

DEVELOPMENT OF ARISTOCRACY
IN
ANCIENT TAMILNAD

To.

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With the best compliments
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By

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An attempt to trace the development of the social institutions of Tamilnad may yet be considered too early by some scholars because of the unsettled nature of the chronology and unfamiliarity with history other than dynasties.¹

Adequate material is available for a sociologically oriented study if one is prepared to (a) work out an internal chronological sequence of the texts, (b) relate them to archaeological and inscriptional evidences and (c) set them in an all-India perspective. 'This does not require a search for new evidence so much as re-reading of the sources with a different set of questions in mind'.²

I

Tamil is perhaps the only non-Aryan language in India which possesses a literature that records the changes that were taking place with the penetration of Aryan influences. No other non-Aryan language of India has such a literature.

The earliest available Tamil epigraphic records belong to c. 200 B.C. and the earliest available Tamil literature to c. 100 B.C.³

A study of the early Tamil texts would enable us to determine the manner in which the North Indian influences both of Hinduism and of Jainism and Buddhism, spread in Tamilnad and how gradually the norms of a culture which is common to all parts of India was established in this region.

At the outset we should note the salient features of this literary source.⁴

The earliest extant literature is referred to as *Caṅkam literature*—literature of the Academies. These are found in two collections. 1. Eight Anthologies
2. Ten Songs.

1. As institutional studies are rare in Indian historical studies in general, one need not make any special apologies for its absence in Tamil. The only available works on South Indian History and Tamils which could be recommended for introductory study are by Sastri K. A. N. (i) A History of South India. O.U.P. (Madras) 1966.
(ii) The History and Culture of the Tamils—(Calcutta)—1964.
2. Romila Thapar—Interpretation of Ancient Indian History in *History & Theory* vol. VII. No. 3 (1968) Michigan U.S.A.
3. Zvelabil K. From Proto South Dravidian to Old Tamil and Malayalam—II International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies (Madras) 1968.
4. For a detailed study of the history of Tamil literature see
(a) Vaiyapuripillai. S. History of Tamil Language and Literature (Madras) 1956.
(b) Jesudasan C. & H. A History of Tamil Literature (Calcutta) 1961.
(c) Meenakshisundaran T. P.—A History of Tamil Literature (Annamalainagar) 1965.

Each of the Eight Anthologies are themselves collections of poems by different poets, grouped according to varying criteria. It is now an accepted fact that two of these collections Kalitokai (Kalit) and Paripāṭal (Pari) belong to a period later to the other six ~~ones~~. Two volumes—Puranānūru (Puram) and Patirupattu (PrP) contain poems on what is called the 'External Theme'—i.e. war, military activities, political organisation, heroism etc.

Puram contains eulogies on the Three Monarchs, the Kings of small territories, chiefs and individual heroes. PrP in its original form had ten poems of praise each on Ten kings of the Cēra dynasty.

The collection of the poems on the 'Interior theme' i.e. those on love—premarital, wedded and extra-marital—are grouped according to the length of the poems.

Kuruntokai (Kur)—The Short Collection—4-8 lines

Narīṇai (Nar)—The Good Conduct—9-14 lines

Akanānuru (Akam)—Interior 400—15-33 lines

Aiṅkuṇūru (Aink)—Five Short Hundreds 3-6 lines

The poems reveal a highly conventionalised pattern of verse making.

The Ten Songs⁵ are longer lays and reveal their 'heroic' character much better than the other collection. Except Kuriṇcipāṭṭu (KP) which relates in an ordered sequence the premarital romance mentioned in the above poems and Tirumurukāṇṇupāṭai (TMA) Guide to Murukan—in whose cult we notice the syncretism of the Aryan and the Dravidian religious observances, all other poems are eulogies on Kings. Four are in the form of guide poems

Porunar Arūpaṭai—PA—(Guiding the Troubadour)

Perumpān Arūpaṭai—PPA—(Guiding the Big Harpist)

⌒ Cirupānāṇṇatupāṭai—NPA—(Guiding the Small Harpist)

Malaipaṭukaṭām—MPK—(Guiding the Actor-dancer) ;

two are woven around romantic situations (Mullaippāṭṭu MP and Nedunal vāṭai NNV); and one is an advice on how to achieve immortality (Maturaik-kañci (MK). Pattinappalai (PP) eulogises Karikala, the Great.

The importance of these two collections as sources for the political history of Tamilnad has already been established.⁶ A recent study has established that these are Heroic poems and are thus comparable in spirit and character to the Homeric Epic and other Heroic Epics of the world.⁷

As is generally agreed to by philologists and historians, these poems belong to a period from circa 100 B.C. to 350 A.D. Those which are considered late (TMA, Kali and Pari) have been placed severally between 5th, 6th and 7th centuries A.D. Thus the entire corpus can be taken to depict a period from about 100 B.C. to 600 A.D.

5. Pattupattu—Tr: into English by Chelliah J. V. (Colombo) 1946.

6. Sastri K. A. N. Studies in Cola History and Administration Chapter I (Madras) 1932. Pillai K. K. Historical Ideas in Early Tamil Literature. Paper submitted to Historical writing on the People of Asia—South Asia Seminar—in TAMIL CULTURE Vol. 5 (Madras).

7. Kailasapathy K. *Tamil Heroic Poetry*—(London) 1968.

To these must be added a grammatical work called *Tolkāppiyam* (Tol), one work from another anthology called the 'Eighteen Minor Works'—the ones referred to already being the Eighteen Major Works—and *Cilappatikāram* the earliest extant narrative poem. The date of the grammatical work is much in dispute. Of the three sections of the work (Orthography, Morphology and Contents and Forms in Literature) the last is the one relevant to our study. The criteria by which social and literary classifications are made in this section cannot be held good for the social and other classifications made in most number of cases in the poems. This work could be assigned to about 5th century A.D.⁸

Of the Eighteen Minor works one needs special mention and that is *Tirukural*, an ethical work, which has been hailed by Albert Schweitzer thus : "There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom".⁹ In presenting what has been described as a 'positivist' code, Valluvar had discarded many of the earlier institutions (*surram*, *nānmakīlirukkai*) given new functions to old ones (family) condemned a few (*harlotry*) and introduced a few (the concept of state as developed in N. India). This work which belongs to about 450-500 A.D., serves as an excellent source for the study of social institutions.

The next important literary work is *Cilapatikāram* (Cil)—the Lay of the Anklet. This narrative poem describe the vicissitudes of a very wealthy merchant prince who after living with a courtesan for some time returns to his wife and sets about to start life on his own in another kingdom but was killed there as the thief who stole the anklet of the queen of the kingdom—a charge levelled against him by the unscrupulous goldsmith of the palace. This work assigned to a period between 450—550 A.D. records the role of the merchants in the life of the city. Its description of the capitals is important for the reconstruction of the social and cultural history of the period.

II

In the *Caṅkam* poetry, there operates a thematic classification by which a particular 'romantic' activity is associated with a particular region. The areas are referred to by the most characteristic flower of the region¹⁰.

Region	Flower	Love Activity
(a) Hills	Kuṟiñci	Copulation and Sexual Union.
(b) Pasturelands Open Terraces	Mullai	Wife patiently waiting for the husband who is away.
(c) Riverine Agrarian	Marutam	Wife sulking over husband visiting harlot
(d) Littoral	Neytal	Agony of separation
(e) Uncultivated dry region	Pālai	Separation from family because of elopement.

8. As would have been noticed already, dating is the major problem in Tamil Studies. Since this is connected with such issues as North-South controversy, Aryan-Dravidian conflict, there is always a tendency to fix dates which would either make the works concerned either too dependant on Sanskrit or as modelled on or independent of Sanskrit.

9. Schweitzer A. *Indian Thought and its Development* (Tr) p. 203—(London) 1936

10. This is referred to as *Tinai vakuppu*. (Tinai classification. See Sivathamby, K. The Social Origins of the Tinai Concept. Paper read at Seminar of Tamil and S. Indian Studies 1971. Tamil Translation of it appeared in *Aaraachi* Vol. 3, No. 1 1971.

Each of these divisions is also associated with a distinct type of military activity.

	Region	Flower	Military Activity
(a)	Hill	Vetci	capture and recapture of cattle.
(b)	Pastureland	Vañci	guarding and raiding of the settlement.
(c)	Riverine Agrarian	Uliñai	guarding and attacking the fortifications
(d)	Littoral	Tumpai	fight to finish
(e)	Dry	Vākai	victory

Of these, the uncultivated dry region (e) was a later addition to an original fourfold division of land. This division strongly reminds the fourfold cosmological division found among many primitive tribes.¹¹ A later day misconception has led many native scholars to treat the different activities as seen in the life of one couple or one war. But a student of historical ethnology would not fail to observe that the conduct code and the military operation ascribed to each of the physiographic region correspond to the social and political organisation of the people that live in those areas.

That each of the geographical units formed separate settlements of people who had common economic pursuits and social organisation and that each of these settlements differed from the other three or four, are well illustrated by the various references we get in the Guide Poems of the Ten Songs Anthology.

This feature of an uneven development has been emphasised by the archaeologists too. Allchins, make this observation: "From the point of view of the archaeologist, the different regions of India have a two fold interest. Firstly many of their distinctive features are capable of being traced back in time and the development and differentiation of regional cultures is the very stuff of archaeology. Secondly certain regions have advanced far more rapidly than others, and the more backward often preserve many features which elsewhere belong only to a distant past".¹²

The resulting cultural variation has also been noted. "It is worth stressing once more that in the past, as today, in addition to the normal range of sites of different size and importance, by which any cultural phase is always represented, throughout the Indian subcontinent distinct cultural groups at very different levels are to be found living in more or less close proximity to one another".¹³

11. Thomson G. *Studies in Ancient Greek Society Vol. II—Chapter II.* (London) 1955.

12. Allchin—Bridget and Raymond. *The Birth of Indian Civilisation*, Pelican (1968) 44-5.

13. Ibid pp 233-4.

And now the earlier statement that the "more backward often preserve many features which else where belong only to a distant past" assumes a special historical significance.

The evidence we have in Caṅkam literature, therefore, is valuable not only for the spatial or regional development but also to place them in some historical sequence.¹⁴

III

The patrons eulogised in Puṟaṇānūru could be classified as follows :

I. Kings of the three Established Monarchies :

- (a) Cēra—18 Kings.
- (b) Cōḷa—13 Kings.
- (c) Pāṇḍya—12 Kings.

II. Chiefs—47

A break-up of the chiefs could be made as follows.

- (a) Enādi—a commander of the army of one of the three Kingdoms.
- (b) Patrons described as 'Kings of small territories'—some of the important tribes like—Vēḷs and Āys would come under this.
- (c) Patrons who are referred to as 'owners of areas'
Amparkilāṇ Aruvantai, Nālai Kiḷavaṇ Mallikilan. Cirukutikilan.

The eulogies are not exclusive to the Exterior Themes. Even the poems on love are subtly worked out eulogies. Some patrons who do not find a mention in the direct eulogies are mentioned in the love poems.

Having taken all such references into count, Turai Arankacamy makes the following classification :

- (1) The Three Established Monarchies :—Cēra, Cōḷa, Pāṇḍya.
- (2) Independant Tribes that lived in the Cēra region :—
Kuṭavar, Atiyar, Malayar, Maḷavar, Puliyar, Villōr, Kongar, and
and Kuṟavar.
- (3) Tribes that lived in the Pandya region :— Paratavar, Kōsar.
- (4) Tribes that did not come under the hegemony of the three Established
Monarchies :—Āviyar, Ōviyar, Vēḷir, Aruvar, Aṇḍar, Idaiyar.
- (5) Tribes that lived in the region neighbouring the Tamil area :—
Tōṇḍaiyar, Kaḷavar, Vadukar.¹⁵

14. For the geographical background and how it has helped to preserve different levels of civilisation see Mahalingam T.V. South Indian Polity. Chapter I (Madras) 1955—and Subbarao, Bendapudi—*The Personality of India* Chapter II—(Baroda) 1956.

15. Turai Arankacamy—*Caṅkakāla Cirappuppeyarkal* Part II (Maḍras) 1960.

A detailed analysis of the kings and the chieftains eulogised by Paranaṇar—the much celebrated poet of the Caṅkam period, would reveal the contemporaneity of many chieftains and kings and indicate the extent of the 'uneven development'.¹⁶

Paranaṇar is the author of the 5th decad of Paṭiṇṇupattu, the poem on Cēra Kings. The King praised was Kuṭṭuvaṇ. He is also said to have sung another Cēra, Perumpūṭporaiyaṇ identified as the victor of Kaḷuvuḷ.

Of the Cōlas, he had sung the praise of the Great Karikāla (150 A.D.) and his father Iḷaṇcēṭceṇṇi.

Of the Pāndyas he refers to one Pasumpūṭpāndyaṇ, identified as the famous victor of the battle of Talaiālaṇṇam.

He also mentions 27 chieftains each of whom could be taken as an independent ruler. Some of them were feudatories of the Kings (Arukai) some were allies—thus independant (Miṇṇi and Naṇṇan). Maṭṭi from Kaḷār was the chief of the fisherfolk and Kaḷuvuḷ, chief of the cattle keepers.

Kapilar, a contemporary of Paranaṇar, praises one Cēra King and 8 chieftains three of whom were praised by Paranaṇar too.

Now, let us see the characteristic features of the chieftaincies and the emerging political pattern.

As observed earlier, some of the chieftains are described by the name of the region and some by the profession of their group. It is an established fact that people of a particular region, generally engaged themselves in the same economic pursuit. This was mainly due to ecological considerations. Thus it is clear that the primary grouping was a tribal grouping. The express mention of the chieftains of the fishermen and the cattlekeepers proves this. Tolkāppiyam, the grammatical work, when dealing with the persons fit to be sung about, expressly states that only owners or property holders should be sung and adds that (unlike in the case of the agrarian region) among the cattle-keepers and hunters everyone is called by the name of the group and that among them too, there are some persons who could be called 'owners' (Tol. Akat. 20 & 21.) This clearly indicates that at the time of Tolkāppiyar, i.e. 5th C. A.D., the tribal feature of collective ownership was found only among the cattle-keepers and hunters.

It would be interesting to note at this stage, the comments Allchins make on the Late Stone Age tools of South India, generally associated with a group of old sand dunes (tēri—'a microlithic industry based upon flakes) "Fishing communities on the coasts of India still live in situations of this kind, building their huts among sand dunes which are far from stable in order to be near their grounds".¹⁷ The territory of Maṭṭi, the fisherchief has to be looked for on the east coast, around the area of these excavated sites (Akam 226).

16. Venkatarajulu Reddiar (a) *PARANAR* (Madras) 1933
(b) *KAPILAR* (Madras) 1936

17. Allchins 1968 p. 94.

Besides these typically tribal chieftaincies, we hear of chiefs who are described as 'Rulers of small territories'. The Vēls are an example. Most of these independent chieftains ruled in and around the hills of Tamiḻnāḍ. Vēḷ Āy ruled over the Potiyil Hill, the southernmost section of the Western Ghats. He could be identified as the 'Aioi' mentioned by Ptolemy as the chief 'ruling the country which included Cape Comorin and mount Bettigo'.¹⁸ Pāri, the celebrated benefactor, ruled over the area around Paṛampū, identified as modern Pīrānmalai.¹⁹ Ōri, another chieftain, was ruling the Kollimalai.

Many of these chieftaincies, as could be seen, arose in geographically secluded, thus naturally fortified areas.

Most important of the political units is the Three Monarchies. The Rock Edicts of Asoka (3rd c. B.C.) which mention the southern boundaries of the empire, refer to Cēra, Pāṇḍya and Cōḷa Kingdoms. These three monarchies must have been quite well established by that time. Megasthenes refers to the Pāṇḍyan Kingdom. The pre-Asokan Arthasāstra mentions the special variety of pearls from the Pāṇḍyan kingdom. All these indicate the antiquity of the three kingdoms. In Caṅkam literature a distinction is made in the reference to these three kings and other rulers. The term 'Vēntaṅ' is exclusively used for the rulers of the three kingdoms.

Cēras ruled the western area. Earliest evidences indicate that Cēras and Cōḷas had at certain times two different families ruling from two different capitals. The two Cōḷa capitals were Uṛaiyūr and Pukār both connected with river Kāvēri. Pukār is at the point of the confluence of that river with the Indian ocean. It is the 'Poduce' of Ptolemy. Kāvēri is the most important river in Tamiḻnāḍ and, understandably, came to be connected with Tamil culture. Next in importance are Pālār, and Pennār to the north of Kāvēri and Vaikai and Tāmraparni to the south of it. Madurai, the seat of Pāṇḍya rule, was sited close to Vaikai.

It is no wonder that the dynasties which controlled the important rivers of the region rose to prominence.

IV

Before we inquire into the development of cities and towns that arose on these river basins, and the social stratification that develops there, it would be appropriate to inquire into the social features of the tribal chieftaincies and groups and the relationship they had with the kingdoms under which they came.

Firstly, the social structure within the group. We do not have any evidence to know of the stratification within each tribe. We also do not have any definitive evidence as to how political authority was founded and transmitted. But there is an interesting reference in *Tolkāppiyam*. While describing the various military operations and activities that could be praised in poems, it mentions an event called 'Pillaiyāṭṭu' (Dancing with the Child or Youth) (Puratinaiyal 60). Whereas one commentator explains it as singing the praise of the dead

18. Sastri K. A. N. *A History of South India*. p. 121. (OUP) 1961.

19. Ibid.

hero, another commentator-Naccinārkiṇiyar-explains it as the celebration at the Investiture of political authority of the young man who had defeated the raiders and established the supremacy of the clan. Philologically this seems to be the more acceptable interpretation.²⁰ If so, in this cult we could see the origin of kingship among the Tamils. The above interpretation gains more support especially in view of the emphasis laid on the security that a ruler has to provide to the ruled (Puram 32, 35).

One important observation has to be made at this point. In Tamilnad we do not hear of any political oligarchies. 'Sārthu' was the guild of the merchants. It cannot be taken as ever having had political authority. But oligarchy as a political institution had existed in North India. The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha, came from an ancient oligarchy. The Lichchavis are another important oligarchy.

It is said that some of the kings and chieftains had their 'surram' (Puram 2, PPA 441-447, MK 227, MPK 76-8). The term 'surram' which means 'those around' today denotes one's relatives. The tribal character of the ruler is well expressed in the convention of 'Nāl Makil Irukkai' in which the ruler sits in state with fellow members of the tribe, drinking toddy (Puram 29, 54, 123, 324, 330, PPA 441-447). This hour provided the time for the eulogy by bards. At the start, even the kings of the established monarchies had this institution. (Puram 29, 54). In cities we find the great rich men observing this (441-52) ritual.

This reveals that at the beginning, the three kingdoms did not differ much from the other units.

The chieftains who came under the major kingdoms do not seem to have lost their political authority. Puram songs 319, 322 and 324 refer to hunter chiefs who help the major kings. The area is described as 'that of the chiefs'.

This type of political control should have led to the development of feudalism in the more classical sense. From the state of a subordinate ruler, the transition is to one who rules on behalf of the King. This feature noted by Kosambi as 'Feudalism from Above' is one of the important forms of the development of feudalism in India.²¹ In North India, the term 'Samanta' which originally meant a neighbour later denotes a feudatory official.²²

The following are some of the names of the chiefs: Cirukudikilān Paṇṇan, Mulli Kilan Kariyati, Nālai Kilāvan Nākan, Eentḥur Kilān, Ton Māraṇ, Vallar Kilān Paṇṇan, Karumpanurkkilān, Amparkilān Aruntai, Poraiyarrukilān.

The relationship between these feudatory chiefs and the King is brought out well in a poem on Nallai Kilān Nākan (Puram 179) in which the bard states 'This fighter of the Pandya King, provides the King with whatever he needs, as swords when the king needs arms, and advice when he seeks it'.

20. Tamil Lexicon—Vol. 5 (Madras) 1932-33.

21. Kosambi D. D. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*—Chapter 9. (Bombay) 1956.

22. Sharma R. S. *Indian Feudalism*—pp 23 ff. (Caltutta) 1965.

Except in the case of a few chieftains (like Āy Andiran and generally those of the Vēl tribe) others did not get much reckoning in the social setup.

But it needs be said that there was a consciousness that all these people of the different regions spoke one language, viz., Tamil. This becomes clear in the various references to the tribes that live in the non Tamil speaking areas (Akam 205, 211, 215, 349, Kur 11). They are referred to as people or places in 'a territory where the language is different'.

V

For the beginnings of class formation, we must look at the development of the three kingdoms.

The geographical suitability of the three seats of capital has already been noticed. The major cause for the rise of the three kingdoms should have been the fertility provided by the river basins. The river basins afforded irrigation facilities to a region where rainfall is not very high. In the incidental descriptions of the different physiographic regions, which come in as a background to the romantic action, we get ample information about the type of food of each region and how it was obtained. Guarding the fields full of millet corns (cultivated by slash and burn method) provides the scenario for the boy meets girl episodes. (Akam 118, 188, 192, 242, 302, Kur 141, 142, 193, 198, 217, 291, Nar 22, 57, 102, 108, 128, 134, Aink 281-90). In the pastoral region, forest clearance and garden tillage is mentioned along with cattle rearing (Akam 334, 394, Nar 121, 266, 289, Kur 279, 221). In the riverine region, irrigation from ponds and rivers is mentioned (Puram 18, 24, 176, PrP 27, PP. 282-9).

The role of irrigation in the development of a centralised monarchy has been observed by many scholars.²³ In early Tamil literature we get references to irrigation only in relation to the three kingdoms. In the case of the other rulers, abundance of food is mentioned, but there is no reference to any major irrigation activity. In PP (283-9) Karikāla is credited with having cleared forests for cultivation and constructed reservoirs for irrigation. In Puram 78, Kuṭa Pulaviyaṇār makes a special plea to the greatest of the Pāṇḍya kings of the Caṅkam era, in this manner: 'What is food but combination of land and water. Those who bring these two together are those whose names will live forever'. MK (85-95) refers to irrigating fields with water from the reservoir by using the well sweep-basket method. As for the Cēras it is clear from Patirrupattu (27) that there were irrigation channels and anicuts with doors to let the water flow. The next poem (28) in the same collection refers to Pēriyāru a river on the west coast, as one which irrigates the Karampai (unfertile) land even during the worst drought.

It is quite clear that legumes and millet formed the traditional food (Puram 335). Rice seems to be an introduced crop. In fact very often we come across poems in which the whiteness of the rice is praised very much (PA 119, MPK 564). Though we hear of a variety of hill paddy called 'aivaṇam', it is

23. Thomson G. *Studies in Ancient Greek Society Vol. II* p. 71-3 (London) (1955).

clear that rice was not cultivated extensively in the hilly and the terraced regions. This confirms the findings of the archaeologists. Referring to the *intermediate* areas of the N. Deccan and W. India, Allchins say "Rice appears to be an indigenous crop. Otherwise the region witnesses an expansion of wheat, flax and lentils from the west during post-Harappantines and shares some of the legumes and millets with the south. Rice seems to have *spread into* the peninsula at an early date and is recorded from far to the South by early Iron Age times".²⁴

In this region, even today, cultivable land is classified into 'nançey' and 'punçey'—'Nançey' is irrigated land and punçey is used only for the cultivation of millets.

The centralised monarchy that arose out of, and helped, this economic development, flourished because of foreign trade. Pukār, the capital of the Cōlas, is the Poduce of the Greeks. PP lists the various items that were shipped from this harbour (184-193). Muziri came under the Cēra domain. Madura, the Pāndyan capital was another important centre (MK 315-325 and 500-556). The significance of the Indo-Roman trade is too well known to be analysed here.²⁵ Most of the ports mentioned by the author of the Periplus fall within one of the three kingdoms.

Naura—Cannanore—Cēra
Tyndis—Tondi
Muziri—Musiri—Cēra
Nelcynda—Pāndyan
Poduce—Pukār—Cōla
Sopatama—Eyirpaṭṭinam

Rice cultivation and foreign trade created a type of society completely different from the ones that existed in the outlying regions. The most important result was the break up of the old tribal society and the emergence of a class society based on property ownership.

Before dealing in detail with the emergence of this new class, it is important to note that each major ruler had a residence town and seaport.²⁶ The residence town was maintained for military reasons. The descriptions of each of these towns reveal the great amount of care taken in military security (Puram 27, 98, 177, 350 ; PA 64-68 ; CPA 203-6 ; MK 343-366 ; PP 283-288 ; MPK 12, 488-91). The militaristic character of the early state and the concentration of settlement in the city which Marx described as the foundation of that early warlike organisation,²⁷ are found, as in other parts of the world, in Tamilnad too.

Of the many urban settlements that arose thus, the ones that prospered were those where rice cultivation and trade flourished.

24. Allchins p. 266. (1968).

25. For Indo-Roman trade see Warmington E. H. *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge) 1928. Wheeler R. E. M. *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*—(London) 1954.

26. Zvelabil K. Tamil Poetry 2,000 years ago in *TAMIL CULTURE*—Vol. X No. 2.(Madras) 1963.

27. Hobswahm (Ed) *Precapitalist Economic Formations-Marx*-(London) 1965.

It is in relation to the cultivation of rice that we first hear of a non-owner worker in Tamilnad. In the course of the descriptions of the agrarian region poets often refer to *Vinaivalar* (those skilled in work) sowing and harvesting (Kur 309, Nar 60 and 400, PPA 196-262 ; MK 230-270 ; PP 7-19). This employment of workers imply the development of the institution of property. The landowner was called *Kilān* (to whom (it) belongs). The beginnings of the development of class distinctions could be seen also in the references to the storing of paddy in large quantities (Nar 26, 60). We hear of the lady love described as 'the daughter of the rich man of the ancient family' (Kur 336). In *Tolkāppiyar's* prescription that servants and workers are not fit subjects for love themes and that they could figure only in cases of onesided love or abnormal sex, (Tol Akat 23 and 24), we find the beginnings of literary discrimination based on wealth.

There is also reference to the sugarcane crushing machine. (Aink 55, PPA 289-60). Labour must have been employed in sugar production too.

The growing affluence of the landowning elite could be seen in the slow transition of the bard from a heroic minstrel to a procurer of women for the landowner, for the latter's extra marital indulgences (Kur 127, Aink 43, 471-480, Kali 67, 68, 70, 71).

The growing distinction could also be seen in the evolution of the character of the *Tōli*—the friend of the girl, from a girl of equal standing to a maidservant. The transition could be seen in poems like Akam 63, Kur 36 and 37, Aink 1, 33 and NNV 151. *Tolkāppiyar* makes her the daughter of the fostermother (Tol Kalaviyal 125). Incidentally, this character (*Cevili*) seem to have evolved from the tribal matron under whose care came the girls of 'growing up' age.

The development of the institution of harlotry is another example. Women in the bardic troupe turn out to be the '*Parattaiyar*' (the other women) and by the time of *Tolkāppiyar* they had become a distinct group. Though the history of the institution of *Haeters* in Tamilnad has not been fully inquired into, it is clear that the female members of the bardic troupe came to be associated with this group. (Nar 360, 390, MK 563 ff. Pari 20 : 74-5).

Another important feature connected with the emergence of the propertied class is seen in those love poems which deal with the theme of separation. Two activities could take a husband away from his home for a considerable period of time—one when he goes on Royal duty and the other when he goes to earn wealth. This is an important aspect of the economic life of Ancient Tamilnad which has been overlooked by historians.

In those poems on separation, the wife's concern for the husband is depicted by the descriptions of the forests and hills he has to pass through and the fierce marauders he had to encounter. The purpose of the journey comes with a certain terminological exactitude. The terms are *ceyporul* (made or earned wealth) and *Viṇai* (effort). '*Viṇai*' would include royal duty too but '*ceyporul*' is essentially economic and concerns only the individual.

In some cases the person who goes away to earn money is associated with *Ilaiyar* (Juniors). (Nar 361, 367). *Tolkāppiyar* mentions the *Ilaiyar* as one of the mediators between the husband and wife when there is misunderstanding

between the couple. (Tol. Karpīyal 170-71). It is said that they should tell the wife about the features of the path and the labour involved in the task. Besides working for the master they have also to be his body guards. Thus it is clear that Ilaiyar are really his servants. The development of this system is another manifestation of the beginnings of class division. It is clear from Nar 266 that all the males did not go on this errand because on his way back the hero sees the cattlekeepers; those who went were from the urban settlements and the propertied classes.

This along with rice production, provides for the accumulation of surplus wealth and the social effect of this wealth is becoming increasingly discernible.

With the development of the river basins, we find the gradual isolation of the people of other regions. Very often the hunters and cattle keepers are referred to as the 'uninstructed' or uneducated ones (Akam 75, 107, Nar 367, Aink 304). A study of the poems indicate the social alienation that was developing (Akam 54, 58, Nar 69, 75, 88, 127, 140, 169, 228, 264, 2174, 311, 3211, Kur 335, 346, 358). The situation becomes very interesting, because, by poetic tradition, particular regions should be kept as the background for particular love themes. Falling in love and sexual union have to be described against the background of a hill. Earlier poems of this genre had as characters hunters and the girls of the hunting community. But soon this tradition was given up and the lover, instead of being a hunter from the hills, is now the 'owner' of a hill. (Kalit 39). This is in agreement with Tolkāppiyar's prescription that only owners could be treated as lovers.

This alienation and isolation is very important because, later, when the caste system was applied to make social gradations, the people living on the hills and in the open terraces were completely left out of the gradations and were considered too low for inclusion within the caste framework.

This aloofness also led to the strengthening of the internal ties of the left out community and whenever they were considered fit for inclusion into the fold—such a situation arose only in case of political power of the group—they were taken as one jāti.

This isolation is reflected in the varying meaning of the term *Kuṭi*. The term *Kuṭi*, as is used in Caṅkam literature means two things 1) a settlement 2) a clan or caste. Later it comes to mean those castes which render service to the agriculturists. The frequent use of the adjectives *Ciru* (small) with '*Kuṭi*' (Nar 82, 87, 110, 114-Kur 284, 322, 355) indicates that the settlements of agrarian labourers must have been meant by this term. The original meaning of the term is 'abode' (DED 1379). Puṇam 335 brings out rather forcefully the meaning 'clan', for, perhaps as a reaction to the emergence of different social groups, it reiterates that these are four clans and four clans only and those are that of Pāṇan, Paraiyan, Tudiyan and Kadampan. The use of the term in PPA (197) and PrP (13) makes it clear that it has come to refer to the settlements of agrarian labourers. It is interesting to note that a PrP song (127) eulogises a King as 'protecting themerchants and carrying the burdens of those who looked after the *Kuṭis*', meaning thereby the agrarian workers.

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This dependance of the labourers on the landowner should be taken as the beginnings of feudalism in Tamilnad.

Besides this new landowning class, there existed in the cities other groups which could be considered genuinely urban in their origin.

We find mention of these groups in the descriptions of commercial cities and military capitals. In the course of the description of the city, MK-refers to a class of rich men who dress well and go about in chariots. They are noted for their liberality (431-442). The real identity of these men is not known but it is important to note they observe the ritual of 'Sitting in State in the morning', one which we have already noticed was associated with kings and chieftains.

There is also reference in the same poem to a group of state officers (489-526). They are the members of the judiciary and the members of the Committee of the Big Four.

MK also refers to a group of persons who had been granted the title Kāviti. The ancient Tamli Kingdoms bestowed three titles upon dignitaries. Those were the Enāti, the Kāviti and the Eṭṭi.

Enāti was a title conferred upon the commander of the army. It is interesting to note that Kalit. 80 refers to an Enātipāṭiyam—a colony of the Enati—as the place where the harlots were kept.

The next title 'Kāviti' was conferred upon high officials. The title holders described in MK- (493-99) are men of great learning and knowledge. The symbol of the title was a flower. The 14th century commentator on *Tolkāppiyam*, Naccinārkiṇiyar, states that royal families used to have matrimonial alliance with the families of Kāvitis. (Tol Elut 154).

The third title 'Eṭṭi' was generally conferred on merchants only. The honours were collectively known as 'Marayam'.²⁸

The descriptions are clear enough indications to take these officials as belonging to the elite of that society.

But it is important to note that the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (DED) does not mention any one of these terms. We should also note the strong similarity the term 'Eṭṭi' (title given to the merchants) has with the term 'ceṭṭi' which refers to a member of the mercantile jāti in Tamilnad.

Thus we see social distinctions arising due to the very nature of economic and political organisation. The influence of Brahminism at high social levels was seen only in the urban centres.

28. For details about the titles see 'Subramaniam N. *SANGAM POLITY*-p. 85-88. (London) 1966.

VI

Now we must turn to the changes that took place due to the spread of social Aryan influence.

The exact date of the coming of Aryan influence into Tamilnad is not known. According to Nilakantasastry, who by his monumental volume on Cōlas and on Pāndyas brought to all-India focus the importance of the history of Tamilnad,²⁹ "History begins in the south of India as in the North with the advent of the Aryans".³⁰ If by history, Sastry means records in contemporary writing he is very right but his very next sentence reveals that it is not so. He says: "The progress of the Aryanisation of South is reflected in literature and legend".

The extent of Aryan influence over Tamilnad has either been minimised or exaggerated. The problem is an emotion charged political problem. An analysis of *most* of the Indian writings on the subject reveal a commitment, either for or against. Of the non-Indian scholars not many knew Tamil. They had to depend on accounts which too were coloured versions.

Perhaps a way out will be not to emphasise the literary sources much. Archaeological evidence as it stands today, reveals that the eastward expansion of the Aryans was a political conquest. The Aryan expansion into the East meant the introduction of the use of iron and of better methods of cultivation. But in the case of south India this is not so. After discussing in detail the date of Iron Age in India, with special reference to the Burial Complex of the South Indian Iron Age, (commonly ref. to as the Megalithic Burials), Allchins conclude as follows: "Certainly the excavated settlements do not give much indication of any major change in the way of life accompanying the arrival of iron. One is left with a feeling of remarkable conservatism among the population of South India throughout the period. There can be little doubt that many of the traits already established in the Neolithic period persisted throughout the Iron Age"³¹ But certainly this is not the case in North India. This is what they say of the relationship of the Vedas with Iron Age. "But it is noteworthy all this later Vedic Literature appears to know iron and therefore may be expected to belong to the Iron Age rather than Chalcolithic. Where therefore Chalcolithic cultures are found to the east of the geographical region of the RgVeda, they may either indicate pre-Aryan settlements or settlements of those who had arrived and dispersed before the arrival of those who brought the RgVeda".³²

It cannot of course be said that pre RgVedic Aryans came into South India. Also it cannot be said that the Vedic Aryans were less revolutionising than they were in N. India, if the conquest was a similar one.

29. Sastry K. A. N. (a) *Cōlās* (Madras) 1955.

(b) *Pandyas* (Madras) 1929.

30. Sastry K. A. N. *A History of South India*. p. 68. (Third Edition) 1966.

31. Allchins B.I.C. p. 232.

32. *Ibid* p. 206.

Thus we have to accept the conclusion that the Aryan thrust into peninsular India differed in character from the ~~method~~ of their eastward expansion. The character of this new expansion is explained by Kosambi, who had set to himself the task of writing Indian history as 'the presentation in chronological order of successive change in the means and relations of production', as follows. "The next major thrust, into the peninsula proper, was backed by the highly developed northern society with its advanced techniques; in particular a recently acquired knowledge of metals. The new territory was far more varied and therefore not to be settled in the same way as the north. Hence the further development and new function of caste, where the Brahmins write puranas to make aboriginal rites respectable, while the savage chiefs of the tribe would turn into kings and nobles ruling over the tribe"³³

This major thrust comes in only after 600 B.C. Sastri himself accepts this when he says "Until about 600 B.C. works composed in the North exhibit little knowledge of India south of the Vindhya, but acquaintance increased with progress of centuries".³⁴ The first mention of the countries of the extreme south-Pāndya, Cōla & Cēra-comes in Katyayana, a grammarian of 4th c. B.C. Even if we accept this as the possible date of the beginning of the 'Aryanisation of the South' we should not fail to take into account all the changes that had radically changed the very process of Aryanisation by this time."³⁵

The extreme ritualistic character of religion and the rigidity in its imposition led to challenges to the system and by the close of 5th century B.C. Buddhism and Jainism had risen. The earlier Vedic gods like Indra had faded away and gods like Siṃha and Viṣṇu, in whose worship the syncretism of several local cults are easily identified, have taken their place. The epic, Mahabharata reflects the changed conditions by glorifying a dark complexioned deity-Kṛṣṇa-a Yadava hero-as the supreme god.

Thus it was a much changed Hinduism that came into Tamiḻnad. By the time it came in the protestant cults of Buddhism and Jainism too had come in.³⁶

Appreciation of this important factor is very essential to the understanding of the process of acculturation.

Another factor of equal importance is that, at a period prior to the Caṅkam literature, almost the whole of India, except these Tamiḻ states had come under the Asokan empire which had a highly efficient and centralised administration. Almost contemporaneous with Caṅkam period, was the suzerainty of the Sātavāhanas in Andhra, to the North of Tamiḻnad. The impact of such politically strong empires on the political, and social thought of Tamiḻnad

33. Kosambi—*Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* p. 10.

34. Sastri—H. S. I. p. 68.

35. For a traditional account of the changes that occurred in early Aryan life in India, see Majumdar & Pusalkar—*History and Culture of the Indian People—Vol. I The VEDIC AGE* (London) 1951.

36. The common view that Hindus were the first to come to South India is now challenged. See K. K. Pillai—*Aryan Influence in Tamiḻaham during the Sangam Epoch*. I Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies—(Kuala Lumpur) 1966. For the earlier view see Krishnaswami Aiyangar S. *Some contributions of S. India to Indian culture—Chapter II*, (Calcutta) 1923.

must have been very great. The decisive character of the influence is seen in that Tamil was first written in a script which is a variation of the Asokan Brahmi. Caṅkam literature itself refers to the Maurya invasion of the South. (Akam 69, 281, 375).

Even though there never was political subjugation, North Indian dominance was dominant enough to familiarise the monarchies and chieftaincies in Tamilnad with their political and religious concepts.

An analysis of the various references to the deities worshipped during the period under discussion prove the above contention. Visnu, Balarāma, Kāma, Cāma and Siva are mentioned. The process of syncreticism of the incoming cult with the indigenous one is seen in the worship of Muruka. Subramanya of the Aryans (in whose worship in N. India some scholars have detected Alexander cult³⁷) merges with Murukan of Tamilnad.

The earliest Tamil literature also has reference to Buddhism and Jainism. In fact it is said that 'from about the 4th century B.C. the Jains and Buddhists had begun to come and settle down in Southern India' and that 'in all probability they preceded the Hindu Aryans'. As noted by Pillai, "the epigraphic evidence as well as the names of groups of brahmins who were settled at various stages in different places prove this".³⁸

It is important to bear in mind that the Aryan immigration had brought not only the Brahmins but others too. Akam 279 mentions an Aryan taming an elephant. Kuṟ refers to Āryakūttu—the dance of the Aryans, a professional performance. But except the priestly class others were not able to create any major impact on the social and political life of Tamilnad.

A study of the various literary references to Brahmins in the Caṅkam literature indicate that not all of them were performing religious rites. Akam 24 refers to a Brahmin making bangles of chank. This makes it clear that Brahmins did not have that unquestioned superiority that is theirs in a typically Hindu Aryan society. But it was soon achieved.

The most important sphere in which we note their rise to social significance is seen in the various references which speak of the respect the heroic monarchs pay equally to the Brahmins and to the traditional bard. It need not be stressed here that in Tamilnad, as among other peoples who have reached a considerable degree of state organisation but have had no system of writing, the bard occupied an important place in the transmission of tradition, which those rulers valued most.³⁹ Avvayār praises a king who gave away presents to Brahmins and bards (Puram 371). 21st, 24th, and 64th poems of PrP mention a similar situation. On the death of Karikāla the Great, poet Karuṅkuḷal Āṭaṇar and mourns his death by saying that the king entertained bards and performed sacrifices.

37. Gopala Pillai N.—Skanda—The Alexander Romance in India. *Proceedings and Trans. of the 9th All India Oriental Conference* 1932—pp 955-997 (Trivandrum).

38. Pillai K. K. Aryan Influence during Caṅkam Epoch—Paper presented to the First Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies (Kuala Lumpur) 1966.

39. Vansina J. *Oral Tradition*—p. 31—(London) 1965.

There is enough evidence available to show the desire of the rulers to establish their authority with the ritual sanction of the Higher Religion—a feature seen in other parts of India too. In fact there are two kings whose very names indicate that they had performed Vedic sacrifices. Palyākasālai Mutukutumi Peruvalūti and Rāca Cuyam Vēṭta PeruNaṟkiḷli. As noted earlier the indigenous cults of offering the dead bodies of the slaughtered soldiers to Pēi and that of having a communal meal immediately before war have been performed along with these Yāgas (Puram 26, PrP 21).

Among Caṅkam poets many are Brahmins and the most celebrated poet Kapilar—on his own admission—is a Brahmin.

In North India, the ousting of the heroic minstrel and taking over of his function and making the epic a priestly preserve had been completed in Mahabharata.⁴⁰ Even though the exact process of the emergence of an epic full of fables designed to emphasise Brahmin superiority was not repeated in the Tamil case, the traditional bard disappears completely from the political and literary scene. Kalittokai, a later work among the Caṅkam Anthologies, chastises them as 'the uneducated singers'. The bard and his group fell from grace. The women in their troupe turn out to be harlots and the bards the pimps. Alongside, we find the rising importance of Brahmin in the court. In a community where there had been no learning in the proper sense of the term, the Brahmin became the royal messenger (Puram 305 and Akam 54). He soon monopolised the entire learning tradition. The word Tolkāppiyar uses for learning is the same word that is used for chanting of the Vedas (Akat. 25).

The increasing power and status of the Brahmin in the court and royal circles is well seen in MK. The poet Maṅkuṭi Marutanar urges the King Neduñceliyan, the victor at Talaiālaṅkāṇam to give up all purposeless, entertainment of the bards and others and emulate Palsālai Mudukuṭumiperu valuti, a king who had performed yagas and Netiyōn, a mythical figure. Sastri in his 'Pāṇḍyan Kingdom' says that it is rather difficult to identify these two kings. Of the first he says he is almost a mythical figure.

These references could be taken to mean the development of myths that were designed to give the royal dynasties a hallowed past. Another instance of a creation of a myth could be seen in the Pulikaṭimal reference to Iruṅkōvel (Puram 201 and 202). This legend about killing a tiger on the instructions of a saint turns up much later in the case of the Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra, a fifteenth century Deccani power.

PPA states (297-310) that at Neerpāyal, a maritime town, the brahmins had a separate area for their houses. Paṭṭiṇappālai (42-58) indicates that at Pukār sacrifices were regularly performed.

Tolkāppiyar, the grammarian speaks of the 6 duties of the Brahmins (Tol-Purat 75).

Kapilar, the Brahmin poet, praises the Cēra King Celva Kaduṅgo Vāli Atan as 'Oh You have bowed none but Brahmins' (PrP 7th Decad). This sums up the eminence the Brahmins were gaining in the court.

40. Majumdar & Pusalkar (ed) *History and Culture of the Indian People* Vol. 2—pp. 243-254 (Bombay) 1960.

It is said in the epilogue to the 6th decad of PrP that Ātukōt-attuccēralātan made a grant of a village to Kapilar. This is a very significant piece of information. This is the earliest literary reference we have in Tamilnad of a landgrant to a Brahmin. The economic significance of the landgrant is that those holdings were exempted from tax and the entire population of cultivators come under the control of the Brahmin. Thus land grants to Brahmins are important in the study of the history of feudalism in India. According to RamSharan Sharma the origin and development of political feudalism is to be sought in land grants made to the Brahmins from first century A.D. onwards.⁴¹ Kosambi explains how these grants to the Brahmins led to the preservation of class structure in a rather primitive stage of production and as an example he cites South India and says the south in effect failed to develop more than just two of the original vedic castes : brahmins and sudras.⁴²

Even in those regions where the Brahmin did not own lands his social pre-eminence would never have been in question because of the position he occupied in the aristocratic circles.

The references that appear in some texts to Ilipirappālar (low-born) should be taken as having risen as a result of the influence of Brahmanism which believes in caste by birth. It is the tribal drummer who is first referred to as the low-born (Puram 170, 363). There is also reference Pulayar--meaning the low people. Besides the tribal drummer, the washer-woman too is referred to as low born (Puram 31). Puram 61 mentions certain women as 'Kadaiciyar'-those of the last rank. The commentator explains the term as labourers in the agricultural tract.

Thus we see the beginnings of caste system in Tamilnad. It cannot be said that the rigidity of the system had set in during the period under discussion. But it is clear that the social division and the glorification of one group has started. This will be the apt place to note a change the grammarian Tolkāppiyar notes. In the section on Morphology he says 'The terms of elevation like the plural form to denote a single person and a plural to denote a single object are found in usage. In grammar such use is not valid' (Tol. Col 27).

This clearly denotes that at a social level certain persons were considered fit for an honorific plural.

As noticed earlier, Kuṭi which denoted an abode, later comes to denote a jāti. To this day, this is used as the Tamil parallel to the Sanskrit term jati.

The above analysis also indicates that, except in the case of the farmers of the riverine region (Vellālās), all other castes are largely tribal.

Because of this unique development, we have in Tamilnad a system by which caste grouping is done on the basis of Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The significance of this classification is noted by modern social anthropologists too.⁴³ They have also not failed to observe the traditional animosity of the non-Brahmin toward the Brahmin.

41. Sharma R. S. *Indian Feudalism* pp. 263-273.

42. Kosambi D. D. *Introduction to the study of Indian History* p. 292.

43. (a) Beteille, A.—*Caste, Class and Power* (Berkeley) 1965

(b) Kathleen Gough—Caste in a Tanjore village in *ASPECTS of CASTE in S. India, Ceylon & N.W. Pakistan* ed. Leach (Cambridge) 1960.

Thus far we have seen the emergence of the Brahmin as the social superior with the Vellāla coming a very low second. Others were completely out of the fold. In South India and Ceylon, some of the depressed classes are referred to as the Pañcamas—those of the Fifth Rank. i.e. one step lower to the Sudras. The creation of the fifth estate was essential to grant the owner cultivator his dominance.

VII

This does not complete the picture. We have yet to see the important part played by the merchant in the Caṅkam society and the position he had in the social and political hierarchy.

Before we discuss the social effects of the much discussed Roman trade we should know something of the internal trade.

Produce of one region were bartered for the produce of another. In this transaction, the agriculturists stood in an advantageous position in that all other groups needed rice more than the farmers needing others' produce. We hear of persons from the cattle-keeping and the fishing communities going about hawking their produce for rice (Puram 293, Akam 60, Nar 97, 118, 142).

In internal trade, salt figured very prominently. Salt and metals played an important role in the development of inter-regional trade in India. "No matter what Marx said, the village economy was not based on hand-spinning and hand-weaving except for some places in Bengal where the spinning and weaving were for the greater part inseparable from the foreign trade and scheme of export, the essential commodities most villages could not produce were salt and metals. Cloth was very little use to the villager himself"⁴⁴. In ancient Tamilnad the salt trade was in the hands of a community of people called 'Umanar'. They, went in convoys. Caṅkam literature has a number of references to these traders and their ox drawn carts (Akam 159, 167, 173, 191, 298, 310, Kur 388, Puram 60, 307, 313). These traders seem to have organised themselves into guilds called 'sārtu' (Akam 39, 167). Theirs was a barter trade and they exchanged salt for paddy. Their main worry was the raiders in the jungles who very often killed them (Akam 89, 248). Nar. 330 makes it clear that the salt was produced by the people of the littoral tract and was exchanged for paddy from the trader. The Umanars were not treated with great respect. Kur 269 mentions a fisher-woman getting paddy for salt.

It is interesting to note in this connection that there is a reference to the women from the minstrels' family selling fish (Aink 4).

The Alakarmalai cave inscriptions of 1st century B.C. mention, "cloth merchants, salt merchant, ironmonger who sold iron tip for the plough, trader in sugar cane juice, trader in gold and bullion and dealer or tester in gems"⁴⁵.

44. Kosambi D. Development of Feudalism in India. *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* Vol. 36 pp. 258-289 (1955).

45. Mahadevan I. Brahmi Inscriptions of South India p. 31. Paper presented to the Second International Conference—Seminar of Tamil Studies (Madras) 1968.

This takes us to the Indo-Roman trade. PP (184-193) refers to the different items of export and import. It should be mentioned in this context that a recent excavation at Kaveripum-pattinam, a landing quay has been excavated. The excavations remains confirm the description of the same in PP.⁴⁶

Important to this study is the position the export merchant held in Caṅkam society. Mankulam inscriptions of 2nd—1st. B.C. "records the existence of mercantile guilds called the 'nhikama'. The head of the guild enjoyed the title Kāviti. The members of the guild acted in their corporate capacity in making endowments".⁴⁷ A reference in PrP (76) suggests that the ships that were used in the trade were owned by the merchants themselves. 12th poem of that collection informs that the king looked after the interests of the merchants of the city. PP (120-135) refers to the customs officers who seal the export packages with the royal emblem—the tiger. It could now be easily deduced that the rich men mentioned in Maturaikkāñci (431-442) should be members of the mercantile community.

Who were these merchants and where did they come from? The graffiti on the potsherds found at Arikamedu and the Tamil Brahmi inscriptions indicate that these merchants should have been Jains and Buddhists.⁴⁸ The role of the Jains and Buddhists in the development of Indian trade has been recognised by all historians. Basham says this: "We can parallel the rise of Buddhism and Jainism and of the many other smaller heterodox systems of salvation which came into being about the 6th century B.C., with the rise of an important mercantile class needing less expensive and less complicated rituals and demanding a more significant role in the religious life of India than Brahmins would concede".⁴⁹ In fact the very name Arikamedu is a corruption of 'Arukan Mēdu' meaning 'Mound of the Arahāt'.

The economic independence and social supremacy of these groups of merchants is clearly revealed in the inscriptions of first and second century B.C. which show that "the trading communities vied with the royalty in the endowment of monasteries in the Tamil country".⁵⁰

Descriptions of city life reveal the pastimes of the aristocrats and the conditions of the craftsmen. MK (511-522) mentions chank-cutters, gem-cutters, goldsmiths, painters and weavers. According to the commentators the term Kammiyas (artisans) would include traders too—perhaps small traders. NNV refers to architects and builders. The early Brahmi inscriptions mention taccan (mason or carpenter), goldsmith and charioteer. Except the master builder who is referred to as the learned one, the other craftsmen do not seem to have had any important place in society. Each of the professional-groups turns out to be caste groups.

46. Raman K. V. Excavations at Pūmpukūr—*Arāicci* Vol. III-No. 1. (Tinnevely) 1972.

47. Mahadevan, I. p 76.

48. Ibid and (a) Pillai K. K. The Brahmi Inscriptions and the Sangam Age—*Tamil Culture* Vol. V No. 2 1956. pp 175-185.

(b) Zvelabil K. The Brahmi Hybrid Inscriptions—*Archiv Orientalni* Vol. 32 (1964).

49. Basham A. L. *Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture*—pp. 32-33 (Bombay) 1964.

50. Mahadevan I. *Brahmi Insc.: of South India* p. 35.

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At an agrarian level the backsmith occupies an important place, but he too is not given any importance. The role of the potter in ancient south Indian life had been very significant. The urn burials of Adiccanallur bear testimony to the funerary significance of urns. Literary evidence amply corroborates the archaeological evidences,⁵¹ and also reveals that the potter though much in demand was not given a high place in society.

Tolkāppiyar says that traders can take up to agriculture. This may perhaps indicate the position of the traders after the decline of the Roman trade.

As for the pastime of the aristocrats various references indicate that extra marital indulgence was the commonest activity. Kalit and Pari have references to the hero going with the harlots for watersports. Pattiṇappālai in the course of the description of the city of Pukar refers to connoisseurs who admired music and appreciated dance and drama. Cil describes the various forms of enjoyment the rich had during the Indra viḷaseason.

VIII

CPA sung by Nalliyakkōṭaṇ is taken as chronologically the last work of the Caṅkam period. It is generally agreed that this was sung on a chieftain who lived in 300-350 A.D. The poet eulogises the chieftain as having become the main hope of the minstrels since the fall of three monarchies.

The causes for this political decline have not been established. But in this period Tamilnad came under the suzerainty of a tribe called the Kalabhras who had occupied the modern districts of Bangalore, Kolar and Chittore. When they were dislodged from their traditional homeland, the region of Sravanabelgola, in the first half of the fifth century, they marched into the Tamil country by about the middle of the 5th century A.D.⁵²

They established their political supremacy over the entire Tamilnad. This period has usually been called the Dark Age because of the absence of continuous dynastic history and also because of the great upheaval brought about in the cultural sphere. The Kalabhras did not rule as a single family. We find Kalabhra rulers ruling over different areas. It is evident that the new rulers allied themselves more with Jainism and Buddhism than with Hinduism.

Kural which belongs to this period depicts beautifully the political and social set up for the period through its definition of a state. It defines a state as one which has an inexhaustible supply of produces, capable and rich men, who are not low and mean (731). It also adds that a country should be free from internal hostility and warring groups (735). All these indicate the existence of a powerful groups within the state having a hold on both economic and political matters.

51. Srinivasan K. R. Megalithic Burials and Urn fields of South India in the light of Tamil literature and tradition—*Ancient India* No. 2. 1946 p. 9-16 (Delhi).

52. Venkata Raman K. R. A Note on the Kalabhras—*Transactions of the Arch : Society of South India* 1956-57 pp. 94-100 (Madras).

The class division in the cities is very well brought out in Cilapatikāram. In the course of the description of the festivities connected with the Indra festival, the poet refers to the lay-out of the city. Maruvūrpākkam, the area close to the shore was the commercial centre and the residential area of the foreign merchants and poor city dwellers like the artisans and others. On the other side in the Pattinappākkam were the houses of the brahmins, big merchants and agriculturists. The market place was in between these two areas (Cil V), Cil makes pointed reference to the caste system by referring to the guardian deities of each caste but also mentions that at the beach, soon after the festival, was heard the noise of the people of all the four castes. This would perhaps indicate the lack of rigidity of the caste system, because of which people could congregate in places.

An important feature of the Post-Canḥam Period is the increase in number of land grants made to the Jaina and Buddhist monasteries. Land grants greatly changed the character of both the clergy and the laity in Buddhism and Jainism. As far as the people were concerned they had come under an authority, which unlike the Brahmin was not geared for such an economic overlordship. In the Kalabhra period, donations to Jaina and Buddhist monasteries increased.⁵³ Much of the cultivable land came under their control.

In the following period, known to history as the Pallava period (6th to 9th C A.D.) we find a great social upsurge in Tamilnad. The great religious movement, in terms of society and the economy, was a peasant revolt against the economic overlordship of the Buddhist and the Jaina monasteries. In the fight against the monastic religions, people from all classes and castes joined together. This only shows that though the consciousness of caste was there, it was not rigid enough to prohibit people from rallying together for a common cause.

Once the Hindu supremacy was established the poor peasants who stormed the Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, were shackled to their land and occupation by the laws of caste. From this point of time, South India, becomes the bastion of Hindu culture and Mahendravarman the great Pallava king calls himself 'the one who maintains the fourfold division'. The changing conditions is reflected in the observation of Minakshi in her 'Administration and Social life under the Pallavas'. "We have plenty of reference in epigraphy to Brahmanas and Kshatryas but vaisyas and sudras are not mentioned in inscriptions"⁵⁴ In fact such a situation wherein the sudra was not considered fit for mention, has been forewarned by the grammarian Tolkāppiyar when he declared "By usage, we mean only those of the Higher People because all the events of this world are determined by them" (Tol-Marap-647).

53. Zvelabil K. Tamil in 550 .D. *Dissertaines Orientales* Vol. 3—(Prague) 1964.

54. Minakshi C. *Administration and Social life under the Pallavas*—Chapter XI (Madras) 1938.

