



# REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 11 | ISSUE - 2 | NOVEMBER - 2021



---

---

## KAMMALAS IN MEDIEVAL TAMIL COUNTRY-A COMMUNITY ON ESSENTIALITY

**S. Chindamany**

**M.A., M.Phil.,**

**Ph.D., Research Scholar in History,**

**Research and Development Centre, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.**

### ABSTRACT:

The Tamil society in the early period was fundamentally tribal and village in character. It was a primitive society where physical courage was valued more than intellectual power. The village artisan communities formed an important part of that society. The craftsmen were the professional groups and they lived in medieval Tamil society involving themselves in creative activities. They were occupied in various professions and promoted the economy and welfare of the country. Together with the peasants, they also influenced the economic situation of the state. Weaving at that time was considered a subsidiary occupation of men and women. In the predominantly agrarian environment of Tamil society, the artisans were often linked to the locality of the temple and land tenure, and they rendered invaluable services. The Kammalas were leading community in the Left Hand Division of the Medieval Tamil Country.



**KEYWORDS:** Artisan, Kammala, Kaikola, Panchala, Tamil Country, Temple, Medieval.

### ARTISAN COMMUNITY

The five artisan groups of the Tamil Country, called 'Panchalars' formed a single unit and thus were commonly known as 'Kammalar' in the Tamil Country. Later they prefer to use the nomenclature 'Visvakarma', the divine architect from whom they claim their descend. Visvakarma blacksmiths consisted of five professional groups, namely, goldsmith (*tattan*), brass (*kannar*), blacksmith (*karuman* or *kollan*), carpenter (*tachchan*) and mason (*silpi* or *kaltachchan*). The term, Asariar or Acharya found in the inscriptions was generic and included all five groups as well as toddy drawers, oil traders, potters, etc.<sup>1</sup> They all lived in Tamil society. A. Appadorai claimed that medieval artisans included oil traders and toddy drawers.<sup>2</sup> Their skill was widely appreciated by people at all times. The culture of a country is measured by the development of art and craftsmanship. Artistic excellence exposes the glory of times. Medieval Tamil society was no exception to this phenomenon. The creations of the artisans were highly appreciated by art lovers and all sectors of society across the Tamil Country. Many artifacts of Tamil Country were found on the overseas market in the medieval period. In addition to these artisans, there were also a number of guilds of artisans in Tamil Country. An inscription mentions that there were eighteen *panas* (sectarian division) namely *Vyavaharika* (*Panchalas*) *Kumbhalikhas* (potters) *Tentuvayima* (weavers), *Vaster- Bhadahas* (cloth dyers), *Tilaghatakas* (oil mills) *Karantekes* (kuratako-

shoemakers), *Parikelettevaru* (herders of bulls), Gorakmenshas (keepers of bulls)), *Kirata Rajakar* (washermen), Ksauraka (barbers).<sup>3</sup> These craftsmen divisions formed their own guilds. The *Virapanchals* also included many communities of artisans such as *Akkasaliga* (goldsmith), *Kammatadaacarigal* (miners), blacksmiths (*kammara*), carpenters and masons. <sup>4</sup>They were widely known by the name of Kammalar. Besides them, there were weavers, oil merchants, kaikoklars, gardeners, stonemasons, braziers, rope makers, jewelers, potters, basket makers, carpeters, designers and tailors. They were experts in the manufacture of artifacts.<sup>5</sup>

## KAMMALAR

According to Burton Stein, the Kammalas are the children of Kshatriya fathers and the Vaishya mothers. <sup>6</sup>The Kammalas are also known as blacksmiths. In the Vedic Era they were called *Achevis*. The kammalas wore the sacred thread.<sup>7</sup> They performed significant ritual roles and they enjoyed the privilege of accompanying the idols during procession and also got the privilege to draw the temple cars.<sup>8</sup> The Tamil Kammalar were divided into three major groups, namely Pandya, Chocla and Kongan. Pandya Kammalar mainly lived in the districts of Madurai and Tirunelveli. The Pandya *Tattan* split into *Kamattan*, *Vembanattar*, Pennaikkuakkarayar (those on the other side of the Pennai river) Munurvittukaran and so on. The kammalar had five other professional sections, namely *Tattan* (goldsmith) *Kannan* (blacksmith), *Tachchan* (carpenter), *Kaltachchan* (stone mason) and *Kollan* (blacksmith).<sup>9</sup> The most important among them were *Panchalas* known as *Virapanchalas*, *Anjuvati Panchalattar* or simply Panchalattar; *Panchumvaru*, *Panchalavaru* and *Anjuvannam*.<sup>10</sup> It was believed that they were hailed from *Panchaladesa*. As they were engaged in five various types of professions, they were called *Panchalattar* or *Anjupanchalatar*.<sup>11</sup> The Kammalas were also known as *kannalans*. The word, 'kannalan' denotes someone who rules sight or someone who gives sight when an image is made when consecration takes place in the temple. Kammalan also refers to those who have created articles and opened people's eyes. They made objects that were pleasing to the eye. The status, occupations, obligations, duties and privileges of these people were clearly different from those of other people.

The Kammalas were associated with works such as building temple towers (*gopura*) with artistic carvings on them, making temple cars and chariots, and making jewelry and vases of various metals. They had held a special place in society and the economy and, in particular, in temple-building activities.<sup>12</sup> The blacksmith or *kollan* was the promoter of the village industry. The wheel was made by him. He collected and repaired many metal weapons needed by the army. The *Tacchan* or Carpenter was a committed craftsman, his contributions ranged from making wooden structures in buildings to wheeled toy carts for children. They built boats, gates, chariots, and temple cars. His residential area was known as *kammalacheri*. An epigraph by Alangudi (Nannilam Taluk, Tanjore Dist) dated 1264 A.D. records an agreement between the kammalas to raise a fund from their members in specific locations for the construction of a pavilion in the village. <sup>13</sup> Another record of an unidentified Sundarapandya from Nodiyur of the same district, related to an arrangement made by the kammalas of various places such as Anjinan Pugalidam, Panagattunadu Sengilinadu, Vallanadu and Pirabikavunadu to collect from each other a *pedakku* for each cultivation of *Kar* and *Pasanam* for the Adinayaka Temple in Nodiyur.<sup>14</sup> The Seyyanampiratti mutt attached to the Nellaiappar Temple in Tirunelveli, received financial help from the Kammala.

## STONE MASON

Stonecutters and bronze smiths, attached to temples and palaces, inscribed royal orders on copper plates and stones. These engravers were mostly hailed from traditional artisan family. <sup>15</sup> The maintenance of the various records of the local and central government in the Tamil Country increased the demand for recorder services. Stone cutting became a separate occupation and the inscriptions refer to *kal-kuttigar* or stone cutters. The craftsman called *sutragrahi* measured and made the stones before making the image or realizing ornamental arches and pillars. The Tiruvarur inscriptions refer to different categories of craftsmen representing the stone makers called *sutragrahi*, the stone dresser called *vartaki* and the royal sculptor called *shilpi* or *kal-tachchan*. The *sthapathis* had acted like

*Vastuthajan* who had knowledge of the science of architecture. He was also known as *Nimitha Shkuna*, *Jyotirguanaprabodhakah* and *Ganitagyah*, i.e. very well versed in the study of omens and in the application of astrology and mathematical knowledge for the construction of temples. The stone masons of the temple reserved one-tenth of their income (*tachchakkuru*) for the mutt. Another record views that a group of temple architects (*sipacharyas*) provided a portion of their income as donation to the mutt.<sup>16</sup>

### BLACK SMITH

The black smith known as the *kollan* ran the village industry. His wheel and foundry fire kept the trades of the people in the field. Since wars were very common during the medieval period, black smiths could produce many types of weapons. The term *perumpannai* denoted lathes of blacksmith. His work consisted in the manufacture and repair of agricultural tools such as ploughshares, hoes, shovels and axes. The village blacksmith was paid by the grain heap. The *perumkollan*, the master blacksmith, was associated with the huge temple cities.<sup>17</sup> The village blacksmith and carpenter lived in slums on the outskirts of the village called *kammanacheri* and lived with the potter and other functionaries.

### METAL SMITH

Among the *Visvakarma* craftsmen, the *kammatasor* worker in the mints were an independent group. Coin minting was an important professional task. Typically, the mint was located in the palace complex or near the royal courts. The art of metalworking and the art of jewellery had reached a supreme state of perfection.<sup>18</sup> The various types of ornaments such as chains, necklaces, bangles, crowns, bracelets known as *bahuvalaya*, pearl strings known as *virasangili*, anklets, vases which were made for the purpose of cooking and for everyday use and other household utensils were also made of metal. The metal image of Narasingar Munaiyadaraiyar, military leader Milada and patron saint Sundaramurthy Nayanar are in their portrait sculpture through centuries attests that portrait sculptures were enjoyed to the fullest popularity in the medieval Tamil Country.

### GOLD SMITH

There were also two categories among goldsmiths. At one level a small *tattan* did repair work on the pieces and lived on the lower status. On the another level the great goldsmith or jeweller were referred in the inscriptions as *perumtattan* (literally great goldsmith). This great gold smith was a master craftsman who placed under him many apprentices in gold works. He made gold ornaments. His gold ornaments were in great demand in foreign countries. They made jewellery for deities and created icons or images of deities. A Thirteenth Century A.D. inscription of the period obviously views that gold taken from the crowns and industries of defeated enemy kings, were used to create ornaments and other gold items for the Sri Ranganatha Temple in Srirangam. A Tiruchirappalli inscription recorded that Pandya King used many gold items and a golden flower for the Lord Tirumalal Suvadigal. This reveals that the craftsmen of this period were skilled enough to craft gold flowers with artistry. A certain Annamalai Thatan (goldsmith) donated a *padiyam* to the Sundaraperumal Temple in Salem. Jewelers were also skilled enough to make jewellery with precious stones and pearls. The poems of *Purananuru*, *Ahananuru*, *Narrinai*, *Perumpanarrupadai* and *Paripadal* provide much information on various types of fabrics, varieties of dyes and dyeing products. *Sekkilar* refers to *Aruvaigar* and *Arugvaivanigarveedi*, *Aruvaiveni-gurveedi* as the residential area or the neighborhoods of the cloth merchants. Caste as a natural product of society played a remarkable role in the making of social organization.<sup>19</sup>

### CARPENTERS

Carpenters were closely associated with temple activities. They were called *Koil Tachhapivan*, *Periyakoil Nambi* and *Periyakoildasan*. The Cheranmahadevi carpenters took on titles such as *Achachar* and *Achcharians*. The master carpenter was popularly known as *Tachchu Acharian*. The term *Thatchu*

in Tamil means joining two pieces. Therefore, the people who had adopted wood work known as *Thatchan*. They were skilled enough to make wheels, trolleys, platforms for beds and boats in an artistic way.<sup>20</sup> They also made many wooden objects such as wooden pots, *mathalam*, musical instruments, rowers and other objects. Door panels with deities depicted in the form of wood carvings also speak of the skill of the craftsmen. *Segandi* (a sheet metal tool) and drums were also used by them in the temple. Wooden chariots were also built in this period. Parivarthiniveena was a new type of musical instrument, which was made of wood by these carpenters. Many musical instruments, which were made of wood, were very common in those days.<sup>21</sup>

## WEAVERS

The weaving communities were very prominent in economic activities in medieval period. The skill of the weavers and their techniques are also mentioned in literary works. *Tolkappiam* mentions the importance of weaving and its ally craft of tailoring. The weavers of Chittasantolipuram in Cholamandalam received substances, clothing and shovels from the Kripapuriswara temple in Tiruvannainallur (South Arcot District ) and kept a flower garden at the temple.

## KALKKOLAS

The name kaikkolar derives from kai (hand) and kol (shuttle). Some of the kaikkolas were called *Tantirattar* and *Sengundar Mudalis*.<sup>22</sup> Many epigraphic sources refer to the kaikkola and their activities. *Terinjakaikkolars* and *Kaikkolasenapathi* are often mentioned in the inscriptions. Kaikkola weaving communities played a vital role in the Tamil Country during the Medieval Tamil Country. The Kaikkolas were *nagarsor* descendants of a mixed race of Naga and Dravidian. During the period, Koikkolar combined weaving with welding.<sup>23</sup> The Kaikkolar community lived in seventy-two nadus, namely forty-four 'mil' (west) and twenty-four 'kil' (eastern nadus). Some of the Kaikkola women dedicated themselves to temples and became dancers. It became the practice of all Kaikkola families to dedicate at least one girl to temple service. But the kaikkolan dancers were different from the Devadasi. According to legend, the kaikkola are descended from Virabahu, one of the nine commanders of Lord Subramania.<sup>24</sup> The word "kaikol" is referred to as a *ratnavel* or a precious dagger carried by Lord Subramania. The kaikkolas on the day of surasamharam or during the festival of Lord Subramaniya dressed like nine warriors and joined the procession. An inscription dated A.D. 1216-1238 engraving on the south wall of Mayapandeeswararkoil records kaikkolas of Thrunelveli denoting Pazhankasu Pattu as Dharmam to direct *Thiruvathirai Thitunonpu*. Another inscription found in Periyakottai, Palani Taluk, indicates a gift of *Achchu* from a Kaikkola named Mamikkan Pandi for burning a twilight lamp in the Thirupandisvara Mudalyar temple at Alvankoyil alias Virasoladevanallur. The amount was left with the Sivabrahma of the temple.<sup>25</sup> Artisans contributed most to the social and economic well-being of the elite in exchange for their peanuts. In addition to being associated with such activities, their association with temple building activities again attracted everyone's attention to a pittance. But the artisans who worked in urban areas and who worked with the guilds there enjoyed the real fruits of their labour.

The artisan community was much attached to the local economic system. The artisans involved themselves in promoting temple building activities and in producing implements for land cultivation. They were connected with the Brahmins, the priestly class and landed community of the Vellalas. The demand for their services from mercantile class and landed class increased their influence in the society and they also received much concessions and privileges in the Medieval Tamil society. However, during the medieval period, the artisan union of Kammalas had broken like the abyss between the poor blacksmiths such as the blacksmiths, the carpenter and the goldsmith of the country. On the one side, *nagaram* or *pattinam* (city-based) goldsmiths and *sthapathis* became wealthier and on the other side the village based artisans were poorer. This development ultimately paved the way for the separatist tendency of goldsmiths from the Kammala unit in the Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries A.D.

**END NOTES**

- 1 Ramaswamy, Vijaya, 'Vishwakarma in South Indian History' in *Keynote Address on the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the South Indian History Congress*, Calicut: South Indian History Congress, 2018, p.4.
- 2 Appadorai, A., *Economic Conditions of South India*, Vol.I, Madras : University of Madras, 1936, p.368.
- 3 EI., Vol.XX, No.1.
- 4 EC., Vol. IV, No.119.
- 5 Thangapandian, K., 'Artisans Under Later Pandiyas' in *Proceedings Volume of Thirty Fourth Annual Session of the South Indian History Congress*, Poondi: South Indian History Congress, 2014, p. 293.
- 6 Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980,p.197.
- 7 Mani, S., *Economic Condition of Tamilnadu Under Later Pandyas (12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)*, Madurai : p.48.
- 8 Ramaswamy, Vijaya, *Textiles and Weavers in South India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.114.
- 9 Thurston, Edgar, *Caste and tribes in South India*, Vol. III, Madras: Government Press, 1909, p.107.
- 10 Selvi, P., 'Merchant Guilds and Overseas Trade in the Medieval Tamil Country' in Ganeshram , S., and Bhavani , C., (ed.) , *History of People and Their Environs : Essays in Honour of Prof. B.S. Chandrababu*, Chennai: Indian University Press, 2011, p.254.
- 11 .Alagappan, N., *Social Conditions in Medieval Tamil Country*, Chidambaram:Thiruvarul Pathippagam, 1998, pp.64-65.
- 12 Champakalakshmi, R., *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p.229.
- 13 .Nagasamy R., (ed.), *South Indian Studies-II*, Madras :Saher Publication , 1979, p.52.
- 14 .ARE, 201 of 1932-1933.
- 15 Mahalingam, T.V., *South Indian Polity*, Madras : University of Madras, 1967,p.54.
- 16 .ARE, No. 296 of 1940-1941.
- 17 . Ramaswamy, Vijaya, 'Crafts and Artisans in South Indian History' in *Address of the President of Medieval India Section of the 64<sup>th</sup> Session of Indian History Congress*, Mysore: Indian History Congress, 2003, pp.12-13.
- 18 . Balasubramanian, S.R., *Early Chola Temples, Middle Chola Temples , Later Chola Temples*, Faridabad : Medgala Trust, 1960, p.42.
- 19 .Thangapandian, K., *loc.cit.*, p.295.
- 20 . Sahai, Baldeo, *Indian Shipping –A Historical Survey*, New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information, Government of India, 1996, p.58.
- 21 .Kuram Copper Plate, p.52.
- 22 . Sadasivan, K., *Devadasi System in Medieval Tamilnadu*, Vandavasi : Akani Veliyeedu, 2011, p.54.
- 23 . Pillay, K.K., *The Caste System in Tamilnadu*, Chennai :MJP Publishers, 2007, p. 57.
- 24 .Thurston, Edgar, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, pp.31-34.
- 25 . ARE, 84 of 1927-1928.