TRADE AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to study the internal dynamics of socio political formations in Tamilnadu, this process may be seen in two overlapping aspects. Among these the first is the pre-conditions for the emergence of leadership viz. the structure of the existing society and economy located in association with a particular physiographic and environmental context. The second is the mechanism of control, viz. personal or individual qualities (of valour, prowess, strength and persuasive powers), the acquisition of social wealth and prestige items, traditions and cult beliefs associated with the clan or the lineage.

The earliest recognizable political instutions capable of taking more advanced forms in their evolution seem to have apperared in the peripheral hills. It is indeed not a coincidence that there is a co-relation between eco-zones and the epithets / titles and personal names of chieftains mentioned in the Sangam texts. For instance ko, koman, Malaiyaman, neduman, kodan (from kodu), Porai perunkal are epithets associated with the montance regions. Similarly, terms such as Ay, Avi, Aviyar, Erumayuran, Erai, Kandirakko, Koman indicate a pastoral connection of these lineage chieftains. The greatest fillip to the emergence of leadership and autority perhaps came from the socio-economic interaction of the Proto Historic society. It is possible to
suggest that the beginnings of a purposeful and planned exploitation of local resources may have given a stronger basis for development of more sedentary settlement units. The process of gradual sedentarization necessitated a more intensive exploitation of local resources than under mobile economy. There are several aspects related to this development that are relevant to our study.

Firstly, kinship relations not only result in social homogeneity but go on to provide a corresponding concentration of households and exploitation of resources. The opposite dynamic occurs when the integration of the household cannot contain within it demographic expansion. The predatory expansions of segmentary lineage groups have been called a social means of intrusion and competition in an already occupied ecological niches⁴ and a means by which the tribe can avoid population pressure on available resources. In fact habitation and burial sites located along the banks of rivers leading from the peripheral area to the fertile lower plains were probably a result of a movement in the process of segmentation. An echo of this resource requirement may be seen in the term vanji, or expeditions led by land hungry pastoral chieftains into the forest tracts.

The second is the operation of the subsistence economy through "simple technology". Pre state societies of the Proto Historic
period developed the ability of the family/extended family as the unit of production, to control labour and the means of production, including property rights. This is primarily due to the absence of a controlling authority that allots specific tasks of production. In this context the resident kin group associated with a particular economy and physiographic region in the peripheral areas becomes significant. The lineage group which was perpetuated largely by the cross cousin marriage system may have provided a convenient social context for the emergence of leadership in association with the resident kin groups. The alliance between families and lineages perpetuated by the cross cousin marriage system made the kin nucleia 'tightly integrated whole', where the intrusion of strangers was avoided and thereby ensured the hegemony or the domination over the tribe exercised by the lineage group. This situation may have had its political implications in relation to the emergence of leadership.

**Titles for Chief:**

The Sangam texts introduce us to a series of chieftains in the peripheral areas known by the epithet perumakan or peruman. For instance chieftains such as Ori (Puram. 152), Korran (Nar. 265-268), Erai (Puram 157, Pekan (Sirupan 86-87), Erumai (Aham 115.5) had the epithet perumakan preceding their personal names. Some of the
etymological derivetions of makan are son as well as husband (DED 3768). The etymological meanings for peruman also include elder brother (DED 3613). Among certain resident kin groups, if the leadership was associated with the head of the local descent group, the term makan (son) may have well implied the 'descendent' of the clan / lineage ancestor. The clan graves and ancestor worship probably associated with the megalithic burials may be recalled at this juncture. Apparently where leadership was claimed through descent, the term perumakan (peru + makan) may have carried the meaning 'great descendant/scion/son'. Similarly, Koman (Ko + Makan) in certain instances may have conveyed the meaning 'descendent/scion/son of the coherd'. The tribal, clan, pastoral and peripheral hilly territorial affiliations of a chieftain is best demonstrated by the epithets attributed to Pekan of Palani hills viz. Aviyar perunkal natan Pekan (Sirupan 86-87)\textsuperscript{3}.

The kinship network was one method by which social wealth concentrated in the hands of certain lineage groups, who may have emerged as dominant political groups in the subsequent period. Especially the cross cousin marriage system may have perpetuated a system of the horizontal transmission of social wealth (i.e. as bride price) and the subsequent vertical transmission of wealth (i.e. to the lineage group). If the chieftain took a bride from an affiliated kin village...
within the tribe sector, his sphere of influence over the extended kin group and an extended area may have increased. In addition predatory expansion and cattle raids offered greater opportunities for the chieftain to secure material wealth by virtue of his 'bigman' status within lineage. In fact the collection and division of booty at a feast and its distribution were integral parts of vetchi -t-turai. Thus there was a concentration of prestige items such as gold, gems, elephants, cattle, paddy, etc., in the hands of the chieftains. By redistributing this wealth among warriors and travelling bards, the chieftain enhanced his authority over individuals and established a rudimentary element of inequality.

As the chieftain had a direct role to play in the acquisition of resources, this situation provided the most conducive pre-conditions for the emergence of leadership and authority. It is here that personal qualities of heroism, prowess, the ability to wield arms went to consolidate an already existing leadership or to create the clan or tribe 'big man'. The element of heroism had a fundamental role to play here. Errai, Porunan, Perumakan, Palavel, Valvel, Vauvel indicate personal names of chieftains are associated with heroism, strength and valour. It may be noted that invention of iron weapons had played major role in harnessing the environment and gaining an edge over more backward technological groups.
The unequal distribution of social wealth was another crucial mechanism of control. The megalithic burials and (slightly later) the Sanagam texts amply indicate that there was already an "accumulation" of prestige items and other objects of social wealth in the hands of the chieftains, and a mechanism of 'redistribution' that consequently enhanced this unequal distribution of social wealth.

In this context it is quite significant to note, that the megalithic burials often entombed some of these prestige items as grave goods. Our studies also indicate that burial sites often had 'special burial' where the method of construction was more elaborate or grave goods were of a special kind. In fact the very cult belief and practice of venerating the dead or ancestor worship and the belief in a life after death, saw the usage of the ritual and cult symbols to perpetuate socio-political domination. If the cult group and descent group become one, than this legitimating ritual provided a convenient psychological basis for the chieftain and his lineage group to perpetuate their hegemony over the resident community. It is not surprising therefore that lineage societies of Tamilnadu saw the titles / epithets taken up by chieftains on the one hand were used for deities and religious symbols / personages and also to identify males who wielded authority with the family / household unit on the other e.g. Ai, Aiyan, Attan, Irai, Ko / Kon / Koman, Makan, Talaivan.

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K.N. Sivaraja Pillai had brilliantly pictorialised this in his work. He says "communites under the direction of Kilars of the village elders. The eldest member of the family had the direction of affairs in his hands, assisted of couses by the village assembly periodically convoked. The term 'Kilamai' means right of possession. This abstract concept is undoubtedly a later growth and should have denoted at first the right of the village elders of Kilavar. In course of time, the village communities grew in number and size and then they held together as a union or confederacy of a number of such communities presided over by a Vel, Ko or king. This Vel or Ko had a number of Kilars under him each representing a village. Though the Kilars and Vels were the executive heads and pridents of their respective village assemblies and confederacies and confederacies, their powers were probably very limited in peace time by the authority of the general assemblies of the villages. This type of political organisation was wholly the results of the peaceful and settled condition of an agricultural community, organised for peaceful pursuits. It is to these early types of communal republics that the Ashoka's edict refers.\(^7\)

Now we have to analyse the emergence of Vels who were the first political authorities as individuals. Origion of vels still awaits a solusion in South Indian history. Raghava Iyangar, a pioneer in the study
of vels, has considered the yadavas of north as the progenitors of the vels of South India. In support of this conclusion he has cited the origin myths given by Kapilar (Puram 201). Owing to the nascent stage of South Indian historiography these origin myths were taken as authentic historical narration without any critical acumen. These conclusions were accepted ones till the fifties Durai Rangaswamy challenged the conclusion of Raghava Aiyangar and maintained the indigenous origin of vels. These vels formed the peer group in lineage societyt either by selection or by election. Etymologically vel is derived from vel which means light with the extended meaning of chief as argued by Romila Thapar — a conclusion put forth by Durai Rangaswamy in fifties. Some scholars have corroborated the Velir movements from north with megalithic BRW culture in South. But unfortunately megalithic archaeology has not yielded promising evidences to confirm the velir migration from north. Also the view advanced in favour of velir as the progenitor of vellalas has no archaeological basis. Certain scholars quote evidences, from Sangam anthologies of the presence of paddy granaries in 'vels' houses and maintain their connections with agriculturul occupations. But it can be argues that these paddy heaps were collected as tribute by vels from husbandsmen—an unequivocal symbiosis between the hoider chief (vels) and cultivator. But vel system must have travelled a longway from this
point. Sangam literature mentions a variety of forms of veldom. In memorial stone region incipient stage of veldom existed throughout the first millennium A.D. But with the passage of time the vel system evolved new additions and dimensions and came to include all chiefs whosoever within its broad spectrum. Though there had been an under current of changes in the vel system even during the Sangam age, the memorial stone inscriptions preserved the oldest infrastructure namely war chief.

Vel Avi (Patur, Patikam : 8th Ten : 2), Vel Ay (Puram.133 : 7, 135 : 13), Nannan Vel (man) (Agam. 97 : 12), Veliyan Venman (Agam. 208 : 5), Ay Eynan (Agam.148, 181, 208, 396), Vaiyavikko-p Perumpekan (Puram.141-147), Ma Vel Evvi (Puram, 24) Nannan Aay (Agam. 336), Ay Antiran (Puram. 129), Irunko Venman (Agam. 36), Maiyur Kilan Vel (Patur. Patikam 9th ten), Vel Avikkoman Patuman (Patur. Patikam : 8th Ten), Velman Pitavur Pitavur Kilan makan Peruncattan (Puram.395 : 20) are some of the names of the Velir chiefs found in the body of Cankam literature leaving apart the names found in the colophons of the verses of it. Velman is a variant of the form Velmakan - a descendant of the Velir; the feminine form is Venmal, a variant of Velmakal. Avi and Ay form a branch of this velir tribe. This sub-group was known as the 'Aviyar.' The words Avi and Ay are not two variants of the same word, consisting of two parts 'a' (அ) and 'i' (இ) 'a' is the
verbal root meaning 'to form', or 'to create', 'i' is the suffix. In later
times, the hiatus came to be prevented by the insertion of the consonant
'v' (ai) and the form Avi (ğb ő) resulted. Ay is probably a more ancient
and more colloquial form. The consonant got confused at the end of a
word. But unfortunately this was looked upon as a colloquialism for
which Tollkkaapiyar could not have laid down any rule. But in the form
Ay where we see that the rule finding an operation the last 'i' of Avi has
become the consonant 'y'. This is what is meant by the confusion of 'i'
with 'y'. Therefore all those who have the prefix Ay or Avi may be
taken to belong to the Aviyar group. They were so named either
because they were worshippers of the Mother Goddess or because they
were looked as people who form the state of society or who develop and
grow from day to day. 

Vel is the prefix already known to us. Irunko represents
another branch of this Velir tribe. Veliyan Venman (Agam.208 : 5) is
another name. Veliyan Tittan (Nar. 58 : 5) (Tittan the son of Veliyan)
and Tittan Veliyan (Veliyan, the son of Tittan) (Agam.226 : 14 & Agam.
152 : 5) are two other names. There is another word Veliman (Puram.
162, 207, 237) which occurs as the name of a chief, there is also an Ilaveliman (Puram. 162, 207, 237). Veliman must mean the descendant of
the Velir. Do the Veliyans or Veli-mans represent a separate of the Velir.

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Do the Veliyans or Veli-mans represent a separate line? In this line comes Aay Eyinan (Agam. 148: 7, 181: 7, 208: 5, 396: 4), probably a member of Ay family. Is he the descendant of Veliyan Vel, as we see that in Agam.208: 5 he is mentioned as Veliyan Venman Aay Fyinan. It was mentioned above that five chieftains opposed Netunceliyan. Do these names represent the names of the individuals or the names of their tribes or subtribes? Irunkovel certainly represents the subtribe where very member was also known as Irunko. It is not possible to say anything about others. Can it be said that Nannan also represents the name of a line?  

The distribution pattern of the Velir settlements (mentioned in the texts) indicates two distinct groups. Group A represents the Velir of the peripheral areas. Such areas also held a series of entry-points leading to Tamilnadu. Chronologically, these entry-points may have housed the earliest intrusive Iron Age culture groups in this region. In fact the Velir of Kunur (Coonoor-Nilgiri) are called `ancient Velir people', probably because they had a relatively higher antiquity in areas of settlement than the others. The communities in these peripheral areas thrived within a broad-spectrum subsistence economy where hunting-gathering, pastoral nomadism and swidden cultivation existed side by side.
Group B represents the second group or the Velir of the lowland, primarily situated in the riverine plains and coastal areas. These areas mainly fall within zones categorized as nuclear areas and in all probability carry a post 8th/7th century B.C. chronology\textsuperscript{16}. A striking feature about the distribution pattern of Group B is a clear coincidence with the spread of particular types of burials i.e. urns, cairn, stone circles.

The title 'Kilan' was interchangeable one between lineage chiefs and chiefs of Nadu regions.

There remains to be considered the suffix 1Kilan' which occurs in Maiur Kilan' (Patikam 9th Ten - Patir.) above mentioned. This is recognized as a title of the velir. There are any number of poets and patrons with the suffix: Aricil Kilar (Kur. 193; Patir. 71-80; Puram. 146, 230, 281, 285, 300, 304 & 342), Alattur kilar (Kur. 112 & 350; Puram. 34, 36, 69, 225 & 324), Ayur Kilar (Puram. 322), Arkkatu Kilar (Agam. 64), Itaikkunrur Kilar (Puram. 76, 77, 78 & 79), Ukaykkuti Kilar (Agam. 69), Kayattur Kilar (Kuram.354), Karuburm Kilar (Kur.170), Kattur Kilar (Agam. 85), Kari Kilar (Puram. 6), Killimankalan Kilar (Kur.76, 110, 152 & 181), Kurunkoliyur Kilar (Puram.17, 20 & 22) Kunrur Kilar (Nar 332 & 338), Kutalur Kilar (Kur.166, 167 & 214; Puram. 299), Kovur Kilar (Kur.65; Nar. 154), Noci Niyaman Kilar (Agam.52; Nar. 17, 208 & 209, P. 293), Perunkunrur Kilar (Agam.
Vatamotan Kilar (Agam. 317; P. 260). These are the poets with Kilar as their suffix.

Amparkilan (Aruvantai) (Puram. 385), Karumpanur Kilan (Puram. 381 & 384), Konkanan Kilan (Puram. 154, 155 & 156), Cirukuti Kilan (Puram. 173), Nalai Kilavan (Puram. 179), Malli Kilan (Puram. 177), Maiyur Kilan (9th Ten - Patir. Patikam), Vallan Kilan Nallati (Agam. 356), Vallan Kilan (Puram. 181 & 265) - These are the patrons with Kilan as their suffix.

It may be suggested that nadu may have been derived from the root nad/nade to walk, go, pass, proceed, happen or nadu to walk, to enter or probably to plant (the foot). These root words are extremely important in the light of community movement - in the process of settling down consequently leading to the evolution of the territory. In fact the very association of the adjectives perunkal and malai with the hill chieftain i.e. natan and also the association of proto Historic sites in peripheral hilly entry-points may give credence to the above assumption. The term nadu has an interesting parallelism in the Indo-Aryan jana + pada foothold of the folk/clan. The very fact that there are nadu units mentioned in the Sangam texts in association with
the physiography, the resident community and economy i.e. the ecological context, gives further weight to our argument about the origins of nadu before the emergence of a full fledged agrarian economy in Tamilnadu. For instance, we come across regions such as Erumainadu i.e. land of buffaloes, which has a dominantly pastoral economy. We also hear of the physiographic representation in puli nadu (land of sands), kuttam nadu (land of lakes), karka nadu (land of rocks), malai nadu (hill country), punal nadu (land of waters) etc. There are instances when a particular region is identified after the resident community, for instance Venadu (land of Velir), Oyma nadu, Konkar nadu19.

It appears that the nadu developed as a larger habitation zone when greater sedentarisation and an agrarian economy gradually development in the nuclear areas. the literary evidence may help to understand the structure of the nadu which evolved during the early historic period.

The geo-political area known as Parambunadu, which was the territory of vel Pari, was situated between Chola country and pandya country. Also many trade routes went through this region. The reference to irrigated agriculture and forest tracts. The reference to irrigated agriculture and forest products (i.e. those not produced by the ploughman vide Puram 109 3-8) indicates the co-existence of different production
techniques within the nadu. A second example may be quoted in relation to the former Travancore area. The Sangam texts mention a particular region named Nanjilnadu, which was under the control of a section of the Velir known as the Ay (Puram 137-140). Earlier on, we had indicated the strong pastoral tradition associated with the Ay groups in a pre-existing situation.

Nanjulnadu, literally means 'plough-land' and notices on the accumulation of surplus rice in the hands of Ay chieftains (Aham 152.20), clearly shows that in addition to pastoral wealth, these 'territorial' possessed agricultural production and thus the existence of different production techniques. In another sense this coexistence also implies, the integration under the leadership of a chieftain, various groups specializing in different production processes within a particular territorial entity, the clan-based units of settlements. Such clan-units apparently continued well into the pre-Christian period, though an equation between the settlement/habitation and its composite with a particular clan or class was becoming less conspicuous in the post 1st Century B.C. period.

This can also be called a transitory period where the pre-existing social relationships, economic system and political structure were new being uprooted at least in the nuclear areas for the establishment of new production relations.
Society in Chiefdom:

The structural formation of more complex and territorially larger political society, was in reality an internal and external integration of dispersed residential communities and ecological zones. In short, the new order sought to establish relatively stable foundations to the political structure that had begun to evolve beyond clan-based sociopolitical entities. This is reflected in the development of kudi and nadu as larger territorial units.

As for the internal integration, this represents a 'unification' of several lineages under the hegemony of one group. In other words, an integration of the political elite located within micro regions to the most powerful or largest group occupying a broader geographical zone.

The internal integration leading to the subordination of sub lineage groups, located in micro ecological niches, by a more powerful lineage group is very apparent in the case of the Cera and the Cola. For instance Malaiyaman Tirumudikari (Puram 121-126) and Vel Nannan Udiyan were the chiefs of lineages which were subjugated by Cholas and Cheras. The Pandyas may have completed their internal integration and probably evolved the concept of the single leader who was recognized as the carrier of the min symbol, around 3rd Century B.C. The fact that
the Pandyas possessed their local variety of Punch-marked coins and
the location of the earliest group of Brahmi inscription in the Madurai
Tirunelveli districts may indicate a relatively early date for institutional
formation in this region.

Even so, this did not imply that by the 3rd century B.C.
political consolidation and territorial integration had been completed by
the Chola, Chera and Pandya. It took at least another two centuries to
eliminate opposition and stabilize hegemonic power.

Among the contending groups who challenged the
expanding hegemony of the Chola and Pandya, were the Velir chieftains
who controlled certain territorial entities with clan-based societies.

On the one hand, the above material transformations
unleashed intense competition for land, for its fertility and mineral
resources rather than as pastures. On the other hand, the chieftainships
of the Velir, which were essentially clan-based territorial-units, were not
competent to control the resourceful areas. Thus the historic task of
evolving state systems capable of integrating communities and resources
under different production relations fell upon the Chola, Chera and
Pandya.
The position of the Velir vis a vis the Cera-Cola-Pandya is reflected in terms attributed to these two groups giving an earlier antiquity to the Velir vis a vis the Cera-Cola-Pandya. Thus the former are called the 'ancient ones / families' (Aham 372 : 3-4; Puram 106; 289.5; Nar 280.8) and the latter, vampa i.e. upstarts/newcomers/strangers/aliens (for details vide Kailasapathy 1968 : 251.2).

In this context we may note that the Chera-Chola-Pandya are called the 'three crowned kings' i.e. Muventar. Ventar is a 'crowned king'. It is worth noting that political leadership and the authority over the community-territory-resources in clan-based societies was a power vested by tradition and not one 'sanctioned' by a superior authority. One may note that, with the exception of the Satiyaputa or the Adigaman, the three other groups identified as Ventar, are also mentioned in the Asokan edicts.

The mere title Ventar did not necessarily imply the establishment of an evolved state and a hierarchized political order. The 'sanction' which gave political status to the Muventar, was only a symbolic representation of power whereas actual political consolidation and real authority evolved only within the next two to three centuries.

Some Velir had control over pastoral wealth, access to areas of mineral resources, fertile agricultural tracts with high potential
and even coastal exchange centres. It was, therefore, imperative, from the point of view of the Ventar that they gain control over such lucrative economic resources, which would in turn deprive the Velir of their material base and consequently undermine their political base as well.

The process of subordinating the Velir (and the other chief­tains) took three forms. Firstly the Muventar directly subjugated the Velir or acquired the territories of some of the Velir. By this process they had expanded their regions. We can sight the example reflecting such an instance is the concerted effort made by the Muventar to eliminate Vel Pari. It may be noted that Parambunadu was strategically located in proximity to all three territories of the Muventar, which controlling vital communication lines.

The second method of integration adopted by the Muventar was the effort made to take brides from the Velir families. In certain instances the Ventar succeeded in obtaining brides from the Velir, e.g. Cola marriage alliances with the Velir of Virai, Uranati, Nangur and Alundur.

The third method was to integrate the Velir by recruiting them to serve under the Muventar. It is recorded that Alumbil Vel served under Ceran Senguttuvan (Silap xxv.i77). In another context, it is recorded that one Manaviral Vel held sway over Alumbil (Maduraik 344-45).
Pandya Nedunjeliyan invaded Kuttunadu and looted the port town of Muciri (Maduraik 105; Aham 47. 149). Apart from the western sea board, he controlled the rich pearl centre of Muttur (Puram 24.18-23) and controlled the Partavar chieftains (ibid 144). In addition he controlled Korkai yielding chank and pearls (Maduraik 135-8).

The Cholas followed a similar tactical policy. Certain chieftains of the Oliya, and Poduvar herdsmen were subordinated by Karikala (Pattinap 274-282). They also used some of these subordinate chieftains to keep in line other independent groups. Matti, the Paratavar chieftain punished chief Elini on behalf of the Colas (Aham 211).

It is therefore clear that the post 3rd Century B.C. witnessed a period of fierce competition and confrontation. Fortified political capitals such as Uraiyur, Karur (Vanji) and Madurai. The lineage become an important legitimating factor. The Pukalur inscription 2nd century A.D.) records three generations of the Cera dynasty (Mahadevan 1966 : Nos. 56-57). This inscription as well as the Sangam texts mention the existence of heir - apperant where they administered at Korkai and Kaverpattinam. With the performance of Vedic sacrifices e.g. Irasasuyam (Puram 16,125,367,377) they obtained a very effective means of political legitimation.
The Velir may have formed the next group in the political hierarchy. They appear to have been socially at par with the Ventar though politically they were at a level below the latter. This structure not only helped the Ventar to absorb elite groups from newly subjugated regions and communities and as a convenient mechanism of integrating them to the Great Tradition, but also provided an avenue of upward mobility for newly emerging affluent groups associated with craft and commercial operations at urban centres and the agrarian elite in rural areas.

The composers of this period adhered to concepts emphasising the equal status in birth for the hero and the heroine i.e. pirappu. Kailasapathy points out that "... it was the aristocrats and noblemen and their diverse actions that were considered fitting poetic treatment. A case in point is a rather common word kilavan or kilan, frequently denoting the male lover in love poems. It means 'owner, master, husband'. The feminine kilal or kilavi means 'proprietress, mistress, wife'. Likewise, many other words used for the lovers definitely connote higher social rank: e.g. talaivan, kuricil, entai etc., mean 'chief, lord, noble'. The idea is clinched by Tol's statement that slaves, servants, errand-men etc., are not entitled to be portrayed as heroes...." (1968: II)20.
A second important method of acquiring economic gains through political strength was the extraction of resources through chieftains who operated in such areas, e.g. Elini supplied elephants to the Cola. Similarly, Matti the chieftain of Kalar at the confluence of the Kaveri, probably had access to commercial resources. Matti was an ally of the Cola and probably paid tribute in the form of oceanic resources. It is quite likely that when Nedunjeliyan subjugated the southern Paratavar chieftains, he may have naturally gained access to certain maritime resources which they controlled in that region.

This acquisition and the gradual intrusion into economic activity by the Muventar coincided with a developing commercial operation during the Early Historic period. There is strong evidence to show that the Muventar actively participated in resource accumulation geared to control trade and commerce.

In the valleys of Vaigai and Tambraparani, south Indian issue of Punch-marked coins occur with the symbol of the issuing authority i.e. the min symbol of the Pandyas (Loventhal 1888: 4-6). The establishment of Korkai s the coastal capital of the Pandya housing their viceroy and where they extracted maritime resources using slave labour (Madurasik 138; Sirupan 62; Silap xx.30, 66; xxvii.127; Schoff 1912/1974: 46, 237) is another instance. The need for Nedunjeliyah to
control the eastern coastal ports, the inward movement of resources from various regions bringing gems, gold, sandal-wood, pearls, coral, etc., which made Kaveripattinam a rich entrepot where exports were sealed with the Cola tiger emblem (Pattinap 90-150), the fabulously rich port of Muciri that was controlled by the Cera where they concentrated import and export commodities such as pepper, gold, gems, ivory, fish, paddy, etc. (Schoff op.cit. 56; Puram 343. 1-10) points to a strong commercial tradition. Likewise, the clearance of forests and the creation of agrarian tracts by Karikala (Pattinap 283), taken along with the commercial factor shows that, by the 1st Century B.C. and after, the Muventar maintained control over the operational mechanism of labour, commerce, trade and agricultural production. Considering this, it is evident that the traditional as well as new elite groups had to operate within the spheres of control laid down by the Muventar.

In all probability, the earliest form of Tamil rule, of which we are afforded some glimpses here and there in the literature, was a sort of communal republic wherein each adult male member of the community had a voice in the direction of public affair. Although we discover the Pandiya and the Chera rulers as full-fledged kings, the origin of the Chola line of sovereigns throws considerable light on the primitive communal republic. The people seem to have existed as village
communities under the direction of Kilars of the village elders. The eldest member of the family had the direction of affairs in his hands, assisted of couses by the village assembly periodically convoked. The term 'Kilamai' means right of possession. This abstract concept is undoubtedly a later growth and should have denoted at first the right of the village elders of Kilavar. In course of time, the village communities grew in number and size and then they held together as a union or confederacy of a number of such communities presided over by a Vel, Ko or king. This Vel or Ko had a number of Kilars under him each representing a village. Though the Kilars and Vels were the executive heads and prididents of their respective village assemblies and confederacies and confederacies, their powers were probably very limited in peace time by the authority of the general assemblies of the villages. This type of political organisation was wholly the results of the peaceful and settled condition of an agricultural community, organised for peaceful pursuits. It is to these early types of communal republics that the Ashoka's edist refers.

No name of an individual king is there in mentioned in the south, as in the case of the western sovereigns. They are called the Cholas, the Palayas the Keralaputras and the Satiysputrace the communal names beyond doubt. It would be highly unhistorical to read the type of princely autocracies evolved thater on in the Tamil land into the early conditions
of the third century B.C. All that is intended to be conveyed here is that
the Tamil autoeracies depicted in these works were certainly preceded
by another type of political organisation which was peculiarly
republican and Dravidian in its character. By the time of the generations
comprised in the Tables the old organisation had well-nigh lost its original
vigour and a process of dissolution had set in. For territorial expansion
the peaceful agricultural communities seem to have placed themselves
under leaders of military genius, who later on turned into autocrats, pure
and simple, and robbed the communities of their original rights and
powers. In short, independence was the heavy price the communities
had to pay, for the doubtful advantage of new territorial acquisitions.
This is the picture we get from the earliest references bearing on the
Chola rule.

Legitimization:

Besides being pace makers of royal authority and agents of
its legitimization, religious establishments posed little threat of armed
rebellion to the king. On the contrary, the sanctity of these religious
centres had to be respected by the king's opponents and this may have
helped in the creation of buffer zones in areas of strategic importance.
There has been some debate on the question of the loss of revenue to the
king. An important consideration is whether the royal donor could himself
have exercised all those powers which he transferred to the monks.

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A spatial study of royal inscriptions, granting land shows that they are concentrated at Madurai and Karur. The importance of both these centres in controlling trade routes from the interior to the coast need not be dealt with here as it has been discussed in detail at several places in this study. What should be pointed out is that karur may have formed a part of the disputed territory between the Cheras and the Cholas.

Kosambli was possibly the first scholar to recognize that the influence of monasteries extended far beyond religious matters. Monasteries were important purchasers of cloth and other commodities for the monks and retainers and of costly material for ritual and ceremony. They possibly also supplied (for profit) essential provisions and loaned (at interest) much needed capital to trade caravans. Besides the monasteries were untaxed and their possessions not in danger of arbitrary confiscation by kings or officials as might be the lay merchant's hoard. A secondary economic function, the charitable use of monastic grain for the relief of famine, scarcity or individual distress among laymen gained them special reverence from the savage tribes and the earliest villagers. The sanctuary that would be given even to robbers who wished to renounce their evil ways rendered these foundations the more immune to attack by brigands.
That takes us to 350 A.D., exactly the period when the Pallava power got itself lodged in Kancipuram. All the Tamil kings suddenly go under an eclipse and the poets of the period had to sing of other themes than their patrons' glories, presumably for want of the old type of patrons. The kings, no doubt, must have been there holding court; but one can justly infer from the lack of literary record that they should have been shorn of much of the power and prestige enjoyed by their early ancestors. Although much is not known about the Kalabhra interregnum, the dark period of Tamil history, it is highly probable that it marked the first incursion of a border race from the north into the Tamil states. The hypothesis that this movement was only a fore-runner of the general Pallava invasion which later on swept through the land can scarcely be considered an extravagant one. Whatever be the subsequent history of the Tamil country, the Tables have to close with Ko-Cenkannan. And between him and Tirugnanasambanda, four centuries intervene, centuries whose gloom is lighted up neither by the early poems nor by later epigraphs. The late Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai in his Age of Trugnanasambanda expressed the hope that this period could be approached with profit from the other side—the Ko-Cenkannan period. The approach does not, however, seem anywise promising; still future research, let us hope, will let in some gleams into this dark and irretrievably blank period.

2. Tamil Lexicon, Vol 5, p. 2881

3. Cirrupanarrupadai 86 - 87

4. Tolkapiyam Poru 58, 61

5. R. Poogundran, Vellalur, Yavana Vaniyagathai 'Kalventu' Iethal.

6. Pre state to state societies: Transformations in the Political Ecology of South India with special Reference to Tamilnadu, Sudharshan Seneviratne, Department of Archaeology, University of Peradeniya, Perdeniya, Sri Lanka., 1989

7. K.N. Sivaraja pillai The Chronology of Tamils. p. i 9 3

8. Mu. Ragava Iyengar, 'Velir Varalaru', p. 8

9. Romila Taper, 'From linage to state' p 48 (F.N. 135)

10. Duari Rangasamy 'Sri Names in Sangam Age Literary and Tribal', p. i 4 3

11. R. Champakalakshmi, 'Trade Ideology and Urbanization', p. 9 8

12. Ibid

13. Dorai Rangasamy Opcit p. i 1 7

15. Kurunthogai Verse 164


17. Dvavidian Etmology No 30-12.

18. Sudharshan Seneviratne Lo.cit

19. Lexicon Vol II p.812

20. K. Kailasapathy, Tamil Heroic Poetry p. 248