

Pettagam: India's First Museum Dedicated to Chettinad Jewellery Opens in Karaikudi

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Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu (September 2025) – Chettinad jewellery, famed for its intricate craftsmanship and cultural symbolism, has found a permanent home in **Pettagam**, India's first private museum dedicated to this centuries-old tradition. Founded by jewellery designer **Meenu Subbiah**, Pettagam condenses **two decades of research and a 50,000-word manuscript** into an immersive storytelling experience of the **Nagarathar community's seafaring heritage and artistry**.

The story of Chettinad jewellery traces back to the **Tamil epic *Silappatikaram***, where the ruby-studded anklet of Kannagi sets off a dramatic chain of events. For Subbiah, this was more than literature; it was proof of the **Nagarathars' mercantile networks** and their ability to source rare natural gemstones as early as the second century CE.

? Why Pettagam?

The museum's name carries deep cultural resonance. In traditional Chettiar homes, an iron vault called a *Pettagam* was used to store jewellery. Subbiah says,

"Since our museum is a treasury of Chettinad jewellery heritage, it could be called nothing else."

Located in the quiet cultural lanes of **Karaikudi**, Pettagam spans **two floors** and blends **multi-media exhibits with artefacts**, offering visitors a journey from the origins of Chettinad jewellery to its global trade routes.

? A Crab, Not Fingers

One of Subbiah's most surprising discoveries during her research was the **mangalsutra motif** long mistaken as "fingers." In reality, it was a **crab**—a tribute to the sea and the **crab route followed by the Chettiars** during maritime trade. This symbol of gratitude now stands as one of the museum's most fascinating highlights.

? Preserving a Legacy

Beyond celebrating heritage, Subbiah hopes Pettagam inspires other regions of India to spotlight their jewellery traditions.

“The whole experience should give people the value of heritage and inspire them to carry it forward,” she says.

With Pettagam, Karaikudi not only safeguards its past but also ensures Chettinad's rich **jewellery legacy continues to sparkle for generations to come.**

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