

# SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF CUDDALORE DISTRICT A HISTORICAL STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

India has a rich cultural heritage, and the art of hand weaving formed part of it. Besides the arts of hand-spinning, hand dying and hand printing, hand weaving had also been perfected by the Indian artisans in ancient times. During the Chola and Vijayanagar period the weavers located around the temple and wove the cloth for the development of temple economy. The rise of the Vijayanagar Empire was a massive southward migration of Telugu-speaking people under the auspices of the Vijayanagar State. These migrations established a series of Nayaka Kingdoms in the plains of the Tamil country, which produced an economic boom in the dry areas of this region. Senji was undertaken under the auspices of the SenjiNayaka. Earlier, this industry was not based on caste system, but in course of time it developed on caste basis. Handloom industry occupied an important place in the rural economy of Tamil country.

The settlement patterns of the “black town are critically analyzed. The life style of the European, especially the English and its impact on the indigenous people are discussed. The shape of colonial Cuddalore underwent several changes in accordance with its social structure. The urbanization of Cuddalore was the outcome of the continuous changes that were going on in the society of Cuddalore for about a period of two and half centuries since 1700 A.D.<sup>i</sup>

The European sector of the town or colonial urban merchants urban settlement was generally located close some Dutch merchants had occupied a lodge in Tirupappuliyur temporarily. The garden houses of the English were found in the capper Hills, Tirupappuliyur and Manjakupaam. The English residential houses were established away from the sea owing to scarcity of land in the sea-side administrative conveniences and increase of population. it is noticed that in the rented houses of the Indians at Tirupappuliyur temporarily in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>ii</sup>

Social history also emphasizes the cultural aspects of the evolution of man form savagery to civilization. It was bounded on the east by the Bay of Bengal, on the south by Tanjore and Trichinopoly, on

the west by Salem and on the north by North Arcot and Chingleput. Within it lies the French settlement of Pondicherry.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT**

Cuddalore is in the coastal district of South Arcot. This district was one of the biggest districts of TamilNadu until it was bifurcated on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1993. It was renamed as South Arcotvallar. Again it had been changed to Cuddalore district. At present Cuddalore is the name of the taluk and the district.<sup>iii</sup>

Cuddalore district was a part of South Arcot District which was bifurcated into Cuddalore and Villupuram districts in September 1993. With the setting up of the Neyveil Lignite Corporation, the district has acquired an important place in the economy of the State. This huge industrial complex is the major industry in the district. Sugar industry is the next major industry in the district. The district was under the rule of Nawab of Arcot during the first decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This division has come to be called as South Arcot to distinguish it from the northern division of Arcot.

South Arcot the erstwhile district formed part of tondaimaqndalam, an area lying between pennar river of Nellore and the Pennar of South Arcot. The district was ceded to the British in 1801, it considered of that part of the Mughal Subah of Arcot which lay to the south of the river Palar. In the records of the early period, it is usually called “the southern division of Arcot” to distinguish it from “the northern division of Arcot” and the word itself is said to be derived from the Tamil “AruKadu” indicating that the country around the Palar was in olden days covered by six forests which were the abodes of six Rishis (saints). The history of the systematic administration of the Land Revenue of erstwhile south Arcot District begins with the acquisition from the Nawab in 1801, when the Nawab handed over the Carnatic to the Company.<sup>iv</sup>

The British connection dated from 1674, when the Bijapur ruler invited the governor of Fort St. George to establish factories in his territories. A British settlement was made at Kurimedu, 12 miles, north of Pondicherry. In 1683, the Cuddalore factory was reoccupied, and a fresh station was also found at Porto Novo. The latter however was closed in 1687, the year in which the deed of grant for all three factories was received from Harji Raja, the Maratha Governor of Gingee. Fort St. George, situated about a mile of Muddalore was purchased from the Marathas in 1690 and other factories were removed to it.<sup>v</sup>

On the capture of Fort St. George in 1746 by the France Admiral La Bourbonnais, Fort St. David became for six years the headquarters of the company on the coromandel coast. During the Carnatic war between the English and the France, South Arcot played an important part and Cuddalore, Fort St. David, Gingee, Tyagadurgam, Virudhachalam, Tiruvannamalai and other places were the objects of repeated attacks and counter attacks.<sup>vi</sup>

## **VELLALARS**

The vellalars occupied the first place in the social stratum among the non-Brahmins. They are very important among the cultivating class. Vellalar is derived from the Tamil word Vellanmai, meaning cultivation. The vellalars were peace-loving, industrious class and have taken to rice and betel cultivation. They called themselves as Pillays, Chettiyars and Mudaliars.

## **KAPUS OR REDDIARS**

The Reddiars were another important caste people. They had lived sparingly in the Manjakuppam area of Cuddalore town. <sup>vii</sup>

## **THE KAMMAS**

The Kammas were mainly cultivators and some were engaged in trading. They had several subdivisions and sects among them. They had gotras and caste councils. They were divided into Saivites and Vaishnavites. <sup>viii</sup>

## **THE KOMATIYARS**

The komatiyars or the 'Komtichetty' as they are popularly known, are the Arya Vaisyas. There are great trading castes, found in almost all the districts of the Tamil Nadu state. They came from the Godavari river region and settled in Tamil Nadu. The word Komati is derived in many ways.

## **VANNIYAS**

The vanniya population is more than the other caste people in the Cuddalore town. They are concentrated much in Vanniyaipalayam, near Devanampattinam. The Vanniya or Pallis or Padayachis are of ferocious nature. The name denotes their Pallava origin. The name Vanniya is said to denote Vanniyaikulakshatriyas which claim descendant from fire or Agnikular race. Padayachi denote that they were militant men. Though they all belong to one caste some wear the sacred thread claim descendant from Solar or Lunar race. The Vanniya are also known by several names such as Nayakar, Varma, Nayinar, Odayar and Gounder. <sup>ix</sup>

## **THE AGAMUDAIYARS**

The Agamudaiyar meant a householder or a landholder. They were mainly agriculturists. The important subdivisions among them were the Aivali, the Nattu, the Kottaipattu, the Malainadu, the

Nattumangalam, the Kallar, the Maravar, the Tuluva, and the Servaikarar etc. The Agamudaiyars were Saivites in religion.

### **THE UDAIYARS**

The Udayars were comparatively more in number in the Cuddalore region. They were cultivators and money lenders. They had three sub-divisions, namely the Malaiyaman, Nattaman and Sudarman. These three groups were the descendants of a king who once ruled at Thirukkoilur. The first son took the hilly parts of his father's country and so was called Malayaman. The second son took the next level tracts (Nadu), and was called Nattaman.<sup>x</sup>

### **THE IDAIYARS**

The Idaiyars or the Yadavas were the great cowherd caste. The main subdivisions were Kalkatti, PasiIdaiyar, SembanIdaiyar, KallarIdaiyar, PodumattuIdaiyars etc. They claimed a high social position that Sri Krishna was brought up by their caste. They were supplying milk, butter-milk, butter and ghee to the villages as vendors. They assumed the titles of Kone or Konar, Pillai, Pongadan and Karaiyalan. Being Vaishnavites they observed Sri Jayanthi and considered Saturday as a holy day.<sup>xi</sup>

### **THE KAIKOLARS**

The Kaikolars were said to have come from the shoulders of the mythical general of Lord Muruga. They were weavers, so the word Kaikolar was derived from Kai (hand) and Kol (shuttle). They were also known as Sengundar (red dagger). There were several subdivisions among them. Some of them were Saivites, wore lingham and most of them were Vaishnavites.<sup>xii</sup>

### **THE DEVANGAS**

Devanga means 'body of the gods' and they were said to have sprang from a Brahmin Rishi, Devalar or Devanga. They are a caste of kannada and Telugu weavers. They generally employed their own caste men as priests. But some of them wear sacred thread and employed brahmin priests.

### **CHETTIYARS**

Edgar Thurston has given some details about the nature of the Komati chettis. They were noted for their quick witted nature and thriftiness. They were the most adjustable Telugu people and interested to learn other languages for the sake of their business. At the closing of the 17th century there were two famous Telugu Chetti brothers known as AchyutappaChetti and ChinnaiaChetti, had the Coromandal trade in their hands. The JathiChettiyars or the Caste Chettiyars were also traders.<sup>xiii</sup>

## PARAIYANS

The name Paraiyan is derived from Parai or drum. They were drummers at marriages, funerals and other festivals. In sangamlitertures they are referred as Pulaiyar or Eyinar. The population of the Paraiyans is comparatively more in this district and also at Cuddalore than elsewhere. The agricultural labourers were mainly Paraiyans (and Pallis) in this region. They are also grave diggers, village watchmen and scavengers. They are also devil worshippers.

## MARRIAGE

Marriages were arranged by the parents.<sup>xiv</sup> Generally they were contracted with in the same caste and the sub caste. Marriage was an important social function and also occasion for pomp and festivity. The marriage ceremonies had lasted for four or five days and it depended upon the castes and the economic status.

## INTER MARRIAGE

Inter marriage between the Saivites and Vaishnavites of the Vellalas of each division was allowed but not with other divisions of the same caste. The Kammas allowed inter-marriage among their division but the goldsmiths were not ready to give their daughters to the blacksmiths. The Vegetarians would not give their daughters to the meat eating family with in their own caste. The Tamil Brahmins would not marry the Telugu Brahmins. Like that the Telugu Devanga and the Kannada Devanga would not .marry among themselves. Inter-marriage was a bar among the Reddis, Pallis, Udaiyars, Vellalas etc. in this region.

## CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage was very common in the 17th and 18th centuries normally girls were married as soon as they attained puberty. If the girl was married before puberty she was sent to her father in law's house after her maturity. A child born with in the first year of the marriage was considered unlucky.<sup>xv</sup> So if there was marriage after puberty the consummation was postponed to a minimum period of three months.

## SATI

Sati is a Sanskrit word meaning 'Virtuous wife'. The Practice of sati is widow's self-immolation along with her deceased husband in the funeral pyre. This practice was prevalent in the country but was mostly restricted to the royal houses and the families of nobility and the warrior.<sup>xvi</sup> Periyapuramam says about the Sati committed by Madhiniyar with her deceased husband Pugalanar. They were parents of ThirunavukkarasuNayanar of the seventh century A.D.

## WIDOWHOOD

The 'borrowing life of the sorrowing widow' was a bane to the society. Widows led a life of misery with utmost austerity. The removal of tali, tilak and other ornaments from the widow were indication of the loss of status. Among the Brahmins and Komatis (Saivites) the tonsuring of the head of the widow was practiced. Their presence in any auspicious ceremony was considered inauspicious. In the Sangam literary works the widowhood is referred as Kaimai and the widow as Kaimben.<sup>xvii</sup>

## WIDOW REMARRIAGE

The remarriage of the widow was allowed among the Saiviles of the Komatis. Among the Idayars, the Pancharankattis accepted their widows to remarry. If the widow had no issue, the kaikolars allowed her for remarriage. The Malayalis, the Vannars the Odders and the Chakkuliyars had accepted widow remarriage. The highcaste Hindus were deadly against widow remarriage. The Brahmins, Reddis, Vellalas, Komatis (Vaishnavites), Vanniyas etc., never tolerated the remarriage of their widows.<sup>xviii</sup>

## DIVORCE

There was no legal practice of divorce in the society. For some reason or other women were deserted by their husbands. Mostly barren women and diseased women were neglected by their counterparts. Sometimes women also left their husband and led a secluded life. Divorce was allowed among the Vannars or Washermen on payment of twice the bride price and the divorced was allowed to remarry. The Tottiyans, Pallans, Malayalis and the Chukkiliyars permitted divorce of wives from their husband and remarriage also.<sup>xix</sup>

## STATUS OF WOMEN

The condition of women from the post - Sangam period to this date was one of dependence. The code of Manu was followed very strictly regarding women. Though they were allowed to stand by the side of their husbands in all the festivals and household functions nothing more of importance was attached to them.<sup>xx</sup> Besides the prohibition of Sati and Child marriage, the British Government also passed the Widow Remarriage Act and the Age of consent Act and so on for the up liftment of women. Schools were started for girls at Cuddalore and education brought many changes in the marriage and status of women. Women employed themselves in various professions equally with men. Inter caste marriages and inter - religious marriages were accepted by the society.<sup>xxi</sup>

## ADOPTION

Adoption was an accepted custom in the society. Generally boys were adopted by the rich and the high caste Hindus in order to inherit their properties and to do some rituals after their lifetime. Adoptions were made after some ritualistic ceremonies in those days.<sup>xxii</sup>

## FOOD AND DRINKS

A great majority of the population were non-vegetarians. Rice was the staple food. In the villages Ragi, Combu, Cholan and Varagu were taken as food. Whatever they ate, the Hindus would not touch it by their left hand. They used to take bath before having food. Mainly the vegetarians had their food on banana leaves.<sup>xxiii</sup> The Brahmins and some of the high caste Non - Brahmins particularly Vaishyas, Saiva Vellalas and the Jains abstain from meat. Some of the lower castes eat beef and pork.

## DRESS

The main source to ascertain the dress of the people was Edgar Thurston's Castes and Tribes of Southern India. Many numbers of practices of the people are given in it which is helpful to know about the dress and the ornaments of the people. The literary works of this period also give some references about the dress and ornaments. The paintings at Gingee fort and at the Factory house of Port town and the sculptures are helpful to ascertain the mode of dress and ornamentation during the 1 and 18 centuries.<sup>xxiv</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The study of social framework in historical perspective makes us clear about the present condition of the society at Cuddalore. Cuddalore has a very long coastline. The beach at Devanampatnam is known as the Silver Beach in Tamilnadu. The Cuddalore municipality has made some improvements in the beach. Further more improvements in the beach will increase the revenue and the happiness of the people. The transport facilities around the port are of British period. They have to be extended further more in order to attract the local merchants towards this port. There are wider areas between the port town and the port which may be utilised to carry on housing schemes for the fishermen community.

<sup>i</sup>Garstin J.H, *Munual of South Arcot District, Part I*, Madras: Government Press,1878,p.223

<sup>ii</sup>Nayam H.M and Gopal, *B.R South Indian Studies*, Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1990, p.3.

<sup>iii</sup> Richard Sission and Stanley wolport, *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*, Madras: Government Press,1998, p.3.

<sup>iv</sup> G.O.No.91, *Public*, Dated 25th January, 1911

<sup>v</sup>*District Human Development Report*, Tamil Nadu: state planning commission, 2017, p.23

- <sup>vi</sup>*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Calcutta: Madras Superintendent of Government Printing, 1908, p.3.
- <sup>vii</sup>Garstin, J.H. *Manual of the South Arcot District, Part I*, Madras: Government Press, 1878 .p.223.
- <sup>viii</sup>Govindasamy, M.S, *The Role of Feudatories in later Chola History*, Musiri: Bharathi Printers, 1979, p. 108
- <sup>ix</sup>Dr.B.S.Baliga, *Madras District Gazetteers*, South Arcot (Government Press, 1962) p.141\_142
- <sup>x</sup>Minakshi, C. *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, Rathnam Press: Madras p.178.
- <sup>xi</sup> Chopra, P.N. (ed.), *Religions and Communities of India*, New Delhi: 1982, pp.135-138.
- <sup>xii</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137
- <sup>xiii</sup>*Gazetteer of South India*, 1855 Tamilnadu Archives Library, Acc.No.21465, p.290
- <sup>xiv</sup>F.J.Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers, Vol.I*, Government Press, Madras, p.135
- <sup>xv</sup>Jagadeesan, N. *The Hindu Widows in Tamil Society*, Ennes Publications, Udumalpet: 1992, p.2 I
- <sup>xvi</sup>Francis, W. *Gazetteers of the South Arcot District*, Government Press: Madras, 1906, p.91
- <sup>xvii</sup>Narvane, M.S. *Battles of the Honourable East India Company*, A.P.H .Publishing Corporation, PP 152-154
- <sup>xviii</sup>*Imperial Gazetteers of India*, madras government press, calcutta, 1908, PP.122
- <sup>xix</sup>Minakshi, C. *Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas*, op.cit., P.176