

Statement of case: Requirements

- Statement of User along with an Affidavit
 - How the applicant claims to represent the interest of the association or producers or any organization

- Statement as to how the GI serves to designate the goods:
 - Originating from the concerned territory
 - Specific quality
 - Reputation
 - Other characteristics
 - Detailed description of the human creativity involved
 - Uniqueness of GI
 - Mechanism to ensure standard is maintained
 - Particulars of inspection structure

- Class of goods
- Geographical map
- Appearance of GI - words/ figurative elements
- Statement containing particulars of:
 - Producers of the concerned goods (Kottans)
 - Collective reference to all the producers of the goods

- Full name and address of the Organization

Statement of case: Requirements

- Statement of User along with an Affidavit
 - How the applicant claims to represent the interest of the association or producers or any organization
 - Affidavit

The M.Rm.Rm. Cultural Foundation is a non-profit organization that supports and undertakes documentations of, and works towards the revival of rural crafts, textiles and architecture that are fast disappearing today. The Foundation helps traditional crafts people, especially women, to adapt them to change and regain their place in the economic mainstream of the country and become self-sustaining producer groups with direct marketing ability. It organizes workshops for craft communities with craft revival, design and marketing in mind, while at the same time, helping young members of the community finish their schooling. The Foundation also encourages, supports and sponsors students from design schools to research and document crafts and architecture and facilitates interaction between students and local craft communities.

With regard to the Chettinad Kottan, the Foundation has done the following work towards the revival of the Kottan and the formation of a craft group:

- Locating craftspersons proficient in the craft of Kottan making, and willing to train other people in the craft.
- Locating and gathering a group of women from Chettinad willing to learn the craft from the craftsperson
- Establishment of the Kottan Centre in Keelayapatti in 2000 after a year-long search
- Design intervention and marketing of finished products, thus providing a steady source of income for the craftspersons
- Starting of a new centre in Sravayal, the neighbouring village to Keelayapatti, and training of a new group in the craft
- Organizing workshops for the craftspersons, providing exposure to them by sending them for National and International seminars and workshops

- Statement as to how the GI serves to designate the goods:
 - Originating from the concerned territory
 - Specific quality (Standard benchmark to be used)
 - Reputation (Standard benchmark to be used)
 - Other characteristics
 - Detailed description of the human creativity involved
 - Uniqueness of GI
 - Mechanism to ensure standard is maintained
 - Particulars of inspection structure

The Chettinad Kottan is specific to the villages in and around the region of Chettinad - Karaikudi and its surrounding villages. The characteristic shape of the baskets, the weave structures, patterns and colours are unique to this region. The Kottans woven by the craftswomen of Keelayapatti and Sravayal and part of the M.Rm.Rm. CF project group bear the Craftmark certification, and the UNESCO Seal of Excellence. This is the standard benchmark maintained by the craftswomen for all the Kottan products woven by them. The reputation of the Kottans woven by this group is high, given the quality checking process that goes into ensuring that all products follow the stringent norms set for the UNESCO Seal of Excellence.

The process of making the Kottan involves the following:

- Preparing the leaves
- Splicing the leaves
- Dyeing the leaves
- Making the base of the basket
- Making the sides and rim

The Palmyra leaves are stripped from the tree; however the tree suffers no damage and continues to flourish, making the craft eminently eco-friendly. The green palm leaves are meter wide fan like structures with pointed ends. The

leaves are dried in the shade for five to six days till all the moisture is lost and the green turns to a light brown. After removing the central vein, the leaves are spliced into equally wide strips and sorted according to length. For dyeing the leaves, firewood is lit and water is heated to a boil. Then salt is added to the dye bath to fix the color. The dye is added to it. The leaves are added and stirred well with a wooden stick. The dyed leaves are washed in a bucket of water to remove the excess dye. The leaves are then dried in the shade to prevent fading due to direct sun light. The leaves are gripped by the feet and kept in place with the knees jackknifed. The base is built by bending over and inserting palm leaf strips crosswise. The weaving of the horizontal strips into the vertical strips makes the base of the basket. Now that the width is determined, the sides are woven according to the shape and design. The final stage is the rim. After this, the lid of the basket is woven. Other processes like adding an extra weft for more complex designs are also used as per the design requirement.

The maintaining of the quality of the Kottan is ensured in two rounds, one in the Kottan centre in Chettinad, and the second in the Head Office in Chennai, before the product reaches the final customers. Kottans that do not meet with the standard are rejected. New products are tried and tested for quality and workability before being woven in larger quantities for sales purpose.

- Class of goods
- Geographical map
- Appearance of GI - words/ figurative elements

The Geographical identification of the Chettinad Kottan should cover the unique design specifications, raw material used, traditional colours and weaves used in the production process and finished product. The designs unique to the Chettinad Kottan are as follows:

- Statement containing particulars of:
 - Producers of the concerned goods (Kottans)
 - Collective reference to all the producers of the goods

List of craftspersons (producers) of the Kottan:
(Specify)

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

- Full name and address of the Organization

M.Rm.Rm. Cultural Foundation

70 MRC Nagar main Road

MRC Nagar, RA Puram

Chennai - 600 028

Gundamani weave - plain weave



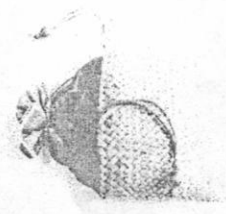
Malayalam weave - twill weave



Cross olai



Surul



Sohi

Mrs. Visalakshi Ramaswamy- Profile

The Founder of the M.Rm.Rm Cultural Foundation is deeply involved in the field of culture and craft, and has done several craft documentations and revival projects. For over a decade, she has been actively involved with the arts and crafts of South India as part of her interest. She is associated actively with Daskhinachitra, the Architectural Heritage Museum at Muttukadu on the outskirts of Chennai city from the onset. During this period, she has been responsible for designing numerous textile and lifestyle exhibitions and has also conceptualized and successfully executed the production of various craft objects and designer collections of household articles. She has also organized craft workshop in Daskhinachitra.

She has spent many years documenting the life-style, the crafts, the textiles and rituals of the Chettiars which has been brought out in a beautifully laid out book called ' The Chettiar Heritage' which she co-authored with Mr. S.Muthiah and Mrs. Meenakshi Meyyappan, the second edition of which is now in production. A cookery book on Chettinad cuisine written by Mrs. Ramaswamy and her sister Mrs. Meyyammai Murugappan is also awaiting publication.

She has also worked in the restoration of an old bungalow in Karaikudi, which has been converted into a heritage boutique hotel and also designed the interiors of the bungalow now called 'Bangala' for whose resident tourists she continues to organize cultural tours.

Mrs. Ramaswamy is a cultural connoisseur and one of the prime movers of the revival of Chettinad arts and crafts. She has contributed significantly in revitalizing the manufacture of the Athandgudi tiles and reviving the traditional tile-laying technology and also in introducing new colours and designs all of which has been documented. She has also documented and revived the Chettinad egg plaster. As part of the activities of the M.RM.RM. Cultural Foundation, Mrs. Ramaswamy is keen on facilitating interaction between student and craft communities. She has been mentor to a group of NIFT students who documented the craft and textiles of the Chettinad region in the year 2000. The 'Kandanghi' label of Chettinad saris that adheres to original weaving techniques is also a concept developed by Mrs.Ramaswamy. She continues tirelessly to reproduce traditional designs, working in unison with weavers' in Karaikudi the largest town in Chettinad.

The M.RM.RM. Cultural Foundation came into being because of several reasons. Mrs. Visalakshi Ramaswamy, the founder and managing trustee was involved with documenting the rich heritage and culture of Chettinad, its textiles, crafts, life style and the rituals of the community of Chettiars. Four years of work culminated in the book "The Chettiar Heritage" of which she was one of the authors along with Mr. S. Muthiah and Mrs. Meenakshi Meyyappan. During this period as she accompanied the photographer to several villages (Chettinad being a cluster of 75 villages between Trichy and Madurai in southern Tamilnadu), she realized that several old and traditional houses were coming down at a fast pace, and several crafts and hobby crafts of the region were fast disappearing. Documentation of all these crafts was very vital because even though many of these crafts were not in practice today, people who practiced and worked in these crafts were still around, most of them being octogenarians. So the need to document every thing while there was still access to information seemed crucial. Being a native of Chettinad and owning a traditional house, which belonged to her husband's family, the "M.RM. House" in Kanadukathan village in Chettinad was another reason to work in that area. Watching familiar traditions disappearing and changing every day life made her realize the need to do work to keep them alive and preserve them for posterity.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOUNDATION

1. To initiate and support the research and documentation of architecture, crafts, textiles and culture of the region.
2. To facilitate the revival of dying traditional crafts and to make the craft products as useful contemporary everyday objects through design intervention thereby improving their marketability, and at the same time improving the economic status of the crafts people.
3. To help traditional crafts people especially women to adapt themselves to change and regain their place in the economic mainstream of the country and become self-sustaining producer groups with direct marketing ability.

4. To organize workshops for craft communities with craft revival, design and marketing in mind, while at the same time, helping young members of the community finish their schooling.
5. To encourage, support and sponsor students from design schools to research and document crafts and architecture and to facilitate interaction between students and local craft communities.

ACTIVITIES TILL NOW

1. A group of ten architects under the guidance of Mr. Benny Kuriakose, a conservation architect, volunteered to document the 100-year-old M.R.M. House in Kanadukathan in Chettinad, the document is complete and awaiting publication.
2. The famous Chettinad egg-plaster or Madras plaster, as it is sometimes known, was once a must for every house built in Chettinad. Today there is hardly anyone with the know-how except for a few elderly masons over seventy years of age. The Foundation has identified "Ponniah Kothanar" a traditional mason and revived and documented this plastering technique, and is also trying to train 6 young masons in this craft.
3. The traditional "Kottan" or Chettinad basket is all but lost to us. Some elderly ladies from the Chettiar community have helped the Foundation to revive this craft by teaching a group of younger village women. A trainer has trained ten women. The students from "Shrishti" school of Design in Bangalore have documented the craft. They were sponsored by the Foundation to do this documentation.
4. Athangudi, a small village in Chettinad, makes exclusive hand-made floor tiles that are back in vogue. The documentation of this is in process. The foundation has helped several entrepreneurs involved in making these tiles; to design and to market them effectively in cities like Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Madras. Several more units have been started in Athangudi and are doing well.

5. An exhibition of life-style objects and textiles has been put up in the M.R.M. House in Kanadukathan. The textile collection contains a large number of traditional Chettinad sarees. The documentation of the sarees is also in progress and is being done by Visalakshi Ramaswamy.

FUTURE PLANS:

1. To establish a common facility center for the craftsperson's in Keeyalapatti village to enable women from neighboring villages to attend the training programs, workshops and train a new group of interested women in basketry.
2. To publish the compiled documentation on the "Kottan", the Chettinad Sarees, the Athangudi tiles and the Chettinad plaster and if possible the documentation of the M.R.M. House.
3. To research and document other crafts in the region and revive them if possible and necessary.
4. Identify a suitable venue and establish a museum on the art, craft and lifestyle of Chettinad.
5. Toilets for all the houses which belong to women in our group.
6. Provision of Gas stove as firewood is expensive.
7. Spoken English is being taught to the group.
8. Other village development projects are being planned.
9. Lots of other groups are wanting to join the organization.

Village Development Plans.

1. Toilets for the school have been built two years ago.
2. Students from the school are taught after school by a (graduate) girl living in the village, and this has helped them to pass out and join a higher school in Nachiarapuram, which they were unable to do earlier. All the students from Keelayapatti are now passing out to the higher school.
3. 2 Students have joined alagappa university in Karaikudi, one of them has passed out in Autocad and joined an architectural firm in Chennai.
4. A building has been built for training and facilities in the village.

PROJECT – KOTTAN

The Kottan Project was originally started in 'Keelayapatti' an agricultural village in southern Tamilnadu, by the M.RM.RM. Cultural Foundation. Now the foundation also runs a centre in Sravayal Pudhur, Sivagangai District. The number of craftswomen engaged in basketry too has increased from 10 women in the first group to 35 women in the two centres.

The aim of the project is to provide supplementary income by reviving a traditional form of basketry from palm leaves. As palm is a locally available natural raw material, the women can work within the comfort of their village once they complete the training workshop. Sourcing raw material, finding urban markets and arranging for the transport of raw material and finished products are some of the activities that the foundation is committed to.

Description of craft products made

Chettinad basketry has been noted for its unique style and colours. Basketry (Kottan) was a hobby craft for the women of an affluent community. The kottans were used during rituals and ceremonies. The raw material used is locally available palmyrah leaf. The palm leaves are available in plenty in and around Keelayapatti and as the palm trees withstand the removal of leaves, the craft is environmentally friendly.

Needs of the artisan group

The women though in need of additional income are unable to leave their home in search of work as transportation from one place to another is difficult. The project aims at training the women in their own village such that they ultimately make the baskets in the comfort of their home without disrupting family life.

Progress already achieved

1. The success of the project has resulted in 40 women being fully trained in kottan making and the economic and artistic progress made by them has resulted in other communities in the village evincing an interest to work together. The willingness of the communities to work together is a milestone in the work of the foundation in the village.

The Kottans Cultural Foundation

Another group of women have been trained in Sravayal, a neighboring village and are now part of the original group.

2. Mrs. Manimekalai, a member of the first group has gained international exposure for her fine workmanship and has participated in a touring international exhibition on basketry called 'Contained Spaces' in the Collins Gallery- Glasgow, Hiratsuka Art Gallery- Hiratsuka, and Habitat Art Gallery- New Delhi. She has now along with other members of the group attended several workshops and exhibitions in London, Santa Fe, Switzerland, Ahmadabad, Hyderabad and several other cities.
3. Some of the members of the original first group have also taken part in two basketry workshops that were held by the DCH (Development Commissioner Handicrafts)- one in Chennai at Dakshinachitra and another in Bhopal. They were able to meet, liaise and exchange ideas with several other groups of women engaged in basketry. The women have gained enormous confidence and awareness on attending these workshops as it has given them the opportunity to see places and understand the competitive market. The trainer along with women from the group has also attended a seminar in Bhopal organized by the Madhya Pradesh 'Hastha Shilp Vikas Nigam' where they were able to interact with designers from Philippines and Scotland. The Kottans were also exhibited in an exhibition called Women's Weaves in Dakshina Chitra participated in and sold successfully and another exhibition organized by the DCH (Development Commissioner of Handicrafts) in New Delhi.
4. Products made by the group were also chosen and awarded the UNESCO Seal of Excellence for handicrafts products in South Asia in November 2004 and in 2006 in recognition of demonstrated excellence and standard setting high quality in craftsmanship, creative and successful alliance of traditional skills and innovative application of indigenous material, traditional technique and endogenous design, expression of culture identity and traditional aesthetic value, and respect of the environment.
5. The group has also begun to work efficiently with natural dyes following the first natural dyes workshop held in August 2004 thereby making Kottans in a stunning variety of hues and shades. They have also attended a second workshop held in Chettinad in January 2005. They are now proficient in the art of natural dyes.

M. S. Ravi Varan Cultural Foundation

6. Another significant stride is the impact of the project on the local school in the village. The school in the village has been enhanced by the addition of a tuition teacher paid for by the foundation as a result of which several village children have actually been able to gain admission to high school. The parents of the village have taken an interest and procured black boards, tables and chairs for the school. Parent-teacher associations has been formed and have invited the director of the foundation to attend the PTA meeting and address the students on the subject of general hygiene and craft education at the school level. Two girls have graduated from Alagappa University Karaikudi, one of them works in Chennai in an architect's office. The foundation has provided toilets and compound wall for the Keelayapati Government School.
7. A documentation of the craft by design school students from "Srishti" School of design Bangalore has been completed and is now awaiting publication.
8. Marketing of sample products has been tested with great success and the last year has seen a big demand in the Kottans for use as containers for ritual giving in quantity at weddings and festival times. The Kottan weaves have been incorporated into making sample products for contemporary use like penholders, coasters and table mats.
9. The 'Sohi Pottana Kottan', wherein an extra layer of palm leaf is woven on the outside has been designed into purses. This has been very well received and has turned into one of the fast selling products. We are now into making contemporary products which have been designed by German designer Ms. Claudia Von Hansemann.
10. Craft Revival Trust, a premier organization devoted to create an encyclopedic guide and resource base for the craft and textile sector and build an artisan information base has listed the foundation as a special feature NGO on its website (www.craftrevival.org).
11. Baskets made by the Kottan group were part of an exhibition held in Vancouver, British Columbia in June 2005. The focus of the event called 'Out of this World' was to introduce world crafts that are being produced by various groups where the sale of those items has a positive impact on the communities.

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12. Two craftswomen from the kottan group participated in an exhibition as part of a two day national seminar called "Indian Crafts: The Future in a Globalizing World" in November 2005 at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad.
13. Two Crafts person attended a workshop on jewelry making organized by Dastkar Haat Samiti in coalition with crafts persons from Thailand in November 2007.
14. Members of the group also participated in the Surajkund Crafts Mela in February 2006 where one of them was awarded the 'Kala-Nidhi' title in recognition of her outstanding contribution towards palm leaf.
15. Three craftswomen were chosen for a Fibre Jewellery Workshop organized by the Crafts council of India in Chennai in March 2006.
16. The foundation also participated in the International Natural Dyes Symposium, in November 2006 held in Hyderabad and was invited to give a demonstration of the natural dyeing practices adopted the craftswomen in the weaving of palm leaf baskets.

Steps to be taken

Through design intervention the product range and functional product usage has been greatly increased. The potential of the craft for giving large numbers of women supplementary income has led to more women from neighboring villages interested in receiving training. Adoption of new designs and experimenting with new materials and other types of fibres and leaves is to be adopted in the new training program. A craft shop to showcase and market the new products is also in the planning stage.