

# Social Settings in Tamilnadu

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### Abstract

*During the age of Sangam our ancestral society was constructed under its five land geographical identity. And they are live from their geo-professional society like group of tribes. During the age they were deferent among them only work of their profession. But there was nothing any determinations of cast or religion among them. From the head of those tribes were given eminently three rulers of ancient realm of Tamil country the Cheras, Cholas and Pandias, but the powers new situations noting to done any impacts on farmer social structure. But after the declined of those rulers with patronage of the newly conquered rulers to organized and constructed the casts system in their contemporary Tamil Society.*

*The similar impacts are vigorously raised up the cast struggles and upraising at present Tamil Society. The conflicts are discriminates the social contacts. Hence works of this research journal hold its historical realms with keep in mind with the current social situations and its solutions.*

*The world technologically equipped nations are united the nations of whole world under the layout of the Modernization, Liberalization and Globalization. Under the productive relationships each and every individual men of this world interconnects with one and among without clear conscious of their own. Against this outward nature to fade the real darken side is disserving activity holds on human population of this world, under the names of caste system, religion, racism and the language.*

**Keynote: Ancestral society, determinations, social structure, contemporary, vigorously, Modernization, Liberalization, Globalization.**

The ancient Tamil country had about Five Fold divisions of Land – Hilly region, Pasture land, Agricultural land, Coastal land and desert land which determined the occupation and culture of the people.<sup>1</sup> This division appeared quite natural in many countries. However, the Varna (caste) system. Slowly began to take a predominant role over Tamil society based on which the triangle Hindu Society came to be divided into four classes viz., the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vsyas and the Sudras, with the passage of the time the Four-Fold Varna System which mingled with the social divisions of Tamils came to be classified into three major divisions viz., the Brahmins, the caste Hindus or non-Brahmins and the depressed classes. This caste system became rigid and social mobility was practically impossible by caste being determined at birth.<sup>2</sup> The non-Brahmins were classified as forwarding non-Brahmins and backward non-Brahmins. Among the forward non-Brahmins, the noted caste Hindus were the Mudaliars, Chettiyars, Naidus and Saiva Vellalas, who wielded much influence in the society as Zamindars, Mirasidars, headmen industrialists, traders and lawyers.

The backward non-Brahmins constituted mostly Vanniyars, Nadars, Goundars and others who had settled mostly by countryside and led invariably a miserable life in huts. In times of drought, Famine, Flood and epidemics the backward and the depressed classes suffered much. The Adi Dravidas were placed in the lowest ring in the social ladder of the Varna system of the Hindu Society.<sup>3</sup> Their depressed economic condition and Social denigrations often resulted in illiteracy, poverty and loss of Self-dignity. This hurt the social life of women. <sup>4</sup> People, who spoke different languages and followed different religious inhabited the area that formed the Madras Presidency. They spoke Telugu, Tulu, Mahratta, Canarese, Tamil and Malayalam languages.<sup>5</sup> The Telugu language was commonly spoken by the people of northern Circars and in portions of the Nizams Dominions, Karnool, Cuddappah, part of North Arcot, Nellore and some parts of Bellary. Tamil was the common language of the districts from a few miles north of Madras to Kanyakumari, the extreme south of the eastern division of the Peninsula.<sup>6</sup>

From the religious point of view, people belonged to different religions. The Hindus formed a majority of the population. Along with them a sizeable number of Muslim minorities scattered in many parts. Christianity was followed in a few parts of the Presidency besides Travancore and Cochin states. The soils of south India were classified as wet, dry and garden on which assessment was charged on lands. The important land tenures prevailed in the century was cows, inams, jagirs, zamindari, and the Molinari estates.<sup>7</sup> Besides this, trade and commerce also flourished in the presidency. To develop trade and commerce in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the English East India Company maintained Commercial activities in Ramnad, Salem, Cuddalore, Nagore, Tirunelveli, North Arcot, Ingloam, the lead district and Ganjam.<sup>8</sup>

The Social setting reflected the caste system, Socio-economic condition and concepts of the native society in Tamilnadu. As the land was overstocked with cattle and other resources available abundantly, it could satisfy the natives and attract Foreigners. The people mostly belonged to the Dravidian stock composing Hindus, Muslims and Christians. <sup>9</sup> The

Tamil Communities fallen to social oppressions were mainly the Padayachis, Nadars, Paravas, Devendrakulavellars otherwise the agricultural Pallas, papayas and Chakallias who experienced inequity and injustice. Among the Parayas and chakallias the depressed classes, Followed the Social evils like irregular marriages, polygamy and divorces were so commonly prevalent. They used to consume intoxicating drinks and eat the flesh of dead animals.<sup>10</sup> Divorce was common among certain communities and it was said that a man dismissed his wife by giving her some money and calling her his sister. A concubine was prevalent among the people especially in the nobility and the rich. People attached much value to funeral ceremonies where the women wept in the noisiest manner. They also had the custom of casting horoscopes for their children. Blood feuds were common among the communities of weavers, and hunters. In certain castes for economic reasons, people resorted to female infanticide. Both royalty and nobility practiced sati while the Brahmins and other castes practiced it rarely.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately the society practiced all kinds of social evils in the form of customs filled with superstitious beliefs.

The Kallars are constituting professional robbers and thieves, had the system of blackmail called Kudikaval under which the other castes were supposed to pay a fee to be exempted from theft. They had ten endogamous divisions and the marriage was governed mainly by the Vaguppus (divisions) and not by the differences of sect or occupation. They practiced customs of enlarging the earlobes among the girls, marrying a young boy too much older women ( sudantharam) and circumcision (cut off the foreskin) of boys at the age of twelve. In the Kallar community, a divorce could be easily obtained and the widow might marry a man she liked. They were fond of bull baiting and the maidens used to select men as their husbands who proved their bravery by capturing the cloth tied to the horns of the bulls running panic-stricken. Some Kallars who engaged in house-breaking and theft were usually accompanied by a Kammalan (Goldsmith) to melt the gold ornaments for selling. <sup>12</sup> The social customs of Kallars were barbaric and much had to be done to reform them from Savagery and criminally.

The Maravars preferred an occupation which required dash holiness while Kallars resorted to less risky business of stealing office boxes of officials and castle of ryots. The Maravars of Ramnad district were an ancient and historic community while the Kallars and Agamudayars were their kinsmen. Maravars were the war-like people who used to serve as village watchmen levying an exaction on the people and at the same time they colluded with criminals and committed robberies. Both the Maravars and Kallars seemed to be not influenced by Brahminical practices.

The Vellalas were the chief cultivators. They had a sense of superiority over all other Dravidians castes and they strove to maintain its rigidity. They had been the most literate community among the Tamils.<sup>13</sup> In the Madurai district, they were peace-loving and industrious and had taken to the cultivation of rice, betel and tobacco. They did not generally take up any degrading avocation and they were considered to occupy the higher echelons of the society among the non-Brahmins. The Vellalas abstained from alcohol and refused to dine in the houses of other castes except Brahmins.<sup>14</sup> Though the Vellalas were educated and peace-loving, they strictly practiced caste discrimination.

The Idaiyans formed the next dominating caste with the shepherds practicing endogamy. The Idaiyans also known as the Yadavas, they were the purveyors of milk, ghee, butter and buttermilk, Valayars equating the population of Idaiyans used to hunt birds and small animals in additions to cultivation and stealings.

Next, to Kammalars, the Chettairs came concerning population and the sub-division dominated in Madurai was Nattukottai. The Nattukottai chetties were concentrated in the Tirupattur and Sivaganga taluks of Ramnad districts.<sup>15</sup> These people were considered to be the off-springs of Kallar women by Muslim fathers or between Kallars and Kuravans.<sup>16</sup> Nattukottai Chettiers, one of the foremost mercantile classes dealt with commerce, trade and money-lending.

Nadars, a peasants community, also known as Shanars, once served as administrators and accountants in Chera and Pandya hegemony. They suffered due to Muslim and Telugu conquests and

moved to places like Kamudi, Chinnamanur, Ramnad, Vannikulam, Palayampatti and Tenkasi. During the British rule, they took to cultivation, industry and trade.<sup>17</sup> The Nadar castes were highly concentrated in the central region of the Ramnad district. The Vanniyars were considered as the descendants of agnikulas (fire) mentioned in the Hindu Puranas and close associates of Maravars. They rarely drank and such people were treated with contempt and excommunicated by village panchayats. The generally neglected education and restored to farming.<sup>18</sup> The Vanniyars were also known by several names as Pillars, Nayakkar, Varma, Padaiyachi, Nayanar, Odayar and Goundar. They used to interdine and inter-marry freely and were engaged in agriculture and trade.

The Pariahs were also known as Pulayar or Eyinar. They generally lived in cherish called Paracheri, away from other communities. They were compelled to travel for announcing the death of individuals, burn dead bodies and remove the carcasses of dead animals for which they were ill-paid.<sup>33</sup> They mainly revered gangammal, the goddess of Cholera and Mariyammal, the goddess of small pox, besides several ghosts and spirits. The Devendra kula Velallars (Pallar) were mostly agricultural laborers and experts in a low ground or wet cultivation. As they did not eat beef, they considered themselves superior to the Pariahs and Chakkiliyars.<sup>34</sup> The Chakkiliyars were the leather workers who immigrated from Telugu of Kanada districts. They occupied the lowest echelon of the society, engaged in drinking intoxicating liquors and eating and flesh including beef and pork. They used to worship Maduraiveeran, Mariamma, Muneeswara, Draupadi and gangamma.<sup>19</sup> Mainly the 'lower castes' had the practice of worshipping the local deities. The washer men of the society were known as Vannans which represented the occupation rather than the caste title and they had sub-divisions based on the caste for which they served like Pudaravannans for Pariahs and tulukkavannans for Muslims. The potters popularly known as Kuravans were believed to be descendants of Kulalan, Son of Brahma. They even conducted the marriage before the bride attaining puberty. They also served as Pujaris in temples and made earthenware horses and

images. In the name of caste, the 'lower castes' were compelled to carry out menial jobs for the society. The divisive nature of caste-based social taboos with all their attendant evils reduced the life style more miserable for all sections. The segregation of higher castes from the middle and lower sections made their life monotonous and exclusive. The middle classes pretended to be upper than the deprived section according to which they hang in between this class structure without any form of social interaction and change. At the last ladder of social spectrum were the depressed classes who were merely used as a workforce for the exploitative and lavish living of the higher and middle caste groups.

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