

MUDALIAR COMMUNITY AND THEIR SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

D. STALIN¹ & Dr. P. PUSHPA RAJ²

¹Research Scholar & ²Assistant Professor (Research Supervisor)

Department of History, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil,
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627 012, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT :

Nanchil Nadu was the southern part of erstwhile Travancore state . Since the area was fertile , invaders from beyond the east Caused deprecations. Krishnappa Naicker of Madurai sent an army under his commander Arianatha Mudaliar to assist Rama Raya of Vijayanagar against Adilshah the sultan of the Bahmini kingdom. In 1565 Rama Raya and Ariyanatha Mudaliar were defeated by the sultan. Rama Raya lost his life. Arianatha Mudaliar though fully dejected over the defeat at the hands of Adilshah yet tried to recover his position by introducing various reforms for the uplift of the Madurai kingdom.

After him Dadarappa Mudali tried to expand the kingdom of Madurai into Travancore. He was succeeded by Alagappa Mudali in committing deprecations in the southern portions of the erstwhile Travancore kingdom and captured this region. After the departure of the Alagappa Mudali's army, many members who came along with Alagappa Mudali began their settlements in kanyakumari District. Thus Mudaliar settlements had its genesis in kanyakumari District. Castism existed from the sangam age.

Because of the influence of Aryans in Tamil country, rigid castism prevailed and Brahmins occupied the top most position in caste hierarchy. A study of Mudaliar community is of great importance as they have influenced the Tamil Society to a great extent.

INTRODUCTION

The people of Tamilnadu had practised agriculture from very early times. There were references to mudaliars in Tamil literary works. Literature of any language does not stop merely in projecting its richness but actually as a mirror reflects the life of the people and their lifestyle.¹ Infact every race has a record of its own past in literature. Pathitupattu one of the ten Tamil idylls gives the following description of Marudam.

This fertile marudam land, the king's domain, contains the brown stemmed kanchi, watery reeds, soft fields, fair gardens and small villages. The men who lived in marudam were cultivators and from them emerged the mudaliyars. The earliest and ancient literature on Tamil grammar Tolkappiyam which is few thousand years old had mentioned about the mudaliyars. It mentions about the presence of four classes or divisions among people on the basis of their duties to the society. The four classes were andanar (brahmins), arasar (kings), vaisyas (mechants) and mudaliyars (farmers).²

In the age of Sangam mudaliyars were grouped under two categories. The division was based on their economic status. The distinction was made between men owning agricultural land and men who worked on others' land.³ The former were called 'uluvithunbor' and the latter as 'uluthunbor'. Mudaliars who owned agricultural lands also held high posts under the kings in the civil and military administrations. They were treated with respect by the kings and were allowed to take part in pleasures and entertainments. .

The class was also engaged in domestic and external trade. The mudaliyars classified as uluthunbor constituted the class of small farmers. The mudaliyars had been connected with velirs. This theory was initiated by N. Raghava Iyengar in his book "Early Story of Velirs". According to him the mudaliyars were the descendants of velirs. He says that the velirs were descendants of Lord Krishna, the hero of the epic Mahabharata, and they migrated from Dwaraka in the north and settled in the south under the leadership of sage Agathiyar. To support this view he made references to Tolkappiyam⁴ and a poem by Kabilar of Sangam age addressed to Irungovel, ruler of a petty principality.⁵

The fact that velirs were the predecessors of mudaliars have been totally accepted by M.Arokiaswamy.⁶ This view was opposed strongly by M.Venkatasamy Nayak in his book Velirvaralatrini Araikai. He had pointed out that the age of Ramayana preceded that of Mahabharata and the Sangam age preceded the Ramayana period. So the possibility of Agathiyar of the Sangam age to have brought the Yadavas of Bharatha period and made them settle in the south does not stand well.⁷ Several epigraphy of Ayvels describe them as descendants of Yadava origin.⁸ The term 'mudal' has been used in Tamil language to mean Lord Muruga, Lord Manmadan (god of love) leader or first man⁹ and land or soil.

This community Which had rich heritage, traditions and civilization and known for their honesty, intelligence, valour, loyalty and administrative ability were occupying high positions like ministers, army chiefs, regional rulers. etc.,in various southern kingdom. mudaliyars, the farmers of the Tamil society had always enjoyed a high status among the people of Tamilnadu throughout the different periods of history.Mudali and Mudaliar have the same meaning and are derived from the same root as mudanmai. The 'ar' in Mudaliar is only the honorific plural suffix in the word Mudali.

When it is expanded it becomes 'Muthanmai Udaiyavar'.¹⁰ It may be interpreted as the person who is first in rank or dignity, hence the chief man in a community or village. In this connection K.K. Pillay is greatly tempted to quote the following extract.¹¹ One of the settlements of the Jewish in Jews Town at Mattancheri, the Raja of Cochin appears to have appointed a chieftain among them with the title of Mudaliar apparently a revival of the privilege granted to Joseph Rabban by Bhaskara Ravi Varma. The Mudaliar was given a rod of office with silver knobs. It is said that the Mudaliars exercised civil and criminal jurisdiction over the members of all the communities in the days of their glory. The Raja reserved to himself the right of trying great and capital cases. They were also given power to impose and remit fines".¹² Among the Mudaliar Manuscripts there is a petition signed by Nayinar Aarumukhapperumal on behalf of the people of Nanchinad, the southernmost portion of Travancore.¹³

The economic condition of a particular person depends upon his occupation. Among the human beings there are daily wage earners, agriculturist, government servants, businessmen and owners of certain industries. Their status can be decided by their daily monthly income. There are persons, whose salaries are varied from day to day. The traditional occupation of the Mudaliars was weaving. It is said to be one of the oldest cottage industries. This industry flourished wherever civilizations grew and thrived. Even at the beginning of human history man had good knowledge that cotton had fibre and he had found different ways and means to spine the fibre into thread and they weave the thread into cloth by using their own hands. In course of time the thread used for weaving cloth was known as yan. The clothing material had been woven with other thread like fibres as well as from the very beginning of human civilization. In Bible, Jabal who is called "the father of the people who dealt in tents and had cattle."¹⁴

Handloom is found in all the houses of the Mudaliars and they engage in this profession even today. There are two types of weaving. One is hand made, which is popularly called in common parlance as Kulithari. Another one is powerloom, which is other wise called shuttlethari.¹⁵ These two types of weaving are common among the Mudaliars. Mention is made about of weaving in Sangam literary works, especially in Tholkappiyam. Tholkappiyar in his grammatical work refers to trees like Elavamaram¹⁶ and Kongamaram. Different patterns of dress were made up of not only in ordinary cotton threads but they used different kinds of silk thread. The different kinds of clothes like Kosegam, Peethakan, Thundugil, Chittira kampi and Ponnezuttu were made and used. This is authenticated from references in Silapathikaram.¹⁷ Even the hair of the rat was also used for making different types of bed-sheet.¹⁸ There are different stages in the process of weaving cloth. The first stage is to make thread by making use of cotton.

In the next stage, the Mudaliars even now follow their traditional way of weaving. Accordingly, after making thread, the thread is mixed with water and make the thread into different shape. A kind of wax or gingili oil is applied in order to polish the thread.¹⁹ This process is done in a place called Pakkalam. Pakkalam is earmarked in the centre of every street. Stone Pillars are erected at both ends having a space of 48" in between. Likewise stone pillars are erected from one end of the street to the other end of the street having a total length of 160 feet. On the stone pillars a cross bar either iron or polished branch of the coconut tree is laid. Thus the entire pillars are connected with cross bars. The vast majority of the people belonging to Mudaliars are leading a rustic life in the villages and agriculture is one of their principal occupations. It is the deliberate object of everyone, whatever is their occupation, to have a small area of land, he can call of his own.

They cultivate paddy, tapioca, cereals and other vegetables in their lands. After harvesting the agriculturist sell their goods in the nearby markets but the rich will preserve the products. Besides the landowners, great and small, there are others who depend on agriculture. The landless labourers of this community are assisting in the operations and sharing the proceeds of agriculture.²⁰ The hired agricultural labourers who assist in agricultural operation receive a daily wage usually in cash or grain. During harvest season, paddy was given as wages to the labourers which is in practice, even now. The number of crops

raised every year in the paddy lands are two, some times three. The people who were engaged in paddy cultivation withdraw from it and start cultivating plantain and coconuts at present. The reason is that they confront not only difficulties but they are not able to get much profit in paddy cultivation.²¹ It is worthy to be noted in this connection that a number of cultivators belonging to this community purchase lands near hillocks and begin to cultivate rubber, which yields much profit. Due to rubber cultivation a good number of people belonging to this community make themselves very rich.

Education of Mudaliar community is known for the traditional system of education. It has been the seat of learning and culture from the very beginning, it achieved this rare, but proud distinction as a result of the sincere efforts on the part of the State, by the dedicated services of the private agencies and the co-operation offered by the people more than a few decades. They provided the needed education to their subjects based on Dharmasastras.

The Travancore Hindu Kings, believed that it was their primary duty not only to protect people and to meet their requirements but also to satisfy their educational needs. Kanyakumari District which was once the southern area of Travancore occupied a prominent place in the field of education right from the Sangam Age. The occurrence of the terms kattar and kalla mandar in the Sangam literature referred to the well and ill educated Mudaliar people respectively.

The subjects included in the educational curriculum, were science, astronomy, logic and ethics. Knowledge was imparted to the students by the teacher on voluntary basis in the Gurusishya system.²² Much of the study put a consistence exercise on memory and successful reproduction. The experts in literature were called pulaver, the experts in music were called panas, the experts in dance were called kuthar and if they were called Porunar, Kapilar, Nakkirar, Paranar were some of the poets during this period. During this period women education was not neglected and there were a number of poetesses²³ from all communities in the Sangam Age.

Informal education also developed. Public discourses on religion, morals and musical recounting of mythological stories were provided for the common folk through informal education. The Christian

Missionaries who came to Travancore for evangelization realized the supreme importance of education and so turned educators. This education was entirely different from the traditional education of Travancore. The term 'Education' in general, is associated with 'learning'. Learning includes all our experiences and the outcomes resulting from them. Learning is a life long activity. 'Education' is used to mean 'bring out'. It is a continuous process all through one's life. Education is the process by which the human being develops the true form of being a man.²⁴ It determines the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people. It improves the quality of culture. It stands for humanism, tolerance and for reason. The principal objective of education is the total development of personality the mind, the soul and the intellect.²⁵ Different levels of economy and serves as a substratum on which research and development will flourish. The core mission of higher education is to educate, train , undertake research and provide service to the community.

The co-operation between the British administrators and the Mudaliars was nowhere hearty and intimate than in the management of the rich temples. Placed in high and intimate favour with the British officials, the Mudaliars were able to influence to strengthen the chains of caste on which, hung their entire system of socio and religious domination.²⁶ The reorganization of the administrative system in the nineteenth century gave a lot of opportunities to the Mudaliars to improve their standard of life. They became elite and administrative groups of the Tamil society. Due to their economic and political status they acquired landed property. The Hindu Mudaliars aggressively attempted to assert their own status with the combined efforts of Christians and Hindus against the high caste Hindus and they were determined to fight to the last, though they were a minority group.²⁷ The Mudaliars from all places of Tamil Nadu irrespective of their territory and religion joined together.

The nineteenth century formed an important period in the history of the Mudaliars. The resurgence of the Mudaliars originating in the south began to spread northward.²⁸ The extension of communications and security measures given by the British government encouraged the mercantile activities of the Mudaliars who were emboldened to demand social rights.²⁹ The community had a higher status through the mythological reconstruction of the Past. In the seventy five years, Education had given Christian aspiration to higher status and the Hindu traders sought a social position commensurate with their rising economic

power. Concerning their status in society and their enthusiasm, initiative and talent in administration and management did not allow them to remain passive but made them desire to climb up the social ladder.³⁰ They had to change their social habits and customs. They also realized that the wealth and education were the ladders to help them to go up. The Mudaliars also objected to their women wearing precious jewels and earpieces. Commenting on the status of the Mudaliars, the Government of Madras recorded it in 1899 that the position of the Mudaliars in the scale of castes was peculiar

CONCLUSION

The Mudaliars had moved to the Kongu region as well. The palayapattu geneologies record these migrations. Copper plates in possession of the natives of Jawadu and Kolli hills speak of migration of Mudaliars to these places, During the days of Ariyanathamudali the Dalavai of Nayaka kingdom of Madurai the Mudaliars had moved as far as Tirunelveli. Thus Mudaliars moved from Tondaimandalam to different regions of Tamilnadu.

They have assumed different titles in different places of the state. They were referred to as Mudalis in Madras and Chengleput, Udayar in certain areas of south Arcot, Nayakar in Salem and Pillai in other areas.³¹ The Mudaliars who were primarily agriculturists in course of time indulged in maritime activities. They invested their wealth earned through agricultural enterprise in trading activities. With the advent of Europeans, they have assisted the Portuguese in their business transactions in the Coromandel coast. During the rule of the East India Company, they held sway over the land as Mirasidars enjoying mirasi or kaniyatchi rights. They were recognised as owners of land, given power to collect taxes from tenants and exempted from payment of certain fees. They have played an active role in the nationalist movement and in self respect movement in Tamilnadu. In modern times the concept of caste has assumed more significance. As M.N.Srinivasa points out 'caste is everywhere the union of social action'. He argues that the development of modern communications, the spread of education and literacy and rising prosperity have contributed not to the disintegration of caste, but to its strengthening. The development of transport and communication

facilitated the process of self awareness of different castes. Roads and railways enabled members of the caste spread over a wide area to come together.

The availability of cheap paper and printing facilitated the founding of caste journal, to promote the interests of the community, record its grievances and give permanent form to the aspiration. These associations sought to organise and unite all members of the caste so that their claims might be advanced more effectively against other castes. Mudaliars caste was not an exception to this rule. The self awareness resulted in the founding of Mudaliars association as early as 1914. Over the years the association had played a key role in maintaining the link among the members and safeguarding their rights.

It is evident from the role played by the association in retaining the backward status of the community. The customs and traditions of Mudaliars are many spreading over the life of an individual from birth to death. Cradling, tonsuring, earborning, manjal nirattu, betrothal, marriage ceremonies are the rituals celebrated by members on joyful occasion. Nadappu and karumathi are the rituals observed by them during sad event of death in a family. The performance of the rituals had necessitated the contact with other communities. This had helped in ensuring co-operation among members of different communities. Caste system can in fact be seen in terms of interdependency which link together members of different castes in local societies. Caste system is what Alan Beal Calls "being together separately". "To survive" he says is required 'the cooperation of only a few - Jati, to enjoy life and do things in proper manner one require the cooperation of many. The various rituals practiced by the Mudaliars only highlight this fact. Their rituals involve the participation of members of other communities like brahmins, gold smith, washer men, potter, pandarams etc. Religion plays a predominant role in society. "It has not merely been the serious business of mankind but the business of the bulk of mankind".

Religion was certainly associated with rituals and as regards religion of Mudaliars there are both Saivites and Vaishnavites in the community. They have made endowments to temples and they celebrate various festivals in honour of different forces of nature like sun, water, fire, etc. Greatmen stride the stage that is the world and their doings which change the course of history must be recorded. These men had a

burning desire to serve their fellowmen and they set up institutions which function for the welfare of mankind. These men by their very presence and by the inspiration they give to other individuals have something to do with the making of history. They have given to the community a great deal, more than what they have received from it.

By organizing the Suguna vilasa sabha the amateur drama troupe and staging more than 90 plays penned by him and introducing welcome changes in the Tamil theatre like restricting the duration of plays to three hours and quick transformation of scenes he had revolutionised the field Tamil drama. His greatest contribution was the respect he earned for the artists of the stage. He has rightly been called the father of Tamil drama, Dr.Mu. varadarajan, had enriched Tamil literature by his novels, dramas, essay, letters and work on linguistics. Thus the Mudaliar caste is one of the ancient communities of Tamilnadu with a hoary past, distinct customs and traditions and comprising of eminent personalities who have enriched the society.

REFERENCE

1. Edgarr Thurston and K..Rangachari, Caste and Tribes of Southern India Vol.VII ,New Delhi, 19871, p.361
- 2.Tolkappiyam, Poruladikiram, Ahathinai Iyal 5.
- 3.S.A. Barnett, History of Kondaikatti Vellalas ,Chicago, 1970, p.30.
4. Tolkippiyam, Ahattinai, sktrh 32.
- 5.Purananuru,Stanza.201
6. M.Amkiaswamy, The early History of the Vellar Basin ,Madras, 1954, pp.9-10.
- 7.M. Venkatasamy Nattar, Velir Varalatin Arachi , Trichy, 1915, p. 13.
8. Dr. KK. Pillay, A Social History of Tamils, Vol. I ,Madras, 1975, p.233
9. Kerala Society Papers, II, Series - 7, p.21.
10. Ibid., p.22.
- 11.Padmanabhan, History of Kerala, Part II, New Delhi, 1983, p.51.
- 12.Kerala Society Papers, Series 7, Doc. No. 18, pp.36-37.

13. The Holy Bible, Genesis, Chapter 4, Verse 20.
14. Personal Interview with T. Soma Sundaram, aged 78, weaver, residing at Kunnankadu, on 20-08-2017
15. A kind of tree which yields Eleven Panchu used for making yan.
16. Silapathikaram, line - 323 to 324.
17. Ibid., p
18. N. Kunjan pillai, Census Report, Trivandrum, 1931, p.443.
19. Ramshakal pandey, Development of Indian system of Education Agra, 2005. p. 6.
20. Sangam Age is the age to which sangam Literature belonged. The poets who lived in Sangam Age composed a number of Tamil works. Tamil works mentioned about the existence of the three Sangams, among them the third Sangam was historical. It flourished at Madurai.
21. V.M. Krishnamurthy, History of Tamilnadu, Neyyoor, 1980. p. 60.
22. Mosi, kakaipadinyar and Avvaiyar were the example for the poetess during the sangam Age.
23. A. Meenakshi Sundaram, Education in Emerging Indian Society, Dindugal, 2008, p.2
24. K.P. Shaked Ahmad, & Singh Issues and Challenges in Higher Education, University News, Vol. 49, March 2011, New Delhi, P.68
25. G. Aloysius, *Dharmatheertha: No Freedom with Caste: The Menace of Hindu Imperialism*, Delhi, 2004, pp.141-143.
26. K. Pachaimal, Ahilam, (T) (Universe) Santhi Press, Suchindram, 1994, p.28.
27. Letter from John Cox to the Resident dated on January 21, 1859, Trivandrum.
28. V. Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manual, Vol. II, Trivandram, 1906, p.526.
29. R. Sanmugam, Nadarkulathil Narayanar Avatharam (T) (The Appearance of Lord Narayana in Nadar Caste), Nadarkula Deepam, Kaarangadu, 2001, p.186.
30. M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays, Bombay, 1962, p.41
31. R. Alan Beals, Go-palur-a South Indian Village, New York, 1963, p.41.