

Tamilnadu on the Eve of Dutch – A Study

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Abstract: - The Tamil country known as **Tamilaham** was a geographical unit situated in the southern end of peninsular India. For its natural divisions the people divided their lands into five namely **Kurunji, Marudham, Mullai, Neydal and Palai** on the nature of the soil.¹ This land was the abode of different communities known from time immemorial. The time immemorial society was basically divided into four major divisions known as **Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras**.² They migrated from place to place for some reasons. After that several new castes found a place in the social stratification of the Tamil areas including the Dutch settled areas with the arrival of Telugu and Kanarese people during the Vijayanagar days. Among them **Reddiars, Cavarai Naidus, Baljas, Uppiliars, Senians** and Telugu speaking Brahmins was occupied important place in their respective areas. The Dutch having come here originally as traders did not interfere in matters of customs and practices. They intermingled with the natives and allowed the natives to follow their own customs and practices so as to maintain good relation with them.

Keywords: Dutch Governance, Trade Growth, Commerce Development, Caste Growth, Occupation Based on Caste and Social equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the social hierarchy the Brahmins, Vellalas and Vanniyars occupied at the top position and the landless untouchable agricultural labourers were at the bottom of the society.³ Most of the communities especially the Brahmin, Vellalar, Vanniyars and Reddiars were immigrants from the Andhra country.⁴ The Brahmins held a high sacrament position and wherever they were dominant landowners and they were also high in the economic ladder. Next to the Brahmins the Vellalas who were the landowners occupied an important place in the social hierarchy of the Tamil country. There were the landless people were next ranked below the non-Brahmins and non-vellalas. The kammalars were included five castes known as ironsmith, carpenters, goldsmith, mansion workers and stone cutters. Generally they were known as **Nunvinaikammiar**. Below the rank of the **Nunvinaikammiar**, the dalit castes like the cobblers and pariahs who formed the last rung of the social order. The pariahs who were measured highly polluted and untouchables were mostly agricultural labourers. In villages, the pariahs lived in a separate hamlet called **paracherry** away from the main village site and were forbidden from approaching the high caste houses and streets.

During the period of Dutch in Tamilnadu 29 castes inhabited in and around of their settlements. They were 1. Brahmins 2. Vellaja 3. Yadava 4. Chetti 5. Cavare 6. Commouty 7. Reddis 8. Canakers 9. Senecode 10. Nattamar

11. vaniyan (Ilaivaniyan, Ennaivaniyan) 12. Weavers 13. Vanniar 14. Kammalar 15. Moutchy 16. Shannar 17. Sattany 18. Devadasi 19. Nattuvarandmelhakarakar 20. Boipalanguin 21. Kusava 22. Mukkuva 23. Panichevar 24. Ambatta 25. Vannar 26. MaravarandKallar 27. Sekkily 28. Kuravar 29. Totti.⁵

The caste society in Tamilnadu was recognised with occupational groups combined with deep religious, social and cultural conservations during the period of Dutch. Among the 29 castes Brahmins treated as superior who were and priest and ritual specialist. Some were lay people comprising landowners, interpreters, diwans and messengers.⁶ Brahmins generally spread over entire Tamilnadu. The vellajas were the leading caste enjoyed a higher status among the non-Brahmins, engaged liberal professions and trade mostly lived in the Gingee region. They were attracted by western ideas and were converted to Christianity.⁷

The yadava caste was identified as shepherds were variously known as **Idaiyar**,⁸ **Kovalar**,⁹ **Manradis**, **Eradis**, **Konar**, **Kurumbar** and **Vettis**.¹⁰ Cattle rearing was their main occupation. The chettys were the best known merchants operations in the southern regions of Mysore, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. The term chetty denotes a commercial community of South India who were known from the Sangam Age¹¹. They were mainly financiers, bankers and trustees. The Chettis were the descendants of the present day seths of North India and the Chettis or Chettiars of South India¹². They were one of the richest communities in Tamilnadu and were endowed with the spirit of adventure¹³. The Cavare caste people migrated from Krishna-Godavari delta of Andhra region and settled in the Tamil country. They were known as **Balijas** in Andhra, **Vadugans** and **Cavare** in the Tamilnadu.¹⁴ The Reddis were land owners and also they engaged in agriculture.

The canakar were recognised as writers and accountants. Senecode were also agriculturalist growing garden crops such as betel and fruits. The Nattamar were cultivators in general and sometimes they were engaged trade. Generally the vaniyars were identified as fabricators of oil and oil merchants.¹⁵ Among the vaniyars, Ilaivaniyans were originally the seller of betel leaf or plantain leaf.¹⁶ A branch of vaniyans known as **sankarappadiyar** were also the oil merchants.¹⁷

Vannia also known as pally, koundar, padayachhi, Nainar and naiker were mostly cultivators.¹⁸ The kammalar were the village community of smiths. The word kammalar is a generic name used for five artisan classes namely **Tattan** (goldsmith), **Tachchan** (carpenter), **Kaltuchchan** (stone

mason), Kollan (blacksmith) and Kanhan (brazier).¹⁹Themoutchy were artists and intellectuals. The shannar were toddy tapers and they were divided into southern part and Northern part. Northern shannars were called as nadars. Garland makers of temple were known as sattamy. Thy musicians and dance teachers were known as Nattuvar and Melakarar. Biopalanquin were palanquin bearers in the temple.

The fishermen community had assumed the title of Nattar and Pavathavar. The eastern coast extending from cape comorin was inhabited by the parathawar who subsisted by fishing. Ancient sea-port Korkai, the seat of the peal fishing was their chief town where the people were mostly pearl divers and conch cutters.²⁰The Kusava were pot makers. Panichaver rendered last rites to dead.The Navida or Ambatta, Vannar,Maravar, Kalla, Sakkily and Totty were minor castes living in and around of Tamilnadu from Various periods and did various jobs.²¹

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