

## **EXPLORING THE CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL SETTINGS OF TAMILNADU**

**E.Selvamani**

Ph.D., Research Scholar (Full Time), PG & Research Department of History, Government Arts College for Men, Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu, India.

**Dr.P.Venkateswaran**

Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of History, Government Arts College for Men, Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu, India.

### **Abstract**

The caste structure, socio-economic conditions, and concepts of the local community in Tamil Nadu were all mirrored in the social context. Because there was an abundance of cattle and other resources on the area, it was able to satisfy the native people and attract people from other countries at the same time. The majority of the population was descended from the Dravidian race, which includes Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. The Padayachis, Nadars, Paravas, devendrakulavellars, and parayas were the most prominent members of the Tamil communities to fall victim to societal tyranny. These communities also endured inequity and injustice. Social ills like as divorce, polygamy, and irregular marriages were so widely widespread among the groups who were experiencing economic hardship. The purpose of this study is to conduct an examination of the social dynamics in Tamil Nadu.

**Keywords:** Social System, Caste Structure, Political System, Reformation, Development.

### **Introduction**

The hilly terrain, pastureland, cultivable land, coastal land, and desert land that made up the ancient Tamil nation all had a role in determining the people's occupations and cultural practises<sup>1</sup>. It seems as though this separation would be rather normal in any country. The Varna (or caste) system, on the other hand<sup>2</sup>. With the passage of time, the four-fold Varna System, which mingled with the social divisions of Tamils, came to be classified into three major divisions. These divisions are the Brahmins, the caste Hindus or non-Brahmins<sup>3</sup>, and the Kshatriyas, Vysas, and Sudras. The rigidity of this caste system, along with the fact that one's position within the system was predetermined at birth, made it practically difficult for anyone to move up or down the social hierarchy<sup>4</sup>. Those who were not of the Brahman caste were separated into two groups: those who were deemed progressive, and those who were considered backward. The Mudaliars, Chettiyars, Naidus, and Saiva Vellalas were some of the most prominent castes of Hindus who were not Brahmins but nevertheless considered themselves progressive. In their roles as Zamindars, Mirasidars, headmen industrialists, merchants, and attorneys<sup>5</sup>, members of these castes of Hindus had a significant amount of authority in the community.

The backward non-Brahmins were largely Vanniyars, Nadars, Goundars, and others who had lived in the countryside and always led a terrible life in huts. They were considered to be the most backward of the non-Brahmin groups. The backward and the impoverished classes experienced a great deal of suffering during times of drought, famine, flood, and epidemics. Within the context of the Hindu social order, the Varna system, the Adi Dravidas occupied the lowest possible rung on the social hierarchy<sup>6</sup>. Their dismal economic state and social denigrations frequently resulted in the loss of their self-dignity, along with poverty and illiteracy. This had a negative impact on the women's ability to participate in social activities<sup>7</sup>. The territory that later became known as the Madras Presidency was populated by people who were devout in a variety of faiths and spoke a variety of languages. They spoke Telugu, Tulu, Mahratese, Canarese, Tamil and Malayalam languages<sup>8</sup>. Telugu was a common language among the people who lived in northern Circars as well as in sections of the Nizam's Dominion, Karnool, Cuddappah, a piece of North Arcot, Nellore, and certain areas of Bellary. The regions that stretched from a few miles north of Madras to Kanyakumari, which is located at the extreme south of the eastern part of the Peninsula, spoke Tamil as their primary language<sup>9</sup>.

People belonged to a variety of distinct religious traditions, according to one point of view. The bulk of the inhabitants identified themselves as Hindu<sup>10</sup>. Alongside them may be found a substantial population of Muslim

minority that are dispersed over several regions. Outside of Travancore and the states of Cochin, there were pockets of the presidency where Christians maintained their religious practices. The soils of southern India were divided into three categories: garden, dry, and wet. These three categories determined how land was valued. The cowlis, inams, jagirs, zamindaries, and poligari estates were the significant forms of land ownership that predominated in the country<sup>11</sup>. In addition to this, there was a thriving increase in commercial activity throughout the administration. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the English East India Company maintained commercial activities in the cities of Ramnad, Salem, Cuddalore, Nagore, Tirunelveli, North Arcot, Ingloam, the leded District, and Ganjam. This was done with the intention of fostering the growth of trade and commerce in those areas<sup>12</sup>.

The caste structure, socioeconomic conditions, and concepts of the indigenous community in Tamil Nadu were all mirrored in the social setting of the storey. Because there was an abundance of cattle and other resources on the area, it was able to satisfy the native people and attract people from other countries at the same time. The majority of the population was descended from the Dravidian race, which includes Hindus, Muslims, and Christians<sup>13</sup>. The Padayachis, Nadars, Paravas, devendrakulavellars, and parayas were the most prominent members of the Tamil communities to fall victim to societal tyranny. These communities also endured inequity and injustice<sup>14</sup>. Social ills like as divorce, polygamy, and irregular marriages were so widely widespread among the groups who were experiencing economic hardship. They were known to sip alcoholic beverages and feast on the flesh of recently deceased animals<sup>15</sup>. It was customary practice in some societies to separate from one's spouse, and it was stated that a man would divorce his wife by paying her some money and referring to her as his sister. The practice of taking a concubine was widespread among the populace, particularly among the wealthy and the aristocratic. People placed a significant amount of importance on burial rites that involved ladies crying in the loudest manner possible. In addition to this, they followed the practice of reading their children's horoscopes. The communities of weavers and hunters were notorious for their frequent occurrence of blood feuds<sup>16</sup>. People in particular castes would kill female infants for economic reasons, leading to the practice of female infanticide. The practice of sati was more common among the nobles and kings of ancient India than among the Brahmins and other castes<sup>17</sup>. In the end, the community engaged in all kinds of socially repugnant behaviour in the form of superstitious practices that were ingrained in its conventions.

The Kallars, who were comprised of professional robbers and thieves, were in possession of a method of blackmail that was known as Kudikaval. According to this method, the other castes were required to pay a fee in order to be immune from theft. They possessed 10 endogamous divisions, and the marriage system was primarily determined by the Vaguppus (divisions), not by variations in occupation or religious affiliation<sup>18</sup>. The practised rituals included augmenting the earlobes of girls, marrying young boys to much older ladies (known as sudantharam), and circumcising boys at the age of twelve by cutting off their foreskins<sup>19</sup>. Within the Kallar society, getting a divorce was not difficult, and a widow was free to remarry anybody she pleased, regardless of their relationship status. They enjoyed the sport of bull baiting, and the maidens would choose their husbands from among the men who could demonstrate their bravery by snatching the cloth that was tied to the horns of the terrified bulls as they ran away<sup>20</sup>. When engaged in burglary and theft, certain Kallars were typically accompanied by a Kammalan (goldsmith), whose job it was to melt down gold ornaments so that they might be sold<sup>21</sup>. The social norms of the Kallars were extremely backward, and significant efforts were required to rid them of their savagery and criminality.

While the Kallars turned to the less dangerous job of stealing office boxes from officials and castles from ryots, the Maravars picked a profession that demanded quick thinking and dexterity. The Maravars of the Ramnad district were a historic and ancient community, and their kinsmen the Kallars and Agamudayars were known as the Kallars and Agamudayars<sup>22</sup>. Maravars were the warlike persons who used to work as village watchmen and impose exaction on the people while at the same time they conspired with criminals and committed thefts. In addition, they levied exaction on the inhabitants of the village<sup>23</sup>. It seems that neither the Maravars nor the Kallars were impacted by the Brahminical customs of their neighbors.

The vellalas were the most important cultivators of the land. They believed themselves to be superior to all of the other Dravidian castes, and they worked hard to keep the rigidity of their society intact. Historically, they had the highest literacy rate of any community among the Tamils<sup>24</sup>. Rice, betel, and tobacco were among the crops that they were cultivating in the Madurai district, where people lived in harmony with one another and worked hard. They did not, in general, engage in any activities that would be deemed demeaning, and as a result, they were believed to inhabit the highest strata of society as compared to non-Brahmins. The Vellala people avoided drinking alcoholic

beverages and refused to eat in the homes of members of any caste other than the Brahmins<sup>25</sup>. Caste prejudice was strongly upheld among the Vellala people, despite the fact that most of them were well educated and committed to maintaining peace. Endogamy was a common practice among the Idaiyans, which contributed to the formation of the next dominant caste. In addition to cultivating land and committing thefts, the Idaiyans, who were also known as the Yadavas, were known for their production of milk, ghee, butter, and buttermilk. The Valayars, who were considered to be equivalent to the Idaiyans' population, were known for their hunting of birds and small animals. The Chettairs stood in second place behind the Kammalars in terms of numbers, and the Nattukottai sub-division was the one that was most dominant in Madurai. In the Ramnad districts, the Tirupattur and Sivaganga taluks were where the majority of Nattukottai chetties could be found<sup>26</sup>. These individuals were thought to be the offspring of Kallar women by Muslim fathers or of Kallars and Kuravans. Either way, they were regarded to be hybrids<sup>27</sup>. The Nattukottai Chettiers were one of the foremost mercantile castes, and their responsibilities included dealing in business, trade, and the landing of money<sup>28</sup>. The Nadars are a group of peasants who are also known as Shanars. They were originally employed as administrators and accountants in the hegemonies of Chera and Pandya. They endured hardship as a result of Muslim and Telugu conquests and subsequently relocated to locations like as Kamudi, Chinnamanur, Ramnad, Vannikulam, Palayampatti, and Tenkasi. During the time when the British were in control, they turned to farming, industry, and trade<sup>29</sup>. The centre part of the Ramnad district had an exceptionally high population density of members of the Nadar caste<sup>30</sup>. The Vanniyar people were thought to be descended from the agnikulas (fire) that were referenced in the Hindu puranas. They were also supposed to be close allies of the Maravar people. Village panchayats looked down on anyone who drank even sometimes and kicked them out of the community as a kind of social exclusion. The education was, in general, ignored, and focus was returned to farming<sup>31</sup>. Palliars, Nayakkars, Varmas, Padaiyachis, Nayanars, Odayars, and Goundars are some of the other names that have been used to refer to the Vanniyars. They used to openly intermarry and socialise with one another, and they were involved in agriculture and commerce<sup>32</sup>.

The Pariahs were also known by the names Pulayar and Eyinar at various points in time. In general, they isolated themselves from the surrounding people by settling in cheris known as Paracheris. They were forced to travel for the purpose of announcing the death of persons, burning dead corpses, and removing the carcasses of deceased animals, all of which resulted in poor compensation for them<sup>33</sup>. In addition to a number of ghosts and spirits, they paid homage to the ghosts and spirits of gangammal, the goddess of cholera, and Mariyammal, the goddess of smallpox. The devendrakula Velallars, also known as Pallar, were mostly agricultural labourers who were skilled at wet or low-ground farming. They regarded themselves to be better than the Pariahs and Chakkiliyars due to the fact that they did not consume beef<sup>34</sup>. The Chakkiliyars were leather artisans who emigrated from Telugu areas in Kanada. They were known for their craftsmanship. They lived at the bottom of the social hierarchy, indulged in the use of intoxicating beverages, and their diet consisted mostly of meat, especially beef and hog. They used to honour Maduraiveeran, Mariamma, Muneeswara, Draupadi, and gangamma as deities in their religion<sup>35</sup>. The practise of worshipping the gods and spirits of the area was most common among the "lower classes." They had sub-divisions based on the caste for whom they worked, such as Pudaravannans for Pariahs and tulukkavannans for Muslims. The washing men of the society were known as Vannans, which signified the vocation rather than the caste title. It was thought that the potters who went by the name Kuravans were descended from Kulalan, who was considered to be Brahma's son. Even before the bride had reached her reproductive age, they went ahead and tied the knot. In addition to that, they worked in temples as Pujaris and created figures and horses made of pottery. In the name of caste, those considered to be members of "lower castes" were obliged to perform menial labour for the benefit of society. Because of the discriminatory character of caste-based social taboos, along with all of the other ills that accompany them, everyone's standard of living became significantly worse. The lives of those in higher castes was rendered more repetitive and closed off because of their separation from those in middle and lower castes. The middle classes acted as though they were higher up on the social hierarchy than the destitute portion, and as a result, they hung in the midst of this class system without engaging in any type of social interaction or reform. The lowest rungs of the social hierarchy were occupied by the depressed classes. These individuals' sole purpose in life was to provide labour for the luxurious and exploitative lifestyles of the higher and middle caste groups.

#### **References**

1. Subramanian, N., History of Tamilnadu, Madurai, 1972, P.2.
2. Nilakantasastri, K.A., The Pandian Kingdom, London, 1929, PP. 45-49.
3. Leach, E.R., Aspect of Caste in South India, Ceylon and Northwest Pakistan, Cambridge, 1977, P.16.

4. Lakshminarasu, A study of Caste, Madras, 1922, P.5.
5. Ibid., P.7.
6. Periyar, E.V., Ramasami, Rural Development, Madras, 1983, P.5.
7. Hutton., J.H., Caste in India, Bombay, 1951, P.207.
8. Baliga, B.S., Madurai District Gazetter, Vol.I, Madras P.38.
9. Census Report, 1871, P.5.
10. Ibid., P.7.
11. Sundaraja Iyenger,S., Land Tenures in the Madras Presidency, Madras, 1916, P.53.
12. Maclean, C.D., Manual of the Administration of the Madras presidency, Vol.1, Madras, 1885, P.29.
13. Rajayyan, K., History of Madurai, 1736-1801, Madurai, 1974, P.20.
14. Ibid., P.273.
15. Ponniah, J.S., An Enquiry in to the Economic and Social problems of the Christian Community of Madurai, Ramnad and Tinnevely Districts, Madurai, 1938, P.56.
16. Ibid., P.327.
17. Subramanian, N., Op.cit., 1972, P.330.
18. Baliga, B.S., Op.cit., PP. 116-117.
19. Ponniah, J.S., Op.cit., Madurai, 1938, P.49.
20. Baliga, B.S., Op.cit., PP. 118-119.
21. Arthur F.Cox, Madras District Manuals, 1895, P.226.
22. Ponniah, J.S., Op.cit., P.44.
23. Baliga, B.S., Op.cit., P.113.
24. Thurston, E., The Madras presidency with Mysore, Coorg and the Associated States, Cambridge, 1913, Vol.VII, PP. 370-371.
25. Rajaraman, P., The Justice Party, Madras, 1988, P.17
26. Thurston, E., Op.cit., Vol.II, PP.125-126.
27. Gazetter, Vol.I, Madras, P.158.
28. Baker, C.J., Washbrook, D.A., South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940, Delhi, 1975, P.152-153.
29. Rajayyan., K., History of Tamilnadu, 1565-1982, Madurai, 1982, PP.277-279.
30. Ponniah, J.S., Op.cit., P.4.
31. Maclean, C.D., Op.cit., P.343.
32. Thurston, E., Op.cit., Vol.VI, P.14.
33. Dubois, A., Op.cit., P.56.
34. Thurston, E., Op.cit., Vol.V, PP.772-775.
35. Pillay, K.K., Thennindiya Varalaru (Tamil), Madras, 1960, P.337.