge and power, is currently being exploited in their exchanges with dealers and

A. Lawson

collectors, there are signs that access to the internet and other sources of information on the wider market is beginning to redress this balance.

As much as this research has been characterised by communities of people, it has also been characterised by communities of things. In archaeological terms we might think of these as assemblages or typologies. But unlike archaeological typologies, these communities are not limited by their original form, function or production. Objects can move between communities through processes of transformation, and re-contextualisation (chap. 3.1.3.1). In the context of this thesis we have seen how many of these objects undergo frequent processes of fragmentation, filtering, regrouping and reconfiguration. For example, riverbed coins are separated from other riverbed objects, are relatively quickly removed of their associations with this provenance. The sense of a great expanse of time and history and a multitude of people, kingdoms and cultures is present in the variety of material that is found in the riverbeds. This expansiveness is subsequently narrowed to reflect particular visions of the past through their re-contextualisation in collections focused, for example, on 'Sangams', 'India', or 'decorative art'.

Chettinad material, in the form of *Sree Danam* articles or structural features, has been collected in the context of Chettiar houses, and subsequently fragmented and dispersed through the current market where it is often reshaped and utilised in slightly different ways in the context of new homes, shops, restaurants and hotels. Van der Hoorn (2003) has explored some of the ways in which built structures, through the processes of fragmentation, circulation and recontextualization, can '*constitute very relevant intermediaries between history and personal experience*' (Van der Hoorn 2003, 210). In the case of Chettinad houses we can see how present communities in the urban centres of South India are appropriating aspects of Chettiar culture specifically, or imagined ideals associated with traditional South Indian culture more generally, through the incorporation of objects and architectural features into their homes and businesses. This is a process of adaptation as much as it is one of incorporation, one that is changing the nature of Chettinad culture, history and memory itself. The filtering of Chettiar objects along the trade

A. Lawson

route means that a limited variety of the same types of objects are repeatedly associated with Chettinad, resulting in a homogenizing and mythologizing of Chettinad culture and history. This in turn sees a conflation of Chettinad with traditional Tamil architecture and material culture more generally. An effect which several respondents have referred to as a generic Chettinad style (R29, R43).

One of the most common forms of material filtering and grouping that takes place in both of these case studies is the separation of valuable from non- or less-valuable objects. A curious aspect of this is the circulation of non-valuable, low quality or rejected objects, often described as junk or rubbish, alongside the circulation of valuable, desirable things. This parallel trade in 'junk' is driven by an economic need to clear space for new stock, as well as a social need to build relationships of trust and reciprocity which could be summarised as: 'If I don't accept this worthless item from this person now, they may not offer me valuable things in the future' (e.g. A61).

The material characteristics and affordances of these objects, often expressed in terms of condition, quality and recyclability, are important factors in distinguishing junk from valuable things, and directing different types of object along different routes. This draws attention to the fact that communities of things are not only defined by human design or intervention. Material interventions and characteristics are just as important. The communities of the objects in this thesis can also be seen in terms of wood, metal, bamboo, or stone, and the characteristics of these different materials have played an important role in shaping their particular routes and biographies. Wood for example, lends itself to repeated re-use and reconfiguration. It can be chiselled, carved and re-carved numerous times without necessarily losing something of its original character, identity and past associations. Metal is easily melted down and reformed and thus lends itself very readily to recycling. However, once it has been melted and recast it loses all of the meanings and associations of its prior form, beyond those of the cultural value of the metal itself.

A. Lawson

In the context of this thesis, the entanglement between communities of human and material things, seems to allow for the transference of values and associations between objects and people. Themes of status, prosperity and pride on the one hand, and loss, economic need and shame on the other, have been recurrent themes. This has been noted in Chapter 7.3 in the form of cycles of accumulation and dispersal that characterise the social histories of both object case studies. Interestingly, these associations with and dependencies on changes in social and economic status and power are paralleled by two different ways in which these old objects are seen to have physically absorbed and embodied the qualities of prosperity on the one hand, and ruin on the other.

The existence amongst certain people and social groups of, 'sentiments' related to old objects that are second-hand or used was frequently mentioned in relation to Chettiar household material (chap. 5.4.1.1). These 'sentiments' were always cast as negative, and amounted to a fear or superstition that the bad luck, poverty or general misfortune of an object's previous owner might be transferred to its new owner and context. This attitude towards old objects has been noted in previous research: Mines (1997) has explored the ways in which past agency and events are seen as material realities that can 'stick' to people and things in certain Tamil worldviews, while Norris (2004) notes that such attitudes can be found in some form all across India and often relate to the relationship between intimate personal possessions, identity and status. The 'sentiments' expressed in relation to second-hand Chettiar household material can be understood in this light. However an interesting addition that this research yields is the possible significance of the particular material an object is made from in distinguishing its ability or likelihood to manifest agency in this way:

'It's mainly to do with wood – wood has life, its organic. Houses built with wood and wood furniture try to take a part in the life of the family. They give what they know. So if they have previously come from a home where lots of bad things have happened that's what they will bring' (T3, B: 15/09/14).

The significance attributed to material substance is echoed in the superstitions and mythologizing surrounding the purported existence of special old coins originating in 17th-19th century Tamil Nadu and possessing magical properties (chap. 6.3.2). In this case it is the addition of Iridium to copper which is believed to endow these coins with supernatural agency. While the powers attributed to such coins range from weather control and electro-magnetism, it is their ability to attract wealth and good fortune that is their defining characteristic and allure. Such coins are sometimes referred to as 'rice-pullers' since they are believed to physically attract grains of rice, and this stems from an association between rice and prosperity. In a general way one could attribute this particular superstition to an association between old coins, hidden treasure and good luck. However, the origin myth surrounding copper-iridium coins associates their production with a secret alliance between the British East India Company and Brahmin priests, suggesting that at least part of the power of these coins derives from the power, status and mystery of their makers.

Both of these examples reveal ways in which human and material agency can be seen to work together to create causal links between past and present people places and events. They bring to mind the fetishism described by Meskell (2005) as '*organic unity between people and things*'. One might be tempted to dismiss them as peculiar cultural anomalies, however, I would argue that they are more rightly viewed as extreme examples of processes that permeate, to varying degrees, all of the relationships between objects and people explored in this thesis. They illustrate how the circulation of old objects and the ongoing entanglement of people and things creates networks that transcend divisions between past and present, and thus play an important role in the negotiation of attitudes towards heritage and identity.

8.3 Nostalgia and authenticity: recycling, repurposing and replicating

Following from Harrison's (2013, 14) definition of heritage as '*a set of attitudes to, and relationships with, the past*', I wish to draw attention to three different ways of relating to the material past that have emerged from this research: recycling, re-purposing, and replicating. The different ways in which people transform and utilize these objects seem to reflect varied and evolving attitudes to the materiality of the past in India that can be seen to coincide with broader social and economic changes.

The recycling of both wooden material sourced from Chettiar houses, and metal objects such as coins, jewellery, and figurines sourced from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu, is a practice which in both cases appear to be at least as old as, and very possibly older, than the evolution of the present market in these objects over the last 50 years. Furthermore, this practice of recycling still continues today at a smaller scale. As mentioned in Chapter 8.2 both wood and metal lend themselves readily to recycling, and their material substance has a potential for malleability which challenges the finality of any particular form they might be moulded into. For some of the other objects studied in this thesis such as the Burmese lacquerware or the stone beads this is less true. Nonetheless, the repeated utilization of such objects, as second-hand or used, in the manner they were originally intended, coincides with this culture of recycling. Recycling is a common feature of life in India and in many ways is a factor of utility and economic pragmatism. However it also implies a relationship with past materiality that is less about the endurance of physical things, and more about the continuity of the processes of production, lifestyle and use.

A shift towards the re-purposing of these objects begins in both cases with their collection by Europeans, and often their removal from India as artefacts, antiquities, handicrafts or curiosities. I am using the term re-purposing to describe, the re-evaluation of an objects meaningful purpose and value, while

A. Lawson

keeping something of its original physical form: a coin becomes a specimen in a collection, a carved door frame becomes a mirror in a heritage hotel, an enamel jug becomes a vintage ornament in someone's front room. This process of re-purposing could also be described as 'up-cycling', a play on the term recycling, which implies the increasing value of an old or second hand object rather than the loss or maintenance of value. Over the last 20 years, the demand for re-purposed or up-cycled Chettiar and riverbed objects appears to have increased to the point where it now far outweighs demand from Europe. This demand is primarily coming from middle-class urban Indians, while closer to the objects source a culture of recycling persists to a certain degree. A number of respondents have described this increased demand as a fashion or trend for an 'antique look' and the result of Western influence, or conversely, in the case of Chettinad architectural material a new preference for an Indian or South Indian look (e.g. R6, R43, R45, R67).

The replication of both Chettinad and riverbed objects can in one sense be seen as a direct by-product of this trend stemming from the commoditization of antique value. However this research has come across a number of different forms of replication, some of which do not seem to fit with such an analysis. In the case of riverbed coins, there are the production of fakes, or forgeries which are deliberately intended cash-in on the enhanced value of certain varieties of old coins, but there are also objects made, in the form or likeness of old coins, that are intended to be tokens, souvenirs or good luck charms.

The replication of Chettinad furniture and architectural features is even more difficult to categorise. There are many examples of pillars and doors, made in the Chettinad 'style' and using antique salvaged wood. Here the provenance of production is new but the material is old, making it closer to another form of recycling. Moreover, they cannot be considered convincing fakes, in the way that some forged coins are, since they are produced more quickly and cheaply, by arguably less skilled craftsmen, than the Chettiar house originals. They are intended to give the impression or effect of Chettinad rather than to necessarily deceive. In addition there is the possibility that some forms of

A. Lawson

replication could be regarded as craft continuity or craft revival, particularly in the context of Chettinad architectural material where modern day communities of carpenters are emulating the work and designs of past communities of craftsmen.

The very idea that something can be a 'fake' implies a notion of authenticity that is dependent on the original production of the object. In both Western and Indian antiquities regulation and management, authenticity has been defined in terms of age, and age has been treated as something inherent, objective and dependent on original manufacture and use. Holtorf (2013) has argued that this emphasis on the inherent age of a thing does not necessarily relate to the ways in which people meaningfully engage with the past. He suggests that instead of considering the age of an object, we should consider its 'pastness', that is, how something is perceived, experienced and engaged with as being *of the past*. This experience is not the same as looking at an objects age:

'Although the perception or experience of pastness may result from a credible determination of the age of an objects material construction or manufacture it may also derive from other perceptions or experiences'
(Holtorf 2013, 431).

Holtorf considers the importance of the physical appearance of age and the passage of time. This is a significant feature of the objects coming from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu, and while coins and other objects in a better state of preservation than most will be more desirable and valuable, anything appearing too perfect would be viewed with suspicion. However, Holtorf also notes that such material clues, indicating wear and tear, can be produced in the present yet still possess the quality of pastness. This research has found that the deliberate aging of objects, described as 'antique effect' items, is becoming more common in India, but that such objects still have a greater appeal with non-Indian customers, while in India there is a preference for things to look new, even when they are old (e.g. R26, R71). In the context of the Chettinad case study the attributes most often associated with age were

A. Lawson

not 'finish' or 'patina', but 'quality' and 'craftsmanship'. The pastness of these objects derives not from the appearance of the passage of time but from the different era that their quality of wood and depth and detail of carving necessitates. *'It's because of the quality of the craftsmanship, which is no longer so available in modern made furniture...You can't get this quality of work nowadays'* (R2, A2).

This emphasis on the quality and craftsmanship of the past is often accompanied in the data by sentiments of regret, loss and nostalgia for an imagined better India, one which, in the words of Bangalore collector Ramprasad, is *'not carried away by all the present money-making, materialistic world'* (R77, A72). There is a feeling that quality of these objects is something that cannot be replicated, because the social, economic and cultural conditions that gave rise to it in the past no longer exist in India. Economic growth, social mobility and capitalisation of production has meant that the type of craft communities who produced such work are no longer supported in the same way. However, it is not entirely true to say that such things cannot be made in modern India, rather, because of the cost of materials and labour, modern made objects like those that are found in Chettiar houses of the past, are simply beyond the economic reach of most middle class Indians. The link between rapid modernisation and the nostalgic appropriation of the material culture of past generations is not surprising, and resonates with Hancocks (2002) analysis of heritage projects in Tamil Nadu stemming from 'elite anxiety' about liberalization, globalization and cultural homogenization. This anxiety is expressed perfectly in the words of Visalakshi Ramaswamy:

'Individuality has been lost. We are all going to look like clones soon, all wearing Punjabi salwar. Hotels, shops etc. – everything looks the same. Individuality has gone. I feel sad. I feel we are loosing something very beautiful' (R45, A42).

The need to define one's identity in relation to others in the face of social and economic change and uncertainty is feature of both case studies. Both the

A. Lawson

return of Indian coins from European to Indian collections, and the trend for traditional South Indian home interiors, can be seen as expressions of cultural shifts and pre-occupations. However this negotiation of identities is not restricted to a simple India vs. the West dichotomy, but exists at multiple levels from nationality and ethnicity to class and caste. It is detectable in the interest of Tamil coin collector R44 with defining the antiquity and scope of Tamil culture, and in the home of Karthic Vaidyanathan, incorporating aspects of his Chettiar heritage into his identity as a young urban Bangalorite.

The drive towards the re-purposing old objects and the emphasis of their pastness, in many ways reflects a conceptual break with the past in India, and a nostalgic reflection on the changes of the 20th Century (Lowenthal 1985). However, this is not a homogenous or inevitable progression, *'because heritage is multi-perceived, multi-sold and multi-consumed, then dissonance is intrinsic to heritage landscapes'* (Robertson 2008, 156). In the continuing practice of recycling and the various ways of appropriating, transforming and replicating the material culture of the past explored in this thesis, it is possible to see a variety of different ways of relating to the past are evidently present in South India.

9 Conclusions

The main challenge of this thesis has been to limit and focus its scope in a field which is potentially limitless, dealing as it does with themes and concerns of wide reaching relevance and significance, namely the relationship between people, heritage and material culture. Conversely, the focus on personal, culturally-embedded, subjective experiences means the potential for broader generalizations leading from such research is more limited. Nonetheless, in the context of India, I believe this thesis provides a significant departure from existing research in the field of heritage and portable antiquities and I would hope it might encourage further investigations of this type. I would argue that in many ways this thesis can be seen as a starting point for further work.

There are certain aspects of the two case studies presented here that warrant more in-depth study. For example, I am interested in the possible significance of the caste, social status of people associated with these objects in their subsequent circulation, valuation and reinterpretation. Both in the case of the Irula who are from a low status community and their role in the circulation of high status objects, and in the case of the Chettiars who are from a comparatively high status community. It has been pointed out to me by an Indian colleague that feelings of social shame are relative depending on caste and social status. Some Chettiars, including the Nagarathars are what is termed in India as 'forward caste', and thus their feelings of shame around the buying and selling of their ancestral house articles may be compounded by this. There are undoubtedly many subtleties and complexities here that have not been fully explored within the scope of this thesis.

In addition, I would suggest this thesis invites parallel comparative studies in other parts of the world, including the UK, or indeed other parts of India that offer different cultural contexts. There is also scope for investigating the routes and biographies of different object categories, perhaps considering objects that fall more clearly within the purview of authorized heritage management in India. For example, early stages of fieldwork for this thesis

A. Lawson

investigated an instance of stone idol theft from a village community (seemingly destined for the international art market), and the appropriation of Buddhist religious sculpture by a Hindu worshipping community. A study of not just the authorized, but also the unauthorized, routes of these religious sculptures would provide an interesting contrast to the routes explored in this thesis.

It could be argued that this thesis is somewhat biased towards non-authorized heritage perspectives, focusing as it does on objects that fall outside or on the edge of the scope of authorized heritage management in India. However this bias has been intentional and explicit. In Chapter 1 I expressed my intention to move the discussion of portable antiquities in India away from the parameters previously defined by governments, academics and professionals from the top-down, and consider instead the organic production of value and meaning through the re-appropriation of old objects in the present, from the bottom-up. In this I feel I have been successful.

The original aims of this thesis were to, a) explore notions of heritage and antiquity in the context of India in general and Tamil Nadu specifically, b) to do so by tracing the routes and biographies of portable antiques and antiquities as they move through unauthorized networks of finders, dealers and collectors, and c) to question the limited and rigid definitions applied to such objects from the top-down, by governments, heritage institutions, and to a large degree, by academics. My motivation has been a belief that it is important to understand how people construct a sense of heritage and identity in the present, from the bottom-up, through their interactions with material culture. I am not arguing that whatever people might feel or believe about the past should be accepted. Rather I suggest that it is only with a better understanding of such perceptions and processes that they can be effectively accommodated, or perhaps challenged.

I have drawn on theories from the field of anthropology, archaeology and the social sciences which challenge the dualistic separation of thought and matter and seek instead to understand the production of culture holistically through

A. Lawson

both human and non-human influences. I have approached the collection of data with a qualitative and interpretative methodology which views social behaviour as culturally-situated, and asked the questions: what are the routes and biographies of these objects, who are the people involved in their sourcing, trade and collection, what are the multiple meanings associated with the objects, and how do they arise?

Initial fieldwork led to the selection of two comparative case studies, both of which offered scope for the consideration of possibly significant variables. The objects from Chettinad range from large structural pieces to smaller decorative utilitarian objects, both sourced from a relatively recent historical and domestic context associated with a specific social group. Conversely, the objects excavated from riverbeds are small and highly portable. Many have been buried in the sand for hundreds of years, and the riverbeds from which they are excavated are public spaces associated with ritual and trade rather than any particular family or community. In total I have recorded over 55 hours of interactions with 107 respondents in locations across Tamil Nadu, as well as Bangalore, Mumbai, Jodhpur and London. I have supported this data with photographs, fieldnotes, and internet sources.

In my analysis of this data I have argued that many people in Tamil Nadu and South India feel a sense of distance and alienation from the world of 'heritage' as defined and managed by the government, while at the same time people are actively engaged in their own processes of meaning-making through the old objects they engage with and circulate on a daily basis. The objects studied in this thesis are not seen as pertaining to the 'sleeping' realm of antiquities and authorized heritage, but to the 'waking' realm of active circulation, use and transformation. Their movement across space and through time creates networks linking communities of humans and things, presencing past people and places. These routes and networks are driven by the interplay between individual human agency, material affordances and constraints, and broader social and economic conditions. Furthermore, in the variety of ways that people engage with and transform these objects we can see the negotiation of relationships with the past and identities in the present

A. Lawson

at a time of rapid social and economic change in India. On the one hand there are feelings of anxiety and nostalgia expressed through the increasing commodification and fetishization of certain aspects of tangible heritage, while on the other hand there is a sense of continuity between past and present expressed through the continuation, evolution and revival of practices and crafts, and through the continued re-use and recycling of material culture.

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**Routing-out Portable Antiquities:
A biographical study of the contemporary lives of Tamil
antiquities**

Volume 2 of 2

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TABLE OF CONTENTS (VOL 2)

APPENDIX A	376
<i>Description and explanation</i>	377
<i>Explanation of interaction headings</i>	377
<i>List of interactions</i>	379
APPENDIX B	860
<i>B1: MAR 2013 – APR 2013</i>	861
<i>B2: NOV 2013 – MAY 2014</i>	873
<i>B3: AUG 2014 – NOV 2014</i>	878
<i>B4: APR 2015 – AUG 2015</i>	890
APPENDIX C	906
<i>Research participants</i>	907
<i>Interviewers:</i>	907
<i>Translators:</i>	907
<i>Respondents:</i>	907

1 APPENDIX A
INTERACTIONS

1.1 Description and explanation

This appendix contains transcriptions of all data collected in the form of audio-recordings and interview notes. It also contains many related field-notes. It has been edited to remove information that may undermine any individual's privacy in cases where anonymity has been requested, and information that is entirely irrelevant to the research. The information here has been selected, divided and numbered according to individual 'interactions'. These interactions range from brief informal encounters of as little as five minutes, all the way to formal recorded interviews of an hour or more. To maintain consistency without the need to identify those participants who would prefer, or may benefit from, a higher degree of anonymity, all the names of the interaction participants have been replaced by a number (see Table 1). Individual interactions may involve more than one respondent, and the same respondent may appear in more than one separate interaction. Those sections of Appendix A written in italic font are drawn from handwritten notes while those written in regular font are drawn directly from audio-recordings.

1.2 Explanation of interaction headings

Date: Date on which interaction took place. Also serves as a cross-reference to Appendix B (e.g. B: 04/03/13)

Transcription:

1. Transcription from field-notes – in this case the handwritten notes made in the field (includes notes made both during and after the interaction) have been copied in full wherever possible.
2. Transcription from audio recording – in this case the audio recording has been transcribed, to the accuracy of all words spoken, but not to the accuracy of all non-verbal utterances, pauses and sounds. In situations where a translator is present the translators repetitions of questions and answers have in general not

A. Lawson

been transcribed, unless they differ from or contribute further to the conversation.

3. Notes extracted from audio recording – in this case, an audio recording has been summarised in note form sometime after the interaction, and these notes have been transcribed.

Interaction type: Interactions are categorised as formal, informal or semi-formal. Those categorised as formal tend to be conducted in private in a seated situation, often across a desk or table, and tend to follow a strict question and answer conversation style. Those categorised as informal tend to be conducted standing and sometimes walking, often in public and/or outdoor situations, and tend not to follow a strict interview style of conversation. Those categorised as semi-formal fall somewhere between these two. Interactions have also been defined as spontaneous or pre-arranged according to whether or not the participants have agreed to and arranged the interaction in advance.

Interaction participants: Interaction participants are all numbered and categorised as: **I** (interviewer), **T** (translator), or **R** (respondent). **FN** (fieldnote) is used to indicate a passage that is taken from my fieldnotes and is not a direct quote from one of the interview participants, but is either descriptive, reflective or a paraphrase of the conversation. For more information regarding research participants see Appendix C.

Language: All interactions were conducted either in English or Tamil, some in a little of both. Those interactions that were conducted mostly in Tamil always involved the presence of a translator. Furthermore, those Tamil interactions that were audio recorded were sent to a student of Madras University to be transcribed in English for a fee.

Duration: Where the interaction is in the form of an audio recording the length of that recording is given in hours, minutes and seconds. However in most cases these interactions began sometime before the audio recording started and continued sometime after the recording stopped. Where no audio recording was made the duration of the full interaction has been estimated in a very generalised way.

Context: This is a brief description of the circumstances in which the interaction took place. In some cases it includes field notes made at the time, and in other cases it includes notes made after the event.

1.3 List of interactions

A1) B: 04/04/13

Transcription from fieldnotes

Interaction type: Informal, spontaneous

Interaction Participants: I1, I2, R1

Location: Bangalore

Language: English

Duration: approximately 10 mins

Context: Shop is set down from the road in a basement room. The front is filled with small bronze and wooden items. The back is given over to carpets. I ask him if he has any old things/antiques. He says most is modern. They have their own workshop to supply them. I tell him I'm a student from NIAS and Gill is my supervisor, that I study archaeology and that's why I was interested if he had any older things. He takes me through to the back of the shop where Gill has begun looking at the carpets. He takes down and unrolls some carpets, which he says are old and made by nomads.

I2: What sort of people buy them?

R1: All sorts. Some foreigners. Some from different parts of India. I sold one to a man from Delhi some time ago.

I1: Where do they come from?

R1: from North India, nomads make them. It's a very special type of carpet called Kilim. skill which came from Persia, brought to Kashmir by Sufi saints who came to convert people in Kashmir.

(He gets down cheaper versions of these carpets, which are modern made. He asks us to look closely and feel the difference in quality. Gill says that though the older ones are more faded she likes them more

A. Lawson

because they have a history. Ali says they are faded because they have been used. They come from people's houses where they have been used as carpets).

I1: How old are they?

R1: Over 100/200 years?

I2: How do you know?

R1: We have had some for a long time. The shop was established in 1910 so it's very old itself.

I1: What is the difference in price between one of the old nomad made carpets and a new replica?

R1: The older one is 58,000 rupees and the new one is 25,000 rupees.

I2: Do people like the old carpets, who is interested in them?

R1: Not many people ask to see the old carpets. The new cotton/wool mix carpets are much more popular. I shows 5/6 every day. The older ones I only take down if somebody asks to see them. The last one I sold was several months ago.

A2) B: 04/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, I2, R2, R3

Language: English

Duration: approximately 10 mins

Context: This shop is one that I2 suggests we look at. She remembers seeing it last time she was in Bangalore in 2010. It is a moderate size warehouse that goes quite a long way back. Furniture is stacked in rows forming two aisles through the shop. Right at the back there seems to be a workshop of some sort where a man is sanding down a chair. It contains mostly furniture with some lamps. A lot of the furniture here seems to be either of European origin, or Indian furniture influenced by European styles. I2 and I1 browse a little before striking up conversation with a shop assistant. Very soon another shop

A. Lawson

assistant joins the conversation. They are both friendly and seem happy to talk to me.

I1: Is this your shop?

R2: No I just work here.

I1: Are you interested in antiques?

R2: I have to be but it's just my job.

I1: Where it is from (indicating the furniture in general)?

R3: Lots of this furniture comes from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. We have agents in these places that source the material.

FN: They mention Pondicherry and Tharagambadi? as sources of European style furniture, and Thanjavur as a source of traditional Indian furniture and oil lamps etc.

I1: Who buys this sort of thing?

R3: People just looking for something to nice to furnish their houses.

I1: Why do you think European style furniture is popular?

R3: It's not more popular, it's just a trend. Everywhere there is more and more western influence and style. Look he is an Indian but he's wearing jeans [pointing to R1]

I1: I am a European but I'm wearing salwar camise

R3: Yes but that's because it's hot so its more practical to wear clothes like this.

I1: Are these sorts of things also popular? [Pointing to a pair of large bronze hanging lamps]

R3: Yes, because they are connected to the Hindu religion and people still use them. [Talks about the importance of fire in Hinduism].

I1: Why do you think people want to own old things like this?

R3: It's a specialised interest. There are people who like to collect such things.

R2: It's because of the quality of the craftsmanship, which is no longer so available in modern made furniture. [He points out an elaborately carved wooden door saying it's from an Old house in Tamil Nadu]. You can't get this quality of work nowadays.

A3) B: 05/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R4

Language: English

Duration: approximately 3 mins

Context: Shop front in a quite residential area. Late morning. I have just arrived having pre-arranged to meet the shop-keeper. The customer initiates the conversation having noticed me standing nearby and making notes.

R4: What are you doing?

I1: I'm a research student from NIAS here in Bangalore. My research involves looking at antiques and antique collecting so that's why I'm here. Are you looking for something specific?

R4: No, I want something antique for the house but I don't know what.

I1: Where are you from?

R4: I'm local to this area.

I1: Is this the first time you've been to this shop?

R4: Yes, I've never bought antiques before.

I1: Why do you want to buy an antique now?

R4: [He shrugs] I just want something nice for the house.

A4) B: 05/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R5

Language: English

Duration: approximately 30 mins

Context: Shop front and two other storage rooms. We walk and talk. R5 is constantly pointing out objects. He seems keen for me to photograph them.

I1: What are these [pointing to a stack of extremely large framed paintings which he has just moved into the shop]

R5: They are Thanjavur paintings from Chettinad

I1: How did you get them?

R5: I have an agent in Chettinad who got them for me.

FN: He indicates for me to follow him across the street to a basement garage. Inside are random antiques stacked around the edges of the room. He is keen for me to see them and photograph them He directs me first to a traditional stringed instrument which he says is 90 years old. I ask him where it came from, and he says from an old house. He points me towards several other pieces of furniture and waits for me to photograph them).

I1: How long he has been running his antique shop/business?

R5: 25 years

I1: How and why did you start?

R5: I used to collect myself. I collected brasses and cameras. Then I moved into selling.

I1: Where do the things in your shop mostly come from?

R5: All over India. Many from Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Bangalore itself. Lots of these things come from old houses.

A5) B: 09/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Chennai

Interaction participants: I1, R6

Language: English

Duration: approximately 15 mins

Context: I have been taken here by an auto-rickshaw driver who will get commission for bringing me. I spend a few minutes browsing before starting an informal conversation with the shop assistant. The shop

assistant is Kashmiri. He says many things are from north India, but also points me to some wooden sculpture which he says is made in Tamil Nadu. I notice some lamps in a style I have seen before quite frequently in antique shops. It is a lady holding an oil lamp in both hands. She has a bird on her wrist. The shop assistant tells me this is called 'Deepalakshmi' – Lakshmi of light. I begin an informal conversation with the shop-assistant and as he seems open and willing to talk I continue to ask more directed questions.

I1: Do you have any antiques?

R6: Yes [He points to some hanging oil lamps. He claims these are 400 years old].

I1: Where do they come from?

R6: South Tamil Nadu. Old houses mainly.

I1: Do any of these things come from temples?

R6: Yes but only the smaller temples. When the small temples refurbish they sell of many old things like the lamps. Larger more popular temples which are known to ASI or who don't/can't sell these things as there is more regulation of these temples.

I1: How popular are antique items, like these lamps, in comparison to the newly made handicrafts?

R6: They are more of a collector's item.

I1: What about these 'antique finish' items?

R6: Antiques and antique style is becoming more of a trend in India. It's a western influence coming from the appreciation of and idea of 'heritage', as well as a recognition that the older something is the more money it might be worth. In general those people buying something for current usage (ie. Puja utensils which are to be used at a household shrine) they will probably want something shiny and new. But if they want it as a decoration or a collectors piece then they might prefer an antique.

I1: I am a student of Archaeology. I study in Bangalore and now I'm doing research from my PhD.

R6: I know the ASI. We have to deal with them a lot. We get licences from the ASI for buying and selling antiques. This is even necessary for replicas of antiques, because some dealers will try to export genuine antiques by pretending they are replicas. Some objects need to go through at least one, and sometimes two, ASI committees to decide whether it is genuine, and if it is genuine they will seize it. Illegal exportation is a big problem in South India.

I1: Not north India?

R6: Not so much.

I1: Why?

R6: There are more antiques in South India, because South India has a longer and richer history than North India and the objects are distinctive and very beautiful. The icons from South India are more elaborately and richly adorned. Siva has a moustache in south Indian depictions while he does not in North India. **FN:** He talks about the difference between Dravidian and Aryan and says Aryan history is more recent.

A6) B: 15/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIEDLNOTES

Interaction type: Semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction participants: I1, R7, R8

Language: English

Duration: approximately 1 hour

Context: I have contacted R7 by phone and he has asked me to meet him at a shop/restaurant called Ashvita. I know R7 already through previous meetings to do with an earlier research project. He is friendly on the phone and seems willing to help me. I arrive a little early for the meeting and so I have a look around the gift shop. A customer is asking the shop assistant about coin collecting – she's heard that there's some connection with Ashvita and coin collecting. The shop assistant tells her that her boss collects and sometimes sells antique

coins. The customer says she's asking on behalf of her grandfather who wants to get into coin collecting. She asks where coins can be bought. The assistant tells her ebay and many other places. But she suggests sending an email to R7 to find out more. R7 appears and invites me to sit down in the restaurant and orders me a coffee. We are joined later by R8. He is a freelance archaeologist and a student friend of my supervisor. I have contacted him to ask if he would be interested in working as a translator and field assistant for me. Since he knows R7, he has agreed to meet me here to talk over possible fieldwork plans. R7 starts talking rapidly about recent changes in legislation related to State Department registration of antiquities.

R7: Rules have changed, things been freed-up. I'm not sure why but the change has come about in the last three months. Coins are no longer required to be registered unless part of a hoard. Also Jewellery and textiles. Since the changes in legislation four new auction houses have opened up in Chennai. This push for change is coming from big collectors in Delhi and Bombay.

FN: He mentions Anupan Koda And the Devi Art Foundation. He sees this as an important time of change for the Indian Antiquities market.

R7: It's becoming more organised. There's a structuring of the market. The changes are all to do with the state department registration system though. Not the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act or the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act. Though there has been some suggestion of possibly shifting the one hundred year benchmark for antiquities to 150 years. Its now legal to import and export antiquities for exhibition – both short term and long term (e.g. 100yrs).

FN: He mentions big coin auction event that has just happened in Chennai (CoinEx). Apparently this happens once a month in different parts of India. Next one is in Bombay on 18th, 19th and 20th of April. I explain to him what my aims are for the next couple of weeks – meeting people related to collecting/selling/finding antiquities. I ask about the river-panning which he told me about last time we met.

I1: Is it possible for me to meet such people? Do you think they would be willing to talk to me?

R7: Yes it shouldn't be a problem. But you need to find them. Last I knew there was some happening near Madurai and Thanjavur. I also know of a family who dredge a gutter in Kanchipuram for coins/antiquities. You should take a drive down the coastal road from Chennai to Pondicherry. There are lots of antique shops there. Its known as the 'antique drive' and people do it as an activity at weekends.

FN: He talks about the superstition involved in antiquities collecting and dealing (though he doesn't use the word superstition). He says there are supernatural concerns.

R7: People worried about bad luck and misfortune because of association and dealing with certain old objects, particularly ones which might have been used in some ritual context. There is a dealer in Mahabalipuram (South Indian Arts) who has suffered accidents, ill health and family losses in the last year or so. People think it's because he deals in old temple/religious artefacts – idols etc. I used to collect a certain kind of fossil found in Himalayas, which contain water sealed inside. I didn't know at the time but these fossils are sometimes used in a ritual for extracting demons/djinn from people. But I noticed a bad feeling about them, so I got rid all of them, and now I wont collect anything that might have a personal ritual significance or use (e.g. amulets). If you're interested in antiques you have to believe the stories connected to them, personal stories. If you're able to look at an old piece of baked clay and believe that someone once worn this as an ornament, they why not also believe in the supernatural things associated with objects. If you're an antique dealer you have to be a storyteller. If you're not a storyteller, you're not an antique dealer.

FN: R8 arrives and joins the conversation, but R7 continues to do most of the talking. He continues to suggest places I might visit: Tranquebar /Tharangamgabi: Bungalow on the Beach and Danish buildings, also Danish coins. Madras University Archaeology Department and

museum. He says this is a terrible state and I really should see it, but they won't let you take pictures.

R8: It's dusty and the shelves are all hanging on top of one another. There are many broken objects. I donated a pot to the Archaeology department museum but I have no idea what has happened to it.

R7: You must visit Srirangam. It's the best example of a living temple city. Now sand mining has been permitted around the city and they recently turned up a solid gold statue.

I1: What happened to it?

R7: Disappeared

I1: What stolen?

R7: No the State department or ASI took it and there's been no more news of it. It's probably been cut into nuggets by now.

I1: So in general what happens to the objects seized by the ASI?

R7: Nothing. They disappear. Stored away and forgotten, broken, lost. Nobody wants to deal with them because there's so much paperwork involved.

FN: R8 tells three stories.

1. Buddha statue stolen – attempted twice from Ariyalur
2. Ancient headless Jain statue remade with local goddesses head.
3. Jain sculpture marked to change it into a Brahma, Siva, Vishnu idol.

I1: What about temples? Are they an important source of antiquities for dealers and collectors?

R7: Not so much. The temple things such as lamps are really huge and not often sold. If you see one in an antique shop and he says it's from a temple he's probably lying because he thinks you'll be more interested in it if it is from a temple. But then some temples will deliberately paint their walls with enamel because ASI won't bother about temples that have been renovated that way. Then if they have any old ornaments in storage they might sell them off. There is a very respected organisation that deals with temple auctions. [Hindu and Religious Charitable Endowments Department?]. I have attended such auctions many times.

A7) B: 17/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIEDLNOTES

Interaction type: Semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R9

Language: English

Duration: approximately 45 mins

Context: At R9's home. His wife brings me coffee and biscuits. We sit on the sofa in the living room and R9 shows me objects in a glass cabinet opposite the sofa, then begins to bring out files and boxes containing his coin collection, also beads and terracotta. I arrive around 11:30. He welcomes me warmly. His wife and daughter in law are also there. I explain my purpose and while he is bringing tea I begin to look at the objects on display in the glass-fronted shelves in his living room. There are lots of small bronze Ganeshas, some fairly old looking terracotta figurines and a terracotta lamp among other things.

FN: He's been collecting antiquities for over 25 years. His father collected before him. His main interest is in coins, especially Chola and Pallava. He is a member of the Madras Coin Society. He says he is happy for me to take pictures, but asks me to keep the pictures of the terracotta's private as he could get in to trouble for keeping them. He gets most of his objects from dealers. The terracotta's come from riverbeds in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They are found by tribal riverbed panners he says, then bought by the dealers who sell them to him. He doesn't register any of his objects with the State Department, though he is well aware that this is required. He the process takes far too much time and effort per object. He thinks the State Department don't have enough staff to do the job properly and quickly so he doesn't bother. He says if it was made quicker and easier to register then he would, although he also mentions that registering some objects might lead the State Department/ASI to seize some of the things he owns, which he obviously doesn't want to risk. He takes out a large leather

A. Lawson

box with velvet lining. It contains rings – he thinks they are quite old, maybe Vijanayagara or older. He hasn't found any references to them in anywhere. They all have a bulky Nadi bull figurine, but each bull design is slightly different. He thinks the bull designs correspond to the bull design of a particular temple and the the rings are some sort of ID for people wishing to safeguard property at the temple. He says this is just his theory, he has been to temples to ask if the priests have any knowlege of them, but nobody recognizes them. He shows me one which has an elephant instead of a bull and points out how the elephant is joined to the ring leads him to believe it is a fake. He says dealers have gotten to know that he buys these rings. Originally he was able to buy them very cheaply, but now they know he collects them they have started to raise the prices to several thousand per ring. He says they are also found in the riverbeds. He shows me a box of various types of bead made of different semi precious stones. He says they are from megalithic sites. I point to some and ask exactly where he got them, he says he went out to Sirutavur? [Smriti's site I think] with R7 and 4 or 5 others after there had been rain to collect the beads. He shows me his coin collections next. They are kept in wooden boxes with felt lining specifically made for keeping coins I think. All of his objects are stored extrememly carfully. They are organized and labeled too. He says his favourite object so far is a gold Chola coin which he shows me. He shows me some decorated pendants which he says are marriage necklaces – worn by the wife after marriage and carrying the husbands family design. Each design is apparantly specific to a male family line (like a coat of arms). His wife shows me hers. She is a historian sepcialising in epigraphy of the Vijanayagara period. Before I go they show me their household shrine, which also has many old bronzes. He shows me one in particular which he is very fond and pround of, not because of its age, he says its perhaps less than 100 years old, but because of the quality of the workmaship and the detail in the face.

A8) B: 18/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: Informal, spontaneous

Location: Auroville

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R10

Language: English

Duration: approximately 15 mins

Context: R10's office. Its small and set up a flight of stairs overlooking a yard filled with banyan trees and wooden furniture and structural material. There is a big friendly dog outside the office, and several people working in the yard. They seem to be refurbishing furniture. R10 is very friendly and happy to answer questions. We begin by taking a look around a large room full of ornaments/objects. Looks like an aladins cave. There are a large range of things including lamps, figurines, toys, pictures. We have a conversation in his office. We look round the furniture in the yard. He shows us some of the refurbished pieces (eg. carved wood door), but says they have also branched out into making new furniture which he shows us.

I1: How old is the business and how did it start?

R10: I Moved here 25 years ago with my wife. She was interested in antiques so we bought a few pieces of old furniture here and refurbished them to sell. We sold out straight away, so we gathered there was a good market for such things. The business has just continued to expand from there. Originally we were a 100% export business selling indian furniture to Europe, but since the economic crisis in Europe in the last ten or so years the export market has dwindled. However at the same time the Indian market for these things has expanded rapidly in the last ten years, so that now we are selling more within India than they ever exported to europe.

T1: Where do you get things from?

R10: We only operate within a 150km raduis [in terms of buying], anything further would be uneconomical given the time and cost of transporting the goods. We don't tend to sell online, though we have a

A. Lawson

website, as the in-store trade is so constant. There have been occasions when somebody has bought an item online only to find it has been sold straight from the store in the meantime. We get all these things from old houses which are being demolished. Many people living in these houses are selling up and moving to the cities.

I1: Do you buy these things yourself in person?

R10: No I have a network of collectors who do the actual sourcing and buying.

Being in Auroville we are in the perfect position for this sort of business. There is lots of tourist and media attention due to the community here. Also the government here is supportive of this sort of 'soft industry'. When we first started we were perhaps the only local business of this kind but now there are many. New businesses are constantly appearing. They get a few pieces of refurbished furniture and call it an antique shop. Some of them last and some of them don't.

A9) B: 19/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIEDLNOTES

Interaction type: Informal, spontaneous

Location: Arikamedu

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R11

Language: Tamil

Duration: approximately 15 mins

Context: We arrive at the site in the morning. There is a school visit group (approx 10-13 year olds?) walking down the track to see the site. The site is surrounded by a metal fence, but it is not secure and there are many gaps. There is a lot of litter on the site, particularly glass alcohol bottles and cans. There is no information about the site, excepting the single blue ASI board near the entrance. It is very overgrown with vegetation so that it is difficult to make out any of the archaeological features. There are some areas on the edges of banks, particularly near the river, where the earth has crumbled away, and Gandhirajan tells me that it is very possible to find archaeological beads here after rainfall, which washes them out of the sections. About

half way around the site the school children catch up to us. They want to know if there is anything to see here but T1 tells them no, the whole site is just like this. After walking all the way around the site we come back to the entrance where the site warden is sitting and we have a short conversation with him. It is very hot. The warden has been sitting on rock in the shade of a tree.

FN: R11 says that his job is not very hard but he travels a long way to get here. He works 6 days a week from 10am – 5pm, and travels 25km each way (1 hour each way). He says that so many people come to the site to drink alcohol, but that there's nothing that he can do about it because he is there all on his own. He says that people come to collect beads after the rain. They are locals, and its not an organised operation – just something that people come and do now and then. Some sell the beads to tourists who visit the site. He says he knows a man who has made himself a garland of beads from the site. He believes the man still has it. I question him a bit further about this and he suddenly starts to become suspicious – Do I want to buy the garland? No? Then why am I asking questions? The warden tells Gandhirajan that he thinks the man with the garland might be ready to sell.

A10) B: 19/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIEDLNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Tranquebar

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R12

Language: Tamil and English

Duration: approximately 30 mins

Context: On arriving in the village we go straight to the small Maritime Museum, there is a coin collector here who Gandhirajan has heard about from a family friend living in the town. The museum is made up of household items and everyday work items recovered from wrecked buildings after the Tsunami of 2004. We have a conversation with the

A. Lawson

coin collector and he shows us some of his coin collection. We walk down to the seafront by the temple we meet a young fisherman who have a short conversation with.

FN: R12 takes out his coin collection to show us. He buys most of the coins from local fishermen. They occasionally pull things up in their nets, but usually they collect the coins from the seafront/beach when the weather is stormy (apparently there is a particular kind of weather and tide which is best for doing this). They look primarily for gold to sell to jewellers for metal value (there is a goldsmiths street in the town and it seems that small bits of gold often wash up on the beach). He has been collecting coins for 25 years and has built up a very sizable collection. His father collected coins before him. He has several full books and has separated them into Indian and Danish coins, and then further into different rulers and periods. He has also separated them according to those coins he wants to keep and those coins he wants to sell. He says he likes to keep the best and the rarest coins for his own collection and sell the more common ones and any duplicates. He says that coin buyers find him through word-of-mouth. There is a network of collectors in Tamil Nadu and many know of each other. The cost has eroded/sunk very significantly since it was a Danish port. R12 shows us an old map of the town and indicates the fort, which is now at the very edge of the current coastline. He says there are ruins of the old town just visible under the water beyond the coast.

A11) B: 19/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: Informal, spontaneous

Location: Tranquebar

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R13

Language: Tamil

Duration: approximately 15 mins

A. Lawson

Context: Down on the seafront by a temple. We meet two young men with a motorbike. They are interested in what we are doing here. They are local fishermen.

FN: R13 says that him and some of the other fishermen look for gold on the beach at a special time of year when the weather is right for it. He says the best spot for finding gold is the stretch of beach right in front of the fort. He says he has pulled up old coins in his fishing net before, but he just throws them back in again because he doesn't really know what they are. He says that he can see structures of buildings under the water off the coast. He claims that its possible to see such remains several kilometers out from the coast. He points to a boat miles off the coast and says that in his grandfathers day you used to be able to walk all the way out there on dry land.

A12) B: 19/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIEDLNOTES FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Kumbakonam

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R14

Language: Tamil

Duration: approximately 30 mins

Context: We arrive into Kumbakonam very late at night. Eventually we find the right house and he welcomes us into a small hall with seats. We take off our shoes and sit in his front room. He is old, in his 80's, but still working. There are several family members of his hovering in the backrooms but they don't join us. I am extremely tired as it is around 10pm and we have been driving all day, so I am not as attentive as I might have wished. He seems to command a degree of respect from T1, perhaps because of his age, but also because of his craft and lineage.

FN: R14 has moved away from traditional bronze work in favour of a more contemporary style with more of his own artistic input. He makes

A. Lawson

pieces to order and displays in art galleries in Chennai and other parts of India. He is a prolific and enthusiastic talker on his subject, and goes into great detail about the art of bronze idol making. He talks about the type of metal used, about the 'grammer' and iconography used in idols. In order to illustrate these things at one point he pushes the coffee table aside and begins to draw on the floor with a stick of chalk. He comes from a long line of Vishvakarma bronzesmiths. He says that his grandfather made several of the pillars inside the Srirangam temple. His father, grandfather etc. all produced bronzes using the same processes and in the same styles – dating back to the Chola period. A bronzesmiths individual style might come through in the small details, but would only be apparent to the trained eye. He says that there are two different types of bronzesmith: the vishvakarma's and the one's he refers to as the 'helpers'. They would outsiders, who came to work as apprentices for the Vishvakarma's. They learned the technology from them, but they were not allowed access to the texts/scriptures of the vishvakarma's. They have passed the skill down through their families, but they are not allowed to use the caste name. He says that he thinks it might be these people who are making the bronzes which are so commonly found in antique shops in Tamil Nadu, but he doesn't really know anything about that sort of market. I ask him if he has kept anything that his father or grandfather made. He says no, he doesn't keep that sort of thing. But then he remembers and fetches two small idols made for the home rather than a temple. They're dusty and have obviously not been kept for display. He uses these to explain about the different proportions and measurements that must be used for temple idols and household idols.

A13) B: 20/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: Informal, spontaneous

Location: Ariyalur

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R15

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx 30 mins

Context: In the village 'square', opposite temple, under a tree. It is a tiny village. A group of men are sitting on an ox-cart. Others gather around when we arrive. There is a small stone bench nearby with a game board drawn in chalk on top. The village headman is keen to repeat the story of the stolen Buddha to me and all the others gathered round to chip in where they can.

FN: There were two failed theft attempts before the buddha was successfully taken from it's roadside location. On the third attempt the thieves had the help of some local sugar factory workers who took a truck from the factory in order to transport the statue. When the villages became aware of the theft they went to the police, who were apparently able to trace the vehicle by following its tire tracks? They found the stolen statue at the side of the road on the way to Nagapattinam. It appears that the thieves had been attempting to take the statue to the port town, possibly to ship it abroad to Sri Lanka or South-east Asia, and had discarded it once they realised they were being followed. The villagers went back to the police station to collect the statue. They wanted to give statements but the police chose to drop the case, saying it was a false charge (i.e. that the statue had not been stolen). The villagers seem to think that the police had been bought-off by wealthy/influential individuals involved in the attempted theft. They think that the statue was intended for sale abroad but that wealthy Indians were somehow involved in the operation. They also mention a group of Sri Lankans who visited the village to see the Buddha statue on several different occasions prior to its theft. The villagers speculate that these Sri Lankans may have been involved in the theft. The statue is now kept in the centre of the village, in site of the temple since the villagers fear further attempts to steal it. The man who owns the fields next to which it used to stand says that his crops have never been as healthy or productive since the statue was taken.

A14) B: 21/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Kanadukathan

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R16

Language: Tamil

Duration: approximately 10 mins

Context: Kanadukathan is a village/town near Karaikudi which is full of old Chettair mansions. Many of the houses seem to be in a state of decay and disrepair, and many more have been demolished leaving only large, empty, grass-grown plots. We walk about the town which seems eerily empty, though many of the houses are apparently still occupied. One of the first houses we come to is a very small (in comparison to the large mansions that dominate the town) traditional chettiar style building. It looks old. We speak to the old woman who lives there.

FN: R16 says her family has been living in the house for over 100 years. She lets us take a look inside. The building is very dilapidated and crumbling. We ask her about the building next door which was demolished. There is now a vast empty plot there, so it must have been a very large house. She says she remembers when the house was pulled down but she doesn't know what happened to the contents or the woodwork. I try to ask her if anyone has ever come to the house to enquire about buying objects or parts, but she doesn't say. She just says that people tell her that her house will have to be demolished soon.

A15) B: 21/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R17, R18, R19, R20

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx 1 hour

Context: T1 wants to take me to one particular street which he said was well known for antiques. It is a small narrow street, and the shops along it have small fronts. They all appear to be antique shops, though some of them are closed at the moment. We visit four of the shops on the street and talk to the shopkeepers there.

FN: South Indian Crafts Centre: Quite small, selling mainly small household items like pots, plates and lamps. The shop owner (R17) says he collects buys his goods from 96 villages in the Karaikudi area – all from the Chettiar community. He says his things are sold all around India – Mainly the big south Indian cities: Bangalore, Madras, Hyderabad. His goods are bought as ornamental display items. He sometimes sells to big hotels. I notice some Bristol Ware pots/jars. Old and New Arts: (R18) says he sells his goods abroad and also to wealthy urban Indians, he thinks this represents maybe 5-10% of Indian population.

Gani Arts and Crafts: The owner (R19) says that most of his goods are bought by people in Kerala and Pondicherry. Some things he says are bought by house owners, and some are bought by agents.

Bismi Arts and Crafts: Looks at first site a small shop much like the others. However, the owner (R20) asks if we'd like to see the warehouse, and takes us upstairs. He seems to own a huge amount of space on the second floor of this street – a series of about 5 or 6 rooms absolutely full of antiques items, ranging from large carved wooden doorframes to small decorative and household items. The owner says that the business is 80 years old. It used to be his fathers – he started a small business from his home, and then in the last 20 years they have run the business from this location. He says that he has some customers from North India (agents/dealers) who will come down with a large lorry, take a look around the warehouse and then ask to buy the contents or an entire room, rather than selecting individual pieces (he mentions a business called Sun City in Jodhpur). I ask about some of his other customers and he mentions Kochin Crafters in Kerala and

A. Lowson

Anil Sharma from Pondicherry who buy materials for construction purposes. He says he has a foreign customer in who comes from Pondicherry to buy terracotta and old photographs (Raj Kondayappa?). He has a customer from Madras called Vasu. There is a foreign couple who come once a month from Pondi and purchase only knives. He says that sometimes he sells items through a bartering system with other shops and agents – an exchange of goods for goods. He shows me a stone Buddha head which he acquired in this way from a seller in Mahaballipuram (it is not antique). He says that he has also had contact from Bollywood film makers looking for set pieces, and more regularly from Indian film makers who rent things from the warehouse for sets. He mentions another customer, a European man, who buys pieces and then converts them into something different eg. a carved wood door made into a table, a cot made into a food/drinks trolley, and cartwheel made into a coat/clothes hanger, and rickshaw made into a drinks bar. In Karaikudi there are around forty antique shops, 150 collectors (people who collect antiques from the old houses). Government regulations have come into effect within the last ten years which make it against the law to demolish an old house/building without specific permissions. He says that now this means that most of his goods are more than 10 years old, and it's increasingly hard to acquire new material.

A16) B: 22/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Musiri

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R21

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: Last week I had asked R9 for a contact number of one of the antique dealers who supplies him, and he gave me the number of particular dealer. Earlier this week I asked T1 to call this dealer and see if he would be able to take us to a place where people collect coins

A. Lawson

and other antiquities from the river bed. T1 calls several times, but the dealer is evasive. He agrees a meeting place and time, but then cancels. However T1 is able to find out the name of the place where he would have met us, and we go there by ourselves to see what we can find. The place is called Musiri. Its fairly small, and we head straight for the main Ghat onto the Kaveri river. There are quite a few people down by the river, just hanging out apparantly, there's also a small temple there by a car park. We ask around people seem to know exactly who we're looking for so we are quickly directed down towards the river bed.

FN: This is a team of about 30-35 individuals, of all ages including children, from 10 families. They are agricultural labourers who are from nearby Thanjavur. The agricultural work is seasonal, and they do this in the off season to add to their income. When the river is wet they work in the fields, when it is dry they dig in the river bed for coins. They don't find things everyday. They might only find something sellable once in four days. They know of the coin dealer who directed us here when we mention his name. They say that students also come to the river bed to buy things from them. The coins and other objects that they don't sell to antique dealers or students are kept in a bag and taken to the jewellers/blacksmiths and sold for metal value. Different individuals or perhaps families within this team seem to have their own personal stash of coins, and they are quite secretive about them. They keep them in small plastic tubs (a bit like the ones that camera film roll comes in). The woman we are talking with opens her stash tub and shows us a handful of old coins. There are several 19th/20th century coins, some mughal, and some much older (possibly chola). Another man wants to show us some gold coins he has, but he mentions this quietly and asks us to move away from the others. He is worried about them finding out. They dig very carefully with small trowels. Some of the children are using large shells or bits of scrap metal to carefully scrape away at the sand. They do not make large group excavations, but dig in small individual pits, sometimes in a cluster of 3 or 4. They say they know the

best places to look for coins – apparently most things will settle near the bank where there are rocks and vegetation. When they come here they work up to 1km in either direction from here.

I1: Which places do you dig?

R21: Musiri, Kodumudi, Srirangam, Manamadurai, Paramakudi.

I1: How and why did you first start this kind of work?

R21: A grandfather of one of the families used to do this by himself. It was his idea and he encouraged others in his own family and in the other 10 families of the team to take it up.

I1: Are you the only group doing this kind of work or are there others?

R21: No we know of several other teams, some use goggles and search under the water when the river is full.

FN: They don't seem to know a great deal about the coins in terms of their history or archaeological value. They can identify a relatively new coin from an older coin, but mostly they judge value according to the material – i.e gold is most sought after. They say that they sometimes find terracotta figurines in the sand, and usually they keep them by to sell to one particular man who comes from Thanjavur to buy them.

A17) B: 22/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karur

Interaction participants: I1, T1, R22

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: Another place mentioned by the coin dealer is in Karur itself, where apparently a nomadic group of river panners are staying at the moment. We find them at the end of an alley, in a small open area under some trees, they have erected makeshift tents from plastic sheeting and scrap material. A middle aged man approaches us. I explain that I am a PhD student and I'd like to ask them questions about their work and the things they find for my research. He is happy to talk to me and spreads out some plastic sheeting on the ground for

A. Lawson

us all to sit on while we chat. Two young children come and sit with us and some other family members stand around to listen.

FN: There are 5-6 families in the group. They travel around south india (Kerala, Kollamkodu, Karnataka, Mysore), searching the river banks and beds from antiquities to sell, either to antique dealers or to jewellers and blacksmiths. They've been doing this sort of work for the past 15 years. Three of the families are from Dharapuram, Kaniyur. Others are from Arasu Colony – Vellore, Kodumudi. He is a native of Krishangiri (15 years). Other places the dig: Pudur, Karveypuram, Velli Shantai, Maramdulli, Pal Sunai. They collect: Gold/brass/silver coins, rings and toe rings, terracotta figurines, metal figurines. They sell to dealers not direct to the collectors. They don't have much knowledge about the antique/archaeological value of the objects they find, only the material/metal value. In his grandfathers generation they collected only gold which would be sold to a jeweller for melt down. He says its only recently with his generation that they have begun to learn about the value of certain kinds of object which have become popular with collectors. They collect from several different locations along the various river routes, but they keep all their finds in a single bag, so its not possible to say where particular objects were found. T1 seems particularly upset about this. He seems to sympathise with, even approve of, this group and what they do, but he wishes they kept records of where things were found so it could be made useful to researchers like himself.

Right here they work a 4km stretch – from yanai medu to Peri Andar or Koil.

He says they select places like Karur, based on where important historic kingdoms were based. He says that he has 4 grams of gold coins – he was approached by someone wanting to buy them for 25,000 rupees, but he decided not to sell them. He wants to keep them as a legacy to pass on to his children. I ask if he finds many gold coins. 'No' he says, 'if I did would I still be living here?'

A18) B: 30/04/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction participants: I1, R23

Language: English

Duration: approx. 45 mins

Context: I met R23 three days earlier. Visited shop with T2's mother and sister who were shopping for old prints of Madras, and struck up a conversation with him. He is an antique collector and enthusiast as well as a dealer and was very happy to talk on the subject. He says that around 40% of the things in the shop are not for sale. They are his collection. At that time I told him that I was a PhD student and explained my interests. I asked him if I could return sometime to talk more and he seems willing. At one point he takes out a small rough white stone and asks us with glee what we think it is. It looks like dirty plastic. He tells us it is a two carat diamond. He asks us if we have ever heard of the 'rice touching coin' (this apparently is a rumour/myth circulating the dealing world, of a coin or coins, which has supernatural qualities). He remains very vague and mysterious about this, but I gather he thinks that such a coin has been found recently which is very strong – lights wont work near it. I wonder if he is pulling my leg but he does not seem to be, and he says that this coin is very valuable because it is unique. I returned by myself and bought three small paintings (modern) before asking him if he had time to talk to me. He said he could talk now and invited me to sit down near the counter. I explain that I would like to use the conversation in my research and he agree, but does not want me to use my audio. He says it's good for me to be able to remember what he says and make notes.

I1: Do you know anything about antiques from Chettinad?

R23: The Chettiars made nothing of their own. They travelled and took all their ornaments and furniture from abroad. I used to deal in Chettinad antiques from Chettinad, but not now.

I1: Why do you no longer deal in Chettinad antiques?

R23: Now the main business is in manufacture of replica furniture rather than selling of originals. There is a racial thing –the local labourers (the people who had previously done the hands on labour work for the wealthier upper/middle class businessmen/antique dealers) are becoming wealthier and more powerful and don't like the idea of working for someone who they see as North Indian. So they have increasingly started businesses of their own [he is himself a north Indian. I think he is implying here that he can no longer get labour as cheap as he used to be able to, in order to refurbish the furniture].

I1: Where in Chennai can I find businesses dealing in Chettinad antiques?

R23: Harrington Road - Shoppers Stop – make replica Chettinad furniture

Auction houses – 1) Royapettah, Mani's Auction House – opposite Pilot Theatre. 2) Murrays Auctioneers (gate next door to tall building near Spencer Plaza).

Go at around 10:30/11:00 am. In Karaikudi there is a dealer called Katarajah – famous in dealing antique toys. That was where all the dealers started. The trade in Chettinad antiques started in the 1970's. We were one of the first to deal them. There was no local demand then for such things. It was very much passion based. With particular collectors taking a special interest in them. We dealt it because we liked it, not because there was a huge market for it. Then it was mainly toys and pillars. In the 1980's the interest in Chettinad antiques started to catch on. There had originally been a big market in exporting, but at this time the government started to come down harder on these things. As the moment the antique market came-up, robberies started to happen. That's why we drew a line. After the robberies we stopped dealing anything that may have been stolen. My father was a very straight man. Many of the dealers were arrested, and at this time they struck deals with the police. That only made them bolder – because the police encouraged them to continue so long as they took a cut. Now the market is going down. The west is going through an economic

A. Lawson

meltdown. Also back then there were just a few dealers and lots of containers going out. Now there are fewer genuine antiques and the base has broadened – there are too many dealers. There are lots of lady industrialists. They have started up their own export companies with a lot of money, and the local dealers have been hit very hard by this. These businesses are in handicrafts manufacture. There is an import/export gov. scheme. These businesses need to export a certain amount so that they are allowed to import. So they export huge quantities of handicrafts, very cheap – usually at a loss. But it means they are allowed then to import – usually machinery goods, and that's where they make their money.

I1: What's the relationship between north and south India regarding the antique trade?

R23: Handicrafts are big in the north, while the south has better genuine antiques (in some things – e.g. Bronze). In Delhi there is a big business in replication. They'll buy one original antique from somewhere in south India (statue/bronze or something), then manufacture 5000 replicas and sell them back to south India. The north is the main exporter of handicrafts, because labour is cheap there. Education is less in north than south. Here in Chennai, even the man living on the street can read the newspaper. Education is high in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, so they demand higher wages.

I1: What sort of interest do you think there is in antiques? Do you think its increased or decreased?

R23: There is an increase but in a different kind of interest. The reason for interest now is money. Salaries have suddenly increased. People want to do-up their houses and they think 'let me do it the way foreigners do'. They visit us and we help them. We don't look down on this. What we do is try to inject the real passion for antiques in them. Most businesses now are just about selling. There is a lot of pressure on sales people to hit targets, so they will use all sorts of strategies to sell, even begging and telling customers about their problems. And here in India that will work. Religion comes into it, or superstition. People will want to help because it's bad luck not to. Just like a black

cat crossing your path. There is also more awareness now about antiques – particularly through the TV and the internet. There is an American show about pawn shops, it gives people lots of information about what to buy and how much things are worth. Now there are lots of malls. And malls don't have antique shops in them. But I give most malls eight years. After that they need oxygen. People here don't have that buying culture.

I1: What sort of people do you get coming to your shop?

R23: Because of the nature of this shop we don't get many of that type of customer (the type he had been previously talking about – only interested in the money side of things). They come because they know I am knowledgeable and they want to know more themselves. I am knowledgeable. Not just a businessman. I also work as a government assayer. For big time dealers who just don't have the knowledge. Auctions are defined by the buying mafia [by this he is referring to the Marwadis which he talks about later]. I have stopped buying any figurines – especially temple figurines, because you don't know how they were obtained. Whatever the government tells me not to deal I have stopped. So I can sleep at night. There is a network of pawnbrokers/buyers and dealers – the Marwadis from Rajasthan. The Marwadis are like the Chettiars. The Chettiars knew zero (no specialised skill or craft). The only thing they knew was how to exploit a labourer. Likewise, the labourers trust these pawnbrokers (Marwadis). They have them during the marriage time. The pawnbrokers have a big network from the local towns to the big cities. Earlier we were in the scene (Chettiar, coins etc.) we were where it started, but now it's the pawnbrokers. Minerals/gems – Orissa – guys used to come here to me in the 80's all the way from Orissa. Then the pawnbrokers moved in there and took over the business. Started to kill people. The pawnbrokers have a chain of communication and they help each other. They own all the top-end gold coins. Chola/Vijayanagar. They infiltrate the Madras coin society – so that they know when one of the members has something valuable, or is in hard times and needs to sell. Containers seized at the seaports and airports. Sometimes the

government doesn't know what the contents are or what their value is. Twice a year they hold an auction to sell off all of the material seized. You have to buy in cash or demand drafts – crores worth. They sell bulk lots and mix different items in a single lot (eg. Diamond dust, plastics/computers, and furniture). I used to organise syndicates for buyers but not anymore. In Triplicane a bag of gold coins seized. I was asked, along with a priest, to identify the hoard. 50% were real, the other 50% were Delhi replica's. That's how small time dealers become big time dealers. They get caught by the authorities and they make deals with them. People make a fuss about Indian antiques being exported to foreign museums and collections. They should be happy. They are being well cared for there. Here you go to the museums and you feel like crying. If those things were here they would disintegrate.

A19) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R24

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: We stop randomly at shops along this road to see the contents and ask if someone is willing to give and interview. Several of these are familiar to me from my previous visit, but others are new. This is one of the more modest looking shops on the road. A small open-fronted building with plain wooden tables, dressers and wardrobes on display, as well as some smaller decorative items such as carved wood panels and brass lamps. The proprietor is in the shop front. He is busy sanding down a wooden table, but agrees to answer my questions. Its too noisy by the road to make an audio recording so I take the interview in notes.

I1: What is it?

R24: It is a lamp, used in the temple and at home.

A. Lawson

I1: Where does it come from?

R24: Karaikudi

I1: How did you acquire it?

R24: I went and bought it from 22 Muneeswaram Street in Karaikudi. He acquires all the things for his shop himself by taking a vehicle to various places – Karaikudi, Madurai, Thanjavur – to buy things for his shop.

I1: Why?

R24: For selling

I1: What will happen to it/ who will buy it?

R24: Mostly foreigners want this sort of thing, very few Indians. The tourists come and buy some pieces, then sometimes we will send things to them abroad.

I1: How old is it?

R24: Sixty years

I1: Do you know anything else about its history and where it came from?

R24: No

I1: What is its value?

R24: It is 2, 200 rupees

I1: Is it rare or common?

R24: Four years ago there were many lamps like this available to buy from Karaikudi and other places, now there are not many left.

I1: What are the other objects sold in your shop?

R24: I sell mainly antique/second hand wooden furniture, which is refurbished in this shop. The main customers for this are Indian. This is the mainstay of the business. The Indian customers want the utility items of good quality and made from wood, as most furniture in India is in plastic or tin, but the foreigners want the non-utility items for decoration. The lamp is not a utility item. It is bought to be used just as a decoration. This sort of lamp is meant for the temple not the home.

I1: What sort of Indian's

R24: Middle income. Antique furniture is cheaper than similar look and quality which is newly made.

A. Lawson

I1: Is the same true for the lamp?

R24: No, this kind of (bronze lamp) production has stopped. You cannot find this look and quality newly made, so this lamp is more expensive than the modern versions.

He also shows me a carved wood panel from Thanjavur which he says is cheaper to buy as an antique like this than to have made new, because of the cost of the craftsmanship.

I1: Do you like this lamp?

R24: yes

I1: Why?

R24: It's in good condition, that's why I selected it for the shop.

I1: Would you like to own a lamp like this yourself – for your own home?

R24: [laughs] No.

I1: Why?

R24: It is meant for the temple or grand houses only. I use the small lamps and stand lamps.

I1: How old is the business?

R24: Eight years

I1: How/why did you start the business?

R24: I started as a worker in a big antique company/shop – paid a low wage. Decided to start own business. Wanted to sell similar types of objects at a lower price/profit margin but higher turnover than the bigger antique companies. That was how I started. There is a sustainability problem in the market because these objects used to be very common eight years ago but now they are more and more rare. Replica's are increasingly taking over the market. In the area of wood furniture the new replicas are not such good quality as the antique versions because the new stuff uses iron nails instead of wooden nails, which makes them less durable. There are 60-70 of this sort of antique shop in the Pondicherry area, but only 15-20 provide fully refurbished, ready for sale pieces like I do.

A20) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R25

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:03:32

Context: We walk through a courtyard where furniture is being made or refurbished. Beyond is a large warehouse. Most of this warehouse is filled with isles of antique wooden furniture, including south Indian style pillars, colonial style wardrobes and cupboards, some carved door frames which could be from Chettinad. One area of the warehouse is full of tables and low furniture on top of which sits lots of ornaments and lamps, mostly in a colonial style. There is an Indian family from Pondicherry here looking at some traditional Chettiar style wooden pillars. I talk to one of the women. She says that they have been building a house and want the pillars for the house. She says that they have been to this shop before to find some antique decorative pieces for the house. They are busy so I just take her name and email and ask if I can contact her to ask further questions. The manager is still not available, and we are told by one of the staff that there is no-one else right now who can talk to me. As we are leaving I ask a man (R25) near the entrance, who is varnishing a wooden frame steel gate/window, what he is doing. He says the piece he is working on is newly made from old wood. I ask if I can ask him a few more questions and he agrees.

I1: From where do you get these materials?

R25: The doors and pillars we get it from houses and the furniture we get it from different areas. These are new works made in old wood. We do things in old wood with new designs.

I1: Where do these woods come from?

R25: We get it from buildings. Those days they use these woods in the ceiling but today only the cement is used. Before 50 years woods were

A. Lawson

used. Mostly they will use only teak woods in VIP houses not any other woods.

I1: Where do you get these small, small materials? Like that one on that table (desk lamps, clocks, ornaments etc.)?

R25: All are old and we get from brokers. They collect these items from houses and we get it from them.

I1: Do you know the mosque here?

R25: Yes. After that mosque there will be a flat and also a small shop opposite to it is a big shop where wood works are done. Carpentry works, polishing also done there. It is a big shop. If you go there you can get a lot of details. In this shop we only do small works. There they are doing doors and pillars.

I1: Okay, how old is this shop?

R25: This shop is some 15-20 years old but its places have been shifting.

A21) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R26

Language: Tamil

Duration: 0:36:16 + 0:12:33

Context: This shop is slightly set back from the road and the front yard is full of large terracotta, wood and stone sculpture. None of it looks especially old. The shop front sign advertises 'colonial furniture and curios'. Inside is a moderate size warehouse. Like all these shops the room is crammed full of furniture and objects, piled haphazardly, in a style that looks like the work of a crazed hoarder. The shop assistant is instantly talkative and friendly. He seems to remember me from my last visit. He agrees to the use of my audio recorder and we conduct the interview while he guides us around the shop.

A. Lawson

T1: We have come here to know about the antiques and about the shops that are doing it and that shop's focus besides about small and big shops which are doing this job. Where are you from?

R26: Chennai sir.

T1: Oh! Chennai, okay. I am an arts college student

R26: Oh! Arts college. We will come to college to get the certificate

T1: To college?

R26: Yes, we will bring woods, big Vijanayagar statues made of wood

T1: To value those objects?

R26: No, we will keep old and new things in a mixture. If they found an old material they will ask us to handle it but we will get the certification from them for the sale of those things. Without facing these problems we can't do our business. For small materials there is no problem but for big doors etc. I had a cupboard which was 75 years old. It will fill a room. If we speak we will hear echoes. A single door cost Rs.3,15,000 as it was full of a Pallava style work. Our regular buyer from Germany had asked for it. These old things are not to be sold. It is an order from our Indian government.

I1: What happens to these things if you can't sell them?

R26: We will sell them to foreign buyers but the Indian people won't buy these old things. A north Indian buyer from Jodhpur bought it.

I1: Do you have any pieces here older than one hundred years?

R26: Hundred year-old pieces are very few and rare. Hundred years old things are mostly stone carvings. Old brass metal, even 200 year-old pieces are available but they are not available to business man like me. Our government is keen on this issue and they will seize it if they came to know that we possess it. Even when buyers ask for old things we will show them the new ones. This is a masala cupboard, it's a new piece but with an old look.

I1: Where is your factory?

R26: My factory is in Ambattur industrial area, Chennai.

I1: Do you have only this shop or some other shops too?

R26: I have five shops madam

I1: In Pondicherry?

R26: In Pondicherry I have four shops. The one worrisome incident in this shop is that it was opened 8 years before. During last Diwali it caught fire and resulted in a loss of five crores in just two hours. This shop will be filled with objects like what you are seeing now. All got burned. I opened the shop at nine o'clock in the morning and worshipped the god then went home and wore a new shirt. Afterwards, I went to the Vinayagar temple and planned to go to another temple. By the time I was going to another temple, a phone came and when I came back I saw the whole shop was burning.

I1: How did it catch fire?

R26: Due to crackers mam

I1: Did you claim for the insurance?

R26: No, there is no government insurance for our business (ie) for antique, or jewellers, but all other business have insurance plans and claims.

I1: Why you cannot claim for the insurance?

R26: Because government cannot have fixed values for these things. If they fix the values it will be very high. His father when doing business in his thirties had big boxes made of wood. He had thirty-six boxes and each was rupees 25,000. All got fired and became charcoals after this incident. Nearly forty-two doors were also wasted.

I1: What did you do after that?

R26: For last six months we had different shops. We borrowed objects from there and maintained a year. Now our owner has gained momentum in this business and we attained normalcy and gained its old value

I1: Your boss is Indian ie. Tamilian?

R26: Yes. He is Tamilian. He lives in Chennai.

T1: Mostly, only north Indians are involved in this type of business?

R26: Yes, some north Indians are also interested but mostly people from Madurai are involved more. In fact Madurai is native for me and I am very much involved in this job.

T1: Which part? Karaikudi?

R26: No, sir. Madurai. Next to Madurai, Guduvainoor. It is in the Thirumangalam route.

I1: Where do you get this chariot?

We get it from small villages. The village head will call for a tender we will claim it for sales. Small temples which are not under the control of the government will be at the control of the village committee. If the chariot is broken, they will call for a tender and our boss will go and purchase it.

I1: You have been doing this business for three generations. Is there a demand for your business - that is the market value picked up or it is dull?

R26: If there is a demand, there are also some problems in our business. If we take an old object and repair it for a fixed rate, say, 28,000. We should also invest some 4,000 or 7,000 more as repairing charge. The buyers are ready to give only 25,000. New materials are always less qualified than the old and the investment is also high as 30,000-40,000. So, we get only a less profit in this business but our investments are always high. If I get an object for 50,000 I know it will get sold but I should pay extra 10,000 for its repairing charges to get the quality. It will get sold only when interested people come to buy it. One in every hundred people is interested to buy it. So, I have to wait till that. This swing is fifty years old and that four doors are made in a single piece of wood. If I fix a rate as 90,000 and when the buyers get it for 85,000 its okay but when they ask for a new piece it cost me 120,000 and the trees are also not available to make the same piece with the same quality.

I1: I have some more questions to ask you, can I ask you? Do you have time?

R26: No problem madam. You ask, I will answer.

I1: I want to ask you about the lamps

R26: Okay mam

I1: First, are you interested in antiques?

R26: Yes, mam. Are you interested in it mam?

I1: Yes. I am. How did you come into this business?

A. Lawson

R26: As my regular buyers come and purchase, the business is good mam. My regular buyers are in Germany, Belgium, France and some local customers are always there.

I1: Are they living here in Auroville?

R26: [He answers as if I have asked if they are *coming* here to Auroville] Yes, mam, they will come once for six months and buy the objects. My Belgium customer has a big shop there. He will come here and ask for small or big things the I will make it with correct measurements and fix a rate like 1,25,000 and export it, he will fix some rate and sell it there. If they order for a new piece I am always ready to do it.

I1: So these are foreign customers with shops in their own countries?

R26: Yes mam. Small, small pieces, big pieces we are buying. Customer coming. New pieces I am making. I am making same condition, pukka polished.

I1: Do you have regular Indian customers?

R26: No mam, only foreign customers. Indian people coming as tourists to Pondicherry will also visit my shop and buy some small pieces, big size cots, big pillars for new houses and get it for a just rate. Indian people. For new houses. My carpenter made a boat model. That one you see there is a boat model. We make only wooden carvings in our shop.

I1: You made it?

R26: Yes mam.

I1: Very nice

R26: This is a pooja stand mam. Very old piece. It's for keeping god statues but this is a new piece. That one is an old water bucket made of brass with carvings but today we make flower vase made of brass without carving. People are interested to buy it.

I1: Oh! okay.

R26: We not only have south Indian collections but also some north Indian collections too.

I1: How do you get the north Indian collections?

R26: We get it from small brokers or through phone contacts or by photo contacts. I will fix a rate and get those objects.

I1: Okay. I want to ask about this lamp. Firstly, what is it – what is its purpose?

R26: These things will be in small temples not mostly in houses only in temples like family temples in villages. According to Tamil customs, kumbabishekkam is celebrated in temples once in twelve years. For that purpose they will remove old and damaged things from temples, as it is not auspicious. We will go there and purchase it and exhibit it. People here will buy it to decorate their houses. We will not buy it from small temples as a bulk order. Some things will be soiled with full of oil. We will clean it and polish it. Those things are original old piece. The repairing and washing cost some 2,100 when buyer ask for 1,500 we will refuse. And it is sold for some 1,900 or 2000.

I1: Do you get these things on your own or do you have agents?

R26: Yes mam. We have agents. They will collect these things from their village or from some other villages we will get it from them.

I1: Will they give information to you or you will go buy yourself?

R26: No mam. We will go on our own and if they have some pieces we will get it.

I1: You get these things from Madurai?

R26: No, not only in Madurai but also from other places. The things in my shop are not from a single place but from different places at different times. This piece is new piece made in a Chennai factory. Not my factory. My factory is only making wooden carving.

I1: Okay. Who prefers these kinds of things, like this bell and lamp stands? What kind of customers buys this?

R26: All people buy this especially this bell kind of things Europeans buy. They will not use it but keep it as a show piece. Indian styles Europeans really like.

I1: They will prefer only old things or new things too?

R26: Europeans like only old pieces but Indians like both. Some buy old pieces but some will ask for new piece and buy it. Indians have some sentiments. They don't buy the used ones.

I1: For what things they will have these sentiments?

R26: For light lamps and rice measuring glass called uzhakai or maraca

I1: How many years old is this?

R26: Confirmed some seventy-five or eighty-five years old.

I1: How much does it cost?

R26: It cost 9,900 rupees. It is made of brass but this one is made of only wood. A single piece of wood. Europeans want only to clean the dust in the objects but Indians ask for a polished one. This thing is also brass and originally old piece. This side is full of plastic buckets and other side full of brass items.

I1: Which one do you prefer? Old or new piece?

R26: We have old things in our house. Those things were brought by my wife as dowry. One copper pot, two brass pots, three silver pots but those things are in the top of my house, in the attic. My wife, children and me are using only the plastic buckets. These things are given by my father-in-law to me (is a custom in India). The dowry gifts are a sign of my father in-law's power.

I1: Okay. Do you prefer old or new things in general?

R26: Old mam. The taste of the old pieces is different. We can't explain it. When I was five years old we had a pot of this kind but a bigger one. I sat inside it and played in it with water. That pot is now with my uncle. I asked for it but he refused to give it. He is retaining the vessel.

I1: How much is this (the brass vessel)?

R26: It is 4,900. The rate varies, according to the weight.

I1: Are these things very common or rare?

R26: All these are common ones. These old pieces of bell metal. The new ones are mixture of many metals and their quality is very poor but this one's quality is very good.

I1: Is this kind of lamp very common or a rare one?

R26: It's common but this is a last piece. If this is sold it takes three to four months to get another. This lamp is a different one. It can hold some 100 ml oil inside. If you keep the cotton inside and locked it, it will give brightness for twenty-four hours.

I1: How old is this?

R26: It may be seventy-five years old.

I1: How much does it cost?

R26: It costs 1,600

I1: These things are of the same age?

R26: These things may be sixty to seventy years old.

I1: How about this?

R26: In temples there are several lamps but there will be a lamp called “anaiya vilaku”(the lamp which glows all the time). If it is damaged they will give it here. This can be kept for a show-piece in houses but one cannot use it, it will leak.

I1: Can you repair this?

R26: Yes, but no one prefers it.

I1: Which one do you prefer? This or that?

R26: I prefer this one mam but my house is not so big to keep a big lamp like this. So I have small lamps like those. These are old pieces and I prefer this.

I1: Why do you prefer it? Is the other only for temple use?

R26: Yes mam that is only for temple use.

I1: What about this one?

R26: That is from north India. Jodhpur collections.

I1: Are these things liked by Indians?

R26: No mam. Indians don't like old pieces as I have told already. They mostly like only new pieces. Europeans, foreigners like old and antique pieces.

I1: What is this?

R26: This is Deepa Lakshmi. A lady holding the lamp.

I1: Are these new pieces?

R26: Yes mam. All these are made in my company. All are show-pieces. We also make many statues of god.

I1: Who buys these?

R26: Indians. They are show-pieces.

I1: Do you have to take any special care for these things?

R26: There are no things in my shop that needs a special care mam.

I1: So, these things comes to you like this?

R26: Yes, mam. Only they need some cleaning and repairing work.

I1: Do you have any objection in me using your information in my research?

R26: No mam. I just said about my business. You asked me and I am telling the truth. All people ask for old things but only few are available here. There is only one god likewise there is only one old piece available in hundred. You will ask me if it is old but I will say it is not old only new. People will buy it and keep it as show pieces in their houses. In my shop only few pieces are old. You take a photograph of this first. It is an original old piece. We make new things with antique look. People also prefer it and that is our business secret.

I1: How many years old?

R26: It will be more than 50 years old.

I1: Why do you think that antique finish is popular?

R26: People are willing to buy antique pieces but they are not available today. So they prefer to buy these antique finish pieces at a low cost and decorate their houses. We make it for their happiness. This one is a Lakshmi statue. Mainly the demand is for statues with dull appearance. We also made it dull and purchased because dull appearance gives an antique look.

I1: This is popular among foreigners or Indians?

R26: Both. But foreigners in particular.

I1: Are they buying it by knowing the antique effect?

R26: Yes, of course. People come and ask these things. We first say the rate as 24,000 but they bargain and finally we give it for 21,000. Customer's happiness is very important for us. The original antique pieces either big or small are difficult to be sold as they are of high rate but these antique look pieces are easily sold and our customers are happy which in turn make us happy. Indians will ask for these things but they wanted to make it bright. We will explain them that we won't make it bright but dull to give it an antique effect.

I1: These things cannot be made bright?

R26: No, if it has to be made bright it takes many days and it is difficult too. You take a photo of this Saraswathi (goddess of wisdom) please. It is really good looking and made of wood. Every part is beautiful with antique look. Some foreigners ask for 100 pieces of the same kind with antique effect. I will also assure the order. That is my business secret.

I1: Do you have any problem in exporting these things?

R26: Yes mam, if I have 5 things I have to take it to the fine art college to get the approval of the officers there. The officers will come and doubt it as old piece and we will clarify their doubts. Only stone and brass materials are old not wooden pieces sir. Then they will certify to export it.

I1: Do you export it from Pondicherry?

R26: Yes, but we also have a harbour in Madras mam. We will pack the things and stamp it after that we will export it. If people ask if it is old I will say it is purely new with old effect. If you ask for one touch-up we will do it or you want very old, we will do many touch-ups to look it as old. Old pieces are not available mam. It is getting extinct. Some of the antiques were taken by the Britishers, who invaded our country, when they left. Rest are buried under the ground by the kings and rest are sleeping at the museum and some are with rich people but they are not available to the public. Public prefer antique which are very costly. We make the things with antique look at a cheaper rate. People are happy to buy it.

I1: Is the demand more abroad or in India?

R26: Totally it is very dull. For the past five years the business is very dull mam. For the past two years restaurants, gardening centres and hotels in Tamilnadu, Andhra, and Bangalore are buying these pieces. But only one in hundred is sold. It has now become like a retail business.

A22) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R27

Language: Tamil

Duration: 1:00:57 + 0:10:41 + 0:09:40

Context: This shop does not seem that large in comparison to some others, but it displays an impressive quantity of very large elaborately carved door frames and solid wooden pillars. There are not any of the other things on sale here, such as lamps, cupboards or ornaments. We are greeted by a young man. Once I explain my purpose as a PhD student he calls over an older man (R27) who I learn is his father and the owner of this business. His father invites us to sit down and pulls up stools and chairs for everyone. He asks his son to bring tea for everyone. He tells me that he's very happy to answer any questions I have and seems very approving of my interest in this subject.

I1: Where do these doors come from?

R27: They mainly come from Karaikudi, Tanjore ie, from south side.

I1: It is from Karaikudi city or the areas around karaikudi?

R27: It is from Karaikudi. They ask us for the Chettinad type doors and even from Pondicherry. We get them.

I1: Do you collect these materials on your own or do you have any agents?

R27: No, we collect it directly. Before demolishing a building we will go and order for the materials we need and they call us after demolishing the building. We will go and collect them.

I1: Are they your agents?

R27: No, they are dealers.

I1: Where do you have dealers?

R27: Mostly in the south side. Because we get the old carving, old makings and materials representing the Indian culture more from this side.

I1: How do you select these doors? Do they sell well?

R27: I selected these doors in the same way. Before demolishing the building we went and ordered for this door and a beam set with lord ganesha picture but we gave that beam set back. We will select

A. Lawson

different things as people like something special and different in these materials that is why we select it in the marketing point of view.

I1: What sort of customers like these kind of big items?

R27: These things are available only in our shop. Local people are buying these things today. It is also exported to foreign countries like Italy, Germany and France. They like the best cultures. In India, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkatta buyers get it, and in Tamilnadu people have different taste. Some ask for these things. Some will ask for very old pieces. Taste differs from person to person. First of all, the materials should be available to buy it. High society people like very rare and very old materials.

I1: Do north Indians prefer these things?

R27: Yes. They prefer it. Not only them but also from Bangalore, Karnataka, Rameshwaram, Hyderabad, Delhi, Calcutta etc.

I1: Earlier these items were mostly exported to foreign countries?

R27: Yes, these items were exported to foreign countries first. But for the last five years, we are not exporting much to foreign countries. In these 5 years Indian customers have increased. They come and select a material and buy it for their own purpose not for trade purpose. Of late rich people in Tamilnadu, especially Chennai, are interested to buy this.

I1: Are village people interested in it?

R27: No, only people from Chennai like cities are interested, that too very few.

I1: Why are local people are not buying the old materials? Is it due to sentiment?

R27: Yes, but the quality in old materials cannot be bought in new pieces. Today machines are available and we cannot increase the depth (of carving) with the machines. The finishing in hand is worth more than the material finished using machines. When we heat the shell there is no change in its colour, likewise the old woods are strong enough. This piece is 70-80 years old. In olden days they cut the tree only after 50-60 years. So that the wood has a natural colour and strength but today they cut the trees after ten years. Those woods are

destroyed by insects. People today prefer old materials only because of this. Today old woods are used for carving and they are very costly. So that is bought by only a few people. In new pieces we have to polish it to get the original wood colour and there is a chance of fading too.

I1: What is the history of this type of door?

R27: That big door is 100 years old and made up of Satin wood which is yellow in colour. It is not been finished. Carpenter has to come and finish it. When finished we get the wood colour. These all were mainly from Burma like teak, sandal and this Satin wood whose major colour is yellow. It is mainly used to make pillars. Today these are not easily bought with this fine quality.

I1: Commonly with which wood you make doors?

R27: Teak, rosewood and Satin wood, old vengai etc. these are all above fifty years old and we even have one hundred year old pieces.

I1: In Kerala also they are doing wood works?

R27: Yes they do it with timber, jackfruit tree and even vengai but the quality is not the same of ours. Their quality is less than ours and they cannot give the same quality of ours. Those materials are made from a single piece of wood.

I1: Do the agents say the details and history of a material or a house before demolishing it?

R27: No, they won't say that. We ourselves know the history by seeing the house. Today's houses are built with bricks and cement but the old houses are not like that. So we know it by seeing. Some may be fifty years, a hundred years even 120 years old. They come to us after meeting four to five hands. If they are maintained properly they even survive today. But they are not maintaining it properly. For the past four to five years the old houses are not been sold instead they repair the houses.

I1: Are the government supporting this?

R27: No, no. The repairing charges equal the construction of a new building. We cannot build upon old houses as they may be slightly weak. Pondicherry is famous for the different style of houses. For repairing the old house one can spend up to nine lakhs.

I1: Do the buyers care about the history of the materials?

R27: Yes the buyers themselves know the age of material. Even a new carpenter knows it. In this locality we have only old woods that are seventy years old. This can be preserved forever (fifty more years or above). It will not break or crack or shrink. We can even put it in sunlight. But the new wood starts to crack after few years.

I1: The people who come and buy from you are buying the materials to sell-on or to use?

R27: They buy to use for their own purpose. If they like a material, they come with an architect and an engineer and buy the material. There is a difference in cost between new and old. If a new one costs one lakh, old one costs 80,000 but it is worth to buy and we ourselves give guarantee. The new piece is costly and the cost of making a carving is also costly but it is not worth too. On those days they build two stories with the pillars made of wood. They were so strong. But today they do it with iron. Those days the roof stood still with the help of the pillars but today stones are needed to build the ceiling. Old house will not be cracked easily. Today we can make such buildings. The house will have several pillars that support the ceiling. There are no people available today to make such minute works and we cannot do it since it is costly. For removing itself it costs one lakh, for building it might roughly cost ten lakhs.

I1: Are people interested in buying old materials or materials with an old-look and finish – antique effect?

R27: No people are interested to buy old materials they can guess a material's history that a particular wood type is fifty years old or less.

I1: How much those doors cost?

R27: With respect to the condition it cost 4 lakhs

I1: Four lakh is for the finished or unfinished condition?

R27: It is for the unfinished condition and 4lakh 50,000 is for the finished condition

I1: How much the pillar cost?

R27: 10,000 -75,000 depending on the size and quality.

I1: Do you know or can you tell the age of the trees?

R27: No, because we know that those days these were all forest. So the trees we get might even be 200 years old. If you see this wood, it is 100 years old. Those days they will cut a tree after it is matured only. So it will be strong. But today they cut the trees when they are young so it will be very weak.

I1: What would be the feeling of the owner of the house?

R27: They will be happy because in a family there will be two or three brothers, sisters, so they cannot divide the house. Instead they get money and divide it easily. So they will be happy. For demolishing an old house costs heavy. We do that job because we get the wood and valuable things from it if we give old wood to "aasari"(carpenter) it is difficult enough that he should break it with an axe, but the new wood can be broken even by a knife. Even the stones of an old house are used to put up a ceiling even now-a-days as they are stronger and can be broken only by hammer, but today's stones are easily breakable even by hand. For the owner of the house it is difficult to find the labourers but these people have special labourers for demolishing the house without any damage.

I1: What do you sell mostly? Doors and pillars? Or any other object?

R27: We mainly sell only these types of doors and pillars. That too main door of seven feet and pillars up to nine feet. other furniture are sold rarely by us. We are specialized to do high doors. Some will come for alteration work also. Our work will be with originality. We will make doors and pillars with rosewood, teak up to nine feet or ten feet. but others will do such doors or pillars by joining small woods and that joints are clearly visible. We won't do such things. People today buy those items as the rate is low. We won't reduce the rate as our materials are with originality. People today want quality materials with low rate. Some will cheat the customers but we are not like that. If you keep these woods and kick it will not even move but those woods will get broken because they fill it with cement and those with residual woods it will not be weight and strong. Because of people like them our fame gets affected. We also say to customer that if they have any

A. Lawson

doubt test the wood with hammer. When both outer and inner is stronger the wood withstands the roof.

I1: Are these pieces available or rare? Do other shops have these kind of pieces?

R27: It is rare. We have normal doors from 5.5ft and maximum of 6.5ft. People know by seeing the showroom of the shop itself. Some will have only ten doors or five doors but will say they have many pieces. Some will keep the ceiling at 12ft and ask for a 10ft door. We can do it by extending the door and merge the joint with the carving itself. But after few years you can find the joint if you see it minutely. A person who had a shop at Bangalore airport asked us for a 10ft door with an old look. But we had only 7.5 ft door. We said to him that only by extending we can do it and we can also give guarantee. Some will not say that. Some people ask for alteration but it has been reduced. Old carving is difficult to do. If you see Pothys, Chennai silks all have a pillar for a traditional look. People today like that old look.

I1: Do hotels have these kinds of doors?

R27: Yes, but doors with a lot of work will usually be small. People look only the work not the door. In Karaikudi and Chennai we have seen that traditional look in Pothys, a boutique shop. One person owns a textile shop in Bangalore behind the bus stand. We did a door for him. He also has a shop in Tamilnadu and he is from Hyderabad. That shop name is Sai Silks, I think. The normal door will be 5/5.5 ft. some ask for 9/8ft. We have done it by adding joints with same carvings. That will be with originality and we will inform them too.

I1: What is the name of the hotel?

R27: Surya, it is in Pondicherry and they have many branches. It is Surya plus other names but all are theirs. Its basement is an old building and on top of it they build a new one with old look. They also have a house called "vaaikal". They demolished the old house and built a new one with a traditional look with lot of money. All the things are new and made of wood. There are also many hotels with traditional looks and many small hotels too. But we don't know much. Since this is in main road we know it. There are also many old buildings with two to

A. Lawson

three storey. But they are closed due to some problems like dispute among the family members. If you go straight in this road there will be a bazaar and if you go to the 2nd cross street you will see an old building in vallava street. It is maintained by the government itself that building was altered and it is full of carving works. We do not know whose it was.

I1: This business started in Pondicherry first or some other place?

R27: It first started in Karaikudi then only in Pondicherry.

I1: When it was started here?

R27: About twenty-five years before it started here.

I1: Was it started by foreigners or by Tamilians?

R27: It was started by our people. A person in Auroville. Those days people won't buy old things right. Yes, those days people see sentiments but today people buy it because for its history and work. Besides even today 10% people won't buy old items even for free of cost. Those days there was no second hand buying at all.

I1: What are the connection between Auroville and the people buying old things?

R27: In Auroville, foreigners started to get settled and they liked the old materials. They mainly bought it for export because if the material cost 10,000 here it cost two lakh there. They just keep it for show. This main door they will keep in dining or even ceiling. These items are rare there. I was abroad once. There are also many Indian shops with good works. There these doors will look grand with simple carvings, here the carving will be heavy but will not look grand. That is the difference. There most of them are Chinese and their work is not as good as ours. One dollar is equal to sixty rupees. So in export they can find high profit. They also use those materials for windows and doors.

I1: What is the customers reason for choosing to buy these thing - price? Style?

R27: They bought it mainly to use as they looked very antique and strong. Some used it for show. They export woods as these heavy woods are not available in abroad. They have only light weighted woods, which has a maximum of twenty years life. After that the

building has to be demolished. Their roof is also of that light weighted wood. So many doors and other things are exported to abroad. Today these pillars are kept only as a show-piece and in steps. Doors are even used for car parking entrance today.

I1: Do you know any houses of traditional style in Auroville?

R27: Yes, there are many houses in Auroville but foreigners are less as they cannot stay here for more than 6 months. If they buy a house also they have to leave it to a person for maintenance after them. But that people cannot be trusted. Some will come here for rent also. People from Delhi, Bombay also come here and buy such items to decorate their houses. People today are ready to spend money on these materials as they know their value and out of their interest. Even we do know that houses as it is full of forest and you can see only trees all around but if you see inside it will be very nice. Once we went there. There was an old gate made of bamboo and was broken. Inside a person from Bombay, he is an architect he said. He asked for staircases with handle in old wood. The people themselves live inside it like a farmhouse and separated their land. The inside decorations were awesome to look at. These are no old buildings only new buildings in Auroville. When people leave some other people will use it. You can see these varieties of materials only when you go inside a shop. From outside nothing will be visible.

I1: When did you start your business?

R27: This business was started twenty-five years ago but we started some twenty years before.

I1: You started this shop or someone else?

R27: Some other person started it but this shop was started by me. Rest of the shops were established by others.

I1: How did you get into this business?

R27: Our family business itself is trading. We did steel business first. I used to go to the demolished house and collected the old steel. My brothers are doing that but I wanted to do something different and I also had interest in this business from my childhood.

I1: How did you get interested in woods?

R27: Earlier I was not interested but after taking that job I gradually got interested. He was not with me when I started it. Only past five years he was with me and he now got interested in it. This is also a safer business and if you do it with interest you can also get some worthier profit. In iron and steel business you have to answer the people and that was not a respectable job but this job I feel it respectable.

I1: Do you yourself like these doors and pillars and the old materials?

R27 (son of): I was in abroad and came here and joined with my father and now I've got the same interest like my father in this business. I was with him for past five years. There are also ten families surviving because of our business.

I1: On what basis do you select the pieces?

R27: I select the pieces by myself and I select it on basis of customer's opinion and interest and we know the quality of the materials by practice.

I1: Can I use your interview in my project that I am writing on these antique materials and their trade?

R27: Yes, you can use it.

I1: Thank you

R27: Today many people are involving in this business but most of them are only looking for the profit not the customer service. We are doing a customer friendly service. We are doing this business for profit but for our customers who have high trust on us. Some customers even give orders through phone. They won't see the material directly. They have that much trust in us. These customers will talk about us to other people too. We are maintaining a regular custom through friendly service. The labour working under me will work for two years and see the profit alone and wish to start their own business but they don't have money for investment if they start also they will close it soon. If we buy a product for ten rupees and we pay extra ten rupees for their repairing work and sell it for twenty-five rupees. On the whole we get only five rupees profit.

I1: What do you think of the future of this business?

R27: According to me, this business will survive only for ten years. The old materials and old wood will only be available for ten years. Antique business is losing its glory.

I1: Some of them are doing duplication of these materials what do you think about this?

R27: Yes, some are doing it but they are all done with new woods not the old ones. They are also doing god and goddesses carvings. After ten years people do these materials by seeing only the photographs. These products are not created or done by us. We have to get it from different places and these are becoming rare to get it. But every year the price of our product are increasing and our labours too. So, there is no loss in this business. If you buy a material at ten rupees and spend five on repairing, you sell it for twenty or twenty-five rupees.

I1: What do you think of the people who have shop by seeing the profit?

R27: For this business we need more patience because if we get loan and keep a shop, we won't get that much profit all of a sudden. It gets few years to get customers and name. These people see the grown up persons in business and think that they get profit at their first attempt itself. If we show haste in this business it will be full of waste.

Whenever you need help come to me I will help you. If you need any information about this business I will say. If you want to take any photo, take. I have three shops including this. You can even visit my other two shops.

I1: I want to visit the place where the finished products are kept. Can I know some of your regular customers?

R27: Yes, I have a regular customer in Bangalore.

I1: Can you give the address of that person? Can you say about me when you contact that person in phone?

R27: Yes, sure.

I1: Is this the address?

R27: Yes, this is the address. This is my name and email okay.

I1: I am doing my studies in archeology. I'd like to go to other places and where antique materials are collected and sold from. Is this the main branch or these are also branches in Karaikal and Nagapattinam?

R27: No this is the big market and we have markets like this in Bangalore and Bombay not in Karaikkal or Nagapattinam. We also go for houses, which are demolished inside the town like zamin houses and collect some materials like doors, pillars and other small items.

I1: If I go to places where old houses are demolished can I use your name there?

R27: Yes, sure. You may say my name, they will help you.

FN: Pause in audio-recording. We move to the back of the shop to look at some more of the furniture there.

R27: There are many risks in this job. We have to get a material and do a lot of work on it and sell it to the party for double the amount. The party itself knows this maintaining the carpenter and the polishing person are very difficult. When we depend on a person and if they say today, tomorrow and day after tomorrow we feel bad. Not only we have problems in this business but also in all the business we have one or the other problem. Stand on the stool and see you can see a board that was made out of single tree. It will look like that we stuck a flower on that board. It will be some 2-3 ft. It has a depth of 1.45 inch. This cannot be done by a machine. Maximum you can go up to 0.5 inch then the pieces will go here and there. This was made by hand and that pieces you see they are also made by hand. Today if you give a good material also some are spoiling it by mishandling. There are very careless in their jobs. They are seeing only the profit that where can we get 100 rupees more and how can we earn 1000 rupees today. Today man's needs are less but their wishes have increased. You see this one is a side carving

I1: Wow, nice

R27: This is also a side carving

I1: Is this for roof that is ceiling?

R27: No, no this is for pillar top.

I1: Oh! I see.

R27: This is an Indian god carving lord Krishna. If you want to take photograph you can take it. It's my pleasure and I encourage your interest. Do you want light?

I1: No, it's okay.

R27: This room is dark if light is there it would be better. This room is full of pillars and main doors. That one is an original piece. That is a side carving for pillar's top.

I1: Some are very simple but are of different style?

R27: Yes, some of our people like simple designs and some expect different designs. So, we are making both.

I1: Oh! It's very nice

R27: That piece which is yellow in colour. This one is made of teak.

I1: In Nagoor, I have seen Muslim houses with pillars.

R27: Yes, but the pillars will be small about only 5ft and they don't have any figures on them. In Islam, we don't have any figure so there will no figures on the pillars or doors. Even we are Muslims.

I1: In north India also I have seen buildings, palaces, none of them has a figure but some have animals and bird figures.

R27: No, there is no chance for it. If they took that building for a lease then it may have because it is some others building. We can't do anything. If it is their own building there will be no figures at all. Because in Islam, the god says, I have given life and created you. Who are you to create and if you create, can you give life to it. So we are not even suppose to draw. In some places you can see flower carvings but it is rare.

I1: Only human figures will not be there or even animals and birds?

R27: Whichever has a life their figure won't be there? Those days people don't know this but today through technology people came to know this. Drawing or creating figures are crime according to our law. If you see we are doing this for our business but this itself a crime but no other go for us. In our religion we should not even keep our images at home.

I1: But today many are keeping it?

R27: That has become a fashion because of mobiles, facebook and technology but keeping our photos and other places for memories is okay but we should not display it. Some will have the year without the clicking their face. Even today many families are there who won't take photo but no one is following it because the old people are not there today. We also don't create images as it is crime, but we just borrow and sell it.

A23) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R28

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:10:41

Context: The shop is set back from the road, long and open all along the front. I notice a large carved door-frame that has been repurposed as a full-length mirror frame. I start a conversation with the shop assistant who it seems is the owner of the business. He speaks a little English.

I1: Will you demolish the house to get the antiques?

R28: Yes we ourselves will demolish a house.

I1: How old is this business?

R28: It is 10 years old. I am in this business for 25 years. Before 25 years there were only 2 or 3 shops but today there are 50-55 shops.

I1: Is the business good or better?

R28: A few years back, it was good but today there is a heavy competition for this business and some are also selling the products at low price.

I1: What do you think of the future of this business?

R28: It has long future

I1: If you see today, the antique products are becoming rare. Then how do you think that this business has a long future?

R28: After 10 years also we will get sources from one or the other even the houses are being demolished but not in a large number. Some materials we may get may be after 15 years the business can lose its glory. Then reproduction of materials takes place. Hmmm. Already many businesses have started to reproduce things.

I1: Do people prefer the old products or the new one?

R28: People today prefer the original that is the old products.

I1: Is that because of the quality?

R28: Yes we can make a better product from an old wood than in a new wood. Compared to new wood the old wood is the best quality.

I1: Are your customers from this area or from different parts of India?

R28: I have most of my customers in Bangalore. I have some 50% of my customers in Bangalore.

I1: Oh! I see.

R28: I also have customers in Chennai, second Mumbai, third in Goa.

I1: Do you have any regular customer?

R28: Yes, I have some 4-5 regular customers. I will send the photographs of good pieces and then send the products to them if they said okay.

I1: Do you know any of your customers in Bangalore who will be willing to talk to me if I go to Bangalore?

R28: Hmmm, I don't know. But I know a person in Bangalore who is not my customer but a customer of another person name Mahesh Kannan – that is his friend's name. He used to collect antique material and has a larger collection of it.

I1: What is his name?

R28: I don't know mam. If you come after some days I will give his details by contacting him if possible. He is not picking up the phone. He has a shop here. He has statues made out of bronze and other materials. He only knows about the Bangalore person very well. His shop is here if you go along this road. There will be a name board meenakshi and next to that is his shop. If you come in the evening you can meet him and ask about him. The person in Bangalore is a big shot there. He studied in a London University and a gold medalist too. He

has varieties of antique collections. If he gives the appointment you can see him.

I1: Did you make this mirror?

R28: Yes madam.

I1: Do these doors come from Karaikudi?

R28: All doors come from Karaikudi. We just do only decorations for the houses. We can put this in living rooms.

I1: For how much do you sell these things?

R28: For 70,000

I1: Why do you think that people like these sort of designs?

R28: Most people like this designs because it is a mirror that is attractive.

I1: Why do you think that customers like these kind of things?

R28: Most of them like the framework and carvings and that may be the reason.

I1: What sort of customers likes to buy these kinds of things?

Bangalore customers or any other customers?

R28: Bangalore customers.

I1: For their houses?

R28: Yes, and also for their farmhouse. People in Bangalore have farmhouse and they buy antique things to give an old look to their houses and even pillars. They build the house with pillars inside like Karaikudi type of house with hall and separate rooms.

I1: What made you to come to this business?

R28: For the past 10 years, people in this field were earning lot of money from this business. So, I too got into it to earn money.

I1: Do you know why this business started here in Pondicherry?

R28: Compared to Karaikudi, in Pondicherry the rate is less. So, that may be the reason. Karaikudi is the brand name but the cost is high. There are 10 shops in Eastern Coastal Road, if you work for five years there, after that you can start your own shop.

I1: Do these items come from Karaikudi?

R28: No, but when you purchase there in a shop it will be expensive. If you go to houses and collect the materials it will be somewhat less. We

A. Lawson

have agents in Mayavaram, Kumbakonam and Seerkazhi, Chidambaram. They will take me to the house and they get commission and the prize is also less. If they take that material and sell it to a party the cost is high.

A24) B: 23/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R29

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:32:36

Context: This is one of the largest and fanciest looking shops of this kind in the area. They seem to have a wider range of better refurbished pieces than many places. In the yards area there are several staff working on the refurbishing of pillars and pillar bases. One man is scraping the original blue paint from a pillar. The proprietor says that most buyers prefer the look of the pillars with plain polished wood.

I1: From where do you get these paintings? Mysore?

R29: These paintings are not original. They are only the copies.

I1: Who are your main customers?

R29: Past 5 years local Indian people are coming to buy things.

I1: Are they from big cities or villages?

R29: They are from Bangalore and also from north India.

I1: Do they buy these things for their houses or for business?

R29: Business, but the business is very dull madam.

I1: Where do you get these doors? Through agents?

R29: Yes madam through agents.

I1: From the demolished house?

R29: Yes madam.

I1: Are these items are very available or rare?

R29: Real antiques are very rare to get today.

I1: Why couldn't you make a door like this new with new wood?

R29: We can make but the cost is heavy but carvings are 75% old only.

I1: How old is your business?

R29: We started this in 1985 so it is some 28 years old. Initially it was started by my father. Before that a French man was there

I1: What is his name?

R29: His name is Clements.

I1: Were there any businesses like this earlier than that?

R29: No, only in city there were 2-3 shops. There was a lady, Indo-French lady called Madam Blanc. She was doing this business and now it has become a guest-house called Reema guest house.

I1: Do you know the history of the doors? How many years old and about their origin?

R29: That door may be minimum 150 years old or maximum 200years old. That is a Chettinad type door and that was the main door. This may be done by the local carpenter when they built the house.

I1: The customers you have would they buy such a product for its age or quality?

R29: The quality is good only in old not in new. So, there is a connection between the age and the quality. So the people are searching for the old. Quality and workmanship are important. There is also another Chettinad door. That one was the main door but this one is the pooja room door. In those days the pooja room was big. You can realize it by seeing the door.

I1: Can I take a picture?

R29: Yes, sure.

I1: Do you select the items by seeing its quality or age or some other features like a customer's opinion?

R29: No, not like that. All types of doors are available here. Some customers will ask for a Chettinad type door, some will ask for normal Tamil Nadu doors and some will ask for doors that is just old and with quality. All the customers will not be same. So, all types are available here.

I1: Is business good at the moment?

R29: No, it's totally waste. Maybe for the one who has started this business recently the business may be good. We are doing it for 20-28 years. Compared to the past 10 years the business is not good now. It has many problems like workers, collecting the materials and selling it, and the money for investment etc. But mainly the workers are the problem because today the experienced people in this business are not available. So, the business is not good as before.

I1: Is there still customer demand for this sort of business?

R29: People are coming for antiques by seeing TV and other media. People threw a 20,000 rupees chair and bought a plastic one, but slowly they are changing today. People who like the real antique in spite of the cost also reduced to 2% today. If you see this pillar, it is a Chettinad type model but not a Chettinad pillar. People see the product, if its look is good and traditional they are buying it and most of them are not knowing this. So, I can't say whether the customer demand is more or less.

I1: Did you make this here?

R29: Yes, this is an old pillar with a Chettinad type carving but not an original Chettinad pillar.

I1: This one is new?

R29: We can't say new. The wood is old, the pillar is old but the shape is new.

I1: Are local people in this area interested in this style of work?

R29: To say frankly the one who doesn't know the tree name has kept a shop here. He doesn't know whether the wood is teak or rose or some other but he has a shop. So doing business among these people is very difficult and if we do this we will become mental soon. So, it is better to get rid of this business and run away.

I1: Do the local people like this sort of style?

R29: Some people like it and buy not much. If we take outside Pondicherry out of 100, 30 are interested but here in Pondicherry out of 100, 10 are only interested to buy. So, people are buying but not in large numbers. Now there is a change in people's attitude towards the antiques and antique replicas. Just a model of materials in my home.

A. Lawson

I1: Is there more opportunity for the person who makes the replica materials?

R29: Yes, they are getting more chances. Today these people are the majority. The number of people selling real antiques are less today. So, their speech will not be audible to the people. I am saying this to you only as you asked. If local people ask, I just say that I don't know to avoid problems.

I1: Which is more expensive? The replica or the real antique?

R29: The real antique cost is high.

I1: Why do the people buy real antique? For its age or quality?

R29: Because of its quality. I have a few customers even from local who want only the real antique they won't change. I do have replicas because you can see this type of pillar in all the shops here. I have original pillars too but some 10-15 only. The people who want real antiques come maybe once in a year. The people who want the replica come most of the time. So, to run my business I need to keep this as the people like these materials. There are some 500 real antique products with me. I am having these replica products only from 6 months before. That too for customers interest. I normally don't have these things in my shop.

I1: What is the difference between the customers who like the replicas and the real antiques?

R29: The number of people buying the real antique has been reduced as I said before. In a hundred 75% of people have money but don't have the knowledge to see the difference between the real antique and the replica. So, 60% of them buy only the replica and only a 40% of people buy the real antique.

I1: Do you have regular customers in Bangalore?

R29: Bangalore..ya , I have some 4-5 dealers in Bangalore. There if you see, real antique means there will be only real antique. Some are also having copies but not like here. They also have mixtures of old and new but not in the shops.

I1: Do they buy materials from here and sell it there?

R29: Yes, they do

I1: Do you know the name of shops in Bangalore?

R29: Ya, a shop called something else in Coramandala and one in Whitefield and also a few more shops. If you go to the local area of the city there you will get the address of the shops.

I1: What is the name of this shop?

R29: This shop's name is Suprajaa Furnitures. Where she is from?
[question directed to T1].

T1: She is from London.

R29: Is she staying here in Auroville or just came from London?

T1: She came before 6 months from London to take a survey. This is a second survey and she will also take a third survey. With this survey she has a plan to write about the history of this business that how it started? And what is the present and future situation of this business?

I1: What will be the future of this business after 10 years?

R29: I don't think it will be good. Because 60-75% of the real antiques only are in this country. Abroad they know antiques better and here also there is not much. So, after 10 years there is no chance to sell real antiques here as there will be no stock and there is no chance of exporting too but there is a chance of import of antique from abroad. I have to say this mainly to her. Here the real antiques are mostly with rich people. I have a regular French customer called coromandel (?), he is doing this business for 50-60 years. He used to buy things from here and sell it there (abroad in France). When he came before 5 years here, he said that a product here cost 100 rupees cost only 15 rupees there. I am not saying this for business purpose. This is the real situation. An auction company had an ivory box. There is a rainy island in France and there is a museum maintained by a person called Deborah Patrick (?). He used to come here and he is a collector. He will not even touch the replica products. Even if the real antique is in a damaged condition, he will buy it. He got the information about the ivory box fully made of sandal through the internet. There it was bought here for 2.5 lakhs. 200 dollars means, how much is it in India?

I1: Will you focus on replica in the future?

R29: Only if we do replicas can we run the business, otherwise it is not possible.

I1: If you could produce a new product like the old, with the same quality and price. Which one would the customers prefer?

R29: That's what am saying 60% of the people have money but they don't have the knowledge about the antique. They will buy the new one. The other 40% only know about the antique and they will buy the real one.

I1: Why do you think people prefer the old because of the age or quality?

R29: Both

I1: Do the people know the age of the wood by seeing it?

R29: Not exactly but they can guess its age that it will be 50 or 100 years old and the old woods are dry and strong enough so that it last long . so, people prefer to buy it today.

I1: If you see there, even when the product is not the best looking people may buy it because it is antique. Does the same prevail here?

R29: No people won't buy it just because the product is real antique. This is the situation today or even in the past. This situation prevailed even in the past too. It's interesting.

I1: Do you have more products like this?

R29: Yes, I have. This is the Indian influence. This is carpel something like indoor wardrobe. I have a huge collection of real antique in this area.

I1: Were these collected by you, your father or your?

R29: Father.

I1: Did you collect much more in the past 10 years?

R29: No, there's not much antique available today.

I1: Did you collect the source/origin of these materials?

R29: Yes, I am doing. These materials were made in 1910,1920's. This is a dressing table. These items will be found in French houses. This was given as a gift by the British who came to put railway to a person in Ooty as he gave land to them.

A. Lawson

I1: I have seen some shops around this area which sell only european colonial style antique. Do they have a different customers or the same customer as yours?

R29: No, they have different customers. From here only the products went to Europe. There they want their stacks to be sold today because of the economic problem raised in America. Now they are not able to invest in products. This is reflected everywhere.

I1: Is the price going up or down?

R29: The real antique product prices are going up but the prices of the normal furniture are down. These products price will never go down. It may remain as such or go up.

I1: What about this furniture?

R29: This is a replica. It is old wood but new making.

I1: Why the antique prices increasing. Is it the rarity of them?

R29: Yes.

A25) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, I3, T1, R30

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:31:15

Context: We enter the shop and take a look around before approaching the shopkeeper to talk. He is seated behind a wooden desk near the shop front. Myself (I1), T1 and I3 stand opposite and continue to look about at the antiques nearby.

T1: Karaikudi is the brand name for this business but how does it have a connection with Pondicherry?

R30: Foreigners come and visit mostly there only. So, for them only people has these materials and selling it there.

I1: Where do you sell most of your products?

A. Lawson

R30: I can't say particularly. I am supplying to almost every state like Bombay, Rajasthan, Cochin, Bangalore, Pondicherry.

I1: Do you have trade with north Indian dealers?

R30: They come with their truck and they go to four or five shops and they collect whatever they want and go.

I1: Is this shop 25 years old?

R30: I started this business twenty five years before, and my father started some fifty years before.

I1: When you started the business 25 years before who were your customers?

R30: From starting till today only foreigners are coming in more number to buy these antiques.

I1: So your father was also doing the same business?

R30: Yes, we are doing it for generations. But the business was in a simple manner when his father started it.

I1: So in total, how old is this shop?

R30: It is some fifty years old.

I1: What were the materials present in the shop when your father started?

R30: That I do not know. Now only the materials are developing. Those days they might have gone in cycle or bus or bullock carts to do their business. [inaudible - Something about demolishing houses and when they started this]. We [a group which involves in demolishing] will go in search of old buildings, which are to be renovated. We start demolishing it and collect materials needed for their craft from those rubbles. There is a separate team for demolishing old buildings. That team will demolish some buildings and collect some valuable materials from them. Those materials were auctioned. Crafters approach them and buy those valuable materials for better cost. Old buildings are famous for old and strong wood items. The items which are showcased in this shop are bought from retailers, for sale.

I1: How is the business in terms of profit changed in the past five years?

R30: The business is dull for the past five years. Because the arrival of foreigners is less in recent years.

I1: Why?

R30: The numbers of foreign traders coming to buy antiques have been reduced for the past five years.

I1: When did the foreign and north Indian traders first start to come to buy antiques?

R30: In the last twenty-five years. Before that local people were their only customers.

I1: How much material is this business? Are the rates same till now?

R30: The profit is comparatively less these days as there are many duplicated products are available in the market these days. I will also do some replica, if the customer demands it.

I1: Do you buy things from collectors or only from the demolished house?

R30: If the collectors offer to sell to me I will buy from them, but also from the houses.

I1: What is the job description of the person who collects the valuable material from the demolished house?

R30: There are about 150 people involved in the collection process. They go by car, by bicycle, by bus. They go in the morning looking for old and antique materials in every house and buy those things from the owners. Then they come here in the evening, and whatever they collect, they sell those materials to the shop owners. The process is more or less like an auction. Whoever bids more money can get those materials. The retail collectors don't have any business agreement with any particular shop owners. They will sell their goods to any shop owners under sun. This is the main street and there are some other shops scattered around Karaikudi.

I1: Do you have separate collectors for yourself?

R30: No, not like that. They come to every shop and sell it. If I am in need of it I will buy it.

I1: Where I can find such people?

R30: You can find them everywhere. They will be in the bazaar in the evening. Around 6pm.

I1: Do they come daily?

R30: Yes. Here some of the collectors will come. Around 10 or 20 will come here daily.

I1: What kind of object do you sell more? Do you have any special type of object you buy and sell more of?

R30: No we have all materials. No specialization.

I1: How do you decide what to buy and what not to buy?

R30: Whatever they bring, we will negotiate the price and if it is a good price we will buy it.

I1: Is the price the only factor? Or do you think about, the style or quality of the item, or what your customers would want? What is the criterion for you to select the goods?

R30: Ya, I do if such a material comes. Mostly they look for a good quality products or the product with less damages.

I1: Do you like these kinds of antique items yourself? Would you keep them in your home?

R30: No, We don't have such items in their homes as we are living in rented houses. If we are well off, we will plan for having such things in their home. As of now only some of the utilitarian items, like cot and wardrobes, are in our houses. Not the ornamental items.

I1: Why don't you like to have these objects in your home?

R30: Because of the maintenance. These valuable items are to be maintained with proper care. I'm only interested to see them not to keep them.....

I1: What is the value of this bureau?

R30: I bought it for 30, 000 as I liked it. It is a very rare cupboard. I have another cupboard worth 1.5 lakhs. It is made up of glass and strong wood.

I1: Is this bureau made of rosewood?

R30: Yes it is made of rosewood. Because of this wood it has this cost. There is furniture which is costliest, say 1.5 lakhs. There a lady pointed out a stone or a material made of stone and asks for the reason for it to

be there. For which the shopkeeper replies that the stone is used for film shooting.

I3: These things are very useful so people will def. buy, but why would you take this one [*pointing to a stone ornament*]?

R30: For shooting purpose. The people who are involved in directing a movie will take some objects for rent. The owner of the shop will get some money in advance and lend those objects. Once the shooting gets over, they will return the objects in good condition.

I1: Is that a regular business for you – film shooting?

R30: In the last 15 years only – Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam movie makers. It is another kind of business.

I1: What is that?

R30: That one is mugalingam, a lingam with human face.

I1: Oh! I have heard about it but not seen that.

R30: It is very artistic. This is from Burma.

I1: Oh! Burma. How old are they?

R30: More than a hundred years. By the Second World War they stopped importing these so they are all older than that.

I1: Is that a camera?

R30: No its binocular, a small one. These are made in north Indian parts like Rajasthan [*a standing lamp*]. It is a one-way trade. They only come here to buy. You are talking about some old photographs there, and enquiring about the persons in the photographs and the words written in old Tamil on it. You got his business card from him.

I1: May I use this interview in my PhD thesis?

R30: Yes. My name is V.J. Murugesan. It's on the card.

A26) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R18

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:18:36

Context: This is narrow shop that extends quite far back. The shop owner remembers me from my previous visit here and he is very friendly. My eye is immediately caught by a large carved wooden doorframe on display near the front. It is in a rough, un-restored condition. The shop owner is friendly. He welcomes us in and quickly agrees to an interview giving consent to use the interview in my PhD thesis.

I1: Can I take a photo?

R18: Yes.

I1: Did you buy this door directly or through agents?

R18: I bought it directly from a Chettiar house after demolishing as it was very much damaged and old.

I1: Can you say the name of the village from where you collected materials?

R18: No, I can't say. The people of the villages won't like to disclose their names. This one is a old material. You can see this if we have a torch. Because there is no current.

I1: How long have you had this door?

R18: For two years I have this door. I don't know when it's going to sell. I just have to wait. I would not sell it for whatever the price the customer demands, because these kinds of products are very rare. So I must wait for a good price. I am not ready to sell the product for the customer's lowest demand. As the product is valuable I will wait for a good price and sell it. No bargain.

I1: Who is interested to buy this kind of door?

R18: All are willing, especially people from Cochin, Bombay, Madras, Delhi and Pondicherry. These people will then export it abroad.

I1: Why did you choose to purchase this door?

R18: I like this door because it has a lot of intricate work, very detailed work. It's very difficult to find such carvings nowadays, so I like this door because of this artistic carving. And you can't fix a price for something like this because the demand is more. It may be 50,000 or 1 lakh or whatever.

A. Lowson

I1: For what price did you purchase this?

R18: I bought it for 40,000 and going to sell it for 60,000 and I am getting 20,000 profit for my patience for 2 years.

I1: Do you know what kind of wood it's made of?

R18: Most of these woods come from Burma. Teak or some other variety of wood. But mostly I look for the quality and the artistic work. Depending on the value of the art, I choose.

I1: How long have you been in this business?

R18: I have been in this business for last twenty years. But for the past fifteen years I was not aware of the demand and quality of the products. But in last five years I have become well versed in this business and its nuances. After attaining this experience, now I am able to select and fix the price of goods. You need at least fifteen years of experience to be able to look at an object and know its quality and find out how much it is worthy.

I1: Is there any particular quality you look for in an object?

R18: I will buy all sorts of things but I prefer artistic products like wood-carving. I like that personally. When I see the product itself I know at what rate to buy and sell that material. If you buy artistic products, you can sell it for a good price. It deserves such a good price. All these things are new. (He might be showing some things now). They have a manufacturing centre where they get the material to prepare these goods.

I1: Some are saying that last five years the business is dull. Is that true?

R18: Not dull, its zero. Last 5-6 years the business is very dull. The reason is that there is no export. The government has cancelled some people's export license, so the business is very dull. And also the demand is less on the other side.

I1: Has the type of customer changed since you've been in this business?

R18: Earlier, people from Bangalore and Mysore and many places would come. But now, more than bulk traders we have only individual customers.

A. Lawson

I1: What is the history of your business?

R18: My father was a labourer and I am a trader

I1: Was your father also in this business line?

R18: No, he was doing some other business not this one.

I1: How did you get interest in this business?

R18: I do not know how I got interest but I got interest.

I1: Did you start this shop?

R18: No, its my father shop, he was working as a labour in this shop before 65 years.

I1: Did you work anywhere else or directly started this shop?

R18: I worked in many places. I was in Chennai. I was working in Amanjikarai, Mesha Nagar and then only came here to start the business.

I1: Do you have any personal interest in these things? Apart from looking it as a business

R18: If I find some very really good and valuable pieces, I don't sell them. I keep them This will show my personal interest. I admire those works a lot. Like this kind of artistic work [points to an old carved panel] not this kind of thing [a modern carved wood door]. If I find any of this kind of artistic work, I keep it for my own purpose. As the ancient items deserve higher price, I won't sell it for a lower price. Even though I am selling these new products, my interest is in the old pieces.

I1: Why do you prefer the old over the new?

R18: Because of its quality, workmanship and perfection. There are no labourers available to do such works today with that perfection. There are some good labourers here but not with that perfection.

I1: Do you know something about the history of the Chettiar houses and the craftsmen who made them?

R18: They never talk about these things in public because the people involved in such crafts are mostly poor. So to avoid conflicts within their working community and family, they don't reveal their artistic secrets. It is their ethics. We need to respect it.

A27) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R31

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 3 mins

Context: A customer (R31) arrives at the shop while I am talking to the shop owner R18. She is an elderly lady in her 60's or 70's. She has picked up one of the wooden game boards that are on display near the front of R18's shop. She speaks a little English, and T1 invites her to answer some questions from me, though she answers mostly in Tamil. She doesn't want to talk for long and I only manage a few questions before she moves off.

I1: Why do you want to buy this?

R31: I just came to buy for my grand daughter.

T1: Her daughter has to teach her grandchild to play.

R31: Two times I have gone to Ireland.

I1: Do you live here in Karaikudi?

R31: Yes it's my native place. But now I live in Madras.

I1: Do you buy this sort of thing very often?

R31: No, Actually these things here have come from our home only. I just came to buy for my granddaughter.

I1: Okay thankyou! Bye!

A28) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R20

Language: Tamil

Duration: 0:36:29 + 0:39:48

Context: This shop looks tiny at first sight, just a little room opening onto the street. However the shopowner (R20) invites us up the staircase next to the shop front. Upstairs is a series of approximately five rooms, all full up with an astonishing variety of antique objects. Most of these have apparently come from house in the Chettinad area, however some have come through an exchange deal from dealers in other parts of India, including north India. R20 is very affable and shows us about his shop while I conduct the interview. We are discussing some brass standing lamps when I ask if I can record the conversation and use it in my PhD research, which he agrees to.

R20: These come from a place called Kumbakonam. It is famous for its brass lamps. Only two places are famous for the brass work. One is Kumbakonam and the other is Thirunelveli. They are also famous for brass pots and other brass items.

I1: Where did you get this lamp? From an agent or dealer?

R20: I got it from a Chettiar house.

I1: So, it was produced in Kumbakonam but came from a house in Karaikudi?

R20: Yes

I1: When did you buy this?

R20: Three years ago, but the Chettiar purchased it eighty years ago.

I1: Why did they sell this lamp?

R20: There is a custom that when we give our daughter we also have to give some offering like this lamps and gold etc. but the younger generation is not interested to carry these items. So they sold this.

I1: What sort of customers likes to buy these items?

R20: Both Indians and foreigners buy this but our people buy it to use it and they buy it to keep it as a show. In some 5 star hotels also they buy it for ornamental purpose.

I1: How much is this?

R20: It is 1300 per kg weight, and this lamp is 13kg 500 grams.

I1: What is its market value?

R20: The lamp alone leaving the brass cost 250 rupees and the rate increase according to the work done.

I1: If this is 13 kg, what will be its rate approximately?

R20: It will be around 15000

I1: Is this a good quality or average?

R20: This is a good quality and full of carving work.

I1: When did you start your business, that is this shop?

R20: This shop was started in the bazaar some 10 years ago. It was initially started by my father about 50 years ago. He did the business in the house itself and from my father it came to my brother and now to me.

I1: How is the business going? Is it improving?

R20: The business is going average

I1: When did the business start slowing?

R20: The business is slow for the past four to five years because of the lack of foreign traders.

I1: When this business started, some fifty years ago, who were the customers at that time?

R20: Fifty years ago, the customers were mostly the foreigners. People from north India like Jaipur and Jodhpur will collect the materials from here and from them the foreigners will collect. We will not sell it directly to the foreigners.

I1: Do you have any specialization in your shop?

R20: Yes, we have doors and stone pillars.

I1: Do your customers like to buy these items?

R20: Yes.

I1: Is that the reason for the demand of these things?

R20: Yes, they buy it to use it and also to decorate their house.

I1: Do you have different customers wanting to buy the utility materials and the ornamental materials?

R20: Yes, some specifically ask for light ornamental materials and some ask for the utilities like chair doors, panels etc which has more demand.

I1: Is the demand higher for the European (colonial) style of antique or the Indian style of antique?

R20: The demand is more for the Indian used products.

I1: Then who buys the European style used products?

R20: The dealers buy those products and also our people buy some 1 or 2 if they like it. Foreigners also buy vinayagar statue during vinayagar chadurthi , maara paachi dolls and iron lamps which will be in Chettinad houses and also terracotta.

I1: Do the foreign buyers come even today and buy these things?

R20: No, they were coming more in number some 50 years ago. Today they come but not as much as before.

I1: From which countries do the foreign buyers come?

R20: From Malaysia, Thailand and some other parts of the world.

I1: Do you have interest in these objects?

R20: Yes, I have a personal interest. I am not just doing this business for profit but also for my own interest because our ancestors have used these products and these objects teach us some lessons that how to live and so on. So, I like these products I am not collecting these items but just dealing with them.

I1: Which object do you like in personal?

R20: I like all the objects but specifically the terracotta figures.

I1: Why do you like terracotta?

R20: Yes, because of their workmanship.

I1: Do you collect the history of an object that you buy or just buy the objects?

R20: We collect the utensils from an Iyer and rest of the wood products from Chettiar. We won't collect much information but we know the age of the material by seeing it. We don't know the full history of an object.

I1: What is the age of this lamp?

R20: It is eighty years old and some iron lamps are 100-150 years old.

I1: Can I see them?

R20: Yes, sure. He has kept it above a stone pillar about 5ft height. Yes, people use it in pooja rooms near the god or goddess pictures.

I1: Are these lamps are very old?

R20: These lamps have recently developed.

I1: May be some 50 years before?

R20: Yes may be.

I1: Is this a traditional one?

R20: Yes. It is used in temples.

I1: Did you buy this from a temple?

R20: Yes, during renovation they will sell all the old materials and I got it at that time.

I1: Did you buy this directly from the temple?

R20: No, there are about 250 small agents. They will go to villages in the morning itself and buy these materials for an amount they have or if it is high they inform us and get commission. There are about 98 villages.

I1: What is that?

R20: It is a container to store salt.

I1: Is this a stone lamp?

R20: Yes.

I1: How old is this?

R20: It will be definitely 100 years or more than 100 years old.

I1: It's so heavy! How much does it cost?

R20: This is 750 rupees.

I1: You said about a salt container. Is that a wood material?

R20: Yes, its covering is destroyed.

I1: Is this made up of stone?

R20: Yes

I1: How old is it?

R20: It will be some 100 years old.

I1: Where did you get this from?

R20: From a Chettiars's house. You see in those days when Chettiars built the house they won't give money to their workers instead give rice or other food stuff to them and their family too till the work is finished. Then another Chettiar will call the same workers to build their house. This type of competition was prevailing in those days.

I1: What is the purpose of this?

A. Lawson

R20: It is a red wood which is used as a medicine for children. They will rub it and apply on the children. This is again a salt container.

I1: Is this a single piece or different pieces.

R20: No, it is a single piece.

I1: What is this?

R20: This is a painting

I1: What is that?

R20: That is a marava. This is a painting of a Mughal character I think.

I1: How much is this?

R20: It is 750 rupees for the painting.

I1: Where did you get this from?

R20: It is from Burma.

I1: How old is that?

R20: It may be 100 years old.

I1: Is this made by pasting from a tree?

R20: Yes, they will tie like this and paste the painting. Which place is she from?

T1: She is from London. I have seen some varieties of knives small, big with designs. Do you have like that?

R20: Yes, I have. Some are not there. They have been taken for shooting (cinema).

I1: What sort of person would buy these?

R20: There is a university for the study of palm leaves. Those students have purchased it.

T1: Is that university is in Madras?

R20: No, it is a university in Karaikudi. It is the department of palm leaf manuscriptology.

T1: That university has only this department?

R20: No, it is a small department in that university. This is a paddy container.

I1: We want to meet the people who are collecting these objects from the villages to sell to the shops here and ask a few questions. Can we come in the evening?

R20: You can come around 5-5.30 to meet them.

A. Lawson

I1: Will you buy the objects you like it or depending on the money?

R20: We will see the rate also but if we like it we will buy it.

I1: This happens every day or once in a month?

R20: It happens every day and they also come every day.

I1: Do your customers come daily or come very seldom?

R20: We don't know when they will come. The dealers will come from Jodhpur once in 3 months but the customers we do not know. They won't come for weeks and months and suddenly one day they will come and buy the product.

I1: So you need patience in this business?

R20: Yes, we need more patience. There are many shops here and a customer comes to a shop and asks for a product. If they don't have it but know that you have the product they will tell you.

I1: Will they come and get it from you?

R20: Yes, they will come and get it from us.

I1: Do they come alone or with the customer?

R20: No they will come alone and buy it.

I1: Who buys these kinds of materials (old fashioned light switches)?

R20: Local people buy it and also some people buy it for their Chettinad houses if theirs is repair or damaged. Even foreigners from England also buy it.

I1: Where this was made?

R20: It was made in England.

I1: This one?

R20: It is from Belgium.

I1: Belgium is famous for glass right?

R20: Yes. These switches are famous from England. Toys are famous from England and Japan. The coffee grinder machines mostly comes from USA.

I1: Did the Chettinad people import these products during the time they built their houses?

R20: Yes, they imported things from a country which was famous for it because of the competition. Like I said before. A Chettiar called Alagappa Chettiar kept offerings in eleven houses as he did marriage

A. Lawson

for his daughter and sent thirty people to find mistakes, and he found that one toothpick missing, and he kept some 101 toothpicks. 'I did this', one old Chettiar said this to me. This Kaanadukathan Chettiar and Nehru were classmates. There will be four cars standing in front of Nehru's house and this Chettiar also asked his father to send four cars and on that evening there were four cars. Then that Chettiar called Nehru for his daughter's reception and Nehru refused because of the heat and that place was a village and how could I come. That Chettiar confirmed the arrival date of Nehru and put tents from the railway station to his house about 4km and spread "ratna kambalam". This type of kambalam.

I1: This kambalam is used in houses right?

R20: Yes, that Kambalam is with that Chettiar's son. They will do a function for about 15-30 days.

I1: Are these old ones?

R20: Yes.

I1: How much is this?

R20: 4000 rupees. It was first used on the floor and now on the wall.

I1: Where did you get this from?

R20: My father got this from Malaya.

I1: Malaysia?

R20: Yes. It is Malayasia. This one is a rathna kambalam. In this one the stone is lost. That contains precious stones in it.

I1: If we want to talk to the Chettinad people can we just approach them or do we need recommendations?

R20: You can ask Ramanathan Chettiar in Vishalam. As he has been in Chettinad houses and is a Chettiar. He knows more details. If you need the phone number. I will give you.

I1: Now it has become a hotel right?

R20: Yes.

I1: What is his name?

R20: Ramanathan Chettiar, from Kanadukathan

I1: Do you have any contact with him?

R20: Yes. He used to bring customers that are foreigners to us. He knows the details about these products very well. They like glass materials. They won't even leave a scent bottle made of glass. They love glass materials. Chettiars like only wood materials. Both the coastal area Muslims and Chettiars buy wood from Burma and make works like this and sell it here. Muslims' works there need no figures. They like glass items very much and both have trade link in Southeast Asian countries.

I1: They both do the same kind of business or different business?

R20: They do the same business. In those days they were the ones who went for trade in a ship as a community.

I1: Like the competition with the Chettiars, is there competition between the Muslim traders?

R20: Yes. There is competition with each other. There will be big lounge boxes in a Bhai's house.

I1: What is a lounge box? What is its purpose?

R20: There will be only small lounge box and they like only the small lounge box. They will collect materials from Burma and keep it in this lounge here. You can see this is teakwood in Chettiar houses and you can see this *poruse* (satinwood) in Karaikal, Nagappatinam and it comes from Sri Lanka. If Chettiar has teak, Bhai has *poruse*.

I1: What is this *poruse*?

R20: It is a quality of wood. It is a better quality than teak. It is Satinwood. They also buy Karungali. Bhai's house will have *karungali* (ebony). If Chettiar has teak, Bhai has a better quality than teak that is *karungali*. If teak is 20,000 this one is 25,000. The *karungali* will be 1 lakh.

I1: Is *karungali* more expensive than teak?

R20: Yes. They will keep it at kovil kalasam also. It is in black colour.

I: Where does the wood come from?

R20: Poruse, in nagerkovil, Pondicherry, karaikal. It is called Mudhirai. Rosewood is given here but it is called *eeti* in Kerala.

I1: First is *karungali*, then satinwood, and then only teak?

R20: Yes

A. Lawson

I1: Do you do any replication?

R20: We do but not much. We will repair and give the old mostly. If anybody compel and asks us to do and give we will do it but that too not in new wood only in old wood with new designs.

A29) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELD NOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R32

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 5 mins

Context: The shopkeeper breaks off our conversation to assist a group of customers. I take the opportunity to speak to them too.

FN: They are three women who have travelled here from Madurai. They have come specifically to shop in places like this. One lady is looking at a wooden salt-box. I ask her a few questions about her interest in shopping here. She says she shops only for utility items, but she prefers antique things because they are made of wood. She does not like plastic, and so many modern things are made of plastic. The quality of modern items is poor, they break or rust easily. I ask is she is interested in the history of these things and she says no only the look and quality. She also shops here for wood pickle container, glass jars and bottles, silver.

A30) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R33

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 3 mins

Context: I wander a little further down the shop to where a customer, a middle aged man, is browsing. He asks my translator Gandhirajan what I am doing and he explains my research purpose. I tell him I am recording interviews for my PhD and if he would be willing to answer some questions. He agrees.

I1: Are you from Karaikudi?

R33: No, I live in Mayiladuthurai. Is it some 140kms from Chidambaram

T1: Seergazhi?

R33: Yes.

I1: Do you come here often?

R33: No, I come occasionally.

I1: Are you searching for any particular object?

R33: Yes, I come here to get duplicate pictures and works of a great painter Ravi Varma. I also have some paintings in my home.

I1: Do you have any original picture?

R33: Yes, I have one.

I1: Do you collect these things to use it or to sell it?

R33: I will have for myself only some important things and the rest if anybody asks, I will give it to them.

I1: Are you interested only in these pictures, or anything else?

R33: No, only with this pictures.

I1: Why do you like him (Ravi Varma)? Style or anything else?

R33: I mostly collect only Ravi Varma paintings and secondly I collect Ramanujam paintings. I like the pictures made out of silk. A Saraswathi picture was made out of silk and I like it very much.

FN: At this point another man, who has been listening to the conversation between myself and the customer, interjects (A31).

A31) B: 25/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R34

Language: English

Duration: 00:31:18

Context: I am in the second floor of the shop, having already spoken with the shop owner, and currently talking to a male customer. Another man (R34) interrupts to ask me what I'm doing. I learn that he is a member of the Chettinad community as well as a sometime dealer in antiques. He seems knowledgeable about the history of his community and happy to tell us something about it. He speaks very good English and our conversation is entirely in English.

R34: On what topic are you writing?

I1: I am writing about the antiquity market, antiquity trade. The people who find, buy, sell, collect antiques and antiquities.

R34: Whatever you see here will be 180 years old or less not more than that. All the Chettinad items are only 180 years old. If you go deep in south you may get old antiques. This is mostly vintage.

I1: So you wouldn't class this type of item as antique?

R34: No, there is no unique item. Whatever you see in this shop is available even in other shops also. Its marketed by European companies, German things, in India. It all comes from Europe.

FN: R34's phone rings and he answers. His conversation appears to be with a client. He says that He is in Karaikudi now and he is welcome to join. He tells the person on the phone that he doesn't have any rare pieces right now, but he'll be in touch. When R34 hangs up T1 asks him about the coins he is carrying. The conversation is all in Tamil and I don't fully follow it.

T1: These are hand coins right?

R34: Yes.

T1: There is a person in Thanjavur who writes books. Do you know his name?

R34: His name is Seetharaman.

T1: He collects only hand coins and some other old antiques coins.

R34: Yes, he is my elder brother son only. These coins are machine coins from Dutch, a colonial product. Mostly it is marketed from Europe. Here we used to keep metal in a safe place.

I1: Where do you buy your coins from?

R34: No, see here they will be lying in the local market or local places. Each and every household, the same kind of material. The material is repeated. If there are five sisters they'll buy five pieces, each sister, like that. Whenever they go abroad they'll stay for three and half years. Once they come after three and half years, they'll buy for the whole family, for the nieces, the cousins.

I1: Where are you from?

R34: I am just 50kms straight away from this place. So antique you'll find only Vijayanagar period or earlier period of some 500 years earlier in deep south.

I1: So antique for you means more 500 years old or more?

R34: Yes. You cannot say like that. 180 years old is vintage right. They are collectable items. That's it. We started accumulating material since 1834. So our tradition is about 400 years we are sea farers. In 1835 the straight settlements were separated from Bengal Presidency. Previously it was under Bengal, and now Penang was also a jail. The Penang in Malaysia was a jail. Those who did crimes in 18th, 17th century were moved from here to Penang. Those who did rebel against Britishers. So 1835...[inaudible]...started investing money in Singapore. So these people moved from this place to Singapore to lend money for the labourers. They used to lend money to the labourers then recollect it. Later on they started buying lands. Then they formed estates, rubber estates. The people from here travelled to Mauritius, Ceylon – Sri Lanka, Burma and Indo-China, now its Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. It's a French Colony. Again Thailand, it's a different state. And Indonesia. So all this lacquerware comes from Burma. There was a market in Singapore, so from Singapore they used to buy. Some brands come from Singapore, other brands come from local places. They used to import from Europe and sell in a weekly market. Enamelware is more expensive, it was two rupees for half a

gram. Gold was selling at thirteen rupees for eight grams. This is 1930's. So we lost Burma due to Burmese war. We left all the things, whatever we got me moved with the clothes and whatever we can carry of jewelleries. That's it. All the property is gone. The people who settled in Malaysia, now they are well off. Indonesia is gone from out of our hands. Indo-China was taken due to the war. We lost property there also. So they start selling these products. Whatever they got inside there home, for cash, between 1965 and 1980. They need money so they would sell from any price.

T1: So it started only after 1960? Earlier it was not like this? What happened after independence?

R34: Partition doesn't have any impact on Chettiar community. We lost money in First World War. Because these people used to do bill of exchange. They collect money there, they will sell information to the local party – you can collect the money here. So they buy all currencies over there. In Germany they start collecting Berlin notes. A thousand mark note, declared in 1918, it's a paper. So they lost big money in that one. In Second World War they converted British Currency into Japanese occupied currency. But when the occupation is over it is no more in use. So they lost all their money there.

I1: I see, so this business started....

R34: No, No. It's not a business. Whatever they accumulated, after the war, they started selling it off to the local market. Then the...[inaudible]...started again 1980's. Now you know Chettiar community is well off in US. Every home has at least two or one person in US.

T1: Are they in business?

R34: No, No. First they left on scholarships in the 70's, engineering colleges. Previously. Even my own son is there. So everyone is there.

I1: I know that some of the big grand houses in this area have been demolished.

R34: Most of them are demolished.

I1: When did that start happening?

R34: It started after 1960's. You can see the photographs of the Chettiar origin pre-1960, and now. So you can see the difference in their richness. Basically money lending. The East Asian people are very good. They won't cheat you.

T1: So what about the younger generations? Are they willing to come back here since mostly they have moved to different cities?

R34: No, No. They never moved to any places. They never moved to French colonies. Then again they started going. By education they came up in a big way.

T1: But are they coming back again to settle here now?

R34: No, now people are interested in buying big houses. Individual houses. If someone is selling the younger generation are willing to accumulate the old building as it is.

I1: So, they want to rebuy old houses?

R34: Yes.

I1: Are they interested in buying the antiques?

R34: Ya, you can see the people of the community even in the opposite shop.

I1: So they are buying back the things that were sold?

R34: No, because people aren't aware of what it is. Because they never bought it. These things were brought three generations back, so they don't know the value of the material. Otherwise they wouldn't demolish houses! You cannot do a single carving now. There's no perfection now. Wooden things you can find. Every house is of a different unique pattern. They are to 1920's and not more than 200 years old you can find.

I1: Which are the oldest buildings and where does this palace concept come from?

R34: It's not a palace concept. It's a concept like this. See if I appoint you as a manager in my firm I appoint you for at least three and a half years. Every three and a half years, they bring money, they construct the first part. So we have first stage, second stage, third stage. The total house will be constructed in 10 years. Not in a single year. First

A. Lawson

venture they bring money, they construct the main place. Then again. Keep on going.

T1: Is there any oldest house to see?

R34: Now people, they don't let strangers in to see the houses.

T1: But we could see the exterior?

R34: Now houses are turned into hotels. You should see Chitambaram Villa's.

T1: Which are the unique villages apart from Kanadukathan, Pallathur and Athangudi?

R34: Kanadukathan and Pallathur have been properly designed in plots. The horizontal and vertical roads are perfect like in Pondicherry. Pallathur has slopes that you start there you come down here. Artistic house you can find in Kolambudi. Nobody will be there. And Allarpichu house will be good, in Kotayhu. It's a good place. Opposite Chittambaram Villas is an old house. You should see it. There is extraordinary work there. A lot of Belgian items. There's a flying peacock on glass. It's illuminated. If you put the light you can see the peacock flying on the sky. Throughout the house is covered by glass. Most of them have settled in Switzerland.

T1: Tomorrow we are planning to visit some houses.

R34: If you know people here they will take you out. Some places will be in a good condition to go inside. Most of them are hanging here and there and uncleaned. Very dirty like that.

I1: So you say if I want to see older items, older than 500 years I should go further south?

R34: Here you can see wood items that are unique items, that is not older than 180 years. If you want to see older wooden things you have to go to Thirunelveli. Even temple carts. Every wood piece is made by Thirunelveli origin people. This is a dry land and the carpenters, gold smith, ironsmith all came here and sold these items 200 years back.

T1: Do the metals come from Swamimalai?

R34: No, Swamimalai is famous for bronze.

T1: So the metals and wood were brought from Thirunelveli?

R34: No. They used to bring the carpenters here. At that time money was not a big problem. They need food, accommodation and clothes. And take care of their family. They keep on working for six months, seven months, one year. Money is not a big problem. That's it, they work for food. That's why the perfection is there. Now people are money minded so they have to finish very fast. If they don't like it they will destroy and again they will start doing. Mentally and physically they should be involved in that particular creation. Because your food is there, everything is there. You have seen a number of arches, now no-one can produce and are like that. It's a very technical knowledge. You cannot replicate any building now. You can try to, that's it. The wall will be straight – if you place a water on the top it comes falling straight. It's a kind of plaster. If you see white on the wall it's an earlier period. If you see red colour on the wall its old – white is new. That time, to some extent we had some money. The boom only happened in 1880's. After Suez Canal opened. Then these people got huge money because if exporting rice from Burma.

T1: But they had a good relationship with the Britishers?

R34: No, we have business establishments. Even the Bangala is there. People have their...[inaudible]...office in London. The whole income will go to London. The tax will be paid in London. If you pay the tax in London you don't have to pay here. But everything comes in pounds to India.

I1: Some houses have paintings and carvings of British people

R34: There are two. Yeah... [inaudible] ...because of Parsi's. The Parsi's dominated north. We dominated south. We were number two. Now we are number seventeen. Before Independence the Chettiar community was in number two financial position in India. Now we are seventeenth richest community in India. Even now Parsi is the richest community. Gujurati moved from seventh to third place. Marvari don't go sea-faring. Gujurati's used to go to the European side, we travelled east to Southeast Asia. This side up to Mauritius, this side up to Indonesia. Not Australia. Not America. Not even to French colonies. Even though we had options when we fled Indo-China. French ships

were there. But nobody boarded French ships. Everybody boarded British ships to travel to Singapore and from there they came to India.

T1: For loyalty?

R34: Not loyalty. They feel comfortable...[inaudible – possible something about the leather industry in UK and India]...Plantations are there. In Coorg and all. Coffee estates. A number of Coffee estates owned by...[inaudible]...people. Thirty percent are well-off, seventy percent are on the poverty line.

T1: Now?

R34: Ya, we need, I mean, they have to work for their survival. Two generations could simply sit on the property without any work. These people are very luxury kind of people.

T1: But now they have realized? The younger generation?

R34: Ya but you cannot remove it from their blood. It is still there.

I1: What are the fields they have gone into now?

R34: On the manufacturing side – oil industries. Cinema, they have people in cinema productions. Actors are not there. Producers, studios. Avn is the pioneer from this are. They started selling the first record players in India.

T1: And they contributed a lot to education

R34: The basic thing we want to be proud of is we rebuilt all the temples in south India. Whatever left over temples were taken care, and each family took one temple and they renovated in 1920's. At that time it was worth about 12 crores – total the community. And we left 150 crores when we left Burma. In cash. All community cash was left over there. Now its not a big money, that time it was very big money. Till 1941 one dollar was equivalent to one rupee. Even if you want to do a marriage now you need at least twenty-five lakhs.

T1: But now are they involved in any business?

R34: Yeah, they are in the business. TS Cycle. Murugappa Group is there in Pallathur. And Chettinad Group is there. A lot of industries there. And Kottaiyur people, entire Coorg belongs to them. You have been to Coorg? Plantations to 1000 acres, 2000 acres are there. And

plenty of properties. Some have gone away from their hands and some are still holding it.

I1: Have any gone into the antique business?

R34: No. If you say antique business, they don't like probably. Because it's called in Tamil (inaudible). They won't treat you well if you say you're an antique business dealer. Anything else you can do. You can simply sit at home and do whatever you want. This kind of business is mostly done by Musalmaans or some other community. Not by Chettiars. And even a Chettiar won't sell anything to another Chettiar. They feel bad. Because if I sell to you, you will come to know that I am short of money. At any stage I don't expose my financial position. That's why all the (material/metal) came here. Otherwise it would be kept at home and sold to the cousins. You can see paintings here. Ravi Varma lithographs. And early lithographs you can find here. Already a book has come from a New York guy. God prints. They got their gallery in New York. Two years back in 2011 it was published.

T1: I know. The author is Erwin Neumayer? From Austria?

R34: One is an American guy and one lady. They stayed here for three or four months. Thanjavur paintings you can see in Chettinad houses. Glass paintings. Now it's very rare. Now market is there. Tin toys you will find. In US there is no antique market.

T1: Only UK?

R34: No, no. Even Canada you can sell it out. I have been to US, I have visited a number of places. They buy only US products. Whatever is here that was made in the US you can sell.

T1: Where is the best market for these products?

R34: Europe. UK. Canada is good. For tin toys Canada is good. Now the booming market is Singapore

I1: What is the role of china in this antique business?

R34: China, you'll find only two Chinese products here. Very most expensive. One is a porcelain. Chinese porcelain which comes in a green colour. Sea colour. And the other thing is a camphor wood box. Camphor wood box normally is a product of China. Sold in Singapore.

A. Lawson

We used to keep documents in it. It won't be destroyed. Germany and Japanese for tin toys. Glass vessels are from Germany.

T1: Belgium also?

R34: Belgium is mirror. Antique shades, light shades. Table chandeliers. Now it's gone. Mostly they are selling replicas.

T1: So what is the future of this business?

R34: Still it is there. When it comes, it comes in a big way.

I1: But in the next five or ten years?

R34: There will be no more. That's it.

T1: Very scary! That's the reality.

R34: No, all the (old?) material we'll make money out of it. That's it.

And...[inaudible]...is a big way here. Postal history. Because we don't destroy a single paper. So you can find papers since 1840. That's a very big market in UK. Postal cancellations of the British era. You find rarities. What are the early post offices, what are the late post offices. Now though we are also not getting that material in a big way.

Previously we used to get five bags, six bags. Now it comes in ten covers, twenty covers. And you can find first edition books. Plenty of first edition books. Printing was a very big problem in those days. Not like this. Publishers...[inaudible]...make money. Not as a fraud. At that time we supported publishers. Some of the published books we used to sell them in a big way...[inaudible]...Tamil literature has been printed in book format from palm leaves.

I1: Do you mind if I take down your name and contact?

R34: You can keep it. You will find through me a guy called Ramasaman. Ask for M.S.M House. You can see vintage photographs of Chennai. Which university you are from?

I1: University of Exeter, in the UK. And I'm affiliated to National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore do you have any contact like email?

R34: Yes

I1: Do you mind if I use what you've said in my research?

R34: No. No problem

I1: Thank you

A. Lawson

R34: If you need any help, just send me a mail and I'll get in touch with you. You can also get in touch with my facebook. There are some photographs which are accumulated. You can take it down from there.

I1: Okay. Thankyou.

A32) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, spontaneous

Location: Athangudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R35

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:29:44

Context: We drive towards Kanadukathan where we know we will find many large Chettiar houses. We stop along the way at a small warehouse and construction yard situated outside a very large Chettiar mansion/palace. There are carved wooden doors and pillars leaning near the entrance. T1 jokes that this is handy as they can remove things directly from the old Chettinad mansion next door to here! There are quite a few businesses like this scattered around the villages and on the outskirts of Karaikudi. Unlike the Muneeswaram Kovil Street shops, they do not deal in a wide variety of antique household and ornamental items. Rather they seem to focus exclusively on the reclaimed wood from house demolitions and refurbishments. The shop owner here is willing to talk. He invites us to the back of the workshop. Some of his staff bring out plastic chairs for us to sit on while we talk.

I1: Do you buy from a collector or go to the houses directly?

R35: I myself go and demolish the house with the help of my labourers.

I1: How old are you?

R35: I am 55 years old.

I1: How will you get information about a house that may be demolished?

R35: We get information through brokers. In ninety villages we go and collect wood items, and in those villages we have one person to give

A. Lawson

information. If they give that information they will get two percent commission.

I1: Will they give this information only to you?

R35: No, whoever has the luck they will get the chance to do the work. If a buyer comes, he sees all the materials in every shop but buys materials only from one shop. So, it depends on the luck. I also have some close agents who when they get information they tell only to me.

I1: Will the house owners give the demolishing charges to you?

R35: No, we say the house owners that we will take all the wood items after demolishing and the land is yours only. They will write an agreement also. We will pay only for the wood items. We buy food for our labourers from a hotel or we cook for them. We approach the house owner and negotiate a contract. We will put an agreement with the house owner which goes like this. The land belongs to the owner and the wooden items are taken by the shop owners. We will estimate the value of the wood which is of primary importance. If the wood worth five lakhs, we will offer some four lakhs. Also we need to cover the cost of the demolition, the labour etc., within that amount. So there is a 50,000 margin for those expenses. Sometimes we make a profit through this. But mostly we incur loss because the wood inside the wall is damaged and we can't assure any damage beforehand. If the wood is in a good condition, there is definitely a profit for us.

I1: How old is this business?

R35: Thirty-five years

I1: Where and to whom do you sell most of your goods?

R35: After demolishing the house, we keep all the goods in the go-down (store room). If the customer orders for furniture, they will bring the wood from the go-down to the shop and prepare the furniture and sell it. People from all the nearby villages and cities come here to purchase like Tirupur, Pondicherry, Coimbatore, Bangalore, Chennai. Also from the local area, when people build a house they come and collect things from us to make wooden main door.

I1: What do local people buy mostly?

R35: They buy these wooden wardrobes and beds. It is a local tradition. It will not get rusted and is given for the daughters wedding. Doors and windows and also some other products will go for sale outside of Chettinad.

I1: For what price would you sell that old door that came from Kanadukathan?

R35: I will sell it for 5000-7000 rupees.

I1: You don't have any other old doors?

R35: Yes, I had. But a Pondicherry buyer name and took them.

I1: And how much did he pay?

R35: It depends on the height and workmanship. Also it depends on the type of wood. If it is teak it will be a higher price.

I1: For a very tall door, what will be the rate?

R35: I may sell it for 15,000 rupees. The cost of pillars also depends on their height. It ranges fro 5,000 to 10,000. Wooden pillars are costlier.

I1: Do you know the age of things when buying?

R35: Here all the buildings are only seventy five to eighty years old. This shop is seventy-five years old. So we know that it will be seventy five to eighty years old, but not more than eighty years old. Before 1950s, the Burma wood is not prevalent in India. Those buildings which are more than eighty years are not in a good condition. They don't demand high cost. It had lost its value and temper. If we got such oldest woods we will take it for very low cost. They have the ability to estimate its value only by looking. Those oldest woods will lose its moisture content which is of no use in preparing furniture.

I1: Which aspect of your business (making new furniture or salvaging old) is the original?

R35: We started doing both together. We started our business by doing both i.e. making new furniture and polishing the old ones. Earlier the cost was comparative. A cupboard which was just 750rps in olden days is now some 15,000 rps.

I1: And which aspect makes you the biggest profit?

R35: Acquiring the wood and shaping it in to furniture gives more profit. For example: A damaged wooden piece of length 4 feet may have at

A. Lawson

least 2 feet of undamaged part. We will use it for another purpose. Moreover the weight of the wood matters a lot. If it is a Burma wood or teak wood it costs more (1000 ton = 1 lakh). If it is a Neem wood, it costs 30,000 per ton. Because ready made items always have a fixed price, there is no profit in it.

I1: Apart from the wooden items what are all the things you get from a demolished house?

R35: We would get *uthrangal* (wooden roof), that is a wood, roof tiles, asbestos sheet, *thagaram* (tin), iron, *pathiyakkal* (mosaic and tile like polished stones). From the floor we won't get anything, because those days there were no tiles only cement. In some houses they have wall tiles from Japan and china too. We will also look for iron and steel items while demolish a house. The house owners all the time sell their movable furniture to some other traders. We people often go to empty houses to collect woods by demolishing it. There is another group of people to collect the movable assets before demolishing a house. Some other dealers from Karaikudi will come to collect them. The dealers are from Muneeswaram Kovil Street.

I1: When you demolish a house the tiles you said from Japan and china will be saved or damaged?

R35: Yes, it will be damaged. But that is not at all a problem. These tiles are saleable even if there is damage. The wall ceramic tiles from Japan have more demand in Delhi. So the dealers in Karaikudi sell them to the dealers from Delhi....etc. They will retain the wooden items and sell other materials to the concerned persons. They have a tie up with dealers in all other parts of the country.

I1: How did you get into this business?

R35: My father was in this business so eventually I came into this business.

I1: Was your grandfather also involved in this business?

R35: No, it started from my father only.

I1: How is business going? For the past few years?

A. Lawson

R35: Ok. Not bad. We have profits then and there. We adjust ourselves with existing market rates. We don't incur loss in our business as long as there are old model houses in their area.

I1: How many more years do you see this type of trade in Chettinad houses continuing?

R35: I am very much sure that this business will flourish for some 100 years, because there are many old houses in Kanadukathan. Some old houses are still in good condition. Whenever those houses reach a stage of demolishing these people will definitively have a huge profit.

I1: How many houses are there in this area (Chettinad) approximately?

R35: May be in all ninety-six villages ten lakh houses?

I1: Are the new houses are built in the old style?

R35: No, they are built in a new model

I1: Then it will affect your business right?

R35: If that affects my business. I will change my business. That's all.

I1: Can I use your name and this interview in my PhD thesis?

R35: Yes, you can no problem.

A33) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Kanadukathan

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R36

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:06:44

Context: When we arrive in Kanadukathan we ask the car to slowly drive around some of the streets. We keep an eye out for any houses that look occupied and open. The streets are empty of people and many of the houses look unoccupied. We try several houses before we find one where there is someone at home who is willing to let us in. I wait with I3 at the gate of the house while T1 speaks to a middle aged man who is sitting inside the front porch. It seems he is a caretaker of sorts, employed by the owners to look after the property.

R36: Come here and see this. That you can take a photograph of. This is a Burma teak wood. Single piece. This one is Lakshmi, Ramayana, two horses and this is Yali. Come here. This is a deer.

I1: Where are the owners of this house?

R36: Four of them are here and six of them are in America and Madras. Come here. It is a Krishna painting done in natural colours using vegetables. This they bought when they built the house. This is Lakshmi and eight lady. This is a marriage hall. These are local tiles from Athangudi. This is wood with silver painting. This is an oil lamp.

I1: In Chettinad many houses are being demolished but why are there houses like this, without any people staying, but being maintained not demolished?

R36: A person who has a shortage of money will sell his house. The owners of this house have their own very rich house outside Karaikudi, and they are very rich. So they wanted to keep their ancestors house to be maintained as a memory.

T1: Also what I heard was if in a family there are ten people, six of them are well-to-do, four of them are poor. So these four cannot sell the house without the signature of the other six. So, houses like this could not be sold because of partition also.

A34) B: 26/11/2013

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Kanadukathan

Interaction Participant: I1, T1, R37, R38, R39

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:04:30

Context: We are shown around by one of the staff (R37). He says that one of the current owners is asleep upstairs. Later we are introduced to two women, one of whom (R38) is a sister of one of the male house owners. They are reserved and polite but refuse to answer any questions and say that if we wait their brother who speaks English might come and talk to us. Later it emerges that an older lady (R39)

A. Lawson

who has been wondering around nearby is also a sister of the present owner. She seems simple and childlike, and she asks us for toothpaste, toothbrush and a comb but we have none of these to give her. Her status in the household seems very low and it appears she has no property rights here of her own, even the servants are rude to her which is quite sad to see.

I1: Where are the family of this house?

R37: They all are outside of Chettinad and they come here and stay for three months and then go off.

I1: Are you staying here alone?

R37: Yes I am here only.

I1: But two of your owners are here?

R37: No, three of them are here and three of them are outside.

T1: She would like to ask you about your thoughts. Are you willing?

R38: No, I am not willing to talk now. My brother will come and talk to you in English.

T1: Its okay if you talk in Tamil also.

R38: No, my brother will come and talk to you.

R39: My father was one of the six sons. He officially has no share as we are all girl children. The one who has a male child only has right in the property we are four sisters two are in Chennai and one has passed away. My mother was staying with her. We can live in this house but we have no rights to this house.

T1: Is your father dead?

R39: Yes, he died three years before.

I1: What she is asking?

R37: She is asking for money. Whoever comes to visit this house they will give some amount out of their wish. Last day someone came and took photographs and gave a hundred rupees. Now she is asking for fifty rupees. I am working here and my salary is only 200 rupees. I won't ask money to anyone. If they give out of their wish I will get it.

I1: Ok

A35) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pallatur

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R40

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:07:04

Context: We are driving through the town and spot this partly demolished house. We get out of the car and go to look at the place. Outside we meet a women carrying a small child. It appears she is a friend or family member of the property owners. When I explain that I am a student working on research and ask if I might use some of her words in my research she immediately closes-up. She says that the property owners are from a different community than her, and as such she shouldn't talk about them.

I1: When did they start to demolish this house?

R40: They started the work one month before and demolished it in ten days.

I1: Where are the owners of this house now?

R40: They are staying outside Karaikudi.

I1: Why did they demolish this house?

R40: It was demolished because some woods works were damaged.

I1: How old was this house?

R40: It will be more than 150 years old. I am just staying here for thirty-five years. Initially my daughter was staying in this house. That time this boy used to come here for playing. Even after the house was demolished he was coming saying that I want to play with my auntie.

I1: Where do you live?

R40: I am living in Kottaiyur, it is a village. Are you going to take any film?

I1: Not now. I want learn about the old Chettinad houses and the woodworks and things of those days.

A. Lawson

R40: They sell these woodworks to Madras or some other places if they decide not to stay in these houses.

I1: The owner of the house is sad or happy about demolishing the house?

R40: They felt sad because the house was not in a good condition. We also had land and planned to build a mill but we can't so we sold it. Then also the mill was not built, so we felt very sad.

T1: Did they sell the house to repay a debt?

R40: No. The owners of the house, some wanted to build new house and some didn't, and at last it was demolished.

I1: Did you mind in using your information and name in my project?

R40: I have to ask my husband about that.

I1: Is the owner of this house is your relation?

R40: No, no, they are Chettiar and we are Vellampara [Vallambar?]. So we should not talk about them.

I1: Okay. Thank you.

A36) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participant: I1, T1, R41

Language: Tamil and English

Duration: 00:06:31

Context: The day before we were told at Bismi Arts on this street that around 5:30-6:30 every evening the local antique dealers, or 'collectors' as they call them, come to the corner of the street to sell their wares to the shop owners. Today we reach the street at around 6 o'clock and are introduced by the proprietor of Bismi Arts to one of their regular agents. He is from the Nagarathar Chettiar community himself, and he says there are around another 10-15 people from the Nagarathar Chettiar community who like himself are involved in the antique trade. Gandhi says he thinks he is a slightly 'higher level'

A. Lawson

dealer than the average and that this is possibly not his main occupation.

I1: Do you go to collect materials every day?

R41: Yes.

I1: How do you learn when a house is going to be demolished?

R41: I won't go for demolishing a house. I just collect materials from either the owner or from a trader.

I1: Oh! Okay. So how do you learn when somebody is wanting to sell?

R41: The agents or the house owners inform us and we go and collect it from them. There will be six or seven families in a house and they are the houses of 100 or 150 years, old where four generations lived in it. So, whatever material they don't like or is damaged or in excess, they sell it to us and keep rest of the items.

I1: What are all the materials that you get from them?

R41: Wooden materials like boxes, cash boxes, table, furniture, almesa, light lamps etc..

I1: Are there many people from your community in this business?

R41: No, only few are there.

I1: Why?

R41: Because they are not interested in this business.

I1: Do you sell these materials only to these shops here, or do you have any other shops?

R41: No, I sell the materials only to the shops in this street.

I1: Has the business improved or declined in the last 15 years?

R41: No, the business is medium. It has not improved or gone down because we don't get materials every day, once in 15 days or 30 days. We will get it. If you want you can see a house in which the Ramayana story would be present as carvings in the pillars.

I1: The pillars are made of stone or wood?

R41: They are wooden pillars. If you want you can see. We can go to that place in auto. It will take 10 minutes. I am going home now if you want me to come, wait for 10 minutes, I will finish my poojas and come.

I1: Thankyou

A37) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R41, R42

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:20:35

Context: T1 wants me to meet what he thinks of as a lower level dealer, so we speak to the shop owner and he says in we come back in half an hour we can also speak to someone else. When we return both R41 and another dealer (R42) are there to speak to me. We stand and talk too one side of the street, just inside the entrance to one of the shops.

I1: How do you collect these materials?

R42: I go everyday in motorcycle and buy the materials directly. I know some people and I will go to them.

I1: How is that they always have something more to sell?

R42: I have a lot of contacts, house owners, in this area so I do not always go to the same people every day. I roam about nearly 90 villages. There are two main occasions when people want to sell more things: the wedding time and the funeral. It is like readying the house for the occasion. While tidying up, if they (house owners) find some objects not worth keeping they will sell those things to these persons. At the same time, it is a practice in Tamilnadu that one must not keep all the things in the memory of deceased. So, obviously those things have to be sold however antique they are. If the dead person has owned some property, it is to be shared within the family members (movable properties) and the remaining things are sold out. Almost every house in that area will have a room reserved for these occasions. Every time there is a function, that room has to be opened and cleaned. Sometimes the owner of house may be settled in some other places. They may appear here occasionally and the house needs to be

A. Lawson

cleaned up after a long time. These people (collectors) use those opportunities.

I1: Do you select any particular material to buy or do you buy everything you are offered?

R42: I mostly don't avoid any materials from wood works to playing toys. Everything has a value. I will even collect iron materials as it will be sold in this market because one or the other shopkeeper will buy it.

I1: So everything you are offered is good quality? Nothing is wasted?

R42: Usually glass items are not worth selling, if it is broken. But wood or metal item will definitely have a value, even if it is broken. There are people here who make valuable products from damaged items. They will repair and reuse it. Most of the second-hand household goods are from other countries, and those goods are always worth buying because they are very rare and they will definitely give us profit. Many wood articles are imported items. Sometimes we encounter some things which are not even used. If the house owners got certain things as dowry (it is a practice in Tamil Nadu where the bride brings all the needed for her new life in her new house), they are packed and they don't even open the packing. Such things can be sold at a good cost.

I1: Do you know about the history of a material when you see it or buy it?

R42: Most of the materials are from Chettiar houses only. We know the material is old by some writings or logos that are present on the material. (Like made in Japan, made in China... etc.) Some older native products have inscriptions in olden Tamil.

I1: Do the Chettiar people ever tell you about the value of these things when they sell them?

R42: Mostly the collectors themselves know about the value of the things. We only buy the original things. They can't find out the value in duplicated things. It depends on the individual's talent and honesty. (One can sell the duplicate by saying it as original which they don't do usually). The owners all the time do not know about the original value of the products.

I1: Okay. Did you get this knowledge by practice or did you know when you started the business?

R42: This knowledge is got by practice and experience. In this job you must have luck. You can buy for fifty rupees and sell for 500.

Sometimes you buy for 500 rupees and sell for fifty. This is not a fixed rate job. Talent also matters in this job.

I1: How many years have you been doing this job?

R42: For twenty years.

I1: How did you get into this field?

R42: My father was there in this field and eventually I also came into this field.

R41: If you see a grinder or any material, the family name will be inscribed in it.

I1: These things are all used and second-hand. Why do you think they are so valuable now?

R41: Because of its rarity. In olden days all the articles are known for its originality and quality. Even a water jug or silver glass used for drinking water weighs more. But nowadays these things have lost its quality. Because of the arrival of many duplicated things available in markets for cheaper rates, older costlier things have lost its value. This is the reason why we are behind old, second-hand things. Those old things also have the best labour. The workers nowadays work for material benefits. But in those days people worked for fame and name. They would be satisfied if they were offered food for their labour. They didn't expect money all the time. That Chettiar house was built over more than two years. A group of people will stay and the labour will be only for food. Not for money. One group of a hundred people would go to one house and stay for more than two years to finish that house. Money didn't matter them all the time.

I1: What is the future of this business?

R41: According to us till the Chettiar houses and family are there, there is not end for this business. Only the middle class people are selling, not the rich families. Here each house will be minimum one acre. Up to six to eight families are living in the same houses. Only in Karaikudi

town are people staying in their houses. Ten to fifteen km out of town people are not staying in their houses. They have gone to Trichy, Coimbatore, Chennai, abroad, US and UK. For business. They come only for functions, like marriage. At that house only the old people will be staying. Karaikudi is very convenient, so they people in big old houses in Karaikudi will stay.

I1: Who are the main customer for Chettinad articles?

R41: All people like Chettinad things. Mostly foreigners.

I1: Because of their particular style and quality?

R41: Style. Quality. And freshness. Originality. The Chettinad houses are very big and the things kept there many years will keep good freshness. No damage. Compare a modern manufactured piece with a Chettinad piece bought eighty years before – the same. No damage. With the label!

I1: Do you know any people in the Nagarathar Chettiar community who would like to talk to me?

R42: Yes we know a person (name R34).

I1: Are you happy for me to use this interview in my PhD research?

R42: Yes, go ahead.

I1: Thankyou

A38) B: 26/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R41

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:14:57

Context: We have met with R41, a local antique dealer, in Muneeswaram Kovil Street. He invites us to come and look inside a Chettiar house nearby which belongs to relatives of his. The brother and sister, who are two of the current owners, are sitting in the front porch section of the house when we arrive and are happy to allow us to have a look around. The sister gives me a small bag of savoury snacks

A. Lawson

which she has made by hand. They are fourth generation owners of this house. They have been able to keep their house and still live in it, perhaps because it is in the city itself where they can keep up some sort of business. However I find out later that they used to be in the banking industry but that they are now mainly living off the funds of the sale of their plantation lands which they had owned in Sri Lanka at the time of their banking business. It is too dark to take photos so, after recording another interview, we arrange to come back the following morning.

I1: How old is this house?

R41: It will be 120 years old.

I1: In which generation it was built?

R41: It was built during his grandfather's period. My father was born in this house. He is my father's brother (a man in a photograph). My father went to Srirangam (it may be like going to holy places at the stages of one's life)...Perumal, Vishnu, Sriranganathar(Indian deity). He sleeps on a five-headed snake and that snake is called Aathiseshan.

I1: Who were the craftsmen who made this?

R41: The craftsmen are not alive today.

I1: Where were they from?

R41: They were from Thirunelveli. We get good carpenters in Thirunelveli and for making lock and keys. Keralites are best for wooden carvings, also Thirunelveli only.

I1: Why the people are not doing this business today? Because there is no demand?

R41: Not that. The business is dull but the workmanship is difficult to do today and people are not available to do such perfect works today. You can see Mahabarata carvings this side and Ramayana carvings this side. If power, light is there it will be good. Mahabaratha and Ramayana are Puranas.

I1: Where?

R41: In that corner, the carvings. Each pillar has different scenes from Ramayana.

I1: Do the people say that they want these kinds of carvings while building the house?

R41: The people of this house worship Perumal, they're Vaishnavites. So they were interested in having this type of carving. Some others were interested in carvings of Lakshmi, Mahalakshmi.

I1: Was there competition between the Chettiar community in making their houses beautiful?

R41: Competition means it was in the terms of money.

I1: But all the old Chettinad houses seem to have a very similar style, why do you think that is?

R41: Similar means the style may be similar but not the designs. In this house there is a parrot. A flying parrot. You see? In glass. Which is a very rare material.

I1: Today when Chettiar people build new houses are they following this style or do they prefer a modern look?

R41: Most of them prefer modern style only one or two will take some pillars for their dining hall. Not too much. Other caste people like this. Each and every day the Chettiar people are seeing these things, so they are not interested. Other people will not see this, so all the other caste people like it. Chettiar family, from past hundred years, two hundred years, they have seen each and every thing, so it is not interesting. Today repairing charges are also too high.

I1: Who are these people [pointing to photographs on the wall]?

R41: They are the national leaders. They are congress people. This is mahatma Gandhi and this one is his signature in Hindi. This is not a original one. This is a photocopy. This is Subash Chandra Bose. All are old. This man spent his own money for the freedom of India. He was the one who started the Indian national army against Britishers . He was the first to design the Indian flag. He was against Gandhi in ideologies. Earlier they were united then got divided. His birth place is Calcutta. Chitranjan das is also from Calcutta. He is great reformer born on 5th November 1870. All are congress leaders. He is Madhan

A. Lawson

Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai . This is Vallabahi Patel. He was born in 1931. This is Motilal Nehru, grandfather of Indira Gandhi. Earlier they did marriage ceremonies in house itself, but now they go to marriage halls for their comfort.

I1: Who does this house belong to?

R41: It belongs to four families. Three families are outside Karaikudi. They are in Chennai.

I1: What business are they in?

R41: Previously, banking business. Right now they are in jobs. Various jobs

I1: What is this?

R41: This is Yali. This is also a figure but not found today.

I1: May we come back tomorrow morning when the light is better, to take some photographs?

R41: Yes, take my contact. This is my card.

A39) B: 27/11/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I3, R41

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:20:47

Context: We visited this house yesterday but it was very late and too dark to take photographs, so I arranged to come back today. We arrive at 8:30am. R41 arrives shortly after. I am not feeling well due to a stomach upset and I focus on taking photographs, while I3 offers to talk more with R41 on my behalf. R41 takes us through the whole house from front to back (though not into any private rooms). It is very quiet and we do not meet the owners.

R41: The price is only for the workmanship. The bottom piece you can get it easily but the top piece is rare. Those days they would cut the woods and leave it in the Irrawaddy river, and that way the woods

A. Lowson

would reach Nagapattinam from Burma. They don't carry them in boats.

I3: Who is this?

R41: He is a famous Tamil actor. This house is also given for the cinema shooting.

I3: And this one?

R41: He is the owner of this house.

I3: Who is this?

R41: I do not know exactly. His name is Iyaakannu. He might be the father or grandfather of him or the grandfather of the man in that photo.

I3: Up to which generation you know?

R41: I know the names of only two generations. I can hear the information about the people of previous generations but I can't see them.

I3: Who is this?

R41: He will be the grandfather of him.

I3: The man in that picture?

R41: Yes, I know him. He will be fifteen years. Elder than my *periappa* (older father/grandfather). He might be the father of him. If this man was alive today he might be a hundred years old.

I3: What is his age?

R41: He is eighty years older. More than eighty years old.

I3: Do you have people to maintain this house?

R41: Yes, for cleaning that place alone once in a month we pay 1700 or 2000 rupees. They won't clean here. We ourselves have to clean here.

I3: Do they have any family god?

R41: Yes, their family god is Perumal. That's why they have his statue there and lord Shiva statue here. These people have two temples in Ariyalur . When you enter the bazaar you can see a 1941 daily market.

I3: No, I don't remember that?

R41: Yes, know the Muneeswaram Street? In that street there is an Iyangar utensils shop.

I3: Yes, I remember. There is an old building like this.

R41: The owner of that is my father and that man. That market is the property of Krishna *kovil*. the owner of that is the owner of that house and another one man. They were partners. There is another place called Sivandimadam, which is near to the old bus stand, and that places also belongs to them. In those days functions and marriages happened in the house itself.

I3: Who is he sir?

R41: He is the son of that man.

I3: Do they frame and keep the marriage invitations?

R41: That is not the invitation but the wishes notice. They framed it and kept it in those days.

I3: Now where they are doing marriages?

R41: They are doing in Pilliyarpatti or in some *kovil*. In those days relations were strong enough that they worked for the marriage. They would come one week before and do all kinds of work. So, it was possible on those days to do the marriages at home but today this situation is not there. So they give orders for catering and pay the bill alone.

I3: The one that is in Ayalur?

R41: That is Perumal *kovil*. It won't come in this list. There is another small temple here.

I3: What is that?

R41: That is the kitchen for all of the family members. That is the serving hall. They serve food during functions.

I3: Won't they sell the whole house as it is?

R41: No, they won't sell. The tourists will ask but they won't sell.

I3: Do you have persons for cleaning houses?

R41: Yes, they clean only front area. When they are doing functions the people who conduct it will give money to them.

I3: Do you know the cost of maintaining a house like this on an average?

R41: The cost would be shared by the people. They get taxes each in a receipt by the municipality. If the places are in shared ownership.

A. Lawson

They share their money if they have any source of money and pay their taxes.

I3: What is this?

R41: This is called *aatu kallu* (traditional large stone pestle and mortar). This is kept upside because if it is in this position water gets stagnated.

I3: What is your own house like?

R41: Its area is same as this but the interiors are different.

I3: Where did this stone come from?

R41: It is from India only.

I3: What type of stone is this?

R41: This is made of the rocks of the mountains near by Thirumayam.

I3: What is this?

R41: If you keep paddy in this hole and dash it with that stick the rice get separated. The name will be here. Kasi

I3: Is this gifted to somebody?

R41: Yes, to her daughter as dowry.

I3: Do people stay here?

R41: No, they live in Chennai, Alwarpet. Next to Isabella Hospital.

I3: Are all the house in this street old, or are some built new?

R41: Some are new.

I3: Were there old houses here that were demolished and rebuilt?

R41: Yes.

I3: Is that house new?

R41: No. That one is old. It may be 80-90 years old.

I3: What is the material used to build this wall?

R41: Semman, redsand.

I3: How do you produce this colour?

R41: It is due to the paint and also the red sand.

I3: What is this stone?

R41: This is not a stone.

I3: The one in the outer side is what?

R41: That is agalakal

I3: Where do you find that?

A. Lawson

R41: We can find it in Arunthangi, Kottaiyur, Kammakarai. It is easily breakable not like this white stone. If you can break a hundred square feet in one hour of that, you can break only twenty square feet in one hour of this.

I3: Then why they use it as basement in many houses?

R41: Because of the sound created by it even though it is breakable you can't break it and come inside. And also the rainwater doesn't get inside easily. They put it as a compound wall to safeguard their important materials. This stone is easily breakable.

I3: Is the cost is higher than the white stone?

R41: No, it is less than that only.

I3: Okay.

A40) B: 01/12/13

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R43

Language: English

Duration: 00:24:21

Context: I have come across online articles about R3 relating to his own home which he has decorated referencing Chettinad styles and architecture and using antique articles from Chettinad. R43 is also the founder of Varnam, a company which produces lac-turnery crafted toys and small decorative and utilitarian items. The philosophy of the company is about re-invigorating and modernizing a traditional craft form. R43 is himself is a Nagarathar Chettiar. My supervisor has met him and contacted him on my behalf. He agrees to meet me for an interview at his home in south Bangalore. This is a new house, not the one I have seen in the articles I read. The downstairs front room is used as a small shop selling the wooden toys and items R43 produces. He invites me to the living room upstairs to talk.

A. Lawson

FN: R43 tells me about Chettinad architecture. Main entrances are very grand, woodwork detailed. Mixture of things from Burma, Japan, London – Italian marble and also own south Indian heritage. Houses constructed on big plot spanning several streets. Courtyard plan of houses – segregated – one courtyard for each section of household. Built for ventilation. Eggshell plaster. Sadly not one family in Karaikudi who still do eggshell plaster – laborious.

R43: Whether knowingly or not the Chettiars did a lot for south Indian arts and crafts. I think the famous Athangudi tiles of Chettinad were influenced by Italian floor tiles. They saw them as valuable and as businessmen they developed it into an industry. Because those patterns are not Indian.

FN: Mentions several other crafts Chettinad is noted for: Kotans, woodwork.

R43: The problem today is that the extended families have split apart. To maintain a Chettiar house you need five to six lakhs a month. Many Chettiar families can't afford that. So a lot of the families have locked-up the first floors. In the past they had big galleries on the first floors where classical musicians would be invited to perform. In those days classical musicians loved performing in Chettiar houses. They would have musicians and dancers at every function and events – birth of child, birthday, marriage, etc. Also they would have rooms for storing things for the daughters. Chettiars are a very chauvinistic culture. Property and money passes to sons only. Daughters have the dowry. Now the houses are dilapidated, the families have moved away. Some are empty. Some have rented the front portion to keep it occupied and locked-up the rest of the house. A few who can afford it have stayed or converted the houses into hotels or heritage properties.

I1: What do you think is the reason for the popularity of Chettinad antiques and the market for them?

R43: The sheer quantity of stuff there. They can't maintain it. They need the money. Also while my grandfathers generation were entrepreneurs and risk takers my fathers generation are really boring. When I wanted to do crafts and music I was really looked down upon.

They wanted me to do engineering so I did. The focus on academic achievement took over. A lot of the Chettiars stopped doing what they used to do, lost touch with culture, and became a fairly diluted version of Chettiars, and the younger generation really don't value where they came from. Until the last four to five years I didn't really. Was only when I bought my own apartment and all those influences from growing up in my grandmothers house came into the house. That's when I started researching it. I thought our fathers and grandfathers were a far more emancipated lot than we are. I think it was that there was just so much (antique stuff) available. And when you couldn't maintain it you would have these antique dealers that would come and offer a reasonable price and then go and sell it for ten times that. Where else in India would you find so many pillars? Every time I go back to my village one entire palace is getting demolished. And where does all of that go? So there is a huge supply coming into Karaikudi and there's a whole buzz there around it. The amount of people who, after looking at pictures of my apartment, have gone to Karaikudi looking for the enamel ware and the woodwork. So there is an increasing demand from the nouveau-rich the upper, working middle class, who want to do up their house and who want to bring an element of *south Indianess* to it. So I think its just that we (the Chettiars) were far more liberal suppliers of this stuff.

I1: The Chettinad 'look' or style is also quite distinctive?

R43: Yes, when it all comes together it is. But if you take any individual pillar and you see it on the market, that pillar could have been made anywhere in south India. There was really no logic to the Chettinad design, some were floral, some rounded. They just said to the carpenter, "you know what you did in that house before, I want it ten times grander". I started writing a book, didn't have money to finish, I interviewed several people. A lot of the ancestors said "we really didn't think about it". It was just a status symbol, like a car. That's why the front doors and gates we so very grand - all about show. Then the youngsters just couldn't maintain it.

I1: Can you tell me a bit more about yourself? What do you do now?

R43: I work with lacquerware toy craft. For the last five years two been trying to re-interpret the craft to make lacquerware floor lamps or small functional objects. My idea is to revisit the entire craft to say that crafts can be relevant today if we look at it. Crafts die out because they only do one thing with it. I don't just make toys with this craft I make all kinds of things – door knobs, pen stands, book ends etc. so it appeals to a wider audience. Because the colours are natural and so strong and they glow. This is my studio store, but I do retail online. For me the whole Chettinad thing took of with revisiting my culture and asking what I wanted to do with my life, and starting to get interested in crafts. So I said okay let me look at a craft. And because Channapatna is really nearby and I really liked the craft. I did a lot of kotan work also. But I realised I couldn't do so many crafts because I also have a corporate job so I had to balance both.

FN: He shows me a large hardcover book called “The Chettiar Heritage” and recommends that I meet one of the authors (R45) when I am next in Chennai.

R43: In Chettinad you have the kitsch look, and then you have the art deco houses. The entire art deco style entered India through the Chettiars. So if you go to a place like Kanadukathan, a lot of ads and film serials shoot there. Chettinad has suddenly become a buzz-word. People have realised there is this vast backdrop available. Its also become one way of paying for upkeep of the houses. Kanadukathan has the most art deco houses. But once you've walked into ten Chettiar houses they all start looking the same.

FN: He gives me the name and contact of a Bangalore based antique dealer who he has bought Chettinad antiques through (R61).

R43: Bangalore is one of the main markets for Chettinad goods. These architects regularly take doors from Karaikudi. Because it's easy and transport costs are low. You get it within a few hours overnight trip and they use it in all their projects. But these [indicating traditional wooden pillars] are not from Chettinad, they are from Mysore. But now

A. Lawson

everything has a generic 'Chettinad' name. It's a tool for marketing it, because my earlier flat got written about. I've been in Bangalore eight years. But I was born and brought up in Bombay. You must visit Chol Bazar in Bombay.

FN: He talks about the phenomenon of what he calls 'Kashmiri emporiums'.

R43: There's so much strife out there that they just get all their stuff and bring it to sell. That's a joke in India. You can go to the farthest corner of the country and you will still find a Kashmiri emporium. They mainly only trade in Kashmiri stuff.

A41) B: 16/12/13

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Thanjavur

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R44

Language: Tamil

Duration: 02:01:37

Context: I am in Thanjavur with T2 who has her own fieldwork to complete here. We agreed it would be good to travel here together so that I could investigate potential contacts for my own research. Last night we met a local archaeologist and academic. He is a lecturer at Tamil University in Thanjavur and a friend of T2's. He suggests R44 as a good person for me to speak to, explaining that he is an eminent collector and numismatist, and calls him to set up this meeting. R44 has asked us to come to his home. T2 is accompanying me so she can act as translator from Tamil to English. We arrive by auto-rickshaw and R44 invites us up to the second floor of his home. He has his office there as well as a room entirely devoted to storing his collection of antiquities. I explain my research and ask him if I may record my conversation with him so it may be used in my thesis. He agrees.

FN: Before the recorder has been turned on he has begun talking about the hobby of collecting coins and other antiques and the sort of people involved....

R44: They earn up to Rs.40, 000 to 50,000 for a month. Some people buy materials like this with the excess money they have got. Some others use these articles as showpieces. Some others will buy such articles with an idea to sell it in a bigger rate later. But everyone is in business motive nowadays. Only a handful of people are doing research in antique things these days. Particularly youngsters, who are within their 30 years of age, are involved in business to the most. Some people around the age of 60 are mostly involved in research. For example, if there is a conference arranged here, like some south Indian numismatic conference arranged for some professors, teachers and some retired persons, they prepare arduously to present their research papers and discussions will go on in that room. At same time a group of young people, 25-30 age groups, in another room will talk about their business (trade) there.

I1: Are they interested in coins more?

R44: In our culture particularly, I collect coins of historical importance. The coin that tells us the history interests me more. Common coins won't disturb my curiosity. I avoid published coins.

T2: Do you have any example?

R44: What kind of example?

T2: Any coin which you have collected?

R44: Yes, I have many coins. It is in the locker.

T2: Something you have published.

R44: I have photos of those coins in books. Now I am going to publish a bigger volume and I am preparing the catalogue now. This one is full of Later Cholas.

T2: Show us any one coin.

R44: Sure. This is Sangam Chola. This book has Sangam Chola. Chera and Pandya. This is Sethupathi and Tanjore Maratas. The upcoming volume is much bigger than this. It has 12 chapters. Only 3

chapters are typed so far. Here typing is a difficult work because of power cut in Tamil Nadu. These are masterpieces of Tamil Nadu coins.

I1: Do you keep all these coins in your collection?

R44: Yeah. In my collection. This is a rare coin in Tamil Brahmi script. It is 2000 years old. (spells the script on the coin) "Pollirumburai"- a Sangam Chera. A Sangam Pandya – "Peruvazhudhi". In Tamil script which is 2000 years old. It is 2nd century B.C. "Maakodhai"- silver portrait coin 2nd century A.D and "Kollipurai". These four coins are masterpieces of Tamil Nadu coins.

T2: Do you have these coins?

R44: Yes. In *Semmozhi* (classical) Tamil conference, I exhibited these coins.

I1: Can I take a picture?

R44: Ok

T2: What is the contribution of these coins?

R44: These are the earliest coins in Tamil Nadu which we get along with script. The models of these coins are imitated from Roman coins. When Roman coins entered Tamil Nadu, people imitated from those coins.

T2: These coins?

R44: Yes. These are all prepared for students. Just to show them how different scripts look like. Like Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Devanagiri, Nandinagari, Pallava granth scripts.

I1: For which students?

R44: For M.A. students.

T2: Students from Tamil University?

R44: No, this book is for students from Jaffna University in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). That university has a separate paper on this study. Tamil University has two papers on it. This year they are going to start Diploma in Numismatics.

T2: Have you published this book in Sri Lanka?

R44: No. I sent it from here. I did this all.

T2: Oh! You prepared it here and sent it there?

R44: Yes. Since they asked for it, I have sent them a photocopy. This is on Later Cholas.

T2: Do you have all the coins published here?

R44: Yes, I have. These are Sangam age coins, only Sangam age.

T2: He owns all the coins that he publishes.

R44: In Karur, Amaravathy River, during 1991, they used to dig up the riverbeds and collect coins.

T2: How do you get these coins?

R44: Earlier, all settlements/ civilizations are centered on riverbeds like Indus valley Civilization and Nile Civilization. Because there is more water on rivers, they develop housing, agriculture, trade and transport there.

T2: I asked why they dig here particularly. He says because they are all river settlements, along the riverbanks we could find houses, forts and settlements. So they get coins there.

I1: The coins you collected, are they from Karur or some other places?

R44: These coins are found in this river. This is for a PhD thesis on Roman trade. A girl from France is doing it. I have her visiting card in home. She came here to do her research. She brought her Laptop and took photos for her research.

I1: Are there any other places like the coins you get from Karur?

R44: This is from Amaravathy riverbed. In Thirukovilur, Thenpennai riverbed. In Madurai, there is Vaigai riverbed. Thirunelveli-Thamirabarani riverbed. In Trichy- Chola coins- Cauvery riverbed.

T2: How do they have the knowledge of digging at right places?

R44: Because of their poor condition, they dig sand and sieve it. They do so to get small pieces of gold at rare occasions. At that time, they accidentally get some coins, coins, rings, gold ornaments. Then they gradually sell it to people like us.

T2: How do they go for digging?

R44: They settle nearby rivers. It is seasonal. They only do these kinds of jobs in April, May and June, because only in summer season the rivers dry up.

T2: Are they experienced in this?

R44: Yes. It is their profession.

T2: I asked how they know to exactly dig here for these things. He says that they are actually gold paddling. They are gold paddlers. They get something else along the way. I asked how they go there for digging and he said that this time of year you cannot go for digging and only in summer (April, May, June) you can do it. And they just have the experience and know where things are.

R44: They are Kurumbars, which is a community.

I1: When did you start collecting these coins?

R44: In 1984.

I1: Why did you start?

R44: I have started my research in 1984. But I have started to collect it from 1980 at the age of 12.

I1: What made you to start this collection?

R44: There was a British coin called half pagoda. It had four languages including a Tamil script. It was the first coin I got in 82. Then I developed my interest.

I1: Was it by chance?

T2: How did you get to know that?

R44: I went to a jewellers. It was my friend's shop. He told me about the coin and asked me to collect it. Because I am more interested in Tamil, I agreed to collect that coin. Then I wrote my first article, "Aangileyar kaalathu Tamil Kaasugal" (Tamil coins of British period). My first article was written in 1986. There is a person called Iravadham Mahadevan from the newspaper Dhinamani. He supported me a lot in these collections. He wrote books on Indus valley Brahmi scripts. This is my boss, Iravadham Mahadevan, early Tamil epigrapher.

T2: He is the person who helped him a lot. When he got his first script he published it in 1986.

R44: In 1988, I published my first Brahmi script coin in Karur which I have collected in Karur. It is Kollirumburai. It is a Sangam- Chera coin in Irumburai dynasty.

I1: Do you publish in the numismatics society here?

R44: In South India, there are four or five articles. But in Tamil Nadu, there are more than 250 or 300 articles.

T2: Will you publish on your own?

R44: I will publish all my findings. These are Arcot Nawab coins, recent Tamil coins, Sethupathi coins, Later Pandyas, Later Cheras, recent discovery in Pallavas, Senki Nayaks, Tanjore Maratas, Tanjore Nayaks, and archeological findings in Tamil Nadu (three volumes).

I1: Do you ever work with the academics of the University?

R44: No. I am doing it for my personal interest.

I1: They haven't asked you to do so?

R44: But I am taking classes in every University for the paper called Numismatics in Tamil.

T2: How is your interaction with the people doing research from universities?

R44: The present scenario of Tamil Nadu is that there is no eligible person to teach classes on coins.

I1: Do you have much contact with Chennai numismatic society?

R44: Yes. My friend (R9) is there in Madras coin society.

I1: Ok. I have met them in Chennai.

R44: They are my students. People all over Tamil Nadu have learnt from people like us. See, he is Michael Mitchener of England. It is UK address. It is got in 1998 in Karnataka and Andhra. This book has many mistakes because he does not know how to read Tamil, he followed what others have said. I told to correct some mistakes, which he did promptly. P.V. Radha Krishnan curator of Reserve Bank of India took a major part in this work. He was in Nasik then. Would you like to have some tea?

I1: It's ok.

R44: No problem at all. My wife took leave today. It is my son's exam today. That is fine because he will disturb us if he is free. This is Chola period's weight. Five *kalanjiyam* weight. *Ru* means five in Tamil numerals. Will you please come here for a minute? I have prepared an exhibition for a school. If you want, you can take a photo of it. I have

A. Lawson

prepared it for my son's school for a compliment. These are all the beads found in Chola region.

I1: Where do you get these from?

R44: All are acquired from Cauvery river bed. This is a carnelian bead.

T2: this is exactly like what we got from Telangana.

R44: Yeah, it is possible. These are all got from Gujarat. In Tamil, we call it *Soodhu Pavalam*. In English, it is carnelian bead.

T2: Do you have a scale sir?

R44: I will bring a white paper. It will be easy for you. The background is dark. This is Japan marble.

T2: Is it not tiles?

R44: Yeah. It is the same. 100 years old.

T2: Do you have it here?

R44: No. it is in that house. I brought it here. But it is damaged now. I have the handle there. I need to fix it.

T2: What is that handle made of?

R44: Glass. It is fully made up of glass and designed.

T2: What is the date of these beads?

R44: All are 1500 years old. All are handmade.

I1: How do you decide what to collect?

R44: Only Thanjavur district has these kinds of things. These are foreign beads found in Tamil Nadu. But these are very rare. This is *maragatham* (emerald).

T2: Is it not glass?

R44: Glass and *maragatham* are mixed. These are soap stone beads. Soap stones are found in Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu and North India. These are wooden beads. And this is terracotta bead. These are stones.

I1: Do you buy them from somebody? How exactly do you acquire them?

R44: I will purchase it from the poor people on the riverbed.

T2: Will you go directly or do you have any mediator?

R44: I will go and get it from them directly.

T2: What are these?

I1: Can I take a picture?

R44: Yes, you can. These are like what you clean your ear with. This is a Danish whistle. This is British weight, British crown and Maratha weight (2 pounds, 1932 in British period). This is *paampadam*, an earring. It is available in silver and gold. There is another ring which is also used as a weapon.

I1: It is strange.

R44: It is a very rare stone. It is called *kuruvi raththam* (bird's blood).

T2: It is a ruby, rare and very old.

I1: How old you think this one is?

R44: 600 to 800 years old. It is a pendant.

T2: It is very small.

R44: Yes, it is meant for small kids. These are other varieties of earrings.

T2: Is this something worn in foot?

R44: No, no. All are earrings.

I1: These are heavy!

T2: How will you wear these?

R44: All are worn in ears.

I1: These are weights, right?

R44: Yeah. Weights. This thing is compass. Very simple ring.

I1: What do you normally do with your collections? Do you display it?

R44: Yes. I will display it in schools and colleges. This is what I have done for my son's school. They are going to open a museum there.

I1: Is that here in Thanjavur?

R44: Yes. In Tanjore. Near new bus stand.

I1: What do the children say about the collection?

R44: No, it is yet to be exhibited. We are planning to do it on June. That is why I am collecting it.

T2: What is it?

R44: This is also a kind of ornament. These are terracotta horns. These are earlobe rings of Chola period. See how shining it is! This is also worn in ears. All are made up of terracotta.

T2: These are terracotta beads.

R44: This is a smoking pipe. Hookah. They are of different varieties.

This is what we call *Thakkalli*.

T2: Spinning wood.

R44: and this is its bigger size.

I1: Is this an expensive hobby for you?

R44: In today's situation, the fieldwork costs more. While going for outing even the food and transportation cost more. The collection of these articles is more competitive now. For example, we pay 50-75 rupees for these collections. The market value is 350-500 rupees. Just imagine that I bought this particular material for 50 rupees. If you go to that spot they will say that I will buy it for 50 rupees. You then bargain that article for 75 rupees.

T2: He is giving an example, that suppose he went to that particular article for 50 rupees. Suppose you and I went there, they would say the original rate with which he used to buy things. Then we bid some more money to get that article. Likewise competition will grow between the collectors.

I1: Do you know any other collectors?

R44: Yes. I know many people in this business. If it is important I would take a photograph of it.

T2: Most are doing it as a business. He knows all of them. If he thinks something is important for him, he will take a picture of it.

I1: How many people do you think are in this kind of business?

R44: There are many college students involved in it. Whoever enters in this field first, come as collectors. They will collect things for three or four months. Then they will become dealers. There are 5000 dealers in Tamil Nadu to date. Only some ten persons are doing research. There are some 10,000 collectors here.

T2: Is there any person who does all the three jobs, (collecting, dealing, researching)?

R44: That is not possible. It is a difficult task. In the beginning, we go to the field (place of work) and collect coins there. It is obtained along with mud. We will bring it here and clean it. After cleaning, we will take photos. With the photography we start studying the coin with the help of

books. Then we acquire knowledge needed for publishing. This is all we need to do this business. Not one person can do all this.

T2: You just went to the field and bring back coins home. It is full of mud which you clean. You will find books to read on it. And then you publish it. The dealer is with different perception completely and he cannot look it as the same way the publisher did.

R44: This is the Chola Terracotta lamp. This is a Neolithic tool. It is 10-15 thousand years old.

I1: Do you look for particular types of coins? Or you take whatever gets your interest?

R44: It depends on the area. If we go to Tanjore river bed, we could get things belong to Chola, Marata or Tanjore Nayaks period. Also we will look for something new always. If there is something new we get, it always makes us happy. This is Chunnambu Garanda (Limestone container). In Maratha period, people had the habit of chewing betel leaves and betel nuts. They had this container tied in their hip all the time. They used this mixture of limestone, betel leaves and betel nuts all the time. The powder they use for whitewashing.

I1: Why do you think this kind of research is important?

R44: Through this, we get to know about the lifestyle and culture of people in Tamil Nadu. It has a lot to do with the people. The numismatics of Tamil Nadu is like an ocean. It has some 500 varieties of people like Pallavas, Cheras and Cholas. It is as huge as we catalogue it and put large volumes of books on it. Every coin has surnames. We can find the name of kings in inscriptions.

T2: When he looks at Pallava coins, the surnames he gets through inscriptions and then he connects it.

I1: Do you think it is true that the universities and museums are taking interest in this type of object?

R44: The problem is they won't pay money for the material.

T2: Is their interest lacking?

R44: This field is declining now. This is just like the teachers preparing their students. We taught the younger persons in this field at that time.

But now, the teachers are retiring from this field faster. They are not preparing their students anymore. It is a terracotta bead.

T2: Where did you get this pen?

R44: It is made of ivory. Some seventy-five years back it was common. You need to dip this inside ink, only then you can write with it. It is made in England.

I1: These are not archaeological?

R44: It is hundred years old. These are very rare. 600-700 years old.

I1: If these are not from ground, where do you get such things?

R44: I got these things from ancient pottery.

I1: What are the things you get from ground?

R44: This thing is found inside that *chunnambu garandai* (limestone container). These are found in riverbed which is hundred years old.

T2: Where do you get these things from?

R44: I got these from the persons who had already acquired it. What is written on it? Birmingham or UK?

T2: This one is from Birmingham. Yes, Both are from Birmingham.

R44: This is made of ivory.

I1: For what this is used? Oh. Letter-opener?

T2: Yeah.

R44: Look at this ink bottle.

T2: Wow! That's amazing. I'm going to clear all this for you. What are these round objects?

R44: these are earrings.

I1: You got these also from riverbed?

R44: Yes, from riverbed. This is a seal. A Vaishnava seal.

I1: What is this used for?

R44: This is *Sangu Chakram*. It has five seals. You can use it separately.

T2: I think this is for branding others?

I1: Branding?

T2: You know like they do [to R1]. It is for tattooing hands right?

R44: Yes. This is heated and tattooed. Once it is used, it is thrown in riverbed. One seal is used for a single person. This is Vaishnavite, Sankran chakra. This is a coffee cup.

I1: How do you do your research? When you find a coin, do you ask other collectors about it? Or do you look for literature?

R44: If at all I ask others, there is none to explain me. All I do by myself. If in the excavation of Tamil university they got some new coins, they would ask me about its details. Even in Madras University.

FN: Short conversation between T2 and R44 about their studies at Madras University.

I1: Do you have any one thing which is your favourite, or you are very proud of, in your collections?

R44: My favourite is the coins and particularly that Kolliruburai coin.

T2: The round coin with the Tamil script, right?

R44: No. that is Perivazhudhi.

T2: Why it is your favourite?

R44: Because it is the first coin, I have found out (*researched*). It brought me popularity. This is Chola period Hundial (donation box found in temple).

I1: The coins are found inside this?

R44: No it is found separately. I just combine it to exhibit. We could get coins and gold ornaments inside this.

I1: Is this also from the riverbed?

R44: No. it is found from ground.

T2: Do they bury it?

R44: In those days, they won't keep all valuables inside their house. It is not safe and can be easily robbed. So they used to bury it under the ground or within the walls. That is why the bottom of this container is not strong. It is not upright. Many such objects are in this condition. I found the container in one place and the lid in some other place. They used to preserve their valuable ornaments within this. This is what is buried in ground. Do you know what this is?

T2: Is this used for combating?

R44: Yes. In Marata period, People used to fight in front of the king. That particular community is named Malluku Chetti. Those people were gigantic. They wore this on their hands.

T2: You put your hand into that?

R44: Yes. It is well placed. One cannot easily take this from you. With one beat the enemy will die. If you give me a punch I will be hurt. Even a wall can be broken with this.

T2: It was like exhibitionary wrestling.

R44: People used to fight with this. Malluku Chetti was huge those days.

I1: For example, take this object, how did you find out what this is for? Did you read?

R44: Malluku Chetti is a group of people, the present generation of that community doesn't know the importance of this material. They throw it in scraps. Once I walked across that scrap shop, I accidentally saw this armour there. And I bought this for 100 rupees. You cannot easily pluck that out from your hand. It could be used in cinemas for stunt scenes. These are 350 years old.

T2: How do you know about the story of Malluku Chetti?

R44: I made few enquiries and got such information. There is this Maratha Museum; it has some paintings on it. There people wear this on their hand.

T2: This is worn in the right hand, right?

R44: Yes. In the left hand they will hold a shield, I didn't get it. In Tamil we call it "Vajra Mushti"

T2: This is what you hold right hand. In the left hand there is a shield which he did not get.

R44: I had it before. Later I gifted it to my friend. This is what you use to break betel nuts. They put the betel leaves and nuts into it and grind. And this thing is used to cut the betel nuts.

T2: You vaguely see it. How do you connect this with the picture?

R44: I saw it earlier. And there is another piece in Maratha museum, it is its replica. This is a whistle. It is a grand old whistle. From 1899. It is a police whistle.

I1: Is there a problem with fakes or replicas? How do you know that the things you collect are genuine?

R44: Because we are experienced we find out the fake from the original. Even in metals like gold and silver we will find the fake ones. I have gone to all museums and have seen nearly 50 lakh coins in Tamil Nadu. So I will definitely find the fake ones. Next to me is (R9).

I1: Do you think there are many fake coins now?

R44: Yes. There are lots of fake coins now. Many fake coins are made in Bangalore.

T2: Even Tamil coins?

R44: Yes. If that is a rare coin they will prepare it daily.

T2: How do they come to know about that coin?

R44: They have the model in photographs. Once I put the coins in print the rates of the coins increase. Once I explain the coins to the people here, its amount gets increased. If that particular coin is in the R44's book, coin's value gets increased. People do not know to explain the coins, they just give evidences.

T2: It is because they do not do the research, they do not explain the coins. If it is important, they say because it is said by R44 it is important. They use him as a guide.

T2: Do you know the people who are making the fake coins in Bangalore.

R44: No. That is a big risk knowing them.

T2: Just to meet and speak with them?

R44: No. They don't meet you. If you know and tell others their whereabouts, they will be in risk. They will be soon caught and heavy punishment will be given for them.

I1: It sounds like you have very good relationship with museum and university but do you ever had any problems with authorities?

R44: I had no such experiences. In this field, everyone accepts my viewpoints. I argue and speak openly. So I had no bitter experiences. I have an important role in the development of Tamil Nadu numismatics. I take care of everything from taking lectures and made many power point presentations. I have explained all the details about the Sangam

A. Lawson

age to British coins and also explained the rare coins of all dynasties.

This is a lamp and this is a weight which is 75 years old. It is called *paavai vilakku*.

T2: How old is this?

R44: Some hundred years.

T2: Is this Meenakshi (indicating an oil lamp in the form of a goddess)?

R44: Yes. It is Goddess Meenakshi with a parrot.

I1: Where does this come from?

R44: From Kumbakonam.

T2: You get it from old houses or do you buy it from shops?

R44: We get these from houses. Particularly it is from my friend's house. This belongs to Chola period. The upper part is used to benzoin (like incense sticks). Inside is used as a lamp. This is used by young princes in Maratha period. It is 250 years old.

I1: What about your relationship with ASI?

R44: I don't have acquaintance with the new person there, Maheshwari. I am closely associated with the old persons there like Sathyabama, Sathyamoorthi, Dayalan, Narasimmaiah, Sharma, Margabandu. Now I am always involved in research and I have no time to visit ASI. You know Raja Velu, he is good friend of mine for some thirty years. I will often go there to meet him. But now he is here, he probably will be here tomorrow. They are planning to inaugurate a diploma course on numismatics in Tamil University. They asked me to research and plan for that. He (Raja Velu) is the head of underwater archaeology department.

FN: Some conversation about our fieldwork plans for next couple of days

T2: Do you know anyone in the antique shop near Thanjavur Palace?

R44: As far as I know, they do not explain things properly. They are very much involved in business. If you go there as a buyer, they will show some interest on you. They are not interested in research. There is a Tamil University museum here. There is a person named Durasendharan, assistant professor and in charge, who is working under Selvakumar, HOD. He will definitely help you. Please meet him

in the afternoon. And there is a bronze Chola gallery, Saraswathi Mahal, two museums of Maratha.

I1: One of the things I have noticed in the museums of Tamil Nadu, there is very much a focus on Bronze and Sculpture.

R44: Tamil Nadu is very much famous for bronze sculptures. The reason is mainly those valuables must not be stolen. In the name of visiting museums some may steal it in fraction of a second. Then they must bear the cost. The punishment of not maintaining proper accounts will lead them to suspension. So they only showcase the bronze idols which people can watch and go any time. Moreover they have installed surveillance cameras everywhere. If it is not bronze, it must be preserved with tight security all the time.

T2: Do they have things other than bronze?

R44: Yeah. They may have one or two small things. They won't show it to all. If you get proper permission, they may show you. In Chennai division, Ms. Vasanthi is in charge. If you get permission from her, they will show you all the articles in the museum. Next to Chennai museum, Pudukottai museum is the best. It is a big one. Who told you this place? Is that Selva? But he told that there is someone coming from Bangalore.

T2: Yes, I am working in Bangalore.

R44: Ok. Have you met (R8) in Karaikudi?

T2: Yes, this person (I1) went.

R44: At that time, they called me and said that some people are here to research on antiques. I have met him in World Tamil conferences and Classical conference. He is a senior, right?

T2: I introduced him to her. It's a small group of people. So everyone knows each other.

R44: In Madras University too, the people who worked earlier really worked hard, but not the people who are working now. People are very much involved professionally. They don't involve themselves in research. I will show you some **coins**.

T2: It is a palm leaf...

R44: These are collected from riverbeds and are 800 years old.

I1: Is this for writing?

R44: Yes, people used to write on palm leaves. This is the first script in grantha and it is 150-200 years old. See how they have written in scripts. First letter is the initial. Most Chettiars write their names even in small objects like pen.

I1: Yeah. I have seen in all the pots in many shops.

R44: Yes. They will write in all glasses and wooden articles.

I1: Is this Chettiar tradition?

R44: Yes. No one, other than their family can use it.

I1: Is this cup from Karaikudi area?

R44: No. Kumbakonam. This is from Tanjore riverbed. These are terracotta articles from early Chola period.

I1: Which type of object is getting more popular?

R44: Today, people are more interested in coins. The reason may be because it is easier to handle. Once, after collecting some pieces from river bed, there was a heavy rain. In that rain those pieces collapsed. Likewise, once I bought two potteries and when I washed it, it broke down. These are used by kings.

I1: Are these from old Chola kings?

R44: Yes.

T2: Where do we get these types of chairs?

R44: These are bought in Kariakudi. These are here for two generations. If you sit on these chairs, you won't get back pain. These are potteries, weightless.

I1: This is also Chola?

R44: later... Nayaks period.

I1: Are complete pots like this rare?

R44: Yes. These lightweight potteries are rare. You will get it in pieces.

T2: Where are these from?

I1: Nayak?

R44: We can attribute it to late Cholas some 500- 600 years old.

I1: this kind of complete potteries, are they very expensive?

R44: It can be rated to 200-300 rupees.

I1: Is there any market for broken pots?

R44: Only exhibitions and museums will use these kinds of pots. But there may be no resale value. If it is a good piece in good condition, we can sell it at any period.

T2: even museums will buy it?

R44: Very rarely. Private museums will buy it. I can't surely tell about government museums. They will buy it at very low cost. It is wooden.

I1: Is this old or recent?

R44: Old one. This is made of rosewood. This is 400 years old.

FN: Some talk between R44 and T3 about people they know in Chennai.

R44: One of my friends (R7) is there (Chennai). He is also collecting a lot.

I1: What do you think of current legislation? Do you think it is useful?

R44: It is useful if everything is original. There are many fake coins now. Other than this no one is following the rules. In Tamil Nadu the rules go like this. An idol with more than nine inches height must be registered. Next registration must be done for having copper plates, ivory and long size swords. Apart from this there is no strict legislation.

There is another rule that things obtained from more than one foot deep must be informed. But in riverbeds we collect coins at surface levels. In that case nobody needs to follow rules as there are many persons now involved in coin collection. There was an act in 1973, that all coins must be registered. At that time, all coins were sold to us for cheap rates because to register a coin we need to spend 50 rupees.

T2: When there was an act saying that all coins must be registered people sold their coins in sacks. Each coin is sold for 25 paise or 50 paise. To register a coin it needs some 50 rupees.

R44: Including recording and paper cost. Those days they recorded some 50 coins per day. It includes the salary paid for officers. So they stopped registering coins. For example, if you had 50 different coins, you can say that you collected it from different places and escape. But you had 50 coins of the same variety you will be caught, as it equals to a kind of stealing.

I1: What do you eventually do with your collections? Will you donate it?

R44: I will give it to universities or private museums. The problem with government museums is that particular curator will write our names for those donated articles. If another curator comes, he will remove our names. This is another portrait and it is very rare.

T2: There is only one piece like this in Tamil Nadu.

R44: This is what we call Kamadhenu. This has animal body and human head. Different hair dress.

T2: Is it not the Lord Krishna?

R44: It did not look like Krishna. But if you look the hairstyle it seems like Lord Krishna. Yes, it seems like toddler Krishna. This is Aalilai Kannan (Krishna in a leaf). These are what I did for school functions.

I1: This is also for school children.

R44: Yes.

I1: Do you think currently the interest in archaeology and history is great in Tamil Nadu?

R44: It is comparatively less these days.

I1: And that is why you want to show these things in schools?

R44: Apart from that my son is also interested. I want this tradition to continue.

I1: That is nice. So you can also pass some of your collection to him.

R44: I have separate things for him and I will give him in the future.

I1: Is he also interested in coins or in different things?

R44: He is interested in coins as well as sports. This is Veeraraya Panam.

I1: This is the one!! Wow! Tell him about this (small gold fanam coin similar to that found on a south Devon beach by a metal detector).

T2: We both did a project in UK. There are some people whose hobby is to detect metals in ground.

R44: This is Maratha fanam.

T2: They are doing research there. We met a person there and he had this coin there on the beach.

R44: It might have gone from here through trade. This is a seal written Marudhanayagam Pillai on it.

I1: This side, there is a script.

R44: There is a script. It is written Palani and a thumb impression on it. It is double-sided. There is ruby in it.

T2: Who will wear this?

R44: Anyone can wear this. This is Sangam Chera.

I1: How old roughly is this coin?

R44: This is 400 years old.

I1: Is this only specific to south India?

R44: It was found in all the places of South India. This is Siri Pudhu Salama coin written as Siri Pudhu Maveesa.

T2: What is in the front side?

R44: Bow and arrow. And this is a Chinese coin. This is a ring used for identification. In olden days spies used it to reveal their secret identity. It has both gents and ladies' figures.

I1: Have you found any of these rings, so R9 showed me his collection of bull rings.

R44: Saivites worship by wearing this ring.

T2: This is an ordinary ring, right?

R44: This is Siri, Pudhumaveesa. This is Pallava, back side is Srivatsa.

T2: Do you find more Pallava coins?

R44: Yeah we will get Pallava coins. The rate of a coin is 2000 rupees.

I1: It is more expensive.

R44: This is Kemp, Ruby.

I1: Is Pallava, the most expensive coins?

R44: Yes, Pallava and Sangam age coins are more expensive.

T2: It is expensive because, it is old?

R44: No the script is very rare. This is Sadhakani.

I1: Which is the most common coin?

R44: Ordinary Chola. But the coins of other varieties of Chola are very rare.

T2: I know it. Because we have lots of Chola coins.

R44: The market rate of a Chola coin is 20-25 rupees. It is thousand years old. But if it is the coin of other varieties of Chola, one copper coin costs 2000-3000 rupees. They are special commemorative coins. This is a Kushana coin. This is copper *panchama* coin.

T2: Is this silver?

R44: No, it is gold. There are coins with fifty touch. It means 50% gold and 50% silver. This coin is seventy-five to eighty touch.

T2: And this?

R44: These are 20 carat and this is 14 carat.

T2: Are these from Vijayanagara?

R44: Both from Vijayanagar and Hoyshalas. Both have common symbols. But only with the script we can identify it properly.

T2: What is this?

R44: These are Maratha fanam. Tahanjavur Maratha.

T2: If you come the next time with printed photographs of things, you can get clear explanation from him because if the script is not there, it is difficult for him to read.

I1: I can remember what is exactly written on the coin.

T2: you can draw and show him.

R44: This line standing is the mythic line actually.

I1: It was almost exactly like this.

T2: The coin which we found in UK.

R44: For which I have given a whole book.

T2: Actually he is happy to have that coin.

R44: This shows the Sulipanam of Madurai. One lady, Barbara Mears of England has studied this coin. This is Arcot Nawab coin of Wallajah. This is French coin, Puducherry. Samaravolahalan.

I1: This is Islamic?

R44: Arcot Nawab's. Delhi Sultanate. Sethupathi. It is a clear script reading Rajaraja, the great Chola king. This coin has Rajagopala Sami on one side and Vijayaraghava Nayaks on the other. You asked for Thanjavur coins. Look in this book. It is a book of Dillip Chakrabarti. It has all photographs.

T2: Actually I am very much interested in it. It tells that they used some pipes.

R44: Yes, the models are in Maratha museum. We did that first in 1988-89.

T2: Where do you find that?

R44: From the ground. All are terracotta pipes.

T2: Are these used for water supply?

R44: Yes, for water supply in Sivagangai.

I1: This one?

R44: It is Mauryan punched coin.

I1: Is this from North India?

R44: It is found in Tamilnadu. But you can also get it from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, even in Sri Lanka. There are die with five and six punches. They are found separate and combined.

T2: Seven is the maximum.

R44: They are found in North India. Here we would find five and four.

I1: These coins are all found in Tamil Nadu?

R44: Yes, in Tamil Nadu. Here is Thirumalai Nayaker and his wife.

I1: I would easily loose coins like this.

R44: Definitely. Handling coins like these are different. In olden days they will use it along with their waist belts or chains. Those belts had pockets in which they store tiny coins.

T2: Some people have this silver like tube on their neck and other places.

I1: I thought it was to be used for prayers or something?

T2: In those tubes they put these coins. You wear it on the hip and open it, gives those coins to others.

R44: These are smaller coins than this. There is a gold Chola coins which weigh only 90 milligrams. It is the world's smallest coin in script.

T2: Where is it now?

R44: I have it. It is like copper coins.

I1: Is there much interaction between different parts of India? I mean amongst the researchers like you?

R44: I have interactions within south India like Karnataka and Andhra. All are research based. They will get photos from me and publish it as books without my permission. So I avoided such relationships.

T2: Are they collector-come-researchers?

R44: Mostly these people collect to do research. But after doing documentation, they will sell those coins. This is a ring of Chola period.

I1: Oh this is made of gold.

R44: Yeah. *Aimpadaithalai* ring 1.2 gram of gold. *Aimpadai* means five types of armies like horse, elephant, soldiers... this is Gadhai, Sword, Bow, *Sangu* (shell) and *Chakra* (wheel). It is tied to children for bravery. I exhibited it. All are thousand years old.

Audio-recording stops here. The following is transcribed from hand written fieldnotes:

R44: This came up for sale for 8000 rupees. It's very rare. I took a picture of it because I couldn't afford to buy it. Then somebody else published it and its now been bought by one of Lilly Vijayaraghavan's relatives. It's left the country. I think it has been sold for 5 lakh. Rings and seals – these have all left the country.

I1: Do coins also leave the country?

R44: Everything, there's nothing that doesn't. I think only 20% of historical remains are in the country, around 80% outside. Mainly with Indo-Europeans and Europeans. Because so many coins are in foreign museums. They are safe, yes. But it's not something I can reach. It's not possible to spend that much time if the coins I want to see are in five different countries.

I1: Where can I meet other people like you?

R44: You don't find anyone. Today it's all about money and nobody wants to help. Last 20 years it's been like that. Younger generation has come and messed it up. Earlier we were looking for coins in good condition and the main driving force was looking for something interesting and unique to research and publish. But now, everybody wants a rare coin because of the monetary value more than anything else. Foreign researchers only interested in Roman, Greek and Chinese coins in India. I collect only coins from Tamil Nadu, not from other places in India. There is no end to them. This will all come out in a few years in a book. I want to collate all my research and collection into a publication.

A42) B: 23/04/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R45

Language: English

Duration: 01:03:16

Context: I have researched R45 online and the M.Rm.Rm Cultural Foundation online, and made an appointment to see her through her secretary. Arrived at 10:30 in her shop/office. She meets me whilst I was browsing around the shop selling Kottan's, and takes me to her office. She apologises for the mess and says how busy she always is. I explain to her once again who I am and what I'd like to talk about.

FN: Before answering any questions, and before I have a chance to turn on the audio recorder, she wants to tell me how important she thinks culture is, that she thinks culture is a way of life, as much about the intangible elements and the tangible, and how it is in danger of disappearing. 'Now foreigners are coming over to England and telling us how important our culture is'. – She thinks this is a very sad situation. She asks a member of staff to bring me water and coffee and asks for a buttermilk for herself. She is polite throughout the interview, but I have the impression that she feels this is just another chore on her list of things to get done in the day. When I leave, there is somebody else waiting outside to meet with her.

I1: How did this antique market start in Chettinad and why in Chettinad, when we have such culture and antiques all over India.

R45: That is because the Chettiars travelled all over the world and they were major collectors. If I'm honest I will say there is no Chettinad style. Its an amalgamation of several styles which they have taken from other countires wherever they have travelled.

FN: She gets a call and says , 'that's a good omen, that was an antique dealer from Karaikudi'.

R45: So when you travel to Europe or Thailand and see the houses, you're shocked because you feel like you've seen it somewhere before. But what happened when they brought the wood to Karaikudi, the local craftsmen also put their own style onto it.

I1: How directly involved were the chettiers involved in the design of their houses?

R45: Very involved. There were no architects. They had masons and they followed a science called *manasasram*. There were certain forms and measurements pre-defined. But though every house is similar, still every house has something different. The decorative ideas have all come from other places. The temple art in South India has a distinct style and some of that comes into the houses. But they also changed things – e.g. instead of Hindu gods they had King George or someone. When I was making the book (*The Chettiar Heritage*) I went with the photographer. We went round. We found that the very, very old houses have none of the extravagant design they are very simple. The women have a flair for quality control. If they go to a shop to buy a vessel to cook rice, even that they'll check and make sure it's the best quality and best finish.

I1: So why did so much accumulate there?

R45: All vessels, chests etc., it is to do with the tradition of dowry. The community is regimental in its rules. Today things are more confused and the young people are not ready to live like that anymore. But in those days when a woman got married she had to take to her husband's home everything she may need for the rest of her life – could be pots, cupboards, vessels, teaspoons, even brooms. All beautifully presented. Presentation was a very big thing for them, and how they displayed everything, all that is really an art. Each one trying to do better than the other. So they collected a lot depending on number of children and status and money. Today it's called dowry but we called it *Sree Danam*, means woman's wealth. They were married young, so you don't have the humiliation of having to ask for any household items, everything provided. Given money also, which would be invested by the husband/family, But it remained the woman's own

money. I think in those days women were more financially independent that they are now. My mothers and her mothers generation were dynamic women. Nobody could tell them what to do. And that came from owning all this. They were given jewellery also. So all these things were stored in rooms. Mother in law had to give them rooms.

Supposing she was one of 3 brothers wives, she would get that portion of the house. And all the *Sree Daman* property will be stored there. At the wedding they'll display everything. It was pride to show what they have collected, or also in order that there were witnesses to what has been given over. When the older woman passes away, what's left of her dowry is divided between her daughters. Now no one wants all of this anymore, but in those days they used to collect. It was a major form of art collection. You should have seen them go into the stores to choose. The quality control and choosing was so perfect. And they would always have in mind how it will look when it is displayed. As a child I would go with my aunts and mother to the shops and I learnt a lot from them. Today every time I display, every time I do an exhibition, every time I do a brides dowry I think of my aunt because I learnt all this from her. Choosing, quality control, so perfect.

I1: Did they favour particular things from particular places?

R45: Yes, yes and there's a name for everything. There are brass things from everywhere, but there are particular ones from Pune – it's a Pune tumbler. So every time someone was travelling somewhere they would request so many items of this or that. They were very particular about where to buy what. And that would be the best. So that is the story of how all these things got collected there. After that, the sad part. Now no one is interested in these things, they don't want to look after it. Also particular time when the Chettiar businesses lost everything in Burma. Then later the lost out here in Indian business too. So when you needed money you had to sell something. You don't want to sell your land or jewellery so you sell these things. Then the houses started going. Now they've gone back to becoming professionals, businesses, manufacturing - they are doing well financially but they don't want to keep the houses. At one point they let go, now to get it back and do the

houses in a good style is very difficult. It's a nuisance. Most of the younger generation are not living in the houses, they are in US, Australia, new Zealand, Singapore. So now the only ones left are the old people, and they can't manage or maintain the houses – it's too difficult. One side they needed money, and the other side they just wanted small box houses. The peculiarity is that they don't want to leave that place. They would rather break the house and build four small ones in its place.

I1: Are the nine community temples an important part of that tendency?

R45: You'll find that people of one temple will settle together. They don't want to leave the security of living together. So they don't want to give up the space but they will give up the house. So that's how these antique shops and trade came into being.

I1: Do you know when the trade started?

R45: Yes, I have always been interested in antiques. I think the first time I went into an antique shop was 30 years ago, and it was just beginning.

I1: Many of the antique dealers I have interviewed spoke of a decline in foreign trade but an increase in Indian trade. Is that something you've noticed?

R45: For me back then something cost 2000 rupees and it was expensive/out of reach because I was young and I didn't have money. Now I have money but it's still out of reach, maybe the price has gone up to 2 lakhs. I used to collect a lot. It was a passion for me. I collected for Dakshinachitra. I used to feel terrible that it's going away. I would rather buy it and keep it at least in the country. And also it wouldn't look right in that context. But at that time it was a matter of affordability, and those you could afford it would pay. Today Indians are spending a lot. They all want Chettinad houses, it's become a big style suddenly in the last 10 years. Slowly it's gathered. There are hundreds of people asking me 'can you get me Chettinad pillars'. And it's already broken, it's already brought to the shop so why not buy it. But I feel bad. I feel very sad to see this. But there's nothing we can do about it. But this antique thing was real at one stage, now so much is fake. I can tell

because I've been with this for a long time. But see on one hand I'm trying to do craft revival – with the *kotans*. So if someone can revive a craft and copy it so well, I should call him a bigger revivalist than me right? But the only thing is, they shouldn't try and say it is an antique. I've tried telling them that their product is so good they should be able to be honest and sell it. But they say that some customers will only want it if its age is antique so what can we do. So now people from Delhi and Bombay come and buy lakhs and take containers full. And Trivandram – I went there trying to buy some Chettinad things. Everything I saw there was Chettinad. Nothing Keralan.

I1: Has the trade increased or decreased in the last 30 years?

R45: When you talk about the pillars and doors its increased. And those are real. You can't fake them. When you make a pillar or door like that it will cost you ten times more. Because of the carving and the type of wood. But if you're talking about an antique painting or a chair, 90% of them are fakes. There's very very little left. Increased interest in 'Chettinad' everything – food, style etc. I get so many calls everyday. Asking if I can get Chettinad pillars. It's against my thing to go and buy pillars, so I cannot do it.

I1: What about your organisation MrMrM? How did that come about?

R45: I was always interested and passionate about all these things. Craft is very important to me. I worked with Dakshinachitra, with Crafts Council. I've been doing weaving for a long time with weavers and I've made a name for them. Sometimes when I have an exhibition I've sold 100 saris in a day. But overtime my interest has become more serious because it's worrying. I'm very worried. When I would go on trips sometimes the third or fourth time I saw a house it had disappeared, or something had been broken or removed. So if in four years it can disappear to this extent, what will happen in the future. So I started the foundation. The first thing I focused on was the baskets – its been very successful – documentation and revival. So this is what im trying to do with all the crafts. One is architecture. I've a done a monogram of my house. And one thing is cookery. We're bringing out a book soon on chettinad cookery – authentic, not the sort you get in these

restaurants., Then Athangudi tiles. Sari's. I've done a design directory of 200 saris. So somewhere along the way my work has changed. I realised when working with the basket weavers, why does a craft die? It dies because there is no use for it anymore, there is no living to be made out of it. So when I started doing the revival it cannot be only a craft revival project it has to be a sustainable livelihood projects, otherwise it will just die again. So it has to be made into a marketable product that can be marketed today. We get lots of orders. And the women earn 6-7,000 rupees per month. The saris also everything gets sold. Another reason crafts die is they don't get respect. They don't get the same respect as an office worker. So all craftspeople want recognition. In mass production it becomes anonymous which makes them very sad. Otherwise is becomes a [inaudible] craft. Just one person sitting and making it and selling it for 20,000 rupees, it becomes 'art'.

I1: Tangible and intangible heritage. Do you see a distinction or difference in importance?

R45: Both are very important. I feel culture is a way of behaviour, a way of life. And it used to be distinct in those days. Especially in a country like India, where every few miles your in a different state, a different language and different behavioural backgrounds. So first of all, being courteous and polite. It is a very Indian or Asian thing, which is slowly going. We are becoming so westernised. We are trying to ape the westerners. We are learning all the wrong things from them and giving up all the good things. So I'm saying, you learn whatever is necessary from modern living, there's no harm in it, but don't give up what you already have. Like Yoga started here but today we have to get a Japanese or American teacher to come. Don't appreciate it until its been appreciated by others and come back to us. When you loose your culture this is what will happen. Familiarity breeds contempt. When it is with you and always easy and free you somehow loose respect for it. But when it becomes hard and when you have to go to New York and learn how to do Yoga then it becomes very respectable. And if you have to pay thousands of dollars to get it then, but if you can

get it free here then your not interested. Hospitality, it's a famous Indian culture, especially here, when someone enters your house you say *vanga* [means 'come' or 'welcome' in Tamil]. It's very simple, doesn't cost you anything, but even that is going. We still have it lots more in Chettinad than anywhere else as far as I can see, but still its going. Necessity to be courteous is really going. But I'm glad to say in Chettinad its coming back.

I1: Why?

R45: I think our book had a lot to do with it. There has been a revival. Just after the book there was a lot of resentment. People saying, how can you write this? But on the day of the release, I could see the pride in the people who were watching. And slowly over time I can see there has been a resurrection. Sometimes exaggerated, over the top, but I'm happy at least there is a consciousness of being proud of what you were, what you had. And everything has its value. You take what is good from it. Don't kill everything. Herbal medicine etc. Now it's all coming back. There used to be a rule that you could eat non-veg only on Wednesdays and Saturdays. And you had an oil bath only on those days. There is a lot of meaning in all this. We are ignorant. Because I do not know why it was done I cannot condemn it as stupid. I have to find out why it was done. So I think nothing was done meaninglessly, depended on climate of the place, the clothes. Etc. For example, colour of clothes, in Kerala it's white, in Chettinad it's colourful to compensate for lack of colour in the environment. Now the revival of south Indian culture, for example food, the trend for Western or Punjabi food, now all the papers say the best food you can eat for your health is south Indian veg. We don't have to follow anything blindly, but cant we at least make an attempt to find out. Let people choose whether they want to follow it or not. When I was trying to find out I found it hard to get any documentation. So I have made documentation my main thing.

I1: What does heritage mean to you?

R45: Its very important. It's a passion. It's not only my heritage. It can be anywhere in India or in the world. Especially in India because I can relate to it more. I love to know how people lived, what they had what

they wore. At the moment I'm reading about the Mughal Emperors. How interesting to learn how much knowledge they had. We think we are discovering things without understanding it was already there and we lost it. Nothing is new. I tell all these girls who work with me. Even in design nothing is new... everything has already been done. There is nothing you can say 'this is my original design'. Everything is already there. You can change it a little, you can use it differently, you can make it give you another idea. But nothing is original. And if you go through your history and heritage properly you will realise this is true. And it's a very precious and wonderful thing. In philosophy, medicine, architecture, food. There is nothing we can do but confuse what is already there and keep on circulating it. So if I ask you, if it is necessary to learn history, why is it not necessary to learn heritage. What is the difference? Those are events, this is a way of life. But both are intertwined. And I think heritage is very important. Just as you can make a hundred designs out of one design, you can do a hundred things by knowing what is already there. For me heritage is a passion. Two things: tangible and intangible. I think younger generation are losing respect for elders. The young people can be whatever they are, rise to any heights, but if they remember the basic values. You can see a degeneration of people all over the world. The calibre of people has come down drastically. Honesty is not so important anymore. I'm just saying if you followed some of these old traditions you might not do half these things. I was brought up in an older generation. I might be feeling irritated and not really want to be talking to you. But you never show it. You are polite and you try to get over it as quickly as possible without upsetting the apple cart. So that is what I'm saying is heritage, the intangible part: manners, respect for elders etc. So advancement is fine but you don't have to give up what is good. Don't claim your rights without doing your duty – all that is part of culture but each country is losing its culture very fast, especially India in the last two decades. I feel sad for it. It doesn't cost anything. Individuality has been lost. We are all going to look like clones soon, all wearing Punjabi salwar.

A. Lawson

Hotels, shops etcetera, everything looks the same. Individuality has gone. I feel sad I feel we are losing some very beautiful thing.

FN: Talks about how things have evolved eg. clothes and styles and tradition evolved out of something different before it, and are still evolving.

R45: So sometimes I wonder am I right to be so passionately against it? Is it wrong to change in any way? That is also an argument. So this is a sari, this is from Daka. You just have to feel it to know it's from Daka.

I1: Why do people collect antiques?

R45: There are different types of people. Those who think its fashionable, those who do it for investment or profit, and the people like me who love antiques but cant afford the very expensive things. So I love to rummage through the antique shops and find small things that are not too expensive.

I1: Do you think the trade in Chettinad antiques has been a positive or negative thing?

R45: It's getting people in, but they are breaking Chettinad into small bits and taking it all away. Without contributing anything to Chettinad they are taking everything away from there. I get annoyed when I see these dealers and the way they buy things. So you feel sad. I feel sad. I don't think it's a wonderful thing at all. But then these people need the money, they want to sell. But they buy it for a song. They hardly pay them anything and they sell it for a lot of money.

VERBAL CONSENT.

A43) B: 27/04/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R46

Language: English

Duration: 00:23:37

Context: R46 is an artist and an art teacher. She has previously accompanied me on a visit to Karaikudi (see I3), as she particularly wanted to visit Chettinad for the architecture and the antiques. While there she purchased an antique brass hanging-lamp, which is now hanging in her living room. Much of her furniture is antique and she has various antique ornaments display along with her own artwork. Interview took place at R46's house in Chennai on a Sunday afternoon. Her husband and child were present. It was a social/informal visit that turned into an interview. I was served food and drinks and stayed for over 3 hours.

R46: I am an artist – painting is a major thing. Apart from that I love keep my house with very antique finished works has to be there – whether wooden or bronze. Very ethnic traditional things has to be there. Wherever I go, wherever I get it it will be completely designed for this. I make sure whatever I buy it will be wood, bronze like that.

I1: Where you influenced by your parents in this?

R46: Maybe, but not in terms of material, but perhaps in the sense that I favour things from previous generations. Maybe I've seen those things. Whatever I have it is 100 to 150 years old. This is a swing. Everything is my Grandmothers, which she got from her father.

I1: So you inherited them?

R46: Yes. So a few things I bought second hand/ old market, like the lamp – so these are all teak or rosewood not countrywood. I am so particular about the wood. I don't go for the other woods. If it's another wood it has to be some carving or has some tradition or history on it.

I1: When you buy these things will you ask about the material/history etc.?

R46: Yes I do

I1: Are they normally able to tell you?

R46: Yes. They can tell you the age of the wood and sometimes type. They cant always tell if its rosewood or teak because of the colour/treatment. So I will take along an expert who will know what

wood it is. And I should check the solidity. It should not be flimsy. And some carving, some traditional work should be there.

I1: Is the monetary value of these things important to you?

R46: Yes if I buy for 5000 now it won't fall in value. If I want to sell it after 10 years it will either be worth the same or more. But I don't buy things to sell. Many people buy for the selling purpose. But as much as possible I'll make sure it is with me till the end.

I1: Will you pass it on?

R46: Yes I would like to pass it to my son. But I can't force it on him. If my son is not interested I will give it to the person who is really interested. We have a dream house which will be designed only for these things. Otherwise if he is getting married he can use these things. A heritage house could use these things, or a guesthouse.

I1: Is there a particular aspect of history that interests you when you buy these things?

R46: I don't know much about the history of these things, but it has to be like mostly, whatever I have got from my grandfather and his father, they have got from the Mughal period. So he was under the Mughal period and he has got all these things. So when I see these things I think of how they have used them – just a lovely experience. We just think and dream like that, that they have all used it. I don't have that feeling that someone has used it and I am going to use it again (negative emphasis) like second hand goods. I don't have that feeling at all. Mostly people don't buy the second hand goods because someone else has used it, but when I go to plays also I can go into that place, era. I have that nostalgia.

I1: Imagination?

R46: Imagination. Might be that some Mughals have sat on this. So all these memories make me interested when I see these goods.

I1: Do you have any favourite/special pieces?

R46: More important is my grandmothers bureau/cupboard. It's a rosewood one. And this lamp from Karaikudi. Because after buying it, the heaviness is very good in it, if you see I never knew about the name of that. Only after buying it I came to learn about the history. A

A. Lawson

few times it happens like that. Only I admired the shape and the form. After I come to know about it – it adds to the value. The name of it is *tunga-veleku*. *Veleku* means lamp. *Tunga* means never-sleeping. Always awake lamp. According to the direction of the air that lamp will be rotated. Also it's very close to us when you buy it from our own land/state it has so much of history. It's not about the broadness, and from where else I went and picked up all these things. When our own country, our own place has so much of heritage. So it adds a value for me.

I1: So are many of the things you have from Tamil Nadu?

R46: Yes most from Tamil Nadu.

I1: Do you also collect anything from abroad or anywhere else in India?

R46: Not so much. If it's from abroad I'll go for the traditional art. If it's from outside my state I'll go mostly for folk/tribal art. I'm interested in sculptures. Not the 2D work. Because when I see 2D work I think that maybe I can do that. That feel comes off. So I go for the 3D objects like sculptures.

I1: How much did you pay for the lamp?

R46: Rupees 1500.

I1: Did you have to bargain for it?

R46: Yes he told 1500, I bargained and got it for 1,100. It's too heavy. If you want to get it they sell it for the weight only. Not for the form, not for the sculpture, not for the historical aspects. You just have to weigh it for the price. But if you weigh this one it will come to more than that. It's too heavy.

I1: So this is cheaper than its weight value?

R46: Yes. So it also has a history. Its kept in the temples, not in the houses.

I1: Why do you think it might be selling for less than its metal value?

R46: It might be that not many people are willing to buy this one. Because it's in the temple. Most of them they don't buy it. It was lucky I got this one. Sometimes they will reduce the price on one object and increase the price on some other object. So between two or three items

it will average out. That will be beneficial when you bargain like that. If you buy two or three things.

I1: Have you ever had to sell any of your antiques?

R46: No. I don't even gift it [laughs]. I always take very close care of the antique things when leaving or shifting my house.

I1: What do you look for in the things you buy/collect – what sort of things – decorative things?

R46: I love bells. Bells and lamps.

I1: Where do you tend to get them?

R46: Whenever I go to some place or pass through I will set aside one day to look for such things. Whenever I go to someplace the first question I ask is what is famous from there? What is the importance of that place? The same craft may be found all over, but quality, detail, material will differ from place to place. So if it's very good I will buy it from there.

I1: How do you think of these things? What words would you use? I use the word antique but would you?

R46: Yes. This lamp you can't call an antique. It's just a vintage. But the people who come from outside they call it an antique. Only after 500 years we can say it's an antique.

I1: In the Indian legislation its 100 years after which something can be deemed an 'antiquity'.

R46: [laughs] oh then many things are antique here!

I1: Are there any words in Tamil that have a similar meaning to antique?

R46: *palum perum polurum* [she is not sure of the word and has to ask her husband for confirmation].

I1: But this is not a common term?

R46: Not at all. In the colloquial speech we will just say the equivalent of 'its very old' or how many years. Or the history as in where we got it from. People won't ask us when they come here whether it is an antique. Where did you buy they ask, and how many years, and the material. Then last it comes about the cost. No one has asked is it an antique. This word has not been used here at all.

I1: What about the word heritage?

R46: Not at all. It's very far from us.

I1: Is there any other way in which people talk in Tamil about the idea of heritage? As in, something important passed down?

R46: Yes my friends they will say - tell people who come that this was my Grandmothers.

I1: But there's no specific word/term that is the same as heritage?

R46: No. The years are very powerful for them. To say its 100 years old, that's powerful. Nowadays people are going for the modern things, lower price, they don't specify materials. Readymade things, like fast food, they want it.

I1: What about replica things? Antique look or finish on modern made things?

R46: There are classes who go for it. It's not about the interest. There are classes, it's designed only for them, because it's too costly. The higher class only it's for them. You can't see any teak wood products for the middle class. Because of the cost, the bureau and a few things, have to be given for the marriage, so that will be passed on. So they will have a budget, and whatever comes within the budget they will get. If you have 1 lakh budget you will not get teak wood. So they go for steel and plywoods and all. But the higher class are demanding for it. Me and my friends have started some teak wood showroom here. It comes from Indonesia, but the main ideology is that teak wood should reach for everyone. See if you buy a cedar set it doesn't last for ten years. But if you buy teak, solid, it will definitely last for fifty years. So the company idea was that. It comes directly from the factory so you don't have to raise the profit level too high. For that we went for a survey report of existing teak wood businesses – they operate on 100% profit and their target is only the higher classes. I think in Karaikudi you asked one shop person 'do you have these things at home?' but he said 'no, who will care for it, we don't maintain it'. In that way only we got this lamp, because he doesn't know.

I1: Also because its from the temple?

R46: Yes usually if it's from the temple they won't take it. I don't know what the reason is. The shapes are different from the temple lamps to the house lamps also. This one has to be given for the marriage and has to be in the puja room. The Kerala lamps have a different shape. So the shapes differ and tell about where you come from. This lamp is very unique; you won't find this shape anywhere, neither from Kerala nor Tamil Nadu.

I1: What about the antiques from North India, do they have much popularity here?

R46: Yes the furniture actually is quite good and some of the carvings. But this sort of lamp and brass thing, I don't think you can beat the south Indian look. In the north India you will see more influences of the Persians, Mughals, in the wood and carving. So when I went to Assam, I wanted some bamboo works and some tribal terracotta works. When they make it there they don't even know they just talk as they make it. It's not an artwork there it's a practice. So from there only I want to get it.

I1: Do you think it's important to protect some old things?

R46: Very important, collecting materials and maintaining that way. It is changing but some other way we can know from where we have come, and what our interest is. We don't know what our parents' interest was, where they came from. At least this is the way we will know about our ancestors. This is the way they were living. So it will be making your life interesting and you will also know the root of your family tree. So when we went to see those Karaikudi houses it was sooooo good. People where there, they migrated, money has come, because of the money more trading has come – how many people have come from different directions. How do we know about the directions, because of the material actually. The Burma teak is there and the Belgium glass. It's so good to hear this. Why this material has come. It has its own history. So this is evidence of 'we were travelling' and where we were travelling.

FN: After the interview finished, Rohini spoke about how her mother sometimes comes to her home and polishes her brass lamps and

A. Lawson

vessels. These items are not antique (maybe only 5 or so years old) but there is a running joke that Rohini keeps them dirty so that they will become antiques. There is a clear difference in aesthetics between Rohini and her mother. With her mother preferring a polished, clean, new look and Rohini preferring a dulled, worn 'antique' look. Later I ask her six year old son what he thinks of the antiques. He doesn't have much to say on this, but when I ask him if he likes old things or new things, he says he prefers new.

A44) B: 23/05/14

TRANSCRIBED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R47

Language: English

Duration: 00:43:15

Context: I met R47 at the Bangalore numismatics exhibition earlier this year, where we had a short conversation. He told me that he had visited the British Museum a few years ago to view some of the coins there. He seemed interested in my research and in talking more so we agreed that I would visit him at his shop at a later date. I travel to his shop by auto and am greeted by a young man who turns out to be R47's son. R47 then joins us and invites me to sit down by the counter near opposite him. The shop is small with a long glass counter. It is displaying a collection of Mughal coins. He says they regularly change the display to different types of coins. On the wall behind the counter are bank notes: some old, some special edition. On the opposite wall from the counter is a decorative display – large 3D plaques painted a bronze colour – depicting classical/archaeological images – Harappan (bull and script), temple friezes.

I1: Can you tell me a little about yourself and how you came to be in this business?

R47: From earliest it was my business, not a hobby. My father started in a small way, he had small shop in same area, Majestic. Then moved to bigger shop. Buying coins from various villages. Villagers used to come here and sell coins. And we redistribute to collectors. So that the villagers knew about this coin shop in the Majestic. Earlier I used to travel, to raise awareness and make contacts. That way slowly I started by business. It's almost thirty years.

I1: Are you now interested as a collector too?

R47: I was interested in knowing more about the coins. In between for a couple of years I started collecting coins also. My subject was south Indian gold coins. But as I belong to a business community, always it has tempted me to sell the coins if I got a profit. My aim to collect coins stopped in between. I made a series of collections but I sold them.

I1: Where do they come from?

R47: The villages mostly. Most Indian families, when they find any metal/coins it goes to a jewellers shop. Ladies have more attraction for the jewellery. So if they find some old coins they'll go to jewellers and ask them to make something. But the jeweller is a smart guy and knows the old coins should not be melted as they have extra value. That way we get the coins.

I1: How long has it been like that?

R47: The jewellers have been educated from our side for the last twenty years. Earlier they would retain some of the best coins for us, other wise they used to sell or melt the coins.

FN: Two men enter the shop with object. It looks like metal weight wrapped in cloth. They speak mainly in Kannada but I understand that they want Kirti to tell them if it is genuine, if he wants to purchase/find a buyer for them. He is polite but reserved, he seems reluctant to agree to anything – he says 'we are just an ordinary coin dealer'. It seems he doesn't want to buy whatever it is. They say, they will get it tested and come back.

I1: How old do you think the coin collecting hobby is in India.

R47: From my experience I would say its at least eighty years. When I was a small boy and my father was selling coins, the collectors then

were so old. But in India it is still an upcoming hobby. People are more interested in it now. Especially young people. When we conduct coin exhibitions, the new collectors come with their children. And we give pamphlets and seminars to schools also. First we will educate the parents. Children will want to buy some coins and the parents object. So we teach that it is a good hobby, and we should collect the coins. And it's our heritage also. There is so much of knowledge in this. Then slowly they start collecting the foreign coins. First they are interested in collecting each country coin. When the child grows – college/earning – then he will buy Indian coins.

I1: Why do you think people collect coins?

R47: Are you talking about children or collectors?

I1: Collectors first then children.

R47: In South India collectors collect what they get easily. Here they have more collectors for Tipu Sultan coins, Vijayanagar, Chalukya, Kaushalya, Mysore coins which are very easy to access. There are collectors for north coins also – like Mughals, Kushans and so on, but they are very less. They collect what they can get easily here.

I1: I'm interested in what motivates people to collect

R47: It has to come from the self. So when we hold exhibitions, our numismatic society, it's advertised in the newspaper and the collectors will come who have a little interest in history. Initially that's how collectors come, with a little bit of interest in history. They will be easily motivated into the hobby.

I1: And the children?

R47: They are initially interested in modern foreign coins, they will display in school shows etc. And eventually when they get some prize they will continue that hobby for a long time. And once they start earning they switch to Indian coins - more expensive.

I1: How big is the Bangalore numismatic society?

R47: Around 750 members. We meet every second Sunday of the month in Rajajanager. We'll have a meeting, then a speech on the coin, on various subjects. To motivate them and keep them informed about new info/coins

I1: Does the Bangalore society have contacts with other societies across India?

R47: Yes. And we keep our members informed about any other coin events and exhibitions going on throughout India. SMS messages. Eg. 'Upcoming event in Gujarat' so we sent SMS.

I1: Is there much demand for foreign coins in India?

R47: Ninety percent Indian collectors want to buy Indian coins only.

I1: Do you deal in any other type of antique?

R47: No just coins and notes. It is a very vast subject.

I1: How do you decide what to buy, or do you buy everything that is brought to you?

R47: No. And we price separately. For common coins we give one price and for rare coins we give different prices.

I: How is the price set? Is there a standard market price?

R47: No it depends upon demand and availability. I get a lot of walk in customers, they come in and say 'oh you deal in coins? I am interested in coins'. We sell coins both individually and in bunches/collections.

I1: What type of coin is most popular?

R47: Tippu coins are very popular. They are very beautiful, the quality/mintage/presentation was sooo nice. So 200 years back also it was so advanced. Currently on display in this cabinet we have Mughal coins – a special series with the calendar months, the twelve months of Akhbar. The price for full set is 6000 rupees.

I1: What are the rare coins that are more highly prized?

R47: Many, the Kushilyas, Chalukyas early 8th – 10th century coins mainly in gold. They are very expensive.

I1: Who else do you buy from other than the villages?

R47: We buy from other collectors/dealers. Sometimes a collector who has completed a collection/set is bored with it and we buy it as a full set, or when a collector dies, if the children are not interested then we might buy the collection.

I1: Your son is also interested in coins?

R47: Yes he is the fourth generation. I'll tell I was inspired. I was invited by the curator at the British Museum and I have seen much of the

A. Lawson

collection there. I was interested much at the time in south Indian coins. Many, many are there. Especially Tipu. All the different mints all the different years. I made a report. It was presented in the numismatic society here. They have a beautiful collection – what we keep in albums, they keep in bowls because they don't have space to keep so many. I have been inspired to see the coin shop Spinks opened in 1790. Spinks is in Bond Street. They have an auction house and different floors for different sections – Indian section has its own floor. It inspired me that a coin shop had been opened in 1790. It's a great thing. A really, really great thing.

I1: Who are your customers? What sort of person?

R47: The hobby is a rich hobby, so most of them are upper/middle class. They are mainly from Bangalore. Most of them are from top /official side. As well as IT and business.

I1: Do they ask for information about the coins?

R47: Yes that's the important part. Not only the selling. We educate: how to keep the coins in a systematic way, how to display.

I1: Do you do any treating or cleaning of the coins when they come to you?

R47: It depends on the metal, we decide. Copper, silver etc. require different way of cleaning.

I1: So when someone brings a coin to sell how does the exchange go, how do you agree the price?

R47: So for example, a villager or jeweller brings some Mughal coins to us. Most of these people can't read the Farsi script on the coins. So we have the advantage there. We buy them as a lot sometimes but we may get some good coins in there. Many will be Aurangzeb, but we may get some Kanbayat, or some Akhbars in there – good rulers. Then we can sell it at a higher price. But if it's only Aurangzeb then we have to sell it at a reasonable price.

I1: How do you decide what to display in the shop here?

R47: We keep changing the display. Today it is Mughal. Sometimes we put British India, or Asia coins. Sometimes we put all the copper coins. If it is Diwali we will put gold coins.

I1: Do the customers tend to have a specific area of interest?

R47: Yes. We have a different room upstairs for the more expensive coins. A little bit of privacy is required, because we are on the main road.

FN: He asks me to switch off recorder while he talks about how he approaches wealthier customers interested in more expensive coins. As the shop gets a little busier he offers me a drink and asks if I would like to see some of his gold coins. He takes me upstairs to an office. He says that they invite trusted customers here to show them the more valuable coins. All these coins have set prices. He will spend time with customers and show them international auction catalogues so that they can see that the prices he is asking are fair in comparison to the international market rates. These are mostly gold coins. He shows me some of them – but he wants to remove the price before showing me. He shows me a fifteenth century Karnataka coin.

R47: This is beautiful carving. They were very powerful.

I1: Do you have any coins from Tamil Nadu?

R47: Very few. I often go to England and USA – (*Asks me to turn off recorder – see notes for off-record conversation*) – many Indian coins held in UK collections now being resold to Indian buyers. We give talks in schools. Powerpoint presentation about what is our history, the dynasties, the coins: how it has been minted, where, for what reasons. And slowly they become fascinated about the coins. When they come to the exhibitions we give the coins initially as a gift. We get many donations also from people who want to give to the children (they give little set gift package with two coins a currency note and some stamps) – 10 paise 1988.) – the package has donors name.

FN: Before I forget I want to show you one more coin of Chaulukyas...this is from Badami in Karnataka. Badami was the capital of Chalukyas. This came to us from a village, a jeweller. We do a quiz with prizes with the children to motivate them.

I1: Do you find they know much about history?

R47: They know basic things, like where is the Taj Mahal, and where is the Qutub Minal, and who is built with [inaudible].

I1: Do you know if the Internet has become very important for coin dealing and collecting?

R47: New generation is coming up. If they have anything they click a photo and put on a website to ask what it is. There are many websites in India (social network sites) where people can get identification of coins. Many experts are there who immediately reply for this. For example, South Indian Numismatic Group. You need to register and then you can see comments, many people arguing about a particular identification.

FN: I ask him about the two men who came in to the shop downstairs, it seems they had a coin they considered special or magical. Kirti asks me to turn the recorder off while he talks about this. (See notes for details of conversation).

I1: Do you have a favourite coin?

FN: He thinks then chooses a coin to show me.

R47: See the calligraphy of the coin – he mentioned Kalima, then his father name is here 'Haider' then mint name and year. 1790, such a beautiful coin, with security aspects.

I1: Do you keep any yourself?

R47: No I sell them. Because I am not fascinated with keeping the coins. I buy and I sell. There's one more good coin here that's gone for 30,000 pounds. This is his fathers Haider le Mohar. Extremely rare. This is from a private collection – half from Paul Stevens and half from Lindon. He is no more.

I1: Where are you from, Bangalore?

R47: I am born and brought up in Bangalore. My wife is from Bombay. I have two children. The elder is a girl with an MA in political science. Son has completed business admin from Pune. He is into business now. My wife is a housewife. She cooks for us all. This [picture] is my family in Egypt. We were there for 15 days. We are all ultimately history lovers. My son is keen on Mughal coins. Mughal is his subject. He's attended two government workshops on various subjects – very nice/ amazing.

A45) B: 25/05/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R48

Language: English

Duration: 00:26:00

Context: I met R48 at the coin exhibition in Bangalore in February. He is the son of the director of a Bangalore based coin auction house, who organised and hosted the Bangalore exhibition. R48 gave me his number at the exhibition. I met him several weeks later for a coffee on MG Road. My supervisor joined us. He is interested doing a PhD in numismatics and was interested to get some advice regarding universities in the UK. I arranged to meet him for a more formal interview at his office later that month. R48 takes me into his office, which is separated from a larger company office. He offers me a drink. I take a minute to explain more fully my research interests and he agree for the interview to be recorded.

I1: Can you tell me about your background and how you got into coins?

R48: I come from a family of collectors. My Grandfather started collecting in 1966 because of my great-grandfather who was in World War Two. In World War Two my great-grandfather was posted to the post-office. So my Grandfather would see him and be fascinated by all these stamps. The first coin I collected in class two. It was given to me by my Grandfather. I became interested in British India coins. I joined the business officially in 2011, but I was involved and interested from very early.

I1: Does your collecting go well with your business interests?

R48: It depends on your purpose: are you interested in studying, or looking at it as an investment portfolio? If your only interested in the studying and research it's totally different from being interested only for investment.

I1: Are those two types of collector very separate?

R48: Yes. Hardcore collectors will always be interested in different kinds of coin. The investment collector will be interested only in trying to get the very rarest.

I1: Are coin collectors generally only interested in coins, or also other types of antique?

R48: Yes, if you have a hobby of collecting coins then you will obviously be collecting something else. There are a limited number of coins in the market and so to keep going you will also collect other things.

I1: What is the main source of coins, new finds or existing collections?

R48: Recirculation of existing collections. Maybe twenty percent are from new finds like the riverbeds.

I1: Do you have a particular area of interest?

R48: British India coins is a personal interest. When it comes to business we deal in everything from ancient age to modern.

I1: How do you source and select what to buy?

R48: It's not based on customer demand. You never know what a customer might ask you for. Coin collectors are interested in collecting 'sets', say the full range of Mughal coins or Chola, one coin of every type. If they can't complete a set, or when they do, they look for a new theme (all sorts of problems/limitations in trying to complete a set: cost, availability, fakes etc.). We never procure on a demand basis.

Whatever comes to us, if it looks decent, condition good, has all the details, then, yes, we buy it.

I1: When you purchase a coin, how much provenance type info will come with it?

R48: It's very difficult. It belongs to a monetary system. There will not be information about how many coins were minted or through whose hands they have passed. Only with the very rare coins, only five out of ten minted might it be possible to find more information about.

I1: What is the standard procedure for buying and selling?

R48: People come to me to sell. Any lot or coin that comes to me: first ask who is bringing it. Is it from the [genaint] sources or the [indianand] sources? Then condition, then metal type and other details, then price.

I1: How are coins valued? How do you set a buying/selling price?

R48: There is a standard market price that is set for certain coins, you can see in the auctions etc. Almost all the coins. We'll follow the auction selling prices. Auctions regulate/decide the prices. Then we have a catalogue (but only from 1556 Akbar).

I1: How much of the market is sold through that sort of auction? Are only the expensive coins sold through auction?

R48: No, not like that. If you're a beginner you should be looking at the reliability of source and the authenticity of the coin, because if something seems wrong about the coin you should be able to go back to the seller. Auction houses give guarantees, security/accountability to buyers. If you're buying from private dealers you don't get that. Auction houses get a license from ASI. When it comes to authentication of coins they have that. So nowadays people will be buying even a 500 rupees coin from the auction. When we sell a coin we give an invoice, and if we buy from another auction house we get an invoice from them.

I1: How many such auction houses in India at the moment?

R48: Four to five. Us in Bangalore, two in Bombay, and one more in Ahmedabad.

I1: What is your main personal interest

R48: British India coins. These are the easiest coins to understand. When I was nineteen or twenty and first got into the business it was high time that I started getting interested in the different varieties of coin. I have to speak about the 1862 one rupee. There are so many different varieties. I have over 500 varieties. What happened was they froze the date 1862 and the next date they minted coins was 1872. For the intervening 10 years they added dots to indicate the number of years past 1862 which the coin has been minted. Then I noticed there are variations in the positioning of the dots. All these things fascinated me. It was this 1862 coin that fascinated me and started my collecting of British Indian coins.

I1: How do you research your coins?

R48: Various books. There is a good one by Pittmore (1965), which is the standard reference.

I1: Do you have a collection of your own that you keep separate?

R48: Yes. I would like to write my own book. And eventually donate it to some museum. If there are any good museums in India.

I1: Where and how did coin collecting start in India?

R48: There is the example of Jahangi (son of Akbar Mughal Emperor). He was a Muslim but respected all other religions.

Audio recording paused due to interruption

FN: Story about his Grandfather: around 1980's he had asked a fellow collector-come-dealer for a book and he refused. He was hurt that the knowledge was not expanding or being shared amongst collectors. So after that he built this library and it is open to all (inside the office we are seated. Books on coins, Indian coins and related history) – also auction catalogues.

Recording resumes

R48: Jahange minted a special series called 'zodiac series'. That suggests he had an interest. Maybe he himself was a numismatist or a coins lover. He issued a coin of his wife. He issued a coin in the name of the prince Salim. So according to me it was then that the coin collecting in India started. But also we believe it was majorly when the invaders came to India that the coin collecting started.

There was one French bureaucrat who majorly developed this field. He wrote a book on the various princely states and he collected those coins. Then there were many overseas scholars who studied Indian history. Then maybe after 17th century people started collecting here in India.

I1: What do you know about the British collections of Indian coins?

R48: All the auctions in UK, the ultimate buyers are either Indians or NRI's. There was a time when everything was taken out of India (1950's, 60's, and 70's). But this is the high time, the last five years, when everything is coming back to India from every auction house in every part of the world. And if its not coming back to India, the ultimate collector/buyer is still of Indian origin. In 90% of cases that's true.

I1: Is there much regional separation in coin collecting (ie. Are coins from Karnataka usually collected by people in Karnataka etc.)?

R48: No it's not like that. All depends on personal taste. I group coins by era and kingdom rather than locality. Themes depend on rulership and kingdoms. People will collect coins from all over India within a theme.

I1: Are there many people here collecting foreign coins?

R48: I don't remember any names, its quite unusual.

I1: There are so many coins within India, old coins too.

R48: Yes, if you look at the Americans, they don't have anything in terms of history – four to five hundred years. India has several thousand years of coinage.

I1: What is the demand like for India coins? Are there favourite era's or types of coins?

R48: Kushans, Gupta's, Mughal. These are the most collected and demanded coins in this business. The subject is very vast, that is the reason, so much to learn. With these Gupta coins etc. you can spend thirty to forty years collecting and it still wont be complete. You have so many varieties. Collection as I call it can ever be complete, because 10% no one can collect. But we call it complete.

A46) B: 25/05/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R49

Language: English

Duration: 03:04:06

Context: I bumped into R49 at the Bangalore numismatics exhibition in February. He struck up a conversation with me as he was curious about my presence there. He told me he is a collector of coins and that he writes an online blog devoted to numismatics. I took his email address and contacted him several weeks later to arrange this meeting. I have come to meet him at his home. He lives in a small apartment with his wife his child and his mother. It seems the apartment is his mothers, and that he and his family have recently

A. Lawson

moved there from Baroda, Gujarat in order to be close to her. I stay for a long time and both he and his wife make a great effort to welcome me, going so far as to prepare me some dinner before I leave. R49 is a keen and enthusiastic collector and seems to thoroughly enjoy sharing his collection with somebody. He keeps his collection in coin albums, and takes each album one by one showing me all of collection.

R49: I still have some writing to do on the coin packages. (*He explains that he collects each coin one by one over a period of time*). When British came to India around the 1600's they started capturing parts of India. They divided India to three sections: Bombay Presidency, Madras presidency and Bengal presidency. They came as a company, East India Company. These are the coins from 1600 to 1857.

FN: He gives me a mini lecture on history of coinage in British India: Started minting coins in Persian language but with the names of the English kings – James and Charles and William. Silver rupees with English kings written in Persian. These coins are very rare. Very few were minted, he says because there was an objection, the highest authority at the time was seen to be the Mughal rulers not the British kings. These coins are very expensive, two to three lakhs per coin.

R49: I don't have those coins. Then they started minting coins in name of Mughal rulers, these I have. Bombay Presidency is a big section.

FN: Spaces/gaps are left in his coin albums where there is a coin he is still waiting to find.

R49: These are from different mints, some from Bombay, some from Surat.

I1: Do you remember where you bought each of these coins?

R49: Yes I do remember. This one I bought from Ahmadabad, from a dealer named Vinod Chaudrey. This one I bought from eBay, this one I got from a friend. I do also remember the prices. Because each one is in the memory. Every time you get a coin, it's a thrill. This is a set – half rupee, one-fifth rupee.

FN: Everything is displayed in sets, with some gaps.

R49: What is the difference between these two coins – it's the flower-small difference.

FN: He's very interested in finding, noticing small differences and details.

R49: The dealers, when they sell it, they just sell it, they're don't go into the history or anything, they just want profit, so sometimes even they don't understand – that if you know what is written, if you can read Persian and go into the history then you can increase the value. My friend in Baroda, is a dealer. Another friend is an expert in reading Persian. My researcher friend has been telling my dealer friend for many years 'come to my place and I'll teach you Persian for free'. He's not going. But many times the dealer gets some very rare coin and sells it for a lesser price. Copper coins especially if there is some rarity. These two coins I've bought from friends in Chennai – one is R90, another is R9. I've met R90, but I haven't met R9 though I've bought many, many coins from him. I've been in contact with him for the past seven years.

I1: Where do you most commonly buy coins from?

R49: With eBay I can buy them from anywhere. And sometimes it happens that from foreign dealers you can get Indian coins at a cheaper rate than Indian dealers.

I1: Is that because they don't know the value of them here?

R49: Yes they don't know the current rate in the Indian market. They just put it on eBay and start the bid from one dollar. Also four to five years ago not many Indians knew how to pay on eBay. Because you can buy on eBay only if you have a credit card, and for many Indian buyer this was not possible.

I1: Which countries do you buy Indian coins from?

R49: All. Mostly UK (two people one from North Hampshire?, and another man. The lady works for Spink. In the USA – John Ericsson D&E Coins website? I've bought many coins from him.

FN: He shows me a coin he bought which he tells me is an extremely rare and valuable, ¼ Paisa. He says he bought it from UK, and the

A. Lawson

seller, registered in Bombay, he just sold it according to the weight of the coin.

R49: I got it for only 500 rupees. If it came for auction it would be at least 5000. Just one coin is missing in this set – four paisa coin. I'm not finding this in good condition.

FN: He shows me all his British India coins – but this is not his only collection – much more. He talks about the Europeans in India. Says he is a school teacher, but what troubles him is that they speak about all the other European countries coming to India, but they don't talk about the Danish.

R49: Danish came from about 1625-1845 though they only ruled in a very small region. Its not even mentioned in the books. I have a few coins from Tranquebar. I want to write an article on my collection and my studies. I'm writing an article now, its not completed yet. The subject is a very small difference in a particular coin. One variation the Qa is in Bengali and the other its in Hindi. It's a very small difference but that's what makes them interesting and no one has written on this before. Also I am writing another article on a medieval Hindu king of Gujarat, very popular king. Thirteenth century.

FN: He shows me another coin, which he says is very rare (45 written in Persian makes it unique/rare) and would go for around 80 pounds at auction. He knows this because he's seen it mentioned in auction catalogues. But he says 90% of dealers wont know what it is or be able to read the script.

R49: I got it on eBay for 300 rupees. This is my most favourite coin. Fish paisa of Bengal Presidency.

I1: Why is it your favourite?

R49: For every collector of the Presidency coins this is special because its one of the earliest issues and it is one of the rarest of Bengal Presidency of the copper coins. The Baldwin auction listed three different fish paisa like this and it was sold for 150,000 rupees (150 pounds). Actually that is very cheap. In previous auction it was sold for 200 a piece and I wanted to bid but I couldn't for various reasons. I was very sad. I was ready to pay 200 pounds for it. This one I bought for

around 3000 rupees. I got it on eBay from a dealer in Ahmadabad. I know where he got it. Just a month before he went to England for the Baldwin auction around 6-8 months back. See on eBay the auction starts from one rupee. This is a very good coin, but the picture that was put on eBay was bad. That's another reason why coins sometimes go for less than they're worth. Madras Presidency coins are a little more costly. In Madras conservation is less and many of the coins went to the Temple Treasure rooms. Travancore, Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Treasure not collection. There was a recent court case. Should they open the temple treasure rooms? The copper coins are costlier than the silver.

I1: Why?

R49: Because the metal value is higher for the silver, more of them were kept, making the copper coins rarer and now more expensive. What I did when I started collecting coins I was 12 years old. In my old house in Baroda it was wooden and dusty and there were termites, my brother was cleaning and one coin fell from the ceiling. I saw it was an old coin. 1939 George 6th copper coin, most common coin. So the portrait of the king I thought it looked like me so I was so attracted to it and I started collecting like this.

FN: R49 has kept this coin and later on in the interview he fetches it for me to see.

R49: I told my dad and he took me to the 'broken market' called *shukravalli*. Bought old and my father would bring me coins from different countries. In the beginning I was collecting everything, whatever I can get. Where I lived at the main *chowrasta* a person sat at the crossroad and used to sell coins. Then I would use my school money 1-2 rupees to buy old coins. When I saw the value of these coins increased. Then I started on the Internet. I came across a magazine – Mint Error News. The main person who wrote this was Alan Levi. He passed away a few years back but I spoke to him through email. He was one of the biggest error coin dealers.

FN: Starts showing me coins that he calls 'Mint Error Coins'.

R49: The error that happens during minting. USA is a very big market for these – especially the US mint errors. There are many collectors there and the market is sky high. I read those articles and saw those coins and saw the beauty of them. The beauty of a normal coin is one thing. You can get it anywhere. But the beauty of an error coin is something very, very, different. So I read those article and started collected error coins. But I saw that they are endless. Each and every coin is separate from another. So I tried to concentrate on ‘types of errors’. So from my study I made a list of thirty-four errors. No sorry forty. And out of forty I’ve collected thirty-two types. I started collecting Indian mint errors and noticed they are very available. Reason is that Indian mints are deliberately producing error coins.

I1: Why?

R49: There’s a big market for it. They can sell a one rupee error for two rupees. And a two rupee for four rupees. So now I only focus on non-Indian error coins, or error coins more than fifty years old. Pre-independence era. Now I have error coins form more than forty different pre-independence states. I have exhibited them in Baroda. But in Indian error coins are not very big thing.

I1: How do you learn about the coins?

R49: Observation, and also by the books. In 2000 I bought this catalogue.

If you putting such a huge amount of investment you have to study otherwise you’ll end up collecting coins that are not worth as much as you are paying for them. This particular coin I got from Pakistan.

I1: Are there many coin collectors in Pakistan?

R49: A few, but the condition in Pakistan does not allow the market to flourish.

FN: Mostly south Indian coins issued with the incarnations of Vishnu – he has built a collection around this theme.

R49: They are all from different kingdoms but all Indian – Buddha is hard to get – If I wanted a Buddha coin it would not be hard, but I want only ones from India. This one, Vijayanagar, I bought from R9 a few days ago.

FN: He has a separate collection of coins he might sell.

R49: If in future I am in need of money. Everybody needs money. I am doing this for a passion, not for selling, but if in future I get in some trouble or something, you can say this is security. But more than security it is my child. This is a coin, it's called hairpin money in English. It's from Bijaipur. I got this from England from the lady who works with Spink (R106). This is from Madras presidency. I even know the price 750 pounds. I bought three such coins for around 135 pounds. It wasn't off eBay. But I came into contact with her through eBay. This particular coin is very rare. She had seven coins. The three that were in the best condition I bought. Even in the big coin exhibition in Bangalore there was not a single coin like this. Actually there are many, but few are in good condition and readable like this.

A47) B: 20/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R41, R50, R51

Language: Tamil

Duration: 01:02:04

Context: R41 takes us to a very old Chettiar house in Karaikudi. He tells us that this house is going to be demolished in the next month or two. The house appears to have been built in several stages with older and newer parts visible. In the first interior courtyard we are met by one of the house owners. R41 seems to know the family here. I think he is a relative of some sort, though perhaps not a close relative as they do not appear to be overly familiar with one another. In all we meet three people of this house, all of them women. We sit down at the back of the courtyard for a chat. I ask if I can turn on my audio recorder and they agree. T2 leads the conversation offering me the occasional translation, and I add questions as and where I feel I can. I try to encourage the women to talk but R41 tends to answer on their behalf and this ends up being primarily a conversation with him. The

A. Lawson

context is fairly informal throughout with different people coming and going throughout the conversation.

FN: some conversation about the type of paint/plaster on the walls.

R41: Inside red soil outer shining.

T2: It is polished so that when it rains, it tends to melt. And when the climate is hot it tightens.

I1: It changes according to the climate?

R41: dries up

T2: It is like a sponge.

FN: R41 asks permission from the house owner for I1 and T2 to enter the house and interview the occupants, and inquires about family relations.

I1: Do any of the family members still live here? Or do they live in some other place like Chennai?

R41: One person lives in Chennai. This is his son-in-law.

T2: This is not the originally built house, right?

R41: Yes, it has been altered in the recent years. Once it was ramshackle then they altered it. People are still living in this house.

FN: In background, they are talking about the house going to be demolished.

I1: This picture shows the change between the old one and the new house, how the house fell down and they had to rebuild it.

R41: When did we meet for the first time?

I1: We met first in the Muneeswaran Kovil Street. I was at the Bismi Arts with T1.

R41 to the people in the house: Yes, She came there and asked me to tell details about these houses. So I am helping her now. I also studied in English medium but I am not that much good in English. If I were in Chennai like cities, I would have spoken in English well. My son had studied in Chennai and he is now working in Chennai. He speaks good English. I did not complete my schooling regularly, I discontinued in between. So I won't have that fluency in English.

T2: If you start to speak continuously, you will get that fluency.

R41: Yes, for that I need to read English newspapers like Hindu regularly. But my daily chores would not give me time for newspaper reading. I don't have that patience too. That stone has a crater which is dug out. The feed (a mixture of husk and starch) which we give to the cattle through that crater will make them healthy. The wood is reversed here. During those days, large trees are cut by placing it into a pit. Like handlooms in Kanchipuram where they prepare saris by putting the looms inside a pit. In the same way they put large woods into a pit; one person holds one end of the saw (tool) from the top and the other person holds lower end from the pit. This way large piece can be easily cut. As there were no machines to cut woods, the cutting would be uneven. The side which was cut flat will face the viewers. Likewise the whole house was built. The rough, uneven part of the wood will be cemented (using cement or any kind of plaster or limestone). If there is no adequate nourishment in the wood part, termites will start gnawing the wood. Commonly the trees with less oil nourishment would be affected by termites. Teakwood are not easily affected, it lasts long.

T2: what kind of wood is this?

R41: this is Teakwood. Mostly teakwood is used for building. Firewood [showing an old wood burning stove used for cooking]. Now we use a gas stove and cylinders but in those days they used only wood.

FN: R50 a lady of the house along with R41 shows the outlet of the water, the drain and the cork to close that drain.

T2: See, that's the drain.

R41: it is also used to drain the rainwater.

I1: Is this the area for cleaning and washing?

R41: Washing, Bathing...

I1: Does the family live here only for some time in a year?

R41: The name of this house is "Maathambiyar house"
(Mathamma?)

R50: There is a place named Maathambiyar in Colombo.

T2: No. She asks whether the family stays here.

R41: Yes they stay here.

T2: Even now?

A. Lawson

R41: Yes. These people are living here. One or two families stay here even now.

I1: Where are they from?

R50: Madhavor

R41: The reason for the name of this house is that those persons who came to this house were from a place from called Madhavor in Colombo, Srilanka. That became the name of this house.

R50: The woods to build this house came from the same place.

I1: The family now lives permanently in Chennai or they come here sometime?

R41: A part of the family live in Chennai and the other members will live here.

T2: How many parts are there in this house?

R41: there are four parts in this house, which includes some twenty members (four families).

T2: Three of them live in Chennai.

R41: Here and all, houses with a male heir only get its identity/initial. Or else their name will be gone.

T2: Why so?

R41: Because always a girl child in a family will go to her husband's house after some years then they take after their in-law's name. On the other hand, the male child of the family will keep up the family's name.

R50: I am also a girl child of this family. I am married to a place called Neypathampatti. Now I am in this house.

R41: she is born here and settled in her husband's place Neypathampatti. It is near Kaanaadukaathan. King's wife was born in Neypathampatti. There we could see such houses.

T2: Are there sons in this house?

R41: Yes. The sons of this house are her brothers. And there is another Meiyappan who lives in Chennai. Likewise there are four to five sons in this house. Only then this house will have a name and the generation goes on. If there is no male heir, they will adopt a son.

I1 to R50: How was the house when you were young?

R50: It was in a good condition then.

R41: Living was very good then. There were no advancements during that period. Instead of TV we had books. We would gather for any occasions and had fun. We would talk to each other more. We had oil lamps instead of electric bulbs. We had separate place for placing that lamp [shows that place named *maadam* (By talking with you I had forgotten to do my work)]. Placing the lamps on both sides will illuminate the rooms. Only the light from this lamp is used for these rooms.

T2: You keep the lamp here the light will be falling in the whole place.

R41: The light won't go off even in strong winds.

FN: Another person (R51) enters. R41 explains his purpose there.

R41: It's me. They said that they wanted to visit houses. I took them to uncle's house first. On their way they took photo of this house. So I took them inside to explain things. I thought that here are some two to three members dwelling then she (R50) explained everything clearly that this house has four shares. They are from Chennai and are here for their research. Their research is on the old buildings and antiques in this area and the lifestyle of the people here. Already we met in the shop and they got my number. Next we are going another house.

T2: What is this?

R41: It is a cutter. It is used for vegetable cutting. Another thing here is to grind coconut. Two in one. There is an individual cutter for cutting vegetables.

I1 to R51: Do you live in this house?

R51: Yes.

R41: These three rooms belong to this *Aachi* (R51). It is 150 year old building, is it not?

R51: Nearly four generations lived in this house.

R41: My house is 220 years old. When the public roads get elevated my house gets trenched inside. Whenever it rains, the water gets pooled in front of my house and it will drain later. But in some houses the rain water doesn't drain off. We worship Lord Muruga. We usually perform certain rituals to Lord Muruga and his wives Valli and Deivanai with his vehicle Peacock, as if what is kept in a temple. In temple you

A. Lawson

could see Murugan, Valli, Deivanai with his peacock and a *Vel* (weapon like a javelin) in his hand. The big *Vel* will be with the lord. We will perform pooja rituals to the small *Vel*. After the sacred pooja, we will offer food to the needy. Every Chettiar will do this ritual. Lord Muruga is of prime importance to them.

T2: You are married to a person in this house and came here, right?

R51: Yes

R41: Which is your native?

R51: You don't know my native?

R41: I have a bad memory. I don't even know the full details of my ancestry. No one tells me about my ancestry.

R51: My native is Otthachettipuram.

R41: Is it not in Amainjanellu?

R51: Yes. It is known for lawyer Nachiappan.

R41: You have been there right? I saw you there yesterday. What is he doing? Aren't you talking with him? He has grown thin.

I1: Can I ask the ladies whether they know anything about the house building or where the furniture came from, the doors?

R41: At what age you got married?

R51: When I was fifteen I got married and my husband was sixteen then.

T2: What do you remember about this house at that time?

R51: The house looks the same for me. It is old now but it was a little new at that time.

T2: Do you have any idea that from where they bought raw materials to build this house?

R51: I have no idea because it is some five generations old.

R41: Just remember and tell what happened at your time. During that people working for houses remained as a group and worked as a group. If you could remember anything please share with us.

R51: I don't know anything about that. We usually take local carpenters and builders for mending work. After that no major renovations were done in this house.

R41: In the same way, people in this area used to burn bricks. The bricks before burning will be yellow in colour. The burnt bricks are red. People used both type of bricks for building.

R51: Some things to build this house were brought from Colombo and Burma.

FN: Shows another maadakudi (a place for keeping oil lamps).

R41: In olden days only oil lamps were used. People struggled a lot before the discovery of electricity and inverters. That too is useless at the scarce of electricity. But these lamps are natural means and people spiritually believed in it. They worshipped lamps as gods.

T2: What is the oil that you use for these lamps?

R41: Castor oil is used mostly.

T2: Tell us about the chandeliers (hanging lamps) which are made up of brass. Do you that type of lamps?

R41: The chandeliers from Colombo are the best. It is of different shapes and designs, like pillars and plantain tree.

T2: Is there any specific lamp for Chettinadu?

R41: Yes. We have Chettinadu *Kuthuvilakku* (chandelier), which is plain and simple. The difference is that it is stronger than the other lamps.

T2: Can we see that lamp?

R41: Do you have it now?

R51: It is on the top. I can't take it now.

R41: I will show it to you later.

R51: We are supposed to light that big lamp daily but we use only small lamps now (*agal vilakku*).

R41: She did not light the big chandelier now. Here is only the small lamp. Lighting lamp is like a tribute to her dead husband. It is a ritual here that they will offer flowers for the dead ones and light lamps near their photographs. Here they will follow the ritual properly by using *rudraksh* (prayer beads/rosary/mala). They also do *surya namaskar* daily or biweekly, in the memory of her dead husband and the ancestors.

T2: Twice in a week she uses *rudraksh* (prayer beads) and prays in the memory of her husband.

I1: Do you ever use hanging lamps or it is only in temples?

R41: Hanging lamps are used only at the time of marriage. There is a marriage ritual where they (co-brothers) invite bridegroom by lighting hanging lamps.

T2: Who are co-brothers?

R41: They are relatives. All will unite for a function.

T2: They are not the immediate relatives, right?

R41: No. The persons who pray the same god will come into that relation. That will come around some twenty to thirty persons. Each community has some ten such divisions.

T2: Even though there are divisions you will unite for every function?

R41: Not all. People who pray the same god in that particular temple will come. That will come around some forty people. We also invite only them. They will come along with their family members like brothers and sisters.

T2: So you will select your co-brothers?

R41: No. These co-brothers are based on our ancestry. They come by a tradition. This cycle will continue by male heir in that family. That is why we insist on begetting male child.

T2: It is like a kinship system. They maintain it over generations. That is what they call *pangaali*. It is their kin group. They are not necessarily relatives. It is an ancestral thing and they are also relatives as well.

R41: Whether it is good or bad, we should have relatives everywhere. For marriage rituals and all other rituals in life, relatives are invited.

FN: Gives examples for rituals in some Tamil movies. Tells of a particular movie which was shot in their area where the hero puts the wedding knot to his bride. The knot is called *kazhuthoor*, which is made up of some 36 pieces. The nearby place called Naatarasan kottai where the family of the groom will wear this *kazhuthoor* to show their identity.

T2: It is to identify the groom's family.

R41: It is followed only in that place, not here. Here all the ladies in the groom's family will wear same coloured saris. It also shows their identity. Then it will be easy for others to find out the groom's family.

FN: Another woman enters (R52).

R41 to R52: Do you remember me? I have been to your house to buy old and antique things.

R52: Here are some shawls with fancy works. Would you like to see?

R41: Let me see. This is *Kunthaani*. It is used to grind flour. It is an ordinary one. There is another type in it with some carvings and designs. That is used only for the funeral for grinding paddy as a last rite.

I1: I just want to ask some questions of R52.

R41: Please sit down. She wanted to ask you some questions.

I1: What do you think about the antique trade in Chettinad?

R41: they just sell it. Other than that the sellers do not know much detail. The sellers just show the antique to us and ask for the rate. We will tell a considerable rate. If it is accountable they sell that to us. We sell that again to the retailers.

T2: Antique is *Kalai porul* in Tamil. It means artistic object.

I1: Are you interested in the history of the house? Do you know anything about it?

R41: During the time of marriage, the father of the bride will give his wealth as a dowry. Every time the father goes to any foreign country he ought to buy things in excess so that he can share that equally for his daughters. Usually the family has six or more daughters.

I1: Do they still do that now? Is *sree danam* the dowry?

R52: Yes.

I1: In Chettinad is it a big tradition?

R52: Yes, they will do that in Chettinad. Still now.

T2: What are all the things they give as dowry?

R52: Usually Jewels and other objects will be given.

I1: Are the things given as dowry still brought from foreign countries?

R52: It is bought both from here as well as from foreign countries.

R41: Those people who went to foreign countries to sell their goods, the seller's relatives would take the seller to the foreign countries. As they were married at their young age, it would be easy for them to step into business at that age. Chettiars mostly were involved in that sort of business. They went to places like Srilanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Burma and Ceylon. After the problems of war in Burma, people extended their business to Singapore and Malaysia. Burma is the most visited place. They would also involve themselves in banking business.

T2: What will they take from here for their business?

R41: They take only money from here. In British period, Indian currency is used in Burma.

R52: They will buy goods from foreign countries and sell here.

R41: So they spent their money very cautiously. Instead of staying in hotels, they took rented rooms and cooked for themselves there. People who went there for the same kind of business will stay together. By doing so, they earn things there and visit their homelands once in every six months or a year. They travelled through ships. The goods they earned were brought in the same ships in wooden containers. Things like *Maravai*, a kind of bowl made of reddish wood, glass articles and Burma mats are brought here. Especially Burma mats are soft and silky. They also brought swings made of wood. People with their things landed here in seashore areas like Nagapattinam, Dhanushkodi. From there they will transport things to their localities through boat mails. This is how these things were brought here. There is an interesting fact about the transportation of the wooden logs. The wooden logs are first carved with their initials, and then they throw the logs in seas. The particular monsoon will take the logs to particular areas. The logs travel in water current. There will be people employed at particular shore to collect these logs. After clearance, the woods are dispatched to respective areas. The sea route to Colombo is via Dhanush kodi.

T2: What was their business there?

R41: Mostly they do banking business. Some others work in hotels. As they were more concerned about their family's future they would spend frugally.

I1: I wanted to ask about the temples, the clan temples?

R41 to R52: Which is your temple?

R52: Maathur

R41: Her family belongs to Maathur temple's clan. Near Iraniyur and Ilaiyathankudi.

T2: The lady who sat here, in what way is she related to you?

R52: She belongs to my father's elder brother family. Their clan temple is in Pillayarpatti. Both the ladies here, one belongs to Pillayarpatti and the other Maathur. Both the families can have marital relationships. But families from same clan temples can't have marital relationships because they are brotherly.

T2: Is it like *kothram* (a category a bit like caste but more to do with kinship)?

R41: Yes. Most people in this area belong to Shiva *kothram*.

I1: People from different places, do they still have to come here for rituals like marriage?

R41: Those people are invited for temple festivals here. If they are free at that time, they will come and join or else they won't. There is no compulsion.

T2: What about the marriage ritual?

R41: Before informing others about the marriage, the family of the bride will visit the temple and offer betel nuts, money (Rs. 51 or 71 or 101). They will also give marriage invitation to the temple authorities. They authorities will register that marriage and keep it as a record. They also keep witnesses for their rituals. Even divorced persons must submit their divorce papers here. Only then the documents are submitted promptly the temple authorities will offer a garland of flowers for marriage. It is called temple garland. The first garland worn by the bride and the groom is this temple garland. Both bride and groom will get garlands from their respective clan temples. Only then the marriage ceremony starts.

T2: Will they exchange their garlands as a symbol of marriage?

R41: the temple garlands will not be exchanged. It is a symbol for registration of marriage. They will carry that garland to their respective home. The second garland is exchanged. It is something like a petition saying that I want to get engaged and once the temple is happy with it they will send the garland. If she is from Maathur, that temple will send her one and the groom's temple will send him one. The boy and the girl have to wear that garland from their own house and then the wedding starts. That is the first garland. After this they will wear other garlands. If you don't receive the garland from the clan temple, that marriage is not accepted.

T2: If you don't get that garland, it means that there is some problem, like some of the documents are not submitted properly?

R41: Even a divorcee who is preparing for second marriage must submit the legal document properly. Otherwise they will not send the garland.

I1: Many people in Chettinadu are moving away and many houses were demolished. How do people feel about it?

R41: the reason for the demolition of house is not only migration. In present scenario when people get employed in foreign countries they will definitely go for it leaving behind your own house in your native place. Depending upon the financial condition, they rent the house or sell it. Some people will sell it as a whole including land beneath it. Some others will just sell the articles and all other saleable items in the house and divide the land into shares. The rightful heirs of the house will the share the land within themselves. For example if this land measures one acre, each one of them divide this land into 25 cents.

T2: How do they feel?

R41: Basically they have no other choice, because a single person cannot own and maintain this house. And they will think of building a small house in their given land. Some other people who are well off they will invest their money in this house by buying it, that too in a few cases where the other heirs cooperate. Some other houses have different problems.

A. Lawson

I1: Even if the house is old, will they keep the land?

R41: Yes, they will keep the land and split it because on single person can't hold that huge property.

T2: What do they do with the woods (wooden structural and decorative material)?

R41: People who sell wood will buy it from here. Antiques sellers would buy these pillars. These doors are also saleable. They use these doors in some other places like VGP. There are many farmhouses in Bangalore. The pillars, doors and panels will be used there.

T2 to R52: Do you have your childhood photographs?

R41: They do not have photographs. It is a belief that when photographed the life span of the child gets reduced.

T2: At what year, did she get married?

FN: R52 doesn't remember that

R41: She got married at the age of fifteen and now she is 84 years old. Nearly 69 years before. In those days people get married at the age of thirteen or fourteen.

T2: How many children?

R41: One son and four daughters.

I1: Where are they now?

R41: Her son is in Chennai. Her daughters are in Dharmapuri, Madurai and Salem.

T2: How often they come here in a year?

R41: They will come for every function. Or if anybody in the house falls ill, they will come to attend them. Or if they occasioned here to any nearby villages they just drop in here.

T2: Is it getting late? Shall we go?

R41: Yes we can. Do you want to take photo? She won't mind. She is the eldest person in this house. And take photo of those two people there.

T2: Where will you sleep at night?

R52: Just here [shows the open spaces].

R41: Once they get married they will have their own rooms. For daughters they will go to groom's and share their rooms. They will have

A. Lowson

all the rituals here. They will light *kuththu vilakku* inside. Daughters' marriage will have hanging lamps. However the house may be, with or without basic facilities they have to utilize it at all times. Some who had a luxurious life can't live here. But the code of every Chettinadu family is to stay in their ancestral house for progeny.

T2: However is the facility in the house, once they get married the custom was that the first night or honeymoon time has to be in your ancestral house and particularly in that which belongs to your family for good procreation or progeny.

R41: The previous generation of my father's has no heir. My father came to our family as an adopted son. He came from a house where we are going to visit next. My father had ten children, five sons and five daughters. Now I have a son. My younger and elder brothers went to other families as adopted sons. My elder brother has two sons.

T2: Do they adopt within their clans?

R41: Yes, he is adopted in the same Ilayathangudi. Or if people from elsewhere but belong to same Ilayathangudi temple will adopt.

T2: They adopt sons between families. In case they don't have one, they adopt sons. For example his father was an adopted son and after that ten children born.

R41: When you adopt a child it must be within that clan temple or within the relatives. While arranging for marriage, they look for bride or groom in different temples.

T2: They marry across temples and adopt within temples.

R41: People from same temple are considered as brothers and sisters. So they don't marry within themselves.

R51: Where are you from?

T2: Chennai

R51: Which part of Chennai?

T2: Alwarpet. How long are you here?

R51: Many years.

T2: How about your house in your native house?

R51: It will be much more grandeur than this house.

T2: Will you go there? Who lives there?

R51: Occasionally. Many people are there. I don't know who are all there now.

T2: Will you tell us the name of those places so that we can go and visit them?

R51: Pillayarpatti, you will get good food there. (Some conversation about hotel food)

T2: Which is the favourite dish of Chettinad? Is it fish?

R51: Yeah, fish also. There are many new items.

T2: What will you eat? Veg or non-veg?

R51: We eat non-veg occasionally not daily.

FN: R41 talks about how his family are related to this houses family.

T2 to R51: Which is your native place?

R51: Karaikudi

T2 to R50: And yours?

R50: Kallikatti near Ammankudi.

T2: Can we use these details and this conversation in her (I1) PhD thesis?

R41: No problem. You can use. Chettiar families use only goddess name, purely god's name. For ladies, it is Deivanai, Valliammai, Naachammai, Adachammai. All are god's names. For gents, it is Valliappan, Palaniappan, Thenappan, Kannappan.

I1: Thankyou

R41: They both are in Mylapore and are Brahmins. This is the door key. Take a photograph of it. (shows how the key functions)

I1: Who designed the carvings on the door?

R41: Woodwork craftsmen.

T2: Do they design it on their own?

R41: I'm not clear about that. But I think that some designs like what is there in temples may be shown to them and they are asked to prepare a same design. Some people will tell some names of birds like peacock, parrot, and swan and asked them to carve the same. Or they might have drawn it asked the craftsmen to do the same.

I1: Like the temple door?

R41: It is same like the temple door.

I1: The main door style is like a temple door. And the smaller door...?

R41: it is also designed from temple doors.

T2: There are no bolts in this door they just folded it to keep it in place.

R41: The point which is joined to the fixture only has the bolt.

I1: This must be one of the most expensive doors... costly?

R41: Yes, costly. This is medium cost. That door is more than fifty lakhs.

This is made of brass. The oldest metal is iron. First invention is iron, then copper, brass... This panel on top is a beautiful one. It has a carving of Lord Nataraja on it.

T2: This panel on the top is the pretty one... it has been sold and replaced like this.

R41: The photo of this demon in the front of the house will not allow any evil into the house.

T2: In a month or two they will sell it (*the house*) to a seller and then he will come and dismantle it. May be we should come here while they are doing it.

R41: What is the difference between demolishing and dismantling?

T2: Demolishing is destroying completely. Dismantling is carefully separating its parts.

R41: We use cranes to demolish within one hour. See this one is like a chariot. You could see one like this in central railway station.

A48) B: 20/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R41, R53

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:32:21

Context: From here we go by auto to a house I visited with R41 the last time I was in Karaikudi. I learn this time around that R41 is in fact a relative of the people who live here. I think his father was adopted from this family. The last time I visited here I had met an elderly couple who

A. Lawson

are part-owners of the property. This time only the husband is at home. He invites us to sit down in the front porch-courtyard. T2 leads the interview and only gives occasional translations.

R53: [He shows pictures of gods] Vinayagar, Subramaiyar, Perumal (he is also called Sriranganathar) and that is a scene from Ramayanam, his *pattabhishekam* (coronation)

R41: The photo in the right shows *pattabhishekam*, in center Sriranga perumal and in the left Vinayagar and Subramaniar. And in the middle there a picture shows *Meenetchi Thirukalyanam* (marriage of god Perumal and Meenatchi). This picture where the god dances is Natarajar and the dance is called *Alinga nadanam*.

T2: The photos in the centre depict *Dhasavatharam*, don't they?

R41: Yes it is *Dhasavatharam* (ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu)

I1: Is this again the protector?

T2: Yes.

R41: It is a genie. It will prevent evil angels from entering home.

I1: How much time and money will you take to make a door like this?

R41: One may spend nearly one and a half lakhs. [He clarifies it with R53] They spent 40 thousand rupees and it is 120 years old [it is not clear if he is speaking about the door only or the entire house].

I1: How long did it take to make?

R41: He does not know the time taken for individual things; the building work lasts for two years.

FN: T2 is looking at a picture of R53's Grandfather

R41: Do you have the picture of your father?

R53: No

R41: His father is the person who built this house. [Looking at pictures of R53's ancestors like great grandfather, grandfather, his next generation has an adopted son]. They stay nearby our community, just four streets ahead. That adopted son belongs to a place called Nerkuppai. The man whom you are talking to belongs to the generation of that adopted son. He has a sister.

T2: Complicated relations. The one in the photograph did not have children. They adopted a son. R53 also does not have children. He adopted a child from a family which is two streets away. That person also did not have a child and he adopted a son from Nerkuppai. His brother is R41's father.

R41: My brother is also adopted for another family. He stays nearby the bazaar. First time you met me there, remember? My house is there.

I1: Which clan temple is yours?

R41: R53 belongs to same Ilaiyathangudi clan. My son and my son's son all belong to the same clan. The clan will not change. Adopted sons also would not go to other temple clan. Only marriages are made across clans. One exemption is that, our clan has nine divisions and people can have marital relations within the divisions. No other clan has such divisions, is it not?

R53: No. Maathur clan has divisions. They can marry between their divisions.

R41: Like our clan, Maathur clan also has marital relationships within divisions.

T2: On what basis do you have divisions within clans?

R41: Ilaiyathangudi has one main temple. There lived a group of people called Maathur division. Likewise Kalanivasakudi, What are all the others?

R53: Peru marudhur, pattana sami...

R41: Pattana Sami is the division of Raja Sir Muthaiah, the owner of Chettinadu cement factory. The name Pattana Sami derived from the person's name Pattinathar. He is our ancestor. Following him, our clan came from Kaveripoompattinam to some elevated lands here to save ourselves from flood. It was our original place nearby Mayiladuthurai. Right now it is called Poompuhar. The famous persons of Sangam age, named Kovalan and Kannagi, belong to our caste. In the same way Kaaraikkal Ammaiyaar (Tamil poetess) belongs to our caste. There is a story about this poetess. While walking on a footpath once, there happened to be Shiva lingams on all the way. As the sacred Shiva lingam should not be touched by the feet, she decided to walk upside

down (her head touches the ground). While doing so, her clothes fell on her face. To avoid the attention of others, she made her face scary like a ghost.

I1: I heard that Ilayathamgudi is the oldest Chettiar settlement. Is it the first settlement?

R41: yes. Ilayathamgudi is the first settlement.

I1: Let's see tomorrow.

R41: Ok. Then I will inform the car driver.

R41 to R53: Tomorrow they are going to visit Ilayathangudi and other temples there. So we have to start early so that they could reach their room in the Chettinadu hotel on time.

R53 to T2: are you a Brahmin?

T2: Yes

R41: His place (R53's) is Mylapore in Chennai. He owned a house in Abhiramapuram.

T1: Is it so? Which is the exact place there?

R53: Third Street.

T2: Still you have that house?

R41: They sold that house. Vanathi and Thirunavukkarasu (publishers) are my friends. In Mount Road there is a building called Kannammai building which was owned by his friend Devakottai Chettiyar.

T2: He had a house in Abiramapuram which is close to where we stay now, but he sold it. Are you settled here?

R41: Yes, because he is aging. Earlier he did banking business in nearby districts of Villupuram like Valavanoor, Senji. Now he has stopped that business. When 20-points plan came during the period of Indira Gandhi, Bankers were affected so much. It is because some others bankers got unruly. As a result, these people shifted their focus towards some other business.

T2: He used to do money lending business when he was younger like pawn broker shop in Villupuram, Senji, Vettavanoor, Valavanoor. Then some policy brought by Indira Gandhi came into effect and affected his work a little bit. Then the next generations have changed their jobs from this to something else.

A. Lawson

R41: At first, he was in Colombo.

T2: Was he a pawnbroker there?

R41: No, there he was looking after my maternal estates, like a manager.

T2: In Colombo?

R41: Yes, that was a big estate- nearly 300 acres. Tea, Coconut and rubber were planted there.

T2: His mother's side of the family used to have huge estates in Colombo.

R41: We are all relatives.

T2: They used to plant coconut, rubber and tea and R53's family looked after it. And then he came back here.

R41: The climate of England is like that of Nurelia in Srilanka.

I1: Very wet. Do you know what the family business was in the great grandfather's time?

R41: They also did moneylending business in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Movee (Myaungbwe?) in Burma, Colombo in Sri Lanka.

T2: Who brought the articles to this house?

R41: This house belongs to four families not one. All the four families put money equally and built this house.

T2: There were four sons. He was the second. And they altogether built this house.

R41: Totally they spent 40 thousand rupees.

R53: I don't have sons. But my brothers have children. So they got half a share in all.

T2: Because he did not have children and they have, they took a larger share in the property. He also generously gave all without any negotiations because he wanted the family to be together and he decided to compromise.

R41: Problem is in future they also have plans to adopt their brother's sons so that property will not go out of their family. So they mostly compromise.

T2: Are these wood carvings done by those four brothers?

R41 and R53: Yes, they did it.

R53: If one of the brothers looks after the construction, others will go for their job.

R41: In fact, this is not their ancestral house, it is their second house, the first one is near Pillayar temple. It is about 180 years old.

R53: The reason for shifting is, when the roads are elevated the ground level of the house went down.

R41: Nowadays houses are built with elevated entrances but not in olden days.

T2: Where are these articles from?

R41: The wood items came from Burma. It was transported through the water current of the seas.

R53: It will carry our number. We will know to take ours by that number.

R41: Like what we are doing for sending parcels through public transportation.

T2: From Burma they used to send it in the sea by the sea current.

They put number on the wood just like the numbers for the house and they put it in the water. Somebody collects it in the other end and brings back to their house identified by that number.

R41: After all clearance processes.

I1: Is all this wood teak?

R53: Yes.

T2: Are all these carvings done here?

R53: Yes, all are done here using local carpenters. Logs are all brought here, cut and cleaned and prepared by carpenters from Thirunelveli.

FN: Names a carpenter from Puddukottai. R41 enquires about the family of that particular carpenter. And he says that the sons of that particular carpenter are doing *vahanas* (vehicles) for god statues.

T2: What are they doing?

R41: They prepare *vahanas* for god statues, namely *rishaba vahanam* (bull), *kuthirai vahanam* (horse), and *moonjuru vahanam* (rat). Those vehicles are prepared here using woods and sent to temple festivals.

T2: So the person who does the carving here was originally from Puddukottai. And that family still continues to practice wood-carving;

A. Lawson

they are somewhere here and do carving for temple animals like cow and snake.

I1: They are here in Karaikudi?

R41: Yes, in nearby temples. If you want, we can see.

I1: Yes, thank you.

R41: They built this building. It is first built with red soil and a red soil paste is applied. Most of the houses in this place are shaped with that red soil paste. Red soil is also called sands of termite mound, where snakes stay (*putthu mann*).

T2: Originally the houses are made up of red soil; you can also find it in termite mound, which is clayey.

R41: Red clay soil. Like what you see in those walls. If you put a hole in the wall, you will find only that kind of sand. And outside you could see the wood, and a white layer made up of particles of shell which is one kind of limestone. First we need to boil those shells, added with palm jaggery, egg (white layer), small shells and a type of vegetable called Kadukkaai.

T2: They boil the shell and grind it.

R41: It is not literal boiling, it is like steaming. That is the better kind of lime, which is used for the walls. That is added with egg white plus this jaggery thing and the kadukkai. The kadukkai gives grip instead of cement. It will bind it together.

T2 to R53: Where are your sons?

R41: He had one son but he is no more. He has more daughters. In that house also one daughter had died. The house we went earlier, Maathambiyar house, is where he gave her girl in marriage. There we met an old lady in a white sari, is it not? His daughter was married to her son. In our days, widows wore white saris and Brahmin widows wore saffron saris. [R41 gives an example from a Tamil movie]. But nowadays wearing white sari is not considered as auspicious. So widows started to wear all colour saris but do not put on the bindi.

T2: Originally, women who have lost their husband wear only white sari like that lady we just met.

A. Lawson

R41: One daughter was married to that last house, to Meiyammai Achi's son. Her son's name is Meiyappan.

T2: Are they in Chennai?

R41: Yes.

R53: My eldest daughter is married to a person in the next street.

R41: She is married to my uncle.

T2: In which part of Chennai do they stay?

R53: in Mylapore.

T2: His son in law Meiyappan is in Mylapore.

R41: He has married for the second time and survives with children. But there was no child with his dead daughter. Other daughters have children. One daughter is married in a place called Aaravayal.... complicated relationships.

T2: R53 and R41 families are inter-related.

R41: Other than that these woodworks were done by local carpenters who worked for two to three years. Woods are from Burma. And this house occupies nearly one and a half acres.

R53: One acre forty cents.

T2: And what about this stained glass?

R41: These were brought from foreign countries like Germany. German glass will give clarity. Those countrymen came here for business.

R53: Two glasses were broken and see they made replicas in wood in the same colour.

R41: Where?

R53: In that last row.

R41: You made it new?

R53: Yes. The same carpenter did this. While importing from there it broke.

R41: See the colour. When the sun shines on it, it is full of clarity.

T2: It is beautiful

I1: It is lovely

R53: It is original

R41: That too has designs on it. Those are the designs which you see on the arch.

I1: Where does the paint colour come from?

R41: That is because of Sheelac polish. It is a French polish. Just like spirit (alcohol). It will get evaporated easily.

R53: And this is also G D Naidu polish.

R41: This is prepared recently.

R53: Is it not the oil made in Kunnakudi which polishes products?

R41: But Kunnakudi oil will not shine like the G D Naidu polish. The G D Naidu polish is like Sheenlac polish. It is made up of spirit and gets evaporated easily.

T2: That is not the paint I was asking about. The paint on the roof?

R41: That is not painted. It is just the sheet like tiles. The inside part of the tile is hollow which help not to trap the heat.

T2: It helps to ventilate the house and keeps it cool. Actually they are hollow tiles.

R41: Because it is painted, it looks like wood. These are rails that are used to lay railway tracks. Those railway departments will announce tenders for manufacturing rails. And we get it with the bill.

T2: This is from railway lines. They used to auction it and give you with the bill and everything.

R53: This was also like that one but worn out. I was just thinking what to do with it.

R41: Which one?

R53: This thing was rusted because of rain and was cut away from that railway line.

T2: The whole thing was wooden but got damaged in the rain and this was replaced with this. You did this?

R41: Already the full length was covered by wooden blocks and they changed it as a whole because of a single damage.

T2: Because it was getting damaged, they changed the whole thing.

R41: And this wood cannot be joined with them, they started using tiles.

A. Lawson

R53: A teacher at that time gave this idea. Before using tiles, it was left open.

R41: Last time you took photographs. Is it ok now? Take a photo of this door.

And here all sides are covered with walls and the top is left open later it is covered artificially.

T2: It is wall covered.

I1: The storage?

T2: Yes. This is the storage. It is so beautiful.

I1: Yeah. What is the maximum number of people who lived here?

R41: Previously?

I1: Yeah

R41: The family in that side has 4 or 5 sons. And the old man this side has two grandsons. Other than that there are four families which have two sons each, totally 8 sons. He is the one who has less number of sons. He has more daughters. And here the back entrance leads to the next street.

T2: And it ends in the next street.

I1: I remember coming at the back here.

R41: And this is the same temple door.

I1: Temple doors. Yeah

R41: And this is the kitchen.

I1: hmm

A49) B: 20/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R54

Language: English

Duration: 00:22:49

Context: Myself and T2 have decided to book lunch at The Bangala. This is a well known 'heritage hotel' in Karaikudi. It is very expensive by Indian standards and is the mainstay for foreign tourists visiting this

area if India. When we arrive I speak to the lady at reception and explain that I am conducting research here and ask if it is possible to speak to the manager here. She tells me that the owner/manager, R54, is here now and would be able to speak to me after lunch. After eating we move to the seating/reception area of the hotel and wait for R54 to join us. She arrives shortly. She is an elderly lady wearing a very fine quality sari. She orders us watermelon juice while I explain my purpose, and she agrees for the interview to be recorded.

I1: Can you tell me more about this building itself, it used to be a club-house, is that right?

R54: Yes, but this is not pertinent to your thesis?

I1: Its context. I'd like to know more about the Chettiars and their houses.

R54: But this is just a hotel. The hotel doesn't come under Chettinad ... you know. But there are a few houses that have been converted into hotels. Maybe that is more pertinent. This is just a club-house, and it was lying vacated and we converted it.

I1: And all of these things you've decorated the hotel with, these are all Chettinad artefacts?

R54: Ya, the pictures, the Burmese lacquer, the enamel. All that is from my own collection or from my dowry collection, and from the antique street.

I1: The Muneeswaram Kovil Street?

R54: Yes

I1: I wanted to ask you about the clan temple system here in Chettinad.

R54: Ya, we have nine clans, We all belong to some clan or other, and we owe allegiance to that clan temple. And all the temples are within a radius of about 20km from here probably.

I1: And what determines membership of a particular clan?

R54: Your born into it. But when we marry we cannot marry a clan member. You have to marry outside your clan. You have that in *Kothram*.

T2: Yeah I that that also, its very similar. Also someone we spoke to said that you can adopt within your clan.

R54: Only within your own clan, you don't adopt from other clans.

T2: But they also explained some sort of kinship system that I didn't really understand. He said that for all functions the elders, who needn't necessarily be related to you, have to be present.

R54: Ya all the *pangalis*

T2: Right, I didn't quite understand how you get to be a *pangali*.

R54: You belong to the clan and you have to be a *pangali*.

T2: So it's just everybody within the clan?

R54: No, no, the *pangali* has to be a clan member, but he has to belong to the nuclear family. Like you know if I am in Karaikudi and the M.S.M. family, we have *pangali* that are only in Karaikudi and [inaudible, possibly Auroville], two places.

T2: So it's some kind of forefathers friendship...

R54: Ya, so at some point in time they must have been brothers, but it would have been many generations ago.

T2: That's very interesting.

R54: Ya because you get subdivided, and subdivided and subdivided.

I1: Do you know how many Chettiars remain living in Chettinad itself?

R54: Worldwide we are 125,000 people only, so maybe forty to fifty percent of them live in the 75 villages here. The others are all scattered around the country and around the world.

I1: And specifically about the carved wood doors, especially the main doors, they seem to be based on temple design..

R54: Ya, first of all you will have a Lakshmi, because she is the goddess of wealth, and then you will have a Ganesha, you know. It is really what the owner of the house wanted at that time.

I1: Do you know much about the craftsmen who made them?

R54: Yes they were paid four annas a week in those days. But you know four annas would have been worth then much more than it is today. Four annas is a quarter of a rupee, and that was their weekly wage. I don't know how much time you have, but on your way home you can see we have a magnificent door on our house. And you can go

there and have a look. So it came from Burma teak and according to the owners wishes they carved what they wanted. There's nothing exotic. The wood is maybe exotic but there's nothing in the story behind the door.

T2: But this guy we spoke said that, supposing there were carpenters in your house doing the door, your neighbour might see it and he might say...

R54: Even now in these days if I need a carpenter...people steal each others staff and servants. That's not a big issue. But the carpenters were freely available then. They were there all the time. My niece from Boston is trying now to make a little plaque, and she got one made as a sample, one fifteen inches.

I1: I was wondering what you make of the recent upsurge of interest in Chettinad and Chettiar culture and the popularity of places like this?

R54: That I must say is entirely due to our family. You know my son. My sister-in-law, she started it. And then everybody coming to the antique street and ordering their tiles from here. Those are the things that have evoked an interest in Chettinad. And the cuisine of course. With the cuisine they only experience it after coming. What you eat in Chennai is not at all it.

T2: Both I1 and I work in archaeology, and you need public participation for archaeology to survive as a subject, but it can also be a double-edged sword, in that once you have public participation you don't know how they're going to participate in it. So when we were seeing some of the houses here some of the people were not so happy with us looking at the houses, because they said a lot of people just come into the house and are not so careful with their things. So do you find that this interest in Chettinad is also a double-edged sword?

R54: But you know, I believe, nowhere in the world, Maybe in Shekhawati, but Shekhawati is one village. We have 75 villages, and nowhere in the world is there such a collection of houses, even if there is 75 villages as there is in this area. So when you see so many of them, and of course a lot of them are going down and we are feeling terrible.

T2: Do you think this public interest will somehow...

R54: No, the people are still selling them. There is a very nice house that belongs to the Income Tax Department. And they had promised it to us two years ago, the Commissioner, saying 'you'll restore it and use it for public purposes'. He went away. The next Commissioner is now saying they are going to bring it down in order to build staff quarters. So I said 'I'm going to Delhi, I'll see if I can get an appointment with Arun Jaitley and tell them 'you cannot do this now'.

I1: It seems the only way of saving these buildings is in making them tourist attractions.

R54: No but how many hotels can you have? Tell me? If you estimate there are about 25000 houses, will you make them all hotels? Otherwise what will you make them? Even for artistic residences, somebody has to be there to run it. No the whole thing is very sad, the way its going. My niece from Boston is here now. She's desperately trying to buy a house. But all the houses are multiple ownership. All have to agree. Many houses are sold because of multiple ownership. They all want a bit of the land to build their own house. So naturally they have to knock down the old house.

I1: As well as the old carved wooden doors etc, you can see in the city there are carpenters working making reproduction type pieces. Do you know anything about that market?

R54: Yes Many people are now buying reproductions. And the antique man will sell you a reproduction. He will bury it under the ground for six months and bring it out dusty and dirty and he will say it is old. Unless you know, it is very easy to get conned.

T2: And these doors must be selling for quite large prices?

R54: Yes now they are. In the old days you could pick up one for 30-40 thousand. Now they are selling at several lakhs.

I1: Do you know anything about ArchHes?

R54: The Frenchmen, yeah. They're alright, they tried many things. They got funding from the French government. They are members of our Chettinad Society, but rarely attend a meeting. So they really want to do their own thing. Promote themselves, promote their hotel. I can't

sincerely say, if you repeat it doesn't matter, but I can't really say they are spearheading a thing to promote Chettinad. They applied to the UN for some heritage thing. But he gave such a shoddy presentation, which he probably thinks is good. But the people who attended it told me that the presentation was very shoddy.

I1: It wasn't successful was it? The UNESCO bid?

R54: Ya they showed it to the judges. You know that kind of thing takes years to make, to put you on that list. He will turn around and say 'I was told only two weeks ago'. But he was preparing for years. And he's had a lot of French students come. He has a lot of material that he shows students. Maybe you should ask him if you can see the material. But don't mention you have been to me.

T2: Are there any new studies, like on the Chettinad architecture of something?

R54: He has always students coming there. He gives very cheap accommodation for students.

I1: Do you have any opinion on how important the buildings themselves are to the maintenance of Chettiar culture. Because there are many aspects to Chettiar culture, like the food...

T54: Yeah it's the way we live, is because of that. You know the women always in the third courtyard or the second, and you know ordering the staff to make all their dried butters and their pickles. It's all part of it. If you don't have that kind of house you can't do it. And now they are doing the winnowing of rice. You need a separate place for that, which we have. And in the front all the business is carried out. In those days, the women never went to the front they had their own entrances.

I1: I was very interested in the Sri Daman, is that right? The dowry. The way it is all collected and displayed. Because it's almost like a form of art collection and display.

R54: Yes it is. Have you read the book 'The Chettiar Heritage'?

I1: Yes I have

R54: Yes it's all in there.

T2: Is there any house in which they still practice the kind of lifestyle that you're talking about? Because in all of the houses we've gone to nobody is there, it almost looks like a shell of a house.

R54: Kannadukathan is very much a ghost town.

T2: But is there any house where we can see it fully functioning in all the rooms...

I1: Now it seems that only happens for the big functions like weddings?

R54: Yes, then you will see it fully used. But I don't know which house there is in which the daily life is still like that. See I don't...you know my staff are all there but how can I say you can see a lifestyle there [speaking of her own house here in Karaikudi].

I1: I was interested in the oil lamps. I've seen some very grand oil lamps and was wondering if there is a particular...

R54: No, I don't think in the houses we have big lamps.

T2: I think maybe now they have them as antiques but they're not used.

R54: We have very big silver lamps that we use for functions but the lamp that we light in the house everyday is a small lamp.

I1: Do you know if there is a particular lamp style for Chettinad?

R54: Yes there is a particular lamp. It is five tiers. And that is the one we light. And festival occasions also like Diwali, Pongal and Ganesh festival also we light that.

T2: But this is silver

R54: Yes silver

T2: Not like, you know, the *ennai velaku* lamps?

R54: No it is pure silver

I1: So these other lamps in the antique shops (brass lamps) are the coming from other places?

R54: Thanjavur

I1: And some of them will come from temples, like the heavy hanging lamps?

R54: No but now they are copying those also. All of us will have one hanging brass lamp in the house that we use at the time of weddings. When the

A. Lawson

I1: What style?

R54: Saramalakum

T2: Where it's a closed thing on top?

R54: No it's a five tier but it's only that portion. Just the top of it and its hanging from a chain.

I1: Thankyou. That's all my questions.

R54: You can always call me as the thesis goes on. And you can ask them at ArchHes if you can see some of their work.

A50 B: 22/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Kanadukathan

Interaction Participants: I1, R55

Language: English

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: We spend the night at the Chettinadu Mansion, a heritage hotel in Kanadukathan converted from Chettiar mansion house. In the morning at breakfast the owner of the house (R55) introduces himself to us and I explain my research interest. We chat for around 10 minutes and he invites me to return next time I am in Chettinad for a longer conversation.

FN: Emphasises importance of intangible [my term] aspects of heritage. He used to lecture on heritage? He asks 'what is an antique? Must be something that has come to you from the past. Can't be something from 20th century or from within your own living memory/experience. 100 years is a good marker. Should be at least 100 years old'. Chettiar houses here were always empty. Used by accountants. When women came they stayed at the back of the house. They would shut down most of the house – when it rained the whole of the first thinnai would fill with water. The cost of repairs is extortionate. More than someone on a paid wage could manage. They were never proper homes. He used to live in the house next door. Most men were

A. Lawson

away working. He studies chemical engineering, rose to manage company (Kerala). He says that from very early on the houses were rented out for film shooting.

A51) B: 22/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R56

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: I have asked R41 if he knows of where we can find some of the local carpenters. I am interested to find out if they have any connection to the carpenters which the Nagarathar Chettiars have spoken of, who came from Thirunelveli to work on the construction of Chettiar houses. R41 takes us to Savaripillayar Kovil street in Karaikudi and we find several small carpentry workshops there. I interview one of them. They show us some catalogues with examples of their work.

I1: How long have you been in this line of business and who are you clients?

R56: Thirteen years in business – business in Karaikudi – Puddukottai is furthest away.

I1: What is your caste/community? Have you any connection to the carpenters who worked on Chettiar houses that came from Thirunelveli?

R56: Devanga Chettiar – mostly weaving. Mutharaiya. This sort of work/job is business not community based. So many different communities will do this work. No, there is no connection with older Thirunelveli carpenters.

I1: Do you ever create replica work based on the older Chettiar houses – like the main doors?

R56: Expensive to research old houses and our clients generally don't want reproductions of those older designs. Mainly because they are so

A. Lawson

expensive to reproduce (due to depth and detail of the carving involved). It would be cheaper to buy an actual antique door than reproduce one from new wood with current labour costs. (New design is approx one lakh. Old design is approx ten lakh).

I1: What sort of designs are asked for by your clients?

R56: Popular designs locally are peacock or flowers on door itself and Gaja Lakshmi, vinaiyakar on the panel and frame.

I1: Do you have any clients from the older Chettiar houses, eg. looking for replacement or alteration work?

R56: People who own a Chettiar house would never want alteration/work, only people who sell and separate the houses.

I1: What sort of costs are involved in the making of the doors for example?

R56: Labour – 3000 rps for a door panel. If it made with new wood, that new wood is usually supplied by the customers. Sometimes we use antique wood that comes from the old houses

A52) B: 22/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T2, R57

Language: Tamil

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: Myself and T2 have spent the night in Kanadukathan and we are leaving Chettinad later today by bus. R41 has taken us to an area of Karaikudi where he says we can speak to some local carpenters. We stop at a small open fronted shop/workshop. There are three men working on various sawing and sanding jobs. One of them stops to speak to us.

I1: Can you tell me about yourself and your business?

R57: I'm from Karaikudi and my customers are in and around Karaikudi. I come from the weaver carpenter community, Kammalar

A. Lawson

(this is the Tamil name or subgroup of the Vishvakarma caste).

Carpenter from family history of carpentry. I'm a chariot maker. Group name is Patra. We wear threads (like Brahmins).

I1: How many years have you been in this business?

R57: This business is fifteen years old. I have been in the job seven years.

I1: What sort of wood do you use?

R57: Old and new wood

I1: What sort of work do you do?

R57: It's an engineer business because I put pieces together. We have occasional jobs to demolish houses, but those jobs are very infrequent, maybe one job every few months. The demolition process is group work. Just one person cannot do it. Sometimes I sell complete old doors or use antique wood to make new things. This business is largely word-of-mouth.

A53) B: 25/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, R58

Language: English

Duration: approx. 20 mins

Context: I email INTACH and get a very friendly response from R58, the Chief architect and Co-convenor of INTACH Puducherry chapter, suggesting that I call by the office the following day. When I arrive I'm invited to sit down in the first courtyard of the INTACH building (which is a restored traditional Tamil style building). R58 comes out and joins me shortly and we chat for about 20-30 minutes. While we're taking he calls R59, who he thinks will be able to help me more than he can.

R58: We use many old parts in the restoration of heritage houses like this. In one way it's good if things are being used/appreciated - if they're being broken apart anyway. But as an architect I can't help but

A. Lawson

look at these things and wonder where they came from – what was the setting – the original context. It's sad. Its also become an impetus for demolition. Originally houses were demolished and a market was found for them, but now the market is the driving factor and people are encouraged to demolish because they know there's a market for it. The things you should really focus on are the building/structural parts of houses: the pillars, beams, doors etc. I think that's the most characteristic aspect of the antique trade from old houses. And it's different from the trade in the small, loose items. There's a problem with provenance. These dealers are just middle-men. They don't even know the full value of what they're selling. If they were really smart they would build-up the story and the history of the antiques – selling point – and sell it for three times the price. But most of them don't. That's the mark of a really good antique dealer.

A54) B: 26/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, R59

Language: English

Duration: approx. 1 hour

Context: We are introduced by R58 at the INTACH office in Pondicherry. R59 is an antique dealer and has worked with INTACH on a number of restoration projects – supplying antique furniture and building materials. We arrange to meet the next day at his shop in White Town. After spending some time talking in the shop R59 drives me out to his warehouse/workshop on the East Coast Road. The workshop is a kind of open yard where certain sheds are filled with finished pieces and other areas are full of this to be restored and other areas are being used for the work of restoration itself.

I1: What do you enjoy about the antique business?

R59: Restoring and re-using the old furniture and houses is about conserving/reviving the creativity, the memory, of the carpenter. The philosophy behind a particular design can tell you a lot about the people who made and used it.

FN: He gives the example of a Roman bed' - why its build in a particular way/style/function/decoration etc.

R59: You can run your imagination wild thinking about such things. The most important thing is detailing.

FN: He says he worked on the furnishing of Vishalam – now a heritage hotel in Kanadukathan. Belonged to Minakshi Maiyappan – of the Bangala.

I1: How is the business in Chettinad antiques now?

R59: The market in antiques from Karaikudi used to be dominated by middle-men/brokers who would have no show room of their own. Now people go directly to Karaikudi themselves. The idea is to reach the source and cut out the middle-men. Really this sort of thing (Chettinad household items) is not 'antique' its (he says a Tamil word I don't know). It means like 'broken house things'. Have you heard of ship-breaking? Imagine all the things you can get out of a ship. Everything is sold from the ship item wise. There will be a person who buys the whole ship, makes a list of everything on the ship and then sells items separately to different buyers and dealers. People like me go to the house-breaker and choose what we like. He sells in bulk – say 2000 plates - and doesn't check items individually. He doesn't distinguish high value pieces from ordinary ones. (He shows me a ceramic basin which he tells me is from an old ship). This is an 'artefact", a rarity. It was manufactured 150 years ago. BISN Cor LTD. Its not to be used its to be kept. The trademark is rare and special – Britannia lion and globe.

FN: Many of the items in his town shop are what he calls 'collectors pieces'. They are obscure and neither especially useful nor necessarily decorative – but he says there are very specialised markets for such things – eg. Carriage head lamps.

I1: Are they (items like the carriage lamps) bought as an investment by some people?

R59: not so much with this sort of thing. But certain types of things become popular as investment items. Such as paintings, for example Thanjavur paintings. But the problem is that the rise in popularity/demand and therefore value causes copying/fakes to become widespread – the market becomes saturated and muddied and then demand falls again. Authenticity becomes a problem. Here in India you don't have a 'car-boot' self-sale concept – so people sell their used/second hand goods to people like us. There is also a shame in selling your belongings – its seen as a sign of falling on hard-times – financial struggle – and people don't like to be seen that way. In Europe its different – people see that money has to move and that's seen as a positive thing – money is so important. In India it's more about honour. If somebody sells something from the house they would say 'what will people think? I'm bringing a bad name to my father – that I've come to such a state that I have to sell my belongings'. Many Chettiars can sell without guilt now though – they have travelled abroad and now many of them live abroad again. But the people who are still living there in Chettinad will feel it.

Also there is the issue of joint family, dealing with siblings. People would rather sell secretly – you can't bargain with your brother – (but you can push for the highest price with an outsider). In India the social-economic situation is very strong – you are not independent – you are part of a joint family. (He talks a little about the differences between Chettinad (Indian) and Pondicherry (French/ European) styles in furniture and house architecture). The Chettinad style is very ornate and heavy with more traditional influences. The houses also are built according to a traditional architectural philosophy involving 'vashta's', to do with orientation and order of rooms. They will be structured from east to west.

FN: We travel from the shop to the workshop on the east coast road.

I1: Are there distinctive styles to the furniture from different regions – Including Chettinad.

R59: It depends on what it is. Pillars might come from anywhere. But the wooden lattice utensil holders are unique to Chettinad. Carving designs vary more according to religion, sentiment, and business/profession rather than place. The doors might be from anywhere, but the size/height is indicative of Chettinad (ie. if it is very tall). In general my customers don't care where the furniture comes from, or if its French, Indian or Chettinad style. They just look at it, and if they like it and it fits the place they want to put it then they buy it. (He shows me a wooden chair which looks slightly art deco to me). It's a J. Thomlinson. I only have this one original and we use this to make copies. The copies are cheaper than the original.

I1: How long this type of business (antique wood and furniture) been around in this area (Pondicherry), and how old is your business?

R59: There have always been antique shops in Pondicherry. Not on the East Coast Road though. That's more recent. I've been in the business for the last 20 years. In the last 5-6 years custom from Hotels and restaurants have given me a push (Heritage hotels such as Vishalam).

I1: How do you get customers to know about your business?

R59: I get many 'walk-in' customers here as well as word-of-mouth. This stretch of road is known for colonial furniture. Customers come here from Bangalore and Chennai. Buying colonial furniture is like buying jewellery. It's not like buying a brand. Your customers have to have 'faith'. Faith in you as a person that what you're selling is genuine. Everything starts with the item, you have to like it. Then it's about the person, do you like and trust them? First consideration is need/utility, then its material/quality – then you hunt, and it's about word of mouth finding a person you can trust.

I1: Why do you think some customers only buy old/originals and others are happy with copies?

R59: It's just habit. You fall into a particular category of customer and get used to what sort of thing you like and expect. In this business combinations can be different in different items. Sometimes new costs more than old, while sometimes old costs more than new (if it's a

unique or special piece). There is a premium on uniqueness in this business. Anyone can have a copy, but only I have the original.

I1: How many antique businesses are there in Pondicherry?

R59: Approximately 40-55. Many start working as carpenters in someone else's shop then they start their own shop. Some close down. It gives opportunity to a wide income group, not just high-end antiques but ordinary second hand furniture. My antiques are different. They should have something interesting (design/material wise). This is not just an ordinary chair. Different in finishing and quality. But there is also a niche for ordinary furniture, utilitarian. Sunday market, refuse furniture.

A55) B: 28/08/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Kothamangalam

Interaction Participants: I1, R60

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I have contacted ArchEs via their Facebook page and they have invited me to stay at Saratha Vilas at a reduced student rate they offer. When I arrive I am served a meal and afterwards R60 sits down to talk to me. I conduct an informal interview with him. Later he shows me some of research work on Chettinad that ArchEs have produced.

FN: He says that they originally came to the area as buyers/dealers in antiques. They are two architects and interior designers – furniture designers. Much of the furniture around the hotel has been designed by them. Revive Chettinad Heritage campaign – 2007 with UNESCO. Difficulties of trying to work with the Maiyappan's): They are possessive of Chettinad and resistant to change and co-operation. Visalakshi became angry when she found out that her museum for crafts had been mentioned (she felt 'used') in an Arches/UNESCO booklet about the area. Visalakshi is ok about UNESCO involvement in the craft side

of things, but they don't want them interfering in the built heritage. They (the local wealthy Chettiar families) want to be able to control that side of things, to be able to do what ever they want.

INTACH Pondicherry: Not got a very good opinion of them. They demolish more than they restore and they flout their own regulations.

Antique street shops on Muneeswaram Kovil Street: He shops often in Muneeswaram Kovil Street. He finds 'gems' there. Ming vases. Things which he has seen listed in Christies catalogues. But the shop owners/dealers there don't know anything about them – they're loosing so much money! Recently one shop on the street has shipped a huge crate (half the shops contents) to a buyer/dealer in Singapore. These things are going full circle, from East Asia to here and now back again.

Heritage management in Tamil Nadu: He talks about his view of the corruption of heritage organisations. He says five crores of funding has just disappeared. Nothing has happened. I believe he is talking about his own organisations efforts (ArchEs in conjunction with UNESCO) to make Chettinad a Heritage zone – he says while this has been achieved, no practical outcomes have happened and the money has disappeared – according to him due to corruption. He talks about a house very nearby, which he says had been architecturally very interesting (built in 1860's/70's).

R60: The family who owned it wanted to let it out. We were interested but they wanted too much for it. More than we are paying here (Saratha Vilas). They said that our presence here had raised the value of the properties nearby. They demolished the house the very same day that the UNESCO proposal was accepted. Maybe they were fearful of new planning regulations – thought that if they didn't demolish the house then they might never be allowed to??

He mentions what he see's as the guilt/shame of house owners who sell or demolish. They don't want to talk about it. I ask if he thinks tourism to the area will make a difference to the state of preservation of the houses? Not without regulations. He says for example, in Kanadukathan there is an old plot which has recently been filled with ugly new houses. He says that the Chennai Plaza Hotel owns an old

building opposite to the plot of new buildings. I'm not sure what they'll do. It seems to me like demolition has slowed down lately. Except in Karaikudi where there is more urban pressure.

FN: Antique trade: I ask about export of antiques and how easily and often he thinks it happens? In Kochin export is strict, in Pondicherry it's strict. Chennai is complicated. He says he thinks bronzes get out of the country through Bangalore. He says it's not as simple as 'anything over 100 years'. Certain styles and motifs will be stopped while other things export officials are not interested in.

Research into Chettinad houses: He has had a student from Belgium stay. She was doing her PhD research on imported materials used in Chettinad houses. I ask why then he thinks that the same objects and materials are repeated in all the houses throughout Chettinad. He thinks that perhaps the dealers in certain objects and materials came to the Chettinad villages – like travelling salesmen, and sold the same proportion of each material in each village. He says also some Chettiars had direct links with England - they travelled there.

Working with the Nagarathar Chettiar community: There is an upper class of Nagarathar Chettiar – maybe 10 or so families. The British gave them official positions and special titles – such as the Raja of Chettinad – KanaduKathan. He feels that expat Chettiars have a different attitude to those who have remained in the area. They have some distance and perspective and in general they are easier to work with. More positive.

R60: But that is not as useful to us. We need to support and co-operation of the local Nagarathar Chettiar families. We've now started focusing on the middle class Chettiars locally, as opposed to the very rich upper-class families like the Maiyappans. Not the elite. We need to get them on side if we want anything to happen. There is so much rivalry between the elite families.

FN: Brochure info on coffee table of Saratha Vilas: 'Saratha Vila's – Built by a wealthy Chettiar merchant in 1903. Tiru S.A.S Subramanian Chettiar who had business headquarters in Malacca (Malaysia). Built according to the rules of Vashu Shastra. Italian marble and Belgian glass. Chettiars had a financial network with Paris and London

bankers' 'kothamangalam 3300 people. Located on edge of sivagangai district. Most houses built between 1900 and 1940. Revive Chettinad Heritage campaign – 2007 with UNESCO. www.arches.com. Ayannar Tamil god of all – present in rural areas. 60 places of worship estimated in this area. Not always in temples. Covered in terracotta offerings. Often located in centre of woods. Pre restoration pictures and info. On the Chettinad Trail in Tamil Nadu 2006 UNESCO. The three houses next door are from the 1905 period. Further down, opposite the temple are four houses all built in 1927. Valambar Community – they were the clerical assistants to the Chettiars and they are the second community of Chettinad.

A56) B: 06/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R61

Language: English

Duration: 00:51:37

Context: I was given R61's name and the name of his shop by R43. It is a small open fronted shop situated on a relatively residential area (though it is walking distance from Commercial Street). When I arrive R61 is not there, but the assistant phones him and tells me he'll be back in about 10 minutes if I can wait. When R61 arrives I find him very personable and happy to chat, speaking fluent English. I begin making handwritten notes, but after around 10 minutes I ask if I can record the conversation, to which he agrees. He begins by pointing various things in his shop out to me: a wooden board game, ceramic tiles from Japan and Europe, carved wooden door panels (I have noticed and picked on these because they all seem distinctively Chettinad).

I1: Do you get many things from Chettinad these days?

R61: Now old buildings are not being demolished there so often so not very much. Also now most customers know about Karaikudi and go

directly there to purchase. Only about 25% go through dealers like us. A lot of wood and wooden beams go to Hyderabad for building new homes.

FN: He talks about tin toys as something that came from Chettinad. Japanese tin toys bought up by Canadian dealer/s? I tell him about my PhD and my interest in Chettinad and Chettiars as a case-study. He seems interested and takes on an almost teacher style of talking to me.

R61: Why do you think the Chettiars brought all this stuff to India? The reason was that they had to fill their boats was that they couldn't take empty boats home – not the Chettiar way. Much of the material that came from Europe they picked up in Burma. So for example the Swedish enamelware vessels, he says, came from Europe to Burma first and it was there the Chettiars bought it and took it back to Chettinad.

FN: I notice a stone pickle jar in the shop which R61 says was imported to India through Bombay – it is marked with the words: 'Marshall 1858 Bombay'.

R61: There is not much Chettinad material left now.

I1: Why?

R61: This sort of thing is a new fad of the new rich. They want to create a legacy. They will say 'this is my greatgrandmothers'. They will purchase photos. I went to a house – she said 'this my great-grandmother'. [His implication is clear - that she was trying to pass-off a shop bought antique picture as one of her own family member].

FN: He shows me what he calls an Alfred Hitchcock lamp. He starts to talk about where the Chettiars came from. The story he tells is the same I have heard several times before: that they had previously been coastal traders, but that their settlement was destroyed by a tsunami so they moved away. Looking for the driest place they could find, they settled on the Chettinad area. This story is different to another version I have heard about a quarrel between Chola king and the Chetti people.

R61: That is the standard story but I have my own theory. The Nagarathar Chettiars are descendants of jungle dwelling (tribal) people. He says that even now you can see these jungle dwellers selling a

particular kind of bead in the Chettinad area. Traditionally among Chettiars a marriage can only happen once a token of some small gift has been presented to one of these jungle dwellers.

I have no idea of the truth of any of this. It is certainly the first I have heard of these people and this theory.

FN: He apologises for the cluttered state of his shop.

R61: This must be the most disorganised antique shop in Bangalore! Two customers come into the shop and speak to Ramanchandaran. Their conversation is in Kannda, but afterwards Ramanchandaran tells me that they had come for some brass lamps and wanted to know why they were not cleaned. I told him that a long time back I lost a lakh rupees from polishing a lamp!

I1: What is the market like for Chettinad antiques at the moment?

R61: There is a big market for antique wood. It's all going to Bombay. In Bombay they only want Chettinad wood.

I1: Why?

R61: Because it's the best quality. Chettinad is also important for jewellery – precious stones. Rubies from Burma. They call them Bloodstones. See the Chettiars were the main people who imported materials to India at that time. You can find everything you need to know about Chettiar history and Chettiar trade from Wikipedia.

FN: He tells me about how the Chettiars would transport whole teak trunks to India by floating them. Everything they had was engraved with initials.

Audiorecording starts after R61 gives his permission.

I1: They are from the forest/jungle? (Referring back to the tribal community R61 spoke of in relation to the Chettiars origins).

R61: Yes their lineage starts from them only. That is the reason every Chettiar marriage now, they will be given... you will have seen them on the roads selling beads, feathers, tin boxes.

FN: Shows me around his new house which is just down a side street near his shop. It's on the second floor and it is not yet finished. There are workmen inside.

R61: Front door panel – this is 100 percent from Karaikudi

I1: I've seen similar types of doors around Pondicherry and other towns and villages in Tamil Nadu.

R61: No this is Chettiar only.

I1: This is from Lucknow?

R61: Yes. I told you we made a door, a temple door. This is the side of it (he has used parts of the door in a wooden screen erected in his living room. This is a Chettinad bed.

I1: Do you think most people who buy this sort of antique furniture, do you think they know that it comes from Chettinad?

R61: Ya. Real characters they will know.

I1: And why do you think people like the Chettinad stuff?

R61: See it's the wood, the quality of the wood from Burma. The finest quality wood. What comes from Gujrat is a half the price of this. Gujrat is closer to Bombay, but Bombay furniture makers, even at a bigger price want Burma teak.

I1: And they want the old/antique wood rather than new?

R61: yes the main thing is the old wood is cut from a tree that was more than 100 years old. New wood is cut from a tree that is 30 years old. This building is three houses. Its 150 years old. We broke it down (he means partitioned). And three floors we made for three brothers. All this wood we have used from Chettinad. For the whole building. Come I will show you the front portion of this wood. The carved portion I will keep and I will sell it.

FN: We enter a building which is further down the side street from the shop and his apartment. Here lots of antique furniture and other antique items are stored.

R61: I'll show you a jewellery cabinet made in Chettinad that's about 150 years old. This is all Chettinad pattern furniture, but my own production.

I1: I see, so you make it yourself using antique wood from Chettinad?

R61: Yes I'll show you. See this has secret doors. Made top to bottom out of one single wood. The glass and all we have changed.

I1: So if something like this comes from Chettinad, will it sell for more than...

R61: This itself my cost is around 40-45 (thousand rupees). I have passionately picked it up, but I have regretted why did I pick it up. Because I've not yet recovered the cost. See in Chettinad, the cheapest pieces are there and also the most expensive pieces are there. This piece is a museum quality. Very few you will see around Bangalore. Did you go to 'Rare' in Bangalore?

I1: No

R61: His name is Balaji and he is a walking encyclopaedia. I'm not joking.

I1: And he also has pieces from Chettinad?

R61: Ya the best pieces go to him. What is rejected by him, maybe I'll get. He is on Avenue Road. You know Arni? She is a European born and brought up in Madurai. She and Balaji are very good friends.

I1: I want to know what you think customers are looking for with these things. Are they interested mainly in the quality or style?

R61: See 80% of Indian customers are monkeys. You can put it in writing! Ok. They want only groundnuts, they don't want cashew and banana. So the Indian mentality market is mass item, peanut price. You can do research on this from Karnataka to Kashmir, from Gujarat to Assam. Ok. This is the Indian money peoples mentality. There are big collectors who want everything for a steal. The value of the product is not this. So 80% of rich people want to buy a product from a person who is going to die the next moment, who is debt ridden.

I1: So they wont be interested in the history of the item or the place?

R61: No very few people. 90% only for show off. To show I own it. Please don't feel bad. I deal in this business. I am an ex-soldier. So 90% or at least 70%. 30% only are connoisseurs. 70% it is for a status symbol.

I1: How did you come to be interested in this?

R61: I was born and brought up with these things. That house you saw is 150 years old. We had everything. Old radio. Old furnitures. Ravi Verma prints. Ravi Verma prints became the most popular because of Karaikudi. Because each and every house it will have a number of images.

I1: How many years have you been in this business?

R61: From 2001 maybe? This camphor wood box is from Chettinad. What is Chettinad only I am showing you. See we are the most unorganised people in the area.

I1: Are your customers only Indian or do they come from abroad?

R61: More than 85% of my customers are Indian. But nowadays foreigners come. From Holland, France. This lady came from Scotland. So people who are interested in old furniture, foreigners, they come. Mainly they buy chests, pieces of furniture.

FN: He shows me a card that was sent from a woman in France thanking him for a chest she had purchased from him and saying that she would recommend him to others.

R61: So I have a lot of foreigners who come, but they are very selective.

I1: I guess it must be expensive for them to transport home?

R61: No, the main thing is they are only interested in things that are not available in Europe. Otherwise they don't want to take it.

I1: So they must like some of the Chettinad pieces that are very Indian in style?

R61: No it is entirely Indian, full south Indian. See in this business more passion is involved and less money.

FN: We leave the workshop and walk back along the side street. He points to one of the doors which I had already noticed bears some some resemblance to the Tamil/Chettinad style of door.

R61: See you have been to Chettiar houses? This is a Chettiar house. The owner is a Chettiar. This house – one, two, three, houses was one single family.

I1: These are Chettiar families living in Bangalore?

R61: Ya in this area there are more than 20-30 families like this. This all used to be one single house. Now it has become three houses.

I1: Did they move here from Karaikudi?

R61: No. See in Chettinad a lot of variety of Chettiars are there. Vaniya Chettiars are there, Nattukottai Chettiars are there. So the clan is Chettiar only. But different names.

FN: He takes me to the temple at the end of the street. The front door was made by him (his business) using wood from Chettinad. It is made from several beam pieces fitted together.

R61: All the panels are original. Made from the beams.

I1: How long did it take to make?

R61: One month. I charged them only for the wood, not the carved pieces.

I1: And the frame around the edge?

R61: No that is not made by us. Only the door is made by us.

I1: How long ago did you make this?

R61: Around two or three years.

I1: Are your family from Bangalore?

R61: No my family is a type of Chettiar from Andhra Pradesh. So before 600 years my great grandfathers moved into Kerala. So my grandmother is from Tamil Nadu, my father is from Kerala, My mother is from Andhra. And settled from 1948 in Bangalore.

FN: We enter another building where more furniture is stores. This is also a workshop of sorts where several people are busy sawing, sanding and varnishing.

R61: This is all Chettinad pattern.

I1: So made in the style of an original Chettinad piece?

R61: Yes made in the pattern of Chettinad piece.

I1: Is the wood also old?

R61: Ya ya. 100%. Whatever we make is 100% old wood, new work. This is all in Chettinad pattern. This has to go to Hyderabad (he previously mentioned a customer in Hyderabad, a publishing company, who has purchased a lot of wood items, I think for their private house rather than the business). This is a Chettinad piece. Because of the quality of wood and work you can make out that it is Chettinad. The most common items from Chettinad here is chests. All these chests will come from Chettinad. This is a Camphor wood chest. This is a dowry chest with drawers, secret drawers and everything. Chests were the main item of Chettinad for each and every home. See what I am going to do with this is make it into *kitchari*. *Kitchari* means mixture of

vegetables. So this is camphor wood from China. Smell it. This is a broken piece. So all this I'll put around and I'll sell it.

I1: How do you decide on the design and figure out what will sell?

R61: We have to use just imagination.

I1: Will customers sometimes ask specifically for a replica of an original?

R61: Everything is possible, but the customer should pay. Remaking is expensive. Because of the quality of this one. All these are broken pieces. My motto is, I want to repair everything except broken hearts! See this is 1930's 1940's foldable camping furniture for officers.

I1: So how do you get these things? Do you have people in Karaikudi?

R61: No, no. Dealers bring here. I don't go to Karaikudi. I have gone to Karaikudi to see and all. Small things, niik-naks I purchased.

R61: See this has been cleaned. It will be dark like in my house.

I1: Do you always clean them? Or do only some people prefer it?

R61: Some people prefer the original, some prefer it cleaned and done up. So the whims of the customer have to be fulfilled. People come and get teak wood and get it painted also. It is their wish so we cannot say anything. This (panel) is 8000. In Bangalore I can show you shops where it is 25,000-30,000. I am not bothered about how much they are selling it for. How much I purchased and how much I am selling is my concern. So you go to Oriental Haveli, the same piece is for 25,000-30,000. For every 10 piece they sell, I sell one piece. People buy. Because the name sells, the showroom, how good you display, how good your English is, that is what is important.

I1: So will this sell easily? How much would you sell in a year?

R61: If I want to sell I can sell. I can sell 100 pieces. But where are the pieces coming from? It's not coming. Demand is more and supply is very less. All these pieces are from Chettinad

I1: This would be used in house construction?

R61: Today it is used for decoration. Originally it would be on the door. Today what has happened is this WhatsApp and Viber and all.

I1: Yeah I've seen this sort of thing advertised on the internet.

R61: Ya. I don't advertise nothing. We have hand to mouth existence. We don't want big name. See these are all Chettinad only. All stuff from Tamil Nadu. See this caste iron. If you go to Chennai there is one man with a door asking one crore rupees. If you got to Victoria and Albert museum, even there it is not there. Calcutta stuff will have carvings. Chettinad stuff will have turnings.

I1: Do you know how much if this stuff is now being replicated?

R61: No see, in replica this quality is not there. So the quality itself will tell you. So people send us images. We get images from dealers and I show it to my customers. If somebody wants it, I take 10% commission from the seller.

FN: He shows me several more pieces that the workmen are working on.

R61: This is more of a passion than money making for me. Maximum of the styles come from Chettinad. Chettinad stuff its not coming now. Very tough it has become.

I1: Back when you started with the business was it easier?

R61: See what has happened is now they have stopped demolishing the old houses. So now they want to keep it as heritage and culture. Just before ten years, every week they used to be a demolition. So the tsunami of demolition is over. Now it is calm waters, nobody wants to disturb. Mainly in south India the Chettiars are the people who brought in Art Deco to south India.

I1: Chettinad things are often not so old, maybe 100 years or maybe 60...

R61: No, 150 or 200 years.

I1: Is this considered to be antique?

R61: Yes. See this (wooden game board), there will be a name carved here somewhere. I have sold most extraordinary pieces for 10,000 – 20,000, but these are common pieces.

I1: Who would buy something like this, and would they use it as a gameboard?

R61: 95% of people use it as a showpiece. Somewhere if you scrape it the name will be there. I sold one small miniature cupboard to a

German family. You know what she told me? She said 'I want the company brand and the family initials to remain. Don't polish this place, this piece of history should remain'. So other people will say, 'no why do I want somebodies name there'?

I1: Are your customers mostly from Bangalore?

R61: Maximum from Bangalore. Very high percentage. Even today Chettiar companies are there which are more than 100 years old.

FN: Shows me Indian advertisement posters/prints for London companies. Points out several other items which are made in the UK eg: tin boxes, safes. ceiling fans. He tells me to try and lift one of the fans in order to see how heavy it is. See you are from which country?

I1: UK

R61: See, Birmingham steel. If one kilo of Birmingham steel was used in UK, ten kilos came to India.

FN: He takes me into the next room and shown me a steel beam across the ceiling.

R61: See. Middlesex something it says. You can see all the old India rails (railways) It will say made in England. Anywhere on the old bridges you can see. See Europeans didn't have an intention to leave India. You know, Raisina Hill is the best presidential palace in the world. In Delhi. The Indian presidents house is the best in the world. So if the Europeans had an intention of leaving, why did they spend that much?

FN: We start to leave and he tells me about another dealer here in Bangalore who he knows and thinks I should talk to (R68).

I1: Okay. Thankyou

R61: Ya I'm a very small dealer compared to R68 and all. They are all international. He is a very close friend of mine, but he is international. I am only Bangalore.

A57) B: 08/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R62

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: R62's name has been mentioned to me by several people as a notable collector of antiques, including those from Chettinad, in Bangalore. I have been given his telephone number so I call him up and explain who I am and why I am interested in him. R62 arranges to meet me at the shop he own shop, Basava Ambara, in Basvangudi. When I arrive he is not there but I am told by the lady behind the counter that he will be arriving very soon. I take the time to look around the shop. The main front showroom is filled with clothes, jewellery and nick-nacky things like key rings. All are artistic, boutique, east meets west, in style. I imagine this appeals to certain wealthy sections of Bangalore society as well as foreign visitors. Some of the silk sari material I am told is made in Chettinad. As I move into the smaller rooms at the back I see pieces of antique furniture, vases and ornamental woodwork, paintings etc. Some of this may be from Chettinad, but none of it is distinctively so. After exploring the shop I sit outside in the restaurant section until R62 arrives. He only stays long enough to sit and eat some lunch with me, but he is friendly and interested in my research.

I1: Do you sell any antique things from Chettinad in the shop here?

R62: Sometimes - doors and pillars, brass items such as lamps and vessels and antique Chettinad saris.

FN: He points to a large painted wooden horse which is a piece from a temple chariot.

R62: This came from the Chettinad region. Now more people are aware of Chettinad and its architecture, houses are no longer being broken. Now the local dealers from there go to north India and fill their shops from there. In the seventies the small Karaikudi shops began selling the Chettinad imported items, such as the lacquerware from Burma. Then in the eighties the building activity started – people buying beams, pillars, doors etc. for constructing new homes.

I1: Was Chettinad material particularly sought after at that time?

R62: Yes, everything from there is marked with initials. It could be recognised and it was valued. Anyone who had visited Chettinad fell in love.

I1: Do you know where I can find those stone pickle jars you see in Chettinad being sold in Bangalore?

R62: A shop called Raintree, opposite the Windsor Manor Hotel.

I1: What do you think is the appeal of Chettinad antiques.

R62: South Indian art is elaborate but subtle, much more so than North Indian. Artisans today they make things without a soul. In the old days they took pride in what they made. That is the value. Also so many of the things that come from Chettinad are pristine and as good as new. All those small things were just kept in storage and never used.

I1: How long have you been interested in antiques?

R62: I have been interested in collecting antiques for the past thirty-five years due to a passion for old things. In my enthusiasm to build a collection for myself I got into the business. There is a good market for quality, artistic things. The price of such things has increased dramatically even in my own experience. In the early eighties those huge carved doors were selling for two lakh. Now I have seen one dealer advertise a door for one and a half crores.

FN: He tells me about a wedding hall business he owns which he built entirely using recycled construction material – wood, tiles, pillars etc. As he needs to leave soon I arrange with him to meet him after my next Chettinad fieldtrip and visit this wedding hall along with his own collection at his home.

A58) B: 12/09/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Kanadukathan

Interaction Participants: I1, T3, R55, R63

Language: English

Duration: 01:12:51

Context: I have met R55 during my last visit to Kanadukathan, at which time he invited me to return for a longer conversation. I email him before this trip to arrange a time to see him. I arrive with T3 and we are invited to sit down on some sofas in the front courtyard of the hotel/house. R55 joins us a little while later. We have a long relatively informal conversation during which time R55 takes out some photo-albums of his granddaughters wedding. We are also joined by R55's son, R63, who is himself a

I1: How old is the house?

R55: Started constructing in the year 1902. Completed by 1912. It's about 100 years old.

I1: Before this house did the family live somewhere else?

R55: We're a community which came from a place called Kaveripoompatinam which went under water. First we were living in mud houses, then we made stone houses, and these kind of houses were constructed between the years 1850 and 1935. Between 1935 and 1945 we made art deco houses like the opposite one. After 1945 we started making square houses. This house constructed in my grandfathers time. We were doing overseas business from the coramandel coast. Mainly Burma. We were the official bankers in the British era. You can call it moneylending. All that the present day bankers were doing we would do – that's lending money, accepting deposits and issuing drafts.

I1: Did you grow up in this house?

R55: I was here till my 19th year. After 19 I joined a company in Kerala. I specialised in Management and Productivity. I was there in that company for about 45 years. During that period I was studying various management and productivity techniques. I joined as an apprentice and retired as chief director. Then later I became an international consultant. Went to China as a member of an Indian delegation to purchase factories to another big industrial house in India – called Bilas.

I1: Do you remember what the town here and the house was like when you were growing up?

R55: Quite a lot of difference – main difference is people moving from agriculture to industry. In my earlier years I would see people carrying a plough with a bull. Today you don't see that its all mechanised. There is a shift from village to the town. Though still the agricultural production has not come down, because of mechanisation.

I1: Was this place (house/village) more busy and populated back then?

R55: What has happened is that the inmates of the house and village have gone to join industry in other places, and some industries have come here – textiles etc., so people from outside have come here. So there's a shift of people in both directions. So you see there are a lot of strangers here. We have a textile industry and couple of colleges. And a big electrical industry only 7-8 km away from here. So industrialisation is taking place here also. That's why all the trains and buses are full.

I1: How long did it take for the house to be built?

R55: total 10 years. Cost would have been very, very low. The opposite house was constructed around 1940 cost around 75,000 rupees. A lot of the material here was imported. These black columns are granite. I used to tell people that they came from Italy until I went to Italy and found that there they have no black marble, so it must have been from Spain. Mirrors came from Belgium. Entire wood came from Myanmar and entire steel came from Myanmar.

The business was all down coramandel coast – Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam. A lot of people had business in Saigon.

I1: And they brought all the materials back with them – the teak etc?

R55: More than that they brought the food. Wherever we went we took our cooks and the best in every place the cooks learnt and brought it back here for the ladies to cook. Its actually food from various other countries, improved. For example in China I like chicken corn soup, but the chicken corn soup that is served there is nothing similar (to what we have here).

I1: What about the things that came from Europe, how did they end up here in Chettinad?

R55: we had a lot of very good relations with the Britishers. They were giving titles. Knight title was given to my uncle. And they gave the title of Raja of Chettinad to somebody here, and he is still called Raja. Even two years back one of my cousin got a title: Member of the British Empire. I don't know if the British Empire still exists. Only thing is I don't know exactly how they brought it here (the material from Europe). The nearest port is far away. We have a port...(inaudible), but the water is a little shallow, so they must have unloaded it in boats and then brought it to shore and then transported in bullock carts.

I1: I've noticed that the same sorts of materials are seen repeated in many of the houses.

R55: Steel is not used in many. Only very few houses. We have steel which came from Birmingham. There is a lot of steel used in this place.

I1: Do you know anything about the carpenters who carved to doors and pillars?

R55: They were all local. I have seen these things being engraved. They were living nearby coming earlier in the morning and working each day.

I1: When did this house become a hotel?

R55: It was constructed in 1912 by my grandfather who died in 1914. He had three children. They had places everywhere, in Tamil Nadu and abroad, so it was not inhabited by the owners. They were keeping accountants in here writing accounts. The manuscripts used to come from Burma and those people used to make ledgers. It was full only at the time of marriage and celebrations. We are going to have a function on the 15th here. We are bringing a child.

I1: Naming ceremony?

R55: no nowadays it's already done in the birth register. Previous days we would just say 'child of so-and-so', but now you will have to give the name for a birth certificate.

I1: You were telling me last time I visited about the marriage ceremony and the dowry...

R55: There is no dowry system now. Dowry is the money given to the boys mother. That way nobody gives anything now. We give to the girl. That is her share of the wealth. The word dowry is misunderstood. What we give to the girl is her share. She can do anything with it, it cannot be called dowry. What we are going to do on 15th is this – she delivers the child at her mothers place, and then she has to come to our house. It's usually done on the 30th day. The child was born on the 11th August. I was there. I received the child first from the nurse. We normally give a saurin (8 grams of gold – a gold coin), I put it in a nice box and place it on his chest. That child is to be officially brought here. About 15-20 people will go in the morning and take breakfast there and then 100 of them will come and leave the child here. So it's a big occasion with lots of food. I have got a cook and for him we'll pay 75,000 rupees for two days. It's very expensive.

I1: Will you decorate the house for the occasion?

R55: Yes today we decorated. Yesterday we had a function here – my granddaughter's daughter had her ears pierced.

I1: Do the younger generation come back here often?

R55: They keep coming. My grandson is working for Goldman & Sachs. He is a qualified Analyst. He is doing analysis of health companies in United States, then he'll give reports based on which they will invest. He's coming to the function, his child will come. My granddaughter who lives in Malaysia is already here. I'll show you her photograph and her daughter.

I1: I was wondering if the younger generation keep anything from the old house in their new homes?

R55: Yes. There is a craze. Old articles are converted. You see this table? It is actually a door, and the legs are pillar-tops.

I1: Was this your idea?

R55: No I have borrowed it....My daughter lives in Washington D.C. She's an associate director for road safety. Her husband is doing software for remote sensing, for satellite. She is seven months pregnant. My son is in Kochin. His first son is in Bangalore working for Goldman Sachs. His daughter is in Penang, Malaysia. They will all be

here till 15th. They have gone to a temple inside the forest today. Yesterday we were at a hotel celebrating a wedding anniversary. And today they have gone to [word in Tamil inaudible – kolayjaivan?]

T3: Clan temple?

R55: No clan temple is different. We have eleven clan temples. This is family temple. We believe one god protects us, and it is invariably Aiyandar. Aiyandar is another version of Aiyappan. These temples are inside the forest.

FN: Shows us some family photographs, and photographs of hotel guests).

I1: Where did the decision come from to make this place a 'heritage hotel'?

R55: Somebody came here who wanted to convert it. I said ok but I'll have to take permission from the children and all. I sent round some emails and they all agreed. But by that time this man had backed out so we had to do it ourselves.

I1: You seem to have kept the interior very close to the original house style.

R55: You wont find anything new here except for the chairs and tables. Nothing else has been altered.

I1: Your website focuses on the idea of heritage and Chettinad heritage. Do you remember when that idea started to become an important thing here in Chettinad?

R55: I am the first person to start this here in a house. My son.. [His son enters and sits with us].

I1: You were also involved in turning this house into a heritage hotel?

R63: Yeah we started it together, but he lives here I live in Kochin.

FN: Some talk about hotels in Karaikudi, where is good and cheap to stay. R55 shows me some more family photographs while T3 talks with R63 about Anthropology.

I1: Before this house became a hotel it must have been very expensive to keep?

R55: It remained closed. If we had any function we would open and clean it up.

FN: His son tells us the story about where the Chettiars came from and why they came – Chola king story – Kaveripoompattinam.

R63: This king (Pandya King) had a lot of regard for the Chettiars because of their business acumen. So he told the Chettiars ‘please come and settle down in my kingdom’ So his intention was that if these people worked out of his place, the wealth would come back here, the economy of his kingdom would be rich. So they settled in this area and they were really paranoid about water. So that’s why this area is very hot and rainfall is scarce. Out of caution they built the houses a little raised. So if you look at most of the houses they are a little bit above ground level, you always have to climb a few steps. They continued doing business and going abroad. So you can see in this house, the steel is from Birmingham. Today steel is Tata. Some of the big steel companies in Britain are today bought over by Tata. But in those days there was no steel in India, so they brought it from Birmingham. These things came from Italy (marble). So they had gone to many countries, Indonesia, Burma. They also picked up the food culture from there. A lot of them had businesses in Burma, and when the Second World War broke out they couldn’t repatriate their money from over seas. Some had parked their money in Malaysia and Singapore. They were ok. So they came back to settle here and could not go out and do business because of the Second World War. So they had no source of income. These people were very good in business and it’s believed that the double-entry system of accounting was founded by the Chettiars. They didn’t use numerals. They used letters. There is a ledger here, which is signed and approved by the English auditors. You can see a ledger there, which is double entry in Tamil letters. So they are very good bankers. So of the people who still had there money two banks were started. The house behind, they started a bank called the Indian Bank.

I1: You mean the Raja’s house?

R63: Yes the Raja. And the two houses this side, they started the Indian Overseas Bank. They are called the MCTM family. They also started an insurance company. For a long time their building was the highest building in Chennai. It was called the LIC Buidling. This

A. Lawson

insurance company was nationalised and became part of the Life Insurance Company of India. So two banks and an insurance company were promoted by Chettiars from this village. And there is also another bank called bank of Mudra which operates all over the country, and they also mastered the present bank ICICI. So what happened was that many other Chettiars worked in these banks. A lot of them were working in banks and they were bank managers. Then many of them became engineers and doctors and they again got resettled in other countries. There are many Chettiars in Malaysia. My uncles daughter was married to a Chettiar lady from Malaysia. My uncles daughters son is married to my daughter. But my uncles daughter maintained her Indian citizenship. So there were people in Malaysia and a lot of the youngsters they became doctors and many of them are in US.

I1: Did they ever build houses like this, this size, in those other countries like Malaysia?

R63: No, can you imagine the cost of a house like this now?

I1: But I mean back then, when they were working in places like Malaysia say in the early 1900's?

R63: All these houses are earlier than 1900's. The latest was built in the 1940's. There is a place called Vishalam. That was given from father to daughter as dowry. It is now with my fathers sister, cousins sister. First cousin. So she leased it to the hotel group and they are running a resort there. So the houses were built until the 1940's. But the difference is that these are all ancient houses, the 40's are just like continental houses. They don't have these pillars. They are generally whitish while these are generally blackish.

I1: Why do you think so many houses in this area have gone to disrepair?

R63: The simple answer is that they could ill afford them. They are very expensive to maintain. For us it's ok because its running as a small resort. Most of the money will go back into maintaining the house. It's not like a new hotel where the upkeep is easy. Here is there is a small error we have to repair it very carefully. My father is the only person, he has a drawing of the house and he knows the electrical lines and all

A. Lawson

that. Then we have a full-time electrician and also he can do some plumbing. Maintenance is an on going affair. If you close this place for one day it is full of dust. So until we started as a resort most of this house was closed.

I1: Back in the early 1900's what is the maximum number of people who would have occupied the house?

R63: It was always joint family. My grandfather had two brothers. So that could have been the maximum also, because it was two generations later. So he earned all the money but did not build the house. His grandfather built the house, and his sons are the three sons there [pointing at photo. Explains the generation relationships in the photos hanging on the walls – these made money, in his time was the downfall] So some families had money in Burma and some had their money in Malaysia in Singapore. They were still rich.

I1: I see, the ones who had their businesses in Burma were the ones who lost the most?

R63: Yes. So of the three girls in this house, the elder two were married to people who had assets in Burma. The third girl was married to people who had assets in Malaysia. So much so, that my aunt was still well to do, while my father was working for a company because he had only the house. So he studied and went on to be the manager of a company. I am essentially into advertising. I work on the Maldives which is a tourism destination. So somebody asked me 'why don't you represent our resort in India', so we started our resort and maintained this house. So that's how I came into the picture. It was because it became a resort that we are able to maintain this. The others, they are already rich people, they had other assets outside of Burma and were not affected. The rest of the people were all affected. And what happens is, they cant stay here and do work. Even myself, only my father is here and we have developed this place, but I don't live here, I live in Kochin. If I didn't have business interest or my father then I would not come here. Now I come once every 45 days or so. You need man power, you need interest and you need money, which is not there

in every case. Also people who have settled in America might have money but they can't come here and look after the house.

I1: But do you think for most Chettiars the interest in these houses is there, it's just a matter of funds?

R63: There are about 3500 mansions in these 72 villages. Anything that has gone down has gone down because of reduced funds.

I1: As a foreigner I can see that maybe in the last 10-15 years there has been an increasing tourist awareness of Chettinad and the idea of Chettinad as a heritage site/area. But I'm interested to know how the Chettiar community themselves feel about this place. Do they see it as a heritage to be protected?

R63: See I have lived through these 15 years when the interest started evolving. Because Chettinad became a tourist destination. This happened to me in London. I had come to London on some other work. At that time we had one resort in Kerala. My friends said that the World Travel Mart is happening in the Excel in London. There are two big travel marts, one in Germany in March, the other in London in November. There was only one resort here in Karaikudi called the Bangala and they were promoting it for themselves. They had some connections with some tour operators. Very few people came. They had 8 or 10 rooms. So it was not really a destination then. I didn't know what really the World Travel Mart was, so I just went and saw the India pavilion and inside the Tamil Nadu desk. Which means the Government of Tamil Nadu promoting Tamil Nadu. It so happened that I had pictures my friend had taken of this place. There was a gentleman sitting there and I just showed him those pictures and said this is my place, though I live in Kochin. He was very excited and told me I was just the sort of person he's been looking for. He was from the civil servant offices. They pass out before they are 27 and they are brilliant guys. They are hand picked. So this man had become the Tourism Commissioner of Tamil Nadu which means he was fairly middle level. So he took me to the Minister and for the next three years insisted that I come with him to tourism fair in Germany. So I went to my father and he said ok we will open up this place. So we opened up

and we were promoting it and then the Daily Telegraph in London had a full page on Chettinad. The French are the most attracted to this place. The French 50+ are the visitors who make it most to this place.

I1: Is there some sort of connection with France?

R63: Pondicherry is the connection, but the older French they like this heritage. India has a good connection with UK. Kerala has a better connection with UK. Many of the tour operators had a good connection with Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, so they also started promoting south India and they promoted this area. And this was a new destination, off the beaten track. So the bigger operators started sending people to this place. Then this place opened up and then Vishalam opened. There are 5 or 6 places now. So this is growing as a tourist destination. Mainly to see the mansions and the Athangudi tile factory. Because the Chettiars could no longer import these things (tiles). So close to this place they got local people to make it. And they make it without machines. It's a very interesting place. But one nice thing is they (Chettiars) keep coming back to this place. I am here for the granddaughter earpiercing and close on the heels of that is the next grandchild. She has come to her father's village and she belongs to this house. So we are bringing her to her own house on the 15th. So I have come mainly for these two functions rather than maintaining the house. Next time I might come for work here to help my father.

I1: Do you see a lot of Chettinad things in Kochin?

R63: I have seen this European, this foreign interest in Chettinad evolving and now the Malaysians. Because the Malaysians who are second generation Malaysian Tamils have not seen Tamil Nadu. And they are very god-fearing people. More than the people here. So they have started coming and we suddenly realised that we have hardly promoted this in Malaysia, but we have a smaller hotel which is cheaper than this (Chettinadu Court). So I suddenly realised that about 30% of the people who came are people who came from Malaysia. Because Trichy has four flights for Malaysia. A lot of people who live here work in Malaysia. Not only Chettiars, all of the other communities.

I1: The tourists coming from Malaysia, are they aware of the historic link between Chettinad and Malaysia?

R63: The Chettiars who come are aware. So much so that my daughters mother-in-law, she is my cousin too, she has been married 30 years in Malaysia. So most of her life she has spent there. Her husband is a Malaysian Chettiar. So they know the connection. But the second generation, when I go to Malaysia I see Tamils who say 'we have not come to India'. So now a lot of those people are coming and they know the temples here are the same gods. So they come to stay here when they come to this area. They go to places all over Tamil Nadu. Chennai obviously. But they have started coming to this side also. Because they think that this is the heartland of Tamil Nadu. Madurai and this side. Trichy.

I1: What about people from other parts of India. North India. Do they visit here?

R63: Chettinad has a lot of people from Europe, 70-80%. But if you go to a place like Kerala we have a resort in Munnar which is a cold place. Kerala is very well known in Europe. It is the state promoted the maximum in Europe. But then only 8% of the people who come as tourists are from Europe and other countries. 92% are from the rest of India. Since we promote both inside and outside India, for us in Munnar it is only 20% foreigners and 80% Indian. And it keeps running the full year. Here it is very seasonal because it is only European visitors and very little Indian visitors. Coorg I see a trend for more Indian people coming now.

I1: I ask because the antique dealers in Muneeswaram Kovil Street say there is a big market for their antiques in north India and Bangalore and some other Indian cities.

R63: Yes, that big market is just a few. And they wont come as tourists. They'll come just a few nights, stay in a place like your staying (budget hotel inside Karaikudi), buy the antiques and go. See this (indicating the coffee table bade from a door) I bought it from a friend in Kochin, and the door is from Kerala. And he showed me the first Chettinad cot. He's such a good friend he said to me 'what are you doing? I bought it

from your place and now you want to buy it from me'. So he gave it to me at whatever price he bought it from here. And then we replicated it. So the furniture here is not all antique. To make a hotel cant have so many. Because there were no bedrooms in Chettinad houses. This is one of the few houses with bedrooms. Because they all lived together. My grandfathers have travelled to Europe. In those days London was called Chime/Sime. They travelled to London my ship. They had gone a few times and they wore coats and things like that.

FN: Some talk about R63's travel plans over next few days and his business in Kerala.

I1: What is the Chettiars opinion of the antique trade in Chettinad?

R63: The people who don't have money they would have already sold all their things. But they do it without others knowledge, because they don't want people to know that they don't have money. Sometimes people come to my mother...(inaudible – mentions antiques and jewellery)... because silver is never 100%. It is like gold. There is 24 carat gold but you cant make jewellery out of it. So nobody knows what the purity is of silver. The average man who goes to buy silver, even today, they don't know what the silver content is. The best of the guys give 80%. But this is difficult to make. Gold has a standard price but silver has no standard price. So when they (Chettiars) go to sell silver, it has no standard price. And they don't like to go to the shop and ask, so they might come to my mother and ask. And we also don't feel like bargaining on the price, because they are coming to us because they don't have money. So my mother she will buy and keep and give them a reasonable price. So then what happens is these houses will start coming down. So these traders will go and quote a price on the full house. Then they will take the pillars and each part separately and sell them separately. Even now sometimes I go, for garden chairs made of iron.

(some talk about the old ceiling fans that leads to a conversation about some members clubs in Kerala and Bombay).

I1: Apparently Bombay also has a lot of Chettinad antiques?

A. Lawson

R63: No nothing. They might take these Athangudi tiles. I had a friend from Bombay who came to Kochin and bought these things. These things they go to Kochin and they use their creativity and make things like this (table made from a door). Probably the doors is from here itself, because there are doors like this.

A59) B: 15/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T3, R20

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:56:54

Context: I have arranged to meet R20 at his antique shop on Muneeswaram Kovil Street early this morning. He remembers me well from my last visit and is very happy to talk to me further. I start by asking him about the stone jars he had talked about when we met several days ago.

I1: You keep many pickle jars in this area?

R20: Yes.

I1: Are they very easy to acquire from the Chettinad houses?

R20: Yes, they will definitely give it for us. When we get it as a whole they give us the pickle jars too.

I1: At other times will they happily sell them?

R20: At other time we would get it from the dealers. The dealers will collect it from all. They won't give pickle jars alone.

I1: Which customers will come to get these pickle jars or buy them?

R20: People get it mostly for hotels, restaurants and also for houses. If you keep salt in that in that jar, it would not melt.

T3: Salt does not give out water when you keep it for a long time.

R20: Pickles won't get spoiled when kept in it.

I1: Will local people buy this?

R20: Yes they do. People from Pondicherry, Jaipur will also buy this. Of late, some people bought this to Ceylon in Srilanka.

I1: Have you seen the dealers who come from other places, do they know what the pickle jars are? Are they available in other parts of India?

R20: They know what they are buying and also they look for the quality in it.

I1: Ok. So it is like that they have seen it in other places.

R20: In Chettinadu there are 94 villages and these are available only here. Or else dealers of different places might have bought it from here.

I1: Do you see many of the pickle jars that are the same but they are made in India.

R20: Yes. They are making it in a place called Manamadurai.

I1: Are they more expensive or of the same price like this?

R20: The jars made there are costlier but of low quality. England is known for these kinds of good quality jars. The place where it is made is inscribed on the jars always.

I1: Do you know anything about the different trademarks?

R20: That I do not know.

I1: Are all the tradesmen Chettiars? Or do you have other community people?

R20: Other people like Nadars, and Iyers.

T3: Will the person who sells those articles look into the community of yours, or do they sell commonly to everyone?

R20: I am a Rowther. If I go to Chettiars house, they will give me objects provided I am more acquainted with them. Once they get to know us they will start to believe in us blindly. I can even sell tin in the name of gold. That much is the trust. Chettiar will not give things to Chettiar because it is a prestige issue for them.

I1: I notice you have some things here from north India, is it so?

R20: Yes there are things from North India but it will be sold out soon. Mostly furniture. These Belgium glasses are from north and those tiles.

A. Lawson

I1: When I go to places like Pondicherry and Bangalore, they say nothing more is coming from Chettinad, they do not break any more houses.

R20: But we are getting things from demolished houses. How ever many things you see here, an equal amount is there in the go-down.

I1: Is it more the small items or big things as the doors?

R20: We get more big items like brass products, wood products, cot, and bureau.

I1: I am wondering about the actual structures of the house like pillars.

R20: Yes. We get things like pillars also. And all are in the godown (*warehouse*). Warehouse is within four kilometers from here. Things like pillars, doors, wood pillars, stone pillars are in the warehouse. And more than 200 pillars are there.

I1: How many pillars you get in a month or a year?

R20: Approximately some 100 houses are destroyed in a year irrespective of their size. We have 94 villages here, in that at least two houses per village are demolished in a year. Maximum houses are destroyed because of low maintenance and plants would grow on all sides.

I1: Was there a time when much more houses were being broken?

R20: Yes, earlier it was broken in large amounts and now it is reduced in its amount.

I1: Last time I came you said they hire things for film shooting. Please tell about that?

R20: Within the last ten years only they hire things for cinema shooting. They shoot in this area.

T3: Is it because the house owners do not let them to use their own furniture they hire things?

R20: Yes. These things had been hired for a film shooting. The movie name is Nandha.

I1: Do they pay a good rate?

R20: We will get more money in hiring. But we always have a doubt that whether the things will be returned in good condition. Good

production companies will return it promptly. Or else it is a doubt.

Certain things have been taken to Kumbakonam for shooting.

I1: When?

R20: Before 4 days

T3: What movie?

R20: They said that it is a new movie. I didn't ask for the name. They took some other things and didn't return it yet.

I1: Can I just go back to the pickle jars. How much will you sell in a month?

R20: No. It will be sold as a bulk to Jodhpur. Dealers will come and they order it as a whole. In marriage houses, it is also given along with the dowry.

T3: In north Indian marriages?

R20: In Chettinadu marriages.

T3: Will Chettiars buy it?

R20: No. Other people like Nadars.

T3: The dowry system we have here, the other community people will give these pickle jars as a dowry.

I1: For local Chettinadu people, as a dowry. Do you have pickle jars in your house?

R20: In my house I have morman jars and filled it with rice.

T3: You remember the Burmese wooden thing that they had water in their house? He has that. He has kept rice in it.

R20: We fill it with tamarind, rice.

I1: Do you know any particular community people in Bangalore, Chennai, Pondicherry and Cochin who would buy these pickle jars?

R20: I know a dealer in Jodhpur very well. In Kochin, there is a company called Croptus; in Coonoor, Shanthilal. These are the companies that would buy pickle jars. Other than this we have sold jars to many hotels and restaurants.

I1: Local hotels?

R20: No. Hotels in cities like Bangalore and Chennai.

I1: Can we have a look around?

FN: We go upstairs. R20 shows us a particular stone vessel.

R20: We can use this to cook food.

T3: It is a kind of a pan.

R20: It is used till now.

T3: Is it in stone?

R20: Yeah

I1: Is this from Chettiar's house?

R20: Yes. It is. You could see their names inscribed on it.

I1: What is this used for?

R20: To prepare curry, sambhar, rasam...

T3: Will it withstand high temperature?

R20: Yes, it will.

I1: Is it good?

R20: After eating the food prepared in it, people do not eat other food. That is the taste this gives. Till now Brahmins use this to cook food.

I1: Do you know how it was made?

R20: Yes it is prepared in our city like Mahabalipuram.

I1: How old is it?

R20: It is a hundred years old. There are more pans in bigger size. It depends on the number of persons in the house. It will taste good if cooked using firewood. There is a lady from Bangalore who will come here to buy this. She will not buy the fresh pan. She always buys the used ones which looks black in colour.

I1: Why does she want to use the used ones?

R20: The one which is used will be better for cooking.

I1: Can we ask him about the superstition thing?

R20: There is no such superstition.

T3: No brother. There are people who think like that.

R20: Yes. People in rural areas think so. But city people don't.

I1: Will they apply this superstition to specific things or all things?

R20: Mostly people apply this superstition to the threshold of houses and window planks because they have doubt on the reason for the sale.

T3: They think for wooden objects like the windows and doors and the panels because they have the doubt that why would someone sell it. Is

it because they have lost their family, wealth and life? What brings bad luck to them?

R20: That is why we clean it properly and apply holy sandal on it. This is the reason why *navaratna* (nine gems) stones are embedded on it and they believe that nothing would affect them.

T3: He says nowadays they clean and do ritual to these kinds of old things and then there is this nine stones we use each one stands for one planet and it is called *navaratna*. Nowadays there is a box available; it contains some herbs and stones. They pray and then bury it right under the door of your entrance. In my house they buried it. Nowadays they do this ritual to make sure that the evil spirits go away.

I1: So that is only for the recycle woods?

T3: Yes for recycle woods. But we did it for new. It is just a precautionary measure that doesn't let any bad thing into the house. It is like a line you draw in the soil, and the permanent line is to just bury the box in front of the house.

R20: You can see the bigger ones in the next room. These are the used ones.

I1: You know the Burmese lacquerware? It is a kind of red in colour from Burma. Can you tell me if just local people want to buy that?

R20: Yes people from here would buy that.

T3: And they used to keep fruits inside and give it as a dowry.

R20: Everyone here would buy that. Now they paint it and it is hung in a wall.

I1: Is it affordable for ordinary people to buy it?

R20: It will come around some 250 to 500 rupees.

I1: And the pickle jars?

R20: Normal rate. One number is 5 rupees. When it is sent to dealers, an average sized jar is 200 rupees.

T3: when they are sending it in bulk or so many things, they take an average of 200 rupees instead of calculating individually.

I1: People in local place buy these things also?

R20: Yes, to keep the flowers.

I1: Do they have also pots and cups and jars?

R20: Yes, we had things like that earlier. But people would buy those things all the time. Now it is all sold out.

I1: Of these pickle jars and Burmese products, which one is most popular?

R20: First are pickle jars and then are the Burmese items.

(Note from transcriber: We don't really use this kind of stuff and we mostly use silver. People don't really like things that break. Anything that breaks is considered as bad omen in Tamilnadu. When you are eating, if you drop your plate and it shatters then it means that someone is going to die. So they prefer using stuff that does not break).

T3: This is used to prepare paniyaram (a recipe)

R20: These are all used to prepare food items. Once they taste the dish prepared using this, they will not even use the other items. Taste will be good, like the curry paste prepared in Brahmin houses.

I1: Do you enjoy this business?

R20: Yes.

I1: What is the best thing about this?

R20: I felt proud when I came to know people from olden days had used such articles. This business was done from my aunt's age. Once she asked for my wish. I told her I liked this cycle very much, it seemed like a horse walking proudly. I told her that I liked cycles and boxes like this. Even then they believed that I would have interest in this type of business in the future.

T3: He says he likes it because every object gives him the sense of a life lived before and it is fascinating to him that everything has so many stories to tell. And when he was small he had an aunt who came and asked like she had these little cycles almost like a horse. He was asked what he likes and he said that he liked these old things. From then on everybody in his family knew that he was fascinated by this kind of stuff.

R20: They will take me to business line in Kadalur, Pondicherry, Courtallam and Vasudevanallur. While going they just ask what I

A. Lawson

wanted money or things (old things). I would ask for things. Likewise I had my own collection.

T3: Is this your family business?

R20: Yes. Our aunt will go out for collection of materials and my brother will segregate it. I remain in the shop.

I1: What kinds of things did you collect?

R20: I will sell it later.

I1: Do you think that the many other dealers who are doing this kind of business are interested in old things in the way that you are?

R20: Many will look at it from business point of view. Some people like R34 are really interested. If I see an object I would think of the history behind it.

See if we eat the food by keeping it in these things, it will give us a longer life. Now every food item has added chemicals. These things can be given to your children.

T3: He is interested to acquire these kinds of things and give it to his children to have a better life. In olden days they used less chemical stuff, and he says that he is trying to bring it to the other generation.

R20: In the same way there are copper water pots on which they do not apply aluminium. I am using that pot in my home because it will help them to lead a healthier life in a more environmentally challenging future.

T3: He is using copper pot. It is a belief that the water in the copper pot (Note from *transcriber: without lead she says but it is actually aluminium*) acquires lots of minerals overnight. When you drink it is really good for health. This is what he gives his sons so that it will help them when they grow.

I1: How old are they now?

R20: One son at his fifth year and other at his fourth. I always tell them the use of these things. I have this spoon at my home. It is not artificially made. So it will be good to use. Likewise I make them to eat in enamel plates. As long they hear these things, and then they will become legible in the future.

A. Lawson

T3: Once they understand all these things, they will inform the next generation.

I1: Do many people buy the photographs?

R20: Yes. Of late I had a customer, two sisters, 45 and 50 years of age. Their daughter is married to a person in London. Their son-in-law brought them here. They visited and went. After some time the sisters alone came. I took them to show the photographs. There they started crying and I was embarrassed. When asked for the reason they showed a photograph of their mother when she was young. It is a photograph of a lady typing. They asked me who had sold me this photo. There had been others that we sold to a person in London. Only that one photo remained here. She said that their mother was very studious at her young age but now she had fallen ill and was at the hospital for to undergo surgery. Then she asked for that photograph and I gave it to her. When their mother saw that photo she asked who it was who had thrown this photo away. The sisters replied that it was in a valuable place. Then she phoned me and thanked me. In the same way there is a bank manager in Hyderabad. He came with his friends. A photograph of them in their college days was here. He exclaimed that even in his own home he does not have such photos. Here is a man who is a dealer in TVS company. He brought many old photos from here and decorated his house with it.

T3: Will customers only buy photos of themselves or their own family, or will they sometimes buy photographs of other people?

R20: Most people will not look at the faces in the photograph. They just look at its artistic beauty.

T3: Will they buy photos of unknown people?

R20: Yes, they will. And then there is another, I do not know any other details about him, other than that he is a foreigner. He has full of photos hung in his house and has focus lights for different photos. His house is full of photos.

I1: Are many foreigners buying the photographs?

R20: Foreigners are the maximum. There is a madam named Nandhinivalli. She has a huge photo collection. She is in

Purasaiwalkam. Every photograph will attract us towards it. That will be very beautiful and real without artificial make up. Wait I will show you a photo just have a look at it.

I1: Do you know who this is?

R20: Chettiar.

T3: Look at it for the artistic work, the way he is standing.

R20: If you are asked to see these photos and photos of this age, you are definitely attracted towards the old photos.

T3: You just keep this picture and keep a picture of yours by the side, you will definitely look at this and not yours.

R20: See at what age she gets married?

T3: See how young she is?

I1: Yes... younger.

T3: She barely fits in the saree. This is very nice.

I1: Yeah.

R20: If the son or daughter happened to see this photo what would they think? Just imagine their feeling. There was another Chettiar whose childhood photo was here. He saw that at the age of ninety-five.

T3: A ninety five year old man came here and found his picture here and said how you happened to get my picture and took it with him

R20: He was in a group photo.

I1: Do you think it is relations in the joint family sell pictures of other persons without knowing?

R20: Yes. In the same way, Chettiars will not let go their family easily. Imagine that I am elder brother and I have a younger brother. We both are not on good terms. But my pooja room is in my brother's portion of the house and his room was in my portion. Automatically we have to talk with each other. This is how they plan the joint family homes, in order to avoid unnecessary rifts and separations. If we had our rooms separately, I may stop talking with my brother at a particular point of time.

I1: So the design...

A. Lawson

T3: Yes, the design is that even you had a fight; it will make you to speak because he is after all your brother. It is very rare that when a family splits they just give away stuff without telling each other.

R20: It is not possible to divide the house because of a fight.

I1: Is there anything you want to see

T3: You just look around

R20: Sure. Please look around. These photos are 100, 50, and 200 rupees.

T3: You have photo behind that chair, is it for sale?

R20: Yes.

T3: It is a photo of a king standing with a girl. It is a framed one.

R20: Ah yes yes.

T3: Will you give me that photo?

R20: But those are new.

T3: It is ok.

R20: Then I will give.

I1: What other things here come from England?

R20: Some glass articles, some boxes, electric stove. They are all in the downstairs. It had the name England inscribed on it.

T3: It is her country that is why she asks for it.

R20: Ok. Belgium is known for its mirrors. Toys, jars, stove and glass articles are the best things from England. See I brought this. It had the name England on it.

T3: On this also.

R20: See here is a god's photo that has the name England on it.

T3: It is the God Saraswathi.

I1: Yeah. But this is a company name?

T3: This is an advertisement.

R20: For tiles, England is better than Japan. What is your native place (to T3)?

T3: Ceylon. Father is in Ceylon. Mother is in Trichy, and I am studying in Chennai.

R20: Is it so? Just now we sent some articles to Ceylon. Mostly glass articles come from England. It has some name inscribed on it. (T3 murmuring the company's name something like Isleworth).

I1: Yes it is from London.

R20: You could also see the Chettiars name inscribed on it. There is a Chettiar here who collected the famous things of every country.

T3: They just go to different countries and find out the best quality products and they buy it. The red and green lights showed in trains in olden days. They do like this when a train passes. Really old one. This soap comes from England.

R20: If we get this in that cover, the cover alone costs 100rps. Soap costs 300rps

T3: He charges 100rps for just the cover.

I1: What type of customer would buy these soap cover?

R20: The dealers would buy that. People are so attracted to the West that if they just saw the name England on it, they are ready to buy it at any cost. There is a dealer here (his native is koothanallur) who goes to Malaysia often for business. At that time he buys this soap in more numbers. He buys all England products.

T3: There is a dealer who is fascinated by English stuff. So he always collects everything that says England and takes it to Malaysia to sell it.

I1: To Malaysia. Oh!

T3: What is this? Is there a bottle inside?

R20: Yes. There is a bottle.

I1: Things changed since the last time I came here. There are different things.

R20: Shirt pins made in England.

I1: Yeah

R20: Chettiars are the only people who safeguard these things. No one can beat them in their treasure. They maintain it in such a way that they roll everything in a cloth and after using they place everything in appropriate places.

T3: This is so funny. It is a nineties product. Everything changed after the 90s. We demolished our house in 2002. Till then we are [inaudible]

A. Lawson

R1: This is made in England [shows something]

I1: Its a razor.

T3: Out of safety.

R20: See the blade here, the knife, catalogue for it, and a belt. This is used to sharpen the knife.

T3: The belt is here.

I1: I think this is supposed to be used for safety. These panels, these wood panels are from the door I think.

R20: Yes, yes.

I1: And they are sold as decorative pieces?

R20: Yes. It can be used for both.

T3: Both as showpiece and door panels.

I1: So they may buy it and put it back on their doors.

R20: Yes, they use it in that way also.

I1: What kind of customer buys this?

R20: Some dealers will buy this. And there is a textile shop owner in Chennai whose shop has a 140ft tall wall. They use this panel to decorate that wall.

T3: Dealers buy it and there is one guy in Chennai who has a long wall to decorate. So he needs these kinds of panels to decorate his 140ft wall.

R20: This is used to hang bunch of keys, mirrors.

T3: It is like a stand to put glasses and mirrors...Ravi Varma's paintings.

I1: It is very nice. How much is this?

R20: One piece 75 rupees.

I1: You just tell him, I just want to tell him thank you. It is very useful each time I come. If he wants I can send him- I will be writing my thesis by next September- I can send him a copy. And also ask him if he is happy if I use his name in my thesis.

T3: She is asking whether she can use the details and your name.

R20: With pleasure

A. Lawson

T3: And every time she comes you treated her with greatness and she is thanking you for it. She is finishing her thesis by next September. If you want she can send you a copy.

R20: sure. Please send it. This is an unused stove which works by using Kerosene. You just fill the kerosene and incline it. Like gas stove.

T3: You just fill it with kerosene and keep it inverted and then it fuels the fire.

I1: I see

A60) B: 15/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T3, R18

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:24:21

Context: It is fairly early in the morning (around 10:30am) and the shops on Muneeswaram Kovil Street have not been open long. I have just finished an interview with R20 a few buildings down. I notice R18 as I pass and we greet each other. I ask if he has time to talk to me and he agrees. I turn on the audio recorder just after I have asked him how he selects his products. Our conversation is quickly joined by two more men (R65 and R66) of a similar age to R18. I am not sure if they are customers, colleagues or friends but they seem familiar with R18.

R18: As soon as I see an article, I will get an idea that who will buy that product.

T3: He stays in this place for past three generations. Every other in his family is in different fields of work. As he is interested in this job, he is doing it. He has an intuitive capacity to tell which person would like to buy certain products, simply by seeing that object.

R18: I am in this business for past 20 years. But I gained experience for the past 5-6 years.

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T3: He is in this business for past 20 years. But he gained more experience in the last 5-6 years.

T3: From where will you get the objects from? Mainly from Chettiars house?

R18: Here are some brokers. They will take me to Chettiar's house. If they give me the address, I will go there directly.

T3: He acquires the object mainly from Chettiar's house. He gets information through some agents. He will also go directly if he knows the address.

T3: To whom the owners will sell the objects? Will they sell it only to Chettiars or to some other community people?

R18: No. Community is not a problem. The owners will sell the product to whosoever pays money. Sometimes they may be egotistic. They will see the status of the person in business.

R65: They will sell it to salesmen only.

R18: If you go and ask them for such products, they may deny your request. The owners of the property who lived prosperously in the past but presently in a poor condition, will ready themselves in selling their goods. In some cases, people had to divide their property equally within their brothers. Such people will sell all the properties to salesmen like us and share the money within them.

T3: The products would be sold by looking at the person (like taking the pulse of a person). After looking at you they will decide whether to sell those products to you or not. They will sell it to their own community people more because they can even bargain with them. They usually refrain from giving it to other community people because they have this feeling that they come from higher status and they just don't want to give it to someone whom they do not know. Usually they won't sell these items except there is a rift/feud in a family. During the time property sharing, they sell these kinds of things and share the money which they get. Sometimes the family may be quite rich in the earlier generations and gradually they go down in their economy. In such condition they have to sell it. Even though they do this owing to

their poor state, they do not sell it anyone, just like that. There too they look for their community.

I1: What community, most of the traders here, are from?

R18: 80% of traders here are Chettiars. Only the remaining 20% are the traders from other community. The traders are very much experienced as they travel to different places like Burma, Singapore, Germany and Japan.

T3: [She corrects her question. He says that the owners are mostly Chettiars] what is the community of the traders like you?

R65: Clarifies the question again.

R18: No, no. Not all traders are Chettiars. It is a mixture of all communities.

T3: The ones who sell (owners of the property) are 80% Chettiars. The ones who buy (traders) are not essentially Chettiars. They are mixed. They are *Aasaris. Pillais* (names of different community of people in Tamilnadu)

R18: Likewise the brokers will go to every house in search of such high quality objects. Those families who are in poor condition will sell that objects.

As of now, only high class families have the reserve of those objects. Chettinadu articles are not extinct. It still exists in some houses. You know Raja Muthaiah Chettiar palace? And a palace in Kanadukathan? (asks you to visit the palaces in Kanadukathan)

T3: People are not allowing us into the palaces.

R18: Is it so? Because every heritage sites here are turning into government property, they don't allow people into these palaces. Earlier it is a private property so people allowed inside. But still you can see it from outside.

R65: There are many palaces and houses of Chettiars in Aathangudi also.

R18: Kanadukathan's King's house is bigger than the palaces in Aathangudi. You can see it. My name was in print in America 20 years back. A foreigner came and interviewed me. She published my interview and she also invited me there.

R65: He has a good experience in this business.

R18: Yes. But I found out my interest only some ten years back.

FN: R65 introduces a third person, R66, who he says is very much acquainted with Chettiar families.

R66: You are coming from?

I1: England

R18: He (R66) will respond you clearly.

T3: The antique objects are still plenty more. They are not completely destroyed.

I1: What about the houses that are demolished? Is it less or more when compared to the past?

R66: Government with the help of the people is trying hard to prevent the abolition of old houses. Many houses were demolished earlier. But now the situation is under control. The number of houses which are subjected to destruction are comparatively less now.

T3: Since the government has made it into a heritage site, the officials are stopping people from destroying it.

R66: People are aware now. Maximum people are now against demolishing.

T3: Nowadays they are not doing it because they know that they don't want to demolish it. Before they demolished many buildings but now they have stopped.

I1: They stopped because there is a regulation against demolition or people want to do so?

R66: No. Generally people initiated this demolishing. The buildings here are really very huge. It covers at least half a kilometre (500metre). People cannot preserve those buildings. As a result of which they migrated from these buildings and started demolishing buildings. For the sake of business.

T3: Now people are more aware of their heritage buildings. But earlier they demolished it because each house covers 500 meters, it takes up almost a street's space and it is difficult for house owners to maintain it. So they were demolishing it. Now they want to preserve their heritage. So they try not to demolish it.

R66: Another main reason is that earlier there were many joint families (all relatives live together as a family in one house). But now they were separated into nuclear families. While departing, they share their property (incl. their big house) for which they pull down their huge houses.

T3: In the previous generation, people lived as joint families. So they shared a single house and there was no problem in sharing. But now everyone wants to live as a separate family and they split. While splitting everybody legally wants their part, so there no other way than abolishing and selling it. They equally share the money which they obtained by selling it. Because the families are breaking, houses are broken.

R66: It is one of the reasons.

I1: Do you have any idea, how many houses or buildings in a month or a year are being demolished?

R66: No. It is a rare phenomenon. It will not exceed one building in a year.

T3: Just one house in a year, may be. There are not many number of houses are demolished.

R66: The people who are living here are mostly Chettiar. They will always keep a watch on their heritage. They also construct their houses in such a way to show off their heritage- say a huge house with a temple and a pond nearby. They definitely don't leave their houses for demolition unless or until there is a property dispute or their low economic level. Rarely, people from other communities buy those buildings and renovate them. Nearly 80% of such house owners are Chettiars.

T3: Chettiars are the community, who are very proud of their heritage. They do not sell their heritage buildings to the outsiders. Demolition happens in places where people are economically low. Nowadays one or two buildings are given to other community people. Some other people join them and build it into a hotel or something else. They are attached to things that much.

R66: When we look into the history of Chettiars, their origin starts from a place near Bay of Bengal, Kaveripoompattinam.

T3: Yes we heard about that.

R66: Their main business is salt (in the shipyard/ harbour). Before some 2000 years, those businessmen (Chettiars) were affected by the overflow in the sea. An epic story in Tamil Nadu called Silappadhikaaram whose protagonists are Kovalan and Kannagi is the base story of Kaveripoompattinam. After being affected by the flood, they looked for a highest (elevated) land which would not be affected by any floods and they got this nearby place Ilaiyathangudi first and Nehymam the next. These places are nearly 100ft high from the sea level. They began to build houses to a much more height than that 100feet. They are very cautious that the seawater should not reach their homes.

T3: They are so scared of the sea after the city Kaveripoompattinam was destroyed by the sea. Then they looked for a land which is high from the sea. They first settled in Ilaiyathamgudi (R66 orders a coffee) which is 100ft above the ground level. They build houses even above that 100 ft. because they are very scared they wanted to stay away from the seashore.

R66: Then their main concern was their safety. The threshold of their house has nearly some 10-18 steps. If you those buildings which are demolished these days, they are all very huge structures. The process of architecture mainly involves clay soil. [He shows some black/ brown stones by your side. Such stones were used in the olden days].

T3: The architecture consists of only clay soil. They did not use any other special items just clay and the brown stones which you could see in the walls.

R66: Building houses in such a way will keep you cool always that you are not in need of air conditioners then.

T3: It is much better than using air conditioners because it is always cool.

R66: Even now it is cool inside because of the hot climate in India. This is the way they do always. Secondly, demolishing houses is rare now.

T3: Nowadays they do not demolish.

I1: Do you have a shop in this street?

R66: I am a retired teacher. (He asks the translator) Are you guiding her?

T3: No. We are all studying together.

R66: Where are you studying?

T3: In Madras University.

R66: Which subject?

T3: Anthropology.

R18: This Madam (I1) is from England. Where is it actually? Because my daughter stays in America.

R66: They were our ruler man (King)

I1: No more.

R66: It was once upon a time. But history is true.

R18: Is America is nearer to England and Italy?

T3: England and Italy are near. Small countries.

R18: This fan is from England.

R66 (asks the T3): Which is your native?

T3: Sri Lanka

R18: I thought the same by looking at your face. Sri Lankan face.

R66: There is a madam in Ganesh electronics. She is also a Sri Lankan but settled here. My in-laws are from Sri Lanka.

I1: How much?

R18: 50 rupees is enough. I am not going to bargain with you.

I1: Normal rate?

R18: We will sell it for 400 rupees but for you I will ask only 50 rupees.

R66: I have become a grandfather. For my son. I have two sons who are working in Dubai. They completed B.E.(Engineering) in Chennai.

I1: Congratulations.

R18: This madam already came here twice. I explained them twice. This is the third time.

R66: Which place in Ceylon?

T3: My dad is in Muscaria.

I1: Can I just ask how many of these do you sell? Can you sell it easily?

T3: How much do you sell in a month?

R18: Some 20 or 30 or 50 pieces per month. Some retailers will take it as a whole sometimes. If a businessman (say Kerala) from other state comes, he may buy it as a lot.

I1: Is it easy to acquire new ones?

R18: Everything is bought from Chettiars house. These antiques were not the things to be manufactured. (He shows an urn and says that it is from England.)

R3: Most things here are from England. We will get it and preserve it.

I1: What do you think of antique trade in Chettinad?

R66: We feel very proud of this trade. Our culture is enlarging across boundaries. When people from foreign countries come here and buy things, it would make us happy.

T3: He feels very proud when people from foreign countries buy things here. Especially when foreigners come, he feels proud that their community is being recognized.

I1: Do you get many foreigners coming directly in to this street?

R18: This is the eighth month; they will come only in particular seasons. The season starts now. They will come till December. Totally for five months.

R3: Foreigners will come at the maximum in this season.

R18: MSM bungalow is here. Foreigners will stay there.

R66: MSM bungalow is here. You can stay there. It is safe.

R18: where do you stay now?

T3: Near new bus stand.

R18: That is ok you can stay there. But all foreigners stay there. It is very costly. Let them stay where they prefer.

I1: Do you know the local people who buy from these stores?

R66: Many people will come and buy things. It depends on taste. For example I will come daily and visit things. Whatever I like here I will get it.

T3: Quite a number of local people who were interested in these stuffs will come. For example he visits this shop daily and looks for new things. And buys things like that. In that way people who were interested in artistic objects will come here.

R66: I will spend some half an hour for a visit and look for latest things like books particularly old books.

I1: What are the other things?

R66: I had bought an old fountain pen, England jars which these shop owners get from Chettiars house.

T3: will you use those things?

R66: I will keep those antiques as a showpiece. I also buy things like old cameras and a lot more.

R18: You can buy anything here. Whatever we get we would sell it.

R66: Once I bought a locker (safe) like what you have in your country.

R18: Where you will keep your money.

I1: Like a metal safe. That is really pretty with paintings on it.

R18: It is me who brought it for him (R3) for 5000. It is a product of England.

R66: For money lending business in foreign. I bought a locker made in England which is fireproof.

R18: Made in England. Fireproof.

R66: How long will you stay here?

T3: Till tomorrow night.

R66: When have you arrived here?

T3: Yesterday.

R66: Straight to Chennai?

T3: Yes

R66: My wishes for your research.

I1: Thank you.

A61) B: 22/09/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R67, R68

Language: English

Duration: 01:11:28

Context: I met R67 and R68 several days ago at their antique exhibition and we arranged that I would come and meet them at R68's antique shop in Avenue Road, Bangalore. R67 picks me up from MG Road in her car and we drive to an old part of Bangalore a little south from the centre where the streets are narrow and winding. R68's shop is well hidden and it would be unlikely I would have found it on my own. It's down a very narrow side street and up a several flights of stairs. I record our conversation. Before I turn on the recorder R67 shows me a book written by her mother. It's about her life, first in Pakistan (pre-partition) and then in Madurai. There is a small section about her visits to the antique shops in Muneeswaram Kovil Street back in the 1970's and the range of antiques found there. This book was never published as R67 says it was meant just for the family.

(Some conversation about R67's childhood in Madurai and her parents lives)

I1: Can I start by asking you to introduce yourself and tell me about you' relationship with the antique business and with Balaji

R67: Yes. I'm Oriole Henry. I'm forty-three. I don't have anything much to do with the buying. I basically help organise shows outside of the shop. So the buying part that I got involved in was that I wanted to have cheaper, vintage stuff, that I thought would sell more often to more people, and would interest people to come to the shows, rather than just having the very expensive stuff and one-off pieces or furniture. So it was my idea to go and buy enamelware and stuff like that from Karaikudi.

I1: Is that because you already knew about it as a place?

R67: How did we know Karaikudi had enamelware (*question directed to R68*)?

R68: Because of that lady and some shops we saw.

R67: Yes, it wasn't a memory. The things that I bought as a child [*from Karaikudi*] we these bottles and bags, which were covered in beads.

R68: No, we had been with my father, so we knew. For toys we used to go. Tin toys.

R67: So yeah, I didn't remember the enamelware. I knew that there was enamelware available in India. It must have been through him [*R68*]. I had no idea of the scale of what they had until I got there. And I wasn't at all sure that I was right, that it would sell. So I took ten or twenty pieces, and then we had our first show and we sold out on the first day. So I thought, yeah.

I1: And the people who buy this from you, are they fully aware about what this stuff is and where it comes from?

R68: We will explain it to them. They will ask how it can be as good as brand new. Then we have to tell them the entire thing.

I1: Is it very common or very unusual that customers would already know. That they would see these and say 'oh that's from Karaikudi'?

R68: Very few of them have that knowledge. Otherwise they just want and like this enamelware.

R67: Foreigners are not particularly interested in where it is from, I would say. Would you [*R68*]?

R68: No they don't bother about that.

R67: They just like it. And they want it.

I1: I wanted to ask you about the difference you've seen between the antique business in the UK and in India...

R67: I didn't really deal in antiques there. I ran a *Past Times*. Remember them?

I1: Yes!

R67: So yeah there was a lot of fake stuff. So I don't know the difference. I mean I can guess. I have more recently gone to antique fairs, like Newark, because they want me to have a look at what's there. And I used to go there in a genteel way and buy things and pay the price that they asked. But I've discovered that it's exactly the same as here. You can bargain. I didn't know that. I got a ticket through the post, it was meant to be for my sister, for the first day of the Newark fair

which is supposed to be for dealers only, not the general public. So I went and it was all the dealers, and I was listening to them and they were all bargaining their heads off! You know 'what's your best price?', 'but what if I buy two?'. And I felt like such a numpty that before if they said it was five pounds I just gave them five pounds. I'd never have assumed that I could bargain in England. And there is a lot of wideboy talk, you know, oh 'its this much old'. And particularly because I was looking for Indian things, and I now know more about them, generally speaking, than the people selling them. So they would just talk total nonsense. I bought a Chola money pot from not even the main Newark Fair, its an offshoot which is more junky, more my cup of tea, and he had no idea what it was, or that it was 11th Century, none of which I told him because I paid him two pounds. He said 'I think its to keep knick-knacks in' or something. I think we've still got it in one of these cupboards, we haven't sold it yet.

I1: Have you come across any Chettinad stuff for sale in UK?

R67: No

R68: It's the only place in the world where we get this enamelware in such a quantity. Foreigners have told me that. They will never find so much of this 1930's enamelware, unused. Even though, all of what they sell is pre-owned.

R67: There is one shop in Portobello Road, I cant quite remember what was there, but he knew about Karaikudi. He's getting a bit old so he doesn't travel as much anymore, but he'd be interesting. It was right at the beginning of Portobello Road. And it's the only shop, if you look in, its no all Indian but there is a lot of Indian stuff in there. He'd be interesting to talk to because he's been travelling here since he was a young man. But the enamelware is very interesting. It's become very trendy to have. I've noticed it in chic Italian places and ??? shops.

I1: And Starbucks!

R67: Yeah Starbucks! Where as the association earlier in India from the older generation is that its hospital ware. So they don't like it.

I1: That's interesting. I wonder why it became so popular with the Chettiars then if that was the association.

R67: I don't know. It's particularly with the white stuff. You know in hospital that's what you were fed with and all the other revolting things. They used enamelware. And there are still places producing enamelware in India. I know there is a woman in Bombay who's designing and getting them made from her hotel and they supplied hospitals. So I would say that mostly I sell to young Indians or foreigners. A lot of Japanese people love it. We have a lot of Japanese customers.

R68: Yes, Awaji ceramics

R67: The Awaji ceramics they like too. It's an island where ceramics were produced in Japan and are no longer produced. We'd never heard of it and I didn't even know it was Japanese when I bought it. I bought it because it was nice.

R68: That lady gave us the link about it. They were selling very cheap, now each are selling for some seven hundred dollars. Some unusual coloured glaze ones. We were selling for two thousand rupees!

R67: And I'm pretty sure that the people selling them in Karaikudi don't know what they are Japanese.

I1: I've noticed that a lot of the dealers around Karaikudi repeat the same story about where things came from, as if its been learned. But I'm not sure if they actually know where these things have come from?

R67: They're not terribly knowledgeable about their stuff. They don't really know what's rare and what's more valuable. And that's the draw for other dealers around India, if you've got the knowledge you can.... It's an odd thing. Sort of a mecca for masses of antiques from all over the place, and yet you can go there and you can find things that they have no idea what the value is.

I1: Are there any other places in India like Chettinad and Karaikudi. In the sense that it is a hotbed for certain kinds of antique?

R67: Kerala used to be a bit like that. And there are particular things that come from Kerala. Particular styles of painting and woodwork particularly. But Kerala has marketed itself so successfully as a tourist destination that they cant produce enough, so they go and buy at

Karaikudi and sell it there. And that's why a lot of the things there are fakes. So as a dealer it's not worth it.

[R67 repeats my question to R68]

R68: No

R67: Before, Kochin right?

R68: See in Kochin there were dealers, but there is nothing like this one hundred villages full of these things. There was one place in Vadakara, Kerala, where you used to get ceramic and glass items, glass collectibles in huge quantities.

R67: Oh really? And it was because the people in the houses in that area at one time bought it?

R68: Yes, yes, from the houses in that area. They had very ancient Ming porcelain jars and all that. From the trade.

R67: And its still there?

R68: No, ninety percent is gone.

[R68 tells me he has just been on the phone to a sometime customer of his (R77), who is an antique collector and keen to meet me.

Mentions another customer of his]

R67: He's a big collector and buyer from us and he's a very senior policeman but he's very nice and very knowledgeable and very passionate actually about these things.

R68: And he's born and brought up in Trichy, near Karaikudi.

I1: So you were telling me about your customers. You say you sell mainly to young Indians.

R68: No, last ten years only. Before it was only elders who used to collect. Youngsters did not bother. Now they have started collecting. He's very young also *[customer he has just been talking about]*. He's thirty-eight.

I1: How old is your business?

R68: 1924. My grandfather started this. Our main business was gramophones, from that a friend in Dharmasthala, that religious place, for the pilgrims, except for the temple, nothing else was there for them to spend there time in. In 1974 my father suggested they start a museum. Then he full-fledged started.

I1: How far is this place from Bangalore?

R68: 300km.

I1: And what type of thing did they have in this museum?

R68: All types of things. Everything. Aircraft, planes, cars, typewrites. Many things from Karaikudi. We have 27,000 items there.

I1: And you said there are a few collectors here in Bangalore. What can you tell me about them? Have they been collecting for a long time?

R68: Yes. Like R77, this one crazy person has been collecting from twenty-five years back. The entire ninety-nine per cent of his pay he spends on antiques. He won't even travel by Auto so that he can buy something, like that.

I1: And do they tend to have a specific interest?

R68: No, like this one collector, he collects bronzes, and Mysore school and Thanjavur school paintings. He collects everything. Thanjavur, Mysore, bronzes, porcelain, Persian carpets, tapestries.

I1: So the stuff that comes from Karaikudi, well I suppose there is a mixture, but a lot of it tends to be more ordinary...

R68: Its very, very utilitarian. Not artistic in any way.

I1: Yeah, so does that appeal to the collectors at all?

R68: No. Some wooden carvings and all, which are 1800's, those are considered antiques. Because Karaikudi itself is not such an ancient place. It is some colony started by some Tamilians. Business people.

I1: So the collectors are interested in the history?

R68: Yes. Mainly some high quality wooden carvings they would get.

R67: Those Kaveri panels.

R68: Kaveri panels, doors, very elaborate doors they would get.

I1: So that is another thing I'm interested in, this wood that comes out of the houses...

R68: And that was that Satinwood that is not originally from India. It is from Burma.

R67: Most people, if you say 'Karaikudi', they will say 'doors and pillars'. That's the association.

R68: After those Jodhpur fellows started coming, nobody was asking for enamelware.

R67: Other than us.

R68: You know it was 20 rupees, 50 rupees each. Now suddenly it is 700/800 rupees each.

R67: Munee is buying a lot. I've been old he's got massive, like eight go-downs. He's one of the biggest dealers. And interior designers come there from all over the world and buy container loads. Because its vintage, so they can ship it without any issues.

I1: Vintage meaning its less that one hundred years old?

R68: Yes

R67: So you don't need a license or special permission. And a friend of mine did an interview with him. He drives you around these go-downs in a truck, it's that big.

R68: In his warehouse you have to go in a go-kart or something. One thousand cupboards will be there. And one lakh chapatti boxes!

I1: So presumably there they have things like the carved doors and pillars, but would they also have the enamelware and things like that?

R68: Yes, thousands

R67: he's just started buying the enamelware.

R68: From five years they started. Even in Kerala they would go and truck loads they would take away. Because North Indian antiques are not appealing to everybody. Because very early pieces are very high quality, and middle era, eighteen hundreds and all, nothing is there, means quality of work was very bad. South India, they prefer that.

R67: In the mid-range price

R68: Or millions of dollars it will cost. Marble panels, miniature paintings and all that. And other than that nothing is good. Mid-range, one thousand, two thousand, five thousand, nothing is there. And all fakes, 99% fakes. North India is famous for copies.

R67: yeah we don't go buying up there.

I1: So where, would you say, do most of the things you buy come from?

R68: Mysore. In Mysore agents will be there. They will go around and get things. Mysore, Tamil Nadu, Kerala. We get mainly from three states: Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Mysore. Not from the north. Once if you

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trust the north [Indian dealer], the day we shake hands with him, the conning will start. Their policy is that.

R67: It's a bit like London like that. You'll get eaten alive if you don't know what you're doing.

I1: Do you get the tiles?

R67: The Chettinad tiles?

I1: Yeah

R67: yeah we did get some, but people didn't really....

I1: Know what to do with them?

R67: Yeah I brought a few and said you can use them as heat plates and that sort of thing, and we sold a few, but it wasn't a great success.

I1: I imagine its used more in the architecture and construction business. And furniture...

R67: Furniture we do buy from Karaikudu.

R68: Some. Whatever we can sell. Now in apartments, used things they don't prefer it.

R67: Yeah, a lot of the stuff is just too big, and people are living in much smaller spaces. But some of the Burmese chests...those will....or...

R68: Camphor chests

R67: Desks, we've bought in the past.

R68: Some simple panels. Door panels. Not elaborate ones which are worth lakhs. We buy in the range of three to five thousand rupees. What we could sell here. Carved furniture is not in demand in Bangalore.

I1: No?

R68: No, very elaborately carved furniture. People prefer the very simple, plain, art deco furniture.

(Introduces another man who has just entered)

R68: We go with him there [to Karaikudi]

R67: He is the master bargainer, while we are all and quiet.

R68: How much, 60-70% we have to bargain.

R67: Yes, even though we're dealers, and we're being introduced as dealers, and we've been now many times, they'll still . . . And

sometimes I'll ask him on the third floor how much something is and he tells me, and then when we get downstairs he ups the price! But its expected, you know we're all having coffee and its all very, you know...

I1: I'm terrible at bargaining.

R68: We also are. We can't do it, that's why he has to be there.

Remember that Krishna we bought. They quoted three lakhs. He bargained it for 60,000 rupees. And we were ready to pay one and a half lakhs! One cupboard Murugan bought, He told two and a half lakhs, he gave for 80,000 . . . There is very unusual furniture very typical to that area. You have seen it? With the gods and goddesses. Like a temple it looks. South Indian, not French or anything. It is particular on to Karaikudi that we get that. Those things are also becoming rare. That's why we stopped this time, because the same repetitions we are getting: enamelware, awaji and all.

I1: So when you go on one of these trips [to Karaikudi] do you have a specific idea of what you're looking for?

R68: No nothing. But our ideas wont work then, some things you wont get...

R67: Yeah you can't ... even the enamelware now, because of these Jodhpur people, we've gone there twice, and we only really buy from one guy, and he just didn't have any. He said that a guy from Jodhpur came yesterday and bought 800 pieces. But also, part of the issue is that it's the same stuff. It's exactly the same. It is that black and red lacquerware, it is ... you know, and ok, you'll get a few other pieces. But...

R68: Awaji is getting less and less

R67: Mmm some things are going. But you know we do a show twice a year, and maybe half of the people who come are the same people, so to keep them interested and keep them coming . . . like the enamelware didn't really sell this time and I haven't bought anymore, and I wont buy anymore, because I've already bought one big lot.

R68: There is one house in Karaikudi with 7000 pieces.

I1: This is in a house, they wanted to sell the whole house?

R68: No only the enamelware. This is a negotiated thing, but we don't have the space to keep it.

R67: That's the other thing, the physical storage space.

R68: When I went first time with my father, thirty rupees each, forty rupees each he was selling.

(speaking in Tamil)

R67: He's saying you got five pieces for one hundred rupees in those days, and they weren't bothered which five. You could take big pieces or small.

R68: Because so many thousand, they will not have space to keep. When you visit that Katraja's place you would see.

R67: That's the place that really shocked me. He's got a room that's twice the length of this and is just enamelware. It's just unbelievable.

R68: In eBay they described it as 'extremely rare enamelware'!

R67: I was just....you know...I couldn't believe it... and then because we didn't buy hundreds he tried to overprice it. And it ended up we didn't buy anything from him. And he's holding out against this Jodhpur fellow.

R68: He thinks these things will be sold for a huge amount in the future. He doesn't know that thousands of pieces are still lying around. He used to sell tin toys, then one Calcutta dealer came and he made millions. Each toy that would sell for hundred rupees, he used to sell for hundreds of dollars there. He made him vegetarian, that Jain dealer. He is a vegetarian Muslim. No milk or anything like that.

R67: Kataraja, he drives you mad. His volume is always on full. I sit in the car now. I can't handle him.

I1: The other thing I noticed in the shops in Karaikudi, is apart from all the standard stuff that you see everywhere, its just full of little knick-knacks. Just random stuff. I wonder what happens to all of that. Do dealers buy that as well?

R67: *(repeats question to R68)* You in the shops they have just rubbish, like arms of dolls. Who buys all that?

R68: Jodhpur fellows.

R67: Because they buy as a lot?

R68: Yes. Not for the collectors and all the architects that come from all over the world, they will use it for something.

R67: But also the dealers in Karaikudi, they need the space. So they'll say, 'I'll give it to you for blah blah, if you take everything without question'. Even R68 has done that a couple of times. You know, 'I'll give you this price if you take all the furniture I have'. And you can't then quibble and say 'I don't like that piece' or 'I do like this'.

R68: Once we did that and within one week an equal amount had come back. We could buy it in a weeks time.

R67: But also in this shop are bits of junk that have come in with small lots. A guy arrives with a bag and you want to buy four out of five things. He's not going to go home with the fifth. You have to give him a price for it all. And if you quibble, he won't come back.

R68: And we can't say no to so many dealers, we have to buy. We don't know what they bring next.

R67: And if you say no two or three times then they'll stop coming to you.

R68: See one dealer standing outside. We bought so much junk from him. Lakhs. In between, one toy he gave us, that went for \$4000. For that we have bought one lakh of his junk.

R67: So yeah it's a sort of trade off.

I1: It also seems like a knowledge based thing. So dealers further up the food chain might be willing to spend a lot on a lot of junk because they know that in amongst it is something really valuable.

R67: Yeah, but I would also say that the knowledge base is increasing through the internet. They all have phones. He travels far less now, because they can all send him pictures. Actually he has a very different way of dealing with a lot of his... (to R68) You know how you buy from these people is different from other dealers right? Are you happy to talk about that?

R68: Yes. See these people, they don't have any knowledge. Just because of me, for me, they buy. And I have to buy. I can't refuse.

R67: And also, if they do have some knowledge, and it's a very good piece, because they are friends of his, unlike other dealers, and

because he bought from them when they needed to pay their school fees, even though it was rubbish, he'll say 'give it to me on consignment, if I get what I think I can get, I'll give you a higher amount'. Other dealers really don't like that about him. He should be screwing the supplier and not telling them that. But he doesn't do that. Other dealers have said to me 'he's spoiling the market'. I think actually he's being more honest.

R68: One shabid, who kept the plates you know? He used to buy gramophone records. Hundreds he used to get me. We were getting bored. We told him 'don't bring'. That day he brought twenty-five. I thought, 'why should I buy all this'? I was screaming at him! Then I saw one Beatles record there for thirty rupees only, but I gave him 10,000 rupees for that. Others they don't do that. And I sold it for 55,000 rupees. When I make only could I give...but that gives us problems also, for very useless things also the demand like that sometimes.

I1: And you mentioned the internet is also affecting some things?

R68: Yes we deal in high-end wrist watches which it is affecting. Antiques it doesn't affect so much. The dealers who are supplying wrist watches, they'll get the highest price from the print-out and they'll bring it along with the watch. Before it was not like that. But not in antiques. See these people don't know how to switch a cell phone on and off. They can't harm us. Serious collectors like Murugan, we can't buy from them. They know the ins and outs of it.

I1: And there aren't many dealers in antiques operating on the internet here are there?

R68: We started our company.

I1: Oh you have?

R67: R68 and his friends have started something called Phantom Hands. But its very new.

R68: seven or eight months. And its picking up very well.

I1: And this is an internet based business?

R68: Yes, online only.

I1: I'm surprised there aren't more.

R67: Well people don't trust the internet here. If you can see it and touch it. Especially if you're spending proper money.

I1: But you say people are willing to buy on the basis of a photograph.

R67: He is. Because he can work it out. But a customer won't. I mean he always sends customers pictures of what he has, but they are not trusting the photo, they're trusting him.

I1: So what kind of customer is this aimed at?

R68: Yesterday we listed one paratrooper bike. 1942. Already this morning four enquiries are there. And comics we listed, enquiries are there. Because it came in the Times Of India.

R67: What I find interesting is that, in England if you bought something on the internet, at no point would you probably speak to someone. But here they will speak to someone. They will make an enquiring then a phone call and will ask how much, is it genuine

R68: And can I come and see it.

R67: It's online, but not fully online as we would see it. It opens up the custom to the whole of India. I mean some people who buy from abroad, they are fine about it. But there will be email conversations. Particularly if they are serious collectors, they often know more about it than we do. I mean there are these extraordinary sites in America that he's gone on to research for the website, you know, '1930's fans' where people talk about it. But yeah business here is very personal and trust based and one-on-one.

R68: Yeah business trust is most important. That we cant expect in the North. Even that Lalji we can't depend on. A big dealer in Jodhpur.

I1: Do you remember much about the customers who bought the pickle jars from this last exhibition?

R68: One lady bought two. One person, he came here and he bought it. For using.

I1: And were they new or regular customers?

R68: New.

I1: Did they seem to know what the jars were?

R68: See we are charging 2000 rupees. Indian jar you get for 200 rupees. That I had to explain why it is, and then they bought it. It is by Dalton company.

I1: And they wanted to use them as a pickle jar?

R68: Yes as a pickle jar

R67: Yeah they are quite literal. With the enamelware they say, 'well what would I use it for?', and I say 'you can cook with it, or you can serve your food on it'. I have to explain what they could use it for.

R68: See in that show [antique show] she explains how it could be used. Here they have to imagine! Many people, they don't buy here, but they buy there. The same piece! Same furniture, we can't sell it here, but it will be sold there. It will be lying here for years, as soon as we put it there it is sold.

R67: You set is out to look like a house, put a lamp on it and suddenly they can imagine it. That's just retail the world over. Some people can, especially with antiques and junk and vintage, some people can think 'oh I'll do this with it' and some people, like Habitat, need to know what it will look like overall, and then want to buy that look. So quite a few people who came [to the show] had brought their interior designers. And they tell them what to buy. An architect came....

R68: He came with the house plan

R67: And then the customer will think about it and come back. There's a muddle actually, with the modernisation of India, initially actually you couldn't get anything foreign and then when foreign things started coming in everybody wanted it. They didn't want anything old in their house, so they wanted Japanese, Malaysian furniture, because no one else had it. Now lots of people can get it. So now there's this little muddle, particularly for the middle class, who, I mean we've only just created a middle class in India in the last twenty years, and so they're muddled about what it is, when they have that money, what they should do to show that they have that money. And so there are some people who only want new, some people who only want old, but if they want old, they also want to be able to say 'this is the rarest thing you've ever seen in your life, there were four made in the world and I have

one', and that's what sells it. So they don't get the enamelware or the pickle jars, because that's not rare. So they come for the one off pieces. But then there is a younger generation who have grown up with money and they are connected through the internet, and they have a very European, or rather a mixed sensibility and tastes from all over the world, and they are just beginning to say 'I like that so I'm going to buy it'. They don't need me to say anything about it. Wouldn't you say, these young Indians who buy the enamelware and all are like that?

I1: So its not really about proving anything?

R67: No they just like it

R68: Yes they don't ask anything they just like it. Only one or two ladies ask..

R67: But they are in their 50's and relatively 'new money', there's a phrase we don't use in England anymore, and they will often make a list of everything and all about its history, so that when visitors come to the house they can say that they have this thing and they have this knowledge. Which is fine. Even I do that because I often don't remember.

I1: What about theses 'collectors' who are a different type again? Is it still about status for them or is it just about an interest in history...

R68: No 90% are show offs. Very few are passionate. Only some like (Murugan) really care about the history and the process of how it was made.

I1: So these passionate collectors, are they of a particular type or class?

R67: No, they're random. There's nothing to connect them other than their particular passion. And it will be quite specific, and they'll often have more knowledge than R68 about it. They're that obsessed.

I1: But you don't know any collectors like this who are interested in Karaikudi antiques.

R68: No, because now they make very poor quality replica furniture there. These youngsters are buying that. These new techies. They don't understand about antiques and they buy that. But they're not crazed for Karaikudi antiques, nobody is.

R67: Which is why it's sort of remained a secret. But it's not a secret. Everybody knows Karaikudi.

R68: But one purchase, one trip is enough. Because we are dealers we are going often.

R67: Its not that they would go there and get something extraordinarily rare. So its fun to go once, but that's it. And I mean it's interesting to see where that Jodhpur fellow is selling so much enamelware. It must be abroad. Because you cannot shift that much here. It's not that popular. There are enough people that it justifies our buying. But I mean, we bough one big lot that was three hundred pieces. That was a big lot for us and that's partly because I couldn't travel to Karaikudi for a couple of years, that was to do with my family, so I couldn't travel back and forward every time.

R68: Because the same stuff we get. Even in enamelware, the same things.

R67: You don't get anything 'wow I've never seen that before'. I mean occasionally there are the more rarer things in the enamelware. Seives you don't see very often. Kettles.

R68: And jugs we never get.

R67: There's also one guy who bought masses of it and sells it in Coonoor. I think that's where I first saw it. The rumour was that he'd bought a big lot for a foreigner in America or something, and then he backed out. So he suddenly had all this stuff.

R68: But Karaikudi dealers, they are loosing their reputation. We go to only one dealer. One American dealer comes here, he was telling how he was conned twice. They will have a meeting every evening on how to con foreigners in Karaikudi.

I1: What sort of thing?

R68: See that American dealer he will come and buy and keep the stuff there till the evening, so that everything they can pack. They'll change the things inside. And they'll refuse that you have kept here. But he is a very tough guy! He started beating one dealer there, then they gave back his things. Karaikudi has one native, Chettiars, who are money people. All others are poverty stricken.

I1: Are Chettiars well know across India?

R68: Yes because we have Telugu Chettis. Same Chetti's. Business communities are called Chettiars. Chettiars means Tamil Chettiars. Karaikudi Chettiars. Do you know that story, entire Madurai district was pledged to that Jewish family who were famous in Germany? Financers? Rothschild. It is entirely owned by Rothschild family, Karakudi, Madurai and all those places.

I1: What percentage of you custom would you say comes from foreigners?

R68: Maybe 10%. And before her (R67) only 2%.

R67: I mean there is an antique shop on commercial street, and then (inaudible). But those are both big shopping streets, so they'll get people wandering in. See this isn't in a main shopping or tourist area, and anyway Bangalore is not a tourist destination like Chadni Chowk.

I1: What about regular custom from foreign dealers?

R68: That relation is in Jodhpur

R67: And in more recent years people are buying from there to sell here.

R68: Like China, they want their things back!

R67: But I'd say a lot of your customers are regular collectors. Maybe 90%. And sometimes they'll be regular for ten years and then for whatever reason they'll stop. They also trust, if one walked in now he wouldn't even look around the shop. He'll come in and sit down and he'll say 'what is there to see'.

R68: We'll know what to show him.

R67: Or he'll call and say 'is there anything new, should I come?'. So they don't walk around and pick stuff up. And the more valuable stuff anyway wont be on display.

I1: I wanted to ask if you have a personal interest in or fondness for any antiques?

R68: It's very much a business. I like knives, weapons. If I get any I keep them. But in my house nothing is there, not even one antique.

R67: It's like that, when I first started I wanted to keep half the things and they said to me here that you'll never make any money that way.

A. Lowson

Also, the more it becomes a business the less you want it at home. Its not that you appreciate it any less its just...having said that, my own house is full of it.

I1: Is there any type of thing your particularly into?

R67: When I first came here I was looking for old black and white photographs. **R68:** That's when I first started getting black and white photographs.

R67: Yes they didn't have them so he bought them for me. And then, these Ravi Varma's I didn't like at first, they're a very different style, but my sister collects them and I started liking them, but now I've got too many, and all of them are gods so its quite difficult to find places to put them where your not pointing your feet and all that. I've got lots of enamelware. I've got a head thing at the moment, wooden heads. I don't know where that started. I've got too many now and I have to stop. They're mostly from puppets.

A62) B: 27/09/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Auroville

Interaction Participants: I1, R10

Language: English

Duration: 00:15:11

Context: I have contacted R10 via email. We have met once before during my first visit to Auroville. When I arrive he takes me to small building with a veranda situated towards the back of the workshop yard. We sit down and talk casually for a little while before I decide the record the conversation.

I1: You said there were already some antique businesses in Auroville when you arrived?

R10: In Pondicherry, not Auroville.

I1: Which ones are the older businesses there?

R10: Curio Centre is an old established shop. On Romain Rolland street....(inaudible)...They all do well. They are still there.

I1: And you said when you started back then it was 100% export.

R10: We were export oriented then because you see, I'm a foreigner here in India. I've been living here past thirty-five years, but still local people wouldn't buy from me so easily. Because they would have the feeling that we are too costly. Though that philosophy is changing a little bit. Because now people are looking more and more for quality. They have realised that buying something cheap does not necessarily mean that it is a good deal. So we were always aiming for highest possible quality under the local conditions, and even today, we were the first ones to import a better quality of polishes and waxes, which were not available in India and are still not available in India. Because the overall market for the quantity required for factory to set-up, was not there. Because if you take quality products, they have a higher price than local products. Local products, as long as they sell, as long as they work, as long as nobody really complains, they are selling because they are cheaper. So it takes peoples mind-sets to change. People have to realise that quality and price is something which they have to strive for. So we were the first ones importing that to India, and now slowly we are getting more and more volume, which people appreciate. Because they see our quality difference and other foreign companies they will (inaudible) because they know the quality difference.

I1: And now the export market is.....?

R10: Its not interesting any more because there is not enough demand for quality products from India, because the Indian rupee is quite strong. Other countries like Indonesia, Bali, where you get this stuff cheaper, so the exporters are shifting away from India. See fifteen to twenty years ago India was a country used for cheap labour and manufacturing. That has changed. That market is not there anymore. Now India has got more and more into quality. Into high-end markets. And with 3 billion people, you have a market of your own, which is stronger than the European market. And the Indians have the money

for it, while the Europe and, they struggle for the price. So the Indian market for export is not so interesting anymore. It has totally changes. I know that we had American customers, we had European customers, they were really talking in high volumes, but those high volumes are not there anymore. Because in old wood, the market has been skimmed off.

I1: So you're saying that now people go to Indonesia and Malaysia for that kind of thing?

R10: Yes. See the whole textile market is not less than a few years ago. Because we cannot produce to the price the international market requires. Now the places are Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam. They get the cheap labour. We cannot compete with that. We are paying higher wages. We are paying higher quality services. Even our industry standard is so high for that.

I1: I'm interested in the sentimentality locally about reusing old wood. How did you find out about that?

R10: When people come to me and tell me clearly that they don't want to sleep in a bed that has been made out of recycled wood, or restored even, incase somebody else might have slept in or might even have died in it. So they are very scared of these types of things and they wont touch it.

I1: Do you know if its just about wood?

R10: Not only wood, it is generally about second hand items. People using such things will generally be looked down upon.

I1: so its not just the superstition, its also about a lack of money?

R10: Yeah, I have some stories which might be interesting for you. We get second-hand stuff, which means people sell, at some point. So, when our suppliers come with this stuff they come usually at night-time, at odd times, because when they remove this things from the houses of the people who are selling it they should not come at certain times. Their neighbours should not see. They don't want to come under the impression that they have been forced to sell their own heritage items, because they must have some problems....See we are used to a society where you buy, you sell, if you make a good deal and get it

cheap, you buy it, its nice, it's a good product. But here it doesn't matter if it's a good product or cheap, it's a matter of what the neighbours think...so sometimes they simply buy junk because it shines, it sparkles. But it's junk.

I1: I'm interested in these things that are second-hand and cheap now becoming 'antique' and heritage items. Is that a change that's happened at sometime on the last century in India?

R10: No there is a difference. You see at the turn of the nineteenth century many things in India had been produced in wood. The wood is a high quality wood. So these types of things, they don't go out of fashion, they maintain their value. Things which have been done on a lesser scale, the poorer houses in the villages, they are cheap. They don't have the value. Because it is only country wood.

I1: I see, so your saying the difference is in the actual material these things are made from?

R10: The product, yeah. If there is an original rosewood piece from the turn of the century or 150 years ago, it has its value, whether it is British or Indian or Chettinad.

I1: How did you find out about the Chettinad region?

R10: Chettinad is a seafaring community, who at the turn of the century was very rich. From higher castes. So they went to foreign countries like Vietnam, Malaysia and all this, and brought stuff from there. A lot of items which we are still selling today. Like camphor boxes. Satinwoods. All this is coming from other countries. They weren't grown in India. So the stuff that is in India, they came in thousands at that time, because it was like a fashion. They have been brought into the family heritage. Then the whole scene changed, the seafaring went down, so the whole community of the Chettiars has become more and more poor. So then there was a shift from the villages into town. So the properties in the villages, they had to be kept-up, so they have been sold off and people don't want them anymore and all their splendour from 150 years ago, it went bust. All the community have become in general more poor, and they have changed over to IT and a lot of different fields. So seafaring, basically, is over.

I1: And as a business person when did you first become aware of antiques coming from that region?

R10: Oh that was right from the beginning, I was learning about it and I spoke to a lot of people and when we were selling to Europe customers were interested in the history of the pieces.

I1: Oh they were?

R10: Yes, when you sell something in Europe they want to know from where it has been born!

I1: And was the amount of stuff coming from Chettinad greater then than now?

R10: Why are you concentrating on Chettinad? See we have a radius here of one and a half to two thousand kilometres, which is economical to bring stuff here. Further than that transport becomes too costly so we don't take it, even if it's nice. Because we have to sell it. There is no point getting stuff from Calcutta or Delhi here, because it will be too costly to transport. So we have a certain radius. That means here towards the south we have Chettinad. Towards the north is the Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh side. The styles are different, items are different, carvings are different. Maybe you have different communities, like the Muslim communities who generally have furniture that is a little more opulent. So style is varying according to the area.

I1: And are you getting an equal amount from these different areas? There is no excess from one place?

R10: No, You cant regulate the market. People sell when they have a certain need. A daughter is getting married, or some function is happening and they need additional money, so at that time they sell. We get an influx of brass articles, for example, after Diwa?? (Diwali?). Old brass articles are being sold and new brass articles are being bought. In the old days we you were getting it by the kilo, but nowadays its being pre-sorted, because people have realised that figures and artefacts sometimes have a higher value than the brass itself.

I1: And is there an equal demand for articles from all areas, from the customers side?

A. Lawson

R10: No that greatly varies. Because we have a certain amount of foreign customers. Auroville is an international city so there are tourists and other people as well. Pondicherry has made the decision many years ago to invest in tourism, that is a big part of the Pondicherry business. So the influx of tourists here is strong. Pondicherry is known as a French-flaire city. People from other big cities, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, come to Pondicherry to relax and for shopping. So we benefit from that.

I1: Do you also deal in the small utility artefacts like enamelware and pickle jars?

R10: There is a full showroom of it.

A63) B: 27/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, R59

Language: English

Duration: approx. 20 mins

Context: This is my second meeting with R59. He was not sure if he would have time for this meeting but agrees to meet me at his antique shop in Pondicherry.

FN: R59 begins by asking me if I have had a chance to seem much of Pondicherry. He mentions notable buildings in Pondicherry – Hotel l' Orient, Palais deMahais – In the French style with big rooms and high ceilings. Maisson Peramol – Old Tamil buildings making up ten rooms. Romand Rolland Street has an antique shop that is one of the first in Pondicherry – there it is 90-98% replica. But they were the pioneers of the antique business in Pondicherry.

R59: I am interested in imparting knowledge, not just in buying and selling. I'm interested in things historically and socially. Now we don't ever have time to think 'why did a person design something like this'? We don't think about the philosophy behind an object or piece of

furniture. Why particular materials were used in different areas. That sort of thing.

FN: He says a good book for antique furniture (particularly Indo-European) – ‘V&A Museum: 400 years of Indian/European Furniture’.

R59: Personally I’ve never felt pinched (trade/economy wise). In India the trade has increased. 90% of trade Indian – 10% export. 90% of what is sold is modern but recycled (from older things). Eg. baby cradles or old doors are re-used in new ways. Sometimes Indians have sentiments about these things. There are local traditions. For example in a new house there has to be a new door (not an old/recycled door), even though new wood is 40% more costly. Furniture is a bit like fashion. People get all the magazines, they get ideas, it leads to a change of taste. There is more money in it now. They go for heritage items – it’s a new trend, like the heritage hotels, which is my main custom. But availability is less now. Ten years ago you could pick-up lovely wood so easily. Now it takes more time. The prices have also increased. Now if I find really good pieces I’m not in a hurry to sell them. I’d rather keep them and maybe wait for a really good price.

A64) B: 28/09/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, R69

Language: English

Duration: 00:14:38

Context: This shop is on the corner of Romain Rolland Street in the French quarter of Pondicherry. This street has been mentioned to me several times as where some of the first antique shops in Pondicherry can be found, though I believe the particular shop being spoken of is not this one, but one a little further down the street. This shop is dominated by large wooden pieces such as doors and pillars, many of which look as though they could well have come from Chettiar houses. Further inside the shop are some items of European style furniture. I

start a conversation with the shop owner. He speaks very good English and once I have explained my research interest he quickly agrees for me to turn on the audio recorder.

FN: R69 is originally from Trivandrum. He started the business in Kodaikanal – Wood, architectural material, building. Used to also have a business in Bangalore but its closed now. Real estate costs are too high there now. Pondicherry is a better location. Now 70% of production is reproduction. I started in this business in 1993. When I started there was always interest here in this area. The mixture of the French and Auroville cultures had a certain appeal. That's why it's the right place to start an antique business. When I started there were already some few businesses in the town. But I was perhaps the first to start professional carpentry – proper restoration work.

R69: Originally I was export oriented. Local people wouldn't buy from me easily. Now there's not enough demand for export. Twenty years ago the Indian market was used for cheap labour along with Malaysia and Indonesia – now the Indian economy is much stronger.

Buying/collection radius of about 100km – To the south as far as Chettinad, to the north as far as Andhra Pradesh. Buy from many different communities. Rosewood, Burmese teak, furniture, brass, some china, glass and terracotta.

A65) B: 28/09/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Pondicherry

Interaction Participants: I1, R70

Language: English

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: This shop has been spoken of to me as one of the first antique shops in Pondicherry. The shop owner R70 is seated behind a desk just inside the shop entrance. Next to him is a shrine to Ganesh with incense burning. I take a look around the shop before stopping to

A. Lawson

explain my research to him and ask him a few questions. He replies politely to me but is not overly talkative, perhaps because he finds my English difficult. This shop seems more like a show room than the shops in Karaikudi. Items are well spaced and displayed and labelled with a price.

FN: He is originally from Kerala. Business started by father 53 years ago, mainly selling ivory to foreigners. Switched to selling antique furniture after the ivory trade was banned. He took over the business from his father around 1993. He sells antiques only, no replication business. Customers are mainly Indians from Bombay and Bangalore. He has some Chettinad pieces but not many. He deals direct with the sellers – doesn't go to Karaikudi anymore. He says there are very few good pieces there now, and what is there is very expensive. He says this is due to the custom from north India dealers from Jodhpur and Delhi who buy in bulk from Karaikudi. He has some Burmese lacquerware, which he says he bought directly from the families/owners in Chettinad, not from the Karaikudi antique shops. He prefers the simple clean lines of the colonial furniture, and so, he says, do his mainly European/French customers in this area. He tells me that before the British came, Indians. Chettiars didn't use furniture such as beds and dressers. Instead they focused all their decorative output on the structural work like doors, pillars and beams. Back then the craftsmen and their families were supported completely for a period of several years by their employers, and allowed to work at their own pace. Now everything is paid for per item or job. Now time is money. That's not how it used to be.

A66) B: 05/11/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R71

Language: English

Duration: approx. 40 mins

Context: I was told about this shop the previous day by a Chennai based friend. I walked to the shop which was closed, but I called the number on the shop board and I spoke to R71. She was happy to meet me for a chat the following day. I arrived around 3:30pm. The shop is on a quite leafy side street of Mylapore. R71 is friendly and informal and asks me to sit for a chat. The shop sells mostly refurbished and re-purposed antique furniture. Some items have been given a modern twist, such as antique wooden chairs with colourful modern fabric cushions.

FN: I start by explaining in a little more detail what my area of research is, and how I have a particular interest in Chettinad antiques. She says there are no antiques from Chettinad – only small articles. [She seems to mean furniture only when she speaks of antiques]. I explain that I'm also interested in the pillars and doors from the demolished houses. That she says yes, you can still get and some of it is quite old.

R71: I remember there used to be such lovely stuff twelve years ago, but not so much now.

I1: Why?

R71: They all get sold off. There is always a market for nice pieces. Mostly this is vintage, not antique. Antique is older than 100 years. Ten years ago the market was more controlled by expats who sold for export mainly. Export controls are strict about doors and pillars. From the days of the British Raj lots of furniture has gone out from India. But as far as exporting, there are always ways of getting around it (restrictions - she says that bribing is commonplace to get round export restrictions).

I1: Was it so in the past?

R71: I've heard from others that there used to be more exported than there is now.

She is fairly vague in answering but seems to suggest that while yes, there certainly was a lot of export business around ten years back she

doesn't imply any dramatic shift towards a more domestic market. And nothing is sold in India in a worn or distressed state.

R71: In India we don't sell antiques unless they are fully refurbished. We don't like the unrefurbished look. Everything is made to look fresh. I run a hotel in Karaikudi.

I1: Which one?

R71: The Bangala. Do you know it?

FN: I tell her yes and that I have met both Vishalakshi and Meenakshi. She says a lot of furniture has been leaving India since the days of the British Raj. She talks about a book (large hardback) called something like 'Furniture of the British Raj'. She recommends I go and speak to a dealer called Muthu who has a shop on the East Coast Road. She says he has a lot of pillars 'the best collection of pillars'. She also mentions an American who has been buying from him for many years. I ask her about the business and what sort of demand for antiques there is Chennai. She says there isn't much at all. People prefer to buy modern brands from abroad. The things I sell mostly aren't really antiques. She shows me around her store. She wants to show me the things she considers to really be antique:

A pair of chairs – they have been refurbished and re-upholstered

A solid rosewood table

A cabinet – this has not been refurbished yet – she doesn't actually know anything about it such as where it's from. She thinks it must be made in India and thinks its quite old. Says the feet are probably not original so she plans to replace them with something smaller. I ask her about herself and her shop. She says she started the furniture business around 2003. She is from Kerala. She spent several years living in Kodaikanal – there used to be lot of colonial furniture and antique objects available but they were sold off very cheaply a long time back.

Recommends I visit Kochin – interesting place but she doesn't think there are many genuine antiques to be found there. A lot of stuff from Rajasthan. Handicrafts etc. She says I should go to a place called The Kochin Crafters. Speak to Sani or Johnny – they export a lot – there is

A. Lawson

a French woman (dealer/shop owner) who has been buying from them for years.

Before I leave she shows me a few more pieces in the front display section of the store – she seems genuinely enthused about them. She tells me she just loves furniture.

R71: I do this because I love furniture. This is not a money making venture (she spoke earlier about how its hard to make money from the business the rent and overheads are so high and business is very slow – she says there is not much demand for this sort of furniture – to Indians its just normal/nothing special.

She talks about a TV show she loves that used to air in India – British show with a man visiting old/heritage houses. She's very upset that its been taken of air.

Some pieces here are antique – this chest is. Its unrefurbished. This cabinet is made with antique wood. In India vintage is cheaper than new. This is a rosewood foldout table.

A67) B: 09/11/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R72

Language: English

Duration: 01:36:21

Context: R72 is an elderly lady who has been collecting antiques for many years. She is the relative of a friend of mine in Chennai and I have met her once previously at a social visit. She seems a well educated, wealthy lady, and she lives in a large house in a leafy suburban area of Chennai. I arrange to visit her at home. Our meeting remains fairly formal, though she is very courteous and polite. I explain my purpose and she is happy to be interviewed and offer any help she can. Both her garden and her house is full of antique objects to the point where is resembles a museum of sorts. She tells me she collects mostly 'decorative art'.

I1: How long have you been collecting?

R72: for 40 years. It started for fun. I had a very sick husband and could not work outside the house. And I like to be busy. So I chose a profession I'm interested in. I also sell a few things and get some pocket money. And it also allowed me to stay home and look after my family. So it started just for fun. But then I had a very good response. People started coming. Through my family which is very large, the word went round. There were not many collectors then. And very few women collectors. But my own family thought I was wasting money. My husband would say 'why are you putting all dark things in the house, you must polish them'. But my response is that if you polish something the age is not visible. The beauty lies in the patina, not in anything glossy or shiny. I don't like that shiny effect at all. In the entire house you will see nothing polished. It's a natural patina that we admire. But it was through trial and error that I learnt a lot about it.

I1: Do you remember what were the first things you collected?

R72: Lamps were my forte from the very beginning. South India can boast of numerous lamps. I have collected a lot from Kerala. Tamil Nadu lamps have distinct features. And Karnataka. Andhra doesn't have much as far as lamps are concerned. Used to travel to Thanjavur for Thanjavur paintings and religious objects. So I made a point of going places and getting to know dealers. Nobody introduced me. But I've made so many friends and I know most of the dealers in Madras. They were very kind to me for some reason. And I had limited friends because my husband was very sick. It was stressful but this was like therapy for me. Collecting art that was the medicine that carried me through. So I get many visitors. And we have one dictum called (inaudible) – meaning 'you learn everything through the years'. At my age, I'm 80 now. At your age, you think of the past and what you learnt, you like to pass that to the future generations. You shouldn't keep it to yourself. So this motivated me to take to this profession. And there were very few like me when I first started.

I1: Are there more now?

R72: Yes now there are more and more coming through. But very few are serious collectors. Everyone is a 'drawing room collector'. They have a few things, put them here and there, and go on changing every month. So there are very few serious collectors. Because this is a very extravagant hobby. Things are very expensive now. Good things are not available, Fakes are everywhere now. This is a different age. When I started collecting there was no word 'fake'. All these fakes hadn't come into existence. So you were sure you were getting your money's worth. But now it's a different story. And now the outlook is different too. Art is deemed as a sort of investment. When I started it was the passion that drove me from one place to another. But I never thought of making money. It was a therapy for me to divert my mind and it was something that interested me. Also I come from a family of collectors. That also is my blessing. My grandfather was a great man in this state. His collection can be seen in the National Museum in Delhi.

I1: What did he collect?

R72: He collected stones and bronzes. That was his forte. His name was S. T. Srinivasagopalachari. He was my paternal grandfather and I was brought it by him from childhood. So I inherited some of his interest. There were always too many statues in the garden. And everything that we used in the household, the vessels to store water, even the small things. All were very, very beautiful. The water containers were fantastic. Brass, beautiful shapes, with a little border of copper. It was very aesthetically sound. That's how my grandfather collected things. So this is how we were brought up. The vessels we used were mostly silver. Because we are the Brahmin community, we used a lot of silver. Even now we use silver for plates. There is a belief in the Brahmin community that silver, with a little gold in the centre, in Madras we don't do this, but in Andhra they have a little gold like a coin in the centre that enhances your age. You'll live longer. That is the belief. Whether it really is I don't know, but that is the belief. Silver was widely used, but money circulation was also less. Like women and jewellery go together. Now there is a lot of fake jewellery, most people can't afford it (genuine precious metal and stones). My grandmother

was a jewellery designer. She bought only old jewellery. I never saw any new jewellery in my life. Only now am I seeing all this trash and I cannot accept it. Beautiful jewellery I have seen in my life. Whatever I could afford, I used to invest in it.

I1: You said your focus is 'decorative art', is there a particular type of art or object that interests you?

R72: Decorative art means even my kitchen is decorative art. I call it decorative art because of the (...inaudible..). I'll show you my house. The puja room is decorated in a particular style, the kitchen is my own. Everything is my own style. I have not copied from any book or magazine. People copy from me, who come here. But I don't copy from a magazine. That is a very common practice amongst collectors, to see all these 'house beautiful' and 'garden beautiful' and then to copy somebody else's idea. Or people who can afford it call designers to decorate their house. I'm not a believer in that. Every house should look like a museum. An Individual museum. Not a copy of somebody else. It is a very interesting hobby. Age doesn't figure in it. I still travel and go from place to place. That is present occupation. My children are all grown up. I am in touch with the family but I'm on my own so I can have more time to spend on my hobbies.

I1: In your lifetime you must have seen a lot of antiques leaving, being exported....

R72: Yeah, I have this feeling, you may or may not agree with me, I feel the Indian antiques are very well looked after abroad in foreign houses. And one aspect I like about these foreign collectors is when they become old, they donate their collection to the museums. That concept is not here in India. They don't educate their children, and their children sell it and enjoy the money. Mostly the children are not interested, that is the problem. And they don't feel like donating to the museums because what happens to the museums here is they are not well kept. When you see a foreign museum you feel ashamed that Indian museums are not well kept. The people here looking after the museums, they have no aesthetic sense at all. So all these beautiful Chola pieces are put in glass cases, which reflect light. If you put a

bronze in a cabinet which reflects light, the beauty of the piece is lost. And they wont allow private people like us to keep and maintain it. They wont allow it. And things are getting stolen there. There is no proper security. Nothing. India doesn't realise all the treasure it has. Most of it has already left the country. But I'm happy about this aspect – it's well looked after over there. That's one thing I'm happy about. Of course there are unscrupulous elements who deal in this stolen property and make a killing in selling it. I'm not talking of them, I'm talking of collectors. There are serious collectors abroad. And they maintain it very well.

I1: Do you have an idea of what you'd like to do with your collection?

R72: Yes. I have three children. One daughter is abroad, she is a foreign citizen so I cannot give her anything, because people wont allow it through customs. Her daughter is all Americanised, she would throw it all in the scrap so I don't want to give it to her. I have two sons in Madras and they're working in a family company, and they cherish it, whatever I give them. So I hope it will go to them.

I1: Can we take a look at your collection around the house?

We go from room to room and R72 points out various pieces to me. Nothing she has, from furniture to utensils to decorative things like pictures and ornaments, is newly made. It is all old, at least second-hand, and has been selected for its beauty or craftsmanship. We start in the kitchen. She points out a wooden utensil rack which I have seen often in Chettinad.

R72: This is typical of Chettinad. Its carved from a single piece of wood. Like chains. These are called stucos (carved stucco faces). These are from Chettinad. See before cement was invented they had brick and plaster. Brick inside and plaster on top. And these are all free hand pieces. Now these artists are slowly getting extinct. They have these stucos on the palace walls. When I went there there were demolishing all the old buildings unfortunately, and there were throwing all this from the palace walls onto the ground. It was not of value. Nobody was collecting it then. I was actually the first one to buy all this. Nobody knew the value of this. They said any money you want to give

us, just give. They are poor people. So I gave 500 rps per piece. Now each one is selling for 1 lakh. But his was forty years ago. There were no buyers for this then. This I bought recently (another stucco) but for one lakh! It's the same but more elaborate.

I1: Its very lovely. Is it also from Chettinad?

R72: Yes Chettinad

(We pause in our tour of the house to drink some coffee)

I1: So roughly how many other collectors are there in Chennai?

R72: very few. And some of them don't like to show to visitors. The super rich don't want to show.

I1: Is there much of a community sense between collectors?

R72: There are Chettiars who are collecting, but they don't like to show unless they know you very well. There is a lot of secrecy you know. Hush hush.

I1: Is that due to competition?

R72: Not only that. Competition is there. Only if there is competition will we improve. You can't be happy with whatever you have. You have to try for greater things. We fish in the market. It's like a treasure hunt. With a lot of rubbish. But although Madras has a huge population, for all that there are very few collectors. Whether they show it or not that's another thing. But you know this is a feeling which I think you cannot acquire. It should be in your genes. Otherwise after a while you will loose interest. And then they jump into modern art or whatever fetches money. Now it is in fashion to collect modern art. So I am stuck onto my old things. You will never see modern art in my house. Now people have mostly modern art in their homes. Because it's a craze now the prices are slashed down 50%. Every house now has modern art. With modern art you have to stand there and explain to the audience what you wanted to convey through this painting because it's all abstract.

I1: Is this from Tanjore?

R72: No these are Hoysala. From Vijayanagar period Karnataka. This is a very old piece. Brahama's wife, Brahmi. To see sculptures of Brahmi itself is rare. And although it is broken, it is still beautiful. So it's

A. Lawson

a vast ocean. Indian art is a vast ocean. And you cannot collect everything under the sun. You must focus on one subject.

I1: is your focus a very aesthetic one. Where you see something beautiful and decide to collect it? Rather than going by period or something?

R72: Yeah. I am not an art historian. I don't collect about the age or region or Pandyas. I don't care. The only thing is, I don't want to collect a new item. For me minimum is 100 years. And it should be aesthetically sound. That is my criteria.

I1: when you first started collecting, was this word 'antique' very much in use?

R72: No. 'Antique' was there, but not to a large extent. Because very few people took to this.

I1: And is there a word in Tamil which conveys the same meaning?

R72: There are a lot of Tamil scholars working in the archaeological department.

I1: No I mean in Tamil language, is there a word that is like the word 'antique'?

R72: Yes, see in Tamil Nadu we speak of temples. Minimum three to four thousand temples are there. And in Madras itself there are so many. So many are dilapidated. Nobody to look after them. And all these (...inaudible...) have taken away all the images. Only the (...inaudible...) remain. That is the scenario. Now the Tamil Nadu government have woken up to all this and very strict laws are there. But still they bribe all the officers and do what they want. They send it abroad and make lots of money. But they are very, very strict now. There are many people behind bars. We are losing all these things. They have retrieved to big images from New York which were in the hands of smugglers. And they are trying to retrieve all these images from big temples.

I1: I'm looking for a word in Tamil. When I speak to some people they don't use the term 'antique' because that is a foreign word. But they use something else. Something likeporul...

R72: *Kuradana*... wherever you are...see there are so many words. *Kuradana* is the common word. *Kuradana* means old. *Kalai poriyal* means 'art object'. I learnt Tamil, the spoken language and the written language, when I was at school. Now the Prime Minister is from Gujurat so they are (...inaudible...) with Hindi. So what else are you interested in asking me?

I1: I'm interested in everything, but mainly these things from Chettinad. Also you mentioned that you collect old beads.

R72: Yeah I have made a few bead necklaces. For my 80th birthday I presented all my relatives a bead necklace in a beautiful embroidered bag. See as an art collector, its not just bronzes or wood carvings that matter. Anything that we use everyday, like vessels. I use stainless steel for cooking. I can't use all the brass vessels, its impractical and I don't have the energy to lift it. Now even plastic buckets have become difficult for us. Our physique has become so weak for all of us, that we cant lift even a plastic bucket of water. In those days they had brass and copper and from wells they were pulling the water. It's a different era now. Eating all fake food, fast food.

I1: Where did you first find out about the beads? What it through a dealer?

R72: See all dealers, I had to come to them. Now after so many years they come to me. And most of them are poor and they borrow money from pawnbrokers and moneylenders. So what I do is like charity you know. I don't quote them very much. As much as I can I set it immediately so that they benefit. I don't buy something for twenty rupees or thirty rupees. Those days are gone. So as much as possible I pay them. So they are fond of me and they give me the first preference. And after all I believe they should be happy. I believe in this dictum: if they are happy giving it to me I should also be happy paying them. This is how I work.

I1: And where do the beads come from? Are they all from Tamil Nadu?

R72: No, no. See you get Tamil Nadu objects in Delhi and you also get them in overseas auctions. In the flea market in London you get Indian objects. It's true, there are a lot of Indian settlements in London.

London is like India if you look at the settlements. Amazing. Mostly North Indian Sikhs are there. And the flea market sells at cheap prices some of the bronzes. Because the children throw them in the garage sale. See museums wont observe small collections. (...inaudible...) collection they will buy. So what about the small collectors? All their things gone into the funeral (...inaudible..). That's how a lot of things come to India again. It makes a circle. You see more in London than America.

I1: Have you been to England and bought anything from there?

R72: Not England, but I've been to America. I went to an auction. I didn't see many Indian things but I bought some bottles. Glass and crystal bottles. You know, something for my bathroom. See a house should not be just bronzes. Every room has to be decorated. So anything that catches my eye. Old textiles. Anything that is old and beautiful.

I1: Do you remember when you first heard about Chettinad?

R72: It was one of my earlier trips. My father used to say that I should not go alone. Chaperoning was there. Even when I was married after three children, my father used to say 'you are female, you should not go there'. So my brother used to escort me. We travelled by car. In Chettinad there are just a few shops. And they are not all dressed up. They have stuck to their old tradition. And 99% is all gone. There are only pillars and doors. Who wants them? They are heavily priced. There is nothing much to buy. And they have this Swiss make enamel. You cannot use them. They immediately spoil and you get flakes. Swiss make – that is the only fascination. And I am not interested in imported goods.

I1: I see, and a lot of things from Chettinad are imported right?

R72: Yeah, all imported. These Chettiar women went abroad and got all these things. Their ginger jars (...inudible...). But you know there is nothing aesthetic about Chettinad. You have seen the houses. Tiles everywhere, white, green and all sorts of multi-colours. Then the floor is Italian tiles. Then the ceiling is all plaster of paris. And chandeliers. This is inbetween the woodcarvings. How the woodcarvings fit in with

all this you ask me. You'll get sick if you go there. Its claustrophobic. They have not focused on anything. They are not artistically inclined these Chettiar women. They are not artistic in what they wear. Have you seen the jewellery? It has a sort of gypsy origin. Like this, the fingers like this. This is their Thali. Every family will have this. This is their (mangosutra??). If you get married you have to wear this. But the Chettiar women if you see them in close quarters, they are dark and they wear low colour saris, like ready and heavy cheques. There is nothing distinctive about their looks. But then you will see fair Chettiars. Because their husbands went away to earn and for years the wives were left alone. So they had an affair with the accountant who was always a Brahmin. Accountants were all Brahmins in Chettinad, once upon a time when I went. But I don't blame the women. Their husbands went away for a long time. Its very funny when you go to Chettinad. In the houses there will be two swings opposite. One swing will be for the master, and far away will be another swing for the woman of the house. This is their culture.

I1: De you remember when it was you first visited Chettinad.

R72: Thirty forty years back I started going. For the last 15 years I have not been to Chettinad. Because there is nothing of interest now. I've been to all their weddings. They give you food on a plantain leaf. There are no tables. And you cannot finish all your food it is too much. Only a glutton can finish. That system still prevails there. With an elaborate feast. Most of the Chettiars are very large in size. So they cannot sit on the floor. I don't know how they manage.

I1: Do you have any particular favourite piece that you have collected over the years?

R72: I think everything is my favourite. With a lot of thinking. I have reached my goal. I do sell because you have to upgrade your collection. So I will replace if I see something else prettier. Otherwise there is not enough space, and I don't like a crowded house. A lot of houses you see of people who are antique collectors, it's like a doll festival. They have TOO many things.

I1: Where are these from (wood and brass boxes on a coffee table)?

R72: They are from Tamil Nadu. They are moneyboxes. As a cluster I think they have a very pronounced effect. This one is from Thanjavur. There are two different styles. They are called Chola money boxes in Thanjavur

I1: Oh, this is sometimes what coin hoards will be found inside?

R72: Yeah that's it. As a collection they have an impact. All this matters as a collector. How you display matters. Not many collectors know this art. I am sorry to say this, but many collectors do not know the art of putting things in order. They ask interior designers, who are novices, and know nothing about art.

I1: It's a shame that there aren't more museums with this kind of focus...

R72: Yes that why... I'll show you this book that my children presented me with on my 80th birthday. It was a surprise for me. They have taken a few photographs in my absence, of what they like here, and they have compiled it into a book. And then there are letters from all my grandchildren and my relatives that are impressions of theirs about me and about my collection.

I1: How lovely!

R72: It was a surprise gift and I enjoyed every bit of it. So my friends will all expect an edition of this but I want to delete all the personal letters and add some more of my latest collections. And compile a book and issue it to all my friends. But it is hard labour. It is not easy. You have to sweat it out. First you have to find the money. You have to decide what to buy and how much you can pay. Dealers are novices, they want money that's it.

I1: The beads, do they come to you strung in a chain, or individually?

R72: No, no. Actually I was buying it not straight from the divers, I don't know where they are. It was through a dealer friend in Madras. And he was a very clever guy. All the beads were coming in various colours loose, just in packets, and he suggested to me to choose whatever bead I want and per bead he will charge. I got some very beautiful beads. And some of them I have sold also. Some of them I have made to match my saris. I'll show you.

I1: Did you buy them with the intention of making necklaces?

R72: Yes. That was the reason. See with this you use your imagination. What will suit your saris? They don't come in just two colours. A lot of colours they come in. Some are only five in one colour. Some are ten in one colour. Some are fifty. Like that. So you have to absorb what comes to your mind and choose the design.

I1: Did the dealer tell you which area of Tamil Nadu they come from?

R72: No they come from two places he mentioned: Malmada river in the north, some place in Madhya Pradesh or some place (most probably Mula-mutha river in Maharashtra). Then the Kaveri river. But if it rains, the divers don't go in and nothing comes. It should not rain. Only then will the beads come. But someone asked me 'which age are all these beads?' I said I cannot answer. The name is not written anywhere. From where do all these beads come? Then I checked with all the jewellers. They said 'these are all antique beads, they are not available to me'. Now imported beads come from Colombia and from Africa and Thailand. Most of the beads come from Thailand. But all the jewellers had all these beads for sale, nothing is equivalent to what I get from the divers. A lot of people have asked me for these but I am not selling because it matches many of my saris. And now if I ask for these beads they will double the price. If you ask...finished.

FN: We go to a room at the back of the house where there is a tall wooden cabinet. She opens one of the middle draws and takes out several silk zip bags and draw-string bags. Inside are bead necklaces in plastic wrapping.

R72: See this is one of my best designs. This is real coral. These are the beads of the riverbeds. You should know how to match. (some talk about whether she will keep the necklaces or give them to her daughter – mostly inaudible. She takes out another necklace). You have to match all the various colours. You won't get a big lot in one colour.

I1: So you have to wait until you have enough to make a necklace

R72: Yes. You collect, collect, collect until you have enough. This is in one gram gold I have made. The three chains are in one gram of gold.

I1: Do you take it to the jewellers to have it made?

R72: yeah the one gram gold I cannot make at home. So I take it to the jeweller. But the jeweller was so fascinated with my designs he said 'you must write a book'. But then I would not get a single bead! But not many people know about this.

I1: do you know anyone else who collects beads like this?

R72: Not really (she takes another necklace).

I1: Wow! I love this one even more!

R72: See with natural beads one bead will not match another. That's the beauty of the entire lot.

I1: Does it work out very expensive? If you buy each bead individually is it very expensive?

R72: I am selling it for 15,000 rupees. Which includes the one gram gold. And the colour scheme is all mine. (Inaudible conversation).

I1: When you make a necklace will all the beads be from the same place normally?

R72: No, when I go to Delhi also I go to antique shops. Sometimes I buy from Delhi.

I1: Do you have any necklaces that are made all from Tamil Nadu beads?

R72: No it's a mixture. Whatever comes. Certain colours I don't like also. Transparent ones I don't like. See it comes in a lot. All useless things are also in there.

FN: She shows me several more necklaces and talks about the colours and design. She also says that her necklaces are very popular with her friends and she is always getting orders.

I1: Are the prices differently according to material?

R72: Yeah it varies according to the material and size and number.

I1: Do you come across these beads very often now?

R72: No this fellow has now opened a shop in London.

I1: Oh! Do you know the name?

R72: No it's a recent business but I don't know the name. (She starts to put them away)

I1: It's quite an impressive collection

R72: I've sold so many also. I have quite a demand for these because these are not available. But now this fellow wont supply me because he has opened a shop. Come and I'll show you one or two more things from Chettinad. These are wooden boxes from Kerala made painted with vegetable dyes. These are all paintings from Kerala with topless women. This is a chariot piece. These are all Kerala. These lamps are from Kerala. Here are all the vessels lined up. And this is my Puja room. This is from Chettinad, with gods and goddesses on top. So Chettinad is all here in this room. This is from Chettinad (a noodle maker). This is a vegetable cutter. This is a (...inaudible...) box. They always write their names.

I1: Yes its very typical of things from Chettinad. Do you know of anywhere else where they do this? Write the name on the vessel?

R72: Only these people. They write on glass also. On cut glass they print their names.

I1: Is that because it was dowry...

R72: Yeah, yeah. It is passed on from one generation to the next. Can you believe ebony being used for these boxes! Now ebony is so expensive. This stone is from Tamil Nadu, mother and child. This is from Tanjore, these are called security guards. This is from Kerala. This is from Chettinad, this is Lakshmi. It's an old piece. This is also from Chettinad. This Ganga Lakshmi. This one is from Srirangam near Trichy.

I1: You cant do this now can you? Because it's all carved by hand.

R72: Now you need to survive. You want to do something in 24 hours and sell. This is red stone of Krishna dancing. It is from Tamil Nadu. These are more chariot pieces.

FN: She shows me several more things. Then we go to a room where she has a large collection of antique cosmetic/beauty utensils, many made of ivory.

I1: I've never met any one else who collects this type of thing.

R72: No, nobody in India collects this theme: beauty accessories.

I1: Are they hard to find?

R72: Very difficult. I used to go to Bombay to collect all these things. Even small things like this are extinct now.

I1: I'm guessing most of this furniture is also antique?

R72: Yes. This is a copy. It is a Chinese design. Unfortunately the lady who made it died. She used to copy very well. (She fetches a key and opens another room). These are all foot scrubbers that people used to use. Back scratchers. Cosmetic pieces. These are all for the eye paste. Kajal. These are face boxes from Bengal to store cosmetics.

I1: This is like a museum in itself. But you would never see these things in a museum here.

R72: Yeah museums want only stones and bronzes. Even that they don't want to look after. What can you do? They don't even dust them. And you cant say anything to them, they don't listen to you. This is a terracotta from Thanjavur – Lakshmi. These are all masks worn by males in temples in Kerala. They go into a trance. These are for attar. Oil based perfumes.

I1: So people would carry these with them?

R72: In their pouches. (I remark on how nice her quilt is). Yes everything I have is like that (laughs). My father used to say 'you should have been born to a royal family'. These are Gowri heads. She was supposed to be the embodiment of beauty. The do this Gowri puja you know. These are all meditation mirrors from Kerala. You do this meditation and you don't analyse your outerself, it doesn't reflect your outer self. You analyse your inner self. It's a deep tantric concept.

I1: It must have taken a long time to collect all these things.

R72: Yes it's a labour of love. So tell me what really impressed you in my collection.

I1: I liked the beads and the way you've reused them in your own necklaces. I like some of the stone carvings. The Hoysala.

R72: Mmm. Hoysala you can never get now. So many people have asked me, but it's difficult.

I1: And the ladies beauty products. I loved those. They're really special. Because its social history. I like the things that people used, that are very personal.

R72: Mmmm. What else? What have you seen in the other private collectors you have spoken to?

I1: Most of the collectors I have spoken to so far have one particular fascination, like coins. Yours is different that way in that it's aesthetically based. Also the way you display is different. Many of the other collectors keep their things in drawers or cupboards.

R72: Yes I know people who say 'oh I have it in a locker'. Which annoys me! Why have a collection you cant see every day?

I1: You're collection is a nice mixture. You haven't focused on one type of object.

R72: It should gel well with the other objects in your collection. You know as an object comes. We don't visualise it immediately. In the night this is the thing that goes on in your mind: 'where should I put it?' So then comes the answer. Also I believe in this – the divine helps me in everyday. With the beads you know. They come in a pack which is 90% rubbish. So I have to sort them out and then how you combine the colours. I don't know what others do if they get any assistance for this. My jeweller was telling me why don't you write a book. And I said because then no beads would be available. I used to buy frantically whatever beads would come.

I1: Because they're that rare?

R72: Yes. But unfortunately this fellow lost interest in this because it doesn't pay much money, so he has gone to open a shop.

FN: Discuss about my research and contacts.

R72: We are born with so many treasures around us. We don't realise. And only after everything is extinct we are trying to see what we can get from the market.

(Consent)

R72: I used to work for the Government of India (???) committee. See the police would seize all these things and then we are being asked if they are fakes or not. But it was a very difficult job because knowledgeable people are not there. So everything they would say it is old. But they don't know because they are not collectors. And when I say 'no, these are all new ones' they think that I am getting a

A. Lawson

commission from the dealers. This is the problem. It's three or four years since I worked there.

A68) B: 09/11/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R73

Language: English

Duration: 01:12:20

Context: R73 is a well known member of the Chettiar community in Chennai. He is also an historian, particularly of the history of Madras. I was given his contact details by a friend although his email contact is also available online. I email him and get a very warm encouraging response inviting me to come and speak to him. I arrange to meet him at his home in Chennai. When I arrive he asks for tea to be brought and shows me book working on of old photographs from Chettinad. He has a humorous/cynical attitude to the idea of 'heritage' which was not what I was expecting. Recommends I speak to his nephew – R74 – says he is more sincere/idealistic about 'heritage' issues.

R73: My Grandfather was one of leaders/founders of heritage movement here. I tend to be more historical oriented rather than concept of saving buildings or whatever. I feel that if heritage is being saved effectively today the only reason is for tourism – but tourism can also kill you. How do you control it? I was one of those who sold idea of The Bangala – but its there to make money – once you do that you've lost all concept of heritage. Either you save a building and it needs to be true to its original soul. Or you change it around because that's what the tourists want and you say it's a heritage building. The people you come to the Bangala, they're not particularly concerned about Chettinad. To them Chettinad is a curiosity. Its not a heritage destination. Its something strange in that in the middle of nowhere you get these big mansions. You have to think of it in those terms when you

think of heritage. Particularly in places like Chettinad. You can get away with it more in the city. We led the movement from here. The first movement in the South was here. In preserving a building you can change it around a little, but you cant change the spirit of the building. So this is the issue in all heritage. If you say I'm saving the heritage but also I'm going to make money out of it then go ahead and do it, but in opinion you cant do both. This movement in Chettinad – with R54 and R45 – The Bangala and R55. The only people they thought of coming and staying there when they started were Chettiars coming from America and places like that for weddings. Who no longer had homes there and wanted higher standards of places to stay. It arose out of my/our book. And the hotel – they were wondering if they could make money out of it then. Over the years the thinking has changed and I have not got involved with it lately. So you have to decide – these two things money/tourism or heritage – which do you want to do? There is a question morality for me. Fight I have with colleagues here – they want absolutely true heritage – using original materials – Chettinad plaster – nobody does that now it's a lost art. We did that in senate house and within month it started peeling off. Safer to put in modern type – I'm prepared to look at compromise. But how you paint the wall is different from putting in a swimming pool and bar. It's about keeping the spirit of the place. You know in England and Australia in all these places they keep the spirit.

I1: Intangible heritage?

R73: Culture and tradition is important – you have three things: Cultural heritage, built heritage and natural heritage – all three equally important. At moment we are fighting with IIT about cutting down forest to put up multi-story buildings. R45 – woven plastics business (kotam) doing it in the interest of Chettinad. But people who are doing it are not Chettiars. Its money. Not that R45 is making money. But it has turned out to be a scheme helping disadvantaged people – not helping Chettiar heritage.

I1: Is Chettinad too recent to be seen as 'heritage'?

R73: This whole concept of heritage. R60 is trying to sell Chettinad as world heritage – whatever his reasons are for that is a different issue. But we are nowhere near a world heritage destination. It's laughable. What is the heritage in our buildings? We made a little money. We spent that money putting up some buildings and now we are pulling down the buildings because we have run out of money. Tell me one thing that makes it heritage?

I1: Some might point to the grandeur of the architecture...

R73: You can find any number of places in India with that architecture. Shekhawati, Rajasthan is identical. They are not getting world heritage status. It's a tourist destination, yes. But don't overplay it to be far most significant, which everyone sits and laughs at. Madras is a World Heritage destination. Because the whole of the concept of Empire, the whole of modern India, virtually everything that began in India today, started in this city. Fort St. George and its environs have historical justifications. Not merely buildings are heritage. The laws we passed, medicine, education, engineering, all of them had their beginnings there.

I1: R60 comes from an Art Architectural perspective. You're arguing that historical significance is more important than architecture right?

R73: There is no architecture in Chettinad. Have any of you looked at the original homes of Chettinad? The original homes are small little one-storey places with no embellishment at all. And they are no different from any other south Indian home, which all believe in the central courtyard. If you go down to George Town you'll see the same sort of houses. Single storey, two or three courtyards with rooms around the courtyard. To me (and I'm doing some research on this), there is nothing in Chettinad which is older than 200 years. They might tell you some building is 500 years or 300 years, but as an objective historian you can see nothing there older than 200 years. My family house is one of the oldest and best kept and to my estimate is about 150 years old. Any older than that are likely to be single storey with no embellishment. Because we only began to make money at end of 19th century. And many buildings were built in 1930's and 40's when architects were first used. Its all very well to say they are impressive

A. Lawson

buildings, it's a tourist destination, come and stay for a few days, look at Visalakshi's Kotan, go to a few of the temples, go round the villages and have a look at the varieties of houses. But nobody will take you to an old house. One third of houses in every village have been pulled down. But any guide in the area, does he tell you anything about it? He's not even aware of it. But even if he were – no we are building up an image. There are houses being pulled down all over the place. It helped in resurrecting the community. I can understand the reasons. And they are very valid reasons. A community which after independence was broke. And all those who were doing well did nothing to help. You have to look at the heritage as a whole complex. That the families are broke is also part of the heritage? – they had a heyday and now they have nothing. The houses that are empty and broken are also a part of the heritage. Now from your perspective looking at the antiques – came onto the market after the community collapsed. Till then there was no antique market – so you're looking at late 50's early 1960's. Families that were broke survived by selling off things. And it comes right down to the photographs and paintings. That's how much they sold to survive. But they survived to educate their children. Period of 25 years when community was absolutely broke (forget high profile people) average community educated children, especially the boys. No more going into entrepreneurship. Get a safe job. They all wind up in America or UK in IT or something. We all pay lip service to our heritage but the old houses have been pulled down and nothing has been resurrected. Famous temple builder they are all talking about now 'UN' Alagappa Alagappan (from Kanadukathan) – Kaziraman (also Vaidyanathan Ganapati Sthapati from Pillayarpatti). One of pioneers of temple building movement in USA and here. He's put a lot of money into temples both here and in the USA. But for the old house? He will not do anything.

I1: Back when the antiques first came onto the market, where they popular? Where they considered antique?

R73: What is the definition of antique? Something you need to consider. False antique market – craftsmen making them to look old.

A. Lawson

That is fake. But if you take the genuine stuff, if it is made in 1935, is it an antique? But its sold as an antique. And I think there are collectors who are prepared to pay. I mean when I first started collecting a stamp it was worth nothing. It depends on the market.

I1: Are you interested in antiques yourself?

R73: No. I'm interested in the workmanship. In the sense of the woodwork that they did. The pillar work.

Ownership of properties has become fragmented. My ancestral house, we are 16 owners in that house. All of various financial levels. But even if one of us agreed to do it up and spend money, the others may not agree. So now it's easier to sell the property and divide up the money. And if you have an empty house that you need to keep running with staff, how do you share the management and cost between 16 owners who are all around the world. These are the practical problems that have come out of the education we have got, and this idea to move on in the world and become a prosperous community.

I1: Why did Chettinad become a name/place people know of? Is it anything to do with community pride?

R73: It became a name for one reason and one reason only: The Chettiar Heritage book. The kind of publicity that book got at the time, features in the press. That was when people began to talk about Chettinad. Second reason: I was on a government committee to name 'heritage towns' of Tamil Nadu. Government came up with a list of thirty towns which they presented to the committee. Chettinad was not there, Tranquebar was not there, and several others. And I fought to have them included. Many times I do these things and regret them! And all the government has done for Chettinad being a heritage town is those big signs they put up. The government have done nothing.

I1: Do you think the Chettinad name is a selling point of antiques from that area?

R73: Now the antiques are third grade. And many of them are not even from Chettinad

I1: But it is still used as a selling point

R73: Its like Chettinad food has suddenly become very fashionable. Everywhere you go there are Chettinad restaurants.

I1: So it's a very recent thing

R73: Yes very recent. As I said in the beginnings, 1950's to 1970's, they were selling stuff because they had to sell it. After the 70's they had to sell it for a different commercial reason. And by then most of the good stuff had gone out of the market. They kept on in that antique market and were known as a source of antiques. Today the antique market is - if you buy a kettle from Japan made in 1930, its an enamel kettle and enamel is no longer used, its an antique. And Chettinad is full of enamel kettles.

I1: Do you know much about where various things came from and how they came to be in Chettinad?

R73: From the countries where Chettiars travelled to: Malaysia, Burma, Ceylon (spoons made out of coconut shells). All manufactured stuff came through dealers in Madras or Trichy. The Japanese tiles would be brought through Madras and everything. Lance Dane? – claimed to be an advertising man. And Walcott. They were the first to come into Chettinad. I think they got caught for smuggling at some time. They first began the concept of the antique trade.

I1: But I imagine now a lot of these Chettinad antiques have no problem leaving the country as they are less than one-hundred years anyway...

R73: Well if you have a teapot that is more than a hundred years old nobody is going to stop you taking it.

I1: Is there much public interest in history and heritage?

R73: None. It's very curious. Three of us twelve years ago said lets celebrate Madras birthday (Madras Week). Started as half day celebration. No sponsors. You could do what you wanted. We we supposed to go frame 11 in the morning to 8 in the evening. We went on till midnight when we were thrown out. The crowd was huge. This crowd was not interested in heritage, they are just curious. 'this is what madras looked like then compared to now'. It's that sort of attitude. So it started as a half day and now its more like a month. 300-350

programmes. Purely voluntary. But not one of these people who do the events are really interested in heritage at the end of the day. Just the activity, the spectacle, the fact that your name will be in the paper, that you might win an activity quiz. This year they started an App. It got 10,000 hits. At least that's 10,00 people who know a little more about the city. I'm trying to create awareness that this is a great city and a city you should respect and take pride in, and because of that you'll do something positive, like clean up your street or whatever. Conscious of why are you saving a building- not because its great architecture but because of who lived the something.

I1: What made you want to produce the Chettiar Heritage book?

R73: I had already done some books on Madras. And my family were all interested in Chettinad. And had travelled and seen how things were being done in other countries. So I thought – lets do a record before all this vanishes. Customs, traditions all of them are vanished. Now there are three or four life rituals celebrated in the house for a person. But there was a time when you did twenty life rituals for a person. Part of my career has been in printing and publishing so...

I1: Do you see Chettinad surviving?

R73: We had 75 villages. I estimate 50 will survive. In the next 25 years I think 25 will go. Remember in Chettiar villages, Chettiar population is a minority. Those houses need people to maintain it. Today it's impossible to get a servant. We will come to the western state where you have to wash your own clothes and cook your own food. Its heading that way. A young boy will come from a village to Madras and within a couple of years he'll want 15000 rupees a month as a driver. Ten years a driver would be on 3000 a month. Its all very good, I'm all for it, but its one of the reasons Chettinad is going to suffer. You cant get a carpenter, mason etc.

I1: I've heard that even when the house is demolished the Chettiar families will keep the land and rebuild. So even if the old buildings go, there will still be Chettiars in Chettinad. Right?

R73: Everybody says the Chettiars are very conscious of our traditions. It has been always there no doubt. More than any other community we

A. Lawson

are conscious of our traditions. I may not be, but as a Chettiar I have some sense and I'm very proud of it. But my daughters and that generation will probably not want to live in Chettinad, but they follow Chettinad traditions whenever they can. But whether their children, born and brought up in Australia, America, China... I'm involved in two or three projects at the moment to try and create some kind of awareness in these kids. But only four of the group (project group) are showing interest (all in our 80's 90's). In many ways the Chettiar community puts on a façade – a sort of deep rooted commitment to the community. We had that at one point in time. Before the crash. Up until the 1930's we were a great community. But from 1930's to today we have changed completely. And today this group which is trying to get something like that and try it again. They are thinking of that period and to recreate that is unrealistic. Now I get a bit cross with it. Today out of a community of 125,000 people there are 25,000 people living overseas. That's increasing everyday. With education. Because we are a very talented community. Excellent with numbers. Great businessmen, which we seem to have lost. So more and more are going out everyday. So houses are neglected, culture is neglected, history is neglected. [*Modi visit Gujuratis. Clannish people. Doesn't speak Tamil*]

I1: Is there an Indian concept of heritage – prior to western idea of heritage?

R73: Indians are totally unconscious of history and heritage. They believe in myth and legend. If real heritage survives it survives only in temples or palaces or forts. In other words with the rulers. Social heritage, social history – nobody cares. The big temple at Thanjavur – a masterpiece of architecture and engineering. Go around it, see all the inscriptions, and tell me who built it? You'll see all about Rajaraja Chola, all about what his wives have donated, but nothing about the architects. How was it built? How did you get a 10 ton stone up to the top a thousand years ago? There is no granite in the area. How did it come to there? We have absolutely no concept. That's why I stay very safely with the British period. But this is the problem. And to make

A. Lawson

matters worse what we have as education now, history, geography, civics and environmental science are all one called Social Studies and taught by an arithmetic teacher. Nobody knows history or geography. Go to Madras university (once the finest history department in India) and go to a student and see if he knows anything about history. We don't teach the humanities any more. It has progressively got worse from 2000. But from 1980's (liberalisation) started going down hill. Now mathematics, biology, commerce studied – this is where the money is. This state has 600 engineering colleges, each with about 3-4,000 students. When the Chettiars went overseas they went into countries which had not been opened, they went into jungle/wilderness for plantations. They were stories of courage, opening up new territories, complete foreigners, didn't know the territory or the language. Today nobody knows about this. They only know it was a successful community that made money and built big houses. They talk of the glory days. Nobody talks about the softening of the Chettiars, after the crash. To me this is heritage. Having part of your heritage which shows courage or something of your best characteristics, a part which nobody talks about. Curiously they always talk about the values they had at that period and not the values of the Chettiars as money grabbers. Speak to my nephew. He is young, enthusiastic, thinks the world of the Chettiar community. He has a totally different perspective from mine. Its different for me because I remember what the community was and not what it has become.

Consent

A69) B: 09/11/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R74

Language: English

Duration: 00:27:27

Context: R74 Very large house/garden. Not easy to talk to. Closed and dismissive of my interest. I am surprised at his attitude, after R73's positive referral. Short recorded interview.

FN: He was born in Colombo and grew up Chennai, but visits family house in Karaikudi (near Bangala) often. Very grand house black and white tiles – black pillars.

I1: Do you have a sense of Chettinad as important?

R74: I don't know about important, but I've always been fascinated by the houses, buildings. They aren't seen anywhere else. I take a liking/interest in it. If I go for a wedding more interested in the house than the function. My business is plantations (coffee and cardamom), beyond Bangalore (Karnataka). Chettinad has become more of heritage destination after the book (The Chettiar Heritage) and after the Bangala opened. People are becoming aware that there's a lot to see there. It should be an important tourist destination, but its not developed yet. It should happen. It really is something worth seeing. As tourism trade picks it up it should start to happen. When we started we were first hotel there were only five or six places. I see more hotels being built, more traffic coming. One big problem is that they are all private houses. Getting them open to visitors is the problem.

I1: Why do you think the houses are being demolished?

R74: I'm not sure. It shouldn't happen, but families cant afford to maintain them. They may need money. The houses don't suit todays lifestyle: No modern bathrooms, the courtyards, its too big, you want your bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and all that. They are hard to maintain. The wood roof has termite problems if any moisture gets in.

I1: When growing-up were you very aware of Chettiar history?

R74: No not really. Only after about age thirty or so. I started taking more interest and becoming more aware.

I1: Do you have an interest in history or antiques now?

R74: Not really. A little interest in history, but a lot of interest in buildings. One particularly special interest in the buildings of Chettinad. Because of the personal connection. Also buildings draw you, they are

A. Lawson

very fascinating. One courtyard leading onto another onto another. It just grows on me. I won't say there are many people within the community who have taken such a liking to it. It is a big joint family house, not everybody can contribute to maintenance. If you live in America it's very nice to know your heritage and all that, but if you come here for two weeks and spend all your time looking after the house then it becomes a bit of a burden. That is a huge burden on the community today, looking after houses. So we will definitely see them being pulled down. I first noticed the antique trade from demolished houses after 1983. But I became more interested after the Bangala started. Then we started sourcing stuff for the hotel. My interest grew. It started with furniture and went on to something else and then something else. All the things for Bangala came from Karaikudi shops and from our home. And they themselves came to Chettinad from somewhere else.

I1: Do you personally buy and collect any of the antique things from Chettinad?

R74: My light fittings - continental ones from 1920's/30's. Then photographs for the book with R73, there is a big controversy if we should do it. Whether there will be any interest in it. The idea of old photographs (of strangers) is not so popular here, but slowly catching on. As society becomes more wealthy they start looking at collecting these antiques.

I1: Many antiques are leaving the country to foreign collectors, what do you think about that?

R74: Yeah but those truly are antiques. Statues from the temples, 1000 years old. Those are serious antiques. It's been going on for a long time. Smuggling.

Our things are not antiques. They are, what do you say?, collectibles. Anything in Chettinad, whether it's antique or not, it's all come from the last 200 years. The shops are filled with stuff people brought back from Burma, Malaysia, Sweden etc.

I1: Do you know why all the houses have the same range of things?

R74: Fashions. The thing to have. The ladies ordered according to fashion. They bought all in bulk and put away in store rooms for the next generation. So your seeing stuff that's built up over multiple generations. It's never used. Still in packing paper. Now suddenly there is a lot of demand for that enamelware.

I1: What about the pickle jars?

R74: We have a lot of those. One we use as a flowerpot – JW Thornton and Co or somebody is embossed on it. If they were imported empty or full I'm not sure.

I1: Do you know of any other places in India like Chettinad?

R74: It's always compared with Shekhawati? In Rajasthan. Both are arid places where you can't do any other living. People went out and made a living from trading and banking and sent money back and built palatial homes. But all these household goods, dowry goods, I don't think they bought so much of. So I think all this comes only from Chettinad. I don't think anywhere in India did they collect in the way our ladies collected in those days.

I1: What do you think about this UNESCO bid for Chettinad?

R74: In away its good to preserve, but its difficult and impractical to restrict people from taking down their houses if they need the money. If you want to enforce it, make sure the government are willing to pay him and take over the house. It would be nice but I think for the people affected they wont be that happy. But for people coming and visiting they will be happy. The tourism there is more popular with foreigners than with Indians. Indian have to reach income level where you can afford to go away. Right now I think we (Indians) are at the stage where if you can afford it you want to go and see the temple towns. Visit all the temples you haven't seen. We are finding it difficult selling it (Chettinad) to Indians. In Bangalore you have all these IT couples. If they want to take a break it will either be to a beach or a hill station. Chettinad still hasn't developed to the extent where we have something to show. We have to open the houses, set up exhibitions. There are one or two houses where they take a small entrance fee and let you see. But there are no displays inside. And generally once you've seen

A. Lawson

one or two of these houses the layout is the same in all. Depending on the period they use different materials and have different styles.

I1: Do you know of any shops in Chennai that are selling Chettinad antiques?

R74: No. You get handicraft/antique shops (Kashmiri). I think Pondicherry has developed more of the antiques market. What is happening is, when you bring down a house in Chettinad you get a lot of wood. Using that to duplicate furniture or making it new to order with top quality wood. The timber used in those days was excellent quality. That carving not possible anymore. All that has gone. In Chettinad you don't see that much stonework.

I1: I've noticed similarities between the house architecture and the temples. Is that right?

R74: Everything we do we try to relate to god. You see lots of old queen victoria and king George. Stucco exteriors, one British soldier and one Indian. It is very unique, very interesting. Those are the things one likes to see. All the clocks painted on the wall will be at 12:15.

I1: Do you think Chettinad will survive?

R74: Definitely some of it. It was 95 villages, now it is 70 or something. We had about 40 houses per village in those days, now about 20. So it's declining but some will survive. But it's a huge burden. These are the things the state should be doing. It would be very simple if the government would allow foreigners to buy houses.
Consent (exclude name).

A70) B: 10/11/14

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, spontaneous

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R75

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

A. Lawson

Context: Shop on East Coast Road just outside Chennai. Large warehouse of three stories. Referred by R71. I am invited into an office by the business owner R75 and he agrees to an interview.

FN: UK Customers – Four Oaks, Andrew – London carpenter. Not much is exported. Is difficult. A certificate from the Archaeology department is necessary. Been in this business 25 years and his father was before him. He has lots of customers in the automobile industry. Foreigners. They come for house construction and decoration. People in the oil/gas industry (Shell). They are from the UK but they stay in Chennai for work. They buy things like carved doors/panels. Things that are antique not utility. Something rare. Rosewood is not possible to get nowadays. He has Never bought/sourced from Karaikudi. Even in the past. Instead he gets things from old houses and dealers in Chennai, Vellore, Kumbakonam and Thanjavur.

R75: Karaikudi is too expensive. Everybody knows about it. People/customers will go directly to Karaikudi so the prices are not so low. Foreigners will go there to shop. Even Indians – big-shot customers who want to construct new houses will hire an architect who will go directly to Karaikudi. Only the very rich can buy from Karaikudi like that. 99% of what I get is from Chennai. Pillars come from Vellore. In Karaikudi you would pay 50-60,000 rupees for a pillar while in Vellore the same would be more like 10,000-15,000. The government have stopped the demolition of traditional buildings now. In Karaikudi there are many replicas.

For exporting there is an inspection once every month. You need to send a photograph of the item you want to export so it can be certificated. Furniture is not a problem, only doors and pillars and very elaborately carved pieces.

I'm not interested in export. The Archaeology department are a problem.

There is no value in antiques. The price of this cabinet is not in antique value. It's 80 years old and 35,000 rupees. But I have to say its 100 years old. It's from Sri Lanka. Now antiques have become fashionable.

A. Lawson

I don't tell people the age. Just aprox 60 years or 80 years. Young is no good. Wood quality and craftsmanship is poor. Old wood is the best. This chair is 120 years old from Vietnam.

A71) B: 12/11/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R76

Language: English

Duration: 00:24:09 + 00:03:43

Context: He is first mentioned to me by a friend of a friend who is himself a director in the Tamil film industry. I tell this friend about my research and ask if he knows anyone involved in Tamil art direction/set design who might be able to speak to me. He immediately thinks of R76, but at first is not sure if he'll be able to put me in touch. Its not until several days later that I get a message from my friend saying that I need to go immediately to a certain Chettiar school where R76 is currently working on some stage artwork for a production there. When I reach the school, I find R76 seated on a chair in the middle of the main hall talking with several people. There is a large painted backdrop on the stage. I introduce my self and he invites me to sit with him, while another man asks if we would like tea.

FN: He knows R45, R54 and R73 etc. He describes Chettiars as authentic and humble. Says they are interested in and good at the maintenance of culture – through their weddings, festivals etc. He talks about the Chettiar origin story –

Talks about their business – Burma teak. He is a member of the craft council of India. Some of the films he has worked on *Jeans, Nayagan, Calcutta Mail, Siva Ji, Anjali*.

R76: I used to promote craft. As a layman it's more difficult, but as someone in the film industry it's more possible. Props is one thing. But I'm talking about awareness. I was the first to bring that to the public.

A. Lawson

Many older people see my films and notice the objects – recognise and remember them from their past.

Chettinad is my favourite place. The culture and tradition have been preserved. I have been many times for collecting. Also to Gujarat. Not that I invented bringing craft into sets, but I had a chance of putting craft in its proper place and giving awareness too it. People know me for the way I used artefacts and arranged them – artefacts of Karaikudi or Rajasthan. Film is a chance to do that.

I1: When did you first start using antiques in your set designs?

R76: From the beginning, working with my father. I always have a clear plan of what I want to get. In the craft section there were mother of pearl sofas and Belgian chandeliers but it's all gone to the dogs. Hasn't been properly cared for. Gets ruined in these fighting sequences. Because these people don't know the cost/value they are not ready to make a duplicate/dummy.

FN: Mentions an architect. Geoffrey Bawa. Built/designed the Raj Connemara, a hotel in Chennai.

R76: He was the first guy to bring in this idea of using old pillars and artefacts. He decorated a whole wall with chariot pieces.

FN: Talks about the film Jeans which he worked on. Some scenes were filmed in Karaikudi on empty land, created a set (house). Was so realistic that the local people apparently thought it was an original abandoned house.

R76: When I go to choose set pieces, first I go to the craft section. Only if they don't have it will I use antique. First I would try to make a copy. That's better because I know the value of the originals and I know how these fellows used to work with them.

FN: Talks about some of the damage he has seen caused to antiques on film sets

- Antique table he used on set. Went away and came back to find a grip standing on top of the table
- Swing worth two and half lakh. 'I had jitters because when we take a prop we have to give it back properly'. Found grip standing on it fixing some light.

A. Lawson

R76: A lot of things like this happened. There is a lack of awareness and appreciation about arts and crafts within Tamil film industry (both in terms of antiques and his own artwork). So I stopped taking any of my props. Craft is very interesting, trying to know what they (the original craftsmen) have done at that time. I am also a collector – because I am painter/artist. You have see the wood kitchen utensil hangers from Karaikudi. I was the first to use these in a film. These were my favourite, I had about a dozen. Metal scales. These small details in a film set are important. These fellows (north Indian dealers) hike up the price of antiques by bulk buying from these shops in Karaikudi.

FN: Tells me he is a good friend of R100.

R76: I made original plans for Dakshinachitra.

FN: discusses public awareness about heritage and antiquities.

R76: To give awareness, film is the best medium. Anything you keep on the film set, if the film is a hit, people will start to notice...the culture is still there in Karaikudi, that's what I can appreciate.

A72) B: 16/11/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R77

Language: English

Duration: 01:27:32

Context: I was given R77's name by R61 and R62. He is an enthusiastic collector of antiques. I interview him at his home in Bangalore which is overflowing with his antique collection. Mostly these are small ornamental items such as china and brass sculptures, glass and chinaware. However he also has unusual things like old water filters, tricycles and tin toys.

FN: I ask him to tell me about Chettinad. What he knows and what he has from there.

R77: They put initials on everything. Lots of crystal and glassware from Karaikudi has this. I have heard it's the family name [shows a picture of the interior of a Chettinad house – courtyard with pillars that look dilapidated/semi demolished]. My dealer sent it to me. You can see the richness. I'm sure people who lived there were really rich and they had a flair for European things. I'm sure the genuine ones (antiques) are coming from there (Chettinad). See the tiles. See the pillars. See the work on the ceiling. I saw this and was so impressed, I had to have a picture. It's so beautiful. My dealer keeps visiting there. I have never visited. Enamelware that comes from there is very popular now, old tricycles (I have a few), baby prams (all comes from the trash yard not the antique shops). I've been collecting from age of twenty-one, since my first pay cheque. I came from a humble background. My father was a cook. My father always liked good things but he could never afford them. Maybe it's in my genes, appreciation for fine things. My first purchases were two rosewood cabinets. I paid 1200 rupees. Now that's nothing. My first liking was for lamps. Kerosene, also some Indian oil lamps. I don't go to any fancy shops. Only dealers who don't have shops. Except R68. Earlier, when I started collecting, the place you could get antiques was Shivajinagar, a place called Richard Square. Also MG Road. All the areas where British lived. Chester Allen Auction house sold beautiful furniture. But that was much earlier. Sivajinagar was more for the common man. Now there are very few shops there. All the dealers sell to big expensive shops like Dukan and Oriental Haveli. I don't shop there. It's too expensive.

I1: Do you know much about Chettinad in terms of the people and the history?

R77: No. I have very half-baked info about Chettinad. I've only known of it for about ten years. I just know the richness of the houses. I think rich people invested a lot there thinking that something would happen or develop in that area. But when it didn't it started to go to ruin. They made the foundations of the buildings with marble because it is a hot climate place. And the houses there are called by the number of pillars they have, like thousand pillar house or whatever. They are of huge

size. Thousand sq meters. Enamelware first and foremost is coming from there. Tiles, Japanese tiles. Whenever they put tiles on replication furniture they get them from there. Tin toys. Cut glass. I saw a beautiful cut glass decanter which had those family initials on. In Karaikudi the dealers are mostly Muslims. It's the same in Bangalore. Muslims are the antique dealers.

I1: Why?

R77: I feel the people who are exposed to art in India are the Muslims. Though they might live in some shanty place they are well exposed to what is rare and what is unique. Another reason is that the English and Christian community in India would always go to homes for the aged. There are many homes in Bangalore. That doesn't happen in Hindu or Muslim families, so all the wealth and possessions stay with the family. But the Christians go to the homes for the aged, and their possessions will be sold off, and the Muslim people had a knack of getting these things. Also, even today Muslims are the only people who demolish buildings. House demolition businesses are maybe 90% Muslim. Another way antiques come into the market are these old ladies who were rich in previous generation and who want to maintain their rich social lifestyle, clubs etc., but who for whatever reason no longer have money, but they still have their beautiful things. I saw one old lady come everyday to a shop in Shivajinagar to sell something she had stolen from her in-laws. And servants also.

I1: Do you think there is much interest in antiques in India?

R77: Not much interest. It does not appeal to the common man. Something I would pay 500 for and ordinary person would only pay 80-90 rupees. They don't see the value. And they would not want such things in their house anyway. They are attracted to bright, colourful things from the mall. I've seen people dispose of beautiful rosewood furniture and go instead for some cheap upholstered furniture, because they don't know the value of the rosewood. It is just about the appearance.

I1: Kannada words for 'antique'?

R77: *Puratana?* Maybe. *Prachina*. [I think he might have checked this on the internet from his phone before telling me, as he didn't seem very familiar with this word]. There is an antique shop in Bangalore called Prachin. In Bangalore there has always been interest in antiques. But what we see as antiques, perhaps that was the luxury of those days. The 'beautiful era' here was post-independence, which I also like very much. There were very rich Indians here but so much into European lifestyle. They would wear suits and in their homes would have very nice pieces, beautiful dinner sets. Even though they were traditional Brahmins, still as a mark of refinement they would have dinner sets. Ivory gods and goddess icons. Till 1982/3 ivory was still sold in India.

I1: How do you choose what to collect?

R77: I buy things which cannot be produced now. Lots of effort must have gone into making it. For example these oil lamps, there are lots produced now, but you the same quality of burner can never be produced now. Even glass, old glass was so thin. Mass production cannot produce this quality. The condition is not an issue – I have many used and worn things. Attar bottles half full of old oil, I think "perhaps this person had spent a lot of money on them and wanted to save it".

I1: Why do you like antiques?

R77: Its unique. There's something special about a person who collects antiques, appreciation of finer details. [He takes out a wood box with inlaid decoration and a metal cutting tool at one end]. See how beautiful? Ebony bird inlaid with pieces of ivory. It's a grater for coconut. What I really like, the purpose is only to chop, he [the maker] needn't have done all these things. But because he had so much passion for what he does, those things I appreciate. My dealer kept this for me. All these pieces together cost me 30,000 rupees. It's expensive but I feel it's worth it. Its ebony wood and satinwood. Expensive and rare. But what I appreciate is that the person who made all these was really motivated by what he does, not carried away by all the present, money-making, materialistic world. He's doing it for his happiness. Dealing network for antiques is very well organised. My dealer will give

A. Lawson

some 20-30,000 rupees to a local party (in Chettinad). It will be his job to all the small trash shops and collect. He will then want to sell that as a single lot/ In that lot you'll get two or three best items. The rest is 'kajana' – its not worth anything. But my dealer has to take it all to keep him happy. Some things I will have to sell to keep going. That's my retirement plan. Now antique collecting has become an expensive thing. It was easier twenty years ago. Now there are more collectors, but mainly for furniture and house building (pillars etc.) Many new houses want pillars – rich houses. Ceramic/china figurines come from Anglo-Indian houses. Beautiful furniture always comes from Parsi families. They keep the furniture like heirlooms. Like Indian women keep gold and jewellery.

I1: Do you have any antiques that you use day to day. Utility items like kitchen utensils?

R77: Kitchen utensils no. I don't use any antique things there.

I1: Why not?

R77: Because I am from a conservative Brahmin family. Strictly speaking you're not supposed to buy anything old (used).

I1: Why?

R77: (starts to speak in slightly hushed tones) I don't know. They say wood and all that, they carry a lot of negativity. They don't buy the old doors or even beds. But I have been okay. They say if its been used before it carries a lot of negativity – wood, stone...All over India this belief is there. Nowadays it's more because all the TV channels are so much into astrology and when a man is in trouble or going through a bad phase he tends to believe such things. That is becoming more and more. Earlier, twenty years ago, the concept of *vasthu* was not known to the common man. *Vasthu* doesn't say anything about the furniture, just architecture and rooms. But later, I don't know, maybe as a further development of all of these fake astrologers....they say there should not be a stopped clock inside the house, or no broken glass. So because of all that the common man does not tend to want old things – he will blame it if something bad happens....There is no end to the things to collect. I have to limit myself when I go to the dealer. But

its important to keep a good relationship with the dealer so I have to be very careful and very polite when declining to buy something. If my dealer buys something with me especially in mind I have to buy it, otherwise next time, when he has something I want to buy he will say 'oh, sorry I just sold it this minute'. That happens a lot.

FN: Has some old kitchen utensils but he explains that these have been passed down within the family, not bought as previously used items. In his puja room he tells me most of the things are old, from grandparents time, but they are heirlooms too. He shows me about the house points out some items in his huge collection – puja spoons, picture made of Karaikudi tiles, old brass tap with a lion head spout.

I1: What will happen to your collection?

R77: It will be sold. It is only making me happy. My mother and sister are not happy with it.

I1: and I guess these things will not be of interest to museums here in India?

R77: Nothing is preserved in India. Everything beautiful, all the buildings are being demolished.

Consent

A73) B: 22/11/14

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Bangalore

Interaction Participants: I1, R62

Language: English

Duration: 00:36:06

Context: I have met R62 once before for a brief informal chat at his shop near central Bangalore. At that time he told me about a hotel/wedding venue which he owned on the outskirts of Bangalore which he says he constructed mostly with antique wood and stone, carvings and structural material. I meet him in central Bangalore and he drives me to this resort. He gives me a tour of this while we talk and

then he takes me to his house where he keeps his personal antique collection.

FN: He started collecting antiques as a kid of 18 years old. It became a passion. Dropped out of college to pursue it. Started an antique shop.

R62: After I had collected so much for myself I decided I had to build something. I started to build my house and that's when I thought, 'why should I go into town to work, I may as well build something here to bring people in'. So that's how the restaurant got conceptualized. I had my gallery here for furniture and art. And I had the restaurant. Slowly the restaurant grew and it became a wedding destination.

I1: Did you source all these things yourself or through an agent?

R62: Myself. Sourcing was easy. I would go travelling around.

FN: I notice that he has a lot of wooden pieces in his collection. He says he particularly likes chariot pieces and woodcarvings.

I1: Are you drawn mainly by the history of these things or the aesthetics?

R62: The aesthetics. I like south Indian arts and crafts. Andhra doesn't have much. Tamil Nadu is very rich. Karnataka is very refined. Kerala is crude but early. I prefer to keep the old patina and original frames (for paintings). I will do some restoration on furniture but not on metal.

FN: He shows me different pieces in his collection: Chinese wood carving (he bought this from Chettinad), various styles of oil lamp, Russian painting (bought in Bermondsey market London, plaster angel from Pondicherry (he points out the Indo-French style of the face and hair), the tiles in his kitchen which he got from Karaikudi, yalli carving from Kerala, pillars and beam from Mysore. He shows me a Ganesh bronze, which he says was found in the Kaveri River near Thanjavur. He got it from a Tamil dealer. He says he wasn't to get it identified and valued. It is heavily corroded. He has several silk saris from Chettinad which have unusual motifs such as gramophones and cars and boats. He says he used to have more but that you cant find theme in Karaikudi anymore.

I1: Will you go back to Karaikudi?

A. Lawson

R62: I'll go back for sure, but I don't know if I'll go for antiques.

A74) B: 07/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R7

Language: English

Duration: 01:38:04

Context: This is my second interview with R7. He has been a key respondent for me in that he was one of my first contacts who provided me with many more. It has been over a year since I last spoke to him, however he remembers me when I call him and he is happy to arrange a meeting. He invites me to his new office, which he has only recently moved into. He invites me to sit opposite him at his office desk. I start by telling him that my interest right now is to find out more about the trade and collection of coins, beads and other things that come out of Tamil Nadu riverbeds.

R7: Past two years coin market has gone crazy. Now more than ten auction houses in India. There is a big demand for material, but interest has shifted from British Indian coins to South Indian and Tamil Nadu coins. Used to be that people would commonly pay 5,000 rupees for and British India coin. Now they pay the same for a South Indian coin.

I1: Why?

R7: Because there very beautiful and they have all these gods and icons. They are like miniature bronzes in and of themselves. Also Facebook has now become a major hub for the coin market. It's the number one source. eBay is done.

I1: Why is eBay no longer preferred?

R7: Because people say why should I pay some 10% just so I can sell my things through eBay when its much quicker and easier through Facebook with no charge. Facebook is now where all the coin trading is done. There are lots of groups. Discussion groups and trading

A. Lawson

groups. But they are always separate. You won't be allowed to buy or sell on a discussion page. They are only for asking for identification.

- Coins of Tamil Nadu
- British India Presidency (Bombay)
- Indian Coins Collectors Club – (discussion only)
- Indian Coins Trading Group – (selling only)

And the amazing thing is you have all of these experts and top coin people on these groups. Like this guy Paul Withers. He is a top coin specialist from UK. He was never reachable before and now he's right here on Facebook and anyone can ask him a question. So the knowledge base is increasing rapidly. And it's all happening on Facebook.

I1: When was that collection put together? Pre-Independence?

R7: No I can tell you this only off record. (Recorder switched off temporarily).

I1: Riverbed panners, I'd like to know more about them. Who they are and how did they come to be doing this.

R7: I can give you an exact date for when it started. 1972. It was the 1972 wildlife act that caused it all. The panners are a tribal group called Irulas. They claim to be descendants of the megalithic cultures... There are now just three dealers who collect from the riverbed panners in Tamil Nadu (R78, R84, R85) – they control that side of the coin market in Tamil Nadu. If you want to speak to some of the riverbed diggers you should go to Trichy now, or as soon as possible. There is some excavating happening somewhere in that area now. I've heard they are even using diggers to get deeper into the riverbed.

FN: He makes a call to R78 and arranges to have him meet me in Trichy in two days time to take me to where the riverbed diggers are working.

I1: What about bead collecting and dealing?

R7: For beads I am the only collector

FN: I mention R72 and her bead collection.

R7: I am her supplier you see. This is a conference I've been invited to (4TH BORNEO INTERNATIONAL BEADS CONFERENCE – STRINGING PAST TO PRESENT)

I1: Has this conference been going for some time?

R7: It is the fifth year I think. Fourth or fifth year.

I1: Are you planning to go... this one in October?

R7: I don't know how this happened... but apparently I'm on the list of invited speakers. I will deliver a paper on 'India: the bead story'.

I1: So you say there isn't really a culture for collecting beads in India at the moment?

R7: In India no, there's only me, and the people who supply me. So it's a craft hub and a three-day thing. Its one-day of papers. It is one of those crafty things you know. Anyway, I'll try to focus on the idea of the riverbed. It's very important. I keep talking about it, debating it, having heated arguments with archaeologists. Archaeologists have a very simple debate. It is not archaeological data if it is not stratified data. Meaning, you have to dig a trench, plot the location, every layer will reveal information, you study it, in its actual location, and all that data is relevant to archaeological study. Riverbeds have no point of origin. It is not the point where they ended up. It cannot allow for stratified trenching to happen because it keeps moving.

I1: How much of a connection do you think there is between where they are found and where they are possibly came from?

R7: That is our study. We took beads as the most vague topic, that is the challenge. Other objects are easily identified. You take coins it's very simple. If you find a Mysore coin in Thanjavur, you know it came from Mysore and if you find a British India coin in the river you know it's a British India coin, its very easy. How do you tell a bead from where it came? That gives us purpose to study, scientific reasons to study, methods of drilling, methods of manufacturing, material and other stuff. This study pretty much reveals several major factors. One of the most important things to me that you know talks about the importance of Tamil Nadu in ancient times, 95% of all the beads in the world that you excavate and find between the 1st century A.D. and 4th century A.D.

originated in Tamilnadu. Whether you found them in Indonesia, in Europe or North America, they are originated here. We were such a massive bead manufacturing community. We invented some of the techniques, some of them were invented in Central Asia and some of them were invented as time came by. There are also clues for some of the greater historical mysteries. So there is always a debate, again all my research is centred around Tamil Nadu and answering the archaeological mysteries of Tamilnad, that's my interest. So there is always this huge debate, and particularly among people like R44 and all these guys, that Indus valley script and language is directly connected to Dravidian which is Tamil. It is a big debate and goes to all levels of nonsense. Now there is this guy who is sitting in Europe saying that Tamil is the mother of the Indus language. Indus language went from here. There is no evidence historically the ascent of culture from Tamil Nadu upwards. There is only consistent proving of the descending of culture and technique into Tamil Nadu. So Indus valley civilization was from there from about 3000 B.C. to 1500 B.C., high period. Climate change happened, this has all been studied. In the Ashmolean there is a guy who has spent his life studying climate change in Indus valley. Any city that grows rapidly will always change the climate. In modern times we're able to deal with it. We have air-conditioning, fans and stuff. In those days if you kill half a forest you change the weather. Nowadays if we kill the Amazon we still may survive. So Indus valley dispersed. They didn't just die out. Over time they came to the Ganges valley. From where they start to coming down south, because the south has always been fertile, green, forested. It's hotter but at least the weather is always stable for growth, it has all kinds of terrains, access to the sea. So when you look at it that way, and then you study it through the view of the beads, very clearly you can mark timelines. And you see that carnelian beads, if you take one particular kind, it was first drilled and made in Indus valley and those pre-date anything you find in Tamil Nadu. But those were also made in Tamil Nadu, meaning that those people at some point came down and made it here. Because there was a technique to make beads, nothing

else, materials were not available. The only known source of carnelian is in Gujarat. Some somebody was mining it there and bringing it all the way to Tamil Nadu, where they processed it, and around 100 A.D. you had etched carnelian beads that were not made here. So the finished carnelian beads were shipped all the way to Persia. Which is where they would make the etched beads. Only those guys knew how to etch them. And then they would come back to Tamil Nadu for some Megalithic burial. Imagine that you know. And so all these would tell you stories of how things happened. But archaeologists won't study these. Because they say 'no, did we find it in a trench? Is it there? Can we prove it? Can we date it?' But a lot of materials [inaudible] you will not find in archaeological digs. You just don't. And nobody has properly really been able to answer why things end up in the riverbed.

I1: That's another thing I'm wondering about.

R7: You need to do mathematics here. And I've tried doing it, it kind of makes sense. Let's give ourselves 2000 years, because we get everything in the last 2000 years. Before 2000 years there is no materials that survive. The older it is, the more fragile the material, meaning it was terracotta, wood, cloth, you know, stuff that was natural so it doesn't survive. It decays in the water. Only after the Pallava period, which is 6th or 7th century, they started using metal a little bit more that starts to survive. And then as you go rapidly forward everything starts to survive. You get random pieces of terracotta, because they survive because they are clay that is hard enough. So what happens in this 2000 year period is, you have to think of populations, based on bead manufacturing, because we know that it would take thirty days to make one stone bead. They were producing millions of beads, which means they must have had at least 10,000 people making beads day in and day out, for 500 years. So if you have 10,000 people with the average life span of 30 years in those days, into 500 years, you're looking at populations of 30-40 million. 30 to 40 million people using all these artefacts are accounting for some 200-300 million artefacts of which, lets say 10% ends up in the river and 90% is lost for good. Of that 10% I think we probably find 1%. So that's

a lot of material and a lot of information that we cannot ignore. Similarly, answering how it came into the river, first all cultures lived along the river. When there was a flood everything was washed in. Even if we assume that flooding happens once in five years, twenty floods are there in a century. So like 300 floods had happened in last 2000 years, on average, that is enough to bring all this material into the riverbed. The floods had washed away houses, settlements, burial grounds. Then we have the tradition of perhaps burning bodies across the water. But actually that's not so much a the culture of the south. Actually they were buried. And Megalithic burial grounds never happened by the river. They always happened by lakes.

I1: Was that to keep them apart from riverside habitations?

R7: Probably, and also for ritualistic purposes. Lakes are constant source of water and particularly megalithic people are constantly digging up these things and giving offerings. That is an Egyptian concept. They have pots, plates and tons of stuffs, anything you need to survive. They are built like houses with walls and windows, its like living in a subterranean world after death. So that stuff doesn't get into the river. But there are so many mysteries. The objects that you get are coins that you do not get in excavations. Do you have any report finding coins in excavations?

I1: Is that because they don't find them or because they don't think they are important enough to report?

R7: No. They do not find them in excavations. They only find it in fields and farms. Apparently money never got buried that much into excavation sites. The funny thing is, we can't excavate ancient Indian cities because they still exist, and they constantly evolve, and our philosophy is one of allowing things to re-incarnate, to recycle, so there is nothing left behind either. So if you go to Thanjavur, I'm always wondering this, where the hell are their houses? They are all human beings after all. Its not like they all lived in a temple! I'm sure that the king had a palace. I mean Rajaraja Chola could build temple, could he not build himself a palace? Where is that palace? Demolished, re-used, re-cycled, or probably just built right on top of. And nobody excavates

because you never know. That is why when you go to places like Karur which is a Roman city, people find roman pillars in there suddenly. It just gets whisked away. Which is the other problem now, because we just have ridiculous antiquity laws. Technically everybody you're talking to in you're research, they are all doing illegal things.

I1: This is another thing I wanted to clarify. I need to speak to somebody in ASI about this because I understand the legislation has been amended at least once.

R7: You wont get any answers from ASI. You'll only be asked to submit many pieces of documentation as to why you are studying all this. But coins have officially been removed from the need to be registered.

I1: So they do not need to go to state department for registration? But it is still illegal to dig them out of the ground right?

R7: Exactly. Anything lower than 100 millimetres in the ground and older than 100 years is covered by the antiquities law. It is actually called the Antiquities and Treasure Trove act. In a country like India, 100 years is not a great number. Every house has stuff. In India there are too many things available. Just an insane number of things. You cannot possibly protect all that. We do not have infrastructure. ASI itself doesn't have enough money to maintain what they currently have. They're doing a great job. If you go to ASI controlled temples in Tamil Nadu they are beautiful. They are restored, well landscaped, tourist friendly. They are doing a wonderful job, there is no denying that. The ladies who are in charge of ASI now are fantastic. But they do not have resources to go beyond their existing capacity.

I1: It does seem that they have legislations that they cannot fully enforce.

R7: Exactly. So the second most important thing of that act is you cannot export anything.

I1: And again it seems very difficult to control the export of things as small as coins...

R7: Yeah, when there is money on one end and demand on the other, borders do not exist. If a guy sitting in New York wants a Somaskandar Chola bronze, he will get it from Thanjavur without

problem. That is the truth, that is the world. You can go to Christies and buy something, you can go to Sotheby's and buy something. They all claim that nothing is from the country. What they also conveniently do is prove that it was stolen. There is no documentation. Only things stolen post-independence, or the stuff that was studied by various museums of the British at that time can be traced back. None of those ever left the country. When Madras museum was built, they brought all the pieces there and they never went anywhere. I can take you to Mylapore which will have fifty temples where there are 500 pieces of Chola bronzes between them. How do you track one? You can't even get, the temples won't let you survey them. You can't even take photographs of the bronzes. If the ASI has to get permission then all the temples must be under the Hindu Charitable Trust. They have a trust for temples. Some temples belong to it and some temples don't. To even get a bronze to be disrobed, you know to remove all the coverings on it to allow it to be photographed, no temple authority will allow you to do so. If anybody wants a bronze, you can just talk to the priest and tell him that is worn out, its looking old, its really bad and you want to donate 5 lakhs to the temple or you want to give him a stunning swamimalai bronze, and then you take the old one away. And that's what happens. It's not as convoluted as going in the middle of the night to steal it. There are idiots who do that, but those are idiots. They steal it and then sell it for 10, 000 rps. They are not the ones doing the big heist. Those guys are sitting in jail now. You know that recent Kapoor case. Those guys get caught because they get in way over their heads. They have offices in Dubai and offices in Switzerland, and everybody knows that so what do you do? Dubai will never change its law. If you can take a piece from India and put it in Dubai you're safe. Done. Dubai doesn't check antiquities, they don't care about Hindu bronzes they're and Islamic state. If you stole something from Mecca and brought it there maybe they would say something. But they don't care they are a country open for business. So you have a shell company in Dubai and you create whatever bills you want to, you can have bills starting from 1945 for all they care. And then you send it to

Switzerland. Switzerland also has the same 'no questions asked' policy. Then you can send it to UK. This happens every day.

I1: This all happens much more easily with coins though?

R7: Coins go by speed post. It's pure personal ethics. I will never ship to a white person, even if they say they have an address in Chennai and are working here, because they're not going to stay here for their rest of their life. That's my personal policy. R9 will not ship. You can come to him and buy, he doesn't care, but he's not selling to somebody abroad.

I1: Why is it do you think that ASI etc doesn't seem to pay much attention to this trade?

R7: There are too many coins, billions of coins, and absolutely there is not enough knowledge from the ASI on coins. Coins are way too detailed. You can only be an expert on one area or one particular state for coins. You cannot be a master of all coins. You can be a master of bronzes, you can be a master of antiquities in general, but you cannot be a master of coins. To study Tamil coins alone you need ten people. R44 has achieved some of that.

I1: Yes, there are people in Tamil Nadu with lots and lots of knowledge on coins...

R7: But R44 is a dealer, that's the problem..

I1: So the ASI can't refer to him?

R7: But at the same time ASI will come to his book launch and talk about it and praise him and say he's done a lot of good work.

I1: That is a very strange relationship.

R7: Yes exactly. Like the ASI brought this guy called Jan Lingen, a Norwegian guy, he is an authority of Indian coins and you cant believe his collection. How did he build his collection? How does he have the best coins India has ever seen? They man is still alive, its not like he collected it 500 years ago. He visits India five times a year and goes back with coins. You cant stop it. So this is my take. I am entirely for the taking away of Indian antiques, not on the commercial, economic and monetary sense. When I have to research my beads and coins, I

started with Madras museum because it has largest collection of beads and coins. It's in their archive store rooms or whatever.

I1: They don't have a huge amount on display.

R7: No, what is on display is rubbish. It's fake. The materials in display are copies. Historically, according to their bulletins there are sitting on millions of coins, beads and artefacts. Nobody knows where they are. It is a giant vault or storeroom somewhere there. To get permission, even if you get letter of authorisation from Prime Minister of India, they will say no.

I1: I tried to visit the museum last time just to talk about the beads and coins...

R7: No way. He is a good friend, he will show you one bag of stuff. But what's the point. You know what they're worried of? These are all permanent government jobs and it is a good job, 30-40 thousand rps a month minimum, with a car and accommodation for the rest of your life. It's a great thing, you don't want to jeopardize that. If for example, you went there and studied 500 coins and when you left there were only 499, they won't give that guy his retirement benefit. They'll put him under a case, an enquiry, which will drag for fifty years. They can't afford to risk that. If you look at the Madras College of Fine Arts, they have a library and museum that's been closed for some 25 years now. Because if they open it, there is going to be an enquiry on every principle that has taught there. Those guys are 80 and 90 years old and they live on their pension. If you open it, there is going to be a downfall because there is going to be nothing inside. It's probably looted, missing, all decayed and all gone, but they are never going to open it. Similarly this is the case everywhere. There are some museums like Chatrapathi Shivaji museum in Bombay are little progressive so they will give you a little bit of access, but they do not have the best material. I went to London, I just sent a mail, and I did not know anybody in the British Museum, and I just said 'I study coins', and in the next week, I got a reply from the head of department regarding their coins saying 'I would be delighted to have you here, this is my assistants number and email, let us know your time and what you

would like to see'. No membership and payments needed. Supervised access to the entire collection of coins in British Museum over one email. There is more documentation and materials there, so nowadays I don't do research in India at all. It is easier for me to spend a little money for travelling and staying there. Whereas spending five years here, paying a researcher a salary and to sit here for so long and spend so much money doesn't make sense. I send my girls there once a year to visit and read everything they want to, V&A gives you access, libraries give you access. V&A is the other extreme, they give photocopies of books for free. The other drive for all this is that I have now become a director of a museum. I have set up what is called the Perumel Museum of Art in Bombay. And because it's private, we want to make it that way. We want to give access to everything we have.

I1: Is it difficult? Are there any restrictions in setting up a museum like that?

R7: Yes, there are lots. Which is why museums are not just set up by anyone and everyone. This has been set up by one of the richest men in the country and the world. You need those kinds of resources, I'm just fortunate enough to have found this gentleman who is insanely nuts about art. So therefore money is not a matter, it is just a passion. He can knock on the Prime ministers office if he needs to. We get things done. There is a lot of paperwork. We have to comply with that but if you know how to get that done you can do anything. Its just about resources and manpower. So what I do is I run Ashvita here to support my life, so whatever I earn in this museum, I bring right back to my interest in antiquities, culture and art. Nowadays I know how to do some fundraising also. We are pulling in sources and we are getting contacts. This year we are going to publish six papers, which is a big thing for an individual foundation. We also publish books and other kinds of stuff. And hopefully all this information is going to go up for free. How else do you get people to know about it. So in all you research you are asking questions about things that are vey openly illegal. If you do it by the law you wont have anything, just a one page report saying all this is illegal and that's it. Look at the greater good of

business, commerce, history, knowledge. Lets look at that. Lets assume that this is illegal. That's not even a debate. Its an open secret, everybody knows. There is no point in talking about the legalities. R9 has spent 30 years collecting coins and I feel that he, R44 and a bunch of other guys, should be given Bharat Ratnas. Why? The amount of historical information that they have protected and preserved that even the ASI has not done. They can sell stuff, they need to live and eat. There is no money in this. Its not like they are billionaires. They live very middle class lives. R44 lives in Thanjavur and then you have to drive for two hours. That's how far out it is. He lives in this little house and his wife is a school teacher. So it's not that he's living some glamorous life of a dealer. And all the money he makes he puts into publishing his books, so he is broke forever. But the knowledge that they have protected and preserved through these coins, there is no money that you can put on. How are these materials coming? That is another question. I completely object to illegal excavating. I very vocally and physically fight that. I take care of sites and wherever I see things happening I go after people.

I1: I haven't come across it happening in a very organised way here does it...

R7: No, it doesn't exist.

I1: I imagine one of the main problems is the development projects like roads, buildings etc.

R7: yes and those are the bastards of the antiquities world. Real estate developers. I have actually been going after some of them and telling them that they have to pay for damages. First of all they're digging up a marsh, that itself is ecologically a crime. They are digging up archaeological sites to get landfill. I tell them 'this is what you're going to do, you're going to right a large cheque and im going to put it into preserving these sites, because you guys are directly responsible for wrecking these sites'. Some of them are shocked, but I tell them, 'you are the devil, you cant have an add saying 'come and live in Chennai, pristine this, this this'... you have killed 2000 years of archaeology and antiquity'. So excavation doesn't happen in an organised manner

because you don't know where to find stuff. When you do excavate here they all crumble. Our weather is not good for preserving goods. And the funny thing it there is nothing precious buried in the ground in Tamil Nadu. If you want to dig you will only get mud and terracotta and iron objects. So where are you getting the gold and the coins? That is from the riverbeds. And this activity is only relatively recent. It has an exact starting date if you want to know. Its called the Wildlife Act of 1972. Along with the ASI act they introduced the wildlife act. So the Wildlife Act prohibited the killing or capturing of wildlife in India. So you've heard of a very large tribal community, not tribal in the way you think but in that they have indigenous origins here in India and their DNA will match the out of Africa theory, they are not descendants from the north, they are called Irulas. They claim to be cultural descendants of the Megalithic people. Their occupation was the rat and snakecatchers in the fields and farms. They also knew how to catch the migratory birds. They had a dual life. When it rained they would be in the rivers catching fish and when it was dry they would be in the fields catching rats. So when this act came it they couldn't do this anymore. And while there were in the river they also used to know about panning and pan for gold and silver. So in 1972 it became aggressive. All the Irula groups there said okay lets just start panning the rivers. That is the first time that coins started coming into the market. That's when early collectors like Krishnamurthy, one of the largest collectors started. That's when Sangam coins and Pallava coins came out. That's when these large quantities became available. Before that you could find coins but more randomly, and there were very few coin collectors then. It exploded in the 70's and 80's and this riverbed thing spread like wildfire.

I1: Is that just in Tamil Nadu?

R7: Yeah, you don't find coins anywhere else. They pan the Narmada river and you get beads and a few coins. But this whole riverbed thing seems to be unique to the Kaveri river and a little bit in the tributaries of the Kaveri. But you wont get it in the Bhavani for example. So that's

another thing. Why the Kaveri? You don't find it in the Kerala rivers. In Karnataka you do find. Around Hampi.

I1: Mysore?

R7: Mysore has gone to the other extreme, it is the largest forger of coins right now.

I1: Why is that?

R7: There is one guy, that idiot is on this group all the time. He just forges them, replicates them.

I1: So its just one dealer?

R7: no it's a big group not just one guy. They went to arrest him once but they couldn't. He says he is not issuing government regulated money. He's not forging, just replicating. The RBI does not say that a copper Chola coin is circulatory value. Its only copper, and it is not illegal in any law to reproduce an ancient coin. If he sold it to and said it is an original Chola coin you can catching him for cheating. But he says 'I never said I sold an original'.

I1: Are they very good replicas?

R7: They are so good I can't tell the difference. Now they know there is a loophole, they are deliberately trying to sell fakes. They know the coins which sell well and they replicate those.

I1: I've seen very poor replicas for sale on the street in places like Bangalore and they are obviously fakes...

R7: Yes, that's the hook. That's the touristy stuff. You make a lot of money for fifty rupees. But if you're an interested collector you go to them and ask 'do you have something original, something better'? And of course now you have China in this market. British India coins are being machine made. Again, in the 70's the RBI sold all the remaining dies that they had of the British coins. So people actually own these dies. You just make your own coins now. Then you have the Republic of India coins with the RBI themselves actually republishing certain commemorative coins which makes a huge mess. Because they say its commemorative limited edition, and they've gone and re-issued it. So my opinion is that unless you're an expert and unless you know the source and have actually seen it come out of the riverbed... but

nowadays I believe they are taking fake coins putting them in the riverbed and taking them out again. But Facebook has enlightened even those guys. They aren't doing anything, just standing in the riverbed, posting a picture and saying 'identification please'. See riverbed guys were always the source and the source was always protected by the dealers. A collector can never reach the source. Because your taking away their money. Nobody in this business is making money remember. Overall the coin market in India must be worth crores, easily. It's the largest hobby in the country. Overall must be one of the largest businesses. You should go to Bombay for 17th-18th. One of the biggest exhibitions is there. It will put you in touch with so many people and dealers. Quickest way to see everything about the coin world in one go.

I1: Ok I'll try and sort that out. So I was talking to a dealer in Bangalore about how some of the big coin collections in America and UK are coming back onto the market and being bought by Indian collectors.

R7: Yes, that's true. Indians are buying Indian stuff. And that's true for the art world too. Christies are doing their big Indian sale because most of the buyers are Indian. For modern art I am the biggest buyer in the country now, because of my museum. So they sell here. That's fine. So the most recent large auction was the David Fore collection. That's the only one that's happened in the last five years. Paul Stevens collection is coming up, he was the advisor to David Fore.

I1: Do you know anything about how and when these collections were put together?

R7: Yes but this has to be off record...

(recorder switched off)

R7: So these coins I did whatever I could to buy them and they were bought in an auction in India. There are two types of coins: riverbed coins which is 99%, and then there are contemporarily collected coins, meaning the patina and condition is better. They don't have any of this riverbed damage. These seven coins were collected in the 1790's just after they were minted, by a British collector.

I1: I see, so they've never been in the ground or riverbed, they've just been passed down since that time.

R7: Yes. It's not that far away. I mean Tipu Sultan issued these until 1798. So they picked up these, went back to the UK, it came for auction six years ago, an Indian dealer bought it and imported it back into India, and this came up for auction again last year.

I1: How much were they?

R7: Probably the most expensive Tipu Sultan coins for their category and price right now. Because the world went nuts when this came out. Because this gives you provenance and detail. But what I want to establish right now is that these are coins which were collected back then. This material has now been exhausted in the UK. Because Indian dealers have been going there and buying everything. The market boomed. So people like Baldwins don't have anymore material to have auctions. After David Fore, then nothing. St James which is close to Baldwins, used to have Indian auctions but now only have four or five coins per auction. The material has been wiped out. And nobody wants to send stuff to the UK now because there is a market here. There is no problem with that. The problem is when these collectors and experts and all that are taking stuff now. They have this guy called Stephen Album who runs out of New York. How is he getting a continuous supply of Indian coins? And that guy comes to India every three months. So you know he's taking stuff back. There are enough dealers who I know that have said it.

I1: But again, like we said its difficult to control...

R7: So when I travel I take these trays (of coins). Within India when we travel for exhibitions I take these trays. They tell me to take them out, because it's metal. And I say it's my collection and they say '*haan*, okay sir'. I was going to London two years ago, there was a guy right in front of me in the security check who was taking out a hundred sheets of coins, like twenty coins per sheet. And the guy is showing it saying its coins and he just took it through in his hand luggage. Like 500 coins! And the guy looked purely like a guy who was carrying stuff with no other agenda. You know not taking it to Dubai or whatever. Small

bronzes you can carry. You can carry it back and no one will trouble you. Wrap it in a saffron cloth and say this is from my ashram that I visited. Small bronzes leave the country regularly.

I1: What is this?

R7: Oh that is a Pallava ring with a symbol of a conch. So these are all riverbed things.

I1: you can see the difference in condition. You have a 2014 coin!

R7: Its all about condition and quality and that's the difference between this Tipu Sultan and any other. The entire script on top is very clean, you can see the elephant ornamentation is very visible. The dotted circle around the elephant is intact. You will never find them, they will always be off centre. This guy just picked the choice ones. That's the thing. Even 200 years ago you see a coin that's a good strike and you keep it, you don't spend it. These are the riverbeds, it has dirt on it, its worn down its flat, it has that white sediment on it.

I1: I guess those Tipu Sultan coins are like you collecting this 2014 coin now.

R7: Yes, that's the thing. I know in a few years it will sell because of its amazing quality.

I1: Are you still collecting any other types of thing. I remember you have some pottery and terracotta?

R7: There is nothing from the riverbed that I don't collect. There is the affordability factor. There is absolutely no market for it. Nobody collects it. So if I don't collect it is getting trashed. So like I said I picked these up from Baldwins. There is a huge market here and he is offering them to me at prices that I could triple here.

I1: Is that because they're not selling for those prices in the UK and elsewhere?

R7: Yeah, Indian stuff will sell the best in India. The thing about Baldwins is they have good condition, these were all contemporarily collected. Not 'collected', but you know you're a guy working in India and using British money and you take it back to UK in your pocket change. And in the UK things don't tarnish, the weather is better. And it

helps me with provenance and authenticity. That's why I keep the tag, if anyone wants to buy from me I can show them it's from Baldwins.

I1: Is it a problem in India to find coins with some sort of provenance?

R7: provenance is literally unavailable. Nobody discloses it. Because they're always worried that you'll find out how much you took them for. I am bringing in all those clean processes. We will tell you this is from Baldwins and it says seventy five pounds there, but I'm not going to sell it to you for less than 200 pounds, and if you think you can get it somewhere else for less than 200 pounds, I also know my market. I know that coins not going to come for less than 200 pounds. So if you're a collector, ok fine, its authenticated, I know how much Ive paid for it, I know how much I've been taken for and that's that. And I tell them I will buy it back for the same price anytime, because I'm not going to sell you something I wouldn't buy. So I'm bringing in all the practices of the art world and trying to make it more transparent. Because that's how you increase value. That's what you want to do at the end of the day. You want to make money out of these coins. People are collecting them. There is no collector in the world who will tell you 'I don't collect for value'. They are lying. There is a difference between collecting for investment and collecting for pleasure, but both of them collect for value.

I1: In the sense of prestige?

R7; Any kind of value that you will get out of it. My Bombay patron for my museum doesn't care about whether he can make money in the art world, but he knows that he's getting value, as in one of the greatest art collections in the country. And invariably those pieces gain value. So if he buys the best pieces of Indian art it literally grows at thirty percent a year. So even if you spent 100 crores now, in ten years its going to be worth 1000 crores. That's a lot of money. So they know that. People who know how to make money know how to make money in whatever they do. That's one side. The other side is people like R44 who sell stuff but doesn't need to make profit, he just needs to fund his next book or project or just the next set of coins. And that leaves you very bitter as well. Because the market always corrects itself to be just

above how much you can reach. And if you're used to buying something for 100 rupees, when it becomes 200 you say 'oh that's too much'.

I1: He also gets a lot from riverbed sources doesn't he?

R7: There is no source other than riverbeds for south India.

I1: Yeah but I mean, going direct to riverbed sources, or going to some collector or dealer. Because there must be a lot circulating.

R7: Yes all collectors will sell a few drop grade. But those collectors will add a premium. A collector will never sell for a low price.

I1: Is that because the collectors will have already improved the state/condition of the coin...?

R7: No its like these Tipu Sultan coins are the best condition you will find outside a museum in the private market. If you add just one coin like this to your Tipu collection immediately the value increases. You add one good Tipu Sultan coin to 100 coins and the 100 becomes better. So that's why condition matters. When they do that they sell their second one. Usually the savvy collectors who make big money will put it in an auction and get the best possible price. And anyway you don't need the money so you're not in a hurry to sell. A lot of dealers also collect. If they have left over stock that doesn't sell, but in twenty years it has become something so they can sell. Sadly, and this is my pursuit for immortality, none of what we collect will die before us. Multiple generations will die before anything happens to these coins. Look at these Sangam age coins. Two thousand years they have survived. So now the trick is to attach your name to that coin. That's how we survive.

I1: Through recording the provenance?

R7: Right. And you write books and put out research, and you donate money to a museum and they put your name in there. You know, the so-and-so room for coins. I think that's why a lot of people finally do this. You know the bigger ones who are setting up museums and so on. After a while you want to leave you name behind, leave an impact. There is no other way to do it other than through material possessions. Through art. The Rockefellers are more popular for their art worldwide

than their business. You know the name because they have the Rockefeller Centre, the Rockefeller Museum etc. When you say Tata's in India, you know Tata is a big company, but what comes to mind are all their institutes. And collectors see that opportunity. Even if you are a dealer, you want to be a great dealer because you have supplied to a great collection. But everybody knows it goes round and round, I've learnt that so I don't get worried these days if I can't find a particular coin. Sometimes there will be twenty-five guys digging in the rivers and you'll get so much material, but where is the money, you have to let it go. I don't worry because you know someone else will buy that and eventually they will die so...

I1: Surely these riverbed panners must have started to catch on to how much money can be made in the coin market?

R7: Oh they have cut out all their own middle-men. They are directly selling now.

I1: And are they becoming more aware of the market value of different coins?

R7: Oh yes, it's completely controlled now by three boys. They have their bikes and cars and they go up and down, up and down Tamil Nadu, making sure that whatever is found in the riverbeds comes to them, otherwise they will create hell for the other guys who are taking it out. A lot of them have stopped. I think...five years from now you won't have riverbed panning. We are killing our rivers, so what's happening now is the coins are getting eroded. There's so much pollution in the water it's just eating through the coins. So now I'm accelerating my collection pace because I can see that it's going to go out. I can see the change in the quality of material. In ten years, I can see that it's gone from a certain kind of condition to now just junk. We are literally scraping the bottom now. But it's not the bottom, it's the acid in the water that in just one year can damage two thousand years of history. So that's sadly what's happening. And I've studied the acid damage, and all acid damage points to chemical damage. It doesn't point to the patina or corrosion that you get over time. Only chemicals can induce this. Because we have tanneries that send sewage into it. All cities are

overgrown and have no infrastructure. You should see the rivers outside Thanjavur. Its just filthy. Just sewage. And every time it rains it gets washed out. But then that's going to stop very soon. When you look on google maps you can see the Kaveri and you can see cities just growing across the river. Kanchipuram used to have a beautiful river. I used to find beautiful coins there. That river has just disappeared now. Its just been built over. So we don't get Pallava coins there now. Very rare. Unless someone finds it as a treasure trove.

I1: So who are these guys causing problems?

R7: They're not causing problems. They are just young kids, newly married, in their thirties. You know typical. They are making a lot of money without any effort. Still buying coins for fifty rupees and selling them for fifty thousand rupees.

FN: Some conversation about contacting these dealers. R7 offers to put me in touch.

R7: As it is they (riverbed panners) get hassled by two people. One is the police, the other is the sand mafia.

I1: Are these quarrying businesses?

R7: So riverbeds have sand, and the rate at which construction happens here means that the demand is so large that they are proper mafia, in the sense that they will kill you if you go there in the night while they are quarrying. They will shoot you and then ask questions. So these guys get hassled by them because they invariably dig in the same areas. There is no understanding at all, like 'you remove the sand and we will excavate', because they are both doing illegal things.

FN: Gives me two identification/research books on coins to take to R9 for him.

R7: See these two books were literally written only after the riverbed guys started taking stuff in the 70's. Every coin there is from the riverbed. R. Krishnamurthy.

FN: Talks about Krishnamurthy whom he does not have a very high opinion of. He believes he is arrogant and gets things wrong but is allowed to because he is wealthy, can afford a very large collection and has published several books.

R7: I don't believe in collector driven research. I only believe in dealer driven research, because they are actually finding out in order to sell the coin, so they have to actually find out information. Collectors always collect with their own idea. It's their slant.

I1: Do you come across this sense of wanting to support Tamil identity/pride/ importance amongst coin collectors?

R7: Yes, that is R44. Tamil Nadu is the beginning and end of his world. He is fanatical about it.

I1: So does this come up a lot in coins in particular?

R7: Yeah because your dealing with history. You're establishing who did what first and who was greater. There are guys who collect only Tamil coins, guys who collect only Pandya coins. You know the whole politically motivated: 'Pandyas were the sons of the soil, 'Cholas were the sons of the soil'. So there is one outfit now, a Dalit outfit, your not supposed to use that term Dalit, they are the underprivileged or harijan caste, their leader has gone and said the are from Pallava descent, which is random crap, because is you look at it ethnically and culturally and DNA studies, Pallava where north Andhra invaders who came here. You cant be 'son of the soil' if you're a north Andhra invader. There is lots of literature. We study stuff. Right now I have a boy studying the lineage of the Pallavas. Where they originate, you know, the lineage of where they come from. And how they would always write the name was, 'I am the son of so and so, son of so and so, son of so and so'. They can trace back ten names. Beyond that it then becomes 'son of this god who's that gods son', towards Vishnu. The beauty of the Cholas, although they have a Shaivite king, their first person was also Vishnu. So what is the idea of religion? Coins talk about all this. Its very simple, Cholas are talked about as the symbol of Tamil culture. But they only issued one coin in Tamil. The remaining coins are issued in Sanskrit. So how do you then answer that debate? The official language was Sanskrit. If you were a Tamil indigenous breed it would be Tamil. The way Rajaraja is written in Nagari, its Hindi actually. All their coins are written in Nagari. Pallava coins they have the bull as a symbol. Similarly if you go back to Sangam period, I believe, in fact that

book which says Sangam coins, I believe that those coins are not at all of south Indian origin. The same coins exist in north India. Those are attributed to various dynasties, Guptas, Mauryas, at that time. So why should those coins found in south India at that time be attributed to Sangam Chera, Sangam Chola, Sangam Pandya?

I1: You think maybe they just came down through trade?

R7: Yes. There is not a single coin found in an excavation. All those coins came from the riverbed and they still continue to come from riverbeds. Meaning traders. Why do you not find Sangam coins in burials, in megalithic sites. In all the contemporary excavation sites they have not found coins. Meaning these came through trade. Its like finding Venetian coins in Tamil Nadu. I have one or two Venetian coins. It doesn't mean Venice was here.

I1: And Roman coins...

R7: No but Roman coins is a funny thing. Romans traded here. Settled here. We never were officially colonised. We were not outposts. But we were trading outposts. So for 300 to 400 years coins kept coming in. Gold. There is recorded data in the Roman city in Egypt, which was the port from which they sailed to Kerala, of the amount of gold coins that came, and if you converted its somewhere upwards of 500 billion dollars or something. They were the suppliers of gold to India. And its because of them that the round coinage takes place in south India. Before that they were the square Sangam age coins. Portrait coins come in after they see Roman portraits. If you look at Madurai Meenakshi temple, the Romans loved Madurai Meenakshi Temple because it is the mother goddess and the same god they pray to there. So they were connected on religious fronts as well. Pagan religion. Madurai Meenakshi is a pagan goddess. There's no doubt about that, although she's associated today with Mandevi Parvati Shiva and so on. So there must have been an original mother goddess temple which existed 2000 – 3000 years ago. The concept of what they call a kasumala, which means a necklace made of coins, originated in Madurai, because the Madurai Meenakshi wore one. Romans used to wear necklaces made of coins. So obviously some Roman guy has

given that to the temple and it then became part of Indian culture. So there are all these phenomenal stories, and that's why these guys collect. I think Raman is now interested in the story. I am very much interested in the story. R44 is interested in the story for highlighting Tamil culture. R90 is not interested in the story at all. So there is a holy trinity of dealers in Chennai: R90, R9, and myself (R7). We have our own agreements and don't invade each others space. But R90 has some of the best coins ever. He is responsible for hundred of collectors to have the best coins. He has more knowledge than anybody else, but he is a closed book. His knowledge is only for the purpose of making money.

I1: He's more of an investment dealer?

R7: not an investment dealer. Its more knowledge is power, knowledge is money. There is a coin issued by (Auranazeb???) in Mylapore, mint name is Milapore?, which already shatters the theories that south India was never invaded by the Mughals crap. They minted the coins literally here, in his name. Nobody knows yet how to read Milapore because so far there have been fourteen coins identified, all fourteen belong to R90, and if you buy it from him he charges the earth. So you have to buy it to know what it looks like to read it. Whereas he can go to any market, they may show it to him as a 100 rupee coin and he may still buy it. So he uses his information that way. R9 and I are too stupid that way. We actually tell all our dealers and educate them.

I1: What do you plan to do with your Tipu Sultan coins?

R7: For the last two years I've stopped selling. If somebody says 'ill pay you ten times', then I'll think about it. If I can get future speculated value today then I will sell it. I just work harder to make my own money now because I am spending it on coins. The idea is that I want to document them. We are doing several things. We have set up a website called indiancoinarchives.com. We're trying to put collectors together and showcase their collections. So irrespective of whether its sold later, you know where those coins are and what they look like. Put together a big database. Free for all, easy to access, searchable website. So I'm working on that, R9 and I are working on a book on

A. Lawson

French coins, he is working on R44's book being translated to English because R44's book is in Tamil. Its one of those crazy Tamil things, he refuses to write in English. And when he speaks to you he'll only use Tamil words, its very difficult. I mean to use the Tamil words for....ah coins itself, which is [inaudible - naryam?], in todays language you cant use. If you say that in colloquial Tamil, and use the word [naryam] its like suddenly talking Latin. So he's that kind of a guy. I'm also nurturing these kids now, kids meaning 20-25 years olds, young collectors who have shown interest. For them I don't sell coins, I tell them 'here's the deal, this coin you would love to have for your collection, you cant afford it for the next ten years, but come here and document 500 coins for me and that coin is yours'. So I now have three boys, one is very knowledgeable in Telugu and Kannada coins, another one in Tamil coins, another in particularly Pandya. So if I develop a network of interested young collectors, then in the next ten years you'll see far better markets and research.

I1: are there many younger children interested in this type of collecting?

R7: I have never see a kid who is collecting this kind of coin. It's time and affordability. There is one kid who's now in first year of college. When I knew him he was in seventh grade. His dad had a lot of spare cash I think and so would give him money. And this kid really studied his coins and was dealing in big leagues, I mean he was dealing stuff that I couldn't sometimes buy, two lakh rupee coins, three lakh rupee coins. He would look at auctions, buy the very best, and then ask for ten times the price. He's still doing this now. He sells two coins a month but he still makes more money that anybody else would. So there's just one kid like this that I've seen.

A75) B: 07/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R9

Language: English

Duration: 01:14:44

Context:

FN: Lots of things from riverbed – Karur. Since 1980's. Used to be much more material, 10 tons per year, now much less. Pollution is the problem. Price increase – what used to cost 5 rps now costs 100rps. He shows me some of his thing, terracotta's – all from riverbeds.

R9: I never touch these things. This is only the second or third time I've even opened this case [on display in a glass case - for preservation]. You can tell the age of this [terracotta] because this one is hollow and this one is solid. The older one is hollow [he is talking about two different terracotta heads broken from a larger sculpture]. This is typical Chola [puja bell], minimum 1200 years. Look its still sandy from the river. Most people don't collect terracottas like this. They're scared the ASI will make trouble. This sort of thing should be registered. But small coins and small bronzes are much easier, its not required to register those.

FN: Different riverbed places best for different things: Thirunelvelly – Pandya, Madurai – also Pandya, Karur – all varieties, Hampi river? – gold fanams, near Arikemedu/pondi – only beads, no coins.

I1: this is used as currency?

R9: Yes, for small, small items. They are natural beads, natural stones. They take it out from [inaudible]. Make their size. The technology is available in those days. They worked as a factory. Thousands of people worked there. Each and every decoration they made may cost more. They put some lines on it and cost more.

I1: Are these beads coming often from the riverbeds or only from excavations?

R9: Yeah. They will come. The excavation quantity is very high. There is an excavation near where Kerala people are doing, there found

6000, 7000 in every part. Comparatively to that riverbed is very less.

But still we will get it.

I1: And the quality...

R9: The excavation quality you cannot imagine. Near Pondicherry, Arikamedu, one or two lakh beads they have found in excavation. See people do like this, remove 12 to 13 feet. They need water, but it should not be over, for only cleaning they need water. So you see, they dig five and a half, six feet, then another five and a half, six feet. So four, five people are looking, another four five people are outside, because they want to remove the sand. They are sure that water should not enter.

I1: Can I take a picture of the screen? I hope to see some of these excavations when I go down to Trichy. This is a very good picture.

R9: I can send the picture.

I1: I'll give you my email.

R9: See, people have trays with holes. They clean with water. See minimum 14-15 feet, then only they will get something.

I1: This is something you found recently?

R9: Yeah. Recently. This is supposed to be a Krishna.

I1: Its a baby Krishna?

R9: Yeah. He is holding butter in both the hands. It is a famous one. You have to clean this also.

I1: R7 told me that there is a big exhibition in Bombay soon. 17th and 18th I think.

R9: Yes. He told me yesterday.

I1: Will you be going? I will try and go. Just to see lots of people from different parts of India.

R9: You just ask and then I will explain.

I1: I'm interested to see anything you've recently collected from the riverbeds.

R9: This is a temple top. From the mud I got it.

I1: Is this difficult to date?

R9: Very difficult. It is supposed to be the temple top. Gopuram we call it You can find it on the top of the entrance.

I1: What is the price of these things? Will there be a price difference. People like R78 have contact with riverbed people and sell this to you people. There must be big price difference. There is a lots of middleman and it goes on and on like this. Somebody bought second or third kind in Bombay for example...

R9: The price will differ definitely. See if I want to go myself I will have to travel in third AC, because minimum single ac bedroom cost 1000 – 2000 rupees. So if I give to the middleman he may be happy, and middlemen know the market price. Because auction catalogues has come.

I1: I see, so they are basing their price on the auction catalogue prices?

R9: They quote ‘this is lot 53 Todywalla, this is on auction for 1000 rupees, why you are asking for 10,000 rupees?’. But these people now are also very rich. They have money now.

I1: They used to be tribal people, right?

R9: Yes. But they have own house now. So they are tribals, but now they plan. From February to March they will work in Tamil Nadu. After March they will go to Mysore, Karnataka and then Kerala. They are very well planned. They travel accordingly. They know when there is water in the river. They also know where they can find antiques. They know the price and sell it for higher price.

I1: Are the places that they look for coins close to ancient cities? Which are the main places?

R9: Thirunelveli, near Thamirabharani River; Madurai, Vaigai River; Karur, Amaravathi river; now there is a city called Manamadurai where people are taking many coins from there. In Kumbakonam, some three or four main rivers are there. Madurai, Karur and Kumbakonam are the major ancient cities. Banavasi River is another major source which is found recently which is in Karnataka. Then Hampi River, it is famous for coins like gold fanams and gold pagodas.

I1: So different rivers are famous for different coins?

R9: Yeah. Karur only is a market place where you can find all the coins. Tirunelveli and Madurai have only Pandya coins. Because there

was big trade in Karur, you will find everything in Karur. But near Arikamedu there is a big river where you will never find coins. You will get only beads. There is no coins and antiquity. Very big river, the ships will come, they load it with beads and then go.. More than 500 or 600 years transaction happened but there was no coins only beads.

I1: Where they used beads to transact?

R9: Only loading and unloading happened in that place. In all the other rivers they will get other things like terracottas. But only in Pondicherry, we will never get anything other than beads.

I1: What about these coastline places like Tranquebar?

R9: Yes, we will get it there (showing some photos)

I1: There is one collector-dealer I met, last time when I went to Tharagambadi. I have his card.

R9: Something is wrong in my phone. So I can't open photos. I have downloaded all the things. Now they are taking coins in Tharagambadi. I have those photos.

I1: I will give you my email contact, so whenever you can, send those photos.

R9: Ok. I will show you a set of seals and rings all found in riverbed.

I1: What is that white?

R9: I have tried to photograph it. These are the originals. I have put some powder to make it clear. See, this is a fish.

I1: This is a good idea.

R9: This seal has two fishes.

I1: These are nice photographs. You take it with good light and camera.

R9: This one you can read. It is found in riverbeds. Even in mirror view, you can read it. These are Persian seals.

I1: R7 was saying that the last most popular coins were British India coins. But now more popularity for south Indian Tamil coins....

R9: From China and Hong Kong lot of duplicate coins started coming for British India. So people are afraid to buy.

I1: So they are looking for something new and different...

R9: Now there is a good market for south Indian coins. Because north Indian coins are plenty available.

I1: So, there is a big market in North India now.

R9: Yes because there is no Ganesha Ganapathy coin in North India. Only in south Indian Nayaks period, they issued Ganapathy coins. So people love to buy it. See I have some statues. Like that, only Ganapathy statues collectors are there. People are now ready to buy it. So there is a craze for Ganapathy coins. Before they are available in 200, 300, 500. But market recent rate is up to 2000 rupees. In Facebook there are lots of groups are there which sell coins.

I1: Yes I had a look. There are lots of discussion groups there.

R9: Yes, people are ready to buy from there. In the same way, there are lots of groups who help the people. If you do not know about coins, within no time...

I1: Facebook must have changed coin collecting a lot.

R9: [inaudible] shipping within India, payment within three days. Payment is online transfer only [inaudible]

I1: So its It is very easy and quick?

R9: The first person will get it and another person will buy it from him, likewise it goes on.

I1: So this has overtaken eBay now?

R9: Yes, they will download it. Likewise in Whatsapp. Say Whatsapp, there are 150 members in one group, they will post there immediately, who sees first will get it.

I1: Is there much sale going outside India? Because the restrictions on the coins...

R9: It depends on who is monitoring the account. If it is clear, we will not sell outside. But people are there.

I1: There is a market for Indian coins outside India then?

R9: Very good market.

I1: In England also?

R9: England is the biggest market for Indian coins. First UK then only US. Then only Germany.

I1: Is this like... Indian people living in UK?

R9: Not like that. You see the British coins. British people also select. Colony issue collectors are there. They need not be Indians. All the island issues are there. They will also collect colonial India, French, Danish and Portuguese.

I1: So British collectors are most interested in Colonial Indian coins. What about the older coins like Chola and Pandya?

R9: They also collect them. Exclusive Chola and Pandya collectors are there.

I1: Which is the best UK auction for Indian coins? Like Baldwins?

R9: UK is... ah Presidency issues are the best market. Madras presidency, Bombay Presidency and Bengal Presidency. Because they issued just before British. They are all clearly dated. Before that there is not... It is very difficult to read Persian because before that all are Mughals. They issued coins in Persian. So Persian year. So very difficult. If you know Persian you can collect it. So people will not collect Persian coins. People are there. Fashion always differs. Colonial issues have clear date and catalogue, so people like to collect it. See this is a Presidency coin. Only you can see, Madras, Bengal and Bombay presidency coins.

I1: This is just one group (Facebook group)

R9: Yeah. They will not sell coins, they only give you information. If you do not know about a coin, you can post it here. People will give you information about the coin.

I1: It is amazing. It is like a coin society online, and you can ask anyone.

R9: See this is British India Presidency Bengal. This is not for sales. You can get details about anything you want.

I1: And there are people from different countries on here also?

R9: Yes, definitely. These are people from outside India. A lot of people are there. There are 1676 members.

I1: How long this is being happening on Facebook?

R9: For last three years.

I1: Before that e-bay would have been the main source on the internet?

R9: Yes. This is Indian Coin Collectors Club with 7549 members. All kinds of Indian coins are here. North Indian, South Indian.

I1: Do they have in other parts of India, this riverbed panning?

R9: All places. From Kanyakumari to Kashmir 90% of the ancient coins are only from riverbeds. Remaining 10%, you can find in excavation...ah taking from pot you know, or they kept in the house. Not more than 10%. 90% coins are from riverbeds. Like that more than 20 separate groups are there. If you want to know detail about a Tipu coin, people here would immediately tell whether it is a forged coin or not.

I1: R7 was also telling me how you can buy two different coins in the market. One is from the riverbed dug recently, other type of coins which are not dug out but collected long time back. Are there many of those now in the market? And that will be more expensive, right?

R9: Yeah because only collectors were able to hold a coin. I am collecting for 25 years. So every year, three lakhs, four lakhs, what is my capacity. In market plenty of material is available but I can collect according to my capacity. So some things I have to exchange or I have to give to R7. I will help for their collection also. Whatever I need only I'll keep it. I keep what I am interested only. So after my day, my sons generation they will hold it or they will not. 50-60% of the people will hold. Other 40% will sell. So in those days it would come to like us, dealers. But now it is going to the auctions.

I1: Yeah, there are many more auction houses in India now right?

R9: More than 10 auction houses are there.

I1: Are auction houses in India, a recent phenomenon?

R9: yes, they are here for last three years only. Todywalla is the oldest auction house in Bombay. The recent one is R7. Lots of auction houses have come. I'll show you some files. If you want any details I will explain you. These are coins. These are terracottas.

I1: Are they large in size?

R9: No, they are small sized.

I1: This one?

R9: Seated monkey. This is maybe Chola period. Chola style has come. This is the earliest stone I have which I love very much. This is a portrait figure copied from Roman, a typical Indian wearing stud in the ear and jewellery. It may be a queen in the Sangam period. My date is Sangam period, 1st or 2nd century B.C.

This is a copper seal, it may be Nayak period. Maximum late from Vijayanagar.

I1: This is very nice. Its also a seal? They are all in very good condition. Would they come from the riverbed?

R9: Mainly this is with jewellery makers. They will keep it there These are not from riverbed.

I1: But where do the jewellery makers get it?

R9: See wherever you go they will do poojas. So they will keep it as treasure, for four or five generations they will keep it. If you go to any jewellery shop, they keep British India coins. Every year Diwali festival, for 100 coins or 150 coins they will do poojas. Like that, these jewellery makers will keep all these old treasures in the pooja room. For jewellers, these are all old treasures and they worship it. If they have some problem, if they vacate, they will disperse it. It has come like that. See, this is Hanuman. This is a seal. This is the oldest seal I have. This is Chola script. This is a goddess and this is a king because he wears crown.

I1: This is like Kali goddess.

R9: The name of this goddess is Visumbasoothini.

I1: Is that a Tamil name for Kali type god?

R9: Yes. This is the mother goddess of Rajaraja Chola. Because we can clearly attribute this script to Chola. This is for Vaishnavites. They will use this. This is separate. There is a conch, star and a chakra. You can see all this in one coin. This is negative. They will make gold thin like a paper. They keep it inside, press it and hammer it. This is a ring. You could see the script there also. This is a round ring.

I1: Your nandi rings- all coming from different rivers?

R9: yes different rivers. Now in Banavasi also they are getting those rings. Here, at the back you could see some number. Numerical scripts.

I1: Where were these? On the seal?

R9: Yes, on the seal. This is a bird with two heads. This is Lord Krishna standing on a snake. You can see a bird here.

I1: Oh, I see.

R9: This is a garnet.

I1: Is it a bead?

R9: Yes.

I1: Do you also collect beads?

R9: Not always.

I1: There is not a big market for beads like there is for coins?

R9: Now, in some auction houses, they are auctioning beads.

I1: In every auction house.

R9: Not very many. This is a roman thing found in India.

I1: Will something like this have a high value?

R9: No. See in UK, you may get it for 100 pounds. But in India it is not more than 2000 rps, twenty five pounds. Because there is no awareness in India.

I1: In India what would be the highest value object that comes from the river bed?

R9: One in gold.

I1: Any gold coin?

R9: Gold with Brahmi script. A beautiful ornament you can date. If you are able to date you will get the good price. (*shows page of an auction catalogue*) See, this is a bead. An excellent bead. A rarity. Not more than fifty pounds. It has a beautiful engraving.

I1: Which auction is this from?

R9: Todywalla. In August 2000. For gold items, you will get good market rate. Only metals.

I1: If it is possible, will I get those old catalogues?

R9: Yeah. They are selling it. This is also from a riverbed. Because it is gold, it costs more. The same beads are only 100-200 rupees, but

because of the gold this is very high. There are more than 20 auction houses. All have started selling beads.

I1: For low price?

R9: R9 showed you some?

I1: Maybe, next time I come back. I am hoping to go down to Karur, Trichy, Madurai and then come back before this Bombay auction. I want to go to that auction. After that I will come back to Chennai.

R9: If you want to see beads, I can show. This is supposed to be a ring used in 13th century.

I1: Yeah, they wear the ring on this part of the finger right?

R9: Yeah. And these are for small babies. Very small. These are all seals. Those days, they sent these through registered parcel. They seal it with red colour 'ka' for identification. Anything with script has its own value. Otherwise....This is written as Virupatchi.

I1: So, the script will increase the value because you can identify it?

R9: Correct. You can fix the date. This is the Tamil script. They used to write on a palm leaf. This letter is pronounced as 'ka', if you want the sound 'ik', you put a dot on the same letter. If you put a dot on a palm leaf, the leaf will tear. So they avoid using dots. But we have to read it assuming dots somewhere. It needs practice. So there are no dots in the coins also. This is a Telugu script.

I1: These are stamps for exporting goods?

R9: There is no particular record, so it is difficult to identify. I have coins, without scripts. It has only symbols. This is Maratha, you can tell this with the date. There is no script attributing to it. If it is an art script, it is very difficult to attribute.

I1: Was there any script on the Nandi bull rings?

R9: So far, not found. It is a small one, so we are not able to clean it.

I1: there are so many of them.

R9: on both sides and top of it. It is a small lingam. It is widely used.

I1: Have you found any other animal on the ring?

R9: Elephant. This is a lingam, bull and in centre there is a lingam. For knowledge sake, I have posted few rings. Now the ring collectors are increased. Then I stopped getting!

I1: Because are people are seeing more on Facebook, they have started to collect more. Has the price of these gone up? How much was it before and now?

R9: Yes. Before it is 500 rupees, now it is 2500 rupees.

I1: Do you know who else is collecting? Are they friends?

R9: Yeah, they are friends. Because finally, for identification it will come to me only. This is a lingam, it is a bull. Four bulls and four lingams and in centre there is a lingam. This pleased my friend. He comes to my place and saw my collection and now he started collecting. You cannot avoid such things. Now these things are not going for melting. People are keeping it. And one should be happy for this.

I1: Before there were markets where people like you would buy them from metal scrapers and jeweller?

R9: lots of coins also I stopped melting. I asked the scrapers to keep these separate. I will pay them for their snacks or tea. The people who sort out those things are low level people. If I ask the owner, he will definitely do not have time to do this for me. So I went to those lower people and offer some food or tea. If you feed them, they will never forget. It is a psychology.

I1: I saw an article in Indian newspaper; I think I still have it. In New Indian Express, an interview and you said that you used to collect from scrap metals and also from some temples. Is that correct?

R9: This is used in Iron Age. This is all from South India.

I1: Where do they come from?

R9: These are not from scrap but from riverbed. Mainly from Karur area. I showed you some riverbed and these are the collectors.

I1: I remember seeing them. Collectors of this kind of items which are not highly valued but interesting, will they be only in Tamil Nadu? Or you also have people in North India, wanting to buy such things?

R9: There is a group of collectors they only discuss about beads.

I1: Do you know what the name of that group is?

R9: I do not remember, but a Yahoo group is there they only discuss beads. I will show that. They are in Facebook also.

Beads.igooglegroup this is the group. They only discuss beads.

I1: Do you know which part of India, this group is?

R9: Across India. You know what it is?

I1: These are hairpins?

R9: Yes. For thick hair, they used these in those days.

I1: I went to the house of R72, a collector in Chennai of antiquities and stuff. She has a big collection of old cosmetic things. Hair combs, kajal, bottles and all kinds of things.

R9: in Chennai?

I1: Yes.

R9: This is a tribal's. This is from a riverbed. This is a walking stick with name made of wood.

I1: This is like a forest tribal god. I have seen this near Karaikudi. This is a fossil?

R9: Yes fossils.

I1: And these are all from riverbed?

R9: Yes. These are all designed pots.

I1: pot shards. There must be very few people collecting these?

R9: Yes. There is no reference. Then they stopped it.

I1: Are they identifiable? Or is it not possible?

R9: So see both there are made of Terracotta. But the finish of these. Those days' people from north India will come to south India. Jain people preserve Buddha's things in fine terracotta boxes. This is a pot and a lady sitting. This should be curve and round shapes. They stopped using this symbol from sixth century. In seventh century, this symbol is not used. So definitely it is made some time before. Like that we can tell, but not all the things. This kind of chakras, you can find in the reverse side of the Pallava coins.

I1: If you want to sell these, will you be able to find a buyer?

R9: No nobody. Anything with the script like this, graphic we call, this is for good market.

I1: They are just river stones that have been written on?

A. Lawson

R9: Yes. If you shape this, you will get a very good market.

I1: How much is something like this cost?

R9: It costs 500r ps. Good pieces with good engraving would cost some 1000-1500rs. But riverbed people don't know. They sell this for 5rps, 10rps.

I1: The riverbed people must know something about the value of coins though?

R9: For the coins, they know [shows me an etched bead] See if this one was found in excavation they would make it a big issue.

I1: If it is found in an excavation but in the riverbed they...

R9: Yeah. These are of important people. Harappa's style people. But if it is from riverbed it has no value or market. I paid 500rps because I love to see this. He is happy.

I1: I hope to ask those people, how they find this kind of collection because they are unique. On one side they say that law is like this and the other side they do not enforce this law. It is not seen as important issue when they come to coins. May be because I can't...

R9: See I have given talk on this in rotary meetings. 90% of history teachers in colleges and schools have never seen the coins. They never went to the museum also. Coins used by Chola people are available at cheap rates. Every school they display some coins only 40 or 50rps, copper coins of chola period. Nobody will do it.

I1: The Madras museum has coins of these types which are only a replicas. But they also have a big collection in the museum.

R9: They have 7 lakh of Chola coins.

I1: But they don't display the genuines.

R9: Nobody is interested.

I1: Why is that nobody is interested?

R9: Recently we wrote a book about coins. The English version is getting ready and this is the Tamil version. This is Sangam period to Nayak period.

I1: This is a book of yours? Your publication?

R9: My friend's. 75% of it if my collection. If you approach a museum, they have a record like this. If you donate any coin, they will make a

record of it with today's date. They will write what you tell. You have to tell them 'this is Chola coin, this is Chera coin'. You have to tell them. If you tell wrongly, they will write wrongly also. They pack it, they put on a registry number and they put in in the locker. So from that register we took ten reference numbers and asked them to take photographs. They asked me to pay 500 rupees. We paid. They are not able to locate a single coin. They say that it is misplaced and it is not available. That 500rs is not refundable. So this [book] is all from private collectors. No single paise government has provided.

I1: The author is R44, I was hoping to see him. I met him last time when I went to Thanjavur.

R9: I published this. 75% are mine.

I1: Can I take a picture of you with the book?

R9: Once a retired government commissioner has come, he removed all the things saying that it should not be displayed here. But people like that, they should encourage others no?

I1: Yes

R9: But he wanted it to be removed!

I1: Strange attitude.

R9: Strange people. They put it all in boxes. Nobody could see. See like the rings. I am happy there are now some four or five people collecting the rings. I am very happy after seeing that.

I1: R7 was talking about the setting up of a private museum; do you think there are other people in India doing this?

R9: All are afraid of government's rules and regulations because no private people are allowed to excavate or to open museum. If you register yourself as a charity, you are allowed. Private people cannot do excavation in their own place.

I1: Do you know this German guy of Auroville? He has been doing his own excavation.

R9: They have permission. Auroville, wherever they want, they can excavate. Only Auroville area, not outside.

I1: Why only Auroville area? Is there anything special?

R9: The land was given to the French.

I1: I was wondered why he was able to do this.

R9: They have got special permission from ASI of Delhi. These are all beads.

I1: South Indian beads?

R9: Indian beads. South Indian only. These beads physically we collect from Arikamedu.

I1: Small kind of bead. Are there local people to collect the beads?

R9: Yes. In Pondicherry, people are there to collect.

I1: And these ones are from riverbed?

R9: Yes the terracotta ones are from riverbed. See the hole in it.

I1: What are they?

R9: This is some seeds.

I1: It has a strange colour.

R9: Yeah that is why I keep it here.

I1: I heard lot about Chettinadu. Is that separate?

R9: Chettinadu is not from riverbed.

I1: It is all about houses. I did a separate study looking at that. One thing was that the local people had a superstition about using second hand things like old doors and beds. Bad associations from old things. Do you anything like that attitude from people with collecting these things?

R9: Yeah. See these pieces are from the Marathas, Thanjavur. Like Karaikudi, this is used in Marathas. Lots of things from old houses are coming for sale. See the hairstyle and the turban they are wearing. These are all used in Maratha period. This is not a common one. It is a separate thing. It is like a king sitting in a chariot. This is supposed to be wheels.

I1: How did you get these? From someone...

R9: In Thanjavur. Maratha kings, dated 250 years back. See the dress.

I1: They wore shorts?

R9: He is wearing full pants. This is also found in riverbeds.

I1: Will they charge more for this?

R9: You can date this on the top. Usually people who worship Vishnu would not like this. This may be dated to 13th century. See the body,

hairstyle and the way they wear dress. This is from Nayak period 15th or 16th century.

I1: you can guess this from the hairstyle.

R9: If you come to later Cholas, it will be like this. If you take photograph, it will not be clear.

I1: Yeah. It is difficult to get it photographed.

R9: You need a pukka lighting. It will not look nice.

I1: The condition of this one is very good.

R9: It is very difficult to do this. Because the tankas/tongue? is damaged, so after manufacturing, they put it in the river, they will not destroy, they will not re-melt. So any fault come with an icon they will never give for re-try.

I1: So, that is why lots of things end up in river, so that they never want to destroy.

R9: Yeah they will not re-melt because it is a god.

I1: So, if it is put in a river, they will never get destroyed.

R9: this is the main reason why lots of icons are from found there.

I1: That is interesting. I used to think why so many are in the river.

R9: Anything damaged, it will not come up. I got everything with mud. Then I cleaned it.

I1: Surely, when it came you did not know what it was.

R9: For Ganapathi I know. Only after cleaning I found the gap.

This is a broken one so I am able to keep it. Otherwise, the size is big so I am not supposed to keep. Or if you want to keep it, you have to register it with ASI.

I1: What is the maximum height till which you can use?

R9: one inch. If it is more than one inch, you have to register it with the government and get the certificate.

I1: And the terracottas?

R9: No these are small things. Big you definitely need to register.

I1: So you do not need to register this.

R9: If it is a big one, you have to register.

I1: Thank you very much. Would you mind if I come back at my next trip?

A. Lawson

R9: Sure.

I1: That would be great. Thank you.

A76) B: 09/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Srirangam

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R78, R79

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:53:33

Context: We reach Srirangam just after 3pm. Shortly before T1 calls R78 and we arrange to meet him just opposite the temple, near to the river. We make introductions and he takes us straight down to the river. R78 is the same dealer who R9 had put me in touch with two years ago, and who failed to meet us, but gave us directions to the river panners at Musiri. This is a temple site on the river with steps leading down to the water. Right now the river is mostly dry, but there are still pools and streams of relatively shallow water, though in some places I can see its neck deep. There are around 30-40 people in the water near the steps, male and female. They have plastic trays with perforated bottoms and they are scooping up riverbed material and sieving it. We start talking to one of the men river panning (R79) and I begin an audio-recorded interview. This continues on the other side of a streamlet, towards the middle of the dry riverbed, where this group of panners has made a temporary dwelling. R78 has obviously come here for business, to see what they have to buy and he invites us along. We sit in a circle with ten of the river-panners: five men, three women, and two children. The each have their own stashes of coins, kept in small plastic bags or tubs. We are shown many things. They are warm and friendly but they are undoubtedly hoping that we will buy something. We talk for around half an hour, then T1 tells me R78 would like us to head back to the car while he stays on to do some business. Before we do I take some group pictures which the river panners are all delighted

A. Lawson

by. We say our thanks and goodbyes and go back to the car. R78 joins us about 15 minutes later.

FN: The oldest of the women, she looks to be in her seventies, says to me this is our living, this is our life. They are obviously very poor, at least in this setting, they have nothing in the way of luxuries. What's more, they work extremely hard from early morning till evening, out in the sweltering heat. I have not failed to notice how hot it is out here on the riverbed. Tamil Nadu in April is hot enough anyway but the riverbed reflects heat like a desert. Out of the shade it's near unbearable for me for any length of time. We eventually learn that they are Irula. The community mentioned to me by R7 a few days earlier. I had wanted to ask earlier before we crossed to their home, But when T1 finally agreed to ask them they apparently said they were of a different community – a higher caste group. It seems that only now, having perhaps relaxed in our company, are they willing to tell us they are Irula. T1 asks them about the different places they dig they list them by river:

Kaveri: Kulithalai, Mohanur, Mayanur, Pattathalai, Musiri, Mokkaompu, Guna Seelam, Ayalur (Kattuputhur), Srirangam

Kollidam: Kallarai, Pattesnam, Kumbakonam, Valamgaiman, Sellur, Poompudam

Vaigai: Manumadurai, Thiruppuraman, Cholavandam

Tampaparai: Gangaikondam, Thirunelveli, Cholapuram

They talk about the different names they use to describe the different types of coins they find. They use descriptive names based on why the inscriptions look like to them.

Kasu – means coin

Tagadu Kasu - Pallava coin

Kozhi Kasu – copper coin

Aalzhi Kasu – Raja raja coin

Naalu mula Sathuram Kasu – Sangam age coin

(Elephant, horse, dog, boar, lion, bow and arrow)

I1: When did the season start?

T1: Are they doing it for three months?

R79: Yes.

T1: Is it a season now?

R79: ...

T1: One group working under the water and the other group...

I1: On the dry. Can I ask him some questions? It is about the history.

R79: I am in this business for some ten years. My native is Patteeswaram near Kumbakonam.

T1: He is nearly ten years in this field. His native place is Patteeswaram near Kumbakonam.

I1: How often do they find objects?

T1: For how long are you here?

R79: We are here for one and a half months.

T1: How often do you get objects from here?

R79: That we cannot assure. For a few days we do not get anything and finally we will get something. We work on the basis of our confidence.

T1: More than one month, they are working here. Even for ten days, they may not get anything. They have a hope that they may get.

I1: What is the name of the spot?

T1: This is called Amma Mandapam. This is a very ritualistic place. That is why they chose this place. They do a lot of rituals here.

I1: Many people put their things here.

T1: Many will bath here.

I1: So they might get things. Can I ask some of them? How many people are in your group?

R79: There are 30 people here.

T1: How many families are here?

R79: 20 families are here.

T1: There are 30 members from 20 families.

R79: Some people are working under that bridge. But we all assemble here. We will assemble at 6 in the evening. We stay in a place near that tank.

T1: How will you reach that place?

R79: We go by this straight road.

I1: Do you work only here?

T1: Some are working here and the other group is working under that bridge.

T1 to R79: Are they searching under water?

R79: We will search under water and on land also.

T1: What kind of things you are searching?

R79: We mostly look for old coins.

T1: They mainly search for old coins.

R79: that is the main object for us. We will sell it to the dealers. It will be placed in exhibitions and auctions. Many school going children will read about the coins. Even some foreigners will come and buy those coins.

T1: How long will you work here in a year?

R79: For some two years till the water drains. Then we will move to some other river.

T1: You don't work here for a whole year?

R79: No. we also do some agriculture.

T1: On which month will you be here?

R79: In the Tamil month of Karthigai. in a season when the water begins to dry. We cannot do work when there is more water. So we will wait till the water dries.

T1: What are the other places you go?

R79: nearby there is musiri and Thimmachipuram. We will go till Madurai and Maanamadurai.

I1: What is his name?

R79: Kaliya perumal.

T1: Take pictures if you want.

I1: He is doing this for ten years. How will he take care of his family?

R79: We are not always involved in this business. We do agriculture also. While panning in the rivers, we have a kind of good relationship with basket weavers and all. We learn from them.

T1: Which caste are you?

R79: Vanniyars (traders).

T1: Where are those basket weavers from?

R79: They are also from Kumbakonam. We are from Patteeswaram.

T1: Will they come with you?

R79: Their main area is Kaveri.

T1: Before ten years people who are weaving in Kumbakonam area, will come here to collect coins. They are bamboo basket weavers.

They won't travel this long distance. They limit themselves to Kumbakonam and the Kaveri River. These people learn from them.

Their caste is Vanniyar. It is one of the dominant castes.

I1: So these are not from childhood?

T1: No.

I1: For how many years they are doing this?

T1: Ten years.

I1: What coins are these?

R79: This is Sree Veera coin.

T1: Nayak's coin?

R79: Yes. These are Sree Veera. Nayak's coin. These are stones.

I1: Did he find them here?

T1: From this river?

R79: Yes.

I1: Recently?

R79: It was taken before 15 days.

T1: Is this a precious stone?

R79: This is a recent stone. We also get old stones.

I1: How much one coin costs?

R79: 150 rupees or 250 rupees. These are sold for 10 rupees.

T1: What is the name of this stone?

R79: garnet stone. This is an ordinary stone.

T1: So you know differentiate within coins?

R79: Not much. In jewels, they will stud these stones. We are looking mainly this particular coin.

I1: Which type of coin?

T1: Sree Veera coins. This is of Vijayanagar nayaks' which is 350 years old. Kozhi kaasu.

R79: They are of 500 years old. They will popularize this business by writing about this. Show it clearly so that they can take photos.

T1: Will you get something daily?

R79: May or may not.

T1: What else do you get?

R79: Sometimes people miss studs, anklets etc. We may get it sometimes.

T1: they mainly look for coins and modern coins. Sometimes they had portions of silver and gold ornaments which people miss while bathing in the river.

I1: Do they ever find Terracotta?

R79: Yes, we will find some.

I1: Is there anything now?

R79: Yes, it is here. There are no toys. Just clay balls. We are just searching in the surface level. If we go some six feet deep, we will get some terracotta objects.

T1: What about this terracotta balls?

R79: It is found little bit deeper on this surface. This is new one but they are looking for older terracottas.

T1: Sir, for how long are you doing this business?

R79: I am in this field for 15-20 years.

T1: Which is your working area?

R79: Maanamadurai and Thirubhuvanam. Also in Thanjavur, Pallipalayam, Erode and Kumbakonam.

T1: What are the places in Kaveri?

R79: Kulithalai, Mohanur, Mayanur, Pettavaithalai, Musiri, Mukkombu and Ariyalur.

T1: All are in Kaveri?

R79: Yes. Include Kaatuputhur in ariyalur.

T1: In Kollidam?

R79: Kallanai and Srirangam.

T1: In the down south?

R79: Patteeswaram, Kumbakonam, Sellur and Valaingamaan.

T1: Will you go to Poombuhar?

R79: yes. From there we go places like Kadalur, Vadalur and Virudhachalam.

I1: How much is this one?

T1: The Saibaba statue?

R79: No, it is Ragavendra.

I1: What is the price?

R79: [Discussion over the price] It is five hundred rupees.

I1: This one?

T1: Is that a Kozhi coin?

R79: It will be good when polished.

T1: What are the places you go in Madurai?

R79: Maanamadurai, Paramakudi, Cholavandhan and Thirubhuvanam. In thamirabharani river, thirunelveli, Gangai kondan and Cholapuram. Our life is here.

T1: For how many years, are you in this field?

R79: For some twenty years.

There are some groups in every place.

T1: You are all from Patteeswaram?

R79: Yes. This is a group from Thanjavur. They look for some 100 kilometers in this surrounding. There is another group from thiruvannamalai. They look for some other 100 kilometers.

T1: In which River they look for?

R79: They will work in Vaigai and Palaru. Their main area is Karur, Amaravathy River.

T1: Are they all Vanniyars?

R79: No, we are all Irulars. Our main occupation was tree cutting and honey collecting. We do inter-caste marriages also.

T1: They belong to Irular community.

R79: We do all works in forests, that is our main occupation. These are temporary works. Before that we are involved in selling the skin of snakes. In 1977, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi put laws to safeguard animals. Then we started doing various odd jobs like this.

T1: For snake skin?

R79: yes, once there were markets which export skins to foreign countries. Skins with more length and width are valuable. After that law, we dropped that business. But now, the snakes are more. Many people died because of snake bite.

T1: They belong to tribal community. Earlier, their profession was hunting, fishing and collecting honey. They also catch snakes and sell the skin of the snakes. In 77, a new rule was implemented not to kill any animal. Then they stopped that business and started to do all kinds of business.

I1: Was it difficult when they first start to do this? How they started to learn this skill?

R79: No one has taught us this skill. While fishing, people start to collect coins. Once I was cutting trees, I saw a silver object shining in the water. Then my son asked me to preserve it. Next day many people started to do this. This was what happened in Patteeswaram. Likewise, I started this profession. The river that runs near Patteeswaram is Thirumalai rajan.

T1: The river that goes to Swamimalai?

R79: The river in Swamimalai is Cauveri. This is Thirumalai Rajan and adjacent to it is Vennaru and Vettaru.

T1: Fishing is the profession. By the way, they find some objects and coins.

I1: So that is how they began. I want to know about the customers, how often they come and from where. Is the customer better now than it was when they started?

R78: Many dealers will come now. There are more than two members in every place. For example, if we take this group, there are 7 to 8 dealers who do business with this group. The same will happen in Thiruvannamalai.

T1: You people do not go there?

R78: I will go there and buy things. I will go to some particular distance and get things. I do not go for long distances. There are some ten dealers in Madurai, they will not come here.

T1: How many dealers are there?

R78: In Tamil Nadu alone, there are some 200 dealers like this.

T1: And those who involve in this job?

R78: There are thousands of people involved in this business.

T1: Their native?

R78: All belong to Tamil Nadu.

T1: Can't you tell their places separately?

R78: I can tell.

T1: In Tamil Nadu, around 200 people are involved in trading and 1000 are involved in collecting. These dealers are connected with different group. In this area, there are 7 buyers. Sometimes he goes to other places to buy whatever he wants. But the buyers do not go long distances.

I1: R78 sir will take them to the buyer in the cities.

T1: He is one of the buyers. So he won't take other buyers.

I1: How many years are you in?

R78: Twenty years.

T1: What is the difference between the customers earlier and now?

R78: Earlier, there was only less number of buyers. Now the number of collectors and dealers gradually increase in number. Likewise in every place, the number of people involving in this kind of business started to increase. Those who accompany those people in the beginning will start to do their own business separately.

T1: So, those who come as just viewers will start to do this business.

R78: They do so, but they cannot stand in this field for long. This field has both gains and losses. We need to wait. We also need profit in this job.

T1: The number of buyers is more now. The number of diggers is also more. Many people start to ignore this business then. Some people who are coming with the buyers will learn things and start business separately. This business doesn't have sustainable growth. We have to wait because sometimes they gain benefits and sometimes loss. Some people come as buyers but after sometime they disappear.

I1: Will they know what each and every coin is?

T1: Buyer or digger?

I1: Digger.

R78: They know whether it is new or old but not the exact period of that coin.

T1: Then how will you calculate?

R78: We will ask for a higher rate always. Then the dealers will bargain and reduce it. If it is accountable, they will pay or else they will show it to any other dealer and get commission from us.

T1: Nowadays, through experience, they know which is oldest or latest even gold or other material. They have knowledge because they have already sold this kind of coins. They may not exactly date the coins but they fit it in either old or new. Whenever the buyer comes, as they do not know the exact date, they tell a bigger amount. Then the buyer will negotiate. If the diggers are not happy with the price, they will wait for another buyer. Whoever bids higher amount will get the coin.

I1: what is the most valuable they have found and what is the least valuable they find?

R78: we have not sold such coins. If so, it may be some Chola gold coins which were sold for 20,000 rupees. It is found in thanjavur.

T1: Is there any possibility of getting roman coins?

R78: roman coins are found in Karur. Here occasionally we may find some Roman brass. It is found in Karur and palani.

T1: What is he saying?

R78: He is telling about a Pallava coin which sells for 4000 to 5000 rupees.

T1: Will it be found here?

R78: Yes.

T1: What is its name?

R79: It is called *Thagadu kaasu*. Because it is as thin as a tin and it can be broken easily.

T1: What are the other coins you find?

R79: *Thagadu kaasu, kozhi kaasu, aazhi kaasu.*

T1: What is *kozhi kaasu*?

R79: Copper coins of all period.

T1: Why it is called *kozhi*?

R78: Because it has an image of hen, it was published by French in Pondicherry.

T1: Now there is no hen symbol on it but also it is called *kozhi kaasu*.

R78: Yes.

T1: I am asking them their local names. Thagadu means sheet. They are thin, flat Pallava coins. *Kozhi kaasu* is Pondicherry coin. The French symbol is rooster. Their ancestors tell this as *kozhi kaasu*. *kozhi* means rooster. Even they don't find the same coin; they give the name *kozhi kaasu*.

I1: Do they have any other names?

R79: Another coin is *aazhi kaasu*. It is found in Rajaraja period.

T1: Is it Rajaraja coin?

R79: Yes. And this is *naalu moolai sathura kaasu*. It has images of Horse, dog, pig and elephant in its ends. It has images of all animals including lion.

T1: Will it have lion image on it?

R79: Yes, lion on one side and bow and arrow on the other.

T1: Are these Sangam age coins?

R79: Yes. You can see it in exhibitions.

R78: If you go to Chennai, I will tell you a place. Opposite to Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple, there is a museum.

T1: Yes, we have seen it.

T1 to I1: They tell another *kaasu* which is four cornered square coin. It is a Sangam age coin. It has images of dog, elephant and horse on its edges.

T1: What are all the other coins?

R79: Every place has its own dialect. This name of coins ends here. If you go to other places, the same coins are called by different names. In Thanjavur and Madurai, there are different names.

T1: People from Thanjavur are going to Madurai, right?

R79: They are just visitors. But the native people have their own dialect.

T1: Who are they?

R79: People of Theni, Kambam, Madurai.

T1: Are they Irulars.

R79: They are some tribes. Other than that Muslim people from Thirunelveli will do this job.

T1: the terminology of the coins differs from place to place. In every region, people use different term.

I1: May be in the next place we go, we can ask people about the terminologies.

T1: and different caste people also involved in it. Those people who catch prawns in the river, are they known to you?

R79: We belong to same clan but not intimate anymore.

T: Where is your house?

R79: In Patteeswaram.

T1: What kind of houses are they?

R79: Like huts. Our family members are there. Our school going kids are there.

T1: They have small huts in Kumbakonam. Their daughters, sons and others elders are there. They leave them there. They survive with whatever they get here. Some of the people in the family is doing other jobs.

I1: Can you ask them, if they are hassled by police or government?

R79: Yes, they have issued such prohibitions. We have also given some interviews to media. It happened in 2008, when we are working in Maanamadurai.

T1: What is this coin?

R79: It is a one-paisa coin of 1955.

R78: If you have any raja coin, show them.

R79: At that time, when police were questioning us, media people also entered and projected the incident. They asked us why you don't go for other jobs. We said that this is our life.

T1: Was it happened in 2008?

R79: Yes.

T1: recently I saw an interview before a month.

R79: Yes. Of late, in Karnataka government caught some people for this offense. Near the river Hampi, some people of thiruvannamalai

worked. They were arrested and questioned. People explained that we take whatever we get on the surface. We never venture in to restricted areas. One with id proof can work there.

T1: there are some restrictions but not much. In Karnataka, some people are facing some problems.

R79: This is British coin of George V. see the horse image at one corner.

I1: What about the problems of sand quarrying, like what R7 said.

R79: The area where they quarry sand is different from the area we pan. They cannot quarry sand here. We concentrate on the place where people took bath. Bathing places in temples where King and Queens took bath. Particularly the area where ladies took bath is where we could find more coins. There is no job for quarry people there.

R79: In places with craters we used to wear this (shows snorkel type mask)

T1: they use this to go under waters.

R79: I will wear this, ask her to take photos. When we wear this, the small objects will appear big for us.

I1: It is a good mask.

T1: You bought this in shop?

R79: Yes. Fishermen will wear this. This glass is thin but the water is denser. So the objects are seen clearly.

T1: Regularly people used to take bath in particular places. Also in temple area, there would be a particular place where kings used to take bath. These people go to such places. The sand quarry people do not get anything from that area.

I1: Which area?

T1: Sand quarries are further. Bu these people prefer only this area.

I1: I will give them some money.

T1: There are many people here.

I1: It's ok. It might be helpful. Who is the main person?

R79: Give it to me.

I1: Give one hundred each.

A. Lawson

R79: Where are you going without coming?

R78: I will come.

T1: Do not mistake. She just gives to the main head.

R79: We are like beehive. No separate leader for us. We don't fight for anything. All are leaders for their own findings.

R78: You people make a move. I have a small business.

I1: Where shall we go next?

T1: To the next village.

A77) B: 09/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Srirangam

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R78

Language: Tamil and English

Duration: 00:21:59

Context: We are in the car driving between Srirangam, where we have interviewed a group of riverbed panners/diggers, and Musiri, where we will look for another group of riverbed panners/diggers. R78 is dealer of coins and other small antiquities. He is a middle-man between the riverbed diggers and the collectors based around Tamil Nadu and particularly Chennai. He has just purchased some items from the diggers at Srirangam and I take the opportunity to ask him some questions about his business.

R78: My full time job is this. My native is Salem, Aataiyampatti. You have my phone number, I think.

T1: Yes, I have your number. R7 gave me.

R78: I have your number.

T1: How come you get my number?

R78: Before two months, you called me.

T1: Ah, yes.

R78: I could not meet you at that time.

T1: Yes.

R78: I heard that you went to Musiri and bought some coins from them.

T1: I just bought some coins. We do not know about rate and all.

R78: Ok. Madam, have my visiting card.

I1: Thank you. Your hometown is Salem?

R78: Yes.

I1: Ask him about the schools.

T1: People say that students and teachers from schools nearby come and buy coins from you. Is that true?

R78: Yes, they will come. It will be useful for them to teach history.

Those teachers substantiate their lectures with these coins. Like what we do here, some teachers also research and study coins.

T1: What is your educational qualification?

R78: I did not study more.

T1: Then how you came to know the history?

R78: I know to read Tamil with which I read many Tamil books on coins. My boys will read me books in English.

T1: You will study the coins with that knowledge.

R78: Yes. With my experience in this field, I can study many coins. By seeing the scripts, I will find out the Roman, Dutch, British and Portuguese coins.

T1: I just asked him about his qualification and how will he identify the coin. He is not well-educated but through experience he can find out the coins. He can understand the difference between the coins like French, Dutch and British coins just by seeing pattern and script. For English coins, he has some boys and they will help him. He is in this field for more than fifteen years. This is his full time job.

I1: Why did he start this kind of job?

R78: At the beginning, I was a collector. My father was goldsmith. At that time, many coins of copper and silver were available. I would like to preserve those coins from then. Gradually it became my profession. I am very much interested in this job. Without interest, you cannot sustain.

T1: He says that his father was a goldsmith. Those days, when people collect coins, they bring those to goldsmith...

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I1: There is a particular caste who are goldsmith, what was that?

T1: Aasari. In general they are called Kammalar or Vishwakarma.

I1: Yeah, Vishwakarma. This is what I heard.

R78: But we are Chettiars.

T1: What is your main occupation?

R78: We will do gold trade.

T1: You are not goldsmiths?

R78: We have people to do that. We just sell it.

T1: He is not a goldsmith. He employs goldsmiths. He is a gold trader.

I1: I see.

T1: Is there any separate Chettiar for selling gold?

R78: All are traders. There is no separate trader for gold.

T1: Like there are separate traders for oil...

R78: Yes, there are oil Chettis, salt Chettis but not for gold.

Some will do this business hereditarily. For us, my grandfather started this gold business. Before him, we were agriculturists.

I1: Is Salem your father's hometown?

R78: Yes, my native is Salem.

T1: Are you here to collect or sell?

R78: I am here to buy things. We can sell things here, but they would not sell things to strangers. You can give any amount of money, but they won't sell. They are afraid of consequences. We also sell things to persons who are involved in trade not to strangers.

I1: He is in this business for last twenty years. Has he seen the increase in prices?

R78: Yes, copper coins' rate have increased drastically. Before ten years Chola coins are sold for just five rupees. Now it costs up to 20 rupees (dealers). It is sold for 50 to 100 rupees.

T1: Copper coins are increasing in last ten years.

I1: What type of things does he sells the most?

R78: Coins with Tamil script are fast moving.

T1: Whose coins?

R78: Rajaraja, Samaragodars and many Chola and Pandya coins. All Tamil script coins are sold more than 500 rupees. Other language coins are cheaper.

T1: Tamil script coins are expensive. They are sold at least 500 rupees. Other language coins are not sold that much.

T1 to R78: Tamil coins include Nayaks?

R78: Yes.

T1: What about Telugu coins?

R78: Telugu coins are called Sri Veera. Some varieties of Sri Veera are expensive. Varieties with bull image and scripts are common coins.

T1: What about Sangam coins?

R78: If the Chera, Chola and Pandya coins are in good condition, it would be sold up to some 4000 rupees.

T1: Is that the expensive coin? What about the gold coin?

R78: In gold, there is a Chola coin in our side named Thambi kula manickam. Other than that, there is a coin with fish symbol behind. It is called Gangai kondan or Rajendran. It sells up to one lakh.

T1: Is it the rarest?

R78: Yes, it is.

T1: What about other Rajendran coin?

R78: It sells within twenty rupees.

T1: Rajendra?

R78: Rajendra and Rajaraja.

T1: Rajaraja is a Chola coin. Is it cheap?

I1: That was gold.

R78: Gold coin will be sold up to one lakh.

T1: What is the size of that coin?

R78: 4.200 gram weight. Some coins come around four grams.

T1: He says that gold coins go up to one lakh. A rare coin by the Rajaraja Chola with fish symbol is expensive.

I1: One lakh.

T1: Yes, because not only gold but the material is also a rare depiction.

I1: Is it difficult to find somebody who buys a coin which is expensive?

R78: Yes, there are buyers. Normally people collect coins of a particular period. In such case, they will collect all the coins of that age from copper to gold coins.

T1: There are some people who wanted to collect things of particular age or particular dynasty coins.

I1: Are they people in big cities like Bangalore and Chennai?

R78: Yes, people from Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai. There are coins worth 10 lakhs.

T1: In our country?

R78: Yes, some Roman coins. There is a variety in Chatrapathi Shivaji coin. It is ten lakh worth.

T1: Is it a gold coin?

R78: Yes. eight gram gold.

T1: How do you come to know about the rate?

R78: From the books.

T1: There is one coin of King Chatrapathi Shivaji which is about eight gram-gold coin, the market rate is ten lakhs.

I1: How did he find the market rate?

R78: it is published in the north Indian catalogue.

I1: What is the most popular coin?

T1: Chola coin.

I1: What was the normal price?

T1: Twenty rupees.

I1: Twenty? Because there are so many?

T1: Yes, but the dealer will sell it for 100 or 50 rupees.

I1: So the riverbed people will sell it for twenty and they will sell it for 50 or 100 rupees.

T1: Sometimes I have purchased Chola coins for 100 rupees. My friends would say that they can get some 20 coins for that amount.

I1: But this is the most common coin from the riverbed.

T1: Which coin?

I1: Chola.

T1: Yes because it is a Chola territory.

I1: Did they get much British Indian coins?

R78: Yes, they will go for some 6-7 lakhs particularly gold coins.

I1: What about the beads?

R78: It costs from 20 to 100 rupees. I have given many beads to R7.

I1: But not many people buy the beads?

R78: He is a crazy guy.

I1: He is very enthusiastic about these things.

R78: The climate is very hot and this road is very bad.

T1: They are getting toll for this road.

I1: The opposite side of the river he is speaking about. That is Musiri.

R78: Where is she coming from?

T1: She is from London.

I1: Which river place do you visit the most?

R78: It is Karur Amaravathy River. Karur is the market place for Cholas, Pandyas and Kongu. It was like headquarters. Even goods like diamonds were exchanged there. Secondly, it is a boundary for Chola and Kongu regions. One must pass through Karur to reach other places. During Sangam period, it was a big market place. Romans went through this place. They had coin mint place in Karur. They come here with coins which are one-sided. Then they will mint the other side with symbols of Tamil Nadu here. With those coins they had bought calves, perfumes from here.

T1: Are there no calves in Rome?

R78: The meal of these calves is liked by them. They are also liked many other things. They travel across seas and cross rivers with boats. Through Karur is a shortest route. When they come by Kerala, they used to come with help of horses to the rivers and traded around the Amaravathy river.

T1: He says Karur is important because of the geography. It is close to the Kongu mandalam. Kongu mandalam is the Coimbatore region. For all the three old dynasties (Chera, Chola and Pandya) Karur is the market place. People bring all the valuable things all over the world, from vegetables to expensive things like diamond, to Karur markets. Also the Roman people did business in this area. So it is a kind of International hub.

A. Lowson

I1: And that is why so much is there in this area? Do they find many Roman or Sangam coins?

T1: yes, in Karur.

I1: Other places?

T1: Even in Madurai, you could find Roman coins.

R78: Has she seen Sangam age coin?

I1: May be.

T1: You wanted to see that.

I1: If he has one.

[He is showing some coins]

A78) B: 09/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Near Musiri

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R78, R80

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:47:49

Context: The river is very wide here and there are still largish stretches of water in the middle. We are approaching the river through an old temple site again where there are steps leading down to the river. Across toward the middle of the river there are around four very large pick up trucks and two huge diggers. At first I think these are the river diggers that R7 was talking about who had been using diggers, but later when we ask the river panners here they say that the diggers are for sand quarrying not coins. R78 sits down with a group of the panners and starts to conduct some business. T1 and I are invited to sit nearby. R78 weighs each coin on a small digital scale before talking about price. I try to ask some questions while this is going on. The light is already starting to fade so I know we don't have long to stay. The river panners are a large group and are spread between to separate campsites. They have stopped working. And are settling around several fires. They seem excited by our interest and welcoming but T1 quietly tells me that we are unlikely to get a good interview here as they

have all been drinking for a while. He's also a little concerned about my safety and wants us to finish and leave before it gets dark. One of the panners says they remember me from last time, and I realise this must be the same group I met at Musiri two years ago. We talk a little longer but by now it's almost full dark and we have to leave. It's difficult to see where we are walking. Just as we leave they all call me back. There is a coin they want me to see. It's a silver Anna. I think they want me to see it because it is a British coin and they know I'm English.

T1: You want to see (holding a coin that was found by the river diggers today)?

I1: Is it a ram or bull?

T1: Bull.

I1: What age is this?

T1: Because it is Nayaks', it may be some 350-400 years. Where did you get this from?

R80: You could see some steps there? In that spot, we found this.

T1: From Water or sand?

R80: When we dig deep inside the sand, you will get this. We must dig inside up to one's hip.

T1: You have to dig at least four or five feet. Only then you would get it.

I1: How long these people are here digging? Is this a different group?

T1: Weighing machine.

I1: Oh, they are taking the weight.

T1: Where are you from?

R80: Patteeswram.

T1: Those who are in Srirangam are your people, right?

R80: Yes.

T1: For how many years are you doing this job?

R80: For some 25 years.

T1: What are the other jobs?

R80: We go for woodcutting and agriculture.

T1: When will you start to do this job?

R80: We will come here at the Tamil month of *Maasi* (February) to *Aadi* (August).

After *Aadi* month, there will be more water in the seas. At that time, we go for agriculture.

T1: During the season, the river is dry. After they open waters from dams for irrigation and that time that is full of waters. Then they go to agriculture jobs.

I1: Are they a family?

T1: Many families but all are relatives.

R80: We are the owners of the things we get. We are all relatives. There are also people from Jeyamkondam and Madurai. Where is the money?

R78: It has cow symbol not Tamil script. So it is not 100 rupees.

T1: They are bargaining the price. It seems that he got 100 rupees but they expect 500 rupees and finally settle at 300 rupees.

I1: What is that coin?

T1: It is a Nayak coin with bull symbol which is 300 to 400 years old.

I1: Copper coin?

T1: Yes.

R80: It is a round coin.

T1: You will go for farming business?

R80: Yes. They also go for wood cutting business. Nowadays they go for different jobs. But in our days, people did not go for any other jobs.

T1: Who taught you this business?

R80: There are some tribal people, for them it is ancestral business.

T1: Where are they?

R80: There are some people in Thiruvannamalai now. From them we had learnt these things. Their family business is this. They mainly do business like catching snakes and gathering honey. Then a law was passed which prohibited catching of snakes. Gradually they took this business.

T1: You learnt from them?

R80: They may come to our place and there are many possibilities for spreading. It may spread through their relatives in our place. We do not have any ancestral business.

T1: They learn from other groups. When they come here and do the business here, these people also started doing it.

I1: Are they from the same group?

T1: The other group, like the people we met in Karur said, are Thiruvannamalai- based.

I1: Are they from the same community?

T1: Yes, from the same community. I have to verify with them.

R80: My father did agriculture. It is not our family business.

T1: It is not his father's family tradition. It is his business.

I1: What is his father's business?

T1: Agriculture.

I1: They have been doing this only for the past ten years?

R80: Yes. We will do this job during that particular season. In the remaining months, we will do agriculture. During rainy season, rivers are full of water. At that time, we cannot search for coins.

T1: For the last ten years they do either digging or agricultural work.

I1: What made them to move into this?

T1: As I said earlier, the people from Thiruvannamalai did the panning here. After watching the river panning, they get to know the importance and started doing it.

T1: How many are working here now?

R80: There are some 15 families here. It includes 30 to 40 individuals. Our people are not only here. They work in all places.

T1: Where will you stay?

R80: We will stay separately.

I1: Do they know why the bulldozers are here?

T1: Some outsiders are here.

I1: Who are these people?

T1: May be some local people. Are they quarrying sand with the bulldozers?

R80: Yes.

T1: The coins will not be taken with that?

R80: No.

T1: How?

R80: Coins are found only near rocks. It will not be found in sands. When the water runs, it will deposit whatever it has when it hits the rocks. So we will remove such rocks which are rare and search for coins. The sand near rocks is not used for construction. So they do not quarry sand here.

T1: Here the rock surface is very close to the shore. When they dig for two or three feet, they will see the rock. Coins mostly deposit on the rock. Those people with bulldozers only dig for sand.

I1: They are digging for sand, not coins?

R80: Yes.

I1: Do they have lots of Rajaraja chola coins?

R80: We will get Sree Veera coins and Sangam age coins. Also we get some Chera coins and Pandya coins. All will be found in minimum amount.

T1: Why do you choose this particular place? Is there any temple here?

R80: Because of the river here. The coins found here taken till Trichy. Trichy coins are taken till Kumbakonam. (another disagrees: Not like that. Different coins are found in a place because people go everywhere and put coins in the river as a part of ritual. Near all old temples you could find this).

T1: But there is no temple here.

R80: There were temples here. There is a Shiva temple in the west side. These stairs were built in those days. We will look for coins near old stairs and old temples.

T1: This is how they select the places. This is an old staircase. Only in these places, people had a bath. In every riverside temple, there is this kind of stairs. They clean these areas often. Otherwise there will be bushes. So they look for places with river, temple and stairs.

I1: How far down the river from such a place will they look?

R80: Till one kilometer.

I1: Do they look for only this river, or do they travel any other river?

T1: For how many days you are here?

R80: We are here for five days.

T1: Before this?

R80: We were in Srirangam.

T1: Why do you come here?

R80: We will be moving always. If more number of people comes to a place, others will move towards a different place.

T1: How will you transport?

R80: By bus.

T1: For how long will you be here?

R80: That depends on the availability of coins.

T1: Have you gone to other places?

R80: Yes. We have also gone to Mohanur, Kodumudi, Erode and Bhavani. In the south we go to Madurai, Maanamadurai, Thirubhuvanam, Sivagangai and Paramakudi. We will stop there.

T1: Why?

R80: After that the salty water of Rameswaram starts. There we do not get anything.

T1: Will you go to Thiruvadam, near Cholavandan?

R80: No. Other group will go there.

T1: They always move from one place to another. They are here for last five days. Earlier they were in Srirangam, the place where we visited before. If there were many people and they don't find much, they move to other places. They will wait and search for another five or six days. If they do not find anything here too, they will start to move other places. After Srirangam, where will you go?

R80: We will go to eastern places like Kallanai, Kachchamangalam, Kiliyur, Boodhaloor and we will go straight to Thanjavur.

T1: There will be people searching already?

R80: In every place, there will be people. Within some two to three months, we will go to our hometown.

T1: Will you get coins in your hometown?

R80: Yes, our town has different coins.

I1: do they make a good living? Or it is hard to make a living?

R80: Whatever we get here will suffice our daily needs. If we get more in ten thousands, we will go to our town towns and settle our loans there.

T1: That a very great life. But they survive with whatever they get. If they get more, they will sort out all the debts there.

I1: where is their original home place?

T1: they are from Patteeswaram near Kumbakonam.

I1: And that is their father's home places also?

T1: Yes.

I1: Do they have any special words for different coins like the previous group?

T1: They are all same group. What are the coins do you get?

R80: We will get Chola coins and Naidu coins.

T1: Tell us by which name do you call these coins.

R80: We call it *kozhi kaasu*, *mann kaasu*.

T1: Why it is called *mann kaasu*?

R80: these copper coins are called as *mann kaasu*.

T1: *Mann kaasu* is a common name.

I1: Do they dig; they don't pan like the previous ones panning in the river?

R80: We will also do that. We also sieve.

T1: They do both. There is another group. Do you want to see them?

I1: we can just walk and take some pictures.

T1: What are your rituals?

R80: We will do the same ritual as you. Nowadays no one is following rituals. Earlier they sing songs for every occasion. But now no one is following rituals. Everything is changed.

T1: they are telling about the song tradition of Hindu functions. Once they had such practices. Now they do not follow such things.

I1: Do they focus only on coins?

R80: We will get some coins, gold and silver. If people missed any ornaments while bathing, we may get those things.

T1: How will you always get things here?

R80: We might have missed some places. Every time the water runs it will deposit some objects in different places.

T1: they can't search completely. Now the sand is on the rock. After the flood, the sand will move to other places and here it will be rocky. They find the coins struck in rocky surfaces.

I1: They don't find it in the loose sand?

T1: Yes, sometimes they will get. In other areas, instead of rock some clay plates are there. The coins will stick in the clay.

I1: How deep?

R80: Near the shores, the rocks are 3 to 4 feet deep. In the middle of the sea, we have to dig, more than 10 feet. They are working nearly 30 feet deep but still didn't get the rock. Mostly we look for some 10 feet. We don't go more than that.

T1: How much length do you dig?

R80: We dig for six feet length and ten feet breadth.

T1: The sand deposit is minimum one foot and maximum 30 feet. In the middle of the river, at least there are twenty feet. These people go up to 10 feet.

I1: Ten feet is quite deep.

T1: when they start digging, they expect something within 3 or 4 feet then slowly they dig deep.

R80: We don't find things daily. There were days when we don't get anything. Sometimes other people may get coins from the pit that we dug. We can't ask them anything, it is their luck.

R78: Shall we go there?

T1: Sir, for how many years you are doing this business?

R81: For 15 years.

T1: What have you done before that?

R81: I did wood cutting and farming.

T1: How do you learn this work?

R81: From the people who did earlier. One day people who are sweeping were sieving in this river. We just watched them for a couple of days. Then we started doing it. We will look for coins and other objects in the soil. You have been to Musiri once, right?

T1: Have you seen me? We both came.

R81: It was two years back.

I1: These were the same people. I remember them.

R81: Another man was with you at that time.

T1: It is better you move to other group. Take a picture of that girl.

R82: We work here as a group.

I1: Is this a family?

T1: Yes.

I1: And children. How many families in this group?

R82: We are 65 families.

T1: Here?

R82: Here are ten families. Sixty-five families are doing this business.

We did agriculture for a season. Now for six months, we will do this job.

We will leave this place, when there is water. Do you know

Vellaperambular?

T1: No.

R78: They are from Chennai.

R82: Our native is Kumbakonam.

T1: There are more than 65 families are engaged in this activity. They work for six months.

I1: They start in December to May?

R82: When the water starts flowing in the river, we will leave this place.

T1: I will tell you the exact English month later. But the day the dam was opened, for irrigation they leave this place. They cultivate paddy.

I1: Are they all related?

T1: Yes. All are related.

R82: All belong to same place and community. Through this, we are looking at the ages of different kings before 2000 to 3000 years. We are not doing anything illegal. Whatever we find under the soil we are collecting it. Even though we work here, we face many problems.

T1: What are the problems do you face here?

R82: This is a big and wide river. There are many deadly animals like crocodiles here.

T1: Have you seen crocodiles here?

R82: Not here but in Kallanai. Mostly crocodiles will be in crater. Other than that, there are many insects.

T1: Is there any snakes?

R82: Many of us don't get afraid of snakes and insects. We are like tribes. Nature is our partner.

T1: There were some crocodiles. It survives in deep water. Ladies say that they are afraid but men are not. Because they are the one who catch snakes already.

I1: Do they have any problem from police?

R82: If they ask so, we will say that if we find any big objects, we will surrender it to the government. We only have some small items with us. We will sell items to those dealers coming from archaeological department. We have given things to school students for their education.

T1: Will they come here and ask you?

R82: Yes.

T1: I don't think that police will come here often, but they will come occasionally. At that time, they will explain that if they find anything big, they will surrender. We collect small things for our survival. So they won't disturb.

I1: Do they start very early and work throughout the day?

R82: We will work from nine to four.

T1: the climate is very hot.

R82: We will take rest then and there. Can you see any tents here?

T1: No.

R82: This is like a ground. We always hide under small trees.

I1: Do they have other parts of the family working in different jobs?

R82: Yes, they do works like carpentry and wiring works.

T1: Don't they go away from their place?

R82: they go till Chennai.

T1: They do all kinds of jobs like masonry and carpentry jobs.

I1: Do they know the team who works in Karur?

R82: We have our relatives working in foreign countries also.

T1: Do you know people in Karur.

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R82: Yes, I know them personally.

T1: How come?

R82: I have been there for a year.

T1: What are the places you went?

R82: I have been to Thirunelveli along with the people in Karur.

T1: You have to give them money?

R82: No, I do separately.

T1: Are they from a different community?

R82: No, all are Irulars.

T1: What is the difference?

R82: We do in sieve. They do in *Paandu* (Iron plates).

T1: He worked with other people in Karur. They are also Irulars of Thiruvannamalai area. These people are Irulars from Kumbakonam area. The working style differs. They use a container of solid metal. Here these people use sieve. Earlier their ancestors use Bamboo tools.

A79) B: 11/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T4, R20

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:35:53

Context: I have been staying with the family of T4 in Trichy. They accompany me to Karaikudi. I want to make this final trip to see if I can get some final details from the antique dealers there. For time and efficiency I draw up a short questionnaire, which T4 then translates into Tamil. When we arrive at Muneeswaram Kovil Street I find R20 in his shop. I try to use the questionnaire, but it does not go well. R20 doesn't want to fill it in. he says you can just ask me the questions and I'll answer. T4 starts to read the questions out and write down his answers. In the end it becomes more of a hindrance than a help, since the Tamil translations of my questions are not quite accurate and many of the questions are not necessarily relevant to his particular

circumstance. Nonetheless I record the conversation for any useful information that might come out of it.

R20: These are Burma woods.

T4: Are these clocks?

R20: Yes, foreign clocks. It came to India even during olden days. This is Jewel box.

T4: Then?

R20: Panels, stone pillars with art designs. There are many panels Gajalakshmi, Dasavatharam.

T4: what are the other things you get from Chettiar's house?

R20: Statues like those. In the entrances they prepare statues using limestone and iron rods.

T4: What is *chunnam* (limestone) in English?

R20: You just write Terracotta. In Chettiar's houses, only now they use marbles. In those days they used a mixture of *kadukkai* (a kind of vegetable) and the white yolk of an egg is used to build walls. Those walls are stronger than what is there now. Of late, we use marbles and tiles.

T4: Where are those walls used?

R20: they will raise beams over that. Houses of that kind are cooler than the others.

In the same way, fans of olden days are cooler than now.

I1: He says that old fans keep it cool?

T4: Yes and the walls are not made out of cement. They are made out of *kadukkai*. I don't know what *kadukkai* is. If you try to break them, it won't break down. They kept here the materials like beams made of wood from those walls. From where and whom you bought these things?

R20: Those Chettiars have done their business in Burma. During the marriage of their daughters, they would give such things as dowry. Madam, they know very well which country is famous for certain things. They will have a collection of those things in their age. Those collections were found in their houses. We will get them.

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T4: How many such things from Chettiar's houses, do you have? How much is the worth of it?

I1: Please read those English questions, so that I can understand.

R20: There is no such measurement madam. Immeasurable.

T4: How old are these things?

R20: We have things ranging from 110 years to 300 years. It changes accordingly for different things.

I1: What is the maximum?

R20: Maximum 200 to 300 years. Those terracotta things there were from a building which was 200 years old.

I1: Minimum?

R20: In antiques, you now have new models which are in old style. Latest is of 10 years old.

I1: What is the word they use to describe antique?

T4: What is Tamil word you use to refer antique?

R20: We will just say that these are old art items bought from Chettiar's houses.

I1: Some of these questions are not related.

T4: Have you brought things other than Chettinadu?

R20: Yes, we will go to places like Nagapattinam, Thirunelveli, Trichy, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram. But we will make a visit within Tamil Nadu.

I1: Where are your customers from?

R20: We will have customers from all over the world. From August to April we will have foreign customers.

I1: Do you have any local customers?

R20: They will buy small items. Low weight exporting no problem. They will purchase some photos and old items. A small thing of some 100 to 200 years old is purchased. People from Thailand, Germany, and Switzerland will come here.

I1: From North India?

R20: Jodhpur, Delhi, Bangalore, Cochin.

I1: I am going to Delhi. Do you have customers there?

R20: Yes. A person called Arjun Singh. He purchased Thanjavur painting. He is from Delhi. In Jodhpur, we know Suncity, Sanjay. They will purchase in Karakudi.

I1: In big level.

R20: Yes. They always purchase in containers. It will come around some two or three containers. They will purchase in April. Customers from foreign countries will stop coming after April. The dealers will come within June and collect whatever he wanted. They will take to their places like Jodhpur. And then in Kerala, Cochin we have dealers like Majunu. From Coonoor, we have a Santhilal who is a pawnbroker. He will buy from here. In Pondicherry, we have dealers like Kailash and R59.

T4: What they will buy from here?

R20: Materials like pillars.

T4: What they will do with that?

R20: They use it for decorating big hotels and restaurants. Mr. Kailash from Pondicherry bought a stone pillar from here before 30 years. It is still there in his hotel. Those pillars will stand strong even for some 30 more years. Quality. The woods are of different age. They will particularly ask for wood of old age. Only then it will be strong.

T4: People will come from places like Coonoor and purchase things like pillars. While constructing hotels they will place these things as an art piece. Because it is very old, in 80 or 90 years, the wood would have dried up well, it won't crack and remain with a good look. So they know what material they are buying. They buy those materials for whatever constructions they do, mostly restaurants.

I1: For big doors and pillars, do they have customers from Thailand, Singapore?

R20: No, they will buy only small items.

I1: Here in Karaikudi and Chettinad, do you have customers?

R20: Yes they will come.

I1: To buy new furniture which is a model of old?

R20: They will keep the old one and give us the new one in the same model.

A. Lawson

I1: Old wood?

R20: Yes, old wood. New production.

I1: Can I take a photograph?

R20: Ok.

I1: Local customer will buy small or big?

R20: They will buy.

I1: What kind of things the local customers would buy?

R20: Some wooden objects, terracotta toys, Thanjavur painting, new tiles, sofa set, cupboard, bureau.

I1: Do you also have customers from Chettinadu houses?

R20: Yes, they will buy.

T4: Are those old Chettinadu houses still there?

R20: Yes.

T4: Are they in Karaikudi.

R20: Yes, they are in Karaikudi. There is a thousand-window house. Earlier people were allowed to visit that house but now. Likewise the Kanadukathan palace is not opened for visitors. They are waiting for government approval.

T4: Shan't we see it now?

R20: If you know any influential person, you could get special permission.

T4: You can see anything, everything is closed.

I1: Today?

T4: No, always. Now and all they don't let any visitors inside.

I1: Shall we go to Chettinadu mansion?

R20: Yes, in MSM Bungalow.

T4: When she visited the last time, she went to such palaces. But now we have to see.

R20: You can visit Athangudi palace. Now it is given for shooting films.

T4: Will it be open?

R20: Yes, they will show you.

T4: Why such restrictions?

R20: When these palaces were visited like museums, because it is profitable to a certain group, government closed it.

A. Lawson

T4: No one could visit it now?

R20: No one.

T4: Tell us about yourself?

R20: I am fifty years old.

T4: Where is your residence?

R20: It is in Meenatchipuram, near Muthumariamman temple.

T4: Your birthplace?

R20: It is Karaikudi.

T4: Your community?

R20: Naidu. I am working here.

T4: Is it a go down or shop?

R20: This is a shop.

T4: Oh! Go-down is in another place.

R20: Yes, everything is there. The native of the shop owner is Mumbai. It is 30 years old.

T4: That man has come from Bombay for 30 years. He is been purchasing things. he owns a shop in Karaikudi as well as Bombay.

I1: I will go to Bombay may be in a week.

R20: If you want to see the go-down, it is nearby. I have his phone number. You can get the address from him and meet him.

I1: He said they will hire things for film shooting, how often they do that?

R20: They will come often. If they need to shoot in a hall, they will list out the things needed to decorate that whole hall.

T4: How will you collect the fare?

R20: One day fare for a room is Rs. 25,000. If it is on the items basis, we will collect amount for particular things which ranges from Rs.150-500.

T4: Will they hire it often?

R20: Yes, if there is a shooting in Karaikudi, we will hire it often.

I1: How much is its worth?

R20: This is a vessel made of black metal. Anything kept in this vessel will not get spoilt. What is the name of it?

R20: Colombo vessel.

T4: It is from Colombo. You can use it directly on a stove.

R20: The batter will not ferment easily when kept in it. In the same way we have pickle jars.

T4: If you pour that idly batter in it, it won't sour easily. You can use it directly on the flames.

R20: See, even in glass tumblers the Chettiars will etch their names. Now and all you cannot write names on glasses, the glass would broke.

I1: It looks like some English judge.

R20: I thought it look like some Egyptian judge.

I1: But it looks like he is wearing a tie.

R20: See here. It has the names of Chettiars.

T4: Just show us the top of that jar. Show us if there are something else. She will publish books with your photos.

I1: How much is this?

R20: This is 500 rupees. From where are you coming mam?

T4: I was born and brought up in Chennai but now I am in Trichy. I too have such plates and cups in my house.

R20: It is from Sweden.

I1: Yes, it looks so.

T4: He is a judge?

R20: Yes, from Sweden. It is not that much easy to maintain. In Chettiar's house they will maintain it in such a way that there won't be even a scratch. The damages you see here are the damages made in our place.

I1: What is the cost of the pillar?

R20: It costs 35,000 rupees.

T4: Are those pillars new?

R20: No, it is old. Just a polish was put on that. It was taken for shooting so it is there.

T4: It went for a shooting that is why it has a polished look.

I1: How much do they charge?

T4: Rs. 25000 for pillars.

I1: For hiring?

T4: Yes.

R20: This pillar was hired for the movie Nanda.

T4: Ok

I1: Which is better? Hiring or Selling?

R20: Hiring because we get more money.

T4: Renting is better because they get more money while using the thing again and again.

R20: We will the antique back and we will cost the money as a whole so hiring is better. Some engineers will come here and see the antique pillars and other structures here. They will build a like model in cities. In Coimbatore, there is a place, Aanaikattimalai, under construction for Brahmanas. *Agraharam*. And for that too they get material from here.

T4: In Coimbatore, a place called Aanaikattimalai, they are constructing a *kudil* (living place) based on how it was built years back.

R20: *Aanai* means elephant.

I1: What is *kudil*?

R20: Brahmins those days, used to live one place. That old style construction is what they are doing it now.

I1: That is for whom?

T4: For rent.

I1: Like hotels.

R20: In the same way, in Kumbakonam, the place for pandian hotel is constructed like this.

I1: Do they supply for all others?

T4: Yes. They supply for old houses, hotels and these old beds, pillows. What are the other places which we can visit?

R20: Places like Paaguneri, Kallal. In entrance of Kallal you have many toy makers. If you want to visit temples, there is a place called Maathur here. They will prepare a substitute for gold.

T4: Tell a spot of our interest.

R20: You can visit temples. You can also visit Ponnamaravathi. In Chettinadu you have 92 villages. Each house differs in construction. The Tamil cinema world now in Chennai originated in Karaikudi. Like AVM studio. Because of the lack of ports and airports, Chennai was

A. Lawson

selected for transactions. Now everything is coming back here. Many shootings are taken here.

I1: For how much do you sell the pillar?

R20: 20,000 This satin wood is from Jaffna, Sri Lanka. It gives out a smell of coconut oil.

T4: If you rub the wood, you smell coconut oil.

R20: Opposite is Teakwood. That is also from Sri Lanka.

I1: The wood came from Sri Lanka but these are from Chettiar's house.

R20: These are taken from chettiar's house. We will collect it and sort it out later. Chettiars and Rawthers are known for their quality in collection. If chettiars collect teak, rawther will collect materials with more quality from other places. In such a way they are competitive. If a chettiar does a timber business, rawther will do glass business.

T4: Chettiars and Muslims are always competitive. If he buys teak, they buy something more than that. They look for better quality.

I1: This reproduction is expensive or the old ones?

R20: Only the older ones are more expensive. That is old jack wood. This is new one imitated on the old ones.

T4: That is old, hardened wood. This is new. Is it a dog or any other animal?

R20: It is an animal.

T4: How will you clean it?

R20: It is a little bit difficult task. Some people do not want it to be cleaned.

T4: Where did you get these *veenai* (stringed instrument) from?

R20: From Brahmin's house.

I1: Can I ask the price of some objects? That carved door?

R20: Starting from 5000 to lakhs and crores.

T4: Depends on the wood and the work.

I1: This red Burmese lacquerware?

R20: starting from 100 to 1000.

T4: How is ceramics made?

R20: Mixture of sand and tin and polished.

I1: The cost of pickle jars?

A. Lawson

R20: It is from England, starting from 100 to 500.

I1: Of all these things, doors, Burma ware and pickle jar, which will sell the most?

R20: Stone pillars are the thing which will sell the most and wood pillars.

T4: Wood and stone pillars.

R20: See the Thanjavur paintings by Ravi Varma.

T4: Who is that in the picture?

R20: Ranjit Singh Patera, A king of north.

T4: And that lady?

R20: That I do not know. It was a canvas painting.

A80) B: 11/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Karaikudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T4, R18

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:05:27

Context: This is my final meeting with R19, an antique dealer on Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudi. I have come here with T4 and her family to collect a few final bits of information from the dealers here. I have already had a long conversation with R20 so I do not question R19 for long. I spend most of my time going through a file of his that he has offered me. It contains the business cards of all his customers.

I1: Did he say any place?

T4: He sold it to a number of places but he is not able to remember. They buy from Chettiar houses or from the fellows who sell. They pay a commission and sell it.

I1: That door, did it come from Chettiar's house?

R18: Yes, that door was bought from Chettiar's house. It was 100 years old. We will sell it for a good rate.

T1: Hundred years old from a Chettiar's house.

R18: She came last time and took photos of that door.

T4: That is why she is asking that why you did not sell that still.

I1: Last time you said that you would sell it by this time.

R18: Yes. It will get sold. I sold every other thing she had seen here the previous time.

T18: All the other objects are sold, what you saw here last time.

I1: That's a good business.

R18: Only then we can have our living.

T4: How about your business?

R18: It is not the equal all the time. Some days go dry and on some other days we will have more sales.

T4: Do you have materials worth a lakh?

R18: Yes, it is according to our status. There are many dealers who are economically rich.

T4: His business everyday is on and off. Sometimes for a big amount, some days for a small amount.

I1: Did he sell this to customers from North India, Singapore and Malaysia?

R18: There are many products which are sent to Malaysia and places like Italy.

T4: These things are to be sent to Italy.

R18: There are more foreign customers.

T4: People from Italy purchase a lot. People from Singapore, Malaysia also come and from North also.

R18: People from many countries come here.

I1: Which is the most?

T4: Where are they from?

R18: There is an agent here. People who are from other countries stay in a bungalow.

T4: People come from that MSM...

R18: It is just half a kilometer from here.

T4: there is an agent here who guides them to the shops.

Shall we meet them?

R18: Definitely. They will also arrange for rooms there.

T4: No. We don't stay there. We just want to meet those agents.

R18: Yes, you can see. I will arrange for an auto.

T4: We came by car.

R18: Just ask anyone about MSM bungalow. You ask the *Aachi* (elder lady) there.

T4: Ok.

R18: That *Aachi's* name is Naachchamma. She is a nice person. She will behave well with others.

T4: But I did not know her.

R18: If you are free, you can go and meet.

T4: We will just give a try.

R18: You just have my card. Where are you from?

T4: We are from Trichy.

R18: Which place in Trichy?

T4: Kumaran Nagar in Vayalur road.

R18: If you go by car, just ask anyone about MSM bungalow. That old lady there will explain everything to you.

T4: There is one lady *Aachi* there who will give us lot of information.

I1: Meenakshi?

R18: No. Naachamma *Aachi*. Her name is actually Naachiammai. There is another grand old lady but I do not know her name. They both will tell you everything. If you wanted to visit other places, they have some men who will guide you to other places. They will also take you to Kannadukaathan Raja palace.

T4: Where is that palace?

R18: It is ten kilometers from here. It is one of the biggest palaces. It is the King Muthaiya Chettiars house.

I1: do you know a dealer in Bangalore named Balaji?

R18: Many people come here. We know them only by their cards.

T4: He knows lots of people but he does not know who it is.

R18: Mam, will you please take that diary. See here are many addresses I have of dealers from Bangalore. You find it for yourself.

T4: You want?

A. Lawson

I1: No.

R18: There are many cards here. You take what you want.

I1: Is it Chennai?

R18: No, Bangalore. See the Bangalore addresses.

I1: These are all customers?

R18: Yes.

I1: Can I see?

T4: You can take the address from here and we will go and meet them.

R18: Please go and sit inside.

A81) B: 12/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Near Manumadurai

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R83

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:45:40

Context: T1 tells me he has heard something about people digging in the riverbed somewhere near Manumadurai. We decide to drive from Madurai along the Vaigai river southwards and see if we can spot anything. We see some people who appear to be working out on the riverbed near a temple: Amman Kovil. There is also a festival in progress. T1 calls it a Tidi ritual – meaning to recall the ancestors. He describes it as a kind of funeral to remember the ancestors it's a ritual with food offerings and he says perhaps also things such as money would be thrown into the river. At Rameswaram it happens everyday apparently but here it would happen once every year. I don't understand why they would throw offerings to the river at a time when it is dry like this. Gandhi says he's not sure. Maybe in the past it didn't used to be this dry in summer. There is a large group of people by the temple steps the river here. We walk through them and down to the riverbed. It is completely dry and there two separate areas where digging is in progress. The digging closest to the temple steps seems to be connected to the festival. They are digging for the water it seems

which is apparently important part of the rituals. The digging a little further downstream from the steps is the river diggers. We go over and say hello. They have two excavations in progress which are currently long and curved and about waist deep. Just beyond these there is a small makeshift camp with plastic sheeting for cover from the sun. We are invited to sit down there. The sand is impossibly hot and burns to the touch so they put some sacking down for me to sit on.

T1: How long are you here?

R83: We are here for a month.

I1: Can I take a photo? Are these Chola coins?

R83: Yes, Chola coins. It is covered by sand.

I1: How much? Rupees?

T1: Did you get any coins?

R83: Yes. Rarely.

T1: What coins?

R83: Chola coins. She is from London. Stay in a hotel in Thanjavur.

T1: No. We aren't staying there.

I1: How long are they digging in this spot?

R83: We will come here for seasons. Now we are here for six months.

T1: Only in Vaigai? How long you stay in this particular place?

R83: For ten days.

T1: Around six months they are working now and then. But this time they take about ten days. Several other groups also come and search in this area.

I1: Do they dig only in Vaigai?

R83: Also in Cauvery and Kollidam. We particularly look for areas with rivers.

T1: How will you choose a place?

R83: We will look for places near temples. Mostly in ups and downs where there are deposits. We also consider the kings who ruled that particular area.

T1: Now these people are here for a kind of ritual. People from all over places come here and offer pooja for their ancestors. They come with

the priest and do some rituals and offer some coins to the river. This is the right time for them to collect. Not only they pour, all common people contribute something to the rituals. Where did you find this coin? From this place?

R83: Yes.

I1: Do they know the other group of people we met?

T1: Do you know such people from Patteswaram?

R83: Yes. We know.

T1: People from Karur?

R83: Yeah. We know them too. We know people in Karur, Musiri, Trichy, Thimmachipuram, Paramakudi, Ariyalur.

T1: Is there people working in Ariyalur now?

R83: Yes. In Vaalikandapuram.

T1: What are the other places?

R83: Maanamadurai.

T1: Do people work in Maanamadurai now?

R83: They may work now.

T1: You belong to the same group?

R83: Yes. We belong to the same place. You see some people there. We all belong to the same group. We work in groups.

T1: What about Paramakudi?

R83: We don't know about Paramakudi. But they are working in Maanamadurai.

T1: Are they working near the temple in Maanamadurai?

R83: No it is deeper inside the forest. You have to eastwards from Aanandha Valliamman temple. Buses will stop at Aanadha valliamman temple. What are you going to do there?

T1: She is researching on it. Just wanted to know where these coins are from? And belongs to which king?

R83: Now and all they show everything in tv.

T1: Earlier paper had a news item regarding this. Is that your area?

R83: Yes.

T1: I have seen that in Dhinamalar newspaper. He is a north-Indian.

I1: Did you ask him how much the coin costs.

T1: For how much you sell these coins?

R83: We can't tell that for sure, it is the dealer's wish.

T1: Approximately how much is this rajaraja coin?

R83: They will give 50 or 100 rupees.

T1: Is there any dealer in Madurai?

R83: Yes, there are dealers in Madurai.

I1: What sorts of things?

T1: They say some traders will come and collect. They will give some 50 rupees for this coin. Which is the costliest coin you had got?

R83: Coins engraved with the faces of kings will add more weight and sold for higher cost.

T1: Have you got any coins of that kind?

R83: No, I have not.

T1: How long are you searching?

R83: Ten days.

T1: Till you did not get anything?

R83: No.

T1: Other than this, what will you collect?

R83: We will collect gold particles from the bathing place. We do not have regular income. Some days will go without any income. However we will manage to get gold.

T1: What did you get yesterday?

R83: Yesterday we got some coins like these.

T1: Shall we see them? For some four days they may not find anything at all. They may work without income for some five days and in the sixth day definitely they will get a good yield. Not only coins, they may get something else like particles of gold and silver. Sometimes the devotees offer something in gold or silver.

I1: Do they know which ones are older and which ones are newer?

R83: We don't know how but we will find it out.

T1: How many years of experience you have got?

R83: We have 20 years of experience.

T1: Everyone has nearly 20 years experience they know how to look at those coins.

I1: How they sell the coins to the dealers? Who do they sell the new pieces to?

T1: They will sell it in jewellery shops.

R83: A girl from came here a few days before to interview us. She said they do interviews for the project and exams. What about you?

T1: She is writing a thesis about you?

R83: That girl told the same.

T1: Where did you meet her?

R83: In our place called Aandipatti.

T1: Is she a girl?

R83: Yes.

T1: There is one more girl doing this kind of studies.

I1: Oh! German girl?

R83: Yes. There will be a German every year.

T1: Is she a student?

R83: Yes. She said that only after this research here, she will be given more marks in exams. She stayed in Tharangambadi.

T1: She is doing her thesis.

R83: We gave many costly coins to those Germans. They will come every year.

T1: To which place?

R83: To Aandimadam. We are Christians so they ask details to us.

T1: Where are you from?

R83: I am from Aandimadam, he is from Meelsutru.

T1: Those two places are far away, right?

R83: Yes, far away but we are related. They are Christians and we are Irulars.

T1: They are from similar community. They are from Thanjavur but not the same place we went yesterday. They are from different places but they are relatives. They know each other.

R83: They are here to research our country? Is this like training for them?

T1: Yes.

R83: Ok. Take them along with you and show the coins.

I1: Do they tell just the name of the coins?

T1: Just show what you have collected. Till then tell us some details.

R83: There is a school in our place, Velichangudi. Twice in a year people like you will come and visit. Cholden and Susanna are our teachers.

T1: Their name is Cholden and Susanna. They are working in a NGO school somewhere. They are running a school. So they come often.

R83: Please move and sit.

T1: Is there an injury in your leg?

R83: Yes, because of heat.

T1: Do you know a dealer R78?

R83: Yes.

T1: Will he buy coins from you?

R83: He is from Aatampatti, right? Yes, he will buy from us.

T1: Are these coins collected by a single person or all together?

R83: This is collected by a family in a month.

I1: Are these beads?

T1: Show some good coins in particular. What coin is this?

R83: This is a coolie coin. Wipe it using coconut oil.

T1: What is the worth of these coins?

R83: They will give some 100 rupees for these.

T1: Which is the old coin here?

R83: This is the older coin. See, there is an image of cow in it. This is samakulam coin. You can see the word samakulam written on it in Tamil. Take a clear photo of it. This is a bead.

T1: What coin is this?

R83: This is Queen Mangamma coin.

I1: What is this one?

T1: 17th century coin in Tamil inscription.

R83: Tell her that it is Nadinam coin.

I1: Did you ask about the names they use for these coins?

T1: What is the name of this coin?

R83: This is Samarkulam coin.

T1: This coin?

R83: This is *kozhi* coin. This is *aazhi* coin where you find cow. This is the coin used by the king of this place. See a bull in it. It is also called Nandi.

T1: *kozhi kaasu* is a French coin. Then *aazhi kaasu*. It is Nadinam coin which is the 17th century coin used by the Queen Mangamma.

R83: This is a Chola coin.

T1: Oh, it is different.

R83: Yes, it is different. Only then we will get money.

T1: What is the name of this coin?

R83: This will be called as *pottu* coin. We have big and small coin in the same variety.

T1: See the wheel. This is *pottu* coin. In Hindi.

I1: What are these names?

T1: What is this coin? Belongs to which period?

R83: This was the coin used by a king who ruled Madurai. A Pandya king.

T1: What is the cost of these coins?

R83: It will go for some 250 rupees. It depends on the coin and the image engraved on it.

T1: This sells around 250 rupees.

R83: This coin belongs to Tipu Sultan period.

T1: Tipu sultan is a king's name.

R83: During British period. She knows British more than us.

T1: If you know more about these coins, you can sell it for more prices. Read some regarding these coins and sell it. Anyone has such books?

R83: One or two will have that book.

T1: You can buy those books and read it.

R83: Yes, we have it. But they just put the images; we don't know anything more than that.

T1: It will tell you which the old and new coins are. From that you can sell it. Old coins and rare coins go for more cost. What coin is this?

R83: This is *aazhi* Chola coin.

T1: Do you have any different coin?

R83: Do you have any gold coin? Show it. These are kendai coins.

T1: What is this?

R83: That is also Nadianam Samarakulam.

I1: Why do they store the new and old separately?

R83: This also belongs to Nadinam but it is costlier than that.

T1: Is it Samaragola?

R83: Yes, Samarakula. This is VOC coin.

T1: Why do you store it separately?

R83: Just because it is collected by my father, if I sold this I have to pay that money to my father.

T1: His father collected these coins. So they stored it separately.

These coins belong to which age?

R83: These are British coins.

T1: This coin?

R83: This is also *aazhi*. That is big, this is small. This is the difference.

T1: What is on its sides?

R83: *Aazhi* (*aazhi* means sea).

T1: What is the cost of it?

R83: If it is clean and clear they will take it for 50 rupees or else 30 rupees.

T1: What is its condition now?

R83: It will go for 50 rupees. These are beads of those ages.

T1: Will it have a hole in it?

R83: Yes, you can see.

T1: What is its cost?

R83: Some 20 or 30 rupees.

I1: Whose collection is this?

R83: It is our family's collection. We had collected it for a month.

T1: What stone is this?

R83: This is *sembu mani* (copper bead). This is a bead not a stone.

T1: What is that red in colour?

R83: That is *pavalam* (coral). It is used to tie along with the marriage rope.

T1: Is it a stone or what?

R83: Stone.

A. Lawson

T1: What is its cost?

R83: Some 50 or 100 rupees.

T1: Shall I take these three? Like a memento.

R83: This is also a stone.

I1: What is that?

T1: A stone bead.

I1: Do they know how old it is?

R83: All are during some king's period. All are old.

T1: Now you said there are *kozhi* coin, *aazhi* coin, *pootu* coin. What are the other coins?

R83: *katta* coin, Gold coin.

T1: Are these gold coins?

R83: Yes. Gold.

I1: Fanam?

T1: What will you call it?

R83: *Pon kaasu*.

I1: The gold coin he showed, did he find that in this place?

R83: I took it here.

T1: It belongs to which period?

R83: That was Pandya's period coin.

T1: I ask this because before 800 years was the Pandya's period. Then came Nayaks.

R83: It was the coin before 800 years. It was not in Nayak's period.

T1: How much is the coin weighs?

R83: Some half gram. It will come up to 350 grams. There are coins of 12, 8 and 4 grams.

T1: What is the image in this coin?

R83: It is *naamam* (three vertical lines). If it is a big coin we can show them clearly. No one found out a big coin.

I1: How much is the coin?

R83: It will sell around 1500 rupees.

T1: You want to buy?

R83: She is a student. How could you expect a student to buy?

T1: They should not buy. It is their rule.

R83: Where have you come from?

T1: We have come from Trichy. We went to places like Cauvery riverbed and Ammamandapam where they collect.

R83: Have you gone to Musiri?

T1: No. But we went to Thimmachipuram. I think it is 40 km from there.

R83: It may be.

T1: A man from Patteswaram came along with us.

R83: Wherever we are, we belong to same community.

T1: I have seen the people of your community from Mahabalipuram in Madras.

R83: Which is your native?

T1: Madurai. But I stay in Madras. But I know people in all other places like Chengalpet, Thiruvannamalai... I will visit them like how I visited you today.

T1: Are they working in Maanamadurai now?

R83: They are working but deep interior.

T1: How can I find them?

R83: Ask people about the coin sievers.

T1: You said the name of some temple.

R83: It is an Amman temple in riverside.

T1: Will take a ten-rupee distance from Paramakudi?

R83: It is some 15 rupees.

T1: Then it is some 20 kilometres.

R83: It is called Panichaiyenthal in the westward side.

T1: Is it from Maanamadurai?

R83: Yes.

I1: Is there other community people who work best?

R83: In Madurai, there are otta community people. Their main work is to clean townships. After that work they will start collecting coins. Mostly they will work at a time, when there is water in the river.

T1: Which is the exact place in Madurai?

R83: I forget the exact name. You go and ask for Thotti people. Anyone will tell you. In the same way, in Paramakudi, people stay in rivers. They laid huts in rivers and stay there.

T1: Who are they?

R83: They also belong to Thodi and they also collect coins.

T1: Do they use sieve?

R83: No. They use baskets.

T1: You use sieve?

R83: Yes. They sieve in teak baskets.

T1: Is there any other community?

R83: No.

T1: There is another community called Ottar. They are in Madurai and Paramakudi. They originally come from Orissa. They are stone-cutters. Later they took up different professions. They do only there is water in the river.

I1: Do they also look for old coins?

T1: Yeah. Do they know about the coins?

R83: They know more than us. They are our fore runners. After seeing them, we started doing this job.

T1: They are more knowledgeable than these people.

I1: Have they been doing this for longer years?

R83: Yes. They do it for more than 50 years.

T1: Are they now in Paramakudi? Shall we meet them now?

R83: Yes, under the bridge you will find many huts there.

T1: What bridge?

R83: Ask anyone about the bus bridge. They will tell you. Like the bridge here. You have to cross that bridge to go to the city. They are more experienced and they know more than us.

T1: Will the dealers come daily?

R83: No. they will come occasionally.

T1: How will you manage at that time economically?

R83: We will get loans for interest and start to search. After we get items for some 3000 or 4000 rupees we will call the dealers to come and collect.

T1: I asked how they manage money because they do not know how often the traders come. They said that they borrow money from their hometown and come here to search for coins. Till each get coins worth

A. Lawson

of some 2000 to 3000 rupees, they keep on collecting. Then they will inform the traders.

I1: So, they will call someone?

T1: Yeah. Do you the phone numbers? I have the number of rajendran, who is the other?

R83: R92. He will come tomorrow. We will give only to those two persons.

T1: To R78 and R84?

R83: Yes.

I1: What about R85?

R83: He will come rarely. He is very knowledgeable.

T1: But their knowledge is different. You are the people who work in fields.

R83: We have given interviews to newspapers.

T1: That is a good thing.

R83: Those researchers from Germany bought many baskets to their country. How did they manage?

T1: That is different. But taking historical things is an offence. It should be sold with permission. I am going to file a petition that government should buy these antique things for a good rate. Then you will get a regular salary.

R83: There won't be any fear then.

T1: More than that, you will have an identity. Where is that place called Panichayenthal?

R83: It is in Maanamadurai.

T1: How long is Paramakudi from there?

R83: That is far away. The people in Panichayenthal will live in riverside. You go and meet them don't confuse. Do not go into the forest. If you go in car, go till Panichayenthal and walk alongside the river. Cross the railway gate, you can see the huts there itself.

T1: She is a researcher; she does not do anything other than that. She asks whether she can use your information in her research.

R83: Sure.

I1: Thank you all.

A82) B: 12/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Paramakudi

Interaction Participants: I1, T1, R86

Language: Tamil

Duration: 00:07:21

Context: We drive into Paramakudi and T1 starts asking passers-by where we can find the Kuruvikaran. He is amused by their response as he says they can't understand why we should want to speak to this community. He says that the Kuruvikaran are not a respected community and have a poor or bad reputation. We find them living in a small campsite near the middle of town. Their homes appear to be temporary shacks rather than houses. They are very curious and excited by my arrival and there are many children in the camp. They rush to meet me and crowd round when I start interviewing several men from the group. It seems that these people dig out drains around the town. They dig often near the jewellers where apparently gold flakes and perhaps other waste can be found and resold to the jewellers. It seems that they have once attempted to dig in the riverbed, but don't make a practice of it. What's more, when they find old coins it seems they don't really know what to do with them. Many of them say they have just kept old coins they found. They say they don't know the value of them. Sometimes, they say, they have sold them to the jewellers. I only record a short interview with them as the situation is a little chaotic and it is difficult to ask questions.

R86: We will go to places like Vaigai and collect there.

T1: From where will you collect?

R84: From the riverbed.

T1: Is there water in the river?

R84: No water is there in the river. It was there some five or ten years back. There was no water in this river for many years.

R84: The jewellery shop owners will filter the waste water here. Usually goldsmiths will take bath here after their work. So the fine gold particles are filtered here. We cannot do it as a regular profession. We will do it then and there, whenever we find time.

T1: Have you ever find coins in this riverbed?

R84: We don't find many. Occasionally we will get some copper coins and old silver coins. We can find it in rivers and gutters also.

T1: How will you get it from gutters?

R84: Because it is used by goldsmiths.

T1: What kind of coins will you get?

R84: Old coins used by kings and queens.

T1: Do you have any coins now? Actually they mostly go to the streets where the waste water gets deposited...

I1: Like the gully?

T1: They go there and collect gold from there. Because there are many jewellery shops in this place, they find that deposit of gold there. They did once in the river but the river is dry nowadays. So they don't do much. Where did you take this from?

R84: From the riverbed. Mostly they don't keep the coins they take.

I1: Can I take a picture?

R84: I had a box full of old coins.

T1: Where are they? How do you get that? Don't panic. Just tell.

R84: I have done some when there was some water in this river. Will you take photos of all coins?

T1: Yes.

R84: Will you return the coin after taking photo?

T1: Sure. We wanted to just study the coin. Occasionally they find the coin in the dry river. They don't know the value of the coin and where to sell it. Sometimes they sell it to the local goldsmith or local people.

I1: did the guy not know them?

T1: He mentioned about and it seems that they are contacted.

Occasionally they will go. Every time they will not go there. Whenever the water comes they do. They do not know the details about the period and all.

I1: For how many years, they have been doing this?

T1: They do this job for years but not only in river but also in many other places.

I1: For how many years they are doing this in the drainage?

R84: We are doing it for nearly forty to fifty years. It is our traditional business.

T1: They are doing this for generations.

R84: There are some twenty members here. Even small kids will do this work here.

T1: Which is the particular place you search for gold?

R84: In the streets where jewellery shops are. We will filter those sand and get gold particles from them. When will you leave this place?

T1: Why did you ask that?

R84: If you stay here we will show you the coins we have collected.

T1: Possibly we will come here some other day.

T1 to I1: Actually many people are not here now, they have gone for work. Everyone has collected some coins but they kept that in home. If we come here some other day, they will show us.

I1: So they keep some coins for themselves?

T1: they do not know what to do with those coins so they keep it with them.

I1: Because some jewellers will buy...

T1: Have anyone paid money for the coins? Can you name anyone?

R84: There is a person called R78 will buy them. There are also people from Ambasamudram and Kambam.

T1: Do they buy some coins from you?

R84: Yes, they will buy some copper coins, copper plates and old papers.

T1: There are some dealers who come occasionally and collect the coins from them.

I1: What are the types of coins they are talking about?

T1: They have collected old copper coins.

I1: What are the different types of coins they are talking about?

A. Lawson

T1: They say about some silver and gold coins. They collect all types of coins they collect in riverbed like silver, copper coins.

Not only coins they also collect some beads and metals.

R84: See the silver coins here.

A83) B: 16/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R87

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: The meeting has been arranged the previous day by a close friend in Chennai. He knows and is on good terms with her. She contributed to a documentary he has recently produced about Bodhidharma and his connections to Tamil Nadu. This friend had also written a letter to the Prime Minister in her defence when she came under fire for apparently intervening when some government politicians were trespassing and spoiling a protected archaeological site. With his reference she was very happy to meet me. I arrive about ten minutes early at the ASI offices in Fort St George. It's a little difficult to find at first since the fort St George site is quite large includes a lot of official buildings. There are no signposts, but eventually I find it around the back of the main entrance. She invites me to sit and orders some coffee and water to be brought. Overall R87 impresses me. She is not what I was expecting. Previous government archaeologists who I have met have been aloof, cagey and officious while R87 was none of these. She struck me as a genuinely passionate and good archaeologist who has found herself in this official role more by circumstance than design. But as we did not really get to discuss the issue of the contemporary antiquities trade here I don't yet know how she will respond to this issue.

FN: I start by explaining a in a little more detail what my research is about, since all my friend told her over the phone is that I am researching antiquities. I often have trouble getting people to understand that I am interested in contemporary trade of antiquities rather than any historical details about them, especially with archaeologists and historians it seems. Perhaps they don't understand why an archaeologist is studying the present rather than the past. In any case this seems to be what is happening here, since R87 begins to talk about her own interest in the importance of understanding cultural connections and trade networks in the archaeological record.

R87: It's not just about the antiquities she says, it's about how they travelled and about the connections between cultures. You should not see it only as an antiquity but as a material. Where have those materials come from and how did they get here?

FN: She talks about various archaeological sites and excavations and various antiquities, the materials from which they were made and the source sites of those materials: Harrappan antiquities, lapis lazuli beads, Andhra ware pottery, limestone pillars in coastal Andhra temples. All this is to illustrate how this is important evidence for ancient trade routes and cultural contacts. She talks about particular temples along coastal Andhra where limestone pillars from older sites further inland have been re-used as linga's.

R87: There is one at Mahaballipuram. You know the Shore Temple? Whenever I would go there I would wonder. Why is this green limestone here? It's not local.

FN: When she pauses I try to steer the conversation towards the present and ask in particular about the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act and whether there have been any recent amendments. She obviously does not find this topic very interesting. It's not that she wants to avoid the subject out of any wariness, but simply that she does not have any interest in it.

R87: I am an archaeologist you see. All this (gesturing to the desk and the surrounding office) is administration. It's boring, but it has to be done. I have done many excavations and found many interesting

antiquities. There was one particular coin. A Satvahana coin. At the site there were thousands of coins scattered across the surface, but this particular coin was very interesting. It was a small copper coin and it had an animal. A tiger. But this is foreign. Satvahana. It shows that there was a Satvahana connection here much earlier.

FN: I say that I'm interested in coins and in the present day trade. I tell her that I've recently visited Trichy and Madurai and met riverbed panners digging for old coins. I ask her if the ASI have ever made and study of or taken any interest in these coins and this activity. She hesitates as if not sure how to answer, but only for a moment.

R87: No, I'm not ashamed to say that there has never been any study in this area so far. You see all this riverbed material is washed. Fixing a date and a place is difficult. It's a matter of roll. How far these things may have travelled from their source. This is the system of archaeology we inherited from the British. In Tamil Nadu we have no perennial rivers. The river is only full for part of the year and you have to take into account the weight of the objects. Most of these coins have maybe only travelled a few kilometres. Except for terracotta which is lighter.

FN: She moves on to talk about an excavation site she's been working on for the past six years. The site is in Kondapur, Telangana.

R87: Everyone thought it was a Buddhist site and that was never questioned. But I have always thought it wasn't. We proved that it was not a Buddhist site. It was a tantric Brahminical site. A fertility cult with Siva worship.

FN: She continues to talk in some detail about this site, the excavations they conducted and what was discovered. I find it a very interesting site. She shows me a powerpoint she has been preparing and many photo's as well as a printed excavation report. I ask if there are any papers she has written on the subjects that are available to read. She says not yet, that's what she's working on now.

R87: Terracotta beads, many coins, green jasper beads. We found really fantastic beads. Mala beads. We found one full mala - in the excavation report pictures many of the beads found in the excavation had been re-strung into necklaces by R87 herself), Roman coins of

Tiberuis and roman pottery, many mother goddess figurines (worship of Devi – Lajji Gowri), male and female terracotta figurines, bones evidencing animal sacrifices.

FN: She gives me her email contact and tells me I can contact her whenever I like with any questions. I leave it at that as we've been talking for quite a long while and I don't think there is anything to be gained by trying to divert the conversation back to the antiquities trade at this point. I feel that she still probably doesn't understand the subject of my research. She sees me as a fellow archaeologist and assumes that if I'm studying the trade and collection of antiquities it must be the ancient trade rather than present-day trade. But we have left on very good terms, so I am hoping if I contact her by email I can make things clearer and ask her a few key questions.

A84) B: 18/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R88

Language: English

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: I am attending a national coin exhibition in Mumbai. I have been sitting at the back of the room watching a coin auction for Oswal Auctions. At the end of the auction an elderly man who approaches me to talk.

FN: He asks me if I'm here to buy or to sell coins. I tell him neither, I'm a researcher from the UK and I'm interested in coin collectors. He wants to see my catalogue and asks if there were any gold coins sold. I show him several in the catalogue but he says he's only interested in gold Gupta coins. He's from Delhi and he's been collecting Gupta coins for several years. He says there is a very good market for these coins in Asia. Buddhist people like to buy them he says, in Japan and China and South East Asia, so you can make a good profit. He reaches into

A. Lawson

his shirt breast pocket and takes out 5 small gold coins in coin pouches. I ask him if they are very valuable and point to one. No, he says this one is only 40,000 rupees. He points to another, but this one is about 2 lakh. I assume from the direction of his talk that he is a very business/money minded collector interested in investment rather than history. However he now starts to talk about the Gupta dynasties and then the Mauryans. He asks about my research and wants to know which historic sites in India I've visited. He says there is so much history in India which people don't know about or don't take care of. He says there are Mughal buildings here where he lives and people steal the bricks for construction work. He blames the ASI and says they need to provide better protection. Some places, he says, are very well cared for, but others are neglected. He gives me his mobile number and asks me to visit him in Delhi if I ever come. He would like to talk more about history.

A85) B: 18/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R89

Language: English

Duration: approx. 10 mins

Context: I meet R89 at a coin exhibition in Mumbai. He is seated behind the desk of 'Stephen Coins', an American dealing company. He tells me he does not work for the company, but he is a friend of the man next to him who does. I explain that I am collecting information and interviews for my PhD and he is happy for me to take notes while we talk.

FN: He is a young man from Mumbai who grew up in large part in the USA. He has a blog called indiacoins.org which he asks me to have a look at. I say that I'm interested to find out what the market for Indian coins is like in the US. He tells me that there was a boom in the 1990's

with lots of expats wanting to buy Indian coins. Indian economy was rising too and becoming more open to the coin trade. He himself started collecting 25 years ago in the US. He collected American coins.

R89: It was/is a very different market, much less frustrating or confusing than the Indian market. Here everyone is trying to cheat you and you never really know what you're getting. There everything was easy and open and there were set prices.

I1: Are south Indian coins are very much collected in the USA?

R89: Not so much. The script is a problem. People can't read it. So they cant identify the coins. That's generally true for Indian coins outside India. And even inside India. The most popular coins are British India because they're easy to read.

FN: We talk a little more. He thinks that Archaeology is an interesting subject and asks if I've heard of Ashoka. He thinks Ashoka is one of the most interesting and important rulers in history because he's unique in the world as a conqueror who renounced war and violence. He says that if India could get back something of what Ashoka taught then it would be a much better country.

A86) B: 19/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R92

Language: English

Duration: approx. 15 mins

Context: This is the second day of the Mumbai coin exhibition, and yesterday I agreed with R92, the owner of Oswal Auctions, to meet him here today for an Interview. I sit with him at the Oswal Auctions desk.

FN: I tell him that I went to the auction he conducted yesterday and I was hoping he could identify which of the coins came from Tamil Nadu.

R92: When we auction we cover all regions. All the coins on auction yesterday come from 'local sources'.

I1: I want to know if any are from Tamil Nadu

FN: He points out a few that are from south India but doesn't offer any specifics. He then tells me a bit about the background of his auction house.

R92: It all started in 2004. You were able to get a license to auction coins from ASI. Todywalla was the first. For us the senior Todywalla supplies the licence while I and [inaudible] bring the expertise. Oswal auctions started in 2009. Now there are around seven or eight houses I think. But most of those don't have inside expertise. They are businessmen but they have to bring in a coin specialist as an advisor. I know coins well, by script, by type, by find spot. The source should be good to be sure of authenticity.

I1: How do you source coins from Tamil Nadu?

R92: It's a little difficult to get consignments. You need to be accepted in that area to get coins. Many of the dealers there only speak Tamil so language becomes a problem. See the main thing is we should get the coins direct from local sources and they should be coins that will sell. It has to be sustainable, which is why we get consignments direct from local sources.

FN: I want to see if I can find out anything about the customers who bid in the auction yesterday but I anticipate this will be difficult and R92 will not want to give me any details. I ask first about a bidder I noticed coming up a lot, number 774. This bidder already seemed to have placed bids on quite a number of the items.

R92: Yes, you see the auction starts online several days before. So many items have already been bid on. There are some customers who can't attend the auction so some pre-bid online, others in writing. 774 was an absentee bidder.

FN: I then ask he can give me any information about the customers/bidders. Not specifics like names but general information like where some of them come from. He seems unwilling to answer this and says that he has to go somewhere for a few minutes. He calls over a young man at the stall and says he will be a good person for me to speak to then he leaves.

A87) B: 19/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, spontaneous

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R93

Language: English

Duration: approx. 15 mins

Context: I have been interviewing R92 of Oswal Auctions at the Mumbai coin exhibition, but he has excused himself. He sends a friend of his to me, R93, who he tells me is a coin collector.

FN: The man he has called over is a coin collector it seems, though like all the others I have met, he also sells coins. He's from Mumbai. I ask him if he has a special interest.

R93: Yes, I like Presidency coins. You see I think it was when Charles, Charles II, married Catherine of Braganza, the islands of Bombay were given as a wedding gift from Portugal. He gave them to the East India Company and it became the Bombay Presidency.

I1: I ask if he has any knowledge of or interest in coins from Tamil Nadu.

R93: No not really, but if your interested in Tamil coins you really have to speak to R90. He's an expert in that area.

I1: How did you first become interested in coins?

R93: My uncle was a collector of coins. I've been collecting since I was a child.

I1: Do you keep your collections from back then?

R93: No not all, see all collectors sell coins too. What happens when you're very young and are just starting out is you don't pay attention to quality. Maybe you're just looking for one more coin to complete your set and you find it, but it's not the best quality. Later you sell those poorer ones on. That's how it works.

I1: So are collections ever kept long term or are they always being sold on?

R93: See I think most people hope their sons or nephews or nieces will get interested in it so they can pass on their collections to them, but that hardly ever happens.

I1: So what happens instead?

R93: I guess some people donate them to museums. Many times they'll be sold off. People get so attached to their coins. It becomes an obsession. I've seen marriages break down. I even know of one lady, who when her husband died she called a jeweller and had him melt down all of her husbands coin collection into metals. I think she was so angry at her husbands coin obsession she wanted to make a point.

I1: I haven't met any women yet who are interested in coin collecting. It seems a very male hobby.

R93: Yes I don't know any women collectors in India, but I've seen some from the USA. Maybe they'll be more in the future. Coin collecting is still expanding in India. It really took off after 2010. There used to be just one auction a year, now there are more than fifty.

I1: What do you think the appeal of coins and coin collecting is?

R93: For a lot of people it's an investment. Coins can be of gold or silver but the value is much more than that. It's a very high value in a very small package. I was with one guy earlier who took out a coin from his pocket to show R90. That coin was very rare. I thought 'that's 4-5 lakh right there in his pocket'. He just took it out for a minute then put it back. You would never know he was carrying 5 lakh in his shirt pocket.

FN: I try to ask him more about how value is determined or created in coins. He doesn't quite know how to answer. Its not just about metal he says. or just rarity or condition. He takes out a coin from his backpack to show me.

R93: It's a Madras Presidency silver rupee. Look, this has been re-struck on an old Portuguese coin. If you look closely you can see the outline of the shield underneath. At that time there was a lack of silver in the Presidency so that's why there were reusing older currency.

I1: Is this rare?

R93: I think so. I'm making a study of this now.

I1: So will it increase its value?

A. Lawson

R93: This coin is already increasing in value right now. I bought it from one guy who sold it to me this side up. I don't think he even saw anything different about it. Now the guy in the next stall is asking twice as much for one.

I1: There are a lot of stalls here selling only notes and stamps. Are the same people collecting both old coins and paper money?

R93: It's more about affordability. I first started by collecting stamps. Then some memorial addition coins. Only later I moved into collecting old coins. You need more money and more knowledge for that.

A88) B: 19/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R94

Language: English

Duration: approx. 5 mins

Context: I meet R94 at a coin exhibition in Mumbai. He is a coin dealer for an American company called Stephen Album, who have a desk here at the exhibition. I noticed him early on yesterday since he appears to be the only westerner represented here as a dealer. I've tried to speak to him several times, but on each occasion he has been busy talking to somebody. Today I manage to catch him when he is not busy and we have a very short conversation.

FN: I start by telling R94 about my PhD research and that I'm interested to know a little more about the international trade in Indian coins. He says that Indian coins are collected all over the place, mentioning the USA, Canada and China. He has come to Mumbai from Shanghai where there is a collector of Indian coins.

R94: He's a very savvy guy. He saw the Indian economy growing and the rising value of Indian coins.

FN: I ask about the market for Indian coins in USA. He mentions Sikh coins, which he says are popular with NRI – expat Indians. I ask if

expat Indians are the major consumers of Indian coins in the USA. He says no, the majority are Americans. I see that right now he has no old coins for sale. He talks about the legal restrictions in India, the 100 year rule, hence he's not buying or selling anything older here today. I ask him if there is a market for south India coins, particularly Tamil coins in USA. He says not so much. The script is more of a problem for most collectors. In any case the legislation in India makes exporting a problem. An Indian man approaches him at this point with several coins he's offering for sale. They are European I think, 18th or 19th century. R94 takes a look and declines them, saying he can buy the much cheaper in Germany.

A89) B: 20/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, pre-arranged

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R95

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I was introduced to R95 at a coin exhibition yesterday. He is the owner (or co-owner, it seems his wife is the actual owner) of what I have been told is one of the oldest and most well known antique shops in Mumbai, Phillips Antiques. Yesterday he invited me to visit the shop this morning and talk to him further. I arrive at the shop at 11:30. It's only a short walk from the hotel. The shop is bright open and luxurious in décor with polished wood floors. The immediate impression is an emphasis on decorative wood-carving, There are large temple chariot pieces near the door. I immediately spot a carved wood door panel like the ones I've seen in Tamil Nadu. Also wooden yalli's from doorframes.

FN: This business is from his wife's family and has been in existence for almost 100 years. It was established as a pharmacy in 1860 but was acquired by his wife's great grandfather in 1920 and converted to selling antiques. He says there was a good market for such things at

that time with the British presence. Twenty years ago they sold mainly glass items such as bowls, vases, chandeliers and mirrors. Now they have moved over to selling mostly what he calls 'tribal and folk art'. He mentions the carved wood and also Bhuta/Boota, which I haven't heard of before. These are a type of brass work from Karnataka, in the form of figures and masks. I ask him about his interest in coins and if they sell coins here at the shop. He says yes they do sell some coins. His own area within the shop is in furniture and coins. They only sell a small selection of coins, some of the best quality and most sought after, mainly British India and some Mughal. I ask about Tamil coins and south Indian coins in general.

R95: The thing about south Indian coins is they're very small. Also there isn't much in the middle period. You get the very old Chola and Pandya, and then you get the Madras Presidency, but there isn't much in between. Usually when people start collecting, they start with British India coins because they're ways to read. Then they might move to Mughal, because the Urdu is still more accessible to some Indians.

FN: I ask him what he personally collects and he says Indo-Greek and Mughal period onwards (towards present). He says that while previously exporting was quite a big part of the shops market, now the Indian market has grown and is the main focus. This has meant that there is no longer any limit on how old the things they sell are since they are selling within the country they can sell very old pieces. Kutch furniture – it's made from exotic woods and not too heavily carved.

I1: I ask about they type of customer who the store attracts.

R95: People want larger more showy pieces nowadays. Most people just want something showy. They don't care about age. The demand for small collectibles is less than it used to be. But there are still customers who are collectors – for things like bhuta bronzes and chariot panels. They will collect themes and gods etc.

FN: Price marks: Burma lacquerware box – 8,500 rps, Wood panel 95,000 rps, Yalli 45,000

A90) B: 20/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R96

Language: English

Duration: approx. 20 mins

Context: I have been taken on a tour of Chor Bazaar by a local Parsi man (R97) who I met yesterday at a coin exhibition in Mumbai. This particular shop and its owner, R96, is known well to R97. I explain my research interest to R96 and ask him a few questions about his business.

FN: R96 says he exports a lot. He knows of Karaikudi and of the Chettiar houses. I ask if he is able to export the Chettinad doors and pillars and he says yes.

R96: You need permission from ASI to say they are not antique. Many of them are not anyway, its difficult to say. And if you put some money under the table everything becomes non-antique. After all how much can you keep?

FN: He has a lot of European style antique furniture and glass lamps and chandeliers. He says theres a good market for this in the UK and USA. I ask again if there's every any difficulty in exporting these things.

R96: No, there's no problem in exporting European art, only in exporting Indian religious art, like gods and icons.

FN: He tells me to go to Portobello Road in London and mentions Hurst Antiques. And he says there are some big antique fairs in UK though he cant remember the names. He mentions Greys or possibly Grace Market. He also tells me I should visit Jodhpur if I can and there is a big antique market there and lots of replication work in old furniture. He tells me to speak to the owner of Prince Arts in Jodhpur.

A91) B: 21/04/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Mumbai

Interaction Participants: I1, R91, R98

Language: English

Duration: 00:54:45

Context: I met R91 at the coin auction/exhibition here in Mumbai at the weekend. He invited me to come to his home today for an interview. When I arrive I find that both he and his father (R98), the founder of the Todywalla Auction business are here and both are interested and happy to participate in a recorded interview.

I1: Basically I am doing a PhD in Archaeology department. I am looking into different perceptions about archaeology and specifically about antique objects in India, mainly the coins coming from Tamil Nadu. Now I am very interested to see the other side of the market. I just wanted to know how it started and how people are interested in collecting coins in the last 20 years from your point of view, like where the coins are coming from and how much is the interest in collecting coins?

R91: The scenario is completely changed in the last decade and a half.

I1: Since 2000?

R91: Only in 2000, coin prices were mediocre and Indian coins were illegally smuggled out. But by then, we are already doing regular auctions once in every six months. At that time, the trade was like a hush trade. People did not want to talk about it and the transactions were all in cash. Nobody wanted to bring their...

I1: I have looked at the legislations a couple of times, there is nothing wrong in buying and selling coins in India. There were some legislations and you have to have a license for everything. Now that is quite common.

R91: Yes. I will come to that thing. It is entirely a different area. It was a hush thing. People transacted through cash and nobody ever wanted

to give a cheque. So, when we started the auctions, we did our first auction in 80s, it was without government license. My dad, you don't believe we not only have to knock at the door, we have to bow down to open the gates in a way. People really did not want to transact with us because they did not want to pay a cheque. And that slowly changed because they have to pay service tax and vat, which were completely unheard of at that time.

I1: At that time what is the requirement of people like you to pass down to the buyer?

R91: First let me get to the legislation. When the antiquities law came about, it was required that any antiquity must get registered with the government. That includes photographs, filling up lengthy two-page form and those photographs should be in multiple. A few like-minded people including my dad filed a case against this law. With a simple argument that it is absolutely impossible to register coins because they are in the millions and billions. One cannot register all the coins in your house. One can understand if it has a statue or an artifact. It is one of its kinds.

I1: When did this happen?

R91: The law came about in 1970s if I can remember correctly.

I1: When did your father filed a case?

R91: I think it was in the late 70s or the 80s. They got them removed. They removed the coins from being registered.

I1: And this incident happened around 80s?

R91: Yes. Or probably in late 70s. I can't remember. Unfortunately what has happened is, because of this law, there are many people who feel that the coins are to be registered. The need for government to be clearer in this law.

I1: Because I did not. When I read through the act, I could not find anything explicitly saying that the coins are not to be registered.

R91: I think it is now in the act. It has not been updated for a very long time, may be for last two decades. I think, it exempts coins. I am quite sure it exempts coins. So that is where the legislation stands. Now, I will tell about the coins outside the country that was happening till the

early 2000. Then we started importing coins back to India. Because people like my father saw that the future is here and not in the west. Whenever there is an auction for coins, he would try to get them back.

I1: Where did you get most of Indian coins from?

R91: Most coins come from London because most auctions houses have coins like Spink. In 80s, the Glendenings was the biggest name. They had done some of the most prestigious auctions. Glendenings, Bloomsbury and then Christy's were doing some auctions. So you buy from everybody. Now the unfortunate part is, in the last four or five years, the customs are not sure about the law. I would not say not sure, but they were not aware of the law. As you would know, any item that is over a hundred years should not be exported to other countries. But that is not the case for imports.

I1: Especially of Indian origin.

R91: Absolutely. Customs confuse the two so they do not allow the imports either, saying that it is banned. So our argument is that, antique coins are not banned, its not firearms or narcotics. But still the customs have not understood the fine print of their own law.

R91 to R98: I was telling I1 about the issue of registering coins and you people went to high court regarding that. When was that?

R98: I was not there at that time. But what happened is they said all coins have to be registered. So petitions were sent out from different sources. Mainly from numismatic societies of India. A copper coin would be worth some five rupees, but to get it photographed and registered would be worth more than the coin. And after the rule came, they argued that the coins need not to be registered. But what is your thesis on?

I1: My thesis is on interest in collecting antiquities in India.

R98: Ok. Have you read the Act? It says the act is to regulate the export of antiquities. It doesn't say the Act is to ban the export of antiquities. In those days, some forty years ago, there was going to be a regulation. A body was to be formed. But nothing was formed. The government has just slept on it for all these years. They say that you cannot export antiquities, while the act gives permission to the director

general to allow the export of antiquities. After the act came, a dealer went to the Gujarat High Court, and the government said if you have license and then if you apply for export of heritage items we will give you permission. But nothing has happened. Nothing. They think we, the collectors and all that, are just non-touchables.

R91: So that's what I was telling her, that in the early 2000's it was a very hush-hush trade. But that's not the case anymore.

R98: In 2007, the government has ordered us to stop our auction. We went to high court and it gave us permission to continue our auction.

R91: It took some six years or more to get a license because we are the first to apply for a license after the gap of two decades. So the government was very reluctant. Dad managed to get a license after about six years. One of the conditions before getting that license was that that we have to carry out our business from a particular address and of course the address would be our office address. An auction cannot happen in an office. We were doing it in a smaller venue called Tejpal. Now we are moved to World Trade. But it was a much smaller venue. So the licensing authority said that they wont allow us to do auction at Tejpal, because the license is for your office.

R98: That is why we went to the high court. There they had no excuse but to say 'they were conducting an auction in a public place but their license to deal is for their office'. I have license to deal in the state of Maharashtra. It does not say that the license is to deal in a particular office, because I will go to somebody's house to buy it or sell it. It is practical to say so. But they give this as an excuse. The license fee is just 2000 rupees. So they said 'just give us another 2000 rupees' and they gave us a new license for the public place. So that's how we got our second license in four hours. After that ten other people have come up. We were the leaders.

R91: See the government work on precedence. They want an example so that other offices or other government employees can follow that example. So the first license took six years. But subsequently it's been very easy. They just wanted the precedence of how it needs to be.

I1: So now it feels like coin trade has opened up and I see it everywhere, on Facebook and eBay...

R98: But now we are fighting to get the import restriction...because India the only country in the world which shoes away their own imports and want to analyse a person and make him pay through his nose, put these fines and penalties. We have been knocking the door of customs department and cultural ministry but they don't have ears.

I1: Are they objecting to all kinds of import?

R98: No. For the import of antiquities, the remark says that one should abide by the rules and the country from where you are importing. It means you do not smuggle things out. But the goods coming through the official cargo channel or courier channel is not smuggling. And you can see what are the rules of a country from where the goods are coming. Like if it is from UK... Where are you from?

I1: I am from UK.

R98: So if you are coming from UK, the UK law says that if you have an item over 65000 pounds, you need a license. For anything under that you don't need a license, for numismatic items. But here the idiots would say, 'no, no, you need a license so get a license'. They confiscated a shipment of about 50000 pounds, because they said that the person did not get his European license. And its all an assumption. I would say they want to throttle anyone to do with antiques here to get something from them.

R91: So imagine from the collector's point of view, even this barricade is opened up, anybody can sit in front of the internet can order coins from any part of the world. That would open up Indian collecting even furthermore. That is what we are working forward.

R98: It is a culture of the people manning the customs. In 1978, you can quote me on this, when I went to England I had some medals of 1897 Victoria. The custom officer told me there in UK, there is no duty or anything, but I would need a customs broker to clear me into the country. But as I was bringing back to England the English medals of Queen Victoria, he said 'Mr Todywalla go, you are welcome'. But in

India you bring in a Mughal coin or a Gupta coin or a Kushan coin, they persecute you.

I1: Is it just the fact that they are not aware of...?

R98: The law is very clear and the rules are very clear. But it is just harassment. It is a law that you can bring anything, if you are coming after six months overseas, you can bring in anything gold and silver, except studded jewellery. And the customs was allowing that for years. But for last two years they say that gold and silver in any form doesn't include anything. But the law also clearly says that the only thing which is not allowed along with gold and silver the studded jewellery. It includes ornaments also. Anything except studded jewellery. But here they say no.

R91: You mentioned simplistically that they are not aware. That's only partly right, I will tell you why. Not aware is the bloke that you see at the airport which is standing at the red channel. He will not be aware fair enough. But once we petition his bosses these commissioners, and they are giving us a reply, they are giving us a reply after looking at their custom manuals and laws. At that time we can't say that they are not aware. Of course they are aware but they do not want to do it.

I1: At this moment, now the trade is picked up in India, where are most of your coins coming from?

R98: From multiple source all over India. From collectors, dealers, sharafas?, jewellers etc

R91: It is practically from every part of the country.

I1: I am curious to how much is new and how much is re-circulating?

R98: It is all re-cycled only. You can't say it is a new treasure trove found because then the treasure trove belongs to government.

I1: True. But is there not some change in that also?

R98: No. The treasure trove is the same everywhere. The finders have to surrender it and they have to pay market value.

I1: I spoke to ASI in Chennai, and I asked, because I've been myself to the riverbeds where they dig for coins. And the ASI knows this happens. They are complicit.

R98: You just ask them 'what have you paid in compensation in the last thirty years'?. Ask the Collector of the town what they have paid in compensation for the treasure trove that has been found.

R91: See the rules in England are very simple. The finder finds something there is a committee made and the finder is paid the market value. Here it is completely different. If a finder finds something and if he is silent about it, he can use that to his benefit, he can sell it. But even if a few people know, the first thing is the police come in and those guys are harassed, police confiscate it, and that's about it. There is no room for any compensation or any reward. As per the rules, it is if you find anything that is one foot underground, that belongs to the government.

R98: If something is found one foot underground, belongs to government which means the compensation is paid. Whatever is found on the surface is.... I don't think they are bothered about that also. And because the treasure trove compensations are not paid adequately, it is not being promoted well. In Maharashtra Archaeology there treasure troves lying there. A scholar of international repute, John Deyell, was here to study those, but he was not given access. He was given permission and told to come a particular day, but...

R91: John Deyell is the author of "Living without Silver." For an M.A. student that is like a textbook. It is the foremost work on medieval coins. He is a very big authority and he was trying to get access but he is not given any access. It's ridiculous. I mean a regular bloke can go to the BM and make an appointment and he'll be shown everything. Where as if you go to the Museum (here) they'll be looking at you with a suspicious eye. As a student, did you face anything like this?

I1: I never got access to the collection at the Madras museum.

R98: You can please quote me - an Indian scholar or Indian dealer, if he wants to learn about coins, he can't study that in India. He has to go to BM or Oxford or Cambridge to study them.

I1: Have you ever been able to go the any of the museums...

R98: They don't allow you.

I1: Nobody gets permission?

R98: Yes, nobody. We have a very different culture. If you go to any UK show, or any US show, the curators are there and they talk to the collectors and dealers. Here they just think they are the gods up there...That's the situation in India.

I1: Have you started it in 1970s?

R98: I started it in 1967.

I1: As a collector?

R98: I started as a collector, then after a few I started digging into it.

I1: How did you first begin collecting?

R98: Can you get that down? (points a framed newspaper advertisement 'reward – search for rare old coins') This comes into a comic book.

I1: This is the one with which you started?

R98: Yeah. When I read this, and when I found my grandfather's collection of coins when he had visited UK in 1925. He had a box of copper coins, silver coins. From there I picked it up. I had a guru for whom we celebrated Shukla exhibition. That was the 24th exhibition we have did it in the name of Shukla. He was the curator for many museums. You need a Xerox of this?

I1: No. I will just take a photograph. Can I take a photo of you with this? So at that time was there much of a community of collectors?

R98: No it was very small community, and at that time there was a lot of control like gold control, silver control. There was a control from the seafront up to fifty miles, nobody can possess silver worth more than 15000 rupees, and nobody can possess gold coins because gold control was there.

I1: Why was that enforced?

R98: It may be because of smuggling and all that. And the gold control was put during the last China war I think. When I started in 67, there was lots of freedom but still it can be done better. Like UK allows gold imports without vat. Or what you call, gold investment scheme. But here India doesn't allow its own coins to come in.

I1: Do you think there won't be a much bigger market for Indian coins?

R91: If you look at history, for any market, the more you open up, the market grows. If you look at India in post 1991, once the government opened the floodgates for foreign companies to come and invest, India has grown. So it is only a natural extension. If you open up something, there will be more interest generated, just for the fact that things become much more simple to do. So yeah it would further, exponentially grow.

I1: I am also interested to know, at the moment, if there is any particular region or type of coins that's growing popular?

R98: The most popular coin is the British India coin. Then come the Mughals and princely states, but now in the last year or so people are interested in ancient coins also.

I1: And do you see much from Tamil Nadu?

R98: See when I started in 67, practically there were no collectors from South India. No Interconnection. The lowest one was from Poladpur in Goa on this side. But now there is complete...we have three or four major shows in the South. Its integration I would say. The numismatics integration has come up in the last 20 years or so.

I1: Is the script or language a barrier to people collecting more from south India?

R98: It is not like that. In my early years south Indians were more collecting foreign coins than Indian coins. But now everyone is collecting different subjects. But still foreign coins are stronger in the south.

I1: Really?

R98: Yeah.

R91: British India as well. And of course south Indian coinage is very strong, like Tipu. Very Strong. Why do you think British India is so popular?

I1: I don't know, maybe the condition and availability is better?

R91: No, it's the English script. Because of the interest to read. Because if you gift somebody a Mughal coin, they wouldn't know head nor tail about it. They wouldn't know who the ruler is or the mint, or the

date in fact, they wouldn't even be able to read the date. That is why it is easier for people to collect.

I1: And the most expensive of the coins are those that have some rarity, its that true?

R91: No. See we meet lot of people who have coins, and everyone of them that we meet who are not collectors, they are under a misconception that the older the coin, the more expensive it should be. I always start off saying that the coin market is like any other market, it is driven by simple economics of demand and supply. So the coin whose demand is high and supply is less, that is going to be more expensive than the coin whose supply is abundant. So the price is driven by the rarity rather than the oddity. In the case of Mughals, it will be a gold coin, a big gold coin, as in....gold Mohurs are common, but an Ahmedabad Mohur versus a Patna Mohur coin will have a huge difference in pricing, one is a lakh other one is five lakh. So it depends on various things for each category. For Moghuls it is on the ruler and the mint, for Guptas it is the rulers and the variety. So there are various combinations and permutations within that particular sector of coin collecting. So fine Mohurs of Akbar, nobody in my generation has seen. So that would be worth hundreds and hundreds of thousands of rupees.

I1: How rapidly has the price of Indian coins increased in, say the last twenty years?

R91: I can't tell you for last twenty years. But I can tell you from early 2000.

R98: If you take out auction catalogue 2005

R91: All our catalogues are online. And we've made advanced search very easy. So if you put in William Mohur, you will see one sold in 2005 for X amount and 2007 and current price list. You will be able to see the whole spectrum. You can do that for broad base popular coins like a Gupta Kacha. A very popular coin, common and you are able to see it how it's risen. You should see that for William II Mohur, because that's a very, very classic and very popular coin. So a couple of these things will give you an idea. People have tried to come out with these

poncey schemes which we don't subscribe to and never advise to clients. People will say that if you invest in Indian coins they will double in value in two years. I think that's a sham. A few things have risen rapidly, but I don't see anything that has doubled in two years. We have seen things doubling in three or four years. Still, up 20 or 25%. It is possible, but not in the area of coin collecting.

I1: How much do you know about your customers? I've noticed there are not any female collectors!

R91: There are actually. They are both south Indians. One is Beena Sarasan, I don't mind giving the other person's name but she will not appreciate...she is quite private. She is a doctor.

I1: Is she from South India?

R91: Yes, from South India, Madras. Beena Sarasan is from Trivandrum. There is one more lady, she is a dealer, the wife of a dealer, and her name is Niha Jain. And she is based out of Delhi. So the husband and wife run a shop in Delhi. There is one lady, she was the president of the Delhi coin society and her name is Jothi Rai.

R98: She collects Sikh coins

I1: The lady in Madras, is she a member of society?

R91: Yes.

I1: I am looking forward to meet her. If I went to that society and introduce myself, will I be able to meet her naturally.

R91: No. The society may not know of her. I may give the name and phone number. We will tell her and you can introduce yourself then.

R98: What you are doing? A research or what?

I1: Yes. My PhD.

R91: Anyway you can take down her number. Her name is Dr Priya Chandrashekha.

I1: Do you see any similarities in people who collect coins?

R91: All kinds of people, and from different occupations and professions. We don't have many industrialists like in west who can buy a half a million pound coin. You won't find many of them in India. But they may buy a half a million pound artefact or contemporary

painting, but probably not for coins. The collectors are a mixed bunch. Doctors, lawyers.

I1: Do you have any idea about the interest in Indian coins outside India?

R98: Yeah there are a lot. But it's declining. In 1970's, there were many people collecting, more in Europe, UK, USA. There the collectors may have increased but they mostly people of Indian origin now.

R91: The reason why Europeans and Americans are collecting Indian coins is because it was cheaper to buy Indian coins than to buy their coins. So that's one of the key reasons for collecting. There were other high commissioners...

R98: You are from which place?

I1: I come from Exeter which is in Southwest England between...

R91: We have been there.

R98: My daughter is in Oxford. She did her masters in Indian History and Culture and she did her M.A. dissertation on Kushans. She worked for some time in the British Museum.

I1: Why did you go to Exeter?

R91: There was a problem with the Mercedes my sister and my brother-in-law bought, and they sold it to a dealer there. So we went there.

I1: Have you noticed any interest for Indian coins in countries like China and Southeast Asian countries?

R91: We hear about it but we are not in touch with anybody. Simply because Indian coins are not allowed to be exported so why would anyone want to touch base with us, they will go to Baldwins or somewhere else. But I think British India and Kushan coins are moving in Southeast Asia.

I1: Thank you so much for your help. Are you happy for me to use this interview in my thesis?

R91: yeah Sure.

R98: Yes you can always quote us.

I1: Can I get a picture of both of you together? When is your next auction?

A. Lawson

R91: Probably in July.

I1: Here in Mumbai?

R91: Yes.

I1: Have you done auctions in Chennai?

R91: Yes. Fifteen years ago.

R98: We did one in Chandigarh, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Rajkot, Pune, Hyderabad and everywhere.

R91: But Chennai market is quite peculiar. There are only few people doing south Indian coins but most handle British India. People are also interested in many other things. It is quite different from what we see elsewhere.

A92) B: 04/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R100

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I have been in contact with R100 via email. She is unable to meet me in person but agrees to a telephone interview.

I1: Background – how Dakshinachitra came about?

R100: I came over here as an anthropologist, was working in western Tamil Nadu as an anthropologist on a nutrition project. Then of course I married a Chettiar, after I had been accepted by the family, it took seven years. When I went to Chettinad and saw the different houses I became interested, thought about how long this would last and how important it would be to start some projects to record and preserve something of these things before its all lost. And then doing a PhD I realised how hard it is to do anything like this from outside the community. I never intended to start a museum. I have no museum experience. But I am good at research. So I founded a society with six likeminded people. We had no money. We did a huge amount of

A. Lawson

fundraising. We gained some funding from companies, mainly based in South India. 1 Lakh per company. And then we gained matching grants from the Department of Handicrafts in the Ministry of Culture. We also had to wait for some land. The government granted us the land but it took a long time. Then my main job was to incentivise volunteers, that was the most important part because for Dakshinachitra to run we needed volunteers.

I1: How has it been received?

R100: Public - Madras adores it. We get 20,000 visitors per year. But it took a long time, eight years. Slowly people started to realize that it wasn't an elite institution. Now we get many middle class families. I would say most of our visitors now come from the middle class. We recently did a 'granparents day', where grandparents and children got in free. It's now on the 'map of Chennai'. Though it's still a little hard for people from north Chennai to reach.

Government - The land came from the Government and early on they gave a grant of 15 lakh. So in that sense they've been supportive. And once a year they give us 15-25 lakh to organise the Pongal event. But other than that no. One of the things we get asked is 'why are you doing this sort of thing?'. There is the idea that museums and heritage matters are the preserve of the government, and they can be unsupportive of independent institutions like Dakshinachitra. But we have tried to say that Dakshinachitra is both - the land is from the government while much of the funding, the work and support is independent. Right now is a very bad time for heritage and culture in India. The current government are very much of that view that culture and heritage are political matters. I recently signed a petition about this, though I'm currently applying for Indian citizenship and this may not help matters!

I1: How did you source and select building materials?

R100: The Chettinad house was very difficult. I looked for three and a half years. I looked and looked but could find a proper house. In 1991 I purchased the front door and the columns from a house in Kombarur. But I couldn't find a whole house. It has to be a whole house, you can't

put it together from bits and pieces of different houses as it wont fit together properly. The only part of the Chettinad house that came from a different building was the front door and the pillars. The door of the main house I had its panel missing anyway. Often people sold the fancier parts of the house to pay for roof repairs or something. Then quite by fluke when I was just leaving Karaikudi, having searched and searched in Chettinad for a house, I met a man who said he knew a house that he could show me. His name was Mr Subramaniyan. He worked on old wood from demolished houses, turning it into new windows and doors. It turned out that as a young man he had worked for my husband's brother. The house he took me to is the one we bought. The kitchen had burned down. Many of the houses that went onto the market did so because they were no longer liveable, rather than because of poverty. And of course you know how it is in Chettinad. When a wall in my house in Chettinad began to lean it took three months just to get the other family members to give their permission to carry out the repairs. A lot of the houses that we purchased for Dakshinachitra had kitchens that had burnt down. Then of course I needed people who could take the house apart and re-build it for us. And you can't just get anyone to do that. You need local carpenters and builders who know the houses. Mr. Subramaniyan was also able to provide us with carpenters from his workshop who helped construct the house at Dakshinachitra. Altogether it's a very long cumbersome process. All of the buildings at Dakshinachitra are whole houses. First you have to wait for a suitable house to come onto the market, or which is due to be demolished, then you need to find someone to take it apart and put it back together. All of the houses at Dakshinachitra took at least three years.

I1: Why Chettinad House?

R100: The whole settlement was planned and designed by occupation. So merchants was one of the occupations, along with agriculturalist and several others. When I look into it, it seemed that many merchant houses were designed after the Chettinad model, though with some variations. In Pondicherry for example there is more French influence.

A. Lawson

The main difference in the Chettiar houses is the front porch. The first inner courtyard is only for the men of the family, so they needed a way of allowing for entertaining guests who are not members of the family without having to enter the courtyard – so a large front porch was necessary.

I1: Attempts to preserve?

R100: There are only a handful of UNESCO heritage sites in India and the government is only allowed to present one new site per year. The problem is there is a huge amount of paperwork involved in putting together an application and that's not something I'm ready to do. These two French guys should be doing it. This business of turning Chettiar houses into heritage hotels is a very recent thing. The Chettiars are a very insular community and normally the houses would only be opened for weddings and family functions, but the cost of maintenance has meant they have slowly deteriorated and in risk of all being lost. They need income from somewhere if they're to be preserved.

A93) B: 05/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R99

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I arranged this meeting with R99 last week. At that time I was required to submit details and evidence of my purpose and affiliation and then await permission from the Museum Commissioner. Today R99 meets me at his office on the Egmore Museum site. He is happy to be interviewed but prefers that I take notes rather than making an audio recording. He also shows me the record books for all the coin acquisitions that the museum has made dating back to the late 19th century. He is happy for me to see these but maintains that I should not make any copy of it.

FN: He's worked in museums 19 years. From 2006 he's been the Numismatics curator here. Prior to that was based in district museums. Did PhD in temple architecture and inscriptions. Gov museum coin collection – approx. 60,000 coins.

I1: Where?

R99: Storage room/safe place. We display only fibre-glass copies. About one and half years back was attempted robbery. So now don't display any real coins.

I1: How do coins come to museum?

R99: The coins are acquired mainly through the Indian Treasure Trove. Sometimes through exchanges with other province museums. Puddukotai king – got some Roman coins. Re-used metal. From *kasu* (coin) *kadai* (shop) *theru* (street).

I1: What's the process by which coins come as Treasure Trove?

R99: there are 20 district museums. Usually coin hoard will come to notice of village admin officer (Tashidar) who's prime duty is to confiscate treasure trove. Then goes to district curator at district treasury for inspection. They submit report to Commissioner of Museums. After the Commissioner decides it will be given to a Government museum – usually Chennai. All bronzes, stone sculptures and coins will come like that.

I1: can you tell me about any recent cases?

R99: Two punch-marked coins.

I1: How are they discovered?

R99: Discovered accidentally while ploughing a field. Or if a tree uproots. Normally those people wont report it but a rumour will always reach the attention of the tashidar. If it has been found by two or more people the secret cannot be kept. The circumstances of discovery will be recorded and filed away with the coin itself.

I1: Where will the coins be found?

R99: in the mud/earth

I1: In the riverbed?

R99: No. In Tranquebar by the coast there will be Danish coins and some early Chola; There are two classifications of finds: Treasure Trove and accidental finds.

I1: What types of coins does the museum have in its collection?

R99: Wide range: Punch-marked, Roman, Chola, even British.

I1: Do you get any coins from Chettinad region?

R99: From Chettinad we get only the coins of Allagappa. When those houses were constructed they would insert many coins, in the foundation and beneath the main entrance. That is one way you can date the house. It is a tradition to invite wealth to the home. In Karaikal Chinese coins were discovered beneath the temple flagstaff (flagstone).

I1: Does the museum have any antiques from the houses of Chettinad?

R99: There are such things in some district museums. Here we have some things in the Anthropology gallery. We have a scale 3D model of a Chettiar house. Its around 100 years old. I have previously worked as curator at Sivaganga museum. I've seen the houses of Chettinad and I took photographs of the thousand window house.

I1: What part of the museums collection do you find is most popular with museum visitors?

R99: Laymen are attracted by the animals (natural history). The foreigners like the bronze gallery. Elite people are most interested in archaeology and art.

I1: Relationship between coin collectors and museum?

R99: Coin collectors don't come to us. There is a gulf. They are afraid we will catch them. Fifteen years ago people didn't know the value of old coins. All exchanges were done by weight. You could buy a bag of copper coins by weight but now they are sold individually. You can speak to R9. Also Krishnamurthy [shows me an article in a local Tamil newspaper written by Krishnamurthy]. He is rich and can buy any coin. This article he wrote about a coin hoard taken by the State Department. They have held it for research for many years and nobody else has seen it.

I1: If it was treasure trove why did it not come through to the museum?

R99: They got it from a collector first. Most people think only of the State Department or ASI. When they have old things they don't think of the Museum.

FN: He shows me the museums coin acquisition log-books. Earliest record is 1919. At that time he says all coins acquired in India through Treasure Trove were sent to Madras Museum.

A94) B: 08/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Location: Chennai

Interaction Participants: I1, R90

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I have met R90 a couple of times before, last time at the coin exhibition in Mumbai. He invites me to his house for a fairly informal conversation though he's happy for me to take notes for my PhD. I also take the opportunity to ask him to identify some of the coins in the photographs I took with the riverbed diggers.

R90: I am businessman (banking business) collecting coins hobby and side business. Would like a qualification in numismatics but choices for coin studies in India is small. Would have to travel to Bombay.

I1: Riverbed digging – where?

R90: River Pallar (nr Vellur), Kanchi – kaveripattinam, Tanjavur belt (Nayak, presidency, gold Chola – belur), Vaigai near Madurai – specifically Pandaya's

I1: How many?

R90: In one year....approx 10,000 coins? Season from mid feb to mid june. Deep digging necessary. Of coins on market, to my knowledge around 90% will be riverbed coins (or archaeological in origin) while maybe 10% will be from old collections handed down.

I1: Legislation/management of coins in India?

R90: Registration of coins is not possible – because of sheer abundance of coins in India. Possibly should remove coins from Antiquities Act.

I1: Irula?

R90: From Thiruvanamalai (?). Originally they were digging for jewellery, then slowly in interest in gold coins developed. They have been focusing on coins from early 1980's.

I1: Riverbed digging in other parts of India?

R90: North India – waterfall coins. Anytime there is a disaster (flood), all things went to the riverbed. Coin river – Nasik in Maharashtra – it is a good place for Satvahana coins. Cremations – one reason for presence of coins in riverbed. At such ceremonies would throw coins into the river – believed the maximum coin used for this ceremony was gold fanam. But 10-20 years back it was the paise.

I1: Market for Tamil coins?

R90: Two years back I made an effort to take south Indian coins to a Bombay exhibition. They all asked me, 'what is this'? They were interested because the south Indian coins all have deities and kings – Konnerirayam, Thitumangaya, Sundarapataya, Sidputirajas. And collectors from north India are looking for something new. South Indian coins are small and very attractive. With British Indian coins everything is there displayed on the coin – there is no history in it. With south Indian coins there is history.

I1: Provenance, do dealers or collectors care?

R90: People are interested. But they don't want to say. It's important if there is no script to identify a coin. It's difficult to know then if it is say a Tanjore Nyak or Sivaganga Nayak.

I1: Trading on social media?

R90: Buying on Facebook is not good. Its business without any licence. On Ebay there is a commission but it is licenced. On Facebook there are more problems with customers. In south India there are around 100 dealers.

I1: Foreign market?

A. Lawson

R90: There is no demand for Indian coins abroad. All the good things went to British prior to Independence. Now they are coming back. Now there is the awareness to collect only the best quality so such coins are a good future investment. I used to travel to UK once every two months but now much less. Even the coin business has gone down there and they have fewer and fewer Indian coins. In London Spink (speak to R106) and Baldwin sell Indian coins sometimes. Not Sotheby's or Christies, they don't have the expertise. There is no custom at all in USA for Indian coins.

I1: What about the other things found in riverbeds – beads, terracotta etc.?

R90: R9 collects those things. Old rings, terracotta. But they are not so popular. Only local collectors will want them. There is some market for beads, but they are hard to identify. I don't collect any of those things myself.

I1: Are there many Indians collecting foreign coins?

R90: They will collect thematically: wildlife, transport etc.

A95) B: 21/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, spontaneous

Location: Jodhpur

Interaction Participants: I1, R102

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I was given R102's name by R96 in Mumbai. I have also visited their website. It seems that Prince Art is one of the largest of these antique/handicraft exporters in Jodhpur. Their warehouses take up both sides of an entire side street. I go to a reception and explain my purpose, whereupon I'm taken to an office and introduced the R102 who is the business owner/manager. He's very courteous and when we have finished talking he asks a member of staff to give me a full tour of the entire complex. I am also taken to R102's private collection

A. Lawson

(antiques that he particularly prizes and does not wish to sell). I am told that many of the things they sell are copies of things in this collection.

FN: R102 tells me that they are not an antique business anymore. Years ago they were (the business was started by his father 42 years ago) but now most of what they sell is newly produced replication antiques.

R102: And many things I don't want to sell. Many things I will keep.

FN: This sounds strange at first but as I later learn, his father had begun a collection of what he considered really special antiques and this has been kept on by himself. He has his own collection showroom which is not ordinarily open to people but I am allowed in. I notice several of the items in this private collection have served as the blueprints for some replication products (e.g. pair of lions). Where are most of your customers coming from? – He says they are almost completely export focused. No custom in India – only 0.2% he says. They export everywhere – He mentions USA and I ask about UK and Europe. We send the very, very best pieces to Europe. The A+ pieces. Because the B grade pieces you can get there for less anyway (really??). His son asks me about my course and which university I'm studying at. He tells me that he studied at Cardiff University, so he's heard of Exeter. I am taken around the various warehouses. They are very tidy and orderly. They appear to be cleaned/dusted daily. There is a large warehouse with Chettinad/type antiques (Burmese lacquerware, enamel, brass vessels). Refurbishment/workshop area. Wooden pillars and doors (in refurbished condition). There is another huge gated, open-air lot where there are rows and rows of un-refurbished doors and pillars. My guide talks to me while we look: most customers are from USA. There is a customer in China (Shanghai) who provides very good business and orders 3-4 container loads per month. European market not too much. In London there are 3-4 customers, but replica business is bigger there. He says that there is no trouble exporting antique things, especially when it is all mixed up. Once it has been broken and changed it's no longer antique. He is referring to the

A. Lawson

'masala' furniture, made up of bits and pieces of antique wood and furniture.

A96) B: 21/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: semi-formal, pre-arranged

Interaction Participants: I1, R103

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: I first discovered this business on eBay under a different name, Orientalhub. I recognised some of the items they were selling as being very common Chettinad antiques so I sent a message saying that I'm researching antique market in India I would like to visit their shop in Jodhpur. They are happy for me to visit but tell me that the shop is called Prachin Arts (Oreintalhub is their online branch for small, less valuable items that can be sent by post). Their shop is full of all the things I have become used to seeing in Karaikudi antique shops. However it is much more tidy and organised. They also have fewer odd/miscellaneous items and seem instead to have just a selection of the best quality standard things – such as enamelware, lacquerware, wood carving etc. In their office they show me a catalogue for wooden doors and pillars. These are almost all from Tamil Nadu and many from Chettinad, and some are incredibly expensive (eg. Athangudi Palace door – offers of 3.5 crores). These are intended for a foreign market I think.

FN: Customers – Suncity, Prince Art, also exporting to Singapore and USA. Prince Art is one of the top ten exporters in Rajasthan but they don't have any antiques anymore, mainly new/masala. Business is 22 years old – they come from Mangalore. Australian customers like enamelware and crockery. UK customers like Ravi Verma prints. The doors and pillars are popular in USA, Singapore and Belgium. Shekawati in Rajasthan is good for stonework, while Chettinad is good for woodwork. Chose to focus on south Indian antiques because not

A. Lawson

many people in North India are doing it. Lived in Bangalore for two years (89-91) and saw these Chettinad antiques and liked them, so decided to do this.

Prices: chariot panels 600x, Burma ware 24x, enamelware 4x, door 6000x – 1500x, pillar 240x (not sure what x stands for).

A97) B: 22/05/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: Jodhpur

Interaction Participants: I1, R104

Language: English

Duration: approx. 30 mins

Context: This is the company that was mentioned by R20 in Karaikudi as a customer of Bismi Arts. The manager is relatively young – late 20's/early 30's. He is interested to visit Chettinad and wants to ask me what he can get there and where he can stay.

FN: Business is 25 years old. Doesn't know Bismi Arts, but says his father will know them because he is the one who travels all over. Chettinad antiques have a reasonable demand but they are more expensive than things from Rajasthan (transportation). Business is 99% export. They export all over the world – USA, Europe, Australia, UK, Germany, Japan. In UK there are not currently many customers but 7-8 years ago there were a lot more. They sell to other dealers in foreign countries rather than direct to customers and they transport things by lorry size containers (in other words only bulk orders will be financially viable for customers). He says 80% of what they sell is old rest is new. But when I look around the showroom here at least 50% looks new. He says they have another large warehouse on the outskirts of the city.

A98) B: 10/08/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: London

Interaction Participants: I1, R105

Language: English

Duration: 00:42:46

Context: I have spoken to R105 via email and arranged this interview. I meet him in the British Museum Coins and Medals office and he invites me to sit down in a nearby meeting room. Before I start the recording he expresses interest in my research and asks if I can provide the British Museum with a copy of my completed thesis. He agrees to the recording of this interview.

R105: I'm responsible for the south and central Asian collections here at the British Museum. What I actually do is work on a research project on South and South East Asia called 'Beyond Boundaries'. So I'm employed to do research. The museum doesn't have a permanent curator responsible for the South and Central Asian collections (coins). It hasn't since 2001.

I1: So you're primarily involved with research rather than curating jobs?

R105: I do all of the collections material – getting it out, sorting it out, knowing where it is. But that's not what I'm employed for.

I1: What is your background and what got you into this field?

R105: I was employed for the research projects. I had an amateur interest in the early centuries AD, and the museum was looking for someone to participate in a research project to catalogue material and I joined the museum in 2008.

I1: Were you ever a collector yourself?

R105: No. By amateur interest I mean that I was outside of academia. But I have never collected coins. But that's not an unusual route in. The other collection in the UK that has a South and Central Asian person is

Oxford (Ashmolean) and the present curator there is Shailendra Bhandari, I don't know if you've met him?

I1: I haven't yet.

R105: He did collect. It's not uncommon.

I1: Are you involved in museum acquisitions?

R105: Yes, any acquisition that's made in the South of Central Asian collection would be basically made by myself. We don't make very many acquisitions.

I1: That was the other question I was going to ask, about any recent acquisitions?

R105: So to make an acquisition it would be necessary to conform with the institutional policy, and it would be necessary for me to be comfortable with the acquisition itself. So the first one is an official thing and the second one is a practical thing. If I'm not comfortable with it, it isn't going to happen. For that to be the case with India the general rule is relating to the 1970 UNESCO convention. My personal comfort zone is that an object would have to have left its country of origin, either with an export licence, or prior to 1970 or the date on which the country adopted an effective control over antiquities. Whichever of those is earlier. So in the case of India, I would view that as being 1947 and Independence when the current Treasure Act was actually put into force.

I have made several acquisitions which consist of modern material. So either tokens from the 19th or 20th century. For example, the tokens that were made at the Mumbai market recently to cover the loss of short change. And I've made two acquisitions of material that is pre-1900 and not machine made coinage. One of those was a group of coins from the late 19th century, sent to the London Mission Society in about 1905 and stored there until it was transferred to us a few months ago. The other is a Nepalese coin from 1798. On that occasion the lady who donated it to us had a handwritten identification for it signed by Rakhaldas Banerji, the person who excavated Mohenjodaro, and for a year after the completion for his thesis he worked at the museum in Calcutta. So this confirmed that in 1910 the coin was no longer in

Nepal so we were able to acquire that. But you can imagine, that's quite a restricted field.

I1: Yes it is, and I wonder how much material you come across that you cant acquire for those reasons.

R105: Literally everything. Everything that comes up for sale in auctions would be something we couldn't acquire even if we had the budget to do so. Almost everything that I'm offered is in fact, not acquirable. Collectors will ask if it's possible. Its very rare we get to the stage of someone making an offer and having to turn it down. Usually a collector will say to me 'is it possible for us (British Museum) to acquire this in the future?', and I will explain to them that its very unlikely that we'd be able to do so.

I1: And that would apply to both sales and donations?

R105: Yes, regardless of whether or not we pay for it. And regardless of the value of the object. Because most countries do not draw a distinction between high and low value. It's the historical importance of the object that ought to matter, not the financial value, which are usually unconnected.

I1: When your acquiring an object, as well as all the stipulations about provenance etc, do you have an agenda based on what would be good for the collection here?

R105: Yes, we would not generally acquire something unless there was some historical study value associated with it. So the reasons you might acquire are: that there is a gap in the collection where you don't have an example, that the object is studies could yield more information than a superficial glance would, so if it's a hoard or related to a hoard. So the Museum acquired a group of Naga coins in the 1990's which were stored but I've recently worked on them, and they are of interest because they're almost certainly a hoard, so their context gives them an interest. We accepted the material from the Mission Society because of the context of it being something that a European collector had sent back to London, so they considered it important for understanding the local culture, gave it a context which said something more than the objects themselves. Because in that

case we already had examples of that type of coin. That one's quite an interesting one because in 1912 the museum was offered the same material and it cherry-picked a small amount, and the rest of it stayed with the Mission Society. So the curator then, which would have been Walker I think, made a different decision to the one I made. So it's dependant on the curator as much as anything else. So others would have turned it down and said it's not worth the time and effort of registering it.

I1: I'm mainly interested in coins from Tamil Nadu and I wonder how much you see coming your way?

R105: Relatively little South Asian (I think he means south Indian) material comes our way, but that is almost certainly a function of my expertise, rather than the amount of coinage in circulation. A great deal of North Indian and North West Indian material is seen here, but that again is a function of the fact that people are aware that that's something I know something about. We have some research visitors come who are interested in south Indian, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka material. We've had three visitors this year come to look at that sort of material.

I1: Visitors from India?

R105: Yes from India. So we do get people coming to look at the material, but we see a lot less of the material that is in trade and circulation, because the expertise on that area is mostly, in London, with the dealers.

I1: A lot of the coins that I have seen from the riverbeds in Tamil Nadu are very poor quality. Would the quality, preservation, of the coin also be a factor for you in acquiring?

R105: Generally speaking, if you've got a hoard, we'd like to acquire all of it. There's always a sifting process, and within research terms we draw a distinction between a hoard and a parcel. So a hoard being a set of material found in a riverbed together, as opposed to a parcel being a group of material that's in trade that's clearly related but that may represent only a section of an original hoard. It may have been sifted to remove material that's worthless because it's been completely

A. Lawson

effaced by rubbing. Or maybe its been sifted to remove any rarities that can be sold independently, and what you have is a rump of the original material. Stuff that cant be sold independently, so it can be sold on ebay or somewhere as an uncleaned group.

I1: In terms of the material acquired by the museum many years ago, how much information does the museum tend to have on the provenance of those coins, specific information?

R105: Very little. The situation is not fundamentally different to the modern situation. Collectors would usually acquire them by purchase, in the country of origin. So how much information they had would depend upon how much information they got from the source. And then there would be the issue of whether or not they translated that information to the museum. The largest collection, mostly north Indian, that the museum has, is that of Alexander Cunningham, the Director General of the Archaeological Survey. He collected information about the coins, which were almost entirely purchased, so he didn't find them, but as far as we can tell, none of that information transferred from his estate when he died to the museum. In some cases we can link a coin to an original site, but not because information was preserved in the process of acquisition.

I1: So it would be through some kind of later research?

R105: In one particular case, because Cunningham worked on the Bodhgaya excavation, they seem to have been in the habit at the Bodhgaya excavation of this very old fashioned thing of writing in ink on the coins a number to identify them. Some of those numbers survived on the coins, and in one or two cases the coin itself is pictured in the publications and we can match them to the publications and establish that coins numbered in that hand came from Bodhgaya. But yes it's almost always the result of further work. There is a collection stored here that belongs to the British Library called the Mason Collection, or the India Office Collection, and a section of that is south Indian, and it was a collector, I think Mackenzie but I can find out for you, there's been an article published. Those were south Indian coins, and that became apparent as a result of further research. But they had

been transferred to the India Museum when it existed in London, when the India Museum closed they had been transferred to the India Office of the civil service, and then they had been transferred to the British Libraries India reading room at Blackfriars, and when the British Library became independent of the museum and the new site opened near St Pancras, that material was moved when it was found in the filing cabinet there, but it was accompanying material of Charles Vas???. And it was assumed to be part of that collection. It was only once that material was sifted and sorted that it was seen to be coherent and was eventually linked back to originally being collected in south India. But no paperwork survived with that process of movements. And that is often the case. In some cases its not. But usually that's relatively easy to discover. If somebody knew something interesting they'll have written it in the register. They will have put it on a ticket next to the coin. And that's true for the Puddukottai hoard, that's labelled, in trays, we know where that is. But in some cases no, the information can only be recovered subsequently through research. Its not recorded there. Because we didn't collect it, somebody else did. We acquired it by donation or purchased.

I1: And from the sound of it, those collectors also didn't collect it, at least not direct from the findspot?

R105: Yes that's usually the case, even with those old collections, the museum is a couple of steps removed. Occasionally we'll have something that was given to the museum by one of the State Governments or one of the Princely States. And that will often be because it's a hoard. So it will be that a hoard was found, it was immediately identified as such, it was collected locally, and then a representative sample of it or all of it was sent to the British Museum. Sometimes it was split, so Lucknow will have half the hoard and we'll have half the hoard. But usually that indicates that an official came into contact with the hoard every soon after its discovery, and that it was claimed under Treasure Trove laws. It doesn't tend to apply to very grotty coins though!

I1: You've mentioned that Indian researchers visit the museum and I'm also aware that you've involved with the Oriental Numismatic Society (ONS), so I was wondering what your perspective is on the current level of interaction between south Indian researchers and collectors and the British Museum and ONS?

R105: For the ONS I'm the assistant editor of the societies journal. I've been a member since 1999/2000 and actively involved in it. So the ONS is an umbrella organisation for various chapters that are essentially organised locally, of which the more active ones are the one in the UK, the one in the Netherlands, the one in India for the last couple of years, and the one in the United States. Most members of the ONS are collectors. A minority of members are scholars, or interested amateurs who don't collect. So the museum hosts meetings of the ONS, though those meetings are restricted to talks on the subject. There are certain ONS meetings that take place in other locations that involve auctions and trading of coins, which obviously the museum doesn't have, because it's slightly uncomfortable. But there is engagement there between collectors and academics, and it's quite an active engagement. I would say most people I know who work in some way on South Asian coins as academics are also members of the ONS, or at the very least get the journal, and more often they attend meetings. The journal itself is unusual in that it accepts a very broad range of papers, from both professional academics and collectors. So some papers are simple notes of new types, or you do get discoveries of hoards from people who work in government institutions in places where the new material is, but you also get academic articles as well. So there is an engagement there. There is a further engagement through the study room facilities at the British Museum. The Study Room at the British Museum is slightly unusual in that most institutions don't have one. Anybody can come to the study room and see the coins. They are required only to provide identification and go through certain basic security procedures. You do not have to have letters of introduction from an academic institution. So, that's very different to the situation in most Indian institutions, which you've probably

experienced. Its quite difficult to get access even if you're an academic, and virtually impossible if you're not. That means we get a significant number of collectors. Collectors who are interested in the history and identification of their coins, who come here to view our material either out of general interest, or because they are working on something related to it, or because they want to compare their own material with our material for purposes of authentication. So authentication is not something that I will do for somebody, but its something that they can do by visiting the study room themselves. So dealers do that, and private collectors do that. So a dealer visited recently, several times, because they'd recently been consigned a group of Mughal coins and they were unconvinced by them so they wanted to view our collection in order to see how their coins compared against ours. And over the summer we've probably had about half a dozen Indian visitors, of which I would say about half were academics and half were collectors. And that's a very blurred boundary.

I1: Yes I know. A lot of the collectors I've spoken to have also been very keen on the research side of things.

R105: Yes you get collectors who know a great deal, but also interestingly I know of at least one case of an academic whose subject is not numismatics and ancient Indian history, who us also a collector of ancient Indian coins, and despite the fact that he's tenured in his own subject, primarily produces academic papers based on the coins. So its very much a continuum, from a very small number of pure academics who received a standard training, PhD in Sanskrit or Art History or something and went on to hold academic position, and who have never engaged with collecting, to at the other end, people who only collect and have no interest in the history, but in between it's a continuum. So I did not follow a traditional academic route to get here, though I've never actually collected, so most of my early contact with people who were interested was through societies like ONS and through collectors, not through academic institutions.

I1: How many of those people who come to view the Indian coins in the Study Room are Indian or of Indian origin?

R105: Most. So as a rule we tend to get Indian academics who are either working on something particular and the collection here has what they want. There are a few areas where the collection here is unparalleled even within India institutions: the Mughal collection, the collection of the Kushan material, essentially the north Indian material that people were very interested in. The south Indian collection is sufficiently interesting that somebody working on the material would need to view it. So we had an academic recently who works on Satavahanas and the Chalukyas, and he came here specifically to examine the lead material of Satavahana origin, because there are several types here that are not, as far as he's aware, attested in other institutions. So we get a lot of people like that. As a rule there are a lot more Indian academics working on Indian history than there are European academics, but there are some European academics. And then of course the collectors, yes as a general rule most of them are Indian or of Indian origin. It's not unusual for us to get ex-patriot Indians who actually live in the UK or the United States, and collect as part of a sense of their own cultural heritage.

I1: And how much interaction is there between the British Museum and Indian institutions and museums in terms of the coin collections?

R105: Well the British Museum loans material. Coins are a very common object to go on loan as part of an exhibition. As a general rule, my experience of this is that we tend to lend coins to other European institutions or UK institutions. American institutions will borrow them from an institution within their own country for practical reasons of expense. Indian institutions will supply their own coins for exhibition, so don't need to loan. Even if they took a travelling exhibition, they would probably be able to decline the coins and use examples from their own collection. But the museum has extensive contacts with museums in India. It has particularly strong contacts with the CSMVS in Mumbai. But the CSMVS has a fine collection of coins and wouldn't need generally to borrow ours. I suppose the only issue that might come up is the 'strongroom attitude' with an Indian museum. But any institution that had that kind of culture, I suspect we wouldn't be willing to lend to.

I1: And I suppose there has never been talk of Indian institutions lending coins to the British Museum?

R105: Again, for coins it wouldn't be necessary. 95% of the coins are in the stores. It's a point that comes up frequently. It is very rare that we would place a coin on display, that I could not then find another coin to tell the same story somewhere else in the museum. Because coins are mass-produced objects and we have a very comprehensive collection. There are a few exceptions. There are a few coins that we only have one example of, so we can only put them on display in one place at a time. But as a general rule no, we can supply our own exhibition and supply somebody else's, and still have an example for somebody to consult if they wish to come see it.

I1: Lastly I wanted to ask what, if anything, you know about the river-panning for coins in India. Also do you know if this goes on in north India and elsewhere as my own research is mainly focused on the south and Tamil Nadu?

R105: I don't know a great deal and its one of the reasons I would be interested to see your work. We are a considerable number of steps removed from the point at which the material reaches us. We tend to get material from European collectors and this is true right the way back to the nineteenth century. The material tends to come from a collector, who will either sell it to us or donate it to us, bequests being a very common method by which we acquire the material. So as a rule we will not tend to get just coins of that dynasty or that area. They tend to come in as part of a parcel of material that contains other material as well. We don't know in most cases how the collector got it, and usually the collector got it from multiple sources, usually by purchase, which means that usually they were interacting with dealers. So Ive had quite a lot of conversations with current collectors about how they acquire material. They almost always get them from dealers. The dealer usually has some idea of where the material has come from. What is unclear is whether the dealer is getting it from a middle-man who gets it from the local villages, or whether the dealer gets it direct from the local villages. Certainly, people I've spoken to have reported a similar

system in operation in a lot of places. I don't know whether this is really or simply their rationalisation of what's happening, but that is that the dealer has deposits, advanced capital down with headmen in villages around the area that they're interested in, which will be 100 rps or 50 rps, a pretty trivial amount, that's valuable to the people in the village because its capital that they can use for something. But it also means that in the event that they find a group of coins, they will bundle them up and somebody in the village will be given the five or six rupees to take the bus to the dealer and the dealer will then give them a certain amount of money for the material. In some cases somebody local will collect material from small children. So I've been told several times anecdotally that Naga coins in the west of India can be picked up off the ground and that local sellers of ice cream will take them in return for an ice cream and then dispose of them as parcels for about a rupee a coin. And my inclination, my feeling, is that that is the majority of collection, its people taking surface finds, and occasionally digging and hitting a hoard. If they dig and hit a hoard several things can happen to that. So I visited the museum in Matera and they had acquired several hoards within the previous ten years. So some hoards still get reported to the ASI and are acquired by the local or the state museum. Most hoards I suspect goes to dealers, and the dealers then sift them, because what they are interested in is the coins at the centre of the hoard which have been protected from corrosion. They can discard or bundle the additional material to be sold as a parcel, but they can pick out the material that's in good condition in the centre, and that can then be moved to a large city to be resold. Some of that material undoubtedly comes to European auction houses. I suspect that is comes secondarily, so that it's acquired by larger dealers in Mumbai, possibly Delhi, they sell it to somebody, that person then brings it to Europe, and then consigns it with somebody like CNG. As a general rule, I've been assured by a number of dealers, the flow of material is towards India. So European seems to be travelling that way. I would imagine that while that is generally true, so true of south India, true of Guptas, certainly true Mughal material, I would imagine it is not true of

Indo-Greek and Bactrian-Greek material. My feeling is that Indo-Greek and Bactrian-Greek material still has much higher demand in north America and Europe and that the flow of material is almost certainly still westwards. My main reason for thinking that is the very large numbers of forgeries that turn-up in that sort of material, and how sophisticated the forgeries are. Coins of Alexander associated with India, Bactrian-Greek, Indo-Greek, Kushan, all turning up together. For that material the demand is greater here than in India, it tends to flow out, and I suspect there are sophisticated workshops located in Peshawar. So when the material is bundled it is then sifted, the material is added to it, it's sent on. The museum received a set of grainy photographs in 1999 for a set of gold coins. A set of forgeries using a cast to produce a dye from one of those coins was salted into a group of coins that appeared on the market in 2008, and that group of coins was given a Peshawar provenance, a hoard of Peshawar. So that and the general routes that we see the material moving through implies that Peshawar is the main site of forgery. So what happens is that material is congregating there from Afghanistan, NW India and Pakistan, and then the people who sell and sift it are probably connected to the people who produce the forgeries, and forged material is probably sifted in at that stage. I've not heard of or seen anything that sophisticated from south India, which is expected because the market is mostly local and much less valuable.

I1: Yeah there are plenty of forgeries there but the ones I've noticed are very crude.

R105: Yes, so often I will hear collectors distinguish tourist forgery and collector forgery. And I actually will occasionally collect when visiting India coins which are dubbed as tourist forgery, which are that even the person selling them admits they're not real. I picked up a coin which was this large and the original was half the size, it was in copper and the original was in silver, and somebody had stamped 1666 onto the back of it. The person selling it said it was a good luck charm, so there was no pretence that this was an ancient coin.

I1: Have you ever heard of rice puller coins? It's a superstition.

R105: Yes, superstitions are very common. I had two young people in this room showing me a Humayan shoemaker coin. So Humayan, the Mughal emperor gives his kingdom to a peasant for a day as a reward for saving him and it becomes this legend of Humayan giving his kingdom to a shoemaker for a day. So he rules the kingdom like a shoemaker and makes leather coins. And I've had two credulous young men in here who had bought one. And we've had, have you heard of the iridium coin?

I1: Yes I think that's the same as the rice-puller coins

R105: We've had a very elaborate one come to us by email, the Iridium Coin. I don't know if we still have the email. It gave an enormous list of the magical properties of this coin, which included that it can travel through time, create infinite wealth, if misused would strip the atmosphere from the earth and bring about the Apocalypse, and if you concentrate very hard in seven minutes the sky will become cloudy, and we were tempted to write back and say that the weather control function on the coin appears to be faulty. Magic coins are a definite thing in India. It seems to overlap a little bit with the popular legend that the coin is exceptionally valuable, that you've found a coin and you will be incredibly wealthy. And it combines with my experience of a fantastic level of ignorance about local laws, which several colleagues in Mumbai have commented on previously. I had a conversation with a group of academics and collectors in Mumbai and somebody was saying that it would be wonderful if India had something similar to the Portable Antiquities Scheme in the UK. That's a comment that comes up. And this particular archaeologist who was there said that the problem is not the government, the problem is the people in India, because a random person pulled of the street in the UK knows more about archaeology than most undergraduate students in India, was his basic opinion. That most people in India simply don't know much about archaeology. They don't understand why finding a coin is something you should report, most of them believe the coin will be stolen from them if it is reported. And I think the magic coin thing overlaps with that kind of thinking, and its not unusual for me, routine I would say, for me

A. Lawson

to get emails from somebody in India saying that they have found an exceptionally old and valuable coin, and usually the coin is a coin of the East India Company or a Ramatanka, or very occasionally what I refer to as Toffo's, which are the extremely dumpy late Mughal and successive State copper coins which are officially dams or dump coins but which resemble those old Toffo sweets, and are completely worthless. So that's a very widespread attitude – that coins that you dig up in the ground must be worth something. And the magical coins thing is I think related to that general cultural backdrop.

A99) B: 13/08/15

NOTES EXTRACTED FROM AUDIO RECORDING

Interaction type: formal, pre-arranged

Location: London

Interaction Participants: I1, R106

Language: English

Duration: 00:38:36

Context: I have been in email contact with R106. I particularly wanted to meet her as her name has been mentioned to me by at least two of the Indian coin collectors I have spoken to. She's happy to meet me at the Spink main building on Bloomsbury Avenue in London. She begins by telling me, off-record, about her early experience of coin research and collecting in India (1980's, before joining Spink & Co).

FN: She tells me she came to Spink in 2004. At that time market very much from India to England, either collections already in England, or Indians coming over to try and sell. But in less than ten years it's gone completely other way. There is a difficulty getting any coins. More restrictions – much have evidence that coins have been here since 1970's like this Rhodes collection. Now trade is all in the other direction [i.e. from UK to India].

R106: When we have an auction we have dealers and collector flying over from India to bring them back to Indian. Now there is such a great

burgeoning middle class in India, they want to buy them. More than anyone in England.

I1: What about Tamil coins in particular?

R106: We get a lot of interest in north Indian coins, Kushan, because they're older. Then there's a group of interest around Mughal coins. And they tend to want to collect the gold coins, and there's not much in south India that's gold, there are the little pagodas or East India Company and that's about it. But again when it comes to East India Company people will come with the most beaten up little thing from East India company, copper, still not worth very much. But anything gold or silver from East India Company will be worth a lot. Which is where Chennai comes in because a lot of them come from round there, but its very difficult to get your hands on these coins now because those that have got them want to keep them.

I1: Do you know where the big collections in UK are?

R106: Yes, because of Oriental Numismatics Society. But personally because I collect from south India when I come back from there (society auctions) people always expect me to have bought more. But no very little comes from there. I don't know why because when those soldiers who were over there collected they were only interested in gold and silver – not these little copper things – and you'd be lucky to get a copper coin.

I1: What is the average turnover of Tamil coins in the British auction market?

R106: I'd be surprised if it was more than 100 per year. For a start they have to be these rare ones like early Sangam or Pallava. Something like this worth 50-70 pounds. But most auction houses at this capacity you've got to make up a lot worth about 300 pounds to make it worth your while selling it. So we tend not to get these things. Maybe they'd turn up in local trade markets. But I'd say most of it is on eBay now.

I1: Facebook, Whatsapp?

R106: Yes I keep getting pictures on Facebook – don't know if they're for sale or not – the one I've got is called 'coin of the day'. They keep join me to these things and sending me pictures.

I1: Links with Indian auction houses?

R106: Yes I know them (Todywall/Oswal) they used to come over here and buy things when I was just starting. We're not linked to them officially. I see things I'd love to buy in them but they have to be very strict now. No longer possible to take bags of coins back. Also they used to post them. There was a thing called 'book poster' I think its finished now. You could put coins in a book, seal it up and post it. You'd have to have the cover showing so you could see they were books. It went by sea not by air and about 6 months later these things would turn up.

I1: Noticed that regulations more strictly enforced now?

R106: Oh yes. There were never any auction houses in 2004. Think they must have started 2009. All have this thing that they cant export.

I1: Todywalla Antiques spoke about problems importing Indian coins to India.

R106: Yes most peculiar. I think because they have restrictions on importing gold, and they just treat any coins in that way. We haven't had any trouble with that because we've got a shipping department and they ship everything with an auction receipt. It goes by Fedex or something. Occasionally we'll have someone saying they didn't get an item. But mostly it's been fine. These Indian dealers, I don't know how they get it all back sometimes. I think they have their own means. Maybe bank transfers? Because your not allowed to take cash more than 10,000 pounds. But its all seems to work at the moment. It's better than the situation with Iranian coins – since Iranian troubles they were restricted and we're not allowed to do any trade in Iranian coins because of the banks and the sanctions. But with the Indian coins it still seems to work. It's mainly an export trade.

I1: Is that situation (mostly export) true for coins from other parts of the world?

R106: No it's mostly an Indian thing. Iran – there are not the collectors out there. Mostly they've got their coins out in 1979 and they turn up with this massive great things with coins with the Shah of Iran on, and I used to be able to buy them but I cant any more. So we had to be very

careful sending that sort of thing to America. That's more difficult than sending things to India. Even Islamic coins 7th century AD sometimes they get held up at customs and our dispatch department has to go back and forth and say 'no they're ancient coins, they're nothing to do with Iran and it's a real problem. But with India, touch wood, no problems. I know some people who've had problems, R90, he had coins confiscated going in through Delhi. So I don't think you can just walk in with them. Or perhaps he's know to them? I don't know. Because he comes and goes quite a lot. As far other countries though its definitely an Indian phenomenon, this big turn around of collectors. Nowhere else in the world I think has got that. China to an extent. I think Chinese coins are becoming popular, but you don't see Chinese people coming over here and buying them. I think they buy them online, which is another thing because all our auctions are online now. And we have a Hong Kong department. So I think a lot of people have bought them online through Hong Kong. We have these catalogues. Also online. So that's how most people bid now. Mostly they haven't even seen the coins, just rely on the picture and they'll be sitting in Hong Kong or Shanghai or Delhi. Some dealers don't even have a catalogue now. It's all online. Which is a bit sad really. But yes China we don't have the same situation. Probably because we don't have the same sort of colonial backlash, we don't have the same sort of collections in England from China. We have one man, his job is to legally export all these things, stamps, bank notes. He's quite well up on how to send these things.

I1: Is America a big market for Spink?

R106: Yes a reasonable amount.

I1: Where is the biggest customer market for Spink?

R106: Still Britain, because mostly we deal in British coins. America is the next biggest. And for my speciality (Indian collections) I'd say 60-70% is going to India. But its very difficult to get them now.

I1: You spoke about a difficulty in naming coins (old names, modern names)?

R106: You could speak to Shailendra Bhandari at the Ashmolean Museum. I published an article about it. About Scott pagodas. The only reason they get called that is because a man called Scott took over as governor of Nagapattinam and reduced the gold content by around 60%. Many of these are names attributed at the time when these coins were in current circulation. But over time as they have become collector's items these names have become confused, and wrongly attributed. Tanquebar coins (Lakshmi) I think have been wrongly called Scott pagodas. Now we have the metal analysis we can see the gold content of these is much higher. Over time the name has got transferred, and the whole fable has been attached to this coin as opposed to this coin. The only evidence relates to something a researcher found – went to Madras museum and looked through their coin collection – at a time when it was still possible to see their coin collection. People see small details and motifs, and they use those to identify the coin, but actually they get it wrong. It may be an entirely different coin with similar designs.

I1: Records used for researching coins names?

R106: Go back to about 1670, when there was a diamond merchant who went to Golkonda, and he was the first one who illustrated these coins in a book. But most of them are sort of 19th century, when they get published with pictures, and the museums publish catalogues. One type of coin can/has been called lots of different things over time. I found this information in catalogues that are available in the British Museum and SOAS special collections room. These are catalogues of different Indian museums, but some are not illustrated. That's 1906, so that's how they knew these coins in 1906.

I1: Have you come across these stories of magical coins with supernatural properties?

R106: Every week I get sent a picture of these coins with the Ramayana (Ramatanka – temple tokens) on, and they're not coins, they're religious tokens basically. The trouble is, they've always got some very old Vedic date on, like 2900 BC or something, and they'll say 'this is a very old coin, its very valuable, it's been in my family for

many generations'. And I have to tell them, 'no these are made in Bombay in the 1950's and they're just made as religious tokens', 'oh no madam, your very wrong, look it has the date of the first Veda'. You should talk to Shailendra Bhandari, he knows a lot about that. Some of these Ramatankas have Hanuman's mountain with the holy herbs on one side and Rama and Sita on the other, and because of that they somehow got conflated with the East India Company coins, and East India Company have got these scales. So you find things with Hanuman holding these scales. And then apparently there's an Indian proverb about a cat and some butter in scales, and the cat licks a bit of butter from one side and the scale never balances, or something. So somehow these stories have got muddled – on some of the coins you've got a cat, you've got scales, you've got Hanuman, and the other side will be like an East India Company coin with a totally improbable date like 1616, before the East India Company. And people are just adamant because its got a date on, that's an East India Company coin, and you have to tell then no, its just something that's been made like that. Yes I've got a few of those at home, because they only cost a few rupees in the street, and when you realise what they are its quite...you know. And he reckons (Shailendra Bhandari) that because of the significance of having a rare item that they will deliberately put dates on that no-one will have, so that you'll have a coin that's completely unique. We don't really get those kinds of things in Spink. But we do get one or two. Because that style of coins has been around since about the 15th or 16th century. So we get some of the gold early ones and they sell for about 2 or 3 thousand pounds, because they're early Ramayana coins Vijayanagar period. So they'd be a collectors piece, but the other ones we try and avoid, the ones that were made within the last 100 years.

A100) B: 15/08/15

TRANSCRIPTION FROM FIELDNOTES

Interaction type: informal, spontaneous

Location: London

Interaction Participants: I1, R107

Language: English

Duration: approx. 00:15:00

Context: I to Portobello Road in London as it is an area well known for antique shops. Having explored the whole road on both shops I do not find any signs or evidence of antiques from Chettinad until I reach one of the very last shops on this street – Chloe Alberry. Inside I can see a lot of brightly coloured glass ceiling lamps and colourful porcelain door handles and towards the back of the shop are shelves with enamelware. Going inside to inspect them I find that each one is engraved with Tamil initials. I the girl at the front counter if I can speak to the manager or shop owner and she goes to find him. Having explained to him my purpose he agrees to a short conversation and takes me upstairs to his office to talk further.

FN: R107 describes himself as an Indophile. He has been travelling to India since he was a very young man, 18 years old (he is now in his 50's/60's). He has heard of Chettinad and knows that the enamelware comes from there. However he has never been there himself, and says that he got the enamelware from Jodhpur, or near Jodhpur, though he doesn't specify exactly. I ask him what he knows, or has heard, about Chettinad and Chettiars and he says that he thinks the Tamil initials on the enamelware belong to the in-laws of the family/woman, and in deference to them it was never used and always stored above head level. He believes that such things arrived in India through Bombay. Enamel shop/product signs were supplied to India free by European exporters to promote their wares. He says the main trading cast in India at that time were the Mawaris, and they controlled all the importing of goods through Bombay. He has been to Shekhawati many times and recommends I visit as he thinks it must be similar to

Chettinad. He gets a lot of things for the shop from Indian. However he doesn't usually tell his customers that and they don't usually ask. Especially as the things he sells originally came from Europe anyway. He says he usually sticks to the European things like the enamelware as there is currently no market for Indian stuff in England. Says the Indian look is not in fashion. I ask him if customer ever want to know about the Tamil initials on the enamelware and he says no. I ask about the trays of old coins downstairs, some of which are Indian. He says there is a good market in old coins now. His opinion is that men like it because of a primal instinct to hunt treasure and women like it for making jewellery. He says in India he can get old Indian coins cheaply, because there they are only interested in the European/Anglo-Indian coins. He buys the coins from scrap metal sellers in North India. He says they are from a gypsy caste – Rabari? And they sell the coins by the kilo – 1000 rupees per kilo. Says he also get coins from Afghan dealers in Thailand. He also collects individual coins and shows me some chunky copper Kushan coins (I cant tell if these are genuine or not). He shows me some painted wall tiles which were made in Japan in the early 20th century. They have Hindu gods and he says they were made in Japan, specifically as exports to India. He finds it fascinating – why Japanese were making these tiles with Hindu gods.

2 APPENDIX B

FIELDWORK DIARY

Description and explanation

This appendix is a chronological record of all fieldwork activities. It also contains any fieldnotes omitted from appendix A because they do not occur within a defined 'interaction'. It has been subdivided into four fieldwork periods (e.g. B1). These tend to cover several months at a time and are loosely separated according to chunks of time spent in India.

B1: MAR 2013 – APR 2013

B2: NOV 2013 – MAY 2014

B3: AUG 2014 – NOV 2014

B4: APR 2015 – AUG 2015

Each of these fieldwork periods is characterised by a broad set of fieldwork objectives. Many of these fieldwork periods have been further subdivided into specific fieldtrips (e.g. B1a). These are shorter, more focused episodes of fieldwork, often with a more specific set of fieldwork objectives.

Cross-references to Appendix A are indicated wherever relevant by their number (eg. A5). Fieldwork participants are referred to by their designated letter and number (eg. R106, or I3). A table of research participants can be found in Appendix C.

2.1 B1: MAR 2013 – APR 2013

This was my first fieldtrip. My aims and objectives were still broad and undefined. This fieldtrip was about scoping the situation before narrowing down the focus of research. I began by establishing contact with antique collectors and dealers in Bangalore and Chennai, before setting out to explore other parts of Tamil Nadu. This was also an opportunity to test and hone my research skills with regard to meeting and interviewing potential research subjects. In this period of fieldwork I did not take an audio recorder as at this stage I wish to explore potential contacts who can be returned to rather than

A. Lawson

to record extended interviews, and I felt recording the meetings would introduce a formality which would be counter productive at this stage. All interactions and observations are recorded in handwritten notes both during and after the interaction.

B1a: Exploring antique shops in Bangalore

26/03/13

- Oriental Haveli, Indiranagar
Antique shop in affluent area of Bangalore. Lots of European style furniture. I pose as a customer to see what response I get. Shop assistant says most things here are newly made. He takes me to a room upstairs when I indicate interest in antiques. There are mostly bronzes in here, including icons and lamps. I ask him where some of the lamps come from and he says they come mostly from temples/palaces/family heirlooms. Says many of the lamps come from Chennai. He shows me some silambu. I ask him if they are old and he says yes, over 100 years old. I ask him the price of the smallest pair and he says Rps 25,000. I ask him if I bought one, would I be able to take them back to England with me. He says yes. I ask again whether I wouldn't need to get permission, or get it registered and he says no. I ask him a few more questions about silambu and what they are used for, and about some other objects in the room. He doesn't know or won't tell me the answers to most of these questions. At this point I decide to tell him that I am a student and I am interested academically in these objects. He seems to me he loses interest in me as he no longer sees me as a potential buyer. I thank him and leave.

04/04/13

- I take an auto towards Koramangala to look for the first antique shop on my list. The driver wants to take us to some souvenir shops along the way so he can get some commission, so we ask him if he can take

A. Lawson

us to an antique shop on route. He takes us to the New Heritage Collection on New Infantry Road.

- Interaction with R1, antique/handicraft shop assistant, New Heritage Collection, Bangalore - (A1)

- Dukan/Bid and Hammer

Antique auction house I had been attracted by the Dukan website, because it attempted to put into words the allure/attraction of antique objects:

“One pays for what he or she desires to possess and it has a value more so when it comes to an article that reflects the personality of the possessor. Collecting antiquities can open a window to the past; there could be surprises, revelation and excitement. Individuals who have an eye for spotting can acquire and preserve priceless objects. These are objects out of reach of all not because of cost, but for want of availability. Thus, you would still be one amongst thousands when it comes to owning an item of the past aeons.... an aura of something intangible forever. Hence the growing scramble world over for uncovering and obtaining anything historical, artistic and above all decorative objets d’art. Not only for the above reasons but also because people have now come to regard antiques as a reliable hedge against inflation, possession of such pieces of art can become an even more satisfying experience!”

- Mahaveer Chand Antiques

Set up meeting for tomorrow with R5. Trying to find these shops it seems many auto-drivers don't understand the word 'antique' or antique shop. Whether there is an equivalent word in Kanada I don't know, but when a passer-by tried to direct our auto-driver to R5 he used the term 'old item' spoken in English.

- Interaction with R2 and R3, shop assistants at Marshaallah Accurate Demolisher and Furnisher - (A2)

05/04/13

- Interaction with R5 and R6, Mahaveer Chand Antiques – (A3, A4)
I arrive just before 11am. R5, the shopkeeper, is still setting out the front of the shop with some help from a young shop assistant. He greets me and then continues busily bringing out tables and lamps and setting large pictures out on the street front. I take some time to look at the shop display. As well as the rather tatty second hand suitcases and coffee tables there are some old clocks, brass pots and plates and a framed fountain pen. There is a customer, R6, browsing. He is a middle-aged man. He is inspecting some hanging brass incense burners. He moves to look at an old camera. Finally he focuses on a miniature model of Tiruchirapalli temple. He asks the shopkeeper about it. I can't follow his answer completely as they are speaking mainly in Kanada, but I hear say that its old. 80 years he thinks. The customer seems impressed by this and continues to inspect it. The customer notices me standing nearby and making notes and we have a short conversation (**A3**). Mahaveer Chand has finished setting things out and now focuses his attention on me. He shows me around his shop while we talk and I take photographs (**A4**). He takes me across the road to a garage where he has more things stored, including wooden furniture, some beams and pillars, a large wood chest. He is particularly keen to show me a musical instrument. It looks like a sitar. He then takes me a room at the back of his shop. It is so full of bags, boxes, clothes and shelves of items that it is hard to get into. The contents of this room does not seem to be very old. It is a random jumble of items from the last 40 years or so very much like the kind of bric-a-brac one might find at a jumble sale. R5 pulls out pieces costume jewellery for me to see. They are mostly plastic and have a 1970's/1980's look about them. He says that they are all old or 'old style' when he shows me each piece. Before leaving R5 and another man take out some newspaper clippings and show me an article about the shop. I tell him it is the same article that I saw online. I take a picture of them and another man standing outside the front of the shop before leaving.

B1b: Around Chennai exploring antique shops, temples, and making contacts

14/04/13

- Exploring handicraft/antique shops around Mylapore

The auto driver asks if I would like to see some handicraft shops 'nice art pieces'. He will probably get commission for doing this. I agree. He takes me to two shops in the Mylapore area. They both seem to sell a very similar range of goods, in some cases identical, to the other shops of this kind I have visited in Bangalore. The first shop is run by Kashmiri's. The goods are mainly from north India. The shop assistant says none of them are old. The second shop seemed to contain more South Indian looking things: bronzes etc. I asked the shop assistant and he said that the bronzes and some of the painted wood sculpture at least were South Indian but many things also came from the north of India.

- Ramakrishna Mutt Temple

Very minimalistic decoration. I walk around the complex and go inside the main temple/meditation hall. There are no decorative items or antiques here. I wander down the street outside the temple and come across a small shop selling brass pots/pans/ladels etc. They have an old set of weighing scales. I try to ask about the scales to find out how old they are and where they are from but the shop-keeper does not speak any English. I must check-up several useful Tamil phrases and keep them with me eg. what is it? How old? From where/who?

09/04/13

- Kapaleeswaarar Temple and surrounding area

I arrive by auto and enter the temple after leaving my shoes by the gate. There are several groups of tourists as well as a fair number of Indian worshippers inside. Lots of people are sitting in the shaded areas of the compound. Directly inside the main entrance is a shrine

A. Lawson

where Brahmin priests are giving blessings. Inside the shrine I can see tall many levelled brass oil lamps, of the kind I have seen in some antique shops. The priests bring out brass plates with small oil lamps affixed to one side. To one side of the central shrine is a table with several small terracotta oil lamps. These seem to be available for visitors to make offerings. Directly opposite the temple entrance is shop called 'Indra Pooja Metal Stores'. I go in and look around. There are lots of shiny new brass pooja utensils, including a wide variety of lamps, spoons idols and pots. They are of a smaller size, meant for the home rather than a temple. There are two young female shop assistants who are keen to talk to me. One of the girls introduces her friend to me as 'black' and laughs. I gather she's making an unkind joke about her skin colour. I ask them how old the things in the shop are. They say they are new, made in a workshop unit in Chennai. I ask them where in Chennai and they say they don't know. Upstairs is another part of the same shop, but this seems to have larger items and more of them look like they might be older. I ask the shop assistant the same questions as downstairs (where are they from? how old?). She says they come from U.P. When I ask to see something old she shows me a small bronze Ganesh. It is blackened in colour and she says it is 'antique finish', but newly made. I wander further down the street. There are numerous small shops with plastic garlands and small terracotta oil lamps for sale. Out on the main road there are larger, more upmarket 'jewellery shops' which also seem to be selling fancy silver pooja utensils. At one end of this road I come across a shop with a large bronze icon outside the front. I stop to take a picture, but the shopkeeper looks disapproving and asks me not to. He is in the middle of a pooja/blessing of the shop. I notice the signboard above the shop advertises, among other things, that it sells 'antique finish' items.

- Interaction with R6, The Museum Company, antique/handicraft shop, Chennai (A5)
- Interaction with R7 and R8, Ashvita, Chennai (A6)

A. Lawson

I have contacted R7 by phone and he has asked me to meet him at his shop/restaurant called Ashvita. I know R7 already through previous meetings to do with an earlier research project. He is friendly on the phone and seems willing to help me. I arrive a little early for the meeting and so I have a look around the gift shop. A customer is asking the shop assistant about coin collecting – she’s heard that there’s some connection with Ashvita and coin collecting. The shop assistant tells her that her boss collects and sometimes sells antique coins. The customer says she’s asking on behalf of her grandfather who wants to get into coin collecting. She asks where coins can be bought. The assistant tells her eBay and many other places. But she suggests sending an email to R7 to find out more. R7 appears and invites me to sit down in the restaurant and orders me a coffee **(A6)**. We are joined later by R8 (also T1). He is a freelance archaeologist and a student friend of my supervisor I2. I have contacted him to ask if he would be interested in working as a translator and field assistant for me. Since he knows R7, he has agreed to meet me here to talk over possible fieldwork plans.

10/04/13

- Dakshinachitra, open-air museum, East Coast Road, Chennai
I have hired a car to take me to a museum called Dakshinachitra, which is about 30k south of Chennai. Many people have recommended I visit this place and it seems to be on the tourist map. The website describes it as a “cross cultural living museum of art, architecture, lifestyles, crafts and performing arts of South India”. I’m mainly interested in taking a look at the Tamil Nadu houses and their contents. I arrive mid morning and leave after lunch having taken lots of pictures. It is reasonably busy. There are server small groups of western tourists, a large school group, and a group of children in wheelchairs. The site is divided into areas by state: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. In the Tamil Nadu area there are several houses including a Chettinad Merchant House and an Agriculturalists House. Before leaving I look around the reception area and shop. The notice

A. Lawson

board advertises cultural events the centre is hosting and organising (eg. lessons in traditional craft techniques, something to do with local dance traditions, visit from someone from the Smithsonian Institute) There is a gift shop sells traditional handicrafts, souvenirs, herbal cosmetics etc.

- Madras University

First I visit the Anthropology Department and meet Dr Sumathi, the head of the department. She puts me in touch with one of their students interested in doing some translation and field assistant work. Next visit the English department and meet a student there who agrees to do some transcribing for me when I have audio-recorded interviews. Next I visit the Archaeology Department. I try to find head of department but he is at a meeting. I ask if I can see the museum. Everyone I meet is fairly surly and unhelpful, including the head of department when he eventually returned. I'm given permission to look around the museum but when I take my camera out the security guard says not pictures. The museum is small dark and incredibly dusty. Old boxes and broken furniture is piled up in the corners. Under the stairwell outside is a Buddhist/Jain stone sculpture left next to a pile of old furniture. It's almost impossible to see inside some of the cabinets as they're so thick with dust. There is a range of interesting objects from excavations around Tamil Nadu (Kudikadu, Pallur, Kanchipuram) but no efforts at all at conservation or presentation. I can't be sure if all the objects in the museum are originals, certainly some of the Indus valley objects are plaster copies.

15/04/13

- Meeting with Antique dealer, Ashvita, Chennai

I was given a list of names and numbers for antique dealers and collectors by R7. One of these has agreed to meet me today. I tried to explain to him on the phone that I am a student not a buyer, I don't think he understood me and is expecting me to be a potential customer. He arrives with a briefcase and a file filled with photographs

A. Lawson

of things he currently has available to buy. I explain again that I'm a student who is researching antique collectors and collecting and that I'm not interested in buying anything. He says he specializes in Thanjavur art and jewellery. He shows me the photo's he's brought. I ask him where he gets these things from. He says he buys them from old houses in Karaikudi, Pondicherry, Thanjavur, Kochin. I ask him who buys these things. He says I deal only in Tamil Nadu. He wants to emphasize that he doesn't sell outside India. I ask him if he only deals in south Indian antiques. He says yes. He says north India doesn't have such good antiques. Mostly modern made. He says south Indian antiques are older – from great kings: Pandya, Chola, Pahlava etc. When I ask him if I might be able to meet him again and maybe take a recorded interview with him he tries to evade the question by saying that he'll introduce me to his friend who is also an antique dealer. I explain that I already know this friend and will be meeting him next week. He says I should visit Thanjavur and Karaikudi. Then he says 'can I go now'? I thank him and he leaves.

17/04/13

- Interaction with coin and antiquities collector R9, Chennai (A7)

B1c: Fieldtrip through central Tamil Nadu: Auroville – Arikemedu – Chitambaram – Tranquebar – Kumbakonam – Thanjavur – Ariyalur – Kanadukathan – Karaikudi – Srirangam – Musiri - Karur

18/04/13

- T1 collects me from my hotel very early in the morning. He has arranged a car and a driver. Yesterday we made a route plan for the next 5-6 days based on recommendations from various people.
- Golden Beach Resort, East Cost Road
On the east coast road between Chennai and Mahabalipuram. Built around 25 years ago. Bits of old temple interixed with modern build to

A. Lawson

form the site walls. T1 thinks many pieces of stonework here are over 200 years old and some over 500 years old.

- Mahaballipuram antique shops

We stop for lunch in the tourist centre and notice an antique shop.

There is a particular painted wood-carved statue in the window which has a faded look. T1 thinks it is genuine, he thinks this because of the types of colours/paints used and how they have faded. We go inside and start to ask questions about the statue. The shop assistant says that it is only 10-12 years old and that it has been given an antique look deliberately. Later we come across another antique shop on the same street which is also selling very similar looking carvings with faded paintwork. A third shop we look at is selling bronzes from Nepal and Tibet. He says they are around 30 years old. All the antique shop owners/assistants here seem to be Kashmiri.

- Interaction with R10, Aurorachana, Auroville (A8)

- Antique/wood/furniture shops, East Coast Road, Auroville

This street is almost entirely made up of antique shops on both sides. They are full of wooden furniture and disassembled bits and pieces from old houses, such as carved wooden door frames. It's getting late, and it would be impossible to visit them all in the time we have, so we select a couple:

1. Where do you get it from? How is business – how often you sell? Tamil customer used to prefer new – superstitious about old/second hand things – if they had money they would have all new. European market used to be huge – now its dropped-off. But Indian demand has picked-up. There used to be lots of antique furniture available – but now its much harder to come by. There is a dealer who is goes to Karaikudi and visits houses that are due for demolition, and he sells to about 30 different antique shops in Auroville – to the highest bidder. He handles the refurbishment of the furniture in store. Sometimes a customer will ask for something specific and he will try to acquire it for him through the Karaikudi dealer.

A. Lawson

2. Lakshmi from wooden chariot – he's also seen the european market flop.
3. Mixture of modern and antique pieces from all different parts of India. Shop assistant says that there aren't enough antiques available anymore to meet demand, so it's necessary to have newly made stuff with an antique finish/look.

19/04/13

- Interaction with R11, site warden at Arikemedu (A9)
- Chitambaram Temple
This is a very important Siva temple in Tamil Nadu – site where Siva performed the famous Nataraja dance. I do not know its age, but it seems to have been rebuilt/renovated largely in the 12th/13th centuries. Outside the temple there are two huge wooden temple chariots under renovation. The larger of the two looks very old and T1 believes it is Vijayanagara. I can see looking at them, that many of the wooden carvings which we saw yesterday in the Auroville antique shops must come from chariots like these. We spend some time inside the temple complex but I am not allowed to take photos here.
- Interaction with coin collector R12, Tranquebar/Tharangambadi (A10)
- Interaction with local fisherman R13, Tranquebar/Tharangambadi (A11)
- Interaction with Vishvakarma bronzesmith R14, Kumbakonam (A12)

20/04/13

- Thanjavur temple, museum and shop
We look around the temple. From there we go a part of the palace museum. T1 sees an 18th century sword on display which he thinks is identical to a sword he has seen buried in a cave in Tamil Nadu. He says he will take me to the cave to see it next time I visit. There is a shop attached to the palace which sells a wide range of antiques. The shop is owned by members of the royal family. Most of the stuff looks fairly new. I chat with the shop assistant. She says the objects are bought from dealers and come from all over India. There is a lot of

A. Lawson

brass and she says this all comes from North India. North India is better for brass while south India is better for Bronze. Brass is cheaper than bronze. The royal family were from Maharashtra and have frequent contact with North India. Though the shop sells a wide variety of things now, the assistant says that they only used to sell Nataraja's and Ganesha's. People would buy them for new businesses, to keep in the window or shop front. She says the logic for this is that you are less likely to be cheated in business when there is such an idol in the room, as people will fear to do bad things in the presence of god.

- Interaction with villagers R15, Ariyalur (A13)

On the way to our next stop at Ariyalur we spot a broken stone idol on the roadside. We stop to take a look. It's Siva in the teaching posture. There is a temple on the opposite side of the road, and T1 thinks that it has probably been replaced and moved here so that it can still be worshipped. We reach the village which T1 had told me about. It was here that a Stone Buddha sculpture was stolen from side of road near the village then later recovered by the police. This happened some months. Says thefts of Buddhist stone sculptures from around Tamil Nadu are more common than thefts of Hindu sculpture. This may be partly because of the popularity of these items in East and South-east Asia and the West, but also maybe less well protected. This particular incident is unusual in that the Buddha statue was important to and valued by the Hindu villagers, who noted its theft and made efforts to have it returned. We found the local village men in in the courtyard in front of the temple, and we spend some time talking to them. The stone Buddha has been moved from it's old roadside location and is now positioned under a tree opposite the temple.

21/04/13

- Interaction with an old lady R16, Old house, Kanadukathan (A14)
This is a village/town near Karaikudi which is full of old Chettair mansions. Many of the houses seem to be in a state of decay and disrepair, and many more have been demolished leaving only large,

A. Lawson

empty, grass-grown plots. We walk about the town which seems eerily empty, though many of the houses are apparently still occupied. One of the first houses we come to is a very small (in comparison to the large mansions that dominate the town) traditional chettiar style building. It looks old. We speak to the old woman who lives there.

- Antique shops, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi (A15)
T1 wants to take me to one particular street which he said was well known for antiques. It is a small narrow street, and the shops along it have small fronts. They all appear to be antique shops, though some of them are closed at the moment. We visit four of the shops on the street and ask a few questions to the shopkeepers.
- Visit to Sitanavasal – Jain Cave and iron age archaeological remains
- Spend night at Srirangam and visit temple.

22/04/13

- Interaction with riverbed diggers/panners, Musiri (Parisal Turai) (A16)
- Interaction with riverbed diggers/panners, Karur (A17)
-

30/04/13

- Interaction with R23, Old Curiosity Shop, Chennai (A18)

2.2 B2: NOV 2013 – MAY 2014

Following my initial survey in April 2013 I have chosen to return to Auroville and Karaikudi in order to pursue a more detailed exploration of the trade in antique items originating from Karaikudi and the area known as Chettinad. My aim is to conduct extended and audio-recorded interviews with some of the traders I have already come across, and to learn more about both the source of this antique trade, and the consumer destination. I am travelling with my translator T1, a freelance archaeologist from Madurai, and I3. I3 is a friend of T1's from art college. She is an artist asked to join this trip as she has never

A. Lawson

visited Chettinad before, but has heard something about the art and architecture of this region. On returning to Bangalore after this fieldtrip I arranged a number of interactions with collectors and dealers in Bangalore and Chennai, as well as one in Thanjavur.

B2a: Fieldtrip to Auroville/Pondicherry and Karaikudi

23/11/13

- Visit to East Coast Road, between Auroville and Pondicherry, where there are many antique shops. T1 and I have hired a motorbike and we travel slowly down the road picking shops at random to explore. I try to visit a range of different sizes from very small establishments with mostly rough unfinished wood on display, to larger shops with more expensive polished and finished items for sale.
 1. V.S Art Gallery, East Coast Road, Pondicherry (A19). This is one of the smaller shops on the road. Just a single room, open fronted. The proprietor agrees to a short interview.
 2. Madhu Mitha, East Coast Road, Pondicherry (A20). We go through a yard where carpenters are busy working, into a large warehouse filled with furniture, pillars etc., at one end, and tables piled with small ornamental items such as clocks and lamps at the other end. There is a local woman from Pondicherry inside selecting several large teak pillars in the traditional south Indian style. She tells me that they are for her new house which she is having built in Pondicherry. I ask one of the shop workers if I might speak to the owner/manager but apparently he is not there, or not available to talk to. On the way out we stop and speak with one of the carpenters who is working on a wooden window frame in the yard outside.
 3. Art Colony, East Coast Road, Pondicherry, interaction with R26 (A21)
 4. Al-Everest, East Coast Road, Pondicherry, interaction with R27 (A22)

A. Lawson

5. Harmony Antiques, East Coast Road, Pondicherry, interaction with R28 (A23)
6. Suprajaa Furnitures, East Coast Road, Pondicherry, interaction with R29 (A24)

25/11/13

- Now in Karaikudi. Today visitning Muneeswaram Kovil Street, the main antique dealing area in Karaikudi. We arrive mid-morning and make our way along the street, stopping in at the shops one at a time.
- South Indian Crafts Centre, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi
The manager was not there. This place sells mainly vessels, ceramic, colonial china. This is the place we came last time, where there is a wood carved panel over the desk which is not for sale. The manager keeps it and it is the only thing in the store he does not allow to be photographed. The painted tin vessels are apparently Chettiar variety of the wedding gift vessels that we saw in Auroville. They have a western flavour, unlike the traditional rounded shaped pots in the rest of Tamil Nadu. The shop assistant says these are very old, maybe eighty years, and are made in Czechoslovakia.
- Chettinad Crafters, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi, interaction with R30 (A25)
- Old & New Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikud, interaction with shop owner R18 (A26) and customer R31 (A27)
- Bismi Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street
Shop owner R20 (A28), female customer R32 (A29), male customer R33 (A30), Villiappan R34 (A31)

26/11/13

- I have hired a car and driver for the full day so that we can visit some of the Chettiar villages, temples and houses. In the morning we visit several local temples (of the 9 Chettiar temples):

A. Lawson

1. Pilliyarpati – name of both the town and the temple. Name of the god is Karpaga vinayaga
 2. Vairavan Kovil – Siva in Viarava form (with dogs)
 3. Kondrakudi – Rock-cut temple. 2000 year old inscriptions at site. Original construction Pallava (1200 years old approx), then built onto in last 300 years
- Next we visit a tile factory in Aathangudi. These tiles are a local craft the area is famed for. Some of the Chettiar houses have tiles like these on the floors, though not many, and they seem to be a more recent development than the imported tiles and marble that decorates many of the Chettiar houses.
 - Wood furniture and demolitions, Athangudi, interaction with R35 (A32)
 - Chettiar House, Kanadukathan, interaction with R36 (A33)
 - Chettiar House, Kanadukathan, interaction with caretaker and family members (A34)
 - Semi-demolished house, Pallatur, interaction with a friend of the owners of the demolished house (A35)
 - Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi, interaction with local antique dealers R41 and R42 (middle men between villages and Karaikudi antique shops) (A36-37)
 - Chettiar House, Karaikudi, interaction with antique dealer R41 (see A36, 37) (A38)

27/11/13

- Chettiar House, Karaikudi, interaction with R41 (A39)
- On the way to the bus station we pass a partly demolished Chettinad style house and stop off to take a look. The auto driver says he knows the owners, and that it belonged to two brothers, but that one of them couldn't afford the upkeep while the other could, so the one brother demolished his half of the property and the other brother kept his.

B2b: Pre-arranged interactions in Bangalore, Chennai and Thanjavur

01/12/13

- Interaction with a member of the Nagarathar Chettiar community, R43, who has made a name for himself in interior design by decorating his apartment in a Chettinad style, using Chettinad antique items, Bangalore (A40)

16/12/13

- Interaction with antiquities and coin collector and researcher who has published work in numismatics (R44), Thanjavur, (A41)

23/04/14

- Interview with a member of the Nagarathar Chettiar community who has been involved in promoting recognition and protection of Chettiar heritage. She is particularly interested in reviving craft industries of Chettinad (R45), Chennai (A42).

27/04/14

- Interview with an artist and school teacher who has an enthusiasm for antiques (R46), Chennai (A43)

22/02/14

- Attended 5th National Numismatic Exhibition in Bangalore. Met a number of local coin dealers and also some based in Tamil Nadu. Was able to make several contacts who have agreed to be interviewed sometime soon. The exhibition was held on the premises of a hotel very close by the main railway station in Bangalore. There were a large

A. Lawson

number of 'exhibitors' with a table to display their goods. These all seemed to be dealers and while most were from south India, some had come further. One dealer I spoke to was from Baroda. There was also a short awards ceremony for a competition involving local children and their coin collections. Whilst most of the people here were dealing in coins, mostly old, some would be classed as ancient, there were also some exhibitors with other kinds of collectible memorabilia like bank notes and stamps. Made contact and arranged future meetings with R47, R48 and R49.

23/05/14

- Interaction with coin dealer R47 in his shop in central Bangalore (A44)

25/05/14

- Interaction with coin dealer R48, Bangalore (A45)

25/05/14

- Interaction with coin collector R49 at his home, Bangalore (A46)

2.3 B3: AUG 2014 – NOV 2014

I returned to India after several months in UK. My focus for this next fieldwork period was the Chettinad case-study. My main aim was to find more respondents from the source (i.e. the Chettiar community) and the destination (i.e. the customers/collectors). With this in mind I organised a number of trips in this period to Chettinad as well as Pondicherry, Chennai and Bangalore.

B3a: Chennai and fieldtrip to Karaikudi and Chettinad villages

18/08/14

A. Lawson

- Conversation with R100, founder of Dakshinachitra, Chennai
I speak to Deborah on the phone before going round to her house late morning. She is happy to meet me and interested in my project but doesn't have a great deal of time to talk. She offers me some further contacts before agreeing to speak to me again next time (after I have made another trip to see Dakshinachitra).

20/08/14

- Myself, T2, and T2's sister have travelled by overnight bus from Chennai to Karaikudi. We arrive in the very early morning and go straight to check into our hotel and drop out baggage. I have, with T2's help, already contacted R41, who I met in November last year in Karaikudi (see A36-39; 26/11/13). He has agreed to meet us later today and show us some Chettiar houses in the town. R41 is a member of the Nagarathar Chettiar caste group. He is also a part-time antique dealer. Since he is a member of the Chettiar community he can offer us access to other Chettiar families, but I remember at our last meeting that he was also very controlling of my conversations and interviews with other people. I also wondered at the time if he was always telling me what he thought the truth, or what he thought I wanted to hear. T2 has spoken with R41 on the phone and he says he will meet us at our hotel in a few hours. In the meantime we look for some breakfast and then walk down to Muneeswaram Kovil Street. However at this time in the morning most of the shops are shut. When we get back to the hotel R41 is there waiting for us. He takes a moment to recognise me and tells T2 he wasn't quite sure as he had met with another visiting foreigner some time back. T2 and R41 chat a little. She is acting as translator for me, but in a very informal way. T2 herself is interested in finding out more about the Chettiar community and she understands by research objectives very well. I don't mention my reservations about R41 to T2. However after the first recorded interview she quietly tells me that she thinks he is a slightly unreliable guide. Firstly, he has a tendency to dominate my interviews, talking a

A. Lawson

lot and often answering on behalf of respondents rather than letting them speak for themselves. Secondly he is sometimes giving wrong information, ie. not saying what the interviewee has said, but perhaps telling us what he thinks we want to hear, or what he wants us to hear. Despite this she agrees with me that he is a good contact in that he is able and willing to introduce to Chettiar households that we would not otherwise have an opportunity to meet. In effect it means any interviews I do with others become as much interviews with him. This is not necessarily bad. R41 is himself a Chettiar who as an antique dealer also has taken an interest in community history and material culture. I had asked T2 to explain to R41 that I would like to see more Chettiar houses and visit the Chettiar clan temples, but in particular, I would like the opportunity to meet and speak to some Chettiar people, the owners and occupants of such houses. He says he knows several houses nearby where there might be people we can speak to this morning. He is busy this afternoon, but we make arrangements to meet again early tomorrow morning when we will travel by car around the Chettiar villages and clan temples. R41 has a friend who can drive us for a very reasonable rate.

- Chettiar House due to be demolished soon, Karaikudi

The first house R41 takes us to is locked and nobody appears to be at home. The second house is occupied and we are invited inside. R41 tells us that this house is due to be demolished very soon. I record an interaction here with several of the occupants, R50, R51 and R52 (A47).

- Chettiar House, Karaikudi

From here we go to a Chettiar house in Karaikudi that I have visited before with R41 (see 26/11/13). I record a short interaction here with the occupant R53 (A48).

- The Bangala, Heritage hotel

A. Lawson

We go for lunch at the Bangala and afterwards I record an interview with the manager, R54 (A49). She is the sister of R45.

21/08/14

- Tour of Chettinad temples, mainly focusing on the clan temples, with R41:
 1. Kunnakuddi/kundrakudi? – Rock cut temple, old inscription. Pallava temple and newer temple.
 2. Pilliyarpatti – temple – clan temple
 3. Kovelur. Temple and hostel – 200 years old. Pallava king. Muruga. All seven temples are Siva temples, but the consort changes for each one (Illiyathangudi – nithya kalyani – ever married). Always a Murugan shrine in every clan temple. Muruga temples in Sri-Lanka, Malaysia and Calcutta set-up by the Chettiars. Nasik – north, when they print money. All places to stay on the way to Burma – temple and guesthouse. King Chettinad – South Indian Corp. A.C Muthaiya - other important Chettiar from Kanadukathan. MAM Ramaswamy – has adopted son Aiyappan (because he has no children)
 4. Melur. Hotel U... - Chennai chettiar hotel.
 5. Pattinasami Kovil – GPS point (25). Branch of Illiyathangudi. Soudaranayaki – consort name. Athmanadaswami – a name for Siva. Muta kumaraswami – murugan
 6. Nityakaliyani Kovil (Main Illiyanthangudi temple). GPS point (26). Sri Nityakalyami – main god. Persendhu Nagarathar. Inscription on shrine – branch of chettiars of illiyathangudi. Sirusethur. Resting house for gods – door surrounded by Japanese tiles – pilliyarai. Last puja – kumba abhishekam 2004. Nataraja shrine leading to Siva. Icons and shrine for famous book and writers. Thirunamalai. Annamlaiya. Muruga – two wives: devamamai and Waliyamai – peacock. Peacock is murugas vehicle. Santikeyswara – 9 planets icon – star signs.
 7. Iraniyur Temple. GPS point (27). Sivapurandevi – consort. Artkundanada – Siva name – acceptor/possessor. 713 AD – Pandya

A. Lawson

king gave to Nagarathar- Thiruvepuriar branch. Temple is under control of Sivaganga Samatanam – not Chettiar Nagam?

8. Sirukudalpatti (Chettiar house). GPS point (28). 94 years old – took about 6 and half years to build. Door – Mahalakshmi, elephants, bull/house/woman. Periyar. Chettiar house – Muthiya Chettiar family. Mathur - Arambakur

22/08/14

- We spent the night at The Chettinadu Mansion, which is a heritage hotel in Kanadukathan. The building is a Chettiar home that has been converted, though the style and decoration of the building does not appear to have been changed a great deal, as it seems in keeping with many of the other grander Chettiar houses I have visited. The first interior courtyard/room is tiled in black and white marble and this room is used for dining. One of the side rooms has been converted into a museum where a variety of artefacts (childrens toys, antique cameras and radios, stone jars, Burmese lacquerware, enamelware, wooden and stone kitchen utensils, family portraits and photographs etc.) are displayed on tables lining the edges of the room. The bedrooms have been fitted with air conditioning and modern bathroom facilities, but otherwise seem as though they might have changed little since they were used as family rooms.
- Interaction with R55, Chettinad Heritage hotel owner (A50)
In the morning, while we are eating breakfast in the front courtyard, the owner of building, R55. Introduces himself to us and I have an opportunity to tell him about my PhD research. He seems interested and invites me to return to the hotel again when we can talk more.
- Interactions with carpenters in Karaikudi
- R41 takes us to several places in Karaikudi where there are carpenters workshops. I carry out an interview with carpenter whose main line of work in making carved doors and furniture (A51) and another who is a chariot maker who occasionally does demolition and carpentry work (A52).

A. Lawson

25/08/14

- Interaction with R58, a member of the INTACH Pondicherry (A53).

26/08/14

- Interaction with R59, Renaissance Antiques, Pondicherry (A54).

28/08/14

- ArcHes, Saratha Vilas, Kothamangalam
Interaction with R60, co-owner/founder of Chettinad heritage hotel and architectural heritage organisation (A55).

B3b: Bangalore and fieldtrip to Karaikudi and Chettinad villages

06/09/14

- Interaction with R61, QurioCity, Antique Shop, Bangalore (A56).

08/09/14

- Interaction with R62, Basava Ambara, Art, craft and antique shop, Bangalore (A57).

12/09/14

- I have travelled by overnight bus from Bangalore to Karaikudi. I have arranged for an Anthropology BA student from Madras University (T3) to meet me there. She will be my translator for this fieldtrip. My objectives for this visit are to build on the data collected during August, focusing on gaining more information about the Nagarather Chettiar community.
- Interaction with R55 and R63, Chettinadu Mansion hotel, Kanadukathan (A58).

A. Lawson

- Tour of Vishalam, heritage hotel, Kanadukathan
- Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi

Most of the shops are closed by the time we arrive but I see R20 and have time to ask him what he know about the stone pickle jars that were made in Britain:

R20: They are called Inji Jaadi, which means ginger jar. It came with ginger stuffed inside originally, but in later days it came to be called a pickle jar.

I1: Who buys them?

R20: Everyone. But village people buy it more than city people. They buy it to store salt in. People from Thirunevalli and Pondicherry come here because they like this jar. Chettinad items are pretty and things you keep in this jar will stay preserved for longer. Foreigners might also like them but they don't transport well. They are heavy and can break.

14/09/14

- Visit to Chettiar temples and houses

I hire a car and meet R41 at 8am. We head towards Pilliyarpatti. The road on the outskirts of Karaikudi is full of salvage/recycled wood yards/shops. I spot three in quick succession. The material here seems of a more ordinary or poor quality than the elaborate doors and pillars found in some of the Pondicherry shops.

1. Kundakudi temple – circular flower motif – same as Chettinad houses often found on base of doorway – not supposed to step on it.
2. Pilliyarpatti – Yalli – mythical beast figure - common in both temples and Chettinad houses.
3. Illiyathangudi – Vishnu temple. Statue of Murugan. Bairabar.
4. Iraniyur - Peacock with Murugan – Siva (when moon wanes pray to the god with dogs – god of the underworld. When it grows, pray to the god of wealth – the laughing Buddha. T3 says 'never seen a temple with this god (with dogs) considered ill omen and 'unworshippable'). Age of temple – 300 years. It is known for its sculptures.

A. Lawson

5. Athangudi palace – Nachiappan. Ninety years old. Rooms in the second courtyard are locked. Each has something inside: seems like lots of furniture, but its covered in sheets so hard to tell. The lady showing us says its full of antiques and that's why it's always kept locked.

- Chettiar house, Karaikudi

R41 takes us into a house that he says belongs to several families who are related to him. Vaadha Malathaai Veedu, Front of house – Persian King (Saraorji?), and a British soldier. We look into the main courtyard and leading off from this R41 points to a room which he says is the family shrine/puja room housing the god which this family worships (this is linked to the different clan temples). We are not allowed to go into this room or to take pictures. We go out the kitchen courtyard where R41 introduces us to an elderly couple. I notice some pickle jars on the edge of the courtyard and ask the lady (R64) about them. She does not speak any English so T3 translates. She is friendly and happy to have her picture taken, but not very talkative. I ask her about the stone pickle jars, which look old, but which she is still using for storing pickles and salt: they have had them for 100 years. Has to take care of them, like glassware. Only now, with interest from outsiders, do they know it is hygienic to keep salt in and gives long life, so they keep these jars longer. Before they didn't know. Now they are proud of them. We move through into another part of the house which is apparently occupied by a different branch of the family. R41 tells me that there is a family feud in this house so two different branches of the family don't talk. The families don't mix their stuff. R41 tells me that's why it's all marked/engraved with initials. He tells me the Tamil name for the Swedish enamelware is Pudhubayal.

R41: In the past, Chettinad was famous for European imports. Now it is famous for the tiles (Athangudi). The birthplace of the antique tradition in this area is Chettinad. In the USA antiques have to be dug up, but here they are all kept safe in the houses.

- Chettiar House, Karaikudi

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The next house R41 takes us to belongs to friends of his family. We are taken through to one of the back rooms. Some women of the family are sitting watching tv and making savoury snacks. They are busy and do not speak any English so R41 tells us a little about the house:

Owned by approximately 75 families but only five of them live here.

There is a Mutt near Chennai which provides income to the house and families. Previous business was moneylending. There are over ten kitchens in the house.

Names: Chitambaram Chettiar - Vijayalakshmi aachi

Kalai porul – art thing

Palaiya porul – old thing

- Chettiar house belonging to R41, Karaikudi

This house belongs to R41. I take a picture of him by his main front door. It looks like an old door, though it does not have the very deep rich carvings found in some of the grandest houses. The top panel is plain with just three simple flower motifs, however the porch is more richly carved with peacocks and flowers. I meet his wife. She brings us tea while R41 shows us some of the things he has bought/collected recently. There are some pickle jars he shows me. They all bear the 'Whittington Moor Potteries' stamp that is common among the antique pickle jars in this area. R41 asks me what these trademarks say. So I tell him about Whittington Moor and how I have noticed that this is a very common trademark for jars from Chettinad. Along with these jars there is an electric blender, a couple of glasses cases, a drinking glass and a plastic toy penguin. None of this stuff seems very valuable yet these are all things that R41 has bought from other houses/families with the intention of at some point selling it on. R41 talks a bit about the house: the house ownership is divided into 12 parts, with four of these belonging to R41. It is 220 years old or more. He shows us some painted Japanese tiles. He shows us his Puja room with peacock - for Murugan. Old tin cars from Germany and Japan. Shows storage rooms upstairs. Previously the family were in Ceylon (Buddha shrine). R41 says to me: 'it's a shame you were not born a Chettiar so you could feel the pride in our culture'. He wants to show certain things. He

A. Lawson

shows us a rug keeps inside an old chest. It's difficult to take out so we yell him not to bother but he insists – 'when else will it be seen'?

15/09/14

- Interaction with R20, Bismi Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi (A59).
- Interaction with R18, Old and New Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi A60.

- Conversation with T3:

T3 tells me she has heard of the Chettiars. She says her parents said they new all about them – repeated same standard story that is told in shops and by Chettiars themselves. I ask how/where they might have come to know about this. She says some magazines tell about chettiars - Vikatan – has different subject magazines – contact office directly. magazine – Kunudham.

I ask T3 if she knows anything about local superstitions relating to old objects because she has told he has reservations/mixed feelings about being in the antique shops (describes it as creepy):

T3: It's mainly to do with wood – wood has life, its organic. Houses built with wood and wood furniture try to take a part in the life of the family – they give what they know – so if they have previously come from a home where lots of bad things have happened that's what they will bring. There is a lot of belief in energy in India/Hinduism. There is a belief that old temples were built on magnetic hotspots and that circumambulation clockwise while wearing lots of metal jewellery increases/activates energy). You should not leave objects unused for long time or allowed to gather dust because they will gather bad energy.

T3 points out that the people I talk to see always to divert attention/conversation away from the objects even when that is what I ask about. They seem happier to tell about the marriage ceremonies or the joint family practice or the temple traditions etc. She tells me about the Yalli which we have seen carved on many of the houses and

A. Lawson

temples we have seen: body of cat, head of lion, tusks of elephant and tail of serpent – mythological animal – popularised in the 16th century. People believe that Yalli is more powerful than lion, tiger or elephant. Also it is an avatar/incarnation of Siva. All Yalli's seem to be male. Called Leogriff. They have them in Burma, there they are called Chinthe – same animal as Sri Lankan flag – head of man and body of lion.

19/09/14

- Antique exhibition by Balaji Antiques with R68 and R67, Raintree (café/boutique), Bangalore

I have been invited to an antique exhibition by R67 who is a friend of a Bangalore based antique dealer, R68. R67 herself is from an English/Scottish family background, but she grew up in Madurai. She is not directly involved in the antique business, but she has helped to organise and promote this type of exhibition for R68 for the past couple of years. R68 has a shop in Avenue Road, but it is difficult to find and reach, so events like this are a useful promotional tool for him to reach new customers. I take a look around the items on display. I recognise similar items to those seen in Karaikudi, but everything looks more expensive here than in the shops of Muneeswaram Kovil Street. I think this is in part due to the setting. The room is nicely decorated with a colonial feel and the items are carefully displayed rather than all muddled together. I notice some enamelware that is black rather than the cream and blue sort that I have seen so far (Judgeware – England). There is a lot of re-purposing of objects here, e.g. carved wood (structural) made into table and floor lamps. R68 is busy with the exhibition right now so I arrange to come and see him at his shop in a couple of days time.

22/09/14

- Interaction with R67 and R68, Balaji Antiques, Avenue Road, Bangalore (A61).

A. Lowson

B3c: Fieldtrip to Pondicherry and Chennai

27/09/14

- Interaction with R10, Aurorachanna, Auroville (A62).
- Interaction with R59, Renaissance Antiques, Pondicherry (A63).

28/09/14

- Interaction with R69, Gitanjali, Antique Shop, Pondicherry (A64).
- Interaction with R70, Curio Centre, Antique Shop, Pondicherry (A65).

05/11/14

- Interaction with R71, The Attic, Antique furniture/interior furnishings shop, Chennai (A66).

09/11/14

- Interaction with R72, antique collector, Chennai (A67).
- Interaction with R73, notable Chettiar historian, Chennai (A68).
- Interaction with R74, Chettiar business-man/historian, Chennai (A69).

10/11/14

- Interaction with R75, Muthu Arts Centre, Antique furniture shop, East Coast Road Nr Chennai (A70).

12/11/14

- Interaction with R76, Tamil cinematic arts director, Chettiar School, Chennai (A71).

B3d: Bangalore pre-arranged meetings

16/11/14

A. Lawson

- Interaction with R77, antique collector, Bangalore (A72).

22/11/14

- Interaction with R62, Heritage resort and wedding venue, Bangalore (A73).

2.4 B4: APR 2015 – AUG 2015

This was my final fieldwork trip to India. Having spent the previous fieldwork period following up the Chettinad antiques case study, the aim here was to focus on finding and interviewing those involved with the collecting and trading of coins (and other 'antiquities') found in Tamil Nadu riverbeds. I was based in Chennai in order to make contact with collectors and with key individuals involved with the management of antiquities in Tamil Nadu, such as the current Commissioner of the ASI Chennai Circle, the Numismatics curator at the Chennai Government Museum, and the current Commissioner of the Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology. From Chennai I made a fieldtrip to central Tamil Nadu, to look for find the groups of people who are digging/panning in riverbeds for coins and other material there. In addition I attempted to follow both my case studies further from their source to some of their national an international trade destinations in North India and London.

B4a: Chennai meetings

07/04/15

- Interaction with R7, a collector, dealer and amateur researcher of antiquities, Chennai (A74).

07/04/15

A. Lawson

- Interaction with R9, a collector, dealer and amateur researcher of antiquities, Chennai (A75).

B4b: Fieldtrip to look for riverbed panners/diggers and finish up work in Chettinad: Srirangam – Musiri – Karaikudi – Manumadurai – Paramakudi – Pondicherry

09/04/15

- Interaction with R78, coin dealer, and R79, A group of riverbed panners/diggers, Kaveri River near Srirangam (A76).
- Interaction with R78, coin dealer, Srirangam (A77).
- Interaction with R78 and R80, Riverbed panners/diggers, Kaveri river near Musiri (A78).

11/04/15

- Interaction with R20, Bismi Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi (A79).
- Interaction with R18, Old and New Arts, Muneeswaram Kovil Street, Karaikudi (A80).

12/04/15

- Interaction with R83, riverbed panners/diggers, Vaigai River near Manumadurai (A81).
- Interaction with R86, with a group of people from the Kuruvikaran (Sparrow hunter) community collect old coins and any other valuables they find from the drains in the town, and occasionally from the riverbed, Paramakudi, near Vaigai River (A82).
- Conversation with T1 regarding the Ottar community:
T1: They were spread in almost all parts of Tamil Nadu mainly along the foothills. Around the late 14th century, this Vijayanagar kingdom came to Southern India and captured up to Tamil Nadu. Major places of Tamil Nadu were captured by Vijayanagara kings from the Moghul

A. Lawson

Empire. During 15th century slowly some development was happened. By the time no big, deep wells. People can dig only for a certain extent. They don't dig very deep wells. So these shallow wells are mostly near the water bodies. So everywhere forest, the cultivation area is small. In villages population is small, and people are almost based on that little water. Their settlement is formed in such a way that drinking water is different from water used for cultivation. Forest land was full of trees and bushes. So these people around 16th century, the whole country was stable politically and stable. So they wanted more economy and wanted to develop the country. For which they wanted to deforest and start cultivation. There is a community called wood cutters and their job is to clear the forests to change it into agricultural land. Then Krishnadevaraya and his followers brought this Ottar community people from Orissa. They are good in this sort of work. So they give lot of commission to set well in different places. The first time they created wells in many places. Earlier there are only deep wells. Even also in the riverside or the water bodies, during monsoon they get water and during summer they have no water. These people dig deeper. They knew that area well. They also deforested new areas. People from one old village were brought to that new area. They divide within themselves and make two or three wells and they did cultivation there. Like that they expanded the cultivation lands. The Ottar community people went everywhere. So they survived till colonial period. After the advent of missionaries, people involved in the job of manufacturing explosives. Then the bore wells came and people started losing their job. So they want some alternative thing, they did some odd jobs.

- Searching for Ottar community on the outskirts of Madurai
Having learned from R83 that there are several other communities in this area who have possibly been in the business of hunting for coins for much longer than the Irula, I am keen to see if we can find any of them. T1 calls R78 to see if he has had any dealings with these other communities. R78 says that he has bought coins from Ottar people in an area on the outskirts of Madurai, so we drive in that direction in the hopes of finding them. We spend a good hour and half driving around

A. Lawson

the general vicinity of the area specified by R78. T1 asks people for information along the way. They always point to somewhere else, but T1 thinks this is a habit of politeness avoid not being able to help us. Several people have stories of possible coin hunting, and/or sand quarrying going on in this area (GPS 36 – Kaseri village, a man says that in a nearby village some people dug a big heap of sand from the river bed, brought it away in a truck, dumped it outside the village, and sifted through looking for valuables). The closest we get is a spot in a dry riverbed area where some locals nearby say that occasionally people from outside (ie. Not locals) come and dig or sieve. They don't specify what they dig for, likely they don't know (GPS 37). Not far from here there is a large area of open land which T1 says is reserved or given over by the government for use by nomadic communities to camp temporarily (GPS 38).

13/04/15

- Car Journey: Madurai – Pondicherry

Today I drive to Pondicherry. Gandhirajan has suggested a route for me that will hopefully allow me to see something of the types of building and architecture in this region. I want to see if the doors and pillars available in Chettinad can be found elsewhere. However, route takes very much longer than anticipated due too poor roads, heavy traffic, and many areas of roadworks. We approach Pondicherry twelve hours after setting off this morning, and the driver is looking so tired I'm getting a little worried about the safety of this. As a result I don't get much time to really stop photograph buildings, but I try to notice things as I pass. Puddukottai, Karaikal are places outside of Chettinad where I particularly notice grand carved wood doors and pillars that could easily be found in some of the antique wood stores in Pondicherry. In Karaikal many I think are new. Indeed all along it is apparent that there is a general style that is common throughout and replicated in modern architecture where people have the money to do so. The wood door with a carved panel is found everywhere, though the theme of the carvings varies according to religion and perhaps a little according to

A. Lawson

area. Size and elaborateness varies according to wealth. In Nagoor there are many old houses with wood doors and pillars but they are much smaller in scale than the grand houses of Chettinad.

Furthermore, this is a Muslim town and the carved panels have more simple leaf and flower designs with no iconography.

Route:

Madurai – Melur – Thiruppathur – Pudukottai – Thanjavur – Velankanni – Nagur (Nagapattinam) – Karaikal – Pondicherry

Photographs:

- Perungalur (near Puddukottai on Thajavur road) – house and wood yard
- Gandharvakottai – house
- Nagur – houses

14/04/15

- Antiques shops, Pondicherry and East Coast Road

Today my main objective is to revisit several of the shops I have visited in the past and collect up to date prices on particular objects, before driving back to Chennai. My main interest is in Burmese lacquerware, European enamelware, stone pickle jars, wood pillars, wood carvings such as door panels and porch or frame sections, and full wood doors. I visit Gitanjali, the curio centre, and Maisson Rose with Amethyst, all on Romain Rolland Street in Pondicherry. Then I drive out to the East Coast Road and visit Al-Everest and Supraaja Furnitures as well as a few others.

Price list:

Gitanjali

Pair of pillars (rosewood, from Madurai) – 140,000

Wood door from tanjavur – 120,000

Enamel pot – 1,200

Wooden lady carving – 12,000

Wooden yalli carving – 12,000

Pair of red teak pillars from karaikudi – 180,000

A. Lawson

Pair of Burmese teak pillars (250yrs old) from karaikudi (can tell age by cast iron rings – no brass) – 250,000

Door (small) from a place outside Karaikudi on way to Rameswaram, Burma teak 250 years old –

Rosewood / teak ?? door from Karaikudi (deer in corner) - 75,000

Wood panel – 9,000

Smaller panel – 7,500

Big panel – 12,500

Curio Antiques

Burmese lacquer small – 1800

Burmese lacquer large fancy – 20,000

Door – 130,000

Panels (teak wood from Madurai) – 27,000

Amethyst – see photographs for prices

Al-Everest

Door and frame - \$4000

Door and frame at back – \$6000

One pillar - \$1500

Suprajaa Furnitures

(much the same stock as two years ago)

Door (sold) – 3.5 lakh

Rosewood pillar (original) – 22,000

Jackwood reproduction pillar (antique style) – 16,500

Door out front of shop – 80,000 before cleaning, an extra 20-25,000 after cleaning

Small door – 30,000

Door (next to green door in photo) 30km from Karaikudi – 85,000

Pair of Yalli's (new) – 4.5 lakh

16/04/15

- Interaction with R87, Commissioner of Archaeology, ASI Chennai Circle, Fort St George, Chennai (A83).

B4c: Fieldtrip to Mumbai to attend 25th Annual Shukla Day Coin and Philately Fair 2015

18/04/15

- MVIRDC World Trade Centre, Mumbai

I was informed of this event by R7 who recommended it as a place for me to meet other coin collectors and dealers. It is apparently one of the largest coin exhibitions in India and will be attended by dealers and collectors from all over the country. R7 told me that some of the big Indian coin auctioneers will be attending including, Oswal Auctions and Todywalla Auctions, and he gives me the names of people I can speak to from both. One of them, the owner of Oswal Auctions (R92), I have met once before at a coin exhibition in Bangalore. The venue is easy enough to find. It's on the second floor of the world trade centre building (Expo Centre) its somehow no as grand or shiny as I was expecting from Mumbai. But the room is full of stalls and at 10:30 already busy with people milling about. The first stall to the left as I enter is Todywalla Auctions. I start there and ask for the name R7 gave me. He's apparently not there right now but will be back in half an hour or so. The next stall to the left is Oswal Auctions. I recognise R92, the owner of this business, and go to introduce myself. After a moment of checking my face he too seems to remember me. I ask if he will be free to talk to me anytime today or tomorrow, or otherwise Monday or Tuesday. He says he's leaving town on Monday and busy today (there will be an auction here by Oswal Auctions at 3pm today) but he should be more free to talk tomorrow. I say ill attend the auction and he gives me a catalogue free of charge. The next stall after Oswal Auctions is called Stephen Album. The man at the desk is clearly a westerner. I'm curious but he's busy talking to someone right now, so I pick up a calling card and flick through a catalogue. The catalogue includes coins from all over the world including USA, Europe, Middle east and central Asia, China, and of course India. There is an Indian man here also so I ask him about the catalogue and whether they are also holding an

auction here. He says no. He doesn't work for Stephen Album, he's just helping out at the exhibition. He's not a dealer or a collector, but he's helped with the exhibition for the past couple of years and it's made him more interested in coins. He used to collect some as a child, 'but I never realised how valuable coins can be till I came here. I've learnt a lot'. Next stall is from Nagpur. It appears that in Nagpur they have a museum/showroom for old coins. There is a young man at the desk. I ask him about the museum. He says it's his father's business but his father isn't here right now. Should be back in an hour or so. They have a website. They both sell and display coins: 'Here people can look at the coins up close touch them and learn more about them. We are the only one like this in India'. I tell him I'm a research student and very interested in the museum. He gives me a card and tells me I can visit the museum or call or email anytime. The next stall is Falcon Coins. I recognise R47 from Bangalore immediately and he remembers me too. He is very friendly and polite. He says he's in Mumbai just for this exhibition. He wants to tell me about an educational programme for children that he is involved with. The next stall belongs to R90, a coin collector and dealer from Chennai. I know of him already. I go and introduce myself and he takes a moment to recall me. It has been over a year since I last spoke to him. I ask if he's involved in any auction here. He says no. He's here just to sell and maybe buy from his own stall. I ask if he has any coins from Madurai, Tanjavur, Trichy or Karur (the riverbed areas I've been visiting). He says yes and suggests I come to his house when we are both back in Chennai so that he can show me properly. I continue on around the exhibition. At a guess I would estimate there are around 60 – 70 stalls here and there are from all parts of India. I hear from Alvin that there are two non-Indian dealers here also. One of them being Stephen Album. The other one I never manage to find. This is a Numismatics and Philately exhibition so there are also many stalls which sell only notes, stamps, postcards. Some stalls seem to be for serious collectors (such as the auction houses and people like R47 and R90), others are very modest and offer a jumble of oddments including bits of second hand jewellery and

A. Lawson

watches, Indian coins and notes from last 50-60 years, and some foreign coins. Also some coins which are clearly fake to my eyes. Large Chinese coins and bags full of brass blobs with vague markings (supposedly punch marked coins I imagine, but not very convincing). Coin-like tokens with various Hindu gods. Apparently some people like to have them in their wallets for luck. One dealer I approach to speak to is an electrical appliance mender by trade who has branched out into coin dealing. His stall is an unlikely mix of cameras, kettles and coins. He says that since the Chinese market in electrical appliances has expanded his business has suffered. People can now buy disposable electrical things cheaply so have less need for someone who can mend them. That's why he went into dealing coins on the side. He doesn't offer anything rare or very old. I stop at IIRNS (Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies) publications book stall. Here there are books on numismatics and research on coins to buy. A number of 'Numismatic Digest' editions. There is also a poster here for something called the 'Money Museum' run by IIRNS. It's located at Anianeri, Nashik – Trimbak Road. There are several pictures of the museum site with captions such as 'Research Scholar at Work', 'School Children at the Museum', and 'Training Course in Progress'. The man at this stall doesn't speak much English so I just make a note of the email address. I go back to Todywalla Auctions and this time I'm able to meet R91. He's very young, probably early to mid twenties, which surprises me at first but he tells me this is his fathers business which he has joined. I tell him about my research and he asks if I can come to his house on Tuesday morning to talk more. I go to the Oswal Auctions auction at 3pm. There is an area at the back of the exhibition set up for auctions with a projector and a front desk for the auctioneer to sit. Plastic chairs are set out with enough space for around 50-60 people to sit. The space fills up slowly and people arrive and leave as those coins they are most interested in come up for auction. Before starting everyone stands while the national anthem is played. R92 himself conducts the bidding. There are 379 items in the catalogue and the whole thing takes around an hour and a half. I keep a note of the price everything

A. Lawson

goes for and the number of the winning bidder. I half hope I might be able to speak to bidders who bought south Indian coins after the auction, but the room is full and the bidding is fast and difficult to see who is doing it. Some bidders quietly slip away once they've got (or lost) the coin they came for. The best I can do is make a note of the bidding numbers and see how often, and for what type of coin different bidders are successful. Certain bid numbers come up again and again. I guess there are less than 20 different successful bidders in the whole auction, which must mean that quite a few people here have come to watch rather than buy (I can calculate this more accurately later). Some coins go unsold while for others the bidding is competitive. The highest bid is over 10 lakh (around 10,000 pounds) for a gold 1835 William III East India Company 1 Mohur. At the end of the auction I stay seated for a while to write up some notes. An elderly man (R88) sits next to me and starts a short conversation, **A84**. I go back to the Stephen Album stall hoping to catch him before I leave, however he is busy talking to someone again. Instead I speak to the man sitting to his left, (R89), and we have a short conversation, **A85**. I leave the exhibition and 5:30pm.

19/04/15

- MVIRDC World Trade Centre, Mumbai

I don't stay for quite so long today. Just enough time to wander about the exhibition another couple of times and speak to a few more people. I am hoping to speak to R92 today and also to try and catch the representative of Stephen Album when he's not busy. I go straight to R92's stall first. He's there and invites me to sit down to talk, **A86**. After a short conversation R92 tells me he has business to attend to and leaves, but he sends over a friend of his to talk to me (R93), **A87**. I leave the hall for a few minutes to write up my notes. While I'm sitting a middle aged man sits down next to me. He asks where I'm from and whether I'm collecting or selling coins. I tell him I'm not here to buy or sell, just to research and ask him why he is here. He says he also is not a collector or dealer. This is his first time here. He came to see how

much the coins were worth. He says he has some old coins and he wanted to know how much they would be worth. Not very old he says. Just ones he's kept from 30 or 40 years ago. He calls his wife and asks her to bring them here to the exhibition. His daughter works for Barclays in Mumbai. He wants to know if it is easy to get a job in a care home in the UK, but I tell him I don't know. There are two elderly gentlemen sitting to my left. They are both from Kolkata. They are collectors and researchers of numismatics. They have come here for the exhibition. When they find out I'm here for my PhD research they say that I should come to a coin exhibition in Kolkata if I get a chance. They say they are better. More serious. Research papers are read. *'This is more commercial, there are more dealers here than collectors. For financing such the event we depend on the dealers, so we can organise it. But here the dealers are the organisers too'*. They say they've been collecting coins for 30 years. They have both written for the Journal of the Numismatic Society of Calcutta. After walking around the exhibition once more I stop at a stall and recognise the name. It's Marudar Arts – from Bangalore. R48 spots me and comes over to say hello. He is still interested in applying for a PhD in an India University so I talk with him for a little while about that. He gives me a catalogue and we agree to get in touch when I'm back in Bangalore. Next R92 introduces me to a man from 'Phillips Antiques', apparently one of the oldest antique shops in Mumbai. R92 tells me it is frequented by Hollywood stars like Richard Gere. I ask if I can visit the store on Monday morning and speak more with him then, and he agrees, giving me a nearby address in Colaba. I see that the representative at the Stephen Album stall (R94) is free right now so I go over to say hello and we have a short conversation, **A88**. There's another man sitting next to R94 who looks like a westerner, but who I later discover is a Parsi from Mumbai (R97). He's also a coin collector. He offers to take me to Chor Bazaar tomorrow. As I'm about to leave a man taps me on the shoulder and gives R7's name. At first I don't understand, but it turns out this is R84, one of the three main coin dealers of Tamil Nadu who R7 has previously spoken to me about.

20/04/15

- Interaction with R95, Phillips Antiques, Colaba, Mumbai (A89).
- Chor Bazaar (thieves market), Mumbai

R97 meets me at Phillips Antiques and together we take an auto-rickshaw to Chor Bazaar. As we walk towards the bazaar R97 points out the car recycling shops and menders. Here they are taking apart cars into all the usable and sellable parts. There are other shops selling second hand sewing machines and other appliances. This gives the character of the market one of re-use and recycling rather than 'rare antiques'. R97 tells me that this was called the thieves market because it used to be a place when house staff and general thieves would bring things taken from wealthy homes to sell. Many of the shops here advertise as suppliers for film sets. It seems a lot like Muneeswaram Kovil Street in Karaikudi, but on a much bigger scale. Also some of the shops here are more specialised, such as the electric fan shop. Here the shopkeeper seems very knowledgeable about this particular product and the fans and other antique appliances he has for sale (a shop spotlight, fridge, semi-motorised bicycle) are often over 30/40/50 thousand rupees. Other shops are much less swish. Jumble sale like caves with a mixture of old and new handicrafts and utility items. I find the carved wood panels and yallis in many of these shops. When I ask they say they are from south India, though not necessarily Chettinad. In fact none of them mention Chettinad. One or two know of Karaikudi as a good source of antiques though. One shop owner (R96) is apparently a friend of R97's. R96 gives us a tour through his shop and while we walk I tell him about my research and ask him some questions, A90.

21/04/15

- Interaction with R91 and R92, Todywalla auctions, Mumbai (A91).

B4d: Chennai and Bangalore

29/04/15

- Government Museum, Egmore, including conversation with R99, Numismatic curator, Chennai

I arrive at 2pm and go directly to the Commissioners office with my letter and proof of affiliation. At the reception I'm told that the commissioner isn't here, he's at the Secretariat. I tell them that's ok, I was just hoping to book an appointment to see the Commissioner. They say no, that's not possible. I should go downstairs and ask to speak to the deputy commissioner and he will help me with anything I need. When I get the deputy commissioners office there are three other men seated at his desk. They all invite me in and read through my letter. I recognise the man next to me. He is the numismatics curator, R99, who I was hoping to speak with. He remembers me too, from two years ago when I visited. The deputy commissioner tells me that I can speak to either of them now, but only off the record. For an official interview I will need to wait for the permission to come through from the Commissioner, which may take a few days. I tell them I'm happy to wait. I want to go and see the numismatics gallery. I've seen it before but not for a while, so I want to refresh my memory and take some photo's. First I go to where museum publications are sold. The numismatics curator has come with me and points out some books that I may be interested in, then calls for a member of staff to fetch the ones I want. There are a few different books on the museums coins collection and I take all of them, as well as a book entitled: Proceedings on the Seminar on "Our Role in the Protection of Cultural Heritage" – held at Government Museum Chennai in 2001. R99 then takes me to the Bronze gallery, upstairs from here is a small room given to numismatics. There are no real coins on display here, just replica models along with a little information about the main dynasties found in Tamil Nadu. I ask why this is and R99 tells me that they used to display a few of the real coins, but that back in 2001 there was an attempted theft and so they removed all the genuines. This gallery was

A. Lawson

refurbished in 2003 to be how is now. R99 has been working here for two decades. He says he is interested in all coins but has made a special study of the foreign coins in the collection such as Roman and Venetian. He gives me a guided tour of the numismatics displays, telling me a little about each dynasty. I ask him where the coins in the museums collection have come from. He says they are Treasure Trove. All accidental finds. Excavation finds are handled by the State Department. But he says they often only get one or two coins in an excavation while the treasure trove brings in thousands of coins at a time. They're usually found in terracotta pots. He says to me '*India has the greatest variety of coins found anywhere in the world. They vary in size in shape in production method, even in language, more than anywhere else.*' He talks a little about the Chola coins, '*I always wondered why there are no gold coins found from raja raja chola. Do you know why?*' I don't. I speculate that they were melted down and reused by a later king. He says no, it's because he donated all his gold to the temple at Thanjavur. I ask him whether they are still there. He says no, when the Mughals came they took them all. The bronze gallery takes up most of the building. This area is very much in the style of a traditional art gallery. The objects are displayed as pieces of art rather than pieces of history and little historical context is provided. Indeed there is altogether little in the way of information given. Just a small plaque for each sculpture with a deity name, a date to the nearest century and a place.

04/05/15

- Interaction with R100, founder of open-air architectural museum Dakshinachitra (A92).

05/05/15

- Interaction with R99, numismatics curator, Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai (A93).

06/05/15

- Wooden door shop, Mylapore, Chennai
I've noticed this shop a couple of times. It sells heavy and sometimes carved wooden doors which are in many ways similar to the antique doors from Chettinad, but these appear to be newly made. I want to find out how their prices compare to the antique doors so I go down there and talk to the shop assistant. He says he can't give me exact prices as doors will be made to order, and vary according to size, wood and workmanship but he gives me a couple of estimates: (all teak wood) Panel – 20,000 rps, heavily machine carved door – 1 lakh, hand carved door – 1.5 lakh.

07/05/15

- Conversation with R101, Commissioner, Tamil Nadu State Department for Archaeology, Chennai
He does not have long to see me, so I tell him I just want to find out what role State department place in managing and registering antiquities. Says that State Department no longer deal with this – *its been handed over to ASI (central gov). For exporting licence there is a committee that meets once a fortnight which we are part of. It is very rare that we deny exporting licence. In our department we do excavations and we keep the antiquities in site museums.*

08/05/15

- Interaction with R90, Chennai based coin collector/dealer (A94).

19/05/15

- Photographs of restaurants, shops, and antique shops, Bangalore, mainly for Chettinad case-study.

B4e: Fieldtrip to Jodhpur to see antique shops/exporters for Chettinad case-study

A. Lawson

21/05/15

- Interaction with R102, Antique/handicraft exporter, Prince Art, Jodhpur (A95).
- Interaction with R103, antique/handicraft exporter, Prachin Arts, Jodhpur (A96).

22/05/15

- Interaction with R104, antique/handicraft exporter, Suncity Art Exporter, Jodhpur (A97).

B4f: Fieldtrip to London

10/08/15

- Interaction with R105, Numismatics Research curator, British Museum, London (A98).

13/08/15

- Interaction with R106, Spink & Co, London (A99).
- Portobello Road, Chloe Arberry, antique shop, Portobello Road, London

3 APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Research participants

For clarity and in order to preserve anonymity where necessary, all research participants have been allocated a letter and a number. Those conducting the interaction as an interviewer, including myself, are indicated by the letter I. Those taking part in the role of a translator are indicated by the letter T. Those taking part as respondents are indicated by the letter R.

3.2 Interviewers:

For the majority of the interactions the interviewer is the thesis author, I1. On several occasions logistics required others to carry out the interview on he behalf.

I1: thesis author, female, 25-35, British (all interactions excepting A39)

I2: first supervisor of thesis author, female, British (A1-A2)

I3: artist and teacher, female, 35-45, Tamil (I3 is also R46) (A39)

3.3 Translators:

T1: freelance archaeologist, male, 35-45, Tamil (A8-A17, A19-A39, A76-A78, A81-A82)

T2: second supervisor of thesis author, female, 25-35, Tamil (A47-A52)

T3: anthropology student, female, 20-25, Tamil (A58-A60)

T4: housewife, female, 45-55, Tamil (A79-A80)

3.4 Respondents:

RESPON-DENT NUMBER	INTERACTION NUMBER (APPENDIX A)	DATE (APPENDIX B)	ROLE/JOB	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN, COMMUNITY/RELIGION
R1	A1	B: 04/04/13	Antique/handicraft shop assistant	Male	25-35	India
R2	A2	B: 04/04/13	Antique furniture shop assistant	Male		India, <i>Muslim</i>
R3	A2	B: 04/04/13	Antique furniture shop assistant	Male		India, <i>Muslim</i>
R4	A3	B: 05/04/13	Customer at antique shop	Male	45-55	India, Karnataka
R5	A4	B: 05/04/13	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India

A. Lawson

RESPONDENT NUMBER	INTERACTION NUMBER (APPENDIX A)	DATE (APPENDIX B)	ROLE/JOB	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN, COMMUNITY/RELIGION
R6	A5	B: 09/04/13	Antique/handicraft shop assistant	Male	35-45	India, Kashmir
R7	A6; A74	B: 15/04/13; B: 07/04/15	Antiquities and art collector and dealer	Male	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu
R8	A6	B: 15/04/13	Freelance Archaeologist/art historian	Male	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu
R9	A7: A75	B: 17/04/13; B: 07/04/15	Coin and small antiquities collector and researcher	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R10	A8; A62	B: 18/04/13; B: 27/09/14	Owner of antique business, antique and reclaimed wood and new furniture	Male	45-55	Germany
R11	A9	B: 19/04/13	Site Warden at Arikemedu	Male	45-55	India
R12	A10	B: 19/04/13	Coin collector and dealer	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R13	A11	B: 19/04/13	Occasional finder of coins from seashore	Male	25-35	India, Tamil Nadu
R14	A12	B: 19/04/13	Bronzesmith	Male	65-	India, Tamil Nadu
R15	A13	B: 20/04/13	Villagers from whom a local stone Buddha was stolen	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R16	A14	B: 21/04/13	Owner/occupant of v.old Chettiar style house	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu
R17	A15	B: 21/04/13	Antique shop owner	Male		India
R18	A15; A26; A60: A80	B: 21/04/13; B: 25/11/13; B: 15/09/14; B: 11/04/15	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India
R19	A15	B: 21/04/13	Antique shop owner	Male		India
R20	A15; A28; A59: A79	B: 21/04/13; B: 25/11/13; B: 15/09/14; B: 11/04/15	Antique shop owner	Male	35-45	Indin, <i>Rowther, Muslim</i>
R21	A16	B: 22/04/13	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent female)	Multiple (main respondent 45-55)	Indian, Tamil Nadu, <i>Irula</i>
R22	A17	B: 22/04/13	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent male)	Multiple (main respondent 35-45)	India, Tamil Nadu, Krishnagiri/Dharapuram/Vellore
R23	A18	B: 30/04/13	Antique shop owner	Male	45-55	North India
R24	A19	B: 23/11/13	Antique shop owner	Male	45-55	India
R25	A20	B: 23/11/13	Antique furniture shop assistant/carpenter	Male	35-45	India
R26	A21	B: 23/11/13	Antique/handicraft shop assistant		45-55	India
R27	A22	B: 23/11/13	Antique furniture shop owner	Male	65-	India, <i>Muslim</i>
R28	A23	B: 23/11/13	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India
R29	A24	B: 23/11/13	Antique shop owner	Male	45-55	India
R30	A25	B: 25/11/13	Antique furniture shop owner	Male	45-55	India
R31	A27	B: 25/11/13	Local customer at Antique shop	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad
R32	A29	B: 25/11/13	Antique shop customer	Female	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu, Madurai
R33	A30	B: 25/11/13	Antique shop customer	Male	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu, Mayiladuthurai

A. Lawson

RESPON-DENT NUMBER	INTERACTION NUMBER (APPENDIX A)	DATE (APPENDIX B)	ROLE/JOB	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN, COMMUNITY/ RELIGION
R34	A31	B: 25/11/13	Local Chettiar dealer of antiques	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R35	A32	B: 26/11/13	Wood furniture and house demolition business	Male	55-65	India
R36	A33	B: 26/11/13	Caretaker of Chettiar house	Male	55-65	India
R37	A34	B: 26/11/13	Caretaker of Chettiar house	Male	45-55	India
R38	A34	B: 26/11/13	Occupant of Chettiar House	Female	55-65	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R39	A34	B: 26/11/13	Occupant of Chettiar House	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R40	A35	B: 26/11/13	Relative of owner of a Chettiar house recently demolished	Female	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R41	A36; A37; A38: A39; A47; A48	B: 26/11/13; B: 27/11/13; B: 20/08/14; B: 14/09/14; B: 21/08/14	Local antique dealer	Male	55-65	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R42	A37	B: 26/11/13	Local antique dealer	Male	35-45	India
R43	A40	B: 01/12/13	Antique collector, founder of traditional craft revival organisation	Male	35-45	India, Mumbai, Nagarathar Chettiar
R44	A41	B: 16/12/13	Collector and academic researcher of coins and small antiquities, mostly from Tamil Nadu riverbed	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R45	A42	B: 23/04/14	Businesswoman and promoter of Chettinad culture and heritage	Female	55-65	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R46	A43	B: 27/04/14	Antique collector	Female	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu
R47	A44	B: 23/05/14	Antique coin and bank note dealer	Male	45-55	India
R48	A45	B: 25/05/14	Coin dealer and collector with an interest in Numismatic research	Male	25-35	North India
R49	A46	B: 25/05/14	Coin collector and amateur researcher	Male	25-35	India, Gujurat, Baroda
R50	A47	B: 20/08/14	Occupant of Chettiar House	Female	55-65	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R51	A47	B: 20/08/14	Occupant Chettiar House	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R52	A47	B: 20/08/14	Occupant of Chettiar House	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R53	A48	B: 20/08/14	Occupant of Chettiar House	Male	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar
R54	A49	B: 20/08/14	Manager of Chettinad heritage hotel	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, Nagarathar Chettiar

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RESPONDENT NUMBER	INTERACTION NUMBER (APPENDIX A)	DATE (APPENDIX B)	ROLE/JOB	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN, COMMUNITY/ RELIGION
R55	A50; A58	B: 22/08/14; B: 12/09/14	Owner of Chettinad house that has been converted to a heritage hotel	Male	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, <i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>
R56	A51	B: 22/08/14	Carpenter	Male	25-35	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, <i>Devanga Chettiar</i>
R57	A52	B: 22/08/14	Carpenter	Male	45-55	India
R58	A53	B: 25/08/14	INTACH Pondicherry Chief Architect	Male	45-55	India
R59	A54; A63	B: 26/08/14; B: 27/09/14	Antique shop and workshop owner	Male	45-55	India
R60	A55	B: 28/08/14	Heritage hotel owner and founder of Chettinad heritage organisation	Male	45-55	French
R61	A56	B: 06/09/14	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India, Andhra Pradesh, <i>Chettiar</i>
R62	A57; A73	B: 08/09/14; B: 22/11/14	Antique/craft shop owner and antique collector	Male	45-55	India, Karnataka
R63	A58	B: 12/09/14	Son of R55	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, <i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>
R64		B: 14/09/14	Occupant of Chettiar House	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, <i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>
R65	A60	B: 15/09/14	Friend/colleague of R18	Male	45-55	India
R66	A60	B: 15/09/14	Friend/colleague of R18	Male	45-55	India
R67	A61	B: 19/09/14; B: 22/09/14	Friend of R68, organiser of antique exhibitions	Female	35-45	Scotland/India, Madurai
R68	A61	B: 19/09/14; B: 22/09/14	Antique business owner	Male	35-45	India, Karnataka, Bangalore
R69	A64	B: 28/09/14	Antique shop owner	Male	45-55	India, Kerala, Trivandrum
R70	A65	B: 28/09/14	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India, Kerala
R71	A66	B: 05/11/14	Antique shop owner	Female	35-45	India, Tamil Nadu
R72	A67	B: 09/11/14	Antique collector	Female	65-	India, Tamil Nadu
R73	A68	B: 09/11/14	Journalist, amateur historian, heritage activist	Male	65-	India, Tamil Nadu, Chettinad, <i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>
R74	A69	B: 09/11/14	Businessman	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu, <i>Nagarathar Chettiar</i>
R75	A70	B: 10/11/14	Antique shop owner	Male	35-45	India
R76	A71	B: 12/11/14	Cinema art director/set designer	Male	65-	India, Tamil Nadu
R77	A72	B: 16/11/14	Antique collector	Male	35-45	India, Karnataka
R78	A76; A77; A78	B: 09/04/15	Coin dealer	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu, Salem
R79	A76	B: 09/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent male)	Multiple (main respondent 35-45)	India, Tamil Nadu, Patteeswaram, <i>Irula</i>
R80	A78	B: 09/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent female)	Multiple (main respondent 35-45)	India, Tamil Nadu, <i>Irula</i>
R81	A78	B: 09/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Male	25-35	India, Tamil Nadu,

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RESPON-DENT NUMBER	INTERACTION NUMBER (APPENDIX A)	DATE (APPENDIX B)	ROLE/JOB	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF ORIGIN, COMMUNITY/ RELIGION
						<i>Irula</i>
R82	A78	B: 09/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent male)	Multiple (main respondent 55-65)	India, Tamil Nadu, <i>Irula</i>
R83	A81	B: 12/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent male)	Multiple (main respondent 45-55)	India, Tamil Nadu, <i>Irula</i>
R84		B: 19/04/15	Coin dealer	Male	25-35	India
R85		B: 22/02/14	Coin dealer	Male	25-35	India, Tamil Nadu, Salem
R86	A82	B: 12/04/15	Riverbed diggers/panners	Multiple (main respondent male)	Multiple (main respondent 35-45)	India, Tamil Nadu, <i>Kuruvikaran</i>
R87	A83	B: 16/04/15	Commissioner of ASI Chennai Circle	Female	45-55	India
R88	A84	B: 18/04/15	Coin collector	Male	65-	India, Delhi
R89	A85	B: 18/04/15	Coin collector	Male	25-35	India, Mumbai/USA
R90	A94	B: 18/04/15; B: 08/05/15	Coin dealer and collector with an interest in Numismatic research	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R91	A91	B: 18/04/15; B: 21/04/15	Coin collector and dealer	Male	25-35	India, Maharashtra, Mumbai
R92	A86	B: 18/04/15; B: 19/04/15	Coin dealer	Male	55-65	India
R93	A87	B: 19/04/15	Coin collector	Male	25-35	India, Maharashtra, Mumbai
R94	A88	B: 19/04/15	Coin dealer	Male	35-45	USA
R95	A89	B: 20/04/15	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India
R96	A90	B: 20/04/15	Antique shop owner	Male	55-65	India, Muslim
R97		B: 19/04/15; B: 20/04/15	Coin collector	Male	65-	India, Maharashtra, Mumbai, <i>Parsi</i>
R98	A91	B: 21/04/15	Coin dealer	Male	55-65	India, Maharashtra, Mumbai
R99	A93	B: 29/04/15; B: 05/05/15	Numismatics Curator, Gov. Museum Tamil Nadu	Male	45-55	India, Tamil Nadu
R100	A92	B: 04/05/15	Founder of open-air architectural museum in Tamil Nadu	Female	65-	USA
R101		B: 07/05/15	Commissioner of Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology	Male	65-	India
R102	A95	B: 21/05/15	Antique and handicraft exporter	Male	65-	India
R103	A96	B: 21/05/15	Antique business owner	Male	25-35	India
R104	A97	B: 22/05/15	Antique and handicraft exporter	Male	35-45	India
R105	A98	B: 10/08/15	Numismatics research curator, British Museum	Male	35-45	UK
R106	A99	B: 13/08/15	South Asia Expert, London based Auction House	Female	55-65	UK