

A Study on Hindu Religious Conditions in Pandya's During the Medieval Period in Tamilnadu

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The features of the early Sangam Tamil country was divided in to five groups namely Kurunji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai. The early Tamil literature dating from the first three centuries of the Christian era, gives a vivid picture of the state of society of that period. The Tamils have developed an advance civilization of their own, wholly independent of northern India¹. There was no evidence in the ancient Tamil society but the growth of Aryan influence and the development of a more political and economic structure produce a system in some ways more religious than that of system in north India². Immigrants from the north who had settled at Madurai and some other cities sought to introduce Hindu notions of caste and communally but met with much opposition and the caste system³. Besides by the influence of this Ariyanisation the people and society were divided in to four groups by means of occupation and the basis of Varunashrama Dharma. They were known as who chant mantras and perform prayer were called Brahmanas, who protect the country were called as *Khastriyas*. Those who involved business were known as *Vaisyas* and the menial workers were known as *Sutras*. From the beginning this was divided on the basis of occupation. Further it extended as hereditary and social hierarchy.

The warriors of Sangam age were called Maravas, which those who were worked as soldier under the King's military. Those people were called in the same name as Maravar. This system extended by Varunashrama society. But they were not real soldiers, they were the descendents of warrior class. That is the difference between the Sangam age and Varnashramam.

¹ A. Smith. Vincent, *The Early History of India, Delhi. 1999, p.439.*

² Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, New Delhi, 1996, p252.

³ A. Smith. Vincent, Op.cit., p.439.

After 6th century C.E. the Brahminical or Vedic culture (Varnashramam) slowly and gradually spread all over Tamil society. After 8th century C.E. Varnasiramam deep rooted in Tamil society and strongly amalgamated among social sphere of Tamil's. During this medieval period new sub caste¹ known as Idangai and Valangai emerged in Tamil society. The Ariyanisation over Tamil society established social inequality and religious hegemony.

The emergence of the caste system behind in the mask of the Varuna, heralded the triumph of Brahminic revivalism in India. Immediately as against the dharma of the Tathagata, the Brahmin astutely proclaimed their religion as sanathana dharma which did not mean anything but the draconic preservation of the society influenced and fragmented individually unequal impenetrably impervious in explicable intricate confusing complex, elusively elaborate and affectedly amorphous violence in built in it and exploitation is an integral part of it. Apathy of its top tends to ensure the passivity of its bottom².

Vellalas is the leading, cultivating and important community next to Brahmins. The word Vellala is derived from Vellanmani (Vellam or water plus anmai or management) meaning of cultivation or village³. They are essentially a peace-loving and industrious people, they tobacco, etc, with excellent results. Among them are to be found also merchants, shop-keepers, Government servants, etc, but they do not generally take up menial professions. An influence community of the Non-Brahmins is that of Vellalas. There were several categories of the Vellalas, in the Chola period itself⁴. The distinction between Tondai Mandalam Vellalas, Karukarta Vellalas, Nanchinad Vellalas, and Kongu Vellalas had emerged, based on the region occupied by them

and on the basis of the vegetarian adopted by the different sections in variations in the customs and manners of the different section of Vellalas, while all the other categories of Vellalas employed Brahmin priest in their sacred ceremonies. The Kongu Vellalas employed sometime their own caste men for the purpose. The barber, Dhobi and other also played their allotted part in the ceremonies⁵.

They were also called Vellalar, lords of the flood or Karalar, lord of the dauds, titles expressive floods and in strong water for agricultural purposes. The Chera, Chola, and Pandya Kings and most of the petty chiefs of Tamilakam belonged to the tribe of Vellals. The poor family of Vellalas who owned small estates was generally spoken of as the Velkudi-Ulvvar or the fallen Vellalas implying thereby that the rest of the Vellalas were wealthy land holders.

The changing religious milieu of the early medieval period is expressed by the central concept of Bhakti in the emotionally powerful hymns of the Alvars and Nayanmars a remarkably rich corpus or super-ordinate instrument of integration. Again the Bhakti poetry of the Tamil saints had no counterparts in the Decan and Andra regions and hence, no evidence of the vernacularization of the puranic tradition existed there. The process of the Tamil tinai deities into regional or universal deities and their incorporation into the Saiva and Vaisnava pantheons show important developments. They gradually lost their individual cultic importance in spite of becoming major components of the puranic pantheon⁶.

The Vellala-Brahmana base of the Saiva movement should be seen not as a mere caste phenomenon. It may be perceived in the elitist character of the Vellala landowners that is agriculturally dominant Vellalas who alone gained control over temple and matha administration and landed property from the twelfth century, as against their sharing of a part of the control temple lands and administration with the Brahmanas before the 12th centuries C.E.

¹K.K. Pillai, *The Caste System in Tamilnadu*, Chennai, 1979,p.11.

² S. N. Sadasivan. *A Social History of India, Delhi, 2000, p.262.*

³ Edgar Thurston, K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.II, New Delhi, 2000,p.361.

⁴ K.K. Pillai, *Studies in Indian history (With special reference to Tamil Nadu)*, madras. 1979, p325.

⁵Edgar Thurston, Op.cit., p. 31.

⁶R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology Pre-colonial South India*, New Delhi, 2011, p. 16.

What appears probably is that there emerged among the Tamils social divisions based upon their occupations which were determined largely by the region in which they live. Gradually, the Kuravar, Ayar, Vellalar, Maravar and Parathavar, the people of Kurinji, Mullai, marutham, Palai, Neydal respectively tended to become endogamous groups. Pre-marital love and marriage seem to have normally occurred on the basis of these divisions of society. But soon, within the age known as that of the Sangam epoch itself, there appeared subdivision among the five divisions. These subdivisions were based on further occupational distribution on the one hand and differences in economic position on the other. Thus, a distinction arose between Vettuvār and Kuravar and former denoting hunters and the latter Hillman pursuing more docile occupations. Moreover among the Kurinji people who are originally known as Kuravar, there appeared another subdivision. Economically the lower section came to be known as Kodiyar and Kodichiyar while, the upper one was continued to be called Kuravar and Kurattiyar. Subsequently groups pursuing auxiliary occupations appear

like the smiths and porters, and in course of time, even further subdivisions among them. We hear of several sub-castes in Purananur, the Mallan, Kuttan, Panan, Kadamban, Tudiyan, Paraiyan and Pulaiyan. Clearly these groups came into being on the basis of the different occupations pursued by them¹.

A peculiar development of the caste system which affected the social history of Tamils and of the Kannadikas in a limited measure was the rise of the division of many castes into one or the other of the Right and Left hand castes. It was believed that each one of those two divisions had within its fold 98 castes. Thus for example the Right hand castes included the Paraiyar and Chetties. The prominent castes included in the left hand group were those of the Kammalas and Pallas. In later accounts the Valangai and Idangai castes are said to have formed subdivisions of the 18 major castes².

¹ K.K. Pillai. Op.cit., Madras, 1979.0.28

² *Ibid.*, p.68

South India particularly Tamilakam offers the most fascinating and pre-eminent forms of the regional pattern of the Puranic process and the resulting synthesis of the Northern and Southern traditions in the development of religion and its social base. It would appear from all the earliest available sources that in South India, the Vedic and Puranic traditions arrived as a package, than is as a fully amalgamated and structured whole a paradigmatic process of incorporating regional differences and specificities.

The Bhakti of the Tamil Alvars and Naayanmars has been the theme of many scholarly works studying the concept and its impact from various standpoints, namely Bhakti as a cult under the broad rubric of the development of religion in south India; as an important element in the sectarian Puranic religions or as the focus of a debate on the nature of Bhakti as a protest or dissent against caste hierarchy states and privileges³. In South India, this happened in the early medieval period that is sixth to the twelfth centuries C.E. in two distinct phases mainly due to the evolution of Bhakti as the central concept in the vernacular idiom and the temple as its innovative focus or the super ordinate instrument of integration, Bhakti it has been shown was a crucial element in the evolution and spread of Puranic religion, which emerged by the sixth-seventh centuries C.E. as a universal and formal system in India.

Review of Literature

The numbers of studies as to society, economy, state and religion have been undertaken by scholars in South India and Tamilnadu. However, in many of their works have been made about Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and the religious condition during the medieval period of the Pandiya Empire. Burton Stain in his work; *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (1955) provides lot of information about Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. K.K. Pillai's work on the *Studies in Indian History (With special reference to Tamil Nadu)* (1975), And his another work on *The Caste System in Tamilnadu* (1979) explain about

³ . R. Champakalakshmi. Op.cit, p.91.

their social condition during the medieval period. N. Subrahmanian in his work *The Brahmin in the Tamil Country* (1989) provides lot of information about the condition of Brahmins during the medieval period. B. S. Chandrababu in his work *History of People and their environs* (1996) provides lot of information about their social and religious conditions during the medieval period in Tamil country. S. Manickam's work on *Facets of History: A Spectrum of Thought* (1998) provides the position of Vellalas during the medieval period. The Pioneering work of Edgar Thurston, K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.II (2000) provides lot of information about Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. Hermann Kulke, Dietmar Rothermund in his work *A History of India* (2004) explains about Indians social, religious conditions during the medieval period. Romila Thapar in her work *Early India From the Origins to C.E. 1300* (2004) provides lot of information about their social condition. R. Champakalakshmi in her work on *Religion, Tradition and Ideology in Pre-colonial South India* (2011) explains about their religious conditions during the medieval period. The contribution made by those scholars about Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and religious condition is the most valuable works and they are forerunners in this field. However at micro level a specific study about caste quiches Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, women and religious condition are very essential aspects which will bring out impact and influence on the Pandiya country during the medieval period.

Aim of the Study

The present study focuses the role and influence of Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and the religious conditions in the Pandya country. This study explains the duty and works of the community on the social sphere. It traces out religious condition donation and endowments granted to the temple by the King, donors and other philanthropists.

Period of Study

The study covers the second Pandya period from 8th to 12th century C.E. This period marks development of art and literature, trade and

commercial activities as well as social changes and religious ideologies. The history of Pandya country from 8th to 12th centuries was also an important because the evolution of powerful class represented by the Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and other sub-castes religious condition had played a predominant role in the Tamil society particularly in the Pandya country.

Hypotheses

A series of Hypotheses have been formulated to prove the fact that the Brahmins role in the temple worship received special privileges from the Kings. The Non-Brahmins were involved into agricultural, trade and commercial activities. The religion had played very important role in the society. The work analyses their influence, role in politics and impact in the Tamil country particularly Pandya Kingdom, through inscriptions, literature and other relevant sources.

Methodology

The present study describes the form and content of the role and influence of Brahmins, Non-Brahmins and religious condition in the medieval Pandya country. This study focuses on the two communities, religion and trace out their services and activities through interpretive, descriptive and analytical methods.

Source Material

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to describe the social and religious condition of Pandya country. Some of the medieval Tamil literature mention about the society and religious ideology. Apart from the literary texts, some of the inscriptions of the medieval period also provide helpful information regarding Brahmins and Non-Brahmins and endowments and land grants. The secondary works provide enough information to understand the background, significance and influence of the both communities and religion.

Chapterisation

A conceptual framework has been used to design the study in to three chapters excluding introduction and conclusion.

The introductory chapter deals with the historical origin of communities and religion. It has also described the aim of the study, hypothesis, Review of literature, Methodology, Source Material and Chapterization.

The first chapter entitled, The Brahmins explains their role and influence in politics as well as in religion and land.

The second chapter on the Non-Brahmins describes about their position in the society politics and land.

The third chapter explains the Bhakti idea and patronage of Hinduism and its sects Saivism and Vaishnavism.

The fourth chapter entitled Vaisnavism describes the present survey of the development of Vaishnava iconographic concepts in Tamilagam before 600 C.E. is based mainly on the study of the earliest known stratum of Tamil literature.

The concluding chapter is the summary of the research findings.

Conclusion

Tamil country during the medieval period brought a enormous change in social, political and economical order. It laid the strong foundation for today's communal system. The Aryan civilization swallowed the cultural heritage of Sangam period. Hinduism revived and it over threw the Jainism and Buddhism. The principle of Varnasharma dharma fixed deep rooted. Many sects sprang out from Brahminical clan. Temples and priests occupied the place of Kings. Temples became prominent in the heart of the people. The position of Brahmin raised high. Instead of first place the King occupied second place. A new habitation was established for the Brahmins in every village. They enjoyed all type of helps from the government. They got tax-free lands, houses etc., from the King. Laws also very favoured to them. The Brahmins acquired social control over the non-Brahmin Kings in their capacity as temple Priests, Prohitas, Rajaguru, Army Commanders and

Ambassadors. The medieval Pandya period was emerged a land of lordism and rooted for feudalism. It was devoted to economic disparity among the people. In the social sphere, caste system appeared as vertical hierarchy. This system was strong attainment due to the inspiration of Bhakti movement.

In due course the majority people of Vellals arose and began popularly several sects also came into being. The agrarian society lost his position. It pushed to last stage of the society. The people of others sects exploited the farmers. The land lords occupied high position and the labours stay back low. In the medieval times the social system in Tamil country was basically a temple oriented feudal setup. The term Vellalas is generally explained as the people who controlled water for irrigating agricultural lands. This effort in the agricultural field transferred the major part of the Pandya country into fertile areas. A number of villages were populated them. Apart from their interest in agricultural field the records refer to them that they were great warriors who occupied the posts of regiment leaders and soldiers from monarch.

A new change came into the society of Vaishyas. They mingled with other language spoken people. Untouchability has grown vigorously in the society. It laid foundation for the communal problems of modern age. A new sect of Valangai and Idangai developed.

The spread of Jainism and Buddhism decreased. Buddhist and Jain Kings converted to Hinduism and they worked for the betterment and development of Hinduism. The renaissance of Hinduism found in the medieval period. The Bakthi cult devoted to develop Saivism and Vaishnavism. The marvelous contributions of Alvars and Nayanmars gave rebirth to Hinduism. The Jain temples were converted to Shiva temples. The Vaishnavas split into two groups. They were Sanskrit spoken Vaishnavas and Tamil spoken Vaishnavas. A great change came into existence in the society during this time.

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