CHAPTER 6

SOCIAL MANIFESTATION OF RURAL DWELLING IN TAMILNADU

6.0 INTRODUCTION

"Vernacular architecture, in addition to its intrinsic value, offers the most obvious and relevant material for the study of the relative importance of different forces on the development and character of built form. A cross cultural study of such material suggests that, generally for any given situation, climate, site and constraints of material and technology will modify but not determine, the form of the dwellings. That form will be primarily the result of choice among possible alternatives. The choice reflects an image of an ideal life expressed through socio-cultural forces in the broadest sense, which are, therefore more important than physical forces in the generation of form." Amos Rapoport.

In the study of villages of Tamilnadu, it can be seen that both the physical and socio-cultural forces have shaped the habitat. However it would be an oversimplification of this house building process if it were to be analysed purely on functional needs or to adopt the physical determinist viewpoint. This chapter of the research outlines how social structure and relations influence the organisation of space and vice versa. The chapter is thus organised:
• The social relations that are evident in any rural family and the influence of these social relationships on the spatial planning of the dwelling are discussed taking into consideration the various typologies already identified and discussed in the earlier chapter.

• The variations and deviations of the types identified are also discussed in the chapter.

Of the identified three major typologies, the third typology is specific to the Nilgiris. This typology is therefore context specific, whereas the courtyard house and the one-roomed kutchta house are typologies, which are seen throughout the length and breadth of the state of Tamilnadu. Variations and deviations of these two models can be seen all over the state as a result of the changes in caste, occupation, family structure, religion, etc. However before going into the details of these variations and modifications it is important to understand the way in which the shaping of social relations within the dwelling influences the way in which space is organised to suit the cultural and social needs of the people.

6.1 SOCIAL RELATIONS IN A RURAL HOUSE

House structure reflects in a complex way the social relations that are enacted within. These social relations are not clearly apparent and only on discreet questioning and through the use of the questionnaire did some of the facts manifest themselves. The themes of orientation, the use of symbolism, rituals, the position of women, notions of privacy, etc. all dictated the way in which space shaped social relations within.

164 Surveys and documentation done by the students of School of Architecture and Planning under the supervision of the author.
The structure of the joint Hindu family determined the way in which spaces within a house were used. In a joint family all the male members of different generations live together with their wives and daughters who stay on until they marry. While there is no strict seclusion of women there are rules of avoidance between males and females—particularly strong between father in law and daughter in law, between elder brother and younger brother’s wife, between husband and wife and so on. The women generally keep to themselves and maintain a distance from men. There are no strictly defined men’s area and women’s area but there is a relationship between the two that may fluctuate spatially. Men and women can freely converse with each other across the distance maintained, but when women serve the men during meals and other occasions, the distance is broken. The male female relationship therefore, is primarily functional and only secondarily spatial.

In a joint family set-up, no individual is assigned a private space. There are no defined places for sleeping, working and sitting about and this amorphous spatial use of the dwelling is partially due to the relative lack of furniture. Sitting, socialising, eating and sleeping are all therefore performed on the floor and there is no fixed function assigned to any area of the house. Women generally sleep separately and adjust the sleeping space according to that of the men. This is a custom, which could have evolved from the fact that the men were out at work for reasonably long times in year and women grouped together for security reasons.

Although relations between the members of the household may be relaxed irrespective of gender, a strict age based hierarchy operates between generations. This hierarchy is particularly clear in the relations between mothers and daughters in law. The daughter in law has to perform her duties to the family before tending to that of her husband or her own.

Though women were not secluded, society placed a restriction on the movement of women outside their homes. They could move around only in a group
or with the general company of the male members of the family and access to recreational and other outside activities was a family affair. The visits to fairs, weekly markets and participation in festivities were looked upon with great gaiety. However today, these forms of recreation, which involved larger communities, are now replaced by better communication networks, television, newspapers and magazines.

Regarding childbirth it was customary for the wife to deliver the child in the home of her own parents. Thus, in the typical dwelling, children born in it belong not to the wives, but to the daughters who have returned to their natal homes. A separate space for them in the house is allocated; if space was a restriction then some area of the house was cordoned off for them. Menstruating girls who, because of pollution taboos, had to withdraw to a restricted area used the same space. When these girls married they returned to their natal homes for parturition because that occasion was equally associated with pollution, and only the ritually safe locus for such an event was the premarital menstrual corner. This is also directly related to giving rest to the girls and women both during menstruation and parturition. During parturition the entire house is considered unclean for a period of 6 days after which the house was thoroughly cleaned and the naming ceremony for the new-born child was held. Worship of any form and participation in festivities is strictly forbidden to all menstruating women.

Bathing is usually done in the open at the well, pond or river where people bathed with their clothes on. This practice also derives from the exigencies of the joint family where the one commodity not available was privacy. In fact the need to do anything in private was almost an admission of guilt.

The storage of articles in a rural dwelling is as follows. The grain is stored in earthen jars or in granaries. Clothes are hung from strings stretched across the room or on pegs attached to walls. Walls had small niches in which small articles are kept, while small similar niches serve to house an oil lamp. The only item of
furniture is the traditional swing and some chests for storage that too found only in the houses of the more affluent. Bedding if any is rolled up every morning and spread out every night. One constraint is the lack of space for a large joint family and thus spaces, which were multifunctional during the day, doubled up for sleeping at night. Besides this inculcated a sense of discipline among family members as going to sleep and waking up of every family member is regulated.

It is in fact the puja or the daily worship of god that prescribes a course of discipline, which is very strict in the case of the Brahmin community and higher caste Hindus. In some cases the puja may be a very elaborate affair, but basically the chief features of the ritual have both religious and secular connotations. A day in the life of any rural family thus begins with the act of bathing as a sign of ablution and cleansing oneself. Having enacted this very secular yet ritual activity the house or at least the puja room is cleaned; the front door opened, the space in front of the house or the yard in front is swept, sprinkled with water and adorned with a kolam, a pattern drawn with rice flour. After these rituals the following acts are performed: achanama meaning the ceremonial sipping of water; the pranayama- control of breath done normally in the open air and the sankalpa- resolution to perform the puja. Only then is one ready to perform the puja. The worship is done through the chanting of Vedic hymns and through food and symbolic offerings. Small offerings of cooked food are also made to the birds in the open air to appease any spirits wandering about. Only then can the family consume food. This is a daily ritual in the life of a Brahmin but amongst other communities it is most often a weekly ritual.

The act of drawing the kolam in front of the house needs special mention. It is viewed not only as a decorative element but also has a social significance. It permitted the women and the young girls to indulge in an artistic pursuit while building up their confidence. It is viewed, as a confidence building ritual as the girls in the past had no other outlet to express themselves to the rest of the community. Besides it had an effect on the general health of the women, as breathing the good
fresh air (*pranayama*) early in the morning was considered good. These *kolams* in conjunction with other rituals act as a catalyst in the renewal of life forces in the house accompanied by a removal of all that is bad and unwanted. This ritual is also enacted in the evenings before sundown and is accompanied by the ritual lighting of the lamp. On festive occasions and on auspicious days these patterns take very elaborate forms and they also adorn wall spaces below sill, around thresholds and in courtyards. Doors are left open through out the day as it is considered auspicious and a welcome to good spirits.

As the food for the puja and the gods is cooked on the family hearth the kitchen was considered sacred. Thus it is kept free of polluting women that is during menstruation and parturition. This is one of the reasons that the hearth is duplicated outside the house so the cooking of food could be done without polluting the main hearth of the house during those days.

During the day the men go out to work in the fields or become engaged in economic activity within the confines of the house. Women and children also go out to work to assist the man if agricultural holdings are small and if it is too expensive to engage other labour. This is mostly seen in the houses of the less affluent rural folk. In the case of the artisan there is no age or sex distinction and every one participates in one way or another in the work. The street deity is worshipped daily at the shrine as one moves in and out of the dwelling. Small acts of worship are performed as one passes by a shrine or sacred place within the village. On auspicious days of the week and on festive occasions the village god is worshipped at the village temple.

On entering any house in the village during the day, perhaps the most striking impression of the visitor is the contrast between the overwhelming presence of women and the near absence of men. Particularly during the day the men are almost entirely missing from the house being engaged in work outside. Those that are present, often the old, sit alone, or appropriately occupy the very margins of the house.
space; sitting on the *thinnai*, watching the comings and goings in the neighbourhood or engaging in conversation with passers by. In the absence of men the women move freely within the confines of the house going about their daily activities whether attending to children, cooking or cleaning. Washing and bathing take place at the village well or tank if facilities are not available, in the houses of the less affluent. This enables women to interact and engage in mild gossip. In the absence of men, women and girls also venture out into the *thinnai* of the house, which is predominantly men's area, and thus maintain a link with the outer world. Hospitality is also offered to the visitor in the confines of the *thinnai* and only very rarely is a visitor taken inside the house. Only close relatives are entertained within the house.

The hearth inside the house is often duplicated outside the house, towards the back yard and therefore the rear. If space is not permissible then sometimes to the front of the house, so that the woman may supervise the children at play as well as engage in social discourse with the neighbour. The preparation of food itself is relaxed involving a number of processes which constructively engage the woman such as picking and cleaning of the grain, grinding and powdering the condiments, preservation of food, etc. The food is first served to the men and only then consumed by women, the children being taken care of much earlier. In joint families the women serve food collectively to the men. This activity brings the adult members of the family together for at least once in the day during which family related matters could be discussed.

The dictates of the social structure and relationships between the members of the family, between the men and women as laid by the joint family system, is evident even in nucleated families. In the face of education and exposure to urban society these precepts still exist, having become tradition bound. However notions of pollution and purity are not and cannot be strictly adhered to in a nucleated family.
The social manifestation of houses in the villages of Tamilnadu is discussed with reference to the three identified typologies. Though the one roomed kutchha dwelling may be the most basic unit of house form as revealed by the case studies, the shaping of space and social relations will be easier understood if the larger traditional courtyard houses are first discussed. These houses were built to accommodate the joint family and the social relations established in the villages of Tamilnadu between the members of the family - men and women, adults and children, adults and the elderly in any familial structure that have grown and evolved from this.

6.2 THE COURTYARD HOUSE

6.2.1 Space and Social Relations

The *koodam* is central to all dwellings and is the multifunctional space that provides for most aspects of dwelling such as living, socialising, sleeping, working, etc. This space along with the courtyard dominates the social interplay of any dwelling. It is thus the prime focus of the dwelling and it is the one entity that profoundly influences the activity of any household and dictates the rituals of the family. It is a totally flexible space that can accommodate not only the day to day activities and rituals of the family, but also serves to host a number of ceremonies and auspicious functions like a naming ceremony, marriage, etc. It also serves to segregate the inner functions of the house from those of the outer.

Generally the women occupy the rear of the house and the men the front. When men are in the *koodam* the women occupy the outer margins of this space or retreat to the rear of the house. But if the men are out in the yard or in the *thittmai*, women freely use the central space, which is the *koodam* along with the *muiram*. When men are out at work the women engage in activity in the central space or the courtyard. It therefore is the space where the two domains meet and merge. In the absence of men they also venture out into the *thinmai* as this provides the social
contact with the outer world. For girls who came of age and for unmarried girls this was the only way of knowing the outer world, as their movements outside the home were restricted. Thus there is no 'male' or 'female' space in the literate sense of the term and women's space derives itself from that of the men.

A number of rooms may open out from the mutram, however no space within the dwelling with the exception of the kitchen is given overly to any rigidly defined function. The most visible function of these rooms looking at the material things within the spaces is that the rooms served primarily for storage, all living functions being relegated to the koodam. All activities are performed on the floor be it sitting, socialising, sleeping or eating and this accounts for the lack of furniture. The floor thus forms the locus of all activities.

The worship of gods is closely related to the preparation of food. Thus the puja space and the adupu are normally found in spaces adjacent to each other. The kitchen (samaiyal arai) along with the puja space thus being sacred is kept free from polluting women. Space is cordoned off for women during menstruation and parturition. In larger houses a room is kept separately for the use of women during these periods. This is strictly adhered to in the case of Brahmins or in higher orthodox social groups. However in other cases the women during periods of pollution are banned from entering the kitchen and attending any forms of worship.

A small, enclosed open to sky space provided in the backyard serves for purposes of bathing and latrines if any, are provided in the backyard. Cattle sheds and storage of farm implements are also relegated to the backyard.

The courtyard house has manifested itself variously not only as the house of the higher ranked social groups such as the Brahmin and the Chettiar, but also in the houses of other community groups such as the weavers, fishermen, potters,
agriculturists, etc. The core of all these houses revolves around the koodam and this along with the mutram determines the social interplay of the houses even as it serves to distribute the functions around it. The agraharam house of the Brahmin and the Chettiar house as manifestations of the courtyard house are discussed in detail as they manifest strongly the ritual intent of the house. Besides the courtyard house is manifested as a modification of the nalukettu type, which we see in the adjoining state of Kerala. The houses of the other social groups demonstrate the way in which the economic activity blends with the ritual aspects of dwelling.

6.2.2 Agraharam House

This is the term applied typically to Brahmin dwellings, which are found in the immediate environs of the temple. The agraharam constitutes the rows of dwelling units around the temple premises. The temple forms the nucleus and the basic configuration of the surrounding fabric is a contiguous street-edge development with narrow, deep plots sharing common walls. (Ref. Plate No: 30) Each plot has an access street in front and a service lane at the back. The first row of houses overlooks the car streets (processional streets), which run along the temple wall. The car streets of any agraharam are the two-sannidhi streets with houses on both sides and the two-mada streets with houses on one side opposite the temple. These streets were the sacred protection for the temple. Originally only the Brahmins who served the temple occupied the four streets. However today, this caste division is not so stringent and people of other castes live here. This is mainly attributed to the fact the Brahmins being the educated class of people, migrated to cities in search of white-collar jobs and could no longer retain their properties within the villages.

165 samaiyal means food and arai means room in Tamil
The Brahmin community live in Agraharams built in the immediate environs of a temple. House plots are narrow so that more number of houses could be provided in the shadow of the temple. The plots therefore are only 4.5 M in width and as much as 20-30 M in depth. Thus a series of rooms happen one opening into the other through doors provided along strict axes.

Two levels of thinnais are seen here, one on the outside for passers by, and an inner thinnai for the exclusive of the family separated from the outer by a grill enclosure.

The backyards of the houses are accessed by a service lane, through which the cattle are brought in or the menials enter to do hired labour.
6.2.2.1 Plan form and organisation:

“The Brahmin required an accommodation where he could chant the Veda and perform his daily religious rites and teach his disciples. His house was therefore constructed so that there was sufficient accommodation for carrying on his routine of work with ease and comfort.” These lines from the ancient texts showed the importance of the ritual practices in organising the daily routine of the Brahmin and therefore his dwelling place.166

At the basic scale of the dwelling unit, there exists a prototype, which is seen all over Tamilnadu. At its most basic it is a rectangular unit with a pitched roof. (Ref Plate No: 30) This expands into a larger rectangular dwelling of several units with an inner courtyard and outer verandah (thinnai). The basic configuration of the narrow and deep plots necessitates the provision of a circulation passage to connect the various spaces of the dwelling. The spaces in the traditional buildings incorporate flexibility. They are designed to include varied activities and varied notions of privacy. Though rooms may be formed as compartments, they need not necessarily be used for a particular function. It all depends on the user and the occasion. The different divisions in the house like the ‘first portion’, ‘second portion’ or the repetitions of a basic unit in succession were intended to accommodate the needs of a growing joint family.

The open thinnai is a raised platform with wooden pillars supporting the roof above. There may be two, four or six pillars depending upon the width of the thinnai. The thinnai is as much a part of the street as it is of the house. It provides a shelter for passers-by. Large thinnais indicate affluence. The smaller houses have small thinnais. The poorer households have raised mud pial167 outside their houses.

166 C. P. Venkatarama Ayyar: Town Planning in Early South India.
167 Pial is a platform
The affluent Brahmins have partially enclosed *thimais*. Timber slat or iron bars and grills are used to enclose *thimais*. (Agraharam at Alwarthirunagar: Ref Plate: 30) The roof of the *thimais* may be flat using Madras terrace construction or sloped Mangalore tiles supported on timber rafters. These *thimais* sometimes have a sloped back so that sitting would be comfortable.

The entrance door is never in the centre but to one side. The passage, which is on the same axis as the entrance door, connects the *thimai* with the front hall or the *koodam*. The *koodam* is the most important space in the Brahmin dwelling and it is a multifunctional space actively used by the household. It is well lit and ventilated by means of a clerestorey, or an adjacent courtyard, which enhances the quality of the space. The clerestorey is supported by means of columns or pillars of stone or wood with decorative capitals varying from region to region. The central space under the clerestorey which, is defined by the columns, has a diamond shaped pattern on the floor believed to symbolise prosperity and is found in many houses. The traditional wooden swing is an important piece of furniture found in most *koodams*. All ceremonies and auspicious functions, even marriages are performed in the *koodam*. The size of the *koodam* and its decoration is an indication of the wealth and affluence of the household. A large house may have two *koodams*. Generally the kitchen is located of this space and a lot of spill over activity from the kitchen happens here.

The *mutram* or courtyard is a common feature to all *agraharam* houses and are provided in the front, back and the rear of the plot depending on the size and needs of the family. The affluent homes have an exterior entrance courtyard enclosed by a compound wall and provided with a gate at the street edge. Thus the more affluent the family, more isolated it is from the activity of the street. The court in the middle of the house is normally covered with a metal grill and is totally the private area of the house. The floor of the court is paved and the floor level lowered and sloped to drain of water as it is considered impure to have stagnant water within the
house. The courtyard could be at the centre of the house or to one side depending on the width and the configuration of the plot. The water source is sometimes located in the courtyard in the form of a tube well. This has been done for convenience in recent times, as piped water supply to the kitchens did not exist. Earlier water was drawn from the wells and stored in tanks or pots here.

The courtyard at the rear separates the dwelling from the cowshed and the toilets. It is referred to as the pulai kadai or sometimes kolai. The thulasi madam is placed on a pedestal in front of the rear door or in the middle of the mutram is considered auspicious. The pulai kadai is always open to sky and has a number of trees and normally a kitchen garden. The well is most often located here and clothes are washed and dried here. At the end of the pulai kadai is a door, which opens on to the service lane.

Most agraharam houses have two storeys. These double storey dwellings normally have a habitable room in the front part of the first floor of the house. There is a balcony in front of this room just above the thirnai overlooking the street. The staircase to the upper floor is located in the ante space called the rezhi, which connects the koodam with the thirnai. The larger houses have a staircase going up to the terrace at the back of the house.

Most Brahmins were agricultural landlords having lands bequeathed (inam lands) to them by the rulers. This necessitated that the produce from the land be stored within the house. Storage of grain was done in lofts or the upper storey of the house; in the southern regions of the state, this being called the machil was accessed by a ladder located in the front room of the house or the rezhi. (Ref. Plate: 25, 26) The ladder space in the machil could be closed with a wooden shutter on hinges. In the Trichy and Thanjavur districts of the state the grain was stored in large wooden crates called the patayam or nelputir. The grain was also stored in large terracotta granaries and wealthy families used brass containers.
Of the Agraharam type of house the Thirumaligai stands out as a special type of house. It is the residence of the Acharya or swami who is a Vaishnavite leader and house of this type is found in Alwarthirnagar.

6.2.2.2 Space and social relations

The Brahmins have greater notions of pollution and purity than other community groups. Their daily routine consists of a number of rituals that aim at providing an environment free of bad spirits. Rituals both secular and religious like the drawing of kolams\textsuperscript{168} in front of the houses; the worship at the thulasi madam; the daily recital of prayers and the chanting of Vedas; the ritual lighting of lamps; the ritual of bathing and eating are all performed incessantly as part of daily routine to appease the gods and drive out the evil spirits.

The lower caste groups are not permitted to enter streets occupied by the Brahmins, leave alone the dwelling. Only the passers-by of considerable social standing are allowed to sit on the thinnai. Even here many agraharam houses of affluent Brahmins are provided with double thinnais a lower outer one and a higher inner one (Ref. Plate: 30) Only people of some higher social standing are encouraged to use the upper thinnai this being almost exclusively used by people of the house. Only very close relatives are allowed to enter into the house. Entry to houses could be gained on removal of footwear, which is considered polluting.

Within the house the kitchen where the food for gods is cooked and the puja where the gods are worshipped are the most sacred parts of the house. Hence these two spaces are provided next to each other. The courtyard being the sacred centre of the house is also kept free of all forms of pollution as well as polluting women. The Brahmins are very rigid on the notions of pollution and purity so that the women of the household, during times of menstruation and parturition have to spend

\textsuperscript{168} Patterns drawn with rice flour in front of the house
the required number of days in isolation. Thus a room is provided separately for them either in front of the house accessed from the *thimmai* or at the rear of the house accessed from the back yard. All this was possible within the framework of a joint family where other women of the household looked after the needs of the family. However with the break up of the joint family system it is not possible for the women to strictly adhere to this custom. Nevertheless worship during these times is totally tabooed for women.

Storage of grain by Brahmin landlords necessitated that labour be employed to carry the grain into the house; to clean it and store it for future consumption. Thus lower class people had to access the house to engage in this work. However through proper spatial planning the Brahmins were able to segregate the activity from the private areas of the house. The upper storey used for storage could be accessed through the staircase from the *rezhi* without entering the house or by a staircase at the rear gaining access to the terrace. The untouchables who came to clean toilets and engage in menial labour could only access the house through the service lane to the rear of the house. The cattle would also be brought through the service lane into the back yard. This area was therefore considered to be the most profane part of the house.

6.2.3 Chettiar House: A mercantile Dwelling

Chettians, more exactly called as ‘Nattukotai Chettians” or “Nagarathars, constitute a small community of less than one lakh persons today according Census of India 1991. They are one of Tamilnadu's most visible mercantile groups most known for their earlier financial trading as well as for the large business houses and industry they represent. They have also been major philanthropists in the field of education and religious endowments. The Nagarathars are settled today throughout the cities and towns of Tamilnadu and Bangalore with small populations still residing in Malaysia, Singapore and Srilanka, areas of earlier financial trade of the
Nagarathars. The homeland of the Nagarathars and the location of their ancestral villages (ur)\textsuperscript{169} is Chettinad. It is to their individual ancestral homes in these villages that they return even today to celebrate their major functions like marriage, ear­boring, birth and death ceremonies as well as for a quiet retirement. These 76 villages a number which has been constantly diminishing from an earlier number of 98 occupy the land given to them, according to Chettiar history, by the Pandya king Sundara Pandya when he invited them to migrate to Pandinadu from Kaveripumpattinam.

Chettinad villages are planned and plotted around straight parallel streets and the Chettiar houses are laid in an orderly manner in the north- south orientation. (Ref. Plate No: 31) Each house is a block with access or service streets along the side giving entry into the kitchen court at the back and also providing for women a segregated entry. Families and relatives tended to move in a group so that exclusive Chettiar villages are formed, whereas the older villages had a mixture of caste groups. Each village has the main Siva temple and a tank. Besides other deities and shrines are found primarily Aiyanar and Mariamma. Each Chettiar family traces its lineage to a clan temple, one of nine in Chettinad. These temples play an important role at the time of marriages in the clan.

The ancestral home became a symbol of wealth and status within the community and at the same time acquired a ritual significance which, seen in its wider sense, linked the house with the temple. The Chettiar homes followed a strict code of architecture embodying the codified principles of house building in spite of affluence and social change. Maybe affluence was one of the reasons they could

\textsuperscript{169} ur in Tamil means village
Salient features of a typical village.

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Each village has the main Siva temple and a tank. Besides other deities and shrines are found primarily to Aiyannar and Mariamma.

NOTE: The plans of the villages are only schematic.
keep close to the ancient texts; whereas the houses of the Brahmins who were orthodox and otherwise very ritualistic showed no strict adherence to the prescriptions of the Sastras. The plan was never changed; only expanded, repeated and embellished.

6.2.3.1 Lifestyle and culture

The people of Chettinadu led a very simple life, but wore a considerable amount of jewelry. Importance was given to the functions and festive occasions more than the day-to-day activities and this continues even today. Houses were built therefore to accommodate the very elaborate ceremonies and rituals conducted on a very grand scale involving the entire community. Thus houses were very palatial. These palatial houses are no longer lived in by the actual owners but are returned to on every auspicious occasion. They are maintained and managed by persons who form part of the extended family.

The female Chettiars (aachis) are famous for their thrifty housekeeping. While men traded in other lands and overseas, these women with their own business acumen were able to manage their households. Cattle were kept in the backyard to produce milk for their own consumption as well as sold to generate money. To cut on housekeeping costs, provisions were bought at the right time of the year and carefully preserved through a number of processes for use throughout the year. The male members financed at the national and international level, whereas the aachis carried out the same at the domestic level. The money saved by the aachis sometimes was loaned out a high rates of interest or more often invested in gold jewelry or silver and brass vessels.

Chettinadu houses mirror the norms and functions of the community. Elder male members in a family often migrated to other countries, normally S. E.

170 aachi is the general Tamil term used for a Chettiar woman.
Asia, for periods of three years, leaving behind the women and children. The younger or older retired male members or relatives of the family looked after the houses. Thus spaces were exclusively created for them in front of the house, such as the highly decorated thinmai and a court. Women spent most of their time to the rear of the house where the kitchen is located.

### 6.2.3.2 Plan form and spatial organisation

The ancestral home became the symbol of wealth, status and power within the community. Chettiar houses have continually followed a strict code of architecture embodying the codified principles of house building in the Sastras through all their affluence and social change. The contact with other cultures overseas led to the incorporation of a lot of decorative details from other styles. Nevertheless the architecture of the house never changed- its basic plan was repeated, expanded and embellished, but hardly changed. Eclecticism thus was portrayed in the exterior whereas the internal arrangements remained traditional.

The plan of the house emerged from the early houses of the Chettiars, which had as their focus a large central courtyard for the preparation, and drying of grains as well as for ritual occasions. (Ref. Plate No: 32, 33) They were simple single storied constructions and represented an agrarian community. There is little sophistication in these houses compared to the houses of the merchants of the 19th and 20th centuries. These houses were primarily out of wood with thatched roofs of which no examples remain but have been described in early Tamil literature: Silapadikaram.

From their earlier experience at Kaveripoopattinam\(^{171}\) where frequent floods occurred the Chettiar raised their houses by 2M. The planning concept was determined by a number of factors:

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\(^{171}\) What remains of Kaveripoopatinam is today preserved by the government as a heritage site and is now called Poompuhar.
This house represents the First Phase of development in the Chettiar house. The house is organized around a central courtyard (mutram) used here for both auspicious functions and ceremonies as well as for kitchen related activities like drying of grain.

Veedu rooms surround the mutram each room being allocated to the male member of the house. "Veedu" means house and this is the territory of one male member. The veedu has a vellarai (outer room) and a ullarai (inner room). The outer spaces of the house move from private to public spaces through a series of raised platforms or ‘thinnais’ the outer most thinnai in front of the house being an exclusive male area for entertaining and receiving guests. Guest rooms and office spaces are provided off this space.

The kitchen and its ancillary spaces are located to the rear of the dwelling and this is predominantly the women’s space. Staircases at the four corners of the courtyard give access to the upper floor thereby giving the necessary segregation for the men and women in accessing the upper areas of the dwelling. The spaces above here are exclusively used for storage.

Kutchin or the menstruation rooms are provided at the rear.
The dwelling represents the Phase II in the development of the Chettiar house. The spaces to the rear are extended to accommodate the kitchen and the women's space. The house becomes progressively plainer as one proceeds from the outer to the inner and as it reaches the women's quarters it is strictly functional.

Columns of the inner and outer thinnais in front of the dwelling are highly decorated made of either granite or Burma teak.

Exquisitely carved floral bracket of the column.
First they were involved in trading and banking and therefore had to have storage space for valuables and cash. The side rooms *Ullarai*\(^{172}\) and the *Veliarai*\(^{173}\) served the purpose.

The house had to provide for the accommodation of guests, supporters and business people who frequently visited the house.

The men folk were away on business for most times of the year and the women folk had to be provided with maximum security. This indicated the introvert nature of planning, with minimum external accesses.

The numerous occasions during which the family got together had to provide for ceremonial spaces as well as large dining halls. The *Kalyana kottagai* (marriage hall) and *Bhojana hall* (dining hall) were determined by this requirement.

The basic parts of a Chettiar house are the outer *thinnai* for visitors and an inner *thinnai* towards the internal courtyard. The central courtyard is surrounded by a series of rooms accessed by a roofed passage. These rooms may be double or single rooms. The double rooms are called the *veedu* (literally meaning house in Tamil) as it is assigned to the son and not enjoyed by the entire family. Traditionally the inner room (*ullarai*) is for storage and the outer room (*veliarai*) next to the courtyard is for sleeping. All houses will have a full second courtyard or occasionally only a semi courtyard for cooking and for eating and for the women to sleep. (Ref. Plate no: 32, 33) As families grew, domestic and ritual needs also increased and with it houses were enlarged with more courtyards and rooms. Specific pattern in their expansion can be noted in a large number of later houses.

In many houses a separate dining hall is added to seat guests during weddings (*bhojana hall*). They take the form of long narrow halls and are most

\(^{172}\) *Ul* means inner and *arai* means room in Tamil hence *Ularai* reads inner room

\(^{173}\) *Veli* means outer and *arai* means room in Tamil hence *Veliarai* reads outer room
frequently added directly behind the main courtyard. This hall was purely functional to accommodate long lines of people seated on the floor, who would be served the meal on large plantain leaves by attendants. For all the elegance of the homes, meals sometimes for up to 3000 guests were strictly a functional affair. Wedding kitchens were also added to the traditional homes consisting of wood fed clay stoves on the ground over which large vessels could be put for cooking. The rooms around the main courtyard usually on the left side were used for dowry displays, given by the bride’s family.

Upper storeys were added and living spaces shifted to the upper levels as the lower rooms became store-rooms to hold the dowry items. These also became the private apartments for the married couples. After 1950 AD it was no longer necessary for the woman to request permission of her mother in law to sleep with her husband away from the women. The upper storeys of the house could be accessed by staircases provided at the four corners of the main courtyard providing the necessary segregation for men and women.

6.2.3.3 Space and social relations

Chettiar houses best reflect the social forces at play in the plan and organisation of a house. Chettiar men were originally localised salt merchants who married Vellala\textsuperscript{174} women when they settled in Pandinadu. These women were very conservative and though uneducated played a major role in the disposition of functions within the house. In the business practice the male Chettiars migrated to S. E. Asian countries for periods of three consecutive years. Their families functioned under the watchful eye of one or more male relatives. This set up led to very conservative social rules, which in their essential form are still being maintained by the greater part of the community today.

\textsuperscript{174} Shepherdess caste
Affluence gave the community the opportunity to create spaces to implement these rules. The front of the house including the outside *thinnai*, which is beautifully decorated, is reserved for the males, for visitors and business people. The front of the inside of the house is reserved for the male members of the family and their guests. Women spend their time in the kitchen rear of the house, the back verandah and the kitchen garden. They were also permitted to use the inner *thinnai* of the house near the main courtyard particularly if the house was small. The house becomes progressively plainer as one goes from the ‘outer’ to the ‘inner’; as it reaches the women’s quarters it is strictly functional. All Chettiar houses from the late 19th–20th century onwards have a side entrance for women so that they do not have to enter through the men’s quarters.

The community has many taboos for rules of avoidance on relationships (mother in law and son in law; daughter in law and father in law; brother in law and unmarried sisters of age; etc.) that spaces were used to segregate the sexes except children. With its high walls and inward orientation the family functioned as a self contained unit.

The planning of the house was done in accordance to the “*Manasara*” and the abridged Tamil version the “*Manaiyadi Sastram*”. These concepts appear to be integral to the Chettiar house both in the architecture and the ritual practices of the Chettiars and the use of space. The central point in the house is the courtyard and is the most sacred. The front and the back of the houses, which include the most vulnerable spaces, are also the marginal social spaces. These include the back gardens and the verandahs with its small room (kutchin) used by polluting women. Men for socialising, sleeping, and conducting informal business use the front verandah. Traditionally the main door of the house is placed centrally on the façade (unlike in the Brahmin houses where they come on the side) and they are in alignment straight through the house. This custom believes that in order to let the good spirits drift
through at ease through the house and the bad spirits who seem to hover everywhere exit easily without getting trapped inside the house.

Throughout their lives Chettiars traditionally re-enact the rituals to cleanse and purify the house as well as usher in auspiciousness and fertility. Daily rituals as well as rituals on auspicious and inauspicious periods of the Tamil calendar are followed. Even today the Chettiars though settled all over the world maintain their links with their ancestral homes which have been preserved in toto, and return to perform ritualistic duties as well as on auspicious occasions there.

6.2.4 Other Manifestations of the Courtyard House

6.2.4.1 Weaver's House

Weavers are artisans or craftsmen who form part of any village system. However in Tamilnadu there are centres of weaving such as Kancheepuram, Tirupur and Salem, Madurai and Kumbakonam, etc. In the past the craftsmen made the product and merchants traded these. Due to exploitation by traders these weavers have formed co-operatives that undertake the placement of orders as well as sell the finished product. Nevertheless there has been no real influence because of this change and the weaving activity is still carried on as a cottage industry within the confines of the home.

Handloom weaving in most cases is an informal sector activity where the home is also the place of work. This activity engages the entire family in a series of activities such as spinning, gumming and dyeing of yarn and weaving the product whether a sari, lungi, dhoti, or angavastram. Weaving is done popularly with a pit loom. In the pit loom arrangement the weaver sits on the ground with his legs in a pit scooped out from the floor of the house. The loom is stretched out on the floor the length depending on the type of product made. This is the most economical and the
easier method of providing a loom in the house. This is a fixed arrangement calling for a permanent place within the house. However the weaving activity like all other activities in rural areas is seasonal, as the loom is difficult to operate during the monsoon season. In many of these villages the courtyard house is modified to suit the economic activity at the same time keeping in line with the demands of the social system.

6.2.4.1.1 Plan form and Organisation

The plan form and organisation of spaces is typical of any courtyard house with the *thinnai* as the element fronting and interacting with the street. The *koodam* is the central feature and along with the *mutram* provides the best kind of environment for this activity as it is well lit and ventilated. (Ref. Plate No: 34, 35)

Thus the loom is accommodated in the *koodam*. In many cases there are two looms provided within the space by having a raised pit loom over the one below worked at in the opposite direction. Space therefore has been efficiently used to provide for more workstations.

The room in front of the house behind the *thinnai* most often also accommodates the loom. If there are no family members to work on the loom and if affordability permits labour may be engaged to operate the loom. A small window with a low sill provides the light and ventilation to this workspace and air movement is generated at the working level. Glass roof tiles also provide overhead light. The kitchen and puja space is relegated to the rear of the house. The back yard is effectively used for the other processes of weaving such as the dyeing and gumming. Gumming most often is done on the streets, as the lengths of thread have to be stretched out for the process.
1) The two koodams serve primarily to accommodate the loom and the various other functions of dwelling are confined to the margins of house space.

2) The thinnais around the courtyard are peculiar only to this village. The locus of activities for the women folk is the space around the mutram and to the rear of the house. A choola is provided in the mutram for cooking, the one inside being used mainly in times of bad weather.

3) The toilet is provided to the back of the house not touching the main house due to social inacceptance.
Glass roof tiles are provided so that the interior work spaces are well lit.

The loom is raised above the ground which permits the use of the space below it. As the floor is the locus of activity this method of accommodating the loom is preferred.

House 1 is around 25 years old and is typical courtyard house. The pit loom is accommodated in the 'koodam' where best conditions of light & ventilation prevail. An additional loom is provided in the front room of the house.

House 2 is a fairly new house 15 years old. The house is planned to provide the two brothers who own the house with equal and identical spaces. However here also the same importance given to the loom and hence the work space is seen.

In addition one of the owners is also a post master and therefore a small room is partitioned of into the post office.

The weaver sits in a pit and works on the loom.
6.2.4.1.2 Space and the shaping of relations

Working at the loom still remains largely men’s activity though this is fast changing. Men in recent times have taken to jobs outside the house and women have to necessarily operate the looms or engage labour. As it requires the effort of the entire family to make the product, the social distance within the dwelling is not visible.

The thinnai still performs its duties to the street while predominantly functioning as the men’s space. As mentioned earlier, the front room of the house behind the thinnai is often provided with the loom. Therefore the man at work is able to communicate with the street visually and is also able to engage in conversation with a casual visitor sitting on the thinnai of the house. The thinnai is also engaged in weaving related activity as women of the house may use this space to spin the thread, while maintaining social contact with the street. The spinning activity is also done in the koodam or in the rear verandah or backyard for the convenience of the woman. The economic activity therefore dominates the spatial organisation of the house and is given more importance than the actual aspects of ‘dwelling’. Notions of pollution and purity are common aspects to any dwelling but are not so rigidly followed. In nucleated families strict adherence to this is not always possible and the custom is done away with. Only worship and visits to the temple are prohibited for women during periods of pollution. Thus to conclude, the weaving activity is the determinant as to how spaces are organised and social relationships are defined. As the work engages both men and women social distance within the dwelling becomes secondary to spatial distance.

The weaving activity also engages the outer space and therefore the community at large in a series of activities visually, socially and spatially. The laying out the threads for a design requires a long length of space approximately 7M, an activity that cannot be done in the confines of the home due to space restriction. This
is done therefore in the street and involves a couple of men. The streets where weavers live are often broad and provided with trees so that this function could be done in shade. This part of the process is normally done in the morning when the weather is more conducive for outdoor activity. Thus a certain amount of vibrancy is generated in the street by this activity and becomes the scene of social interaction. Similarly gumming or starching of threads is taken out into the streets. The linear configuration of streets thus is well suited for these functions. (Ref. Plate: 36)

6.2.4.2 Agriculturist's house

6.2.4.2.1 Plan form and organisation

The plan form and organisation of this house is similar to that of the agraharam house described earlier in this chapter, in the disposition of spaces around the central courtyard. (Ref. Plate No: 36) Here however more importance is given to the storage of grain, within the house, most often taking up most of the inner rooms of the house. A granary could also be provided in the upper level of the house or the loft space, the access being achieved by a steep stairway or by a staircase from either the inner part of the house or from the house. The cattle are kept in the back yard space. Puja here could be provided in a separate room or along with the kitchen as the case may be.

6.2.4.2.2 Space and the shaping of relations

As already seen the courtyard very effectively segregates the front spaces of the house with the rear spaces and therefore segregates both spatially, socially and visually the activities of the house 'outer' and the house 'inner'. Thus total privacy is achieved for the women' spaces which are confined to the inner areas of the house.
The conservative people of Udalaiyur believe that the house should not overtop the Selvama Kali Temple and therefore all houses are single storied.

This agricultural landlord's house within the agraharam of Udalaiyur village, makes use of the adjacent house as its Granary and the court as a service yard for drying and threshing of grain.

For house consumption the dwelling has its own store along with the 'puja' room.

Note the absence of furniture within the dwelling. A wooden swing is provided in the koodam.

Though a room has been designated for sleeping there is no furniture. Mats are rolled out everyday for the same.

Backyard is used for housing cattle and bathing spaces.
6.2.4.3 Fishermen’s house

The house illustrated here is typical of the fishermen community seen in the villages of Kanyakumari district though this inward oriented type is not generally preferred by the fishermen of this district. The plan form is representative of a well to do fisherman and the courtyard here is a kind of a status symbol. (Ref. Plate No: 37)

6.2.4.3.1 Plan form and social relationships

Conceptually the house in terms of space arrangements is typical of any courtyard type. However in this type the platform in front of the house takes the form of a large cemented verandah where the temporary storage and mending of nets take place. This is the only connection between the fishing activity and the house, as all other activities related to this occupation take place at the seafront. The fishing activity engages both men and women; the men go out to sea; the catch is auctioned at the seafront and the remaining catch is sold by the women for local consumption at markets in nearby towns.

6.2.5 Variations on the Courtyard Type

Generally when the term courtyard is used it implies open to sky space in the centre/inner regions of the house. The provision of open space in front of the house or the rear of the house is referred to as the yard: front yard or back yard. In the rural context in Tamilnadu the absence of the central courtyard, is seen compensated most often to the front of the house. This space is excluded from the activities of the street either by high walls or by additions in front of the houses, which are not physically but spatially linked to the main dwelling unit. This typology is found mostly to the southern regions of the state notably in the Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts and finds its expression variously in an agriculturist’s house, mat weaver’s house, fishermen’s houses, potter’s house etc.
This courtyard house represents one of the very few examples found today.

While having an internal courtyard for the exclusive use of the family, the house is provided with a broad platform in front where the mending of nets or the drying of fish take place.

Thus while being introverted like all courtyard or 'naliukettu' houses this house is also extrovert like the other houses found in this area with the activities related to fishing provided outside.

This particular village being Christian does not follow any dictates of texts for planning or customs and beliefs as in Hindu houses, though the general spatial planning remains the same.

Platform surrounding the courtyard serving for multifunctions.

Broad cemented platform outside the house for the activities related to fishing.

PLATE: 37
6.2.5.1 Agriculturist's house

These houses found in the village of Pathamadai, Tirunelveli district, speak of their status as landholding families and are secluded houses/ mansions boundaries of which are defined by the walls of the house as well as by high compound walls. The house has a front yard with the thinnai oriented inwardly. The house eliminates its duties to the street and the thinnai becomes part of the house inner. These houses are conspicuous because of the absence of the mutram. The house has a number of rooms in compartments functioning variously as multifunctional spaces and store- rooms with the kitchen to the rear of the house. (Ref Plate No: 38) The kitchen and the puja are the last compartments of the house so that the sanctity of the space is preserved and it can be easily cordoned of from polluting women.

The house is centrally provided with a first floor with terraces in the front and the back. The first floor accessed by a ladder or a steep stairway is entirely used for agricultural related activity. The cleaning and drying of grain is done on the terraces and the rooms are used for storage. The grain is carried in bags to the upper floor and after drying, it is pushed through a small hole in the floor to the lower level whenever required. The yard in front of the house serves for purpose of temporarily storing the grain before it is transferred into the house. Storage of farm implements is also done here. Thus this provision of an enclosed front yard has eliminated the central courtyard and therefore the notional centre of the house. The activities of the women are therefore relegated to the rear of the house.

A similar arrangement can be seen in another more palatial residence of two brothers who while sharing the same compound run two different households. (Ref Plate No: 39) The brothers are agricultural landlords who also possess a number of bulls to plough their fields. The core unit of the house is similar to the one described earlier, the one major difference being in the location of the kitchen in
VARIATIONS OF THE COURTYARD TYPE

AGRICULTURISTS HOUSE, PATHAMADAI

Thinnai exudes the activity of the sirood as it has an inward focus.

The front yard is used primarily for temporary storage of grain and farm tools.

The verandah forms the focus of men’s activity.

The multifunctional space or the koodam is central to the house & its activity.

The kitchen or the women’s space is relegated to the rear of the house.

Drying of grain is done on the front verandah & rear terrace of the first floor.

The upper room used only for the storage of grain.

SOCIAL MANIFESTATION OF THE HOUSE

PLATE: 38
VERANDAH ENTRANCE PORCH

MULTIPURPOSE SPACE

STORE

VERANDAH

FRONT YARD

THINNAI

CATTLE SHED

OP YA

ENTRANCE PORCH

ROUND FLOOR PLAN

SECTION AA

Roof over cattle shed

TERRACE
(For drying grain)

GRAIN
STORE

STORE

VERANDAH

FRONT YARD BELOW

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SECTION BB

Social Manifestation of House

Variations of the Courtyard Type

Agricultural Landlord's House

Plate: 39
spaces outside the house. The kitchen and other related activities are therefore performed in the front yard space. However the required privacy for women is obtained because the entrance to the front yard space is through a monumental archway which houses platforms internally for sitting. The casual visitor to the house is therefore entertained here and only the close relatives are permitted further. The monumental archway in its design and execution seems to have its derivation from colonial practices and thereby professes the place of the occupants of the house in the power structure of the village as well as the wealth and status. Passing through the structure the intimate scale of the dwelling is revealed through the open space forming its front yard. The cattle shed is also housed in an area cordoned off the front yard in no way interfering with the movement of the people of the house. This profane area of the house along with the toilets is therefore well segregated.

6.2.5.4 Nalukettu house

This type of house is also a courtyard house with the open to sky space inside the dwelling. It has derived from the chattusala nalukettu\textsuperscript{175} house of the Nair community in Kerala, which is an individual unit set in the midst of a large plot. A few surviving examples of these houses are found in Colachel and Padmanabhapuram in Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu. (Ref. Plate No: 40) This individual homestead does not find a place in the compact rectangular settlement pattern of Tamilnadu. Hence the dwelling form has been altered to fit into the settlement pattern of the state, forming house rows fronting the street. A courtyard called the nalukettu is found in front of the dwelling immediately after the external thinnai with broad verandahs around likened to that of the salas\textsuperscript{176} in a nalukettu.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} sala means hall in the Sanskrit language
ANKANAM WITH THE SURROUNDING PLATFORMS FOR VARIOUS FUNCTIONS OF DWELLING BEYOND THE ANKANAM IS THE WOODEN WALL OF THE PUJA AND THE GRANARY THE TWO MOST SACRED AREAS OF THE HOUSE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

STORE

GROUNDFLOOR PLAN

SACRED AREAS OF THE DWELLING

ELEVATION

PLATE: 40

VARIATIONS OF THE COURTYARD TYPE

SOCIAL MANIFESTATION OF HOUSE

ROW TYPE NALUKETTU

KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT
6.4.1 Plan form and Organisation

Facing the street is the conventional *thinnai* that we find common to all house typologies. The *ankanam* (courtyard) is entered through a door from the street. The *ankanam* has a continuous raised platform all round covered with a lean to roof. The platform is sufficiently broad enough to accommodate a variety of activities related to the dwelling. It is also conspicuous because of the decoration that is applied around it in terms of columns and capitals. The house is accessed from the *ankanam* on the side opposite the entrance. This single block has the *puja* as the central feature with the granary to one side and the kitchen on the other. The mud walls of the *puja* and the granary are heavily clad with timber planks giving the impression of solid wooden walls. The door of the *puja* and the granary is highly decorative and the lock is stronger and more decorative than the rest of the structure.

The kitchen opens out to the back yard and is provided with a broad platform where most of the kitchen related activities take place. The kitchen and granary is accessed from the rear of the plot or by a narrow passage (*muduku*) on one side of the house. The bathing place as well as the cattle shed is placed to the rear of the plot. This part of the house most often has an upper storey accessed by a steep stairway. The rooms at the upper level are most often used as storage spaces or for drying clothes. It is also used for the accommodation of guests.

6.4.2 Space and Social Relations

The *thinnai* in front of the house is the most obvious of the male bastions of the house as also seen in the other typologies and is primarily a male area. The internal courtyard or the ‘*ankanam’* is the prime focus of this house type and influences the activity around it and dictates the rituals of the family. The broad platforms around the *ankanam* are used variously for sleeping, sitting, socialising, etc. Both men and women use the space. The women’s use of this space derives from
occupancy of the space by the men. Thus both men's and women's domains meet and merge here.

The private areas of the house are behind the ankanam and form the rear spaces of a dwelling. The ritual importance attached by the agrarian society to the occupation manifests itself as richly decorated and heavily wood panelled structures for the granary and the puja. These spaces along with the kitchen are considered to be the 'sacred' part of the house. These spaces are very dark having no windows to the outside and one gets the feeling of a ritualistic passage in a temple where one moves from the bright 'outer' to the dark 'inner'. The organisation of space and the dramatics associated with it thus well define the 'sacred' and the 'profane' areas of the dwelling.

The muduku is a narrow access, which connects the street with the service functions of the house and in modern terms may be described as a service entry. It is found in all large houses. It is the entry that is used for various ritualistic purposes during funerals, women' menstrual periods, meeting people of lower castes, etc. A person attending a funeral is considered to be impure and therefore he cannot enter the house through the main entry or cross the sacred spaces of the house. Therefore he enters through the muduku, and only after cleansing himself by the ritualistic act of bathing can he enter the house. The same applies for polluted women. The lower caste people by the very virtue of their status cannot enter the house through its main door. The muduku therefore is much more than just an approach to the side or the back door; it is representative of the feudal hierarchy that still exists in rural society. The backyard is considered to be the least important space but it is here that the garden grows, the cattle are housed, the toilets are located and the washing is done.
6.2.5.2 Mat weavers' house

Mat weavers are mostly Muslims. To term this, as a 'Muslim House' may be a misnomer as these houses are similar to those occupied by the Hindus in most ways. Many of these Muslims are also converts from Hinduism and some of the social customs related to the previous tradition are still retained by them. However the difference arises because of the adoption of certain Muslim domestic customs that led to a change in lifestyle.

The house illustrated here is once again found in the village of Pathamadai. Each house has its own well-defined boundary in the form of a high wall and houses very rarely have common walls. The house is a mini fortress as high walls and blank facades are presented to the street. Windows to the outside are virtually absent therefore providing the necessary seclusion and privacy so desired by the Muslim women and laid down by their law. The only communication to the street is a doorway gaining access to the inner regions of the house. Though the Muslims all live in the same area and occupy the same streets it is evident from the planning of the house that they valued their privacy and that seclusion of women was a must for them. Women and unmarried girls wore a burkha covering themselves from heads to toe when they moved outside the house premises.

The house proper has a verandah fronting it leading into a koodam (multifunctional living space) beyond which is the kitchen. (Refer Plate No: 41) In many cases the kitchen is separated from the main house unit by open to sky space thereby providing the women their own private outdoor space where the food is cooked while children could be supervised at play. This was also their recreational space. Similarly there is an open to sky space in front of the house with broad earthen platforms or thinmai surrounding it on two or three sides either in a continuous arrangement or otherwise. This thinmai is broad affording a comfortable workspace for weaving mats. The mats are made with a loom, which is movable, so flexibility in
SIDE ELEVATION

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

1) High walls enclose the house and windows do not open on to the street providing necessary seclusion.
2) The front yard with the broad thinnai is the main work space.
3) The kitchen is at the rear segregated from the main house by an open space where women perform the cooking related activities while supervising children at play.
4) The central space of the house is the koodam with a verandah in front.
5) The rooms of the upper storey are used mainly for storage or for sleeping.

SOCIAL MANIFESTATIONS

1) Privacy is ensure for the family and therefore the women by high girdle walls as required by the Muslim society.
2) The entrance from the street is connected by a passage to the rear so that women could move easily to the rear without having to cross the living spaces.
3) The thinnais are inward oriented providing privacy to women when at work on the thinnai.

PLATE: 41
working arrangement is seen. Both men and women are involved in this work and they sit side by side on the *thimais* when at work. The work atmosphere within the house is relaxed and comfortable with men and women of the house freely engaging in conversation. However when any visitor enters the house the women retreat from the front to the rear taking their looms with them.

As the roofs are steeply pitched, most houses have an attic for storage in the upper regions of the house approached by a ladder or a steep stairway from the living space. In many cases rooms are provided on the first floor providing additional living/sleeping spaces. These upper floors have grilled verandah where women of the house could view the proceedings on the street without being seen from outside. This was the only way through which one could communicate with the street in the absence of the conventional *thinmai* n front of the house.

In another arrangement, the house being entered from both the Village Square and the street creates an uncertainty in the plan arrangements as to, which is the front of the house or the rear, depending on the side from which entry is made. This ambiguity is reflected in the provision of two kitchens, and an additional living space. (Ref Plate No: 42)

6.2.5.3 Potter's house

The example illustrated here is found in Pathamadai village in Tirunelveli district. There are ten potter families in the village and they live separately in a cluster of houses arranged in house rows on either side of a street having no thoroughfare. Thus this street space is exclusive to this group as a result of which the pottery making spills on to the street. The workspaces are in the *thimais* of these houses as well as in thatched or tiled extensions of the house. (Ref. Plate No: 43) Entire families work on this craft, engaging both the old and the young in a number of
The high walls give adequate privacy to the Muslim household and encloses open space within. Men's domains are closely related to work domains and women's domains to living.
A group of ten potters occupy this cluster. Besides sharing the same occupation they share common spaces, a common workshop, and common bathing facilities. The work spills on to the common open spaces and the kiln for the burning of the pots is provided in the open spaces of the village next to the cluster.

An old woman giving shape to a pot on the tinnai of her house. The work involves both the old and the young.

The work engages both the men and the women.

Storage of finished products in the upper room of the house. The koodam is also used for storage.

Lean to additions are provided in front of the house to provide work space.
activities ranging from the making of the product to selling it. The pots are made not only for local consumption but also transported across great distances to other towns especially during the festival times. The selling process engages the male members of the house and women today most often work at the potter's wheel as well as help in the finishing and burning process. While the younger persons operate the potter's wheel the older people finish the base and give final shape to the pot. The storage of raw material as well as the burning of the finished product takes place outside the cluster in open spaces around the cluster. The sale of the finished product for local needs also takes place within the cluster and so the dwelling unit is also the showcase for the product.

The house proper is very similar to that of the agriculturist's house having a series of compartments with the thinnai forming the outermost space. The thinnai is extended beyond the boundaries of the house by another lean to roof made of thatch or tile to accommodate the potter's wheel. The other spaces are multifunctional and the last room in the house is the kitchen. When one enters the house one is overwhelmed to see stacks of pots within all of the spaces showing the preponderance given to the economic activity over actual living. Some of the houses have a double storey, the upper floor being approached by a steep stairway or ladder. Here also the rooms are used as multifunctional spaces; in addition to storage, terraces are used to dry the pots.

To conclude we see the dependence of this economic activity on the open spaces in and around the house thereby involving the dwelling in a new set of spatial relationships at the settlement level.

6.3 ONE ROOMED KUTCHA DWELLING

This type of house is the minimum affordable structure for most families in the rural areas and emerges as the elemental unit in the conception of space for
dwelling. It is identifiable as a one unit roofed structure most often made of local thatch containing one multifunctional space within. The roof as described in the previous chapter is supported on posts of locally found timber and the low mud walls serve to exclude the weather and animals. Living conditions are very poor and attributed to a lack of light and ventilation, unhygienic conditions for living and the very temporary nature of materials.

6.3.1 Plan form and Organisation:

The dwelling has one multifunctional space (koodam) accommodating all functions and aspects of dwelling such as sleeping, cooking, living, etc. These dwellings are occupied most often by nucleated/ sub nucleated/ supplemented nucleated families with an average size of 5-6 members in a family. Internally there is no segregation of functions and the only fixed elements discernible being the adupu or the cooking platform on the floor and the puja, where the deity is worshipped. These form the two fixed functions of the house and find their location normally in the southeast corner or northwest corner of the house such that the adupu or the cooking platform and the puja faces the east. Beyond providing for this the house just functions as a store place for the meagre belongings of the household.

In front of the dwelling there is a low earthen platform or pial (referred to even as the thinnai) accommodating most aspects of dwelling such as socialising, sitting and sleeping. This earthen platform can also be found on two/ three or all four sides of this rural dwelling. This space covered with the lean to roof or by extension of the roof of the house provides a shady place for the spill over activities and relates the house to the exterior space around it. The thinnai could be scooped out to accommodate poultry or the goats could be tied to the posts of the thinnai, which provides a shady rest space.
The _adupu_ within the house is duplicated outside, as internal conditions of light and ventilation are very poor. Also the building materials with which the house is constructed are highly inflammable. This _adupu_ is protected from wind by a low mud platform or with a thatched partition. A small enclosure of thatch suffices for bathing whereas all calls of nature are relegated to the fields.

These houses can be found in a variety of spatial situations. They normally front a street or lane; they are also most often found around open spaces forming a cluster indicating an organic growth of units maybe arising from the needs of an expanding family. However with the allocation of land to the rural poor on ownership (patta) basis these houses are now accommodated within plots enclosed by a thorny fence. Nevertheless the basic unit provides us with every information on how social relationships exist.

6.3.2 Space and Social Relations

In this type of dwelling it is not possible for us to discern what is the men’s area and women’s area as space within the dwelling is restricted. There is no men’s space and women’s space and women’s space derives itself from what is men’s space. They adjust themselves to the use of space depending on the men. Thus notions of privacy cannot really exist.

However, the front part of the house, that is the _thinnai_ can be designated as predominantly the men’s area as men use this space for sleeping, socialising and sitting. Old men and women who cannot move around easily occupy the margins of the _thinnai_ and this area forms the locus of all activity for them while maintaining contact with the outer world. The women most often sit near the door, slightly to one side and watch the happenings outside. Any visitor would also be spoken to from the same position taking partial shelter and security from the door. The younger and
married women would rarely use the *thinmai* as the sleeping/ resting space during the day, as this was a social taboo.

In spite of social taboos and other norms the women of the house have to depend on the external space for a lot of house related activities because of restricted indoor space. The outdoors provides them with living space at little or no cost. Thus the cooking activity mostly takes place outside in the external hearth except during times of bad weather. This may be a matter of convenience, but taking note of the fact that the *adupu* (hearth) and *puja* are combined together inside the house, cooking outside during times of menstruation protects the sanctity of the house. Cooking on the outside hearth also generates some social intercourse with neighbouring women and children can be supervised at play. During times of parturition also the sanctity of the house is preserved by screening a portion of the *thinmai* with a thatched partition for the accommodation of the woman during the period of pollution. After six days, with the house cleaned and the naming ceremony for the child performed the woman is taken into the house. Not all caste groups adhere to this ritual today.

As most of these houses do not have a piped water line or their own well they have to depend on the village tanks or wells for all daily chores. Bathing and washing of clothes invariably take place at these locations and this provides the women contact with the other village women. Such activities are thereby seen more as recreational and are done at a relaxed pace. The men of the village also tend to use the outdoors more effectively as they gather at common spots, such as the temple, the village shop or outside their homes to indulge in mild gossip or some recreational activity. Children also play out on streets or in the school playground rather than within the confines of their homes or surrounding areas. This is all very typical of the 'hamlet' where the 'untouchables' live. The outdoors here is therefore very vibrant and full of activity. Thus the dependence of these people on village infrastructure, common open spaces and the outdoors is much more than that of the higher social
The house thus remains a space for storage and a space where cohabitation takes place.

In spite of the low-income status of the occupants of these houses and the poor quality of materials used in the construction of the house, the house is as much a space of ritualisation as other dwellings. Daily rituals like cleaning the house, the drawing of kolams in front of the house, the ritual lighting of the lamp in the puja, are done with great religious fervour by the women of the household. The immediate environs of the house are swept and kept clean everyday. Besides the ritualistic practice of smearing the walls and floor of the house with mud and cow dung slurry is done every month if not every fortnight.

6.3.3 Variations and deviations of the type

The basic one roomed dwelling is typical of an agricultural labourer’s house having an income of Rs. 350/- to Rs. 500/- per month. A variation of the type can be seen when a thatched or a mud wall partition is provided within the koodam so as to create a partially segregated space affording some amount of privacy. (Ref Plate No: 44) In this example the goats are accommodated in a separate roofed structure and poultry in the thinnai. In a small-scale agriculturist house this segregation of space within the dwelling is achieved by positioning the earthen granary as a partition. A deviation from the model occurs when two or three rooms are provided under this single roof unit all accessible from the outside. This is seen in some small-scale agriculturist house where there are three rooms each accessible from the thinnai. One space is a multifunctional living space, one-room functions as the store for farm implements and the other as a kitchen. The thinnai is found on two sides of the house and used for sitting, sleeping, etc. besides storage of farm implements. However the hearth is duplicated outside- here it is provided toward one end of the thinnai sheltered from weather by a low mud wall. Cattle are accommodated in a separate shelter.
ONE ROOMED KUTCHA HOUSE
UDAIYALUR, THANJAVUR DT

Materials of construction:
Mud and coconut thatch walls
Thatch roofing

Interior Planning:
All spaces are multifunctional
Traditional Adupu using firewood for cooking
Puja space combined with the kitchen

Occupant: Small scale agriculturist

SLEEPING/SPORAGE

MUD WALL

THINNAI PROVIDES FOR SLEEPING, SITTING AND SOCIALISING

PLANT

Plinth Area: 5M x 7M

AXONOMETRY

SOCIAL MANIFESTATION OF HOUSE
ONE ROOMED KUTCHA DWELLING

PLATE: 44
In a weaver's house at Munugapattu, the pit loom is accommodated in the koodam (Ref. Plate No: 45), the other aspects of dwelling being confined to the margins of house space. This indicates the dominance of the economic activity over other functions within. The space therefore is conceived entirely as economic space as the entire family is involved in the activity.

At Ayyangarkulam village, Kancheepuram taluk, Chinglepet district, several such houses are grouped together in a cluster around a common open space. These units are typical (Ref. Plate No: 46, Fig: 1) and are occupied by Muslim mat weavers. Most of the men folk are away being employed as labour in other states and women along with the children and a few male relatives reside here. The inward orientation of the cluster group provide the necessary seclusion and privacy required by Muslim women from the rest of the society. All spillover activity of the house takes place in this open space at the centre, which is shaded with tall trees. Cooking, washing, socialising as well as mat making take place in the outdoors which is a semi private area because of the cluster configuration. Thus the culture of this social group is reflected in the spatial organisation.

In a Muslim mat weaver's house at Pathamadai, Tirunelveli District the seclusion required by the women of the house is manifested by high thatch walls all round the house. (Ref. Plate No: 46, Fig:2) The internal arrangement of the house is a single room (koodam) with an internal hearth. The hearth is duplicated on the outside as seen in most models of this type. A verandah is provided in front where mat weaving usually takes place. This occupation engages the women of the house. The loom is movable and therefore can be carried over to any comfortable work-space.
Low windows provide ventilation at the work level and also communication with the street.

Broad thinnais on both sides of the house for outdoor living.

Social Manifestation of House

One Roomed Kutch Dwelling

Mat Weaver's Dwelling
Munugapattu; Vellore District
Mat weaving is an occupation which is done by both men and women; mostly women. The activity can be done anywhere as the loom is movable. An external adupu is not a prerogative as the Muslims do not believe in periods of pollution and purity, nevertheless a acupu is provided outside as internal ventilation is poor.

Each dwelling has a koodam, a thinnai and a kitchen. Most often cooking is done on an external choola.

FIG: 1

ELEVATION

This cluster is occupied by a group of Muslim mat weaver's secluded from the rest of the village. The cluster is inward oriented giving the required privacy for the women. Bathing enclosures are common for the group of dwellings.

PLATE: 46
6.4 CONTINUOUS INTROVERTED HOUSE-ROW CLUSTERS

There are around 300 villages in the Nilgiris each of population 1000 to 2000 mostly occupied by the Badagas. Most of them are involved in tea growing while a lot of them have migrated to other places. The villages are typical having remained unchanged for a number of years. The reason for this is that members of the clan properties jointly hold properties in these villages. Any change or division made within a house or a transfer of a property is subject to the approval of the elders of the clan. Thus very little internal change is possible and external influences are negligent because an outsider is not permitted to settle down within the village. Thus change is really seen only outside the defined boundaries of the village or where the limits of the village end.

6.4.1 Settlement Pattern:

The pattern of settlement is the compact rectangular type with streets in the north south or east west axis. The houses are formed into house rows all accessible from a common front yard space, which is of a main street. (Ref. Plate No: 16 & 29) The houses are strictly oriented to the east or the south irrespective of the hilly terrain on which they are sited. The village has a temple at its notional centre and temples for the four deities that preside at the four corners of the village.

6.4.2 Plan form and Organisation

The house is accessed through a porch (bayihu), which may contain an earthen platform for sitting. (Ref. Plate No: 27) This space also forms a shelter for goats. The internal spatial planning consists of two rooms normally of dimension 5M x 2.4M – The Ogamane (inner room) being accessed through an arched doorway from the Ithamane (outer room). The arched doorway has a shelf on two sides; the
A full house where the kitchen is segregated from the ogamane where the hogutu is housed. This is done as this is a nucleated family and the lady of the house is a widow who is unable to strictly adhere to the rituals of pollution and purity.

View of the Bayilu: B

Typical Elevation

View of the Ithamane showing the arched doorway to divide the house into two.

Section AA

Low partition wall separating the hogutu.

Main door detail with an arched decoration above.

Bamboo planks from ceiling over hearth.

Fig: 1 FULL HOUSE

View of the Ithamane showing the arched doorway.

Suspended bamboo shelves to dry grain over the fireplace.

Fig: 2 FULL HOUSE

Incorporates a room in front of the house adjacent to the bayilu. This serves to segregate women during periods of pollution and visitors could also be entertained herein.

Fig: 3 HALF HOUSE

The Bayilu is enclosed to form an entrance lobby where guests are entertained. The pallemane at the back is used for both the kitchen and the bath; the choola in the bath serving for that purpose.

The arched doorway is closed and the same is provided between the pallemane and the Ithamane.

Social Manifestation of Type

Continuous Introverted House Row Cluster

Full and Half Houses
one on the left is broader to accommodate the lamp that is lit at nightfall. Because the Saivite Badagas were so influenced by their reverence to the sun (an emblem of Siva), the arched doorway symbolising the sun became the norm to connect the inner and the outer room. The positioning of the lamp enabled the entire house to be lit by a single lamp and though apparently functional it is in fact ritual.

The *ithamane* is provided with a wooden sleeping platform to the left made out of a single plank of teak, 16' x 3' in dimension at a height of 2.5'. The space below was for the storage chests and also had the stone mortar demarcating the raised left area for the males and the right area for the females. The space behind the *ithamane* was provided with a bathing area- *pallemane* often provided with an *adupu* so that water could be warmed for bathing. Thus there is an internal tripartite division. Calls of nature were relegated to the outside.

The kitchen comprises of a traditional *adupu* place along the right wall of the *ogamane* with large bamboo shelves suspended from the ceiling over the *adupu*. This enabled the harvested crop to be dried over the *adupu*, by the heat generated from it. As milk from livestock was routinely processed in many houses, a small-secluded area called the *hogotu* was also provided in this space. Male members of the house churned the milk traditionally. The house is provided with an attic on the right side of the house over the *ogamane* for storage of grain. Most often a room outside the house, on the right side corresponding to the *hayilu* on the left is provided for storage of farm implements and as this room is outside the house menstruating women also use it.

### 6.4.3 Space and Social Relations

These dwellings in the house-rows show a clear demarcation of men’s spaces and women’s spaces. The *ithamane* or the ‘outer room’ contained the sleeping platform, which was for the men whereas women slept in the same room on the floor,
the stone mortar, found on the floor of this room, dividing the raised men's area from the women's area. The *ithamane* was also provided with a grinding stone and a quern worked on by women. All processes of food preparation took place in the 'outer room' and the outdoors was not used for this, as the climate was not conducive.

The *ogamane* or the 'inner room' contained the hearth. Within this room a small space was cordoned off for churning the milk. This though apparently a secular function was indeed sacred and done only by men. The potential sacredness of this corner, sacred in the past because of its association to milk, is further demonstrated by the location of the sanctuary sanctorum in the houses belonging to the head of a clan, for the goddess *Hethai*. No statues or pictures of the deity are placed here but the silver ring worn by the head of the clan during the annual festival is placed in a small casket rendering this place as the most sacred. Food cooked on the adupu was first served to the goddess before it was distributed. Therefore the *ogamane* is the sacred room of the house and women during their "unclean" periods are not permitted inside. This is further attributed to the fact that only men are allowed to eat inside this room, and women have to eat in the *ithamane* at all times. The women however serve food to the men in the *ithamane*. This indicates that relationship between men and women was primarily functional and only then spatial.

The *bayilu* or entrance porch contained the earthen platform on the left and on the right space was cordoned off by a thatched partition for the storage of farm implements or for housing the goats. In other instances this space was provided as a room with an external door to accommodate the women during menstruation and parturition. Guests were also entertained here. Thus this outermost space formed the 'profane' area of the house. The spaces inside and their functions are arranged in a hierarchical order of sacredness, the most sacred space being the *hogotu*. It must also be noted that the status of polluted women was equated to that of animals as the same space was reserved for them. Toilets were a social taboo in the traditional setting and a toilet attached to a dwelling was not acceptable.
These houses are built in rows with a large front yard space common to a group of houses. These houses all belonged to members of the same clan and therefore strict notions of privacy did not exist. Women therefore freely used this space for various domestic activities such as drying of grain and wet clothes. This space also became the common venue for festivities and marriages. The marriage ceremony took place inside the ogamane and the festivities outside. Marriage was a simple ceremony after which the sun god was saluted by the married couple in front of the house and then a visit was made to the local temple. In the event of death, the body would be placed inside the house if the death took place within the walls of the house, or placed in the bayilu if death took place outside.

6.5 SUMMARY

From the above outlined typologies and the study of spatial and social relationships it is seen that space in the rural dwelling can be loosely gathered around three concepts of space:

- Physical space
- Social and economic space
- Ritual and symbolic space

6.6.1 As physical space the rural habitat satisfies the immediate basic needs of the community in terms of living and its associated activities like sleeping, praying, cooking, socialising, bathing, etc. The architectural spaces within the house serve to accommodate multiple functions of dwelling and therefore is flexible to accommodate varied needs and varied activities and are therefore polyvalent. This is illustrated by the various spaces and elements of the house such as the thinnai, mutram and koodam which form the basic components of any dwelling. The only defined function/activity is the adupu and the puja. The outdoors
manifested variously as courtyards, front yards and back yards also serve to accommodate a number of functions whatever the social group or whatever the economic activity of the household. The open space in and around the house is as important as the inner space. This definition of physical space is not limited only to the confines of the house- to the inner rooms and the outer rooms (open spaces)- but the geography of the place which extends to the footpath, the street, the temple square, the market, the fields, the next village and so on. A hierarchy of spaces is established by the connections made between the 'intimate' private areas of the house and the settlement at large. The dwelling place therefore cannot be segregated but has to be studied in its context and setting.

6.6.2 Dwellings are also measured in terms of social and economic space- the space where social position and social distance is measured, - a distance which proclaims who should do what, where and how; whether it is the decoration of the threshold or performing a ritual, whether it is walking on the street or talking to a person, etc.; a distance, which also says that people of one caste, live here and people of another caste are far removed or isolated; a distance which, dictates that people of higher social ranking occupy the higher ground and the people of the lower ranks should live on the wasteland; a distance, which says that the temple is holy ground and only selected people, can worship within, etc. The social space of the village is determined by barriers and 'spots,' which never have had any physical representation, but exist vividly in every villager’s mind.

6.6.3 Ritual and symbolic space is directly related to social space, as social distances and social positions exist not only within the basic commensal unit but also amongst the aggregation of people forming the village community. Rituals within the dwelling take place one on a daily basis and on the other annually and give the dwelling the dynamics that make it
a home. The form and decoration of spatial elements within the house and their organisation within with respect to the divine cosmic order and simple ethics of building speak of the ritual intent of the rural house.

To summarise, the concept of space is very important to the activity of architecture and the creation of the habitat. As Irene Rice Periera defines 'Architecture is a dynamic of relationships which involve space, give objective reality to structural form, and within the form content and meaning.'