SOCIAL LIFE OF THE TAMILS

- The Classical Period

Dr. S. SINGARAVELU

உலகத் தமிழாராய்ச்சி நிறுவனம்
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TAMIL STUDIES
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FOREWORD

The Institute feels proud of reprinting **SOCIAL LIFE OF THE TAMILS-the classical period,** written by Professor S.Singaravelu.

Professor Singaravelu has deeply dealt with the classical period of the Tamils and he has unearthed different aspects of their Social Life. It is a highly useful contribution. It gives a refreshing insight into our past social life and surely it will help those who are involved in this field .

We express our thanks to the University of Malaysia for granting permission to reprint this book.

We are very grateful to the Chairman of our Institute Hon'ble Minister Dr.Tamilkudimagan, Minister for Tamil Development and Hindu Religious Endowment under whose guidence and support this Institute grows further and further. We are thankful to Mr.S. Ramakrishnan ,Secretary to Tamil Development and Endowment who encourages our activities for the development of the Institute.

Thanks are due to the United Bid Graphics who has neatly printed this book.

DIRECTOR

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S.S.

Kuala Lumpur,
April, 1966.

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TRANSLITERATION

The following is the key to the transliteration of Tamil alphabets:

VOWELS

அ	a	எ	e
ஆ	ā	ஏ	ē
இ	i	ஐ	ai
ஈ	ī	ஒ	o
உ	u	ஓ	ō
ஊ	ū	ஔ	au

CONSONANTS

க்	k	ம்	m
ங்	ṅ	ய்	y
ச்	c	ர்	r
ஞ்	ñ	ல்	l
ட்	ṭ	வ்	v
ண்	ṇ	ழ்	l̲
த்	t	ள்	ḷ
ந்	n	ற்	r̲
ப்	p	ன்	n̲

ĀYTAM

ஃ k

REFERENCES IN THE FOOTNOTES

Owing to limitation of space, it has not been possible to include all the passages of poems cited as evidence. Instead, the titles of the relevant literary and grammatical works are noted at the foot of each page in abbreviated forms (Please see List of Abbreviations), followed by numerals which, in the case of the Ten Idylls, refer to the particular line(s), while in the case of other literary works the numbers refer to the stanza and the specific lines containing the relevant evidence.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ainkuru.	=	Aiṅkuṟunūṟu.
Akam.	=	Akanāṉūṟu.
Cil.	=	Cilappatikāram.
Cirupan.	=	Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai.
Kali.	=	Kalittokai.
Kurin.	=	Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu.
Kuru.	=	Kuṟuntokai.
Malai.	=	Malaipaṭukatām.
Matu.	=	Maturaikkāñci.
Mullai.	=	Mullaippāṭṭu.
Nampi.	=	Nampi Akapporuḷ.
Nar.	=	Naṟṟiṇai.
Netu.	=	Neṭunalvāṭai.
Pari.	=	Paripāṭal.
Pattin.	=	Paṭṭiṉappālai.
Pattir.	=	Patiṟṟuppattu.
Perumpan.	=	Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai.
Poru.	=	Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai.
Puram.	=	Puṟanāṉūṟu.
Purap.	=	Puṟapporuḷ Veṇpā Mālai.
Tiru.	=	Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai.
Tol.	=	Tolkāppiyam.

INTRODUCTION

The first thing that needs to be said in introducing the ensuing chapters is that the primary data for the present study have been drawn solely from the earliest surviving Tamil literature, also known as 'Caṅkam' literature, of the classical period.[1] Some use has also been made of the third part of the *Tolkāppiyam* which is the earliest Tamil grammatical treatise extant and which is also believed to have been anterior to the literature that has survived.

The Ten Idylls *(Pattuppāṭṭu)*[2] and the Eight Collections *(Eṭṭuttokai)*[3] are the earliest surviving Tamil literature, and these are anthologies of oral and written poems composed by about ten generations of poets between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, more or less conforming to certain poetic conventions and principles enunciated by past literary grammarians. (The earliest surviving Tamil grammar, *Tolkāppiyam*, particularly its third part, *Poruḷatikāram*, was one such source of conventions and principles of poetics, and its influence may be detected in wide ranges of content in the poetic

[1]The justification of using literary works as sources or social documents for the reconstruction of social life or social history of a people rests on the fact that literature of a people, viewed as a whole, is part of the entire culture of the people, tied as it were by a tissue of connexions with other elements of their culture. (In fact, the characteristic qualities that distinguish a particular literature from other literatures generally derive from the characteristic qualities of the life of the people to whom the literature belongs.) Furthermore, literature generally imitates life; and that 'life' is, in a large measure, a social reality. Again, whether consciously or unconsciously, the literary craftsmen usually leave a record of their social experience. The nuggets to be mined out of this material are particularly valuable to the student of social history. Indeed, this has been one of the principal uses of the study of literatures, particularly those of earlier periods for want of other sources of evidence.

See Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Chap. IX.

[2]The Ten Idylls are: *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* (261 lines) by Nattattaṉār, *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* (261 lines) by Kapilar, *Maḷaipaṭukaṭām* (583 lines) by Peruṅkaucikaṉar, *Maturaikkāñci* (782 lines) by Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, *Mullaippāṭṭu* (103 lines) by Nappūtaṉār, *Neṭunalvāṭai* (188 lines) by Nakkīrar, *Paṭṭiṉappālai* (301 lines) and *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* (500 lines) by Uruttiraṅkaṇṇaṉār, *Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai* (248 lines) by Muṭattamakkaṇṇiyār, and *Tirumurukaṟṟuppaṭai* (317 lines) by Nakkīrar.

[3]The Eight Anthologies are: *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* (500 short love poems), *Akanāṉūṟu* (400 love-lyrics of varying length), *Kalittokai* (150 love poems), *Kuṟuntokai* (400 love poems), *Naṟṟiṇai* (400 short poems on love), *Paripāṭal* (twenty-four, originally seventy, poems in praise of gods), *Patiṟṟuppattu* (a short collection of eight, originally ten, poems each of ten verses, in praise of the king of Cera country), and *Puṟanāṉūṟu* (400 poems in praise of chieftains and kings).

compositions that have survived.)

But there is reason to believe that even before the era of poetic compositions and literary grammarians, the poetic arts of the Tamils had already progressed. The earliest surviving Tamil grammar, *Tolkāppiyam* (which is assigned to 3rd century B.C.) and several poems contained in the anthologies themselves would seem to tell us a good deal of the earlier poetry. Thus we are able to surmise that the earlier poetry which preceded the era of poetic compositions was oral bardic poetry,[4] mainly narrative in form, direct, simple, and often dramatic, and generally recited or sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as the lyre or the lute.[5]

The professional practitioners of this earlier form of oral lyric poetry were the bards or minstrels, distinguished for their skill and inspiration, who were at once 'poets' and musicians, accompanying their own songs on the lyre and perhaps leading the dances as well. Since this earliest poetic art existed in combination with the arts of music and dancing[6] and was practised by both skilled men and women, the professional bards, songstresses and dancers organized

[4]This earlier form of professional bardic poetry itself may be traced back to the earliest folksongs, which, originating anonymously in times past in connexion with some practical activity, facilitated such activity, or rendered it more effective, e.g. work songs grew out of various labours; and the hymns and dirges developed out of the charms and prayers of religious ceremonials. In this earliest stage, the practioners of the folk literature were naturally the practitioners of the occupations or ceremonials to which the art of folk literature was subordinate. In the next stage, however, the folk literature developed in itself, beginning with the development of special skills in its practitioners and resulting in the creation of oral lyric poetry with melody, and also in the formation of singing and dancing troupes.

[5]The Tamil name for the professional bard, namely, *Pāṇar*, is itself derived from the word, Paṇ, which denotes 'melody' of musical instrument such as the lyre. Furthermore, the bards in the ancient Tamil country were differentiated by the kind of lyre with which they accompanied themselves, i.e. those who used the lyres of large size were distinguished from those who used the lyres of smaller size.

[6]Dancers, both men and women, formed an integral part of the ancient Tamil bardic troupes, for it was they who actively helped in bringing about what is now known as 'kinaesthetic process', i.e. the mental or emotional state of the singer was 'translated' deliberately into dancer's movements which when perceived by the onlooker aroused in him sensations of muscular sympathy, and these in turn associated themselves through memory with mental or emotional states which would have produced similar muscular effects in his own experience. Thus ideas were conveyed from the mind of the bard to that of his audience not only through the words of his songs but also through kinaesthesis brought about by the dancers of the bardic troupe.

themselves into bardic troupes.

The primary function of the early bardic troupes was to entertain the community with songs and dances. The material with which the bard or minstrel worked was the basic experience of the community: he drew upon the local history, and folklore. His tales were of love and war.

In order to provide a background to his narration, the bard probably indulged in description of aspects of the natural world likely to arouse emotions of delight, awe, respect, or thankfulness in his audience. (This earlier practice might well have later developed into an elaborate system of literary imageries.)

As the early society was a heroic one in which warfare of the feudal-vendetta type frequently occurred, yet another important function of the bard was to inspire heroism among the warriors by entertaining them to songs and long recitals of the past heroic achievements of the tribe or the clan, and eulogising the qualities of a true warrior such as honour and glory, and thus keeping alive the spirit of bravado and bravery in times of both war and peace.

As reward for these important services to the clan and the community, the bard received gifts of various kinds, and most important of all, the princely patronage of the chieftains and tribal leaders. But, patronage also meant panegyric, i.e. the bard, who enjoyed patronage of the chieftain, was perhaps also expected to indulge in a bit of praise of his patron's hospitality and liberality; but all indications are that the bardic panegyric was always within bounds.

An important feature of the ancient Tamil bardic-craft was that it had gradually grown to be the hereditary occupation of the skilled singers known as *Pāṇar* and therefore the transmissoin of the oral bardic literature was possible within the group for generation after generation. In fact, it was this transmission of bardic tradition from one generation to the next which made literary continuity and progress possible.

In the ancient Tamil country, as the regimes of tribal chieftains began to give way to feudal monarchy and political and social life developed on a larger scale and with a more extensive and variegated background, the bardic stage of poetry was replaced by the poetic stage in which the scholarly and learned poet came to assume

the panegyric role of the bard while the remnants of the bardic troupes themselves continued with popular song, music, and dance.[7] (It was at this stage that the Tamil society would seem to have found it necessary to distinguish the poet from the bard or *Pāṇar* by the use of another term, i.e. *Pulavar*, meaning a poet, noted for his learning and knowledge.)

The question when the poetic literature evolved from the bardic literature and tradition is not easy to solve. But it is quite clear that to the literary craftsmen of the poetic stage the existing bardic literature and tradition seemed of great value, and their object was to be in it, to make much use of it, and if possible to carry it a little further. There is no doubt that the poets of the age which succeeded the bardic stage drew a great deal of material from the existing oral bardic poetry, particularly the form and themes of bardic songs. It is true that the poets of the period did not *sing* their compositions nor did they accompany themselves upon the lyre as the bards of the earlier period did. It is also true that the panegyrics of the poets were of higher order than those of their predecessors, i.e. the bards. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that the early Tamil *poetic* metre, *akaval*, had its origin in dance-measure or the rhythmic and recitative chant of the earlier bardic poetry, and also that the poets who had assumed the panegyric role of the bard continued to compose their panegyrics in the manner of bardic panegyric, i.e. as if a bard were praising the hero of the poem, and not as if the poet himself were addressing the contemporary patron.[8] Not only the panegyric poems, but also the love lyrics, heroic poetry, the laments and elegies all bear the unmistakable stamp of the earlier bardic poetry. Now, to sum up, the literary craftsmen of the poetic stage in the ancient Tamil country had a rich bardic tradition behind them from which they could draw much material for their own poetic compositions.

Thus using the surviving bardic tradition as their principal source of themes and folklore, the poets composed their verses with a candour and spontaneity of the earlier bards. They took the bards of the earlier period as their prototypes and revived and kept alive the forms and traditions of the ancient period which they

[7]Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *The Typology of Ancient Indian Education.*
[8]Ibid.

considered worthy of emulation. At the same time, they portrayed the actual customs of the people and the actual environment which gave rise to those customs, just as the bards used to do in an earlier period. Just like the bards, the poets also sang imaginatively of love and of other aspects of life. In all their expression of imaginative experience and in describing the people and places in their poetry, they were scrupulously truthful and realistic. This poetic realism was second only to the bardic realism of the earlier period.

A later age which was heir to all the poetry composed during the period must have really been impressed by the realistic nature of the poetic compositions, and as there were also others who aspired to compose poetry, it was found desirable and useful to codify the general principles and elements of such realistic poetry. Thus a bye-product of the poetic stage was the appearance of codified literary principles (or poetics). Though it would appear that during this period there came into existence numerous grammatical works on poetics, what has reached us is only *Tolkāppiyam*, which is assigned to 3rd century B.C.

Of the three parts which constitute the *Tolkāppiyam*, the third part, namely, *Poruḷatikāram* is of great value and interest to the student of early social history of the Tamils, for the wealth of information it contains in the form of literary conventions relating to various aspects of life.

It must be stressed here however that, by literary conventions, it is not meant that they were artificial and hidebound rules of poetics. Quite on the contrary, ancient Tamil literary conventions would seem to have evolved gradually from the actual customs and manners of people inhabiting various regions of the Tamil country. That is to say, at first, the bards sang of the diverse customs and ways of life of their own immediate communities; and when the bardic tradition was transmitted to the literary craftsmen of the poetic stage, the poets must have kept up the traditional imagery of the bards even at a time when the conditions of life, in which those traditions had their origin, had altered, and thus in course of time those poetic images must have become literary conventions.[9]

[9] The possibility that several poets were not entirely subservient to the rules and conventions enunciated by the author of *Tolkāppiyam* and also that the literary conventions of a particular period were not fixed but were

P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar describes the ancient Tamil literary conventions rather aptly as *petrifactions* of old customs developed by the action of the environment on human life.'[10] And it would seem that the 'petrifactions' of Tamil literary conventions should be as valuable to the student of Tamil social history as the fossil or relic or trace of a former living thing preserved in the rocks is valuable to a prehistoric palaeontologist. Thus one may learn from these conventions about the various aspects of actual life of which the early poets used to compose poems. One may even go back further to the earliest times when the poetic arts were in the hands of the bards or minstrels. If these literary conventions alone could be of such great merits in throwing light on the early Tamil social life, how much more illuminating the actual poems could have been, if only they had survived? Unfortunately, the poems belonging to the age before and immediately after the composition of *Tolkāppiyam* have not come down to us. The only surviving literature of the classical period, namely, the Ten Idylls and most of the poems contained in the Eight Anthologies, are believed to have been composed some time after the *Tolkāppiyam*. Be that as it may, the authors of these poems themselves would seem to have followed the earlier bardic and poetic tradition, and faithfully portrayed the social, economic and political state of the Tamil country in the two centuries before and after Christ. And for these reasons one may justifiably use the surviving Tamil poetry of the classical period as well as the Tamil grammar, *Tolkāppiyam*, as reliable social documents for the reconstruction of the early Tamil social life.

METHOD

Having considered briefly the basic nature of the sources, it now remains for me to say a word regarding the method followed in analysing the literary data. It has been my object in preparing

constantly changing, is seen in the fact that there are some poems in the surviving anthologies of Tamil literature for which there are no corresponding conventional themes mentioned in the *Tolkāppiyam* and also in the fact that not all the conventions of the grammar, *Tolkāppiyam*, are illustrated by the poems of the anthologies. See Dr. U. V. Saminatha Aiyar (Ed)., *Kuṟuntokai*, p.8.

[10] *History of the Tamils from the earliest times to 600* A.D., p.60.

this study to make it not merely a record of the customs and beliefs of the early Tamils as they would seem revealed in their earliest surviving literature, but also a demonstration of social anthropological method in interpreting the classical data. By anthropological method, I mean the use of some ideas from the science of social anthropology for the purpose of interpreting and, if possible, illuminating the classical Tamil literary data.

There are two principal reasons for using the ideas, concepts, and theories of the science of anthropology for the purpose of interpreting the data in the present study. First, the science of anthropology deals with the history of human society. Its subject matter includes all the phenomena of the social life of man without limitation of time and space. Furthermore, the prehistoric inventions and discoveries that have led to gradual improvement in man's conditions, the sources of the differentiated forms of social life, the process by which modifications of human culture came about by the action of inner forces and by mutual influences, the interrelations between man and his environment, the types of mental and physical activity in distinct cultures, the relations between individual and society—these are some of the problems that anthropology has been trying to solve. Over a period of years, anthropology has developed a scientific objective and a host of *heuristic* devices and concepts and methodological tools to interpret and illuminate various aspects of social life of man. These anthropological techniques are indeed valuable tools by the use of which one may have insights into the range of development of cultures and social institutions of people. As the present study is also concerned with the social life of a people who had evolved gradually a rich civilization, the ideas and concepts that the science of anthropology has to offer, should indeed be of immense value not only in describing the varieties of conditions in which the early Tamil social life developed, but also in explaining its development.

Secondly, the nature of the data that are available in the surviving Tamil literature of the classical period is such that the anthropological method is likely to yield more illuminating results than any other method. As indicated earlier, much of the surviving literature belonged to a stylized and conventionalized age. By this is meant that the authors of most poems (with some exceptions, of

course) would seem to have composed their poetry in accordance with certain poetic conventions relating to the themes and background of their poems. And the literary conventions themselves had evolved from actual customs and ways of life of people inhabiting various regions of the ancient Tamil country, and therefore the literary conventions, like the petrifactions, are good material for ethnological interpretation. As for the surviving poems themselves, one is able to obtain a great deal of data relating to the life-patterns of various communities of people, who, in modern anthropological terms, represented various stages of cultural development. Indeed, most of the poets of the classical period would seem to have been very well acquainted with the ways of life of people who were at diverse levels of cultural achievement. It is most likely that much of this first-hand knowledge was obtained through extensive journeys undertaken by the poets themselves to various regions of the Tamil country. The poets' curiosity and interest regarding the past ways of life might have constantly shifted them to the various settlements on the coastal region, on the pastoral region and the riverine plains, to the arid wastes, and to the ancient hills of the Tamil country. During these journeys, the poets would have no doubt visited the humble dwellings of the people who inhabited the various settlements, listening to the people's conversation, attending their rites and rituals, partaking of the meagre meal, and observing their customary behaviour, and the result was the composition of realistic poetry from which one may learn a great deal about the life-patterns of people in the ancient Tamil country.

Now, the application of anthropological ideas and concepts to the ancient literary data for the purposes of elucidation is by no means anything new. In fact, in the West, there would seem to have been some rapprochement between the two fields of Grecian antiquity and anthropology.[11] In this connexion, it may be of interest to note that there have been some notable contributions with regard to the application of anthropology to the data of Greek

[11] The rapport between classics (Greek and Latin) and anthropology in the West does not seem to have been entirely one-sided. In fact, there is reason to believe that classical scholarship has done much to stimulate anthropological investigation. First of all, there is the fact that a number of the most influential of the world's anthropologists were well read in Greek

classics. For instance, D. George Thomson in *Aeschylus and Athens* and *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* is aware of many of the modern anthropologists (Kroeber, Lowie, Firth, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and others), although he rejects them in favour of doctrinaire Marxist anthropology based on Morgan and Engels. He has chapters on totemism, matriarchy, and 'communism'. He sees the origins of Greek drama in social and economic pressures. His discussion of totemism and matrilineal descent recall equally Morgan and Frazer. Again there have been other scholars who have tried the method of anthropology in relation to Greek antiquities. Sir William Ridgeway *(The Origin of Tragedy with special reference to the Greek Tragedians)* has attempted to show that Greek Tragedy arose out of the dramatic dances in honour of the dead. Raymond Firth, for example has suggested that *Oresteia* (a Triology by Aeschylus on the story of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes, produced in 458 B.C.) contains a symbolic religious affirmation of the social principle of patrilineality. In further discussing the ritual and social sanctions for conduct, he calls attention to the elaborate network of obligations in Homeric society and importance of the patterned exchange of gifts. Firth is impressed by the resemblance of Homeric culture to that of Polynesia and other non-literate cultures. He sees the real value of the study of Greek culture not so much in understanding the origins of the European peoples as in providing a set of contrasts to contemporary Western culture. Of the other works in this field, M. J. Finlay's *The World of Odysseus* and Norman Brown's *Hermes The Thief*, are regarded as excellent ethnography. E. R. Dodd's *The Greeks and The Irrational* has

and Latin literature. For instance, Franz Boas's interest in manners and customs of the people would seem to have been stimulated by his earlier study of Herodotus, Thucydides, Caesar and others. A. L. Kroeber has much to say of Greek literature, philosophy, and arts in his *Configurations of Culture Growth*. E. B. Tylor, the acknowledged leader of British anthropology and the first Professor of Anthropology in Oxford University, is known to have used classical data in his own writings as one aspect of comparative approach. His interest in classical data has been attested in a number of ways. In 1888, he gave a course of lectures on "Anthropological Elucidation of Passages in Greek and Latin authors". This series was followed by courses on: "Anthropology as related to Ancient and Modern History"; "The Anthropology of Higher Nations"; "Anthropology in Classical literature"; "Anthropology in Ancient History", and similar titles. Two of the students, J. L. Myers (*Who were the Greeks?*) and R.R. Marett (*Anthropology and the Classics*) who followed Tylor's lectures, are said to have turned from classics to anthropology.

impressed many an anthropologist. The author's anthropological interests were earlier evidenced in his edition of the *Bacchae of Euripides*, where he did not hesitate to draw parallels from the Kwaktiul Indians, the Polynesians and other 'primitives' to illuminate the relations of symbolism to social structure, the comparative cultural psychology of maenadism and other topics.[12]

From the foregoing list of scholars and their works, it would seem that in the West there has been a long-continuing relationship between the Greek Classics and anthropology. One may ask whether there have been similar attempts with regard to the application of anthropological notions to the classical Tamil literature. An answer to this question would naturally involve a survey of past works of Tamil scholars relating to the classical Tamil literature, to which we turn now briefly.

V. Kanakasabhai and P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar serve as the foremost examples of classical Tamil scholars in an earlier period who would seem to have been receptive to the fact that ancient Tamil literature cannot be profitably studied in a cultural vacuum, and who therefore felt the need to interpret the Tamil classics from a cultural angle for the reconstruction of early Tamil society and prehistory.

V. Kanakasabhai's contribution began with the publication of a series of articles on "The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago" in the *Madras Review* between 1895 and 1901, which was then followed by the publication in 1904 of all the articles in the form of a book entitled *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*. In this book, the author dealt with, among other topics, the geography of the ancient Tamil country, ancient Tamil foreign trade, Tamil races and tribes, the ancient ruling lineages, princes and chieftains, social life, religion and philosophy, of the period between A.D. 50 and A.D. 150. Considering the fact that several of the classical

[12] According to Kluckhohn, classicists in the West are moving in the direction of anthropology, "because the wider intellectual climate of our times favours generalizations and principles as opposed to particulars, theory in contrast to description, science, if you like, as opposed to the humanities... In an epoch when, for better or for worse, science is dominant on the intellectual horizon, it is not surprising that students of the oldest humanity (Classical studies) find something congenial in that science (Anthropology) which has along with its scientific aspect deep humanistic roots..." — *Anthropology and the Classics.*

Tamil literary works were not available in properly edited and printed form in his time, V. Kanakasabhai's pioneering efforts to make use of the poems (many of which still remained in palm-leaf manuscripts) for the reconstruction of early Tamil social history, are indeed highly commendable. (Another notable feature of the author's work is that he made a pioneering attempt to reconstruct the geography of the ancient Tamil country and her foreign trade with the help of non-Tamil and non-Indian sources of information such as J. W. McCrindle's translation of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* and of *Ptolemy's Geography of India and Southern Asia.)*

P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar's pioneering work in the field of Tamil studies started with a course of lectures on *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture* which he delivered at the University of Madras when he was a Reader in Indian History, and the lectures were later published in the Journal of Indian History, Volume VII. His next important contribution was his monumental work, *History of the Tamils from the earliest times to 600* A.D., which was published in 1929. That the author had in fact intended to make use of the classical Tamil literature anthropologically for his historical work is evident especially in the earlier portions of his work. In his Introduction he wrote: ".....If history means the account of the slow evolution of the social and religious life of a people under the stimulus of the geographical conditions of the environment and the influence of contact with peoples who have developed different kinds of culture, the description of slow change in the ways in which they ate and drank, played and loved, sang and danced, paid court to kings and to gods, the relation of the story of the development of their internal trade and commerce with foreign countries, far and near, the narration of the evolution of their literature from humble beginnings till a complicated scheme of literary convention was established, there are ample materials (in the classical Tamil poetry) for the reconstruction of the history of the Tamils from the earliest times up to 600 A.D."

Though the author has included non-Tamil sources as well for his work on the history of the Tamils, he has rightly pointed out that the kind of information obtainable from such sources (as for example, the Vedic literature, the Aryan sutras, Itihasas, Puranas

etc.) would only deal with the intercourse of the Aryas with the Tamils, and therefore, as he says, 'the staple crop' which he had garnered for the purpose of writing his book was the Tamil literature of the period before A.D. 600.

Furthermore, the author has stressed that he has based much of his deductions not only on the *Porulṭikāram* of the *Tolkāppiyam* ('treating the literary conventions which are described in the grammar as in fact representing the actual customs and manners of the people who lived for a millennium or two preceding its date'), but also on the more direct evidence of the several poems of different ages, collected in the anthologies. It is worth mentioning in this connexion that of the thirty chapters of his monumental work, the author devoted no less than fifteen chapters to the discussion of various social and cultural aspects of ancient Tamil life, for which, he says in his Introduction, he has hardly made use of more than *one-fourth* of the matter that could be mined from the early Tamil literature alone.

Now, of the contemporary expository and interpretative works on the classical Tamil literature, Professor Xavier S. Thani Nayagam's *Nature Poetry in Tamil: the Classical Period* and *The Typology of Ancient Indian Education*, as well as Professor M. Varadarajan's *The Treatment of Nature Poetry in Sangam Literature*, *Ovacceyti* (an interpretative study of a poem of *Akanāṉūṟu* collection), and *Ilakkiyakkalai* ('The art of literature'), have been very useful to me mainly because the authors of these works have given their readers a great deal insight into the *cultural background* of the early Tamil literature in addition to treating their subject matter from the point of view of a literary critic and historian.

Of course, I must also add, a number of other books, written in Tamil as well as in English by various authors on the classical Tamil literature from time to time in the recent past, have been of great help to me in providing a background to the actual literature, and some of these works have been mentioned in the bibliography.

Besides books, I must also mention one other source of knowledge which has been of fundamental importance to me, i.e. I refer to the many lectures which I was fortunate to attend while I was a student in the Madras Christian College and in the University of Malaya between 1953 and 1960. It was through the lectures that I

first got acquainted with the classical Tamil literature. In this connexion, I must mention that I am greatly indebted to Mr. M. Rajakkannu, formerly Head of the Department of Indian Studies in the University of Malaya, for it was he who first introduced and initiated me to the study of classical Tamil literature.

THE SCOPE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Having considered the sources and method of the present study, it now remains for me to conclude the introductory remarks by briefly outlining the scope of this work. It was my original aim to give the most rounded portrayal possible of the early Tamil social life. But now I must admit that I have to have limits which, for reasons of time, space, and competence, I cannot exceed. In spite of the delimitation of the original scope, an attempt has been made in the following pages to organize the social life of the early Tamils in terms of its principal aspects.

The material culture of the ancient Tamil communities at diverse levels of cultural achievement is treated under five main headings entitled Food, Agriculture, Barter, Means of Transport, and Dress, Ornament and Adornment.

The first heading considers the principal foodstuffs and beverages. Under Agriculture, the ancient methods of cultivation and irrigation are discussed, while in the subsequent chapter discussion centres around the origin and development of barter. The means of transport and communication is considered next, and the analysis of material culture ends with a discussion of the various functions of Dress, Ornament, and Adornment.

In the second part of this study early Tamil religious beliefs are described and explained under the principal headings of Animism and Totemism, while, in the third and final part, the chief elements of the ancient Tamil social structure are discussed in the chapters entitled *Nāṭu* and Family.

The assumption that underlies the presentation of topics as outlined thus is that of most descriptive and interpretative studies of culture. That is to say, the description moves from consideration of those aspects that satisfied the physical or material wants of people to the aspects that, in giving meaning to the universe, sanctioned everyday living and afforded men some of the deepest (spiritual) satisfactions, and finally to those aspects that ordered social relations.

PART ONE

HABITAT AND MATERIAL CULTURE

INTRODUCTORY -- HABITAT*

A Society has been defined as an organized, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life. In still simpler terms, a society is composed of people.[1] But one must hasten to add that, of late, ethnologists and cultural anthropologists have come to believe that a definition such as the one cited above, would be rather too narrow to encompass various aspects of social life of human beings.

Some of the enthnologists and cultural anthropologists in the West would seem to have come to this simple but vital conclusion only after coming in contact with certain tribes in Australia whose social life they have studied. For some of the scholars it has been a matter of no little surprise to find that for the native Australian, (apart from human beings) things themselves, everything which is in the universe are part of the tribe; that they are constituent elements of it, and so to speak, regular members of it; just like men, the things have a determined place in the general scheme of organization of the society. "The South Australian savages," Fison exclaims, "looks upon the universe as the Great Tribe, to one of whose divisions he himself belongs; and all things, animate and inanimate, which belong to his class are parts of the body-corporate, whereof he himself is a part." (Fison, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, p.170.)

Now, how much more astounding would it have been to the ethnologists like Fison, Tylor, Durkheim and others, if they had been only aware of the fact that the ancient Tamil grammarians, especially the author of the earliest grammatical treatise which is extant, namely, the *TOLKĀPPIYAM*, had arrived at a somewhat similar conclusion nearly two thousand years ago in the Tamil country.

In so far as men were thought of as anything more than biological organisms or mere animals, they were, in the Tamil grammarian, Tolkāppiyar's phrase, biological organisms endowed with the sixth sense of the mind or reason, in addition to the five senses

* "*Habitat* — the natural setting of human existence — the physical features of the region inhabited by a group of people: its natural resources, actually or potentially available to the inhabitants: its climate, altitude, and other geographical features to which they have adapted themselves."
— M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, p.95.

[1] Ibid., p.316.

of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. In the ancient Tamil grammatical treatise, *TOLKĀPPIYAM*, the animate world is classified into six classes on the basis of the sensory organs of practically all living creatures.[2]

The plant life such as grass, trees, plants, and creepers is said to have been endowed with one: sense of touch *(tactile)*; the mollusc life such as snail, oyster, conch, and shell with two: senses of touch and taste *(gustatory)* ; the hymenopterous creatures (with membraneous wings) such as termites and ants with three, senses of touch, taste and smell *(olfactory)*; the crustacean creatures such as crabs, lobsters, and bees with four: senses of touch, taste, smell, and sight *(visual)*; the animal species including birds and beasts with five: senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing *(auditory)*; and human beings with six: senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing and the mind or reasoning. (According to this classification, it would imply that those human beings, in whom the sixth sense of the mind or reasoning is not awakened, are placed in the category of beasts. In literary usage, the term, *makkaḷ* (மக்கள்) denotes, generally, rational beings, and the term, *mākkaḷ* (மாக்கள்) signifies those human beings who are devoid of reason.[3])

Besides this fundamental differentiation of the living creatures, human beings were also thought of as participating with the other species in the life of the *Tiṇai* (திணை). (The noun substantive, *Tiṇai* is said to have been derived from the root, *tiṇ* (திண்) n.eaning a 'stretch of land',[4] marking a topographical entity by itself.) Essentially, the early Tamils' relationship or companionship, not only with their own species but also with the other species in the physical milieu of the *Tiṇai* (திணை), constituted their society.

There does not seem to be any modern institution corresponding exactly to the concept of the ancient Tamil *Tiṇai* (although it might correspond with the Greek 'ἔθνος' *ethnos* or 'Nation'). Like the modern *state*, it denoted a distinct topographical unit, but its scope was far wider, for it combined the plant life, the birds and the beasts, human beings, their tribes and clans, their state, their gods, and their society. Even the clan and its collective aspects of eco-

[2] *Tol.* 1526 — 1532.
[3] R. P. Sethu Pillai, *Words And Their Significance*, p.9.
[4] P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, *History of the Tamils from the earliest times to 600* A.D., p.3.

nomic aquisition would seem to have been included in its domain, perhaps largely because the individual, unlike in later days, did not in the modern sense constitute a being with his own independent aims and values apart from the consensus in which he participated in the physical milieu of the respective *Tiṇai*.

The early Tamil social thought divided the Tamil 'world' into five regions, namely, the montane, the arid, the pastoral, the riverine or agricultural, and the littoral or coastal regions — which also would seem to correspond to the natural order of the earth's surface — and developed a distinct conception of social life peculiar to each of the five regions (or *Tiṇai*). This five-fold 'cosmological' conception would also seem to have become fused with the then developing rules or conventions of classical Tamil poetry, which, while possessing essentially the same objective and truthful conception of the *Tiṇai*s, came to reflect from a very early date, the actual life in the five regions of the Tamil land; the classical Tamil poems which were prior or heir to the five-fold classification of poetry,[5] came to be named after the most significant flora of the five regions, i.e. Kuṟiñci (montane), *Pālai* (arid), *Mullai* (pastoral), *Marutam* (riverine), and *Neytal* (littoral).

Each of the regions was essentially conceived as a *total web of life* in itself, wherein particular species of plants including cereal food plants, flowers, and trees, certain species of fowl and animals, particular groups or clans of human beings together with their deities, interacted with one another and with the physical features of the landscape, climate, and even diurnal periods of day and night. Again, in this conception, the use of particular types of tools and artifacts, the existence of particular types of dwellings of shelter found in settlements, particular types of food and other material adjuncts of existence were not overlooked. Besides, communities or clans of human beings as determined by occupations or by means of subsistence and pastimes, their folk music with musical instruments, and even marriage patterns in each environment have been regarded as crucial in the differentiation of local populations and in the emergence of varieties of ways of life. Moreover, the earliest Tamil grammarians would seem to have recognized that the web of life of any particular group belonging to any particular region

[5] *Tol.* 948; 951.

might extend far beyond the immediate physical environment and therefore they prescribed what is known as "Regional Interchange"[6] (திணை மயக்கம்) which, in the classical Tamil poetic convention, meant that the flora or the fauna or any of the other objects of one region might be mentioned in a poem pertaining to another region, for even nature is not rigorous in her natural divisions as to be so exclusive. However, the deities were regarded as exclusive to one region.[7]

In speaking of the *Bellinger River tribe* of Australia, Palmer[8] says: "All nature is also divided into class names." Again, the Port Mackay tribe in Queensland is said to have two classes or phratries with the names of *Yungaroo* and *Wootaroo*, among whom all things, animate and inanimate are divided by these tribes into two classes, named *Yungaroo* and *Wootaroo*. Besides, the men of each phratry are said to be distributed among a certain number of clans; likewise, the things attributed to each phratry are in their turn distributed among the clans of which the phratry is composed. A certain tree, for example, is said to be assigned to the Kangaroo clan, and to it alone; then just like the human members of the clan, it will have the kangaroo as totem; another will belong to the snake clan; clouds will be placed under one totem, the sun under another, etc. All known things will thus be arranged in a sort of tableau or schematic classification embracing the whole of nature.[9]

The systematic classifications are also said to have been modelled upon the social organization, or rather that they have taken the forms of society as their framework. In classifying things, they would also seem to have limited themselves to giving them places in the groups they formed themselves. *The different classes of things*

[6]*Tol.* 958.

[7]"Mountains may exist as barriers, as suppliers of raw materials, as elements in the landscape, as factors in influencing climate, or in other capacities; and so with rivers and other aspects of the habitat. *Nor must we, for a moment, in sketching the environment of man, neglect those unseen beings that people the habitat....* It is a commonplace that in any culture where belief is strong one can actually encounter those who have seen supernatural beings. In our mechanistic universe, multitudes still people graveyards with ghosts whose presence, even for those who do not acknowledge them, is sufficiently a part of that particular detail of their habitat to make them reluctant to visit such a spot late at night."

— M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, pp.106 — 107.

[8]Notes on Some Australian Tribes, *J. A. I.*, XIII, p.300.

[9]Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, p.168.

are not merely put next to each other, but they are arranged according to a unified plan, because the social groups with which they commingle, themselves are unified, and through their union, form an organic whole, the tribe. In other words, it is because men are organized that they are able to organize things.

In the ancient Tamil classification, of the human beings inhabiting each of the five regional landscapes mentioned above, the titular head or the chieftain of the tribal group and his wife were distinguished from other members of the regional tribe which would also seem to have been classified into two 'phratries'.

Thus, in the mountains, hills and hilly tracts (such as those covered by the present day Palani hills, the Nilgris, and the Western Ghats, in South India) the distinguished chieftain was known as *Poruppaṉ*, *Veṟppaṉ* or *Cilampaṉ* while his spouse was known as *Koṭicci* or *Kuṟatti*. The montane tribe, of which the *Poruppaṉ* was the chieftain, was divided into two main phratries. The members of the two phratries were known as *Kāṇavar* and *Kuṟavar* while their female companions were known as *Kuṟattiyar*.

In the arid region (the half hilly and rocky parts of the Tamil country), the chieftain was called *Viṭalai* or *Kāḷai*, whose spouse was either *Mīḷi* or *Eyiṟṟi*. The members of his tribe were those belonging to the two phratries of *Eyiṉar*, and the *Maṟavar* whose women were *Maṟattiyar*.

In the pastoral region (such as the meadows between Trichinopoly and Maturai, and Salem and Coimbatore Districts of the present day South India), the head of the pastoral people was *Kuṟumporaiṉāṭaṉ*, also known as *Tōṉṟal* with his spouse being referred to as either Kiḻatti or *Maṉaivi*. The phratries of the pastoral region were the *Āyar* with their mates known as *Āycciyar*, and the *Iṭaiyar* with their womenfolk *Iṭaicciyar*.

In the riverine plains (i.e. agricultural regions such as those of Tanjore District), where, incidentally, civilization was more advanced than in the other regions just mentioned, the leader of the settlement was known as *Makiḻnaṉ* or *Ūraṉ* whose wife was called *Maṉaivi* or *Kiḻatti*. The members of the settlement who were mostly agricultural people were divided into two groups of *Uḻavar* with their *Uḻattiyar* and *Kaṭaiyar* with their *Kaṭaicciyar*.

In the littoral region (localities peripheral to backwaters, water-

logged tanks and lakes and the coastal region of the Tamil land), the tribal chief was known as *Cērppaṉ* or *Pulampaṉ* with his wife being known as *Paratti* or *Nuḷaicci*. There would seem to have been three phratries in this region, namely, *Paratar* with *Parattiyar* (female), *Nuḷaiyar* with their *Nuḷaicciyar*, and *Aḷavar* with their *Aḷattiyar*.

The classification did not stop there. Just as the men and women of each regional tribe were classified or distributed among a certain number phratries (and later even into clans), the objects or things attributed to each regional tribe, would in their turn seem to have been distributed among the phratries (or clans) of which the regional tribe was composed.

These objects or things which were collectively known as *Karupporuḷ* (கருப்பொருள்), were regarded as the most *exclusive and indigenous* to each of the five regions, and therefore formed the essential elements of classical Tamil poetry.

Now, as for the objects, the author of *Tolkāppiyam*, has briefly referred only to eight classes of objects, namely, the deity (தெய்வம்), foodstuff (உணவு), tree (மரம்), fauna (விலங்கு), avifauna (புள்), instrument of percussion (பறை), occupation or pastime (செய்தி), and musical (stringed) instrument (யாழ்):

> "தெய்வ முணவே மாமர மாபுட் பறைசெய் தியாழின் பகுதியொடு தொகைஇ
> அவ்வகை பிறவும் கருவென மொழிப."
>
> — *Tol.* 964.

The phrase, *'avvakai piṟavum'*, (i.e. 'also others of that kind') (அவ்வகை பிறவும்) in the above-mentioned verse of *Tolkāppiyam*, would seem to warn us that the author has limited himself to enumerating only some of the objects. But through a grammatical work of later period, namely, *Nampi-Akapporuḷ* of Nāṟkavirāca-Nampi, we have more extended information, for the author of this work has added six more 'objects' to the list, namely 'the tribal chieftain, the phratries, water-resources, settlement, flowers, and musical tune'.

The following chart will show the *fourteen* 'objects' which have been thought to belong to each of the five regional landscapes of the ancient Tamil country, and having the chart as a background, I shall attempt to explore in the ensuing chapters how the ancient Tamils reacted to their various habitats.

CLASSIFICATION OF *KARUPPORUI* ('OBJECTS')

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)		(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
REGIONS	**PHRATRIES** (Inhabitants)	**FAUNA** (Animals)	**AVIFAUNA** (Birds)	**FLORA** (Flowers)	**TREES**	**OCCUPATION AND**	**PASTIMES/ FESTIVITIES**	**FOODSTUFFS**	**WATER-RESOURCES**	**DRUM**	**MUSICAL INSTRUMENT**	**MUSICAL TUNE**	**SETTLEMENT**	**TITLES OF CHIEFTAIN AND HIS SPOUSE**	**DEITY**
MONTANE *(Kuṟiñci)*	*Kuṟavar* (m), *Kuṟattiyar* (f), *Kāṉavar* (m).	Tiger, Bear, Elephant, Lion, Ram.	Peacock, Parrot.	*Kuṟiñci (Strobilanthus), Veṅkai* (flower of Kino tree), *Gloriosa superba. Kaṭampu (Eugenia racemosa).*	Bamboo, Sandal wood. Teak, Aquila, *Acoka (Uvaria longifolia), Nākam,* Margosa.	Hunting, Digging roots, Gathering honey, Seasonal cultivation of hill-paddy and millet.	*Veṟi-ātal* (Frenzied dancing), Bathing in hill stream, Bird-driving.	Meat, Hill paddy-rice, Bamboo rice, Millet, Honey, Roots.	Hill streams, and pools.	*Toṇṭakam*	*Kuṟiñci* lyre	*Kuṟiñci*	*Ciṟukuṭi*	*Poruppaṉ* (m) *Veṟpaṉ* (m), or *Cilampaṉ* (m), *Kuṟatti* or *Koṭicci* (f).	Murukaṉ or Cēy.
ARID *(Pālai)*	*Eyiṉar* (m), *Eyiṟṟiyar* (f), *Maṟavar* (m), *Maṟattiyar* (f).	Jackal, Ass.	Eagle, Vulture, Pigeon.	*Pālai (Mimuscops Hexandrus), Kurāmpū (Webera corymbosa).*	*Pālai, Ōmai (Salvadara persica), Iruppai (Bassia longifolia), Uḻiñai (Oerva lanater).*	Soldiering, Marauding, Highway robbery.		Meat, Grass-rice, Roots.	Stagnant water in pits. Liquor.	*Tuṭi*	*Pālai* lyre	*Pañcuram*	*Kuṟumpu*	*Viṭalai* (m), *Kāḷai* (m), or *Mīḷi* (m). *Eyiṟṟi* (f).	Turkkai, Kaṉṉi, or Koṟṟavai.
PASTORAL *(Mullai)*	*Āyar* (m), *Āycciyar* (f), *Iṭaiyar* (m), *Iṭaicciyar* (f).	Gazelle, Wild hare, Cow, Bull, Sheep, Goat.	Wild fowl	Jasmine *(Mullai), Koṉṟai (Cassia), Kullai (Cannabis), Piṭavam, Tōṉṟi.*	*Koṉṟai (Cassia). Kāyā, Kuruntam.*	Minor cultivation of crops like *varaku, cāmai* etc., Shepherding, Cowherding.	*Kuravai* dance, Bull-fighting, River-bathing.	*Varaku, Cāmai, Mutirai,* Milk and milk products.	Rivers, Tanks.	*Ēṟaṅkōl*	*Mullai* lyre	*Cātāri*	*Pāṭi*	*Kuṟumpoṟai-nāṭaṉ* (m), or *Tōṉṟal* (m). *Maṉaivi* (f), or *Kiḻatti* (f).	Neṭumāl, or Tirumāl.
AGRICULTURAL *(Marutam)*	*Uḻavar* (m), *Uḻattiyar* (f), *Kaṭaiyar* (m), *Kaṭaicciyar* (f).	Buffalo, Otter, Freshwater fish, Carp.	Heron, Swan, Water-fowl, Duck.	Aquatic plants, Lotus, Water-lily.	*Marutam (Terminalia alata), Kāñci, Vañci.*	Farming, Harvesting, Threshing.	River-bathing, Festivals, (agricultural).	Paddy-rice, Sugar-cane.	River, Pond, Lake, Well.	*Kiṇai (For harvesting). Muḻavu (For wedding etc.)*	*Marutam* lyre	*Marutam*	*Pērūr*	*Ūraṉ* (m), or *Makiḻnaṉ* (m). *Kiḻatti* (f), or *Maṉaivi* (f).	Intiraṉ, or Vēṇṭaṉ.
LITTORAL *(Neytal)*	*Nuḻaiyar* (m), *Nuḻaicciyar* (f), *Aḻavar* (m), *Aḻattiyar* (f), *Paratar* (m), *Parattiyar* (f).	Shark, Fish.	Sea-gull.	*Neytal (Nymphae alba), Tāḻampū (Pandanus), Muṇṭakam, Aṭampam,* Water-lily, Water-hyacinth.	Alexandrine laurel, Mangrove.	Coastal and inland fishing, Deep-sea fishing, Drying the fish, Making salt, Pearl-diving, Selling fish.	Sailing, Bird-driving, Sea-bathing, Playing on sea-shore, Worshipping of skeleton of shark.	Fish, and products obtained from other regions through barter.	Sea, Salt lakes, Sea-side canals.	*Mīṉ-kōl (For fishing). Nāvāy (For sailing).*	*Viḻari*	*Sevvaḻi*	*Pākkam, Paṭṭiṇam.*	*Cērppaṉ* (m), or *Pulampaṉ* (m). *Paratti* (f), or *Nuḻaicci* (f).	Varuṇaṉ

CHAPTER ONE

FOOD

Foodstuffs of human beings are usually recognized of two kinds, animal and plant, used either in their wild state, or in a state of domestication.[10] The five-fold[11] classification that results from these alternatives has been for a long time used in anthropological studies relating to culture as the basis for distinguishing the different economic systems of ancient people or those of the existing 'non-literate' peoples, in the following manner:

ECONOMY	FOODS
Food gathering	Plant (wild)
Hunting	Animal (wild)
Herding or Stock-raising	Animal (domesticated)
Fishing	Animal
Agriculture (cultivation)	Plant (domesticated)

The order in which these are given was believed to be that in which the economies of human societies evolved. M. J. Herskovits in his *Cultural Anthropology*, writes: "There can be little question that gathering, hunting, and fishing existed long before herding or cultivation. This is well established by the archæological evidence. Before the beginning of the neolithic, life was lived on the basis of finding and utilizing the foods offered by the habitat with no way to control the supply except by knowledge of the location of roots, nuts, and berries, or of the habits of game animals. There are many peoples who, to the present, have neither domesticated plants nor domesticated food animals. Among these gatherers are the Indians of the

[10]At a very early time, the Tamil poets would seem to have differentiated the vegetable or plant food into that which grew wild and that which was raised by cultivation. For example the poet, Kapilar, singing of his patron, Pāri, a hill chieftain, refers to the abundance of four main articles of plant food that were not produced by the ploughmen and, the articles were bamboo rice, jack fruit, tuber of *Vaḷḷi*, and honey. Honey was also regarded as a vegetable food perhaps because it was nothing but the nectar of flowers — *Puram*, 109: 3 — 8.

[11]If 'food gathering' and 'hunting' are to be considered together, then it will be a 'four-fold' classification. See Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, pp.123 — 124.

California and Great Basin areas, the peoples having 'marginal' cultures in the eastern and southern open country of South America, the pygmies of Central Africa, and elsewhere, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Andaman islands. Hunting peoples include the Eskimo, most of the Canadian Indians and Plains Indians, the South African Bushmen, and the Australian aborigines — though these last two are as much food gatherers as they are hunters.[12]

In the context of the above-mentioned anthropological classification of foodstuffs of the present day non-literate or primitive peoples, it will be perhaps instructive and useful to note that the ancient Tamil grammarians (like the author of *Tolkāppiyam* and even those before him) had arrived at nearly the same conclusion, when they classified, among other things, the occupations and foodstuffs of various people who were inhabiting the five types of physical milieu of the ancient Tamil country. As one may infer from the chart of "Classification of Objects" which might also be described as a kind of an 'element list',[13] the principal occupations and food habits varied from people to people inhabiting various regions. Thus, for example, the hill dwellers placed their major dependence on game; the *Eyiṉar* of the arid tracts, in spite of their economic scarcity, do not seem to have faced the possibility of death through starvation, for they could either eat meat or grass roots, or they could live on food obtained through marauding. The *Āyar* of the pastoral region had milk and milk products, while the agriculturists had plenty of paddy and sugar cane and, the littoral dwellers had fish to eat.

But, one must hasten to state that, in spite of people's major dependence on a particular diet, none of them would seem to have restricted themselves to single and exclusive 'economies' (or occupations), and instead they are actually known to have supplemented

[12] Op.cit., pp.124 — 125.

[13] Julian H. Steward (*Theory of Culture Change*, 1955), refers to the 'elements list' of the Great Basin Shoshonean Indians, which breaks the culture down into details such as basket weavers and shapes, religious beliefs, social practices, and other details, includes a total of about *3000* items. "By comparison, the U.S. forces landing at Casa Balanca during World War II unloaded 500,000 items of material equipment alone. The total 'elements' of modern American Culture would probably run to several million." (p.102).

their food by additional or some other items of foodstuff, which either they themselves raised or obtained from other regions through a system of barter which will be discussed in some detail subsequently.[14]

The people supplemented their usual diet with other items of food, probably because of the nature of dietary requirements.[15] (For example, carbohydrate diet of rice had to be seasoned by, say, meat.) Furthermore, a diet restricted to meat or rice would have been monotonous, as indeed the rice diet is said to have been to those people who lived in huts built on the ridges, and who therefore 'rejected' the lumps of old cooked rice:

"பழஞ்சோற் றமிலை முனைஇ வரம்பிற்
புதுவை வேய்ந்த கவிகுடின் முன்றி
லவலெறி யுலக்கைப் பாடுவிறந் தயல.."
— Perumpan., 224 — 226.

A general survey of the classical Tamil literary evidence relating to the food habits of people belonging to the various regions of the ancient Tamil country reveals that they made much use of vegetable food[16] in addition to meat.

The vegetable food which was used since the earliest times, would seem to have fallen into two main categories, namely, edible tubers and cereals.

Among the edible tubers of root nature were such indigenous food plants as ginger,[17] *cēmpu (Caladium nympæifolium),* and turmeric.[18] Of the tubers of stem nature, there was the *valli*[19] (*Dioscorea sativa*), a kind of woody creeper.

[14]"People do not live at economic stages. They possess economies; and again we do not find single and exclusive economies but combinations of them." — C.D. Forde, *Habitat, Society, and Economy: A Geographical Introduction To Anthropology,* p.461.

[15]"Even the Eskimo, forced by their habitat to eat nothing else during the long winter, in summer become food gatherers and taboo eating the flesh of sea mammals. Similarly it is difficult to think of any people, even with a well-advanced agricultural system, who do not supplement their garden produce by hunting. As in all aspects of culture, we find that clear-cut classifications are difficult..." — M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology,* p.124.

[16]*Malai.*, 174 — 183; ibid., 203; *Kuru.*, 214 : 1 — 3; *Perumpan.*, 90 — 94; ibid., 130 — 131; *Puram.*, 176 : 1 — 4; ibid., 61 : 5 — 8; *Mullai.*, 7 — 10; *Paṭṭiṇappālai,* 27 — 30.

[17]*Malai.*, 125 — 126.

[18]Ibid., 343 — 344.

[19]*Puram.*, 109 : 6.

The cereals, whether cultivated or uncultivated, comprised the most important group of vegetable food for people in the ancient Tamil country. The principal cereals were paddy-rice, panicum, and millet. Of these, the most important cereal would seem to have been paddy-rice, for it was not only the most nourishing but also it could be made into a kind of beer known as *tōppi*, which was, as we shall see subsequently, indispensable to religious ceremonial and to social festivity. The classical Tamil poetry has evidence to show that rice-paddy in one form or the other was widely distributed in various regions of the ancient Tamil country.[20]

Principal Uses

The cereals furnished not only the principal food of human beings, but also the principal feed of animals[21] and fowl[22] on which people depended for meat, milk, leather,[23] wool, and eggs. The cereal plants, besides yielding the food grains, provided also the stalks[24] which were used as thatches for dwellings of people. In this triple role, the cereal grasses sustained life of the early Tamil communities, and were in fact the basis of living standards.

Now, turning to some of the particular uses of cereals, one finds that the pre-agricultural man ate the grains raw, of course together with meat.[25] Even the agricultural folk, who were used to cook the cereals by boiling, would seem to have occasionally had a raw grain diet,[26] as is evident from the idyll, *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai*, in which the poet, Uruttiraṅkaṇṇaṉār, has said that since those people, living in the slanting huts situated on ridges, grew tired of eating lumps of old cooked rice, they pounded the unhusked paddy by means of pestles and thus prepared the food known as *aval*.

There was also the custom of parching the cereals like paddy-rice.[27] 'Parching' or roasting foodstuffs was known as *uṇaṅkal* (உணங்கல்). In the montane region, people are known to have

[20] *Kurin.*, 35; *Malai.*, 120 — 121; *Matu.*, 286 — 288; *Malai.*, 114 — 115; *Kuru.*, 100 : 1; *Perumpan.*, 130 — 131; *Mull.*, 7 — 10; *Puram.*, 61 : 5 — 8; *Matu.*, 261 — 262; *Paṭṭin.*, 27 — 30.
[21] *Puram.*, 44 : 1 — 2; ibid., 184 : 1 — 4; *Perumpan.*, 147 — 148.
[22] *Matu.*, 291 — 293.
[23] *Perumpan.*, 151.
[24] *Perumpan.*, 150.
[25] *Malai.*, 563 — 566.
[26] *Perumpan.*, 224 — 226.
[27] *Perumpan.*, 473.

parched or dried their cereals, especially panicum, upon the rocks.[28] And that among the coastal people also there was the custom of drying the grain in the sun, is seen in the idyll, *Paṭṭiṉappālai*.[29] (The ancient practice has survived to this day in that the rural folk in South India almost always make it a point to dry the grain in the sun before pounding it in wooden mortars, or sending it to the village rice-mill for getting it ground, or unhusked.) It was probably from the early habit of parching the cereal or even roasting the meat either in the sun or over the fire that cooked food (of both grains or greens and meat) came to be referred to by the general term, *uṇavu* (உணவு), which was perhaps derived from the verbal root, *uṇ* (உண்), meaning 'parch' or 'burn'.

That the pre-agricultural people of the arid region also ground or pounded their meagre cereals and cooked a kind of gruel is evident from the idyll, *Perumpāṉārṟuppaṭai*, in which the author describes rather vividly how the white-toothed women *(Eyiṟṟiyar)*, after plucking the soft 'rice-roots' of certain grasses by digging the earth with a sort of hoe, and pounding the grains with short, strong, pestles in improvised mortars which were actually pits made in the ground, mixed the substance with the subterranean brine which they seem to have obtained with great difficulty from a spring located far down in a deep, near-bottomless, pit (it was a dry 'desert' region), cooked and served together with salted meat on teak leaves.[30]

As mentioned above, people, especially of the agricultural region, also ate boiled food, made of paddy-rice as well as of its flour.[31] Indeed, a great favourite item of food in those days (as even in these days) was the rice gruel or porridge which was known as *kūḻ*[32] (கூழ்) when it was thin, and *kaḷi*[33] (களி) when it was prepared thick. Also, the rice gruel or porridge would seem to have been a great delicacy particularly if it was mixed with the pleasant,

[28] *Kuru.*, 335 : 2; *Nar.*, 344 : 11 — 12.
[29] *Pattin.*, 22.
[30] *Perumpan.*, 91 — 104.
[31] Ibid., 343; *Malai.*, 180 — 183.
[32] *Perumpan.*, 325 — 327.
[33] Ibid., 275.

acidulous, and sweet, pulp of tamarind fruit.[34]

It is also significant to note in this connexion that, while those who lived in the montane, arid, and even pastoral regions ate their food generally in porridge or gruel form, people of the riverine plains, who were culturally more advanced, strained the starchy water[35] of the rice gruel and, this starchy water known as *kañci* (கஞ்சி) was used in the laundry as a stiffener, because of its starch value.

Besides the practice of boiling cereals for food, there was also the custom of steaming the moistened and kneaded flour for making bread and cakes. The occupational group of people known as *kūviyar*[36] (mainly in urban areas) would seem to have specialized in the art of 'baking'. The small round[37] cakes which they baked either over fire or perhaps on flat, hot, stones, would also seem to have been superseded soon by the more satisfactorily formented product made in pans using jelly. That the people living in urban settlements were served by members of the baker's craft is confirmed by Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, the author of the idyll, *Maturaikkāñci*, in which he has referred to the traders of cakes who also did the baking.[38]

[34]*Malai.*, 435 — 436.
[35]*Matu.*, 721; *Netu.*, 134 — 135.
[36]*Perumpan.*, 377 — 378.
[37]*Matu.*, 395 — 396.
[38]Ibid., 624 — 627.

The cakes which the traders baked were known as *mōtakam* (மோதகம்) a compound of rice-flour, pulses, coconut, and sugar. As for the art of making them, the present-day typical Tamil housewife uses the same inherited rule of palm procedures in kneading the dough and other ingredients of *mōtakam* (also known as *koḻukkaṭṭai*) before steaming, which do not seem to differ fundamentally from the procedures described in the following lines of the idyll, *Maturaikkāñci:*

"நல்வரி பிரசல் புரைபு மெல்லடை
யயிருருப் புற்ற வாடமை விசயன்
கவவொடு பிடித்த வகையமை மோதகந்
திஞ்சேற்றுக் கூவியர் தாங்குவன ருறங்க..."
— *Matu.*, 624 — 627.

The following line in the passage quoted above, " திஞ்சேற்றுக் கூவியர் தாங்குவன ருறங்க.. " is significant, because it refers to one of the characteristic practices of bakers, to be found all over the world, i.e. night work was the characteristic of cake traders in the ancient city of Maturai. The nature of the production process and the time involved had perhaps made it expedient for the cake traders to work at night, if they were to supply their clientele with the fresh '*mōtakam*' at an early morning hour.

BEVERAGES

The early Tamils are also known to have made use of certain cereals, especially paddy-rice, for making or distilling alcoholic beverage known as *tōppi*[39] (தோப்பி), which would seem to have been different from other alcoholic drinks such as *naṟavu*[40] (நறவு), *kaḷ*[41] (கள்) or *tēṉ*[42] (தேன்), made of the flowers' nectar.

In order to know more about the alcoholic beverages used by the early Tamils, it would perhaps be convenient to classify them as beer, wine, and distilled liquor. The ancient Tamil beer was known as *tōppi*, produced by the fermentation of paddy rice. It was in use not only in the montane region where the beverage was made of 'bamboo rice' and stored in hollow bamboo stem,[43] but also in almost all the other regions.[44]

As *tōppi* was a beer made of paddy-rice, it should have actually become one of the important beverages of the agricultural region, but somehow it did not become so important, perhaps because people of the riverine plains preferred the second category of alcoholic beverage, namely, wine.

The wines used by the ancient Tamils were the fermented juices of palms, such as the palmyra[45] (or coconut palms as in later days), also sugar cane, and even of flowers.[46] Besides, there was mead — fermented honey[47] — which also might be classified as a wine. The palmyra palm wine was referred to as *peṉṉai-piḻi* (பெண்ணைபிழி) and it was much in use in the agricultural and littoral regions.

The origin of distillation is somewhat obscure, but there are some references in the classical poetry to a certain alcoholic beverage known as *tēṟal* (தேறல்), probably produced by some kind of distillation,[48] and it is said to have been a very strong liquor.

[39] *Perumpan.*, 142.
[40] *Cirupan.*, 51.
[41] *Perumpan.*, 213 — 214.
[42] *Malai.*, 522.
[43] *Malai.*, 171 —172; *Puram.*, 129 : 1 — 2; *Tiru.*, 195 — 196.
[44] *Perumpan.*, 141 — 142; *Puram.*, 125 : 7 — 8; *Matu.*, 137.
[45] *Pattin.*, 89.
[46] *Akam.*, 150 : 11.
[47] Ibid., 2 : 4.
[48] *Cirupan.*, 155 — 159.

Besides alcoholic beverages, there was the kumiss or *tayir* as well as butter-milk or *mōr* which were favourite drinks of shepherd folk, known

The universal prevalence of alcoholic beverages in ancient cultures is sometimes explained by the scarcity and uncertainty of pure water. This view seems to be confirmed by the Tamil literary evidence found especially in poems relating to the arid or 'desert' region where the people known as Maṟavar who, when faced with the problems of shortage of water in pits due to lack of rain, are said to have used wine which they obtained by bartering the cows (which they had previously stolen from elsewhere).[49]

Again, among the ancient people, alcoholic beverages are known to have been used variously as a common drink in ceremonies, dances, and similar social occasions to stimulate merry-making, and even as an offering to the deity. The partaking of alcoholic beverage on occasions of festive dances like *kuravai*[50] (குரவை), and, the offering of *kaḷ* (கள்) at the memorial stones[51] of great heroes, are mentioned in several verses of classical Tamil literature.

Furthermore, the ancient Tamils, like people in other parts of the world, had found in age-long experience that, in general, alcoholic beverages were pleasant rather than painful in their physical and psychosmatic effects upon the organism and useful to the physiological need to a degree that they would seem to have considered them as legitimate items of food. Alcohol in moderate amounts is said to be completely oxidized or burned in the human body, yielding energy for use in muscular work and in the maintenance of body temperature. This fact, by definition, makes alcohol a *food*. Thus in its normal use as distinguished from its excessive use, alcohol had been important as food in the ancient Tamil country.[52]

Finally, alcoholic beverages are known to have been used as facilitating agents to social relations between human beings. The beverages in ordinary doses, served in cups or even in bowls as was

as *Āyar*. The women of pastoral regions are said to have carried the milk products to other regions and bartered them for the goods of those regions. (*Perumpaṇ.*, 158—168). The kumiss or *tayir* would also seem to have been available in the montane region where the beverage, like the *tōppi*, is said to have been stored in the hollow bamboo stem. (*Malai.*, 109)

[49] *Perumpaṇ.*, 141 — 142.

[50] *Puram.*, 129 : 1 — 3.

[51] *Puram.*, 232 : 3 — 4.

[52] *Maṟu.*, 137; *Perumpaṇ.*, 339 — 340.

the practice among the ancient Tamils,[53] is a mild narcotic of rapid action because it is extremely diffusible and passes easily through all animal membranes. It thus brings about quickly a dimunition of function of the neural mechanisms of the highest level in the cerebral cortex which becomes evident especially in sparkling eyes of the person who takes it. The author of the idyll, *Perumpāṉārṟuppaṭai*, has described the eyes of certain young maidens who had taken such a beverage as having had a charming, cool, sparkle.[54] This was of course said by an ancient Tamil poet, Uruttiraṉkaṇṇaṉār. A modern writer, E. H. Starling, has described the resulting effects of alcoholic beverages upon the behaviour of those who drink them, in these words: "The self-consciousness and preoccupation of each man with his own affairs become lessened. He is more receptive of the moods and the interests of his companions. His emotional responses are more readily aroused; the solemn man unbends, the critical becomes charitable and sympathetic, the silent more loquacious. Each man thus not only reveals himself more to his fellows but is more ready to appreciate the merits and conversation of those who are around him. In a word, the use of alcohol, in moderation, promotes good fellowship."[55] The collective experience of the ancient Tamil bardic community and their munificent patrons, would seem to have demonstrated that such forms of behaviour which favoured social intercourse and relations were in no small measure due to generous flow of wine and beer on almost all social occasions when the bards and their patrons used to meet.

However, when alcohol is taken in excessive doses, its narcotic action is believed to extend from the highest neural levels to those lower and lower. If the amount taken should exceed, then the personality of the individual becomes completely disorganized or even reversed, and when that happens, he might be lulled either into slumber or sometimes even unto death. One *bacchanal* member of an ancient Tamil bardic troupe, Kaṭaiyattaṉ, whose poem is found in the *Puṟaṉāṉūṟu* collection, has referred to his patron as having been lulled into such a slumber.[56] The author of the idyll,

[53] *Perumpaṉ.*, 382; *Maṭu.*, 228.
[54] *Perumpaṉ.*, 386 — 387.
[55] E. H. Starling, *The Action of Alcohol on Man*, p.77.
[56] *Puṟam.*, 316 : 1 — 4.

Cirupāṇārruppaṭai, i.e. Nattattaṉār, has confirmed that the distilled liquor known as *tēṟal* could prove to be as fatal as the venom of a snake.[57]

If a bard had taken alcoholic beverage intemperately and was still awake, then he began unconciously to flout the conventions of prosody and music, as the colleagues of the Tamil bard, Vaṉparaṇar, are said to have done in playing on their lyres the *marutam* tune (மருதப்பண்) in the evening and, the *sevvaḻi* tune (செவ்வழிப்பண்) at dawn, which was contrary to the traditional practice of playing the *marutam* tune at dawn and, the *sevvaḻi* tune in the evening. The author obviously implies that the reverse action of his colleagues was mainly due to the good feast and the beverages of alcoholic nature, provided by their patrons, Perunaḷḷi.[58]

Chapter Two

AGRICULTURE

To begin with, let us now examine the literary data that are available on the many varieties of the paddy crop, the types of land used for cultivation, the role of men and women who cultivated the crop, the types of agricultural implements that were used, and the kinds of irrigation facilities that were available.

First, the paddy-rice would seem to have comprised of several types or sub-species; the principal among them were known as *veṇṇel* (வெண்ணெல்), *aivaṉaṉel* (ஐவனநெல்), *tōrai* (தோரை), *cennel* (செந்நெல்), and *putunel* (புதுநெல்). Of these species, the *veṇṇel*, the *aivaṉaṉel*, and the *tōrai* were found in the montane region[1] both in wild and in cultivated forms, while the *cennel* and the *putunel* were properly cultivated in the riverine plains.[2]

[57]*Cirupan.*, 237.
[58]*Puram.*, 149 : 1 — 5.
[1]*Malai.*, 114 — 115; *Kuru.*, 100 : 1 — 3; *Kurin.*, 35; *Malai.*, 120 — 121.
[2]*Pattin.*, 12 — 14; *Puram.*, 61 : 5 — 8.

In the hill region, the *vennel*, the *aivaṇam*, and the *tōrai* types of rice are said to have grown in wild form on the bamboo stem or *kaḷai*[3] (கழை), and it is also known to have been sown on hill slopes which were first cleared of the brush, probably for the special purpose of cultivation.[4]

PADDY FIELDS

Just as there would seem to have been varieties of rice and also various terms to refer to them, there were also varieties of fields for the cultivation of paddy which have been again referred to by various terms in the classical literature. Of these latter, the term, *pulam* (புலம்) — perhaps a derivative of the root, *pul* (புல்), meaning 'grass' or 'pasture' — is known to have denoted the paddy field in general. Though a predominantly pastoral environment might not have been very suitable for proper cultivation of paddy, nevertheless there is the possibility that the term might have had its origin in the practice of paddy cultivation in the pastoral region, however

[3]*Matu.*, 242; *Malai.*, 180 — 181.
It was already mentioned that paddy was used in other regions as well. In the arid region, the cooked paddy-rice is said to have resembled the red berries of *intu* palm *(Phoenix farinifera)* — *Perumpan*, 130 — 131; in the pastoral region, paddy was used in religious worship — *Mull*, 7 — 10. In the littoral region, people obtained paddy (obviously for food) in exchange for their salt on the basis of barter. — *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, 27 — 30.

[4]*Matu.*, 286 — 287.
"...it becomes clear, as we study the relations between culture and habitat, that man not only adapts himself to his natural setting, but as his adaptation becomes more effective, he is freed from the demands of his habitat, making it possible for him at times to challenge or even defy its limitations.
Rice cultivation in the Far East affords an excellent instance of how this operates. Though there are types of rice that grow where the ground is dry, the species of rice used in this part of the world is grown in irrigated paddies. It would seem obvious that flat land is essential for this sort of cultivation, for where else could the necessary pools of shallow water be maintained? Obviously, as the tradition of 'wet' rice growing and the taste for rice spread, either through borrowing or migration, or both, to regions where the land is rugged, a choice of adaptation or renunciation was forced.
Rice cultivation as carried on by the Ifugao of the Philippines shows how the knowledge of terracing, a technological development, permitted the growing of irrigated rice in a terrain that, on the face of it, would seem absolutely to forbid this. Rice grows to an altitude of five thousand feet, and the terraces that have been built up the mountain sides to reach this limit sometimes soar three thousand feet from the floor of the narrow valleys that lie between the mountains. With these terraces, the only requirement for growing 'wet' rice is that the water begins its flow at a point higher than the highest terrace. Then the stream can be directed

limited it might have been.[5] In this connexion, it may also be noted that traces of agriculture of a sort would seem to have been found in the semi-arid lands too, which were known as *puṉ-pulam*[6] (புன்புலம்).

Of course, agriculture on a larger scale, in segmented plots which were variously known as *vayal, ceṟu, kaḻani, paṇai*, and *paḻaṉam*,[7] was carried out in the riverine plains, and also to some extent in parts peripheral to the littoral tracts.

There are also references to reclamation of forest land for the purpose of paddy cultivation. Reclamation of land has been regarded the world over as a major factor in the advance of civilization, for it provided increase in land resources and therefore enlargement of opportunities for people to gain a livelihood from the soil. Projected to its full meaning, reclamation of land for cultivation, would include the improvement of lands requiring some degree of melioration such as clearing of jungle to make them fully useful, the construction of irrigation works, and the establishment, upon the reclaimed land, of a full complement of farmers' settlements together with other daily amenities such as a temple (for the people's daily worship). That there was such reclamation of land and establishment of farmers' settlements at the time of the Cōḻa ruler, Karikālan II (*circa* A.D. 75 — 100), is seen in the idyll of *Paṭṭiṉappālai*.[8]

FARMERS

With regard to the early Tamil agriculturist,[9] one finds that he

as needed from its source to the highest terrace, then to the next, and so on until all the 'fields' have the water they need. And the water, having finally dropped its silt in the calm pools through which it has been directed, joins the river in the valley bottom..." — M. J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, pp.103 — 104.

[5]*Perumpaṇ.*, 184; *Paṭṭiṉ.*, 12 — 13.

[6]*Puṟam.*, 18 : 24; ibid., 34 : 9.

[7]*Mull.*, 32 — 33; *Perumpaṇ.*, 211 — 213; *Puṟam.*, 13 : 11; *Cirupaṇ.*, 186; *Malai.*, 454 — 455.

[8]*Paṭṭiṉ.*, 283 — 286.

[9]The farmer was the head of the household or homestead known as *maṉai*. The farmer's wife was known as *maṉaivi* (மனைவி) i.e. one who stays frequently at the household, or *housewife*. Their domestic or family life was referred to as *maṉaiyaṟam* (மனையறம்). Their occupation was at first known as *Vēḷāṇmai* (வேளாண்மை) meaning 'power of managing or controlling the land,' while they themselves were referred to as *Vēḷāḷar* (வேளாளர்), i.e. 'those who manage land.' The term, *Vēḷāṇmai* later came to denote 'hospitality' which was an important characteristic of Tamil agriculturists in

was a tiller, i.e. *ulavar*[10] (உழவர்), of the soil, who earned his living with the help of his plough[11] (சால் வாழ்நர்), and to whom the land, which he and his family worked, offered both a home and a living. The early Tamil peasant economy, in the broad sense, was so stable that the chieftains of the agricultural population, *vēḷir* (வேளிர்), upon whose labour the entire world was very much dependent, are even said to have had the 'prerogative' to become rulers of other territories as well.[12] As we will have occasion to note in a later chapter, on account of the importance of their occupation, their daughters were much sought after in marriage by the rulers of other regions or territories.[13]

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Early Tamil agriculture was not only an important occupation of stability, but is also seen as a cooperative effort in which the adult members of the family, or even sometimes of the community as a whole, participated. In this joint effort, the role of women was of no small importance.

An important social aspect of early Tamil agriculture was the concerted effort needed to protect the cultivated crop. This was particularly evident in the attempts of cultivation in the hill region or even in forest clearing where even a small plot of growing plants, like panicum or even paddy-rice, stood as a constant lure to the wild life[14] as well as to the fowl[15] of the region. Therefore the growing crop was to be guarded not only by day but also by night.[16] This watching especially during the day was best accomplished by womenfolk[17] while the men were perhaps away hunting. The women would seem to have carried out the task of watching the growing crops (or those that had already ripened, awaiting harvest) by using some implements such as the corn-cracks of

general, probably because they were the only people who always had surplus food grains which would have become so handy when an unexpected stranger or guest turned up at their homes.

[10] *Perumpan.*, 197.

[11] *Puram.*, 33 : 4; *Cirupan.*, 233.

[12] *Pattuppāṭṭu* with Naccinārkkiniyar's Commentary, Dr. U. V. Saminatha Aiyar's Tamil edition, p.560.

[13] *Puram.*, 109 : 11 — 13.

[14] *Malai.*, 204 — 206.

[15] *Nar.*, 306 : 2 — 3; *Malai.*, 329.

[16] *Kurin.*, 40 — 44.

[17] *Malai.*, 328 — 329; *Akam.*, 188 : 11 — 13.

hillside canes, or slings, and even instruments such as drums,[18] in addition of course to using their own hands in clapping and thus chasing the birds away from crops.

In the 'desert' or semi-arid region, while the men were away hunting or waylaying passers-by, their womenfolk known as *eyiṟṟiyar* (எயிற்றியர்) are known to have indulged in some minor form of horticulture, by digging up the ground with a hoe-like implement and obtaining the soft rice-grain stored in grass-roots.[19]

In the pastoral region where the main task of the people was the production of milk and milk products, the womenfolk played an important role at home in preparing the milk products and even going out to sell them in other regions.[20]

In the riverine plains, women helped their men in the harvest of crops,[21] while in the littoral region where fishing was the main source of living women helped in watching or guarding the fish[22] that was put out to dry on the sandy beaches, just as their counterparts in the hill region carried out a similar task in protecting the millet crops from parrots and other birds. In this role of women as active helpers in the occupational activities in almost all the five regions, certain traces of a fundamental division of labour may be recognized under which men hunted and fought, ploughed the land and cultivated the crops, and went out to the sea for fishing, while women were engaged in somewhat less dangerous but important functions of safeguarding the growing crops from birds and animals, and harvesting them.

It would also seem possible to distinguish traces of an inevitable sequence in the development of the division of labour from life in the hill region where the division of labour would seem to have originated from the circumstances of hunting and some cultivation by men, and watching of the crops by women. This division of labour would seem to have continued to operate in the arid region, where the men still hunted for food, while the women tried their hands in some primitive form of horticulture in which the hoe was used. In the pastoral region, the division of labour

[18] *Kurin.*, 40 — 44.
[19] *Perumpan.*, 91 — 94.
[20] Ibid., 158 — 163.
[21] *Poru.*, 241 — 242.
[22] *Nar.*, 331 : 3 — 5.

continued with the introduction of what may be described as cattle-breeding or animal husbandry administered by the herdsmen or *'āyar'* (ஆயர்) or *'kōvalar'* (கோவலர்), while their womenfolk looked after the production of milk products and their sales. In the agricultural regions there was the merging of the primitive horticulture practised by the females in the desert or semi-arid region together with the cattle-breeding administered by the males in the pastoral region and the entrance of men into full-scale agriculture in the riverine plains with the substitution of animal, particularly oxen, for human labour, and therefore, the division of labour in the riverine plains was one in which the men were the ploughmen who generally carried out the difficult tasks, while the women helped them in weeding, transplanting the seedlings, and harvesting the crops. The littoral life also continued within itself the useful system of division of labour between men who went to the sea and brought back its treasures, and their women who dried the fish on sandy beaches.

This basic division of labour which is known to have been found in all regions of the ancient Tamil country, illustrates more aptly the forces which probably operated to give Tamil society its orientation towards a division of activities between men and women, and also to set a prestige upon men's activities, because perhaps of the difficult and sometimes dangerous nature of their share of the economic activities.

Agricultural Implements

Let us now examine briefly the sort of agricultural implements used in the ancient Tamil country. To begin with the montane region, in the case of the wild grains and other articles of nature's bounty, the plucking or 'harvesting' was done by hand plucking[23] and perhaps also by the aid of a flint knife. The short and straight harvesting blade would seem to have been long, curved[24] and also fitted with a handle. The threshing of the food-grains which were so plucked or harvested by hand or by harvesting blades was done by beating the sheaves of grains on the rocks.[25]

[23] *Perumpan.*, 473 -- 474.
[24] *Malai.*, 109 -- 110; *Poru.*, 242.
[25] *Kuru.*, 335 : 1 -- 3; *Nar.*, 344 : 11 -- 12.

In the arid region where the practice of dry cultivation would seem to have been prevalent, and where people would seem to have felt the need for some instrument to loosen the soil, the seed or tuber bed preparation or 'tillage' was accomplished by means of the 'progenitor' of the ancient hoe or spade which was fashioned from a barbed stick.[26] Besides, the digging stick or a kind of hoe would also seem to have been used.[27]

As agricultural techniques must have gradually evolved from the humble beginning of hoe culture especially in the arid region and reached the riverine plains, yet another development had taken place in the pastoral region, that is, cattle-breeding. A combination of these developments were mainly responsible for the invention of yet other types of agricultural implements such as the plough operated by animal power, mainly oxen.[28]

Among other aspects of early Tamil agriculture, the art of growing better crops by the application of fertilizing substances such as animal manure[29] and also the use of green manures such as decomposed or decayed vegetable matter[30] may be noted.

Another important aspect of agricultural development is seen in that the Tamil agriculturists had become aware of the fact that the selection of the seed was necessary to improve and censerve the domesticated plants. This is evident from a rather unexpected context in which the poetess, Auvaiyār, speaks of sowing *selected* seeds of praise in the ears of the chieftain, Atiyamāṉ, and reaping the harvest of gifts.[31]

Another delicate aspect of the cultivation of paddy in riverine plains was the preparation of seed beds. The cultivation of paddy differed from that of other cereals mainly in being grown under water during its early stage. To prevent plants being choked by water-loving weeds, selected seeds were usually sown thickly in

[26]*Perumpaṇ.*, 91.

[27]It would seem possible that the wild rice-paddy of the montane region might have been adopted to either hoe culture or some primitive type of horticulture in which the grain would seem to have been hoed rather than sown. Specific reference is also made to the white mustard seeds which are said to have been produced through hoe culture. — *Malai.*, 122 — 123.

[28]*Maṇi.*; 173; *Perumpaṇ.*, 197 — 200.

[29]*Perumpaṇ.*, 153 — 154.

[30]*Ciṟupāṇ.*, 136 — 137.

[31]*Puṟam.*, 206 : 2 — 4.

specially prepared seed beds and later were transplanted by hand to the paddy field.[32]

ANTIQUITY OF TAMIL AGRICULTURE

There are indeed several recognized criteria to determine the antiquity of certain cultivated cereals. The chief of them are:

1. The diversity of ancient uncultivated and cultivated cereals; and,
2. The process of domestication of the original wild cereal grasses and the consequent changes in the methods of cultivation.

On these bases, paddy-rice, which has been and still is the most important staple cereal of the Tamils, offers proof of the great antiquity of Tamil agriculture.

As it was already indicated, the people who lived in the montane region subsisted on grains of wild paddy known as *aivaṉam, tōrai, kaḷai nel* which were provided by nature's bounty, and which the people plucked by hand or 'harvested' by some rude implements, threshed on the rocks, and either parched or cooked the grain for consumption.

In the next stage of development which was one of domestication of the wild plants, it was observed that the wild paddy-rice was adopted to some primitive form of horticulture or hoe culture by the people of the arid or desert region,[33] whereas in the later stages of development, the paddy in the riverine plains was sown rather than hoed. To put it in other words, the modification of the originally wild plant was in the direction of adaptation to hoe culture or elementary form of horticulture in which the hoe (improvised from horns of animals or even made of iron) was used.

In this connexion, it would be perhaps useful to cite certain theories pertaining to the origin of agriculture in early cultures. Among the theories is one that assumes that agriculture began in mountainous and jungle areas where it is supposed that the plants of cereals grew or were grown with minimum effort, and reached

[32]*Perumpaṇ.*, 212.
[33]*Maḷai.*, 122 — 123.

its full development when people accustomed to this mode of life migrated to drier lands, where greater difficulties were encountered.[34] The assumption in this theory is that agriculture came as a shift from wild species to domesticated forms. Since the transition must have been from wild to domesticated plants, the place of origin for such domestication may be approximated by locating not only the parental wild species and its habitat, but also the domesticated species.

Now looking at the evidence that we have in the classical Tamil literature, one might advance an assumption that the wild paddy which was variously known as *aivaṉam, tōrai,* and *kaḷai veṉṉel* might have been the earliest wild species, and the *cennel* and the *putunel* of the riverine plains might have been the product of the domesticated species of paddy. (Although neither the time nor the exact place of the domestication of this important cereal is known with certainty, there is reason to believe that because of the wild diffusion of this crop and extensive culture of the grain in neolithic times this grain must have been domesticated *millenia* earlier.)

Now, the contrasting type of agriculture which did not use draft animals and the plough is best seen in the earlier form of hoe culture or elementary form of horticulture of the arid region where the 'digging stick' or more likely some implements such as the hoe was the tool used. In this connexion yet another theory of agriculture would seem to be applicable. This theory assumes that agriculture proper began in arid places where life was hard and vegetation sparse and developed in the effort to protect and to conserve the wild plants. (Norman, S.E., *A History of Agriculture.*) An application of this theory to the elementary form of hoe culture in the arid region of the ancient Tamil country, would imply that the modification of the wild paddy was in the direction of adaptation to hoe culture.[35] The development of this elementary form of hoe culture

[34] C. Wissler in *Encyclopædia of the Social Sciences,* Vol. 1, p.572.

[35] *Perumpaṇ.*, 91 — 94; *Akam.*, 377 : 2 — 4.

"The techniques of cultivation are numerous. The simplest agricultural implement is the digging stick, a pointed branch hardened by fire. In Australia the women use it to loosen the earth about the roots of the wild tubers to facilitate the growth of the plants. Elsewhere, however, in Africa, the Americas and the South Seas, the digging stick is employed as a kind of hoe, while among the Maori of New Zealand and the Zuni a crosspiece is

into one of plough culture in the riverine plains is the next thing we have to consider.

First of all, there is reason to believe that the plough was developed from the hoe,[36] and this belief would seem to be confirmed of the plough together with the hoe, (which would seem to have been retained for purposes of weeding, even after the use of plough came into being), given by the author of the idyll, *Perumpāṇārṟuppaṭai*, in which he has said that the ploughshare that went quite deep looked like the face of the iguana, and the curved ploughs to which they were fixed resembled the trunk of an elephant; and the farmers sowed the grain and weeded the fields with the weeding hoe.[37]

Together with the development of the plough and the ploughshare, yet another development may be observed, that is, the use of oxen for ploughing.[38] The combination of the paddy, the plough together with the ox and later the cart[39] was indeed responsible for the highly developed agriculture in the riverine plains.

With regard to oxen as an important feature of agricultural practice, it might be observed that this substitution of animal for man-power had a direct influence upon agriculture. It was of course this substitution that made the plough culture what it was in the ancient Tamil country. But it must be remembered that the use of the ox as a draft animal must have followed the practice of stock-raising in the pastoral region.[40] Thus far, we saw something of the process of domestication of the paddy crop and the consequent

attached, or a crotch provides a footrest so that the implement can be utilised as a crude spade." — Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, p.126.

36 "The most important implement of primitive culture is the hoe which is either formed like a pick or has a broad blade, often running *into a point. While the workers who use the digging stick shove the tool forward, those who use the hoe pull it towards themselves.*

The difference is worth remembering when we try to understand the origin of the plough. The simplest forms of plough seem to be digging sticks pulled forward instead of being showed forward. The uniformity of the principle employed in the plough, the range of its distribution in the Old World, and its absence in all the outlying parts of the Old World as well as in the whole New World, make it certain that it is a single invention which has spread at a late period from a single centre..." — Boas, *General Anthropology*, pp.262 — 263.

37 *Perumpaṇ.*, 197 — 201.

38 Ibid., 198; *Cirupaṇ.*, 189 — 190.

39 *Perumpaṇ.*, 46 — 51.

40 *Puram.*, 395 : 1 — 2.

changes in the method of cultivation, namely the hand hoe changing into the plough-share and the use of plough drawn by the oxen. There were still other aspects of agriculture, such as the methods of irrigation, harvesting, storage of grains and the greatest innovation of all, the bullock-cart which was an important need of the agriculturists to transport the grains to other parts of the country.

Early Tamil agriculture may be said to have passed through at least two stages of development before its advance on to the riverine plains, where it reached its zenith of success made possible by irrigation facilities. The first stage was one in which the cereal plants grew or were grown with minimum effort, and the cereal plant, particularly paddy, thus domesticated, spread from people to people in other regions. The second stage was one in which its somewhat rudimentary form of cultivation began in arid places where life was hard and vegetation sparse and developed in the effort to protect and to conserve the domesticated cereal plants. The first stage of development occurred in the montane region and to a certain extent in the pastoral region subsequently, and it is significant that these two regions associated with this stage of development are known as *vaṉ pulam*[41] (வன்புலம்), with the qualification that the pastoral region or *Mullai* (முல்லை) which is referred to as *vaṉ pulam* was in fact the region peripheral to the riverine plains or *Marutam*[42] (மருதம்). The second stage of development in Tamil agriculture would seem to have taken place in the desert or semi-arid region which was known as *pālai* and *puṉ pulam* (புன்புலம்)

It was in these semi-arid lands or *puṉ pulam*,[43] that what is known as *dry farming* would seem to have been carried out. Under the climatic conditions of these lands, production and yield of crops were primarily limited by low rainfall, and sometimes cultivation stopped due to lack of rain.[44] Nevertheless, this dry farming stage was an important one which was in fact the final stage in the gradual advance of agriculture on to the grasslands and then to the riverine plains and to a certain extent to the littoral region, which were

[41] *Puram.*, 314 : 4; *Perumpan.*, 206.
[42] See *Paṭṭuppāṭṭu*, Naccinārkkiniyar's Commentary, Dr. U. V. Saminatha Aiyar's Tamil edition, p.231.
[43] *Puram.*, 18 : 24.
[44] *Pattin.*, 243 - 244.

known as *meṉ pulam*[45] (மென்புலம்).

Irrigated Agriculture

The effectiveness of full-scale agriculture is said to depend upon human control and adjustments to the physical factors involved and, given a semi-tropical climate and dry lands as constants, effective agriculture is said to be easy, *provided* that there is water-supply easily controlled by man. The control of water-supply for purposes of agriculture is known as 'irrigation' — a process of artificially supplying water for agriculture in regions where rainfall is either seasonal or deficient at times.

The Tamils of the riverine plains are known to have cultivated food and cereal plants by its aid, and in this connexion it might be recalled that the recovery of subterranean water by sinking wells would seem to have supported the early attempts at cultivation in arid region too.[46] But it was in the riverine plains that surer results would seem to have been obtained, where taking advantage of the fact that rivers flowing towards the sea were at monsoon times heavily flooded and thus caused exceptional inundation at times, the people would seem to have constructed ponds, tanks, and lakes along the banks of the river courses. These ponds, tanks, and lakes formed the reservoirs in the early days, from which simple channels were led out to the fields of cultivation.[47]

The literary data of the classical period that we have on full-scale agriculture would seem to come from poems describing the three kingdoms of the ancient Tamil country, namely, the Cōḻa, the Pāndya, and the Cēra kingdoms whose prosperity has often been traced to their chief rivers, the *Kāviri*[48] of the Cōḻa land, the *Vaiyai*[49] of the Pāndya land, and the *Pēriyāṟu*[50] of the Cēra land, which were the sources from which the fields were irrigated. Because the lands on the banks of the *Kāviri*, the *Vaiyai*, and the *Pēriyāṟu* were assured of water supply for agricultural produce, i.e. even if the rains failed

[45] *Puram.*, 395 : 1 — 2; ibid., 42 : 17 — 18.
[46] *Perumpan.*, 97 — 98.
[47] *Maṟu.*, 244 — 247; *Puram.*, 33 : 4 — 6.
[48] *Paṭṭin.*, 5 — 15; *Puram.*, 35 : 8 — 11.
[49] *Puram.*, 71 : 9 — 11.
[50] *Paṭir.*, 28 : 7 — 10; ibid., 88 : 25 — 28.

in other parts of the country,[51] the construction of irrigation projects by rulers were greatly emphasized by the ancient Tamil poets,[52] and often constructed by the cooperative labour of the farmers themselves, with the aim of establishing in these areas communities of farmers.[53] There is also reason to believe that the nuclei of such agricultural families eventually became townships to which other trades and handicrafts were attracted and the result was the development of a commercial agricultural economy in which crops were grown for distribution to other regions of the country, and later even for export to other countries. The development of the community of traders was an important phenomenon so much so that in later days, the Tamil people came to look upon agriculture and trade as not only the twin occupations but also the most important occupations from the economic point of view. The explanation of Naccinārkkiniyar in his commentary on the idyll of *Maturaikkāñci*, would seem to confirm this point.[54] Thus, irrigation facilities conferred other benefits, apart from its direct aid to agriculture.

One of the important factors in social relations of the people in the riverine plains, for which irrigation has been directly responsible, was the spirit of association in promoting common action for the attainment of common aims, which was developed by the mutual interest of the cultivators in the cooperative use of available water for irrigation.[55]

The spirit of association in promoting common actions for the attainment of the common aims was not confined to the mutual use of the available irrigation facilities only, but it was evident in almost every kind of group activity connected with agriculture. Even the task of ploughing[56] the land, was one of cooperative effort of farmers, just as irrigation, especially the process of drawing water from tanks and other reservoirs like lakes and supplying the waters to the fields of cultivation, was always a joint effort.[57] Again, group activitiy was the prevailing practice at the time of harvesting paddy

[51] *Puram.*, 266 : 1 — 2.
[52] *Puram.*, 18 : 21 — 30.
[53] *Pattin.*, 284 — 286; *Poru.*, 168 - 170.
[54] *Matu.*, 120 - 122; See also *Paṭṭuppaṭṭu*, Naccinārkkiniyar's Commentary in Dr. U. V. Saminatha Aiyar's edition, p.351.
[55] *Puram.*, 266 : 1 — 13; *Matu.*, 89 - 90.
[56] *Matu.*, 259 - 260.
[57] Ibid., 89 - 93.

crops and sugar cane,[58] and threshing the harvested grains[59] and crushing of sugar cane. Even the womenfolk would seem to have preferred to carry out their task of pounding the paddy in mortars by means of pestles jointly, as is evident from the poem of Kuṟuṅkōḻiyūr Kiḻār which is found in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology.[60] The fact that all these activities were cooperative efforts is made clear by the poets when they refer to the loud and joyful noise and din which are said to have always accompanied such activities as ploughing, irrigating and threshing.

On all those occasions of cooperative or group activities, any monotony which might arise from such work, would seem to have been eased somewhat by the simple forms of folk songs which the participants are said to have sung. When both men and women sang together, they really produced such great noise and din that they would seem to have scared away both the birds[61] of the locality and those people[62] or visitors who happened to pass through agricultural settlements. In view of the nature of the group activities amidst which such folk-music and folk-songs are known to have originated, rhythmic repetition, parallelism of structure, and emphasis were the forces with which the folksongs operated, as is evident from some of those songs which have survived to this day mainly through folk memory. Some of these songs also have been given folk-literary-form in later days and one such collection is known as *paḷḷuppāṭṭu*[63] (பள்ளுப்பாட்டு).

The accompaniment of song by rhythmic noises — hand-clapping, foot-thumping,[64] beating of drums, or even rattling of instruments such as *taṭṭai*[65] (தட்டை) — was also the usual practice. There would seem to have been a vital interrelation between the articulation and the special forms of body-movement involved in such work as irrigation of fields by means of water-lifts known as *ēṟṟam*[66] (ஏற்றம்), *akalāmpi* (அகளாம்பி) etc., and also harvesting

58*Poru.*, 193 - - 194.
59*Matu.*, 94 — 95.
60*Puram.*, 22 : 18 — 19.
61*Poru.*, 211 — 213.
62Ibid., 193 - - 194/198.
63e.g. *Mukkūṭaṟ-paḷḷu*, 35; 48; 120 - 123.
64*Perumpan.*, 209 211.
65*Kuru.*, 193 : 2 3; *Malai.*, 10; *Matu.*, 89 - 90.
66*Matu.*, 90 — 91.

and threshing the grains. On account of this interrelation, rhythmic body movements released rhythmic articulations, that is, songs. (In this respect, songs of agriculturists and other occupational groups such as fisherfolk, especially those songs which have certain meaningless syllables and which have survived even to this day through folk-memory, may have had their origin in the actual rhythmic movement of the people participating in such activities.)

Another very important social and economic benefit which was rather indirectly conferred by irrigation in early Tamil agriculture, was the medium of exchange and the consequent development of trade and commerce. That is to say, when irrigation produced surplus crops, a medium of exchange was provided, for instance in the barter trade which came into practice between people of riverine plains and those of other regions, thus leading to the origin and development of not only internal trade but also subsequently to oversea trade and, as a result cultural links were established with other regions and other lands.

Chapter Three

BARTER

The practice of exchanging goods for goods is regarded as a *stage* in the development of economic relations.[1] That is to say, among the earliest people there was *not* the practice of exchanging goods for goods, or what is known as 'pure barter', but there was the practice of making gifts on a reciprocal basis. Some of the gifts would seem to have been somewhat instinctive as in the giving of food and drink to guests and strangers.[2] In the Tamil language, the term *viruntu* (விருந்து) which connotes in modern usage a sumptuous feast given to friends and relatives, is said to have signified originally the hospitality offered to wayfarers, and its primitive sense

[1] N.S.B. Gras. *Barter* in *Encyclopædia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 2, pp.468 — 469.

[2] *Puram.*, 235 : 1 — 6; ibid., 761 : 2 — 3; ibid., 177 : 13 — 15.

was *newness*, and the derivative, *viruntiṉar* (விருந்தினர்) therefore signified literally *newcomers* or strangers.[3] Some of the gifts were also religious in nature as in offerings to the deities,[4] perhaps with the aim of getting some benefits or blessings in return. Some other gifts were simply social for the purpose of facilitating both formal and informal relations among people of diverse or same origin. Whatever the forms which the early practice of giving gifts assumed, it is significant to note that the practice of making gifts of food on a reciprocal basis among the ancient Tamil people would seem to have survived to this day in the form of a taboo which forbids a Tamil householder to return an empty vessel or utensil to another householder who had sent some food in it as gift; instead, the recipient of such gifts is expected to send some food in return, and if he has no cooked food to send, he should at least send a handful of some food-grains like rice. The modern custom of giving special gifts to friends on important occasions would also seem to be a continuation of the ancient practice of exchanging gifts on a reciprocal basis.

As for the practice of giving gifts of food, there are a number of references in the classical Tamil poetry, especially those poems dealing with the early chieftains and rulers, to the large-scale provision of food and drink, which were made available by the chieftains of various regions to the bardic and dancing troupes and their members who frequently stopped at the chieftains' prosperous settlements in the course of their travels from place to place obviously in search of food and new patrons. On those occasions of sumptuous feasts, the bards, the dancers and their associates are known to have been fed rather sumptuously with large amounts of cooked rice[5] (பெருஞ்சோறு) together with meat dripping with fat and also a great quantity of wine which poured literally like rain[6] ("மழையென மருஞ மகிழ்செய் மாடத்து") for a number of days. A vivid account of such overwhelming hospitality is given by the poet, Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār in the idyll, *Porunarārṟuppaṭai* in which he imagines

[3] R. P. Sethu Pillai, *Words and their Significance*, p.53.
[4] *Tiru.*, 232 — 234; *Poru.*, 182 — 184; *Perumpan.*, 104 — 105; *Matu.*, 456 — 460.
[5] *Puram.*, 177 : 13 — 15; 235 : 1 — 6; 216 : 2 — 3.
[6] *Poru.*, 84.

himself as a bard and says:

> "The morning star arose and widely spread its rays in the thick darkness of the morning. The king wished to treat me as friend and welcomed me so as to make me wish to ask him always for hospitality and thus give him a chance to do his bounteous deeds. He placed me near him so that he might keep me in sight. He looked at me with longing eyes...
> The smiling maids poured out repeatedly from golden vessels much stupefying drink like the cheering rain... Inviting urgently, the king welcomed us. And after having completed the formalities, in due course he asked us more than once, to eat the well-cooked haunches of rams. We ate this meat by changing it from one side of the mouth to the other (probably because of getting tired on one side) and we were cloyed by eating much... My teeth quite lost their edges because of eating much meat... One day, we gently said, 'O Renowned King, we wish to return to our settlements.' The king was vexed, and asked with seeming angry look, 'would you in haste give up this bounteous food?' Yet, he gave us elephants and calves as gifts... that were worth according to his means."[7]

Such hospitality or feast which was its manifestation was indeed the custom of accomodating guests or strangers who were in need of shelter, food and protection. (Among the early Tamils, such hospitality was found in a pronounced form among agriculturists probably because of the abundance of food-grains like paddy-rice that were available for their own consumption as well as the consumption of other people.)[9]

Although such hospitality might have been due to a spontaneous feeling of sympathy for strangers, it would also seem to have been regulated by certain other factors such as fear of a stranger who appeared as the bearer of magic powers and perhaps certain mystical attributes, or the desire to achieve importance by the display of one's own wealth, or the desire to hear and exchange news of

[7] *Poru.*, 71—130.
[8] "*Vēḷāṇmai* which denotes cultivation has acquired the sense of hospitality." — R. P. Sethu Pillai, *Words and their Significance*, p.11.

other regions, and the most important of all, the need of articles of trade from other regions.

On occasions of such great hospitality, the bard, because of his important role as leader of the visiting troupe, is known to have been the centre of attention.[9] The main reason why the bard alone was treated with so much reverence and respect on the part of the host might perhaps be attributed to the fact that the bard appeared as the bearer of magic powers and mystical attributes which were so much reminiscent of his predecessor, the shaman. In this connexion, one might cite the interpretation of Professor Xavier S. Thani Nayagam in regard to the origin of early Tamil bards and poets.[10] According to the author, the predecessor of the Tamil bard was the shaman who carried out certain multiple social functions such as averting illness, depredations and similar calamities, and also interpreting omens in the earliest communities.[11] The religious and spiritual functions of the shaman became differentiated as society increased in numbers and cultural complexity. From the shaman developed the priest and the ascetic on the one hand, and the bard, later the poet, and then the philosopher on the other. "Though the earliest Tamil poetical anthologies reflect a predominantly bardic and poetic stage of educators, they contain traces of shamanistic functions, which because of the reasons arguing their antiquity, are to be considered survivals and retentions of still earlier stages of culture."[12] The possibility that the bard, of whom the poet Muṭattāmakaṇṇiyār speaks in his idyll, might have been regarded as one who was still capable of shamanistic functions, would seem to be implied in the reference to the manner in which he took care of his bodily health.[13]

Another important reason which might have been most instrumental in showering such great hospitality on the bardic troupes would seem to have been the need of articles of trade which could be obtained through reciprocal exchange of gifts of articles between

[9] *Poru.*, 76 — 77.
[10] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, "The Typology of Ancient Indian Education" *in Pacdagogica* III, 2, Blandijnberg, 1963.
[11] Ibid., p. 359.
[12] Ibid., p.358.
[13] *Poru.*, 91 — 92.

the members of the visiting troupe and the local people of the chieftain's settlement. Such a reciprocal exchange of gifts might have represented an early form of trade. As to the manner in which the exchange of gifts was carried out, the Tamil poets do not seem to say much except referring to certain formalities which the bard had to carry out as leader of the visiting troupe on meeting the chieftain[14] and to the food offered by the host to the guest, and gifts given to the bard by the chieftain probably in recognition and appreciation of his most valuable services in organizing his troupe or band and leading its members to the chieftain's region. And when the time came for the troupe to move on to new settlements or to return to their own settlements, and if their leader or spokesman, namely, the bard, should express the wish to depart before the exchange of gifts was completed, the chieftain was not very happy, for the reason that if the bard were to leave, he would miss the company and entertainment of the bard, and for the reason that his dependents might not all have completed the exchange of gifts. Therefore the chieftain, who was playing host to the bardic troupe, would rather purposely seem to procrastinate giving his own personal gifts to the bard. Some of the bards of course expressed annoyance at this calculated delay,[15] although they were certain in their own minds that they would receive their gifts from their princely patron.[16] When the proper time came for the departure, that is to say, when all gift transactions were completed to mutual satisfaction, then the chieftain gave elephants[17] as his parting gifts, which must have been so useful to the bardic troupe to move from one place to the other, with members of the troupe following them in search of a new settlement and yet another patron.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the next stage of development, namely, 'pure barter', and even at the risk of a bit of digression, I must mention an important piece of evidence which might still throw some light on the question of origin of gift-barter. It is this: There was a certain form of poetry of the classical period,

[14] *Poru.*, 102.
[15] "*Paricil — Nīṭṭittal*".
[16] *Tol.* 1036; *Puram.*, 205; 206; 207; 208; 209.
[17] *Puram.*, 140 : 5 — 8.

known as *Āṟṟuppaṭai* which was a literary device by which a poet could sing of a bard or minstrel, or one of the members of the bardic troupe such as the dancers (both male and female), who had received bountiful gifts from a patron, as guiding a member of yet another bardic troupe to the same patron so that the latter also could receive similar gifts.[18] There are five long idylls of this form of poetry in the *Pattuppāṭṭu* collection, namely *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Poruṇarāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, and *Kūttarāṟṟuppaṭai* (also known as *Malaipaṭukaṭām*). Of these idylls, the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* (or *Pulavarāṟṟuppaṭai*), which is a religiously orientated poem and which is also considered to have been of later origin than the rest, contains vivid descriptions of the various habitats or shrines of the godhead, Murukaṉ, whom the devotees were supposed to approach for their salvation. But the other four idylls are of different nature in that their authors have imagined bards or dancers as describing the territories of various chieftains with the objective of guiding another bard or dancer to a patron from whom they could receive food and gifts, just as the guiding bard himself had already received such gifts. Now, it may be reasonably assumed that, before the subject matter — i.e. 'a bard guiding another bard' — became a literary device or a theme in the classical Tamil poetic convention, such a practice or custom of one bard guiding another bard to a munificent patron must have been actually prevalent at an earlier period of time. If this had been so, the question is, what was the actual purpose of the long journeys undertaken by the bards to places which another bard had recommended. If it had been mainly or solely for the purpose of receiving 'gifts' for nothing, then there is not much point in proceeding with the question just now. But on the other hand, it may be asked, would it have been possible that the bards and dancers with their troupes undertook to travel long distances for the purpose of obtaining goods of other regions on a gift-barter basis and then returned to their own settlements.

In this connexion, reference may be made to certain interesting trading customs which are said to be found among the Arapesh

[18]*Tol.*, 1037 : 3 — 6.

people of New Guinea. Margaret Mead describes the customs in these words: "When the Arapesh go beyond their own locality, whether towards the Beach, the Plains, or the tribes beyond, each man must follow an inherited path. There are three networks of such paths along which the members of different lineages walk from hamlet to hamlet. The people using these paths have their safety guaranteed under the pledge of safety given by the presence in each hamlet of a herditary trade friend who is called "brother". Along these roads all the articles which are traded in to the Arapesh come ...These come from the Beach. From the plains come pots, net bags, shell rings (which are used as currency and in marriage exchanges),... All this importation is phrased as *gift giving* between devoted friends,... A Mountain man will go a day's journey in one direction, receive the gift of a locally manufactured object, walk two days in the opposite direction and present this object to a friend in a region where it has a scarcity value. He receives a gift in payment, part of which he keeps, part of which, or its equivalent, must eventually be passed along to the Beach friend. This is the general principle of Arapesh trade, but because of the absence of any attempt to keep accounts, and the absence of direct exchange on the spot, the emphasis is upon the friendliness and kindness of the giver and the joy and gratitude of the receiver. It is often a most uneconomic procedure; people even walk in the wrong direction and so obtain no profit... From the Beach the Mountain Arapesh receive also the elaborate dance complexes — songs, steps, masks, costumes, charms, taboos, etc.—to purchase which many people band together, sometimes all the hamlets of a locality. Their whole association with the Beach is one of pleasant anticipation of the luxuries and refinements of life..."[19]

Now, to pose again certain questions, is it possible that in the Tamil country there could have been in the earlier times certain number of traditional networks of paths[20] along which the bardic and dancing troupes travelled from settlement to settlement for the

[19]Margaret Mead, "The Arapesh of New Guinea" in *Cooperation and Competition among primitive peoples*, Beacon Paperback edition, Boston, 1961, (pp.21 — 23).

[20]Mayilai Seeni Venkatasamy has made an able attempt to trace one such 'path' as described in the idyll of *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*. See his article written in Tamil, in *Tamil Culture*, Vol. IX, No. 1, (1961), pp.57 - - 64.

purpose of 'gift-barter'? Is it again possible that the chieftains of various settlements were very interested in playing hosts to the bardic travellers, on account of their usefulness in promoting gift barter as well as in entertaining them with songs and dances. These questions, of course, require careful study. But for the time being, certain evidences might be placed here to see whether such a study in the future might produce some results. For example, we have the following evidence of the poet, Muṭattāmakkaṇṇiyār (extracts of whose idyll were cited earlier); and in the evidence which is given below the author would seem to describe so fascinatingly, one of the examples of 'gift-barter', which might have survived in his own time:

> *"Those who have honey and edible roots exchange them for the oil of fish and for deer flesh...*
> *The fisherfolk sing hillmen's songs, while the hillmen wear garlands of fragrant blooms of the coast...*
> *The pastoral dwellers sing the songs of those who live in fertile lands, they in turn praise forest lands where the blue mullai grows..."*[21]

It is perhaps significant to note from the passage cited above that ceremony and singing, and even exchanging of garlands were closely intertwined with the exchange of gifts of food. The garlands that were exchanged in this instance, were probably the forerunners of those garlands of lotus blooms made of gold, and of the necklaces of white, shining pearls which the early bard (பாணர்) and the song-stress (பாடினி) respectively received as gifts in recognition of their services of promoting such 'gift-barter'.

What is more significant in this instance of exchanging gifts accompanied by exchange of garlands is the fact that along with the social intercourse of gift-barter, went a dawning sense of objective values. The garlands made of ordinary blooms were valued in themselves, in so far as they were worn as symbols, or as the mere possession of them gave the people certain distinction. This concept of objective value, coupled with the fact that gold was used among the early Tamils for ornaments long before the days of money, might

[21]*Poruṇ.*, 214 — 221.

have been responsible for the tradition of ancient Tamil chieftains and rulers giving away gifts of gold ornaments to be used probably as the most common media of exchange by the bards in the course of their travels.[22]

The practice of exchanging gifts for purposes of trade which might be described as 'gift-barter', probably did not last long, for it was soon followed by 'pure barter', i.e. exchange of goods for goods on a purely commercial basis. The bards also might have ceased to act as chief promoters or intermediaries of the 'gift barter', because that role was assumed by individual traders with the development of growing commercial activity.

However, many of the bardic troupes still led a wandering life in search of hospitality. By that time also, some of the bards had relinquished their panegyric and middlemen role and had emerged as poets of a complex and wealthy stage of society and as persons having authority, scholarship and learning.[23] Some of the bards would also seem to have taken up the occupation of traders.[24] Nevertheless, the remnants of the bardic profession survived, and probably they were the people who are referred to as *iravalar* (இரவலர்) in the poems of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology. The term, *iravalar* denoted those who begged for hospitality. But it should be borne in mind that these persons who were known as *iravalar* were not actually beggars in the modern sense of the term. In fact, it is believed that ancient societies had no beggars and that begging has been a phenomenon closely associated with the emergence of private property. But the fact remains that the wandering bards came to be known as *iravalar* or those who asked for hospitality, and those who extended their hospitality to such persons, were known as their protectors or *puravalar* (புரவலர்). At this stage, begging or requesting hospitality would seem to have been an honourable act, and the giving of alms which was known as *īkai* (ஈகை) or *koṭai* (கொடை) which should perhaps be distinguished from giving 'gift'[25] (பரிசில்),

[22] *Puṟ.*, 159 : 162; *Puram.*, 126 : 2 - 3; ibid., 141 : 1; *Perumpan.*, 485 - 486.

[23] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, "The Typology of Ancient Indian Education", in *Paedagogica Historica*, III, 2, Blandijnberg, 1963, (pp.361 — 368).

[24] e.g. The author of a poem in *Puram* anthology, Uraiyūr Ilampoṉ Vaṇikaṉār, has sung of the poverty of a bard, following the death of his patron (*Puram.*, 264).

[25] *Puram.*, 101; 145; 147.

a meritorious deed. The remnants of the bardic profession belonging to this intermediate period who sought hospitality from chieftains and rulers probably expected their donors to play host to them for a number of days, in keeping with the tradition of the earlier bards who were looked after with great care and affection on account of their usefulness in promoting 'gift-barter'. Probably the kings of this period saw no such need as there were already the traders to conduct the trade, and there were the court minstrels or poets to counsel them on matters of wisdom and learning; nevertheless, since the ruling monarch usually belonged to the lineage of kings noted for their munificence and generosity, he too followed the tradition of giving the beseeching bard certain gifts and then quickly turned his attention to other important matters of state. Some of the bards would seem to have been annoyed at this abrupt treatment, and protested in a rather vehement and sarcastic vein by reminding the ruler that they were *not* the descendents of those bards who received their legitimate gifts by virture of promoting trade.[26] ("வாணிகப் பரிசிலனல்லேன்").

With the disintegration of early forms of social organization, especially after the beginning of the growing commercial activity in urban areas had disturbed the old pastoral and agricultural economy, the case of such begging on the part of surviving bards would seem to have increased.

In later days there also came into existence the belief of giving alms as part of the ritual of religious occasions. Owing to this belief, a great religious value has been placed upon the mendicants and their donors for many centuries now in the Tamil country. That is to say, religion would seem to have given sanction to a 'profession' made necessary by social disorganization. In this connexion, it might be noted that the ascetic mendicant and the bardic mendicant, both of whose origin night be traced back to the earliest shaman, came together again as one group of people who happened to live by getting alms under religious sanction.

Now, coming back to barter and its development, the pure barter would seem to have finally come upon the scene as an exchange of goods with a developing sense of *equivalents*, not merely

[26] *Puram.*, 208 : 7.

of good intentions but of *commodities*. Closely connected with the gift-barter in the ancient Tamil country was the open barter of goods. Thus one potful of kumiss was worth one identical basketful of paddy or deer meat, or fish or even certain pulses such as *perumpayaṟu* (பெரும் பயறு). Such a system of open barter is mentioned in a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* collection.[27]

"காணுறை வாழ்க்கைக் கதநாய் வேட்டுவன்
மான்றசை சொரிந்த வட்டியு மாய்மகள்
தயிர்கொடு வந்த தசும்பு நிறைய
எரின் வாழ்நர் பேரி லரிவையர்
குளகீழ் விளைந்த களக்கொள் வெண்ணல்
முகந்தனர் கொடுப்ப வுகந்தனர் பெயரும்"

— *Puram.*, 33 : 1 — 6.

The existence of this kind of 'open barter' as an intermediate stage between gift-barter and money economy presupposes the evolution of a single commodity, or ideally at first two important commodities into common measures of value for other commodities, before they were generally used as media of exchange. This single commodity, or the two commodities which have been recognized for their intrinsic value as chief measures of value in the monetary systems of several countries in the world, have been either gold or silver bullion, or both. Although gold was used among the early Tamils long before the days of money-economy, somehow it did not attain the position of the medium of exchange in the transitional period when open-barter was giving way to money-economy. According to some evidence that we have in the classical Tamil poetry, there was not one commodity, but there were indeed two commodities that were regarded as important and common measures of value in barter transactions. The commodities were *paddy* and *salt*.

Of all the important food-stuffs in their natural state, perhaps paddy and salt were best adapted to storage and commerce, and therefore suitable as common measures of value, because of their comparatively non-perishable nature.

As for paddy, one of the very important social and economic benefits which were rather indirectly conferred by 'irrigation' in early Tamil agriculture was that the paddy came to be used as medium of exchange. That is to say, when irrigation and improved

[27] *Puram.*, 33 : 1 — 6.

methods of cultivation produced surplus crops, a medium of exchange was provided.

As for salt, although it is at present considered an absolute necessity of human food, it would seem to have been used in the early days by people living only in certain regions who had reached a rather advanced stage of culture as a result of changes in living and food conditions. For example, people living largely on meat do not seem to have used any additional salt in their food[28] probably because the meats themselves supplied a maximum of salt. However, when meat gave way to vegetables, additional salt became more and more necessary, as vegetable foods ranked far lower in salt content, the cereal rice lowest of all. Salt needs therefore must have increased with each move from the hill towards the plains. The growing use of salt was thus bound up with the shifts of people from montane region where they could live on meat almost without salt, through the arid region where the people would seem to have felt the need for salt[29] which was not available except in natural brines issuing from subterranean sources, and through the pastoral to agricultural regions.

On account of these reasons, the two commodities, paddy and salt, assumed a great deal of importance in barter transactions, and gradually attained the importance as common measures of value. In view of this common recognition, it was customary in the settlements of ancient Tamil country for traders to announce openly that paddy was equivalent to salt in value.[30]

Finally one might conclude this brief account of the possible origin and development of barter in the ancient Tamil country by drawing attention to the fact that paddy and salt would also seem to have been given as wage for work done; thus the terms *kūli* (கூலி), and *campaḷam* (சம்பளம்), meaning 'wage' or 'salary', are said to have been derived from *kūlam* (கூலம், food-grains), and *campu* (சம்பு), paddy of high quality, and *aḷam* (அளம் salt), respectively. The English word, 'salary', is also said to have been derived from the Latin root, *Sal* meaning 'salt'.

[28] *Puram.*, 363 : 12.
[29] *Cirupan.*, 137.
[30] *Akam.*, 140 : 5 — 8; ibid., 390 : 8 —9; *Kuru.*, 269 : 5; *Pattin.*, 29 — 30.

Chapter Four

MEANS OF TRANSPORT

The importance of communication and means of travel in the ancient Tamil country cannot be underestimated. Various regions remotely distant from one another enjoyed social, cultural and ecnomic contacts mainly through constant movement and migrations of people who used the then available means of transportation.

In the early days, means of overland communication in the montane and arid regions of the Tamil country were merely the beaten paths of animals leading to food and water; animal trails led through the underbrush, and such tracks were known as *atar* (அதர்). The idyll of *Porunarārṟuppaṭai* mentions such a beaten track used by elephants,[1] while the *Perumpānārṟuppaṭai* refers to trails originally made by deer and cattle, which were then used by men.[2]

In the case of mountainous routes, contours, climate, seasonal variations, and even temporary changes in weather conditions were decisive in determining the feasiblity of human travel. Thick woods, slippery hills, crocodile-infested streams and rivers, and dangerous whirlpools made travel difficult and troublesome, as is evident from references to the physical fatigue and pain experienced by the travelling bardic troupes.[3] Because the tracks lay through forests and undergrowth and ranges of hill, some of the travellers would seem to have frequently lost their way.[4]

A rather detailed and vivid description of the travel undertaken along the montane territory by the bardic troupe is given in the idyll, *Malaipaṭukaṭām* (also known as *Kūttarārṟuppaṭai*):

> There is a track along the jungle stream that runs through the forests which are as dark as night. In the rivers there are crocodiles that swallow even huge elephants. There are also whirlpools, ponds and pits. It is difficult to traverse along this path which is quite slippery. Therefore, I shall advise you to walk along this track by holding on to the strong

[1] *Poru.*, 49.
[2] *Perumpan.*, 106; also, *Puram.*, 138 : 1 — 2.
[3] *Poru.*, 93.
[4] *Puram.*, 150 : 10.

creepers that twine round the trees, and proceed with your children, walking one behind the other like sheep. On the hill-slopes upon which the soft, smooth, moss has grown thick, thus making them slippery, you'd better prop yourselves with the slender plaited bamboo sticks and stalks of *korukkai* reeds, which are all along the path."[5]

It is rather significant to note that the mountainous track such as the one described in the above passage of the idyll, is referred to as the 'track of the jungle stream' ("..காஞ்யாற்று நடவை *Malai.*, 214), which would seem to imply that the first roads or tracks in the hill region were often single-line tracks, which followed the dry bed of a seasonal river. Moreover, the term, *āṟu* (ஆறு) in Tamil means 'stream', or 'river' as well as 'path' or 'way' (வழி) and the literary device by which a bard or minstrel was supposed to be guided along the path which was probably at first parallel to the stream or river came to be known as *Āṟṟupaṭai* (ஆற்றுப்படை).

Again, under primitive natural conditions, land routes did not seem to offer a permanent beaten track, but merely followed the direction of the movement of rivers from their source, and owing to this fact, the early travellers perhaps chose to walk along the river or stream, so that they might not lose the way.

There might have been yet another reason for the early traveller to have kept as close as possible to the course of the river, that is, they could put their heavy personal belongings on a raft which they could drag along the banks of the stream.

It may also be noted that the early track in the hill region has been described so narrow as to allow only a single line of traffic ("துருவினன்ன ..ஒருவிர் ஒருவிர் கழிமின்" — *Malaipaṭukaṭām*, 217 — 218). Such a 'mule' path in the hill region has also been likened to 'the rope lying on the back of an elephant.' It was so steep that it seemed like a road of the plain that has been set up almost perpendicularly.[6] Of course, such narrow paths were gradually made into wider paths in the wilderness by the movement of people and those paths in turn must have stimulated travel of people from

[5]*Malai.*, 212 — 225.
[6]*Malai.*, 15 — 16.

montane region to other regions, and vice versa.

The *constructed* road, first cut into rocks through the mountain ranges by invading armies and later developed as highways even on the plains, constituted an essential advance over the primitive single track. The fact that such highways or roads were constructed in the hill region of the ancient Tamil country is evident from references of at least three different authors of poems to the chariots, of the invading Mauryan army,[7] that are said to crush the rocky surface flat on the hill, which is probably a poetic description of the early process of road-making, and the cutting of a mountain.[8]

Apart from roads or highways (பெருவழி), which provided the link between one place and the other, there were also streets within settlements like villages, towns, or cities where groups of family-dwellings existed. These streets, some of them very broad on account of their use by large number of people or vehicles, were constructed either in straight lines or they were undulating in 'zig-zag' fashion through the settlements, as is evident from the poetic comparison of these streets with the course of rivers.[9] Some of the main streets in towns are said to have become quite sandy because of the constant movement of people as well as beasts like elephants, and of vehicles, especially on festive occasions, while other streets are said to have had large pot-holes which were caused by the chariot-wheels.[10] Perhaps at this point it would be interesting to compare or contrast the early beaten tracks of elephants leading to water or food in the hill region ("கனிறு வழங்கதர்க் கானத் தல்கி" *Poru.*, 49.) with the paved streets in towns where the elephants would seem to have been used to carry water to spray on streets in order to keep them free of dust.[11] The significance of comparison between the elephant in the mountainous track and the elephant in the streets of urban areas lies in the fact that the elephant in urban area had come to be used as a beast of burden. And of course, animals like the elephant, the mule, and the donkey,[12]

[7] See S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Some Contributions of South India To Indian Culture*, 2nd edition, Calcutta, 1942, (pp.20 — 24).
[8] *Akam.*, 69 : 9 — 12; ibid., 281 : 8 — 13; *Puram.*, 175 : 6 — 8.
[9] *Matu.*, 359.
[10] *Perumpan.*, 397.
[11] *Cirupan.*, 200 — 201.
[12] *Perumpan.*, 79 — 81.

must have been early utilized in the mountains whence their use spread to other parts.

Man himself has often been the bearer of burden in the course of his movement from one region to another, and yet animals like elephants were used as carriers of both persons and things, and hence the references by bards to the gifts of elephants that they received from the chieftains.[13] Mules or donkeys were also used to carry goods. (The Tamil pilgrims or even ordinary travellers who went to bathe in the Vaiyai river in the Pāndya kingdom, are said to have travelled by horse, elephant, mule, bullock-cart, horse-carriage, and even by palanquin carried by men.)[14]

With the development of the barter trade and its continuance for a long time, the need arose for transport facility to move the goods from one place to the other by land. This need in the ancient Tamil country was met by the use of bullock-cart which also would seem to have come on the scene gradually. The oxen that were properly reared in the pastoral region came to be used for drawing the plough in the riverine plains of agriculture, and from the yoke of the plough to the yoke of the wheeled cart was the next step.

The use of bullock-carts and horse carriages meant that the development of the *constructed* road increased the speed of movement of man and beast, and made the cart or the carriage now usable in many regions for the first time, and in fact the bullock-carts and the horse-carriages have since then been regarded as the most important universal means of transport. This innovation of the cart was of great importance as the first expression of technical principle with great possibilities of further development. At first, however, its utility was rather limited. A cart or carriage could bear only a light load if the drawing power of the animal was not to be overtaxed, and long pauses at short intervals were needed to restore the strength of man and beast.[15] A further cause of the slowness of the freight carriage was the transport method imposed by the conditions of the roads.[16]

[13] *Puram.*, 129 : 4 — 6; ibid., 165 : 7 — 8.
[14] *Pari.*, 14 — 18.
[15] *Perumpan.*, 39 — 51.
[16] *Puram.*, 90 : 7 — 9; *Cirupan.*, 189 — 190.

Since individuals could not cope with all the dangers and uncertainties involved in travel such as the sudden attack of highway marauders, they probably began to move in caravans or in large groups.[17]

Travel in groups would have presented serious difficulties, especially in connexion with breaking camp and setting out on the next lap of the journey. And there was the increased dependence on campsites and hamlets of chieftains where, fortunately for the travellers, hospitality, especially food, was available in plenty. However, the carts were slow and moreover all transportation in this way was perhaps bound up with certain fixed periods of group travel. It was in course of such travel beset with difficulties, that goods and people destined for certain points had to pass the cross-roads. It was at such intersections that tolls were levied.[18] It is also possible to infer that in such intersections which were closely guarded by men armed with bows to prevent any burglary, trade fairs developed and flourished. A description of sales of things at such fairs and the movement of travellers' caravans is given by Uruttiraṅkaṇṇaṉār, the author of *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai:*

> *"On the way you'll meet some noisy carts whose wheels are made of well-bent wood on which are set the fine spokes fixed to the large drum-like axles...*
> *The strong-muscled men who trade in salt protect the carts by walking beside the bulls that are hitched to the small-holed yoke...*
> *They take with them bulls, and travel along long stretches of roads and reach certain hamlets where they stop and sell salt...*
> *Bold strangers sell to those who rest after the day's journey, rare and useful things obtained from the hills and sea...*
> *The erect-eared mule that has a strong and scarred back, and bears the burden of a bale of pepper, is driven along wide paths. The men that stay in hamlets armed with bows guard the cross-roads and levy toll..."*[19]

[17] *Perumpan.*, 39 — 41.
[18] Ibid., 81.
[19] *Perumpan.*, 46 — 82.

Together with the foregoing account of land transport by means of cart or carriage, mention also must be made of the advance in early trasportation technique which arose out of the needs of warfare. Among the forward steps attributable to military necessity were the improvement of the earlier cart or carriage on the basis of a military chariot (தேர்) drawn either by steeds, elephants or oxen, and also the consequent breeding of the horses and elephants as fast saddle-animals which came to be used in war. Reference was already made to the chariots of the raiding Mauryan army. There are also other references in the classical Tamil poetry to gifts of such chariots even to bards and poets given by the chieftains and rulers,[20] no doubt with the object of facilitating their travel from one place to the other. One such chariot is described by Nattattaṉār, the author of the idyll *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai:*

> "He (Nalliakkōṭaṉ) makes a gift of a fine chariot that has a hub, well-carved with sharp chisels, and it rolls with ease as it is proved quite fit by use. Its wheels are set with slender-spokes that look like milk-white rays of the silvery moon. It is enclosed with boards that are painted white with the melted red lac, on which figures resembling the opening buds of the *muruṅkai* tree, have been wrought by skilled workmen."[21]

(There are also references in the literature to certain toys of children which were more or less replicas of real chariots. Just as the modern children are given toy-motor-cars to play with, the children in the ancient Tamil country had the toy-chariots[22] which were meant to give them not only amusement, but also early training on how to walk, as playing with such toy-chariots would involve pulling or drawing them by means of strings. Even children of poor families might have had such toys, if not eloborate toy-chariots, at least simple structures with three wheels, as one such toy has survived to this day in the form of what is known as *naṭai vaṇṭi* (நடைவண்டி) by the use of which children learn how to walk.)

Yet another advance in early transportation technique which

[20] *Puram.*, 15 : 5 — 6.
[21] *Cirupan.*, 250 — 260.

arose out of the needs of warfare was the breeding of horses and elephants as fast saddle animals which came to be used in war. There are references in the classical Tamil literature not only to the stables where the horses and elephants were specially bred for the purpose of using them as saddle-animals in war, but also their actual use in the battlefield. The stable for the elephant was known as *kantu* (கந்து) whereas the horse stable was known as *paṇai*[23] (பரண). Those animals must have been trained as really fast saddle-animals, as the speed of those animals has been sometimes compared to the speed of Time. In a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, a war elephant has been compared to a war ship.[24]

Transportation by Water

Transportation by inland waterways under primitive conditions might not have been very dependable. In the mountainous streams, for instance, the water level would have varied so markedly that heavy rain or storm could prevent any use of the mountain streams.[25] Even on the plains there was the constant likelihood of the rivers becoming dry owing to conditions of drought. Besides, both in the mountain streams and in the rivers of the plains there were dangerous whirlpools[26] which would render passage difficult. Again on the plains, the bed of the stream changed so frequently that even where there was plenty of water, no accurate forecast as to the navigablity would have been possible.[27] Therefore it is really doubtful whether the inland waterways or canals in the ancient Tamil country were used for navigation purposes very much, except those coastal waterways and backwaters (கானல், கழி) which are known to have been used for some limited navigation.

There are references to canals that were constructed for the purpose of connecting one waterway with another, again for irrigational purposes,[28] and also there are certain references to the existence of locks or dams,[29] which permitted the linking up of river

[23] *Puram.*, 178 : 1 — 3.
[24] *Puram.*, 13 : 5; *Matu.*, 729.
[25] *Pattin.*, 161; *Puram.*, 105 : 6 — 7.
[26] *Malai.*, 213 — 214; ibid., 325.
[27] *Malai.*, 51 — 52; *Matu.*, 244 — 246; *Patir.*, 28 : 10.
[28] *Puram.*, 263 : 8; *Matu.*, 725 — 726.
[29] *Puram.*, 18 : 28 — 30.

systems for purposes of irrigation.

The evidence that I could get from classical Tamil literature on waterways used for transportation happens to mention mainly large vessels of water transport. Of these vessels of transportation by water, *kalam* or *kalaṉ* (கலம், கலன்) and *nāvāy* (நாவாய்) are mentioned. These vessels are believed to have been large ships of commerce. Of the terms that are used to refer to these vessels, the word, *kalam* (கலம்) which means both the utensil for holding something, as well as a craft usually bigger than a boat, for transport by water, refers to the sea-going vessel which would apparently seem to have evolved out of the primitive dug-out canoe. The dug-out canoe is known to have been used to cross the broad rivers in the ancient Tamil country.[30] The canoe or the dug-out has been called the parent of the boat and also it has been traced back to late stone age. (It is probable that in Tamil language the term *kalam* might have been derived from the root, *kal* (கல்) which means 'stone' and perhaps later when wooden canoes were made, the term *marakkalam* (மரக்கலம்) might have been coined to refer to the dug-out first and then to the boat. Also it is interesting to note that the term, *nāvāy* (நாவாய்) in Tamil, also meaning a large sea-going vessel, has very close resemblance to the Indo-Aryan root, *navis* (meaning 'ship') from which other words such as 'navy', 'navigation' have been derived in English.

Among other crafts which are known to have been used for water transport in the ancient Tamil country, there was the *tōṇi* (தோணி) which, like the coracle, consisted of wicker frame probably covered with skin. Besides, there was the raft known as *puṇai*[32] (புணை), later also known as *teppam* (தெப்பம்), i.e. float, and *kaṭṭumaram* (கட்டுமரம்) (or the English derivative, 'catamaran') which was a raft of logs lashed together. Again, there was the rowing boat which was known as *paṟṟi*[33] (பஃறி), driven by slender poles. Besides these vessels which were used directly as carriers, there were also special types of boats employed in various special services.

30 *Perumpan.*, 432 — 433.
31 *Matu.*, 375 — 379.
32 *Cirupan.*, 116 — 118.
33 *Pattin.*, 30.

For example, there were the fishing boats which were known as *timil*[34] (திமில்), used by the fisherfolk in the high seas.

The fact that the names of all these crafts are mentioned in the classical Tamil literature would seem to indicate that the transition from the early forms of canoe to the ship proper — from boats capable of rendering local service, as in crossing the rivers, to vessels which could *sail* on relatively long voyages — was achieved in prehistoric times in the Tamil country.

Commercial shipping vessels in the ancient period may be classified roughly into two classes: (a) Sailing vessels or vessels dependent upon ocean winds;[35] and (b) Unrigged crafts whose movement was determined by human or animal power.

With regard to the latter type, the problem of transportation upstream or against the strong current of the coastal rivers, especially at times of high tide from the sea, must have been always serious in ancient times. In an attempt to solve this problem, the ancient man tried to use oars or long poles and later even used horses or man to tow his craft.

In the idyll of *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, there is an interesting reference to the rowing boats loaded with paddy, being moored to the wharf at the sea-port of Pukār or Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam:

> "நெல்லொடு வந்த வல்வாய்ப் பஃறி
> பலைநிலைப் புரவியி னணைமுதற் பிணிக்குங்
> கழிசூழ் படப்பை . . . ."
>
> — *Pattin.*, 30—32.

The author of the above lines of poetry mentions also horses: "வல்வாய்ப் பஃறி, பலைநிலைப் புரவியினணை" The commentator of the *Paṭṭuppāṭṭu* collection, Naccinārkkiniyar, and other scholars have always interpreted the lines that were quoted above as meaning that the boats that were tied to the pegs on the wharf looked as though horses were tied to their pegs in their stables. But I wonder if the lines could be interpreted to mean that the boat which was the carrier, and the horse that might have been used to tow the craft against the high tide, were both tied to the same peg on the wharf. Or is it possible that the poet merely refers to the boat alone whose

[34] *Pattin.*, 111 — 112; *Puram.*, 24 : 3 — 4.
[35] *Matu.*, 75 — 83.

beaklike bow was artistically finished off with the head of a horse, as there were in later times boats which were known as *kutiraimukavampi*[36] (குதிரை முகவம்பி).

In the ancient Tamil country, large sea-going vessels would also seem to have been differentiated from one another by the flags[37] flown at the sailing mast, as in the case of modern ocean liners. The flags probably indicated the owner of the vessels, and if that had been the case, then it would further imply that the ancient ships were the property of individual merchants or groups of merchants.

The owners of these shipping vessels, who must have been indeed great merchant princes of those days, are known to have lived in sea-ports which soon became very prosperous as a result of the expansion of shipping commerce. The chief economic interest of these sea-ports was the handling and transportation of goods between remotely located regions or settlements. Just as in the later-half of the middle ages Venice, Genoa, and other ports had become important commercial city-states in Europe, there were in the ancient period such sea-ports as Pukār or Kāviripūmpaṭṭiṉam on the east-coast, Korkai in the south, Toṇṭi and Muciṟi on the west coast of the ancient Tamil country, which had developed into important and famous cities mainly on account of the expansion of shipping commerce.

The ancient shipping centres like Kāviripūmpaṭṭiṉam, Toṇṭi and Muciṟi were indeed sea-ports that were fully equipped to facilitate the transhipment of freight between water and land carriers. They would seem to have been not only sea-ports, but also harbours in the sense that the great body of water in them was protected from wind and wave action, and owing to the sufficient depth and bottom of good holding, large vessels could find haven in them and anchor safely.[38]

Another interesting thing about the ancient Tamil sea-ports is with regard to their location. Just like other great sea-ports of the world such as London, Hamburg and Rotterdam of these days, the

[36] P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar has also mentioned in his *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture*, that there were boats whose bows were carved as heads of elephants and lions as well, which were known as *karimukavampi* (கரிமுகவம்பி) and *arimukavampi* (அரிமுகவம்பி) respectively.

[37] *Matu.*, 79.

[38] *Puram.*, 30 : 10 — 14.

ancient Tamil sea-ports of Pukār or Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam, Korkai, Muciṟi, and Toṇṭi, were far from the sea, and they were situated on rivers or canals. The sea-port of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam was situated on the northern bank of the river, Kāviri, which was then a broad and deep river into which heavily laden ships entered from the sea without slackening sail. Korkai which was known by the name of *Korkei* in Ptolemy's time and later known as Kayal at the time of Marco Polo, was, according to V. Kanakasabhai, was situated on the river, Tamraparni or *Sembil* in Tamil. Muciṟi is said to have been situated on the mouth of the *Pēriyāṟu* while Toṇṭi is identified by the author as located on the banks of the canal of *Mākkaḷi* (மாக்கழி), which he has again identified with a place now known as 'Agalappulai'. (V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, pp.16 — 25.)

From the evidence that we have in the classical Tamil literature, there is reason to believe that the rivers or canals on which the ancient Tamil sea-ports were situated, would seem to have been sufficient for most of the large ships. If however they were not sufficient, then there were the smaller boats to transport the goods from vessels that might have chosen to remain at the outer roads.

There are said to have been some special reasons for the inland location of the great sea-ports of the world. Early merchants would seem to have preferred to proceed as far up-stream as the draft of their vessels would permit, mainly in order to avoid the depredations of the pirates and other marauders at sea. The possibility that the ancient Tamil shipping trade might have been exposed to such dangers from pirates cannot be ruled out, as indeed there are some references to battles at sea in which even some of the ancient Tamil rulers would seem to have participated.[39]

Yet another reason for the inland location of the sea-ports was that inland trade and commerce were carried over the navigable inland waterways, especially the coastal waterways, which were perhaps safer and cheaper means of transporation than the high-roads which were known to have been infested with highway marauders.

Therefore, the ancient Tamil sea-ports of Pukār, Toṇṭi, and

[39] *Akam.*, 212 : 16 — 20.

Muciri, were situated at points where ocean and inland river vessels could meet as far from the high seas as possible.

Wharf

One of the essential units of a sea-port of these days is the wharf to which a ship might be moored directly, with an adequate depth of water at all stages of tide or fluctuation of water level. The fact that the ancient sea-port of Pukār or Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam, had this facility is evident from reference in a poem of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology, which says that the large vessels entered the port without either slackening the sail or reducing the load of merchandise which they brought.[40]

The wharf at the ancient port of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam would seem to have been an open pile platform which was equipped with a transit shed or area designed to facilitate the movement of cargo, as well as a warehouse for the storage of the merchandise.[41]

Revenue from Shipping

In sea-ports like Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam, shipping trade must have been a source of large revenue and was therefore more or less regulated by ruling authority in the interest of the proper conservation of the important source of not only revenue, but also income to the people. Hence the reference in the idyll of *Paṭṭiṉappālai* to the tax officers fixing the 'Tiger Seal' of the Cōḻa king on bags of cargo which had piled up on the wharf, probably waiting for shipment.

[40] *Puram.*, 30 : 10 — 14.
[41] *Pattin.*, 129 — 137.

Chapter Five

DRESS, ORNAMENT AND ADORNMENT

The belief that clothing originated in the need for protection against the elements or the rigours of climate is defended by Knight and Dunlap *(The Development and Function of Clothing)*. The fact that climatic condition or simply the weather characteristic such as warm sunshine or bitter cold, or strong and chilly wind with or without heavy downpour of rain has been an important factor in the origin of the use of clothing cannot be doubted, for after all it is one of those factors that has differentiated human beings from animals which grow warm coats and transmit them to their offspring by heredity. It is even assumed that on account of the loss of hair of the body, man was compelled to seek for an artificial covering.[1]

However, in the case of some of the early inhabitants of the ancient Tamil country, the factor of weather would seem to have played a very minor role in the need of clothing as a means of counteracting climatic conditions of some of the regions of the ancient Tamil country. The South Indian climate (except in the highest hills for a few months) was never too cold to exclude the possibility of outdoor life, and it, in fact, promoted an intimate life with nature in the open, which consisted of such unique features as seeking relief under the shade of trees with the breeze freely blowing, or within the cool waters of the pools overshadowed by the branches of the *Marutam* trees, or dancing under the bowers, or holding their meetings of the clan under the umbrageous tree, feasting in the open, bathing in the ponds, rivers, and the sea, or *decorating themselves even in daily life with garlands and leaves*, in short, living a close and intimate life with nature.[2]

The feeling for coolness combined with warmth has found its classic expression in one of the poems of the *Kuṟuntokai*, in which the poet imagines a lover as speaking of his beloved: "In the warm season she has the coolness of the sandal wood of the god-dwelling *Potiyil* hills; and in the season of dew she has the mild warmth of the deep recess of the lotus that folds itself as sunset

[1] Boas, *General Anthropology*, p.266.
[2] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, p.10.

having gathered within its bosom the tender shimmering sunshine."[3]

Such poetic fancy apart, ordinary people, to whom such happy condition as described in the above poem might not have been always available, sought shelter from bitter cold from the fire which was meant to keep off both the cold and the wild animals. And when that fire died out, then and perhaps only then people would seem to have sought an alternative method to keep themselves warm at night. And this was to wrap themselves and their children too with the skin of those animals which they had hunted and, under such conditions therefore a bed or deer skin, for instance, on the hard surface fulfilled the needs of tough active bodies.[4]

This type of covering might well have originated the idea of clothing, especially woolen clothing, in those early days. (This idea would seem to have had an echo in a simile used to describe the fine cotton cloth of later days, i.e. the cotton cloth is said to have resembled the pellicle of snake and the skin of animals.)[5] The same idea would also seem to be echoed in the references to the need of stiffening the cotton cloth of later days with starch obtained from rice gruel in the agricultural civilization.[6] As for the woolen cloth, according to the poet Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, in the days of Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñ̄celiyaṉ, a kind of *woolen cloth* was used to cover the War Drum; however, the wool seems to have been unspun, and the cloth consisted of the natural locks of hair with the hide of probably ram or bull.[7] (But in the days of Iḷaṅkō, the author of *Cilappatikāram*, the wool would seem to have been spun for garments.)[8]

Although the skin of animals might have suggested the idea of some kind of covering in times of cold, the skin of animals like deer or tiger would seem to have been used by certain people mostly as material to spread over a bed or couch,[9] or simply on the ground as a sheet[10] or blanket for sleeping,[11] or even as a kind of mat for

3 *Kuru.*, 376.
4 *Perumpaṇ.*, 88 — 89.
5 *Puram.*, 383 : 10 — 11; *Poru.*, 82 — 83.
6 *Kuru.*, 330 : 1; *Akam.*, 34 : 11.
7 *Maṭu.*, 732 — 733.
8 *Cil.*, 14 : 205 — 207.
9 *Akam.*, 58 : 4; *Maṭu.*, 310.
10 *Puram.*, 317 : 3; ibid., 310 : 8.
11 *Perumpaṇ.*, 151.

drying the grains like millet.[12]

Men who went hunting found the animal-hide a comfortable bed on which to sleep when they had no other shelter in the jungle.[13] Animal-hide or skin was also used to make sandals mainly worn by men,[14] while women would seem to have been barefooted.[15]

Animal-hide was also used as covering for the protective weapon such as the shield. For protection against rapid projectiles such as lances and arrows, the earliest and simplest protective staff or narrow piece of wood might not have been of much use; therefore wide shields covered with thick hide came to be used, and these shields were known as *tōl*[16] (தோல்), meaning hide or skin, perhaps because of the material of hide with which it was covered. The body of warriors was also protected by armour made of heavy hide of tiger.[17]

The various uses to which the skin of animals was put would imply that some of the early Tamils had attained considerable progress from tearing up or cutting up animals to careful skinning of whole animals, and the elaborate process of curing the heavy hides of tiger, wild boar, and deer, all of which must have been no easy tasks.

There is a reference in *Tirumurukārṟuppaṭai* of *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology to the white-haired (grey-haired) ascetic seers using the deer skin as a garment to wrap the upper parts of their thin, emaciated, bodies.[18]

In the lines 128 — 129 of the idyll, there is an interesting reference to the fact that the deer skin worn by the sages was sewn ("மானி னுரிவை தைஇய"). In line 126 of the same idyll, there is a reference to a kind of 'sewn' garment made of bark[19] ("ஈரை தைஇய உடுக்கையர்"). The idylls of *Perumpāṇārṟuppaṭai and Poruṇarārṟuppaṭai*, as well as the anthologies of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and *Kuṟuntokai* have references to what has been identified as a kind of bark

[12] *Puram.*, 320 : 10.
[13] *Akam.*, 58 : 3 — 5.
[14] *Akam.*, 129 : 12 — 13; *Perumpan.*, 169; *Matu.*, 636; *Pattin.*, 265 — 266.
[15] *Akam.*, 5 : 3 — 5; ibid., 13 — 15.
[16] *Puram.*, 4 : 5; ibid., 97 : 16; ibid., 16 : 2.
[17] *Puram.*, 13 : 2 — 4.
[18] *Tiru.*, 127 — 130.
[19] Ibid., 126.

cloth, and this is known as *citarvai*[20] (சிதர்வை), *citāar*[21] (சிதாஅர்), *citar* (சிதர்), and *citaval*[22] (சிதவல்).

The origin of the sewn-skin garment of human beings is traced back to basketry and mat-weaving, i.e. the simplest form of weaving was at first one of *intertwining* of pliable branches or twigs between stiff rods. Such a wicker was at first used for fish-traps and later for construction of shelters or fences. Later on, such wicker work, made in the shape of pots, was plastered with clay or mud to form permanent walls.[23] There is a reference in a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology to such a wicker work plastered with mud.[24] The phrase, "சேறுபட்ட தசும்பு" (pot plastered with mud) is indeed significant since it might also refer to the early practice of moulding in or over baskets by means of mud or clay, which is also said to be the origin of pottery. Tylor has advocated the theory that the making of pottery developed from the early technique of protecting basketry from being burned over the fire by covering it with clay which became fired when the fire was hot enough. The ancient *tacumpu* (தசும்பு) of the Tamils might well have been the product of such a process, and this is evident from the references in the classical Tamil poetry to the *tacumpu*, which also meant 'basket', would seem to have been used as an utensil for kumiss[25] and even for liquor.[26] The phrase, 'the pot plastered with *mud* (சேறு)' may also be explained by the possibility that as the natural clay is fine-grained, it was tempered by the addition of sand, so as to make the pot non-fragile.

Now, with regard to the original art of basketry, besides the simple, single-strand twining which was used for the wicker work, there was also the plain up-and-down weaving in which warp and woof were of the same width and pliablity. This type of weaving was used for mats. The next step from basket-and-mat-weaving is believed to be weaving, i.e. weaving of *strips of skin*. Skins were

20 *Perumpan.*, 468.
21 *Poru.*, 80 — 81; ibid., 153 — 155; *Puram.*, 150 : 1 — 2; ibid., 138 : 5; ibid., 376 : 4 — 5.
22 *Kuru.*, 146 : 3.
23 Boas, *General Anthropology*, pp.255 — 260.
24 *Puram.*, 377 : 18.
25 *Puram.*, 33 : 3.
26 *Puram.*, 224 : 2.

cut into narrow strips and dried so that they became twisted and had the hair everywhere on the outside. These were united by twining with a wrap made of vegetable fibre.

Besides the reference to the deer-skin garment, which might have been made in the manner described above, there are also references in the classical Tamil poetry to the fact that animal hide was cut into thin strips which were used for fastening the ancient Tamil musical instruments of lute[27] (யாழ்) and drum (முழவு) of the bardic troupes. There is also a significant reference to the cover for the lute, made of leather straps which were twined or united so closely that the cover is said to have appeared as though it was cast of smelted metal.[28]

Bark Cloth

With regard to the bark cloth,[29] the art of obtaining large sheets of material by felting fibres of soft bark or even coconut husk would seem to explain the art of making bark cloth in the ancient days. The process of making such sheets consisted of peeling the bark off certain trees or even coconut husk and beating it with a mallet and finally rubbing with hands until it was soft and pliable. The material so obtained might have been used as a warp and made into blankets by twining. Of course, the final manufacture of the threads out of the fibre depended upon the art of spinning, of making strong and sufficiently long threads of material such as vegetable fibre or even hair.[30] The general principle was that the fibres were twisted together and that new fibre was so introduced that it became interwoven with the material previously twisted together. A common method of securing this result was by rubbing the fibre, hair, or even feathers on the thigh or leg[31] or on some flat, hard surface, and attaching the end to a spindle[32] which was revolved so as to twist the material into a stronger thread. Stronger threads were secured by twisting two or more such threads together. The whole process of producing strings or

[27] *Poru.*, 14 — 15; *Cirupan.*, 22 — 222; *Malai.*, 3.
[28] *Perumpan.*, 9.
[29] *Poru.*, 80 — 81; ibid., 153 — 155; *Puram.*, 69 : 3 — 4.
[30] *Patir.*, 5 : 16 — 17.
[31] *Nar.*, 353 : 1 — 2.
[32] *Nar.*, 74 — 1.

ropes from coconut husk, as described above, has indeed been followed in the rural parts of the Tamil country from the earliest times to the present day. There is evidence in the classical Tamil poetry which refers to the technique of making strong threads of material such as vegetable fibre or even hair, by rubbing the fibre or hair on the leg and by attaching the end to a spindle which was revolved so as to twist the material into a stronger thread.[33] That there was also a garment made of such strong threads is evident from a reference to it in a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology.[34] Again, the bark cloth worn by the ancient Tamil bards might have been made of the vegetable fibres, obtained from the bark of certain trees or even coconut husk.[35] Now to sum up on the art of making sewn bark garment, it was at first done in the manner of mat-weaving, i.e. in the simplest manner of weaving done by hand, one set of threads (or leather strips in the case of animal skin), hung up as warp while another set of threads was passed with fingers up and down the warp threads. This form of weaving is also believed to have been the origin of weaving of cotton and silk cloth in later days.

The development of the advanced process of weaving of cotton and silk cloth is believed to have been by no means a sudden process, although it would seem to appear so in those circumstances in which the ancient Tamil bards when they met their patron chiefs were given new silk garments which they of course promptly put on after removing their bark cloth.[36] The development must have taken considerable period of time; nevertheless the complete adaptation of the method of mat-weaving without much change to spun material of clothing is indeed significant, as it paved the way for more innovations in cloth weaving. Especially after the invention of the needle which was also used in the ancient Tamil country in interlacing of cords on the wooden frame to make the Tamil *kaṭṭil*[37] (கட்டில்), the variety of stitches on the woven cloth increased considerably, and various methods of embroidery developed. It might

[33] *Nar.*, 353 : 1 — 2; ibid., 17 : 1; *Patir.*, 5 : 16 — 17.
[34] *Puram.*, 376 : 10 — 11.
[35] *Poru.*, 153 — 155; *Puram.*, 69 : 3 — 4.
[36] *Poru.*, 154 — 155.
[37] *Puram.*, 82 : 3 — 4.

also be noted that there was some significant resemblance in the manner in which the warp strands of vegetable fibre used for mats and the warp strands of the twisted coils of the silk cloth were tied into knots.[38] It would seem that the play with strings has been a most important element in the development of weaving and sewing. Again, just as great varieties of sewing were used and the pleasure of play was expressed in the technique of making woven baskets by so arranging the fibres as to produce varieties of patterns and embroideries, after the invention of the needle, the variety of stitches increased a great deal in the case of woven cloth of cotton and silk and finer methods of embroidery of complex flowery designs are known to have developed.[39]

Functions of Ornament and Adornment

Thomas Carlyle (1795—1881), speaking through his Professor, of dress and ornament, had this to say on the origin of dress and ornament: "The pains of Hunger and Revenge once satisfied, his (i.e. the early man's) next care was *not* comfort but decoration. Warmth he found in the toils of the chase; or amid dried leaves, in his hollow tree, in his bark shed, or natural grotto: but for Decoration, he must have clothes. Nay, among the early people we find tatooing and painting even prior to clothes... the first purpose of clothes was not warmth or decency, but *ornament*."[40]

E. A. Westermarck considers human dress under the heading of "Primitive Means of Attraction".[41] He believes that it is fundamentally rooted in the erotic impulses. He mentions both of habitual ornamentation of the public coverings and of ornamentation worn for particular social occasions such as dances. He also bases his argument on the fact that decorations frequently call attention to the genital or sex organs rather than conceal them and in the individual life cycle body ornament reaches its maximum during the years immediately following puberty.

There are also other views on the function of human dress.

[38] *Poru.*, 155.
[39] *Mar.*, 90 : 4; *Puram.*, 383 : 10 — 11.
[40] *Sartor Resartus*, p.28, Everyman's Library Edition, London, 1959.
[41] E. A. Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, vol. 1, pp.497 — 571.

For instance, Herbert Spencer (*Principles of Sociology*, Chapters IX and XI) regards human dress as a collateral development of the badge. According to him, distinction of various sorts in respect of ornaments and dress were therefore inevitable. Furthermore, human dress, especially dress fashions, based on imitation, has been a method of asserting one's equality with others who look upon themselves as different or superior.

Another scholar, D. B. Klein, points out that the Latin root of person, namely, *persona*, means 'mask' and that in the early days of drama, actors presented characters with the help of an appropriate mask. Thus one's personality refers to the role one strives to play in the drama of life, and therefore clothing selected by an individual is apt to be in harmony with his idea of himself or herself. Again, clothes worn by an individual also tend to influence not only the person wearing them to act the part indicated by them but also others to react to the particular mode of dress in a particular manner, e.g. uniforms of soldiers.[42] Besides, clothes may refer to particular political association, e.g. Black-shirts of Mussolini's followers (or in modern times the black-shirts worn by members of the *Tirāviṭa Munnēṟṟak Kaḻakam* in South India). According to Klein, there is in a very real sense an internal and external relationship between certain features of mental life of human beings and the clothes or ornaments that they wear.

However interesting these and other views of various scholars may be, the problem of the origin of human dress does not seem to have been settled beyond any doubt. Perhaps in order to know more about the possible origin and function of early human dress and ornaments, and even adornments, one might profitably examine the various references that are to be found in the earliest literature that is now extant of the Tamil people, which would probably throw some light on the question.

In the Tamil language, the substantives, *uṭai* (உடை) *uṭukkai* (உடுக்கை) or *uṭuppu* (உடுப்பு), derived from the verbal root, *uṭu* (உடு) refers to clothing or costume or the principal outer garment in general, in the sense that it is worn close to the body. There is also another term, namely, *āṭai* (ஆடை) which, though appearing

[42] *Mull.*, 59 — 60.

to be synonymous with the term *uṭai* (உடை), denotes, according to R. P. Sethu Pillai (*Words and Their Significance*, p.61), the dress put on for the sake of appearance.

Again, in the Tamil language, there is a *distinction* between clothing and ornament or adornment, the first being regarded as the covering which satisfies the claims of 'modesty', personality or *human* appearance as is revealed in some of the popular sayings ("ஆடை உடையான் அவைக்கஞ்சான்", "ஆடை மிழந்தவன் அரை மனிதன்"), and the second referring to those appendages known as *aṇi* (அணி வகைகள்) which satisfy the aesthetic sense [the term, *aṇi* (அணி) means 'ornament' or 'adornment'].[43]

In the ancient Tamil country, the bards and poets would seem to have shown their appreciation of the then prevailing styles of costumes and ornaments, principally ornaments and adornments, as is evident from a number of references in the classical Tamil poetry to the manner in which the men and women were dressed or adorned. For instance, the following is the poet Kapilar's description of a young man whose smart appearance would seem to have literally swayed or swept some young maidens' feet off the ground, when he appeared in their midst during one of his hunting expeditions.[44]

> "The youth's imposing, noble head was decked with cool and fragrant wreaths of multi-coloured blossoms, gathered from trees, hills, ponds, and in valley. He wore around his body pretty wreaths, made of lovely flowers of soft-stalked *pitchi*, and he stuck behind his ear the pretty buds of *asoka* tree. His strong, high chest bore the sweet-smelling garlands conspicuously along with the gauds. His stout hands held a painted bow with arrows. He wore a fine girdle tightly round his waist. And when he moved, his anklets, made of gold, produced a tinkling sound."[45]

In the same poem, Kapilar also says that the hero observed that the young maiden's hair was dressed in five kinds of whorls or

[43] *Akam.*, 13 : 1 — 5.
[44] *Kurin.*, 133 — 134.
[45] *Kurin.*, 113 — 127; (Trans., J. V. Chelliah).

braids which received his praise,[46] and also that she and her companions were wearing bangles which also made a tinkling sound. The hero also saw that the young maiden of his choice wore a girdle or waist string which was an ornament of young maidens, and hence the hero is said to have addressed her as "இலங்கிழையீர்." [47] It is rather significant that the young man who came to pay his *addresses* ('attentions of the nature of courtship') addressed the young maiden by referring to the particular ornamental *dress* which she was wearing. Indeed, Tamil language has been one of those few (?) languages in which the grammatical figure of syntax known as *Ellipsis of Other Words* (அன்மொழித் தொகை) has been used since the earliest time in connexion with women's dress and ornaments, with great subtlety and nuance combined with economy of words. Such elliptic expressions as *miṉṉiṭai* (மின்னிடை) *pūṅkuḻal* (பூங்குழல்), and *iḻaiyīr* (இழையீர்) are examples of endearing terms of addresses calling attention to the mode of their dress.

From the *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* description of men and women of the hill region, one may gather a fair idea of their adornment. The men for instance would seem to have worn a very scanty dress, considering the fact that in winter (கூதிர் காலம்), a season prescribed for the theme of *Union of Lovers* by poetic convention, and in the mountains the climate was usually cold. The costume would seem to have consisted possibly of a waist garment loosely folded round the loins and confined at the waist by a tight girdle or belt of minute workmanship.[48] Again, the other parts of his body are not depicted as entirely bare, for on the head and the upper part of his body he was wearing fragrant wreaths of multi-coloured flowers, in addition to wearing garlands and sandalpaste on his broad chest.[49]

Commenting on the use of flowers by the ancient Tamils in ordinary life, Professor Xavier S. Thani Nayagam observes: "Apart from the aesthetic and natural love of flowers which the Tamils shared with the Greeks and Romans, it is not unlikely that the abundance of wreaths and garlands in warfare and in ordinary life, served to keep the body, especially the head, cool and was a

[46] *Kuriṉ.*, 138 — 139.
[47] *Kuriṉ.*, 233.
[48] *Kuriṉ.*, 125 — 126.
[49] Ibid., 113 — 127

medicinal protection against the sun. The purpose for which sandal-paste was used to give fragrance and to reduce the body temperature, or the sensation of heat, seems to have been also the purpose for which wreaths and garlands were used in such profusion."[50]

Apart from wreaths of flowers, the young man is said to have worn anklets also which made a tinkling sound.[51] From the evidence of another reference in *Cirupānārruppaṭai* the ancient practice of men wearing anklets may be traced back to the earlier habit of wearing, as leg-ring, a certain twining creeper plant known as *kaḻal* (கழல்) together with its seed-bearing pod,[52] with which to urge the elephants on, while riding them.[53] The possibility that the *kaḻal* creeper produced also the seed-bearing pod is evident from a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology, which refers to the young girls playing with the dried seeds of the pod, known as *kaḻaṅku* (கழங்கு) of the creeper plant known as *kaḻal*[54] (கழல்), while an *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* poem mentions that the shaman who performed the frenzied dance in honour of Murukaṉ, wore on his body the seeds of *kaḻal* (கழல்) creeper, probably because they too were regarded as sacred to Murukaṉ, the deity of the hill region.[55]

It is significant that the original name of the ancient Tamil anklet, *kaḻal* (கழல்), like the names of other ornaments believed to have been made of plants and leaves first and later of gold and precious stones [i.e. ornaments such as *kuḻai* (குழை), *tōṭu* (தோடு), kinds of ear-studs and ear-rings; *toṭi* (தொடி) and *vaḷai* (வளை), kinds of bangles; and also the *tāli* (தாலி), the marriage string[56]], would also seem to have been derived from the name of the creeping plant known as *kaḻal* (கழல்) with its pod of dried seeds emitting the tinkling sound. The anklet, also known as *cilampu* (சிலம்பு), later made of gold and worn by later day Tamil women and children, contained precious stones inside the hollow ring of the anklet. Or again, the anklet was one of strings to which tiny bells were attached and this was tied around the ankles of children so that

[50] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, p.77.
[51] *Kuṟiṉ*., 126 — 127.
[52] *Puṟam*., 97 : 23 — 24.
[53] *Cirupāṇ*., 122 — 123.
[54] *Puṟam*., 36 : 4.
[55] *Aiṅkuṟu*., 245 : 1 — 3.
[56] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, p.20.

the bells emitted tinkling sound when the toddlers moved about.[57] This particular reference in a *Puṟanāṉūṟu* verse is significant for it draws attention to another function of ancient Tamil ornament as implied in the custom of removing the *kiṇ-kiṇi* (கிண்-கிணி), and putting on the *kaḻal* (கழல்) as an indication of the attainment of manhood on the part of the adolescent who until then only wore the *kiṇ-kiṇi*.

The Tamil anklet which would thus seem to have originated among those who rode the elephants in the hill region later came to be made of metals, and worn by warriors who rode on the elephants in the battlefield. The author of the poem *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology refers to such an anklet, the rough edges of which had been worn out and had thus become as smooth as the elephant's tusk because of its constant contact with the tusker on which the warrior was riding.[58]

The anklet thus worn by victorious warriors and their chieftains came to be known as 'heroic anklet' (வீரக்கழல்) which was esteemed by the bards and others alike, with added significance particularly if they were the ones recast by using additional gold obtained from the vanquished enemy's crown.[59]

The German philosopher, Hermann Lotze, is of the view that clothing and ornament give one an increased sense of *power*, a sense of the extension of the self. 'The heroic anklet' worn by the ancient Tamil chieftains, especially if it were one made of the smelted gold of the enemy's crown, would indeed seem to have given the wearer, Kiḷḷi Vaḷavaṉ, an increased sense of power and hence the eulogy of the poet, Āvūr Mūlaṅkiḻār.

Now, after this rather long digression, going back to the *Kuṟiñci* (hill) region where we left the hero admiring the beauty of the young maiden[60] we might recall that he had previously praised the beauty of her coiffure which was dressed in five kinds of braids. This coiffure was again another significant adornment from the viewpoint of both the prospective groom and the bride.

In classical Tamil poetry, the young maidens' coiffure is

[57] *Puram.*, 77 : 1.
[58] *Puram.*, 4 : 3 — 4.
[59] *Puram.*, 40 : 3 — 5.
[60] *Kurin.*, 180 — 181.

referred to as *aimpāl* (ஐம்பால்), i.e. the young maidens are said to have even trimmed their hair and dressed it in five types of braids or whorls.[61]

The commentator, Naccinārkkiniyar would seem to have been of the opinion that the term, *aimpāl* (ஐம்பால்) denoted five *different* styles of coiffure, namely *kuḻal* (குழல்), *aḷakam* (அளகம்), *koṇṭai* (கொண்டை) *paṉiccai* (பனிச்சை) and *tuñcai* (துஞ்சை), which were probably different patterns of hair-styles regarded as conventional or suitable for females of various age groups.

The Tamil scholars of later days have also recognized the classification of women presumably on the basis of their age into seven groups, namely, *pētai* (பேதை) of seven years and less, *petumpai* (பெதும்பை) of 11 to 12 years, *maṙkai* (மங்கை) of 13 to 18 years, *maṭantai* (மடந்தை) of 19 to 24 years, *arivai* (அரிவை) of 25 to 30 years, *terivai* (தெரிவை) of 31 to 39 years, and *pēriḷampeṉ* (பேரிளம்பெண்) of 40 years and above.[63] Of these groups, *maṭantai* (மடந்தை) refers to maidens between the age of 19 and 24 years. And it is this term which is used by the author of *Malaipaṭukaṭām*, one of the Ten Idylls, when he refers to a nubile maiden[64] as "வதுவை நாறும் வண்டு கமழ் ஐம்பால் மடந்தை". Also in the *Kuṟiñcippaṭṭu* which describes the first accidental meeting followed by a number of subsequent secret meetings of the young lovers in the hills and the assurance of the young man that he would subsequently marry her at a special ceremony witnessed by every one in the community, the young maiden would seem to belong to the same age group of *maṭantai* (மடந்தை), which is evident from the epithet used to describe the maiden.[65]

In both cases, the maidens are said to have worn their coiffure in the style of five braids (ஐம்பால்), which would seem to imply that nubile girls wore their hair in five braids from puberty until marriage, perhaps representing the fact that they were already in an advanced stage of marriageable age; and that following their marriage, they would pass through five stages of growth including the one in which they were regarded as suitable for marriage, i.e.

[61] *Kalai.*, 32 : 1.
[62] *Kalittokai*, Naccinārkkiniyar's Commentary, p.89.
[63] *Maturai Tamil Lexicon*, Part II, p.722.
[64] *Malai.*, 30 — 31.
[65] *Kuriñ.*, 141.

maṅkai (மங்கை) followed by the four stages of *maṭantai* (மடந்தை) which was an advanced stage of marriageable age, then *arivai* (அரிவை),[67] *terivai* (தெரிவை) and *pēriḷampeṇ* (பேரிளம் பெண்) during which they would wear one of those hair-styles, namely, *kuḻal* (குழல்), *aḷakam* (அளகம்), *koṇṭai* (கொண்டை), *paṉiccai* (பனிச்சை) and *tuñcai* (துஞ்சை), corresponding to their age in the individual life cycle. (If they should be so unfortunate as to become widows, they had their hair shaved as a sign of their widowhood.)[68] The fact that *nubile* girls in the ancient Tamil country dressed their hair in the traditional style of five-braids is also confirmed by another reference in a poem of *Kali* anthology in which the wife is depicted as teasing her inattentive husband by referring to those days before their wedlock when he was wont to praise her five-braid hair style, and asking him why he no longer praised her coiffure which was probably of different style after the marriage.[69]

Generally, both men and women in the ancient Tamil country would seem to have worn their hair at its full natural length. Occasionally, the women's hair is seen trimmed or shaved completely as in the case of mourning women. The men in the ancient Tamil country would seem to have worn their hair unshorn and falling loose at the back: on the neck it was done up into a knot or simply in natural curls[70] like the horns of the ram which has been rather vividly represented by the Tamil poet Māmūlaṉār, probably because of the prevailing chracteristic.[71] Fashion evidently dictated various modifications of the hair-dressing of both men and women, the hair being either piled up in coils on top of the head and adorned with flowers,[72] or simply hanging loose[73] about the body, or knotted up in a bun or chignon,[74] or again plaited in braid or braids,[75] and it was also twisted as in the case of ascetic sages.[76]

Next to the coiffure, the most charcteristic ornamental dress of

[66] *Puram.*, 11 : 1 — 5.
[67] *Akam.*, 34 : 18.
[68] *Puram.*, 25 : 14; ibid., 250 : 4; ibid., 280 : 11 — 14.
[69] *Kali.*, 22 : 12 — 14.
[70] *Kurin.*, 107.
[71] *Akam.*, 101 : 4 — 5.
[72] *Kurin.*, 103 — 104; *Tiru.*, 26 — 27.
[73] *Kuru.*, 225 : 6 — 7.
[74] *Puram.*, 61 : 1; ibid., 77 : 1 — 2; ibid., 273 : 3; ibid., 279 : 9 — 11.
[75] *Cirupan.*, 191 — 192; *Akam.*, 73 : 1.
[76] *Puram.*, 251 : 7; 43 : 4.

Tamil women in the earliest days, would seem to have been the girdle or the intercrural cord or string worn at the waist,[77] which came to be known as *arai-nāṇ*[78] (அரைநாண்) in later days.

In the ancient days, the intercrural string of women might have been given the special name of *iḻai*[79] (இழை) which originally meant 'thread' and when this thread was worn as an ornament (அணி), it came to be known as *iḻaiyaṇi*[80] (இழையணி). The importance of this ornament in the esteem of ancient Tamils may be gauged from a reference in the *Puram* anthology to the fact that womenfolk who had the misfortune of falling in dire poverty because of the death of the chieftain who protected them could not part from the waist string which they wore.[81] Because of the slim waists of early Tamil women, (i.e. judging not only from the frequent references by the poets to the slender waists and concave navel,[82] but also from the universal testimony of the statuettes and sculptures of later period) the intercrural cord worn around such slim waists (மின்னிடை) came to be also known as *miṉṉiḻai*[83] (மின்னிழை). The slim waist, characteristic of early Tamil women, would also seem to have been rather artificially accentuated from youth by tight belting[84] or wearing of silk garments confined tightly at the waist perhaps by a very tight belt as in later days, and falling towards the angles.[85] Although we are happy to note that the ancient Tamils appreciated the slim waists and even narrow foreheads[86] of women, it does not seem to have led to the practice of artifically constricting the waist or the forehead (as among the Chinese of old days leading to the artificial binding of feet). Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the women knew only too well of the potentiality of an ornament like the arm-ring or bangle as ornaments of both beauty and *attraction*. It is particularly the aspect of 'attraction' of the arm-ring and the bangle worn by young maidens both before and after wedlock that

[77] *Puram.*, 11 : 1 — 5.
[78] R. P. Sethu Pillai, *Words and Their Significance*, p.14.
[79] Ibid., p.14; also pp.11 — 16.
[80] *Puram.*, 383 : 10.
[81] *Puram.*, 127 : 4 — 6.
[82] *Kuru.*, 277 : 6; *Kurin.*, 140.
[83] *Kuru.*, 246 : 6.
[84] *Poru.*, 39.
[85] *Puram.*, 383 : 11 — 13; Kali., 111 : 2 — 3; ibid., 115 : 12 — 15; *Netu.*, 145 — 146.
[86] *Puram.*, 25 : 12; ibid., 32 : 4.

is significant. That is, when women became aware that men of those days were beginning to pay more and more attention to their smooth (bamboo-like) shoulders which were singled out for their men's interest and emotion, then they began to accentuate the interest by wearing bangles around the shoulders as well as forearms. At first these bangles would seem to have been made of plants, especially creepers[87] and later also of conch shells[88] and of course finally of gold as well.[89] The fact that the arm-rings and bangles worn by women were looked upon as *means of attraction* is evident from references in certain poems which describe how the bangles and arm-rings slip down from their positions around the shoulders and forearms on account of the thinness of the ladies' shoulders to which they have been reduced in the absence of their beloved.[90]

There is also reason to believe that women knew the art of adjusting these arm-rings either by loosening or tightening them as and when required, and this is evident from the *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* description of the ancient Tamil musical instrument, known as *yāḻ* (யாழ்), the straps of which are said to be adjustable like the arm-rings of ladies.[91]

It was mentioned earlier that there was the possibility of a strong association between ladies' ornaments worn around the shoulders and erotic impulses. This possibility would seem to be confirmed by the references in the classical Tamil poetry to the fact that widows had no bangles nor did they have any other ornament. On the death of their beloved, the widows removed their bangles and arm-rings. In her *Puram* poem, the poetess, Nakkaṇṇaiyār, expresses her fear that she might have to remove her bangles in the event of her loss of Perunaṛkiḷḷi.[92] Similarly, the poet, Peruñcittiraṉār, mourns the death of his patron, Veḷimāṉ, which also led to the removal of bangles from his lady's hands.[93]

However, the possibility of the strong association between ornament and erotic impulses is to be regarded merely as a conditioned

87 *Puram.*,352 : 5.
88 *Nar.*, 77 : 9 — 10.
89 *Netu.*, 141.
90 *Akam.*, 125 : 1 — 2: ibid., 68 : 10 — 13.
91 *Perumpaṇ.*, 12 — 13.
92 *Puram.*, 83 : 1 — 2.
93 *Puram.*, 238 : 6.

reflex, and it is therefore to be expected that, given certain turns of human interest and emotion, certain other parts of the body would be singled out and the emotion directed towards those parts —for example, the face as among Muslim women in the Middle East.

Among the ancient Tamil women especially of the later period, there would seem to have been the tendency to relate the function of ornament and dress to the necessity of attracting further attention of the male to those parts of the body towards which men began to show their interest and emotion. Judging from the various references in classical Tamil poetry to certain forms of ornaments as well as garments which however do not appear to be universal, one may reasonably assume that certain elementary forms of those ornaments and garments seem designed so as to call attention to those parts of the body of which under conditions of later Tamil civilization they aim at concealment. If this assumption were accepted as valid, then it would also mean that some of the earliest forms of Tamil ornaments, garments, and even adornments were regarded as stimulii to excitation of the passions of the opposite sex.

Looked at from the view-point of emotional excitation, it would appear that a stage in the progress of Tamil society is marked by the discovery that concealment of certain parts of the body afforded a greater stimulus than revelation. For example there are references in the classical Tamil poetry to indicate that ancient Tamils at one time were not in the least concerned over the fact that women's breasts were bare, except for the nipple-shield in the case of nursing women who might have worn it as defence for the nipple. However, later on people's attitude would seem to have changed with regard to bare parts of the body, and the breasts of women came to be protected by sheaths.[94]

Probably somewhat earlier to this development, another custom would seem to have come into existence, and this was the practice of wearing leafy garments merely as an ornament by nubile girls. This earliest form of ornamental dress was known as *talaiyani* (தழையணி). If it should have been regarded merely as an ornament as is more likely, then the question is: what is the function of this

[94] *Netu.*, 149 — 151; *Mull.*, 47.

ornament? The answer would seem to be that again it was a primitive means of attracting attention to the fact that the maidens wearing them were of marriageable age. If one were to recall E. A. Westermarck's opinion that decorations of women frequently called attention to the genital or sex organs rather than concealed them and that in the individual life cycle body ornament reached its maximum during the years immediately following puberty, one may be able to interpret the ancient custom of young maidens themselves wearing the leafy garments, or being presented with the leafy garments by their lovers for them to wear on the eve of the wedding, as a social device to announce the fact that the young maiden has attained puberty, and also as the individual's device of attracting attention to oneself. Of course, as against this interpretation, there is the belief that the human instinct of 'modesty' might have expressed itself in clothing, i.e. to say, there is said to be a strong association between dress and the covering of sex organs. However, from the evidence that is found in *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*, one may recognize that in the earliest days and among the earliest people, the feeling of shame or modesty was only associated with certain types of behaviour, and not connected with clothing or lack of it. In the poem, *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*, the heroine who does not seem to have worn any elaborate clothing as such, except certain ornaments, is seen to display her sense of shyness or shame only when the young man succeeds in catching hold of her hand — an impulsive behaviour on the part of the young man, which was in those days regarded as a taboo to the effect that a young lady should not touch or be touched by anyone else than the one who was to be her partner in life, which is again confirmed later in the same poem, where the young man assures the maiden that they would marry when the members of her clan would formally give her hand to him at a special ceremony.[95]

Again, there is another reference in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology to the unfolding cluster of petals of the whole flower being worn by a young maiden around the region of waist and hips probably as an ornament of attraction and stimulus.[96] That the stimulus

[95] *Kurin.*, 231 — 233.
[96] *Puram.*, 116 : 2.

was real is seen also in the fact that the public woman (பரத்தை) of urban civilization is said to have adorned herself with a similar ornament while bathing with her paramour.[97]

However, the original leafy dress, at first meant as an ornament of attraction, would seem to have developed into one of concealment, again with the object of exciting passions. For example, in the descriptive passage of a poem in the *Akanāṉūṟu* anthology, the bridgroom teasingly refers to the fact that when he attempted to see the face of his bride who was completely enshrouded in her costume, she did not seem to know the art of concealment and as a result she abandoned her dress.[98]

Again, the novelty of costumes and ornaments which increased with the growth of urban civilization with the implication that they were regarded more and more as means of excitation may also be seen in the fact that, among people of non-urban regions in the ancient Tamil country, flagrant immorality would seem to have been far less common or even non-existent than among the more clothed people especially in the so-called *Marutam* region which came to be regarded as the background for the classical Tamil poetry mainly dealing with occasions of marital infidelity with courtesans or public women wearing elaborate dresses and all kinds of ornaments, and hence the later-day strictures that family women should be within bounds with regard to dress and ornaments.

Magico-religious Aspects

R. Karsten[99] and J.C. Frazer[100] argue that all body coverings including clothing, ornaments, adornments, and even decorative arts, have been based on the influence of magic, especially on the desire to ward off evil spirits. That is to say, ornaments suspended from or attached to convenient portions of the body (such as the head, the ear, the nose, the neck, the arms, the wrists, the legs, the ankles, the fingers, the toes, and the hip, or amulets hung about the neck, rings inserted in the nose or the ears, or bracelets, arm-

[97] *Kuru.*, 80 : 1 — 4.
[98] *Puram.*, 136 : 17 — 26.
[99] R. Karsten, "Civilization of South American Indians," *History of Civilization*, New York, 1926.
[100] J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, and *The Golden Bough, a Study in Magic and Religion.*

rings, anklets, leg-rings, or even the crowns, the head-dresses, and the masks worn by warriors and chieftains or kings, or the bangles of various sizes, girdles with or without the ceremonial or distinguishing dress of leaves and flowers, several types of necklaces mainly worn by women, or adornments such as scarifying or tatooing or using paints and pastes of vegetable matter by both men and women) — all these and other forms of ornaments and adornments have been noted by the aforementioned scholars not only as the full scope of 'dress' among certain peoples of less advanced cultures, but also they have been interpreted as elements which were originally meant, under the influence of magic, to ward off evil spirits, or even to prevent evil eyes of other human beings being cast upon the wearer of those ornaments and adornments. On the other hand, they are also believed to have been primitive means of detaining and imprisoning the immortal soul despite its efforts to escape from the body: in short the ornaments were believed to have acted as spiritual fetters. The wearing of the above-mentioned ornaments and adornments are also believed to have been evolved as means of indicating either the totemic affiliation, social group, or even failure to attain one's desire, or occupation, or even achievement of the wearers.

From some of the references that are available in the classical Tamil poetry, one may be inclined to agree to a certain extent with the observations of the aforementioned authorities. Now, to take up the early religious or spiritual aspect of ornaments worn by the Tamil people:

There is a reference in a poem of the *Akanāṉūṟu* anthology to the fact that the mother of a young maiden who had been love-stricken and therefore was love-sick adorned her with the leaves of the margosa tree, probably because of the belief that the leaves of the margosa tree (sacred to Murukaṉ, the deity of the hill region) would ward off the 'evil' spirit which, the anxious mother mistakenly believed, was the apparent cause of her daughter's ailment, whereas the real cause of the maiden's sickness was the young man with whom she had fallen in love.[101]

Besides the use of margosa leaf, there was also the use of the

[101] *Akam.*, 138 : 3 — 5.

leaves and the flowers of yet another sacred tree, *Kaṭampu* (கடம்பு), together with the palmyra stalk, especially worn by the shaman of the hill region for the alleged purpose of exorcising the spirit which was believed to have caused the maiden's sickness.[102]

A somewhat similar anxiety felt by another mother would also seem to have been responsible for yet another ornament worn by the young maidens of those days, i.e. the string of several round, bead-like objects (probably the seeds of the pod belonging to the *kaḻal* plant,[103] (கழற்காய், கழற் கனி), or a string to which the tiger's tooth was attached. These objects which were attached to the string worn around the waist perhaps covered the organ of reproduction in order to prevent the evil eyes being cast upon it.[104]

The wearing of the leafy girdle or the leafy dress or even a single leaf or flower by the nubile girls around the region between the waist and the hip might also have been based on the desire to ward off the evil spirits. This factor of protective power of such ornaments would also seem to have been rather delicately and subtly associated with a reference in another poem of the *Akanāṉūṟu* anthology to the shape of the flat head of the early Tamil spear which resembled the shape of the leaf that was worn.[105] If we were to recall that the spear originally used by the hunters in the hill region later came to be associated more and more with the protective nature of Murukaṉ, the supreme deity of the hill region, and that the shaman or the deity himself came to be known as *Vēlan*[106] (வேலன்), then it would seem doubly significant to note that both the leaf-covering worn by the maidens and the leaf-shaped spear-head were indeed regarded as protective symbols. (The fact that the leaf-shaped spear-head has been regarded as a protective symbol especially among the worshippers of Murukaṉ would seem to have survived to this day in the form of the religious ceremony of inflicting bodily mutilations by means of either large or small spears or skewers as a penance — this ceremony being known as *alakiṭutal* (அலகிடுதல்), the root word, *alaku* (அலகு) *retaining*

[102] *Akam.*, 98 : 5 — 19.
[103] *Ainkuru.*, 245 : 1 — 3.
[104] *Akam.*, 75 : 17 — 21.
[105] *Akam.*, 59 : 10.
[106] *Ainkuru.*, 245 : 1.

its original meaning of 'protection' as in the ancient usage in a *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poem.[107]

It is also significant to note from the ancient Tamil poets' descriptions of young men of those days as always carrying the spear, perhaps as a protective symbol, together with other items of ornamental paraphernalia, that nothing was so expressive of the young man in the Tamil country of those distant days as the fetishes he is said to have gathered around him — his spear,[108] his bow and arrows,[109] his anklets,[110] his garlands, his hair decked with flowers, probably with a couple of buds or stalks stuck behind his ears, and his chest daubed with the sweet-smelling sandalwood-paste[111] — just as a typical Englishman in modern days, according to Herbert Read, would gather around him his top-hat, his pipe, his pens, his pocket knife, and a rolled umbrella of his, and even the pattern of his suit: art of dress and ornament in its widest sense is merely an extension of the personality, a host of artificial limbs.

Among the ornamental items with which the young man of the ancient Tamil country appeared in public, it is significant to find the *kaṭampu* flower which he wore on his head as a wreath or chaplet.[112] This flower would appear to have been a great favourite item of ornament probably because of the sacredness in which the *kaṭampu* tree, its leaves and flowers were held on account of their sacred association with the hill deity, Murukaṉ. In fact, the worshippers of the deity were not less fond of these flowers and leaves than were the priests and the priestesses who officiated in sacrificial rites. "The *Kaṭampu* tree was the tree most sacred to Murukaṉ. His spirit was supposed to dwell in the tree, and a particular *Kaṭampu* tree at the foot of the Tirupparaṅkuṉram hill was the object of great devotion. The crowds (of pilgrims) were immense on certain festive occasions. The thousands of heads crowned with wreaths all along the highway (from Maturai) gave the impression to one on the hill of one long garland stretched along the road."[113]

[107] *Puram.*, 282 : 8 — 9.
[108] *Cirupan.*, 94.
[109] *Kuru.*, 7 : 1 — 2.
[110] *Puram.*, 83 : 1; *Kuru.*, 1 : 3; ibid., 7 : 1 — 2.
[111] *Kurin.*, 112 — 122.
[112] *Akam.*, 127 : 12 — 15; *Puram.*, 23 : 3 — 5.
[113] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, p.58.

In this connexion, it may be noted that there was also another flower of bright flame-like scarlet colour, *Kāntaḷ* or the *Gloriosa superba*, which was noted for its beautiful petals resembling the slim fingers of young maidens[114] and which was also held in great reverence and respect by the people, again because of its sacred association with the hill deity, Murukaṉ, so sacred that according to a poet even the bees dared not touch its petals.[115] In spite of the sacredness of this flower, people do not seem to have worn it (?), as they did wear the *kaṭampu* and the *vēṟkai*, and the *veṭci* blooms.[116] This was probably because they knew that the plant, particularly its bulb, was poisonous, the poisonous substance being known as *colchicine*.[117] [The poisonous substance of the *Kāntaḷ*, colchicine, is said to have been turned into medicine (just as other substances of poisonous nature are usually made into medicine) in the indigenous Āyurvedic and Yunani systems of medicine, as a cure for certain skin ailments and insect bites.][118] The sacredness of the *Gloriosa superba* was however not forgotten by the people, and they had a high regard for its 'protective powers', and hence they grew the plant particularly along the fences around their huts, perhaps as a symbol of the protective force of Murukaṉ to whom it was sacred.[119]

Just as the *Gloriosa superba* and the *Kaṭampu* flowers were regarded as sacred, certain other flowers, plants, and trees are also known to have been regarded as sacred to deities of other regions by the worshippers of those deities. For instance, the banyan tree and its leaves were regarded as sacred to Māyōṉ *(Tirumāl)* of the pastoral region, and the deity itself is said to have resided in the banyan tree and also worn the garland of the basil.[120] And of course, the worshippers of Māyōṉ are said to have adorned themselves with the dress made of the leaves of the *kuruntam* tree, for which the supreme being himself is said to have been helpful in

[114] *Poru.*, 33 — 34.
[115] *Tiru.*, 43 — 44.
[116] *Akam.*, 38 : 1 — 2.
[117] I. H. Burkill, *A Dictionary of Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula*, vol. I, p.1078.
[118] *Tamil Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, pp.482 — 483.
[119] *Kuru.*, 76 : 1; ibid., 100 : 3; ibid., 373 : 7 —8.
[120] *Patir.*, 31 : 7 — 9.

bending the branch of the tree for the young maidens to pluck the leaves.[121]

The fact that the Tamils of ancient days as even in these days were conscious of the need to ward off the influence of the evil spirits from being cast upon them is evident from the references to their use of the white mustard seeds in religious rites.[122] The paste of the white mustard seeds was plastered on the door-posts at the entrance to the house as well as the fortress.[123] In later days, the sandalwood paste was also used (and it is still being used in Tamil homes), just as the paste was daubed merrily on the chest, shoulders, and even on the forehead of both men and women to prevent the evil eyes being cast upon them.

Again, perhaps as a means of averting the influence of evil spirits, the leaves of margosa tree were intertwined with garland worn by the mothers in their coiffure in order to protect their children from evil spirits.[124] (The custom of tucking of margosa leaves in the coiffure of Tamil women or in the thatched roofs of bullock carts while going on a journey, or at the lintel of the house where a person is sick or a woman has given birth, has survived to this day, again as a symbol of protective powers.)

In the foregoing paragraphs, mention was made of only those plants, leaves and flowers that were worn by the people as ornaments on account of protective powers which they were believed to confer on the wearer. Of course, other flowers, especially garlands and chaplets of certain other flowers, were worn for their fragrance and sensual appeal as well.[125] The garlands were also used by men and women when they went on social visits. Also, the ancient bards and poets would seem to have been very eager to adorn not only themselves but also their musical instruments with garlands of flowers. Such garlands or even single petals of flowers came to be valued so much that their replicas were made in gold foils and presented to the bards by their patrons.[126]

The social importance of such ornaments, particularly fresh

[121] *Akam.*, 51 : 3 — 6.
[122] *Tiru.*, 228.
[123] *Neṭu.*, 86; *Maṇi.*, 354; *Paṭir.*, 16 : 4.
[124] *Perumpaṇ.*, 58 — 60.
[125] *Malai.*, 430 — 431.
[126] *Puram.*, 126 : 2 — 3; ibid., 141 : 1; *Perumpaṇ.*, 485 — 486.

flowers on social occasions signifying joy and friendship, may be better appreciated if it were to be recalled that during periods of mourning flowers and garlands were not used as personal ornament, and that poverty and suffering were some other factors which made people abstain from the use of flowers as ornaments.[127]

The social aspect of the use of garlands as ornaments may also be seen in the reference to a group of young maidens, all of them wearing garlands, playing on the sandy mounds of the sea-shore.[128]

Perhaps, the same sort of collective identity which was manifest among the young maidens by virtue of the fact of their wearing those garlands and playing on the *playground* was expressed in the wearing of certain other flowers or wreaths of those flowers by the warriors and chieftains in the *battleground*, for after all, the ancient Tamils would seem to have regarded the game of war also as a sport with all its rules and conventions. What better means of identification could have been found than the flowers of the *veṭci (Ixora coccinea)* signifying initial stage of warfare and 'cattle-lifting', the *vañci (Hiptage madoblata)* denoting strategic movement in which a king and his warriors wishing to conquer another's country resided in a temporary military camp, the *tumpai (Leucas linifolia)* signifying pitched battles; the *vākai (Mimosa flectuosa)* denoting victory in battle; the *uḻiñai (Oerva lanatar)* denoting the military movement by which soldiers surrounded a city and attacked the wall defences, whereas the defenders of the besieged fortress wore the *nocci (Vitex nirgundi)*.

It was one of these garlands, i.e. one made of the *veṭci (Ixora coccinea)* and the *vēṅkai* blooms, both flowers of the hill region, with which the chieftain, Atiyamāṉ, is said to have been adorned when he returned from the battle-field to have a look at his newly-born son.[129] Again, the children in the ancient Tamil country had a few flowers tied to their forelocks from their infancy onward, and again this custom of wearing flowers or chaplets on the head would seem to have continued through the rest of their lives except during periods of mourning.[130]

[127] *Puram.*, 242 : 1 — 6; *Kuru.*, 19 : 1 — 2.
[128] *Akam.*, 60 : 9 — 11.
[129] *Puram.*, 100 : 4 — 11.
[130] *Akam.*, 5 : 22 — 25.

Besides using flowers, leaves and even seeds of certain creepers of sacred connexion with the supreme deity, the ancient Tamil mothers also sought to protect their daughters from evil spirits by painting the god's image on their person,[131] although we have no way of identifying how the image may have looked like.

Again, probably for the same purpose of averting the influence of evil spirits, the nubile girls' upper parts of the body were painted with sandalwood paste and other vegetable matter, sometimes by the groom himself before the wedlock. The colouring matter or the object with which they were painted was known as *toyyil*[132] (தொய்யில்). It was also customary to spread the *microspore* (the pollen-grains) of the *vēṅkai* blooms which was yet another flower sacred to the hill deity, Murukaṉ, over the paste already applied to the breasts of women. This choice of pollen-grains for the purpose of spreading over the paste, would seem to imply the idea of fertility.[133] Again, those women who wished to entice men are said to have painted on shoulders or arms the figure of yet another plant, *karumpu* (கரும்பு), i.e. the sugarcane plant *(Saccharum officinarum),* which would later seem to have evolved into the imaginary bow of *Kāmaṉ*, the love-god, like that of the Latin love-god, Cupid (Cupid — *Cupido* — *inis-cupere*, to *desire*). It is a matter of some doubt whether the paint or the colouring matter was simply used in writing temporary patterns on the skin, or whether it was pricked in, thus leaving a permanent design marked on the skin which is known as tatooing from a similar custom among the Tahitians (Tahitian, *ta'tau*). There are references to both kinds of this adornment of *toyyil*.[134] While it was *toyyil* among women, men used the sandalwood paste rather merrily on their chests especially on social occasions, probably because of both the medicinal and spirtual protection which it was believed to confer.[135]

As for the custom of scarifying the skin for purposes of adornment, it is again doubtful whether there was such a custom among the early Tamil men, although the scars left on their body by wounds caused by the arrows in battle are known to have been

131 *Akam.*, 62 : 12 — 16.
132 *Nar.*, 225 : 6 — 7; *Kuru.*, 276 : 3 — 4.
133 *Tirum.*, 35 — 36.
134 *Kuru.*, 276 : 3 — 4; *Matu.*, 415 — 416.
135 *Puram.*, 3 : 15 — 16.

regarded with some sense of pride in the heroic society.[136]

Now, coming back to the magico-religious function of early Tamil ornament, one finds that some ornaments such as the bangles or bracelets worn around the wrists, shoulders, or even ankles by women would seem to have originated as symbols of protection against evil spirits. The earliest form of bangle was probably some kind of sacred plant or creeper, wound around the wrist or shoulder. It was probably at this stage that rolls of strips of the palmyra leaf were used for the perforations in the ear, and branches of creepers were entwined about the arms and legs and neck, as it would seem to be evident from the names of such ornaments as *tōṭu, aracilai, kuḻai, ōlai, kontiḻavōlai, tālikkoṭi*. Again, the bangle would seem to have been made of the chank or conch shell, and later of gold as well.[137] Whatever be the material of which the bracelet or bangle was made, it would seem to have been regarded not only as an ornament of aesthetic value but also of some spiritual value in which case it was meant to keep off the evil spirits. For instance, there is a reference in the poem of *Neṭunalvāṭai* to the sorrowful queen wearing a piece of thread known as *kaṭikai nūl* (கடிகை நூல்), also known as *kāppu nāṇ* (காப்பு நாண்) meaning 'thread of protection', around her wrist together with the bangle made of the chank-shell.[138] Again the Tamil bracelet, besides being known as *vaḷai* (வளை), has also been known by the term, *kāppu* (காப்பு) meaning 'protection'. The term *kāppu* is indeed said to have been derived from the root, *kā* (protect), and the expression *kāppu nāṇ* (காப்பு நாண்)signifies the string of protection tied around the wrists of persons.[139] (Some of the Tamils still use this kind of string often with an amulet, popularly known as *tāyattu*, made of copper plate with certain spells engraved upon it.)

With the discovery of metals like gold and iron, the bangle was made of such metals and worn even by the male children at least until they attained their age of maturity, the purpose of such an ornament, *kāppu*, being essentially one of protecting the wearer from evil spirits or sickness while they were still young.

[136] *Akam.*, 90 : 11; *Puram.*, 14 : 9; ibid., 167 : 3.
[137] *Akam.*, 6 : 2; ibid., 24 : 1 — 2; *Neṭu.*, 141.
[138] *Neṭu.*, 142.
[139] R.P. Sethu Pillai, *Words and Their Significance*, p.13.

In addition to this ring which was worn around the wrist and perhaps on the arm too, there was again the finger-ring. Such a finger-ring is also mentioned in the *Neṭunalvāṭai* and *Maturaikkāñci* poems.[140] The ring worn around the finger was known as *viḷakkam* (விளக்கம்) and it was also referred to as *muṭakku mōtiram*[141] (முடக்கு மோதிரம்). The term, *muṭakku* (முடக்கு), signifying 'impediment', 'hindrance', or 'obstacle', was probably an apt term to refer to the finger ring on account of its probable function of preventing the evil forces. The intention or assumption behind the custom of wearing the finger-ring by the queen who was, incidentally, sorrow-stricken because her lord was away, was probably the constriction of the finger by the ring, which might have been believed to hinder the egress of the soul or/and to prevent the entrance of evil spirits. ("With the like intention, the Bagobos of the Philippine islands put rings of brass wire on the wrists or ankles of their sick" — J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, vol. I. p.238.) That is to say, the ring may have been conceived to excercise a certain constrictive influence which imprisons the immortal spirit, and thus the ring would seem to have acted as a spiritual fetter. On the other hand, the same constriction which was believed to hinder the egress of the soul might have been also believed to prevent the entrance of evil spirits.

The wearing of bracelets, anklets, and arm rings among the earliest people has also been interpreted by Frazer as due to the belief in their efficacy as amulets to keep the soul in the body or demons out of it.

Frazer also points out that knots tied on a string have been used as both maleficent and beneficent according as the thing which it impedes or hinders is good or evil. For example, he says, knots may be used by an enchantress to win a lover and attach him firmly to herself.[142]

The Tamils are known to have used the knot on the string for an important purpose (தாலிக்கட்டு), i.e. for *wedlock*. When the early men tied the knots using both ends of the *tāli* or string, those knots might well have signified the corporeal and spiritual fetters

[140] *Neṭu.*, 143 – 144; *Maṭu.*, 719.
[141] See *Paṭṭuppāṭṭu*, Dr. U.V. Saminatha Aiyar's Tamil edition, p.460.
[142] J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Abridged Edition), vol. I, p.319.

on their wives' chastity, as seen in a poem of the *Akanāṉūṟu* anthology.[143] To the string of wedlock, which came to be known as *the* string (தாலி) for the married women among Tamils, was also added, again as a symbol of heroism, the tooth of the tiger which probably the hero himself hunted.[144] The children too are known to have worn a similar string-ornament possibly with a pendant of the tiger's tooth.[145] It is significant to note that the *tāli* worn by the married woman was never removed from her neck until it was untied or severed in the event of her own death or in the event of her becoming a widow. But the *tāli* worn by the children would seem to have been replaced by a garland when they came of age. The poet, Iṭaikkuṉṟūrkilār, praising the heroism of his patron, Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceliyaṉ, points out that the king entered active service of warfare even while he was still a youthful prince, i.e., when he was still wearing the *tāli*, instead of the garland which was meant for the young warrior.[146]

[143] *Akam.*, 9 : 24 — 26.
[144] Ibid., 7 : 18.
[145] *Puram.*, 374 : 9.
[146] *Puram.*, 77 : 6 — 7.

PART TWO

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

CHAPTER SIX

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

Among the external and easily recognizable signs of 'religious phenomena', one idea which has generally been believed to be characteristic of all that is religious, is that of the *supernatural*. By this is understood the world of all that is mysterious, unknowable, and ununderstandable. (For Max Müller, it was all "a struggle to conceive the inconceivable, to utter the unutterable, a longing after the Infinite".)[1] But, according to Emile Durkheim, the idea of the *supernatural* was completely foreign to the early people.[2] For the early men there was nothing strange in the fact that by a mere word or gesture, one was able to command the elements, retard or precipitate the motion of stars, bring rain or cause it to cease. This view would seem to be somewhat plausible, with regard to certain evidence in classical Tamil poetry as well.

When we observe the early Tamil bards and poets attribute extraordinary virtues to certain tribal leaders or rulers, it is true that one is prone to find an air of 'mystery' in the conceptions.[3] It would seem to us that those men of early days would have been willing to resign themselves to those ideas so disturbing to our modern reason. But in fact, these conceptions which are so much mystifying to us might well have appeared to the early people not only as the simplest in the world, but also as the most obvious manner of representing and understanding what *they actually saw about them*. For the early Tamils, there would seem to have been nothing strange or mysterious in the fact that by a mere word or gesture accompanied with certain oblations, the hunters of the hill region were able to bring rain or cause it to cease.[4] Again, the rites which they employed to assure the fertility of the jungle, the soil, the rivers, or even the oceans, or the fecundity of the animal species, or the flora and the fauna on which they were nourished, perhaps did not appear more irrational or mysterious to their eyes

[1] Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religions*, p.18.
[2] E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp.39 — 43.
[3] *Puram.*, 38 :4 — 9.
[4] Ibid., 143 : 1 — 3.

than the scientific and technical processes of the modern agricultural scientists, for the same object, do appear to laymen like us. That is to say, the powers which the early people (or their representative, the shaman) put into play by diverse means probably did not seem to them to have anything especially mysterious about them. Of course, the forces employed or manipulated by the early men were undoubtedly different, as we shall see later, from those which the modern agricultural scientist, the game-warden, or the fishery or cattle-farming experts employ nowadays. Nevertheless, for those early people who *believed* in the efficacy of such powers, they must have been as intelligible as, say, gravitation and electricity are said to be intelligible to the physicists of today.

Again, according to Durkheim, if there had been the idea of 'supernatural' among the earliest people (which is unlikely), then it would imply that the same people were *fully* aware of a *natural* order of things, bound together by laws of nature etc., which concept alone could have given rise to the contrary idea of 'supernatural'. However, Durkheim is of the view that the idea of 'supernatural' or even the contrary idea of 'Universal Determinism' is of only recent origin. ("Even the greatest thinkers of classical antiquity never succeeded in becoming *fully* conscious of it. It is a conquest of the positive sciences; it is the postulate upon which they repose and which they have proved by their progress.')[5]

In the absence of such awareness of anything 'supernatural' or so long as it was insufficiently developed, even the most marvellous phenomena or events that might have occurred among the earliest people would have appeared perfectly conceivable or natural. So long as early men were even vaguely aware of only the immutablity or inflexiblity of the order of things and so long as they saw in those events or phenomena the work of certain contingent wills, they found it natural to believe that even contrary wills or others could not and would not modify human actions arbitrarily. That is perhaps why we have references in the poems of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology that even if there was any change or mutablity or flexiblity in the original nature of nature's elements, such as the straying of the Sun and the Moon or even the stars from their customary paths, (which even in their elementary conceptions was impossible)

[5]E. Durkheim, op.cit., p.41.

the conduct and behaviour of the rulers would not change from the righteous or natural path.[6] That is also perhaps why the 'miraculous' events which the ancient Tamils attributed to their gods or other forces of nature would *not* seem to have been to their eyes *miracles* in the modern acceptation of the term. For some of the Tamil poets of the classical period, even those events which somewhat resembled nature's phenomena were not even 'surprising'.[7]

Even for other bards or poets, such events could not have been rare or terrible, but mostly beautiful spectacles which were causes of small wonder or marvel (*mirabilia, miracula;* விய, வியத்தல், வியப்பு) but probably they never saw in them even glimpses of a *mysterious* world into which reason could not penetrate.

The fact that those events or phenomena which might strike us as something 'supernatural' or mysterious, were actually regarded as beautiful, would seem to be evident from the early Tamil concepts with regard to the cult of Murukaṉ, which were essentially associated with the beauty of nature. The term, Murukaṉ, itself, is said to have meant *beauty, youth,* and *godhead,* and the ancient Tamils who lived in the hill region associated their godhead with the perennial *youth* and *beauty* as reflected in nature. Before anthropomorphism entered into the cult of Murukaṉ in the absence of a teaching authority on religion like the Church in Christianity, the people of the hill region would seem to have worshipped God only as revealed in *Nature.* "His cult is indissolubly connected with montane nature. The spots he chooses for his habitation or for the manifestations of his greatness and for bestowing his favours upon his clients, are places where *Nature* is most alluring, such as 'the wood and grove and enchanting islet, the river and lake and such other places... In his worship, his devotees use the flowers of the mountain region such as the *Gloriosa superba* (கார்த்திகை), the red *ixora* (செங்கோடு), and other red flowers... He himself is decked with a wreath of red *veṭci* blooms and garlands of flowers from his favourite tree, the *kaṭampu (Eugenia racemosa),* which is sacred to him, and from his ears hang the leaves of the *asoka* tree *(Uvaria longifolia)*... His devotees revel in the *newness of life and beauty*

[6] *Puram.*, 6 : 26 — 29; ibid., 2 : 16 — 20; ibid., 34 : 5 — 7; *Nar.*, 289 : 1 — 3.

[7] *Puram.*, 197 : 1— 14.

that the hill wears after the first rains in August and September, when the tanks are filled with acquatic flowers; when the *koṉṟai* (*Cassia* tree) hangs out on its branches, its golden garlands, the *vēṅkai* (*Pterocarpus bilobus* or the Kino tree) bursts into bloom, the *Gloriosa superba* unfolds its rosy fingers, and the bees and the beetles make music like the strings of the lute, while the peacocks and peahens cry as if appealing to departed lovers to linger no more but return to their own..."[8]

Similarly, with regard to the god of the pastoral region according to Professor Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, the cult of Murukaṉ was transformed into one of *Māyōṉ* (மாயோன்), named after the green pastures, by being subject to the natural law of growth among the Tamil people to whom *Nature* was actually the background of their life, social, literary, as well as *religious*, and in the agricultural region the godhead who held the power to rule the clouds and bestow rain on which agriculture depended was known as *Vēntaṉ* (வேந்தன்), and in the coastal region (the blue expanse of the ocean which was constantly before the eyes of the inhabitants of the region) people called their god *Varuṇaṉ* (the 'coloured-one'), and worshipped him with the produce of the ocean, i.e. fish, and performed their ritual cleansing by bathing in the sea. In the arid region, people adored the goddess of *Koṟṟavai*. (The worship of Koṟṟavai is believed to have been the revival of the ancient Dravidian cult of Mother-Goddess. But also it could have been the survival of the disintergration of one of those agrarian cults, mentioned earlier. That is to say, if for some special reason such as depredation caused by war or such calamity, the agrarian cult of which it might have been a part, may have gone out of existence, leaving the cult of *Koṟṟavai* in a somewhat disintegrated condition. In certain instances, it might not have been even a cult, but a simple ceremony or particular rite which might have persisted in this way. This would also seem to have been the case with the worship of such deities as *Aiyaṉār* (ஐயனார்) which has survived to this day among rural dwellers in South India, and also in some parts of Malaya (e.g. Malacca) where Tamil settlements are to be found).

[8] Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, *Nature Poetry in Tamil*, pp.55 — 57.

There is also the other belief that the idea of the 'supernatural' in the conception of religion of early people was born when they saw that certain events occurred outside the course of determined or known sequences of nature, such as the eclipse of the Sun or the Moon, failure of rain, the slow appearance of the Moon, or the falling of meteors or the appearance of comets, etc.[9]

According to Jevons, the early people attributed such phenomena as above to extraordinary, exceptional causes or extra-natural or supernatural causes, and it was under this form that the idea of supernatural was born at the very outset, and from that moment, religious thought found itself provided with its proper subject.[10]

But, Durkheim disagrees with this view and points out that the supernatural cannot be reduced to the unforeseen. "In order to arrive at the idea of the supernatural, it is not enough to be witnesses to unexpected events; it is also necessary that these be conceived as irreconcilable with an order which, rightly or wrongly, appears to us to be implied in the nature of things... Also, in whatever manner men have represented the novelties and contingencies revealed by experience, there is nothing in these representations which could serve to characterize religion. For, religious conceptions have as their object, before everything else, to express and explain, not that which is exceptional and abnormal in things, but, on the contrary, that which is constant and regular. Very frequently, gods serve less to account for the monstrosities, fantasies and anomalies than for the regular march of the Universe, for the movement of stars, the rhythm of seasons, the annual growth of vegetation, the perpetuation of the species etc. It is far from being true, then, that the notion of the religious coincides with that of the extraordinary or the unforeseen."[11]

Ancient Tamils, too, would seem to have gazed at the celestial phenomena in the sky with a sense of wonder, not only because of the beneficial aesthetic aspects of some of the heavenly bodies like the Sun, the Moon, and rain-bearing clouds, but also on account of their luminous appearance in the firmament. And therefore, they

[9] *Puram.*, 41 : 4 — 6; ibid., 117 : 1 — 2; ibid., 400 : 1 — 2.
[10] *Introduction to the History of Religions*, p.15.
[11] Durkheim, op.cit., pp.42 — 43.

referred to those self-luminous celestial bodies like the stars by the collective term, *mīṉ* (மீன், i.e. 'that which twinkles or flickers') a derivative of the verb *miṉ* (மின், 'flash or twinkle'), the same verbal root from which the term *miṉṉal* (மின்னல்), denoting the 'flash of lightning', has been derived. However, as there were certain other objects like the fish, the scales of which appeared to glitter in the waters and which were also for the same reason known as *mīṉ*(மீன்), the self-luminous objects in the sky came to be distinguished by the addition of the prefix *viṇ* (விண், sky) or *veṇ* (வெண், white), and the galaxy of stars in the sky were known as *viṇ-mīṉ* (விண் மீன்), while the poets referred to them as the 'glittering objects in the sky,[12] or 'the glittering objects which appear and move in the sky'.[13]

The celestial bodies were further distinguished into asteroids or stars which were known as *Nāṇ-mīṉ* (நாண் மீன்) or *Nāḷ-mīṉ* (நாள் மீன்) or *Vaikal-mīṉ* (வைகல் மீன்), probably because of their daily or day-to-day, 'fixed' nature in maintaining practically the same relative positions in the sky, unlike the 'wandering stars' or planets which were known as *Kōḷ-mīṉ* (கோள் மீன்), perhaps because of the apparent global shape of the clearly visible bodies like the Sun and the Moon.[14]

In the passage of the poem, *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, which has just been referred to, the picturesque phrase of the author, "நீனிற விசும்பின் வல்கோள்பு திரிதரு நாண்மீன்" is very significant, because here the poet, standing in the south of India, i.e. more or less south of the celestial equator would seem to have observed accurately enough that the 'fixed' star appeared to rotate around the south celestial pole in a *clockwise* direction, whereas the same phenomenon would have seemed to occur in the counter-clockwise direction around the north celestial pole to a person standing in the north polar hemisphere.

The same poet, Uruttiraṅkaṇṇaṉār (his name itself would seem to imply that he had very sharp eyes, perhaps with power of extra-sensory perception) speaks of the possibility of the Northern star (Polaris) changing its position to the south of the celestial

[12] *Puram.*, 109 : 9.
[13] Ibid., 367 : 15 — 16.
[14] *Paṭṭiṉ.*, 67 — 68.

equator, and at such a period drought and famine would seem to coincide probably on account of the failure of rain, but, according to the poet, the never-failing sea-like *Kāviri* river nourished the ever-growing fields of golden paddy and sugar-cane, thus averting the drought and famine.[15]

The poet's reference to the northern star Polaris, which appeared to change its position occasionally, was probably due to the misunderstanding of the fact (since known) that it was the earth which was actually rotating on its axis, while the self-luminous star merely appeared to rotate around the south celestial pole in a clock-wise direction. The mistaken belief, now probably an idle "superstition", however, represents, like many other "superstitions", an important phase of bygone thought. So long as the early people believed the earth to be the centre of the Universe around which the stars and the planets were ever circling, it seems natural that they should have regarded the happenings on earth as influenced by the movements of heavenly bodies which were believed probably to control and to cause the variations in meteorological conditions corresponding to the seasons, and thus astrology, as a science, is said to have been born.

In the ancient Tamil country, such a phenomenon as mentioned above might have appeared to the ordinary and yet observant people as something extraordinary, but it is doubtful that, by merely witnessing this phenomenon, the ancient people would have arrived at the idea of supernatural. It is also doubtful that the notion of the earliest Tamil religion or religions would have coincided with that of the extraordinary or the unforeseen phenomenon such as that noted above or other similar phenomena. Indeed, the ancient Tamil poets do not seem to have shown even the slightest sense of awe, mystery or even fear at seeing such exceptional phenomena.[16]

The idea of mystery or fear obviously was not there, but nevertheless such a possibility would seem to have been expressed in the concepts of some people which may be described merely as the product of their own imagination to account for the exceptional disorders and accidents: To those people who were probably not accustomed to seeing their expectations fail, such failure of

[15] *Pattin.*, 1 — 8.
[16] *Puram.*, 397 : 24 — 25.

expectation as failure of rain would have appeared as something extraordinary, and therefore they promptly attributed such disorders as famine to the so-called straying of the northern star towards the south.

But, Jevons contends that men commenced by imagining the phenomena to account for disorders, and that it was only afterwards that they began to utilize them in explaining the uniformities of nature,[17] to which Durkheim replies that " it is not clear what could have led men to attribute such manifestly contradictory functions to them. More than that, the hypothesis according to which sacred beings were at first restricted to the negative function of disturbers is quite arbitrary."[18] In fact, he says, even with the most simple religions, their essential task is to maintain, in a positive manner, the normal course of life. It is to this system of religious observances which were meant to uphold positive and bilateral relations with the religious forces that Durkheim gives the name of *Positive Cult*.[19]

The ancient men were more concerned about the 'rhythm of life' which however sometimes appeared to them going in oscillations in contrary directions. Vegetation died some time during the year; would it be reborn? Animal species tended to become extinguished by the effect of natural and violent death; would they be renewed at such a time and in such a way as was proper? Above all, rain was capricious; there were periods during which it seemed to have disappeared for ever.[20]

But men could not regard these spectacles as indifferent spectators. If they were to live, the universal life must continue, and the natural forces must not languish. So they sought to sustain and aid them; for this, they put at their service whatever forces they had at their disposal, and mobilized them for the purpose. From the paddy grains grown on the sacred hills possessed by the glorious leader of their clan they took those germs of life which lay dormant there and scattered them into space.[21] The liquor made of those paddy grains, and the blood flowing in the veins of the ram or in

[17] Jevons, op.cit., p.23.
[18] Durkheim, op.cit., p.43.
[19] See Durkheim, op.cit., p.366 ff.
[20] *Puram.*, 203 : 1 — 3.
[21] *Kuru.*, 53 : 3 — 4; *Ainkuru.*, 243 : 1.

their own veins, had fecundating virtues; and they poured them forth.[22] (The sacrifice of ram and the libation of liquor, made of paddy rice, which were associated particularly with the totemic rite of *Veṟi-āṭal* — a sort of frenzied dance — and also certain animistic rites to be discussed later in this part with some detail are believed to have had the objective of nourishing divine forces, i.e. if the sacrificer scattered the grains of paddy-rice or wild-oats or poured the liquor made of the paddy-rice, or immolated the ram and poured its blood, it was in order that the living principles within them might be disengaged from the organism and go to nourish the divinity. Similarly the effusions of blood — always a sacred principle with the early people — which were usual at such rites, were veritable oblations. The purpose of a somewhat similar ceremony among certain tribes in central Australia is said to be that by means of pouring out the blood of the animal, the spirits of the animal were driven out in all directions, and thus increasing the number of animals. From the blood which has served to make the animal, they are said to believe that vivifying principles go forth, which animate the embryos of the new generation, and thus prevent the species from disappearing. For the people belonging to the tribe in central Australia, it is the kangaroo which is the favourite animal of sacrifice, whereas the ram was the chosen animal for the hill-folk in the ancient Tamil country.)

It is this sort of rites to which Durkheim has given the name of *Positive Cult*. What is the nature of the Positive Cult? According to Durkheim, "a cult is a system of diverse rites, festivals, and ceremonies which all have this characteristic, that they reappear periodically. They fulfil the need which the believer feels of strengthening and reaffirming, at regular intervals of time, the bond which unites him to the sacred things upon which he depends... That is why one speaks of marriage *rites* but not of a marriage cult, of rites of birth but not of a cult of the new born child: it is because of the events on the occasion of which these rites take place imply no periodicity. In the same way, there is no cult of the ancestors *except* when sacrifices are made on the tombs from time to time, when libations are made there on certain more or less specific

[22] *Akam.*, 35 : 9; *Kuru.*, 362 : 4 — 5; ibid., 263 : 1.

dates, or when festivals are regularly celebrated in honour of the dead."[23]

However, with regard to the origin of the cult of ancestors among certain people, Durkheim has pointed out that death of ordinary beings did not have the power of deification for those rites that formed an ancestor cult. The personages represented in the rites relating to the ancestor cult of those people were considered to have exercised super-human powers while alive. To those fabulous few, was attributed all that was grand in the history of the tribe, or even of the whole world. It was they who in a large measure made the earth such as it was, and men such as they were. The haloes or feathers with which they, or rather the objects symbolic of them were decorated, did not come to them merely from the fact that they were ancestors, i.e. that they were dead, but rather from the fact that a divine character was and always had been attributed to them.

The origin of positive cults, either of ancestors or their souls, geniuses, divinities or spirits which were believed to have animated them and other beings and which were nevertheless distinguished from those organic beings by the nature of their powers, is traced by scholars like Tylor to the religion of spiritual beings also known as *Animism*, and by scholars like J. G. Fraser and E. Durkheim to the religion of *totem* or *Totemism*. These two systems of religious beliefs are discussed in the ensuing chapters.

Chapter Seven

ANIMISM

Animism has spiritual beings as its object, i.e. souls, spirits, geniuses, demons, divinities which are all animated and conscious agents. Animistic beliefs and practices are said to be based on three main concepts: first, the idea of the soul; secondly, the concept that souls become the object of a cult and are thus transformed

[23] Op.cit., p.80.

into spirits; and thirdly, the concept that the cult of nature is derived from the cult of spirits.

According to Tylor,[1] who has been the pioneering exponent of the theory of Animism, the idea of the soul was first suggested to men by the badly understood spectacle of the double life they ordinarily appeared to lead, on the one hand, when awake, on the other, when asleep. In fact for the earliest men, the mental representations which they had while awake and those of their dreams, are said to have been of the same value: they objectified the second like the first, that is to say, they saw in them images of external objects whose appearance they more or less accurately reproduced. So when they dreamed that they had visited a distant place, they believed that they were really there. But they could not have gone there, unless two beings existed within them: the one, their body, which had remained lying on the ground and which they found in the same position on awakening; the other, during the time, had travelled through space. Similarly if they seemed to talk with one of their companions, dead or alive, who they knew were either dead or alive and were at a distance, they concluded that the other persons were also composed of two beings: one who stayed at a distance, and another who had come to manifest himself by means of the dream. (Of the negroes of Southern Guinea, Tylor says that 'their sleeping hours are characterized by almost as much intercourse with the dead as their waking hours are with the living.')[2] From these repeated experiences, the early men, little by little, are believed to have arrived at the idea that each of them had a double, another *self*, which in determined conditions had the power of leaving the organism where it resided, and of going away, roaming at a distance.

This double, known as *soul*, is at the same time believed to have been distinguished from the perceptible being which served it as external covering, by its energetic and active nature (it could cover vast distances in an instant), as well as its malleable and plastic quality (for, to leave the body, it passed out by the apertures of the organism, especially the mouth and the nose). The soul is also said to have been conceived in the image of the body. There would

[1] *Primitive Culture*, Chapters XI — XVIII.
[2] Ibid., p.443.

seem to have been not only a close union of soul and body, but also a partial confusion of the two.

Certain regions and certain organs of the organism were believed to have a special affinity: such was the case with the heart (the blood), the lungs (the breath), and even the liver and the fat of the liver. Sometimes it was also believed that these various material substrata were not mere habitations of the soul; they were the soul itself, seen from without. When the blood flowed, the soul was believed to escape with it; when the breath departed, the soul departed too. The soul of the heart could not be the same as that of breath. While they were related, still they were distinguished, and therefore had different names.

Nevertheless, the soul was also believed to be distinct and independent of the body, for during this life it could leave it at any moment; it did leave it during sleep. It might even remain absent for some time without entailing death; however, during these absences, life was weakened and even stopped if the soul did not return home. But it was especially at death that this distinction and independence manifested themselves with the greatest clarity. While the body no longer existed and no visible traces remained, the soul was believed to continue to live: it was believed to lead an autonomous existence in another world. It was also believed to lead a life absolutely analogous to the one it led in this world; it ate and drank. When it fluttered among the branches of trees, it caused rustling and cracking which even profane ears heard. But it was believed to be invisible. Ordinary individuals were believed to enjoy the privilege of perceiving it at only one moment of their existence: when they were on the eve of a premature death. Therefore this quasi-miraculous vision was considered a sinister omen.

Howsoever real this duality of body and soul might have appeared to be, it was in no way absolute. Quite on the contrary they seemed united by the closest bonds; they were separable only imperfectly and with difficulty. Everything that hurt the one, hurt the other. It was so intimately associated with the life of the organism that the soul was believed to grow with the body and decay with it. When senility set in, and the old man was no longer able to take a useful part in the life of the community, it was thought that weakness of the body was communicated to the soul. No

longer having the same powers, the old man lost the right to the privilege and the prestige accorded to him earlier.

Again, the soul was believed to be not gone entirely when the last breath had been expired: the bond uniting the body and the soul might have been loosened, but not entirely broken. Therefore a whole series of special rites was thought necessary to induce the soul to depart definitely. The flesh of the dead was thought to contain a sacred principle which was nothing more than the soul. In order to drive it out completely and definitely, the flesh was melted by submitting it to the heat of artificial fire. The soul was believed to depart with the liquids which resulted. But even then, the dry bones were believed to have retained some part of the soul. Therefore they could be used as sacred objects or instruments of magic; or if someone wished to give complete liberty to the soul, he broke these bones and liberated the soul completely.

Thus a moment did arrive when the final separation was accomplished. And when this moment did arrive, the liberated soul was believed to take flight for the land of souls. This land was conceived differently by various peoples; sometimes different conceptions have been found existing side by side in the same society. For some it was situated under the earth where each tribe had its part. Among other people, the land of souls was more or less vaguely localized beyond the hills or mountains, or into the sky beyond the clouds.

There was the belief that in the land of souls a different treatment was sometimes accorded them based on the way they had conducted themselves upon earth: those who had excelled, during life on earth, as warriors or as men of righteous deeds towards their fellow beings, were not confounded with the common hordes of others. A special place was granted to them.

Again there was the belief that the souls which, in each generation, quitted the bodies in which they dwelt and went to the land of souls, returned after a certain length of time to reincarnate themselves, and these reincarnations were believed to have been the cause of conception and birth.

Such were the beliefs relative to the soul and its destiny, in their primitive form, and reduced to their most essential traits. We must now turn to the second characteristic on which the animistic

theory is based, namely, that the souls became the object of a cult and thus transformed into spirits.

The basic idea on which the second characteristic is based is that the soul is not a spirit. That is why it is said that the soul has not been the object of any cult. The spirit on the other hand has been the object of various cults. But a soul was believed to become a spirit by only transforming itself, and it was thought that the fact of death produced this metamorphosis. Although death was not distinguished from a prolonged sleep among the early people, in the case of death, when the body was not reanimated, the idea was formed of a separation which was taken as final when the funeral rites were over. The soul was thus believed to be transformed from a simple vital principle animating the body of a man into a spirit, a good or evil one or even a deity, according to the importance of the effect with which it was charged. Since it was death which brought about this apotheosis, it was to the dead, to the souls of the departed, that the first cult known to humanity was addressed. Thus the first rites were funeral rites; the first sacrifices were food offerings meant to satisfy the needs of the departed; the first altars were the tombs of the dead.[3]

These spirits which were once regarded as souls were also believed to concern themselves with the life of their past companions, either to aid them or to injure them, according to their sentiments which they had shown towards them. According to the circumstances, their nature made them either very precious auxiliaries or very redoubtable adversaries. Owing to their extreme fluidity, they could even enter into the body, and cause all sorts of disorders there, or else increase its vitality. Thus came the habit of attributing to them all those events of life which varied slightly from the ordinary. If a person was overtaken by an attack or seized by some sickness, it was because an evil spirit had entered into him and brought him all this trouble. Thus the power of spirits was increased by all that men attributed to them, and in the end, men found themselves the prisoners of this imaginary world of which they were however the authors and the models. They fell into dependence upon these spirtual forces which they had created in their own image. If the spirits were the givers of health and

[3] Tylor, op.cit., p.481 ff.

sickness, of good and evils, to this extent it was wise to conciliate their favour or appease them when they were irritated, and hence came the offerings, prayers, sacrifices etc.

The spirits which were mentioned above were of course of human origin, and as such they were thought to act only upon human events. But the early people also imagined other spirits to account for other phenomena, both of animate and inanimate origin, of the universe, and thus the *cult of nature* was subsequently formed.

For Tylor, this extension of animism was due to the peculiar mentality of the primitive men who could not distinguish the animate and the inanimate, and consequently they were inclined to endow all things, even inanimate ones, with a nature analogous to their own. As a result of this extension, they came to believe that the souls of things that resided especially in the phenomena of the physical world caused the movement of water-courses, the germination of plants, the reproduction of animals etc. They then believed that they had an equal need of the spirits which appeared to animate these things, and thus came to implore their assistance with offerings and prayers.

However, according to Herbert Spencer[4] who upon this point differs from Tylor, the extension of the belief in spirits of men to those of nature's phenomena, was due to a confusion in the use of language, i.e. in the primitive societies, it was common custom to give to each individual, either at his birth or later, the name of some animal, plant, star, or natural object. The early men, however, soon lost sight of the fact that these names were only figures of speech (mostly metaphors) and taking them literally, they ended by believing that an ancestor named 'Tiger' or 'Jackal' was really a tiger or jackal. Thus, according to Spencer, the cult of which the ancestor was the object upto that time was changed over to the animal with which he was thereafter confounded, and as the same substitution went on for the plants, and all other natural phenomena, the religion of nature took the place of the old religion of the dead. Besides the fundamental confusion involving the literal interpretation of metaphorical names, Spencer mentions others:

[4] *Principles of Sociology*, p.126.

The animals which frequented the surroundings of the tombs or dwellings of men were taken for their reincarnated souls, and adored under the title, or again, the mountain which tradition made the cradle of the race was finally taken for the ancestor of the race; it was thought that men were descended from it, because their ancestors appeared coming from it, and it was consequently treated as an ancestor itself.[5]

Notwithstanding certain reservations on the value of some aspects of Tylor's theory of animism made by scholars like Spencer who has differed from the original theorist upon the above-mentioned point and upon the point only, and Durkheim who, too, after an able analysis of the chief aspects of Tylor's theory, has pointed out grave difficulties in applying the theory closely to the earliest religious beliefs, Tylor's hypotheses on the dream and the origin of ideas of soul and spirit, are still regarded classic.

Let us, therefore, now, turn our attention to some significant evidence in the classical Tamil poetry, which might usefully be interpreted with reference to several aspects of the theory of animism, as outlined above.

First, of all, there is evidence in the poems of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology which would seem to support the very principle which is at the basis of the theory, namely, that the soul was believed to be entirely distinct from the body, that it was its double, and that within it or outside of it, it normally lived an autonomous life.

[Although it might seem from the evidence to be cited hereinafter that the conception was not that of the very earliest Tamils, nevertheless it would seem to throw some light on certain aspects of the ancient Tamils' idea of the soul. In this connexion, it must be noted that various terms have been used in classical Tamil poetry to signify the principle of life or soul, e.g. *uyir* (உயிர், 'breath'), *maṉam* (மனம், 'mind'), *neñcam* (நெஞ்சம்), or *uḷḷam* (உள்ளம், 'heart' or 'inside of chest'). Of these terms, the last two though meaning generally the 'heart' might also be taken to mean the *viscera* in general or any one of the organs situated within the chest — heart, lungs, liver etc. The ancient people's tendency to give various names to the principle of life or the soul will be

[5] Herbert Spencer, op.cit., pp.366 — 367.

discussed subsequently.]

First, the author of a poem in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology would seem to bear witness to the fact that the ancient Tamils did believe in the separate existence of the soul in each individual[6] while the possibility of one soul dwelling in or near the soul of another person (especially in the case of lovers) is referred to by Tāyaṅkaṇṇaṉār, the author of a poem in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology,[7] as well as by other poets: That the soul which resided in individuals animated the bodies of those persons has indeed never been in doubt, and is implied in a number of verses.[8]

Secondly, the belief that the soul, though invisible[9] was distinct from the body would seem to have been expressed in the references of the poems of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology to the departure of the soul or the principle of life known as *uyir* (உயிர்), the existence of which animated the body, while its departure stilled it.[10] (Perhaps again, it was to be expected that this principle of life, *uyir*, should be confounded with the double, the soul, since the absence of the 'double' during sleep had the effect of suspending thought and life, and hence the use of the same term, *tuñcu* (துஞ்சு) in Tamil language meaning both 'sleep' and 'die', implying the analogy of sleep and death.[11]

Thirdly, the 'double' nature of the soul and body would seem to be expressed in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poems, in which the poets in their 'soliloquys', address their double, i.e. the soul, when their patron's gifts are either declined or simply procrastinated.[12]

For the early Tamils, though the soul under certain conditions would seem to have been independent of the organism as mentioned above, it would also seem to have been confounded itself with the image of the entire body or at least some parts of the body (in which it was believed to dwell), to such an extent that it did not seem possible to separate it from the organism or the organ. Certain organs of the body such as the 'heart' have not only been regarded

[6] *Puram.*, 159 : 15.
[7] *Puram.*, 356 : 5; *Kuru.*, 36 : 2 — 3; ibid., 56 : 5; ibid., 228 : 5 — 6.
[8] *Puram.*, 31 : 16 — 17; 53 : 7; 159 : 15; 198 : 7 — 8; 176 : 12; 210 : 13.
[9] *Puram.*, 282 : 6.
[10] *Puram.*, 282 : 4 — 6; 363 : 8; 175 : 4; 307 : 14; 192 : 9 — 11.
[11] *Kuru.*, 32 : 1 — 2; *Puram.*, 22 : 37 — 38.
[12] *Puram.*, 101 : 9 — 10; 207 : 1; 237 : 20.

as the seats of the soul, but also its outward form or forms and material manifestations, so that, in the case of the term denoting the organ, *neñcu* (நெஞ்சு) or 'heart', the same term came to be applied to the soul as well. Mention was already made of the organ of heart, in which the principle of life or the soul was believed to be ever present in the form of blood; hence the sacredness of blood which was frequently used in religious rites.

Again, probably on account of this belief regarding the normal existence of the soul in the heart which was the clearing house of the sacred blood, coupled with the belief that when the blood flowed the soul escaped too, the ancient Tamil warriors were not only proud to receive the fatal spear in the chest, but also they regarded it as a sign of greatest disgrace and cowardice to turn one's back in battle. Cēramāṉ Peruñcēralātaṉ who happened to receive the wound at the back from the spear thrown by his adversary, Karikālaṉ, is said to have sought redemption from such disgrace by undergoing a more dreadful means of liberating the soul, i.e. by fasting unto death, which was in those days denoted by the euphemism "Sitting Towards the North"[13] (வடக்கிருத்தல்).

A similar belief that the chest or breast was the seat of the soul, would seem to have moved the heroic mother in the ancient Tamil country, who on hearing that her son turned his back in battle, swore that she would tear off her breasts which suckled such a coward, and then proceeded to the battlefield to find her son's body mangled in the true heroic fashion, and felt greater joy than when she gave birth to him.[14] The ancient Tamils would also seem to have believed that the tongue or the mouth (from which or through which the breath was thought to depart) was also the seat of the soul, and this is evident from Peruṅkaṭuṅkō's poem in which he refers to the existence of the soul of the departed hero in the tongue of the poets who sang his praise.[15]

Now, turning to the belief that through the experience of dream, the soul was conceived as the 'double' which was able to leave the organism to go places during sleep, we find certain references again in the poems of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology, to the dreams in

[13] *Puram.*, 65 : 9 — 11.
[14] *Puram.*, 278 : 1 — 9.
[15] *Puram.*, 282 : 1 — 11.

which the poets are said to have seen the vision of their patrons bestowing gifts and when they actually received their gifts, i.e. when they were fully awake, it would seem to have appeared as a dream or in other words, a sort of dream-come-true.[16] There is also a reference by another poetess, Auvaiyār, to certain enemies' souls being afraid to travel as far as the guarded city of Atiyamāṉ even in a dream.[17]

Also the soul was believed able to speak to the other person or the other person's soul in the dream, and this is implied in the reference of Pēri Cāttaṉār in a poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, collection, in which he says that even in dreams he spoke of his affection for his patron, Naṉmāraṉ.[18] (In later days, the soul was believed also to travel to distant places, even while the body was awake, and probably on account of this belief, a Tamil poetic form of *pirapantam* class, namely, *Neñcu-viṭu-tūtu* (நெஞ்சுவிடு தூது) was added to other poetic forms, and it was a form in which, as the title implies, the heart was personified as a messenger to a lover.)

Durkheim who is somewhat sceptical about the claim that the primitive man could have conceived of himself as two beings merely by the experience of dreams, observes: "Of the two existences which he successively leads, that of the day and that of the night, it is the first which should interest him most. Is it not strange that the second should have so captivated his attention that he made it the basis of a whole system of complicated ideas destined to have so profound an influence upon his thought and conduct?"[19]

An answer to this question would no doubt require further research, but for the present, one can treat it as only a comment and proceed with the other aspects of the belief regarding the soul.

The soul was also believed to be distinct and independent of the body, for during this life it could leave the body at any moment (as it did leave during sleep). The suddenness with which death occurred would seem to have made the exasperated poets to address the god of death as an unrighteous killer.[20] The author of a poem in

[16] *Puram.*, 377 : 19 — 20; 387 : 26 — 28.
[17] *Puram.*, 390 : 4 — 6.
[18] *Puram.*, 198 : 6 — 8.
[19] Durkehim., op.cit., p.75.
[20] *Puram.*, 210 : 8.

Puṟanāṉūṟu collection, whose name is unfortunately not known, says, that even if the principle of life (உயிர்) or soul, were to leave as suddenly as the sudden occurrence of thunder during the coldest season of the year (கார் காலம்) he was not afraid of death.[21]

Again, the soul was believed to remain partly absent for some time without actually entailing death; although, during this part-absence life was weakened, the faithful soul of a wife is said to have been still mindful of her husband's whereabouts, and fearing that her husband's soul also might have been severed by the cruel god of death, she is said to have expressed the wish to yield the rest of her soul completely, perhaps to enable her soul to go in search of her husband's soul, just as the faithful and loving soul of Pūtapāṇṭiyaṉ's wife went in search of her husband's.[22]

The voluntary liberation of one's own life or soul (not suicide), was noted in connexion with the rite known as *vaṭakkiruttal* — a sort of fast unto death. That the people were ready to sacrifice even their lives for fame is evident from the reference to those worthy men to whom all that was grand in the history of the tribe or even of the whole world was attributed and who in a large measure made the earth such as it was and the men such as they were in the ancient Tamil country.[23]

Howsoever real this duality of body and soul, distinctness and independence of the soul from the body, might have appeared to be, it was also in no way absolute. Quite on the contrary, it was united to the body by the closest of bonds. It was even believed to have been so intimately associated with the life of the organism that it was said to grow with it and decay with it.[24]

It was at such a time when senility set in and the old folk were no longer able to take an active part in the life of the society, it was thought that weakness of the body was communicated to the soul. Having the same powers no longer, the old men could no longer have a right to the pleasures of their younger days, as expressed by the poet. Viḷuttaṉṭiṉār in a pathetic but beautiful reminiscence of his vigorous youthful pleasures of diving from the tallest branch of

[21] *Puram.*, 361 : 1 – 3.
[22] *Puram.*, 247 : 6 – 10.
[23] *Puram.*, 182 : 3 – 6.
[24] *Puram.*, 24 : 26 – 27.

the riverside tree into the deep stream and rising above the surface of the water with a handful of sand from the river bed, to the marvel of all those spectators of young men and women who had come to bathe in the river.[25]

Similarly when the elderly, grey-haired matrons who had until recently wielded a powerful influence in the life of young men and women of the family or tribe reached the ripe old age, hardly able to walk without the support of the walking staff, they would seem to have wondered as to when their souls would take flight.[26]

However eagerly old people wished to be rid of the soul which was supposed to have grown old with the body, yet when the moment came when it did seem to leave the body, it was believed to be not quite entirely gone, when the last breath had been expired. The bond uniting the body and the soul might have been loosened, but not broken. Probably with the idea of breaking or severing the bond completely, the ancient people conjured up in their own minds a figure of a Divine Messenger or the god of death, known as *kūṟṟuvaṉ*[27] (கூற்றுவன்), who in later days was depicted as a most dreadful figure with a ferocious face riding a very sturdy buffalo and demanding his toll ruthlessly.

The ancient minds were not satisfied with the 'creation' of *kūṟṟuvaṉ;* besides, a whole series of special rites was thought necessary to induce the soul to depart definitely.

The flesh of the dead body was thought to contain the sacred principle of life, i.e. the soul, and in order to drive it out definitely, the organism was hacked to pieces, just as the ram was immolated for more or less the same purpose. This violent method of liberating the soul would seem to have been possible through the murderous tribal wars of those days, in which the warriors who fell in the battlefield met with exactly the same treatment, and their souls, thus liberated were assured of their places in the other world.[28] That is perhaps why the ancient Tamil mothers are said to have rejoiced to find in the battlefield their sons' bodies hacked and mangled, sometimes even beyond recognition.[29] Probably this was again the

[25] *Puram.*, 243 : 6 — 14.
[26] *Puram.*, 159 : 1 — 5.
[27] *Puram.*, 75 : 1; 210 : 8; 221 : 8.
[28] *Puram.*, 62 : 18 — 19; 27 : 7 — 9; 341 : 14 — 16; 228 : 10 — 11.
[29] *Puram.*, 295 : 5 — 8; 278 : 7 — 9.

motivating force, besides the somewhat ostentatious demonstration of one's love for one's ruler and community, which was responsible for the overwhelming passion on the part of heroic mothers to send forth their sons and kinsmen to the battlefield;[30] wives of heroes who had fallen in the battlefield also perished with them.[31]

If, however, a child happened to be born already *dead*, and was thus deprived of the opportunity of falling later on in the battlefield, it was actually hacked to pieces with a sword, probably again with the aim of liberating the soul in the heroic way.[32] Also, perhaps with the same intention, even persons who died of some disease or other, were meted out the same treatment after their death and then buried.[33]

In order to drive the soul with certitude, the flesh of the dead was melted by submitting it to the heat of an artificial fire.[34] The soul was believed to depart with the liquids which resulted. Thus the custom of cremating the dead is believed to have come into existence. Whether it was cremation or burial that came first, is not certain. But both customs would seem to have been prevalent in the ancient Tamil country. According to a poem in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology, the question whether a person who had achieved fame should be buried or cremated would seem to have been posed by the poet with regard to the dead body of one Nampi-Neṭuñceliyaṉ. It did not seem to matter whether it was cremation or burial in his case, because neither could destroy the fame which he had left behind.[35] In this connexion, it might be noted that the ancient practice of widows throwing themselves into the funeral pyres of their husbands might also have had its origin in the belief of liberating one's soul. It was probably with the intention of rejoining her husband's soul in the 'other world' that the wife of Pūtapāṇṭiyaṉ decided to throw herself into the funeral pyre of her husband which she regarded as a pool of cool water,[36] i.e. when compared to the severity of obligations for widows in those days (especially severe

[30] *Puram.*, 279 : 7 — 11.
[31] *Puram.*, 62 : 13 — 15.
[32] *Puram.*, 74 : 1 —2.
[33] *Puram.*, 93 : 5 — 11.
[34] *Puram.*, 245 : 4 — 6.
[35] *Puram.*, 239 : 18 — 21.
[36] *Puram.*, 246 : 11 — 15.

for women, for they had to cut off their hair; a strict and meagre herbal diet, and a hard stone-bed were imposed upon them during the whole period of mourning which perhaps lasted for a long time after the death of their husbands).

Again, probably because of the belief that the flesh of the dead contained a sacred principle which was nothing more than the soul, it is thought that the rite of funeral anthropophagy occurred frequently, either at the cremation ground (சுடுகாடு) or at the burial ground (இடுகாடு), or even at the battleground. A few poems of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology have references to the rite of *anthropophagy* in which some gruesome, devilish, feminine creatures known as *pēymakaḷir* (பேய் மகளிர்) are said to have fallen on the corpses, and were seen devouring the flesh and blood, followed by some kind of frenzied dance. The male of this species of goblin-like creatures, who would seem to have participated in a similar rite on the battlefield which was strewn with corpses of dead warriors, are said to have boiled the flesh of the dead in the blood of the departed kings, on the hearth improvised with their fallen heads, mixing the gruel with the arms of the dead used as ladles. And this 'meal' is said to have been served to the victorious warriors who survived.[37]

There was also the belief that even the dry bones still retained some part of the departing soul, and therefore they came to be used as sacred objects. Perhaps on account of a similar belief, the fisher-folk in the coastal region of the ancient Tamil country gathered together with their womenfolk especially on the night of the full moon to plant in the sandy yards around their dwellings the cartilaginous skeleton of the gravid shark which they had hunted in the sea on a previous occasion, and worshipped the deity (or the spirit) which was believed to dwell in it, with offerings of liquor and garlands of flowers. (The assimilation of the worshipping participants in such a rite to the mammal over which they might have desired to exercise control would seem to suggest a connexion with the conceptions of totemism, which will be discussed subsequently.) It is also significant to note here that the poet has mentioned that the skeleton chosen for the rite was one of gravid shark (ஈன்ற

[37] *Puram.*, 371 : 21 — 26; *Matu.*, 29 — 38.

சுறவு), thereby implying powers of fertility and prolificity, which were obviously meant to multiply the species on which the worshippers depended for their livelihood.[38]

The ancient Tamils would not seem to have been satisfied merely with cremating the body of the dead human beings, and they took care that the dry bones were also turned into ashes,[39] probably for immersion in the rivers and oceans, which also became sacred. Again probably because of the belief that the bones contained the sacred principle, they would seem to have left them scattered about the arid fields, perhaps as fertilizer for the life-giving crops[40] just as in modern times too, the fertilizing properties of bones are recognized by agricultural scientists.

Land of the Souls or "The Other World"

In the case of souls which were supposed to dwell in human body, when the final separation came, the liberated soul was believed to leave for the land of souls or the other world. Among the ancient Tamils, this land was more or less vaguely localized beyond the clouds in the sky. There in the other world, a different treatment was accorded the souls, based on the way they had conducted themselves upon earth. Those who had excelled themselves during life as warriors, or those who had performed good deeds towards other beings were not confounded with the common hordes of those who had committed unpardonable sins and evil deeds. Thus one may see the first outlines of those two distinct and even opposed compartments into which the 'other world' was later divided.[41] While the brave and righteous souls reached the abode of peace and tranquillity, others on account of their evil deeds (such as murder of innocent women) were believed to be condemned to the timeless inferno.[42]

While the souls of the righteous and glorious dead had reached their abode in the heavens to enjoy the fruits of their brave and good deeds, their former companions down in the earth were busy performing *piacular* rites for their spirits. Since it was death which

[38] *Pattin.*, 86 — 93.
[39] *Puram.*, 356 : 6.
[40] *Puram.*, 362 : 16.
[41] *Puram.*, 341 : 14 — 16; 62 : 18 — 19.
[42] *Kuru.*, 292 : 5 — 6; *Puram.*, 5 : 5 — 6.

had brought about the transformation of a simple vital principle animating the body of a man into a spirit, it was to the glorious dead, to the souls of the departed, that the first cult known to humanity was addressed.

Durkheim designated the ceremonies held in respect of the glorious dead, as *piacular*, as according to him, the term *piaculam* has the advantage that while it suggests the idea of expiation, it also has a much more extended signification of 'misfortune'. "Every misfortune, everything of evil omen, everything that inspires sentiments of sorrow or fear necessitates a *piaculam*, and is therefore called piacular.[43]

In classical Tamil-poetry, the sentiment of sorrow associated with such rites or conduct was generally known as *kaiyaṟunilai* (கையறுநிலை) which became even a secondary theme (துறை) in *Puram* division of poetry, according to which, the associates of the dead ruler or other persons of righteous deeds gathered together in a state of uneasiness or sadness almost marked with the gravity of religious solemnity, but lacking neither animation nor joy, and repented the sad loss of departed ones.[44] The etymology of the phrase, *kaiyaṟunilai* (கையறுநிலை), is significant. The root, *kai* (கை) meaning the hand, is regarded as denoting the instrument of action. The action of giving a helping hand to another person in difficulty or distress is referred to as *kai-koṭuttal* (கைகொடுத்தல்), and the withdrawal of help is *kai-viṭutal* (கைவிடுதல்). The phrase, *kai-aṟu-nilai* (literary meaning 'a state in which the 'helping' hand is or has been severed') would seem to denote a position of despondency or helplessness following the death of those persons, upon whose 'action' the members of the family or the clan were dependent. (The term *kai* is said to denote also 'rectitude' or 'moral conduct', and *kaimmai* (கைம்மை) means 'widowhood', while *kaimpeṇ* (கைம்பெண்) is a widow, and a widow's abstention from various aspects of life, after the death of her husband, is known as *kaimmai-nōṉpu*[45] (கைம்மை நோன்பு).

Besides the piacular rites held under the name of *kai-aṟu-nilai* in honour of the departed rulers, there were also similar rites in

[43] Durkheim., op.cit., p.435.
[44] *Purap.*, 267; 268.
[45] R.P. Sethu Pillai, *Words and Their Significance*, p.6.

respect of one's departed husband, which were known as *mutu-pālai*[46] (முதுபாலை) and *tāpatanilai*[47] (தாபதநிலை).

The rites performed by the lonely husband who mourned the death of his wife was known as *taputāra-nilai*[48] (தபுதார நிலை), while *talaippeyaṉilai* (தலைப்பெயனிலை) denoted the mourning of a widower in the company of his children left behind by the deceased wife.[49] The mourning of those who witnessed the act of the widow throwing herself into the funeral pyre of her deceased husband was known as *mālai-nilai*[50] (மாலைநிலை) perhaps implying that both the husband and wife had reached the evening or the end of their earthly life, while the mourning of the 'stunned' passers-by, was referred to as *mūtāṉantam* (மூதானந்தம்).

Durkheim's view that "every misfortune, *everything of evil omen* ... necessitates a piaculam..." was mentioned above. In the Tamil country too, there would seem to have been such in interpretation as expressed in the piacular theme of *āṉantam* (ஆனந்தம்) which meant that those who happened to observe certain evil omens trembled at the impending death which they seemed to foretell.[51]

From the above evidence of *Puṟapporuḷ Veṇpā Mālai* which is a grammatical work relating to topics of the *Puram division* of classical Tamil poetry and whose authorship is traced to Aiyaṉār-Itaṉār, and also from a few examples of the poems from the *Puṟa-nāṉūṟu* anthology, cited above and to be cited below, it would seem that mourning for the departed souls, offers us a first and important example of the cult of *piacular* rites.

However, a distinction may seem necessary between the different rites which went to make up mourning. Some of the rites or observances consisted in mere abstentions which were rather severe in the case of women. (It was forbidden for the widows to adorn their hair which they also shaved off, to adorn ornaments like bangles which they removed, to eat normal type of food — the widows had to be content which certain seeds and leaves, while others abstained from any feasting during the prescribed period of

[46] *Purap.*, 254 ; see *Puram.*, 253 : 1 — 6.
[47] *Purap.*, 257; see *Puram.*, 248 : 1 — 6.
[48] *Purap.*, 256.
[49] *Purap.*, 258.
[50] *Purap.*, 261.
[51] *Purap.*,264.

mourning.) The poet, Kaḷāttalaiyār says that following the death of Cēramāṉ Peruñcēraḷātaṉ, the bardic lyre became silent, the milk pot was empty, the relatives abstained from liquor, the robust occupational din of the agriculturists was no longer heard, the festivities had ceased, and even the sun seemed to have come to a stand-still (for, without his patron, the poet felt the day dragging along).[52]

All these observances might be said to belong to the negative cult of rites, and they were insisted upon, again because of the belief that the dead man had become a sacred being. Consequently during the prescribed period, everything which was or had been connected with him, was, by contagion, in a religious state excluding contact with things or persons from profane life.

However, mourning was not made up entirely of interdicts which had to be observed. Certain other positive acts were also demanded, in which the relatives and members of the clan were both actors and those acted upon.

The piacular rites, which were positive in nature, would seem to have commenced as soon as death appeared imminent. This would seem to be evident particularly at the ceremony known as *Vaṭakkiruttal* which was mentioned earlier. When someone chose to die by this means of 'fasting unto death' groups of men and women sat on the ground lamenting at certain times during the period of mourning for the chieftain who had decided to forsake his earthly existence. We have some very rare verses in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology which draw attention to these rites.

When Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ decided to *sit towards north*, he is said to have initiated the rite himself by inviting his close relatives and friends to the place where the rite was to be held. Of those special invitees, the poet Picirāntaiyār was one for whom Kōpperuñcōḻaṉ had a very high regard and therefore the ruler who had abdicated his throne to perform this rite is said to have asked for a special place set aside for the poet friend of his.[53]

That women too joined men in the rite is evident from the reference of the poet, Pottiyār. Since Pottiyār's wife was then pregnant, social sentiment probably rendered it incumbent upon the

[52] *Puram.*, 65 : 1 — 12.
[53] *Puram.*, 216 : 9 — 12.

ruler to persuade the poet and his wife to return home first and then come back to the place of the ceremony after his wife had given birth to the child. But when he returned he found only the memorial stone which stood there marking the departure of the ruler's soul to the other world, and yet, Pottiyār ruefully asked the sacred being to point the place set aside for him.[54] Extreme sadness and sorrow were not the only sentiments expressed during this ceremony; a sort of anger was generally mixed with it. The poet Pottiyār, as is evident in a *Puram* poem, also felt a need of avenging the death of the ruler in some way or other, at least by violently abusing the god of death — the thoughtless *kūrruvan* — who was believed to have snatched away the sacred life of Kōpperuñcōlan.[55] The phrase, "பைத லொக்கற் றழீஇ யதனை" ("hugging the *relatives* who were stricken with the misfortune") would seem to imply that all those who had assembled there felt a need of coming close together and communicating most closely: They were to be seen holding to each other and entwined so much as to make one single mass, from which loud, angry voices of abuse could be hurled at the senseless *kūrram*. (Some of these same intensified sentiments, thus collectively affirmed, are known to enter into that sort of rage with which relatives, especially women in those Tamil homes where death has occurred feel the need of beating themselves on their chests: the sorrow which becomes exalted and amplified when leaping from mind to mind, and therefore expresses itself outwardly in the form of violent movements which are not without a certain amount of anger; the Tamils, unlike certain other people, do not hire professional mourners to mourn their dead.)

Again there was weeping and lamentation on the part of close relatives and other members of the same clan over the loss of human life. They embraced one another, put their arms round one another, pressed as close as possible and wept together;[57] a sort of collective manifestation of agonized sorrow and a sort of mutual pity occupied the whole scene.

Ethnographers and sociologists (Durkheim, principal among

[54] *Puram.*, 222.
[55] *Puram.*, 221 : 8 — 10.
[56] Ibid., 221 : 9.
[57] *Puram.*, 357 : 7.

them) have tried to explain the rites of mourning possibly as made up of *collective* ceremonies which produced a state of effervescence among those who took part in them. According to Durkheim, when someone died, the family group or tribal group to which he belonged felt itself lessened, and to react against this loss, it assembled. A common misfortune required the renewal of collective sentiments which led men and women to seek one another and to assemble together. Since they wept together and they held to one another, the group was not weakened, in spite of the blow which had fallen upon it. Of course they had only sad emotions in common, but communicating in sorrow was still communicating, and every communion of mind, in whatever form it was made, raised the social vitality.

On the other hand, to remain indifferent to the blow which had fallen upon and diminished it would be equivalent to proclaiming that it did not hold the place in the hearts of members which was its due. An individual, in his turn, if he was strongly attached to the group or clan of which he was a member, felt that he was morally obliged to participate in its sorrows and joys; not to be interested in them would be equivalent to breaking the bonds uniting them to the group. That is why, Kōperuñcōḷaṉ was absolutely certain that even if Picirāntaiyār might not have been with him at other times, he would certainly be with him at the time of the misfortune of his own death.[58] That is again the reason why many wise and learned men are said to have made it a point to be with the departing ruler at the ceremony mentioned above.[59]

Of course, this explanation of mourning might seem to leave aside the idea of soul or spirit. However, according to Durkheim, the ancient men did not know the psychological mechanism from which the rites resulted. So, when they tried to account for them, there was one moral power, of whose reality they were assured, and which seemed designated for the role: that was *the soul* which death would liberate or had liberated.

Thus, as the hypothesis of the animists supposes, the first sacred beings were really the souls of the dead, and the first positive cult was that of the ancestors, to which we now turn.

[58] *Puram.*, 215 : 8 — 9.
[59] *Puram.*, 218 : 5 — 7.

The basic reason for mourning the dead was the impression of a loss which the group felt when it lost one of its members. This very impression resulted in bringing individuals together, in putting them into closer relations with one another, in associating them all in the same mental state. The group felt its strength returning to it; and it began to hope and to live again. When its members thus felt themselves confident and secure once more, they believed that the soul of the dead, now transformed into a spiritual being, would continue to demonstrate its sentiments of tenderness and solidarity. In order to bring themselves nearer to the tenderness and solidarity of the sacred being, the ancient men would seem to have devised certain positive methods or ways and means of entering into positive and bilateral relations with the sacred being. To these special means of religious rites organized into a more or less elaborate system, the name, *Positive Cult of Ancestors*, is given.

Classical Tamil poetry has some traces of this *Positive Cult of Ancestors* which would seem to have been organized on an elaborate basis as it is evident from the Tamil grammatical treatise, *Tolkāppiyam*, though in later days it would seem to have survived merely as a simple group of ritual precautions performed within a prescribed period immediately after death, and henceforth once a year, possibly on the anniversary days of the dead.

But it might be noted that those few traces of the ancestor cult which are to be found in a few poems of the classical Tamil literature as well as in the gnomic verses of the grammatical treatise, *Tolkāppiyam*, belonging to the same or earlier period, refer to the rites celebrated in honour of only those personages who were considered to have exercised extraordinary powers of both physical and spiritual nature. Thus, from the evidence, one may only infer that the haloes of peacock feathers, garlands of red flowers, and even weapons with which they, or rather their memorial stones (stones were chosen for the purpose probably because of their durability) bearing particulars of their names and acts of greatness, did not come to them merely from the fact that they were ancestors, i.e. to say, that they were dead, but rather from the fact that an extraordinary — divine — character was and always had been attributed to them. In this respect, it may not even be correctly surmised of those rites that formed an ancestor cult, for it is said that in order

to have a real cult of the dead, it is necessary that after death, the relations whom men lost every day become the object of the cult as among the Chinese or ancient Egyptians. Although there do not seem to be very many traces of any such real cult of ancestors in the classical Tamil poetry, the evidence referring to the cult of *memorial stones* erected in honour of the glorious dead does seem to indicate that it was a system of a series of rites, festivals and ceremonies, and that it fulfilled the need which the believers felt of strengthening and reaffirming at regular intervals of time, the bond — the divine power — which united them to the sacred beings upon which they wished to be dependent for the protection and grace.[60]

This and other evidence that we have on the cult of famous heroes also speak of their names being inscribed on the stones,[61] erected in their memory, of the sacrifices of ram being made at the stones when libations of blood and liquor were made,[62] to the accompaniment of the beating of a small drum. Also, it would appear that these ceremonies, once instituted, were periodically repeated especially by those people who on account of their heroic deeds came to be known as *maṟavar*.[63]

However, with regard to people of other regions in the ancient Tamil country, although there might have been the belief that something of the dead man must survive, and that it could only have been the soul, besides their name and fame, if any, yet after they buried or cremated the remains of the dead according to certain ritual, followed by mourning for the dead during a prescribed period of time and in a prescribed manner, and probably after avenging their death, if there was occasion to, then after all was said and done, the survivors perhaps had no more duties towards their relatives who existed no longer. Even in the case of these people, it may have been possible that there was a way in which the dead continued to hold a place in the lives of their kindred, even after the mourning was finished. It was sometimes the case that the walking staff used by the elderly people, because of certain special virtues which were attached to it. (In Tamil homes, the walking

60 *Puram.*, 221 : 12 — 13; *Ainkuru.*, 352 : 1 — 2.
61 *Akam.*, 67 : 8 — 10.
62 *Puram.*, 232 : 3 — 4.
63 *Akam.*, 35 : 6 — 9.

staffs used by the elders are known to be kept treasured after their death, probably to be used again or as a reminder to the younger people of the inevitablity of old age: In a later Tamil ethical work, *Nālaṭiyār*, there is a poignant reference to an old lady supporting her withered limbs with the help of a walking staff which her mother once held.)[64]

But probably by the time of the second or third generation of an individual in a particular family, they (the dead) might have ceased to exist as persons, and have fallen to the rank of anonymous and impersonal charms, and probably worshipped at what is even today known as "the rite of presenting or offering of specially cooked food to household deities" on the night before certain festive occasions like marriages in the family concerned.

The contrast between the more or less permanent cult of the hero worship found among the ancient *maṟavar* in the Tamil country and the few infrequent or occasional rites which others performed in their own homes in memory of their late ancestors (both rites having more or less the same objective of seeking the help of the departed ones) would however seem to be somewhat considerable that one may even ask whether the second was not derived from the first, and if the souls of heroic men and women, being the models upon which the deities or gods, probably were originally imagined among the early Tamils, have not been conceived from the very first as emanations from the divinity — the same kind of divinity which the heroes fallen in battle were believed to attain in the other world, which was not only their reward but also their due.

Whatever it might have been, the cult of hero worship among the ancient Tamils would indeed seem to have been an elaborate ritual, as it is evident from the *Tolkāppiyam*[65] and a later work, *Puṟapporuḷ veṇpāmālai*, the gnomic verses of which refer to no less than six successive phases or stages in the ceremony of erecting the Memorial Stone in honour of the heroes fallen in battle.[66]

As one may infer from the verses of *Puṟapporuḷ-Veṇpā-Mālai*, the entire ceremony consisted of six successive stages, although at present it has survived only in the practice of drawing or inscribing

[64] *Nālaṭiyār*, 14 : 3 — 4.
[65] *Tol.*, 1006.
[66] *Purap.*, 247; 248; 249; 251; 252; 253.

a simple and rough outline of the 'human figure' on a slab of red brick on the fourteenth day after death, the rite being known as *kalletuttal* "(கல்லெடுத்தல்)".

However, in order to find out something of the significance of the various aspects of the original ceremony, let us see what those six stages were: The object of the rites which were supposed to take place in the first phase, namely, 'finding the block of quartz or stone for the ceremony in or around the jungle-clad hill (*கற்காண்டல்*) would seem to have been to preserve the scaredness of the glorious ancestor. The question would arise, why is it that the ancient Tamil people had to proceed to a certain jungle-clad hill for the block of stone? We may only surmise on the basis of evidence cited by Durkheim with regard to certain similar ceremonies among the tribes of central Australia. It is said that among the ancient people, there was the belief that the fabulous ancestors from whom each clan was supposed to be descended had left traces of their existence, especially in stones and rocks which were considered the bodies of the ancestors whose memory they were believed to keep alive. The rocks and hills, the animals and plants were believed also to represent the ancestors. Consequently, they were believed also to represent the animals and plants which served these same ancestors and their successors as *totems*. (This and other related aspects would be taken up subsequently in the context of early traces of Tamil totemic beliefs; however, it might be mentioned here that the Tamils too from the earliest times have shown particular interest towards the hills together with the animals and plants which thrived on them, and this is particularly seen in the concept of the godhead, Murukaṉ, who was believed to reside in the hill and its flora and fauna; again just as the famous hill of Tiruppaṟaṅkuṉṟam has been associated with the scaredness of Murukaṉ in South India, the somewhat equally famous *Batu Caves* ('batu' means 'stone' in Malay) in Kuala Lumpur with its deity Murukaṉ or Lord Subramanya, attracts vast crowds of his devotees on the occasion of the *Tai-p-pūcam* festival. According to some unconfirmed reports, the remains of a pious old man have been interred in Batu Caves.)

Probably on account of this sacred character of the hills, the journey was undertaken by the survivors in search of the 'stone'. Perhaps, after traversing some distance of the rugged country, they

arrived at a spot where they found a suitable block of quartz.

Then, in the second stage of the ceremony, as they dug up the ground and detached the block of stone, the drum was beaten loudly, and the stone was lifted and carried away. In the third phase, they either sprinkled water over the sacred rock, or they dipped it in the stream. (The object of similar rite among the people of Australia mentioned above is said to have been to create rain or to augment the productive virtues of the rock.) Then in the fourth phase, the name of the hero fallen in battle was inscribed on the stone which was then erected. Libations of ram's blood and liquor were made, and the stone was also decorated with peacock feathers (pea-cock has also been regarded as sacred to Murukaṉ, the god-head of the hill-folk). The object of making the libations was, as mentioned above, probably to nourish the divinity. In the fifth phase of the ceremony, those who participated in it lamented and praised the hero's achievements. At this time, their thoughts were naturally centred upon their common beliefs, their common traditions, the memory of their great ancestral heroes, and the collective ideal of which they were the incarnation. The individual participants themselves probably profited from the ceremony. For the spark of a social being which each bore within him necessarily participated in the collective reawakening. The individual's soul was regenerated too, by being dipped again (as the stone, at which they stood gazing, was dipped earlier in the life-giving waters) in the source from which its life came; consequently it felt itself stronger, more fully master of itself.

The final phase of the ceremony was designed to consolidate this feeling, by embodying the symbolic stone, by raising probably a shelter which soon developed into a temple or a permanent place of worship to which many people came to pray, while women saw to it that the flame of the lamp set up there was alive throughout the evening.[67]

Then there were the periodical festivals around the shrine which soon came to be known as *potiyil*, i.e. places where everyone assembled. The exigencies of material life did not allow the participants to remain in congregation indefinitely. So they scattered

[67] *Pattin.*, 247 — 249.

only to assemble again and again when they again felt the need of this, and thus the essential constituent of the cults like the cult of ancestral hero worship was the cycle of feasts or festivals which were revivified. Society itself was able to revivify the sentiment by assembling again. Thus is explained the tendency towards periodicity of feasts and festivals; the rhythm of social life, and the results from it.

However, in certain parts of the country whose inhabitants had later shifted to other parts in search of new means of livelihood, such places of common worship as mentioned above became deserted and ruined, and naturally enough, the spiritual beings too departed with the people,[68] who later came to observe the age-old proverb, i.e. "Do not live in a place where there is no temple."

Thus it would imply clearly that in the simplest stage of religion such as the pure ancestral hero worship it was the spiritual being not the stone which came in for all the veneration and adoration of the survivors. Yet, in course of time, just in proportion as the soul evolved into the spiritual being, so would seem the memorial stone to have evolved into the fetish or idol. Once the idea of sacredness of certain stones became firmly fixed in the minds of the people, the stones came to be more or less rudely carved first into the semblances of human figure and worshipped. Although it is not known that there was already the existence of such an image worship among the Tamils of earliest times, fetishism did come into existence later, largely perhaps on account of the Āryan religious influence from the north of India with its mythological and *puranic* personalities, both gods and goddesses. Besides the fetishism, there also came into existence one other belief on which was based numerous fairy-tales (probably again originating from the north) which spoke of men being petrified, and the stone becoming alive as human being, again playing on the misunderstanding of the people who probably had forgotten the earlier connotation of the phrase referring to someone 'becoming stone', i.e. one who had become 'dead', was commemorated by the erection of the sacred stone.

In the foregoing pages, it was shown how the belief in the existence of 'a double' — the soul — led to the further belief that from a simple vital principle animating the body of heroic man, it

[68] *Puram.*, 52 : 12 — 13; *Akam.*, 307 : 11 — 12.

became a spiritual being or even a deity. It was also noted that since it was death which brought about the transformation, it was to the glorious dead that the first religious rites were addressed at the memorial stones erected in their honour.

Besides, there was also another belief that the souls of men and women, which in each generation quitted the bodies and went to the 'other world', returned after a certain length of time to reincarnate themselves, and that these were the cause of conception and birth. (Thus among the Tamils, there has been the custom of giving the newly-born child the name of its grandfather or grandmother, if it should be born sometimes after the elder's death, probably on account of the belief that the latest member of a family who died, came back to life in the person of the first child to be born in that family.)

Be that as it may, there is evidence in the ancient Tamil poetry which would seem to indicate that there was the belief in reincarnation, transmigration of souls, or 'rebirth'. There was not only the belief in the 'other world' where the soul of the righteous person might enjoy the fruits of his good deeds of past life, but there was also the belief in 'rebirth'.[69] These beliefs were of course based on another belief that the soul survived the body, i.e. the idea of immortality of soul, as it would seem to be expressed in another *Puram* poem.[70] It is also significant to note that in the poem the soul or the principle of life has been referred to as *maṉṉuyir* (மன்னுயிர்), the term, *maṉ* (மன்) denotes 'stability' or 'permanence'.

The question would arise: Why and how did early people come to believe that the soul survived the mortal body? Is it possible that they imagined the prolongation of their existence through the idea of soul surviving beyond death, with the hope that a just retribution of their righteous acts or a realization of their wish might be possible in another life or in another world, if it should fail in the present life? This would seem to be the case, as is evident in certain poems.[71] In some other poems, the poets imagine their heroines as expressing the wish that not only in the present life but also in the subsequent birth (or in the 'other world'), their souls

[69] *Puram.*, 214 : 7 — 10.
[70] *Puram.*, 19 : 3 — 4.
[71] *Puram.*, 214 : 6 — 8.

would continue to dwell in those of their life's companions.[72] If there had been some obstacle in the way of union of lovers, they are also shown by the poets as consoling themselves with the thought that even if their union were not to be attained in the present life, it would at least be possible in the other world.[73]

Again there is another hypothesis that the other life was imagined by the early people as a means of escaping the agonizing prospect of annihilation of the body, say, on the funeral pyre. Although the fear of destruction of the erstwhile body after death might have been real to ordinary beings, those who had performed righteous deeds and those who regarded death in battle as the most fitting and proper means of liberating the soul do not seem to have feared death at all.[74] Being accustomed to count their individual bodies for little, and being trained to exposing or devoting their life to heroic and virtuous deeds constantly, they gave their bodies up easily enough. Indeed they preferred death to dishonour, for death was an 'affliction' for only a little while, but dishonourable acts caused irreparable ill, not only to the individuals but also to the group to which they belonged.[75] In a poem which is attributed to Cēramāṉ Kaṇaikkāl Irumporai, it is implied that the people of this world would not wish to give birth to such persons as those, who, having no regard to one's self-respect, shamelessly existed through begging things from others.[76]

More than that, the immortality that would seem to have been implied in the early belief of the survival of soul was not personal bodily existence. Indeed, it would seem to have been axiomatically believed that the soul did not or could not have continued the previous personality of the dead man. After death seized the body and hurried off with the soul, nothing of him remained behind, nor did anything go with the soul, except of course his fame or the result of his good deeds: the body which some men cherished so much was regarded as useless by others.[77]

It was probably on account of a strong belief of the transitoriness

[72] *Kuṟiṉ.*, 49 : 3 – 5; ibid., 57.
[73] *Kuṟiṉ.*, 23 — 26.
[74] *Puṟam.*, 361 : 2 — 3; ibid., 307 : 11 — 14.
[75] *Puṟam.*, 65 : 9 — 11; ibid., 74 : 3 — 7.
[76] *Puṟam.*, 74 : 3 – 7.
[77] *Puṟam.*, 363 : 16 — 18; *Perumpāṇ.*, 466 — 467; *Maṇi.*, 209

of the bodily existence and of the material things of the world, there also arose a negative attitude of forsaking all life. In this connexion, the two concepts of profane and sacred things in life would appear to have been conceived not only as of separate, but also even hostile and jealous rivals of each other. Since some men came to believe that they could not belong to one of these groups except on condition of leaving the other completely, they withdrew themselves completely from the profane world in order to lead an exclusively religious life. Thus asceticism is said to have come into existence whose object was to root out from oneself all the attachment for the profane world that remained in him. (The Tamil term, *turavar* denoting the ascetic seer, would seem to have been derived from the root *tura* meaning 'leave aside', and probably the ascetics who 'abdicated the profane world' came to be known as *turavar*). In order to withdraw from the profane human society, such men went to live in the forest, far away from their fellow-men.[78] So strictly was the forest considered their natural environment that the ascetics put on bark dress. In this way, they passed their days which were a period of all sorts of abstinences for them. There was, for instance, restriction of food. They took only that quantity of fruits and herbs which was absolutely essential for the maintenance of their ascetic life. They sometimes even bound themselves to a rigorous fast.[79] In course of time, some of these men who had aspired to the ascetic life sanctified themselves by efforts made to separate themselves from the profane, and would thus seem to have raised themselves above other men by privations of negative nature rather than by acts of positive piety such as offerings and sacrifices which of course they came to exhort other men, especially the rulers and the well-to-do people, who could not or did not wish to follow the ascetic way of life.[80] Nevertheless, in the case of both the ascetic seers and non-ascetic men, the notion of the soul as a sacred thing as opposed to the body, would seem to have been the same: it inspired those sentiments which were reserved for that which was *divine*. It was this divine being, the soul, which was regarded as immortal. The belief in the immortality of soul was probably one way in

[78] *Puram.*, 193 : 3 — 4; ibid., 251 : 4 — 7.
[79] *Tiru.*, 126 — 130.
[80] *Puram.*, 15 : 19 — 21.

which men were able to explain a fact which could not fail to attract their attention: this fact was the *perpetuity* of the life of earthly things. Individuals or individual plants or animals died, but the *class of beings* survived. So *the force* that gave them life was believed to have the same perpetuity. It was even necessary according to this belief that, in surviving, the souls carried with them the consequences of their good and evil deeds. Thus there was something like a germinative plasm, of a divine order, which was transmitted from generation to generation or from one existence to the other, which made the moral and spiritual unity of the class of beings through all time. And this belief, in spite of its symbolic character, was not without a certain objective truth. Because, though the group of beings might not be immortal in the absolute sense of word, still it was found true that it endured longer than the individual beings, and that it was born and incarnated afresh in each new existence or generation. Early people would indeed seem to have been concerned over this *continuity of the group or class beings*. On the human level, it was considered as absolutely necessary. Hence the ancient Tamil belief that human beings should leave their heir behind in order to perpetuate the transmigratory circuit. They even dreaded childlessness,[81] and regarded forceful abortion as a great sin.[82]

[81] *Puram.*, 188 : 1 — 7.
[82] *Puram.*, 34 : 2.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TOTEMISM

The various "animistic" beliefs of ancient Tamils which have been mentioned in the previous chapter would seem to have constructed the idea of the divine out of the sensations aroused in the early people by certain physical or biological phenomena. For the animists, it was the dreams which first served as the point of departure for religious evolution. In other words, it was in the nature of man that animists have looked for the germ of the grand opposition which separated the sacred from the profane.

The theory of animism, has, of course, not been above serious criticism. One of the common criticisms that has been addressed to its hypotheses is that, in order to explain how the various religious beliefs have been able to take a sacred character, a whole world of delusive representations has been made to superimpose itself upon the other, thereby not only denaturing it to the point of making it unrecognizable, but also substituting a pure hallucination or a 'delirious' imagination for reality.

Nevertheless, the critics do admit that the theory has been useful in pointing out one important fact: That is, since men themselves had no other sacred character apart from the soul which they seemed to get from another source, there should be some other reality, in relation to which, this so-called 'variety of delirium' which all religions are supposed to be, had a significance and an objective value.

In other words, it is claimed that beyond those cults which have been called 'animistic', there should be another sort of cult, more fundamental and more primitive, of which the first is believed to have been only derived forms or particular aspects. Ethnologists have given the name *Totemism*[1] to the fundamental system of beliefs.

[1]With regard to the word 'totem' it is said to be the one employed by the *Obojibway*, an Alonquin tribe in America, *to designate the sort of thing whose name the clan bears*. Hence, for nearly more than half a century since 1791 when an American interpreter, J. Long, mentioned the term 'totem' in his *Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter*, totemism is said to have been known as something exclusively American until Grey

One of the important features of totemism is that the totem[2] is believed to have been not merely a name of an animal or plant; it has been an *emblem*, a veritable coat-of-arms, whose analogies with the arms of heraldry have often been remarked upon. Howitt says that "the Australian divisions show that the totem is in the

in 1841 pointed out the existence of wholly similar practices in Australia where however the words employed were found to differ with the various tribes (e.g. *Kabong, Murdu, Ngaitye, Mungai* etc.). Even the term 'totem' is known to have been written differently, e.g. *Totam, Toodaim, Doduim,* or *Ododam* (Frazer, *Totemism*, p.1). Nor is the meaning of the word known to have been determined exactly. According to the report of J. Long, the first observer of the *Obojibway*, the word, *Totam* designated the protecting genius, i.e. the individual totem, not the totem of the clan, while accounts of other explorers would appear to have implied the contrary. (Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, II, pp.49 — 52). Although the expression, *totem*, has been found only in one single society in America, and it is not at all Australian, nevertheless, ethnographers have universally adopted it and extended the meaning of the word to speak of a *Totemic System*.

Since the time the word 'totem' appeared in the book of J. Long which was published in London in 1791, several eminent scholars have taken more than an ethnographical curiosity in the totemic system of beliefs as an archaic institution, and have contributed to the progress of the study of totemism. Among those pioneers are: MacLennan, *The Worship of Animals and Plants*, (1869); *Totems and Totemism*, (1870) in Fortnightly Review; Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*; Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy; Golden Bough;* Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in early Arabia;* and *Religion of the Semites;* Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), dealing with the *Arunta*, the *Luritcha*, and the *Urabunna* tribes; and *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904) dealing with the *Unmatjera*, the *Kaitish*, the *Warramunga*, the *Worgaia*, the *Tjingilli*, the *Binbinga*, the *Walpari*, the *Gnanji* tribes occupying the territory between MacDonnell's range and Carpenter Gulf, and the *Mara* and the *Anula* tribes on the very shores of the Carpenter Gulf; Carl Strehlow (a German Missionary), *Die Aranda-und Loritja — Stamme in Zentral Australia;* and Howitt, *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*.

[2]In a very large proportion of the cases, the objects which serve as 'totems' belong either to the animal or vegetable kingdom, but especially to the former. Inanimate things are also employed, but only rarely. Out of more than 500 totemic names collected by Howitt among the tribes of South-eastern Australia, it is said that there are scarcely forty which are not the names of plants or animals: these are the cloud, rain, hail, frost, the moon, the sun, the wind, the autumn, the summer, the winter, thunder, fire, smoke, water, or the sea. It also happens that clans take their names from the localities or certain geographical irregularities or depressions of the land. Sometimes, the totem is not a whole object, but the part of an object. It is said that the totems had to break themselves up in order to be able to furnish names to the subdivisions of the clan. Strehlow has collected 442 names of totems among the *Arunta* and the *Loritja* tribes of Australia, of which many are said to have been, not of an animal species, but of some particular organ of the animal species, such as the tail or stomach of the kangaroo etc.

first place the badge of the group." *(Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, p.165.) Schoolcraft says the same thing about the totems of the Indians of North America. "The totem is in fact a design which corresponds to the heraldic emblems of civilized nations, and each person is authorized to bear it as a proof of the identity of the family to which it belongs. This is proved by the real etymology of the word, which is derived from *dodaim* which means 'village' or 'residence' of a family group." (*Indian Tribes*, I, p.240.) Thus when American Indians entered into relations with the Europeans and contracts were formed between them, it was with its totem that each clan is said to have sealed the treaties thus concluded. (Schoolcraft, op.cit., III, p.184.)

In the classical Tamil literature too, we have references to such 'totemic' emblems. For instance, the poet Kōvūr-Kiḷār, in his poem, speaks of Nalaṅkiḷḷi, who conquered the seven-walled fortress of a ruler of the Pāndya line and inscribed his own totemic emblem of the fierce-mouthed Tiger.[3]

Again, probably at an earlier period of time (*circa* A.D. 75 — 100), when the rulers of both the Cōḷa and Pāndya clans [whose royal emblems have been traditionally identified as the Tiger, and the Carp (மீன்), respectively] had not only established their supremacy over their own territories, but also were trying to extend their sovereignty over those of other minor chieftains, the poet Kārikkaṇṇaṉār, would seem to have expressed the hope that the rulers, Tirumāvaḷavaṉ (Karikālaṉ II) of the Cōḷa line on the one hand, and Peruvaḷuti of the Pāndya line on the other, would succeed in inscribing their respective totemic emblems of the Tiger and the Carp, upon the hills of the chieftains to be conquered.[4]

When Karikālaṉ II was reigning with the ancient Tamil seaport of Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam or Pukār as his capital, (i.e. to say at a time when the hills had been replaced by the palaces and when the plastic arts were more developed) the totemic emblem of tiger was engraved upon the wood-work of the fortress.[5]

Probably since that time or even earlier, a very particular

[3] *Puram.*, 33 : 7 — 9.
[4] *Puram.*, 58 : 1 — 32.
[5] *Paṭṭiṉ.*, 40 — 42.

ornament of the royal palaces and houses of the rich as well as the poor has been the totemic engravings of animal and plant forms sometimes even combined with human forms, upon the posts at the sides of the door of entry. They were generally painted with bright red colours[6] and decorated with the paste of white mustard seed and sandal wood, particularly on religious and festive occasions.

For example, even in the early days of Nakkīrar and Neṭuñ-celiyaṉ III (*circa* A.D. 75 – 200) the palaces of rulers had their door-posts carved with the figures of the totemic symbols of a certain flower known as *kuvaḷai* and of the female elephant, which were also plastered with the paste of white mustard and ghee,[7] because they were regarded as sacred to the deity which was believed to dwell at the door-post.[8]

The door-posts upon which certain totemic objects and adornments were engraved, would seem to have been very high indeed (at least 45 to 60 feet) to enable the victorious male tusker to march through the palace-gates, carrying the royal standard.[9] With the sculptured door-posts of the ruler's palace rising to a great height, the capital city of the Pāndya ruler, Kūṭal(கூடல்) later known as Maturai, must really have given the impression of a sacred city, as indeed in later days the cities like Maturai of Pāndyas, Arūr and Uṟantai of Cōḷas, with the towering temple-gates *(gōpuras)* of many sculptured images, became great centres of religious importance. (Durkheim refers to the fact that the villages inhabited by the *Haida*, the *Tsimshian*, the *Salish* and the *Tlinkit* peoples in America, give the impression of sacred cities, all bristling with belfries or little minarets engraved with animal and human forms. (op.cit., p.135.)

In the ancient Tamil country, it was not only the palaces of rulers or the temples of deities that came to be decorated with totemic emblems. It would appear that even ordinary people wished to have the totemic symbols in and around their humble dwellings. For example their tools, weapons, their furniture, their household utensils of every sort, and also the vessels and boats that plied the rivers and the high seas, were engraved with carvings imitative

[6] *Neṭu.*, 80 – 81.
[7] *Neṭu.*, 78 — 88.
[8] *Maṭu.*, 353.
[9] *Neṭu.*, 87 — 88.

of animals and plants, and flowers, perhaps again on account of their totemic significance. Even to this day, the door-posts of their houses could be seen decorated with carvings. Although these totemic decorations upon the wood-work of the door-posts may not be found in every house in the villages of South India and elsewhere where the Tamils have emigrated, they would nevertheless be found particularly in the ancient houses of the village headmen and the rich.

Now, turning back to the totemic emblems of ancient Tamil rulers, the Tiger emblem of Karikālaṉ II was also used as a seal with which the country's merchandise was stamped, probably as proof of the identity of the kingdom from which it was exported.[10]

The totemic symbols or emblems of ancient Tamil rulers are said to have been no less than seven at one time,[11] and these were known as *Ēḻilāñcaṉai* (ஏழிலாஞ்சனை), and according to a later Tamil literary work, *Kaliṅkattu-p-paraṇi*, composed by the poet Ceyaṅkoṇṭāṉ in praise of the notable victory of the Cōḻa king Kulōttuṅkaṉ (A.D. 1070 — 1112) over Kalingam, the seven ensigns were the Tiger, the Plough, the Stag, an animal known as *Yaḻi*, the Lute, the Bow, and the Carp.

In this connexion, it has to be noted that the 'totemic symbol' has been denoted in the classical Tamil poetry by the expression *poṛi* (பொறி). And this is significant, not only because it is found in connexion with almost all references to the traces of totemic symbols or emblems of ancient Tamils, but also because it denotes the sense of something or its symbol being engraved or carved on some other external objects.[12]

In some poems, however, the only reference is to the *poṛi* (பொறி) or 'engraving', with no indication as to the name of the totemic object whose figure might have been inscribed. This is the case with the anklets of warriors as well as those worn by young maidens, which are said to have been engraved, perhaps with certain totemic symbols of the clan.[13] Similarly in the case of memorial stones which were erected in honour of the heroes who

[10] *Pattin.*, 135 — 136.
[11] *Puram.*, 99 : 7 — 8.
[12] *Puram.*, 58 : 29 — 31; ibid., 39 : 14 — 16.
[13] *Puram.*, 281 : 9; ibid., 341 : 3.

fell in battle, it is not known whether it was the name of the heroes or the figure of the totemic object of their clan which was engraved upon them.[14]

The other objects upon which the totemic symbols, particularly of animals and birds, are known to have been engraved were the flags. The idyll of *Paṭṭiṉappālai* speaks of several kinds of flags used as emblems at the market square, denoting various aspects of the ancient Tamil city life in Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam. Among the multitude of flags, which are said to have cast such a mammoth shadow over the city as to prevent the rays of the sun, there was the flag which had been put up by the learned seers who were particularly fond of spending their abundant leisure by enticing their learned colleagues into acrimonious discussions and disputations, and puzzling one another with awkward questions,[15] just as Socrates is said to have done in the market square of Athens in the ancient Greek Commonwealth. The flag of these learned men is said to have presented a really 'fierce' appearance ("உருகெழு கொடி"), which would have probably reflected only slightly the nature of the acrimonious disputations that were the order of those days.

Then, there were also the flags which were fluttering from the mastheads of the sea-going vessels that had dropped anchor at the busy port.[16]

The third kind of flag that has been mentioned in the idyll of Paṭṭiṉappālai was that of the liquor dealers who had raised it obviously with the aim of attracting their customers, who of course came in large numbers.[17]

There were many other flags, but for our purpose, special reference must be made to the two kinds of flags which marked the places of religious worship.[18]

The flag, as a form of symbolism, has had the original purpose of recalling or directing special attention to some person, object, idea, event, or projected activity, and in this sense, the flag has been part of the kind of symbolism known as *referential symbolism*. Thus we have just seen how the various kinds of flags in the city of

[14] *Puram.*, 264 : 3 — 4.
[15] *Pattin.*, 169 — 171.
[16] Ibid., 173 — 175.
[17] Ibid., 179 — 183.
[18] Ibid., 158 — 160; 165 — 168.

Pukār served the purpose of directing special attention to the learned men, to the dealers of liquor, to the ships' masts, as well as to the idea and event of religious worship.

There is reason to believe that the ancient Tamils have made use of the referential symbolism particularly through coat-of-arms and flags, bearing totemic symbols, in the fields of both war and religion. Mention was already made of the practice of engraving totemic emblems on certain external objects. Similarly, figures of certain totemic animals and birds would also seem to have been identified with divine powers, and these figures were apparently painted on the flags. [Before these flags and banners came to be made of cotton or silk cloth on which the totemic objects were painted, or about the same time, the replicas of the totemic objects were probably made of wood or clay or even of cloth stuffed with paddy husk. This practice would seem to have survived to this day in the form of simple toys made of either wood or clay or of stuffed cloth, resembling certain birds like peacock, parrot, cock, or the eagle and even animals such as the elephant, which are usually sold by pedlars on the occasions of the festivals like Tai Pūcam (for Murukaṉ) in Malaya, and numerous other religious festivals in South India.]

Nakkīrar in his poem of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* collection makes reference to the totemic objects of the plough and palmyra stalk, the eagle, the peacock and/or elephant that adorned the flags of certain divinities with whom the poet compares his patron, Naṉmāṟaṉ.[19] Again, the same poet, Nakkīrar in his idyll, *Tirumurukāṟ ṟuppaṭai*, mentions several flags bearing various totemic emblems; for example, there was the victorious flag bearing the emblem of the cock which was highly praised and worshipped by the devotees of the godhead, Murukaṉ.[20] Besides, there was also the victorious flag upon which the figure of the multi-spotted peacock was engraved, and to the poet, the emblem of the peacock would seem to have appeared so much alive that it seemed to issue the cry of a live peacock (அகவல்), calling upon the devotees who had gathered at the sacred shrine of Murukaṉ in Tiruccīralaivāy(திருச்சீரலைவாய்) which is identified now with the present-day Tiruchentur in South

[19] *Puram.*, 56 : 4 — 14.
[20] *Tiru.*, 38 — 41; 210 — 211; 219.

India. (It is interesting to observe the poet attributing the function of calling upon the devotees (அமரர்) to the peacock, as the same function is also known to have been ascribed to the diviner or the maid-diviner of Murukaṉ.[21]

The poet, Nakkīrar, has also mentioned (in the idyll, *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*) various other flags, each bearing a particular totemic emblem relating to certain manifestations of the divine power. Of these flags, the following are noteworthy: the flag bearing the emblem of eagle (later identified with the pastoral deity of Māyōṉ, both as an emblem and as a 'vehicle'), the flag bearing the ensign of the white bull (identified with godhead, Civa), the flag bearing the symbol of elephant (identified with Intiraṉ, in whose honour the Festival of Intiraṉ was periodically celebrated in the ancient city of Pukār).

(The use of flags bearing totemic emblems of animals and birds has survived to this day in the traditional form of 'flag-raising ceremony', held in Hindu temples everywhere, which usually precedes the inauguration of every major temple festival celebrated over a period of time, and the flag bearing the emblem of the particular deity, would be kept hoisted up during this period of time. The Tamil epic poem of *Cilappatikāram* refers to the sacred flag which was raised in order to proclaim the inauguration of the Festival of Intiraṉ, and, according to the commentator of the epic, Aṭiyārkkunallār, the flag bore the emblem of an elephant known as *Airāvatam*.)[22]

Probably it is this sort of preliminary and essentially symbolic manner of preparing for the worship of the divinity that is implied in the phrase, *koṭi-nilai*, (கொடிநிலை), mentioned by the author of *Tolkāppiyam*, in connexion with his verse on the Invocation of Divinity.[23] Thus in the first stage of *koṭi-nilai*, the totemic symbol came in for all the veneration and adoration. But, of course, one cannot consider this totemism as a sort of animal worship. The attitude of a man towards the animal or bird whose figure was engraved upon the flag could not have been the same as that of a believer towards the real divinity which the animal or the bird

[21] *Kuru.*, 23 : 1.
[22] *Cil.*, 5 : 145 — 146.
[23] *Tol.*, 1034.

merely represented. The most that can be said is that in the cases cited above, the particular animal or bird seems to have occupied (and still occupies) a more elevated place, just as its image on the flag was hoisted high upon the head of the flag-staff. It is because of this perhaps that the worshippers would seem to have felt themselves in a state of spiritual or moral dependence in regard to it. But in other, and perhaps even more frequent cases, it happens that the expressions used, denote rather a sentiment of equality and fraternity. For example, the heroic actions of the men were frequently compared to those of fierce animals, which in certain cases, also happened to be totemic animals. In the idyll, *Paṭṭiṉappālai*, which has some references to the heroic actions of Karikālaṉ II of the Cōḷa line, the poet compares the young prince who was imprisoned by his enemies for a while, to the tiger's cub (Tiger was the totemic emblem of Cōḷas) that grew imprisoned in the cage.[24]

Again, in the classical Tamil poetry, young maidens are often compared to the peacock.[25] Besides, the totemic elephant is sometimes called the elder brother of not only its fellow species, but probably of its human fellows as well.[26] Also, there is reason to believe that certain bonds were thought to exist between the totemic plant and human beings, which would seem to have been regarded much more like those which united the members of a single family. There is a poem in the *Naṟṟiṇai* collection, in which a mother, playfully reprimanding her daughter, suggests that she had better behave herself like her 'sister'. By 'sister', she in fact refers to a *punṉai* (laurel) tree, which had grown from a seed, left behind by children while playing on the sand, and which the mother had been looking after, by pouring milk, ghee etc.[27] On account of this sort of relationship, men regarded the plants, animals, and birds of the totemic species as kindly associates upon whose aid they thought they could rely. They called them to their aid, and often they were believed to respond not only in assisting them but also to give warning of whatever dangers there might have been.[28]

Mention was made of the various emblems of rulers as well as

[24] *Paṭṭiṉ.*, 221 — 222.
[25] *Puram.*, 395 : 13.
[26] *Puram.*, 93 : 12 — 13.
[27] *Nar.*, 172 : 1 — 5.
[28] *Puram.*, 28 : 8 — 10.

divinities. It may be asked why these emblems were taken from the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and especially from the latter. First of all, the totemic objects had to be those with which the men of the clan or group were most immediately and habitually coming in contact. Animals like the tiger, the elephant, and the bull, and fowls like the peacock, the cock and the hen, (which were more or less rooted to the ground unlike other birds of flight except of course the eagle), and also the selected flowers of certain plants and trees, would seem to have fulfilled the condition to a great extent. (It is also said that, because of the fact that the sun, the moon and the stars were too far away and gave the effect of belonging to another world, and also because the starry vault did not offer a sufficient diversity of clearly differentiated things, they were unfitted for the role of totems, while the variety of the flora and the fauna were almost inexhaustible and therefore they were chosen as totemic objects.)

Now, with regard to the totemic animals and birds that are known to have been chosen as totemic emblems, one may observe that the animals such as the tiger and the elephant, and even the bull, and the birds like the peacock and the gallinaceous cock, would seem to have been characterized by one common trait, i.e. their 'fighting spirit'.

The tiger has always been regarded as a most ferocious as well as a self-respecting animal. According to a Tamil proverb, it will not stoop so low as to bite the grass if it were to go without any prey. And according to Nalluruttiran of the Cōḷa clan who is the author of a poem in the *Puram* anthology, the tiger would not devour its prey, if its victim should fall on its left, and it would go on to seek another victim, say, an elephant which it would attack in such a manner as to make it fall on the right. The author of the poem expresses the hope that he would have such friends as the tiger in disposition.[29]

As for the elephants, they could not have been underrated at least as far as their fighting qualities were concerned. Many a battle of the ancient Tamil tribal chief would have been utterly lost, if it had not been for the indomitable valour, courage and fighting power of the elephants which, together with the cavalry, formed a

[29] *Puram.*, 190 : 6 — 11.

vital part of the vanguard in the battle array, and the elephants therefore have been frequently compared to the god of death himself.[30]

The mammoth power of this animal would seem to have been so great as to require a boulder of rock to which the domesticated or trained elephant was tied with a chain. And this stake or pillar to which it was tied in the stable or in the public place such as the *potiyil* (பொதியில்), was known as *kantu* (கந்து). It is perhaps significant to note that on account of the totemic relationship of the elephant and the divinity, it was not only the elephant which assumed the great importance both as a totemic emblem and a 'vehicle' of Murukaṉ, but also the term, *kantu*(கந்து) originally meaning the 'stake' or pillar in the stable of elephants, soon came to mean the 'bond' (பற்று) that was believed to unite the human beings spiritually together so that they might contemplate upon the divinity through the symbolic, visible, totemic object, with a sort of common sentiment of devotion. This particular state of mind of the worshippers, i.e. the fusion of all particular sentiments into one common sentiment, as expressed through the unique totemic object, be it in the form of a flag or the 'stake' (கந்து), has been referred to as *kantuṭai-nilai* (கந்துடை நிலை), while transcending beyond the totemic symbol and experiencing the invisible divine power, without the help of the totemic object, has been described as *kantaḷi-nilai* (கந்தழி நிலை) and the absolute state of bliss was referred to as *vaḷḷi* (வள்ளி), often said to be felt by the devotees participating in a religious dance known by the same name (வள்ளிக்கூத்து). Thus the three stages leading to experience of the supreme spiritual bliss which is the result of communion with the divine power, have been succinctly prescribed as *koṭi-nilai* (கொடிநிலை), *kantaḷi-nilai* (கந்தழி நிலை), and *vaḷḷi* (வள்ளி), in the earliest Tamil grammatical work of *Tolkāppiyam*.[31]

As for the other totemic animal, the bull, of Civaṉ, it figures in the classical Tamil poetry in such works as *Kalittokai* which is believed to have been of later period, as a fighting animal, i.e. fighting either with its own species[32] or with a male of the human

[30] *Puram.*, 4 : 10 — 12.
[31] *Tol.* 1034.
[32] *Malai.*, 334 — 335.

species. With regard to the latter, the bull-fight would seem to have been a popular spectacle in the pastoral region in which the male hero grappled with a ferocious bull with antler-like horns, in order to bring it under control, as otherwise he ran the risk of being gored to death by the angry bull.[33]

Now, of the totemic fowls, there was the peacock, a beautiful bird, proverbial personification of pride, which at first inhabited the montane region, whence it was introduced into private and public parks and aviaries of other regions. The crest on its head and the colour of its neck and breast have been noted for great beauty. Its most famous ornament has been the long tail coverts; the feathers of the train of great totemic significance bore the "peacock's eyes" at their distal ends, and the notable display of the peacock in spreading of the train, accompanied by a shivering or rattling of the quills, must have not only presented an awe-inspiring spectacle, but also it must have been useful in keeping away such creatures as the snake which is said to be always afraid of the peacock. (In the pictographical representation of Murukaṉ seated on the peacock, one may very frequently see the image of the snake as well, entangled in the sharp claws of the peacock.) Just as the elephant was associated with the hill deity of Murukaṉ, the peacock too had become a totemic object whose feathers have been greatly valued by people from very early days, both as personal ornament, and as an ornament for other objects like the war drum, the spear, and even the memorial stone in the ancient Tamil country.[34] It was probably on account of this totemic significance of the peacock that Pēkaṉ, one of the famous seven chieftains renowned in the Tamil poetry for their munificence and liberality, is said to have covered a peacock with his own silk mantle, when he found the bird shivering with cold.[35]

Now, as for the gallinaceous cock (கோழி), at least two of its traits would seem to have attracted the attention of the Tamils from the beginning: its shrill cry at dawn, and its pugnacity.[36] The cock has been, above all else, the herald of dawn; and since the night is

[33] *Kali.*, 103 : 60 — 64.
[34] *Puram.*, 274 : 2; ibid., 50 : 2 — 5; ibid., 95 : 1 — 3; ibid., 264 : 3 — 4.
[35] *Puram.*, 145 : 1 — 3; *Cirupaṇ.*, 85 — 87.
[36] *Puram.*, 383 : 1 — 2; ibid., 321 : 1.

by far the time for all kinds of evil spirits, demons, thieves and the like, the cock's proclamation of the rising sun, which was believed to put the fiends to flight, has given the fowl its prime significance as an 'apotropæic' being, a belief well summarized in Horatio's words:

> "... ... *I have heard*
> *The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,*
> *Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat*
> *Awake the god of day; and at his warning,*
> *Whether in sea or fire, in earth, or air,*
> *Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies*
> *To his confine... ...*"
>
> — Shakespeare, *HAMLET*, Act.I, Scene I, 145 — 155.

— a concept which almost would seem to have been an echo of the lines of Tamil poetry composed by the Tamil poets, Mutukaṇṇaṉ Sāttaṉār and Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, centuries before the famous English dramatist:

> "... செம்பொறிச் சேவல்
> ஏனல் காப்போ ருணர்த்திய கூஉம்
> கானத் தோர்நின் றெவ்வர்..."
>
> — *Puram.*, 28 : 8 — 10.

> "பாணுட் கொண்ட கங்கு லிடையது
> பேயு மணங்கு முருவுகொண் டாய்கோற்
> கூற்றக் கொஃறேர் கழுதொடு கொட்ப
> விரும்பிடி மேஎந்தோ ளென்ன விருள்சேர்பு
> ... ...
> பொறிமயிர் வாரணம் வைகறை யியம்ப
> ... ...
> இரவுத்தலைப் பெயரு மேம வைகறை..."
>
> — *Matu.*, 631 — 634; 673; 686.

As for the pugnacity of the cock, the commentator of *Cilappatikāram* has interpreted the paronymous expressions of *vāraṇam* (வாரணம்), occurring in the epic, to mean the elephant on the one

hand, and the cock on the other, and he explains that the one-time capital of the Cōḻa rulers was at first known as Kōḻiyūr (or Kōḻiakam, and later as Uṟaiyūr), because it was founded at a spot where a cock successfully and bravely fought with an elephant.[37]

Thus the various animals and birds were perhaps chosen as totems mainly for their fighting qualities, i.e. fighting the evil spirits, that might pose a danger to the worshippers. However, it has to be borne in mind that although the totemic objects, thus chosen, were regarded as friends and protectors and therefore treated with respect, they were not by any means gods, nor did the imagination of the totemic nature endow them with powers greatly beyond the human.

Now, these different facts would seem to indicate that totemism of a sort had held a considerable place in the socio-religious life of the Tamils. But, upto the present, it might have appeared as something outside of man, for we have only seen that the totemic emblems were represented upon external things. However, we would find that the totemic images were placed not only upon the door of the fortress, upon the flags, and on the memorial stones, but also they were found on the bodies of men and women, so that they would seem to have been part of them. Thus, the poet, Muṭamōciyār in his poem refers to the chieftain of the Kiḷḷi clan, Kōpperunaṟkiḷḷi who had put on the skin of the tiger as an armour for his chest.[38] Again, the poet, Peruṅkuṉṟūr-kiḻār mentions in his poem that his patron chief, Iḷañ-cēṭ-ceṉṉi of the Ceṉṉi clan, was wearing the totemic mark of his clan upon his person; he would seem to have imprinted it upon his flesh.[39] The author of *Mullaippāṭṭu*, Nappūtaṉār, speaking of the pastoral chieftain who had gone to the battlefield, says that he bore the totemic marks of the chank and the discus on his arms, probably because they came to be regarded as sacred to Māyōṉ (Tirumāl or Neṭumāl), a deity of the pastoral region.[40]

This feature of inscribing the totemic marks on the body of person is another example to show that early Tamil social life, in all its aspects and in every period of its history, has been made

[37] See *Cilappatikarām*, U. V. Saminatha Aiyar's edition, p.285.
[38] *Puram.*, 13 : 1 — 4.
[39] *Puram.*, 266 : 12.
[40] *Mull.*, 1 — 3.

possible by a vast symbolism. The material emblems and figurative representations were one form of this. Of course collective sentiments could just as well have become incarnate in persons or certain formulæ such as the flags etc. But there has been also another sort of emblem which would seem to have made an early appearance, i.e. 'tatooing' which was also of some totemic significance. When early people were associated in common life, they were frequently led, by an imitative and instinctive tendency, to paint or inscribe the body with images that bore witness to their common existence. It is understandable that especially where methods were still rudimentary, tatooing or painting should have been the most direct and expressive means by which the communion of minds could be affirmed. The best way of proving to one's self and to others that one was a member of a certain group was to place a distinctive mark on the body. The proof that this was the reason for the existence of the totemic image is the fact that sometimes it did not seek to reproduce the aspect of the thing it was supposed to represent. Very often, it would seem to have been made up of spots or points or designs drawn upon the body (or even on the ground which practice might have later evolved into an elaborate art known as 'drawing of *kōlam*' and which has since been a special feature of almost all Tamil homes), to which a wholly conventional significance might have been attributed. Its object was perhaps not to represent or bring to mind a determined object, but to bear witness to the fact that a certain number of individuals participated in the same collective social life. (Just as a family or clan would consist of so many individuals, varying from family to family or clan to clan, the Tamil *kōlam* also is known to have been drawn in various patterns within which varying number of points or spots would be found. These patterns of *kōlam*, usually drawn using the flour or thin paste of paddy rice, may very often be found right at the door-step of each house in South Indian villages.) As for the tatooing on the body of women, there are also references in the classical Tamil poetry.[41]

Now, turning to another aspect of the totemic representation, it would seem to have been a very general rule that members of

[41] *Puram.*, 161 : 27; ibid., 68 : 5 — 6.

each phratry or clan, inhabiting a particular physical milieu, or the members of each clan following a particular occupation, sought to give themselves the external aspect of their totemic objects. For example, the *Kāṉavar* and the *Kuṟavar* phratries of the hill region in the ancient Tamil country, (both men and women) took part in the religious dance of *kuravai* (குரவை) under a certain 'totemic' tree, which bore a resemblance, either wholly or in part (i.e. the flowers of the tree) to the body (i.e. the streaks or stripes) of the animal whose name the tree also bore.[42] The fact that the members of the *Kuṟavar* clan have indeed sought to give the external aspect of their totem to another object would seem to be evident in the usage of the term *vēṅkai* (வேங்கை) which, probably at first denoted only the Kino tree, but which later came to denote the totemic animal of tiger as well, because the colour of the tiger's stripes had a strong resemblance to the colour of the flowers of the *vēṅkai* or Kino tree.[43] It was on account of this resemblance that the young maidens of the *Kuṟavar* phratry shouted out "Tiger, Tiger"[44] when they were plucking the flowers of the *vēṅkai* tree.[45]

When the author of the poem, Maturaikāñci, i.e. Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār, visited a locality in the hill region, he would seem to have heard the cry of the Kuṟavar maidens plucking the *vēṅkai* flowers, as well as the cry of their womenfolk who were engaged in hunting the animal, *vēṅkai* (tiger).[46]

The sensitive ears of the poet were of course able to distinguish on the one hand the feminine cry of "Tiger, Tiger" which emanated from the lips of those young maidens plucking the *vēṅkai* flowers, and on the other hand the manly shout of 'tiger' which arose in the midst of feverish hunting of the tiger.

But, according to the author of another poem in the *Akanāṉūṟu*

[42] *Puram.*, 129 : 1 — 3.
[43] *Puram.*, 202 : 18 — 20.
[44] The original Tamil word for 'tiger' is known to have been *puli* (புலி) while the term *vēṅkai* originally must have denoted only the Kino tree. After the resemblance between the yellow colour of the *vēṅkai* flowers and the yellow streaks of the tiger was noted, the term *vēṅkai* on account of the totemic significance of both objects, might have come to mean both the Kino tree and the tiger. It is said that the Mexican iridaceous plant *(Tigridia)* with streaked flowers is also known as the *'Tiger-flower'*. (Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary, p.1152).
[45] *Akam.*, 48 : 6 — 7.
[46] *Matu.*, 296 — 298.

anthology, Muṭakkoṟṟaṉār, a young man who had come out hunting probably a tiger, mistook a similar cry of the young maidens, and quickly hurried to the spot whence the cry came, and on finding there only a group of shy young maidens, inquired rather anxiously, "Where has the tiger fled?" When the shy maidens hid behind one another, the hero, who thought that it was all a 'practical joke', rather sheepishly asked: "Is it possible that falsehood emanates even from lips such as yours?"[47]

Again, the fact that the chieftain of the clan sought to himself the external aspect of the totemic tree is evident from the name of the chieftain, Karikālaṉ, which most probably referred to the fact that he or his predecessors of his clan, had the *vēṅkai* tree as a totem, because the term, *kari-kāl* (கரிகால்) is known to have signified the black or dark stem or trunk of the *vēṅkai tree*.[48]

Probably on account of the totemic significance of the *vēṅkai* tree and its flowers, a poet of Cōḻa country in his poem refers to the memorial stone, erected in honour of a leader of the clan (the name of the chieftain is unknown), which was also adorned with the *vēṅkai* flowers.[49]

It was again because of the totemic significance of the *vēṅkai* flower (which is mentioned as one of 99 flowers of the hill region, in the poem of *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*),[50] that women of the hill region sought the pollen grains of their favourite flower which they applied on their breasts.[51]

Probably the men too adorned themselves with the *vēṅkai* flowers strung as a garland to be worn around their necks, as it would seem to be implied in the name of a chieftain. Vēṅkai-mārpaṉ.[52]

The poetess, Auvaiyār, also speaks of her chief, Atiyamāṉ,

[47] *Akam.*, 48 : 6 — 19.
[48] *Akam.*, 141 : 21 — 25.
J. V. Chelliah in his *Translation of the Pattuppāṭṭu* (1962) refers to various legends that have been gathered around Karikālaṉ, particularly Karikālaṉ II, including the fanciful explanation that he was called Karikālaṉ because his leg was burnt when he was a child, which the author, of course, has rejected on the ground that his (Karikālaṉ's) grandfather too bore the name. pp.19 — 20.
[49] *Puram.*, 265 : 1 — 5.
[50] *Kuṟiñ.*, 95.
[51] *Tiru.*, 35 — 36.
[52] *Puram.*, 21 : 9.

still wearing the great *vēṅkai* flowers together with the *veṭci (ixora)* flower when he returned from the battlefield,[53] while the poet, Sāttaṉār, refers to the garland of *vēṅkai* flowers worn by the chieftain, Piṭṭaṅkoṟṟaṉ.[54] Again, Kapilar in his poem of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* implies that the greatness of (Vēḷ) Pāri's hill was in no small measure due to the *vēṅkai* tree that was found on his hill,[55] just as the *Mullai* flower (Jasmine) and the creeper were regarded with a similar totemic respect by Pāri, who is also said to have lent even his chariot to the creeper to climb on.[56]

Besides the *vēṅkai* tree and its flowers, there were two other important flowers which also would seem to have been of particular totemic significance to the inhabitants of the hill region: they were the *Gloriosa superba* (கார்த்தன்) and the *Eugenia racemosa* (கடம்பு). Of these flowers, the *kaṭampu (Eugenia racemosa)* flower whose name was adopted by a clan known as *Kaṭampaṉ*,[57] is known to have been a great favourite of Murukaṉ, and it was also worn together with the *Kuṟiñci (Strobilanthus)* flower by his worshippers, especially when they took part in the *kuravai* dance.[58]

The various totemic decorations mentioned above would seem to indicate that the totem was not merely a name and an emblem, but it was also a part of the liturgy, for it was also in the course of religious ceremonies that the totemic objects would seem to have been employed; so, while the totem was a *collective* label, it also had a religious character. In fact, it would seem that it was in connexion with it that certain other things also were distinguished as sacred from the profane.

The ancient Tamils would seem to have attached great deal of religious importance to certain objects which were counted among the eminently sacred things, and sometimes it would seem that there were none which could have surpassed those objects in religious dignity. These objects, in themselves, were of either wood, metal or skin. They were nevertheless distinguished from the profane by one particularity: That is that the totemic objects were used

53 *Puram.*, 100 : 5 — 8.
54 *Puram.*, 168 : 15 — 16.
55 *Puram.*, 108 : 3 — 4.
56 *Cirupaṇ.*, 89 — 91.
57 *Puram.*, 335 : 7.
58 *Maṭu.*, 611 — 615.

to adorn them. Of the various objects that were thus sanctified, we shall mention two or three such objects, namely, the lance or spear, the drum, and the Guarded Tree.

Now, the lance or spear with a leaf-shaped head, which figured mainly in the battlefield (அமர்க்களம்) and in the public ground where the religious dances like *kuravai* were held (பொதியயர்க்களம்), was an object of great religious respect.

In the battlefield, the lance or spear was a prominent symbol, and was at the same time a sort of standard which served as a rallying symbol for the group.[59]

The spear in the battlefield gave the men of the group, force, courage, and perseverance, while on the other hand its mere presence depressed and weakened their enemies. The latter belief would seem to have been so firmly rooted that according to the poetess, Auvaiyār, when the combatants of Atiyamāṉ and of his enemy stood pitted against one another, the soldiers of the enemy-camp are said to have lost confidence and set about laying down their arms quickly.[60]

Before the spear actually reached the battlefield, it was well taken care of, in a specially protected place. It was greased, polished, and adorned with garlands and peacock feathers (a totemic object). When the poetess, Auvaiyār went to pay a visit to the armoury of Atiyamāṉ's enemy, Toṇṭaimāṉ, in a bid to mediate in the impending clash, she observed that the spear of Toṇṭaimāṉ was kept in a protected place, and it was greased, and adorned with garlands of peacock feathers.[61]

The author of a poem in the *Akanāṉūṟu* anthology, Kīrattaṉār, also refers to the spear being adorned with peacock feathers.[62] Again, in the poem *Neṭunalvāṭai*, there is mention of the spear adorned with the margosa flower, being carried by the general who accompanied the chieftain inspecting his warriors.[63] The fate of the group as a whole was so much bound up with the spear that its destruction was tantamount to the defeat and rout of the entire group. Very often the spear and the drum were captured and

[59] *Puram.*, 15 : 12 — 13; ibid., 42 : 3 — 4; ibid., 57 : 8.
[60] *Puram.*, 98 : 9 — 14.
[61] *Puram.*, 95 : 1 — 3.
[62] *Akam.*, 119 : 12 — 13.
[63] *Neṭu.*, 176 — 177.

destroyed, as a sign of victory over the enemy.[64] That is perhaps why some of the poets have particularly stressed that the spear must be triumphant over everything else in the battlefield.[65] When the time came for the praise of the poet all round, they did not fail to include the most important of all totemic objects, the spear.[66]

As for the spear used on the occasion of the religious dances and ceremonies, whether implanted in the earth or carried by an officiant (who came to be known as Vēlaṉ — the spear-man on account of this practice), it marked the central point of ceremony: it was about it that the dances took place.[67] It was also the same kind of spear, together with the protective shield, that the hill deity, Murukaṉ, is said to whirl round and round, with two of his twelve arms.[68] Perhaps, the officiant of the ceremony, the Vēlaṉ, too, whirled the spear about, to the accompaniment of the whirling of another instrument of the cult to which ethnographers have given the name of 'bull-roarers'. This instrument which has been known as either *Toṇṭakam* or *Tuṭi* in Tamil was whirled rapidly in the air in such a way as to produce a sort of deafening, humming sound, similar to that made by the toys used by children. This sound, accompanied by the songs, had a religious significance.[69]

Another object that came in for much veneration was the instrument of percussion or *Muracam*[70] (முரசம்).

The most important of the drums would seem to have been

[64] *Puram.*, 25 : 7 — 9.
[65] *Puram.*, 58 : 28 — 29; ibid., 21 : 12 — 13.
[66] *Puram.*, 172 : 9 — 11.
[67] *Akam.*, 22 : 8 — 11.
[68] *Tiru.*, 110 — 111.
[69] *Tiru.*, 240; ibid., 243 — 244.
[70] Ancient Tamils are known to have used several types of musical instruments such as the lute or lyre (யாழ்) of various sizes, flute (குழல்), horn (வங்கியம்) and various kinds of drums (பறை). Of these instruments, only the lute, or the lyre (which were stringed instruments) and the flute were instruments of tonal variety, while others (mainly drums) were of rhythm-making kind. While the use of stringed instruments with great possibilities of tone might have contributed to the unusually elaborate development of Tamil melodies of later ages, somehow it would appear that there has been an overabundance of rhythm-making instruments such as *aṟippaṟai* (அறிப்பறை), *akaṇappaṟai* (அகணப்பறை) *kiṇaippaṟai* (கிணைப் பறை), *ciṟupaṟai* (சிறுபறை), *ceṟuppaṟai*, or *pōrppaṟai* (செருப்பறை, போர்ப் பறை), *taṭṭaippaṟai* (தட்டைப்பறை), *maṇappaṟai* (மணப்பறை), *toṇṭakap-paṟai* (தொண்டகப் பறை), *tuḍippaṟai* (துடிப்பறை) *eṟaṅkōṭpaṟai* (ஏறங்கோட் பறை) *mīṉkōṭpaṟai* (மீன்கோட்பறை) *nāvāyppaṟai* (நாவாய்ப்பறை) *taṇṇu-mai* (தண்ணுமை), *uṭukkai* (உடுக்கை), and finally *Muracam* (முரசம்.) Some

the drum used in the battlefield which came to be known as the 'heroic drum' (வீரமுரசம்) or the 'drum of victory' (வெற்றிமுரசம்). It was this drum which was counted among the eminently sacred things; it was adorned with garlands and peacock feathers.[71] Profane persons were not allowed to touch it. It was piously kept in a special place, when not in the battlefield. It was periodically taken out for ceremonial washing. Sacrifice of ram and blood was made to it.[72] The sacred character of the drum was so great that it communicated itself to its surroundings: the profane could not approach it. But if one succeeded in reaching it or the special place where it was usually kept, then he could not be seized there. We have a poem in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology, which describes such an incident involving a Tamil poet Mōcikīraṉār. The poet who had gone to the palace of Cēramāṉ Peruñcēral Irumporai, unknowingly had reached the forbidden place from which the drum had been taken out for the ceremonial washing and there he had dozed off. The chieftain who happened to notice someone on the forbidden bed of the drum is said to have rushed to the spot with his sword drawn. However, on finding that it was the poet, Mōcikīraṉār (poets, in those days, were regarded with great respect and reverence), he put the sword away, and instead took a fan made of yak's hair and furnished a cool breeze for the slumbering poet, who, on waking, found the chieftain standing beside him with fan in hand, and was overwhelmed by the gesture, and after having realized his unpardonable act in sleeping on the bed of the drum, greatly commended the ruler's forbearance, in a poem.[73]

But the virtues of the drum were not manifested merely by the way in which it was kept away from the ordinary beings. If it was thus isolated, it was because it was something of a high religious value whose loss would injure the group and the individuals severely. The drum was regarded as a symbol of protection and security for the group[74] and was often used to announce the victory in battle. It would also seem to have been inherited by the ruling chieftains

of these drums are known to have been used for communication over long distances and in war, and some of them were used mainly in religious ceremonies and dances.

[71] *Puram.*, 50 : 2 — 5.
[72] *Purap.*, 98.
[73] *Puram.*, 50 : 5 — 17.
[74] *Puram.*, 3 : 3.

from generation to generation.[75]

The third object that was venerated by the chieftain and members of the clan alike was the "guarded tree", which was again symbolic of the clan. Just as the loss of spear and the drum was regarded as a disaster for the clan, the felling of the "guarded tree" by the enemy meant defeat and disgrace. The poet, Kārikkaṇṇaṉār in his poem reminds the chieftain Naṉmāraṉ that the "guarded tree" was even more important than the spear.[76] The association of the tree and the clan was so close that their destinies were thought to be bound together. It is also significant that the *vēṅkai*, *kaṭampu*, *margosa* and *puṉṉai* (laurel) trees were among those chosen as "guarded trees".[77]

We have so far seen that totemism had placed the figured representations of the totem in the first rank of the things it considered sacred. However, if a certain species of animal or plant, or flower or tree had been the object of this reverence, it was not because of its special properties, because the similar sentiments inspired by the different sorts of things in the minds of the believers, which gave them their sacred character, could evidently come only from some other common principle partaken of alike by the totemic emblems and human beings. In reality, it was to this common principle that the various cults would seem to have been addressed. In other words, among the early Tamils, totemism was the religion, not of such and such animals or trees, or flowers, but of an anonymous and impersonal force, found in each of these things, but not to be confounded with any one of them. The common force was so completely independent of the particular objects in which it was believed to incarnate itself or dwell, that it preceeded them and survived them: individual beings, individual animals or plants died, generations passed and were replaced by others but this force always remained actual, living, and the same. It animated the generations of yesterdays as it animates the generations of today, and as it will animate the generations of tomorrow. In other words, one may say that it was the immortal divine force that was adored by each totemic cult. Although it was an impersonal force, it was, neverthe-

[75] *Puram.*, 387 : 19; ibid., 73 : 3.
[76] *Puram.*, 57 : 8 — 11.
[77] *Patir.*, 11 : 12 — 13; ibid., 5.

less, immanent and diffused in a multitude of things.

It was probably to this divine principle that the Tamil poets referred when they referred to the divinity by the term *kaṭavuḷ* (கடவுள்) the supreme divine power, immanent in every object and being in the universe. Of course, in much later literary works, mention is made of the various gods who had their own names, and to a certain degree their own personal physiognomy. Also in other verses which probably belonged to an earlier period and which would seem to have retained some faint traces of totemic beliefs, various *deities* (தெய்வம்)would seem to have been recognized, as attached to a group, either local or domestic, just as the totemic emblem was to the group. Each of these deities would also seem to have been thought of as immanent in a species of animal or tree. However, it did not mean that he resided permanently in any one object in particular; he was again believed to have been immanent in all, at once. He was diffused in the species as a whole. Thus, these two earlier conceptions of the Supreme God, *Kaṭavuḷ* and of deity (தெய்வம்), were probably related, differing only in degree, i.e. while *kaṭavuḷ* was diffused into the whole universe, what they called deity or *teyvam* (தெய்வம்) of the totemic principle, was localized in the more limited circle of the beings and things of certain species.

But the early Tamils would nevertheless seem to have represented the divine force not always in an abstract form of *Kaṭavuḷ*. Under influence of certain causes, they had been led to conceive the divine under the form of an animal or vegetable species, or in a word, of a visible object ("கந்துடைநிலை"). This was what the totem would really seem to have consisted of: it was only the material form under which the imagination represented this immaterial power, this energy diffused through all sorts of heterogenous things, which alone was the real object of the cult.

Since totemism of the early Tamils would seem to have been influenced by the idea of the divine principle immanent in certain categories of things and men, and thought of under the form of an animal, or vegetable, or flower, the explanation of this religion is essentially the explanation of the belief; to arrive at this explanation, we must seek to find out how the early people had been led to construct the idea, and out of what materials they constructed it.

As mentioned above, it was not the intrinsic nature of the things that could have marked them out to become objects of the various cults. Also, if the sentiments which they inspired were really the determining cause of the totemic rites and beliefs, then they (the objects) themselves would have become the pre-eminently sacred things. But we know that the centre of the cult was actually elsewhere. It was the *figurative representation* of the particular flower or animal or bird, and the totemic emblems and symbols of every sort, which had the greatest sanctity. So it was in them that might be found the source of that religious nature, of which the real objects represented by these emblems received only a reflection. Thus, the totem was above all else a symbol, a material expression of something else. But of what?

From the evidence that has so far been cited, it would appear that the totem expressed and symbolized at least two different sorts of things: in the first place, it was the outward and visible form of what has been called the totemic principle or force, or divine power, or God; secondly, the totem was also the symbol of the determined group or clan. It was its coat-of-arms, and its flag.

So, if it was at once a symbol of the God and of the clan, was that not because the God and the clan or at least its leader were regarded as only one. Otherwise, how could the emblem of the group have been able to become the figure of the divine power, if the group or clan and the divinity were two distinct realities? The divine principle or power of the clan, the totemic principle, could therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or tree, which served as its totem. But how did this apotheosis take place?

Generally, a clan or group or society as a whole is known to have all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds merely by the power that it has over them: for, to its members it is what a god is to his worshippers. Indeed a god or *Kaṭavuḷ*, is known to have been conceived as a being whom men have thought of as superior to themselves, and upon whom they felt that they depended. Whether it has been a conscious personality, such as Murukaṉ or Tirumāl, Vēntaṉ, Varuṇaṉ, or merely an abstract force such as that in play in totemism, the worshipper, in the one case as

in the other, believed himself held to a certain manner of acting which was imposed upon him by the nature of the sacred principle with which he felt that he was in communion.

Now, the group or clan also gave the members the same sensation of a perpetual dependence. Since it had a nature which was peculiar to itself and different from the individual nature of its members, it pursued ends which were likewise special to it; but it could not attain them except through the members' intermediacy, i.e. the clan through its leader imperiously demanded the aid of its members. It required that, forgetful of the members' own personal interests, they must make themselves its servitors, and it submitted them to every sort of privation and sacrifice, without which the social life would have been impossible. It was because of this that at every instant, members of the clan were obliged to submit themselves to certain rules of conduct and of thought. Even if the clan, through its leader or chieftain, was unable to obtain these concessions and sacrifices from its members except by a material constraint, it might still awaken in them the idea of physical force and moral authority to which they must give way, of necessity. If the members yielded to its orders, it was not merely because the clan or its chieftain was strong enough to triumph over their resistance; it was primarily because the clan or its leader was the object of a venerable respect.

An object, whether individual or collective, is believed to inspire respect when the representation expressing it in the mind is gifted with such a force that it automatically causes or inhibits actions. Therefore when the members of the clan obeyed their leader (or their own spokesmen who in the ancient Tamil country was either the shaman, the bard, or the poet), because of the moral authority which they recognized in him, they followed out his opinions, because a certain kind of physical energy was imminent in the idea, formed of the person, which conquered their will and inclined it in the indicated direction.

But a god on the other hand was not merely an authority upon whom the members of the clan depended; it was a force upon which their strength relied; the worshipper who had obeyed his god, for this reason approached the world with confidence and with the feeling of an increased energy. For example, among the early

Tamils, it was those religious dances such as *kuravai* and *veṟiyāṭal* (வெறியாடல்) which were the occasions for the people to reaffirm their feeling of new confidence and increased energy. It was at those periodical reunions that they revivified their common faith by manifesting in common: to strengthen those sentiments which, if left to themselves, would soon weaken, it was necessary to bring the members of the clan together and to put them into closer and more active relations with one another. This is probably the explanation of the significant phrase, *taḻūu* (தழூஉ) in Tamil meaning 'embrace' or 'union', which even becomes a *synecdoche* in the ancient Tamil language, denoting the *kuravai* dance.[78] Again, it could be also the explanation of the particular attitude of the participants in such dances towards the officiant, the *Vēlaṉ*, especially when he had succeeded in entering into communion with the divine force. His language had a grandiloquence which would have been ridiculous in ordinary circumstances. When he danced, his gestures showed a certain domination. It was because he felt within him an abnormal exuberance of force which overflowed or tried to burst out from him. It was through the phenomenon of 'delirium' that the participants were able to recognize his words of divine inspiration. (With regard to the expression *veṟiyāṭal* (வெறியாடல்), it may be observed that perhaps the ancient Tamils were only too aware of the fact that religion was the object of a certain delirium, as it is evident in the expression itself. What other appropriate name could they have given to that state of mind when after a collective effervescence, men believed themselves transported into an entirely different world from the one they had before their eyes? The ritual use of intoxicating liquor could also be explained thus, but of course it does not mean that an ardent religious faith such as that of Murukaṉ's worshippers was necessarily the phenomenon of drunkenness. It could possibly be explained that as experience soon informed the people of the similarities between the mental state of a delirious person and that of the *Vēlaṉ*, they might have sought to open a way to the second by artificially exciting the first. But the fact is that if the intoxicating liquor had *not* been taken by the officiant, his mental state could still have been described as one of delirium, for after all, it was only natural that the moral forces which the totemic dances

[78] *Matu.*, 611 — 615.

represented and expressed, should affect the human mind powerfully by pulling it outside itself and plunging it into a state that might be also called ecstatic. They produced such a violent superexcitation of the whole physical and mental life that it could not be sustained very long: the officiant taking the principal part, finally fell exhausted to the ground. However, the exceptional increase of force felt by the *Vēlaṉ*, would seem to have been something real. It came to him from the group which he addressed. The sentiments provoked by his words, in fact, came back to the members of the group, but enlarged and amplified; to this degree, they strengthened their own sentiments. The passionate energies which *Vēlaṉ* aroused, re-echoed within the group. It was no longer a simple individual who spoke; it was the group incarnate and personified.

Now, besides the *kuravai* and *veṟiyāṭṭal* dances, there were also other occasions when this strengthening influence of the clan made itself felt with greater consequences. Under the influence of collective shock brought about by the enemy-clan, men again looked for each other, and assembled together, this time in battle array. Again the same general effervescence resulted which was characteristic of violent action. (While the *kuravai* dance was also known as a sort of *Veṟiyāṭṭal* — a kind of religious *dance*, the term, *pōr-āṭṭal* (போராட்டல்) would also seem to signify the war as a sort of 'dance'.) The people (both men and women, though the latter did not actually participate in the battle, they nevertheless encouraged their men and children actively to a glorious fight), now saw more and differently than in normal times. The passions marking them were of such an intensity that they could not be satisfied except by violent and unrestrained actions of superhuman heroism and sometimes of bloody barbarism. This is what explains the many battles fought by the ancient Tamil chieftains and their warriors, and many of the scenes, either sublime or savage, which have been brought to us by the poets and bards who accompanied such men. Under the influence of the general exaltation, we see the most generous-hearted chieftain becoming either a great hero or a ruthless butcher. All those mental processes would seem to have been so clearly at the root of religion that the individual bards and poets have often tried to picture the scenes in a somewhat religious form. According to the poets, the warriors would seem to have really believed that they would ascend

to the heavens, if they fell in the battle; Killivaḷavaṉ of the Cōḷa clan is said to have actually responded to the call of celestial beings to be their guest.[79]

Be that as it may, the surviving members of the clan found in their victorious chieftain the principal aspirations that moved them, as well as the means of satisfying them, and therefore the glorious chieftain who was a real hero, was raised above the others, and as it were, deified. Public opinion invested him and even his successors with a majesty analogous to that of the gods. The sentiment felt by the survivors for such glorious personalities would seem to have encouraged them to regard even their successors as direct representatives of the deity. Such sentiment felt on those occasions was so closely related to the religious sentiment that a single word, *Iṟaivaṉ*[80] (இறைவன்) came to designate both the *God* and the *King*, just as the temple of God and the palace of the king were both denoted by the same term *Kōyil*.

All these facts allow us to arrive at the conclusion that the clan in the ancient Tamil country through its totemic symbolism might have had something to do with awakening, within its members, the idea that outside of them there existed forces, i.e. religious forces, which dominated them and, at the same time, sustained them.

[79] *Puram.*, 228 : 10 — 11.
[80] *Paṭṭin.*, 119 — 121; *Puram.*, 48 : 4 — 5.

PART THREE

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER NINE

THE NĀṬU

The social life of the ancient Tamils was enclosed within what may be described as concentric circles of companionship and fraternity. Outside there was the *nāṭu* (நாடு), within which there were the units of settlements which were variously known as *mūtūr* (மூதூர்) or *kuṟicci* (குறிச்சி) in the montane region; *kuṟumpu* (குறும்பு) in the arid region; *cēri* (சேரி) or *pāṭi* (பாடி) in the pastoral region; *pērūr* (பேரூர்) in the riverine plains; and *paṭṭiṉam* (பட்டினம்) or *pākkam* in the littoral region.

Within these settlements there were the corporate companionships or brotherhoods of elementary families comprising the members of the clans or gens [who regarded one another as 'relatives' (சுற்றம்) of the common lineage] and the kins within the elementary family [who were known as *okkal* (ஒக்கல்), *kēḷir* (கேளிர்), *uṟṟōr* (உற்றோர்), or *tamar* (தமர்), in the sense that they were affinal relatives].

Within these 'brotherhoods' or companionships and kinship groups, there was the still narrower circle of the elementary family[1] as the basic unit of the kinship structure. The members belonging to each elementary family of this kind lived in dwellings which were variously known as *irukkai* (இருக்கை), *kurampai* (குரம்பை), *kuṭi* (குடி), *maṉai* (மனை), *il* (இல்), and *akam* (அகம்).

Let us now examine the various elements of the early Tamil social structure in some detail.

THE 'NĀṬU' (நாடு) :

The term, *nāṭu* would seem to have been used in the classical Tamil poetry very often in the tribal sense which might be said to

[1] Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown has suggested the term 'elementary family' to denote the group consisting of a father and a mother and their children. By this he means that the relationships, of kinship and affinity, of any person are all connexions that are traced through his parents, his siblings, his spouse, or his children. "Sibling" — Anthropologists have adopted the term 'sibling' to refer to the closest of all cognating relationship that exists between the children of the same father and mother: a male sibling is a brother, a female sibling is a sister. — Radcliffe-Brown, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, p.4 ff.

correspond with the ancient Greek ἔθνος or 'nation'. The various ideas of the poets of the classical period would seem to indicate that the *nāṭu* or 'nation' did dominate the social relations of everyone who belonged to it. Sometimes it would appear that the ideas concerning the *nāṭu* were the only factors which could suddenly arouse a great wave of patriotic or tribal feeling which could unite a whole people in common endeavour and common sacrifice of the most unlimited kind as very often manifested on such occasions as the tribal wars. The question now is, what actually constituted the *nāṭu?*

There are a number of poems especially in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* anthology of the classical Tamil poetry, which would seem to throw some light on the early Tamil concept of a *nāṭu*.

In its physical aspect, the ancient Tamil speaking world of the three centuries before and three centuries after Christ was a distinct geographical entity, situated as it was between the Tirupati hills in the north and Cape Comorin in the south.[2] Water-logged on all sides except the north which was bounded by a chain of mountains, the peninsular Tamil country seemed almost an island (L. *Peninsula; paene*, almost; *insula*, an island).[3] Nevertheless, to call the ancient Tamilakam an 'island' is to belie its possibilities. It was in fact double-natured — the littoral or coastal regions of the 'island' far better adapted to boats and sails, and a peninsula, bordered on either side by long ranges of hills (the Western and the Eastern Ghats) from which flowed the life-giving waters of the chief rivers eastwards and westwards to the seas, passing through the populous pastures and plains. This double-natured geographical situation of the ancient Tamil country had its own peculiarities, some of which had important bearings upon the constitution of the various and numerous tribal entities which were known as *nāṭu*. For example, some units of the *nāṭu* had the sea, the rivers, the forest, or even the long range of hills as boundaries, from which one is able to infer that a *nāṭu* was a distinct entity often limited by a boundary or *ellai*[4] (எல்லை).

[2] *Puram.*, 17 : 1 — 4.

[3] The term, Tamilakam (தமிழகம்) denoting the Tamil country, would itself seem to have conveyed the meaning of a peninsula; *akam* — 'interior' or 'insular', i.e. surrounded by the seas and the mountain range.

[4] *Puram.*, 17 : 1 — 13; ibid., 13 : 13; ibid., 144 : 14.

The next important feature of the *nāṭu* which has been frequently emphasized by the bards and poets of the classical age, is that the *nāṭu*, to be worthy of its name, should have the perennial sources of the various means of subsistence which were essential for the inhabitants as food, and for the chieftains as revenue.[5] The importance of the various subsistence resources could be inferred from the clear reference of the classical poet, Kuṭṭuvaṉ Kaṇṇaṉār, to the fact that the inhabitants of Āy's territory, after the able chieftain's death, shifted to other territories because they could not bear the hunger which was caused obviously by the disruption of resources, following the death of the chieftain. The author in his poem mourns the death of his erstwhile patron-chief, and describes how his *nāṭu*, once a prosperous territory, became a ruined and desolate place.[6]

In this connexion, it must be mentioned that not all the territories of the ancient Tamil country were blessed with such perennial resources of nature's bounty. When one normally thinks and speaks of the early Tamils as the pioneers of their great civilisation and wide commercial contacts with the West in the early centuries of the Christian era, one unconsciously credits their territories with an abundance of material resources, and one often forgets that there were some regions which were more or less completely lacking in the essential means of subsistence. While it was true that in certain regions there were extremes of conspicuous consumption which often characterized the great feasts at the chieftains' settlements, there were also cases of extreme pauperism. As a proof of the latter, one has only to remember the incredible poverty in which some of the travelling bards would seem to have moved about — the fire place without the fire, the ruined dwellings with dilapidated mud walls on which the thatched roof had collapsed beyond repair, the meals that began and ended with herbs plucked from refuse heaps, and the barking bitch with milkless teats. The poet, Nattattaṉār has vividly portrayed the old Tamil atmosphere of poverty and discomfort in his idyll of Ciṟupāṉāṟṟuppaṭai. "In the ruined kitchen lay the barkjng bitch which had only recently whelped; its pups, too young to open their eyes, suckle not the milkless teats of their

[5] *Puram.*, 200 : 17; ibid., 7 : 12 — 13; ibid., 29 : 16; ibid., 63 : 14 — 15.
[6] *Puram.*, 240 : 2 — 14.

mother. The hollow mushrooms had sprouted upon the earth, piled up by ants which swarmed the walls on which the roof had fallen down. There, the daughter of the drummer, gnawed by hunger, plucked the herbs from the refuse heaps with her sharp nails, cooked it saltless, and made a meal of it with her poor relatives within closed doors, too ashamed to be seen by the prying folk; such was the sorrow of the partakers of the meagre diet, caused by the gnawing hunger[7] ..."

The bards and poets who were clearly aware of this state of affairs, strongly exhorted their patron-chiefs to take definite steps to avert this sort of dire poverty. One such exhortation was for the provision and maintenance of water resources upon which the regular growing of crops was so much dependent.[8] One way of providing for the perennial supply of water for the paddy fields was to build reservoirs and dams to store the surplus water which overflowed from the rivers when they were periodically flooded as a result of heavy monsoon rains. The chieftain who had been instrumental in building such reservoirs and tanks, the poet assured, could count upon his name and fame being established permanently upon the memory of his people for generations to come.[9]

Some of the chieftains and rulers were not satisfied with merely providing these facilities. They also took it upon themselves to obtain fresh resources of food for their subjects. For this purpose, when the need arose, they decided to expand their territories by conquest.[10] In order to obtain new resources of food by means of conquest, they also had to have a powerful army.[11] To develop this manpower, they would seem to have adopted the system of universal conscription: every able-bodied person of each household was a warrior in those days; it was the primary duty of the village blacksmith to furnish the warriors with weapons.[12] Having maximized the number of warriors whom the chieftain could call to arms at any time to the beating of war drums which were hung at public places,

[7] *Cirupan.*, 130 — 140.
[8] *Puram.*, 13 : 11 — 13; ibid., 18 : 18 — 23.
[9] *Puram.*, 18 : 28 — 30.
[10] *Puram.*, 8 : 1 — 3; ibid., 57 : 5 — 6.
[11] *Puram.*, 201 : 19 — 20.
[12] *Puram.*, 312 : 3 — 6.

they had also to equip them with the weapons and keep them in constant readiness.[13]

Though some of the tribal wars might have been presumably for the purpose of expanding the resources of food for the subjects through conquest of other's territories, ironically enough such expeditions often resulted in wanton destruction of the riches of the conquered territories. Apart from the incidental destruction of the enemy's territory in the course of pitched battles, to reduce to ashes every settlement in the enemy's territory was the severest penalty that a conqueror could inflict upon an enemy in those days. Sad to say, some of the ancient Tamil chieftains would seem to have been cruelly fond of such callous and barbarous destruction, mostly by setting fire to the settlements[14] (a sort of 'scorched-earth' policy), oblivious of the fact that the war impoverished the country by annihilating the wealth which had been previously accumulated. The tragedy of the waste to which the ancient settlements were cruelly reduced, was aggravated by the circumstance that the human victims were the elite of the country, the brave young men of the tribe. While the machinery of nature worked for the survival of the fittest, the winnowing of such tribal wars resulted in the elimination of the fittest.

THE CHIEFTAIN

Let us now turn to the chieftain of the tribe or the clan. According to Neṭuñceliyaṉ of the Pāndya clan, himself a ruler and poet of great repute, the tribal chief or ruler was chosen from among all the members of the clan, irrespective of age, by consensus of the whole body, and the personal qualities of intelligence and knowledge of affairs determined the choice.[15] There were also certain personal qualities of a person which have often been associated with a tribal chieftain or ruler of men — qualities such as leadership, valour, dedication, perseverance, and liberality.[16]

It was the duty of the head of the tribal clan, with the unswerving aid and advice of the older men of the group, to watch over the

[13] *Puram.*, 95 : 1 — 5.
[14] *Puram.*, 21 : 22; ibid., 16 : 15 — 17; ibid., 57 : 5 — 7.
[15] *Puram.*, 183 : 5 — 7.
[16] *Puram.*, 75 : 4; ibid., 5 : 6 — 7; *Pattin.*, 222 — 227; *Puram.*, 60 : 7 — 9; *Puram.*, 54 : 2 — 4; *Poru.*, 76 — 78.

welfare of the whole group.[17] The chieftain had the power and the duty to settle private disputes between any of his fellow members of the group so that peace and solidarity could prevail in the group. For this purpose, the chieftain of the group is known to have made himself available daily to the members of the group, usually in a public place under an umbrageous tree,[18] so that he could personally listen to the complaints and appeals from the people and issue his decrees of justice.[19] (This day-to-day practice of the early chieftains would seem to have later become a formal ceremonial in the royal courts, at which the ruler, seated on his throne, granted 'audience' to his subjects, and administered justice, the ceremony being known as 'Nāḷōlakkam'[20] (நாளோலக்கம்).

Now, apart from the physical presence of the chieftain at the 'assembly', one of the most important features of the 'ceremonial court' was the chieftain's custody of the ancestral regalia or instruments of insignia belonging to his lineage, such as the Umbrella and the Sceptre which had soon become important and sometimes even sacred emblems of his status and authority. Of these regalia, the royal umbrella of later days, which consisted of light circular canopy of white silk cloth supported by a thick stick, and which was carried in hand by a bearer or fixed at the back of the ruler's throne to form a canopy over the head of the occupant, would seem to have had some connexion or resemblance to the umbrageous trees, under the shade of which the earlier chieftains are known to have been present to settle disputes. (It is worth noting that those trees that are so trained that its branches droop in umbrella form are called 'umbrella-trees').[21]

However, the fact that the royal insignia of the white umbrella ("வெண்கொற்றக்குடை") was definitely not meant to be used as an ordinary kind of umbrella for mere protection against the sun (or

[17] *Puram.*, 42 : 10 — 11; ibid., 5 : 6 — 7.
[18] *Puram.*, 34 : 12; ibid., 181 : 1; ibid., 128 : 1; ibid., 79 : 4.
[19] *Puram.*, 54 : 1 — 4; *Puram.*, 35 : 14 — 16; *Perumpan.*, 443 — 444.
It is significant to note that the term *maṉṟam* which denoted the assembly of people in the presence of the chieftain to seek redress of their grievances, is being used to this day to refer to the court of justice (i.e. *nīti-maṉṟam*) and the legislative assembly or even parliament (*Nāṭāḷumaṉṟam*).
[20] (A ceremony of this kind has survived to this day among the Sultans and Rulers of certain states in Malaysia, the ceremony being known as *Raja Menghadap* ceremony.)
[21] Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary, p.1194.

rain) for the chieftain was clearly enjoined upon the chieftains by the Tamil poets of those days, as it is evident from the subtle warning given to Kiḷḷi-Vaḷavaṉ of the Cōḻa clan by Veḷḷaikkuṭi-nākaṉār.[22]

The sceptre of the ancient Tamil chieftains and rulers was known as *kōl* (கோல்), and usually it was referred to as *ceṅkōl* (செங்கோல்) if the rule of the chieftain, wielding the symbolic sceptre, was a righteous one,[23] and if on the other hand he happened to be a despot who was also notorious for his cruel deeds and edicts, then his rule was branded as *koṭuṅkōl* (கொடுங்கோல்) and he himself was called *koṭuṅkōlaṉ*.[24] As for its origin, two interpretations might seem possible. First, the sceptre could have been originally the spear which was also an important emblem and weapon always carried by the warrior-chieftain wherever he went. Secondly, it could also have had its origin in the ancient practice of pastoral chiefs of the shepherds carrying with themselves the pastoral staff or rod, usually when they were tending their droves of cattle. (In English language, the term, 'pastor', means both the shepherd and the clergyman of a congregation, while the crosier — a tall staff forming part of a bishop's insignia — is also headed like a shepherd's crook. (The herdsman in the ancient Tamil country is said to have had such a crook.)[25] It is also significant to note that the original Tamil term, *kōṉ* denoting the shepherd or herdsman, later came to be applied to the king as well. All this is, of course, based on the assumption that kingship might have had its origin in the pastoral chieftainship, in the sense that the herdsmen might have succeeded in exercising domination over others by virtue of their possession of cattle. This aspect, however, requires much detailed and separate study in conjunction with the evolution of kingship in South India, which is not within the scope of the present study.

Now, coming back to the chieftain of the ancient Tamils, as mentioned above, he was the main representative of the group in its 'political' and legal relations with other clans and communities, and as such he had the power and the duty to protect his people from

22 *Puram.*, 35 : 19 — 21.
23 *Puram.*, 42 : 11; ibid., 230 : 4.
24 *Puram.*, 71 : 8 — 9.
25 *Perumpaṇ.*, 170 .

the incursions of the enemies. Though, on those occasions, the chieftain himself took the lead in organizing corporate obligations, the bards and poets of those days would also seem to have played an important role in mediating or settling not only the disputes between leaders of rival clans, but also the internecine quarrels among men of the same family or clan who aspired for leadership. With regard to the latter role, the poets sometimes appealed for reason and commonsense, but at other times tried to avert clashes between siblings or brothers by appealing to them to uphold the prestige of the clan to which they belonged. With regard to the former, the feud which occurred between Kōpperuñcōḷaṉ and his children would seem to have been settled by the poet Pullārṟūr Eyiṟṟiyaṉār who pointed out the futility of an aged father fighting with his own children on an issue of succession to the chieftainship and his property, for after all, his children were going to inherit it.[26] With regard to the dispute which arose between the brothers, Nalaṅkiḷḷi and Neṭuṅkiḷḷi, the poet, Kōvūr Kiḷār, intervened, and asked them to cease fighting between themselves (i.e. two persons belonging to the same Kiḷḷi or the Cōḷa clan whose emblem was the *ār* or *ātti (Bauhinia racemosa)* flower, and not the palmyra flower which belonged to the Cēra clan nor the *margosa* flower which was the emblem of the ancestors of Pāndya clan) — because, if one of the Kiḷḷi brothers should suffer defeat which was inevitable, then the other clans would be only too pleased to see that the solidarity of the Kiḷḷi clan was impaired. On this occasion, the totemic affiliation, particularly the existence of the emblem of the clan, would seem to have done much in strengthening the social ties of the clan, by subordinating the personal interests of individuals to the interests and prestige of the clan. What is seen in the appeal or reference of the poet to the 'totemic' emblem of *ātti* flower is indeed that the totemic tie was deemed more binding than even that of blood.[27]

While the bards and poets did their very best in mediating and sometimes settling the internecine disputes among members of the same clan and thus strengthened the solidarity of the clan concerned, they also did all they could by way of bolstering up the

[26] *Puram.*, 213 : 14 — 19.
[27] *Puram.*, 45 : 1 — 9.

enthusiasm of the members of the group when they came to fight for their rights against the members of the rival clan. The commonest occasions on which the unity and solidarity of the clan received public expressions, were the tribal wars, led by the chieftain of the clan. Very often, the bard and poet found themselves on the battlefield, giving encouragement to the warriors and praising their victories.[28] Of course, this important role of the bards and poets was not confined to tumultuous periods of life alone; it was also manifestly evident in times of peace when the poets were helpful in an advisorial capacity.

Besides the poets' sagacity on which the chieftain and ruler could safely rely, there were also times when he sought the advice of those elderly men of his own clan who were noted for their never-failing wisdom on matters pertaining to the clan and its members. As those men were known to have freely voiced their opinions without fear or favour, the ruler dared not swerve from the righteous path, for fear of risking condemnation and ridicule of the sagacious few.[29]

SETTLEMENTS

Now, having seen something of the *nāṭu* and the chieftain who was in charge of it, let us turn to the various kinds of settlements that were found in each of the tribal territories of the ancient Tamil country.

In the montane region, the settlement was known as *kuṟicci* or sometimes *mūtūr* (மூதூர்), and it would seem to have been characterized by the smallness of its communal aggregates, and consequently by a greater social homogeneity.[30] A greater proportion of the montane dwellers' social contacts were face to face and therefore their relationships with particular individuals tended to have longer duration and to be even more hospitable to guests and visitors like the bards and poets.[31]

As for the settlement in the arid region, the following graphic account of Uruttirankaṇṇaṉār in his idyll, *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, may be cited: "There were thatched dwellings of the community of

[28] *Puram.*, 42 : 23 — 24.
[29] *Matu.*, 496 — 499; *Puram.*, 72 : 10 — 16.
[30] *Malai.*, 156.
[31] Ibid., 151 — 157.

'Eyiṉar'. Their greased spears were ranged on the walls of the dwellings. Besides, there were also thatched ramparts to which fierce hounds were tied by means of chains. The bows and the quivers full of arrows hung on the 'beehive' sheds.[32] These shelters and other dwellings were fenced with thorny creepers, while separate palisade-like wickets served as gates to these dwellings.[33]

The pastoral settlements in the ancient Tamil country had also thatched huts (the thatch was one of straw) with doors made of wooden sticks tied together. The huts were propped on short sticks or posts on which leafy twigs were hung for the ewes to munch. There were front yards in which cattle were tied to the pegs by means of long ropes. The shepherds pastured their cattle and sheep upon the adjacent grazing ground for which a close row of thorny bushes served as hedge or fence.[34]

The fourth type of settlement was the permanent agricultural settlement with a number of dwellings either placed close together or sometimes irregularly in and around the paddy and sugar-cane plots, or even sometimes away from the cultivated fields in a row of streets. Besides the farmers' pretty little huts of thatched roofs with courtyards in which children played with their toy-chariots, and the cattle kraals which were attached to the farmers' dwellings, the agricultural settlement was also marked with the heaps of

[32] Wilhelm Wundt who describes the most important types of primitive dwellings in his *Volkerpsychologie*, Vol. VII, has pointed out that their form was influenced by certain aesthetic requirements: the simplest geometric patterns — the circle, the oval, the triangle, or the quadrangle — were preferred by the early people. Thus in the most elementary forms of dwellings found in almost all parts of the world, the spherical and 'beehive' hut (in which the circle was combined with the triangle), and the tent (in which the quadrangular shelter had a triangular shaped roof) leaning against a central tripod, have been noted. With regard to the former, probably (though I am not sure) the phrase "வரைத்தேன் புரையும் கவைக் காற்பந்தர்" in the line 123 of *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* might seem to describe such a 'beehive' hut. As for the tent, a reference is made in the idyll, *Mullaippāṭṭu* (lines 38 — 41) to the tent in which warriors took up residence during encampment:

"முக்கோ லசைநிலை கடுப்ப....

.. .. ..

கூடங் குத்திக் கயிறுவாங் கிருக்கைப்
பூந்தலைக் குந்தங் குத்திக் கிடுகு நிரைத்து"

— *Mullai.*, 38; 40 — 41.

[33] *Perumpan.*, 119 — 129.

[34] *Perumpan.*, 148 — 154.

paddy-grains, and the smoky sugar-houses where sugar-cane was being crushed and probably made into sugar-crystals.[35] [In the riverine plains there were also towns which became distinguished from the rural settlements by the term, *pērūr* (பேரூர்). While the towns in the interior were mainly centres of internal trade, the coastal towns and cities [known as *paṭṭiṉam* — (பட்டினம்) became increasingly associated with foreign trade and commerce].

The fifth type of settlement was the coastal or littoral settlement of the fisherfolk who inhabited the long littoral tracts of sandy territory lying on the eastern and the western sea-board of the ancient Tamil country. In a typical settlement of the littoral dwellers, (the huts were thatched with *taruppai* (தருப்பை) grass. Besides there were also sheds built of the branches of the laurel tree. The fish baskets and the knotted nets lay on the banks of the deep fishing pools.[36] A little further away from these settlements, there were many-storeyed mansions located in a network of streets, where the traders and merchants lived with their womenfolk.[37]

Thus, the ancient Tamils are known to have lived in various kinds of settlements — the hill-dwelling *kuṟavar* and *kuṟattiyar* living high upon the mountains[38] and the highly advanced traders and merchant-princes with their womenfolk living in the sky-high mansions[39] in the urban areas of the coastal region as well as in the interior, and other people — the agriculturists, the pastoralists, and the hunter-like *maṟavar* — living in the humble dwellings or thatched huts located on the rich plains, pastoral regions, or on the arid tracts of the ancient Tamil country. It was within these settlements that each elementary family had a dwelling.

Whether the dwelling was a cave-shelter or a thatched hut on the slopes of the hills, or a 'beehive' hut in the pastoral hamlet, in the riverine plain, in the littoral or arid tract, or whether it was a sky-high mansion in the cities and towns of the ancient Tamil country, it must have risen originally out of the elementary need for protection from wind and weather. Although the various terms

35 *Perumpan.*, 237 — 244; ibid., 247 — 249; ibid., 259 — 262.
36 *Perumpan.*, 264 — 274.
37 Ibid., 332 — 337.
38 *Kuru.*, 108 : 1.
39 *Perumpan.*, 332 — 333.

denoting the variety of dwellings (such as *malai-viṭar-akam* (மலை-விடரகம்), *kurampai* (குரம்பை), *irukkai* (இருக்கை), *kuṭi* (குடி), *maṉai* (மனை), or *māṭam* (மாடம்) do not actually mean 'family', the various types of dwellings which were denoted by these terms, undoubtedly provide the framework for the development of the primary form of social life, i.e. the domestic life of the elementary family.

Chapter Ten

FAMILY

For the understanding of any aspect of the elementary social life (i.e. the family life) of the ancient Tamils, it would seem essential to have some knowledge of their system of *kinship and marriage*.

A system of kinship and marriage may be looked at as an arrangement which enables persons to live together and cooperate with one another in an orderly social life. For any particular kinship system as it existed at a certain time, one could make a study of how it worked. To do this, one has to consider how it linked persons together by *convergence* of interest and sentiment, and how it controlled and limited those conflicts that were always possible as the result of *divergence* of sentiment or interest. Furthermore, in reference to any particular feature of a kinship system, one may ask how it contributed to the working of the system, in other words, its social function. If and when one succeeds in discovering the function of a particular custom, i.e. the part it played in the working of the system to which it was connected, one may reach some understanding or explanation of it. This kind of understanding of a kinship system as a working system linking human beings together in an orderly arrangement of interactions, by which particular customs are seen as functioning parts of the social machinery, is what is aimed at in this section. In such a study which may be called 'synchronic' approach, we shall be dealing with the various features of certain aspects of a system as it would seem to

have existed in the classical period, abstracting as far as possible from any changes it might have been undergoing. But, it is not within the scope of this study, to undertake a diachronic study of the system, aiming at understanding the process of change, which would have to be a matter for separate study covering the post-classical period as well.

NATURE OF KINSHIP

Two persons are described as kin when one is descended from the other. (Persons are said to be cognatic kin or cognates when they are descended from a common ancestor or ancestress, counting descent through male or female.)

The term, 'kinship' is used in this section to refer specially to a social relationship and not necessarily to a physical relationship for which the term, 'consanguinity', may be used. The difference is clear if we consider the position of children in the ancient Tamil society. Both the male and female children had not only a *genetrix* (physical mother, தற்றாய், or பயந்த தாய், 'the mother who begot'), but also a 'social' or 'foster-mother'[1] (ஓரணிவித்தாய்). The fact that the early Tamil grammarians did not assume that the physical relationship and the social relationship of the person known as 'mother' (தாய்) normally coincided, is evident from the earliest 'definition' of the social or foster-mother (ஓரணி) as distinguished from the genetrix, which is found in the classical Tamil grammatical treatise, *Tolkāppiyam*.[2]

While physical motherhood (and fatherhood, i.e. 'paterfamilias' and 'materfamilias') was usually determined by a socially recognized marriage, the social motherhood would seem to have been established not by birth, but by *fosterge* as it would seem to have been practised in the ancient Tamil country and in many other parts of the world in the old days.

By the term, 'fosterage'[3], is here meant the practice of fostering or nurturing the child of the physical mother for a certain period of time. (The custom, of course, differs from 'adoption' in that

[1] *Kuru.*, 229 : 1 — 4.
[2] *Tol.*, 1070.
[3] In the following pages of this chapter, we shall be concerned mainly with the 'fosterage' exercised by the female, i.e. by the fostermother, for which there is some clear evidence in the classical poetry and grammar.

the foster-child did not become a permanent 'daughter' or a 'son' of the foster-mother, nor a permanent member of the foster-mother's family.

FOSTERAGE

The custom of female 'fosterage' among the ancient Tamils would seem to have evolved as a natural development of nursing of a newly born child by a lady other than the physical mother who begot the child; this custom of nursing arose probably when consideration of health of the actual mother or other special circumstances such as the rigorous isolation of the mother who had given birth to the child and the taboos pertaining to the lochial state to which she was subject during delivery and lying-in period would have rendered it desirable to separate the child for a time from its mother. This would seem to have been the case from the evidence of a poem of *Naṟṟiṇai* collection, in which the author has described how the husband (who was a conjugal infidel during the lochial

But it is not known (?) whether there was also such a person as 'foster-father'. However, there would also seem to have been the custom (though it might have been rare initially, but it might have become popular in later days under the influence from the north) of learned men (especially poets) to take into their charge those helpless children of certain chieftains who had met with premature death in the battle or otherwise. For example there was the instance of Kapilar who showed compassion towards the daughters of his patron chief and life-long friend, Pāri, and took them into his own charge, after the chieftain's death. When another chieftain of the Vēḷir clan, Iruṅkōvēḷ to whom the poet had taken the daughters of Pāri, inquired who the young maidens were, Kapilar is known to have replied that though they were the daughters of Pāri who was dead, he (the poet) looked upon them as his own daughters (*Puram*., 201 : 6). But this evidence has to be treated with some caution, as there was the custom in those days (as even in these days) among the Tamils to use kinship terms of classificatory type, e.g. the practice of using the same term, 'makaṉ' ('son') 'Makaḷ' ('daughter'), or 'makkaḷ' ('children') to refer to the children of others where there was some element of attitude or etiquette, or an obligation, to exhibit friendliness and affection towards others' children.

Among the early Aryans of the north, however, there would seem to have been the custom of the son of the tribal chieftain being taken away from home and consigned to the charge of a tutor or foster father. Boys were regarded rather as the property of the tribe than of the parents. R. C. Dutt, speaking of Rama's early training under the guardianship of Viśwāmitra, the royal sage, says that the Aryan boy of those days was taken away from his parents at an early age, and lived the hard life of an anchorite under his teacher for twelve or twenty-four, or thirty-six years, before he entered into matrimony and became a householder. (R. C. Dutt, *The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata*, (p.159), Everyman's Library Edition, 1961.)

state of his wife) on hearing that a son had been born to him, came stealthily to see the infant which was asleep with the foster-mother, while the child's actual mother was sleeping on a separate bed.[4]

In view of the custom of nursing by foster-mother, it might have been also possible that there came to subsist between the nurse and the nursling a natural tie of affection. This would seem to be supported by another fact that in the early Tamil society language itself does not seem to have originally distinguished between nurse and foster-mother, and the female, carrying out both functions would seem to have been denoted by the same term, *cevili* (செவிலி). Perhaps only later, as it became more and more obvious that the natural tie of affection between the nurse and the nursling was of an exceptional strength, then the grammarians combined the term, *tāy* (தாய்) with *cevili* (செவிலி) to make a combined word, *cevilittāy* (செவிலித்தாய்), and thus add one more term to the list of kinship terms belonging to what is now known as 'descriptive' type of kinship nomenclature.[5]

In the course of time, the relationship between *cevilittāy* (foster-mother) and the child who was her charge, would seem to have been regarded as an important one, so much so that it might have evolved into a social institution. And as in the case of other social institutions, it also became an essential theme of poetry, in the *Akattiṇai-iyal* of the classical Tamil poetic convention, in connexion with the themes of 'courtship' and 'marriage'.

In Tamil poetry of the classical period, we do have some significant references to certain aspects of the institution of 'foster-age'. To begin with, there is reference to the possibility that the *primary function* of a physical mother ended immediately after begetting the child.[6] It is possible that the function of the physical mother ended there and then, for the phrase, *puṟantarutal* (புறந் தருதல்) in the verse 312 of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* collection, besides meaning 'fostering' or nurturing', would also seem to imply that the child which she begot was at once entrusted to some other person, i.e. the foster-mother who assumed the function of nourishing, protecting, and even educating the female offspring until she was safely

[4] *Nar.*, 40 : 5 — 12.
[5] *Tol.*, 1070 : 2.
[6] *Puram.*, 312 : 1

married to a man of her choice with the consent of all parties concerned.

Again, the possibility that the function of nurturing the newly-born child was entrusted to the foster-mother would seem to be evident from the reference in the idyll, *Perumpāṉārṟuppaṭai* to the nursing of the child at the breast of the foster-mother.[7] And the act of nursing at breast is regarded as an important element of foster-kinship as practised in other parts of the world as well.[8]

Again with regard to the Tamil custom of fosterage, another poem of the *Naṟṟiṇai* collection indicates that even beyond the stage of suckling the child, it was the function of foster-mother to feed the child which had passed its infancy.[9] The phrase, *ari narai-k-kūntal cem-mutu ceviliyar* (அரிநரைக் கூந்தல் செம்முது செவிலியர்) — 'grey-haired, aged foster-mothers' — occurring in the *Naṟṟiṇai* poem[10] is interesting, but somewhat ambiguous. It is interesting

[7] *Perumpaṉ.*, 249 — 252.

[8] In some parts of the world, the act of nursing at breast has been regarded as the essence of foster-kinship, and it has been noted to have been of some significance that it centred in the person of the foster-mother. This practice is said to have prevailed in Arabia. It is said that Prophet Muhammad was put out to nurse with a woman of the Beni Sad, who reared him among her own people until he was five years old, and anecdotes are told of the attachment which he displayed towards his foster-mother and her daughter. It is also said that when Prophet Muhammad came to legislate for his followers, he laid down a law against the intermarriage of persons connected by the tie of milk-kinship. The principle of the law is stated in the words: "whatever is prohibited by consanguinity is also prohibited by fosterage," i.e. the tie of milk is as much a bar to the marriage as the tie of blood, and the kin of foster-parents came within the forbidden degrees in just the same way as the kin of actual parents.

Again that foster-kinship was more than a legal fiction among the Muslim rulers of India may be seen in the case of Akbar (1543 — 1605), the Mughul emperor of Delhi. It is said that Akbar had much to suffer on account of the favours which he lavished on his foster-mother, Mahan Anaga, and her family. She was for many years the most influential person at his court, and her son, Adam Khan, was one of his generals. When Akbar was annoyed by certain impulsive actions of Adam Khan and was often tempted to punish him, he is said to have remarked rather helplessly: "Between me and him there is a stream of milk which I cannot cross." (Malleson, *Akbar.*)

It is also of some significance to note in this connexion that 'suckling' is also regarded in some parts of the world as a ceremony for the institution of 'adoption'. It is said that among the Circassians, a woman formally offers her breast to the son to be adopted, at the 'suckling' rite which is a 'must' for the adoption to be recognized by the community.

[9] *Nar.*, 110 : 1 — 6.

[10] Ibid.

because it does seem to imply that the aged, grey-haired matrons played a great role in child-rearing. (It was from the old matrons or grandparents of both sexes that children could learn family history, folklore, proverbs, and other traditional lore, mainly because of the fact that the elderly folk were indeed the living links with the past.) The power exercised by the apparantly decrepit ancients ('foster-mothers', mentioned in the above verse) over their charge, would also seem to have been rather autocratic as is evident from the reference to the small sticks which they are said to have wielded in the course of their efforts to feed the recalcitrant toddler. Their wielding of the stick, almost contrary to the age-old family dictum, namely, "grandparents scold by the mouth, parents more often with the stick", would seem to indicate the high esteem in which the foster-mothers were held — a position almost equivalent to that of the actual mother.

But, again, the phrase, *cem-mutu-ceviliyar* (செம்முது செவி லியர்), is somewhat ambiguous, because we are not in a position to know for certain whether the aged matrons known as *ceviliyar* were actually maternal or paternal grandmothers of the child, in whose care the actual mother might have left her child during those absences when the mother might have had to cultivate the farm or to do other work. If the aged matron had really been a maternal grandmother of the child, it is possible that the scene described in the above verse was at the mother's natal home where by custom (still observed among Tamils) birth took place, on account of the inclination of most women to be under the care of their close maternal kin, in particular, their mothers during the early years of marriage and particularly at the time of birth and also subsequently.

Irrespective of whether the foster-mothers referred to in the poem were maternal grandmother or paternal grandmother, or neither, the grandparents and foster-mothers would seem to have been the most honoured of all one's kinsfolk. Their position and status were of a very great importance in the social system of ancient Tamils.

The unique feature about the ancient Tamil system of fosterage is that the foster-mother's daughter also played an important role, particularly in the premarital stage of the life of her mother's charge, as a constant companion to the young maiden. While the foster-

mother was known as *cevili*, her daughter was referred to as *tōḻi* (தோழி)— which meant 'female companion' to the maiden.[11]

Let us now observe some of the social functions of the foster-mother and her daughter in the social relations of the young maiden.

The foster-mother's originally simple function of nurturing the female child would seem to have increased manifold immediately after her ward attained puberty, for this attainment signified that the young maiden had reached the threshold of premarital courtship which included all forms of behaviour not only on the part of the lovers concerned, but also on the part of the maiden's companion and foster-mother, mainly because the subsequent marriage to which courtship was preliminary was an important relationship affecting not only the husband and wife but also their families.

COURTSHIP

Courtship among the early Tamils, especially among the hill dwellers, (in the Tamil poetic convention of the classical period, the montane region was prescribed as the suitable physical background for poetry relating to the theme of 'courtship'), began with the first accidental meeting of a young man and a nubile girl, and this meeting was frequently brought about by the condition of the physical environment in which they happened to live. For example, it was natural that the young man while hunting should meet by chance the young maiden guarding the millet crops of the hill region, and that such a meeting should engender 'love' on account of the mutual attraction of two persons of opposite sexes. Following the 'natural union' (இயற்கைப் புணர்ச்சி) of lovers, several things happened both in regard to the young maiden and the community of families to which she belonged. With regard to the maiden who had fallen in love, it produced the love-sickness, which of course did not fail to attract the attention of her kin, especially that of her watchful foster-mother. Although the foster-mother might have known or sometimes seen what had happened and consequently might have become anxious, yet how could she be certain so early? Therefore, she rather adroitly did what was best in the circumstances and attributed the maiden's 'illness' to the influence of certain evil spirits, and also arranged for the ritual dance in honour of the

[11] *Tol.*, 1071; ibid., 1072.

godhead, Murukaṉ, whose help was sought to exorcize the evil spirits.

The foster-mother's own daughter who acted as the female companion for the love-striken maiden of course knew the real cause of the 'incurable' sickness, and while she was therefore highly amused at her (apparently ignorant) mother's solution for the lady's love-sickness, she also happened to speak her mind rather unwittingly on the occasion of the ritual dance, and made fun of the godhead by greeting, "May you, Murukaṉ, continue to live in blissful ignorance!"[12]

However, the foster-mother happened to hear this subtle innuendo and promptly asked her daughter the reason for saying such a thing even in a jocular vein.[13] Still the true answer was not forthcoming from the faithful confidante, but that did not really keep the secret love-affair of her lady from her kinsfolk. Strange as it might seem, the lady herself came to reveal the truth rather indirectly when it became evident in her changed conduct and behaviour. The maiden who was in love then seemed to desire solitude more and more; previously she used to roam about rather aimlessly with her female companion, but now that she had a male companion, her thought centred around one particular spot where she first met or used to meet him subsequently by previous arrangement. Again, her love-sickness had a pronounced effect on her normal diet which became less and less, as the days went by. Besides, it was also reflected in her physical appearance and in the discharge of perfumes.[14] Moreover, the lady began to talk in sleep[15] which the foster-mother who used to sleep with her nursling since infancy could not understand, and she of course asked her companion who was also the foster-mother's own daughter, and still there was no reply. Eventually when the people of the community itself started exchanging curious looks, and gossiping,[16] then the foster-mother began to act.

But all this while, the secret meeting of the lovers had gone on and this period of courtship was being closely watched by the foster-

12 *Nar.*, 34 : 7 — 11.
13 *Tol.*, 1061 : 1 — 4/7.
14 *Tol.*, 1060 : 1 — 4.
15 *Tol.*, 1061 : 6.
16 *Tol.*, 1085.

mother's own daughter, i.e. *tōḻi* who, because she was a disinterested party, was placed in a position to test by various ingenious means the suitor's adaptablity, general desirability, and seriousness of purpose. And it would seem that the period of time required for the courtship of lovers together with the time taken by the female companion to arrive at a favourable judgment as to the suitability of the suitor very often coincided with the time when he scandal-mongering of neighbours had gathered some momentum, and then it was time for the female companion to confide at last the truth to the foster-mother who in turn informed the lady's real mother from whom the father and 'brothers' (either the lady's own elder brothers or her mother's brother, i.e. the maternal uncles of the lady) learned of the truth.[17] Then the whole affair became a matter of common knowledge, which was to be followed by certain formalities before the actual wedding. But sometimes it happened that the lovers, who were doubtful whether they would receive the consent of the parents of the bride or not, might have decided already to elope.

Again, it was the foster-mother who would seem to have been affected very much by the couple's elopement. As she found herself in great sorrow on account of the thoughtless action of her beloved 'daughter', she often sobbed and lamented the loss of the young maiden upon whom she had showered so much affection since infancy.[18] The real mother too was deeply hurt, and felt a great sense of loss.[19] The true remorse which the *foster-mother* felt at the running away of her 'daughter' indeed impelled her to go at once in search of the couple who had eloped, and it was usual for her during this search to make inquires from the passers-by if they had seen such and such a couple.[20] Eventually, if the foster-mother managed to find the pair, she immediately informed the real mother of her daughter's whereabouts, and persuaded the couple either to get married at the 'patrilocal' residence of the young man or return to the bride's home for the ceremony.

Now, from what we have seen above, it would seem that the

[17] *Nampi.*, 48.
[18] *Ainkuru.*, 372; ibid., 380.
[19] *Akam.*, 35 : 1 — 11.
[20] *Ainkuru.*, 389.

roles of the foster-mother and of her daughter were important ones, not only in the physical and social upbringing of the young maiden, but also in the establishment of a new family through marriage.

In the foregoing paragraphs, we saw something of the role of 'fosterage' relating to the 'social' kinship system of the family. Let us now turn to some aspects of the equally important role of the institution of 'marriage' relating to the cognatic or affinal kinship system of the family. For this purpose, we have to understand the institution of 'marriage' which was an essential prelude to the process of cognatic kinship system.

MARRIAGE

In order to understand the early Tamil customs relating to marriage, one has to bear in mind that a marriage in those days (as even in these days) was regarded essentially as a rearrangement of the existing social structure or of the existing arrangement of persons in institutionalized relationships. It is a matter of common observation that, by a marriage, certain existing relationships, particularly those of the bride to her family are changed. Through marriage, new social relations are created, not only between the husband and the wife, and between the husband and the wife's relatives on the one side and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the other, but also, between the relatives of the husband and those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from it.

Another important factor in the development of the early Tamil conception of marriage would seem to have been the idea of romantic love — a theme that was much elaborated in the classical Tamil literature and grammar, and has now become the mainstay of most of the Tamil short stories and novels and Tamil movies that are based on those stories.

But to understand the early Tamil marriage based on 'romantic love', one must remember that the modern Tamil novel writers' idea of marriage is recent and decidedly unusual, the product of both a particular social development and of mainly Western influence. Some of the modern writers of Tamil film-scripts, short stories, and novels, seem to think of a marriage as an event that concerns

primarily the man and the woman who are forming a union. For them, the consent of parents, is strictly, only required for minors; and a religious ceremony is not essential. According to reports which periodically appear in the Tamil newspapers even in Malaysia, such a marriage essentially consists of a special occasion which is witnessed by a group of specially invited friends and sometimes relatives too of the bride and bridegroom, and presided over usually by an eminent community leader who is also very often a politician. On this occasion, after a speech from the presiding person, the couple exchange garlands and perhaps wedding rings too, and this is followed by the declaration of both parties to those who are assembled there that they wish to live as wedded husband and wife. More often than not the bridegroom ties the symbolic marriage 'string' (*tāli* தாலி) around the bride's neck, as a further corroboration of his solemn pledge. On occasions of this kind, religion does not play any part, nor does the state have any part in giving the union its legality. (There is of course an exception in the case of Singapore where it is required by legislation to register all Hindu marriages at the Government Registry. In other states of Malaysia, Tamil marriages by registration are not unknown.)

In other forms of marriage which are prevalent among the Tamils of these days, the ceremonial plays an important role. The wedding is held under a formal arrangement and consent of the parents of the couple concerned. (Sometimes, the formal arrangement is known to include the actual payment or a promise of payment of the so-called dowry, and the dower is frequently the bride's family. The payment of dowry is believed to be both of considerable economic and symbolic importance.) The ceremonial of an arranged marriage is characterized often by an exchange of gifts between the bride's family and the bridegroom's family. For example, the bridegroom is expected to present the bride with her wedding trousseau or *saree* (which is hardly used again after the wedding ritual), and the important wedding string *(tāli)* to which are attached a few pieces of carved medallions and coins made of gold. The ceremony is held usually in the patrilocal residence of the bridegroom, or sometimes at the residence of the bride's family or even in some neutral ground such as the local temple hall or public assembly hall, and it is solemnized by a brahminic priest in

front of an artificial, sacred fire, around which the couple make a ceremonious circumambulation after the tying of the 'wedding-string', as a culminating point of the ceremonial. It would appear that this kind of ceremonial which has survived to this day with very little change was more or less the same at the time of the author (Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ) of the Tamil epic poem, *Cilappatikāram* in which he has described a similar ceremony held on the occasion of the wedding of the chief characters of the story, namely, Kaṇṇaki (the bride) and Kōvalaṉ (the groom)[21].

But, it would also seem that there was still an earlier form of Tamil wedding ceremony, as is evident from two of the poems belonging to the *Akanāṉūṟu* collection, and that the earlier form of ceremony did not include the custom of the couple making a circumambulation round the sacred fire, nor did it have the officiating brahminic priest. (These two elements which would seem to have been absent in the earlier form of Tamil wedding rituals are believed to have been borrowed in later days from the Aryan customs of the north.)

The 'purely' Tamil wedding as it had evolved at one stage and as it has been described in the *Akanāṉūṟu* poem[22] would seem to have consisted of a ceremonial, held early in the morning of an auspicious day, to the accompaniment of drums, with the bride and bridegroom seated on a specially decorated dais which had been constructed under a covered shelter or *pantal*. At the ceremonial, elderly women who were already blessed with children had the privilege of blessing the young couple by showering confetti of paddy grains and flowers (signifying fertility), and presenting such gifts as pots and utensils (probably for use of the bride in her new home). The most important feature of the ceremonial of the wedding was the 'giving-away' of the bride by her kinsmen and the worshipping of the godhead, Murukaṉ, by the newly wedded couple And of course the entire ceremony was followed by a grand feast, and the nuptials were held on the same night.

Having now seen some kinds of the Tamil wedding ceremonial as it prevailed in the past and as it would seem to prevail in the present, let us now turn to certain important aspects of the marriage

[21] *Cil.*, 1 : 41 — 53.
[22] *Akam.*, 86 : 1 — 9; ibid., 136 : 1 — 18.

customs of the early Tamils.

As it was mentioned above, the earliest Tamil conception of marriage was the idea of romantic love. Still later, people would seem to have come to think of marriage as union based not only on the idea of romantic love, but also on such features as beauty, character, kinship and family background, age, and even wealth which were factors determining the choice of a wife or husband. When these factors appeared as of equal proportions between the bride and bridegroom, the union was regarded as an ideal one.[23] Besides, fighting among suitors would also seem to have been not uncommon as part of the procedure of selecting the mate for the bride. In the pastoral region of the ancient Tamil country, the 'bull-fight' — a tournament for testing the man's strength — was one in which the male suitor was expected to bring a fierce bull under control, and the females would politely decline to marry those young men who were unsuccessful in their bid to bring the bulls under control.[24] (It is significant to note that the same term, *kāḷai* (காளை) or *ēṟu* (ஏறு) used to refer to both the ox and the human male.

To understand the early Tamil concept of marriage and the various ceremonials relating to it, one must think of it not merely as an event, but as a developing process. The first step in this developing process was usually the first meeting of the prospective bridegroom and the bride. This was followed by a period of court-ship. The third step was the prospective bridegroom's formal offer of certain prestations, e.g. gift of 'leaf-dress' or clothes, signifying a proposal for a formal bethrothal, which was usually followed by a wedding ceremonial at a later date, provided the couple had received the necessary consent of their parents. However, if the bride's parents seemed somewhat reluctant to agree, then an elope-ment of the ardent couple usually preceded the wedding. Then, of course, the most important stage in the development of the marriage was the birth of the first child. It was through children that the husband and wife were regarded as completely united and again it was through children that the two families of the husband and wife were united by having descendants in common. Let us examine the early Tamil marriage in its various aspects as a developing

[23] *Tol.*, 1219.
[24] *Kali.*, 103 : 63 — 64.

process, which, however, was not an entirely smooth process.

The first meeting of the lovers might have taken place rather easily or by chance mainly with the help of what is known as Providence (இயற்கைப் புணர்ச்சி). But the subsequent stage which followed the first union of lovers was not at all a smooth process. It was attended with several obstacles, both for the eager young maiden and for the surreptitious young man, so much so that the theme of poems dealing with 'courtship' in ancient Tamil poetic convention came to be known as *kaḷavu* (களவு) in view of the clandestine nature of the lovers' meetings.

During the period of courtship, the lady, for instance, had to keep the matter of her clandestine and nocturnal meeting with her suitor, a closely guarded secret. The young man himself, who had to traverse a long distance and dense jungle in order to keep his tryst, in fact ran the risk of being mistaken for a wild animal and consequently being attacked by the night watchmen of the settlement who kept awake all night in ambushes on tree-tops to scare away the wild animals from the crops.

In spite of these and other obstacles, the clandestine meetings continued, and soon people of the community came to know of this, and they started to gossip. The lady's companion who had until then allowed the matter to drag along then realized the seriousness of the situation and, by discreet intervention, she reproved the seeming carelessness and dilly-dallying of the male lover, which produced the desired result. In keeping with the then prevailing custom, the young man came subsequently with bouquets of flowers and the ceremonial 'leafy-dress' signifying proposal for a formal bethrothal. The next logical step was, of course, bethrothal followed by wedding. But in some cases, it did not happen to be so. The necessary consent of the bride's parents was not forthcoming and it was really the stumbling block. The question would arise, why should the lady's parents show reluctance in agreeing to the match?

The answer would seem to lie in the ancient Tamil custom concerning marriage between kin. In these days, of course, people do not bother to investigate the background of kinship of the bride and bridegroom before actually deciding on the match. On the other hand, there is also the custom among the Tamils, according to which it is thought very appropriate that a man should marry his

cross cousin, most usually the daughter of his mother's brother (தாய் மாமன் மகன் or அம்மான் மகன்) and more rarely the daughter of his father's sister (அத்தை மகன்). Again, it has been the general rule that a man and woman who were kin, or at any rate closely related, might not marry and thus no bonds of kinship could have united the two families before the marriage. For how long this latter rule has been observed among the Tamils can be gauged from the evidence of a poem of the *Kuṟuntokai* anthology, in which the poet succinctly expressed the rhetorical assurance which a young man might have given or actually gave to his lover, to the effect that she need not worry herself about the possibility of the existence of some previous kinship which might later stand as an obstacle to their union as man and wife:

"My mother and your mother, whoever could they be?
My father and your father, in what way are they related?
How did you and I know each other?
(Yet) like water fallen on red soil
Our loving hearts have become one!"[25]

It is possible that due to uncertainty relating to considerations of this kind, the girl's parents might have hesitated to give their outright consent. However, the loving couple thought otherwise, and in the event of a possible refusal on the part of her parents, the couple promptly eloped together and got married in the patrilocal residence of the bridegroom.

Now, we have to consider another important aspect of the early Tamil marriage which would seem to have given rise to certain symbolic customs whose meaning and purpose would seem to have been lost in the mist of time.

Let us now refer back to the stage where the parent's disapproval seemed imminent. The possibility of kinship considerations was suggested as one of the probable reasons for the hostile attitude of the prospective parents-in-law of the young man. There might have been yet another reason: this was the fact that the marriage of the daughter involved some modification or partial rupture of the relations between the bride and her immediate kin. This would seem to have been most marked when the woman, after she

[25] *Kuṟu.*, 40 : 1 — 5.

married, left her family and went to live with her husband and his family. Her own family suffered a loss. It was not only an economic loss, but also the loss of a person who had been a member of a group, in other words, a breach of the family solidarity. With regard to the former, it is obvious that women in those days proved themselves economically useful to their families in almost all environments. For example, the *kuṟattiyar* in the montane region watched the millet crops while their men were away hunting; the *āycciyar* of the pastoral region prepared milk and milk products which they themselves bartered for goods of other regions; the *uḻattiyar* of the agriculturists in the riverine plains worked in the fields both at the initial stage ('planting seedlings') and at the end of cultivation ('harvesting'); and the daughters of the *paratavar* in the littoral tracts guarded the fish that was put to dry, and with regard to the economic usefulness of the *parattiyar* of the coastal regions, one may refer to a poem of *Naṟṟiṇai* collection, in which the female companion of the lady is depicted as discouraging the male suitor from another region, by questioning rather bluntly how it was going to help the fisherfolk if the young man of the riverine plain should take away the daughter of the fisherfolk of the coastal region.[26]

Besides being an economic loss, it was also the loss of a person who had been a member of a group; a breach of the family solidarity. It was these two aspects of marriage which would seem to have been given symbolic expression in the simulated hostility between the two bodies of kin either at the actual ceremony, or before the ceremony itself, by the pretence or by the actual practice of the bride's kin making a show of resistence at the removal, followed by the 'seizure' of the bride by force (the so-called capture of the bride by force). Of the eight 'kinds' (or aspects) of the ancient Tamil marriage referred to by the author of the grammatical treatise, *Tolkāppiyam*, it would seem possible that one of them corresponded with this aspect of real or simulated 'capture of the bride by force' on account of the 'resistance' shown by the bride's kin against her removal.[27] The author of a later grammatical work, *Iṟaiyaṉār-Akapporuḷ* (இறையனார் அகப்பொருள்) and also later commentators

[26] *Nar.*, 45 : 1 — 11.
[27] *Tol.*, 1038.

of this work and of the earlier grammatical treatise, *Tolkāppiyam*, would seem to have been of the view that 'taking the bride by force' was one of the eight types of marriage, i.e. *irakkatam* (இராக்கதம்), the other seven being known as *aṟanilai* (அறநிலை) *oppu* (ஒப்பு), *poruḷkōḷ* (பொருள் கோள்), *teyvam* (தெய்வம்), *yāḻōr-kūṭṭam* (யாழோர் கூட்டம்), *arumporuḷ-viṉai* (அரும் பொருள் வினை) and *pēy-nilai*[28] (பேய் நிலை). (The later-day commentators of the *Tolkāp-piyam*, such as Naccinārkkiniyar and Iḷampūraṇar, would seem to have not only incorrectly interpreted the relevant verse of *Tolkāp-piyam* and that of *Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ* to mean eight different *types of marriage* just as the Āryans, somewhat from the same tendency, are known to have arrived at the fantastic notion of various kinds of births, but they would also seem to have rather wilfully used terms of Sanskritic origin, such as *piramam*, *pirasa pattiyam*, *ārīṭam*, *teyvam*, *kāntarvam*, *ācuram*, *irākkatam* and *paicācam*, and arbitrarily ascribed each of the above 'kinds' of marriage to various groups of people.[29]

Be that as it may, let us now turn to yet another aspect of early Tamil social life which had certain connexion with the above mentioned ritual or symbolic expressions of 'hostility' and 'resistance' on the part of the bride's family. This was the custom of 'cattlelifting' or 'cattle-raid', which is said to have been undertaken by the party wishing to initiate hostilities of any kind. But, as far as ancient Tamil grammar and poetry are concerned, this theme of 'cattle-lifting' is included in the *Puram* division, and not in the *Akam* division in which the theme of 'courtship' and 'marriage' etc. are classified. But at the same time, it would seem that the theme of *veṭci* (வெட்சி) denoting 'cattle-lifting', and that of *karantai* (கரந்தை) denoting 'regain of lost cattle', have been included in the *Puram* division merely in their symbolic aspects and that these two themes do not in any way materially supplement the other themes of *Puram* division, namely, *vañci* (வஞ்சி) denoting 'offensive action' or 'invasion', *kāñci* (காஞ்சி) denoting defence, *nocci* (நொச்சி) denoting 'defence of one's fortress against seige', *uliṇai* (உழிஞை) signifying 'attack or seige of the fort', *tumpai* (தும்பை) denoting 'active warfare', and *vākai* (வாகை) meaning 'victory in battle'.

[28] *Iṟaiyaṉār Akapporuḷ*, Nakkīraṉār's Commentary, pp.23 — 28.
[29] See Naccinārkkiniyar's Commentary of *Tolkāppiyam*, vol. 2, pp.2 — 5.

Although the themes of 'cattle-lifting' *(veṭci)* and 'regain of lost cattle' *(karantai)* are classified in Puram division, nevertheless they would seem to have had some connexions with courtship and marriage originally, as it is significant to note that the environment prescribed for the theme of courtship (i.e. *kuṟiñci*) in the *Akam* division, and the environment prescribed for the theme of *veṭci* or 'cattle-lifting' together with the supplementary theme of *karantai* or 'regain of lost cattle' are one and the same, namely, montane region (i.e. *kuṟiñci* of *Akam* division corresponds with the *veṭci* of *Puram* division).

There is some reason to believe that the later symbolic custom of 'cattle-lifting' (i.e. as a sign of beginning of hostilities), might have had its origin in an earlier custom which was probably also a ritual or symbolic expression on the part of the bride's family in the sense that the 'cattle-raid' and the actual or simulated capture of cattle belonging to the ('rival') kinsmen of the bridegroom served as a sort of indemnity or compensation to the bride's kin in return for the impending loss of their daughter. Or yet another assumption is possible: it might have had its origin in the practice of the early chieftains and rulers seeking brides from the land-owning *Vēḷir* (வேளிர்) clan to become queen-mothers, so that the ruling lineage might be extended and perpetuated through the mother-right[30] and in the real simulated hostilities that ensued on account of the refusal of the bride by her kinsmen.[31]

Now, with regard to the custom of 'cattle-raid' as part of marriage customs, ethnographical literature affords some interesting

[30] I have not sufficient data to go into greater detail into this important aspect of kinship and marriage system (relating to lineage), which would however seem to have been the key-stone of the succession rights of the ruling chieftains in the ancient Tamil country. It is significant to note that the daughters of the land-owning *Vēḷir* clan, were much sought after in marriage by the ruling chieftains (e.g. daughters of the chieftain, Pāri), and also that the term *tāyam* (தாயம்) denoting 'succession right' would seem to have been derived from the root, *tāy* (தாய், i.e. 'mother'), thereby perhaps implying that the right of succession and inheritance, which is often said to have been inherited by the children of the chieftains through the so-called 'mother-right' (not 'matriarchate' which is quite a different thing), in the sense that succession and inheritance went hand in hand, and that the fundamental principle underlying the selection of the main heir was that property and power were inherited from men and acquired by them, but *were transmitted through the mother*, i.e. to say, "a ruler was ruler by his mother-right". (*Puram.*, 73. : 3)

[31] *Puram.*, 349 : 1 — 7.

examples of the custom. For example, the following custom would seem to vary only slightly from the custom of 'cattle-lifting' of ancient Tamils in connexion with matrimony.

It is said that in some parts of Basutoland in Africa, on the day fixed for the marriage, the young men of the bridegroom's group drive the cattle that are to constitute the marriage payment to the home of the bride. When they draw near, it is said, the women of the bride's party gather in front of the entrance to the cattle kraal. As the bridegroom's party tries to drive the cattle into the kraal, the women with sticks and shouts drive them away so that they scatter over the veld and have to be collected together again and a new attempt made to drive them into the kraal. This goes on for some time until at last the cattle are successfully driven into the kraal. The women of the group are said to make a show of resistance at the delivery of the cattle which will have as its consequence the loss of the bride. According to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, the proper interpretation of customs of this kind is that they are merely symbolic expressions of the recognition of the structural change that is brought about by the marriage.[32]

In this connexion, one may refer again to the so-called *ārīṭam* kind of marriage, which has been mentioned by the commentator, Naccinārkkiniyar, and others, as one of the eight 'kinds' of early Tamil marriage, and one may interpret it to mean in fact a later echo of the earlier custom of 'cattle-lifting'. However, there is the danger that one might regard such customs involving 'cattle' and other objects as being a 'purchase' of a wife. But of course, one would be mistaken if one were to believe that the early Tamils bought a wife in the way that farmers bought cattle. In the first place, it is necessary to recognize that whatever economic importance[33] such transactions might have had, it was their symbolic

[32] Radcliffe-Brown, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, p.50.

[33] The marriage payment is a complex institution having many varieties in form and function. In any given society it has to be interpreted by reference to the whole system of which it is a part. Nevertheless, there are certain general statements that seem to be well grounded. In Africa the marriage payment, whether it be small or large, is the objective instrument by which a 'legal' marriage is established. In some instances it is a compensation or indemnity to the woman's family for the loss of a member. This is particularly so where the marriage payment is considerable and is used to obtain a wife for the woman's brother. The payment may in some instances

aspect that would seem to have been important. This would be clear by another custom of tiger's tooth being given by the male suitor to the bride which would seem to have been prevalent in the ancient Tamil country, or even by the modern custom of the engagement ring, the wedding ring, and the wedding presents. Though the tiger's tooth may have had very little value by itself, or again, though a modern engagement ring may have considerable value (more than many ancient Tamils might have paid for their wives), none of those objects could be regarded as an economic or as a business transaction. One may regard it as only symbolic.

Moreover, the ancient Tamil marriage was not the concern of political authorities who could give certain legality to it, but it was established by a compact between two bodies of persons, the kin of the man and the kin of the woman.[34] The marriage was an alliance between the two bodies of kin based on their common interest in the marriage itself and its continuance, and in the offspring of the union, who would be, of course, kin of both the kin groups. For the children of this alliance to attain a definite and legitimate status in the society ancient marriages had to have this sort of 'prestation' (payment of gifts etc.,) and formalities in which the two bodies of kin, that of the husband and that of the wife, were involved. Thus the making of gifts of cattle, or the presentation of 'leafy-dress' (or even silk garments among the advanced people), could be interpreted as an essential part of the establishment of 'legality'.

CHILDREN AND GRANDPARENTS

It was mentioned earlier that the ancient Tamils had come to

be regarded as part of an exchange of a kind that is used in many parts of the world to establish a friendly alliance between two groups. In some societies of South Africa and the Nilotic region, it is the derivation of the cattle used in the marriage payment that fixes the social position of the children born of the union. Where the same cattle or other goods are used in two or more successive marriages this is in some tribes held to establish a special relation between the families thus formed. Where cattle are sacred in the sense that the cattle of a lineage are the material link between the living and their ancestors (having been received from those ancestors and being used for sacrifices to them), the use of cattle in marriage payments has a significance which a transfer of other goods would not have..." Radcliffe-Brown, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, (p.53 ff.), Oxford University Press, London, 1950.

[34] See Ilampūraṇar's Commentary of *Tolkāppiyam*, pp.159 — 160. *Kuriṉ.*, 231 — 232.

regard 'marriage' as a developing process. This would seem to be particularly evident from the way in which certain expressions have been derived in the language. As pointed out by the great doyen of Tamil linguistics, Dr. R. P. Sethu Pillai, a close perception of the resemblance between the nature and man's life has given rise to some beautiful metaphors in Tamil.[35] Thus, for instance, the resemblance between the tender creeper and the young maiden was expressed in the poetic names of *valli* (வல்லி) and its variant, *vaḷḷi* (வள்ளி), and *koṭi* (கொடி) for the young girl. The puberty attained by the girl was signified by the metaphor, *pūppu* (பூப்பு, bloom). Again the union of man and woman on the wedding day is denoted by the term, *maṇam* (மணம்), which means 'fragrance'. As the marriage was still a developing process, the analogy was carried beyond the stage of matrimony. The offspring among the Tamils were cherished as fruits of wedded love.

Indeed, a most important stage in the development of marriage was the birth of the first child. It was through the children that the husband and wife were united. And this fact that the bond uniting the father, the mother, and the child was an absolute binding spiritual relationship is beautifully conveyed by the author of a verse in *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu*, when he describes the overwhelming fond embrace of the husband, the wife, and the child, all together in one great fold.[36] Again, the fact that among the Tamils the children have been regarded as the keystone of all social relations is implied by the poem of Pāṇṭiyaṉ Aṟivuṭai Nampi who would seem to have meant that childlessness was the greatest of all personal tragedies.[37]

Division of Generations

Let us now turn to yet another important aspect of the family structure of the early Tamils. Within the elementary family, there is said to be a division of generations, i.e. the parents form one generation, the children another. As a result, all the kin of a given person usually falls into generations in relation to him, and there are certain general principles that are universally recognized in the person's different behaviour towards persons of different generations.

[35] *Words and Their Significance*, p.4.
[36] *Aiṅkuṟu.*, 419.
[37] *Puṟam.*, 188 : 6 — 7.

The normal relation between *parents* and *children* may be described as one of super-ordination and subordination. This is believed to result from the fact that children, especially during the early part of life, are dependent on their parents, who provide and care for them and exercise control and authority over them either directly or indirectly (for example through the foster-mother, or teacher as the case may be). Any relation of subordination, if it is to work, requires that the person in the subordinate position should maintain an attitude of respect towards the other. It is therefore a general rule that children should not only love but also should honour and obey their parents. The social function of this kind of relation between persons of two proximate generations (parents and children) is thus easily seen. There was yet another kind of relation — i.e. the one which existed between the *grandparents* and the *grandchildren* — which was equally, if not more, important, for the smooth functioning of the family.

In the passage of persons through the social structure which they entered by birth and left by death, and in which they occupied successive positions, it may be seen that strictly speaking it was not children who actually replaced their parents, but those of the grandparents' generation were replaced by those of the grandchildren's generation. (This is probably because, as those of the younger generation were moving into their positions of social maturity, those of the older generation were passing out of the most active social life.) This kind of 'replacement' of grandparents by their grandchildren was in a way recognized in the ancient Tamil society, as is evident from the fact there was the custom of giving a child the name of its grandparent.[38] It is also worth noting that in the ancient Tamil country the age-sets would seem to have been arranged in cycles in such a way that a son's son frequently belonged to the same one as his father's father.[39]

Dr. R.P. Sethu Pillai has been of the view that "the need for remembering the names of the immediate and remote ancestors at the ceremonies connected with the propitiation of their disembodied souls was perhaps responsible for this practice" (of giving

[38] *Nar.*, 40 : 12.
[39] *Puram.*, 198 : 14; ibid., 198 : 21.

grandchildren the names of their grandparents).[40] Besides this possibility, there would seem to have been yet another reason for the existence of this aspect of the structural principle, namely, that one generation was replaced in course of time by the generation of their grandchildren.

Among the Tamils generally even to this day there is a marked condition of restraint on the behaviour of children in the presence of their parents. As mentioned earlier, the normal relation between parents and children is generally one of super-ordination and sub-ordination. Between the two proximate generations of parents and children the relation would appear to be one of essential inequality — authority, protective care on the one side, respect and dependence on the other. In this connexion, it may be also noted that in any relation of super-ordination and subordination, conflict is always possible. This is true of the relations of fathers and sons, and of mothers and daughters.

But relation between grandparents and grandchildren can be found to be one of privileged familiarity. There is very much less restraint on the behaviour of grandchildren in the presence of grand-parents. In general also, grandparents are much more indulgent towards their grandchildren than are parents towards their children. [A child who feels that he is being treated with severity by his father may appeal to his father's father; a man who is appealing to his ancestors (while praying) for help and protection, usually makes his first appeal to his father's deceased father or mother.] The grand-parents, while they are still alive are the persons above all others who can interfere in the relations between parents and children. This 'interference' would seem to have important social functions. Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown is of the opinion that this sort of 'interference' very often minimizes possible friction between the parents and their children and provides for a condition of equili-brium in social relations.[41]

This view does seem to be confirmed by the evidence of classical Tamil literature in which we find the foster-mothers or/ and grandparents acting as a sort of 'buffer' between the actual parents and their children. And this would seem to have been

[40] *Words and Their Significance*, p.23.
[41] *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, p.31.

possible mainly on account of the contrast between the two kinds of relationship — one of essential inequality and authority (parents/children), and the other, one of friendly familiarity and near equality, between grandparents and grandchildren.[42]

The role of these elderly folk in minimizing possible friction within the immediate family was more or less of the same nature as that of those elders who settled communal disputes among members of the clan or community, in public places,[43] which was also an essential feature of the social life of early Tamil communities.

[42] *Kuru.*, 146 : 1 — 5.
[43] *Matu.*, 492; *Puram.*, 224 : 4.

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