

CHAPTER - II

CALDWELL AS A SOCIAL SCIENTIST

Study of the society as an independent subject came into existence following the postulations of Augustus comet, the Positivist Philosopher of France and Charles Darvoin, the Evolutionary thinker of England. Social history as an independent discipline entered educational institutions only after the publication of G.U.Trevelyan's *A Social History of England*. The study was further strengthened and popularised by the studies and publications of the famous *Annales School* of French historians March Bloch, Lucien Febrve Fernand and Braudel and Immanuel Le Roy Ladure. It received the attention of the Marxian historians of England only in the last century – Eric Hobswavn, C.P. Hill and E.P. Thomson. But, Caldwell, even before these schools took up studies of social problems and Communities, took up the anthropological and social aspects of a particular community in Tirunelveli in the sixteenth century. Perhaps Caldwell was influenced by the writings-field studies and observations of Bachofen, Levis Morgan and Engles – *Mother Right, Ancient Civilizations and Family, Private Property and the State Respectively*.

In India, social history was conceived as an area of research by the early Marxian historians, though some beginnings were already made a little earlier by European historians in the last century. Of the modern historians of social history of India. Sumit Sarkar occupies a pre eminent place. Among the historians of Tamil Nadu K.K. Pillay receives the prominent place. But all these historians, lived and contributed only in the twentieth century. K.K. Pillay's *A Social History of the Tamils* is said to be a model for social historians. However great this work, Caldwell, infact, laid the foundation for the study of communities from a socio-anthropological point of view.

History according to the Greeks meant an enquiry. The social historian makes enquiry into the past from the social point of view. He enquires about the life of the people in a particular period and region, religious, cultural, economic, political pursuit, etc. Prof. G.M. Trevelyan defined social history as the history of a people with the politics left out. Social history however does not mean everything that happen in society, but it is an attempt at understanding the life of men in the past, in its setting of societies and institutions'.¹

“Social history” as K. K. Pillay deems “Primarily concern itself with the daily life of the people in the past, the character of family and household life as well as the objects in use including the household implements. It examines how the prevalent conditions of war or peace and the general nature of the administration influence the very day life of the people. It comprises the human as well as the economic relation of different classes to one another, the social stratifications and groups, occupations, crafts and trades, the conditions of labour and of leisure, the attitude of man to nature, the culture of each age as it arose out of those general conditions of life and the reflection of this culture on religion, literature, music, dance, architecture, learning and thought. Intimately connected with these, there appears the history of ideals and aspirations of manners, customs, and beliefs and superstitions”²

Social history therefore is an important area of enquiry and study of everyday life of men in society. It opens up the window to knowledge between human societies and their interdependence and interaction with nature. It helps to promote human

¹ Dr. G. Venkata Raman, Presidential Address, Socio-Economic History Section, Tamilnadu History Congress, VI Annual Session, 3rd and 4th October, 1999, Islamiah College, Vaniyambadi, p. 1.

² K. K. Pillay, *A social History of the Tamils*, Madras. 1975, p. 4.

understanding. The understanding strengthens social harmony.³ “History if it is to be truly profitable and illuminating, should deal as much with people as the kings and their courts”.⁴ The European sense of social history promoted Caldwell to flower into a social historian. Being the first eminent social historian his work only promoted other social historians with good intentions to embark on such works. Thinking that he was doing good, he produced the history of a certain community in its prevalent form. The *Shanars* then were an oppressed community by the caste-Hindus. Perhaps, Caldwell thinks, they are not the originals, but emigrants to this part. His work primarily concerns itself with the origin of the *Shanars*, their placement in the social hierarchy their relation with other castes and subjugations, mental capability, their families, status of women, their moral condition, living condition, surroundings, illtreatment meted out to them by higher castes, etc. He very picturesquely portrayed the aforesaid condition of the community in his inspiring work, *Tinnevelly Shanars*. One may be struck by the love that emanated from him towards Nadars, his intrepid courage and his incredible faith in the community.

Advent of Caldwell and the Tirunelveli Society in Transition

Why did he choose to write about the Shanars?

a) Idayangudi had Shanars dominant:

Caldwell himself says that, though the village was founded by shepherds, he found not a single shepherd in it on his arrival. The inhabitants were mostly *Shanars*, with the usual addition of a few families of goldsmiths, dyers, oilmen, washermen, etc. The only Christians in the place were Shanars, of whom there were about 300; about

³ M. Immanuel, *The Dravidian Lineages, A Socio Historical Study. The Nadars Through the Ages*, p. XXVI.

⁴ P. Subramanian, *Social History of the Tamils (1707 – 1947, New Delhi, 1999, preface, p.6.*

200 persons of the same class were heathens still, and this heathen minority included some persons belonging to the higher division of the caste who had been Christians originally and had relapsed before the arrival of the European Missionaries.⁵

b) Shanar's obedience and honest, at Caldwell's first look:

He saw some Shanar Christians from Tinnevely at Mr. Hubbard's house. Stating about them he writes, he was struck by their long ears, long pendent earrings, long hair tied in a knot behind the head like women, their presents of sugar candy, and their graceful salaam with folded hands and their mild, subdued expression, so different from the rough forwardness of further north.⁶

c) Place of Nadars in the Social Hierarchy during Caldwell's time

P. Subramanian a historian of modern social history, expresses the debased condition of Shanars in his work Social History of the Tamils such as they were treated as untouchables, forced to pay a number of taxes, their women denied the right of using upper garments.⁷ All these have become the history of the past. It was true of the times of Caldwell. Social hierarchy; The caste of Shanars occupies a middle position between the Vellalars and the Paraiar slaves. In general they may be described as belonging to the highest division of the lower classes, or the lowest of the middle classes; poor, but not paupers; rude and unlettered, but by many degrees far removed from a savage state.⁸

In his opinion in some respects the position of the *Shanars* in the scale of castes is peculiar. Their abstinence from spirituous liquors and beef, and the circumstance that

⁵ J.L. Wyatt, op.cit., p.80.

⁶ I bid., p. 77.

⁷ P. Subramanian, op. cit., p. 40.

⁸ Rev. R. Caldwell, op.cit., p.4

their widows are not allowed to marry again, connect them with the *Sudra* group of castes. On the other hand, they are not allowed, as all *Sudras* are, to enter the temples; and where old native usages still prevail, they are not allowed even to enter the courts of justice, but are obliged to offer their prayers to the gods and their complaints to the magistrates outside and their women, like those of the castes still lower, were obliged to go uncovered from the waist upwards. These circumstances connect them with the group of castes inferior to the *Sudras*; but if they must be classed with that group, they are undoubtedly to be regarded as forming the highest division of it.⁹ Though the *Shanars* rank as a caste with the lower classes and though the greater number of them earn their daily bread by their daily labour, pauperism is almost unknown amongst them. The great majority, it may be said, that they are equally removed from the temptations of poverty, and riches, equally removed from the superficial polish and subtle rationalism of the higher castes, and from the filthy habits and most hopeless degradation of the agricultural slaves.¹⁰

Early Tamil Nadu had no caste hierarchy therefore no Sudras. If Sudras in the Aryan scale is to be applied, it will well fit not with the Vellalars¹¹. Nadars are said to have East Asian blood Ezhavars of Eurasian blood. Strength of the theory : Nadars are found widespread in the southern most districts the erstwhile Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Madurai, South Travancore upto Cochin.

⁹ The Rt. Rev. R. Caldwell, *Records of the Early History of the Tinnevely Mission of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts*, Higginbotham, Madras, 1881, pp. 44-45

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹ My Co. Guide's Views : Early Tamil Nadu had no caste hierarchy, and therefore no Sudra caste. If the four fold division is applicable to the Tamil Society, then the position of the Sudras is offered to the Vellalars and other agriculturists. (K. Sadasivan, "Villavar Lineage of the Ceras: An Archaeo – Historical Study", in T.P. Sankarankutti Nair edition of *The Last Phase of Monarchy: A test script for Sri Uthirandam Thirumal Maharaja*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011, pp.68-70).

d) Shanars wretched condition: defiling social status

The hierarchy occupation of the Shanars, as the time and space warranted, was that of cultivating and climbing palmyrah palm. They boil the juice into a coarse sugar. A considerable number have become cultivators of the soil, as land owners, or farmers or are engaged in trade.¹²

In many respects, their character was as peculiar as their social position. They were peculiarly docile and tractable peculiarly fitted to appreciate the advantages of sympathy, guidance and protection, and peculiarly accessible to Christian influence. Though inferior to many of their neighbours in intellectual attainments, they were by no means inferior to them in sincerity. The chief faults dissimulation, litigiousness, and avarice were the faults of all Hindus; but with respect, atleast, to dissimulation, the first and worst of those faults; experience testifies that of all Hindus they were the least guilty. The strong points of the Hindu character were patience, good humour, and natural courtesy, and in these particulars the Shanars were quite on a level, with the rest of the Hindus. Their patience had no limits.¹³

Demonolatry or the worship of evil spirits, prevailed among the Shanars. The popular superstitions of the Hindus may be divided into two classes viz., the higher or more classical Hinduism, consisting in the worship of the Gods and Goddesses, heroes and heroines of the Brahmanical pantheon, and the lower of pre-Brahmanical superstition deriving its origin of devils.¹⁴ Bloody sacrifices were offered to appease the anger of the demons; but the most important and essential feature in the worship of all demonolaters was the “devil dancer”, who wished to represent the demon, signs and

¹² The Rt. Rev. R. Caldwell, op. cit., p.4

¹³ I bid., p. 46.

¹⁴ I bid., p. 47.

dances himself into a state of wild frenzy, and leads the people to suppose that the demon they were worshipping had taken possession of him; after which he communicated to those who consulted him the information he had received. The votaries of this system were the most sincerely superstitious people in India. The demonolaters literally “believe and tremble”. In times of sickness, especially during the prevalence of cholera, it was astonishing with what eagerness, earnestness, and anxiety the lower classes worshipped their demons.¹⁵

Shanars were ruled by Demonism in one shape or another. A few of the demons were forms of Kali and Ammen. The places in which the demons were worshipped were commonly termed, “Pe-coils”, or ‘devil temples’. Temples were simple and without any architectural pretensions.¹⁶ They offer goats, sheep, fowls to appease the anger of the demons, remove the calamities they have inflicted or to abstain from inflicting the calamities.¹⁷ The grand national festival of *Shanars* was first day of the solar month of Adi, in memory of Ravana the Racshasaking of Ceylon. It was believed that on that day he carried away Sita the wife of Rama Mahodara, the Prime Minister of Ravana was believed to have been a Shanar. Shanar’s glory in the historical position was gained by a member of their caste. So they rejoiced over Rama’s grief and in Ravana’s joy. This point to the Cingalese origin of Shanar caste and their anti-Brahmanical zeal.¹⁸ Owing to demonolatory obliterated the idea of man’s accountability for his actions, and consequently fails to exercise any moral restraint. In their calculations the past is past forever, and the present is independent of the future. They would not hesitate to tell a profitable lie or commit a pleasant sin.¹⁹ The demonolatory of

¹⁵ I bid., p.49.

¹⁶ I bid., p.17.

¹⁷ I bid., p.21.

¹⁸ I bid p.28.

¹⁹ I bid., pp. 32-35.

the *Shanars* equality with the idolatry of the higher castes disconnected the idea of moral duty from the theory of religious faith and worship. Consequently it fails to exercise any moral restraint. Lying and licentiousness, pride and anger are not forbidden.²⁰ No prayers or gifts are ever offered to their devils and Ammens for the acquisition of virtuous habits or peaceful tempers. A man who had committed a highway robbery straight way offers sacrifice to the devil to prevent him from getting jealous of his success and bringing upon him the terrors of the law.²¹ The *Shanars* who extract the palmyrah juice, avoid the use of it in a fermented state.²² Alms giving was the only moral duty expressly taught by the Brahmanical religion.²³ The litigiousness of the *Shanars* is generally considered one of the most characteristic features of the caste.²⁴ The *Shanars* of Tinnevely, though as a class poor, uneducated, and in a low state of civilization, with few exceptions, they are proprietors of land.²⁵

Amongst *Shanars* it frequently happened that no person concerned in the dispute, whether litigant or arbitrator, is able to read or write. All depend upon some clever rogue who acts as secretary and registrar to the council, insert or omit a few important words infavour of one of the parties.²⁶ The *Shanars* generally are illiterate, destitute of principle, and on the verge of pauperism.²⁷ The langour and apathy produced by the heat of the climate exert considerable influence upon the condition of the *Shanars* morally, socially and intellectually.²⁸ The great majority of the people are not only unable to read, but unwilling to learn or to allow their children to learn. The only persons who know one letter form or another belong to the class of Nadar land

²⁰ I bid., pp.36-37.

²¹ Ibid., p.37.

²² Ibid., p.38.

²³ Ibid., pp.41.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.49-50.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.53-54.

²⁶ Ibid., p.52.

²⁷ Ibid., p.53.

²⁸ Ibid., p.55.

owners. Women never learned to read, uneducated condition is partly due to their intellectual dullness.²⁹ They are hardworking, stupid, always go to sleep when their work is over, and are not accustomed to think.³⁰ They follow the multitude to do evil and they follow the multitude to do good. They think in herds.³¹ During the colonial period they have considered their subjection to the East India Company's Government and the introduction of the rudiments of English Law as priceless blessings.³² No insurrections no riotous insubordination, no disloyalty, have ever been laid to their charge. Though taxed, like all Hindus, under all successive Governments beyond their ability more submissive tax-payers are no where to be met with in the world. They are industrious.³³ The staple food of the sandy districts is the palmyrah and all that were related to it.

Caldwell hoped that the description has given the general characteristics of the class, especially of their demonolatory and its consequences, will enable the English reader to form a tolerably correct idea of the condition of the heathens and the prospects of Christianity in Tinnevelly.

His views about the Shanars: etimological study of the word:-

Nadar/Gramani/Shanar: One of the major communities in South India, the Nadars are distributed particularly in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu and in the adjoining southern districts of Kerala³⁴. They claim that the name Shanar is derived from the Tamil word Sanror, meaning learned or noblemen. Thurston states that the word Nadar means, ruler of a country or village, or one who lives in the country and

²⁹ Ibid., p.61.

³⁰ Ibid., p.65.

³¹ I bid., p. 69.

³² I bid., p. 72.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ People of India, National Series, Volume VI, India's Communities, N-2, K.S. Singh, Anthropological Survey of India, Delhi, 1998, p. 2511.

has the title Shanar. The word Shanar is derived from the word *saru* meaning juice. The Shanar later preferred to call themselves Nadars³⁵ Traditionally, the Nadars were toddy-tappers.

Samuel Sargunar, a Christian Nadar, published a small pamphlet (1883) where he tried to reconstruct the glory of the Nadar past on the basis of etymological analysis of the word Shanar.³⁶ He denied the low status of the community. He stated that the word *Shanar* was infact a corruption of *Shandrar*, the Tamil word meaning the learned or “the noble man”. The claims soon created a linguistic imbroglio which remained unsettled even with the compilation of the *Tamil Lexicon* in 1900 of the word *Shanar* could be found either in Tamil literature or in inscriptions. *Shanar* is ordinarily derived from *Saru* meaning toddy.³⁷ The Census Superintendent in 1891 notes that a learned missionary derived the word from *san* (span) and *nar* (Fibre or string), that is the noose, one span in length, used by the *Shanars* in climbing palm-trees.³⁸ For Sargunar, however, and the Nadar caste historians to follow him, *Shandrar* was the key word, and taking it to refer to his particular community, he reconstructed the history of the Nadars through the references in Tamil literature using the word. Since *Shandrar*, “the noble man” was used frequently to refer to the kings of Tamil Nadar, the Nadars were taken to the ancestors of these rulers and therefore Kshatriyas.³⁹

Caldwell accepted *Shanar* as a corruption of *Shandrar*, but he did not equate reference to the specific class with the term of distinction as it was more boldly used.⁴⁰

Shandrar was also used according to K.V. Soundra Rajan, Superintendent of the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Shanar characteristics” Letter from a “non-Shanar”, *Madras Mail*, July 12, 1899.

³⁷ Letter from “W” *Madras Mail*, June 30, 1899, Reply from “a Shanar” dismisses the derivation from *Saru* as “Childish”, *Madras Mail*, July 4, 1899.

³⁸ *Census of India*, 1891 Vol.XIII p.297. In an interview a young Nadar Christian gave the same derivation, indicating the meaning as “you need on span of fibre for your living”.

³⁹ Robert L. Hardgrave, J.R., *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 81.

⁴⁰ The Rev. R. Caldwell, Op., cit, p.4

Archaeological Survey of India, Madras, in regard to a group of Cobblers were “hardly kings”. This class, commonly called “*Shanars*” had a secondary occupation of toddy-tapping. The term, he suggests, may have been applied to the caste of exclusive tappers.⁴¹ Sargunar took every use of *Shandrar*, so as to refer specifically to the *Shanar* community. The three nouns, *shandror*, *Shandrar*, and *Shandravor* are all, he said, derived from the root *sal*, meaning great or abundant. “The persons denoted by the word (*Shandrar*) are the *Shanars* or Kshatriyas, learning having been their speciality as much as palm wine.”⁴² One of the most learned of the *Shandrars* according to Sargunar, was Enadinatha Nayanar, one of the sixty three apostles of Siva.⁴³

In 1883, Samuel Sargunar published another pamphlet, presenting the Nadars as learned Kshatriyas, and attacked Caldwell for having drawn a “dark picture” of the condition and status of the community in *Tinnevelly Shanars*, published thirty four years ago. *Shanars* were reduced to servitude because they were defeated by higher castes. *Shanar*, he says that, toddy-tapping was not infact a low occupation. “In truth, palm juice was esteemed a luxury, fit to be consumed by the Kshatriyas, and Brahmins. It was regarded as the earthly counterpart of the celestial nectar of the Gods.”⁴⁴ T.V. Duraisamy equates Nadar with Kshatriyas, Nadar is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit word Kshetra. Kshetra is the root word of Kshatriya, meaning country. Nadu is the root word of Nadar, meaning country. Both are the same.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Hardgrave, Op., cit., p.81. Footnote.

⁴² Samuel Sargunar, Bishop Caldwell and the Tinnevelly Shanars, Palamcottah, 1883, p.12. “The Shanars: who are they,” Madras Mail June 19, 1899.

⁴³ Sargunar, Op.cit., p.16.

⁴⁴ Sargunar, Op.cit., pp.17-18, 13-14.

⁴⁵ T. Vijaya Duraisamy Gramani, Op.cit., pp. 67-68.

a) *Origin – place of – origin – various theories Caldwell, Hardgrave, Ponnaiah, Immanuel and others:-*

A concise content analysis of his book the *Tinnevelly Shanars* becomes imperative. Discussing the origin of the *Shanars* infer that *Shanars* were emigrants from the northern coast of Ceylon, where the same or similar caste still exists, bearing a grammatical and intelligible form of the same name *Shandrar* (cantrar) of which *Shanar* is etymologically a corruption. Ilavars and Teers (i.e., ‘Cingalese’ and ‘Islanders’) who still cultivate the coconut palm in Travancore, are descendants of *Shandrar* colonists from Ceylon. *Shanars* the inhabitants of Tinnevelly, came from the neighbourhood of Jaffna in Ceylon. One portion of them, called *Nadars* entered Tinnevelly by way of Ramnad, brought with them seed nuts of the Jaffna palmyrah and settled in the sandy waste lands of the south east of Tinnevelly.⁴⁶ The other portion (lower division of the caste) came by sea to the south of Travancore. Vast numbers of them are still found there. He says that *Nadars* of Tinnevelly invited them and employed them as climbers of palmyrah. Syrian Christians of Travancore asserted that one portion of the tribe, the Ilavars were brought over from Ceylon by their ancestors, for the cultivation of the coconut palm. According to him, the *Shanars*, though probably emigrants from Ceylon are Hindus not of the Brahmanical, but of the Tamil or aboriginal race; the inhabitants of the Northern Coast of Ceylon being themselves Tamilians – the descendants, either of early Tamil colonists, or of the marauding bands of Cholas who are said repeatedly to have made irruptions into Ceylon both before and after the Christian era.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The Rev. R. Caldwell, Op. cit., pp.4-5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.5.

Origin

Robert L. Hardgrave chose to discuss two theories of the origin of Nadars. One is the mythological origin. The story of the miraculous birth of the Nadars. Seven Sons of God and the seven virgins. Second one is the theory of Caldwell. He tried to establish the Nadars as “emigrants from the northern coast of Ceylon”. Worship of Mother Goddess was very popular in the Harappan Culture, pointing to the importance attached to the Mother – Mother Goddess and matrilineal succession with Dravidian society before the advent of Brahmanism. One of the deities worshipped in ancient Tamil Nadu was *Korravai*, the counterpart of her is Kali, the famous Goddess of the Bengalees. This *Korravai* or *Kali* is later synthesised with Goddess Parvathi, the daughter of Parvath, the Himavan of the Himalayas. Belonging to the Dravidian ethnic family, the Nadars (*Shanars*) might have come from the Eastern parts of the globe to southern India, from where they would have gone upto the Indus valley. The story of the birth of seven sons to Narayana and seven Virgins is Vaishnava form of the birth of Karthigeya – Murga or Subramanya. Such stories like the one narrated in the *Keralolpathi* about the creation of Kerala by Parasurama and story of Mavali – Varana before the Brahmanic colonisation of Kerala could not be verified and their veracity established. These stories floated only to establish their antiquity under Brahmanic influence.

H.R. Pate accredited the mythological origin of Nadars. At the same time he accepts that this popular account does not form any part of the “learned” version. The founders were the sons of seven maids – Kannis-formed from the eye sight of the God Narayana. They were brought up by Bhadrakali on the milk of the cow of the God Indra. Even today Bhadrakali is the household deity of the community. Then he

narrates the story of the breach and flood after flood threatened Madurai District. The king ordered the seven boys to carry mud in baskets and close the breach. But the Shanar boys replied that, their heads were made to carry, crowns, and not baskets, and refused to obey the king. The furious king ordered one of the boys to be buried in the sand upto his neck. An elephant came and kicked off the boy's head, and then the head was thrown into the river. The others were still defiant and a second victim was treated likewise. As his head floated down the stream, it cried out: shall this head prove false to the other? When the king heard it he was appeased. From each of the remaining five, originated a sub division of the caste. They were (i) Manattan (Karukkumattaiyan) (ii) Menattan (iii) Kodikkal or Nattati Shanar (iv) Kaveripurathan (v) Pulukka Shanar⁴⁸

The story of the breach and flood of river Vaigai, the origin of Nadars from the remaining five sons of the *Kannis*⁴⁹ is also found mentioned in the work of Robert L. Hardgrave. He says that the Cauvery region of the Chola Country, Madurai and South Travancore are the areas of Nadar origin⁵⁰. The sub-divisions of the caste, as it is mentioned by H.R. Pate, is also mentioned by Hardgrave. They are Karukkupattayar, Mel-Nattar, Nattatti, Kodikal and Pulukka Shanar⁵¹.

Nadars as they are observed by Templeman

Temple man is of the opinion that the Nadars of South India over the past century and a half, have moved upward in the hierarchy of their region from a status just above 'untouchability' to a solid, forward caste position – from lowly toddy-tappers to respectable business persons. In the process, they have become relatively

⁴⁸ H. R. Pate, Op. cit., 1993, p.129.

⁴⁹ Robert L. Hardgrave, Op.cit., p. 19-20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 32-34.

wealthy, educated in the western style, politically prominent and quite urbanised⁵². This view confirms the status of *Shanars* over the past century definitely achieved by the tireless work of missionaries such as Caldwell. Moreover Caldwell's writing of *Shanars* won the sympathy of Englishmen, in turn it helped the *Shanars* upliftment, undoubtedly, Templeman says that the area of the Nadars highest concentration includes the southern most district of Tamil Nadu, from Kanyakumari district at the tip of the Indian sub-continent as far north as Madurai district⁵³.

Traditionally, the Nadars were toddy tappers. Regarding their origin, Gladstone (1984) contradicted the view of Caldwell. He opines that, they hail from Madurai and Travancore, and the Cauvery region of South India⁵⁴.

In this regard there is a mention of the legendary or mythical origin of the Nadars. According to it the Saptha Kanyakas gave birth to seven children through Lord Krishna. When they were abandoned, they were brought up by Bhadrakali. During their childhood they were given limed toddy (akkani) in place of milk. One of them learned to tap toddy, prepare akkani and jaggery, and adopted it as his occupation. He is considered to be their mythical ancestor. Tamil is their mother tongue⁵⁵. Accepting this legend, M. Immanuel mentions that the shannars are called *Kali Puthrar* (the sons of Kali or Bhatrakali, the great Bellona of India) and this Goddess is considered as their tutelary deity⁵⁶. This legend has to be subjected to scientific scrutiny. Many such legends and myths were created only to boost the morale of Tamilian communities following Brahmanization of Tamil Nadu. Such legends / myths evolved only from the Brahmanical religion which, in course of time, affected Jainism and Buddhism too.

⁵² Denis Templeman, Op.cit., p.1.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁴ People of India, National Services, Op.cit., p. 2511.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 2511.

⁵⁶ M. Immanuel, Op.cit., p. 108.

Though Claude Levi Strauss says that myths can yield historical reminiscences, here this story cannot be scientifically proved.

Regarding the divisions of *Nadar Jatis* Templeman quotes the views of Thurston. The five original *jatis* are *Karukkupattayar*, *Mel-nattar*, *Nattati*, *Kodikal* and *Kalla*⁵⁷. (Pulukashanan) Joseph Mullen's opinion of the origin and profession of Nadars are as follows. The people of Tirunelveli district, with few exceptions to a single tribe and call themselves *Shanars*. The *Shanars* are a portion of the great aboriginal *Tartar* race which first overran the soil of India. There were other tribes also such as *Vellalas*, *Reddis*, *Gentus*, *Maravas*, *Pariahs* and *Pallar*. But, undoubtedly, the great bulk, about half the entire population of the district are *Shanars*⁵⁸. Where no rice is to be had, they rely mostly on the palmyrah products, which form a part of their food. Most *Shanars* climb fifty trees per day. Some are capable of climbing sixty trees. They are very hard working and surely very few races could be said to be more hard working than they are⁵⁹. These people though they have all the facilities at hand for making toddy, do not allow their palm juice fermented. Hence it could be concluded that they are not at all a drunkard tribe. They spent the days in strenuous work which at last yields a little more than their bare necessities. Some among them are called *panaieries* (the climbers). But, all do not have a hand to mouth living. Some among them are men of property, holding small estates of their own, have influence and contribute a better class, called *Nadars* or *land holders*. These *Nadars* either lease their palmyrahs and collect the produce or engage these *panaieries* under them and get the work done⁶⁰. Joseph Mullen says that the *Shanars* are to a small extent *Hindus*. They are, of course, not *Hindus* in caste, but

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.26.

⁵⁸ Joseph Mullers, *Missions in South India*, p. 94-95.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

partially bound by the laws of caste. They form a caste by themselves and as they occupy altogether one locality, they can act almost as if they were not a caste at all⁶¹.

Traditions of the Solar, and Lunar races claiming *Shanar* caste to Kshatriya origin are mythological. The Nadars Kshatriya origin faced criticism. Still then there are some justifications defending the Kshatriya claims of Nadar caste. Kshatriya Nadar were Dravidian rulers of the South of the Peninsula and Ceylon, seems very probable⁶².

Social Hierarchy : Status of the Caste Hindus

Next to Brahmins, comes the caste Hindus – the Naidus, the Reddis, Vellalar, the Chettis merchans, Konars – shepherds, cultivators etc. The Naidus and the Reddis sprung from Telugu origin and lived in luxury and comfort. They were the descendants of those men of adventures who followed the fortunes of Vijayanagar generals⁶³. They were rewarded for their services by donation of uncultivated lands in the Northern part of Tirunelveli. They constituted the middle class and formed the major population of the towns.

“More Brahman than the Brahman the Vellalars (known by their tile Pillai) held themselves aloof from the lower castes. A Vellala who wanted to command respect gave up meat eating, performed daily worship in their own houses and read the Vedas. The Vanniyars and Kammalars wore threads and shaved their faces clean to look like the Brahmin while women adopted Brahmin fashions in their dress. In some temples they performed priestly functions. They considered Christianity as a foreign religion and as the religion of the lower caste and did not follow it⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶² Hardgrave, Op.cit., p. 86.

⁶³ Caldwell Robert, The Tinnevely Mission Madras, 1849, pp. 39-40.

⁶⁴ Hutton, J.H. Caste in India, Cambridge, 1946, pp. 59-61.

Status of Shanars

The caste of Shanars occupies a middle position between the Vellalars and the Paraiar slaves. Their hereditary occupation, as the time and space warranted, was that of cultivating and climbing palmyrah palm. They boil the juice into a coarse sugar. A considerable number have become cultivators of the soil, as land owners, or farmers or are engaged in trade. In general they may be described as belonging to the highest division of the lower classes, or the lowest of the middle classes; poor, but not paupers; rude and unlettered, but by many degrees far removed from a savage state⁶⁵.

Occupation and Economy

The shanar economy centred on the palmyrah / palm then the only commercially viable agricultural crop in the teris⁶⁶ Caldwell's remark of the *Shanars* found in Templeman's book; Shanars who extract the palmyrah juice, avoid its use in the fermented status as carefully as the most punctilious Brahmins. Some expressed the conviction to Caldwell that the Nadars had once been drunkards. Templeman gives two possible explanations for this apparent contradiction. Firstly it may be an attempt on the part of some of the *Nadar's* neighbours to deny them recognition of the high status, they claim (Kshatriya status). Secondly, *Shanars* may once have consumed the toddy they produced, but had given up the practice by the time Caldwell arrived-perhaps under the influence of the Christian Missionaries⁶⁷. Affirming the view of Caldwell, Templeman says that he had not seen and reported prior to Caldwell's pamphlet that the shanars drank⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁶ Dennis Templeman, Op.cit., p. 20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

Their Creed

Shanars had a form of religion in those days which was full of superstition. They worshipped devils out of fear, that is if they do not do this or that, something evil or serious and drastic will occur in their homes. They feared the power at work both in sky, and on earth and close around them; this is nothing but nature worship; the only reaction was the wild devil dances of the priest⁶⁹, a form of devil dance related to the worship of Velan. M.A. Sherying says that Shanars were degraded by devil worship, pei worship emanated from the considerations of ghosts. But they were not slaves of the soil like others of the lower order, not addicted to drunkenness, as is the practice among many other classes⁷⁰. Caldwell had dealt with this people more closely and spent more years probably his entire life time. So his statement could be relied upon.

The origin of devil worship is unknown, but it is sure it did not originate from Brahminism. The devil worship has two forms devil dancing and bloody sacrifices. The ignorant people without any idea just offer sacrifices of a fowl, goat or pig to these devils to appease their anger⁷¹. Supreme Being was primitive and born of ignorance. Their usual term Lord or Ruler to signify God, does not denote a Divinity or a Devil, and they use it as a general term without any specific significant. So, it is clear that they do not have any idea of the existence of God. They do not have any written records regarding this and the only source from where we could gain knowledge of their God is from the old people of the village⁷². Perhaps, they worshipped devils since they believed that these devils did harm to them. It was universal in remote times.

⁶⁹ The South Indian Mission of the CMS, p. 46.

⁷⁰ M.A. Sherying, The History of Protestant Missions in India, p. 248.

⁷¹ R. Caldwell, Op.cit., p. 21.

⁷² Ibid., p. 8.

They believed, the dwelling places of these devils were the Tamarind trees, the Banyan trees, or the palmyrah trees. So these people built temples under such trees and offered sacrifices; when such sacrifices were being offered it was believed that the devils smelt the odour descended unseen from the tree and joined the gathering to take part in the feast. The temple was not exactly a temple in the modern sense, but a heap of earth which is built into a pyramidal shape and it was white washed occasionally with red stripes in between. They offered their sacrifices upon this mound. It was usually from five feet to eight feet in height⁷³. Sacrifices, even human beings were done by a group of Brahmins called the *Parppar* in Tamil. They were experts in witchcrafts, as mentioned in Athervaveda. By doing sacrifices, the status of a society could not be belittled.

In the memoir of Rhenius his son says that the Shanars and Pariahs were usually very dirty, ignorant and of wild appearance, particularly in this country. They could hardly be said to have character. They live almost like the brute creations and every vice is common among them. They were not without abilities but still seem to be a degree at least, behind the *Sudras*. Doubtless, the reason was the abject state of slavery in which they had been, and their desires did not extend beyond the support of their bodies. Of course, their ideas and conversations reach no further than the employment in which they were engaged⁷⁴. The above description seems to be a little exaggerated, but it is a clear indication of their most backward position and the poor status they held in the society. In the 19th century, *Shanars* were an underprivileged and illiterate sect. So when they were given privileges and an opportunity to exploit their talents, they were happy. They understood that it was to a large extent through the Christian Missionaries, and so followed their religion. Child-marriage had been prevalent throughout the

⁷³ R. Caldwell, Op.cit., p. 18.

⁷⁴ Memoir of Rhenius, . . . by his son, p. 241.

district and remarriage of the widows was very rare. The widow's not in life was tragic⁷⁵. These were practices they might have borrowed from the Brahmins, among whom child-marriage, paying (dowry), prohibition of widow remarriage were prevalent. Similarly, they encouraged the practice of endogamous marriages (marriage of the kins).

Cornelius Nadar says that, as a result of their great sin of pride, God punished their community with inferior status. He did not defame their profession (Palmyrah climbing), but championed that the palmyrah itself is, as sacred to Siva, the Hindu Tree of Life⁷⁶. The Nadar caste historians explained the fallen state of the community as a product of the Kaliyuga, the present age of decline in which the purity of caste observances have been subverted⁷⁷. Another story says that, with the utterance of a *mantra* (of God), a sacred formula, the trees would bend their heads to the ground and the sap would pour freely into the awaiting pots. But, when a wicked Kshatriya offended the gods, they cursed the *mantras*. Since then the trees have had to be climbed and they remain obstinately perpendicular⁷⁸.

The *Shanar* it is stated, "have risen enormously in the social scale by their eagerness for education, by their large adoption of Christianity and by their thrifty habits. Many of them have forced themselves ahead of the Maravar by sheer of forced characters⁷⁹. Bishop Caldwell was hostile towards the Maravar because they acted against the *Shanars*. It is clear from the following view, that Bishop Caldwell's hostile

⁷⁵ J.A. Sharcock, South Indian Mission, p. 247.

⁷⁶ J.S. Cornelius Nadar, *Amarar Puranam, Being the Antiquities of the Gods of India*, Salem, p. 233.

⁷⁷ Rajah Baskara Sethupathi V. Irulappan Nadan, P. 75.

⁷⁸ Arthur Margoshis, "Tinnevely : Being an account of the District, the people and the Missions, Mission Field, XLII October 1893, p. 392.

⁷⁹ Edgar Thurston, 1906, p. 373. (On Tamil Militarism all part essay, part 6 Bishop Caldwell and the Tamil Dravidians, prepared by Sachi, Srikantha, for electronic record, 15 July, 1992, p. 4.

attitude towards the Maravar arose from the blood violence they unleashed on the *Shanar*, large numbers of who were embracing the protestant faith⁸⁰.

The Nadars were unusually receptive to Christian teaching. This was largely because of the increase in social status that could be effected through conversion to the faith⁸¹. Hardgrave, a specialist in Nadar History writes of other mass conversions of Nadars to Christianity in the 1840s, in the late 1870s and largely in the 1880s and by the end of the 19th century, the Nadar's, he writes, "..... had the greatest number of Christians in the Madras Presidency, divided about equally between the Roman Catholics and the protestants"⁸². Geoffrey Oddie made use of the views of Caldwell, i.e. "generally conversion to Christianity is found to raise rather than lower then in the social scale". Unlike higher caste converts, the shanars who converted in groups together, did not lose status, and were not usually ejected from the broader caste com much..... Not only did they not lose caste, but as Hardgrave has pointed out, having connections with the C.M.S or other Protestant Missions, provided them with a network of opportunities in education and in other activities that had the effect of greatly improving the community's social standing⁸³.

Christianity and Christian agencies raised the people. The degraded superstitions of them, old devil worship had dragged them and their forefathers down for generations, the knowledge of God raised them in mind and spirit, in habits and aims. Education expanded their capacities and Christian teachings led them by degree along the paths of honesty and truthfulness⁸⁴.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸¹ Susan B. Harper, A Biography of Azhahiah, p. 12.

⁸² Robert Hardgrave, Op.cit., p.47.

⁸³ Geoffrey Oddie, "India" Missionaries, Conversion and change, pp.249-250.

⁸⁴ Bishop Caldwell, Protestant Missions in India, p.370.

The Times on Bishop Caldwell echoed his views on Shanars. The Shanars, who claim to have been the original lords of the soil had been ousted from the crop lands, and lived by the cultivation of the palmyrah palm. Hinduism had not yet established itself firmly at that remote point of the Peninsula, and the prevailing religion was the of demons, or the malignant forces of nature, which we conveniently sum up as devil worship⁸⁵.

The following views confirm the findings of Caldwell about Nadars. The Nadars are an interesting people, known for their work among the palmyrah trees in the region. Stephen Neill was very familiar with this people and explains them with familiarity. The great majority of Christians belonged to the Nadar community. This remarkable people occupy a peculiar position in the Hindu world. They are not admitted to worship in the Hindu temples and therefore cannot be regarded as caste Hindus. On the other hand, they are not untouchables, and do not belong to that fifth of the population which is excluded from all social privileges. The extremely hardwork by which they earn their living gives to many of them a magnificent physique and a hardly aggressive temperament, which when influenced by the grace of Christ leads to great strength of Christian character. These folk had for the most part become Christians in groups. When the missionaries first encountered them, the Nadars were almost wholly illiterate; they took eagerly to education, and have produced a number of distinguished leaders.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ The Times on Bishop Caldwell, October 19, 1891.

⁸⁶ Stephen Neill's Autobiography, "Gods Apprentice", London, 1991, pp. 82-83.

e) causes hidden behind the publication of “Tinnevelly Shanars”

His intention of lifting them up:

Caldwell pleaded on behalf of the *Shanars*. To cull out sources he mainly relied upon direct interview with the people he happened to interact during his journey on account of religious mission. He himself stated the reason for such attempt of revealing the social condition of *Shanars* namely,

- 1) To enable the persons residing in England to have a very distinct idea of the nature of missionary work in Tinnevelly district and the nature of difficulties connected with it.
- 2) To enable them to form a more distinct idea of the peculiarities of this sphere of missionary labour and tend to excite them to a more practical interest in it.⁸⁷
- 3) Caldwell wrote it with an intention to uplift the Nadar community through the magnanimous contributions of the broad minded English people.⁸⁸ Out of compassion he had written it.
- 4) His object was to awaken sympathy for them and to obtain funds from his friends in England to educate and elevate them. He said that his object was accomplished to a large extent.⁸⁹
- 5) In all probability, there can be no doubt that Caldwell, the Christian missionary had written this in order to win more sympathy for the *Shanars*, in their down trodden condition, but certainly, his intention could not have been to demigrate and ridicule this community.

⁸⁷ Rev. R. Caldwell, *Tinnevelly Shanars*, Op.cit., p. 1.

⁸⁸ D.A. Christadoss, *Caldwell Athyatehar*, Op.cit., p. 82 and R. Caldwell, Op.cit., p. 85.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Protest against the book

The great opposition made Caldwell to withdraw his book about *Shanars*. He himself describes the situation. At the time or after a long time when he wrote the book, the *Shanars* were not able to read English. So they were not able to understand the book. When they began to oppose the pamphlet (after 20 years) they had risen in social importance, entirely because of the efforts of European missionaries. The ungrateful Shanars, unmindful of the advantages they got from the missionaries cast away the ladder by which they had risen. They tried to establish their origin as a high born race, sons of kings, ranking next to the Brahmins. They regarded him as a of their caste. In 1881, some young men of this caste induced ignorant people and signed petitions against Caldwell's return to India from England.

Out of compassion he had written it. He said that his object was accomplished to a large extent. His book has captured the hearts of many English people almost immediately and yielded very satisfied results. The community people mistook that Caldwell had a hidden motive in writing this book. Mistaking his pure and unblemished intentions they launched an agitation against it. Even though he sacrificed his own energy, time and intellect for the benefit of those who were deprived of everything. In all probability, there can be no doubt that Caldwell, the Christian missionary, had written those booklets, in order to win more sympathy for the *Shanars*, in their downtrodden condition, but certainly, his intention could not have been to demigrate and ridicule this caste.

But whatever the sympathy the missionary had for the *Shanars*, he was not a born *Shanar* to understand and react to the true sentiments of a 'born Nadar'. On the other hand, Sattampillai, (Arumanayagam) (D.O.B. October 24, 1823), was a born

Nadar who could understand much more about the history, sentiments, traditions and feelings of the Nadars. He also knew the causes of their downfall, which the missionary did not.⁹⁰ Arumanayagam happened to read the booklet published by Caldwell it must have been a rude shock to the scholar. Infact, all the adverse impressions and comments about the Nadars have been originated by the missionaries and except for them, the Nadar Movement would have taken a complete turn of war and bloodshed in the style of Kshatriya Character. However, the moral enlightenment, an economic progress made later by Nadars must be accredited to the Christian missionaries⁹¹. Though Caldwell was in a situation to give justification for his writing, he did not try to do so because caste feeling like pride of race, cannot be argued with. He wanted to avoid making matters worse. His reiterated attempt to convince them failed and was mostly foiled by fanatic sentiments. Unreasonably he withdrew it from circulation as far as he could.⁹²

After a pretty long time he himself remarked the improved condition of Shanars. He says that they are constantly endeavoring to improve themselves and make progress both intellectually and in social position. Whatever their original position may have been, they now occupy a very high place amongst the most progressive native tribes and castes in Southern India.⁹³ Then South Travancore upto Quilon, mainly in the coastal and interior belts, vary sparingly in other parts. This may mean either they were originals to Southern Tamil Nadu or emigrants from East Asia.⁹⁴

The writers of *Shanar* community did not agree with him in all aspects. Even the validity of Caldwell's view of the origin of *Shanars* is being tested by many others.

⁹⁰ M. Immanuel, Op. cit., p.100.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁹² J. L. Wyatt, Op. cit., p.85.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

⁹⁴ K. Sadasivan, his forthcoming paper on the original home of the Nadars.

Moses Ponniah in his book *Nadar Varalaru* (T1) contradicts Caldwell's view. He says that the origin of *Shanar* is "Shan" race of China. They left China and entered Siam. From there they spread to south and west and spread paddy culture.⁹⁵ Maramar who ruled Bengal were Pandyas. Maramar are Tamils. The language of Sanrace was Tamil.⁹⁶ San race came to India from Siam across the Bay of Bengal (when it was land) and settled in Tamilaham and Lemuria South of Tamilaham. Through Tamilnadu they extended upto West Asia. They carried with them paddy and palmyrah. They established their rule in Nanjil Nadu and Panai Nadu. Then Maramars reign started in Pandya Nadu. San race were the children of Palaiyol the mother Goddess.⁹⁷ Palaiyol was known as Bhathrakali. People offer palmyrah produces to Bhathrakali in Thatchineswaram of Calcutta. So it is doubtless that the Dhatchineswari is the Mother Goddess of san race.⁹⁸ Many hundred years after the advent of *Malava Sanror*, *Ilasanror* entered the western coast of Malayalam through the eastern islands. They brought coconut to the southern country.⁹⁹ San race reigned Tamil Nadu since ancient time / days and led/indulged in good trade.¹⁰⁰ Moses Ponniah states states that North Indian Brahmins came to South India when the heads of *Palaiyar* (the ancients) reigned and accepted kinship as Chera, Chola and Pandya.¹⁰¹ Palaiyar belonged to the Iron Age and the urn of ancient graveyard of Palaiyar. This idea does not find place in the book of Caldwell. Further he says that Dravidian society belonged to matriarchal (system) family.¹⁰² *Shanan* of those days was called *Senan* during the period of *Paranar*. They

⁹⁵ Moses Ponniah, *Nadar Varalaru*, Sion Publication, Madurai, p.11.

⁹⁶ V. Kankasabai Pillai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, (1856 – 1906) p.46.

⁹⁷ Moses Ponniah, *Op.cit.*, p.14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.32.

were the people who denoted *San* race.¹⁰³ *San* race inhabited and cherished their civilization from Sundara island, in the Pacific Ocean to Crete in the Mediteranean Sea.¹⁰⁴ According to U.V. Saminathier's *Santror* is the name of a clan (சூலப் பெயர்). V. Nagamaiah in his work Thiruvithancore State Manuel states his view of *Santror* as rulers of Tirunelveli and Thiruvithancore region.¹⁰⁵ During the Sangam age *Santror* had army of their own, served and protected the king as shield by their army, might, valour and diplomacy.¹⁰⁶ Gramani and Nadar of today are *Santror* denoted as *Santror Meimarai* by Pathitruppattu.¹⁰⁷ According to Caldwell Pandaiyanadu / Pandi Nadar must be the pearl fishery of Korkai in the Eastern coast of Tirunelveli District.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile William Taylor proposes another theory. He says, *Nadar / Nadandavan* now indulged in agriculture and trade¹⁰⁹. The one who ruled over / had hegemony over, Nadu were called *Nadar*. In southern Districts it is the title of *Santror*. This view is found in the *Census of India* 1809.¹¹⁰

In Kerala, Ilavar assumed the title *Shanar*. The eminent among the Ilavar assumed the title *Santror*. In Chola Kingdom also Ilavars lived in plenty. During the days of the Pallavas they engaged in planting coconut and toddy tapping.¹¹¹ Toddy tapping was their occupation since they lived in South China. They thought that this profession was given to them as sons of Bharatrakali and did with a religions cult. It gave no room for lying, stealing, deception and bribery and cherished fearlessness,

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.59.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.64.

¹⁰⁸ R. Caldwell, History of Tinnevely (1881), p.10 & 19.

¹⁰⁹ William Taylor, Oriental Manuscripts, Vol. II, p.27.

¹¹⁰ Census of India, 1809, Vol. XIII, p. 97.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.83-84.

honesty, firmness in mind, perseverance, etc.¹¹² People of *San* race were hard workers, agriculturists, amassed the wealth of palmyrah palm or gathered goods and brought them to consumers as *Saththar*. They were innocent and did their work as worship.¹¹³ Moses Ponniah however accepts the view of Caldwell about the appearance of Nadars in the 19th century.¹¹⁴ In Tirunelveli district there were conversions among *Mara Nadars* to Christianity since 1796-1803. In the *teri* region Thaveethu Upadesian (Preacher) was responsible for conversion. Until then his uncle indulged in *Sakthi poojai*¹¹⁵ *Shanars* unlike their counterparts such as Brahmans and Vellalas indulged not in Brahmanical worship¹¹⁶. *Shanars* worshipped their ancestors as Gods (Samy). Words of *Avvaiair Annaiyum Pithavum Munneri Theivam* (mother and father the earliest God), reveals the fact of ancestor worship.

Jegadeesan gave the Nadar the lowest position in the ladder of society. It was because of lack of historical knowledge about Mara Nadars. Pate describes that they were a funny people. Joseph Muller a missionary, says that *Shanars* were not Hindus, they were free from *Bramaniyam* (influence).¹¹⁷ Tolerance, thinking tendency, planning before beginning of any profession, preplanning, liberality / generosity are their inborn qualities. Flattery, hypocrisy, selling themselves as serfs are unknown to them. They consider their work as worship¹¹⁸. Malayala Nadars had not the habit of *Sastha* (Sattan = Jain) worship. When *Mukkantha* Mara Nadar fell in evil days of poverty and

¹¹² Ibid., p.84.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.114.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.134.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.153-154.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.160.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

sufferings, they were not aware of their ancestral history as rulers and traders. They resumed palmyrah climbing as it was the occupation of *San* race.¹¹⁹

Robert L. Hardgrave, JR. is perhaps the first American to be influenced by the writings of Caldwell. The impact of Caldwell on him is apparently visible in his work, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu* (1969). In many a place he quoted the views of Caldwell such as the region *teri*, where Nadars settled, origin of Nadars their profession, social condition, status in the society (rank), their moral condition, the transmission taking place in the social order and status, etc.

Dennis Templeman, the author of *The Northern Nadars of Tamil Nadu* talks about two types of changes. Caste mobility and social evolution. He says that Nadars of South India had moved upward in the hierarchy over the past century and a half. From the status just above untouchability to a solid, forward caste position from lowly toddy-tappers to respectable business persons. In the process they have become relatively wealthy, educated in the western style, politically prominent and quite urbanised.¹²⁰ It should be noted here that there is a vast difference between the views of Caldwell in his book *Tinnevelly Nadars* and Dennis Templeman. The difference is because of the lapse of one century, the progress the community has made to erase the stigma attached to them and western liberal education. As in the words of Templeman drastic changes have taken place in the life style of *Shanars*. Undoubtedly, it is because of the efforts of Caldwell and other missionaries of south (Tinnevelly). They worked tirelessly for the upliftment of *Shanars* both spiritually and materially. Templeman confirms the view that Caldwell wrote *Tinnevelly Shanars* with an intention to stimulate support for missionary activities by emphasizing certain ‘deplorable’ aspects of the Nadars. He

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.192.

¹²⁰ Dennis Templeman, *The Northern Nadars of Tamil Nadu*, 1996, p.1.

accepted that Caldwell's study presents much useful information on Nadar religious and other practices at that time.¹²¹ He accepts the views of Caldwell and Hardgrave. He is influenced by the fact that the *Shanar* economy centred on the palmyrah palm, then the only commercially viable agricultural crop in the teris. Templeman sees the cause for the low status of *Shanars* in the society. *Shanars* association with alcohol was one of the primary reasons for the traditionally low social status of the *Shanars*. He attaches much more importance to palmyrah by stating that plmyrah yielded products such as mats and baskets woven from its fronds and palmyrah trunks were used as poles and roof-beams for houses.¹²² Templeman agrees with Caldwell about the intense physical exertion involved in the *Shanar's* labours. During the hottest part of the year, from March to September, menfolk is employed in climbing the palmyrah in the greater part of every day, in the full blaze of a vertical Sun. The women folk engaged in boiling down the sweet juice into a coarse sugar and other works related to palmyrah products unquestionably it is a more exhausting species of labour than any other performed within the tropics.¹²³ He also echoes the views of Caldwell that some *Shanars* are wealthy land Lords. Some of these land lords were petty chiefs. They collected revenue in the isolated settlements in which they lived. They were called *Nadars*, i.e. Lords of the land. A separate group of *Shanars* acted as servants for the wealthy land lords and *Nadans*, some of them served as palanquin bearers for the *Nadars*.¹²⁴

The *Shanars* were regarded as 'unclean' or 'ritually polluting' by other jatis. Though they were ranked at the lowest but not as low as Pallan or Paraiyans. He agreed with Caldwell who states, that the lowest castes only used alcoholic beverages. The

¹²¹ I bid., p.19.

¹²² I bid., p.20.

¹²³ I bid., p.20.

¹²⁴ I bid., p.22.

Shaars avoided its use in the fermented states. This is also responsible for not classifying *Shanars* as untouchables¹²⁵.

Templeman proposes his own views on Caldwell's writing of *Shanars* association with alcohol. At the time Caldwell wrote his study on the *Shanars*, he was a young missionary seeking to generate support for his activities. The account he gives of their condition, was overwhelmingly negative, a picture of the degradation which he believed resulted from their non-Christian state, portrayed not merely as heathenism, but as devil worship. Caldwell was therefore unlikely to overlook an opportunity to report that alcohol was among the evils from which the *Shanars* needed to be saved. Also, since he had lived among them for some time, there is good reason to believe that his observations on this point were accurate.¹²⁶ It is also possible that the *Shanars* might once have consumed the toddy they produced but had given up the practice by the time Caldwell arrived perhaps under the influence of Christian missionaries. This likelihood has lent some weight by the fact that in 1814 the Government of Travancore granted *Shanar* women the right to cover their breasts, a high caste prerogative.¹²⁷ Christian influence then had clearly left its mark on some aspects of *Shanar* life by Caldwell time, the abstinence from alcohol might have been among these changes. However, it is worth mentioning that Templeman accepts the views that he knew of sources written prior to Caldwell's pamphlet, that reports that the *Shanars* drink.¹²⁸

Drinking toddy or alcoholism, until the arrival of the Jaina, Buddhist and Brahmanic religions in the South, was not considered polluting. The Brahmins have also consumed drinks like *devapana* (divine drink). The Pandya, Chera and Chola kings

¹²⁵ Ibid.,

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.23.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.23.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.29.

of yore are depicted in the *Sangam works* as lovers of drinks of various kinds: They are said to have given them to the poets, courtiers and minstrels. They are said to have encouraged preparation of toddy, biting toddy (thermal) and other drinks. Down the centuries, drinks are reported to have found place in rituals and royal sacrifices. The Pallavas are recorded to have levied a tax on the toddy tappers called the *ilamputchi*.¹²⁹ By the time of the missionary activities in Tamil Nadu, poligars and zamindars were very much wedded to drinks. However, drinking alcohol in the spiritual sense and missionary zeal is a sin. The polluting stigma attached to the *Shanars* is not only due to drinking alcohol, but due to their non-conversion to the Brahmanical rituals and forms of worship. Secondly, they were not wealthy land owners; but dethroned from their position by the invading Nayaks.

As far as the *Shanar* religion is concerned Templeman accepts the views of Caldwell. Roughly speaking 10% Nadars as Christians. Some are Catholics, particularly in the coastal villages of Tirunelveli. The bulk of Nadar Christians are Protestants. The first permanent *Shanar* settlement, Mudalur (first village) was established in 1799.¹³⁰ It was not uncommon for the entire *Shanar* settlements to convert to Christianity. Caldwell attributed this to a tendency to think in herds, a judgement, no doubt prompted by his failure to win many individual converts. Hindu Nadars claim that such mass conversions happened because the converts sought favours from the British.¹³¹ It is not always true that the missionaries lured *Shanars* to convert to Christianity by extending official and personal favours. As a missionary religion like Buddhism, Christianity was also interested in the spread of its ethics and teachings to

¹²⁹ K. Sadasivan, "The Antiquity of the Palmyrah Palm: A study from Early Tamil Works and Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions," paper presented in the 31st Annual conference of South Indian History Congress, 26-30th January 2011 at Cuddapah, Andhra Pradesh.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.29.

¹³¹ P. Subramanian, *Social History of the Tamils*, New Delhi, 1999, p.38.

the affected and the afflicted. Extreme condemnation belittles their service to the cause of lifting up community, that was suppressed for many centuries by the dominant and the elitists.

Tillers like Vellalars, weavers like Kaikolars and toddy – tappers like *Shanars* due to change of circumstances and favours conferred on them by the British became big merchants and *dubashis* whose business investment exceeded several lakhs in the 19th and 20th centuries. This indeed was a great social revolution¹³². Dissatisfied with the traditional set-up, *Shanars* revolted against it in order to get emancipation. In Tinnevely and Kanyakumari Districts, their women were denied the right of wearing upper garments to cover their bosom. Practically, by doing so, they were treated as untouchables and were forced to pay a number of taxes such as poll tax, house tax, marriage tax, property tax and many other taxes which were too oppressive and discriminating. Their very presence was deemed to be defiling and they were prevented from using public wells, roads, tanks and temples. After conversion to Christianity, they were encouraged by the missionaries, foreign and Indian to cover their bosom with upper garments like *Kuppayam* (a kind of skirt) which to the higher caste was a breach of age old tradition¹³³. This right the shanars got not as a benevolent act, but as a right to protect the feminine motherliness. Mutthukutti Swamigal waged a relentless war against this barbarous traditions of the Travancore upper castes. Missionaries like Mault, Mead and British officials like Col. Monro, Commanders like Cullen did play a major role in getting this right after waging a protest by women and shooting at the bosom of a woman, who boldly violated the prevalent practice.

¹³² Ibid., p. 41.

¹³³ M. Immanuel, Op.cit., p. 100.

P. Subramanian's views of *Shanars* co-insides with that of Caldwell. Toddy-tappers like *cānārs* i.e. *Shanars* were oppressed by the higher caste people after the Pandyas have accepted the caste hierarchy. Dissatisfied with the oppressive traditional set up, *cānārs* revolted against it in order to get emancipated.¹³⁴

Shanars: Categories or Divisions among them:-

H.R. Pate makes some study about the divisions among the *Shanars* (Nadars). They are the *Melnadars* (the Malayala Nadars) with whom the Tamil Nadars would not have marriage relations: no giving and taking. Then the *Kodikal Nadars* of Ambasmuthiram region whose major occupation is agriculture i.e. tending betel leaves. *Nattathi Nadars* of the Srivaikundam region, having some social status due to land owning; *Karukkupatti Nadars* i.e., the palmyrah climbers of the Trichendur region. Palmyrah land owing and climbing; and lastly the *Pulukka Shanars* of the Aruppukottai region, having the servants of the other groups. At present these groups have lost their separate identity owing to education, employment, business (big and small), agriculture in small areas, political positions, marriages between these groups and Malayala Tamil groups and intercaste marriages, temple entry and temple management. The only difference still persist among them is that division of Hindu Nadars and Christian Nadars, where the Hindu Nadars claiming a high social status.

The Tamil Nadars have their counterparts in other parts of India. The Gramani and the Moopanars are said to belong to the Nadar community. Again in Kongu Nadu and in Karnataka they have their counterparts.

¹³⁴ P. Subramanian, op. cit., p.38.

D. Vijaya Duraisamy Gramony too states that Nadars are a hard working, industrious people and pauperism is almost unknown among them D. Duraisamy Gramony, Nadar Enum Chol Aaraichi, Chennai, 1927, p.194.

Edgar Thurston lists out four major divisions namely *Karukku-pattayar* or *Karrukku – mattayar* (where the term *Karukku* means ‘sharp edge’ and *pattai* or *mattai* means ‘the leaf stalk of the palmyrah’, *Mel-nattar* (‘western or Travancore or Kerala Nadars’), *Nattatti* (“Nadars of nadu nadu”), *Kodikkal* (‘cultivators of the betel yards’) and *Kalla* (perhaps ‘the lowest’) (The meanings given in the brackets are of my guides interpretation). H.R. Pate makes a slight modification in the last one and calls that division as *Pulukka – Shanar* (meaning ‘the lowest section of the group’) Meanwhile, the Salem Gazetteer makes two divisions among the Nadars. They include *Velau Chanar*, *Katpura Chanar*, *Kalla Chanar*, *Eeku Chanar*, *Tennamatte*¹³⁵ *Chanar*, *Paunamatte chanar Pallavaraya Chanar*¹³⁶. Of this the Pannamatte Chanars are the palmyrah climbers. *The Census of 1891 of the Government of India* records 324 sub-divisions, while the *Travancore census* of 1891 lists 11 subdivisions.

Joseph Mullen a missionary says that Nadars are not Hindus¹³⁷ Rev. William T. Ringeltaube says that their religion is not Brahmanical.¹³⁸ Their wants are very few, and their desires do not extend beyond the support of their bodies. Of course, their ideas and conversations reach no further than the employment in which they are engaged, says another missionary.¹³⁹ They contented with the trade and position of life with which their forefathers were content; to be always indebt and to live from hand to mouth.¹⁴⁰ Shasta also, the Hariharaputra of the Brahmans, and rather a demon king than a divinity, being guardian of boundaries and protector of paddy-fields, is worshipped to

¹³⁵ My co-guide thinks that the Tennamarattu – chanar may refer to coconut – climbers, the Ezhavars the counterparts of Nadar in Travancore.

¹³⁶ The *Pallavaraya – Chanar* may have been those *Chanars* who have gone to Ceylon from the Pallava country in the early medieval times. R. Sooryamoorthy, *Climbing up the story of Palmyrah Workers Development Society*, Martandam, 2000, p. 22, footnote 41.

¹³⁷ Moses Ponnaiah, *Op. cit.*, p.160.

¹³⁸ Robert L. Hardgrave, *Op. cit.*, p.38.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁴⁰ R. Caldwell, *Tinnevelly Shanars*, pp.56-57.

a considerable extent in his official relations¹⁴¹ Worship of shasta is confirmed by Moses Ponnaiah.¹⁴²

Conclusion:

1. Early Tamil Nadu had no caste hierarchy, and therefore no Sudra caste. If the four fold division is applicable to the Tamil society, then the position of the Sudras is offered to the Vellalars and other agriculturists.¹⁴³
2. Biologically the *Shanars* or *Nadars* have certain distinct physical features. The search for the original home of the *Shanars (Nadars)* has landed genetic engineers to make studies about the blood group of them. A Biological journal brought out a startling revelation that the Nadar's blood belonged to the East Asian blood group. Perhaps they would have descended from the Java group and the Ezhava blood is more related to the Eurasian blood group.¹⁴⁴
3. The *Shanars* or *Nadars* are found in innumerable number in the Southern districts of Ramnad, Madurai, Tirunelveli, the then South Travancore upto Quilon, mainly in the coastal and interior belts, very sparingly in other parts. This may mean either they were originals to Southern Tamil Nadu or emigrants from East Asia.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ R. Caldwell, Op.cit., p.12

¹⁴² Moses Ponnaiah, Op.cit., p.192.

¹⁴³ K. Sadasivan, "Villavar Lineage of the Ceras: An Archaeo – Historical Study", in T.P. Sankarankutti Nair edition of *The Last Phase of Monarchy: A test script for Sri Uthiradam Thirumal Maharaja*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2011, pp.68-70.

¹⁴⁴ *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia*, Accessed on Dec. 14, 2010 at 7.30 P.M.

¹⁴⁵ K. Sadasivan, his forthcoming paper on the Original home of the Nadars.

On making an impartial study of the various divisions of the Chanars (Nadars) of Ceylon and the biological (genetic engineering), it becomes obvious that the *Shanars* or *Nadars* might have left their original homes in East Asia and came to Ceylon and from then the *Chanars* and *Ezhavars* might have migrated to the tip of the Indian soil at a far off days.

However Caldwell's maiden attempt gave a fillip to many more social historians, to further tread their way into community studies. Whatever may be the criticism, Caldwell had a reputation of being the fore runner exponent of social history in Tamil Nadu.