



## THE SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE WEAVERS UNDER THE CHOLAS

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### Introduction

In ancient Tamil Country the social divisions were based not on birth and caste but on habitat or profession. The occupation was the base for the caste system. This occupation based Varna system, defined the regular activities and other functions of all castes. Nesafield's occupational theory explains that the nature and the quality of work performed by the various group of people were the main causes for the origin of caste system. The choice of one's profession itself was largely conditioned by the caste of the individual in the medieval times. Moreover the caste of a particular individual influenced his profession. In the Age of Imperial Cholas, the caste system became rigid. Caste was a natural product of society in the creation of social organisation. There were many castes existed during the medieval times. The weavers were also one among them. The weaving communities were the best occupational groups who lived in the Chola society. They involved in weaving and other related works for their livelihood and even contributed a major part of income of the state. They involved in multi- purpose activities in the society.

The hereditary character of the profession is borne out by a few pieces of contemporary evidences. Sulaiman says that in the kingdom he visited people followed the professions of their respective castes.[1] An inscription of 48th regnal year of Kulottunga lays down the most example of the influence of hereditary as a means

of livelihood for a class of the people known as Rathakaras.[2]

### Weavers during the Cholas:

There were many references available to reveal the economic and societal activities of the weavers. At Takkolam an inscription refers to a nagaram. It describes the members of the nagaram. In this, nagarattar of the Sankarapadi, saliya nagarattom and viyapari nagarattom were the members. [3] Viyapari is a general term using for merchants, who dealt in many types of commodities rather than specific commodity. Sankarapadi were the oil merchants. Saliya nagarattar were the cloth merchants. They were weavers who sold their own cloth.[4] These saliyanagarattar were mostly settled around Kanchipuram region and involved in trading activities. They had contact with the merchant guilds and exported their cotton cloths to other countries.

Saliyanagaratar of Kanchipuram had access to Mayilapur, the port city. The antiquity of its commerce is attested by Ptolemy. His reference to Mailarphan is identified with Mayilappur.[5] Mayilappur as weaving centre was linked to the capital, Kanchipuram. Kanchipuram had a good concentration of weaving communities.[6] Kanchipuram was not a port city. But it gained commercial importance due to its cotton textile industries. Its commerce was linked to the nagaram network. The main export of the site was fine cotton fabrics. It was exported to the Arabian ports like Armuz and Aden.[7] Saliyanagarattar exported cotton varieties to

Malaya and Java and they imported camphor, horn of rhinoceros, horses, cloves and perfumes etc.[8] Nagarattar of Kanchipuram continued their prestigious position. The saliya nagarattar in this region played a managerial or supervisory role. They became the weavers of the royal garments and maintained the temple accounts. The saliyannagarattar of Kanchipuram had link with the other guilds like Nanadesis and Tisayayirattuainnuruvar.[9]

Kaikkolas were also weavers involved in weaving and other related works. Many epigraphical sources refer to kaikkolas and their activities. Terinjakaikkolars, kaikkola senapathi were frequently referred to in the inscriptions. During the time of Rajaraja I many weavers were invited to Tamil Country. Being dissatisfied with the quality of turned out by the Tamil weavers, Raja Raja I brought the Soliya weavers from Andhra. After that, Kaikkolas learnt how to weave fine cloths. The Devanga weavers hailed either from Andhra or Karnataka region. They moved into Tamil country. A chola inscription tailors are referred to as tunnakkarakar(4). An inscription from Tittandattanapuram informs that there was a collaboration between the guild and Kaikkolas (weavers). [10]Because of the collaboration they purchased cotton fabrics from them and exported the same to the foreign countries

### **The Kaikkolas**

The Weaving Communities of Kaikkolas played a vital role in Tamil country. Many Chola inscriptions refers to them. During the Chola period the Kaikkolar combined weaving with soldering. The Chola inscription mentions that the Kaikkola Senapati(1). In inscription they were frequently referred to as the Terinja Kaikkolar. Terinja means trusted, they were so called because of whom formed the King's body guard there were Samarakesari Terinja Kaikkular, Vikramasinga Terinja Kaikkolar and Virasola Terinja Kaikkola(2). They were natives of Tanjore and employed as soldiers under the Chola King Parantaleal and Raja Raja I.

The Kaikkolas who trace their descent from Virabahu, one of the nine commanders of God Subramanian. The word 'Kaikol' referred to as Ratnavel (FN) or precious dagger carried by Subramania(3). The Kaikkolars on the Sura

Samharam day during the festival of Subramania dressed upto represent to nine warriors and join in the procession. The Kaikkulars other wise known as Senguntar. They had Red dagger who indicates their military powers (or) and war like traditions. The name Kaikolan is further derived from Kai (hand) and Kol (shuttle). This suggest, the traditional association of the caste with weaving. The Kaikkolas as a community have been divided into 72 Nadus or Desams. Of these 4 formed the "Mel" (Western) and 24 "Kil" (eastern) Nadus. Some of the Kaikkola women became dedicated to temples and they became dancers. It became the practice for every Kaikkola family to dedicate at least one girl to temple service. But the Kaikkolan dancers were distinct from the Davadasis.

The sale or the Saliga community classified as the Padma Sale and the Pattu sale. The Tirumalai – Tirupathi inscriptions also refer to them as Saliya (1). They worships common deity called Saliswara. In course of time, they acquired different Tamil cultural habits and settle in various part of Tamil Country in Tanjore, Tirunelveli, Kanchipuram, Coimbatore and North Arcot. They formed a major weaving caste, they were called as Choliya – Saliyar(2).

The Saliyans have the right to wearing the sacred thread, engage Brahman purohiths and guided by Brahman priests. They had their own caste priests. The Saliyans were not allowed to sell their goods except in a fixed spot called Mamarath Mumedu. Where they set out their cloths on bamboos. The Saliyan weavers of silk, who settled at Mayavarnam neat Tanjore, neither intermarry not interdine with the Saliyans of the Tirunelvely Saliyans closely follow the Kaikkolans in their various caremonies, and their social organisation and interdine with them. Saliyars also involved in trade and agriculture, while others weavers coarse cotton cloths end dye cotton yarn.

### **Textile varieties and Technologys**

The weavers produced various types of cloths for the requirement of the temple, the royal household and the public. In the sangam age, high quality cotton was named as Tugil. The Jivaka Chintamani refers to women were sarees with folds and drapes at the end. The major articles of clothing woven were vetti, Uttiriyam

Pudavai and Head gear. Raja Raja III inscription mentions the vetti and Pudravai. The Jivaka Chinthamani refers to both silk and cotton cloth starched with rice wastes and performed with fragrant smoke. It also refers to Pumpattu, Pactchilai Pattu, Konkala Pattu, and Ven pattu. Different types of silk produced during the Vikrama Chola period.

In medieval literature the loom is a part of innumerable poetic similies and metaphors, sain manikkavasagar compares flights of fancy to the rapid movements of a shuttle on the 100m.

There is a reference to achuchutari occurs in the inscription Raja Raja Chola I, from Tiruvottur North Arcot District. Raja Raja III inscription also mentions about the achchuri.

Kanchipuram was the main centre of the weaving guilds. The weaving communities of the surrounding areas secured their privileges only through the members of the Kanchipuram guild. The supreme head of the guild was called as the Mahanatta. He was also called Senapati in some guilds.

#### Trade Activities

Brisk internal and external trade in medieval Tamil Country. Cloths were either carried on the head (Talaikattu) or in bags. Peruvali Siruvali. The main weaving centres were Kanchipuram Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Shiyali, Arantagi and Kumbakonam talugs. During the Chola period, the cotton growing areas and weaving centres were linked with Chola pots. Madurai was a centre of cotton production and weaving.

The weavers sold their own at the local fairs called Santa. Local autonomy.

#### Conclusion

The status and role of the weaving communities in medieval society reflected the ups and downs of their socio economic condition. In the Chola Period the main weaving community of the Tamil region were the Kalikkalors and Saliyar. The Kaikkolars had essentially functioned as a military group under the Cholas. Then they emerged as full-fledged professional weavers in

the Tamil Countr. The weavers as an artisan group, were leading beneficiaries of the commercial prosperity of the empire. The weavers formed their own corporations with codes and regulations, if any violatin of these rules was punished by social obstracism. The status of the weavers in society can be measured in terms of the size and nature of the donations made by them to the temples.

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