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The Trading Community in Early Tamil Society Up to 900 AD

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**THE TRADING COMMUNITY IN EARLY TAMIL SOCIETY
UP TO 900 AD**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS**

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-- R. Jayasuriya, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is the result of research work done by me during the academic year 2007-2008 on “The Trading Community in Early Tamil Society upto 900 A.D” for the M. Phil degree in the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras.

I express my gratitude to the authorities of University of Madras for permitting me to do research in the university. I express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. K.V. Raman, M.A., M. Litt. Dip, Arch, Ph.D, Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras, for permitting me to submit this dissertation and for his encouragement and help at every state.

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R. JAYA SURYA

TRADING COMMUNITY IN EARLY TAMIL SOCIETY UPTO 900 AD

INTRODUCTION

We have a lot of Information about trade and commerce during the early period in Tamil country. Inscriptions, numismatic evidences and literary evidences throw light upon Internal and external trade which help in collecting information about the various guilds prevailing in those days. The main literal source material of trading community in early Tamil society is found in Pattinappalai, which belongs to the Anthology of Pathuppattu.

From this source material we came to know about the internal and external trade of the early Tamil society, which is corroborated by the finds from the excavations conducted by the Archaeological Survey of Korkai, Arikkamedu etc. From Arikkamedu, numismatic evidence is the most important source, which gives about the foreign trade of early Tamils with Rome. Agananuru gives the details about the trade of the Tamil merchants in North India. The literary source gives an account of the sea trade of the Tamils and information about the various ports. Pearl, Coral, Sandal etc., were exported from these ports.

The dissertation work is mainly based on the trading community of the early Tamil country with emphasis on merchant guilds. Numismatic evidences and inscriptions are the main source materials for the study, of trade and commerce. It is possible to know how far these trading communities, i.e. Merchant guild, the caste guild, weights and measures, currency system, collection and distribution of products, help in the future development of Industrial growths, trade and commerce. Visits to Arikkamedu, Karur and Kaveripalayam helped to collect

materials about the trade prevailing in early Tamil country.

SOURCES

The primary sources giving information connected with this topic are Pattinappalai, one of the Anthology of Pattupattu and the other work Ettuthogai and the Twin Epics Silappadikaram and Manimekalai. Pattupattu gives a picturesque view about the bazaars and streets of the city of Madurai. From Pattinappalai we find out lots of information about the famous cities of South India which imported horses by the sea. It throws some additional light on the life of Kaveripattinam.

From Agananuru and Purananuru we get a vivid description about the communication of Romans with India. Apart from the literary sources, some inscriptional evidences provide valuable information about the merchant communities and their duties.

Secondary sources are also of much value in writing the dissertation. Number of books connected with the subject and Journals containing valuable articles of eminent scholars have also been consulted. With all available primary and secondary sources a sincere attempt has been made to present a picture without bias and prejudice.

The topic "Trading community in Early Tamil Society" is detailed in three chapters. The first chapter describes about the foreign notices, which provide detail, about the location of the ports, as well as the inland towns. As a maritime state, the development of ports became a primary necessity for them. So the

trios, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas vied with one another in developing their ports and attracting foreigners. These ports developed into focal points of prosperity in the country. Invariably the best port became the capital city of the ruler. Import and export with godown facilities offered work, and a good section of the people flourished on the fruits of their labour in ports. In view of the important role they, played in the life of the people during the period under study, the ports are given priority.

In the second chapter Industry and Trade are dealt with. The chapter is subdivided into two sections. In section 'A', the Internal Trade has been discussed. The primitive pattern of exchange of essentials on barter systems was common in villages. But side by side with that, in the sangam age, there were bazaars and markets where the monetary economy was prevalent.

Section 'B' reveals the foreign trade of the Tamil people. There seems to have been no prohibition against Tamil merchants crossing the seas to carry on their trade. There was a flourishing sea trade in big ports like Musiri, Tondi, Puhar and Korkai in Sangam times. Foreign notices confirm the evidence of early Tamil literature that in the dawn of the Christian era there was a flourishing trade between Tamilnadu and the Mediterranean countries.

The object of the third chapter is to trace the merchant community and its functions in the Ancient Tamil Society. Merchants were generally associated with powerful guilds and corporations which often transcended political decisions. The most celebrated guilds from the early days were the Manigraman and the Nanadesi or Ainnurguvar. The records of the Kakatiyas speak of merchants of the home country (Svadesabharulu), merchants of another country

(Paradesabeharulu), and merchants from different countries (Nanadesis). The first were the local merchants organized into local guilds – Nagarams. The second were like the first except that they came from another country. The last were the powerful guilds already mentioned which included merchants from all countries with established branches in all of them and perhaps playing a prominent part in the foreign trade of the country as a whole.

IMPORTANT PORT CITIES

The Tamil country was renowned to the world over for its products, like pearls, feathers, sandal wood, teak, pepper, muslin, etc. As a maritime nation the development of ports became a primary necessity, for them. And the early kings, the Cheras, and the Cholas and the Pandyas vied with one another in developing their ports and attracting foreigners. These ports developed into focal points of prosperity in the country. Pearl fishing was also responsible to a certain extent for the development of ports. The above factors considerably encouraged the growth of the ports during the period. Certain ports were submerged by an invasion of the ocean. The muds carried by the rivers and deposited in the ports have also rendered certain ports useless. Thus an attempt to trace some of the ports detailed below in the Tamilakam of to-day may only end in a futile venture. With the great development of trade with Rome in the very beginning of the Christian era, sea port towns rose to great importance, and so they are mentioned in our ancient poem also. From the Sangam works we learn that on the east coast the prominent ports were Mavilangai (Modern Mahabalipuram), the celebrated Puhar or Kakandi, known as Kaveripattinam, Korkai and Kumari.

According to Sangam works Musiri was the most prominent harbour and the next to that was Tondi. Several other ports mentioned by the foreign writers such as Camara, Poduce, Sopata Colchi are not traceable in the Tamil literary works.

We now turn to the foreign notices, which provide details about the location of the ports, as well as the inland towns. The exact dates when these writers completed their works are not determinable, but arguing on the basis of

internal and external evidence, the authors of these books have provided approximate dates on their compositions.

The Natural history about 77 A.D. by Pliny mentions several, ports on the west coast of the Tamil country, but his work was not an original contribution for he based his facts on the information furnished by earlier writers. Perhaps the most useful data regarding the ports and the maritime trade of south India are available in the 'Periplus of the Erythraean sea'.

These accounts are confirmed by the poets of the Sangam age. Paranar, for instance, adverts to the heavy loads of pepper brought to the place and the gold received in return. A facile view is held that the maritime commerce from the ports on the west coast was always in the hands of foreigners, while the trade of the East from the ports of the coramandal coast was in the hands of the Tamils.

In view of the important role they played in the life of the people during the period under study, the sea ports are given top priority. Let us consider now the sea ports on the eastern coast of Tamilakam one by one.

KORKAI

Korkai was situated on the eastern coast of the Southern Pandya kingdom, on the Tamraparni delta and was the chief port of the Pandyas. We came to know of its ancient glory from the works of the Greeks and the Tamil classics. Among the Greeks, the authors Periplus and Ptolemy came to Tamilakam as traders.

They must have visited Korkai in 80 A.D and in 130 A.D respectively.

Korkai is mentioned as Korkai, in their works.

Owing to difficulty in pronunciation, they might have called Korkai as Kalchi. They even called the Gulf of Manner as Kolkhi Gulf. The Importance of Korkai could be realized from the fact that the port had lent its name to the sea also.

The site was first excavated in 1827 by Dr. Caldwell who found a few runs, one of which was reported to have been of giant size. During 1968-69 five cuttings were laid out four in the present village of Korkai and one in the midst of a tank at the southern end of the village. That Korkai was important for pearl fishery is confirmed by the find of innumerable pearl oysters in the various levels of the site. Dr. Wilson (Professor of Sanskrit, Oxford) was of the view, that what the Greeks called Kolkai, was not Korkai but Kulakkarai in Ramanathapuram district. Rev. William Taylor in 1837 traced an interconnection between the Nepalee Gurkhas and Kolkai. All these assertions have been falsified by the arguments advanced by Dr. Caldwell claiming that Kolkhai and Korkai are one and the same. He contends that the Greeks wrote Kolkai for Korkai because of the sense of euphony. Dr. Caldwell put forward evidences for this view from the inscriptions in the Tiruchendur temple.

Pearl fishery was a conspicuous feature in Korkai. The annual yield of pearl of Korkai was estimated to fetch crores of panam from the foreigners. We are told in Periplus that "Pearls Interior to the Indian sort are exported in great quantity from the morts ,of Apologas and Omana. It is also stated that it was in very great demand in foreign markets. The best variety of pearls obtained were sent to the Pandya king as gift. We understand that criminals were employed as pearl-divers

in Korkai and Cape Comerin. Pearl diving was carried on in the immediate presence of the Pandya king. In his absence there was a representative of the king. Tamil literature deals with Korkai in a good many places. Although literary evidences could be exaggerated yet the essence of truth in such accounts cannot be doubted.

Korkai was the Key city of the Pandya Kingdom. For instance in Sillappattikaram in almost all places the Pandya King is spoken of as Korkai Pandyan. In Maduraikkancy we come across a description of Korkai. Manimekalai speaks of Korkai as the old capital of the Pandyans. In Tamil literature the city is described as pearl yielding – Korkai and great Korkai. We also have good many references about this port in Ahananuru and Narrinai. Later Korkai no more fit to be a harbour. Hence the sea coast, four miles away from Korkai a new sea port came into being. It became to be known as Kayal.

Today Korkai is on the river Tamraparni five miles away from the sea in Srivaikuntam Taluk, Tirunelveli district.

KAYAL

When the sea retreated far away from Korkai, a new port later formed in the neighbourhood of Korkai called Kayal. Kayal means 'Lagoon' backwater and the name seems specially, appropriate to any place situated on the flots lying about the delta of Tamraparni river.

KUMARITURAI

The southern most extremity of Tamil Nadu is cape comerin. Kumari was famous for sometime as an important port of the Pandya kingdom. Kumariturai is spoken of in Periplus as Comar. Pearls were exported also from Kumariturai.

In Sangam classics Cape comerin is frequently referred to. It was customary to call it as Kumariam Perunthurai. Therefore it is possible to assume that once Kumariturai might have been a very great sea port. Cape comerin has lost much of its ancient glory today. Now it is functioning as a separate district under Madras State.

KAVERIPUMPATTINAM

Kaveripumpattinam or Pumpuhar, the celebrated port city of the Early Cholas, is now an insignificant fisherman's hamlet on the eastern coast of Tamilnadu, where the river Kaveri joins the sea. Its flourishing commerce, its well planned layout, beautiful mansions, the harbour area, the religious centres etc., all are eulogized in early Tamil works like the Silappadikaram, the Manimekalai and the Pattinappalai. The later work gives graphic descriptions of the gay inhabitants of the area and their noble traits, the foreign merchants like the Yavanas, lived there for trade purpose. The city was called by various names in ancient times, Pumpuhar Kaveripattinam, 'Kakanti, Champapati, Cholanpattinam and Khaberls Emporium. Puhar was described into two main parts, Maruvurpakkam and Pattinappakkam. The intervening space with trees was used as a market place. The king and his officers, merchants, cultivators and the army lived in Pattinappakkam, while other small traders, artisans and labourers, lived in

Maruvurpakkam. On the sea shore were located the huts of the fishermen and a little away was the settlement of the Yavanas, Granaries and store houses for imported goods were also located in the area.

All the Prakrit references to this city came from Buddhist sources. The celebrated book : Milindapana dealing with the questions of Bikkhu Nagasena, refers to this city as Kalapattina, one of the best known ports of the time. There were many, bazaars, selling various goods.

Kaveripumpettinam had extensive commercial contact with Far East. This is attested by a find of a Tamil inscription and a few sculptures in a place called Takua Pa in Lower Siam. Though many private institutions and scholars evinced interests, there was no scientific excavation for a long time. In 1961, the Archaeological Survey of India excavated the site and continued the excavations for three seasons. Even a small scale excavation has yielded remarkable remains and antiquities. Mangaimadam, Vellalyaniruppu, Manigraaam, Pallavanisvaran and Vanagiri have so far been excavated. Of the structures so far exposed two deserve mention. One is a wharf, found at Killayur. Wooden ports have been discovered in sites. These were probably used to construct the boats. Pattinappalai gives a graphic description of a wharf where country boats laden with paddy were tied to rows of pegs. It is likely that the wharf now exposed is one such thing of ancient times. The other structure of interest is a part of a Buddha Vihara, over sixty feet long and with square chambers. Unfortunately the entire area could not be exposed since it is covered by an extensive residential portion. A Roman copper coin discovered at Vellaiyatruppu confirms the literary references to the presence of foreigners.

TONDI (EAST COAST)

There are two ports in Tamilnad by the name of Tondi. One is on the east coast and the other on the west coast. The epic Sillappathikaram describes scenes of sailing ships on the Bay of Bengal with salt, sandalwood, garlands, camphor and spices exported from Tondi to foreign lands. No other information is available to us to know more about the place. Now this place is found in the Ramanathapuram district.

MAMALLAPURAM

It is referred to as 'Mamallapuram' and 'Kadalmallai' in Tamil literature. Ptolemy mentions this place as 'Malanga'. N.W. Hintze is of view that no place is equal to this in any port of India. During the Pallava regime many ships were found anchored in Mamallapuram harbour. This harbour has been submerged by the sea now. We can yet see the light house standing as a monumental evidence of commercial importance and heavy sea-borne trade of this great port. Purananuru and Sirupanarrupadai refer to this Mamallapuram as Mavilangai.

WEST COAST

Now let us see about the ports on the West coast.

MUSIRI

The Greek writer Pliny has given an account of what he saw in Musiri. He says, ships anchor at a great distance from the shore and the cargoes have to be landed and shipped by employing boat. From Periplus we infer that the diamond

was the costliest article sent to Rome from Musiri. It became such an important centre of trade in those early times, that in the first century of the Christian era. Musiri that spread the commercial glory of Tamilakam to the entire world has lost all its glory to-day. This harbour was also known by another name Mohotnai. Scholars are of the view that Musiri was the first city to enjoy foreign connections two hundred years ago.

TONDI

The Greeks and the Romans have written about this port. According to literary evidence this place appears to have been a coastal city of great importance. Tondi is referred to in Padirrupattu, the work that is useful for a study of the political life of the Cheras.

So far we have dealt with some of the ancient harbours of Tamilakam. What we have learned at length only makes us agree wholeheartedly with Sir R.K. Shanmugam Chetty that in the adventure of commerce the south led the way to India. To quote the very same authority, and conclude 'this account, our ancient ports were known throughout the world when Bombay was a fishing village and Calcutta was not heard of'.

There are ample evidences to show that Tamil country had commercial relationship with foreign countries in ancient times. We came to know of this from Greek author's note and other foreigners accounts.

Strabo, the geographer while explaining about Pandyan Embassy to Augustus says 'The merchants of the present day who sail from Egypt to India by

the Nile and the Arabian Gulf have seldom made a voyage as far as the Ganges. They are ignorant and unqualified for writing an account of the places they have visited. From one place in India and from one king Pandyah, but according to other writers Poros, there came to Caesar Augustus gifts and an embassy accompanied by the Indian sophist who committed himself to the flames at Athens, like Kelanos, who had exhibited a similar spectacle in the presence of Alexander.

Pliny in its voyage to India said, at the present day voyages are made to India every year; and companies of archers are carried on board because the Indian seas are infested by pirates. If the wind called Hippalus be blowing, Muziris, the nearest mart of India can be reached in forty days. It is not a desirable place of call, pirates being, in the neighbourhood who occupy a place called Nitrios, and besides it is not well supplied with wares for traffic. Ships which anchor at a great distance from the shore and the cargoes have to be unloaded and shipped by employing boats. At that time I was writing this Colobathras was the sovereign at that country. Another more convenient harbour of the nation is Neacyndon which is called Becare. There Pandyan used to reign, dwelling at a great distance from the mart in a town in the interior of the country called Madura. The district from which pepper is carried down to Becare in Canoes is called Cottonara. None of these names of nations, ports, and cities are to be found in any of the former writers from which it appears that the names of the places have been changed.

THE PERIPLUS OF THE ERYTHRAEAN SEA

Beyond Calliena there are other market towns of this regions, Symella, Mandagora, Palaepataae, Mellslgara, Byzantium, Togarua and Aurannoboas. Then come Naura and Tyndis, the first markets of Damarica, and then Musiris and Nelcynde, which are now of leading importance.

Tyndis is of the kingdom of Cerobothra, it is a village in plain sight by the sea. Muziris of the same kingdom abounds in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia, and by the Greeks; it is located on a river, distant from Tyndis, by river and sea five hundred stadia, and up the river from the shore twenty stadia, Neleynda is distant from Muziris by river and sea about five stadia, and is of another kingdom, the Pandyan.

There is another place at the mouth of this river, the village of Becare; to which ships drop down on the outward voyages from Neleynda and anchor in the roadstead to take on their cargoes, because the river is full of shoals and the channels are not clear. The kings of both these market towns live in the interior.

They send large ships to these market towns on account of the great quantity and bulk of pepper and malabathrum. There are imported hae, in the first place, a great quantity of coin, topaz then clothing, not much; figured linens, antimony any, coral, crude, glass, copper, tin, wine, not such but as much as at Barygaze realgar and orpiment; and what enough for the sailors for this is not dealt in by the merchants there. There is exported pepper, which is produced in quantity in only one region near these markets, a district called Cottonera. Besides, this there are exported great quantities of fine pearls, ivory, silk cloth, spike-hard, from the Ganges, malsbathrum from the places in the Interior, transparent stones of all kinds, diamonds and sapphires, and tartoise shell, that from Chryse Island, and

that taken among the islands along the coast of Damirica.

This whole voyage at above described, from Cane and Eudamon Arabia, they used to make in small vessels, sailing close around the shores of the Gulfs, and Hippalus was the pilot who by observing the location of the ports and the conditions of the sea, first discovered how to lay hit course straight across the ocean. For at the same time when with us the Elesian winds are blowing on the shores of India the wind sets in from the ocean, and the south west is called Hippalus, from the name of him who discovered the passage across. From that time to the present day ships start, some district from Cana and some from the Cape of spices; these bound for Damerica throw the ships heed considerably off the wind, while these bound for Barygaze and Saythia a keep along shore not more than three days and for the rest of the time hold the same course straight out to sea from that region, with a favourable wind, quite away from the land, and so said outside port the aforesaid gulfs

From Comari toward, the South this region extends to Colehi, where the pearl fisheries are; and it 'belongs to the Pandyen kingdom. Beyond Colchi there follows another district called the coast country, which lies on a bay, and has a region inland called Argaru. At this place and nowhere else, are bought the pearls gathered on the coast there abouts, and from, there are exported muslins, those called Argaritic. Among the market towns of these countries and harbours where the ships put in from Daminica and from the north, the most important are, in order as they lie, first Camara, then Poduca then Sopatma, in which there are ships of the country coasting, along the shore as for as Daminica; and other very large vessels made of single logs bound together called tangara, but those which make the voyage to Chryse and the Ganges are called Colandia, and are very large.

There are imported into these places, everything made in Damirica, and the greatest part of what is brought at anytime from Egypt comes here, together with most kinds of all the things that are brought from Damirica and of these that are carried through Paralia.

AELIAN'S VIEW ABOUT PEARL FISHING

The Indian pearl-oyster is caught in the following manner. There is a city which a man of royal extraction called soras governed at the time when Eukratides governed the Baktrians, and the name of that city is Perimuda. It is inhabited by a race of fish eaters who are said to go off with nets and catch the kind of Oysters mentioned, in a Great Bay by which a vast extent of the coast is indented.

The Periplus of the Erythraean sea quoted in the Tamils 1800 years Ago. Pearls were first introduced into home during Jugarthene war end made popular by the large quantities brought back to Italy by pompey.," Pearl fishery, was an important national Industry in South India. It was chiefly as the country from which pearls came that the Greeks know southern India. Pearls came from the coasts of the Pandya kingdom, and Magasthenes had heard of Pandaea, the daughter of Herades who had become Queen of a great kingdom in the South. With her he also connected the pearl. He reaches wandered over the world for ridding land and sea of the monsters that infested them and had found this thing of beauty in the sea made, it might seem, far a woman's adornment. Wherefore from all the sea pearls were brought together to the Indian coast for his daughter to wear. The people, in India according to Arrian was worth thrice its weight is refined gold.

From Pliny's work, The natural history about 77 A. D. we get details about

the ports on the west 'coast of the Tamil country. But his work was not –original contribution for he based his facts on the information furnished by earlier writers.

The most useful data regarding the ports and the maritime trade of South India are available in the Periplus of the Erythrean sea. The unknown author of the Periplus appears to have been a native of Egypt, and it is believed that he completed his work sometime after the fall of Augustus Caesar. The completion of his book has been assigned to a date ranging from 80 to 89 A.D. He furnishes elaborate details and his account was based on personal knowledge. A few of the relevant extracts deserve to be quoted.

Next to the Periplus in order to time, is the famous map of the world prepared by the Alexandrian geographer, Ptolemy sometime about the middle of the 2nd century A.D. Though very useful for the reconstruction of the early geography of South India, it is extremely doubtful whether he had visited the land; in all probability, he too like Pliny, derived his information regarding South India from other writers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy but industry and trade, internal and maritime added much to the wealth and happiness of the people. The Tamil land was not an exception for this. The object of this chapter is to trace the internal trade or the local trade and trade with foreign countries of early Christian era. For this purpose the chapter has been sub-divided into two sections. Section A deals with the Internal Trade and section B deals with foreign trade.

The Geographical classification of the Tamil land into Kurinj, Marudam, Neidal and Palai with their respective inhabitants played a great part in trade and commerce of the period. Fundamentally barter system played a large part in all transactions. The Kurinji people exchanged their goods honey venison and Toddy, for the food grains from the people of other parts of the land. So did the people of the Mullai land by exchanging milk, curd, butter milk and butter for the other essential commodities which they got from the people of the other lands. Likewise the people of Marudam land exchanged their goods sugarcane, rice and aval (rice flakes) for the commodities from the people of the other lands. The people of Neidal lands exchanged their products fish, ghee, honey and fish oil for the other commodities from the people of the other lands. Such kind of barter system was in vogue in the Tamil land due to the absence of any systematic coinage. The barter systems of the Tamils could not be considered unique since it was prevalent all over the world at that time.

Salt was an important commodity of trade. Those who traded in salt were known as Umanar and Umattiyar. Salt merchants moved with their families in carts to all towns and villages. The carts in which they carried salt, served them as

temporary resting house at the places where they halted after finishing their business in different places.

Pepper was grown in the Chera country. It was carried to several countries. The merchants used donkeys as transport to carry the pepper loads from place to place and from fair to fair. Pearl, Coral, Diamond, sapphires and sandal, which were imported at the sea ports from the foreign ships were carried into the Hinterland by the native tradesmen and sold by them in the Tamil lands.

Other articles like venison and fish, fish oil, mutton, honey and arrack were also sold in barter. Commodities which were complementary to each other in satisfying peoples needs were often sold together. Thus sugarcane and rice flakes were together sold in exchange for venison and toddy. With the sale proceeds of ghee, buffaloes were purchased. Women sold flowers in exchange for other commodities. Shepherds and Shepherdess were engaged in vending milk and milk products like curd and ghee in their own and neighbouring village. Pedlers moved about the streets vending their articles for sale. It appears that streets existed except perhaps in the distinctively Kurinji and Pallai regions. The streets however, appears to have been sandy on account of the frequent movement of people, animals and vehicles.

Mention is made of the beaten paths in the hilly tracts and regions, which were used originally by animals like elephants deer and cattle. The tracts were arduous moreover passing through them was often risky on account of dacoits from way side robbers. The traders used to proceed to various villages in small groups. These were called Vanikachchattukkal. The commodities were carried in carts or on donkeys. On the bags of articles their weight or measure was indicated.

At the same time, there existed highways connecting villages and towns. They were known as 'Peruvali', they must have been constructed roads. It is learnt that tolls were levied at the entrance of towns and at cross roads. It is known from Ahananuru and other literary sources that the Tamils had commercial contact with North India. This internal trade in the sub-continent continued from the time of the Pandas who ruled the country with Pataliputra as capital. From the evidence found in the Arthasastra it is learnt that there existed trade relationship in the 4th century B.C. between Magadha and the Tamil country. Among the Articles which found their way to the royal treasury at Pataliputra, Kautilya mentions, precious stones (Ratna) from Tamraparni and Pandya Kavata and Vaidurya or precious stones from strirajya which is identified with Kerala. It is believed that Panduraka blankets and excellent cotton cloth were exported from Madurai. These must have been carried in country carts over rough highways connecting North India with the south.

The Silappadikaram also mentions that the sealed goods from North India reached the South and merchants, had to pay customs duties and other taxes on the loads. These Tamil caravans are referred to in our as Vandichattu and these carts passing the coast to the interior. Though the maritime trade of the Tamils with distant countries was well developed as will be shown presently, it is doubtful whether trade through inland waterways in the country had developed in any considerable measure. The streams running through hilly tracts were hardly fitted for the purpose. Even the rivers flowing through the plains were not suitable on account of the frequent droughts, floods and whirl pools. But the coastal waterways and backwaters must have to some extent been useful in the transportation of commodities. The preferences found in the classics to small vessels like the punal, pahri, odam, ambi and timil indicate the traffic through

streams and lakes must have taken place. There were small pathways by the side of streams.

In the village and more particularly in towns of Tamilakam there existed bazaars and markets. We hear to Angadi meaning bazaar, mentioned in the Sangam works. There were Allangadi (evening or night markets) as distinguished from Nalangadi (Day time bazaars). The term Avanam indicates the market places. Flags are said to have been flying in front of shops.

A notable description of the busy transaction in the bazaars is provided in the Maduraikkanchi and more vividly in the Silappadikaram, but it is open to doubt whether the accounts can be taken to have been true. At any rate the articles known to the poets of the age can be learnt from the descriptions provided.

Foreigners are stated to have moved in the bazaars, apparently, transacting business. There were interpreter who helped them in their commercial transactions. Naturally in such well established markets where Tamil traders and foreign traders met, exchanges must have taken place on the basis of common system of coinage. The wide variety of articles sold in the markets of Kaveripumpattinam as it was commonly know textile goods, bronze and copper ware perfumes of various kinds, flowers, sandal patte, were some of the articles for sale. Besides, there were edible food rice cakes, fish, mutton and vegetables, salt and grains of various varieties were in abundance. Ornaments and jewels, beside fanciful articles made by copper smiths and workers in silver and bronze, were also available. On the roof of each a flag was flying aloft, which bore the names of the articles available for sale in that shop. Whole sale dealers had their names as well as the names of the contents superscribed on the covered pockets.

There were separate ware houses for keeping the goods in storage.

The bazaars of Madurai appear to have been bigger in size, and more notable in the volume of business transacted than those of Kaveripattinam. From the scanty evidence available in the literary works of the age, it may be inferred that dealings were fair.

Measuring rods and yard sticks are mentioned in the Silapadikaram. The carts on which the packages were piled also had particular about the names of the owners and the goods carried on them. Near the bazaars there were ware houses, in which goods could be stored in rooms which had no ventilations or windows. Towns and villages were already connected by tracks, with wells at intervals. The commercial centre grew up at the more important intersections of routes. This concentration of trade at fixed points must however have been long retarded by armed men. We come to know from the geography of the country, the natural routes by which India was entered from outside. Early Buddhist literature especially the Jatkas, tell us of the internal roads. A most important amenity in a city life is perhaps the markets. Great care has been bestowed by the ancient Tamils, in locating the market at a central place in the city.

In the great marketed of the premier cities and ports varied articles were displayed for sale. Even carts, chariots and ornamental chariot coverings, coats of mail and metallic belts, sandals and various articles made of copper and brass and chisels and other tools were available in the markets. In the Jewelers street were sold emeralds, rubies, sapphires, luxurious pearls and bright red coral loads. Clothes of various colours and patterns made of cotton, wool or silk were also displayed in the markets. In the clothers shops cloth neatly folded and arranged in

rows, numbering several hundreds was to be seen. Merchants dealing in different articles lived in different localities in city. We are more concerned with that part of the city called 'Pattinappakkam'. The palace of the king was situated in this part of the town and the royal streets, were the main highways here. The leading merchants lived in separate streets in different types of houses. Bangle, and ring makers out of conch shells, pearl, bead sellers etc had their quarters on the western side.

The two epics give us a clear idea of Puhar, the sea port of the Cholas. It was a commercial centre. Many valuable goods were lying in the dock yards having been imprinted with the tiger signet of the Chola kings. There were customs officers whose duty was to collect the customs duties and affix the seal of the king to indicate that the duties have been collected. There is no doubt that indigenous coins of the Tamils were in use in the Sangam age. The gold 'Kasu' as well as unminted solid gold were bestowed as gifts to poets Brahmins and Panar. 'Kanam, is another name of the gold coin in usage, but like Kasu it also denoted gold in general.

The term 'Palingu kasu' occurring in the Agananutu indicates that some material other than gold was also used for making coins. It is however, difficult to determine the material out of which it was made, perhaps it was shaped out of glass beads or cowrieshells as may be guessed from its name.

Trade was not confined to cities only. It went out far beyond the cities and reached the remotest villages.

The merchants of early times earned great wealth in our country and there

were many rich merchant families who willingly spent their wealth for the welfare of the people.

FOREIGN TRADE

The Tamil being a sea – fearing people developed their overseas trade to a great extent. From Sangam sources we hear of commercial relations between the Tamil country and foreign lands, but much of the correlated information relating to foreign trade however, one gets from foreign sources i.e Roman, Greek, Arab, Chinese etc., and not from indigenous sources. The periplus and Ptolemy give us valuable information regarding the ports and marts which managed the trade. Foreign trade was one of the planks on which the economic prosperity of the Tamils depended.

In the Sangam Age at least the Tamils stood much to gain by lucrative trade with the Roman empire. In later times the shift in foreign trade was from the west to the east and China, Philippines and Indonesia became chief oriental markets for Tamilian products. Trade with Ceylon was continuous and considerable and was only technically overseas.

The contacts of the Tamils with countries overseas have been commercial, political and cultural. The Tamils could have inherited their commercial and sea fearing instincts from their Middle Eastern ancestors particularly, the Phoenicians. The earliest Hebrew and Tamil accounts agree in mentioning the lucrative trade the Tamil merchants carried on from c. 1000 B.C. down wards. The Chiruttai (Panthal) tohai (peacock), the monkey etc; were favourite animals imported from Tamil country. The loan words in Hebrew and Aramaic from the Dravidian language, particularly Tamil also suggest trade relations. An early colony of South Indian Merchants is believed to have been established in Babylon, where it continued to flourish till the 7th century A.D there are more dependable evidence

from the early Tamil literature. The Greek merchants in Tamil India were known as Yavanas, obviously that name was derived from Ionians who formed a section of the Greeks. From the periplus of the Erythraen sea, of the 1st century A. D. It is learnt that Greek merchants from Egypt to the Malabar coast brought wine, brass, lead, glass, copper, antimony and wheat.

OVERSEAS TRADE BETWEEN ROME AND SOUTH INDIA

The evidence available from the classical writers of the west reveals the reign of Augustus and the following connections between the Chera kingdom and the Pandyan kingdom and the Roman Emperor.

The Tamils were the first to learn the technique of Ocean going, traffic, which they perfected from small beginnings. First they built small coasting vessels, which they perfected through various improvements and they proceeded to build bigger vessels until they built ocean going ships. Periplus is clear on this point when it mentions three types of vessels, large coasting vessels, small coasting vessels and ocean going ships, which agrees with the evidence of the literary works of the Tamils. We also come to know that the ancient Tamils distinguished three kinds of boats. These were those for fishing craft, those for river crafts and those far overseas.

On the basis of internal and external evidence furnished by the Arikamedu excavations Sir Maritimer Wheeler concludes that the site was occupied by the Romans at the end of the 1st century A.D. and that it was deserted sometime in the 2nd century A.D. Therefore, the glorious epoch of Arikamedu's industrial and commercial activity ranged during the first two centuries of the Christian era.

There was a close trade relation between South India and Rome which is supported by the finds of many Roman coins in that region. The coins were not used as a currency but for their metal value only. The excavations of Virampatnan near Pondicherry have yielded evidence that this port imported from a strange land situated at a distance of 5000 miles, wine glass and engraved gems. As at Puhar there was a small colony of foreigners. Poduca of the periplus and Poduca emporium of Ptolemy is identified with Pondicherry. Periplus mentioned only summarily the cities and ports after the Cholamandala. According to Ptolemy the Chola ports were Nicamer (Nagapattinam), Chaberis (Kaveripumpattinam), Saburas (Cuddalore), Poduca (Pondicherry) and Malanga (Krishnapattinam). The cities situated on the sea coast are called by the generic name Pattinam. Every coastal city was composed of two main divisions. One division was called ur and the other Pattinam. The two divisions of the city of Pumpuhar were known as Maruvurpakkam and Pattinapakkam. Likewise the city of Nagai on the Chola mandal coast also consisted of two ports. The places now known as Nagur and Nagapattinam were treated in ancient times only as two divisions of one and the same coastal city. Small settlements on the sea shore are known as Pakkam.

There was a colony of Yavana merchants at Kaveripattinam. Roman gold poured largely into the Tamil country at this period, is attested by the numerous Roman coins dating from the reign of Augustus, to that of Zeno (B.C. 27 to A. D.491) which have been found buried in different parts of the Tamil land.

Roman colonies were set up in South India during the period. Not only in the coastal area but even in interior parts like Madura, Karur, Perur, Coimbatore, Pollachi, Kangayam, Dharapuram and even in places like Kaniampundi in the

Avanashi Taluk of Coimbatore district, and Kalyamuthur Palani, comparatively unknown today there were permanent Roman settlements as is evidenced by the Roman coins unearthed from these places.

The Pandyan king was the first to realise the benefits of an alliance with the Romans. He sent two embasis to Augustus caesar, desiring to become his friendly ally. Roman soldiers were enlisted in the service of the Pandyas and other Tamil Kings.

The commercial relations of the Tamil with the Greeks and Romans is mentioned in some of the Sangam classics as well as in the twin epics. A poem describes the prosperous port of Musiri, whether the fine large ships of the Yavanas come bearing gold, making the water white with foam, and returned with pepper, along with the rare products of the sea and mountains given by the Chera king. Pepper became the "Yavanapriya" or the spice dear to the Yavanas here referring perhaps to the Romans, and it is said that pepper formed more than half the cargo of many a west bound Roman ship. The remarkable skills displayed by the Yavanas in making artistic lamps of breaks in adverted to more than once. The Purananuru speaks of the importance of delicious wine which was eagerly sought for by and courtiers.

It is interesting to observe that among the exports from India to the west, tigers, elephants, hounds, parrots, peacocks, serpents and pythons were included. Ivory, pearls, diamonds, silk cotton, pepper and spices, coconuts, generally oil and timber of various kinds formed other articles purchased by Home. The periplus testifies to the South Indian export of coconut oil while Pliny includes bananas, rice, millets and various plant products like nut, mugs and tamarind. The

Pattinappalai provides the additional information that gold from the Kongu country, pearl from the Pandyan sea, sandal from the Malabar coast and pepper coorg were among the most prominent article of export from South India. The imports from the west and particularly from Rome included coins, gold, coral, wine, tin, lead and decorated doll lamps. The Sangam classics have several references to the wine imported from abroad. The Pattinappalai adds that horses were brought from across the seas; it is difficult to determine the country from which they, were imported perhaps they came from Arabia or Persia. But there is no doubt that on the whole, so far as home was concerned, the imports from India for outweighed the exports. After the second century A. D. there was a marked decline of the Roman trade with Tamilakam.

The foreign trade of South India was not confined to the west. With the east, too there was a brisk trade from early times. The earliest trade relationship with the East appears to have commenced with China. Besides silk, sugar was imported from China. The names of these articles which obtained currency in Tamil indicate this fact. Silk is known in Tamil as Pattu as well as Cinam, again through the ages sugar has been known as Sini. In exchange for these articles China imported from South India Pepper, Cardamom, incense and red coral. The Chinese historical sources belonging to the 7th century B.C. confirm the fact of Indian commercial products having reached China. Some of them might well have gone from North India, but the typical products of Tamilnad were also included among them. It is but natural that the trade between China and the coramandel coast of Tamilakam must have led to commercial relationship with other countries to the east of India. Burma, (Suvarna Bhumi) Java (Suayeka) Malaya and regions of the Far East undoubtedly had commercial contacts. In this connection it may be

noticed that among the pre historic relics or the Philippines have been found iron weapons like daggers, knives and axes, as well as bangles and glass beads, which archaeologists consider to be similar to those found in South India and datable to the 1st Millennium B, C. This fact suggests an early and close contact between the Philippines and South India. It is not too much to presume that sooner or later commercial relationship should have followed. Recently similar glass beads and bangles have been unearthed in North Berne, Java and the Malaya Peninsula.

The goods imported at this port were horses, wine and lamp of sculpture. The goods which were exported from the sea port of Korkai were white salt, palm sugar, spiced tamarind and dried fish. These are known from the literary sources. The Ten Tens also bear testimony to the existence of sea shore cities. They were Eyirpattinam, Pattinam (Mamallapuram) Korkai and Kaveripattinam. Eyirpattinam was the sea port of Oymanadu. Pattinam was the sea port city of Tondainadu, Korkai was the sea port city of Pandinadu. Kaveripattinam was the sea port city of the Chola country.

At the sea port of Eyirpattinam Ahil and other scented goods were imported. At the sea port of Pattinam horses from Western countries were imported. Kaveripattinam became a composition city due to its active trade. The ship carrying the cargo was called as Vangam. The merchants had never devalued the goods which they sold or purchased from the people. They valued both the goods equally. These moral values are known from the research work on Pattupattu. The motive of their adventure does not seem to have been conquest but commercial. Pattinappalai give us a graphic description of the trade of the times which no historian can ignore.

MERCHANT COMMUNITY AND ITS FUNCTIONS

Merchants were generally organized in powerful guilds and corporations which transcended political divisions and were therefore not much affected by the wars and revolutions going on about them. The merchant community was mostly in evidence in the towns. The name Chetti denoting the commercial community of Tamilnad, occurs in the two epics. We come across a merchant called Aratter Cheet in the Silapaddikaram. The Manimekalai mentions another Chetti by name 'Chandradattan'. Among the Chettis were to be seen the richest person in the capital cities with the possible exception of the kings. The suburb of the city in which they lived was like the very good house of the Goddess of wealth. The foreign trade which is known to have been very extensive in the Epic age was managed by the Vaisyas. The wealthy merchants owned the big ocean going vessels. They lived in luxurious houses and lead a high life.

The question arises whether the trading profession had become hereditary among the Tamils of the Sangam age. The available data shows that even during the time of the earlier works of the Sangam epoch it had emerged faintly. For example, the Umanar selling salt, were not only of the Paradavar group in the beginning, although the hereditary basis would have developed in due course. Often we find persons who were pursuing, certain occupations, themselves offered their produces for sale, as for instance the fishermen, copper smiths, goldsmiths and agriculturist. But side by side with them we also hear of certain traders in particular commodities like the Kulavanigan, Aruvaivanigan and the dealer of Palm leaves.

Nagaratta were the best among the traders. From an inscription we get information regarding the trade carried on by several Nagarattar at Rajasingapperangadi in Ukkirankottai. It is doubtful whether there was a clear cut Vaisya Caste in the early period, though Tolkapiyar mentions the Vaisyar. It does not occur anywhere else in the Sangam works, while 'Vanigan', denoting the merchant appears in Puram 134, and Manimekalai and also as part of proper names in other places. Much ingenuity has been displayed in determining the etymology of the word 'Vanigam' and 'Vanigar. It has been attempted to show that they emerged from the Sanskrit word 'Panis' who were the Dasyu or Tamil traders of the Vedic times and it is concluded that the word 'Pani' and its variants and derivations must have passed to North India from the south, hence Tamil 'Vaniga' became 'Baniga' and 'Pani'. But the hypothesis on which this view has been advanced is not provable.

The caste name 'Chetti' particularly applied to the merchant class is sought to be derived from the Sanskrit word, Sreshti or Vice Versa on equally doubtful basis. However, the term 'Chetti' occurs as far as we know for the first time only in the Manimekalai. It might have emerged from the Tamil word 'Chetti' meaning trade, as is shown from the fact that the 'Chettiyar' community is described in registered documents even to-day as belonging to the Chetti-caste.

Etti was a title apparently, derived from conferred on a merchant. This, too significantly occurs only in the Epics." Ettippu was another honour conferred on merchants. A few of the poets of the Sangam age belonged to the class of merchants. Madurai Aruvai Vanigan Tlavettanfr, Madurai Kula Vanigan Sittalai Sattanar, Kaveripumpattinam Ponvaniganar Mahanar Nappudanar, Beri Sattanar, Uraiyur Illampon – Vaniganar and Madurai Olakkadai Kannam Pukundarayattana

were some of the poets belonging to the merchant community of the Sangam epoch. In the census report of 1901 it is recorded that "Chetti means traders, and is one of those occupational terms, which are often loosely employed as a caste names. The weavers, oil pressers, and others use it as a title, and many more take it on to be title names to denote that trade is their occupation. Strictly employed, it is nevertheless the name of a true caste.

Many divisions of Chettis were there. One among those i.e. the Puvathukudi Chettis who receive their name from village in the Tanjore district, are mostly litterant peety traders and money lenders, who travel about the country.

Different guilds are known to have been in existence during the period of Pallava, Rashtrakuta, Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagar dynasties. The three essential merchant guilds to which inscriptions of the Deccan and South India frequently refer are Ayyavole, Manigramman and Chitrameli. The other merchant guilds are Nanadesiyadisaiyayirattu – ainnurruvar, Ainnurruvar Anjuvannam etc., From the Brahmi inscriptions around Madurai we come to know of the existence of the merchant guilds of the early centuries of the Christian era. They give details about the help rendered by the salt merchants, cloth merchants and the bead merchants to the Jain monks. The members of the merchant guild were called as 'Nigamathyor' .

These merchant guilds and corporations had been functioning in many part of the Pandya country even before the Chola period. An inscription of the 9 th century A. D. gives details about the guild functioning at Munichandai. The Manigramam, a variant of Vani-kagramam was an association of merchants, named after a place Valarmanikkam in Pudukkottai state. The expressions Manigramas and

Manigrammatar, occurring in the Kottayaa plates of Sthanuravi and of Vira Raghava are with reference to a trading corporation which seems to have functioned in other countries like Siam and Ceylon as early as 8th to 9th century A.D. Merchants from Ceylon, named Valanjlyar came to Tamilakam for the purpose of business. They were given some special rights as also to keep protective forces for their trade, which was permitted to be extended beyond the political sphere. A Tamil work refers to six occupations of Velalar namely agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade, bead making sanitary and service to twice born. The Vellalal nattars and others engaged in tillage constituted themselves into a corporation called Citrameli.

Chitrameli exerted control over the production and distribution of the produce. The members of this corporation were noted for their valour and unbending service like the other members of mercantile corporation. The Chitrameli organization was originally constituted by the Vellala (agricultural community) and such others engaged in tillage. It was also engaged in import and export trade like Manigramam. This guild probably had its beginning in Karnataka as the earliest inscriptions have been noticed in this region.

Ayyavole five hundred mentioned in the inscriptions of Athole of early 8th century was another important mercantile guild. The Tisaiyayirattu alnnurruvar meaning the five hundred of the thousand directions had its origin at Athole and extended its influence over the entire Deccan and outside. They overshadowed the other guilds by the great authority vested in them to augment the commercial wealth of the country, and to promote cultural unity among the artisans. They were the protectors of Virs Banajadharma and the Chitrameli corporation. The mercantile corporation of the eighteen towns existed on either bank of the river Kaveri. The Ainnurruvar, often styled the Five hundred Svamis of Ayyavolepura

(Aihole) was the most celebrated of the South Indian merchant guilds. Like the great kings of the age, they had a prasasti of their own which recounted their traditions and achievements. They were the protectors of the Vira Bananjadharaaa, i.e., the law of the noble merchants, Bananju being obviously derived from Sanskrit Vanija merchant. This dharma was embodied in 500 Vira Sasanas edicts of heroes. They had the picture of a bull on their flag and were noted throughout the world for their daring enterprise. Among the countries they visited were Chera, Chola, Pandya, Malaya, Magsdha, Kausala, Saurashtra, Kurumba, Kambhoja, and Nepala. They traversed land routes and water routes, penetrating all the countries of the six continents. They traded in elephants, pearls, rubies, diamonds, carbuncles, emeralds and other precious articles, cardamom, cloves, sandal, camphor, musk, saffron and other spices and perfumes. They either sold them wholesale or hawed them about on their shoulders, they paid the sunka regularly and filled the Royal treasury with Royal and Jewells and replenished the kings armoury, the, bestowed gifts on Pandits and were well versed in the four sangas and six darsanas.

There has been considerable confusion in the names used to describe these guilds. Most of the records are preamble by a long eulogy or prasasti, giving an account of the Ainnurruvar's origin and achievements. By far the largest number of these, nearly forty are in Kannada while there are about a dozen each in Tamil and Telugu and a handful in Malayalam. The earliest of these goes back to the eighth century. The name of the community has been the subject of various interpretations by different scholars. In most of the Kannada inscriptions it appears as the Five Hundred Svamins of Ayyavole. Several variants of this name occur in the Tamil epigraphs, such as Nhanaateeth thical Aayiraththu Ainjjauttuvar, that is, the Five hundred of the thousand directions of the several countries.

Nhaankhuthicai Ainjninuuttuvar, that is the five hundred of the thousand directions and Ainjnuttuvar the Five hundred. Sometimes they are just referred to as Aivole, Ayyaavole or Ayyappozhal.

The use of the name Ainnurruvar has led R.C. Majumdar to think that the organization consisted of five hundred members. T. V. Mahalingam on the other hand, feels that their extraterritorial organization was managed by an executive committee of five hundred members. On the contrary its records have been found in several districts of South India and in Ceylon and Sumatra. It is therefore not possible to surmise that the 'organization' had a constant number of members throughout their period and all over the vast area covered by their activities. The meaning of the term Ainnurruvar has to be explained differently. They call themselves wandering traders and claim to have visited a large number of countries, many of which were in North India and some outside the sub-continent.

The number of communities is not as large as in the South Indian inscriptions. Among those mentioned in the preserved portions of the inscriptions are the Cetti, Cettiputrar, Nanadesi, Valanciyar, Virakoti, Valankai, Angkakarar and Tlanjcinkam. The Cettis were traders as well as money lenders. The chettiputras may also have been traders, but nothing is available regarding the nature of their activities. The Nanadests as we have already noted, were a community of traders like the Valanciyar. Another inscription from Sivapuri gives details about one merchant Arasumadhai Kuttan alias Sivakarunalyan, a Merchant of the 'Manigramam -guild at Kodumbalur is stated to have made provision for the supply of pittu (cake offerings) to the god Tiruttandenor Mahadeva. The existence of a trade guild by the name of Manigramam at Koduabalur has been mentioned in an inscription copied already from Salem, and from the name

manjan Manlyamarttandan, occurring in that record and Arasumadhai kuttan alias Sivakarunalyan of this epigraph, the statement made in page 94 of the Annual report for 1927 that Manigramam could not have been a purely Christian trade organizations but must have been a non denomination guide which included mainly Hindu Merchants, received additional support. From another record, we learn that a small guild of merchants existed at Aruviur, a suburb of which was called Nanadesiperunderuvu, the big street of merchants from various districts. Ariviyur near Sivapuri was called Desi Uyyavandapattanam and it was a place of some commercial importance as a number of merchants of that village figure as doners to the temple of Tiru-ttandorisvaram Udaiyar at Sivapuri. A mathe called Alagiyamanavalanmatha at Sivapuri apparently a Saiva institution is mentioned in No.56, an epigraph dated in the 24th year of Tribhuvanacharavartin Srivallabha, and it owed its construction to one such merchant of Aruviyur named Alagiyamanavalan Udaiyanambi alias Alikaiman of Tirunallur.

The words Manigramam and Anjuvannem which occur in this record, have evoked considerable interest among scholars in general and Syrian Christians in particular.' It will be useful therefore to give below extracts from a number of inscriptions where these words occur, either together or separately. Kottayam plates of Sthanuravi. Adikararum prakritiyua Manlkraeaaua, Anjuvannasum punnsitt alaip patiyua Ulavaittu", Kottayam plates No. 2 "Arunujxumarum Mjavannaaua Manlkkraaanua Irakablkakkaaverft.

Seppu-pattirattili-patta vannam seydu kollak kadavar Anjuvannamum,
Manikkramamum.

Kop-padavaram koyil kondu pati padavaram Anjuvannamum

Manikkiramum Kolvada.

Talakkad inscription of Rajasimha – Perumana-digal “Ivv-amanjavaniyaril Manikkirmatar sattm Vaduganum Iravi Sattanum ivargal iruvarkum irandu-muripidi gaiyaluney illai”. Tittadatanapuram inscription of Vira Pandya.

“Ivvuril irukkira Anjuvannam Manikkiramattomum ariyaril samanta pandasaliyum alsarum pattariyarum toyalttirachche-itigalum Tennilangai-valangi yarun kaikkolarum tusuvarum vanigarum minidatraiyarum kudi... Koyil tirumbileniraivara kudi-irundu”.

From these instances it may be seen that there is nothing in the records themselves to indicate that the word Manigramam has been used with special reference to Christians, or that its use is confined only to the west coast, as suggested by some scholars. Manigramam was the name of a trading corporation of merchants and the Tamil commentator Nachchinarkkiniyar has explained it as a collective name for a community (Kuluvin-peyar) and following his lead, the author of the Neminatham has cited the word as an instance of Kudiyarppayar. The form used by the first commentator, namely Vanika-grammam, not necessarily a misselection, may possibly explain the origin of the word Manigramam, as a corporation (gramam) of merchants (Vanikar). Trade and craft guilds, such as Sreni, gana etc., It therefore appears that Manigramam was the name of a merchant guild of South India like the Vala-njiyar and Ayyapolil associations, membership to which have been open to all merchants, as such irrespective of their religion, and whose constitution was almost analogous to that of the Sreni of Ancient India, the assembly of eminent merchants defined as composed of traders and artisans; including men of different castes but pursuing

similar means of livelihood. In the west coast where trade was in the hands of the Christian merchants for a longtime, it is possible that the Manigramam organisation may have had Christian merchants also on its rolls, along, with many other Hindu traders. The existence of a number of Nayar families bearing the name Manigramakkarar at Quilon and a few other coast towns in the Travancore state at the present day appears to indicate that these Hindu merchants had simply belonged to the Manigramam trading guild, mani-gramam again was not confined to the trading communities in coast in particular, for we find the name occurring with reference to merchants at the two inland towns of Uraiyur and Kodumbalur; and also at Tittandanapuram and Kaverippumpattinam, two old sea ports on the coast. At the latter place a few Hindu families called Manigramakkarar are said to live. The fact that the donors to the Siva temple at Tiruvellarai, Salem and Kuttalam were Manigramattar shows that they were Hindus and not Christians. It is possible that the Manigramam which figures in the Christian plates may have been composed exclusively of Hindu and Christians, the latter having been granted privileges similar to those that had been enjoyed by trade guilds of apparently Hindu origin.

As regards Anjuvannam, Venieayya considered it to be a semi-independent corporation. The Kottayam plate also makes mention of this body, along with the Manigramam, as having been given the rights of collecting the taxes due to a local Chieftain. The present record is the only other- instance till now found where Anjuvannam has been referred to. This word has generally been considered to be a Tamilized form of the foreign word Anjuman, an Association. If so some foreigners must have been residing at the seaside town of Tittadanapuram and formed themselves into a guild at the time of this record. From other sources we know that a few Arab colonies had been formed in a few important ports of the

east coast of South India, called the Mabar by the Arab sailors.

ANJUVANNATTAR

It seems that these people belong to the Muslim community. They were residing at Tithandathanapuram, Nagapattinam. They had commercial contact with the Arabian countries. They were importing and exporting goods through the port cities Tondi, Kayalpattinam where they, resided.

Cavalry occupied an important place in Pandyan and Pallavan forces. So they imported horses from the foreign countries. It is learnt from the later inscriptions that Kudirai Chettis' were class of people who were engaged in horse.

The inscription belongs to the reign of Vira-Raghava-Chakkaravartin, who claims to be a lineal descendant of Vira Kerala Chakra Vartin. It is dated on the day of the nakshatra Rohini and Saturday, which corresponded to the twenty second day of the solar month Mina of the year during which Jupiter was in Makara. On this day the king while residing in the great palace probably at Kodungatur, which is mentioned further on, conferred the title manigramam and certain honours and rights connected with an Iravikkorran of Magodaiyarpattinam who was also called saman-loka-pperun-jetti.

As stated before, Vira Raghava. conferred the title of Manigramam on the merchant Iravikkorram. Similarly Anjuvanm was bestowed by the Cochin plates on the Jew Joseph Rabban. The old Malayalam work payyamur pattola, which Dr.Gundert considered, 'the oldest specimen of Malayalam composition, refers to Anjuvaanam and Manigraathe context in whole the two names occur in this work,

implies that they were trading institution. In the Kottiyam, plates of Sthanuravi both Anjuvanam and Manigramam are frequently mentioned. Both of them were appointed along with the six hundred to be the protectors of the grant. They were "to preserve the proceed of the customs duty as they were collected day by day and to receive the land lords, portion of the rent on land". If any injustice to be done to them they may: withhold the customs and the tax on balances and remedy themselves commit a crime, they are themselves to have the investigations of its. To Anjavannam and Manigramam was granted the free bold of the lands of the town. From the extracts and from the references in the Payyanur pattola it appears that Anjuvannam and Manigramam were semi-independent trading corporations like the Valanjiyar, The epithet setti (merchant) given to Ravikkorran, the trade rights granted to him and the sources of revenue thrown open to him as head of manigramam confirm the view that the latter was trading corporation. There is nothing either in the Cochin grant or in the sub-joined inscriptions to show that Anjuvannam and Manigramam were, as was believed by Dr. Gundert and others, Jewish and Christian principalities respectively. It was supposed by Dr. Burnell, that the plate of Vira-Raghava created the principality of Manigramam and to Cochin plates that of Anjuvannam and that consequently the existence of the two grants is presupposed by the plates of Sthanu Ravi which mentions both Anjuvannam and Manigramam very often. Therefore Anjuvannam and Manigramam must have existed as institutions even before the earliest of these three copper plates was issued.

In the Uttandisvara temple at Tirumallsal many inscriptions give informations about Chitrameli. On the pillar of the mandapa in front of the central shrine of the same temple denotes the gift of money for the Tiruvettai festival by Sittirameli alias Kuttan a gold smith of Tirumalisai.

On a slab set up at this ruined main entrance into the Parasurameswara temple at Attirla we get information that one mandapa which was called in the name of Chitrameli. It records an argument by the residents of the Pattapirean who had met in the mandapa called Chitrameli to raise on madai from each villages in order to construct embankment on the side of the river and to prevent any injury from floods to the temple of Parasurameswaradiay Nayanar.

Next we comes across another inscription on a stone set up in the courtyard of the Malasthanesvara temple at Tenkarai. It mentions the Ayyapolil merchant community. On a slab set up in a street of Periya Irumbedu states that the village (agaram) Irumbedu alias Chitrameli Chaturvedimangalam was the

Two inscriptions one from Malabar (No. 402 of 1939-40) and the other from the North Arcot District. (No. 193 of 1939-40) are of interest as they mention a mercantile corporation called the 'Pandinen Vaishyatar' or 'Padinenbhumi Tisai Ayirtt sinnurruvar'. This body is frequently me with in inscriptions of all periods, from the time of the Chola king Parakesarivarman who may be identified with Vijayalvay (Pud. Ins. No. 61). Their activities took them to several places even beyond the borders of South India and they had their own organization to promote their interest. (Ep. Rep. 1913-para 25). From the elaborate string of birudas assumed by them in all their records, they seem to have wielded great influence wherever they settled. An inscription from Virinchipuram (No. 193 of 1939-40) alludes to a local tradition about the god to the effect that a merchant named Dhanapalan trading in pepper halted in this village on his way to Kanchi.

From all these epigraphical source we get lots of information about the

merchant community which existed in the early period of Tamil history. The Manigramam is well known as a powerful mercantile corporation mentioned in several inscriptions in South India, and apparently in the enjoyment of continued prosperity for a period of several generations. The other corporations Anjuvanam, Valanjiyar, Nanadesi are also known to have had a share in the overseas trades of Southern India and who appear to have maintained bands of armed mercenaries for the protection of their interests. These merchant guilds enjoyed extra-territorial rights and were more or less autonomous self regulating bodies.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages, an attempt has been made to give a brief account of the trading community in early Tamil society upto 900 A.D.

Korkai the sea port and the capital city of the Pandyas on the banks of the river Tamraparni, Kaveripumpattinam the sea port at the mouth of the river Kaveri, and Vanchi, the Chera capital, Madurai the capital city of the Pandyas and Kanchipuram, the capital of Tondaimandalam have retained much of their ancient glory. We get clear glimpses of more of these cities from the writings of the ancient Tamil poets, whose love of truth was in no way inferior to their love of beauty. From their descriptions as also the writings of Greek and Roman travelers and inscriptions are learn of the great civilization which then prevailed, the advances made in the realities of art, culture and learning of the people, their palatial buildings, their travels to foreign countries in quest of trade; the concourse of many races in the ports and capital cities of the reigning monarch, the busy trade in the bazaars, where commodities of all countries were exchanged, the mighty arms of kings who spread their conquests for and wide in other lands and so on.

Times have changed and the ancient shape of civilization in Tamilakam has undergone a lot of transformation. The old civilization however, still has its appeal, not much because it is interesting from the point of view of history, but because it exercises our influence, though imperceptible, on everyday life at the present time.

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